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ANCIENT POETOVIO FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Abstract: In Roman times, Poetovio, the largest city between the northern Adriatic and the Danube and an important European centre of Mithraism, flourished on the banks of the River Drava in the area of today's Ptuj. The history of the ancient city, the Mithraeums and other Roman monuments of Ptuj constitute those museum-related topics that students are required to know in History, Art History, and Latin. These topics are also listed in the examination guides for the matura examination.¹ At the Ptuj Ormož Regional Museum, students are introduced to these topics through live teaching programmes at the museum and *in situ*, as well as through online learning materials available on the museum's website.

Key words: museum pedagogy, museum education, learning, school, Ptuj Ormož Regional Museum, Poetovio

INTRODUCTION

"*Scientia est potentia*", which translates as "*Knowledge is power*", is a saying that greets high school students on the matura exam and especially applies to three particular elective subjects: History, Art History, and Latin. These three subjects are the reasons for the students' visit to our museum on an excursion, either to complement their lessons or as part of the matura curriculum to consolidate their knowledge for the matura examination.

THE SUBJECT OF HISTORY

In their first-year history studies, general upper secondary school students cover the compulsory broad topic of *Prehistoric and Ancient Cultural Heritage in the Territory of Present-day Slovenia*. One of the aims of this topic is for students to develop a responsible and positive attitude towards the surviving cultural heritage from the Prehistoric and Roman periods on the territory of present-day Slovenia in various archaeological parks, museum collections, and other places. The topics are *Romans Occupy Present-day Slovenian Territory*, *Roman Cities*, *Roman Countryside*, and *Roman Cultural Traditions*. These topics are also partially relevant to the elective topic *History of Everyday Life*.²

Students taking the History matura exam must have a good knowledge of *Ancient Cultural Heritage in the Territory of Present-day Slovenia*. History is an elective subject in

¹ General upper secondary school-leaving external examination.

² Kunaver et al. 2008, 15-18.

the matura examination, and the internal assessment part of the exam consists of a written assignment and an educational excursion.³ Students learn about the Roman cities of Poetovio, Emona, and Celeia and the ancient archaeological heritage of Slovenia. Many of them visit Ptuj as part of an excursion to see Mithraeum I at Spodnja Hajdina and Mithraeum III at Zgornji Breg, the Roman Kiln in Rabelčja Vas, the Povoden Museum with the Orpheus Monument in Slovenski Square, the Dea Nutrix⁴ relief in Cankarjeva Street, the Archaeological Park Panorama, the Roman double flute (tibia) in the collection of musical instruments in Ptuj Castle, and the Roman monuments built into the walls of Ptuj Castle and the walls of houses in the town of Ptuj.⁵ They can also visit the museum's temporary archaeological exhibitions and the so-called *Showcases of the Month* dedicated to archaeology (Fig. 1).

The museum's pedagogical department has also prepared a lecture entitled *Poetovio – a Roman city by the River Drava*, which we present in the museum's classroom at Ptuj Castle. The PowerPoint presentation outlines the history of ancient Poetovio and touches on all the important topics that are useful for the students, as the lecture is based on the curriculum and the matura examination topics.

For the matura exam in History, students must know, explain, justify, interpret, deduce, analyse, compare, place key events, phenomena, and processes, read and evaluate information from maps, historical sources and literature, and draw independent conclusions.⁶

An example of an assignment from the spring 2020 exam on *Ancient Cultural Heritage in the Territory of Present-day Slovenia* is provided. I included it to stress the importance of knowledge about two Roman cities, Poetovio and Emona. The students must first read both paragraphs and then decide which city to describe in more detail in their essay.

Poetovio was the largest Roman city in the territory which is now Slovenia. Emona also played an important role in this period. Trajan granted several of his retired soldiers lands in the hinterland of Poetovio. Their tombstones testify that most were veterans of the XIII Gemina



Fig. 1. Damaged votive relief slab with an inscription.

³ Gabrič et al. 2012, 9, 12.

⁴ Particularly characteristic of Poetovio is the Cult of the Nutrices, related to the Celtic mother goddesses, to whom several shrines were dedicated. The Dea Nutrix or Nutrices were divine nursing mothers, protectors of the family, and guardians of children's health. Their worshippers ranged from the urban aristocracy to slaves. (Horvat, Nestorović 2021, XXIX-XXXI)

⁵ Vomer-Gojkovič, Žižek 2008; Vomer-Gojkovič et al. 2011; Vomer-Gojkovič et al. 2012; Vomer-Gojkovič 2014; Vomer-Gojkovič, Žižek 2015; Horvat, Nestorović 2021.

⁶ Gabrič et al. 2012, 9, 12.

*Legion, which had previously been based here, and some were soldiers of other units. Among them, we should mention Gaius Cornelius Verus, who received a double measure of land, as we can see from his tombstone, now built into the north wall of the city tower.*⁷

*In the area where the important Roman road to the Balkans and the navigable Ljubljanica River, an essential trade route between the northern Adriatic and the Danube region from prehistoric times until the introduction of the railways, almost intersected, archaeologists have discovered, among other things, traces of a wooden Roman military camp built in the early 1st century.*⁸

Circle the letter in front of the ancient city of your choice.

A. POETOVIO

B. EMONA

Using the above texts and Images 5 or 6 in the colour annexe, write a short essay naming the settlement from which the city developed, indicate its status and the Roman province to which it belonged, describe how the transport of handicraft products was carried out, explain where Romanisation was visible in the city, and list the ancient Roman monuments that can still be seen today if you walk around the city.⁹

The following is an example of an assignment that highlights the importance of understanding Mithraism. Poetovio is one of the largest centres of Mithraism in Europe. No less than five shrines have been discovered in Ptuj, which was a military base, customs station, and base of provincial tax authorities. Two Mithraeums, Mithraeum I and Mithraeum III, have been preserved *in situ*.¹⁰

A salvation cult, the cult of Mithras, also spread here from the East.

*The headquarters of the customs administration was located in the Poetovian business district of Vicus Fortunae (the district of the goddess of fortune) in today's Spodnja Hajdina, where a large warehouse (horreum) was built to serve the needs of the customs. /.../ The cult of Mithras probably spread among the customs officials because the first customs slaves in Poetovio were predominantly Oriental. It was the customs officials who built the oldest Mithraeum in Poetovio (today known as Mithraeum I) in the middle of the 2nd century.*¹¹

12.1. What form of belief is Mithraism?

12.2. Explain the reasons for the fact that the greatest number of Mithraeums in Slovenia was discovered in Ptuj.¹²

The first and largest Christian community with a diocesan seat in what is now Slovenia was organised in Poetovio. At the end of the 3rd century, the bishop and martyr Victorinus of Ptuj authored ecclesiastical records, thus becoming the first and only known literary author of the Danube region.¹³ **Matura assignment:**

At the end of the 3rd century, Ptuj was home to an important ecclesiastical writer, martyr, and the first known literary author on the territory of present-day Slovenia. Use Image 7 in the colour annexe to help you.

⁷ Lamut 1992, 161–162.

⁸ Županek 2013, 10.

⁹ History, Exam Sheet No. 2, 10 June 2020, 7.

¹⁰ Vomer-Gojkovič et al. 2011; Vomer-Gojkovič 2014.

¹¹ Hepe et al. 2012.

¹² History, Exam Sheet No. 2, 10 June 2020, 9.

¹³ Bratož 2007, 340.

*No reliable information about his life has survived. According to epigraphic material, he came from the Upper Pannonian region /.../. The city where he became bishop was one of the most important in Pannonia.*¹⁴

13.1. Write down the name of the ecclesiastical writer and martyr who came from Upper Pannonia.

13.2. Name two early Christian centres in present-day Slovenia.

13.3. Explain the place of Christianity in the Roman Empire at the end of the 3rd century.¹⁵

THE SUBJECT OF ART HISTORY

Roman Art in the Territory of Present-day Slovenia is a relevant topic for the Art History exam.¹⁶ Students gain 20% of their grade through an art history practicum, which involves encountering sites and bodies of art *in situ*, in galleries or museums, and visits to major exhibitions and artists' studios.¹⁷ Within this topic, students should be familiar with Roman military camps, Roman cities and their organisation, necropolises, royal and private portraits, mosaics and wall paintings, monotheism, Mithraism, the cult of the god Mithras, Mithraeums and the iconography of sculptural decoration in Mithraeums. The most important items, which must be known in detail, are:

- Hadrian's imperial portrait,¹⁸
- Portrait of Roman emperor Lucius Verus,¹⁹
- The statue of *Mithras Carrying the Bull*,²⁰
- A fragment of a mosaic depicting the *Abduction of Europa* from Ptuj²¹

Fig. 2-3.

This content is not so relevant for the actual exams but rather for the writing assignments required as part of the compulsory excursions.

THE SUBJECT OF LATIN

In the Latin matura examination, students are required to have a good knowledge of the Romans in Slovenia, with particular emphasis on Roman cities, archaeological remains, inscriptions, and the cult of Mithras. Also important are various aspects of everyday life in Rome and the provinces: dwellings, towns, roads, water supply, baths, customs (birth, marriage, burial), trade, economy, monetary units, the Roman Empire, and Christianity. All of this falls under the topic of *Greek Mythology and Roman Legendary History* and the broader topic of *Culture and Civilisation*.²²

¹⁴ Bratož 2014, 241.

¹⁵ History, Exam Sheet 2020, 9.

¹⁶ Blatnik et al. 2018, 27.

¹⁷ Blatnik et al. 2018, 11.

¹⁸ Horvat, Nestorović 2020, XVI-XVII.

¹⁹ Djurić 2016, 149-175.

²⁰ Vomer-Gojkovič et al. 2011, 40-41.

²¹ Nestorović 2021, 84-89.

²² Pobežin et al. 2010, 21.



Fig. 2. Marble bust of the Emperor Hadrian (117–138). The part from the neck down is a modern addition. The unknown site, first half of the 2nd century.



Fig. 3. Votive pedestal base made of white marble with the statue of Mithras Carrying a Bull, Mithraeum I, Spodnja Hajdina.

In the *Archaeology* educational programme, students learn about life in Roman times through replicas of ancient objects, and for Latin students, we highlight the topic of *Reading and Writing in Poetovio*. In Mithraeum I, Mithraeum III, and the Povoden Museum, we read Latin inscriptions on stone altars, tombstones and consecration stones, and we use Latin sayings and proverbs to diversify the activities. Thus, history is the teacher of life: “*Historia vitae magistra*”.

“AT THE HEART OF POETOVIO/PTUJ IN THE TIME OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE” EXHIBITION

From November 2019 to June 2021, the museum hosted a temporary archaeological exhibition entitled “*At the Heart of Poetovio/Ptuj in the time of the Roman Empire*”, focusing on the central part of ancient Ptuj. It was based on recent archaeological research, which has yielded new insights into ancient architecture, streets, buildings, temples, and squares and marked the 1950th anniversary of the first mention of Poetovio in an ancient literary source.

An educational programme was organised for the students on the occasion of the exhibition, which included a guided tour of the exhibition, a brief overview of the history of the Roman State, and an introduction to life in antiquity through the handling of replicas of ancient artefacts (legionary equipment, crockery and food, clothing and jewellery, reading and writing in antiquity).

The publication *At the Heart of Poetovio / Ptuj in the time of the Roman Empire*,²³ which will soon be published in print, is available on *Issuu*, the digital content publishing platform, and the English version is available on the museum's website.²⁴ It can be of great help to students studying ancient Poetovio, as it describes all the fundamental topics: the origins of Poetovio, the name of Poetovio, incorporation into the empire, the army and the military camp, 69 – the year of the four emperors, the founding of the city, Colonia Ulpia Traiana Poetovio, the municipal government and tax offices, trade and manufacturing, and religion. The part of the exhibition that explores the ancient religion of Poetovio, entitled *The Poetovio Pantheon, the Spiritual World of Ancient Ptuj*, is once again on display at the museum.

THE MUSEUM AS A SPACE OF AUTHENTIC LEARNING AND THE ARTEFACTS AS AN "OBJECT OF LEARNING"

Direct contact with an authentic work of art in a museum or *in situ* is crucial for a student's experience, understanding, and appreciation of artwork. Actively experiencing and learning about the past in front of original artworks or artefacts, that is, in an authentic cultural environment, is a unique experience. The purpose of History, Art History, and Latin is not to provide factual knowledge about works of art, but to train students (through this knowledge) to perceive works of art independently and holistically, to relate creatively to their heritage, and to experience the pleasure that comes from this direct contact with works of art. This is ultimately only possible when one encounters an authentic work of art, and one of the most important spaces for this aesthetic experience is the museum.²⁵

The educational programmes in our museum are based on the museum's collection, i.e. the collection of artefacts which are the main "objects of learning".²⁶ Original, real objects speak to students in a way that representations of these objects do not. It is believed that it is the authenticity of museum objects that influences and shapes the visitor's experience most strongly.²⁷ It is these real objects that introduce a new dimension in the comparison between museum learning and formal learning, as they provide an opportunity for experiential learning. The latter is based on handling and encountering real objects or artefacts.²⁸

The museum education mission is to present original objects and to teach through and about them, explaining their meaning, their aesthetic and historical value.

PREPARATION FOR A VISIT TO THE MUSEUM

Careful preparation is essential for a successful visit, both on the part of:

- **Teachers** (who have autonomy in the selection of monuments, who teach and guide the students and must follow the basic objectives of the curriculum, and who discuss

²³ Horvat, Nestorović 2020.

²⁴ Horvat, Nestorović 2021.

²⁵ Bračun Sova, 2012.

²⁶ Tavčar 2009, 78.

²⁷ Evans et al. 2002, 55.

²⁸ Milutinović 2010, 217.

the objectives, content, and activities in the museum with the curators before the visit),

- **Students** (who take an active role in preparing for the excursion or assembling the material, conducting or presenting the field report, and complementing their school lessons with learning activities on-site); and

- **Curators of education and archaeology curators** (usually, a short presentation is needed, as students use one day to visit as many sites as possible). Both must be proficient in different methods of museum interpretation (the process of meaning-making). Despite the short time usually available, curators of education, in particular, must allow the student to have an aesthetic experience of their own directly, thus encouraging their perception, understanding, and appreciation of the works of art.

ONLINE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTENT FOR HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS

The museum education mission mentioned earlier is becoming increasingly important and challenging in the age of digital images and virtual museums and exhibitions. How do we bring the material closer to the students at a time when they are distance learners and still need the content to continue their learning process?

When the students were unable to visit us and encounter the artworks directly due to the epidemiological situation, we provided them with online content: online exhibitions, virtual tours and walks, publications on the Issuu platform, short articles, and TV features.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PTUJ

- The Gods of Poetovio, an online exhibition
- Travelling through millennia / Archaeology of the Lower Drava River Region, publication
- At the Heart of Poetovio / Ptuj in the time of the Roman Empire, the publication
- At the Heart of Poetovio / Ptuj in the time of the Roman Empire, a virtual walk
- At the Heart of Poetovio / Ptuj in the time of the Roman Empire, a short description
- Roman Pottery Kiln, short description
- The Orpheus Monument and the Povoden Museum, short description
- Bust of emperor Hadrian, short description
- Portrait of Roman emperor Lucius Verus, short description
- Fragment of a mosaic depicting the Abduction of Europa, a short description
- Bishop Victorinus of Ptuj, short description
- Part of a relief depicting Sol, a short description

THE MITHRAEUMS OF POETOVIO

- Poetovio Mithraeum I, online exhibition
- A virtual tour of Mithraeum III in Zgornji Breg and Mithraeum I in Spodnja Hajdina
- Poetovio Mithraeum III, publication
- Poetovio Mithraeum I in Spodnja Hajdina, publication

- Mithraeums in Ptuj, TV feature
- Mithraeums of Poetovio, short description²⁹

On the web portal of Slovenian museums and galleries *Museums.si*, 133 archaeological objects are available under Archaeology and 203 objects under Ancient Lapidary³⁰ in the Collections of the Ptuj Ormož Regional Museum. Two sculptures from Mithraeum I, *Mithras Carrying the Bull* and the *Birth of Mithras from a Rock*, are featured among the 73 objects from our museum on the *Google Arts and Culture* online platform.³¹ Online access to the monuments of the ancient lapidary is also available through the *Ubi erat lupa* database of ancient stone monuments.³²

All this material is available on the museum's website for both teachers and students, who can visit our museum from the safety of their own homes. We are aware that the new "virtual reality" cannot replace a visit to a museum, as we have already established that direct contact with an authentic work of art is only possible in a museum. These new possibilities can only complement the experience of exploring artworks. And this addition, we hope, encourages people to visit the museum in person whenever possible.

CONCLUSION

Direct observation of cultural and historical heritage in a museum is essential for students, as it allows them to study specific parts of the History, Art History, and Latin curricula. They learn about the past from historical sources, learn about and develop positive and responsible attitudes towards cultural heritage, reflect on the past and people's way of life, broaden their knowledge and interest in past historical events and enrich themselves spiritually. The Ptuj Ormož Regional Museum offers a wealth of historical sources and is happy to present them to knowledge-hungry high school students. A visit to the museum also strengthens their awareness of local and national cultural heritage and the importance of preserving and protecting it.

Translator: Mateja Lapuh

²⁹ <https://pmpo.si/sola-od-doma/>.

³⁰ <http://museums.si/sl-si/Domov/Zbirke?unit=10208>.

³¹ <https://artsandculture.google.com/partner/pokrajinski-muzej-ptuj-ormoz>.

³² <http://lupa.at/museums/66>.

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Rezime:

ANTIČKI PTUJ (POETOVIO) ZA UČENIKE SREDNJIH ŠKOLA

Ključne reči: muzejska pedagogija, muzejska edukacija, učenje, škola, Ptuj Ormož regionalni muzej, *Poetovio*

Tokom rimskog perioda, *Poetovio* je bio najveći grad između severnog Jadrana i Dunava, kao i značajan evropski centar mitraizma, razvijen na obalama reke Drave na području današnjeg grada Ptuja. Najveći prosperitet ovaj grad je doživeo između II i III veka. Njegov istorijat, zatim pojam mitraizma, kao i drugi rimski spomenici u Ptuj, predstavljaju muzejske teme o kojima učenici srednjih škola uče u okviru predmeta Istorije, Istorije umetnosti i Latinskog jezika. Takođe, te teme su date i kao izborni sadržaji maturalnih ispita i jedan su od razloga zašto učenici posećuju naš muzej putem ekskurzija. Iz istog razloga oni posećuju Mitreje I i III, kao i druge rimske reljefe i spomenike širom Ptuja, zatim Ptujski zamak i povremene tematske izložbe. U okviru muzejske učionice, učenici mogu dobiti lekcije koje se odnose na *Poetovio – Rimski grad kraj Drave*, učeći o antičkom životu putem replika autentičnih predmeta. Ovakav edukativni program usklađen je sa sadržajem školskih predmeta i temama maturalnog ispita a upravo je i razvijen u dogovoru sa nastavnicima koji imaju autonomiju da odaberu sadržaje i aktivnosti za njihove učenike u muzeju.

U Ptuj Ormož regionalnom muzeju učenici se takođe mogu upoznati sa antičkim predmetima i temama kroz *online* edukativne materijale koji su dostupni u okviru njegove internet prezentacije. Ipak, može se reći da je najpre direktan kontakt učenika sa muzejskim artefaktima od suštinske važnosti za njihovo razumevanje i shvatanje vrednosti nasleđa odnosno umetnosti, kroz jedinstveno iskustvo u autentičnom kulturnom okruženju. Dodatno, poseta studenata muzeju razvija i njihovu svest o značaju lokalnog i nacionalnog kulturnog nasleđa, kao i o važnosti njegovog očuvanja i zaštite.