

60 km  
186 C3  
E5

# Kočevje

Gottschee

The history of Kočevje was closely associated with the mediaeval colonization of the Kočevje region. It was initiated and executed by the Counts of Ortenburg, the then Lords of a substantial part of Lower Carniola, Inner Carniola and the region along the upper river Kolpa. The centre of the Ortenburg estates was in Carinthia and Tyrol. They had first appeared in Slovenia after 1220, when the dominions of Ribnica and Čušperk were enfeoffed to them by the Patriarchs of Aquileia, and erected the castles

period villages in the plain of Kočevsko Polje were established. Otto V had the new feudal centre built in the form of a *villa* with the chapel of St. Bartholomew in the place called *Mooswald*, or Mahovnik in Slovene ('mossy forest, place'). In 1337 the Patriarch of Aquileia elevated the chapel to a subsidiary of the parish of Ribnica. Otto VI carried out the colonization of remote places even more ambitiously than his predecessor; the process involved extensive deforestation and substantial resources.<sup>1</sup> It is of minor importance whether the story of the settlement of rebellious Frankish-Thuringian peasants was true or not. The fact is that during his period the region of Kočevje became populated to such an extent that churches had to be erected in five settlements and regular services provided. The document of the Patriarch from 1363 settling the ecclesiastic affairs in the area stated that 'in some forests and groves that used to be uninhabited and uncultivated dwellings were created for people, and the same forests and groves were deforested for agriculture, and a large number of people was gathered. In those places the inhabitants [...] erected new churches [...] as permitted by our blessed Son of Christ, the illustrious Count Otto VI of Ortenburg, on whose estate the above-mentioned estates are located...'<sup>2</sup>

The name of Kočevje first appeared in that document in its German form *Gotsche*.<sup>3</sup> The new name replaced the previous *Mooswald*, yet it had named the place and the region for long. In



Poljane and Kostel on the periphery of the Kočevje region even before colonization took place.

The most important representatives of the Ortenburgs for Kočevje and the Kočevje region in the fourteenth century were Otto V, Provost of Brixen, who died in 1348, and his nephew Otto VI, who died in 1374. The two dates marked two waves of colonization in the Kočevje region. During the first





the next document from 1377 Otto VI spoke of 'our borough in Kočevje', which was the first record of that place as an urban settlement.

Most authors are of the opinion that Kočevje was not located in the meander of the river Rinža while it was a borough, but on its left bank, adjacent to the former graveyard and the church of St. Bartholomew. The conclusions about the transfer of the settlement are based primarily on the location of the church of St. Bartholomew, which was first recorded in 1339, as mentioned above. The second source was the civic privilege of Emperor Friedrich III from 1471,

by means of which the Emperor ordered the transfer of the town or rather the construction of a new settlement at a safer location.

Yet it must be stated that the formulation in the privilege containing the 'order' for the removal was almost equal to the formulation in the privileges of Krško and Višnja Gora. In the case of Krško it was evident that its location was not altered after the acquisition of the status of a town. Višnja Gora had equally been located at the present site decades before Friedrich III issued the privilege deed. Therefore it can be concluded, in the case of Kočevje, that the Emperor only defined the status of the town





Karl Postl,  
Kočevje,  
gouache, 1864

in the legal sense and facilitated the construction of fortifications by means of resources brought about by the status. It was clear on the basis of strategic and defence considerations that only the part of the town located on the meander of the river, adjacent to the former Ortenburg court, was fortified. A weir was built in front of the town in the south-easterly direction, raising the level of the disappearing river Rinža, the flow of which dried out in dry spells. In this way water was provided for the dike along the western side of the town, and the meander was turned into an island. The church and the graveyard remained on the other side of the Rinža.

It seemed that Kočevje had not been walled-in during the fifteenth century and for some time thereafter, but surrounded by a wooden stockade, clearly depicted in the arms of Kočevje.<sup>4</sup> Yet the town was in desperate need of stronger walls. In 1492 the Emperor once again ordered the citizens and serfs to construct it. However, it was evident from written documents that the walls had not been completed even by 1501. In any case, in the great fire in 1596 there were walls built of stone around Kočevje. Valvasor reported about a century later that the town was 'surrounded by mighty walls with a tower in each corner, and a moat on top of that.' In the second half of the eighteenth century the walls were still preserved, although most had already disintegrated, and the moat was gone.<sup>5</sup> The walls were finally pulled down at the turn of the

nineteenth century, since they were no longer depicted in the Franz cadastre of 1825.

In 1471 Stari Trg by the church of St. Bartholomew<sup>6</sup> was mentioned in a privilege deed, and that record was the only proof of the original location of the borough on the right bank of the river Rinža. Later the name of Stari Trg sank into oblivion. St. Bartholomew with the graveyard had served as the parish church of the town until the Modern Age.<sup>7</sup> Thereafter the seat of the parish was transferred to the town church of St. Florian, which has since then been consecrated to St. Fabian and Sebastian. In 1872 the church of St. Bartholomew was pulled down. The graveyard was abolished some decades ago, and now blocks of flats are standing at the same location. The fate of the other centre of the settlement, the former Ortenburg court, was even more tragic. Under the Habsburgs, who succeeded the Counts of Ortenburg and the Counts of Celje as feudal lords, the former court was transformed into a public building with the seat of the office of Kočevje. When the town was walled-in, it was integrated into the fortification and served as an additional stronghold by the southern town gate. At the end of the sixteenth century it was so old and crumbling that it was provisionally restored, but thereafter destroyed in a fire. It was the new town lords, the Counts of Auersperg, who had thoroughly rebuilt it in 1641 and transformed it into a powerful castle residence, which was praised by Valvasor. It

impressed him to such an extent that he had it depicted in the engraving of Kočevje in his book *Die Ehre des Hertzogthums Crain (The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola)* as much larger than the rest of the town. The castle was damaged during the Second World War. After 1945 no attempt was made at its restoration; on the contrary, it was levelled out, so that nothing has remained of it.

The former imposing main square – the inhabitants called it Hauptgasse, ‘main street’ – was surrounded by town dwellings built of stone. It was typical of Kočevje that stone-built houses had prevailed since the second half of the eighteenth century. Some timber ones were preserved on the periphery of the town. The mills on both banks of the river Rinža above the upper bridge were likewise made of timber.

The picture of the main square from 1864 depicted a typical funnel-shaped quadrangle.<sup>1</sup> It was visually closed on both sides by two retracted buildings. On the northern side there was the town church, and on the southern a town dwelling opposite the northern corner of the castle. Most houses were one storey high, some even two, with broader facades. Ancient houses prevailed among the lower ones, with narrower facades with crested gables facing the square. There were two arched openings on the ground floor. One of them served as an entrance to the hallway of the home and the other to the shop or workshop.

Like other towns in Slovenia Kočevje had lost two ancient symbols during the last two centuries, namely the town walls and the gallows. The latter was located close to the pilgrim church in Trate, along the northern road leading into the town, through the village of Mlaka and further in the direction of Ribnica.<sup>9</sup> It is tragic that the town has lost almost all its urban features (the divisions into plots and street islands, old town houses along the main square and in side streets) on account of the modern *damnatio memoriae*. Only the disfigured main square has been preserved, the present Trg Zbora Odposlancev, as well as the locations of the two bridges across the Rinža and the successor of the

Auersperg town church of St. Florian built at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup>

*Jelka Pirkovič*

<sup>1</sup> It is known that Otto had borrowed larger sums of money from the Jews of Ljubljana on several occasions. Ivan Simončič, *Zgodovina kočevskega ozemlja*, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> The document was written in Latin as was common in the Church administration. Since Latin scribes had not translated the Slovene names into German (as was common in German documents), the inscription of *Gotsche* is in contrast to the theory of the Slovene origin of the name of Kočevje.

<sup>4</sup> Let me note briefly that the arms of Kočevje contained an interesting inscription *Sigillum civitatis in Kotschew* 1471. This means that the name was translated into Slovene.

<sup>5</sup> Vincenc Rajšp, Majda Ficko, *Slovenija na vojaškem zemljevidu 1763–1787*, Ljubljana, ZRC SAZU, AS, Vol. I, 1995, p. 73.

<sup>6</sup> One of the three annual fairs supposedly took place there, namely the one dedicated to St. Bartholomew. Peter von Raditz, *Aus dem Privilegienbuche der Stadt Gottschee*, Argo, II, 1893, No. 10, pp. 187–189.

<sup>7</sup> There are two existing records concerning the removal of the seat of the parish. It should have happened either in 1791 or in 1871. Stane Bernik, *Kočevje: urbanistično arhitekturni oris: topografsko gradivo*, Ljubljana, Zavod za spomeniško varstvo, 1969, notes Nos. 27 and 28, pp. 33 and 34.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Postl, *Malerische Skizzen von Gottschee und denen in Krain und Istrien liegenden Herzoglich von Auersperg'schen Domainen, / nach der Natur aufgenommen und verfaßt von Carl Postl, k.k. Ingenieur in der aufgelösten ungarischen Landesbaubehörde in Pension / 1864*. The manuscript book is kept in Študijska knjižnica Mirana Jarca in Novo Mesto.

<sup>9</sup> The gallows was drawn in the chart section 232 of the military map of Emperor Joseph II. The textual part included information about the road to Ribnica leading over Koblarji at that time. Vincenc Rajšp, Majda Ficko, *Slovenija na vojaškem zemljevidu 1763–1787*, Ljubljana, ZRC SAZU, AS, Vol. I, 1995, p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> The plans for it were drawn by Viennese architect Friederick von Schmidt.