The Ljubljanica — a River and its Past

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Rivers have always had great influence on the lives of people, as river transport in prehistory and antiquity (and also later, up to the building of the railroads) was both very brisk and less expensive than transporting freight along roads.\footnote{Cults of rivers and other waters have been well documented from the Bronze Age onwards, and flourished far into the period of late Antiquity when the church was repeatedly forced to persecute pagans who prayed to trees, rivers, and stone idols. At the Council in Toledo in AD 693, the church dignitaries in addition to spells and black magic forbade the worship of stones, trees, and springs, and the kindling of torches. River cults are mentioned on inscriptions, and archaeological material can also offer evidence when it is possible to classify it as votive gifts to a river deity, which is often highly unclear. Undoubtedly the cult of a river god existed along all important rivers, and in the northern Adriatic, eastern Alpine, and Pannonian regions in antiquity these gods were mainly worshipped as a male deity, such as Pater Padus (the Father of the Po), Timavus (Timava/Timavo), Aesontius (Soča/Isonzo), Dravus (Drava), Savus (Sava; Fig. 90) and Danubius (Danube); a cult of the Ljubljanica has not yet been attested on inscriptions.}

The Roman name of the river is known: it seems that it was called after both important settlements that evolved along it, the Nauportus in Pliny – after Nauportus (present Vrhnika), a settlement of the Taurisci and later an important fortified Roman trading center – and the Emona after...
the indigenous and Roman Ljubljana. The river seems to have been mentioned as the Emona on the tombstone of a boy from the tribe of the Aman-
tini (settled between the rivers Sava and Drava in present-day Serbia). The unfortunate Scemaes drowned as a hostage in the Ljubljana, probably in the period of the conquest of the Balkans in the first decades BC under the emperor Augustus, when a military tactic of the commanders of the Roman army was to take the children of tribal leaders and distinguished families as hostages. The inscription is unfortunately preserved only in manuscript form (Fig. 91), as the stone itself is lost. Perhaps it was incorrectly copied and the mentioned name of Emona in fact referred to the town and not the river (in flumen perit Hemona: "he died in the river Emona"); perhaps more logically "in the river in Emona", since the river is known to have been named Nauportus). The encyclopedist Pliny the Elder (1st century AD) mentioned the Nauportus River in connection with the mythical return of the Argonauts, as the final river between the Black Sea, from which they returned, and the Adriatic, where the river route allegedly took them (N. h. 3. 128). In fact, there is no direct river connection between both seas, although this incorrect opinion was deeply rooted in antiquity; this is emphasized in particular by Pliny, who was also well versed in geography.

The Ljubljanica is also mentioned by the Greek historian and geographer Strabo, although not by name (4. 6. 10 C 207). He stated that "Ocra is the lowest part of the Alps in the region where they extend to the Carni. Over Ocra [Razdrto below Nanos] goods are brought on freight wagons to Nauportus along a road that is not much longer than 300 stadia [74 km]. From there, the goods are transported by rivers all the way to the Ister [Danube] and the lands there. By Nauportus runs a navigable river coming from Illyria that joins the Sava, so that goods
can easily be sent to Segestica [Sisak] and the lands of the Pannonians and Taurisci." Strabo did not know these lands personally, rather he depended on sources that he did not always properly understand in full detail and was not able to make them compatible with data in his other books. This is visible from the note that the river that flows by Nauportus "comes from Illyria", as in fact the Ljubljanica has its source near Nauportus. This is further clear from data in book seven of his Geography (7. 5. 2 C 314). There he wrote as follows: "Similarly [as from Aquileia] runs the road across Ocra from the Carnian village of Tergeste [Trieste] into the marsh called Lugeon [perhaps Cerkniško jezero (Cerknica Lake)]. Near Nauportus flows the Corcoras River [Krka], which transports goods. It flows into the Sava, the Sava into the Drava, and the latter into the Noarus [the lower course of the Sava] near Segestica." This does not mean – as some think – that Strabo incorrectly noted the Ljubljanica was named the Corcoras, rather that he confused the Ljubljanica with the Krka, probably because road connection existed in prehistory between these two rivers (Fig. 92), along both of which boats transported various cargoes.

The Ljubljanica is part of an important karst river system: connected to the Pivka and Unica Rivers, it emerges as the Ljubljanica near Vrhnika, of which the full 44.7km to the confluence with the Sava at Zalog is navigable. The several meters difference in the water level at the rapids in Fužine was probably lower in the Roman period, as the erosion of the riverbed was not so extensive at that time; the unsafe section may have been regulated by the Romans. It is known that in the Roman period the protector of this dangerous segment of the river, the god Laburus, was worshipped at this spot. The name Laburus is pre-Roman; the god undoubtedly protected river travellers on their route through the rapids long before the Roman occupation.

An association of boatmen existed at Emona (Fig. 93), which indicates the great importance of the Ljubljanica as a transportation artery. It was an important river trade route, as was described as early as Strabo, and its significance was not reduced at all throughout the entire Roman period. In times of peace merchants and various artisans sailed the river, in times of military activity it was used by the army, as is proven by the tombstone found in Ljubljana of a soldier of the Pannonian navy (Fig. 94), which probably had its own military dock in Emona in the war times.
Notes

1 Šašel Kos 1994; Šašel Kos 1999b.
2 Šašel Kos 1999b, 23.
3 CIL III 3224.
4 See Šašel Kos in this volume, pp. 122–123, where Pliny's text is translated.
5 E.g. Saria 1933; Saria 1935, 2013.
6 CIL III 3840 + p. 2328, 188 = ILS 4877.
7 Šašel Kos 1997a, no. 46.
9 Kept in the National Museum of Slovenia, Inv. No. L 18; Šašel Kos 1997a, no. 95.
10 CIL III 3224.

11 Kept in the National Museum of Slovenia, Inv. No. L 31; Šašel Kos 1997a, no. 46.
12 Kept in the National Museum of Slovenia, Inv. No. L 58; Šašel Kos 1997a, no. 44.