





The Establishment and Development of Mediaeval Towns in Slovene Styria

Since the very beginning towns as settlements with liberal inhabitants had played a different role in the administration of the country, its economic organization and communications infrastructure than the countryside with its feudal system of villages and hamlets. It was that difference that transformed the towns into entities that influenced their direct and often distant surroundings in accordance with the growing importance of fiscal economy. Some of the towns had stagnated in their development due to historical reasons of the Modern Age, yet none of them deteriorated. Since their urban development had regularly passed the stages from a borough village to a borough and finally a town (not always at the same location), it is almost impossible to trace them within their present appearances or even ground plans (from plot structures). Thus the village predecessors of Maribor were the settlements around Garrison and Castle Squares (Vojašniški and Grajski Trg), and the borough predecessor was the settlement along Koroško Road. Pre-Hungarian Ptuj originated from hamlets near the bridgehead in Vičava, on the Dominican plateau and around Provost Church, and post-Hungarian Ptuj from the borough settlement between Castle Hill and the river Drava. Slovenj Gradec originated from near-by Stari Trg ('old borough') with Gradec, Slovenska Bistrica from the village of Gradišče in the south-eastern part of the town, Brežice from the former adjacent village of Gradišče (later destroyed by the river Sava), Ormož from a Hungarian hamlet in the western part of the settlement rampart, and Celje from a bridgehead hamlet on the southern periphery of classical urban remnants.

Although some boroughs had developed more or less perfect borough plans and built their *rotovži* ('town halls') and spitals, only some of them could have 'afforded' complete town walls or partial



Unknown artist, Maribor, painting in oils on canvas, 1681

ones. The walls were obligatory for towns and therefore constructed with no exceptions, not only for reasons of defence, but also due to their legal status based on the principle that 'the urban air was liberating.'

The first question to be answered in a study of towns in Slovene Styria is the question of when they came into existence. The direct tradition of Antiquity was out of the question even in the cases of Celje and Ptuj, since there was a gap in their settlement between the sixth and eighth centuries of such proportions that it cannot be considered as continuity. That, however, does not indicate that they were not occasionally partly inhabited, at the least. Celje is closest to continuity according to its location, since its mediaeval centre was connected with classical remains in its ground plan, and the Modern Age town even utilized their sewage system in the nineteenth century. A similar, yet less direct connection took place in Ptuj. Its post-Hungarian settlement had developed to the east of the classical one, along its suburban road and the present Prešeren and Murko Streets towards the east. After the Frankish conquest of Slovenia at the end of the eighth century the more extensive development of trade and traffic began which facilitated the emergence of the first borough settlements adjacent to still usable and at least partly restored Roman roads.

Ptuj was first recorded in 853, when the church in the possession of Prince Pribin near his court was consecrated. Both the church and the court were presumably located on the Dominican prominence above the road, which ascended from the renovated bridgehead in Vičava beyond, and led further along the valley between Panorama and Castle Hill to Rogoznica. In 874 the settlement consisted of three hamlets, the two adjacent to the bridgehead and Pribin's court and another of Prince Kocelj on the other side of Castle Hill with a court and a church located close to the remnants of the classical cemetery basilica. A road led to them along the ancient classical layout, surrounded by the remains of Roman grave plots. The settlement prospered in all respects since it obtained a bridge with a bridge toll, an annual fair with a fair toll, a court and the parish seat near Pribin's church, which depended on the newly introduced 'Slovene' tithe. Except for the public buildings enumerated above there were further buildings in Ptuj at that time: storehouses, lodgings, dwelling places and also courts. It was typical for the settlement topography that the western part was designated as the lower one, and the eastern as the upper one, which was reasonable according to the position of the bridgehead and the elevation of the terrain, yet in contrast with subsequent denominations referring to the flow of the river. There was an



Celje, watercolour based on the original from the middle of the 18th century, Provincial Museum of Celje

additional third part of the settlement, which came under the Archdiocese of Salzburg after the death of Kocelj's widow in 890, and which was presumably located on the Dominican plateau according to the nature of the settlement area. Hungarian occupation lasting for several decades had interrupted or at least hindered the development of the place. It continued after the year 970, when the function of defence was added to those of the bridge and fair. Ptuj had become an important, yet very exposed frontier stronghold. The settlement was fitted with ramparts, and the presumed fort on the hill was replaced by a castle which was at least partly built of stone.

The urban origins of the other six towns were younger originating from the twelfth (Maribor) and thirteenth century (Brežice, Celje, Ormož, Slovenska Bistrica and Slovenj Gradec). Market-places of various forms were their centres from the outset. Some of them were of a strip-shaped or lens-shaped form due to the removal of the transit road (Brežice, Slovenj Gradec), and sometimes with a trumpet-shaped conclusion (Ptuj), while others were extended rectangularly or trapezoidally (Celje, Maribor, Ormož). Slovenska Bistrica additionally had a funnel-shaped conclusion.

During the establishment of boroughs their future functions were taken into consideration, yet they were subsequently completed and thus they influenced the urban transformation of towns. In several settlements additional market-places were soon required, and the market centre was thus spread throughout the town, which caused the development of several town quarters.

The successful development of towns depended on numerous factors, primarily the importance of the founder, geographical features, the communications position and the importance of fortifications, which underwent a new evaluation within the framework of the new provincial defence structure.

The founders of the towns under consideration were the bearers of sovereign rights: the Princes of Provinces (Maribor, Slovenska Bistrica), the Archbishops of Salzburg (Brežice, Ormož, Ptuj), the Patriarch of Aquileia (Slovenj Gradec), and the Counts of Celje elevated to Princes (Celje), yet their founders' rights had entirely devolved to the Habsburgs by the middle of the sixteenth century. The geographic aspect was also important in the emergence of towns since most of them developed close to river crossings (Brežice, Celje, Maribor, Ormož, Ptuj), and only two of them in the centres of large administrative units of the territory (Slovenska Bistrica, Slovenj Gradec). The locations of towns were dictated by the interests of their founders (town lords), who wanted their settlements to be prosperous and close to their administrative and residential posts. Therefore the towns were, as a rule, established



Morik
Steinbach,
Ptuj,
watercoloured
pen-and-ink
drawing, 1832

in the proximity of important castles. On account of their spatial relationships the towns are divided into those established beneath castles and those that had developed adjacent to them. The best example of a town beneath a castle was Ptuj. The Lords of Ptuj resided in the castle above the town as the Ministerials of the Archbishops of Salzburg, while their shooters and militants resided around the castle in twelve shooting courts. Thus the town developed beneath the castle, which had no closer connection with the castle until the middle of the fourteenth century. On the other hand, Maribor cannot be considered as a suburb, since the castle on the Piramida hill was fairly distant from its market centre. The borough emerged along Koroško Road, between the original settlement in Pristan and the administrative court (later the castle) beneath it, and the parish church on a terrace above it. The rest of the towns developed adjacent to castles: Slovenska Bistrica between the court of the Prince of the Province (later the castle) and the village of Gradišče, Brežice between the castle and the parish church of St. Lawrence, Ormož to the west of the castle of the Lords of Ptuj, and Celje between the lower castle of the Counts of Heunburg and the parish church of St. Daniel. Only Slovenj Gradec was established 'on a green meadow', considerably distant from its borough predecessor of Stari Trg and the castle above it.

All seven towns were distinguished by their chosen positions at important transit locations. Another important factor that influenced the formation of urban settlements was their defence aspect. Ptuj and Maribor were the first to obtain town walls in the third quarter of the thirteenth century. They were followed by: Slovenj Gradec in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, Brežice, Ormož and Slovenska Bistrica in the first half of the fourteenth century, and Celje as the final one in the third quarter of the fifteenth century. By means of the town walls the towns distinguished themselves from the feudal countryside that surrounded them. In the fifteenth century their importance for defence increased and with it the positions of strongholds. They played an important role particularly in the sixteenth century when some of them obtained the status of provincial fortresses (Brežice, Maribor, Ptuj), were appropriately fortified and acquired strategic importance on the state level.

During the period of the Traungavs (1056–1147) and Babenbergs (1147–1246) the economic conditions, yet not the formal and legal ones, for the establishment of towns were gradually created. In contrast to the Traungavs the Babenbergs had known towns from their central territory of Lower Austria. Strongholds had already emerged at the sites of Roman camps and castella along the Danubian limes during the Carolingian period. Within them new places developed amidst Roman ruins, and they partly used their more or less preserved walls for their houses and outhouses and for defence. In Lower Austria there were already ten towns in the twelfth century, including Vienna, Tulln and Krems, which developed from Roman ruins. A new feature of urban settlements, unknown before, was introduced through them, namely their defence capability. Open borough settlements were joined by enclosed urban ones, which provided protection and shelter from outside enemies to their inhabitants, temporary refuge to people from the surrounding area, and safe residence to travelling tradesmen and hauliers. Towns had thus joined the castles in their defence capabilities as guarantors of order and security. Consequently, the princes of provinces subsequently used them in their fights against the aristocracy, who relied primarily on their castles in their rebellions. The terms of *civitas* and *oppidum*, which had defined the urban settlements in the Danubian region in the twelfth century, acquired their proper meaning in Slovenia only in the thirteenth century, when the first three towns were formally established: Ptuj, Maribor and Slovenj Gradec. Ptuj, in possession of the Archdiocese of Salzburg, was established before the year 1250, Maribor belonging to the Prince of the Province after 1250, and Slovenj

Gradec in possession of the Patriarch of Aquileia in 1267 owing to the Spanheims. All three were granted the right of town walls, which they all realized in the first half of the thirteenth century. Ptuj with its triangular walls had enclosed the two mendicant monasteries and included the castle by the first half of the fourteenth century, Maribor with its rhomboid walls contained the monastery of Friars Minor and both town courts (the castle and the administrative building), and Slovenj Gradec with its rectangular walls facilitated the emergence of the castles of Rottenturn and Trapp. During these processes all settlements had expanded their areas, which held true particularly of Maribor, which expanded its own by more than threefold. The development of towns was greatly influenced by the internal policy of King Otokar II, Přemisl of Bohemia, who had been the Prince of the Province of Styria for the second time and for a longer period between 1260 and 1276. He was the first to recognize the economic importance of towns and use it for his struggle against the rebellious aristocracy. In order to strengthen his position in the Province he established three new towns at strategic locations. Those were Bruck an der Mur, Leoben and Radgona, and it is only the latter that is of interest to us (the former two being in present-day Austria). Opposite to the borough village that emerged on the southern bank of the river Mura beneath the frontier castle and the original parish of St. Rupert, he set up a settlement on the island of the Mura between 1261 and 1265. It was enclosed by walls with the castle Tabor of the Prince of the Province in its north-eastern part. Radgona, which was recorded as a borough in 1265, and as a town in 1299, distinguished itself as a frontier fortress in skirmishes with the Hungarians in 1286. New monastic orders in the thirteenth century, which no longer avoided settlements, played a decisive role in the establishment of new towns. In contrast to the earlier, more aristocratically reserved Benedictines, Cistercians and Carthusians who were in search of ascetic solitude and who performed great tasks in the colonization of uninhabited land through deforestation, settlement and organization of agricultural cultivation, new orders appeared after 1200. They were seeking closeness with people and settled in the proximity of boroughs and towns. In the fifties four mendicant orders emerged in succession: the Dominicans in 1216, the Friars Minor in 1223, the Carmelites in 1254 and the Augustinians in 1256. The Dominicans settled in Friesach in 1217, and the Friars Minor in Graz in 1238. They were followed by the Augustinians and the Carmelites, and by female orders of the Dominicans, Poor Clares and Carmelites, who were joined by the Teutonic Order and the Maltese Order. It was typical of their monasteries that they were established in the peripheries of towns, partly in order to strengthen their defence capabilities, and partly because there was no room in the towns. Their huge complexes of buildings would have upset the existing settlements that were densely built and could only have accepted



Ormož, The Old Kaiser Suite, needle lithograph, ca. 1830

the monasteries as conceptual intrusions.

After Styria had formally come under the Habsburgs in 1282, another town of the Prince of the Province was established, Slovenska Bistrica. It was granted the status of a town about 1310, before it formally became a Habsburg town. Slovenska Bistrica competed in trade with Maribor against Ptuj, which was in possession of the Archdiocese of Salzburg. It was important primarily due to its location at the intersection of transit routes from Maribor and Ptuj towards Konjice and Poljčane. At that time the road over the Čretveško mountain near Konjice had already gained importance and become a competitive route to that from Ptuj, past Zbelovo and Ponikva to Celje. The other two newly-established towns, Brežice and Ormož, were also in the possession of the Archdiocese of Salzburg. The former extended its market-place into a strip between the castle and the parish church, while the latter formed a rectangular square with the arterial road leading from it through the eastern Borough Gate and later through the north-eastern Hungarian one. Brežice was recorded as a town in 1322, Ormož in 1331, and both were granted the status during the period of Archbishop Friedrich III of Leibnitz (1315–1338), a loyal supporter of the Habsburgs in their struggles with the Bavarian Wittelsbachs, which brought considerable support to the Archdiocese on the part of the Princes of the Province.

In the fifteenth century several boroughs came into existence and only a single town, Celje. It was established by the Counts of Celje turned Princes in 1451, only five years before they had become extinct, and it was completed by the Princes of the Province and the inhabitants through the construction of rectangular enclosing walls in 1473. The town castle together with its outhouses, the monastery of Friars Minor and the parish church, were integrated into the town, while the palace of the Counts and a spital adjacent to Koprivnica were excluded and pulled down for reasons of defence. The construction of the walls changed the road system within the town, and the exchange of the town lord that in its surroundings. With the demolition of Zidani Most in 1441–1442 the road link of Celje with the Posavje region was destroyed, and the route through Mišji Dol and Sevnica could not have replaced it. After the extinction of the Counts of Celje, the Princes of the Province supported the route from Maribor, Ptuj and Rogatec towards Ljubljana, which granted considerable importance to Celje as the seat of a special Vicedom of the Counts. With Celje, the last, namely the seventh, town in Slovene Styria came into existence, since others followed it only at the beginning of this century.

The period between 1358 and 1493 is described as the time when the late Gothic citizenry had started to gain importance. The towns and several larger boroughs became vital economic factors, since they stimulated business development, and were centres of capital and growing financial power, intersections of business and trade contacts, and cultural promoters of specific urban material and spiritual affairs. Therefore the princes of provinces and other town lords supported them with increased resolution by special privileges granting them partial or complete civic autonomy. General provincial law was no longer binding for their inhabitants, but a special civic law adapted to different economic structures and conditions of establishment. Among them Ptuj was the town with the broadest trade references; its town tower was, and still is, the symbol of its importance. Since the first half of the fourteenth century Maribor had had its town tower as well, yet forming part of the complex of the parish church and therefore less conspicuous. The same held true of the late Gothic tower in Radgona, which became part of the town hall, thus losing its independence.

It is discernible from the afore-mentioned that Ptuj was the most important town in Slovene Styria since it was a trade intersection between Hungary and Italy. Other towns, with the exception of Maribor with its sound economic base, performed the functions of posts along transit routes.

The Jews that were under special protection of the princes of provinces and the Archbishops of Salzburg proceeded according to the economic strength of the towns. In towns where they lived in greater numbers and for a longer period of time, they resided in special quarters, ghettos (in Maribor, Ptuj, Radgona) and had their own synagogues, in others they lived temporarily and were spread throughout the town. They dealt primarily in finance, which was prohibited among Christians on account of interest rates until the middle of the fourteenth century. The towns were permanently damaged by the gradual banishment of the Jews between 1408 and 1497. All of them, with the exception of Ptuj, had lost their economic prominence considerably. Some of them were partly saved by their regional importance: Celje as the seat of the Princely County, Maribor as the centre of the wine trade. The average inhabitants of the towns mentioned lived mostly on local trade and crafts. The artisans were united in brotherhoods and subsequent guilds, which regulated their business and private lives, and hindered yet simultaneously protected them against competition, particularly that of provincial crafts and trade.

The population of the towns at the end of the fifteenth century reveals that they were all small, without exception. The largest one was Ptuj with 1,700 inhabitants, Maribor with approx. 1,600, Celje approx. 700, Slovenska Bistrica and Slovenj Gradec approx. 500, Brežice approx. 300 and Ormož approx. 200 inhabitants. Like all Styrian towns those in the Slovene part of the Province faced economic difficulties in the second half of the fifteenth century, and Ptuj was the only one that surmounted them successfully. Apart from Graz and Radgona, it was the wealthiest town in Styria in the first half of the sixteenth century, while Maribor stagnated. General deterioration affected Ptuj only at the end of the sixteenth century, when the cattle trade was transferred from Styria to Croatia. Through that Ptuj had lost its position in the international market, and it stagnated in its development in the first half of the seventeenth century, the same as Radgona. As a substitute for such economic deterioration, Ptuj and Maribor gained the positions as important military strongholds integrated into the defence structure of the Province and therefore of the whole state in the second half of the sixteenth century. New roles had not granted them better economic positions, yet through them they weathered the stagnation of the seventeenth century, which had brought Slovene towns to the brink of economic ruin.

Jože Curk



Joseph
Kuwasseg,
Slovenska
Bistrica,
lithograph, ca.
1845