



Franciscan Library and Museum with Pinacotheca in Ljubljana

Jan Dominik Bogataj OFM*

The Franciscan Museum and Pinacotheca of the Franciscan Friary in the center of Ljubljana represent, together with the renovated library, a newly conceived cultural and art-historical section of the Friary as the mother house of the Slovenian Franciscan Province of the Holy Cross. The library currently holds ca. 70,000 book units, including precious books such as incunabula – one-seventh of all incunabula in the country – and can thus boast the title of Slovenia's most extensive monastic library. The newly designed museum showcases some of the friary's key cultural and artistic objects.

This heritage dictates an obligation to preserve the artifacts carefully – yet opens the question of public accessibility. The purpose of the renovated library and the new museum is to offer, on the one hand, a detailed presentation of typically Franciscan or Franciscan-related exhibits or personalities and, on the other hand, to create a modern museum with a diverse collection for a broader range of visitors. The design of the new Franciscan Museum and Pinacotheca is thus a synthesis between a historical presentation of Franciscan identity in Ljubljana and the display of a broader cultural and artistic heritage interesting for the widest possible audience.

THE MUSEUM WITH PINACOTHECA

At the entrance of the museum, visitors are greeted by a chronogram. The sum of the highlighted Roman letters, number 2023, represents the year of the museum's foundation, while the content of the chro-

* University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Theology, Poljanska cesta 4, SI-1000 Ljubljana; jan.bogataj@teof.uni-lj.si.

nogram illustrates the two-fold design of this new exhibition place, the museum with a gallery and the library.

In prInClpIo LoCVs MVsIs fVIt,
 nVnC hIC
 VnICo qVI artes InspIrat,
 InspIratIo Ipsa et artIfeX est,
 CantIbVs CanVnt CoLores LItteraeqVe

Initially, this was a place for the Muses,
 Now, a place where
 The only Inspirer of art, who is
 The Inspiration itself and the Artist,
 Is glorified with songs of colors and letters

The museum premises consist of two units: the Treasury and the Pinacotheca. The Treasury displays the key precious objects and books from the library collection. The most significant works of art from the friary's collection hang in the Pinacotheca.

Treasury

The items in the Treasury are presented in thematic sections in chronological sequence. The Franciscans' history in Ljubljana covers eight centuries, from the 13th to the 21st century. The exhibition thus begins with the oldest medieval document in the collection: the privilege (*Ad consequendam gloriam*) of Pope Clement IV from 1265, which granted the Order of Friars Minor that no other monastery, church, or oratory of other religious orders would be within a circle of more than 500 meters of their monasteries.

The late Middle Ages are represented by a fantastic polychrome Gothic statue of the "Madonna of Rožnik" from the middle of the 15th century. This is one of the extremely rare surviving Gothic (sacral) objects in central Slovenia, currently on loan from the National Gallery.

The written heritage is represented by two manuscript codices from the early 15th century, a Bible and a collection of sermons. The collection continues with several incunabula bound into manuscript fragments, often richly illuminated, a manuscript psalter for the chanted prayer, and manuscripts in Hebrew and Arabic. This is followed by a presentation of selected incunabula and other older prints. Among these, the second edition of Copernicus' seminal work *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (1566) is an exceptional rarity. Among the

key Slovenian publications are a copy of Jurij Dalmatin's Bible (1584), Primož Trubar's personal copy, which includes his signatures; the first edition of Prešeren's poem "Krst pri Savici" ("The Baptism on the Savica") (1836) adorned with the author's dedication to his fellow lawyer, Judge Josef Pillman; and a manuscript collection of poems by Prešeren's contemporary and friend, Fr. Benvenut Crobath.

The museum display continues with the Baroque period: next to a vitrine with the liturgical vestments and utensils, one can find a significant but hitherto almost unknown source, the *Bosna Seraphica* chronicle, written in 1780 by Fr. Maver Fajdiga (the so-called "Fajdiga Chronicle"). Fr. Fajdiga describes the history of the Franciscan Order in the Balkans, with particular attention to all the Franciscan friaries of the then-Croatian province.

The museum further preserves two important ethnological collections founded by Slovenian missionaries: the Bishop of Marquette, Frideric Irenaeus Baraga (1797–1868), and the missionary to China, the Franciscan Fr. Engelhard Avbelj (1887–1928). The first collection includes objects from the daily life of the Ottawa and Ojibwe Indians of the Great Lakes region of North America and Baraga's dictionary of the Ojibwe language. The second collection includes various artifacts from Chinese culture and Catholic prints in Chinese.

The museum also displays the work of Fr. Stanislav Škrabec (1844–1918), the instigator of Slovenian phonetics and one of the greatest Slovenian linguists. When Fr. Škrabec had to flee to Ljubljana to escape death and destruction of the First World War, he brought with him his copies of the covers of the magazine *Cvetja z vertov svetega Frančiška* [Flowers from the Gardens of St Francis], where he recorded his linguistic findings. The author's handwritten comments give these copies exceptional value.

Two objects by the Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik, also a member of the Order of St Francis, represent the 20th century. Plečnik's red monstrance, explicitly designed for the Franciscan church in Ljubljana, is considered one of his central liturgical works. Below the monstrance, the visitors can observe one of Plečnik's two unique chess sets, which he made specifically for the Franciscans in Ljubljana.

The museum's installation concludes with a thematic section dedicated to the difficult period of World War II when the Franciscans also found themselves in a difficult situation between the two sides involved in the Civil War. The display includes some scarce inter-war prints and documents, above which two flags hang: the original flag of the Kingdom of Italy, which flew at the Friary during the Italian occupation (1941–1943), and a copy of the old Slovenian flag, which

was hung on the church bell tower by the Slovenian resistance fighters during the war.

Pinacotheca

The gallery installation comprises a selection from the broader collection of artworks the Friary holds. The chronological arc of the artworks on display stretches from the 16th to the 20th century but focuses on the Baroque period when most of the paintings now owned by the friary were created. Still, the collection starts with two icons: an older representation of Mother of Consolation and St John the Baptist that probably belongs to the Cretan school of the 16th century and a Baroque copy of the Black Madonna of Brno with an artfully carved and gilded frame.

Two Baroque canvases follow: the Adoration of the Shepherds by an unknown Venetian master of the Bassano tradition and the Sorrowful Mother of God by an unknown, probably southern Italian or Spanish painter. The installation then introduces the central figure of the local Carniolan Baroque, Valentin Metzinger, who was closely associated with the Franciscans throughout his life and is represented by three canvases. The next painting is St. Bonaventure by Anton Cebej, which means that the collection's paintings include half of the "Big Four" of Carniolan Baroque painting, completed by Fortunat Bergant and Franc Jelovšek.

The era of the so-called fading of the Baroque at the end of the 18th century is effectively represented by two late Baroque painters: Leopold Layer, author of one of the quintessential Slovene paintings, the merciful image of Our Lady Help of Christians from Brezje, and the Bavarian painter Janez Andrej Herrlein, who brought his unique style of painting to Carniola. The transition in the subject matter of Slovenian painting at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries is illustrated by two works by the Šubic brothers. Firstly, one can admire a painting of Janez Šubic, St. Anthony of Padua, which still retains traits of late Baroque Pietism in its early celestial sphere. Then, there is Visitation of the Virgin Mary by his brother Jurij Šubic, opening the door to early 20th-century realism – and thus also to Impressionism and Expressionism – and is therefore considered one of the seminal works of Slovenian painting. The collection is completed by two works that already embrace this Impressionist enthusiasm: Rihard Jakopič's intriguing small canvas, The Baptism in the Jordan from around 1900, and Matej Sternen's sketch for the ceiling frescoes of the central nave of the Franciscan Church in Ljubljana.

THE LIBRARY OF THE FRANCISCAN FRIARY

History of the library

The Library of the Franciscan friary in Ljubljana, the oldest continuously operating library institution in Slovenia, is the richest monastic library in this area. Its eight-hundred-year history is depicted by an anaphoric Latin inscription at the entrance to the gallery, focusing on the critical years of its functioning:

s. XIII condita, s. XIV incensa, s. XV observantibus tradita, s. XVI
partim dispersa, s. XVII iterum congregata, s. XVIII locupletata et
trans fluvium translata, s. XIX nova domo accepta, s. XX confun-
dendo salvata, a. D. MMXXIII vero renovata

Founded in the 13th century, burned in the 14th century, handed
down to observants in the 15th century, partly dispersed in the
16th century, reassembled in the 17th century, enriched and trans-
ferred across the river in the 18th century, received in a new home
in the 19th century, saved through confusion in the 20th century,
and genuinely renewed in the year 2023

The origins of the library date back to the early 13th century, when the Franciscans settled in Ljubljana in 1233 at the invitation of the Patriarch of Aquileia, Bertold v. A friary was built by the Conventuals on today's Vodnik Square. This friary must have had at least an armarium, a place for the most essential books needed for communal life and worship. Valvasor's large panorama of Ljubljana suggests that the library was located in the western wing, in the corner of the cloister. In 1382, the library burned to the ground but was rebuilt between 1403 and 1412.

When the province adopted the Observant reform in the 15th century under the Auersperg family, who were provincial governors, the Conventuals had to leave the friary. It was then occupied by the second branch of the Order of Friars Minor, the Observants, who were intensely involved in the collection of books, librarianship, and education. During the Catholic Reform, the Franciscans abandoned the friary almost completely and emigrated from Ljubljana in 1596. On their return in 1602, many books were temporarily moved to the Franciscan friary in Graz. From 1596 to 1602, when the friary was taken over by the Imperial Hospital, many books were lost or

appropriated by the hospital administrator. In 1609, the monks asked him, through Bishop Tomaž Hren, to give them the books and the library inventory.

The formal founder of the library was Fr. Sigismundus Škerpin (1689–1775), theologian, provincial, general visitor of the provinces of Hungary, Austria, Bavaria, Venice, and Rome, and general defensor. He secured a special fund to purchase books, to which citizens of Carniola and Ljubljana contributed as donors. The library collection grew, and from 1733 to 1735, the friary built a new extension decorated with a painted ceiling and furnished in baroque style. Škerpin traveled extensively and purchased or received many books that are now part of the friary library during his journeys. In the second half of the 18th century, the entire collection comprised over 4000 volumes. No less than 2672 volumes bear Škerpin's ex-libris. Although it begins with the personal characteristic of an ex-libris (*Ab A. R. P. Sigismundo Skerpin*), it also emphasizes the communal purpose of his purchases (*pro Bibliotheca Labacensi PP. Franciscanorum*). Škerpin's entire project was one of the central contributions to the Ljubljana baroque "scholarly renaissance," the library was one of the richest collections in Carniola.

In 1784, the friary of the barefoot Augustinians in nowadays Prešeren Square was abolished by Joseph II and given to the Franciscans, who took over the pastoral care in the newly established parish, carrying out school activities and social work. The Franciscans also brought books and documents from their previous location in today's Vodnik Square. There is no precise information about the library's location and layout during the initial period of the Franciscans' stay in Prešeren Square. One exception is the mention in Fajdiga's chronicle that Fr. Lenart Košar, monastery guardian between 1814 and 1823, had new library premises built or the existing ones enlarged. The present two-story building with two library galleries on the site of the friary was built according to the plans of architect Raymund Jeblinger from Graz after the earthquake of 1896, during the time of the guardianship of Fr. Hugolin Sattner.

In 1919, a reading room was added to the library. In 1933, the library was renovated since it was already very neglected. During World War II, almost all the duplicates of the books were removed, leaving only the covers and some other fragments of the bindings (about 200 items of *membra disiecta*). Before World War II, the library attempted a complete reorganization of the layout of the material by subject, which was only partially implemented. This may have saved the books from the German occupiers, but after the

war, the Visitor General ordered that the old layout according to size (formats) should be introduced. In 1970, the library premises were almost demolished in favor of a shopping center on the new “Boris Kraigher platform,” but the 1952 decree on protecting the library’s monuments prevented this.

Between 2022 and 2023, the library was extensively renovated following the strict guidelines of the Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of Slovenia. The electrical wiring was replaced, new integrated lighting was installed to replace the old 1960s lighting, the window sashes were thoroughly refurbished, and the wooden and ceramic floors were renovated. The discovery of a dangerous wall fungus that had been dormant for decades has helped ensure that the building is thoroughly restored. Many of the artworks have been reinstalled. In January 2023, the library became the first Franciscan library in Slovenia to join the mutual bibliographic system, Cobiss.si, and cataloging began with the entry of all incunabula. A new archive room has also been set up in the corridor next to the library, where provincial, friary, and parish archival material is stored. There is also a new layout of the books: the ground floor and the first gallery now house the historical part of the collection (printed up to around 1850), while the second gallery houses later items. To solve the problem of space constraints, later periodicals and fiction have been excluded.

Library collection

The historical and modern parts of the library’s collection total around 70,000 items. The library has undergone several cataloging attempts in the past. The earliest catalog dated from 1491, when the friary in Vodnik Square was abandoned by the Conventuals and occupied by the Observants. Unfortunately, this manuscript catalog was likely destroyed. There were several attempts at various catalogs from the early and late 20th century, but none were complete.

The Škerpin books alone are printed in ten different languages: Arabic, Flemish, French, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Chaldean, Latin, German, Spanish, and German. In addition, the collection also includes books in Dutch, Old Czech, and other languages, mainly European. The works are classified into 14 subject groups. The library also contains a considerable amount of modern manuscripts, a collection of sheet music by Hugolin Satner, a large amount of older photographic material and older periodicals, a collection of church pictures, a collection of postcards, a collection of small prints, a numismatic collection, a collection of decorations, documents, and

diplomas, and a collection of posters and maps. A unique feature of the library is an extensive collection of more than three thousand prayer books in over fifteen languages. The library's diverse material is displayed in eight exhibition cases on the ground floor. The exhibition concludes with showcases in which the arc of history extends to the present with the contemporary scholarly and literary work of the Franciscans from the Ljubljana Friary.