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ANCIENT POETOVIO FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PUPILS

Abstract: The Ptuj Ormož Regional Museum preserves and presents a rich fundus of material remains from the ancient period, telling the story of Poetovio, the largest Roman city in the territory of present-day Slovenia. To present ancient Poetovio and daily life in Roman times as vividly as possible, the museum has designed a series of educational programmes and activities for pre-school children, elementary school pupils, and families. By visiting the museum, schools can achieve their curriculum objectives, while contact with original objects brings the past to life. Through appropriate interpretation, discussion, didactic materials, handling of replicas, and encounters with experts, we create a vivid and complete experience of a journey back in time that pupils can only experience in a museum.

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

INTRODUCTION

Poetovio was the largest Roman city in what is now Slovenia. An influential administrative, artisanal, and commercial centre with a strong agricultural hinterland, it was one of the most important cities between the Adriatic and the Danube border, as the seat of the tax administration and the offices of the Illyrian customs, and at its height, it was a "cosmopolitan place with many officials, priests, soldiers, merchants and slaves."¹

The Ptuj Museum is home to an extensive collection of ancient stone artefacts and numerous small archaeological finds, which are displayed in temporary exhibitions. The ancient monuments in the museum's care are located in various locations in and around Ptuj. In the centre of Ptuj stands the *Orpheus Monument*, a nearly 5-metre high tombstone, and the *Povoden Museum*, the oldest open-air ancient lapidary in Slovenia. Ancient stone monuments built into the city tower's walls are on display here.

Poetovio was one of the largest centers of Mithraism in Europe. In Ptuj, which was a military base, customs station, and base of provincial tax authorities, five Mithraeums have been discovered, the remains of two of which are on display at the discovery site. The oldest is the so-called Mithraeum I of Poetovio, where an especially rare sculpture

¹ Nestorović et al. 2012, 13.

of the *Taurophorus* (*Mithras carrying the bull*), which is considered “one of the most important images of Mithras in our country”,² can be seen.

A 3rd-century Roman kiln for firing clay products is also presented *in situ*. It is surmounted by a protective building with a permanent exhibition dedicated to Roman crafts.³ The preserved kiln represents a part of the rich artisanal activity that took place in Poetovio. This was the site of the industrial production of various pottery and brick products, not only for the needs of the city but also for other provincial towns in the Roman Empire.⁴ The abundance, variety, and telling nature of the material remains of ancient Poetovio provide excellent opportunities for learning alongside the original artifacts and for a vivid presentation of life in Antiquity. For this reason, the Museum has designed a series of educational programs and activities for preschool children, elementary school pupils, and families. To provide a vivid experience of history, these activities combine authentic contact with the original objects and an opportunity to handle high-quality replicas.

By exploring the ancient exhibits in the Ptuj Museum, schools can achieve many of the curriculum objectives in social studies, history, and even music education. The 4th-grade curriculum for social studies includes the words *archaeologist*, *historian*, *ancient history*, *Romans*, *cultural monument*, and *museum* among the basic concepts that provide the first contact with human history for this age group. It is recommended that lessons be based on as many concrete activities as possible, including a visit to a museum.⁵ The learning objectives for 4th grade pupils are to learn about the past of their home town and region through people’s lives and to compare it with life today, to learn about the natural and cultural heritage of their home town and region, and to understand the importance of preserving it. Pupils from the 5th grade should be familiar with the main historical periods (prehistory, ancient, medieval, and modern times), use different historical sources to research the past, and be aware of the activities of a regional museum.

In the history curriculum, the *Roman state* is a compulsory topic, while *ancient culture*, *ancient economy*, and *ancient daily life* are optional.⁶ Pupils from the 7th grade are asked to explain the main changes brought about by the Romans and to describe the main Roman cultural monuments in what is now Slovenia. These include, of course, the monuments of ancient Poetovio.

According to the curriculum for music education, 7th-grade pupils can understand and use the musical terms *Antiquity*, *aulos*, and *tibia*.⁷ In 1988, archaeologists from Ptuj discovered the remains of a double tibia flute from the 2nd or 3rd century in the area of Poetovio. The fragments of the Ptuj tibia are an exceptional and rare find and “there is no doubt that the Poetovio tibia and similar double-pipe finds with mechanisms must have been expensive professional instruments for virtuoso performers and are a testimony of a very sophisticated musical culture in the Roman imperial period, which followed

² Vomer-Gojkovič et al. 2011, 41.

³ Horvat, Dolenc Vičič 2010, 89.

⁴ Tomanič-Jevremov 2005, 3.

⁵ Budnar et al. 2011, 17-18.

⁶ Kunaver et al. 2011, 12-13.

⁷ Holcar et al. 2011, 10-11.

the highest Hellenistic standards.”⁸ Pupils can see the tibia at the permanent exhibition of musical instruments at Ptuj Castle, which is considered the largest collection of historical musical instruments in Slovenia.

MUSEUM EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES

The content of the curricula is best presented through dedicated museum educational programs or other forms of collaboration between the museum and schools. Activities can also be linked to other subjects, such as Slovenian, science and technology, art, music, and sports education.

The Story of Mithras is an educational program designed for pupils of the first three years of school, to accompany their visit to Poetovio Mithraeums I and III.

How do we introduce the Mithraeum to children and explain concepts such as *Mithraism*, *religion* or *belief*? What should pupils do when visiting the Mithraeum?

Younger children have no background knowledge of the subject and cannot actively participate in the discussion. The explanation method does not work well for them because it does not encourage them to participate actively. However, unfamiliar topics can be successfully introduced using the storytelling method.



Fig. 1. Illustration from the picture book *The Story of Mithras*.

In designing the program, we drew on the legends of Mithras, which we compiled into a short story and supplemented with illustrations. *The Story of Mithras* summarises the mythology of Mithraism, such as the birth of Mithras from a rock and the creation of the world, and introduces children to the part of the belief that they can grasp. The illustrations bring the subject matter closer to them.

We have published *The Story of Mithras* as a picture book with an accompanying explanation for adults, aimed at educators, teachers, and parents. To give children an even better idea of life in Antiquity, we use replicas when they visit the Mithraeum.

Mithraeums I and III for Pupils from the 4th to 9th Grade

For the 4th to 9th grade age group, we use didactic aids in the form of cards for visits to the Mithraeum. The first set contains the inscriptions of the consecration stones and their translations. The pupil looks for the inscription on the stone monument and reads

⁸ Sutkowska 2018, 89.

the translation from the cards. Then we try to understand or explain what the inscription is saying. The second set of cards contains Slovenian words of Latin origin, together with their originals in Latin. Pupils read the Slovenian word of Latin origin on one side of the card, then turn the card over and learn from which Latin word it comes. The third set of cards contains Latin proverbs and their Slovenian translations. Pupils make pairs of cards: for each Latin proverb, they try to find the corresponding Slovenian translation. This is followed by handling the replicas.

The Roman Kiln illustrates the rich artisanal activity that took place in Poetovio. When pupils visit the kiln, we complement the explanation with replicas of clay and glass vessels and oil lamps, as well as foods that were eaten in Antiquity. For comparison, we place alongside them foods that were unknown in Antiquity but are now common ingredients in modern cooking. Pupils are also allowed to handle original fragments of ancient clay pottery.

The Orpheus Monument and the Povoden Museum

When pupils visit the Orpheus Monument, we use illustrations to tell the myth of Orpheus, and we may also use replicas.

The World of Musical Instruments at Ptuj Castle

The Collection of Historical Musical Instruments introduces pupils to ancient musical instruments and sounds, such as bone and horn flutes, bells, musical forks, and the extremely rare double *tibia* flute. Objects and fragments depicting ancient musical instruments are also on display. The program concludes with a workshop in which pupils make a simple lyre.

The Heart of Poetovio / Ptuj in Roman Times Temporary Exhibition

The temporary exhibition *The Heart of Poetovio / Ptuj in Roman Times* was augmented by replicas, which were used directly alongside the originals. The educational program also included the retelling of the Orpheus myth, accompanied by illustrations and the making of a simple stringed instrument.

Why use replicas?

Much of the archaeological material consists of only partially preserved artifacts, which do not tell a child much. This is also often the case for well-preserved or fully preserved artifacts, as children have no previous experience with them. In such cases, we can help them with replicas, which – unlike the originals – can be handled by the pupils. They can be used to demonstrate the use of the object, they can be held and turned and looked at from all sides.



Fig. 2. Presentation of the triclinium. Cooking in the Past educational programme for Lower Podravje, a Land of Culinary Delights temporary exhibition.

***Lower Podravje, a Land of Culinary Delights* Temporary Exhibition: *Cooking in the Past* Programme**

After a guided tour of the exhibition, we invited the pupils into the museum classroom, where we presented Roman cuisine by setting up a triclinium, replicas of clay and glass vessels, and the foods that were eaten in Antiquity. For comparison, we placed alongside them foods that were unknown in Antiquity but are common ingredients in modern cooking. The pupils were asked to identify which foods were already known in Antiquity, which was not, and why this was so. They learned about spices, herbs, and garum. They handled original fragments of ancient clay pottery.

The program was organized for 1st to 5th-grade pupils of the Olga Meglič Ptuj Elementary School, as part of the European Heritage Days 2021, themed *Bon Appetit!* and was part of the activities to mark Slovenia's appointment as the European Region of Gastronomy 2021.

Poetovio and Life in Antiquity for Families

Every month, the museum organizes a *Museum Weekend*, a free workshop for families. We often choose themes related to ancient monuments and artifacts. Families visit a temporary or permanent exhibition and then make something based on that theme, e.g. jewelry based on ancient designs, a bookmark with a Mithras motif, a simple lyre, a legionary's helmet made of paper, etc.

For many years, we have also been participating in **Art Camp**, the children's part of the Lent Festival in Maribor. We have presented our activities promoting archaeological collections here on several occasions. The most popular activity among children and parents alike is the handling of replicas of Roman legionary equipment and various creative workshops.

Similarly, we present our activities with originals, replicas, and workshops at the **Ptuj Roman Games**.



Fig. 3. Museum Weekend, a free workshop for families.

POETOVIO ONLINE

While schools were working remotely, **virtual tours** of Mithraeums I and III and of the exhibition *The Heart of Poetovio / Ptuj in Roman Times* were organized. We also designed the “Legionary Equipment” **online quiz** and the “Roman Poetovio” word grid, in which pupils look for terms related to Antiquity.

We created a **video** for the online presentation of ancient musical instruments. In 2012, we designed an **online game** called *Be an Archaeologist*, although this is no longer available for technical reasons.

COOPERATION BETWEEN THE MUSEUM AND PTUJ'S EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE ANNIVERSARY YEAR 2019

In 2019, Ptuj celebrated the 1,950th anniversary of its first written mention in ancient sources. "The Roman historian Tacitus, in his *Historiae*, mentions Poetovio as the scene of an important event in the fateful year of AD 69, when, after Nero's death, three candidates vied for the imperial title."⁹ At that time, a meeting took place in the legionary camp, at which the commanders of the Illyrian legions decided to support Vespasian as emperor. The event is known in Roman historiography as the military coup d'état of Poetovio. Tacitus writes: "*Poetovionem in hibernia tertiae decimae legionis convenerant. Illic agitavere placerente obstrui Pannoniae Alpes, donec a tergo vires universae consurgerent, an ire cominus et certare pro Italia constantius foret.*"¹⁰



Fig. 4. The Ptuj Ormož Regional Museum at Lent Festival in Maribor. The most popular activity among children and parents alike is the handling of replicas of Roman legionary equipment and various creative workshops.

To mark this anniversary, the Municipality of Ptuj organized a number of events in the fields of tourism, culture, and education throughout the year under the slogan *Vivat Poetovio!* Various organizations, municipal services and institutions, schools, kindergartens, associations, and individuals took part.

How did the Ptuj Museum work with Ptuj schools and kindergartens during that year? On this occasion, all educational institutions in the city prepared projects and turned to the museum for collaboration.

⁹ Nestorovič, 2012, 12.

¹⁰ They gathered in Poetovio at the winter garrison of the 13th Legion. There they analysed whether it would be better to barricade the Pannonian Alps until they had organised all the available forces to the rear or whether it would be more rational to take up arms and fight for Italy (Tacitus 3.1, translated after: Šašel, 1979, p. 1).

Mladika Elementary School developed the project *The Ways of the Ptuj Romans*. They actively involved the pupils, designed the project for the general public, and partnered with our museum to implement it.

Pupils from the 1st to 9th grade visited our archaeological sites as part of a school day dedicated to culture. Pupils from the 1st to 5th grade visited Poetovio Mithraeum III. The youngest children were introduced to the concepts of *Mithras*, *Mithraeum* and *Mithraism* through *The Story of Mithras*, which was accompanied by illustrations from the picture book of the same name. The pupils explored life in ancient Poetovio with replicas of Roman legionary equipment, ancient pottery, glassware, coins, wax tablets, and food. They could also handle these objects. In the end, each class received a picture book, *The Story of Mithras*, as a gift from the museum. The 4th and 5th graders were introduced to reading and writing in Antiquity, and then learned about life in Antiquity by handling replicas.

The 6th and 7th graders visited the ancient stone monuments in the city center: the Orpheus Monument and the Povoden Museum. They learned about the equipment of a Roman legionary, reading and writing in Antiquity, and Roman cuisine, all with the help of replicas.

The 8th and 9th-grade pupils visited the Roman Kiln. Here, they reviewed their knowledge of Ancient Rome and learned how Poetovio was founded and developed, what its importance was in ancient times and what it is today. Handling replicas helped them imagine life in Poetovio in a more practical way.

With the pupils of the Ljudski Vrt Elementary School, we set up the exhibition *A Walk through the History of Time*. The museum's archaeologist presented the history of the Ptuj area from the Stone Age to the early Middle Ages. Two archaeologists gave a practical demonstration of the restoration of Roman pottery, and the pupils, with their help, assembled and glued the pottery pieces together. The museum lent display cases and artifacts to the school. The pupils, with the help of the archaeologists, set up the exhibition in the school corridor.

As part of the *Roman Day in Nature*, 7th-grade pupils visited the Museum's archaeological sites. Museum archaeologists presented the Mithraeum III, the Roman Kiln, the Povoden Museum and the Orpheus Monument.

A Roman Botanical Garden with an Outdoor Classroom was built next to the school. To make the garden more authentic, they turned to our museum. We gave them custody of three urns and part of a Roman aqueduct. This way, pupils can discover the value of the original excavations in their immediate environment and learn about the history of their city.

An exhibition was organized at the Breg Elementary School, featuring pupils' works, written sources about the ancient period, and authentic artifacts on loan from our museum. The archaeological curator gave the pupils a lecture on Ancient Rome and Poetovio and brought pottery, oil lamps, oil lamp molds, money, arrowheads, a knife, kitchenware, and tableware from the museum's depository for the exhibition. In this way, the pupils presented various themes from ancient history: the Roman army, architecture, crafts, food, and beliefs.

Pupils from Dr. Ljudevit Pivko Elementary School presented their artwork recreating monuments from the Ptuj Mithraeums at the *Stories of Our City* exhibition, which

was set up in shop windows in the city center. They made consecration stones with inscriptions and reliefs, and an altar with a statue of the Taurophorus.

The Ptuj Kindergarten also commemorated the anniversary with a series of activities. They worked with many contributors, including the archaeological curators of our museum. Among other things, they built a sensorimotor playground, which they named *The Amber Trail*. The museum's archaeologists provided expert supervision for the construction and the text for the information board. They also took part in the filming of a video in Poetovio Mithraeum III and at the Orpheus Monument, in which children present the past of Ptuj in a heartwarming way.



Fig. 5. Presentation of the Ptuj Ormož Regional Museum at the Ptuj Roman Games.

Learning through active participation is the cornerstone of knowledge acquisition in modern museums. Museums offer contact with original objects, making history alive and real. We bring heritage to life through original artifacts, age-appropriate interpretation and discussion, various didactic materials, activities and workshops. Handling replicas and meeting experts are also important parts of this method of learning. Only in a museum can pupils have such a vivid and complete experience of traveling back in time.

By exploring the ancient exhibits of the Ptuj Museum, schools can achieve many of the curriculum objectives in social studies, history, and even music education. The specific teaching and learning methods in the museum can become an integral part of the learning process, as they contribute to the successful assimilation and consolidation of knowledge and to general and cultural education.

Translator: Mateja Lapuh

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Rezime:

NASLEĐE ANTIČKOG GRADA *POETOVIO* I UČENICI OSNOVNIH ŠKOLA

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

U regionalnom muzeju Ptuj Ormož čuva se bogati fundus predmeta koji predstavljaju materijalno svedočanstvo o životu antičkog grada *Poetovio*, najvećeg rimskog grada na teritoriji današnje Slovenije. Kako bi prezentovao ovaj grad odnosno svakodnevni život u rimsko doba, muzej je kreirao seriju edukativnih programa za predškolsku decu, zatim decu u osnovnim školama, kao i za porodice, koji su ovom prilikom predstavljeni. Kroz posetu muzeju na taj način se ostvaruju dvostruki benefiti – lakše se postižu ciljevi školskih programa, dok se kroz direktan kontakt sa originalnim predmetima o prošlosti dolazi do boljeg razumevanja iste. Tako se putem odgovarajuće interpretacije, diskusije, didaktičkih materijala, replika i susreta sa ekspertima, kreira bogato i upečatljivo iskustvo, dok se sam muzej pozicionira kao izuzetno važna karika u celom edukativnom sistemu.