

The beginnings of Roman epigraphy in Slovenia

(Marjeta Šašel Kos)

The creation of the epigraphic collection of the National Museum of Slovenia is closely connected with the foundation of the museum itself, on 15 October, 1821; the museum truly began to flourish six years afterwards, when Franz Joseph Graf von Hohenwart became the head of the institution, which was then called the *Landes-Museum im Herzogthume Krain*. In 1832, he acquired rooms in the building of the Lycaeum for the Museum in Ljubljana, where the Roman monuments were initially kept. Under Karl Deschmann, the chief curator and director of the Museum in the second half of the 19th century, a new museum building was constructed, in which the National Museum has been located ever since. It was completed in 1885, and the Museum collections were opened to the public four years later.

However, the history of copying Roman inscriptions of Carniola is much longer. The first serious collector of Roman inscribed monuments in the present-day lands of Austria and Slovenia was a renowned Renaissance humanist and architect, Augustinus Prygl-Tyfernus, born in the 1470s and named after his native town of Laško (in German *Tüffer*) in Styria. His collection is preserved in two transcriptions in three codices from the 16th century. The foreword to his collection was written in Naples on 27 February, 1507, when he perhaps prepared the edition for printing. However, Theodor Mommsen ascribed the authorship of one of his collections to an *Antiquus Austriacus*, reconstructed by him on the basis of the two slightly more recent collections of Konrad Peutinger and Petrus Apianus. Modern scholarship has seriously questioned Mommsen's definition of *Antiquus Austriacus*; recently, Primož Simoniti has convincingly argued for the identification of *Antiquus* with Augustinus. His collection is significant because it contains several Roman monuments from Carniola that are mentioned neither by Apianus nor by Lazius.

The value of Roman inscriptions as primary sources for the reconstruction of Roman history of the later Carniola was first fully recognized by Johann Ludwig (Janez Ludvik) Schönleben, a 17th century orator, theologian, historian, and the author of the first notable history of Carniola up to 1000 AD, a typical product of the Baroque historiography, and of higher quality than those of his contemporaries. Schönleben was a member of the distinguished Academy *dei Gelati* in Bologna; in Maylander's book, *Storia delle Accademie d'Italia*, he is called 'a most learned plant, part of our forest (referring to the Gelati) living outside Italy at the threshold of Germany'. Interestingly, Schönleben had no knowledge of Tyffernus' manuscripts.

In the 2nd chapter, his earlier monograph *Aemona vindicata* is reproduced; it was a decisive landmark in locating the Roman town at Gradišče (in German: *Im Burgstall*) in Ljubljana. The 7th chapter is dedicated to Roman inscriptions and is actually the first published *corpus* of Roman inscriptions from Carniola. *The most reliable testimonies of past epochs are the ancient inscriptions on stones and ruins that illuminate historical events. Unfortunately, however, they mostly fall into the hands and under the authority of those who do not value them: this may be attributed usually to ignorance or greediness; as soon as the inscriptions are excavated they are buried within new edifices.*

Later, scholarly research was closely linked to the foundation of the *Academia Operosorum Labacensium* in 1693, only 33 years after the foundation of the oldest scholarly academy in Europe, the Royal Society of London, founded in 1660. For several years, the *Academia Operosorum* (a forerunner of the SAZU) was the only learned academy existing in the Austrian and Hungarian lands under the Habsburg

rule. However, it declined in 1725, was revived in 1781, but permanently disbanded around 1800. Ioannes Gregorius (Janez Gregor) Dolnitscher (also Thalnitscher), Doctor of Laws, Schönleben's nephew, and one of the most illustrious founders and members of the *Academia Operosorum*, also a member of the Academy *dei Gelati* of Bologna, and the Roman *Arcadia*, ordered thirteen interesting Roman inscriptions from Emona and Ig to be built into the walls of the cathedral and seminary at the beginning of the 18th century, thus creating the first *lapidarium* in Ljubljana. In his *Historia Cathedralis Ecclesiae Labacensis*, from 1701, in which he published these inscriptions, he wrote: *To crown the chapter, it remains for us to note the inscriptions and monuments that were found here, as well as in the suburbs and neighbouring sites where the Roman inhabitants of the town once had their villas and estates. These have recently been collected, at my initiative, to contribute towards a celebration of the glory of the ancient town of Ljubljana.*

Interestingly, Count von Hohenwart appealed as early as 1832, after he had acquired rooms at the Lycaeuum for the Museum in Ljubljana, to the then Bishop Anton Aloys Wolf for permission to remove these stone monuments from the walls of the cathedral, in order to prevent them from being exposed to decay. The answer was negative, concluding that the church would not want to upset the townsmen of Ljubljana by robbing the cathedral of its precious exterior decoration. It is clearly evident from the letter that the church mainly considered these monuments to be architectural ornamentation, and not as representing a significant archaeological and historical heritage. This is in contrast to Thalnitscher, who had them immured for this very reason.

Let me finish with Valentin Vodnik, a prominent Slovenian poet and linguist with many other interests, including history. His *Itinerarium* of 1808 and 1809, preserved in manuscript in the Museum Archives, cited some 30 inscriptions from various sites, mostly in Carniola. On his visits to the ruins of Emona and on his epigraphic journeys, he was accompanied by a French colleague, Étienne Marie Siauve who, according to Vodnik's own words, introduced him to the art of reading and correctly understanding Roman inscriptions. Siauve was an archaeologist, also active in northern Italy, and a member of the *Académie Celtique* in Paris who, as a high official in Napoleon's army, spent some time in Ljubljana in 1806 and especially in 1809 (1809–1813 was the time of the short-lived Illyrian Provinces under French rule).