

David Movrin

***Base and Superstructure: Medieval Studies
in Slovenia and a change of context***

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BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE: MEDIEVAL STUDIES IN SLOVENIA AND A CHANGE OF CONTEXT

David Movrin

A spectre is haunting European schools – the spectre of Latin grammar. All kinds of powers have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: rectors and ministers, school boards and state parliaments, scientists and scholars. And sometimes classicists themselves.

This problem necessarily lies at the very heart of any survey that tries to address both the position and prospects of medieval studies in the region, particularly in its western parts. Anecdotal evidence of this cultural shift has been mounting up for a while. Last time around when Medieval Studies at CEU was in a celebratory mood, the resident classicist was already forced to quote King Lothar's maxim, *tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis*: "in the first years we had to 'jazz up' the English of the incoming students; now it is usually their Latin which needs a bit of starting help."¹ Other American universities noticed this trend years before.² The issues involved are broader and indeed global; this review can only focus on the observable facts within the Slovenian educational system, which are harbingers of a change in the climate and have recently become difficult to ignore.

Past and Present of Teaching Latin

The relationship between teaching Latin and European schools has been a difficult dance of *odi et amo* for more than a century. Gone are the days when Latin was a synonym for education itself and it is true that the guild has struggled with adapting to that fact. "Too many advocates of classics...have tended to speak with

¹ György Karsai, "Medieval Latin and Classical Greek," in *Ten Years of Medieval Studies at CEU: 1993-2003*, ed. János M. Bak and Katalin Szende (Budapest: Central European University, 2003), 24.

² A vigorous debate started with the controversial charge against the present university system by Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath, *Who Killed Homer? The Demise of Classical Education and the Recovery of Greek Wisdom* (New York: Free Press, 1998). Although a review by Peter Green, "Homer Lives!," *New York Review of Books* 46, no. 5 (1999), provides some welcome perspective, the numbers quoted in the book remain indicative.

the unattractive voice of privilege in retreat, frothing on vaguely about law and order, faith in God..., the expression of values, or the spirit of man, while at the same time sneering (like Plato, like Seneca) at ‘soulless technicians’ and new-style layabouts....”³

Yet it seems that teaching Latin in Slovenia has had more than its fair share of abuse. A school reform in 1958 relegated its status in all elementary schools to the position of an optional, “facultative” subject; a decree from the National Education Institute in 1975 banned it altogether, as “irreconcilable with a self-managing socialistically engaged school and with basic tenets of Marxist pedagogy.”⁴ High schools followed suit; in the 1980s, only three schools in the entire country – two in Ljubljana, one in Maribor – were able to offer their students a Latin class that would cover at least basic morphology and syntax.⁵ Latin had to be learned at the university, from scratch. Since the intrinsic beauty of Latin declensions and conjugations is more difficult to appreciate – and easier to forget – when one is twenty years old than when one is ten, this development resulted in a significant decimation of Latin knowledge across the humanities; with a steady retirement of the older generation, a scholar with a working knowledge of Latin became something of a *rara avis*.

At the end of the 1980s, when the grip of ideology started to disappear and basic tenets of Marxist pedagogy suddenly lost the power of incantation, Classics bounced back with surprising vitality. Fifteen elementary schools started to teach Latin during the following decade, mostly in major cities such as Ljubljana and Maribor.⁶ More importantly, Latin took firm root in several high schools, with Latin classes being available to students in most of the regions provided they chose their school on that criterion. Latin was offered to students in fifteen gymnasias; six of them eventually reinvented the classical gymnasium, where Latin was not just one more language but

³ Peter Green, “Precedent, Survival, Metamorphosis: Classical Influences in the Modern World,” in *Classical Bearings: Interpreting Ancient History and Culture*, ed. Peter Green (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) (originally published in New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989.)

⁴ Bojan Baskar, *Latiniščine, prosim: latiniščina in njeno izganjanje na Slovenskem, 1849-1987* [Latin, Please: Exorcising Latin in Slovenia, 1849-1987] (Ljubljana: Univerzitetna konferenca zveze socialistične mladine Slovenije [Knjižnica revolucionarne teorijeg], 1988), 137.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶ Aleksandra Pirkmajer Slokan, “Oš Prežihovega Voranca, Ljubljana: 50 let osemletke in 110 let latinščine pod isto streho,” [Prežihov Voranc Elementary School, Ljubljana: 50 Years of Elementary School and 110 Years of Latin under the Same Roof] *Kerla* 10, no. 2 (2008): 175. Slovenia has almost 800 elementary schools; 15 Latin schools thus represent about 2%.

the core of the curriculum.⁷ At the end of decade, all this resulted in unprecedented numbers of classicists finishing their studies at the University of Ljubljana; thirteen BA theses defended in 1999 amounted to a revolution in the department where the average during 1980s was precisely one thesis per year.⁸

Soon after that, the situation began to change. A major national reform of elementary education was started in 2003; first in pilot schools, it eventually became compulsory for every elementary school in the country in 2008/09. While the reform introduced a nine-year elementary education, starting a year earlier, it also excluded Latin from the core curriculum and made it an optional subject, available only during the last three years. This fragmentation resulted in significant technical difficulties regarding the organization of teaching. One by one, schools decided to avoid the extra effort by dropping Latin altogether. The rather disturbing *decimatio* can be seen in the following chart.

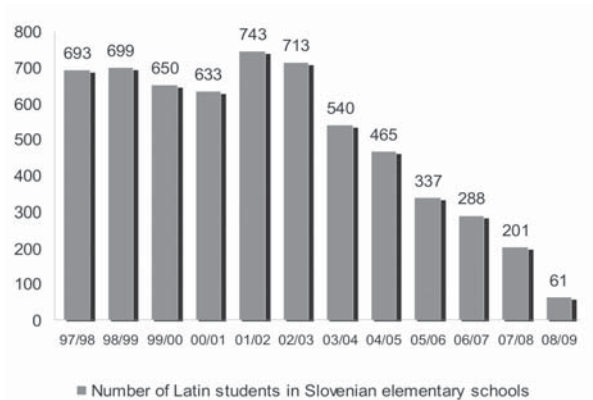


Figure 1. – The gradual introduction of the nine-year-school reform (2003–2008) and its effect on teaching Latin in elementary schools.⁹

It is still a question how this will affect high-school Latin, which has enjoyed moderate success and a fairly stable position for more than a decade now.

⁷ Katja Pavlič Škerjanc, “Klasično izobraževanje v Sloveniji” [Classical Education in Slovenia] *Vzgoja in izobraževanje* 36, no. 1 (2005): 56–57.

⁸ These titles are published on the website of Department of Classical Philology, Faculty of Arts, Ljubljana, www.ff.uni-lj.si/oddelki/klasfilol.

⁹ Pirkmajer Slokan, “OŠ Prežihovega Voranca,” 173. Data for 2008/09, not yet available at the time of publication, were reported by the author to the discussion group “Agor@” (agor@ijs.si) in December 2008.

The elementary-school curriculum reflects the collective *mentalité* and indicates the shape of things to come. Another reform, however, has resulted in a substantially more influential effect on Latin, this time at the university level. The Bologna process, designed to foster mobility and compatibility within the European higher education area, has drastically reduced the level of Latin knowledge expected across some of the crucial disciplines within the humanities. While Latin was never mandatory for everyone who wanted to study archaeology, history or art history, it was – until very recently – considered a *sine qua non* for those interested in further research; at the University of Ljubljana, for instance, prospective scholars were expected to complete a thorough Latin course (360 lessons, each 45 minutes long) which equipped them with sufficient reading knowledge to deal with their sources.¹⁰ The Bologna process abolished this notion, essentially halving the number of Latin classes students are expected to take during their first five years at the university.¹¹ The consequences remain to be seen.

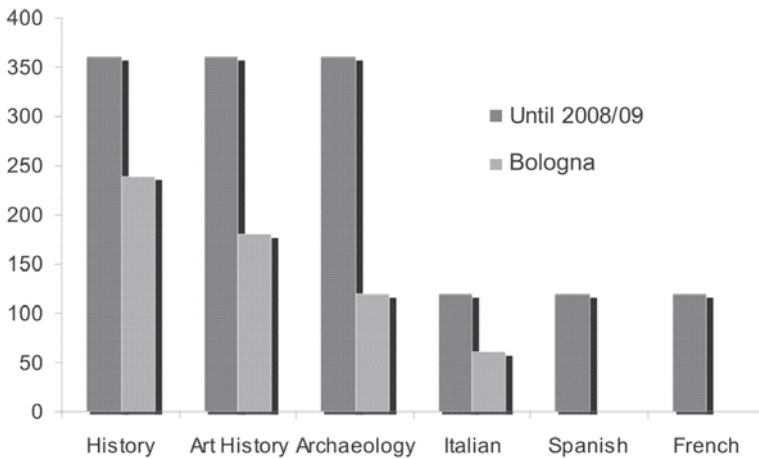


Figure 2. – The Bologna process and its effects on teaching Latin at the university. The columns represent the number of mandatory Latin classes attended as a condition for a degree in these majors (after five years of study) at the University of Ljubljana – before and after the implementation of the new curriculum.

¹⁰ The numbers come from the University of Ljubljana Faculty of Arts website (www.ff.uni-lj.si).

¹¹ Although the two systems are not exactly the same, this comparison assumes a graduate spending five years at the same department studying for a research degree. The numbers are taken from the University of Ljubljana Faculty of Arts website. A reformed curriculum will only be implemented in 2009/10; still, after years of discussion, it is well - nigh impossible to expect any significant change in the near future.

The Fragile Revival of Medieval Studies: People and Places

Renewal of Latin during the last two decades went hand in hand with a renewal in medieval studies. Despite the aggravating fact that the country has no independent entity – such as a university department or a research institute – primarily devoted to the Middle Ages, there has been a sort of blossoming in medieval studies, spearheaded by a number of scholars working within a diverse institutional network. While the stringent word-count limits here make it difficult to do justice to all of them, a brief account will be attempted; the illustrative list of people and places that follows does not even pretend to be exhaustive. Examples of their approach follow in the footnotes; as a rule, books published internationally take precedence over the rest.

The work of Rajko Bratož provided a fresh historical perspective on the area in late antiquity.¹² Peter Štih has published extensive research in the field of the aristocracy;¹³ recently, his studies of Slovenian identity – accompanied by a Slovenian translation of *The Myth of Nations* by Patrick Geary – have sparked a major public debate. The history of daily life, a previously neglected area, is beginning to come to the fore; an interesting example is a study of a “medieval female voice,” published by Peter Štih and Igor Grdina.¹⁴ Dušan Kos has concentrated on social and cultural history, dealing mostly with textual sources.¹⁵

Indeed, it is medieval history where the influence of CEU alumni is most present. Matjaž Bizjak has been unearthing late medieval economic history;¹⁶ recently he has begun to publish a series of important primary sources for the Auersperg family.¹⁷ Matjaž Vesel, another CEU alumnus, is researching and

¹² Rajko Bratož, ed., *Slowenien und die Nachbarländer zwischen Antike und karolingischer Epoche: Anfänge der slowenischen Ethnogenese*, Situla 39 (Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti [hereafter: SAZU], 2000).

¹³ Peter Štih, *Studien zur Geschichte der Grafen von Görz: die Ministerialen und Milites der Grafen von Görz in Istrien und Krain* (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 1996).

¹⁴ Igor Grdina and Peter Štih, ed., *Spomini Helene Kottanner: ženski glas iz srednjega veka* [Memories of Helena Kottanner: A Female Voice from the Middle Ages] (Ljubljana: Nova revija, 1999).

¹⁵ Dušan Kos, *He Who Does not Suffer with the Town, Shall not Reap the Benefits Thereof: The Statute of Ptuj from 1376, Article 94* (Ljubljana: Ministry of Culture, 1998).

¹⁶ Matjaž Bizjak, *Ratio facta est: gospodarska struktura in poslovanje poznosrednjeveških gospostev na Slovenskem* [*Ratio facta est: Economic Structure and Operations of Late Medieval Rulers in Slovenian Territory*], *Thesaurus memoriae (dissertationes)* 2 (Ljubljana: Znanstvenoraziskovalni center [hereafter: ZRC] SAZU, 2003).

¹⁷ Miha Preinfalk and Matjaž Bizjak, ed., *Turjaška knjiga listin* [The Auersperg Book of Deeds], *Thesaurus memoriae (fontes)* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2008-).

single most important philological achievement of this period, the result of a major collective effort, was the thorough revision and modernisation of the Latin-Slovenian Dictionary in six substantial volumes and over 3000 pages, a grand project that had been interrupted by the First World War, then thwarted by the economic crisis, and finally shelved after the Second World War; its resuscitation in the 1990s and eventual completion by a group of Latinists, supervised by Matej Hriberšek, brought to a close an effort that spanned an entire century, thus providing foundations for Latin translations in coming decades.³⁰

Beyond the necessarily inadequate list of individual scholars given above is a broader community of people working in their respective fields. The following list of institutions provides a fairly dense net of starting points; people there will provide further information and direct any enquiry towards the appropriate archive, library or specialist. *Cuncta fluunt, nihil est toto quod perstet in orbe*; things change, particularly in the volatile world of websites. This is why Slovenian names are provided in brackets; a skilful surfer will be able to find their new place of interretial dwelling.

³⁰ Fran Wiesthaler, *Latinsko-slovenski slovar* [Latin-Slovenian Dictionary], 6 vols. (Ljubljana: Kres, 1993-2007).

translating the medieval and renaissance history of science.¹⁸ Still, there is a painful gap in the “recent flowering of medieval studies in Slovenia, effected by a new generation of young scholars;”¹⁹ Andrej Komac, an accomplished medievalist of great promise, had already submitted his doctoral thesis²⁰ to the defence committee when he tragically lost his life in a diving accident during the summer of 2003.

The research of Jurij Snoj has shed new light on the previously neglected sphere of medieval music.²¹ In the history of art, Nataša Golob has illuminated a series of issues concerning local medieval manuscripts;²² from the archival perspective, the phenomenon has been investigated by Jedrt Vodopivec.²³ Janez Höfler dedicated a lifetime of research to medieval art.²⁴ From 1990 onwards, Ivan Stopar has been publishing his landmark analysis on Slovenian castles, with a new volume appearing almost every year.²⁵ A significant amount of archaeological research has been carried out at the Academy of Science Institute for Archaeology by Slavko Ciglenečki,²⁶ Andrej Pleterski,²⁷ and others. Literary research and translation have been advanced by Primož Simoniti, whose principal work on Slovenian humanists is now available in German as well.²⁸ More recently, Miha Pintarič explored the transition from the medieval to the modern period as attested in French literature.²⁹ Perhaps the

¹⁸ Matjaž Vesel, *Učena nevednost Nikolaja Kuzanskega: Kuzanski in konstitucija univerzuma moderne znanosti* [*Docta ignorantia* of Nicolaus Cusanus: Constituting the Universe of Modern Science], *Philosophica* (series moderna) (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2000).

¹⁹ Peter Štih, “Andrej Komac (1970-2003),” *Annales* 13, no. 2 (2003): 465.

²⁰ Andrej Komac, *Od mejne grofije do dežele: Ulrik III. Spanheim in Kranjska v 13. stoletju* [From a Margraviate to a Province: Ulrich III Spanheim and Carniola in the Thirteenth Century], *Thesaurus memoriae* (dissertationes) 5 (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2006).

²¹ Jurij Snoj, *Medieval Music Codices: A Selection of Representative Samples from Slovene Libraries* (Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, 1997).

²² Nataša Golob, *Twelfth-century Cistercian Manuscripts: The Sitticum Collection* (London: H. Miller Publishers, 1996).

²³ Jedrt Vodopivec, *Vezave srednjeveških rokopisov: strukturne prvine in njihov razvoj* [Medieval Manuscript Binding: Structural Elements and their Development] (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2000).

²⁴ Janez Höfler, *Der Meister E. S.: Ein Kapitel europäischer Kunst des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Regensburg: Schnell and Steiner, 2007).

²⁵ Ivan Stopar, *Grajske stavbe* [Castle Buildings] (Ljubljana: Viharnik, 1990-); 16 volumes published so far.

²⁶ Slavko Ciglenečki, *Tinje oberhalb von Loka pri Žusmu: Spätantike und frühmittelalterliche Siedlung*, *Opera Instituti archaeologici Sloveniae* 4 (Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, 2000).

²⁷ Andrej Pleterski, *Frühmittelalterliche Siedlung Pristava in Bled: Funde*, *Opera Instituti archaeologici Sloveniae* 14 (Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, 2008).

²⁸ Primož Simoniti, *Humanismus bei den Slovenen: Slovenische Humanisten bis zur Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008).

²⁹ Miha Pintarič, *Le sentiment du temps dans la littérature française (XIX^e s.-fin du XVI^e s.)* (Paris: Champion, 2002).

Major Libraries/Manuscript Collections

National and University Library
(Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica)
Turjaška 1, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-2001-188
www.nuk.si; izposoja@nuk.uni-lj.si

Regional Archives Koper, Piran Department
(Pokrajinski arhiv Koper - enota Piran)
Župančičeva 4, SI-6330 Piran
Tel. +386-5-6732-840
www.arhiv-koper.si; arhiv.koper@gmail.com

Archdiocesan Archives Ljubljana
(Nadškofijski arhiv v Ljubljani)
Krekov trg 1, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-23-47-570
arhiv.lj@rkc.si

Archdiocesan Archives Maribor
(Nadškofijski arhiv v Mariboru)
Koroška cesta 1, SI-2000 Maribor
Tel. +386-590-80-120
www.mariborska-metropolija.si/ustanove/arhiv.php
skofijski.arhiv@slomsek.net

Theological Seminary Library in Ljubljana
(Semeniška knjižnica v Ljubljani)
Bogoslovno semenišče Ljubljana
Dolničarjeva 4, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-232-78-91
semenisce-lj.rkc.si; info.semenisce.ljubljana@rkc.si

Major Archival Holdings

Archives of the Republic of Slovenia
(Arhiv Republike Slovenije)
Zvezdarska 1, SI-1000
Tel. +386-1-241-42-00
www.arhiv.gov.si; ars@gov.si

Regional Archives in Maribor
(Pokrajinski arhiv Maribor)
Glavni trg 7, SI-2000 Maribor
Tel. +386-2-22-85-024
www.pokarh-mb.si; vloge@pokarh-mb.si

Historical Archives of Ljubljana
(Zgodovinski arhiv Ljubljana)
Mestni trg 27, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-306-1303
www.zal-lj.si; zal@zal-lj.si

Historical Archives of Celje
(Zgodovinski arhiv Celje)
Teharska cesta 1, SI-3000 Celje
Tel. +386-3-42-87-640
www.zac.si; zg.arhiv-celje@guest.arnes.si

Historical Archives of Ptuj
(Zgodovinski arhiv Ptuj)
Muzejski trg 1, SI-2250 Ptuj
Tel. +386-2-787-97-30
www.arhiv-ptuj.si; zgod.arhiv-ptuj@guest.arnes.si

Regional Archives in Koper
(Pokrajinski arhiv Koper)
Kapodistriasov trg 1, SI-6000 Koper
Tel. +386-5-62-71-824
www.arhiv-koper.si; arhiv.koper@gmail.com

Archdiocesan Archives in Ljubljana/Maribor
See above.

Major Museums and Galleries with Medieval Collections

National Museum of Slovenia
(Narodni muzej Slovenije)
Prešernova 20, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-241-44-00
www.narmuz-lj.si; info@nms.si

The National Gallery
(Narodna galerija)
Puharjeva 9, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-24-15-434
www.ng-slo.si; info@ng-slo.si

City Museum of Ljubljana
(Mestni muzej Ljubljana)
Gosposka 15, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-24-12-500
www.mestnimuzej.si; info@mestnimuzej.si

Regional Museum in Maribor
(Pokrajinski muzej Maribor)
Grajska ulica 2, SI-2000 Maribor
Tel. +386-2-228-35-51
www.pmuzej-mb.si; info@pmuzej-mb.si

Regional Museum in Celje
(Pokrajinski muzej Celje)
Muzejski trg 1, SI-3000 Celje
Tel. +386-3-428-09-50
www.pokmuz-ce.si; info@pokmuz-ce.si

Regional Museum in Ptuj
(Pokrajinski muzej Ptuj)
Muzejski trg 1, SI-2250 Ptuj
Tel. +386-2-787-92-30
www.pok-muzej-ptuj.si; grad@pok-muzej-ptuj.si

Regional Museum in Murska Sobota
(Pokrajinski muzej Murska Sobota)
Trubarjev drevored 4, SI-9000 Murska Sobota
Tel. +386-2-527-17-06
www.pok-muzej-ms.si; pok-muzej-ms@guest.arnes.si

Major Research Institutions

Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts
(Znanstvenoraziskovalni center Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti)
Novi trg 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-470-6-100
www.zrc-sazu.si; zrc@zrc-sazu.si

Milko Kos Historical Institute
(Zgodovinski inštitut Milka Kosa)
Novi trg 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-4706-200
zimk.zrc-sazu.si; zi@zrc-sazu.si

France Stele Institute of Art History
(Umetnostnozgodovinski inštitut Franceta Steleta)
Novi trg 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-470-6-100
uifs.zrc-sazu.si; umzg@zrc-sazu.si

Institute of Archaeology
(Inštitut za arheologijo)
Novi trg 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-47-06-380
www.zrc-sazu.si/iza; iza@zrc-sazu.si

Institute of Musicology
(Muzikološki inštitut)
Novi trg 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-470-6215
mi.zrc-sazu.si

Institute of Philosophy
(Filozofski inštitut)
Novi trg 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-470-6470
fi.zrc-sazu-si; fi@zrc-sazu.si

University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts
(Filozofska fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani)
Aškerčeva 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-241-10-00
www.ff.uni-lj.si; info@ff.uni-lj.si

Department of Classical Philology
(Oddelek za klasično filologijo)
Aškerčeva 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-241-14-20
www.ff.uni-lj.si/oddelki/klasfilol

Department of History
(Oddelek za zgodovino)
Aškerčeva 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-241-11-90
www.zgodovina-ff.uni-lj.net
info.zgodovina@ff.uni-lj.si

Department of Art History
(Oddelek za umetnostno zgodovino)
Aškerčeva 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-241-12-10
www.ff.uni-lj.si/oddelki/umzgod

Department of Archeology
(Oddelek za arheologijo)
Aškerčeva 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386-1-241-15-58
arheologija.ff.uni-lj.si