

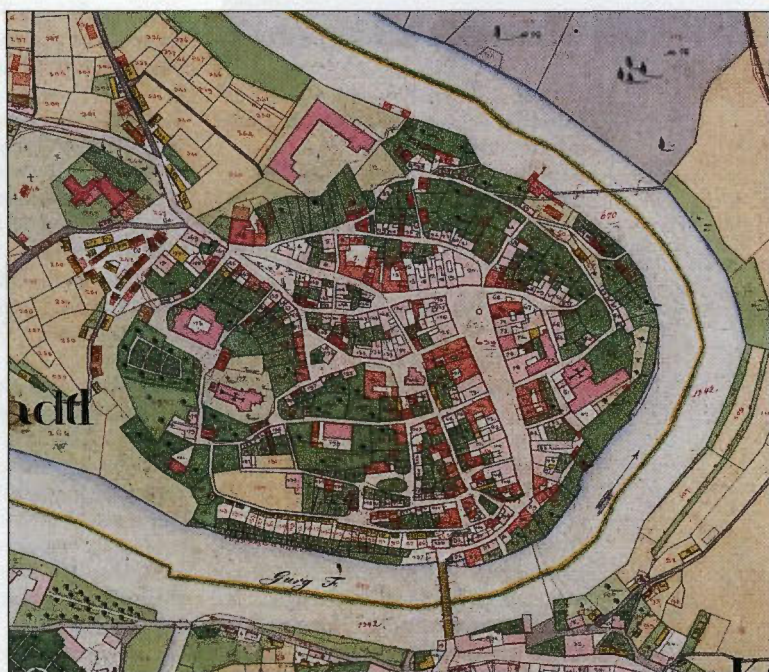
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Novo Mesto

Rudolfswert, Neustadtl, Rudolfovo

In contrast to other towns presented in this book, in the case of Novo Mesto the establishment of the town coincided with its construction. Rudolf IV of Habsburg had the town built¹ either in 1364, or at the beginning of 1365, and in April 1365 he issued the privilege deed for it. Novo Mesto was also important because it represented the type of town in the possession of the ruler, the Prince of the Province with special privileges. When Rudolf's advisers were selecting the location for the construction of Novo Mesto, they had to inspect the surrounding area and evaluate that the location on

the hill in the meander of the river Krka called Gradec was the most advantageous one. At that time Gradec was in possession of the Cistercian monastery in Stična. There were other meanders on the river from that point upwards, yet they were less suitable for settlement. Three further meanders downstream the Krka were settled at the time of the construction of Novo Mesto, in spite of constant flooding. The Freising borough of Guttenwert and the Spanheim town of Kostanjevica grew there. The third urban settlement, recorded in documents as *Chronaw*, was presumably located near





Dolenje Kronovo, on the river meander with a significant ancient fallow name of Tržič.²

The location of Gradec of Stična was sunny and safe from floods. It was surrounded by rural countryside and was located at the intersection of two important transit routes. The first one led from Hungary along the valley of the Krka, and across the Rašica towards the Gulf of Trieste and Italy. The second one, in a lateral direction, connected Gradec through the toll-house of Mehovo with Metlika and further with the Gulf of Quarnero. Such favourable circumstances contributed to the emergence of a presumed prehistoric stronghold³ at the location of Gradec, and another, larger and more important one in its direct proximity, i.e. in Marof. The stronghold in Marof reached its climax in the Hallstattan Age. We know of the existence of both strongholds indirectly, on the basis of finds in the fields of Chapter, Town and Znanec. The area had also been settled during the La Tène and Roman periods.

Let us turn back to the middle of the fourteenth century. Rudolf of Habsburg had agreed with the Prior of Stična on the exchange of Gradec for another estate.⁴ In the same year he issued the privilege deed for the town.

The special political and strategic role of Novo Mesto influenced the characteristics of its urban plan. It was the only town in Slovenia that was not sheltered by a castle. The

Chapter Church of St. Nicholas stood atop the hill instead of the expected castle of the town lord; however, the presumed fortified tower of Stična had been located there before 1365.⁵ The Chapter was initiated by the then Emperor, another Habsburg, Friedrich III, a century after the establishment of the town, in 1495. The church building was constructed in several phases since the first quarter of the fifteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth.⁶ The near-by Provostship is equally the result of development through the centuries. Circular town walls were typical of Novo Mesto, apart from the acropolis-like Chapter. The course of the walls was determined by the location of the town on a mound, surrounded by a river meander from three sides. In the place of Pod Bregom where a ferry-boat crossed the Krka, the walls were doubled.⁷ Remnants were preserved on the north-western side, below the top of the Chapter hill. The inhabitants of Novo Mesto call that part Šance. It was there that the town was connected with the 'mainland'. Two gates led into the town, the north-eastern Gorenja Vrata and the southern Dolenja Vrata ('upper and lower gates'). Remains of the first one were discovered during the restoration of the Skabernet house and the district office (the present library) opposite to it. The lower gate protected the crossing of the river. The earliest suburb of Novo Mesto, Kandija, was located on the opposite river bank. According to its name it could have been as old as the use of the name Kandija for 'the land on the other side of water' after the Candian war between the Venetians and the Turks (1645–1669).⁸ The northern arterial road descended towards the upper gate from Marof, where gallows used to stand as late as the eighteenth century – sinister proof of blood judicature. The third urban feature that distinguished Novo Mesto from other towns in Slovenia was the large Main Square of an oblong trapezoidal shape. Its dimensions were exceptional. In the upper, northern part it was almost rectangular, gradually narrowing towards the south, yet not graded. Until the construction of the present bridge

over the Krka in 1898 the square was closed by a group of houses, and a steep winding street led from its south-western corner through the lower gate towards the river crossing. Such urban features prove that the square was constructed according to a consistent plan and simultaneously with the establishment of the town. This, of course, was not the case with houses along the square: they were constantly being rebuilt on account of their 'depletion', repeated fires and also of changes of taste or new requirements. The main architectural emphasis of the upper half of the square with houses of wealthy citizens was created by arched hallways on the ground floors. Such a feature was exceptional in the architectural heritage of Slovenia. The most plausible explanation for it was that the masons, who had come to the city to build the church of St. Nicholas and the Provostship, executed some 'prestigious' additions to the houses of Main Square, like portals, window frames and arcades. Stylistic features of the preserved parts and the manner of construction proved that the oldest arcades were erected in the middle of the fifteenth century, and the majority of them at the time of the establishment of the College Chapter, when the town had reached its heyday.⁹

The periphery of Main Square was divided into typical Gothic strip-

shaped plots. The lower, eastern edge of the square was clearly not built up yet in the second half of the fifteenth century. A Franciscan monastery with the church of St. Leonard had settled in the background of the square after 1472, on the basis of money donated to it by the aristocracy and contributed by the citizenry.¹⁰ The gardens behind the town dwellings and the location of the Franciscan monastery inside the town walls proved that the town was planned on a grand scale even during its establishment. The other, Capuchin monastery, the construction of which began in 1658, had to make do with a location outside the town gate, along the northern arterial road. Final remnants of this monastery have recently been discovered during the construction of a new commercial centre in New Square. The remains of a pre-urban stage of settlement, i.e. Gradec of Stična, are a distinctive feature of Novo Mesto. They can be traced on the highest terrace beneath the Chapter hill, in the present Prešeren Square.¹¹ Presumably there was an ancient route connecting the stronghold of Marof with the crossing of the river Krka. This is the present-day location of Prešeren Square, and Sokol and Dilač Streets. Before the year 1365 there were farms along the same route, recorded in a deed of exchange between Rudolf IV and the monastery of Stična. When the



land was measured for the new town, a large market-place was drawn, apart from Gradec on the lower terrace, which had to be deforested, as the heart of the new urban settlement.¹²

Streets along the town walls were typical of Novo Mesto, similar to all other mediaeval towns that were walled-in. Such streets were of later origins and developed from paths leading along the walls inside the town. The paths facilitated maintenance of the walls and were vital during attacks as access to the fortifications. On account of that they had to be maintained and unobstructed with overgrowth. After the walls had lost their defence function, the area adjacent to them was built up and the paths were turned into streets. In Novo Mesto the circle of wall streets enclosed the ancient centre of the town almost completely. Their course is interrupted in two areas of special importance, i.e. in the gardens of the Provostship and the Franciscan monastery. The lower classes settled along Vrhovec, School and Hladnik Streets and Breg where there are still smaller, mostly single-storey houses. Their line is located on a rocky slope on Breg, in a picturesque way that is a typical feature of Novo Mesto.

Jelka Pirkovič

³ Borut Križ mentioned not only the stronghold in the area of Marof confirmed by excavations, but also the location on the Chapter hill. Borut Križ, *Prazgodovinska gradišča v občini Novo mesto, Novomeški zbornik*, 1985, pp. 29-30.

⁴ Jože Mlinarič, *Stiška opatija 1136-1784*, Novo mesto, Dolenjska založba, 1995, p. 149.

⁵ Jože Mlinarič, *Stiška opatija 1136-1784*, Novo mesto, Dolenjska založba, 1995, pp. 43, 44.

⁶ A synthetic overview of the history of the construction of Chapter Church was presented by Robert Peskar. He followed Komelj's explanation of two construction stages. *Gotika v Sloveniji*, Razstavnica katalog, Ljubljana, 1995, pp. 113-114.

⁷ Fortification devices were first recorded in written sources in 1437. Komelj dated the remnants of the walls as from the first half of the sixteenth century, on account of the preserved architectural details, e.g. embrasures. Ivan Komelj, *Umetnostna preteklost Novega mesta*, p. 198. The town walls along the Krka, together with three towers, were drawn on the military map of Emperor Joseph II, issued between 1763 and 1787.

⁸ Kandija, i.e. Candia, was another name for Crete. If nothing else, the consequence of the war was experienced in Slovenia in the form of refugees from Dalmatia, who fled from the Turks.

⁹ Could the stone-cutter marks preserved in Chapter Church indicate from where the masons had come to Šentrupert and then to Novo Mesto? The solution to this riddle would render greater significance to the estimation about the models for Udine in Friuli or for several towns in Bohemia. Gregorič and Komelj dated the majority of the arcades in Main Square as from the second half of the sixteenth century. Jože Gregorič, *Kulturna slika Novega mesta in njegovo zunanje lice*, p. 123; Ivan Komelj, *Umetnostna preteklost Novega mesta*, p. 198.

¹⁰ The inscription on the plaque above the old monastery porch informs that the citizens had resigned the chapel of St. Leonard to the new monastery, and the money for the purchase of land was donated by Elizabeta Snopčan from the family of the Lords of Črnomelj.

¹¹ Several authors, Gregorič, Mušič and Komelj among them, argued that remnants of the fortified Gradec of Stična were preserved in the lower part of the Chapter tower.

¹² The name of the earliest town church of St. Antony in the Woods was recorded in written sources. It was pulled down in the second half of the nineteenth century.

¹ Milko Kos, *Ustanovitev Novega mesta, Novo mesto 1365-1965*, Maribor, Obzorja, 1969, p. 78.

² Stane Granda, *Srednjeveški trg Kronovo, Grafenauerjev zbornik*, Ljubljana, 1966, pp. 232-330.