The Disappearing Tombstone and Other Stories from Emona

Marjeta Šašel Kos


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Some Highlights from the History of Emona

Map of the Roman Empire

Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, has been a significant city in the south-eastern pre-Alpine region for more than 2000 years. It is situated between two hills, Rožnik and Castle Hill (Grajski hrib), along a river and an old commercial route, in an area that has always been easy to traverse. Emona, Ljubljana's predecessor, developed here, becoming an autonomous

city with the status of a Roman colony (*colonia Iulia Emona*) during the reign of Emperor Augustus (27 BC–AD 14). As a Roman town, it witnessed the end of the western part of the Roman Empire in AD 476.

The ancient Amber Road passed through Emona, whose importance was enhanced by the navigable Ljubljanica River (the Nauportus) running through the town. This was the first section of the important water route that linked the Emona Basin to the Black Sea by way of the Sava and Danube Rivers. All the rivers were sacred and fluvial deities were among the most influential: Laburus was worshipped at a dangerous waterfall on the Ljubljanica, Savus along the Sava, and Danuvius protected those who travelled along the Danube. Nauportus (Vrhnika) and Emona were the two principal settlements along these two routes, at the very margins of the northern Adriatic regions, which were controlled by Aquileia since at least Gaius Julius Caesar onwards (about mid-1st century BC). Both settlements were linked to the legend of the Argonauts.

Pliny the Elder (1st century AD), who was the first to mention Emona in his *Encyclopaedia*, critically commented on the flow of the rivers: "No river flows from the Danube into the Adriatic Sea. I think that the writers were deceived by the report that the boat Argo descended by river into the Adriatic Sea not far from Tergeste, although they did not know by what river. More reliable writers state that they carried it on their shoulders through the Alps; it arrived there from the Danube, then along the Savus and along the Nauportus, which has its source between Emona and the Alps and received its name for this reason." (*N. h.* 3. 128). According to Pliny's erroneous etymology, the name Nauportus would have been composed of the words *navis* (ship) and *porto* (carry).

The pre-Celtic population of the Ljubljana Basin is not known by name, although some evidence for their ethnic identity can be inferred from the personal names attested on Roman tombstones from the Ig area. It seems

that they were related to the Veneti and other northern Adriatic peoples. The Celts came to settle in this region in the 3rd century BC, perhaps as early as towards the end of the 4th century. They also left traces in the names of the Ig inhabitants, while at Emona colonists from Italy prevailed, particularly from Aquileia and other northern Italian cities. Among the inhabitants of Roman Emona, indigenous names are very rare. Nauportus was known as a settlement of the Celtic Taurisci, where (in the course of the 1st century BC) the Aquileians founded a large *emporium* and had it fortified with walls. The main sanctuary at Nauportus, archaeologically confirmed and mentioned in an inscription, was dedicated to the local goddess Aequorna, whom the

AUGUSTUS

MARCUS AURELIUS

MAXIMINUS THRAX

THEODOSIUS

settlers from Aquileia adopted as an influential divinity. Her worship was no less important at Emona. Aquileia played a crucial role in conquering the regions of present-day Slovenia.

Nauportus fell into decline in the 2nd century AD, while Emona continued to flourish; it is not surprising, therefore, that Emona became linked to Jason and the Argonauts. The Greek historian Zosimus (5th/6th cent. AD) writes in his *New History* (5.29.1–3): "Alaric had left Epirus at the head of the Goths (that happened in AD 408), and marched towards Italy. Having already passed the narrow passes leading from Pannonia to Venetia, he built his camp at a town called Emona. It was founded by the Argonauts, who

MAXIMINUS THRAX
AD 235–238

THEODOSIUS
AD 379–395

ALARIC
(king of the Visigoths)
AD 395–410

Fall of the Western Roman Empire
AD 476

A 3D landscape model of the reconstructed Emona

were returning to Greece from the Black Sea along the Ister (= the Danube), while they were being pursued by Medea's father Aeetas. With convenient winds, they came very near to the other sea. Having arrived at the place they sought, they founded a town there as a memorial of their return journey. Afterwards, they placed their ship, the Argo, on special devices, and drew it four hundred stadia, as far as the sea. From there they reached the Thessalian shores, as is recounted by the poet Pisander from Laranda."

The Roman town of Emona was built towards the very end of the reign of Augustus on the left bank of the river, where there had been no previous settlement. The prehistoric village, in which the first Roman merchants came to settle as early as the time of Caesar, was situated on the right bank, below Castle Hill. It is attested by archaeological discoveries and numerous finds, and not least by the pre-Roman town name Emona. An early prehistoric settlement is documented on Castle Hill, where it would have been better protected. The inhabitants buried their dead on the left bank of the river, and a cemetery from the late Bronze Age (10th–9th cent. BC) has

been discovered in the courtyard of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The Ljubljana region, however, has been inhabited already since the Eneolithic period onwards, from the 4th millennium BC, when the first pile dwellings were built in the nearby Ljubljansko barje (Ljubljana Marshes).

Emona as a north-easternmost Italian town is mentioned by the Greek historian Herodian (3rd cent. AD), in a passage in his *History after Marcus Aurelius* (8.1.4–5), in which he describes the march of the emperor Maximinus Thrax in 238 AD to Italy. Maximinus had left the Danube war theatre in order to depose the senators Pupienus and Balbinus, who had usurped the imperial authority in Rome. "They stopped at the first Italian city, called Ema by the local inhabitants. It is situated at the highest point of the plain, at the foot of the Alps. There the advance guard and reconnoiterers met Maximinus and informed him that not a single soul remained in the city;

Preserved and partially renovated southern city wall of Emona

all the inhabitants had fled after having burnt the doors of the sanctuaries and their houses. They partly carried away and partly burnt everything in the city and in the countryside, thus no food was available either for transport animals or men. [...] After having spent the night in the town, some in totally empty houses without doors, some on the plain, they set out for the Alps at the sunrise." That this passage refers to Emona is clear from the *History of the Emperors* (*Historia Augusta*), written in Latin, in which the unknown author describes the same event. He adds the non-authentic detail about 500 wolves suddenly turning up in the town; this portent would have announced the imminent death of Maximinus (*v. Max.* 31.3). The emperor was actually killed in front of Aquileia.

Due to increasingly frequent incursions of organized groups of barbarians towards the end of the 5th century, Emona almost entirely fell into ruins. The town is last mentioned in a corrupt form as Atamine (*ad Emonam*: at Emona) by the anonymus geographer from Ravenna (7th/8th cent. AD). However, in his letters to the Emonian virgins and to the monk Antonius from Emona, St. Jerome complained, as early as the 4th century AD, about the terrible devastations of "our regions" and the daily bloodshed of Roman citizens (*epist.* xi and xii).

Nowadays, visitors can better understand life in once-flourishing Emona by visiting the archaeological collections in the National Museum of Slovenia and the Municipal Museum. A visit to the preserved southern section of the Roman city walls at Mirje would be equally informative, as would be two archaeological parks, the "Early Christian Centre" and the "Roman House at Emona". Also interesting is a walk to the first *Lapidarium* of Ljubljana, created at the beginning of the 18th century by Ioannes Gregorius Thalnitscher, who had 13 Roman inscribed monuments built into the Ljubljana Cathedral and Seminary at the beginning of the 18th century. Additional information is contained on several panels erected at small archaeological sites in the centre of Ljubljana.

Centenarians in the Countryside of Emona

Landscape of the Ig area

It is highly interesting that in some of the funerary inscriptions in the territory of Emona, the ages of several deceased persons are declared to have been 80, 90 and even a hundred years. A pair (!) of centenarians is mentioned on a tombstone from the village of Ig; it was erected by Fronto, son of Vib(i)us, while still alive, for himself and his living wife Secunda,

Fronto's tombstone for his wife Secunda, built into Ljubljana Cathedral

daughter of Maximus. These two were not the only recorded centenarians in the village. Another funerary monument came to light at Ig, which belonged to Secco and Rega, who died relatively young; however, the grandmother Manuna is also mentioned on the stone, and she was 100. The inscription reads: "For Secco, the son of Nammo, who died at the age of 50, and Rega, the daughter of Tertius, died at the age of 40, and Rusticus, the son of Secco, died at the age of 20, and Manuna, grandmother, died at the age of 100. Quintus and Enignus erected (the gravestone) while still alive".

What, in fact, was the life expectancy of the average man in the Roman Empire? The age pattern in Roman funerary inscriptions is severely distorted both because the ages are rounded off and are often exaggerated – whether intentionally or through ignorance – and because high infant mortality is unrecorded.

As is evident from documents from Roman Egypt (where many survived in sand, on papyri), age declarations by the same person at different dates can be seriously inconsistent, and such declarations could even have a lower age at a later date. Hence, ages in the inscriptions must be regarded

Tombstone for Secco and Rega, built into Ljubljana Seminary

– in terms of exactness – as highly unreliable.

One of the most evident characteristic features of many Roman funerary inscriptions is the rounding up of age to the nearest multiple of five, which is particularly prevalent in Noricum (modern Austria and Slovenia) and the Danube provinces. In the Ig area, the age-rounding to multiples of 10 is very common, such as in the cited case, as well as in many others. Interestingly, the percentage of age-rounding and the concentration of elderly people is very high in the hinterland of Emona among the people south of the town, in the Ig area, where an unexpectedly large number of tombstones (over 100) has been found. Although the village of Ig did, of course, belong to the city's administrative territory, Emona and Ig were two entirely distinct worlds, separated by broad marshes.

Due to high (infant) mortality, mean life expectancy at birth in the Roman world would have ranged between 20 and 30 years, more or less the same among the rich as among the poor. Ethnic differences, climate, geography, and different lifestyles: all these varied from region to region and certainly had some impact on demography, which, however, can never

be accurately reconstructed. The mortality of new-born (not reflected on tombstones) and of small infants was particularly high, not merely due to diseases but also due to the exposure of sick infants and perhaps of some new-born girls, which may or may not have also been common in the Roman period. It certainly seems that in the Emona region this was not the case, since girls are frequently commemorated on tombstones.

As elsewhere, here, too, many children died young. The most lethal diseases were – due to the often-polluted drinking water and low levels of hygiene – various dysenteries, which were likely to cause fatal dehydration. Malnutrition, tuberculosis, and malaria were further common causes of high mortality in antiquity.

Before vaccination against smallpox was discovered in 1796, one child in two died in the course of the first twelve months of his or her life. High infant mortality existed in the Roman period even before the disease appeared in the western part of the Empire; the plague of the late second century AD was most probably a pandemic of smallpox, which since then became endemic, particularly in large cities. The mortality of women was also high, due to many pregnancies at a much too early age (the legal age for marriage was 12 years for a girl).

Interestingly, Pliny the Elder (1st century AD, the author of the first Roman encyclopaedia), when referring to a recent census under the Flavian emperors Vespasian and Titus in AD 74, noted that in *Regio* VIII (Aemilia) over fifty persons had declared their age to be 100, while over twenty claimed to be ultra-centenarians. In the Iliad, for example, Nestor, the king of Pylos and the sage giver of advice, was allegedly three generations old and was believed to be about 110.

There are some outstanding personalities from Greek and Roman antiquity, who had lived to be 100 years old – or almost. Lucian, the famous Greek rhetorician and satirist of the 2nd century AD, devoted one of his essays to centenarians and listed some more or less famous men who lived

Bust of Isocrates

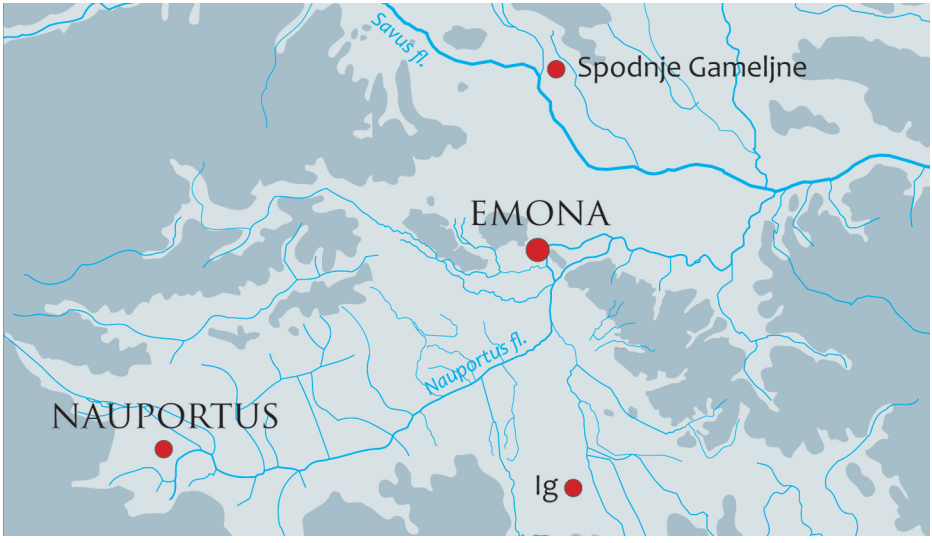
to be 80 or more, titled *Octogenarians*. Lucian made a present of his essay to his friend Quintillus at the ceremony when the latter gave his second child a name. This may have happened on the seventh day after his birth; according to Aristotle, so many new-born infants died before their seventh day (perhaps one third) that they were not even given names before this day. Everybody has always wished for his child a long and healthy life, and Lucian added: "I can fittingly show you that your good hopes are of easy attainment by recounting that on every soil and in every climate men who observe the proper exercise and a diet most suitable for health have been long-lived."

Unfortunately, we shall never know what the secret of the Ig centenarians was! Lucian further quoted the case of the famous Greek orator, Gorgias, who was 108 years old. When he was asked the reason for his great age and health, he replied that he had never accepted other peoples' invitations to dinner! He was not the only Greek orator to attain old age. Isocrates wrote his *Panegyricus* (exalting the Greeks) when he was 96 and, as Lucian tells us, passed away at 99, when Macedonian king Philip, the father of Alexander the Great, defeated the Athenians (and other Greek city-states) at Chaeronea in 338 BC.

Did the Emonians and the Ig people know Greek, were they acquainted with Greek literature and culture? Some probably did and this does not seem unlikely, since in the nearby Neviodunum, right across the provincial

border in Pannonia, a teacher of Greek (unless he was a primary school teacher, he is styled *praeceptor Gr(aecus?)*) may have taught in the local school.

Carna – a Goddess who Protected Roman Babies



Map of the Emona area

More than five hundred years ago, an elegant funerary stele was built into the southern wall of the small church of sv. Lenart (Saint Leonard) in the village of Spodnje Gameljne, some 9 km to the north of Ljubljana (Roman Emona). A small Roman settlement, or *villa rustica*, located there belonged to the territory of Emona. The tombstone was owned by a well-known family of the Caesernii, who came to Emona from Aquileia, probably in the time between the assassination of Caesar in 44 BC and beginning of the imperial period under the emperor Augustus (27 BC). In 1997, the tombstone was removed from the wall, transported to the National Mu-

seum of Slovenia and replaced with a cast. This is the only inscription in the Roman Empire in which the festival of the goddess Carna, *Carnaria*, is mentioned. Lucius Caesernius Primitivus, who held a high position in Emona's college of artisans (*collegium fabrum*), and his wife Ollia Primilla left 200 *denarii* to the college in their wills for the purpose of having roses brought to their grave every year on the day of the festival of Carna. This day, 1 June, must have had a particular significance for their family, perhaps it was the birthday of Lucius Caesernius Primitivus.

In his famous poem *Fasti* (vv. 105–182), Ovid describes the first day of the Kalends of June as sacred to the goddess Carna, calling her a goddess of

Tombstone of the Caesernii

hinges. A nymph, she was supposedly born in an old sacred grove near the Tiber, where she wandered through the countryside, chasing wild beasts with her arrows, until Janus (the god with two faces) fell in love with her. In return for her lost maidenhood, Janus gave her a whitethorn with which she could send away dangers that were waiting behind doors.

Ovid then describes *striges*, monstrous nocturnal birds similar to screech-owls who came by night to attack babies in their cradles and drink their blood. They sucked the blood of Proca, the future king of Alba Longa (one of the legendary kings of Latium and the great-grandfather of Romulus), when the unfortunate baby was only five days old. However, the nurse

Striges, monstrous nocturnal birds

who took care of him went to Carna to ask her for help. The goddess came to the cradle and saved the infant by touching the doorposts three times with arbutus leaves and marking the threshold with them three times as well, sprinkling the entrance with salubrious water to which she added some herbs. She then sacrificed a two-month-old sow to exchange "a heart for a heart, entrails for entrails". Finally, she placed Janus' rod of whitethorn by the small window of the chamber, and the baby recovered.

Ovid explains that Carna was a goddess of ancient times during which people did not import fancy food but rather feasted on pork and simply ate what grew in their fields: broad beans and spelt (a species of wheat). A gruel made of broad beans mixed with spelt, eaten during the ceremonies at her festival together with rich pork fat, a food considered to be especially nourishing, protected people against any harm to their internal organs. These two foods eaten on the June Kalends were believed to make them immune to the intestinal illnesses.

Macrobius (a Roman writer and antiquarian of the early 5th century AD) adds that Carna was the protectress of vital human organs, and people prayed to her to preserve the health of their liver, heart, and intestines. Broad bean gruel with lard was sacrificed to her. Therefore, the Kalends of June were popularly called the "broad bean Kalends", since in this month the first ripe broad beans were brought to the altars.

Carna's miraculous whitethorn chased away all night monsters who attacked tender babies' bodies not yet made strong by the food sacred to the goddess. Greeks (and probably Romans) also believed that branches of whitethorn or buckthorn fastened to doors or windows kept out witches, and it is still generally believed that plants with strong odours hung in rooms repel bloodsuckers and vampires. Whitethorn could supposedly also protect people from ghosts on the day of the year when the souls of the dead were believed to be lurking around the city and intruding on the living. The association of Carna, whitethorn, and the spirits of the dead, and

Whitethorn (*Crataegus laevigata*), a thorny small tree and its flowers

particularly the fact that at Emona the colleagues of Caesernius Primitivus were asked to bring roses to his and his wife's grave on the day of the festival of Carna, induced some scholars to regard her as the goddess of the deceased. The more so, because black broad beans were used in the rituals performed on the day of the dead, *Lemuria*. However, the first fresh broad beans eaten on the festival of Carna, *Carnaria*, had nothing to do with the black broad beans thrown over the shoulder during the ritual performed to propitiate the spirits of the dead on the festival of Lemuria.

Iunius Brutus, who became the first Roman consul after he had expelled the last king of Rome, Tarquinius, had a shrine built to Carna in fulfilment of his vow on 1 June, on the hill of Caelius: it seems that he suffered from a cardiac disease at the time. Despite her obscure immemorial origins and the overwhelming progress of Christianity, 1 June remained her holiday until as late as the 4th century AD.

The Disappearing Tombstone

Two ivory dolls from a sarcophagus from Emona, favourite toys of girls

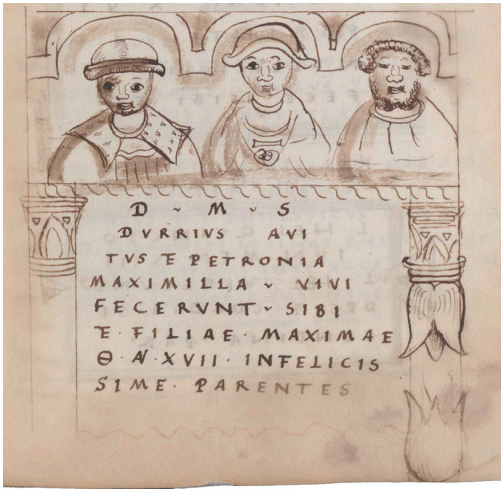
A seventeen-year-old girl, Durria Maxima, died in the 2nd century AD in the prime of her life – a great distress for her parents. The family, bearing an extremely rare name, perhaps of Celtic origin, was living at Carnium (Kranj, some 25 km north of Ljubljana, Roman Emona); her parents had the tombstone erected after their daughter's death. Her father was called Durrius Avitus (the Latin name Avitus is common among the Celtic population) and her mother, Petronia Maximilla. The Petronii were one of the first families to settle in Nauportus (Vrhnika), before they came to Emona, where some members are well attested. The portrait of the girl, Durria Maxima,

is preserved on a tombstone in the National Museum of Slovenia, together with the busts of her mother and father. Oddly, however, the inscription that is now carved on the monument is obviously not Roman: it is German, and from 1814, in fact. This raises questions about what happened and why somebody slightly repaired the Roman portraits.

The current epitaph reads:

Herr Nicolaus Merck / bürgerl. Bräuer / verlis das Irdische im / 67 Jahr seines rastlosen / Lebens, / Eine weinende Gattin / und / Eilf noch lebende / Kindern / Im Jahre 1814 den 8ten / Dezember.

Tombstone for the brewer Nicolaus Merck



Sketch of the tombstone of the Durrii family, after Tyfernus

Sketch of the tombstone of the Durrii family, after Vodnik

(Mister Nicolaus Merck, the town brewer, left the earthly life in the 67th year of his tireless life. His crying wife and eleven still living children. On 8 December of the year 1814.)

Some Roman stones have met strange fates indeed! This tombstone must have been often transported from place to place, since it was seen at different times at different locations. It is most fortunate that two sketches have been preserved of the original Roman text. The first is from the 16th century manuscript of Augustinus Tyfernus, thus named after his native town of Laško (in German *Tüffer*) in Styria. He was a renowned humanist and architect, and the first collector of Roman inscriptions in present-day Austria and Slovenia. His collection is preserved in manuscripts in the National Library in Vienna. The other is from the early 19th century in the *Itinerary* of Valentin Vodnik, a famous Slovenian man of letters and poet.

Augustinus Tyfernus recorded antiquities in a most reliable way, as is evident from his carefully produced manuscripts; he travelled extensively in Italy, Carniola (now Slovenia), and Austria, and carefully copied Roman

inscriptions. He saw the tombstone of the Durrii in Kranj near Saint Peter's church, drew a sketch of the monument and copied the inscription; we thus know its original text. It reads in translation: *Sacred to the Spirits of the Departed. Durrius Avitus and Petronia Maximilla had (the tombstone) erected while still living, for themselves and their very unfortunate daughter Maxima, who died at the age of seventeen years. The parents*.

The inscription was published several more times; in a publication from the 16th century (by Wolfgang Lazius) it was not only listed under Kranj but also (either mistakenly or deliberately) among the ruins of Roman Virunum (Zollfeld near Klagenfurt). Johann Ludwig Schönleben (1618–1681), a theologian and historian from Ljubljana, discovered it in the bishop's residence in Ljubljana. It seems more than probable that Tyfernus had the tombstone transported to the palace, where he supervised its rebuilding after a severe earthquake in 1511. Why Richard Pococke (1704–1765) placed it among the inscriptions from Vrhnika is a mystery.

In 1808, Vodnik saw the tombstone at a small church just outside Ljubljana; how it left the bishop's residence to end up at that church is also a mystery. There, it must have been noticed and liked by the brewer Nicolaus Merck, who transported it to the courtyard of his house. We already know the end of the story: after his death in 1814 (only six years after Vodnik had seen the Latin text), his wife had the Roman inscription carved off and replaced it with the German epitaph for her husband. As it seems, the Roman portraits were slightly "repaired", which was probably done at her request.

Of Lions and Dolphins

Scene from the Aesop's fable "The Lion and the Mouse"

Nowadays few would associate dolphins with cemeteries, and the lion is usually regarded as the king of the beasts. Several of Aesop's fables featured a lion in his role as the strongest among animals, although even he could be vulnerable. The lion once spared a mouse disturbing him in his

sleep, because he was so amused when the little mouse said that one day he might help him in his turn. And indeed, when the lion was caught by hunters he was saved by the mouse. They tied him to a tree, in order to fetch a wagon and carry him alive to their king, but the mouse happened to pass by, nibbled the rope, and the lion could escape. As a rule, people were usually afraid of lions and hunters had a difficult time catching them. Remember the Nemean lion that could only be killed by Hercules! Nemea was in Greece, where lions became extinct as late as around 100 BC.

However, dolphins and lions are the animals (not including mythical creatures) most frequently associated with Roman funerary monuments. Some tombstones decorated by lions and dolphins can also be found at Emona and in the Ig area. Dolphins most often adorned the upper part of tombstones, the corners to the right and left of the gable. Mysterious sea mammals, kindly disposed towards sea-faring people, they frequently appear in classical mythology.

Fragmentary Fronto's tombstone from Strahomer in the Ig area

Children in the Roman Empire who received at least a basic education were surely acquainted with Greek mythical folklore involving dolphins. The Greek historian Herodotus (5th century BC) recorded the well-known story of the poet Arion (7th–6th centuries BC), who was returning to Corinth from a musical competition in Sicily, after having won great prizes. Wicked sailors wanted to kill him or throw him into the sea in order to rob him. He was allowed to sing a last song in praise of Apollo, playing his *kithara*. Dolphins came to listen and were enchanted by his song; when Arion then threw himself into the sea, one of them carried him safely to the sanctuary of Poseidon at Cape Tainaron.

Funerary lions in the church of St. Martin at Ig

In funerary art, it seems that they were believed to escort souls on their way to the islands of the blessed, or, in any case, to accompany the deceased into the afterlife. The world beneath the waves, inhabitable for humans, a kind of kingdom of the dead, was a realm of the dolphins. In one way or another, the dolphin implied the transition from this world to the world beyond death.

Wealthy citizens of Emona, like many others in the Roman Empire, travelled in the Mediterranean area for business or for other reasons, where they could become directly acquainted with dolphins. Direct contact with dolphins, however, was less likely for villagers in the Ig area. Some of the dolphins depicted on their tombstones are odd creatures, more like birds, which suggests that the artist had never actually seen a real dolphin. However, there is also a beautiful example of a large, exquisite dolphin decorat-

Dolphin on a tombstone, built into the church of St. Martin at Ig

ing the funerary altar of an upper class resident of the Ig area. The identity of its owner is, unfortunately, unknown, since the inscription was built into the church of St Martin, but visitors can still admire this splendid dolphin at the corner of the church.

Large and proud lions still guard many a monumental tomb in various Italian towns, and there is also a large marble lion in the National Museum of Slovenia, who once protected a small burial ground of a well-to-do country estate not far from Neviodunum (Drnovo near Krško) in nearby province of Pannonia. This lion has the head of a horse between his paws, although usually the heads of calves or rams are represented between lions' paws. Such funerary lions were symbols of unconquerable death, and they were also regarded as guardians of tombs, which were often robbed in antiquity. As a rule, Roman graves not only contained the ashes of the deceased, but also many more or less precious objects meant to serve the dead in their afterlife. Grave robbing was wide spread in antiquity, and in the course of excavations, archaeologists often discover looted tombs. Lions were meant to watch over them. The remains of some lion sculptures linked with graves have also been found in Emona. One such sculpture is particularly beautiful: the head

of the lion, made of marble from Pohorje, protecting the tomb of the so-called Emonian citizen. His unique gilded bronze statue from the first half of the 2nd century AD is on display in the National Museum. Other such statues found in Italy and elsewhere usually portray Roman emperors and members of imperial families.

In the Ig area, two capitals of pyramidal form, each with two lions, have been discovered; they once adorned the upper part of two tombstones and were likely not carved by the same stone-mason or at the same time. These lions hold a ram's head between their paws, and while one pair do resemble actual lions, the other pair, of which only one lion is preserved, are not particularly lion-like; in fact, the single remaining lion resembles nothing so much as a large frog. This is not surprising; the stone-mason probably never saw a real lion, but as he lived on the edge of extensive marshes, he was surrounded by a large variety of frogs.

Funerary lions from the Ig area

When Lightning Strikes ...

Tombstone commemorating a buried thunderbolt

A well-carved small stone roof, settled on the ground – what was once underneath ... what does it mean? It was found in Ljubljana, Roman Emona, and is now an attraction of the National Museum of Slovenia's collection of Roman stones. The roof bears a short inscription that says it all: *fulg(ur) c(onditum)*, which means "buried lightning bolt". However, before the abbreviations *fulg.* and *c.* were correctly explained, the significance of the monument was not at all clear. Alfons Müllner, one of the first scholars to copy Roman inscriptions from Emona and its territory in the second half of the 19th century, imagined that it was a tombstone, erected for a woman: *Fulg(inas) c(oniux)*, "Fulginas, (my) wife". The name *Fulginas* is exceptionally rare, but it does occur at the nearby Roman village at Nauportus, where the tombstone of one Fulginas Procla was found.

A place or a person struck by a thunderbolt was taboo; it was considered an ominous sign. According to an ancient law, such a person had to be

Tombstone of the Fulginas family

buried on the exact spot of his death. A spot struck by lightning was ritually purified by special priests or preferably by Etruscan soothsayers (*haruspices*), considered the true experts, who explained the future by interpreting prodigies, the internal organs of sacrificed animals, and lightning. Etruria, a region in central Italy (Tuscany and neighbouring regions), where religion played a preeminent role, produced diviners who were not at all rare in the cities of Italy and nearby provinces, and were undoubtedly active also at Emona. An Etruscan *haruspex*, Aulus Vederna Maximus, with a clearly Etruscan family name, Vederna, is attested at nearby Celeia (Celje) in Noricum. Another Etruscan *haruspex*, Lucius Tuccius Campanus, is known from Virunum in Carinthia.

The rituals were closely linked to the Etruscan liturgy, prescribed by the books about lightning (*libri fulgurales)*. First, it was necessary to clean

the ground, burying everything that had been killed or shattered by a thunderbolt. Then, the area was fenced in and carefully enclosed within four stones covered with a roof; a circular hole was dug in the ground, similar to a small well (*puteal*). It was consecrated by sacrificing a two-year-old sheep that already had two permanent teeth or two rows of teeth (*bidens*); the area was thus called *bidental*. It was forbidden to use this ground for secular purposes.

The weather-bringing god was Iuppiter Fulgur or Tonans (Thundering Jove), an ancient god among the Romans, who had a sanctuary in the Field of Mars; the priestly college at Rome, the Arval Brothers, sacrificed to him on 7 October. Emperor Augustus had a sanctuary built to Thundering Jove on the Capitoline Hill in 22 BC; he had vowed to build it after having safely escaped death by a thunderbolt when on a military campaign in Cantabria in 26 BC. Roman architect Vitruvius (1st century BC) says that sanctuaries to this god, as well as to Caelus (Sky, Haeven), Sol (Sun), and Luna (Moon) should have no roofs: they had to be open to the sky.

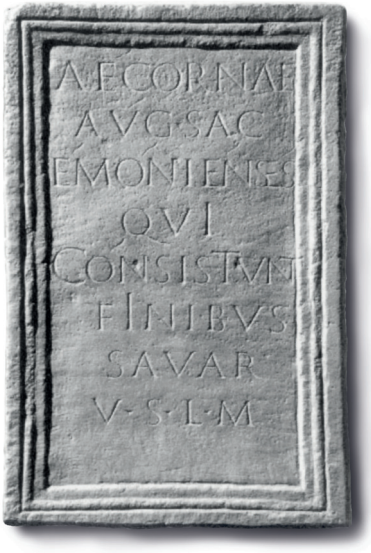
Jupiter, averter of evil

Only Etruscan soothsayers knew the art of explaining lightning and thunderbolts, averting or diminishing their perils with the correct expiatory rites. They examined the colour and sound of a thunderbolt, the exact hour when it had struck, whether by day (*fulgur Dium*) or by night (*fulgur Summa-*

nium); Summanus was the god of the nocturnal sky and thunder. Thunderbolts that struck public places or public buildings in a town foretold civil riots and a change of government. If the town wall was damaged, enemies were to be expected. If a thunderbolt struck a sanctuary of Iuno (Juno Lucina was the goddess of childbirth), this was a sign and a warning for women, perhaps negatively affecting birth rates. When someone sinned against Jupiter, the god would strike an oak tree in the sinner's grove.

Sometimes the god was asked to send a "helpful" thunderbolt: in the old days Etruria was devastated by a monster, which was killed by a thunderbolt, sent down at the supplication of Porsina, the king of Volsinium, one of the most opulent Etruscan towns. Porsina is perhaps the legendary Lars Porsenna, usually regarded as the king of Clusium (Chiusi in Tuscany) and reigning around 500 BC, the ally of the last Etruscan kings of Rome. A happy future was predicted for a person who survived being struck by a thunderbolt. Some trees were believed to be lucky because they were never struck by lightning, such as vines bearing white grapes or laurel trees. Houses, in contrast, and wooden dwellings in particular, were always in danger of fire, not least of fire caused by lightning. People tried to protect themselves by writing magic words on the walls, such as *arse verse*, believed to be Etruscan and meaning "keep away fire" (*averte ignem* in Latin).

A Mysterious Goddess



Dedication to Aecorna from Savaria

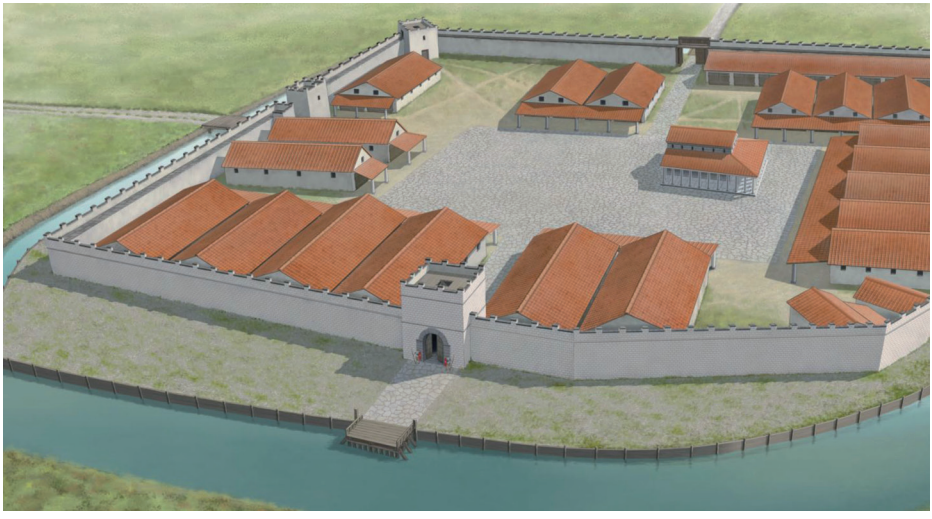
One deity that was unique to Roman Emona was "Aequorna" (also called "Aecorna" and "Aecurna"); she can be regarded as similar to a *Genius loci*, a protecting spirit of the town. But she was more than that: she was a goddess closely related to the marshy Emona–Nauportus area and the Emona Moor (Ljubljansko barje, part of which was a lake in antiquity), representing the mysterious water powers that were so essential to human life, yet could also be fatal or merely make life difficult.

A dedication to her was also discovered in Savaria (Sombathely in Hungary), in the nearby province of Pannonia. This is nothing strange, however, because the dedicators were Emonians, settled in the flourishing Pannonian town as a community of merchants and craftsmen. They moved to Savaria on business but could not live abroad without their goddess, so they carried her along with the rest of their luggage: her effigy and sacred

objects, related to her worship. Her non-Latin name indicates that she was venerated by native inhabitants in pre-Roman times, but obviously in a different way, without leaving any traces.

Rich Aquileian families sent their freedmen to found a village at Nauportus at the latest after the Illyrian War (35–33 BC), when the native inhabitants of the area, the Celtic Taurisci, had been defeated. The Aquileians took control of the profitable trading, which had earlier been in the hands of the natives. The Taurisci had been in charge of the traffic across the Ocra Pass below Mt Ocra (Nanos), where wagons full of wine, olive oil, and other goods imported from Aquileia travelled as far as Nauportus. There, the

Small chapel (the statuette is lost) and small altar dedicated to Aecorna



Reconstruction of Roman Nauportus with the sanctuary of Aequorna

cargo was reloaded onto boats and the journey continued along the rivers Nauportus and Savus as far as Siscia (Sisak in Croatia), a prominent Pannonian *emporium*, and further to the Danubius (the Danube), to the Celtic Scordisci and other distant peoples. Goods also travelled in the opposite direction. Strabo (Greek historian and geographer in the time of Augustus) wrote: *They* (Illyrian tribes along the Danube) *are supplied with all that the sea offers, with wine loaded in wooden barrels on carts, whereas those* (the Romans) *received slaves, livestock and hides*.

After the war, the Romans took the upper hand, but times were difficult and dangerous, as the region was not yet firmly under Roman control, and the Taurisci were anything but friendly. Judging by the names of some of the Aquileian freedmen (Torravius, Corbo), these men perhaps originated as slaves from that area (though they were certainly thoroughly "Romanized"), which may have enabled them to establish cooperative relations of some kind with the local people. The great advantage of the newcomers was undoubtedly the local almighty goddess, Aequorna; they took

Rapids of the Ljubljanica River near Fužine

an official decision to build for her a Roman style sanctuary with a portico in the central place of their fortified village. The Romans often adopted foreign gods; they would worship Aequorna with appropriate rituals, and she would protect them.

The Ljubljanica River played a most influential role in antiquity, and there must have been several sacred sites along it, as is proven by many objects found in the river bed, some of them offerings to a divinity, perhaps to Aequorna. The name of the river then was Nauportus, but no god with this name has been attested to thus far. We know of the god Savus (the personified Sava; the Ljubljanica flows into the Sava not far from Ljubljana). Savus had a sanctuary together with his companion, the goddess Adsalluta, along the river between Emona and Norican Celeia, high above the rapids

between two dangerous waterfalls, where many a boat was shattered, and boatmen killed.

Scholars have long been convinced that Aecorna was connected with the traffic along the Ljubljanica. It seems, however, that the god more closely linked to the river was Laburus, whose name is known from an altar (now lost) discovered near the rapids at Fužine on the outskirts of Ljubljana. These dangerous rapids were the only part of the river where navigation was severely hindered. Boatmen must have had enormous difficulties when they navigated along this section of the river, and some probably met with death or were faced with serious material damage. They sacrificed to Laburus in the hope that he would protect them; he may have been Aecorna's companion.

Gods, Superstition, and Magic

Figurine of a pre-Roman god from Emona, perhaps Belenus

In antiquity, people believed that divinities were omnipresent. Greek and Roman gods and goddesses, as well as local and pre-Roman divinities, were invoked on many altars and in various dedications. The pre-Roman deities are mainly known from Latin inscriptions, meaning that they had already been "Romanized" in one way or another. The fact that dedications to them were inscribed on stone altars also points to their "Romanization", as this was a typically Roman way of worshipping deities. Some pre-Roman sites of cult activity have been discovered in the northern Adriatic and eastern Alpine regions, where various votive objects were ritually deposited; such places are also known to exist in the Emona area, along the Ljubljanica River.

Places of worship must have been numerous, and sacred landscapes can sometimes be partially reconstructed on the basis of early Christian churches, often built as a substitute for pagan sacred sites. Many centuries after its triumph, the Church had to issue edicts against pagans who used to pray to the trees, rivers, and stone idols. The Romans, however, liked to adopt foreign divinities that had been venerated for many generations, their origins lost in the mythic past. An already existent prehistoric cult place, a shrine, a wooden precinct or a sanctuary was likely often "translated" and adapted by the Romans.

On the way from Aquileia to Emona, at *Fons Timavi*, where the Timavo/Timava River re-emerges from the earth and flows into the Adriatic, an ancient female divinity ("the mother of the sea") may have originally been worshipped. Later, the cults of the river god Timavus and the Greek hero Diomedes, the protector of sailors, were introduced at this spectacular site. Strabo (the Greek historian and geographer of the Augustan Age) reported that the Veneti used to sacrifice a white horse to Diomedes.

Faunus from Emona, a god of forests, flocks, and herds, similar to Greek Pan

Diomedes' sanctuary was situated near two prominent cult places with sacred groves, in which tame and wild animals were living together, deer together with wolves, all behaving docilely, and any animal pursued by dogs could find safety by taking refuge in these groves. Strabo stated that these groves were dedicated to Hera from Argos and Aetolian Artemis, the

mistress of wild animals and the patroness of hunting. Strabo explained the local goddesses in the Greek tradition; the Romans called them Iuno and Diana, but their Venetic names are not known. Linked to the two sacred groves is the story of a wolf that had been saved from the nets of hunters by a well-to-do man who was prepared to pay for the damage the wolf might do if set free. As an act of gratitude, the wolf (which may be regarded as a prototype of the Master of the Wolves, a mythical figure who determined what wolves may eat, also protecting people and animals against wolves) drove off a herd of unbranded horses and brought them to the stable of his benefactor; these horses proved to be a superior breed and winners at races.

Diana was also worshipped at Emona (by a priest attending to the cult of the emperor), which suggests that the townspeople had close con-

Dedication to Hercules, built into Ljubljana Cathedral

nections to the surrounding forests and wilderness. Many other gods were venerated in the city, but some were more influential than others. Jupiter received the most dedications, and next most popular deity was the local Aecorna, the patroness of the Ljubljana Marshes. However, one of the earliest cults was that of Hercules. Although his worship had many aspects (he was popular with soldiers, travellers, merchants, stone-cutters), he was also associated with the breeding of cattle, sheep, goats and pigs, transhumance and livestock trade. Aesculapius was honoured by a physician named Lucius Peticius Technicus. A surgeon with the same family name, Peticius, is known from central Italy, which indicates that medicine was transmitted from generation to generation within a family.

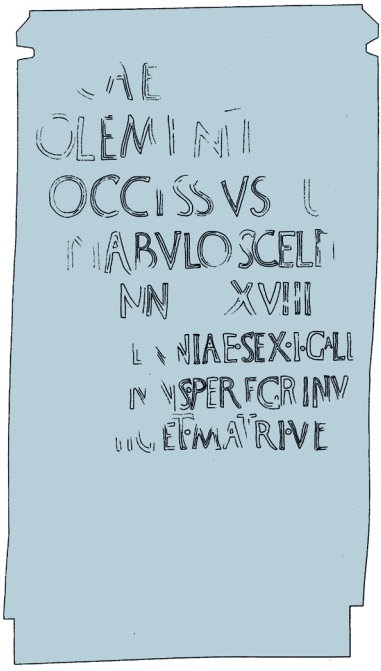
Diomedes, who was not worshipped at Emona, was so popular because he protected sailors, but traffic along the rivers also demanded protection, and river gods from Emona are well known. Along with the water deities, Neptune and the Nymphs, the local river god Savus was worshipped in the Emona region. One of his altars was found in the Sava River near Vernek, not far from Ljubljana. Boatmen encountered difficulty crossing the river rapids, and they needed his help. Some worshippers, however, asked Savus to commit an evil act. In a curse-tablet found in Siscia, he was invoked by a group of people to drown their opponents in order to prevent them testifying against them in court. We shall never

Dedication to the god of medicine, Aesculapius

Altar for Savus, from Vernek, near Ljubljana

know what happened to those people, but many a traveller perished in the river even without the help of magic.

Murder on the Outskirts of Emona, and Other Crimes



Drawing of the epitaph for the murdered Paetinius

Crime in these regions took various forms. A Roman tombstone was discovered more than a century ago near Škofljica, not far from Ljubljana, most likely at the place where it had originally stood, some 12 km south-east of Emona. Unfortunately, its surface is so badly corroded that not even the name of the deceased young man can be read with certainty; however, there is no doubt that he was murdered. He was eighteen years old and was probably called Paetinius Clementinianus; according to the inscription, he was killed in a stable. It was his brother Paetinius (?) Per-

egrinus who erected the tombstone to him, as well as to their mother Caesernia (?) Galla. She must have died earlier, but there is no mention of their father. The word "stable" in this context probably means a tavern with a stable, where travellers who arrived with their horses could spend the night.

Mention of an inn with a stable indicates that a small road station existed some 12 km outside Emona along the road leading eastwards towards Neviodunum (Drnovo near Krško) in Pannonia; indeed, the presence of an inn would have been expected at such a distance from the town. It was probably only a *mutatio*, a small settlement with an inn, equipped with a large stable and basic facilities, where travellers directed to Neviodunum and further towards the Danube or to the East could take a rest and change horses if they wanted. The same was done by those travelling in the op-

Mighty walls of the settlement Fluvio Frigido, also called Castra

Hypothetical reconstruction of the late Roman fortress at Ad Pirum

posite direction, towards Italy. If they did not change horses, at least the animals were given some rest and fodder.

We shall never know why Clementinianus was killed. This was certainly not an accident, since it is expressly stated that he was killed in a criminal way. The murder could have happened in the tavern in the settlement where he lived, unless he was killed while on a journey, in some distant inn. He probably lived in the road settlement near Škofljica, since he is commemorated on the family tombstone. His death may have been due to robbery or to some kind of revenge or else he may have been involved in illegal activity.

Clementinianus' funerary inscription reminds us of another one found at Fluvio Frigido/Castra (Ajdovščina), an important settlement on the way from Emona to Aquileia. The tombstone commemorates one Antonius Valentinus, a commander (centurion) in the 13th legion Gemina, who was killed by robbers in the Julian Alps (which at that time also included hills in the

Tombstone for Rusticus, killed by an enemy

region of Hrušica), at Scelerata, that is at a place called "Accursed". A site with such a name implies that crimes often occurred in that area. The funerary monument was erected to Valentinus by his son of the same name.

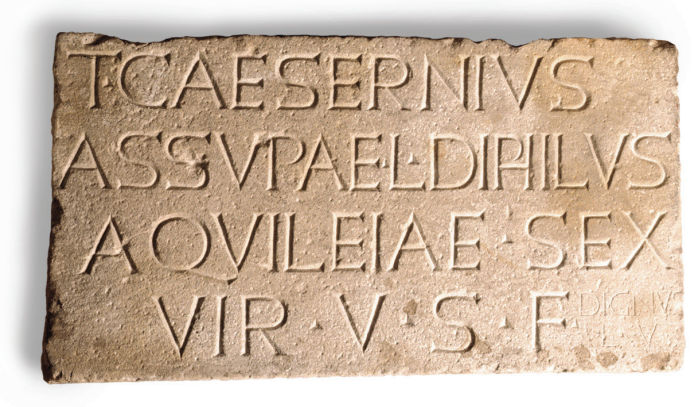
A traveller going from Fluvio Frigido towards Emona soon began to ascend, reaching the highest point of the road at Ad Pirum (Hrušica), the famous pass in the Julian Alps. On the night of 5 September 394 AD, the emperor Theodosius allegedly prayed in the chapel at Ad Pirum, and the next day defeated the usurper Eugenius in the battle at Fluvio Frigido, which greatly contributed to the decline of paganism in the Roman Empire. The place must have looked magnificent and awe-inspiring, deeply impressing

to all those travelling across it. It was surrounded (and still is) by rocks, hills, and impenetrable forests inhabited by wolves and bears; it was very easy to get lost there. The road was a military route constructed by the emperor Augustus, and the main (and shortest) communication route between Aquileia and Emona. Travel along it could be dangerous; there were plenty of hiding places for thieves and robbers, who could easily attack a small caravan or a single traveller. Undoubtedly, they did so often.

Actually, there were so many brigands in the nearby province of Dalmatia and in the more distant Moesia (modern Serbia and Kosovo) that the emperor Marcus Aurelius forcibly recruited them into the Roman army. That happened at the time of the Marcomannic Wars (167–180 AD), when the Empire was seriously endangered by attacks of several German and Sarmatian peoples. Indeed, the enemy even crossed the borders, notably the Danube, penetrating not only into the provinces of Noricum and Pannonia, but even into Italy. The Marcomanni and Quadi came as far as Verona, besieged Aquileia and destroyed Opitergium (Oderzo).

It may have been during such an attack that an inhabitant of Ig at the outskirts of Emona was killed by an enemy. His tombstone reads: "Maximus, son of Vib(i)us, had the tombstone erected to his brother Rusticus, killed by the enemy when he was forty years old". Maximus' knowledge of Latin was poor, as indicated by three mistakes in the inscription. Instead of *quem hostis occidit* (whom the enemy killed), the stone-cutter carved *quem ostes hoccidit*. Local people were still probably speaking their own language; however, they knew enough Latin to use it for their funerary inscriptions, communicating to the others their distress about the crime that had happened in their community.

Outstanding Families from Emona



Funerary slab for Titus Caesernius Diphilus

In every Roman town, some families played more significant roles than others; however, it must be admitted that our insight into the life of a city is quite limited. Inscriptions are a vivid, direct voice from the past, but perhaps no more than 0.1% of all Roman inscribed monuments once adorning a town have been preserved to date. This is indeed a remarkably small percentage, and one that likely provides us with a distorted picture.

One of the richest families at Emona were the Caesernii, who had come to the newly founded town from Aquileia. The first known member of the family was Titus Caesernius Diphilus, who came to settle in the town probably soon after the Illyrian War (35–33 BC), when the area of Emona came firmly under Roman control. He was a freedman of one Titus Caesernius Assupa. "Assupa" is a unique name that reveals close connections with the local, non-Roman inhabitants in the hinterland of Aquileia; the nature of

Reconstruction of a fresco from a house of a wealthy inhabitant of Emona

these connections eludes us. Diphilus had a Greek name, which was quite typical of former slaves (enterprising and reliable slaves were often freed by their masters). At Aquileia, Diphilus was one of the six members of a board whose nature is not entirely clear, but members probably had priestly and administrative duties.

His high position at Aquileia suggests that he did not come to Emona by chance but on a mission; in any case, it is clear that he intended to stay there permanently, as he arranged for his tombstone while still alive. The tombstone also travelled all the way from Aquileia or Tergeste (Trieste/Trst). It is made of limestone quarried in the hinterland of Tergeste, at Aurisina (Nabrežina) or its vicinity, and must have been produced in a stonecutting workshop there (in the second half of the 1st century BC, quarries had not yet become active in the territory of Emona).

The Caesernii were mainly wealthy merchants; they were in the business of metallurgy. Most of

"Citizen from Emona", a gilded bronze statue, adorning the tomb of a wealthy Roman at Emona

Imported goblet of mosaic glass

them were well-to-do and prominent, so it is not surprising that some of the family's freedmen were priests in charge of the worship of Roman emperors. The imperial cult was an expression of Roman identity and one of the most powerful cults in every Roman city. A branch of the wealthy Caesernii had estates not far from Emona. Caesernius Primitivus was one of the officials in the college of artisans and, when he and his wife died, they left in their wills 200 *denarii* to the members of the college in order to have roses brought to their grave annually on the day of the festival of the goddess Carna, on 1 June, as has already been mentioned in the story of this goddess.

The Barbii likewise came to Emona from Aquileia, where they had been among the first colonists in the 2nd century BC. They owned brickworks and were in charge of commerce with building materials. Some of the Barbii migrated to the neighbouring Noricum, where they are attested among the early settlers in the Roman emporium on Magdalensberg (the old Virunum above the Klagenfurt plain), to which they were very likely attracted by the trade at a famous Norican iron. Even Galen of Pergamon, the best-known physician in antiquity, recommended its use for a medical instrument. The Barbii were members of the municipal aristocracy at Emona; Marcus Titius Tiberius Barbius Titianus was one of the rare councillors at Emona about whom there are existing records.

Tombstone for Cantius Proculus, built into the church of the Teutonic Knights in Ljubljana

The Dindii were by origin from Praeneste (Palestrina) in Italy, where in 82 BC the dictator Sulla ordered all the citizens to be slaughtered because they had given shelter to his political opponent Marius the Younger and his army, and the city only surrendered after a long siege. Some surviving members may have gone to Aquileia (where a branch of the family had probably been settled earlier), and from there to Emona. Their economic basis seems to have been metallurgy and related crafts. At Emona, they are attested as cult officials of the Lares, protectors of households and local neighbourhoods.

The Cantii were also wealthy; probably they were enterprising merchants, craftsmen, and perhaps stock breeders. Some members left Aquileia to find new markets at Emona and in the towns of Noricum and Pannonia. Lucius Cantius Proculus, for example, was living at Emona but was still inscribed in the voting tribe of the Aquileians. They may have specialized in metal craft, but the objects depicted on their tombstone: a *kantharos* (a deep bowl with two handles) and a shepherd's staff (if not rather a musical instrument?), may not refer to their activities during their lifetime. Rather, they allude to their ideas about the other world and rituals related to the cult of Dionysus, associated with wine-drinking and banquets.

A Death in the Nauportus River

Inscription on the cenotaph for the Amantine boy Scemaes

It has long been believed that the Ljubljanica Rriver had two names during Roman times. The first was "Nauportus", after the settlement of the Celtic Taurisci, the pre-Roman inhabitants of these regions. This settlement would later, during the reign of Augustus (27 BC–AD 14) and even earlier, become a village of Aquileia and a prominent Roman emporium on the way to Emona. The second name of the river would have been "Emona", after the town of Emona. The Nauportus River is mentioned by the author of a Roman encyclopaedia, Pliny the Elder (1st cent. AD), when he refers to the journey of Jason, described in the story about the Argonauts.

The river name "Emona" seems to have appeared on a now-lost cenotaph for a ten-year-old Amantine boy found at the distant village of Putinci in Moesia (Serbia), where the people of the Amantini once lived. A cenotaph was erected to a person who was buried elsewhere or whose body had never been found. The unfortunate "Scemaes" (whose name may actually have been "Scenas", if the inscription was not copied carefully) drowned as a hostage in the Ljubljanica, no doubt during the period of the great conquest of the Balkans conducted during the reign of the emperor Augustus by his adopted son Tiberius in the last decade BC. A military tactic of the commanders of the Roman army at the time was to take the children of tribal leaders and distinguished families as hostages. The Romans had to provide suitable living conditions for a considerable number of such children, obviously in towns that were safely under Roman control, preferably in Italy, and, if possible, not too far from the regions at war.

The Amantini inhabited the easternmost region of Pannonia

The taking of hostages is well illustrated by the Greek historian Appian of Alexandria (2nd century AD) when describing how Octavian (as Augustus was called before 27 BC) arrived in Pannonian Segesta (also called Siscia, present-day Sisak in Croatia) during the Illyrian War (35–33 BC), in order to station a garrison there and use it as a base against the dangerous Dacians and Bastarnae. Octavian demanded and received a hundred hostages, and also asked for as much food as the inhabitants of Segesta could supply. Appian recounts that "[...] the chieftains agreed to his demands, but the common people were furious, although not on account of the hostages, since they were not their children but those of the notables".

Before that, Octavian attacked Metulum, the capital of the Iapodes (near Ogulin in Croatia), and demanded that the residents of Metulum deliver fifty hostages to him. However, they decided not to surrender. Instead, they offered desperate resistance and eventually all perished in flames, women and children included. The Delmatae, Octavian's last enemies in

Reconstruction of a ship, which once navigated along the Ljubljanica

the war, had to deliver several hundred children as hostages after their defeat, together with the military standards seized from Gabinius, the commander of Caesar, in the previous war in Dalmatia in 48 BC, after having ambushed it in a narrow valley.

The inscription on the cenotaph of the Amantine boy is, unfortunately, preserved only in a manuscript. It supposedly read: "He died in the river Emona" (*in flumen perit Emona*). However, it was almost certainly incorrectly copied and the mentioned name of Emona likely referred to the town and not the river. The text should, in fact, read: "he died in the river in Emona". This is corroborated by the fact that all rivers in the region, whose ancient names are known, are of masculine gender, such as also the three main rivers, the Aesontius, the Savus, and the Dravus. There were possibly two hundred or more hostages in Emona, if the "second *centuria*, a unit of 100" mentioned in the inscription, refers to their number, which seems highly likely.

The hostage Scemaes, who had been brought to Emona during one of the wars in Pannonia, must have belonged to one of the most prominent families of his tribe; otherwise, his father Liccavus and two of his close relatives, Loriq(u)us and Licaios, would not have erected an expensive cenotaph to him. What happened to the poor child can only be guessed. Perhaps he fell in the river while disembarking from a ship and nobody noticed in time that he was missing, or perhaps he drowned while attempting to flee.

The Argonauts at Emona

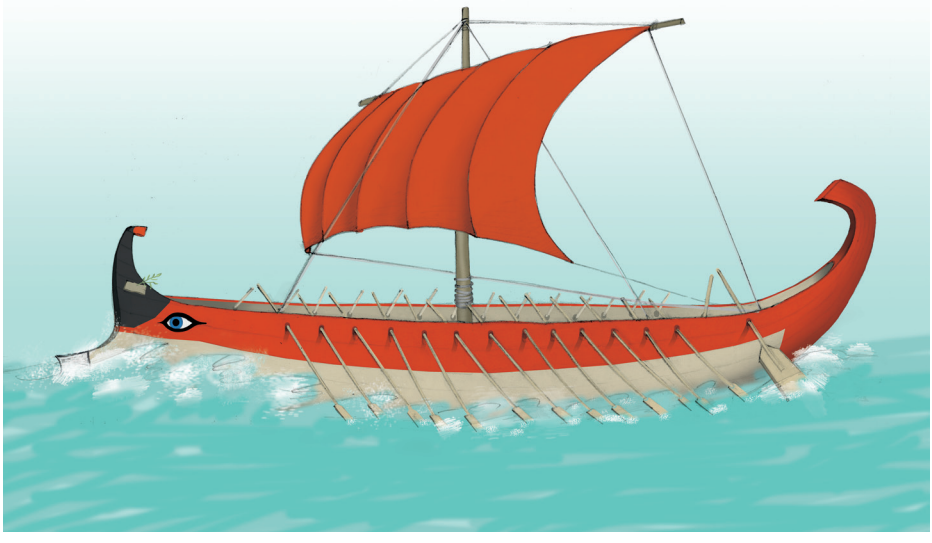
Argonauts are building Emona

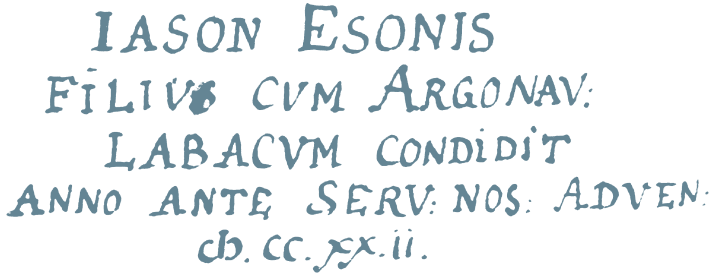
France Prešeren (1800–1849), the greatest Slovenian poet, celebrated Emona with poetry that only a few would understand nowadays. In one of his poems he wrote: "A wolf and a sharp-eyed hawk were still dwelling on the seven hills, when already the Nauportus had washed the town walls of Emona for several hundred years" (*Elegy to his fellow countrymen*, 7th strophe). "Seven hills" is a metaphor for Rome; the wolf is a symbol of the wilderness (not the famous she-wolf who suckled and saved the twins Romulus and Remus the founders of Rome, as one might expect). The Nau-

portus is the Ljubljanica River, which flows through Ljubljana. The lines are meant to convey that Emona was several hundred years older than Rome, since it is known that Rome, the eternal city, was founded in 753 BC.

Prešeren drew from common historical knowledge of the period, which was based on the historical narratives of scholars residing in Ljubljana in the 17th century. These scholars proudly recorded the earliest legendary history of Emona, tracing it back to the times of the Argonauts. The Argonauts were named after the Argo, the miraculous boat, built by Argos, one of the participants in Jason's famous expedition. In order to eliminate his nephew Jason, the legitimate heir to the throne, king Pelias of Iolcus in Thessaly sent Jason to Colchis on the Black Sea, to bring back the golden fleece (the fleece of a golden ram guarded by a dragon). Jason killed the dragon with the help of the sorceress Medea and then returned with her and his crew along the Danube to Greece.

The mythic ship Argo





Inscription of Jason, created by Thalnitscher

According to Pliny the Elder, the Argonauts must have founded Nauportus, since the waterway ended there; no river ever flowed from Nauportus further to the Adriatic, which was where the Argonauts wanted to go. Therefore, they had to stop at Nauportus and carry the ship on their shoulders across the mountains.

Later, after the decline of Nauportus in the early 2nd century AD, it was Emona that was linked to the Argonauts. Jason was first mentioned as the legendary founder of the town by the Greek poet Pisander of Laranda (3rd century AD), but it is not known who first exchanged Nauportus for Emona as Jason's foundation. The Greek historian Zosimus stated that the king of the Visigoths, Alaric, placed his camp at Emona, which had been founded by the Argonauts to mark the place from which they had to transport the ship Argo to the sea on special devices.

The historian Johann Ludwig Schönleben (1618–1681) placed the founding of Emona by Jason in 1222 BC, which was supposed to correspond to 2831 years after the creation of the world (believed to have happened in 4052 BC); he even introduced a distinctive dating system, which counted from the foundation of Emona, *Aemonae conditae*, similar to the counting from the foundation of Rome. This chronology was also used by his nephew Ioannes Gregorius Thalnitscher (1655–1719), Doctor of Laws and one of the most illustrious founders of the *Academia operosorum Labacen-*

sium (founded in Ljubljana in 1693), a member of the Academy *dei Gelati* of Bologna and the Roman *Arcadia*, and the author of the *Epitome chronologica*.

Thalnitscher, like his uncle Schönleben, recognized the importance of Roman inscriptions to the Roman history of Carniola (Slovenia). Proud of the Roman past of his native town, Thalnitscher collected Roman inscriptions (and invented a few as well in his excessive zeal to glorify Emona). Some of the fakes are very difficult to detect, as certain of them may have resulted from genuine texts that he simply did not understand. In contrast, one text referring to Jason, which reads: *Iason Esonis / filius cum argonau / Labacum condidit* (Jason, son of Aeson, founded Labacum with the Argonauts) is quite obviously invented! Why? Jason and the Argonauts never appear in Roman inscriptions and Ljubljana was Emona and not Labacum in antiquity.

The Argonauts would have belonged to the generation before the Trojan War and the sack of Troy: around 1250 BC, according to Herodotus (that is, 800 years before his time), or in 1182 BC, according to the Chronicle of St. Jerome. It is not at all clear how Schönleben determined the exact year of Emona's foundation, but he likely would have considered the Chronicle to be a reliable authority. Anton Linhart, the most eminent historian of the 18th century, the Enlightenment period, also briefly mentioned the Argonauts and Emona, placing the episode at about 1260 BC. His calculations were clearly based on those of Herodotus. He emphatically added: "Those who want to eliminate the journey of the Argonauts from the timeline of real historical events, might as well discard ancient history in its entirety."

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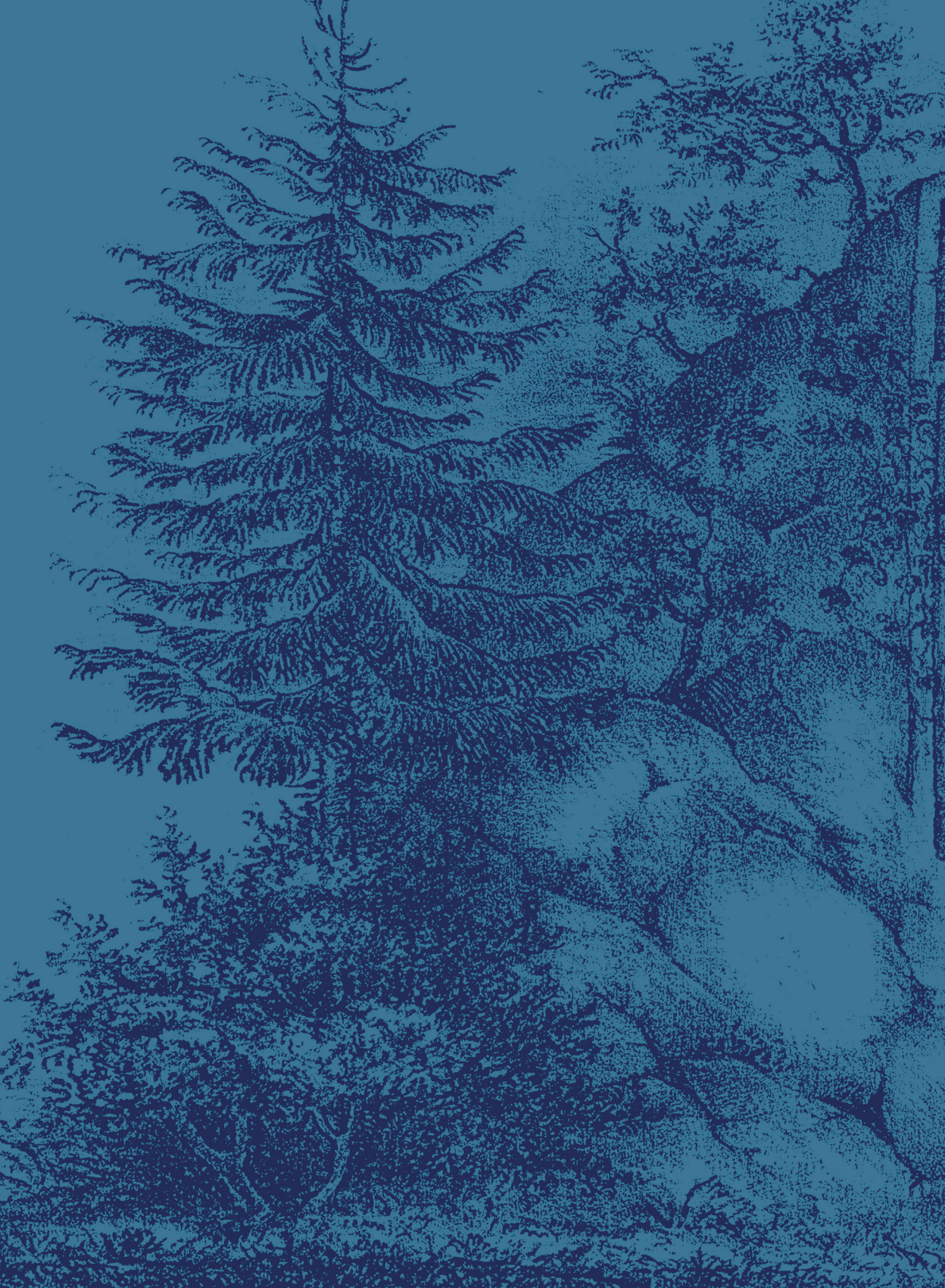

"The Disappearing Tombstone" is a collection of ten stories about real people, who once lived in Emona or the surrounding countryside. These stories shed light on the everyday lives and often highly unusual fates of these people. The eleventh story reveals why the Romans believed that Emona had been founded by Jason and his Argonauts. The myth would lead later historians to believe that Emona was older than Rome.

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