



The Significance of Podpeč limestone in the Cultural Heritage of Slovenia

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Podpeč limestone is characterized by its dark grey, or nearly black colour, with white fossil shells of the *Lithotia*. These beds, which have been dated as Lower Jurassic, occur in southern and south-western Slovenia, and are particularly common in areas southwest of Ljubljana. The main quarry, which is not active, is located next to the village of Podpeč near Ljubljana, and has been declared as a geological natural value of national importance; as such, it is officially protected as a natural monument. In the close vicinity of the village there are some other smaller quarries, but all of them have been abandoned. With its very low porosity (0.9%) and water absorption (0.13 – 0.30 % by mass), but relatively high compressive strength (185 MPa), this limestone is quite durable, although its colouring becomes somewhat bleached when situated outdoors. The use of Podpeč limestone was first documented in the case of the Roman period in Slovenia, when it was used for funerary stelae, votive altars, boundary stones, and other artefacts. At the end of the 5th Century AD, with the fall of the Roman Empire, stone-cutting ceased at Podpeč for the next few centuries. Before 1850 Podpeč limestone had no special value. Only very few portals or pilasters made of this stone are known, and no evidence has been found in churches. However, towards the end of the 19th Century Podpeč limestone became better-known, although before the first half of the 20th Century there were no significant stonecutting workshops in Podpeč. After this, stone was supplied progressively from the main quarry. Large numbers of buildings in Ljubljana and central Slovenia have sills, lintels and jambs made of Podpeč limestone. Production stopped in 1967. The internationally renowned Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik (1872-1957) used Podpeč limestone in various Slovenian buildings – the central stadium in Ljubljana, the National University Library, many altars and churches (Bogojina, the Šiška and Bežigrad districts of Ljubljana), parts of the Parliament of the Republic of Slovenia (Ljubljana), and Ljubljana's first skyscraper. With the exception of the Antonius Church in Belgrade, which was constructed by Plečnik, where part of the altar was made of Podpeč limestone, the international use of Podpeč limestone is not known.