This book presents, from the point of view of the early modern historian, the legacy of Baroque thought in modern and contemporary literature, a highly under-researched subject that spans two disciplines and several centuries. Its purpose is not to discover the direct links and references of one culture in the other, but, rather, to present the patterns of thought that our time owes to the age of Baroque, namely both temporal and spatial plurality. The books explored here (*Invisible Cities*, by Italo Calvino, *Rings of Saturn*, by W.G. Sebald, and *The Investigator*, by Dragan Velikić) are not novels that are consciously or purposefully Baroque in their structure, or use the age of the Baroque as the setting of their narratives. However, the Baroque is still present in them all, primarily as the aesthetic principle, as that invisible heritage that shapes the worldviews of their characters. They are Baroque in the sense of space they inhabit, and in the way reality and imagination are interwoven.

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Cover image Francisque Millet, *Landscape with antique figures and a beggar*, c.1660, © State Art Collection in the Royal Compound, Belgrade

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Hidden Legacies of Baroque Thought in Contemporary Literature

Jelena Todorović

JELENA TODOROVIĆ

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The Realms of Eternal Present

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By

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To my parents

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

**Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (London: Picador, 1974) /
Le Città Invisibili (Milano: Mondadori, 1972)**

Invisible Cities is several books folded into one, comprising a multiple image of one city and a polyphonic understanding of our relationship with urban space. It consists of fifty-five portraits of imaginary cities that Marco Polo recounts to the Great Khan, under the pretence that they are the metropolises of the latter's vast empire.

As in the true Atlas of the Khan's realm, they are collected in several categories: *Cities and Eyes, Cities and the Dead, Cities and Memory, Thin Cities, Trading Cities*, and so forth. Each of them is both an independent centre, with all the prerequisites of physical space, and an allegory of our experience of the veritable nature of the city. They are solid and profoundly ephemeral at the same time, forever escaping our perception; taken to an extreme, as with Calvino's emblematic city of Fedora, they are no more than *mere assumptions* dissolving into nothingness. Being slippery and unattainable, like the true fabric of any metropolis, they possess a relentless power of metamorphosis, frequently changing their seemingly fundamental aspects according to the viewpoint of the observer.

There are cities that are simply places of reversal, like Argia, where earth takes the place of air, or Isaura, whose visible shape only echoes the outlines of another city buried underneath. Many of them are capitals of dichotomy, perpetually developing unions of opposites. One such is Valdrada, eternally bound to its reflection, replicating its every change unto infinity. Moriana, for its part, possesses a splendid face and a dilapidated reverse: reminding any visitor of the transitory nature of our realities. Some cities deny their own existence, like the elusive Irene, which constantly changes its name according to the perception of the traveller; or

Ersilia, which has almost no shape at all, but is constructed of intertwined and knotted lines formed by the associations between its citizens. All of Calvino's cities are no more than *spider-webs of intricate relationships seeking a form.*

The most transitory of them all, however, is the city that exists neither in the book nor in the Khan's empire. It is concealed behind each city recounted, its fleeting shadow and hidden side. This enduring true object of the narrator's longing is his forlorn hometown, Venice, of which all the cities in the book are just facets in a symbolic portrait. Venice can only be hinted at, never described, because Polo fears that *memory's images, once fixed in words, are erased*.

Invisible Cities is, above all, the book of manifold journeys to unknown territories and invisible realms that Calvino's narrator recounts. But all his journeys revolve in the past; they are voyages of memory and longing. He moves forward, but never loses sight of the past in his quest for a true understanding of space and our place in it.

W.G. Sebald, The Rings of Saturn (London: Vintage, 1995) / Die Ringe des Saturn: Eine englische Wallfahrt (Frankfurt am Main: EichhornVerlag, 1995)

The Rings of Saturn is a work beyond categories: simultaneously a travelogue, an elusive memoir, and perhaps especially, a melancholy journey into the depths of European history. Meditating over an intricate intertwining between our presents and our pasts, it is also an essay on the circular nature of the true matter of time. Equally intricate is the route of the main narrator's passage through the English countryside.

Written as a record of a walk along the coasts of Norfolk and Suffolk, *The Rings of Saturn* is only on the first level of perception a voyage through the landscape of the present. Actually, as its original German title suggests, it is a pilgrimage into the labyrinths of our calamitous past. Every curve on the road the narrator follows, and each person he encounters along the way, is an introduction into reflections on a past that never seems particularly remote. In particular, Sebald reminisces about great authors who

resided in the same territory of East Anglia that the narrator passes through: Thomas Browne, Edward Fitzgerald, Joseph Conrad, Michael Hamburger, Chateaubriand.

Just as vague as his images of the present are the photographs Sebald inserts into the text. Resembling the documents of the past, they are images of constructed history, as unstable and ethereal as our own reminiscences. They are unsettling reminders of the fallacy of history and our own flickering nature.

Sometimes, Sebald's passages into the obscurities of history take him as far as China, to the malevolent Dowager Empress T'zu-hsi, or to the coasts of the Congo, or to the suffering of victims of Jasenovac. Rusting boats on the Norfolk shores, dilapidated edifices in Somerleyton, long forgotten silk-worm farms, shoals of herrings that disappear into oblivion – Sebald's view of history is one of endless destruction, where *too many buildings have fallen down, too much rubble has been heaped up, the moraines and deposits are insuperable.*

This sense of the past is bequeathed to Sebald bequeaths by one of the principal, albeit shadowy, protagonists of the book: the Baroque philosopher and physician Thomas Browne. It is precisely Browne's legacy that defines the sense of time in the entire book: as amalgamated, inseparable; an eternal present into which all our histories are perpetually folded. Only in such a temporal constellation can Sebald's world be comprehended, as a realm where *years behind us were still to come.*

Dragan Velikić, *Islednik/Investigator* (Belgrade: Laguna, 2015).

Investigator, like the other novels to be discussed, defies standard genre classifications. It is simultaneously a recollection, a pseudo-memoir, and a fictional journey through a swarm of pasts. Nearly everything in this work eludes definition, even the character of the narrator, who is – and is not – the author. This ambiguity of identity only draws the reader deeper in the true matter of *Investigator*: the pursuit of the unattainable fabrics of memory and oblivion.

Begun upon the death of the narrator's mother, the book follows his investigative and retrospective journey aimed at unravelling the thread of her life, and achieving the disentanglement of his own. Thus, the entire novel can be seen as a melancholy quest for the very nature of time. For that reason, all the characters are not only interconnected through the knotted paths of their lives, but through the sense of a *pervasive* past that marks their own narratives. While the narrator's mother appears as the bearer of the very notion of memory – its true and absolute allegory – other key characters in the novel, Lizeta Bizjak and Diona Fažov, are guardians of its deposits, and possessors of intangible mnemonic spaces.

Velikić rightfully sees memory as the substance upon which our world is constructed, and without which our spaces, as well as our identities, begin to unravel. *The world indeed is a riddle, a collection of artefacts, intuitions and obsessions, a compendium of seemingly irrelevant moments retained by the fickleness of memory.* The lands of memory also define two cities, Pula and Thessaloniki, as pivotal *loci* in the life of the narrator. Both are also the ultimate liminal realms, veritable invisible cities: their spaces constructed of a multitude of reminiscences, and their imagined boundaries far wider than their physical confines. In his quest for the elusive fabric of time, the narrator returns to Pula, the city of his youth, where all times and all ages seem to intersect; a place that is both then and now. It is not the city proper, but the realm of dreams. Equally insubstantial is the city of Thessaloniki, which the narrator discovers in his childhood through the reminiscences of Lizeta Bizjak. It is the city of the past, an apparition on the wall, a mirage that will haunt him for the rest of his life.

Throughout *Investigator*, the narrator explores the confines of time, discovering the omnipresence of the past and the eternal intertwining of all times and all places. He discovers that time, in its essence, is indivisible: *everything that ever was, exists eternally. It floats in the chasm of centuries.*

I

INTRODUCTION:
THE PURSUIT OF HIDDEN LEGACIES

For decades, early modernists endeavoured to trace how various elements of the Baroque cultural heritage influenced our time: mainly in philosophy, the visual arts, the theatre, and urban planning. However, these diverse legacies were usually viewed as mere precursors to developments that the same fields underwent in the 19th century, that great dawn of the modern world.

Unquestionably, the Baroque bestowed lasting tangible legacies upon us. However, a less visible but no less significant Baroque heritage has endured down the centuries, and still profoundly defines how we perceive the world. Two fundamental concepts, time and space, experienced a pivotal change in the age of the Baroque. Above all, this change is linked to the idea of mutability, a quality innate in the Baroque itself.

Hybridity and Permeability: The First Global Style

What, good, strong, thick, straight,
Long, great, white, one, yes, air, fire,
High, far is named,
Thinks bad, weak, thin,
Bent broad, small, black, three, no
Earth, flood, deep, near to shun.
(…)
All is changing, all is loving, all things seem some things to hate,
He must human wisdom fathom, who this but would contemplate.[1]

---

[1] "Was gut, stark, schwer, recht,
Lang, gross, weiss, eins, ja, Luft, Feuer,
Hoch, weitgenennt,

From here to the very end of this book, spanning centuries, cultures and languages, the Baroque will remain a constant, despite denying constancy itself: an element of everlasting change. It will meander, like the convoluted outlines of Baroque art, and define the works of the period, connecting – in unexpected ways – painting and poetry, sculpture and architecture, state spectacle and literature. The ideas of fickleness, permeability and mutability are pivotal to understanding the Baroque world, and foundational to the crucial legacy of the Baroque age in the present: how we chart and measure our world, and more fundamentally, the sense of time and space through which everything else is experienced.

Mutability not only pervaded all aspects of Baroque culture, but was inherent to the style itself. Flexibility and permeability, for their part, would enable the Baroque to expand from a purely European culture into the first global one. For, although initially connected to the countries of Catholic Europe, the Baroque proliferated throughout the known world, demonstrating an admirable capacity for transformation, adaptation and change –a quality only recently noted in modern scholarship.[2] Our new understanding of the Baroque as a fundamentally adaptable style has not only profoundly changed perceptions of its age, but remapped the territories of the Baroque world.

Previously understood as a time-honoured interrelationship between centre and periphery, Baroque culture was particularly connected to Catholic capitals in Sicily, Bohemia, Austria, France,

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Pflegtbos, schwach, leicht,
krumm, breit, klein, schwartz, drei, nein,
Erdt, Flut, tief, nah zumeiden.
(...)
Alles wechselt, alles liebet; alles scheinet was zuhassen:
Weraus diesem nach wird denken, muss der Menschen Weisheitfassen."
From "The Change of Human Things" by Quirinus Kuhlmann, in Harold B. Segel, ed., *The Baroque Poem* (London: Dutton, 1974), 198-199.
[2] The idea of the *universal Baroque* was discussed in recent reconsiderations by Robert Harbison and Giovanni Careri, but it was with Peter Davidson's *The Universal Baroque* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) that this new understanding of expanded Baroque received an appropriately detailed examination.

and southern Germany, as well as Rome itself. At the time, its cultural development in other countries was either viewed as a pale reflection of the dominant style emanating from one of the centres or, worse, as its pale epigone.

But in reality, the Baroque world had no metropolis. In essence, like many Baroque spaces, it was a highly polycentric world. It was a universe in perpetual movement; a realm of ceaseless change.[3] As carefully elaborated in the pioneering work of Peter Davidson, this particularly 'Baroque' quality of the Baroque was the very foundation for its development into veritably universal and, one could almost say, omnipotent phenomenon. Baroque artistic creations produced on the distant shores of South America, China and England can easily be seen as the equals of those created in centres like Rome or Paris. Thus, the Baroque should never be considered *a single style* of the Counter Reformation, with one undisputed capital in Rome and many peripheries of greater or lesser importance. Rather, it ought to be seen as a *movement of pluralities*, as an age of manifold visions, a world with many peripheries and no centre.[4]

Though born out of the demands of the Counter Reformation, the Baroque swiftly surpassed its religious confines to influence all known artistic disciplines and, indeed, all spheres of life. Like no culture before it, the Baroque managed to embrace and appropriate, to adapt and subject, to make conquests through visual idioms that had far greater influence than any conquest attempted by other means in early modern history. It was a peculiar form of conquest, in which was no clear distinction between the conqueror and the conquered, with this blurred border allowing for influences to develop in both directions.[5] As such, the Baroque possessed an

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[3]A critical study of the concept of the universal Baroque was presented in Jelena Todorović, "The Baroque Has no Metropolis – Peter Davidson and the Universal Baroque", in *European Theories in Former Yugoslavia: Trans-theory Relations between Global and Local Discourses* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

[4] Todorović, "The Baroque has no Metropolis," 187-192.

[5] See Davidson, *The Universal Baroque*, 1-12, and Todorović, "The Baroque has no Metropolis," 187-192.

unsurpassable level of vitality and renovation; it was a style that re-invented itself eternally.

Due to its high level of adaptability, the Baroque cultural idiom could be re-written, re-invented and re-combined into infinity. It developed in the most diverse and remote cultural surroundings, enriching the established cultural model with an almost endless number of local variations. Therefore, from Macao, to England, to the Orthodox Archbishopric of Karlovci, Baroque culture's perpetual alterations yielded autonomous forms of its style. This process almost seamlessly merged the known elements of the Baroque visual idiom with local cultures, thus engendering works of pronounced cultural hybridity, in which the local element was never viewed as weakening, only as enriching its substance. Some of the best examples of this cultural bilinguality proliferated in the territories previously considered the Baroque world's borderlands. Whether in a physically remote land such as New Mexico, or a confessionally distant one such as the Orthodox Archbishopric in the Austrian Empire, Baroque culture created some of its most powerful art precisely where one might expect it to be the most constrained; and thus were the new outlines of the Baroque world confirmed.

The Baroque's ability to transform itself and to create myriad variations established it as a style whose nature was to appropriate. One of the most prevalent Counter Reformation emblems – the flaming heart – could be seamlessly transferred from the height of the Roman Baroque, as exemplified in Bernini's sculpture of Ludovica Albertoni, to the ceiling of a church in Aberdeen and the pages of Zaharija Orfelin's festival book devoted to Bishop Mojsej Putnik in Novi Sad.[6] In all three works, despite geographical and confessional differences, the same Baroque emblem is used in the most direct way, carrying in itself a multitude of interpretations. The same emblem also adorned another remote but equally important corner of the Baroque world: the metropolitan gate of the Orthodox capital of Kiev, thus confirming, on the map, the presence of yet another autonomous Baroque capital.[7]

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[6] For the migration of this emblem throughout the Baroque world, see Davidson, *The Universal Baroque*, 177-180.

[7] Jelena Todorović, *Entitet u Senci: Mapiranje moći i državni Spektakl u*

From Kiev to Cusco, from Aberdeen to Karlovci and Rome, the notions of the Baroque capital proliferated, as a living argument for the world as a fusion of pluralities. Wherever spectacles of the state, the Jesuit educational system and pattern poetry could reach, the Baroque culture could be established, further expanding the confines of that polycentric realm.

The Age of Metamorphoses or the Unity of the Arts

The same concepts of mutability and permeability that so profoundly changed the outlines of the Baroque universe also conditioned approaches to artistic media. The Baroque age considered the boundaries between different arts utterly porous, and saw the creation of works that, for the first time, integrated all the arts in *one beautiful whole*.[8] Despite initial steps towards the unification of the arts during the Renaissance, it was Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) who successfully fused all known artistic media into a new medium in its own right.[9] Like Baroque culture itself, the arts became inter-permeable and therefore radically adaptable. In its style, as well as in its form, Baroque art was the expression of a ceaseless movement, the embodiment of transformation.

This new approach towards the integration of the arts had its primary expression in Bernini`s emblematic works, including his *Ecstasy of Santa Teresa* in Capella Cornaro, and his magnificent modulation both of diverse media and the space that enveloped them, in the *Throne of St. Peter's* in the Basilica of St. Peter. In all his creations, the boundaries separating the various artistic

Karlovačkoj Mitropoliji (Novi Sad: Platoneum, 2010), 58-67.

[8] For the concept of *bel composto* in the Baroque see Irving Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); Bruce Boucher, *Italian Baroque Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 134-152; and Careri, *Baroques* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 27-60.

[9] For the concept of *bel composto* in Bernini's work see Charles Avery, *Bernini: Genius of the Baroque* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997); Rudolf Wittkower, *Bernini*: *The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque* (London: Phaidon, 1955).

disciplines he employed were as fluid as the style itself, for this was the essence of the *bel composto* and of Baroque culture itself. Art and its expression were amalgamated in a perfect unity, in which one can hardly tell where one media begins and another ends: painting fuses with sculpture and melts into architecture, in a single unending metamorphosis.

Moreover, the *bel composto* incorporated yet another concept that defined the Baroque age: a pervasive sense of illusion.[10] In a period that embraced change and transformation as primary characteristics, the veracity of our reality became a highly unstable category. If the world was the embodiment of constant change, then nothing that reality presented could be entirely true; nothing could be what it seemed, and everything was what was not. Alteration and transformation were the principles that underpinned the entire visible world. Outside of the heavenly spheres, there were no fixed certainties; mutability and alteration were in the very hearts of things.

The Baroque individual was the first to doubt the reliability of his surroundings, and ultimately of himself. This new disbelief in the solidity of space and our place in it tinted all forms of artistic expression, and found its ultimate manifestation in a profusion of effects that were previously deemed to be outside the confines of visual media. The unity of *bel composto* enabled the creation of unparalleled realms, which – though imaginary– perfectly reflected our world: a compendium of mists, shadows, visions and dreams. The fundamental role of illusion in the creation of Baroque aesthetics and the Baroque age itself is particularly pertinent to discussions of the notions of time and space, upon which the image of the world is constructed.

Alongside the *bel composto* religious ensembles that adorned churches throughout the Baroque world, the age saw the dramatic rise of a particular genre that further explored the malleability of

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[10] For more on illusion in the Baroque age see Maravall, *Baroque Culture: Analysis of a Historical Structure* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 225-251 and Careri, *Baroques*, 61-81.

different media: spectacles of state.[11] Though originating in antiquity, this genre reached its pinnacle of development in the age of the absolutist state. Each realm had to be perpetually legitimised and glorified to ensure its enduring presence on the political scene. Its main aim being to communicate the ideology of rule, the spectacle of state fused all known visual and performing arts into a single unified form. For the creation of a successful performance, architects, painters, sculptors, musicians and choreographers had to join forces, since spectacles of state were the first multimedia performances. This intertwining of different media enabled artists to experiment more freely than they could ever do in the context of religious commissions, and to create works that were unequalled in their levels of illusion and manipulations of space and time. Paradoxically, state spectacle also gave form to the concept of mutability, by manifesting a perpetual flow of different media, transgressing the usual confines of the visual and performing arts.

A festival machine created by Bernini and Giovanni Paolo Schor, and recorded in a print by Dominique Barrière **(Fig. 1-1),** encapsulated this integration of the arts as well as the heights of illusion for which Baroque culture strove.[12]A flawless amalgamation of visual and theatrical vocabulary, it was presented not in the space of a church or a palace, but of a whole city. Constructed in 1661 in Rome to celebrate the birth of the French Dauphin and further strengthen the political alliances between the two states, this festival *apparato* was also – or perhaps primarily –a glorification of the Baroque vision of the world: as polycentric and polymorphic, a

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[11] The recent literature on state spectacles is voluminous, but the following works can be especially recommended: Barbara Wisch and Susan Scott Munshower, eds., *All the world's a stage…: Art and Pageantry in the Renaissance and Baroque*, 2 vols. (City: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990); J. R. Mulryne and Elizabeth Goldring, eds., *Art, Politics and Performance* (London: Ashgate, 2002); and J.R. Mulryne et al., eds., *Europa Triumphans: Court and Civic Festivals in Early Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (London: Ashgate 2004).

[12] For more information on Bernini's ephemeral artworks, see M. Fagiollo dell'Arco and S. Carandini, *L'Effimero Barocco: Strutture della Festa nella Roma del '600*, 2 vols. (Roma: Skira, 1977-78), and Mulryne et al., eds., *Europa Triumphans*.

vortex of movement; a symbolic visualisation of William Drummond's verse dictum that the only constant is constant change.[13]
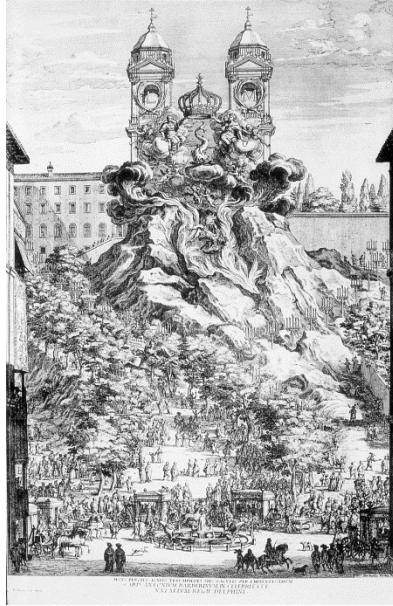
1-1 Gianlorenzo Bernini and Giovanni Paolo Schor, *Festival Apparato for the French Dauphin*, 1662. © Comune di Roma, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali-Museo di Roma

Bernini's *apparato* was movement personified, an augmented scenography that remodelled the townscape using a panoply of diverse media. Over the entire slope leading from SS. Trinita dei Monti to Piazza di Spagna, Bernini constructed an artificial Hell rising out of clouds, with its own spaces of damnation, sinuous paths, flaming rocks, and a figure of the falling Devil. Above it, high between the twin towers of SS. Trinita dei Monti, the opposite

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[13] "The Instability of Mortal Glory", in Drummond, *The Poems of William Drummond of Hawthornden: With Life, by Peter Cunningham*(London: Cochrane and M'Crone, 1833), 115.

appeared: a silver dolphin rising to glory among gushing waves – the symbol of young Dauphin triumphing over his infernal adversary. The unstoppable surge of water intermingled with streaming lava and billowing flames. In this triumph of opposites, the unity of nature and artifice was given a further sense of illusion by the clouds of fireworks that enveloped it, the fragility of smoke merging with the ephemerality of plaster clouds.

Indeed, reality and illusion were folded into a single inseparable entity. The entire festival construction was a monument to movement, insubstantiality, and change. While glorifying the French prince, it also celebrated the element that most clearly embodied change: fire. The entire structure flickered and fumed, a quivering mirage appearing in the townscape of Baroque Rome.

Moreover, the visualisation of political ideology in the spectacles of state envisaged by Bernini was one of the most easily adaptable and transmittable elements of Baroque culture; the one that reached the farthest corners of the known world. The application of the models of the spectacles in the presentation of the state meant not only better understandings of state's political standpoints, but more importantly, secured state's rightful inclusion in the Baroque political arena, and its desired international legitimating.

The Baroque combined legacy of artistic malleability and cultural permeability left one of its most curious and complex examples on the borders of the Baroque world, in the Orthodox Archbishopric of Karlovci: a semi-autonomous Orthodox province in the Austrian Empire. Zaharija Orfelin's 1757 manuscript *Festive Greeting to Bishop Mojsej Putnik* (presently in the collection of the university library in Wroclaw) is a proper artefact of festival culture that combines literature, fine arts, calligraphy, scenic design and music, as well as a powerful combination of poetry and propaganda, art and politics.[14] An illustrated panegyric to a newly installed bishop, the *Festive Greeting* was conceived by Orfelin as a

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[14] For more information see Jelena Todorović, *An Orthodox Festival Book in the Habsburg Empire* (London: Ashgate, 2006) and the facsimile edition of the manuscript: Jelena Todorović, *Zaharija Orfelin, Svečani pozdrav Mojseju Putniku 1757, fototipsko izdanje sa studijom* (Novi Sad: Platoneum, 2014).

triumphal representation of Putnik's investiture, but in the event it remained only a synopsis. The spectacle in its entirety, had it actually been executed, would have been a political enthronement rather than a simple pastoral installation, and therefore far too dangerous to be publicly performed within the confines of the Austrian Empire. As such, it remained the ultimate expression of illusion: a' paper triumph', a spectacle without performance. Its space was liminal and its ideas enclosed within the lavishly decorated pages of the manuscript. Its contents had to remain hidden, its riches accessible only to a chosen few. From the blatantly public celebration of Bernini`s *apparato*, to Orfelin's hidden triumph, the spectacles of state had an unexpected diversity that mirrored that of the age itself.

Both in form and content, the *Festive Greeting* is a supreme visualisation of the concept of metamorphosis. It is a thoroughly hybrid work that combines the Baroque cultural idiom with the local tradition of Orthodox Serbian art, with this amalgamation being visible on each page of Orfelin`s manuscript. It is particularly evident in the intricate poetic labyrinth **(Fig. 1-2)** that stands as the book's ultimate and concluding image. Composed of the last verses of the book's panegyric poem, presented in the form of a convoluted *carmen figurate*, this labyrinth also presents a dual illusion meant to bewilder its reader: it is not just inscribed in the flowing lines on the page of the manuscript, but also depicted on a large, illusionistic drapery held by four trumpeting angels. The use of pattern poetry for the visualisation of this labyrinth is, by itself, confirmation of the pronounced adaptability of Baroque culture. This poetic/literary form proliferated widely in Baroque festivals of state, and was readily appropriated by the Orthodox Archbishopric for its own political ends. Additionally, the choice of a labyrinthine form for the conclusion of the narrative underlines the Orthodox appropriation of one of the most powerful symbolic images in Baroque culture, and further emphasises the theme of continual change that flows through Orfelin's book.

Like the unending line of the labyrinthine poem itself, the *Festive Greeting*'s last page summarises the sense of movement and flow that permeates the entire manuscript, rendering it an embodiment of the idea of endless transformations. The undulating

lines of rich calligraphy are fluently reflected in the meandering curves of the labyrinths as well as the ornate vestments of the protagonists.
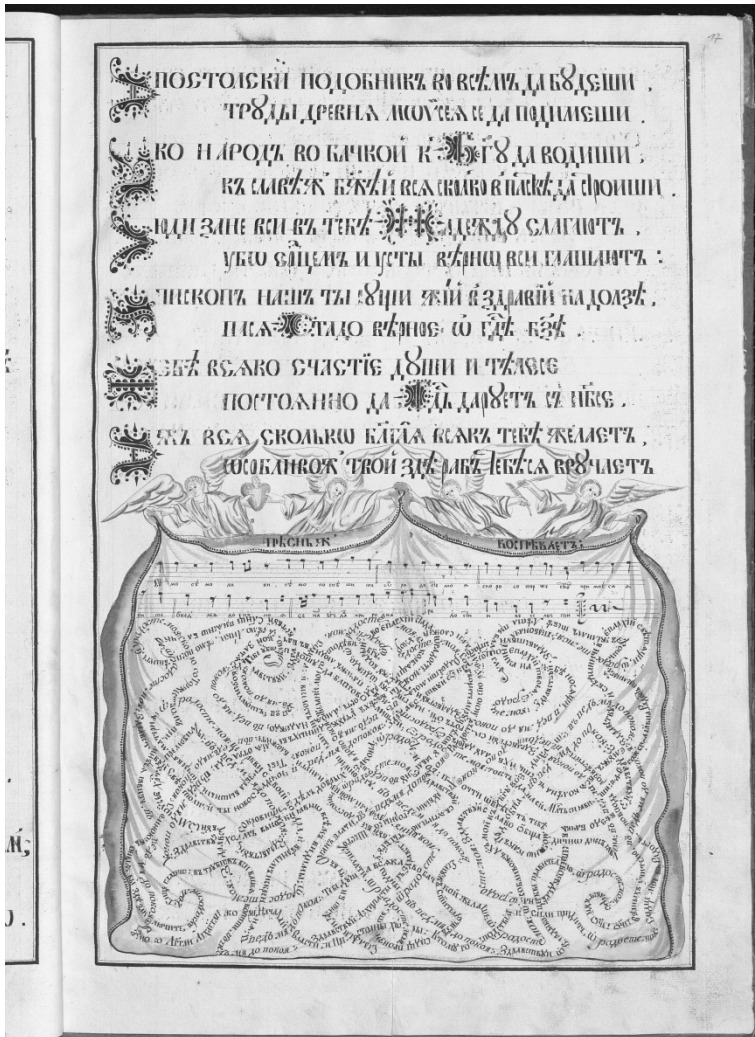
1-2 Zaharija Orfelin, *The Labyrinth with a Heart*, Svečani pozdrav Mojseju Putniku, 1757. © Platoneum Publishing

Moreover, both Bernini's festival *apparato* and Orfelin's labyrinth speak to another crucial sphere of mutability that profoundly defined the age of the Baroque: continuous presence of multiple times in a single artistic creation. Throughout both works, present time is interpolated with visions of time eternal. All times and all spaces are folded into a single instant, overcoming transience while striving towards infinity.

The Flight of Time

A sense of the unstoppable flight of time shaped the entire Baroque age, and lent a particularly poignant quality to many of its works of art. Almost no period in the history of culture was so profoundly marked by an awareness of time in all its different manifestations, from time as the great destroyer to the *atemporality* of ideal worlds and Heavenly realms. But above all, it was the Baroque's complex experience of different temporal domains, and its changed notion of the past, that most influenced subsequent understandings of temporality. The prospect of simultaneous existence in different times opened almost endless possibilities for humankind; while a completely novel view of the past – as not fixed and immutable, but suddenly changeable, rewritable and adaptable– strongly influenced our own relationship to time. The dominant understanding of time in the Baroque revolved around transience, fugacity and demise. The relentless passage of time obliterated everything, spared nothing.[15]

The Baroque era's approach to death (and the passage of time more generally) was dual: people feared death as the Great Destroyer, and simultaneously aimed to tame it by making it less macabre and more familiar. More interestingly, this novel sensibility was common to Catholics and Protestants alike. Protestants insisted on educating the soul in order to banish all the vanities of our world, whereas for Catholics, the new Jesuit *spiritual exercises* were meant to prepare the bodies and souls of

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[15] On the concept of time and transience in the Baroque age see Jelena Todorović, *O ogledalima, ružama i ništavilu, koncept vremena i prolaznosti u kulturi baroknog doba* (Beograd: Clio, 2012), 13-45.

the devout for the approach of death. More specifically, the exercises' aims were equally to teach the faithful the fragility of human existence, and to prepare them in a timely manner for their *good death*.[16]

For the Baroque individual, the vision of time was primarily that of its passage, its flight, its unattainability. Baroque culture's *memento mori* imagery became especially prominent in perilous periods such as epidemics. One particularly disturbing visual reminder of this is the allegory *L'Umana Fragilita*, created by Neapolitan painter Salvatore Rosa **(Fig. 1-3)** (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). As an intensely personal memento, the *ex voto* of a painter who lost most of his family in the plague that swept Naples in 1655, this painting subtly combines the medieval spiritual legacy of *ars moriendi* with the new visual vocabulary. The entire pictorial space is dominated by the ominous allegory of Death/Time as a grinning winged skeleton,[17] positioned diagonally on the picture plane and connecting and overshadowing all the painting's protagonists. Rosa's Death/Time emerges from the gloom of the background to sweep humankind before him. With the bony fingers of his right hand, he clasps the wrist of a child who sits in the foreground on his mother's lap. Guiding the child's hand, Death/Time inscribes the following words: *Conceptio culpa, Nasci Pena, Labor Vita, necesse Mori.* The idea of the necessity of death, as if taken from some medieval funerary monument, becomes once again omnipresent in the time of plague of 1650s. The woman sitting closest to the viewer, with her resentful pale face, represents the whole of humanity helpless before the approach of Death. Just opposite the woman, a second child extinguishes a candle, and a third blows soap bubbles – two of the most recognisable emblems of the passage of time and the fragility of our existence.

The symbol of the extinguished candle, in particular, was very strongly represented in the Baroque arts, while the idea of *smoke* was one of the great metaphors of Baroque poetry. A laconic and

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[16] For the idea of the *good death* and *vanitas*, see also Philippe Aries, *The Hour of Our Death* (London: Knopf, 1983), 322-353.

[17] For the fusion of death and time, particularly in Baroque sculpture, see Boucher, *Italian Baroque Sculpture*, 113-134.

effective image of transience, the candle image befitted the prevailing sensibility about death that was so well described by Giovanni Sempronio, for whom man was merely *the smoke which rises in the sky and fades*.[18]

1-3 Salvator Rosa, *L'Umana Fragilita*, *c*.1656. © Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

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[18] "(...) é fumo, che nel ciel s'alza e svanisce." From "What is a man?" by Giovanni Sempronio, in Segel, ed., *The Baroque Poem*, 220.

The age of the Baroque not only made death more prominent and more immanent in people's lives, and thoughts on vanity a major preoccupation. This notion of change as the passage of time, as the cohabitation of death and life, took on the most unexpected and creative forms.[19] Thus, the new imagery of Death fused with Time was taken from the confines of the churches, unearthed from the depths of crypts, and incorporated into a various elements of the quotidian. Originally limited to religious settings, macabre images overflowed their traditional boundaries and found their way into domestic interiors. From then on, a secularised version of the macabre was a part of the décor of the private life of those sufficiently prosperous to afford private life and décor.

Only in this period could there have been a pope like Alexander VII, who numbered among his most prized possessions an architectural model of his own coffin, which he kept safely at his side in the papal apartments.[20]A similar sensibility prevailed in one of the more peculiar Baroque funerary monuments in England: Nicolas Stone's tomb-sculpture of the poet John Donne (1631) in St. Paul's Cathedral. By his own wishes, Donne is represented standing upon the burial urn, wrapped in his own shroud, thus giving a most vivid shape to the idea of meditation on one's finitude. Given how many sermons and verses Donne had devoted to death and transience over the course of his career, such careful preparation for his own demise would not have been unexpected.

Together with the concept of death, the idea of the futility of material life and the vanity of vanities inspired a rich and diverse genre of visual production, ranging from highly personal *memento mori* like the one by Salvatore Rosa previously discussed, to universal messages meant to be transmitted *urbi et orbi*.

As explained by Aries,[21] Baroque *vanitas* imagery – whether of Dutch, Spanish, French, English or Italian origin – typically comprised two main elements: the anecdotal, connected to the

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[19] See Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, 322-353.

[20] See Boucher, *Italian Baroque Sculpture*, 114.

[21] See Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, 322-353, and Michel Vovelle, *La Mort et l'Occident de 1300 à nos jours (précédé de la Mort, État des lieux)* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 25-32.

prime function of the painting (still life, portrait, genre scene); and the symbolic, which utilised a broad range of symbols related to transience. The predominant genre was that of still life, since it fulfilled aims critical to the proper functioning of the *vanitas* image as a visual reminder. It incorporated everyday objects that, by their materials or their functions, were vulnerable to the passage of time, thus reminding the beholder of his own inevitable departure. All elements that populated *vanitas* still lives of the Baroque had one predominant characteristic: inconstancy. Like life itself, their existence was always precarious and transitory. Catholics and Protestants both joined in this form of meditation upon life's brevity, united byte idea of the ultimate change wrought by the passage of time, the one that can never be reversed.

The Past Remodelled

If the Baroque age feared and respected the transience of time with an intensity not seen since the Middle Ages, it also advanced its manipulation. In previous periods, people knew that time in its captured (literary or visual) form could be altered and rewritten, but they never recognised the true power of such procedures. It was the age of Reformation and Counter Reformation that brought a new sense of mastery to the ways time was perceived and experienced. The Baroque era defined how we know the past, and its controversial histories paved the way for historiography as we know it.

The Baroque individual was the first to fully explore the power and influence of the past on present events. He realised the power of rewriting and editing the past, of the fabrication of history and its integration into wider narratives of validity and legitimation. Anything might be employed for the glory of faith or the Church, or to create conflicting narratives aimed at settling feuds and cementing allegiances.

Collective pasts, and subsequent histories in the grand manner, were the entities first subjected to the process of shifting and manipulation. Only later was the idea that pasts could be changed to serve greater ideological and political needs transferred into the microcosms of national and ethnic histories within the Baroque