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**Iconography of Emblematic Animals in *The Album of the Ljubljana Noble Society of St Dismas* –
Readings and Misreadings**

The Theatrum memoriae nobilis ac almae Societatis unitorum or *The Album of the Ljubljana Noble Society of St Dismas* in the Archive of the Republic of Slovenia is an illustrated manuscript, a sort of memorial book of the pious Society of St Dismas and the most important illuminated manuscript of the Baroque era that survives in Slovenia. Each member was obliged to participate with a sheet, bearing his coat of arms, emblem, the date of the enrolment in the Society and his signature. The beginnings of the Album go back to 1689 and in the long span of 113 years a kind of memorial gallery had been created – including 187 illuminated pages with a variety of interesting emblems.

Although *The Album of the Ljubljana Noble Society of St Dismas* is invaluable for understanding of Baroque art in Slovenia, it has until recently been known only to a few specialists. Only in 1998, when a great project of the Facsimile was undertaken, scholars started to pay due attention to this treasure of Baroque illumination. In 2001 the facsimile was accompanied by complete transcription of the text and studies of the most prominent Slovenian scholars - specialists in Baroque art, manuscript illumination and iconography. For the first time the illuminations were systematically examined and the iconography of the emblems interpreted.

Theoretically, interpretation of the emblems in *The Album of the Ljubljana Noble Society of St Dismas* shouldn't be too hard a task for an art historian because a variety of preserved Books of Emblems, printed in the late Renaissance and Baroque periods, offer a solid ground for their deciphering. But sometimes failure to see the detail in the reading of the illustration – the *pictura* – can cause a serious problem. An art historian lacking sufficient botanical or zoological knowledge can easily experience difficulties in recognizing plants or animals. If the identification of the animal is wrong, the whole understanding of its symbolic meaning turns into an irreversible avalanche of misreadings leading to most bizarre conclusions.

The paper concentrates on the iconography of animals in Baroque emblems depicted in *The Album of the Ljubljana Noble Society of St Dismas* with special attention to selected cases the interpretation of which failed because of different *faux pas* in the methodology of iconography and iconology. The author tries to point out the actual traps and why they were not recognized as such in previous analyses. The re-reading of the emblems shows that insufficient knowledge of zoology is not the only and often not even the most important reason for misinterpretations: they are mostly due to uncritical approach and use of certain set images or notions, which can easily deceive even the most experienced scholar.