Prekmurje – Wendic March, Trianon, and that black guitar

Today, one barely remembers that Prekmurje constitutes a fairly recent notion dating back no more than a century. It was established after the First World War, with the annexation of the northeasternmost part of Slovenia into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Before that, the region formed part of the Hungarian kingdom divided into Vas and Zala counties under the name Wendic March.

Today, Prekmurje serves as a popular tourist destination and even a kind of romantic synonym for a serene and comfortable way of life. It was not always like this. Not only was the region separated from the rest of Slovenian territory as part of another state, but it also remained a kind of distant exotica after its annexation. It was especially unpopular among teachers and civil servants who were sent to Prekmurje on official duty. The reasons why and what life was truly like in Prekmurje are revealed in twenty-four articles in the current special issue of *Kronika*. These present lesser known and some completely unknown aspects of Prekmurje's past and thus draw attention to striking characteristics of the region in which Slovenian history and culture intertwine with those of Hungary and the Romani people.

Prekmurje's earlier periods are brought to light through archaeological inquiries. The excavations conducted in Murska Sobota between 2020 and 2024 revealed the beginnings of a medieval settlement or the gradual construction of a preurban centre in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. (*Branko Kerman*) A few years earlier, archaeological excavations were carried out next to Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in Tišina. The investigation focused on a medieval and early modern burial site, which was in use from the eleventh century until it was abandoned in the last quarter of the eighteenth century; it is considered the largest church burial site in Prekmurje researched to date. Archaeologists unearthed head circlets, jewellery, and other funerary objects. (*Samo Sankovič*)

The development of land tenure in present-day Prekmurje and Porabje began in the twelfth century and concluded in the nineteenth century. Initially, the territory was predominantly characterized by very few high noble families that owned most of the estates in the area discussed. During the early modern period, new forms of nobility emerged, most notably the early modern petty nobility (*nobiles armalisti*). Social stratification also characterized local serfs, who were either hereditary tenants ("tied to the land") or bond tenants. (*Andrej Hozjan*) The origin and development of the nobility in Hungary, thus including the area of modern Prekmurje, were quite distinct from those of its peers in the Holy Roman Empire. Instead of the central European system based on vassalage, Hungary developed a form of relationship known as *familiaritas*. (*Jaka Banfi*)

Among the most important noble lineages that marked the area of present-day Prekmurje were undoubtedly the Nádasdy and Széchenyi families, which exchanged ownership of the Beltinci seigniory. After Ferenc III Nádasdy was executed in a conspiracy against King Leopold in the late seventeenth century, the Beltinci estate, established as permanent tenure under Hungarian law, passed through György Széchenyi to his nephews. (*Dominik Šteiner*) In the early nineteenth century, the seigniory came into possession of the Gyika family, which fled to Prekmurje from the territory of modern Moldova. The period of their lordship in Beltinci was characterized by economic turbulence and inflationary pressures of that period, coupled with protracted legal disputes. (*Dominik Šteiner*)

A different course of development took place in the village of Markišavci, first mentioned as part of the Gornja Lendava seigniory in the fourteenth century. It was initially owned by the Gornja Lendava Széchy family and its matrilinear descendants. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the entire village came into possession of Gregor Horvath de Markusotz, after which the estate passed between various, particularly petty noble families through marriage and inheritance. (*Gregor Kovač*)

In Prekmurje as part of the Kingdom of Hungary, written communication was dominated by Latin, with occasional Hungarian. Nonetheless, the Prekmurje dialect was not completely unknown. This is, among other documents, attested to by six records of administrative and business nature originating from Prekmurje and Razkrižje that were produced between the mid-sixteenth

and mid-eighteenth centuries. The first five documents were written in Kajkavian with a few elements of the Prekmurje dialect, whereas the latter was already dominant in the last one. (*Boris Golec*)

Language practices likewise changed in keeping civil registers. In these records, too, Latin dominated at first and was subsequently replaced by Hungarian and Slovenian. A striking example is the Črenšovci parish registers that the local priest Peter Borkovič kept from the establishment of the parish in 1807 until his death a quarter of a century later. The documents testify to his consistent and rigorous performance of pastoral duties and serve as a valuable historical source for understanding the daily life during the first decades of the parish of Črenšovci. (*Tone Krampač*)

When discussing the early modern period, we would be remiss if we did not mention artistic movements most profoundly marked by Baroque. The same hold for Lower Prekmurje, where certain artistic phenomena only became apparent with a delay due to late Recatholicization. The first figural shrines in the region thus appeared in the eighteenth century, more than a hundred years later than in other parts of the Holy Roman Empire. Nonetheless, they do not depart from the iconography of other Habsburg territories. (*Jure Donša*)

The First World War also wreaked havoc on Prekmurje. During the four years of the conflict, more than half of the male population or slightly over 20,000 men from the territory of present-day Prekmurje were drafted into the military structures of the Austro-Hungarian Army. Most joined the 83rd Imperial and Royal Infantry Regiment, which initially fought in Galicia and the Carpathian Mountains and finally also in the Italian battlefield. The share of losses relative to the entire population of Prekmurje was 3.6%, surpassing the average of the former Austro-Hungarian territories. About 2,000 soldiers from Prekmurje received military decorations. (*Mark Krenn*)

The creation of new nation-states in the aftermath of the First World War drew new borders and cut a deep wedge into local communities. The demarcation of the new boundary between Hungary and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was fraught with difficulties, as the theoretical boundary, determined by the Treaty of Trianon, still had to be set out on the ground. Both sides tried to shift the border to their own advantage and, by doing so, greatly interfered with the daily life of the local populations. (*Tadeja Andrejek*) The problems persisted even after the boundary was finally settled. On the one hand, it negatively affected the Prekmurje Hungarians, who abruptly found themselves as a national minority within the newly established state. They expressed their discontent in different ways, while the new authorities, despite their assurances to the contrary, went ahead with the implementation of assimilation policy. (*László Göncz*) On the other hand, Prekmurje was not a popular destination even among Slovenians or Yugoslavs themselves. Teachers compared their relocation to Prekmurje with being sent to a penal colony, and the same perspective was voiced by civil servants. This led the Association of State Employees and Pensioners in Murska Sobota in 1923–1924 to demand financial benefits and preferential calculation of pensionable service for its members. (*Željko Oset*)

The interwar period brought about major social change with a particularly devastating impact on the former nobility. The agrarian reform forced many noble families, including the Counts Szapáry in Murska Sobota, to sell their estates. However, the very inventories that were compiled during such sales now allow for the reconstruction of former castle interiors. One such example is the once richly furnished Murska Sobota Castle Chapel, from which only a handful of objects have been preserved to date. (*Renata Komić Marn*)

During the Second World War, Prekmurje briefly returned under Hungarian rule, while the resistance movement only began to form in the final stages of the conflict and with the Soviet forces approaching. Because the region served as an important corridor of German retreat towards Austria thanks to its transport and geostrategic position, military operations there continued even after the official end to hostilities. (*Klemen Kocjančič, Blaž Torkar*) Several hundred Red Army soldiers of different nationalities, mobilized throughout the Soviet Union, were among those who perished in the concluding battles in Prekmurje. Their remains were transferred to a collective tomb in Murska Sobota in 1962; the vast majority have been identified. This number further includes 146 troops who had been mobilized in the territory of present-day Ukraine. (*Metka Fujs*) The Second World War brought about the destruction of the Jewish community in Prekmurje, which had been permanently settled there since the eighteenth century. Their economically powerful community also had a profound impact on the region's cultural landscape. Most Prekmurje Jews perished in concentration camps and a few survivors moved to Israel after the war. The memory of Jews in Prekmurje has

been preserved through a few examples of material remains, such as the cemetery and the synagogue. (*Oto Luthar*)

Prekmurje's postwar development was crucially marked by the Mura textile company founded in Murska Sobota in 1952 from the textile factories of Janez Cvetič and Ludvik Šiftar, which had been in operation since before the Second World War. The new government sent both industrialists to prison, confiscated their properties, and established a new textile company by merging their factories. (*Gordana Šövegeš Lipovšek*)

Due to its specific geographic position, Prekmurje played an important strategic role in Slovenia's independence in the landmark year of 1991. The area was primarily defined by the immediate proximity of Austria, Hungary, and Croatia along with the presence of the Yugoslav Army's military facilities. Timely planning, effective command, high-level coordination, and local support all contributed to the successful defence strategy. (*Klemen Kocjančič, Pavel Vuk*)

A very important period in Prekmurje is the Easter season, characterized by a series of events ranging from processions, mortar firing, and games with decorated Easter eggs, locally known as *remenke*. The diverse religious composition of Prekmurje is further manifested in the differences between Catholic and Evangelical Easter traditions. (*Mateja Huber*)

An essential part of any discussion on Prekmurje is the Roma and their strong mark on the region. Prekmurje Roma are regarded as an example of Romani integration into Slovenian society. Indeed, as researchers observe, living side by side with the majority Prekmurje population has caused the culture of the Romani community to blend more closely with the dominant Slovenian culture. It turns out that the Roma or Gypsies are not so special after all, as some might wish, and that Roma and Slovenians share much more in common than it may be generally believed. (*Jelka Pšajd*)

One of Prekmurje's unique characteristics is its language, which is often difficult for the rest of Slovenia to understand. Nonetheless, it is found in songs that are widespread across Slovenia. Everyone surely knows the upbeat folk song *Marko skače*. The Prekmurje dialect also features in contemporary creativity, for example, in rap lyrics written by the group Stekli psi. (*Tjaša Jakop*)

The thematic issue of *Kronika* concludes with an overview of how Prekmurje is presented in encyclopaedias and lexicons, with the analysis pointing to various degrees of representation and interpretation of historical processes. The usual presentation includes a chronological view of development spanning prehistory and the twentieth century, with an emphasis on political events; some local peculiarities are also highlighted, most notably the famous Shrovetide tradition, referred to by locals as *borovo gostüvanje*. (*Darja Kerec*)

Prekmurje is therefore the next region of Slovenia to which *Kronika* has dedicated a special issue. The articles published in this issue reveal new insights into the history of Prekmurje, whilst also raising new questions and shedding light on certain gaps in Prekmurje's past, which will undoubtedly be the subject of in-depth research in the future.

The publication of *Kronika*'s thematic issue on Prekmurje was financially supported by ZRC SAZU, Muncipality of Beltinci, Urban Municipality of Murska Sobota, Ustanova Fundacija Jožefa Klekla st., the companies Pomgrad and Megras along with Pomurske lekarne, for which I would like to express my sincere gratitude.

Miha Preinfalk
Managing Editor of *Kronika*

