

Study exhibition *The Reverse Side of the City a Hundred Years Ago: The Photographs from the Vladimir Čepulić and Lujo Thaller Collections*

AUTHOR:

MARTIN KUCHAR

The exhibition titled *The Reverse Side of the City a Hundred Years Ago: The Photographs from the Vladimir Čepulić and Lujo Thaller Collections* was held at the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb from March 21 to June 2, 2024. Organized to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Croatian Medical Association, which is also a partner in the project, this exhibition continues the successful collaboration between the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Croatian Medical Association on programs of particular social, scientific, and cultural significance. The exhibition presents Zagreb's housing poverty through the lens of social pathology, with a particular focus on tuberculosis in the early decades of the 20th century. It is based on a preserved collection of photographs from the estates of doctors Vladimir Čepulić (1891–1964), one of the presidents of the Croatian Medical Association (1935–1945), and Lujo Thaller (1891–1949), a pioneer of Croatian medical historiography.

During the interwar period, under the influence of Štampar's ideology of social medicine, doctors became increasingly interested in issues such as tuberculosis, housing problems, sexually transmitted diseases, and alcoholism. This approach required doctors to work through dispensary services to establish closer contact with patients. Although affecting all social classes, tuberculosis was particularly prevalent among the poor and working class who lived in barracks, railway cars, basements, or attics, accessed through stables or gar-

bage dumps. Multiple families often lived in these spaces, unable to properly isolate a patient suffering from tuberculosis.

The material presented in this exhibition consists of 132 photographs taken in Zagreb in the 1920s. The photographs from Vladimir Čepulić's collection were taken in 1924 and 1925 as part of an epidemiological study conducted by the Zagreb Antituberculosis Dispensary. The locations included the city center (Vlaška Street, Tkalčićeva Street, Nova Ves, Pod zidom, Cigłana – Klaićeva, behind the current Mimara Museum, railway cars behind the Botanical Garden) and the outskirts (Savska Road, Trešnjevka, Zavrtnica, Novi naselak, Kanal). In 1932, these photographs were exhibited at the 4th exhibition of the Zemlja Artists' Association held in the Art Pavilion in Zagreb. A selection of these photographs was included in Vladimir Čepulić's scientific article "Socio-Epidemiological Problems in the Control of Tuberculosis", published in *Liječnički vjesnik* in 1939. After the opening of the Museum of the History of Healthcare in Croatia in 1944, twenty photographs from this series were exhibited in the Croatian Medical Association building at Šubićeva 9 in Zagreb in the form of photo enlargements mounted on cardboard. With the transfer to the Division for the History of Medical Sciences of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in the 1960s, Čepulić's collection once again served as a photo archive. Today, these photographs are part of the Photo Collection of the Croatian Museum of Medicine



Visitors at the opening of the exhibition "The Reverse Side of the City 100 Years Ago: Photographs from the Collections of Doctors Vladimir Čepulić and Lujo Thaller" at the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb (photo: Nina Koydl, EMZ)

and Pharmacy of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Recently discovered collection of photographs by Lujo Thaller depicting Zagreb's housing misery around 1920, comprising 58 small black-and-white photographs, was presented to the public for the first time at this exhibition. Some photographs show flooded houses and yards – these could have been taken during one of Zagreb's floods (1922, 1923, 1925, or 1926). As a socially engaged doctor and long-time city council member, Thaller had been involved in Zagreb's hygiene and public works issues for years. He commented on the principles of building houses from a hygienic standpoint and studied the housing conditions of the poor and their impact on the spread of tuberculosis, publishing articles on the subject in periodicals.

In the context of early Croatian social photography, cycles of photographs of Zagreb's housing misery from the collections of Vladimir Čepulić and Lujo Thaller represent a significant and previously under-researched segment of Croatian photographic heritage. Accompanying the exhibition were three lectures and guided tours, resulting in significant media coverage and a large number of visitors. The exhibition was organized by the Croatian Museum of Medicine and Pharmacy and the Division for the History of Medical Sciences of the Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The concept was authored by Silvija Brkić Midžić, museum advisor and director of the Croatian Museum of Medicine and Pharmacy, Associate Professor Stella Fatović-Ferenčić, MD, PhD, a senior research advisor at the Division for the History of Medical Sciences and director of the Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science, and Assistant Professor Martin Kuhar, MD, PhD, a senior research associate at the Division for the History of Medical Sciences of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The curator of the exhibition was Željka Petrović Osmak, a museum advisor at the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb. The visual design of the exhibition, visual identity, and graphic design of the exhibition materials were created by Ante Rašić (Studio Rašić). A richly illustrated bilingual catalog (Croatian/English) of 124 pages accompanies the exhibition, with text resulting from the research work of Stella Fatović-Ferenčić, Martin Kuhar, and Silvija Brkić Midžić.



Exhibition poster "The Reverse Side of the City 100 Years Ago: Photographs from the Collections of Doctors Vladimir Čepulić and Lujo Thaller" (design: Ante Rašić)



Participants at the opening of the exhibition "The Dark Side of the City 100 Years Ago: Photographs from the Collections of Doctors Vladimir Čepulić and Lujo Thaller" at the Ethnographic Museum in Zagreb, from left to right: Vjekoslav Jerolimov, F.C.A., Prof. Željko Krznarić, MD, PhD, Željka Petrović Osmak, Assoc. Prof. Stella Fatović-Ferenčić, MD, PhD, Silvija Brkić Midžić, Zvezdana Antoš, PhD, Marko Pečina, F.C.A., Josip Madić, F.C.A., Assist. Prof. Martin Kuhar, MD, PhD (photo: Nina Koydl, EMZ)