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PROGRESS REPORT

August 2011
Including a visit to
Dalmatia

The International Trust for Croatian Monuments marks its 20th anniversary this autumn. I am glad that in November an exhibition, initiated by the Trust, opens at the Royal Society, which will celebrate the 300th anniversary of the birth of Roger Joseph Boscovich, 1711–1787, a fellow of the Royal Society and a major figure in the history of the Croatian nation.

Boscovich, a Jesuit priest, was one of the most remarkable scientists of his time. He left his mark in many fields: mathematics, physics, astronomy, geodesy, geometry, optics, archaeology, philosophy, poetry and diplomacy. In 1743, when Pope Benedict XIV was faced with cracks appearing in the dome of St Peter's cathedral, Boscovich suggested encircling it with iron rings, thus saving Michelangelo's masterpiece from collapse. In the 1750s, he worked with Athenian Stuart on the famous Obelisk brought to Rome from Egypt by Emperor Augustus. He published many books and papers, his *magnum opus* being *Theoria*, the first general theory of atomism, which made him world famous.

The Royal Society holds a valuable collection of Boscovich material. The curator on the Croatian side, Dr Ivica Martinovic, was delighted with his discoveries in their archives and he will, together with Dr Felicity Henderson, Keith Moore and Rupert Baker from the Royal Society, present the achievements and importance of this historic figure, still relevant today. The year of his birth is commemorated throughout 2011; in Croatia, where he was born, and in Italy and France, where he lived and worked. The exhibition at the Royal Society is our contribution to the celebrations.

My search for the untraced full figure portrait of Boscovich by Robert Edge Pine, 1730 - 1788, in spite of delving into many sources, is proving fruitless. By kindness of the editors, a letter was published in *Country Life* in July 2010 and in the *Art Newspaper* in November 2010, asking for help in our search. The National Portrait Gallery and *Art History News* both placed our quest on their web pages. I traced the family of Dr William Bromfield, an eminent London surgeon who commissioned the portrait in 1760, to no avail. We feel, however, that this painting is somewhere in England, unrecognised. In order to do all we can, this painting is now placed with the Art Loss Register, together with a head and shoulders portrait of Boscovich by Pine, stolen from the Franciscan Convent in Dubrovnik in 1972.

The book, *Croatia: Aspects of Art, Architecture and Cultural Heritage*, published by Frances Lincoln in November 2009, is sold out. In the words of the publisher, this is a big success. By kindness of a new sponsor, JADRANSKI NAFTAOVOD d.d., there will now be a reprint. All royalties from the sale of both editions will go towards the conservation of books from the Franciscan Friary in Vukovar. The most recent review of the book is by Professor Deborah Howard writing in the *Renaissance Studies Journal* in June 2011. As Professor Howard says, "Croatia's contribution to European art and architecture badly needs reassessment", one of the main purposes behind the whole project. This and other reviews, including an article by Professor David Ekserdjian in the *Burlington Magazine*, January 2011, giving the correct attribution to one of the paintings in the Mimara Collection in Zagreb, may be found on our web page, www.croatianmonuments.org.

Henry and I spent a week in Dalmatia in May. We started in **Zadar**, where my sister, Ljerka Njers, opened an exhibition of new work in glass at the Museum of Antique Glass. The Museum was founded two years ago and holds an important collection of Roman glass from Zadar and its surroundings. We also visited the Easel Conservation Department of the Croatian Conservation Institute where we saw work in progress on a number of paintings, including work by Carpaccio. Our main port of call was the State Archives, which holds documents relating to the history of Dalmatia for the last 400 years. In 2010, we donated £1,000 to the Archives for the purchase of conservation material and I am happy to say that we shall do the same again this year, by kindness of the Sandy and Zorica Glen Charitable Settlement. The same charity is supporting again this year, as they did last year, the International Conservation Workshop on the island of **Lopud**. To be able to help to preserve, conserve and store important artefacts in a sensitive environment, making them available also for research and public access, considering our limited funding, is one of our priorities.

Following in the footsteps of Timothy Clifford's chapter relating to Dalmatia, we visited the historic Queen Jelena Madio Park, created on one of the main bastions of Zadar by the then commander, Baron Franz Ludwig von Welden, and opened to the public in 1829. While Zadar was a fortress town, the park was a most popular outdoor space. Today, much remains of its original planting, fragments of carved stone are still scattered around the park, one of which, a gazebo with two Renaissance marble figures of bearded satyrs, sadly defaced by graffiti. The park, one of many in Zadar, is lovely and still a great asset to the town.

Zadar is rich in antiquities and its many churches and museums full of treasures, so well described by Timothy Clifford and Donal Cooper in the book already mentioned. We visited the Permanent Exhibition of Religious Art in the Benedictine nunnery of St Mary, where many of the art treasures are exhibited, the People's Museum and the Franciscan Friary. In 1974, thieves broke into the Friary and stole valuable pieces, including a 14th century crucifix, which Donal Cooper recently recognised on display in a museum in Italy. It was bought at Sotheby's in 1976 in good faith and donated consequently to the museum. The procedure is in progress for its return to the Franciscans.

Back in London, we were approached by a young textile conservator, Silvija Banic, who, while working for her PhD, also works for the Zadar Diocese as a volunteer, helping to collect, preserve and restore church vestments and remnants of textiles found in churches throughout the Diocese. The textiles date from the 17th to the 20th century and form a part of the Collection of the Zadar Archbishopric. Unless they are taken care of, they will perish, as photographs sent to us clearly show. The Ministry of Culture is financing the costly repair of some chosen pieces, the Zadar Diocese is doing all they can, but help is still needed for the provision of conservation material and adequate storage. The Trust has contributed £1,000 for a conservation standard metal chest of drawers, but more is needed. Any donation towards this project would be most welcome.

In **Sibenik**, the imposing cathedral of St James never fails to elicit a sigh of wonderment. Its stone façade glitters in the sun and it will be another marvel when its interior is cleaned. We also visited the Franciscan Friary and were happy to see that the library is now restored and the books safely returned to their places. Holding 148 codices and 161 incunabula, the library was threatened some years ago by the leaking roof and infestation. Dr Nicholas Pickwoad and Robert Child visited the library, a team of conservators from the University and National Library in Zagreb spent time removing and taking care of the books while the restoration work was carried out. Now all is in place. We offered to supply them with anti-sun film for the windows and new curtains, which are still needed.

In **Trogir**, the interior of the cathedral of St Lawrence did take our breath away! The difference between parts of the walls which have been cleaned, and those still waiting to be done is astonishing. Work continues at a pace! It was by kindness of the Headley Trust in 1997 that the process of conservation was able to begin.

In Trogir, we also wanted to see the garden and park of the Garagnin family created in 1811, today a poor reflection of its former glory. We never knew that it existed. Now there are hopes that this park may see better days again and become a welcome place of rest for the people of Trogir. Its history and present condition is fully described by Dr Ana Sverko in the June issue of Historic Gardens Review, also available on our web site.

In **Hvar**, the restoration of the garden of the poet Hanibal Lucic, created in the 16th century, continues. The survey of the garden has been done. Ivan Sikavica has by now carved eight new pillars with funding from our Trust and the curator of the garden, Nives Tomasevic, is arranging for the well area, in the middle of the garden, to be secured. Flagstones will be levelled and three new pillars and an original one put in place, with wooden poles on top, forming a pergola. Water from a stream running nearby will be reintroduced into the well, and this will be used for watering the garden, saving a considerable expenditure. I hope that before long the landscaping of the garden will become a priority.

In **Split**, we were delighted to see our ex-students, who now hold important positions at the Croatian Conservation Institute and the Academy of Fine Arts. The stone conservators continue with their impressive laser cleaning of the Peristyle. Ivan Sikavica is coming to London in September to attend a conference at the British Museum about the use of lasers in restoration. The Institute has moved their Stone, Frescos, Mosaics and Wood Conservation Departments to a disused military barracks affording them more space and better working conditions. At the Academy, students under Jurica Matijevic, head of the Easel Conservation Department, showed us different projects in progress. They prepare their own paints, make tools and carve frames. Marin Barisic was part of a team of conservators who worked on a splendid marble statue of Venus, recently found near Skopje in near perfect condition.

We continue to support students in their efforts to gain further training and experience. In August last year, we helped a student at the Nordoff_Robbins Music Therapy Centre, Dejan Cacija, to acquire books for a music therapy library in Osijek and Vukovar. In November, Iva Gobic, paper conservator, attended a seminar by Professor Christopher Clarkson. Ivo Kipre, who finished his MA Degree in Furniture Conservation and Restoration at Bucks New University last January, now works at Arlington Conservation, gaining further experience. We hope that the Croatian Conservation Institute will one day open furniture department in Dubrovnik, where Ivo's skills could prove very useful. Ivana Unkovic, who works for the Croatian Conservation Institute in Split, attended a seminar, New Methods of Cleaning Paintings, at the London Metropolitan University in July this year. Jasenka Gudelj was another happy recipient of a scholarship from the Attingham Trust for their Summer School this year. We continue to subscribe institutions and individuals to scholarly journals.

We very much hope to help with the conservation of some of the 409 books from the library of the Franciscan Friary in Vukovar. We have pledges of support as well as royalties from the sale of our book, once the best method of proceeding is established. After an absence of 20 years, it is high time that these books should return to their old home. As far as I can gather, Vukovar remains a desolate place, its soul has been extinguished, and very few Croatians are returning to their homesteads.

The hand-woven linen towels from the Flax and Linen Workshop in Ivanic Grad are still available for sale at Postcard Teas and Livingstone Studio and with me at home.

I would be delighted to give more information about any of the projects mentioned in this report and extremely grateful for any support towards the work of the Trust. The Trust is operated at minimal expenditure and all donations can be Gift Aided.



Clockwise from top left:

Queen Jelena Madio Park in Zadar.

A view across the Hanibal Lucic Garden on Hvar.

A painting of Tomyris by Georg Pencz in Zagreb

by DAVID LEKNERDIJAN

Madonna and Child, Niccolo Di Giovanni Fiorentino, Franciscan Friary, Hvar.

A marble statue of Venus under restoration at the Academy of Fine Arts in Split, highly successful example of International cooperation between the conservators of the Academy and the Museum of the City of Skopje.



The newly restored Library of the Franciscan Friary in Sibenik.

A painting of Tomyris by Georg Pencz at the Mimara Museum in Zagreb.

A view of Peristyle and the Cathedral bell tower in Split.