

The Upper Savinja Valley: So Much More than a Mountain Paradise

In 2017, when *Kronika* published its thematic issue on the history of the Lower Savinja Valley, the idea arose to dedicate one of its future issues to the Upper Savinja Valley and thus complete the discussion on the Savinja Valley as a whole. The idea evolved and finally came to fruition this year. In the meantime, Slovenia was hit by the worst natural disaster in history: in August 2023, intense rainfall caused disastrous flooding, during which the Savinja River and its tributaries also flooded much of the Upper Savinja Valley, completely cutting them from the outside world. This was also one of the reasons that prompted the *Kronika* team to place this area on the calendar of thematic issues and make certain that the valley is recognized not only for the natural disaster but also, and more significantly, for its abundant and fascinating past.

Kronika's issue on the Upper Savinja Valley brings forth eighteen research articles, along with the presentation of photographic material (old picture postcards) and three museum collections that shed light on lesser known or previously completely unknown snippets from the history of the area covered today by the municipalities of Gornji Grad, Ljubno, Luče, Mozirje, Nazarje, Rečica, and Solčava. The current thematic issue, as its predecessors, seeks not to offer a comprehensive history of the area concerned but rather to draw attention to topics that have primarily gone unnoticed or remained forgotten.

The Upper Savinja Valley already held significance in the High Middle Ages, when it passed into the hands of the nobleman Diepold de Chagere, most probably as a royal donation. In 1140, Diepold and his wife Truta donated one part of the estate to the Aquileian patriarch and the other to the newly founded Benedictine monastery in Gornji Grad (Ger. *Oberburg*). This was one of the largest continuous seigniories in the territory of present-day Slovenia, which was controlled and cultivated by the Gornji Grad monastery until the mid-fifteenth century. Another indelible mark on the history of the area was left by the Lords of Sanneck or the Counts of Cilli, the lawyers and great supporters of the monastery, which was also the original location of their tomb. The entire Upper Savinja Valley fell under the Coun-

ty of Cilli, in addition to which the counts controlled all castles in the region. (*Miha Kosi*) In the fifteenth century, the Gornji Grad monastery was dissolved and its revenue used to fund the newly established Diocese of Ljubljana. In the early seventeenth century, when the seigniorship was administered by the Ljubljana Bishop Tomaž Hren, the exorbitant taxes sparked a peasant revolt, which the papal nuncio decided in the bishop's favour. Due to Hren's dual capacity as Ljubljana's bishop and a feudal lord, the peasant revolt also raised the question regarding judicial jurisdiction. (*Nina Ošep, Lucija Pečnik*)

The other important monastery in the Upper Savinja Valley was founded by the Franciscan Order in Nazarje in the seventeenth century and still boasts a rich and engaging library today. The library began to be compiled on the establishment of the monastery and survived many upheavals, such as loss and destruction of material during the Second World War, subsequent relocations, but also the recovery of books that had been considered lost. It holds a few interesting medieval fragments that testify to various methods with which the Nazarje library collection was compiled. (*Jan Dominik Bogataj, Anja Božič, Bernardin Domen Ilijaš*) Another Nazarje's major landmark is (was) the monastery Church of Our Lady, which soon turned into a pilgrimage church, and the parish began to create miraculous images for pilgrims, featuring the now lost statue of Mary. The Upper Savinja Valley was dotted with churches, no fewer than twelve set up for pilgrims. Soon after 1715, the greatest recognition was attained by the Church of St. Francis Xavier in Radmirje, which grew into the most visited house of worship honouring this saint across the entire Habsburg Monarchy. (*Metoda Kemperl*)

In the same context, mention should also be made of ties that Bishop Anton Martin Slomšek had with the parish of Mozirje. Slomšek made three canonical visitations there, consecrated the branch Church of St. Nicholas in Ljubija, and his numerous contacts with the Mozirje parish can be followed via the official correspondence between the parish and the diocesan ordinariate. (*Lilijana Urlep*)

In the twentieth century, Europe and the entire world were most profoundly marked by the two world wars, and the same also holds for the Upper Savinja Valley. Numerous newspaper reports, alongside the local monastery's chronicle, describe the religious and social life in the settlement of Nazarje during the second decade of the twentieth century. (*Miha Šimac*) In the First World War, people from Miren, a settlement in the Gorizia region, sought refuge here organized as a shoemaker cooperative and set up their workshops at Altenburg Castle (modern Vrbovec). (*Petra Svoljšak*) One of the watershed periods of the Second World War was the year 1944, during which the Partisans took advantage of the invading army's momentary weakness and briefly liberated the entire Upper Savinja Valley. Because the existence of such a liberated territory jeopardized the strategic passage through Lower Styria and Slovenia, the occupier retook the Upper Savinja Valley and retained control over the area until the end of the Second World War. (*Klemen Kocjančič*)

Castles constitute a crucial element of the Upper Savinja Valley's cultural heritage. Vrbovec Castle, still considered one of the most recognizable historical buildings in the area, was built as early as the second half of the twelfth century. Although repeatedly demolished, it has steadfastly defied the ravages of time and survived until the present day. (*Igor Sapač*) A less fortunate fate was in store for Rudenek Castle, which was of later origin but closely connected to Vrbovec Castle in terms of ownership and purpose (during a certain period, both served as diocesan residences). Rudenek Castle was abandoned at the end of the seventeenth century, with only modest remnants having survived to the present day. (*Igor Sapač*)

The written heritage of the Upper Savinja Valley boasts a number of Slovenian texts produced prior to the mid-nineteenth century. While a few have already been known, the latest discoveries have brought to light new documents, most notably tithe registers and two documents that are unique in the entire Slovenian area: the only probate inventory of a serf in Slovenian and the only last will of a serf drawn up by a priest. (*Boris Golec*) Equally significant are the well-preserved parish registers and states of souls (*status animarum*) for the parish of Mozirje, the earliest of which was produced in 1657, providing interesting and important details about the market town of Mozirje and its inhabitants in the mid-seventeenth century. (*Boris Golec*)

When discussing the Upper Savinja Valley, we would be greatly remiss if we did not mention its

mountainous world, which made the area famous fire and wide. Local mountain tourism began to develop early in the nineteenth century. An interesting mark in the history of mountaineering was left by four young men who attempted to climb Mount Ojstrica in August 1880. Although not all of them made a successful ascent, their feat was eternalized in the logbook of Herle's tavern in the village of Solčava. (*Branko Šuštar*) At the turn of the twentieth century, mountains were not only a place to spend leisure time but also a site of national and cultural struggle. Mountains profoundly inspired Branko Zemljič, a teacher, cultural worker, and longstanding secretary of the Savinja branch office of the Slovenian Mountaineering Society, who invested enormous efforts into strengthening the Slovenian presence in the Savinja part of the Kamnik–Savinja Alps during the first half of the twentieth century. (*Peter Mikša, Matija Zorn*) At the end of the nineteenth century, the first picture postcards emerged displaying mountain motifs from the Solčava area, which are presented under the section "Gradivo" of the current thematic issue. (*Davorin Lenko*)

The mountain realm of the Upper Savinja Valley is associated with specific forms of living, including high-altitude pastoralism. While most mountain pastures in Slovenia are communally owned or used, the vast majority in the Solčava area are privately owned. A prominent place among them is held by the Grohot mountain pasture, which is the only shepherd's settlement in the Upper Savinja Valley. (*Elizabeta Vršnik*) The Solčava area is also famous for many of its remote high-altitude farms, where life ran a much different course than in the valley. One such example is the Gradišnik farm with its centuries-long tradition and the birthplace of the musician Karli Gradišnik. (*Marina Gradišnik*) Other witnesses to the rural life of the Upper Savinja Valley are many preserved objects, which today form part of various major and minor complete collections, including the one compiled by the legal historian Sergij Vilfan, who purchased the Zgornji Kovšak farm at Florijan pri Gornjem Gradu in 1971. Until then, the farm had preserved several agricultural tools and various household appliances that Vilfan restored and organized into a collection. (*Irena Bruckmüller, Ernst Bruckmüller, Veronika Pflaum*)

Finally, the Upper Savinja Valley is also known for its rather frequent floods. The trend in weather and hydrological conditions since the 1960s points to increasing average annual temperatures, a decreasing annual amount of rainfall, as well as a drastically shorter period of snow cover,

accompanied by noticeable changes in river regimes. This has also been demonstrated in the form of severe flooding in 2023. (*Mauro Hrvatin, Matija Zorn*)

The thematic issue of *Kronika* on the Upper Savinja Valley concludes by presenting local museum collections. The first is the permanent collection of the Museum of Forestry and Woodworking, which has operated at Vrbovec Castle since 2000. (*Barbara Šoster Rotar*) The Mozirje Central Library presents itself with two collections: the collection Mozirje and Its Inhabitants, which was created by the Celje Museum of Recent History and passed into the library's administration, and the collection of Aleksander Videčnik, a local historian and collector (1920–2019). (*Petra Širko Poljanšek*)

The thematic issue of *Kronika* demonstrates that the Upper Savinja Valley is not only a paradise for mountaineers and other lovers of attractive tourism destinations but also an area with a rich and diverse history, which will undoubtedly continue to be the subject of research in the future.

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Miha Preinfalk
Managing Editor of *Kronika*

