The question of the collaboration between baroque sculptor Joseph Straub and baroque painter Valentin Metzinger: Some circumstances about the altars in Taborsko (Croatia), Malečnik, Slovenska Bistrica and Rogatec (Slovenia)

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Abstract: In the first part of this article I present a less known painting of St Joseph on the side altar of St Joseph in a parish church of the Assumption of Mary in Taborsko (Hum na Sutli, Croatia), attributed to Valentin Metzinger; and in the second part I focus on the collaboration between baroque painter Valentin Metzinger and baroque sculptor Joseph Straub.

Key words: Joseph Straub, Valentin Metzinger, Taborsko, Rogatec, Malečnik, Slovenska Bistrica, baroque sculpture, 18th century, collaboration between sculptor and painter.
The side altar of St Joseph in a parish church of the Assumption of Mary in Taborsko and some circumstances about the origin of the painting

In the parish church of the Assumption of Mary in Taborsko (Hum na Sutli, Croatia), there is a baroque side altar of St Joseph placed in the north side chapel. Above the mensa, there is a wooden polychrome altar with a painting in the middle and a pair of columns and pilasters on the sides. Between the painting and the column, there are two sculptures of male saints, one on each side: St Zachary on the left and St Joachim on the right. Above the side openings, there are two sculptures of female saints: St Elisabeth on the left and St Anne on the right. The sculptures represent two couples – St John the Baptist’s parents on the left and Mary’s parents on the right. In the attic (upper part of the altar), there are two big volutes with two angels sitting on their sides. In the middle, there is a dove of Holy Spirit surrounded with clouds and rays of glory with angel heads and two smaller angels. The sculptures of St Zachary and St Joachim are of great quality: they have lively postures and expressive gestures.

The record of the canonical visitation in 1742 mentions that the altar of St Joseph is soon to be erected.\(^1\) The inscription in the cartouche above the altar painting reveals that the altar was indeed completed in 1745 and that Josip Jagušić commissioned it.\(^2\) The record of the canonical visitation in 1748 confirms that it had already been polychromed and gilded by that time.\(^3\) The altar was attributed to the baroque sculptor Joseph Straub by Doris Baričević.\(^4\) The sculptures have all the characteristics of Joseph Straub’s personal style, indeed. We can find several

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\(^2\) Inscription in the cartouche on the altar: A. 1745. PER JOS. JAGUŠIĆ. A. 1869 AERC PAROCHI POPULI ET ECCLESIAE FACTUM.

\(^3\) Archives of the Archdiocese of Zagreb, Canonical visitations, Zagorje Archdeaconry, protocol 156/V, 1748: »Sunt in hac ecclesia arae quinque; 4 quidem minores, bene et eleganter dispositae, decoloratae et deauratae.« (Published by Ožanić, Škarić, The side altar, 2018, (accessed 20/09/2018).

similarities with his other (documented) works. The faces of St Joachim, St Zachary and St Elisabeth are especially significant. They all have big, open, almond-shaped eyes with thick lower eyelids; the beards and the hair of St Joachim and St Zachary are curly. They are similar to the sculptures from Studenci, which are Joseph Straub`s documented works (today in Regional Museum Maribor). Also the face of St Elisabeth shows significant characteristics of Joseph Straub`s female saints. With a double chin and a hair style, the sculpture is similar to the sculpture of the same saint from Studenci. Only the face of St Anne is not so well made, but the drapery has similar movement – the creases and the significant “open” crease in the lower hem of a garment. Several characteristics of Joseph Straub`s personal style can also be seen in the attic of the altar – the angels and angel heads are chubby and similar to the angels from Studenci. According to the inscription on the altar, it was renovated in 1869. In 2009 the Croatian Conservation Institute carried out on-site conservation works on the entire church equipment, including the side altar of St Joseph. The works were conducted by Marijana Galović.5

**The altar painting of St Joseph**

The altar painting shows St Joseph kneeling on the clouds with Jesus in his arms. There is an angel with a blossoming rod accompanying them. Above, in the middle of the gleaming sky there are two angel heads looking down on them. In the right lower edge, a green lush landscape is seen.

The painting of St Joseph with a child (oil on canvas, 175 x 100 cm) was known as a work of unknown painter from the 18th Century until 2008, when Mirjana Repanić Braun attributed it to the workshop of Valentin Metzinger and pointed out that it has been repainted several times. She added that the composition of the painting – especially the pose and the relationship between St Joseph and the child, which is almost identical on some other works by Valentin Metzinger – was probably made after a graphic.6

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Between 2010 and 2011 the painting was restored by Vesna Sobota from the Croatian Conservation Institute. Among other restoration works, she also removed all the repaintings. This revealed much lighter and transparent colours, as well as much richer colour palette. Some repaintings were completely removed and some original details, which were completely covered, became visible again; for example the figure of an angel on the right and some parts of the clouds and the sky. The restoration work revealed the painting as an unquestionably and a very quality work of Valentin Metzinger.

Beside the similarities with the works of Valentin Metzinger, which were already mentioned by Mirjana Repanić Braun, we should also point out the similarities with others – especially documented – works of Valentin Metzinger. We can compare the painting in Taborsko with a painting of the Holy Family in a parish church of Our Lady of Sorrows in Breznica (Slovenia) and a painting of St Joseph (with Jesus) in Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb (Croatia). Both paintings are signed and dated (VALENTIN METZINGER PINX 1744; VALENTIN METZINGER 1735). Even though the composition of the painting in Taborsko is simpler, the position of St Joseph and the child in the middle is identical on all three paintings. But the relationship between St Joseph and the Child is the most intimate on the painting in Taborsko.

We should point out that St Joseph is dressed the same on all three paintings – even the colours match as well as the model of his sandals. His kneeling posture with a head leaning toward the Child (which is the most significant on the painting in Taborsko) can also be seen on the painting in Breznica. The face of St Joseph is also similar on all three paintings, but only on the painting in Taborsko his face shows older features than on the other two paintings. When we focus on the figure of Jesus on the painting in Breznica, we can see that the same face features appear also on the painting in Taborsko – but not in the depiction of Jesus, but in the figure of angel with blossoming rod.

The comparison of the painting in Taborsko and the painting in Zagreb is even more interesting regarding the circumstances of their origin. The painting of St Joseph, kept at the
The Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb, was originally made for the cathedral in Zagreb. The altar in Taborsko was commissioned by Josip Jagušić, who was a secretary of Jurij Branjug, the bishop of Zagreb. Therefore it seems possible, that Jagušić made a commission after “the role model” of the painting he saw in Zagreb and with a painter he already knew. Such explanation seems possible also regarding the fact, that Zagreb painting is older and more complex.

The question of the collaboration of baroque sculptor Joseph Straub and baroque painter Valentin Metzinger

In the second part I would like to give some attention to the fact that Valentin Metzinger and Joseph Straub worked on the same altar not only in Taborsko, but also at some other locations. Note however that their collaboration has not been emphasized and studied well enough in the literature. So far we know three other locations (all in Slovenia) beside Taborsko, where they worked on the same altar – Joseph Straub as a sculptor and Valentin Metzinger as a painter of altar painting(s): the side altar of St Anthony of Padua in parish church of St Peter in Malečnik, the side altar of St Anthony of Padua in parish church of St Bartholomew in Rogatec and the high altar in pilgrimage and succursal church of St Joseph in Slovenska Bistrica.

Besides a sculptor and a painter of altar’s paintings, other masters were included in the process of making an altar, too: a carpenter, who made the altar’s architecture and a painter, who did the polychromy of an altar and sculptures, when the sculptor finished his work. Archival sources revealed that Joseph Straub collaborated with carpenter Franz Leeb and painter Franz Beinlich (he did the polychromy), on the high altar of the parish church of St Joseph in Studenci. Interestingly, Joseph Straub and carpenter Franz Leeb worked together also on the high altar and the pulpit in the minorite church of St Peter and Paul in Ptuj. On the other hand,

10Cevc, Valentin, 2000, cat. 94.
11Archiepiscopal Archives of Maribor, Župnija Hoče, 47, Inspections Raittung 1752: “No. 6 Ingleichen H. Leev tischler Maistern alda, ut quitting No. 6 400 fl.”; Archiepiscopal Archives of Maribor, Župnija Hoče, 47, Inspections Raittung 1756: “No. 4 Leuth quitung No. 4 bezalle Hr Frantz Beintlich Maller vor fasstung dest hochaltar undt orgl lauth gemachten Contract per 930 fl.« There is also a receipt from 26th January 1757 saved (Archiepiscopal Archives of Maribor, Župnija Hoče, 47).
12Ludvik Pečko wrote that during the renovation in 1859 an inscription in pencil was found on the back side of the pulpit (›DEN 9 TEN MAI 1752 HABE ICH JOSEPH STRAUB, BILDHAUER VON MARBURG, DEN HOHEN ALTAR WIE AUCH DIE KANZELL, SO WOHL VOR BILDHAUSER ALS TISCHLER UND MAHLER VOLLLSTÄNDIG HIER HER VERSSETZT, DER MAHLER IST GEWESEN MIT NAHMEN DOMINICUS CAGONI, DER TISCHLER FRANZ LEB‹) in which Joseph Straub wrote that he made the pulpit and the high altar. In addition, the carpenter Franz Leeb and the painter Dominicus Cagoni
the painter Dominicus Cocconi (Cagoni), who did the polychromy of the high altar and the pulpit in Ptuj, worked with Joseph Straub also in Malečnik and in Ruše. According to the parish chronicle of Malečnik, the polychromy of the side altars in the parish church was done by Dominik Cocconi in 1746\(^\text{13}\) and according to the parish chronicle of Ruše he made (together with Franz Assecla) also the polychromy of the organs, which were made by organ master Joannes Franciscus Janechek, and their sculptural decoration by Joseph Straub.\(^\text{14}\)

These are rare examples of archival sources about Joseph Straub’s altars in Styria. Still, we can see that he permanently collaborated with certain carpenters and painters. There are at least two possibilities, which explain how they cooperated. They might worked and represented themselves as a workshop, but more likely one of them (probably the sculptor Joseph Straub) got the commission and then chose or suggested which other masters to invite in the project.

On the other side, the question of the collaboration of sculptor Joseph Straub and painter Valentin Metzinger is more complex and cannot be explained easily. Their collaboration was probably not so tightly. With the following examples we will take a closer look at Joseph Straub’s altars with altar paintings by Valentin Metzinger and try to explain if and how they collaborated.

**The side altar of St Anthony of Padua in parish church of St Peter in Malečnik**

The side altar of St Anthony of Padua in the parish church of St Peter in Malečnik is placed in the last chapel on the left side of the church and the side altar of St Francis Xavier in the chapel on the opposite side. The altar painting with a depiction of St Anthony of Padua with baby Jesus is an attributed work of Valentin Metzinger.\(^\text{15}\) On the left side of the painting, there is a sculpture of St Anthony the Great, and on the right is St Paul of Thebes. The sculpture of St Anthony the

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Great looks a bit stiff, especially regarding the right arm and the position of the head. The sculpture of St Paul of Thebes is better in this respect, but we can mark that his hands are extremely big. Nevertheless, the head of the saint is similar to other works of Joseph Straub – open mouths with teeth, big open eyes, curly beard and hair. In addition, the lower part of the drapery shows significant movement. The side altar of St Francis Xavier has an altar painting with a depiction of St Francis Xavier baptising a black man, which is usually attributed to a certain Gottlieb Gessor because of the signature which used to be on the painting, but is lost today. Anica Cevc even suggested attribution to Valentin Metzinger because of similarities with a painting of St Francis Solano in the Franciscan monastery in Trsat (Croatia), but she remained reserved because of the supposed signature. On the left side of the painting, there is a sculpture of St Apollonia, and on the right of St Lucy. Both sculptures have many similarities with a sculpture of St Lucy from the Succursal Church of the Virgin Mary of the Assumption in Podlehnik (attributed work of Joseph Straub). One should also point out the ornamentation of the altar – for example the wreaths of roses on the upper part of the altar painting – which is significant for Joseph Straub’s altars.

Two side altars (the altar of St Francis Xavier and the altar St Anthony of Padua) in the parish church of St Peter in Malečnik were attributed to Joseph Straub by Sergej Vrišer. Vrišer wrote that according to the chronicle, the polychromy was done by Dominik Cocconi in 1746.

The side altar of St Anthony of Padua in parish church of St Bartholomew in Rogatec

The side altar of St Anthony of Padua in the Parish Church of St Bartholomew in Rogatec was also attributed to Joseph Straub by Sergej Vrišer. The altar was erected to form a pair with the side altar in the opposite chapel (the Rosary Altar) and was designed in 1748. The confraternity

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17 Cevc, Valentin, 2000, cat. 47.
18 Cevc, Valentin, 2000, p. 388.
of St Anthony of Padua had a seat at the altar and was probably also the patron for the altar.\textsuperscript{23} The gilding of four side altars was made in 1765 and costed 500 fl.\textsuperscript{24}

Both altar paintings are documented works of Valentin Metzinger: the main altar painting depicts St Antony of Padua and, placed in the upper part of the altar, a smaller painting depicts St Anthony the Great.\textsuperscript{25} The altar`s architecture represents the most common type in the opus of Joseph Straub: there is a pair of columns on each side of the altar`s painting, with sculptures placed in between (St Aloysius Gonzaga and St Martin on the left and St Nicholas and St Stanislaus Kostka on the right). In the upper part, there are angels sitting on volutes, putti and angel heads. The altar represents a high quality work in the oeuvre of Joseph Straub.

\textbf{The high altar in the pilgrimage and succursal church of St Joseph in Slovenska Bistrica}

Sergej Vrišer set the dating of the altar in 1757/58 and suggested Joseph Holzinger as the author.\textsuperscript{26} Valentina Pavlič, on the contrary, recently argued for Joseph Straub`s authorship based on the style analysis as well as on the secondary sources (namely the sources about the building of the church and the visitation records of the church made by Savinja Archdeaoncy of Gorizia Archdiocese from 1756).\textsuperscript{27} The sculptures as well as the architecture of the high altar share some similarities with works by Joseph Holzinger, but many more with works by Joseph Straub. Pavlič also suggested that the altar is Joseph Straub`s last work (alongside with the sculptures from the parish church in Zlatar in Croatia).\textsuperscript{28} Evidently, the statues were made just before his death and we can assume that Joseph Holzinger (supposedly his successor) set them on the altar and carved two angels on the sides of the attic and fine ornaments (wreaths of roses above the heads of St Anne and St Elizabeth).

The altar fills the whole space of the church apse. It is harmoniously adjusted to the architecture. The four main figures are life size (170 cm) and represent St Anne, St Joachim, St

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Grobelnik, \textit{Sopotnica}, 2003, p. 80.
\item Cevc, \textit{Valentin}, 2000, cat. 264, 250.
\item Pavlič, "Jožef Straub", 2017, pp. 162–163.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Zachary, and St Elizabeth with a young St John the Baptist standing beside her. All four saints are of great quality and richly dressed. In the upper part of the altar, there is a representation of heavenly glory: a figure of God the Father with significant globe beneath his right hand. The altar painting of Saint Joseph’s Death was attributed to Valentin Metzinger.\textsuperscript{29} It shows dying St Joseph lying on the bed with Virgin Mary and Jesus on the sides. There are also angels beside – one is depicted above St Joseph, with an open book, while two others (in the left lower corner) play with tools of St Joseph. The light is coming from the left side and brightening the body of St Joseph and the youthful face of Virgin Mary.

The side altar of St Anthony of Padua and the side altar of St Francis Xavier in the parish church in Malečnik must have been made around the same time as the side altar of St Joseph in Taborško, while the side altar in the parish church in Rogatec and the high altar in the succursal church in Slovenska Bistrica are later. In the literature we can find an opinion that the collaboration between Joseph Straub and Valentin Metzinger must have been very tight in Rogatec, because the angels on the altar painting and the sculptures of angels supplement each other.\textsuperscript{30} In my opinion this is exaggerated because we can clearly see that the size and the format of the painting were changed since some parts of the depicted angels and angel heads are cut. If the painter had to cut his canvas because he obviously did not know the exact dimensions of the altar opening, it does not seem to be plausible, that he knew where the sculptures of angels are (to be) placed and even how they would look like.\textsuperscript{31}

With the above presented examples, collaboration between Joseph Straub and Valentin Metzinger cannot be explained in detail. The painter made his paintings in studio and had them transferred to a location. Therefore we can assume that they were in contact or even collaborated at the stage of designing the altar. When this was settled, there was also no need for tighter cooperation; they worked individually – Valentin Metzinger in Ljubljana and Joseph Straub in Maribor, where they had their studios.

Joseph Straub’s altars with the altar paintings by Valentin Metzinger are the altars with the highest level of quality in his oeuvre (for example the side altar in the parish church in Rogatec). Therefore, we should point out one further aspect of their cooperation: Valentin

\textsuperscript{29}Cevc, Valentin, 2000, pp. 288, 418 (with there listed older bibliography); D. Krašovec, Valentin Metzinger 1699–1759. Lorenec na Kranjskem = un Lorrain a la lisiere de l’Empire, Ljubljana – Educy 2000, p. 255.
\textsuperscript{30}Cevc, Valentin, 2000, p. 248.
\textsuperscript{31}Cevc, Valentin, 2000, p. 248.
Metzinger and Joseph Straub were both the most eminent artists of 18th Century in Styria (and Carniola in the case of Valentin Metzinger). Commissioners that wanted the highest level of quality, engaged Valentin Metzinger and Joseph Straub because they were the best masters living in the area of today’s Slovenia (Styria and Carniola in the 18th Century).

I believe that further studies will help us to understand how the commissions were realised and how the process of making an altar and collaboration of different master looked like in 18th Century Styria.

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5. Archiepiscopal Archives of Maribor, Župnija Hoče, 47, Inspections Raittung 1752.

**Literature:**


Figure 1 - The side altar of St Joseph in a parish church of the Assumption of Mary in Taborsko (Hum na Sutli, Croatia), photo by Valentina Pavlič.
Figure 2 - The painting of St Joseph from Taborsko, before the restoration work, photo by Croatian Conservation Institute.
Figure 3 - The painting of St Joseph from Taborsko, after the restoration work, photo by Jovan Kliska, Croatian Conservation Institute.
Figure 4 - The side altar of St Anthony of Padua in Parish Church of St Peter in Malečnik, photo by Valentin Benedik, Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia.
Figure 6 - The high altar in the pilgrimage and succursal church of St Joseph in Slovenska Bistrica, photo by Valentina Pavlič.
Summary

The question of the collaboration between baroque sculptor Joseph Straub and baroque painter Valentin Metzinger: Some circumstances about the altars in Taborsko (Croatia), Malečnik, Slovenska Bistrica and Rogatec (Slovenia)

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In the first part of this article I present a less known painting of St Joseph on the side altar of St Joseph in the parish church of the Assumption of Mary in Taborsko (Hum na Sutli, Croatia), attributed to Valentin Metzinger; and in the second part I focus on the collaboration between baroque painter Valentin Metzinger and baroque sculptor Joseph Straub.

The painting of St Joseph in Taborsko was attributed to Valentin Metzinger by Mirjana Repanić Braun. In this article I point out the similarities of the painting with documented works of Valentin Metzinger. I also suggest that Josip Jagušić (a secretary of Jurij Branjug, the bishop of Zagreb), who commissioned the altar in Taborsko, made a commission of the painting to Valentin Metzinger after “the role model” of the painting he saw in Zagreb (the painting of St Joseph (with Jesus), which is kept at the Museum of Arts and Crafts in Zagreb (Croatia), but was made for the cathedral in Zagreb) and with a painter he already knew.

The collaboration of baroque sculptor Joseph Straub and baroque painter Valentin Metzinger raises a question of commissioning altars in 18th Century and a question of how these altars were made especially with respect of the collaboration of different masters. It seems rather obvious that carpenters, sculptors and painters, who did the polychromy, had to collaborate closely or were even organised as a unified workshop. On the other hand, a painter of altar paintings did not need to integrate in this group so tightly, but still had to join at certain phases in raising the altar.