

# MARIJAN MATIJEVIĆ

## A CENTENARY TRIBUTE

Ivan Mirnik

When many years ago I arrived at the Zagreb Archaeological Museum's Department of Numismatics, among the countless chests, boxes and parcels brought back to the museum in 1966 from the vaults of a bank in nearby Praška (Prague Street), formerly ulica Marije Valerie (Marie Valerie Street), where the entire numismatic collection had been deposited in the winter of 1945-46, were four bronze medals of high quality, wrapped in newspapers from the 1930s. The four medals all seemed to be by the same artist, who had signed one of them. After I had consulted some of the scarce relevant literature, it became obvious that the sculptor who had modelled them was Marijan Matijević, an artist who had been absent from the Croatian art scene for many decades. One of the medals bore the name of a priest, Petar Sivjanović, who was known to have been killed by the communists soon after the Second World War (fig. 1), but who the other three were I did not know: one was of a woman identified only as Zora, one was of a boy named Saša, and the fourth, a bald man, remained totally nameless. How the medals reached the museum was – and will most probably remain – an enigma, as there are no traces of them in either the museum archives or the inventories of acquisitions.

8 March 2007 saw the opening at the Glyptothek of the Croatian Academy of Science and Arts in Zagreb of an exhibition of works by Ivo Kerdić<sup>1</sup> and two lesser-known Croatian medallists, Viktor Bernfest and the above-mentioned Marijan Matijević. I was hopeful of seeing previously unknown works by both these artists and I was not to be disappointed. Among the plaster models by Matijević were examples of all four portraits owned in bronze by the Zagreb Archaeological Museum, with the differences that in the exhibition the medal of Sivjanović had a different inscription and the unknown man's portrait was on a plaquette.

Present at the exhibition's opening was Aleksandar (Saša) Bjelousov, a man whom I have known for quite a long time. During our conversation he told me that he was a nephew of Matijević and that he was Saša, the young boy on the medal (fig. 2). It turned out that Zora was his late mother (fig. 3), one of the sculptor's sisters, and later, when Mr Bjelousov visited the museum, he recognised the bald gentleman as his father (fig. 4). Mr Bjelousov also kindly allowed me to study all the highly interesting documents and letters of his uncle's that are in his possession.

Marijan Živko Matijević was the son of the geometrician Max Matijević and Slava *née* Graf. He was

born in Grubišno Polje, in Croatia, on 27 March 1907 and was found dead in his flat at Ebner-Rofenstein-Gasse, Vienna, by his second wife Edeltraud at nine o'clock in the morning on 14 November 1971. He had two sisters, Jelisava (Beba) (1913-78) and Zora, who was portrayed on the medal. He attended primary school in Grubišno Polje from 1913 to 1917, and then continued at secondary school in Zagreb from 1917 to 1919 and at the Crafts School in Zagreb from 1919 to 1923 (fig. 5). As a gifted art student, he continued his training at the Zagreb Academy of Fine Arts, where he studied from 1923 to 1927. Among his professors was Ivan Meštrović, who not only greatly influenced the young man's style but also recognised his talent, accepting him into his special sculpture class, where he stayed from 1929 until his graduation in 1931. During this time Matijević worked for Meštrović, first in Zagreb and then in Otavice, where the older sculptor was constructing a chapel that was to be consecrated to the Holy Redeemer and serve as his family mausoleum (fig. 6). Two other talented young sculptors working at Otavice were Vanja Radauš and Antun Augustinčić (fig. 7).

When in 1931 Matijević exhibited for the first time in Zagreb, he received good reviews and, through Meštrović, he obtained a scholarship to go to Paris. There he was in contact with Aristide Maillol. The works he exhibited at the Georges Petit gallery in 1932 were also well received, and the French government granted him a scholarship enabling him to continue his studies in Paris. However, the following year his mother fell seriously ill, and so he had to return home to Zagreb late in 1933. For a time he worked as an independent artist, which gave him a certain freedom but meant that his income was neither constant nor good. He therefore took a job as a teacher, working at grammar schools in Cetinje in Montenegro from August 1934 to August 1937 and Kruševac in Serbia from August 1937 to March 1938, at the 5th Boy's Grammar School in Belgrade from March 1938 to August 1939, and then, as head of the pottery department, at the Zagreb Crafts School from July 1940 to the end of 1943.

Meanwhile his reputation as a sculptor was growing. One of his most noted monuments can be seen at Rakovica in Croatia, not far from the famous Plitvice Lakes. This is a bust of Eugen Kvaternik, a Croatian patriot who instigated an unsuccessful rebellion in 1871 and was shot dead. The monument was unveiled on 4 June 1933 at a solemn ceremony. In those days this village, a community of about four hundred inhabitants,



1. Matijević: Petar Sivjanović, 1935, bronze, 233mm., Archaeological Museum, Zagreb.

had a Roman Catholic parish church, a primary school, a post office, a soda water factory and a lime factory. The Kvaternik monument was commissioned by a committee headed by Juraj Mravunac, a primary school teacher in the nearby village of Drežnik, and the funds came from the ordinary people of Rakovica and its surroundings, as well as from other parts of Croatia.<sup>2</sup> In 1991 this monument was vandalised and the bust carried away and damaged. When it was found after the

liberation of the area in 1995, a new cast had to be taken, which was then placed in the original position.

In 1935 Matijević won the first prize for the model of a monument for Split in Dalmatia.<sup>3</sup> A relief of 1939 commemorating women fighters in the Spanish civil war was exhibited in the Meštrović pavilion in Zagreb in the same year. Also in 1939, he again exhibited works in a group exhibition in Zagreb and received an award from the city's Academy of Fine Arts.



2. Matijević: Aleksandar (Saša) Bjelousov, 1936, bronze, 222mm., Archaeological Museum, Zagreb.

As a political Leftist, Matijević soon began to encounter problems with Croatia's quisling regime and, in order to avoid complications, he discreetly left the Zagreb Crafts School and moved to Vienna late in 1943.<sup>4</sup> His inevitable suspension from his job as head of pottery did not take place immediately due to the solidarity of his colleagues, who covered his flight. In Vienna he worked at first as an independent artist and then, from 1945 to 1949, as a teacher at the Academy

of Fine Arts. His sculptures were exhibited on several occasions, at Vienna's Welz Gallery in 1946,<sup>5</sup> in 1948 at the Agathon Gallery, in 1952 and 1954 in Eisenstadt in nearby Burgenland,<sup>6</sup> and then again in Vienna in 1956. His life was not easy but very modest. In 1961 he succeeded in obtaining employment as a teacher at the grammar school in Mattersburg in Burgenland, remaining there until 1964, and from 1965 he worked as a conservator for the local government of Eisenstadt



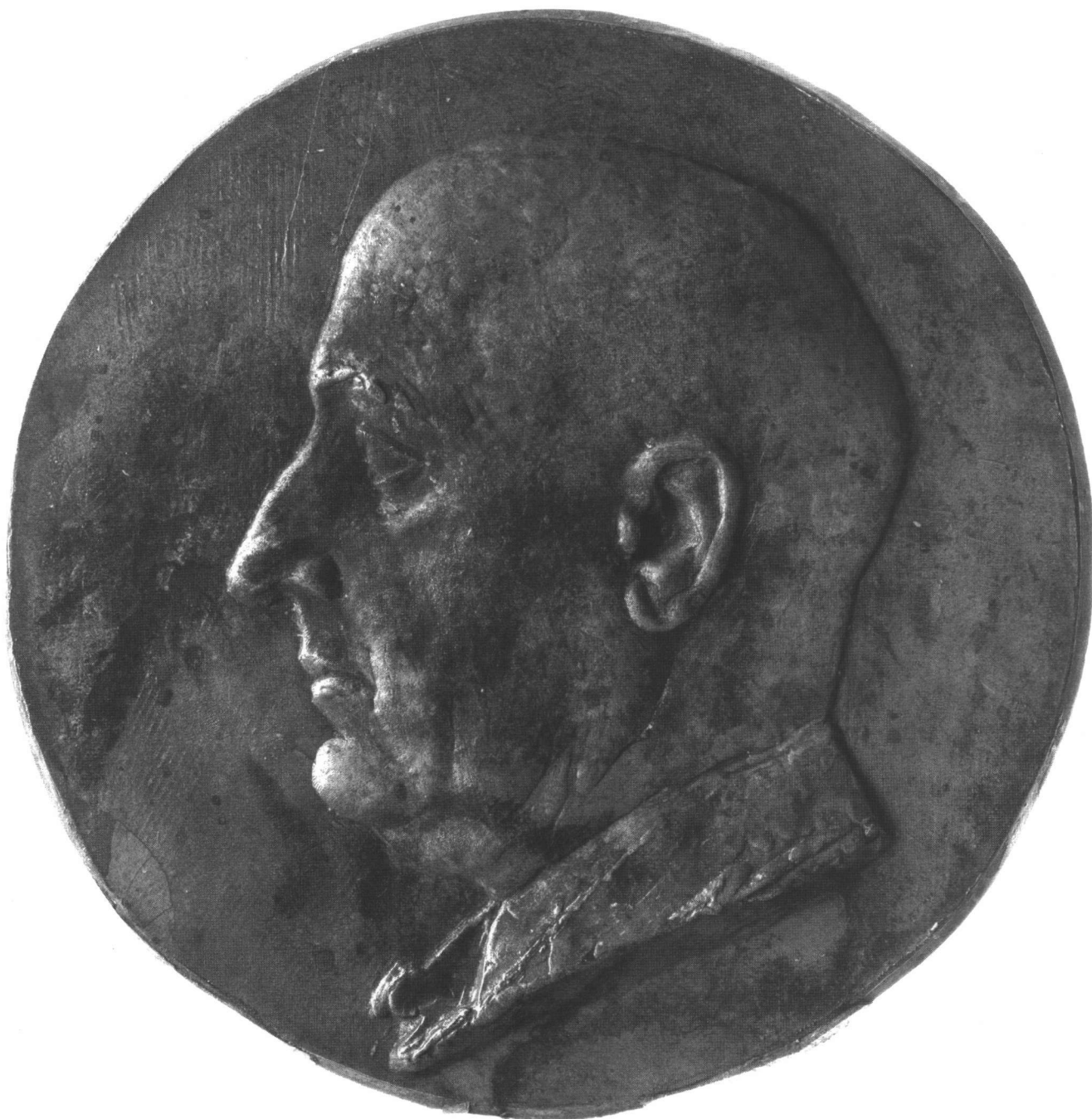
3. Matijević: Zora Bjelousov, 1936, bronze, 215mm., Archaeological Museum, Zagreb.

(fig. 8). He was reluctant to apply for Yugoslav citizenship after the Second World War and continued to live in Austria until his death.

During this period Matijević executed several monuments, including one in Belgrade to partisans who lost their lives (1945) and others in Austria to

combattants who had died at St Rupert (1946), Sele (1948) and Ferlach (1949). It seems that none of these monuments has survived. He is also the author of a stone relief in Neusiedl in Burgenland (1954), stone sculptures in Eisenstadt (1955), a bronze group in Obertraun in Upper Austria (1956), an *Icarus* in





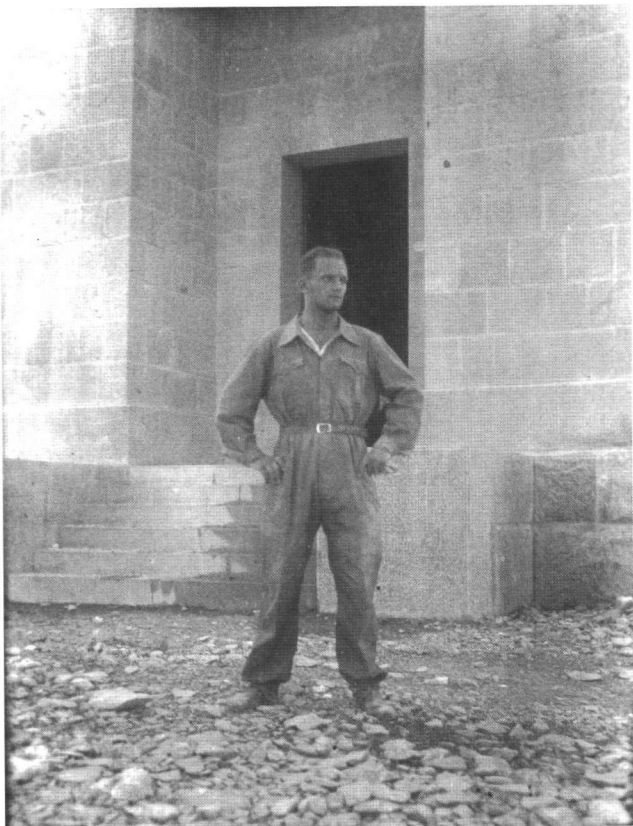
4. Matijević: *Aleksej Bjelousov*, 1935, bronze, 250 mm., *Archaeological Museum, Zagreb*.

Spitzenberg in Lower Austria (1956), and two reliefs in Vienna (1957 and 1960). In 1964 he was commissioned to make a relief in artificial stone for Tschurndorf in Burgenland, where he then lived. His works can also be found in various private collections in Croatia and Austria. He also executed paintings on

canvas and many drawings. For many years he suffered from ill health, with rheumatism in his knee and foot (as a young man he played football very well) and nervous strain, but he could never afford total rest. He married twice and has a daughter, Marijana Ehrlich, from his first marriage, who now lives in Paris.



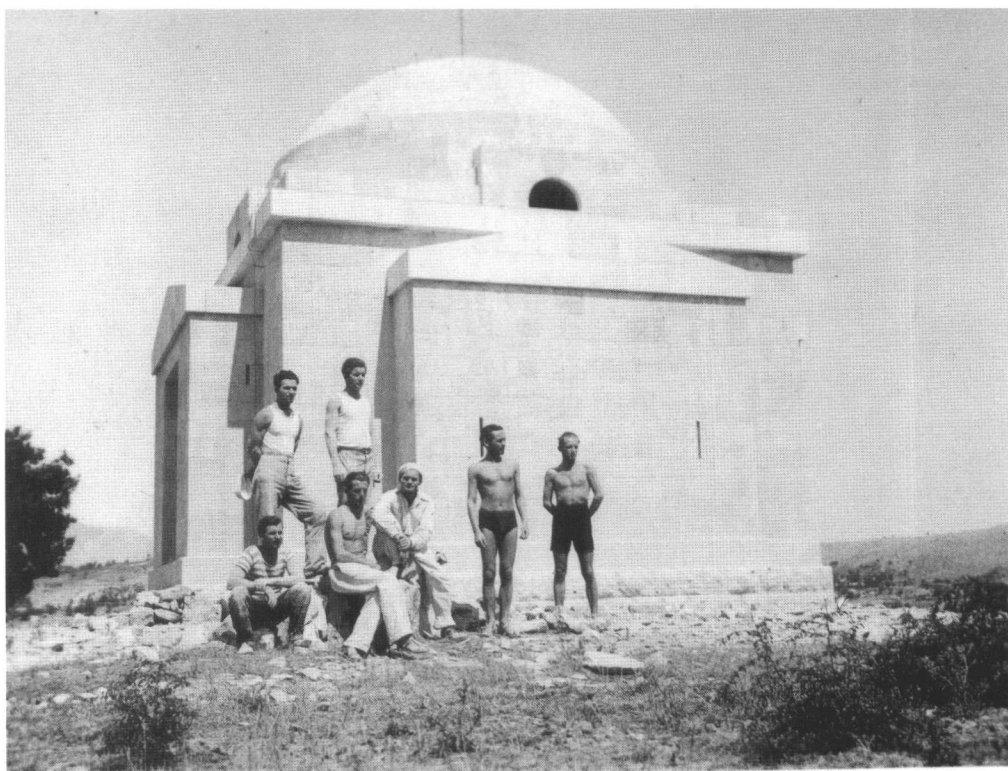
5. Matijević (far right) at the Zagreb Crafts School, c.1920.



6. Matijević in front of the Meštrović family mausoleum, Otavice, c.1930.

Matijević created a number of medals, plaquettes and reliefs, produced both at actual size and as reduced versions. As with his larger three-dimensional sculptures and his drawings, these generally follow the various stylistic trends of the 1920s through to the 1950s, with Art Deco features predominating. It is obvious that Meštrović was an important influence. The relief of these pieces is always quite low and carefully executed, and the lettering is good, although not as perfect as on the medals of Ivo Kerdić.

Various public collections contain medals by Matijević. The Zagreb Modern Gallery has one of the Sivjanović medals, modelled in 1935,<sup>7</sup> and a 1936 portrait of Đorđe Mrkobrad,<sup>8</sup> who taught artillery at the Kragujevac Military Academy in Serbia; both came from the collection of Dragutin Mandl. The Belgrade National Museum also has a medal of Mrkobrad,<sup>9</sup> along with an undated portrait of the widow of a certain Golenko.<sup>10</sup> According to Dragutin Mandl's notes, as quoted by Vinko Zlamalik, during his stay in Montenegro Matijević also made a portrait of a young Montenegrin woman, which must therefore date to 1934-37.<sup>11</sup> Most of the artist's small-scale relief works are preserved in the Zagreb Glyptothek. As well as the four medals already mentioned, these comprise a plaquette with two female nudes,<sup>12</sup> a medal of Stjepan Radić,<sup>13</sup> a plaquette of Ivan Meštrović,<sup>14</sup> a plaquette of an unknown man,<sup>15</sup> a plaquette of two women in a sort of chorus line,<sup>16</sup> four men performing a folk dance,<sup>17</sup> portraits of three unknown men, all dating from 1935,<sup>18</sup> a portrait of an elderly woman (1936),<sup>19</sup> and



7. Matijević (second from the right) with colleagues in front of the Meštrović family mausoleum, Otavice, c.1930. Matijević is flanked by Vanja Radauš (third from the right, seated) and Antun Augustinić (far right).

two plaquettes with scenes from the Spanish civil war (1937).<sup>20</sup> On one of the last-named are four women, one of whom aims a rifle, whilst on the other are four armed men, their legs arranged in parallel and resembling those of ballet dancers while their heads and arms are in varying positions.

The earliest among these is the medal or badge made for the Croatian Peasant Party in 1927, which also exists in the Zagreb Archaeological Museum (fig. 9). This bears the portrait of the Peasant Party's founder and president Stjepan Radić, who was shot by Puniša Račić in the Belgrade parliament building on 20 May 1928 and died later in Zagreb as a result. Radić is shown facing left, and the accompanying inscription consists of his name and the slogan of the party, VJERA-U-BOGA-SELJAČKA-SLOGA (Trust in God and peasant unity). Below is the Croatian coat of arms, flanked by vegetal motifs. On close inspection the signature M. MATIJEVIĆ can just be made out on the truncation of the neck. Were this not there, the medal could well be attributed to Ivo Kerdić<sup>21</sup> or Emil Bohutinsky. The plaster model in the Zagreb Glyptothek is 230 millimetres in diameter.<sup>22</sup> The much smaller bronze badge was struck by the well-known Zagreb firm of Griesbach & Knaus. There are two specimens in the Zagreb Archaeological Museum, one of which came with the Kopač collection in 2001.

Petar Sivjanović (1893-1946), known as Pero or Pop Pero, who can be seen on a medal made in 1935 (see fig. 1), is one of many martyrs of the Catholic Church in Croatia. He attended grammar school and

studied divinity in Zagreb and was ordained in 1916. He served in various parishes before arriving in Grubišno Polje, where he became a close friend of Matijević's family, taking the part of best man at the Bjelousov/Matijević wedding on 22 August 1931. Sivjanović also taught religion and was active in various societies, and during the Second World War he saved many lives. When the communists arrived, he was



8. Matijević in 1971.





9. Matijević: *Stjepan Radić*, 1927, bronze, 24 x 28mm., Archaeological Museum, Zagreb.

unjustly arrested, tried, condemned to death and hanged. In 2004 his bones were exhumed and buried in the parish priests' vault at Daruvar. The two different inscriptions on the Glyptothèque's plaster models read PETAR SIV. 1935<sup>23</sup> and PETAR SIVJANOVIĆ 1935.<sup>24</sup> The latter is identical to the bronze version in the collection of the Zagreb Archaeological Museum.<sup>25</sup> The portrait of a middle-aged man facing right and wearing a priest's collar is the same on all.

The other works referred to at the beginning of this article are the portraits of the Bjelousov family. The father, Aleksej Bjelousov (fig. 10), who was born in Taganrog in Russia on 25 March 1895 and died in Samobor near Zagreb on 22 November 1975, can be seen on a plaquette<sup>26</sup> as well as on the medal, which dates to 1935 (see fig. 4): a middle-aged, bald man with a collar and a cravat, facing left. There is no inscription. His wife Zora (fig. 11) was born in Velika Gorica near Zagreb on 9 May 1901 and died in Zagreb on 15 February 1975. In the medal, made in 1936, she is portrayed in profile, turned to the right, with short wavy hair (see fig. 3). Her first name ZORA can be read on the right, and behind her head are the artist's initials, MM. The neckline of her dress is indicated. The plaster model in the Glyptothèque has a diameter of 265 millimetres,<sup>27</sup> whereas the Archaeological Museum's bronze cast is smaller at 215 millimetres. The couple's son Aleksandar Bjelousov was born in Virovitica on 1 April 1932 and was portrayed by his uncle in 1937. His portrait shows him with short hair and a shirt, facing to the left, with his nickname SAŠA on the left side of the medal and the artist's initials on the right (see fig. 2). The plaster at the Glyptothèque is 219 millimetres in diameter,<sup>28</sup> and the example in the Archaeological Museum is 222 millimetres. A reduced, cast bronze version owned by Mr Bjelousov has a diameter of around sixty millimetres (fig. 12). According to Mr Bjelousov, the artist was not satisfied with the casting of the reduced version.

This exhibition at the Zagreb Glyptothèque was a good occasion to study little-known works by Ivo Kerdić, in whom interest has never waned, and has contributed to a revival of interest in both Viktor Bernfest and the subject of this article, Marijan Matijević, who were previously known only to a few specialists.



10. Aleksej Bjelousov.



11. Zora Bjelousov, Matijević's sister.





12. Matijević: Aleksandar (Saša) Bjelousov, 1936, bronze, 61mm., collection of Aleksandar Bjelousov.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Aleksandar Bjelousov most warmly for his kindness in giving me access to the correspondence of Marijan Matijević; Rev. Dr Stjepan Razum of Zagreb cathedral chapter archives, who kindly furnished me with a biography of P. Sivjanović; and Igor Krajar, photographer at Zagreb Archaeological Museum, for the images of the four medals.

#### NOTES

1. For whom, see Ivan Mirnik, 'Ivo Kerdić', *The Medal*, 16 (1990), pp. 53-7; Lida Roje-Depolo and Vesna Mažuran-Subotić, *Ivo Kerdić retrospektivna izložba*, exhibition catalogue (Zagreb, 1993).

2. *Svijet* (Zagreb), 23, 3 June 1933; Z. Kulundžić, *Odgonjetavanje 'Zagonečke Rakovica'* (Zagreb, 1994), p. 815.

3. *II izložba zagrebačkih umjetnika 1935, Umjetnički paviljon* (Zagreb, 1935), nos. 86-90.

4. Matijević lived in Zagreb for most of 1943. Those records of teachers' meetings at the Crafts School that mention his presence lack an exact date, which is probably an indication of the solidarity of his colleagues, particularly M. Kamnikar-Šimon, who kept the minutes, and the school's director Emanuel Skiva. At the meetings Matijević reported that he had ordered glazes and gave estimates for how much wood would be needed for the furnaces and also on the amounts of clay and plaster required. According to the minutes for the meeting of 31 January 1944, all the teachers were present except for Ivan Popp, the head of the Carpentry Department, and Matijević. Among those present was the well-known painter and engraver Milenko D. Gjurić, killed on 21 January 1945.

5. *Marijan Matijević, Zagreb. Skulpturen – Zeichnungen*. 23. *Februar bis 30. März 1946* (Vienna, 1946). The Galerie Welz was at Weihburggasse 9.

6. Burgenland, or Gradišće in Croatian, is one of Austria's confederate states. Croats fleeing from the Turks arrived there between 1532 and 1584, and have remained as a minority, retaining a sixteenth-century dialect.

7. Bronze, 58mm. V. Zlamalik, *Medalja u Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb, 1964), p. 69, no. 251; V. Zlamalik, *Memorijal Ive Kerdića*, exhibition catalogue (Osijek and Zagreb, 1980), p. 116, no. 308.

8. Bronze, 33mm. Zlamalik, *Medalja*, p. 69, no. 252.

9. Bronze, 31mm. N. Todorović, *Jugoslavenske i inostrane medalje. Médailles yougoslaves et étrangères*. (Belgrade, 1964), p. 125, no. 361. Another example (bronze, 32mm.) was formerly in the Ante Kesić collection in Zagreb, and was exhibited in 1981; V. Zlamalik, *Memorijal Ive Kerdića*, exhibition catalogue (Osijek and

Zagreb, 1981), p. 116, no. 309.

10. Brass, 33mm; Todorović, *Jugoslavenske i inostrane medalje*, p. 127, no. 369.

11. Zlamalik, *Memorijal* (1980), p. 115.

12. Plaster, 212 x 323mm. V. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato u poznatom. Kerdić, Matijević, Bernfest. Iz medaljerstva prve polovine XX. Stoljeća. Zbirka medalja i plaketa [Unknown in known. Kerdić, Matijević, Bernfest. From the art of the medal of the 1st half of the 20th century. Collection of medals and plaquettes]*, (Zagreb, 2007), p. 25.

13. Cast bronze, 230mm., on wooden board. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato*, p. 35.

14. Plaster, 221 x 275mm. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato*, p. 35.

15. Plaster, 220 x 275mm. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato*, p. 35.

16. Plaster, 180 x 260mm. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato*, p. 38.

17. Plaster, 230 x 287mm. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato*, p. 39.

18. Plaster, 220 x 275mm., 223 x 287mm., 220 x 285mm. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato*, pp. 40-41.

19. Plaster, 220 x 270mm. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato*, p. 42.

20. Plaster, 377 x 205mm., 253 x 217mm. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato*, p. 43.

21. I. Mirnik, *Ivo Kerdić (1881-1952). Medalje i plakete iz fundusa Arheološkog muzeja u Zagrebu. Medals and plaquettes from the Zagreb Archaeological Museum* (Zagreb, 2004), p. 37, no. 98.

22. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato*, p. 35.

23. 227 mm. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato*, p. 37.

24. 225mm. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato*, p. 38.

25. 233mm. Zlamalik, *Medalja*, p. 49, no. 251; I. Mirnik, 'Medalje Zagrebačke nadbiskupije u Riznici Katedrale i Arheološkome muzeju u Zagrebu. Zusammenfassung: Die Medaillen der Erzdiözese von Zagreb in der Domschatzkammer und im Archäologischen Museum in Zagreb', in *Zagrebačka biskupija i Zagreb 1094-1994. Zbornik u čast kardinala Franje Kuharića. Novem saecula dioecesis Zagrabienensis. Miscellanea in honorem Francisci cardinalis Kuharić* (Zagreb, 1995), p. 608, no. 29.

26. Plaster, 205 x 265mm. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato*, p. 39.

27. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato*, p. 41.

28. Mažuran-Subotić, *Nepoznato*, p. 37.