

## **Egyptology in Croatia**

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### **Abstract**

This paper presents a short overview of the history of Egyptology in Croatia. It describes the earliest scientific approaches to Egyptology and the latest project to disclose the Egyptian artefacts in Croatia.



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In the last 140 years, ever since 1862, Croatian historians have not been much concerned with the problems of ancient Egypt. This is not difficult to understand. Croatia has a relatively small amount of original material (about 4,031 artefacts in 20 museums and unknown amounts in private collections<sup>1</sup>), insufficiently developed international contacts and limited funds, which do not allow research in Egypt and the Middle East. In Croatian institutions there are not enough books or periodicals to allow scholars to keep pace with current problems and research.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the first explorative expeditions began work in the Middle East, Croatian historiographers were still concentrating on their own national antiquities of the Ancient and Middle Ages and the early modern period. There were a number of enthusiasts and maecenas (Mihael and Ilija Barić, Josip Juraj Strossmayer, Juraj Haulik etc.), custodians, archaeologists and historians like Mijat Sabljarić (1790-1865) or Šime Ljubić (1822-1896) and their work and interest are responsible for Zagreb possessing one of the most important oriental museum collections in southeastern Europe in what is today the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb whose holdings include about 3,100 articles connected with Egyptian history from early dynastic periods until the Byzantine era. The nucleus of the collection dates from the donation in 1862 of the well-known 'Zagreb mummy' with its linen wrappings and the purchase in 1868 of most of the collection of baron Franz Koller (1767-1826). During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century this nucleus was expanded by a whole series of small donations and purchases. Besides this largest collection in the Zagreb Archaeological Museum there are a whole number of smaller collections. The largest and most important of these are in Archaeological Museums in Dubrovnik and Split, in the Istrian Archaeological Museum in Pula and in Museum Mimara in Zagreb. Smaller collections exist in many different towns from Slavonia to the Adriatic coast. The most important smaller collections are in the Town Museum Varaždin, the Museum of Slavonia in Osijek and the St. Euphemia monastery in Kapor on the island of Rab.

The material collected in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century allowed scholars to become interested in contemporary work in this field. There were visits by well-known Egyptologists and Orientalists. During the same time the importance of the Zagreb mummy in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb became widely known among scholars and thanks to the work of that museum and the good relations of the Yugoslavia with Egypt during the later 20<sup>th</sup> century a sarcophagus and mummy were presented to the museum.

The works of several scholars are associated with Egyptian studies in Croatia. Šime Ljubić was curator and later director of the National Museum, out of which the present day Archaeological Museum in Zagreb developed. Gavro Manojlović (1856-1938) was professor of general history in Zagreb University's Faculty of Philosophy, Grga Novak (1888-1978) was professor of Ancient history at the same faculty, Petar Lisićar (1908-1987) professor of Ancient history first in Skoplje University and later in Zadar University, Petar Selem (1936-) is present professor of Ancient history in the Zagreb Faculty of Philosophy, Igor Uranić (1960-) curator of the Department of Egyptology in Zagreb Archaeological Museum and Mladen Tomorad (1971-) assistant at the Department of History in the Zagreb Faculty of Philosophy.

The initial study of the Egyptian collection in the National Museum was instigated by Šime Ljubić. Ljubić invited the famous scholar Henrich Brugsch to examine it and made an inventory on the basis of Brugsch's notes, details of which he published in two catalogues in 1871 and 1889. It was on Ljubić's initiative that various foreign scholars visited Zagreb to examine such rarities as the wrappings of the mummy. Ljubić was author of the first Croatian article about the Hellenistic god Harpocrates.

Further research and information concerning ancient Egypt was made possible by translations of recent publications and basic sources by Gavro Manojlović (Gaston Maspero, 'Poviest iztočnih naroda u starom vieku' ['History of Near East in ancient times']) and August Musić (Herodotes, 'History') at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a whole series of articles were published in Croatian periodicals and newspapers covering recent and relevant older sources.

Two important Croatian historians of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who from their earliest days concerned themselves with Egyptian research were Gavro Manojlović and Grga Novak. In 1923 Manojlović published his 'Povijest Starog Orijenta' ['History of the ancient Near East'] which was the first attempt to provide a comprehensive account down to 12<sup>th</sup> century BC. A few years later he attempted to write a philosophical history 'Sile pokretnice i pravilnosti u univerzalnoj historiji' ['The universal forces and laws of history'] which included Middle Eastern history.

Grga Novak was the most important scholar in this field from the twenties to the sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He put enormous expertise and energy into his writing, lectures and travels in the east (in the 1930s) which allowed a much wider circle of people to become interested in and involved with this period. He wrote more than twenty articles and six large studies in the 'Croatian Encyclopaedia', travel observations in his 'U zemlji faraona' ['In the land of the Pharaohs'] from 1945 and mimeographed texts. His most important work was

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<sup>1</sup> I presume that there are more than 1,000 artefacts in private collections.

'Egipat. Prehistorija, faraoni, osvajači, kultura' ['Egypt. Prehistory, the Pharaohs, conquerors, culture'] from 1967.

Petar Lisičar made important contributions from 1956-1975 in his university textbooks on Egyptian and history of the Ancient Near East. The same or slightly altered texts were published several times under different titles.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century more attention began to be paid to Egyptian history and antiquities. As part of their research articles were published on Egyptian architecture (S. Gvozdanović, B. Milić, M. Hudec), literature (P. Selem, S. Petrović, I. Uranić), and mythology (B. Gospodinović, I. Uranić).

Petar Selem is the most important name in the last four decades. From the sixties onwards he published a whole series of articles on aspects and diffusion of the Oriental cults and analysis of material from Croatian territory. In a large number of these he considered the problems of Isis cults and surveys of oriental cultural phenomena in Pannonia and Dalmatia. Selem is the most outstanding Croatian Orientalist.

During the last ten years Igor Uranić curator and Egyptologist of the Zagreb Archaeological Museum, has systematically written on the museum holdings. He published books on Egyptian mythology 'Sinovi Sunca' ['Sons of the sun'] in 1997 and 'Stari Egipat. Povijest, književnost i umjetnost drevnih Egipćana' ['Ancient Egypt. History, literature and art'] in 2002, the first systematic study on ancient Egyptian history in the last 35 years.

In the period which I have considered (1862-2004) Egyptian culture and history have not been the subject of much study, which shows how segmented this discipline is. Croatia was once within the great Roman Empire which has made it possible for some Croatian scholars to include certain aspects of Egyptian culture in their work. As an example in what were once the Roman provinces of Dalmatia and Pannonia traces of various cults existed of a whole range of Egyptian gods, spread either from the east in general or from Egypt itself. This has made it possible for great numbers of Croatian specialists in several fields to include such material as part of their studies, articles and two monographs (P. Selem). Some researchers have studied who spread such cults or how they were transmitted in the ancient world. Indeed in this aspect Croatian scholars are on the European level.

Our scholars (G. Novak, D. Rendić-Miočević, M. Gorenc, P. Selem, I. Mirnik, A. Rendić-Miočević) have all visited the cradle of civilization: Egypt. Some have published their accounts in academic journals, for example Grga Novak in the 1930s, and in his popular book 'U zemlji faraona' ['In the land of the Pharaohs'], which relates Egypt's history and culture. Others registered their experiences in the form of professional reports which have found a place in museum records. In addition the contacts they made sometimes resulted in the gift of artefacts, outstanding among them being the sarcophagus and mummy presented by the Egyptian government (1973) and attempts to organise two large exhibitions of Egyptian art (between 1978 - 1981) which unfortunately could not be realised due to financial problems.

Analysis of individual periods shows that Egyptology in Croatia has gone through several periods. The first was one in which world developments in Egyptology were the centre of attention and studies of the holdings of Croatian museums. The second period was one of analysis and interpretation of these Croatian holdings, which resulted in the first historical publications and textbooks and inserts in encyclopaedias. In the third period the first professionally trained specialist appeared (P. Selem) who carried out research in Croatia especially on the cults most commonly found. Their research tended towards the social background of these. In both periods there were individuals whose main research was concentrated on Egyptian history and culture (G. Novak, I. Uranić).

At the present time three scholars (P. Selem, I. Uranić and M. Tomorad) are engaged in interpretation and updating of material of Egyptian provenance and in following world developments in this field. In 2003 Tomorad published a book about development of Egyptology in the Croatian historical studies ('Egipat u Hrvatskoj. Egipatske starine u hrvatskoj znanosti i kulturi' ['Egypt in Croatia. Egyptian antiquities in Croatian sciences and culture']).

Various articles have been written on items from museum holdings (Š. Ljubić, don F. Bulić, J. Brunšmid, M. Gorenc, D. Pinterović, D. Rendić-Miočević, V. Jurkić-Girardi, P. Selem, N. Cambi, I. Mirnik, H. Kadić, A. Rendić-Miočević, I. Uranić, M. Tomorad and many others), newspaper articles (largely travel accounts and articles with popular appeal), encyclopedia insertions (G. Novak, P. Skok, Ž. Marković, B. Širola, M. Šaper, B. Antić), historical surveys (G. Manojlović, G. Novak, P. Lisičar, I. Uranić, M. Tomorad), articles dealing with oriental cults (P. Selem, J. Medini, M. Suić, N. Cambi, V. Jurkić-Girardi, M. Tomorad), surveys of Egyptian music (J. Andreis), literature (P. Selem, S. Petrović, M. Višić, I. Uranić) mythology (B. Gospodinović, I. Uranić), and building and architecture (S. Gvozdanović, B. Milić, M. Hudec).

In the last 140 years many foreign scholars have written about items of Egyptian provenance that were found in Croatia. The Zagreb mummy and its wrapping have attracted most attention but also the Egyptian holdings of Zagreb's Archaeological museum (catalogue is published as doctoral dissertation by Janine Monnet (1970).

Analysis of Croatian publications shows that the majority deal with the holdings of museums and similar institutions and the existence of oriental cults in the provinces of the Roman Empire. Very few are written from the historical aspect (Manojlović, 1923; Lisičar, 1956; Novak, 1967; Uranić, 2002; Tomorad, 2003). The lacunae that were felt have more recently been filled with some translations of recent foreign publications. There are almost no translations of capital works in the fields of Egyptian and Oriental studies.

Lack of funding and of interest among most Croatian scholars can be seen from the fact that the Croatian National and University library in Zagreb are not subscribed to a single periodical covering Egyptian studies<sup>2</sup>. It is only possible to get recent foreign publications through direct exchange between university libraries or by buying them personally.

Croatia has no institute that specializes in ancient history as part of which a department of Oriental and Egyptian Studies could develop. In Central Europe such institutions exist (Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, Bulgaria) and better connection should be maintained with them in order to train younger people in the field. Over all this time there are only two institutions in Croatia (the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb and the Department of Ancient History, Department of History in the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb) with active assistance in these field of study.

Zagreb University is presently undergoing changes in studies and there is a possibility that the problems of ancient Egypt may play a greater part in the university curriculum. As a beginning there may be a greater number of publications by Croatian scholars on materials not only from museum collections but private ones which still contain numerous items from ancient Egyptian culture. It is these expanded possibilities that lie behind the project 'Croato-Aegyptica Electronica. Baze podatka egipatskih spomenika u Hrvatskoj' ['Croato-Aegyptica Electronica']. Date base of the Egyptian artefacts in Croatia<sup>3</sup>. Its basic aim is to select relevant material presenting the cultural Egyptian connections with Croatia both in the form of institutions and private collections. My first intention, as the head of this project, is to produce a database on the Internet in English and Croatian language, several CD-ROM's that would present the material from the various collections, and a whole range of short published works (catalogues, guides etc.). My colleagues and I have hope that by these means Croatian historical sciences may include in contemporary ancient Egyptian studies.

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<sup>2</sup> The Italian periodical 'Aegyptus' is the only publication recently to be received by the National and University Library but the subscription has ended. The library of the Zagreb Archeology Museum has recent numbers of the 'The Journal of Egyptian Archeology'. The History department library of the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb has the following periodicals 'Der alte Orient' (numbers from first half 20<sup>th</sup> century), 'Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orientgesellschaft' (first half 20<sup>th</sup> century and some later numbers), 'Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatischen-Aegyptischen Gesellschaft' (first half 20<sup>th</sup> century but not all numbers), 'Revue d'egyptologie' (sixties, seventies, eighties of 20<sup>th</sup> century with gaps, and recent numbers), 'Aegyptus' (70's and 80's with breaks) and 'Aegypten und Levant' (recent numbers). The Archaeological museum in Zagreb library has the following periodicals: 'The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology' (recent numbers) and 'KMT' (recent numbers).

<sup>3</sup> The following institutions are taking part in the project: Department of History and Department of Information Sciences, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb; Archaeological Museum in Zagreb; Museum Mimara in Zagreb; City Museum in Varaždin; Museum of Slavonia in Osijek; Archaeological Museum of Istria in Pula, Archaeological Museum in Zadar; Archaeological Museum in Split; Archaeological Museum in Dubrovnik and more than ten small museums. The project is supported by the Department for the Conservation of the Cultural Heritage in Zagreb and it is financed by the Ministry of Science of the Republic of Croatia since December 2003.

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