SUBTERRANEAN WATERS DESCRIBED IN CARNIOLAN LETTERS MAILED TO A. KIRCHER (* 1601; †1680)

PODZEMNE VODE V KRANJSKIH PISMIH POSLANIH A. KIRCHERJU (* 1601; †1680)

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Abstract

Stanislav Južnič: Subterranean waters described in Carniolan letters mailed to A. Kircher (* 1601; †1680)

Kircher's letters connected with the area of today's Slovenia were analyzed. His Jesuit informer Wilpenhoffer's reports on the Cerknica Lake and Idrija Mine were put forward. He also helped distribution of Kircher's books among Auerspergs and other Ljubljana nobles. Janez Vajkard Auersperg's letters as an example of high nobility correspondent patronage were put at the limelight in connection with Janez and his admirer Valvasor's own research of the Postojna Cave flora and fauna.

Keywords: Athanasius Kircher, Christophorus Wilpenhoffer, Janez Vajkard Auersperg, Janez Vajkard Valvasor, History of Karst Research, Cerknica Lake, Jesuits.

INTRODUCTION

The baroque letters are important source for the history of science and karst in particular. In fact, they are sometimes the only baroque sources available because at those times the printed publications were not such necessary part of the research as they are nowadays. Kircher's correspondence kept at Roman Archive of the Pontificia Università Gregoriana (APUG) contains 2291 letters of 763 writers distributed at 14 folios. Almost one third of the correspondents were Jesuits. We knew some of the letters contained information about Cerknica Lake which Kircher never visited personally but nevertheless described as one of its first scientific researchers. We suspected that he had Carniolan informers and the guess proved to be a true one. We examined all letters mailed to Kircher from Carniola or Gorica, and also the letters of people connected with those areas. We are happy to report that at least some success was obtained.

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Received/Prejeto: 04.09.2007
KOBAV

Tab. 1: Latin Kobav’s letters mailed from Vienna to Kircher’s Rome (Gramatowski & Rebernik, 2001, 63).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>APUG</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 1, 1640</td>
<td>567 ff. 20r-21v</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 20, 1640</td>
<td>567 f. 205rv</td>
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Our first “suspect” was Cerknica native Andreas Kobav (* November 7 or 11, 1593 Cerknica; joined Societatis Jesu (SJ) October 22, 1610 Brno at Moravia; † February 12, 1654 Trieste), one of the most talented Paul Guldin’s (Habakkuk, * 1577; † 1643) students at Graz University. After his youth at native Notranjska, Kobav joined the Franciscans but soon changed his mind and became a Jesuit. At least in 1652 he was a confessor at Ljubljana College. Just few months before death he moved to Trieste College, probably stopping at Cerknica on his way. As the native of Cerknica he was certainly an expert for the Cerknica Lake phenomena, but he did not describe them at his known letters mailed to Kircher. He rather examined the properties of new comet paving the way for his forthcoming book.

CUZZIO

Tab. 2: Italian letters of Giulio Cuzzio (SJ; † 1688) mailed from Gorica to Kircher’s Rome (Gramatowski & Rebernik, 2001, 37, 131)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>APUG</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 6, 1675</td>
<td>565 f. 184rv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1, 1675</td>
<td>565 f. 263rv</td>
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</table>

Besides Ljubljana also Jesuits from Gorica or Trieste College could have informed Kircher about the nearby Notranjska limestone area phenomena. Just two letters from Gorica mailed to Kircher are kept at APUG. Cuzzio wrote both of them in Italian language with Latin appendix of his college rector. Among other reports he described Jesuit visit to the Count Torrismondo de la Torre’s (Thurn-Valsassina) castle Devin (Duino, Tybein). He described the administrative curiosities and did not take care of the limestone region Timav River near Devin or Cerknica Lake.

WILPENHOFER’S CERKNICA LAKE REPORT

Tab. 3: Wilpenhoffer’s Latin letters mailed to Kircher after Wilpenhoffer’s settlement at Ljubljana in 1653

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>APUG</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 24, 1658</td>
<td>567 f. 111rv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 23, 1669</td>
<td>559 f. 95rv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 28, 1669</td>
<td>559 f. 50rv</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ljubljana Jesuit Christophorus Wilpenhoffer (Kristof Wilpenhofer, Wilpenhofer, Vilpenhofer, Bilpenhofer, * February 1597 Radstadt on Enns at Salzburg; SJ March 19, 1614 Brno; † March 30, 1671 Ljubljana) stayed at Ljubljana between 1640-1641 and 1644-1648. At that time he did not write to Kircher, who was just beginning his ascent to fame. During his third and final stay at Ljubljana Wilpenhoffer mailed several letters to Kircher’s Rome (Gramatowski & Rebernik, 2001, 113, 136; Dolinar, 1976, 186). Those documents are of greatest interest for this study. At least one of Wilpenhoffer’s Ljubljana letters went through Venice and got a mark “franchise of Venice”.

Fig. 1: Wilpenhoffer’s October 24, 1658 letter with Kircher’s address and a mark of franchise (APUG 567 folio 111v). (Courtesy of Stanford University and Glen Worthey).
Wilpenhoffer was a novice at Brno. He studied philosophy and theology at Graz between 1616 and 1625. On June 29, 1635 he gave his fourth “mobility” vows, but he never left his homeland for missions and stayed at Habsburg domains. In 1628 he taught logic at Graz and became the Viennese College confessor (1629-1631). In 1640 and 1641 he had similar function at Ljubljana College. Later he became superior at Varaždin (1642-1643), prefect at Ljubljana (1644-1648), and superior at Sopron (1649). In 1651 he was at Vienna and next year he became the confessor of Jaurin (Raab) bishop. He informed Kircher about Cerknica Lake phenomena during his stay at Ljubljana College. He was an administrator, scribe (scriptor), counsellor, and prefect of the Ljubljana Jesuit church and stayed at Ljubljana almost for two decades between 1653 and 1671 (Lukács, 1982, 789-790).

Wilpenhoffer listed the Carniolan local natural curiosities and Kircher in fact used his report for his own description of Carniola. Wilpenhoffer took care for the distribution of his Jesuit-fellow Kircher’s books among Carniolans, mostly on demand of the Governor General Count Volf Engelbert Auersperg. Immediately after the Mundus Subterranei printing (1657) he reported on October 24, 1658 that the »Count, our Governor« wished to get the item. In fact, Volf’s librarian and personal friend Janez Ludvik Schönleben (* 1618 Ljubljana; SJ October 28, 1635 Vienna-1654; † 1681) marked Volf’s bookplate at his copy of the famous Kircher’s Mundus Subterranei during the same year 1658. Somewhat later Schönleben became rather prolific researcher of Cerknica Lake and published his opinions just before he died (1680-1681). He collected the library of his own and bequeathed his books to the Ljubljana Jesuits at his last will.

The readers also expected similar Kircher’s work Mundus Mediterranes because Kircher announced he would publish it. It was never put at the limelight, at least not under that title. In fact, the Mundus Mediterranes case seems to be a part of the very clever politics. Kircher paved his road to fame by adding index of his published and would-be published books at the end of his early works. Several of them were never printed, but readers...
expected them anyway. Just by reading the titles and descriptions of his “planned” works everybody was wondering how clever and erudite man Kircher must be. The Baroque authors actually knew very well how to sell their books and we could learn a lot from their examples.

In addition Wilpenhoffer brought previously unknown facts about karst to Kircher’s attention. In Mundus Kircher did not mention Idrija Mine or Cerknica Lake yet, although at the paragraph “Alpine hydraulic” he described waters at Alps region with silver and other minerals beneath the mountains (Kircher, 1657, 185-186). He carefully described Danube River (Kircher, 1657, 162) and properties of quicksilver (Kircher, 1657, 202) but failed to mention famous Idrija mercury mine.

Wilpenhoffer reported on the mercury mine without mentioning the city of Idrija. He also described the vein of «fossil silver» and cited the Jesuit Casati’s work connected with mining. Wilpenhoffer put special concern on the lake «near the town named Cerknica». The lake altogether sank to enable ploughing of the dried fields and even hunting. After a while the lake reappeared again and flooded the fields with the water and fish, according to Wilpenhoffer’s report.

Eleven years later on October 23, 1669 Wilpenhoffer again wrote from Ljubljana to Kircher’s Rome without mentioning any karst phenomena. A week later he wrote a new letter (November 28, 1669) with last lines somewhat compressed to fit the single page. He mentioned two parts of Kircher’s Ars Magna scienti seu combinatorica under the shortened title Ars combinatorica. That book again pleased very much »the Count his Eminence Land Governor« Volf Auersperg. In the meanwhile Volf was promoted to a higher status of emperor’s secret counselor (1660) and consequently got the prestigious title “his Eminence” (Molè, 1937, 50). Volf certainly got Kircher’s book Ars combinatorica too, and Schönleben shelved it at the class of – linguistics. Certainly, the words of the baroque times did not always have the meaning we ascribe to them today. At the front page bookplates of three other Kircher’s books Schönleben wrote a note: “author’s (Kircher’s) present”. Ars combinatorica and Mundus Subterranei were not among them. Volf certainly have to buy some of his books as had all ordinary mortals, even if he was the Carniolan Governor.

Kircher continued Frischlin’s research of Carniola subterranean waters (Habe, Kranjc, 1981, 20-21; Korošec, 1967, 12) without ever seeing the phenomena he described. Kircher’s museum at Rome was in fact the Jesuit collection of all world curiosities and Carniolan ones just fit there. Already before Wilpenhoffer’s notes Kircher received some other information about Carniolan peculiarities focusing on Idrija Mercury Mine. Kircher’s informer was very young Klagenfurt Jesuit Sigismund Siserius (* May 1, 1636 Klagenfurt; SJ; † December 29, 1693 Vienna). Kircher published Siserius’ letters as he was used to do with other fellow Jesuits reports, although he eventually did not care to publish Wilpenhoffer’s contributions. Siserius’ work was put at the limelight as the appendix of first edition of Kircher’s subterranean book under the title Epistola ad R.P. Kircherum, in qua hydria sive fodina argenti vivi in Carniola descriptur (Kircher, 1657, 2: 173). Wilpenhoffer certainly read the item at Auersperg’s Ljubljana library and decided to improve Kircher’s understanding of the phenomena with his own Idrija Mine and Cerknica Lake descriptions. Kircher eventually used the new data acquired from Wilpenhoffer’s letter for his Mundus Subterraneus (Kircher, 1678, book 9, part 2, paragraph 7).

From the early little booklet later published as the addenda to Kircher’s outer space trip, the third printing of Mundus (1678) with Cerknica Lake description have grown up to nearly thousand pages of the great folio format. Its weight is almost 5 kg! The book was not just
heavy, it was considered to be the most important caves and underground waters baroque research. Kircher put at the limelight early description of the caves Antiparos at the middle of Greek Kiklads (Kykklads) Islands southeast of Athens, Ghar Kebir of Tunis, Drachenhöhle near Mixnitz southeast of Styrian Bruck on Mur River, and, least but not last, the Cerknica Lake. He founded the modern hydrology of karst and connected the subterranean springs with seas and precipitations.

In 1669 Englishman Edward Brown (* 1642; † 1708) continued Kircher’s Cerknica Lake research on behalf of the London Royal Society. Brown’s mistakes stimulated the development of Valvasor’s own opinions and ideas crowned with Valvasor’s ambitious election at the same Royal Society as it’s first and so far the only fellow from Carniola on December 14, 1687. Former Jesuit Schönbén and Valvasor modified Kircher’s explanation of fluids (Valvasor, 1689, 1: 626, 630), and Valvasor bought almost all Kircher’s works including Mundus. During Kircher’s lifetime E.G. Kappelius (1672, 1685) described Cerknica Lake fish and fields at Hamburg Journal (Korošec, 1967, 13) and paved the way for the research of local authorities, namely the Prince Janez Vajkard Auersperg.

JANEZ VAJKARD A UERSPERG

Tab. 4: Count, later Prince Janez Vajkard Auersperg’s letters mailed to Kircher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>APUG</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 30, 1651</td>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>556 ff. 214r, 215v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 9, 1654</td>
<td>Regensburg</td>
<td>556 ff. 212r, 213v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 27, 1655</td>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>556 ff. 204r, 205v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 3, 1661</td>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>562 ff. 26rv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 12, 1665</td>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>555 ff. 212r1,v1, 213v1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 23, 1671</td>
<td>Ljubljana</td>
<td>565 ff. 70v, 70av</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Janez Vajkard Auersperg, his older brother Volf Engelbert, and their protégé Valvasor were among the most erudite Carniolans. Six Janez Vajkard Auersperg’s letters to Kircher were preserved at APUG. In first letters Janez ensured his patronage and eventually also payment of Kircher’s usually very expensive books. Kircher dedicated a part of his Oedipus to Janez, who was just promoted to the rank of Prince (Kircher, 1654, 139). Janez mailed the last preserved letter to Kircher from Ljubljana on April 23, 1671, more than a year after he was dismissed from his highest positions at Viennese Court on December 10, 1669.

On July 3, 1669 the Prince Janez Vajkard Auersperg bought the Prince Janez Anton Eggenberg’s Notranjs-ka manors Snežnik and Lož and also took over Postojna manor. Probably he expected the Viennese troubles
would force him to return to his native Carniola few
months later.

The Prince Janez Vajkard Auersperg was aware of the
Leyden Professor Philippus Cluverius’ (Cluverij, * 1580
Danzig; † 1622) description of Postojna Cave (1623) as a
»big cave with noisy river at hollow hill near Ljubljana«.
Janez’ brother Volf had at least four Cluverius’ items at
first or early editions (1619, 1624, 1631, and 1653) bound
into three volumes. Five Cluverius’ works were on sale
at Ljubljana and Valvasor eventually bought all of them
for his Bogenšperg library (Sotheby’s, 1982, 30-31; Mayr,

Soon after his last letter mailed to Kircher, the Prince
Janez Vajkard Auersperg used ropes to descend one of his
peasants-fishermen beneath one foot thick Postojna Cave
natural bridge (1673). Janez’ ownership of the Postoj-
na area stimulated his curiosity which culminated after
reading Culverius and Kircher’s books he inherited from
his recently deceased brother Volf. Janez became one of
the first systematic researchers of Postojna Cave subter-
ranean flora and fauna. Kircher would certainly love to
read his results, but no Janez’ letters eventually written
after 1671 were preserved.

Just before Kircher died, Valvasor (1679) tried to
upgrade the discoveries of his model Prince Janez, but he
was eventually not quite successful. Valvasor discovered
the Auersperg’s subject-fisherman who formerly brought
some fish from subterranean of Postojna Cave. The poor
old fellow was still alive and in pretty good health. But he
was certainly not very cooperative being still somewhat
frightened by the ghost he seems to have met at the dark
Postojna Cave underground (Reisp, 1983, 144; Kovač Ar-
temis, 2005, 72; Valvasor, 1689, 1/4: 532).

CONCLUSION
The Jesuits from Carniola informed Kircher about the
Cerknica Lake karst phenomena. Kircher was considered
an expert in several fields, but he did not widely travel
after his young years. His books were in fact the com-
pilation of letters he received from his fellow Jesuits all
over the world, and with that in mind we claimed that
the Carniolan Jesuits were partly the authors of Kircher’s
books describing Carniola local subterranean limestone
regions. Kircher became well aware of the local peculiar-
ities, corresponded with the highest Carniolan nobility,
and eventually stimulated the Auersperg’s subterranean
karst fauna research programme.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
This research was carried out in the frame of the pro-
gramme “The Physics Books and Manuscripts in Car-
niolan Libraries before Napoleonic Wars” founded by the
Mellon fellowship of the Oklahoma University History of
Science Department in 2007. We thank acad. Dr. Andrej
Kranjc for constructive advices.
LITERATURE


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Sotheby’s, Bloomfield Place, New Bond Street, London WIA 2AA, 1982: The Catalogue (A Collection) of Valuable Printed Books and Atlases of the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century Formed in the Seventeenth Century by a Continental Nobleman and Now the Property of Senhor German Malhou and Senhora Johanna Auersperg de Mailhos from Uruguay. Days of Sale Monday, 14th June 1982 Lots 1-223. Tuesday, 15th June, 1982 Lots 223-440 at eleven o’clock precisely each day. - Sotheby’s, London.


POVZETEK
Pisma, ki so jih Kircherju pošljal jezuiti in plemiči z območja sedanje Slovenije, so prvorazredni zgodovinski dokumenti. Znano je, da Kircher naših krajev osebno ni obiskal; prav logično se zdi, da je moral imeti v Cerknici obveščevalce, ki so mu pripovedovali o notranjskih kraških pojavih. Že dolgo nas zanima, kdo bi utegnili biti ti ljudje, katerih pisma je Kircher vtikal v svoje opise kraškega podzemlja. V poštev je kazalo vzeti predvsem ljubljanske, goriške in tržaške jezuite. In res, prav z ljubljanskega kolegija je Kircher dobival potrebne podatke o notranjskem krasu.
