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Lož

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It is difficult to imagine that Lož was a prosperous town during the Middle Ages. Soon afterwards it started to deteriorate for various reasons. A record from the eighteenth century states: 'The town used to be respectable, and it is still a town of the Prince of the

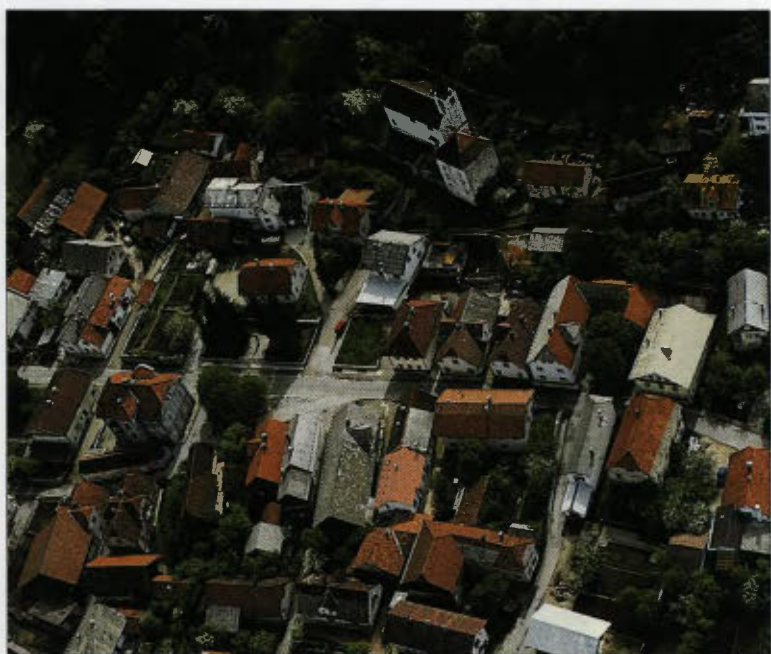


Province. Yet it was so discriminated due to its decline that it hardly resembles a village.¹ Sources from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries presented a different picture of life. There were weavers, carpenters, peddlers, inn-

keepers, cobblers, tanners and bag-makers recorded in Lož, which indicated that the settlement supplied the neighbourhood with its products and services. There were also gold-smiths,² and particularly merchants trading over long distances.³ The trade route between the continental hinterland and the sea passed through Lož.

The trade and political circumstances of that time must be taken into account. The Patriarch of Aquileia was the feudal lord of the broader territory of Inner Carniola, Istria, Karst and the drainage-basin of the river Kolpa. The passages from Friuli to Carniola and the routes over the Snežniško highland and the mountains of Gorski Kotar towards the Gulf of Quarnero were under his control.

In the thirties of the fourteenth century the Patriarch had enfeoffed the dominion of Lož to the Ortenburgs for the first time.⁴ About a century ago the dominions of Ribnica and Čušperk were equally enfeoffed to them by the Patriarch, and later additionally the castles of Ortnek, Poljane and Kostel. The presence of the Ortenburgs in the upper valley of the Kolpa had increased the importance of the routes from Bloke along the Loško valley and the plain of Babno Polje to the Gulf of Quarnero. That was an ancient





route, confirmed by remnants of Roman *limes* in Prezid, which was named after it (in Slovene 'zid' denotes a 'wall'). Some historians point out that the route had only appeared since the end of the fourteenth or fifteenth century.⁵ Such chronological determination is based primarily on the data of increased traffic and the emergence of toll-houses connected with it in the present Croatian part of the route. Goods that were traded from the interior to the sea were primarily wheat, honey, wax and cattle hides, and salt in the opposite direction. Contraband and peasant trade were equally prosperous.

It is not surprising that the castle of Lož as the original centre of the settlement and the *raison d'être* of the urban settlement emerged on a height above the most favourable mountain pass leading from the plain of Cerkniško Polje and from the height of Bloke to the Loško valley. The castle was first recorded in 1218, yet its architec-

tural elements indicate that a castle *palazzio* was built in the twelfth century.⁶ The castle was the seat of the provincial court of law. The scaffold where capital punishments were executed was located on the periphery of the dominion, by the path linking the baptismal chapel of St. Gertrude in Nadlesk with the pilgrim mountain of Križna Gora. A fact worth highlighting is that in the case of Lož the province, the castle and the borough were called by the same name, as in the case of Metlika. To make things even more complicated the name of the settlement additionally referred to the place by the parish church of St. George, the present Stari Trg ('old borough'). The parish had probably emerged relatively early, about the middle of the twelfth century, and it was first recorded in 1221.⁷ Stari Trg was therefore an example of a settlement with a prehistoric, or rather, a classical tradition and an original parish, which was granted fair deeds in the Middle Ages (the borough was



first recorded in 1237), yet with hardly any urban features. A map of Stari Trg from about 1800 depicted a village with houses along two roads crossing perpendicularly.⁸ The first one was the main road from the plain of Babno Polje to Lož, and the second one led upwards to the parish church. There it was expanded to form a funnel-shaped square of small proportions, with about ten building sites.

In 1341 the Patriarch of Aquileia permitted, at the request of the Head of Lož, the borough to be removed together with the fair deeds to another location beneath the castle of Lož. The document of the Patriarch reported, among other things, that the inhabitants and *coloni* of Stari Trg were to move with the fair and build their houses there for reasons of defence and in order to promote the development of the borough.⁹ The decision was probably influenced by the fact that a few decades earlier the parish priest of Stari Trg helped the Counts of Gorizia to take temporal possession of the dominion of Lož.¹⁰ In spite of everything, the decades after the removal were not more peaceful, since the castle and the borough were seized by enemies in succession.

The new borough of Lož had a street plan formed by a funnel-shaped square out of the main road and a lateral street leading to the town church of St. Peter. The path continued past the mighty defence tower of Tabor and upwards to the castle of Lož. Valvasor's engraving of Lož from 1689 depicted the castle as a ruin, yet still with power-

ful walls. The rectification of the Franz cadastre noted the exact location of the surrounding walls and the ruins of the centre, yet the whole was divided into dozens of small plots. In the nineteenth century the remains of the castle obviously served as a quarry, and after the disengagement of land it was appropriated by nearby peasants.

The land by the borough was divided into street islands. The islands on the eastern side of the square, beneath the hill, were not typical on account of the elevation of the terrain. The northern part of the settlement showed obvious signs of an earlier mediaeval centre, maybe a court and a toll-house along the main road, or even of a village as a precursor of the borough.¹¹ The urban plan of the western part of the settlement was a relatively clear example of a mediaeval strip division into plots, from which the original division into house blocks was discernible. The blocks consisted of three or four building units, i.e. *burgages*. The lateral division into street islands was also indicated, yet the islands were not built up on all four sides on account of the stagnation of the development of the borough.

The Franz cadastre from 1823 clearly showed the course of the wall street and the land where the walls and the moat used to be. A brook still flows along the same course. The walls and the moat filled with water already existed in 1380,¹² almost a century after the elevation of Lož to a town. The privilege deed was issued by Em-



peror Friedrich in 1477, almost at the same time as for Krško.

Valvasor's view of Lož clearly depicted that the town was of oval form. In the description of Lož pertaining to a military map from the period of Emperor Joseph II it was written that the town walls still existed, yet they were low and inadequate.¹³ They had been pulled down by 1825, since they were no longer depicted in the Franz cadastre. The northern gate was visible in Valvasor's view of Lož, and it was protected by a cylindrical tower with a tent-shaped roof. The other gate could be discerned by the juncture of the walls and the road towards Stari Trg. If Valvasor's view was creditable, the course of the town walls must have been to the north of the town church of St. Peter. The church with its belfry and the tower of Tabor constituted a special defence complex with their walls. The tower of Tabor was probably part of the earliest pre-urban fortification on account of its dimensions and the location by the entrance to the castle, and simultaneously the residential and defence seat of one of the ministerials of Lož.

The former prominence of Lož was confirmed by the fact that the houses in the main square and some others had been built of stone since ancient times.¹⁴ Their present appearance does not differ greatly from the appearance of houses in nearby villages of the Loško valley. The houses in the main square were one storey high, as a rule, facing the square with their narrower sides and gables. There were passages between houses, some of which were narrow, only a metre wide; others were broader and served as drives. It is interesting that there are still numerous entrances from side streets and not from the main road. It would take further investigation, even of an archaeological nature, to prove whether that is a sign of the early origins of that type of house or a consequence of ruralization.

Jelka Pirkovič

¹ Vincenc Rajšp, Majda Ficko, *Slovenija na vojaškem zemljevidu 1763–1787*, Ljubljana, ZRC SAZU, AS, Vol. I, 1995, p. 55.

² Božo Otorepec, *Srednjeveški pečati in grbi mest in trgov na Slovenskem*, Ljubljana, Slovenska matica in ZRC SAZU, 1988, p. 98.

³ There were seven merchants from Lož in Rijeka in 1437. Ferdo Gestrin, *Trgovina slovenskega zaledja s primorskimi mesti*, SAZU, Ljubljana 1965, pp. 44–45.

⁴ Dušan Kos, *Med gradom in mestom: Odnos kranjskega, slovenještajerskega in koroškega plemstva do gradov in meščanskih naselij do začetka 15. stoletja*, Ljubljana, ZRC SAZU, 1994, p. 187.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 204.

⁶ Ivan Stopar, *Gradovi na Slovenskem*, Ljubljana, Cankarjeva založba, 1986, p. 322.

⁷ Janez Höfler, *O prvih cerkvah in pražupnijah na Slovenskem*, Ljubljana, Znanstveni inštitut FF, 1986, p. 41.

⁸ Janez Kebe, *Loška dolina z Babnim poljem*, p. 240.

⁹ '[...] ibi domus eorum facere et aedificare'. *Ibidem*, p. 19.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

¹¹ An old source from 1283 recorded seven farms in the village Wizdorf in connection with the castle of Lož; Stanc Okoliš, *Izseki iz zgodovine Loža in okolice*, p. 561. The tollhouse of Lož was first recorded in 1313 (Jože Mlinarič, *Sriška opatija 1136–1784*, Novo mesto, Dolenjska založba, 1995, p. 119.) The exact location is unknown. It was probably beneath the castle, in the subsequent borough of Lož. The second possibility with the name Šrenga is denied by the fact that it is not located by the main road, but by a branch leading past Snežnik Castle over Snežniško Pogorje to the valley of the river Reka.

¹² Božo Otorepec, *Srednjeveški pečati in grbi mest in trgov na Slovenskem*, p. 97.

¹³ Vincenc Rajšp, Majda Ficko, as quoted.

¹⁴ At least that was the state of affairs according to the Franz cadastre from 1825. An earlier source recorded that almost all houses in the town were made of wood.