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ONLINE EXHIBITION
PHOTO ALBUM OF FOLK COSTUMES
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Abstract: Franz Thiard de Laforest (Vienna, 1838 – Kotor, 1911) was one of the pioneers of the art of photography. In 2005, thanks to a donation of artist's granddaughter Lidija Laforest, the Maritime Museum of Montenegro in Kotor received his original Album od Folk Costumes and the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb received 384 copies of images of costumes and digitized them in order to make them available to the public. Today, these photos represent a valuable testimony as a unique ethnographic document that serves, among others, as a precious source for the study of folk costumes at the turn of the 20th century. Their first public presentation will be in the form of an online exhibition named *Photo Album of Folk Costumes by Franz Thiard de Laforest*. Given the fact that this collection of photographs of folk costumes is a historical document of exceptional cultural value, the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research and Maritime Museum of Montenegro in Kotor launched a collaborative project of preparation and organization of a traveling exhibition that will be staged in many different places in which Laforest has spent a part of his life.

Keywords: Franz Thiard de Laforest, photography, folk costumes, online exhibition, traveling exhibition

1. Franz Thiard de Laforest (Vienna, 1838 – Kotor, 1911)

Franz Thiard de Laforest, the descendant of the renowned Burgundy lineage Thiard de Bissy, was born in Vienna in 1838. Although he graduated *cum laude* from the merchant school (1856), he chose photography as his life's calling [7, p. 63], at that time a completely new and astounding medium. He set out on a journey throughout Europe with a wooden camera given to him by his parents. Taking photographs of scenes whose beauty enchanted him, he captured the natural and cultural heritage of many European lands and cities, particularly those along the Adriatic coast, thereby becoming one of the pioneers of the art of photography. However, this was more than just art. Today his photographs are a source of data about life as it was at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, a testament of the people of that time, clothing and fashion, events and holidays, landscapes, architecture and interiors.

Franz Laforest was a man with artistic and restless spirit who loved to travel a lot, and was also fond of frequent change of residence. He spent the first twenty years of his life in his home town Vienna (Austria). After his studies at the end of the 1850s, he lived and was employed for some time in Trieste (Italy) and he spent the next two decades in the territory of the present-day Republic of Croatia. After living in the area of Rijeka and Bakar, he moved to Zadar where he lived from 1860 to 1868, working with his business partner Stiger [6]. Afterwards he stayed briefly in Šibenik and by 1870 was active in Split. He spent a short period in his home town, Vienna, where he married Gabriella von Lachmann, and in 1883 moved to Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), where four of their children were born. He finally settled in Kotor (Montenegro) in the 1890s, where he got three more children and where he lived until his death in 1911. He ventured out along the Dalmatian coast and occasionally went inland, filming also in Pula, Omiš, Livno, Metković, Dubrovnik [1, 8] and

some other places, creating documents of the time with the camera. Laforest also published two books illustrated with his own photographs: *Spalato und seine Alterhümer* (1878) and *Die Bocche du Cattaro* (1898) [3]. After Laforest's death, his wife Gabriella employed photographers who continued to work in his atelier in Kotor. His children, daughter Marija (Mitzi) and son Feliks, continued the tradition, so that the Atelier Laforest in Kotor kept its door open until some time after 1960 [4, p. 281].

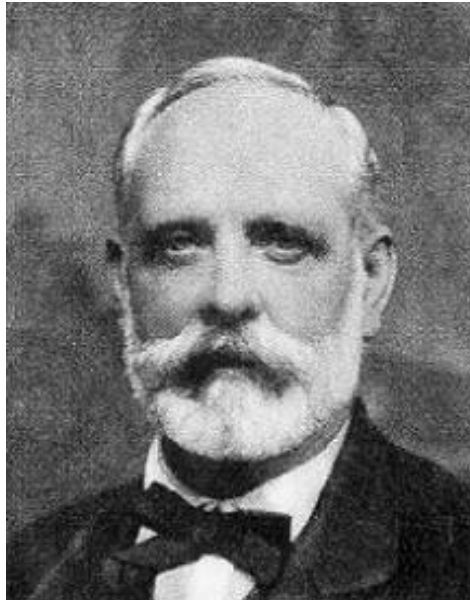


Figure 1: Franz Thiard de Laforest

2. Photo album of folk costumes

Franz Thiard de Laforest was introduced to the Croatian public for the first time in 2005 with the exhibition *Franz Thiard de Laforest and his large Album from Dalmatia* which was curated by the Croatian State Archives in Zagreb and accompanied by the digital edition of *Album from Dalmatia* (2005). The exhibition featured him as a photographer of landscapes and cultural landmarks. However, this great photographer also filmed people, mostly in his ateliers along the Adriatic coast, but also in the open. His descendants have preserved a photo album that probably served as a demonstration material to potential clients who came to one of his photo studios. Lidija Laforest, the photographer's granddaughter, donated the original photo album to the Maritime Museum of Montenegro in Kotor (where he spent the last three decades of his life working in his photo atelier), and she presented copies of the same photos to the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb (IEF) in 2005.

Laforest had picked 384 photographs from his opus and included them in this album of portraits, but, since two of the photos from the album are too damaged to determine what they represented, there are actually 382 useful photos. The album consists of 22 cardboard sheets, dimensions 25 x 32.5 x 1.8 cm, which are connected two by two with brown adhesive tape. Nine sepia photographs dimensions 5.5 by 9 cm are glued on every page of the photo album. These portrait photographs are today unique testaments, precious historical and ethnographical documents which are, among other things, used for the study of the clothing of people in villages and cities at the turn of the century.



Figure 2: Photo Album of Folk Costumes



Figure 3: Male Costume,
Dalmatian hinterland – Imotski

Working on the inventory of these donated photographs was quite an undertaking, because none of the data about them, such as the dates and places of filming, were provided anywhere. Only a specialist with a comprehensive experience and knowledge of the history of the clothing of Croatian and neighboring lands could determine the origins of clothes or figure out more accurately the localities and kinds of clothes worn in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries and be able to assign descriptions to these photographs. The expert who

accomplished this task was Dr. Aleksandra Muraj, former employee of the IEF, now retired. She recognized in these photographs 164 Montenegrin costumes, 139 costumes from Bosnia and Herzegovina and 74 costumes from Croatia. She could not distinguish the precise location of nine photographs, but recognized four Albanian and two costumes of Moslem people, and three photographs of costumes that were artist's renderings. Laforest's opus consists of 211 photographs of male, 192 female and two child costumes.



Figure 4: Peasant woman,
Dalmatian hinterland – Vrlika

These photographs document the clothing of the more affluent people from the countryside and cities. The making of a photograph was, at a time when photography was a new and rare medium, a costly endeavor, and only the wealthy could afford such a luxury. They dressed for such occasions in their finest and most festive clothes. Lidija Laforest wrote that every year her grandfather Franz would photograph the festival of St. Tryphon (February 3rd), which used to be celebrated for up to two weeks [7, p. 67]. Some photographs were probably taken during such periods, when people would dress up and put on their finest clothes. As Vujošević and Karadžić [9, p. 118] assert, on such occasions people tried to include all parts of dress worn at that time. Men for instance were filmed with weaponry, and women with ornaments, handbags, gloves, hand warmers and similar fashion accessories. Gabriella von Lachmann, Laforest's wife, is filmed in a few of the photographs, dressed in various folk costumes [7, p. 67-68]. The kind of fabric, ornaments and other detail are recognizable in the photographs, which are therefore an authentic and valuable testament of the past and a source for the study of clothing of the period. The pictures were technically and aesthetically perfected to the tiniest of details. Although Laforest took most of the photographs of people in his atelier, he also took photographs outside the atelier, which was

quite a demanding task at the time when the equipment itself weighed more than 40 kilograms, and he would take porters to help him [3].

3. Online exhibition

The wish of the donor, Lidija Laforest and her family friend and attorney Lana Srkoč, who are the caretakers of Laforest's legacy, was to make the photographs accessible to everyone and not only to the users of the IEF's collections. For that reason, the photographs were digitized and included as the first trial material in a new digital repository of the IEF.

As a next step in the promotion of Franz Thiard de Laforest and his photographs, IEF proposed to the donor the presentation of the album in the form of an online exhibition, which seems to be the simplest and financially the most acceptable way of its publication. After all, visibility, recognition and promotion can today be most easily and most efficiently achieved through the Internet.

The realization of the exhibition began in collaboration with the IT company ArhivPro from Koprivnica which has developed its own module for online exhibition. That module presents not only text and pictures in a very clear manner, but also audio and video materials which further improved and enriched the exhibition and made it much more attractive. But, because of the poor quality of the photocopies of the photographs, which could be better seen after their digitization and augmentation, the IEF had to contact the Maritime Museum of Montenegro in Kotor and ask for the access to the original photo album to make copies more suitable for publication. With the support and interest of Ms. Mileva Vujošević Pejaković, the museum's director, the IEF finally received the original photo album. The photos were digitized at the IEF, following the highest archival standards and recommendations for digitization.



Figure 5: Female costume, Montenegro

In this online exhibition, the little known opus of Franz Thiard's photographs of clothing will be displayed for the first time to the public. The exhibition will present Laforest as a photographer – portraitist and artist – and tell the story about the life styles and clothing culture of his contemporaries. Laforest's life story will be enriched in this exhibition by family memories – video testimony of his granddaughter Lydia Laforest will also become part of the exhibition.



Figure 6: Herzegovinian

The exhibition will present 10% of the material from the photo album and will be released in 2014 at the <http://www.arhivx.net/laforest/> and also on the web pages of the IEF (<http://www.ief.hr>). In addition to this, there is also a plan to export the scanned photos and the whole online exhibition into Europeana, through which Laforest's life and work are going to be more visible and accessible to European and global audiences.

4. Beyond the online exhibition: Project Laforest

Laforest's online exhibition is just at the root of a broader international project. Given that this collection is of such exceptional value as a document of the past, IEF and Maritime Museum of Montenegro in Kotor – together with the caretakers of Laforest's heritage Ms. Lidija Laforest and Ms. Lana Srkoč – started a collaborative project with the intention to promote the life and work of Franz Thiard de Laforest as one of the first photographers who were active in Southeast Europe (Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The project has several aims, including preparing and organizing a travelling photo exhibition with the accompanying large illustrated catalogue and the publication of the digital

photo album on CD, which will remain as a permanent memory of the project and broaden awareness of the existence of these precious documents of artistic and cultural heritage.

A part of the plan is to stage a travelling photographic exhibition in bigger towns in which Laforest stayed, if not in all of them. These are located all over the territories of five European countries, which were, during his life, unified within the borders of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy (Austria, Italy, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro). The opening of the exhibition is planned at the Maritime Museum of Montenegro in Kotor, after that it will move to the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb. Although Laforest did not live in Zagreb, his granddaughter Lidija, also a photographer, lives in Zagreb now, fostering the memory of her grandfather by promoting his life and work. Vienna, the city in which Laforest was born and married, will also be included in the first round of exhibitions, to be followed by other towns that marked his life's path, for example Trieste, Rijeka, Šibenik, Split, Dubrovnik, Mostar and so on.

5. Conclusion

This project is a very good example of the value, rationale and purpose of digitizing the heritage documents. Digitization of Laforest's photographic legacy is of exceptional documentary value, protecting the original collection and making copies, thereby allowing further distribution and popularization of the name and opus of Franz Thiard de Laforest. Laforest's album of people in folk costume is a unique testament and ethnographic document of the period, which should be accessible to the public and serve for the study of country and city dress at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, in addition to the study of folk creativity and customs in general. Instead of one original photo album, stored in a museum depot and hidden from the public eye, high-quality copies have been created which will be disseminated in several ways and will become a common good, accessible to anybody who is interested.

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