

Vrbnik, Parish Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Conservation of the Central Part of the High Altar

Parish church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Vrbnik was first mentioned in the 14th century as a court building, and in 1579 Agostino Valier referred to it as a three-nave church of smaller dimensions. Its rich history is confirmed by numerous inscriptions written in Glagolitic script and preserved *in situ*. Based on these inscriptions, we know that the extensive renovation of the church began in 1585, and a new sanctuary was built in 1592.

The polychromed, gilded and carved high altar of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (719 x 775 x 60 cm) comprises of the central part of Venetian provenance from late 16th and early 17th century, and lateral two-tiered wings, possibly made in a local workshop in mid-17th century.

The inscriptions on the *Last Supper* painting, which once stood below the altarpiece, mention the acquisition of the retable in Venice in 1599 through Marin Cvitovič, the bishop's vice chancellor and a layman of Kotor, but it is not entirely certain they refer to that retable. The altar was consecrated in 1600, and gilded in 1601 and 1652, as evidenced by the inscription on the pedestal of the left pillar of the predella discovered during the removal of the overpaint in 2015. The central part of the altar is tectonically designed in the form of a classic aedicula with Corinthian columns and a triangular gable. It was made in an excellent late Renaissance and Mannerism Venetian workshop that was strongly influenced by Sebastiano Serlio's treatise on architecture. Its sculptural decoration and ornaments are inherent to the Renaissance and Mannerism vocabulary, unlike the lateral wings, which, despite their successful incorporation into the unity of the altar, formally and structurally differ from the central part due to typical Baroque vine ornaments, along with cartilage and algae motifs. The rich iconographic decoration of the altar consists of thirteen freestanding sculptures arranged around the altarpiece of the Assumption of the Blessed

Virgin Mary with angels and saints. The altarpiece is the work of an unknown painter, reminiscent of the 17th-century Venetian painting.

Conservation began in 2012 at the Rijeka Department for Conservation of the Croatian Conservation Institute. It was performed in phases due to the complex construction and dimensions of the altar. When the altar was being disassembled, elongated volutes were discovered on the sides of the columns. Lateral wings were attached to the volutes that are similar to a shallow cartouche above the altarpiece, and they harmoniously form the entire altar irrefutably proving an earlier date of the central part. Research has shown that the central part of the altar was completely gilded with poliment gilding on two occasions, and partially re-painted on three occasions. The most recent layer of overpaint was carried out with multi-coloured contouring and marbling. The extremely weakened wooden carrier, along with the entire altar, was completely disinfected and consolidated, and the work continued on the central part. Stabilization of the completely separated, disintegrated and elevated areas of the painted layer that were attached to the surface only with the recent altered glaze, which was then removed along with the second and third overpaint from the bases of columns, predella and sculptures, was a particular challenge. This was followed by carpentry repairs, reconstruction of damaged areas and carving missing elements of the carrier, reconstruction of the chalk base, retouching, reconstruction of the gilding and glazing the overpaint, thus completing the visual integrity of the altar.

Conservation of this remarkable work of art will continue on the lateral wings. After the work on the entire altar has been completed, this extraordinary liturgical, traditional and cultural *objet d'art* will be returned to the local community that co-financed the restoration project together with the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia and the Krk Diocese.



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Vrbnička župna crkva Uznesenja Blažene Djevice Marije spominje se prvi put u 14. stoljeću kao dvoranska građevina, dok je Agostino Valier 1579. godine spominje kao trobrodnu crkvu manjih dimenzija. O njezinu bogatom historijatu svjedoče i brojni glagoljski natpisi sačuvani *in situ*, prema kojima je poznato da je 1585. godine počela velika obnova crkve te da je 1592. godine izgrađeno novo svetište.

Polikromirani, pozlaćeni i rezbareni glavni oltar Uznesenja Blažene Djevice Marije (719 x 775 x 60 cm) sastoji se od središnjeg dijela venecijanske provenijencije s kraja 16. i početka 17. stoljeća te bočnih dvokatnih krila, mogući rad lokalne radionice sredine 17. stoljeća.

U natpisima na slici *Posljednja večera*, koja se nekad nalazila ispod oltarne pale, navodi se nabava retabla u Veneciji 1599. godine posredovanjem Marina Cvitovića, biskupskog vicekancelara i kotorskog laika, no nije posve sigurno da se referiraju na taj retabl. Oltar je posvećen 1600. godine, a pozlaćen 1601. i 1652. godine, o čemu svjedoči natpis na postamentu lijevog stupa predele otkriven tijekom uklanjanja preslika 2015. godine. Središnji dio oltara tektonski je koncipiran u formi klasične edikule s korintskim stupovima i trokutnim zabatom, a rad je vrsne kasnorenesansne i manirističke venecijanske radionice koja je stvarala pod snažnim utjecajem traktata o arhitekturi Sebastijana Serlija. Njegova skulpturalna dekoracija i ornamentika inherentne su renesansnom i manirističkom vokabularu, za razliku od bočnih krila koja se, unatoč uspješnom uklapanju u koncepciju oltarne cjeline, tipičnom baroknom ornamentikom vinove loze te motivima hrskavice i algi formalno i izvedbeno razlikuju od središnjeg dijela. Bogati ikonografski program oltara sastoji se od trinaest slobodnostojećih skulptura. One okružuju oltarnu palu s prikazom

Uznesenja Blažene Djevice Marije s anđelima i svecima. Pala je rad nepoznatog autora koji reminiscira na venecijansku slikarsku produkciju 17. stoljeća.

Cjeloviti konzervatorsko-restauratorski radovi počeli su 2012. godine na Restauratorskom odjelu Rijeka Hrvatskog restauratorskog zavoda, a izvedeni su u fazama zbog složene konstrukcije i dimenzija oltara. Tijekom demontaže su na bočnim stranama stupova otkrivene izdužene volute na koje su pričvršćena bočna krila, a srodne su plitkoj kartuši iznad oltarne pale te skladno zatvaraju cjelinu, nepobitno dokazujući raniju dataciju središnjeg dijela. Istraživačkim je radovima utvrđeno da je središnji dio oltara u dva navrata posve pozlaćen polimentnom pozlatom, u tri navrata djelomično je preslikan. Najrecentniji je preslik izveden raznobojnim konturiranjem i marmorizacijom. Oltar je dizinsekcijom i konsolidacijom izrazito oslabljenog drvenog nosioca obuhvaćen u cijelosti, a radovi su nastavljeni na središnjem dijelu. Naročito izazov bilo je stabiliziranje mjestično potpuno odvojenih, dezintegriranih i koritasto odignutih dijelova slikanog sloja koje je za površinu nosioca držao tek recentni alterirani lak, koji je potom uklonjen, kao i drugi i treći preslik s baza stupova, predele i skulptura. Uslijedila je stolarska sanacija, rekonstrukcija oštećenja i rezbarenje nedostajućih dijelova nosioca, rekonstrukcija kredne osnove te retuš, rekonstrukcija pozlate i lakiranje oslika, čime je zaokružena vizualna cjelovitost oltara.

Radovi na obnovi te iznimne umjetnine nastavit će se na bočnim krilima. Po dovršetku sveobuhvatnih radova, ovo umjetničko djelo iznimne vjerske, tradicijske i kulturološke vrijednosti bit će vraćeno lokalnoj zajednici, koja je uz Ministarstvo kulture RH i Krčku biskupiju sufinancirala projekt obnove.

