THE LAND BETWEEN

A History of Slovenia

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2002, there was a huge map of the world in front of Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Actually, it was a part of a playground and therefore only children were allowed access. In fact, the map was designed for them. They were supposed to learn about the different countries of the world, while playing on it. Quite an original idea… Unfortunately, a closer look revealed that the map was largerly incomplete. As the map also included pictures of the most famous cities, a picture of Venice was placed where Slovenia was supposed to be. For an obvious lack of space, the mapmakers just covered this rather tiny country with a photograph of the famous Renaissance city. Like Vienna, Venice seemed much more important to them than a country that no one really knew…

Just as in the past, Slovenia's more influential neighbors were again spread across the country—this time metaphorically.

Therefore, when discussing the idea of writing a history of Slovenia, the authors decided that their main task would be to write about that hidden portion of the map where a person with an average knowledge of European history and geography would expect to find pieces of Italy or Austria.

When working on our respective chapters, each of us would therefore find Slovenia or the Slovenian lands serving as the region or space between two different worlds—an extension between Europe and its "periphery." On the other hand, the occasional visitors, like the first modern age tourists, have experienced the Slovenian lands as distinct from other surrounding areas. From their point of view the landscape, temperament, history, tradition, and language were different from everything else in the region. At first glance they compared it to "Switzerland or the Tyrol," until their "closer inspections" showed that the temperament was Slavic. The language was similar to Serbian or Croatian, but with marked differences. It was observed as more archaic and complicated, and far more difficult to learn.

However, the most puzzling thing for everyone who is not familiar with the Slovenes is their history. Most people who are interested in it find it hard to understand that they survived after so many centuries of foreign rule and cultural influences. Therefore, we decided to represent the history of Slovenia as also a history of this space, particularly when we were dealing with the prehistorical periods and the time before the arrival of the Slavs. Well aware of

the usual brief and superficial description of this period, we decided to present it in its full complexity as comprehensively as possible. For us, this was also a way to show that the Slavs did not settle in an empty space. And they did not simply replace the Celto-Roman inhabitants of the earlier times. On the contrary, the people who were first mentioned as newcomers in the mid-6th century discovered the West and were discovered by it as early as the 9th century. And it is from this time onward that Western writers have been in a position to give these neighboring peoples particular names (by which they are still known today), instead of lumping them all together into a great Slavic mass. However, the historians envisaged them as ready-formed "peoples," although the reality is more complex: the formation of these peoples was a matter of reciprocal acculturation.[1]

We approached the later periods in a similar manner, which is the reason why the Slavic territory in our interpretation is not depicted as a typical frontier march under various margraves throughout most of their history. We also tried not to portray them as scapegoat defenders of the empire against the Hungarians, sometimes against other Slavs, and later against the Turks. Neither do we think that the Slovenes only made two important appearances throughout the entire feudal era: a brief period of glory under the Counts of Celje and an early revival of national sentiment and language during the Reformation.

The same holds for later periods, especially for the 20th century, when the majority of Slovenes joined the resistance movement against German, Italian, and Hungarian occupation during World War II, and finally when they gained independence without being dragged into the wars that accompanied the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

The purpose of the authors of this book is simple: instead of a briefly sketched overview, we offer a concise but complete history of the Slovenian people, thereby affording the reader a view past (or through) the stereotypical depictions of the area. In short, we wish to show everything that has been hidden beneath the administrative surface of each of the different dominant ruling cultures throughout the more than 2,000-year-long history of today's Slovenian territory. In other words, we wish to present the history of that place beneath the picture of Venice to all those who wondered what was there when they looked at that London map, and of course to all those who are interested in the history of one of Europe's smallest countries.

Oto Luthar, Ljubljana, April 2013

[1] See also Thomas Lienhard, "Slavs, Bulgarians, and Hungarians. The Arrival of New Peoples," in: *Rome and the Barbarians. The Birth of a New World*, ed. Jean-Jacques Aillagon (Milan: Skira, 2008), 578–579.

FROM PREHISTORY TO THE END OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

HISTORY CREATED BY ARCHAEOLOGY

FROM THE ICE AGE TO THE DECLINE OF THE HUNTER-GATHERER COMMUNITY

In what is now Slovenia in the Middle Paleolithic period, although no fossil remains of Paleolithic man have been discovered to date. The first find is a human cranium from the Ljubljanica River dated to the Mesolithic period. Otherwise, both variants of *Homo sapiens*, Neanderthals (*Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*) and Cro-Magnons (*Homo sapiens sapiens*), have left traces of their presence. The Neanderthals lived in Europe and Slovenia during the Middle Paleolithic period (300,000 to 30,000 years ago), before they became extinct; the Cro-Magnons lived during the Late Paleolithic period (40,000 to 10,000 years ago).

Findings from the Lower Paleolithic period (300,000 years ago) are rare in Slovenia, and are known only from excavations around Postojna, e.g., the deepest layer of the Betalov spodmol (Betal Cavern). The Middle Paleolithic sites are mainly cave sites, and originated more than 200,000 years ago. Interestingly enough, Paleolithic people had visited these caves from time to time without awareness of any predecessors, although they used the same routes and pursued similar aims over the millennia. The Middle Paleolithic period was at its height during the first three quarters of the last glacial period (c. 115,000 to 30,000 years ago), when Neanderthals who made and used mainly stone tools lived there. During the transition from the Middle to the Early Upper Paleolithic era (c. 40,000 to 30,000 years ago), Cro-Magnons settled in Europe and Neanderthals became extinct. Composite tools, made of wood with interchangeable stone and bone parts, were characteristic of the inhabitants during the Early Upper Paleolithic period. The beginnings of art and religion are also attributed to this time. The rapid development of Cro-Magnon man was accelerated by great climatic changes, which took place between 35,000 and 10,000 years ago. Significant cooling caused the spread of glaciers, which interrupted contacts between certain regions and transformed the natural environment into an extremely demanding challenge for man and beast alike. Individual

groups of Cro-Magnons therefore made vast technological advances. Some 13,000 years ago, the glacial period was followed by rapid warming, the beginning of present-day conditions.

Middle and Early Upper Paleolithic sites are most common in the Postojna basin, where Friulian plain met the then continental northern Adriatic. Rich food sources provided by the fertile plain and the foothills of the subalpine and Dinaric mountain ranges significantly influenced the movement of people. The two most significant Neanderthal sites were Betalov spodmol at Zagon near the Postojna Cave, and Divje babe I above Reka in the Idrijca River Valley. At various times the cavernous shelters were home to both Neanderthals and larger beasts: cave lions, hyenas, wolves, and, especially, bears. Cave bear bones have been found alongside Neanderthal tools. A rash conclusion attributed this combination of finds to the cult of the cave bear; however, cooking debris next to rare hearths and fireplaces allowed the Neanderthals' way of life to be at least partly determined. The Neanderthals only visited the caves, mainly searching for the limb bones and skulls of large animals, particularly bears. They crushed these bones to reach the very nutritious marrow. People at that time probably consumed food similar to the bears' and may have had comparable needs for living space in caves. Competition may have thus arisen between humans and beasts, although little is known about it.[2] Neanderthals seemed not to have sought further advancements or new challenges and remained content with what they already had. Interestingly, Neanderthals and cave bears, both outstanding in their adaptation to Ice Age conditions, became extinct together, while Cro-Magnons and the brown bear—as less specialized species—continued to survive and develop. Man advanced mainly technologically.

One of the most interesting and best researched sites of Neanderthals and Cro-Magnon man is at Divje babe I,[3] where the most outstanding Slovenian Paleolithic find was discovered: the approximately 60,000-year-old bone-flute, probably the oldest flute in the world to date (Fig. 1). Divje babe I is also an invaluable cave site because it is the only Slovenian site where objects from the last Neanderthals have been found (there are only a few such sites throughout

[2] Unfortunately, only tools have been preserved. These are mainly flint stone scrapers and points, but not artifacts made of non-lasting materials, like skin or wood. Their (Mousterian) tools were used for a very long time—from the last inter-glacial period (c. 120,000 years ago) until their extinction—suggesting that they were inventive only up to a certain point. See Ivan Turk (ed.), *Divje Babe I. Upper Pleistocene Palaeolithic Site in Slovenia* (Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, Inštitut za arheologijo, 2007).

[3] The deposits, between 35,000 and 115,000 years old, are about 9 meters thick. See Ivan Turk (ed.), *Moustérienska "koščena piščal" in druge najdbe iz Divjih bab I v Sloveniji* (Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, 1997).

Figure 1 *Neanderthal flute from Divje babe I. Courtesy National Museum of Slovenia, photo T. Lauko.*

Europe), and one of four Slovenian sites containing objects belonging to the early Cro-Magnons. The discovery of the Neanderthal flute utterly transformed earlier conceptions of their rational capabilities, since they had not been credited even with the most rudimentary artistic skills. The flute undoubtedly signifies these, although we do not know its purpose or its use.

During the Early Upper Paleolithic period (c. 40,000 to 20,000 years ago), Cro-Magnons, our immediate ancestors, began to settle on Slovenian land. They were identified by Aurignacian and Gravettian tools and art objects made of stone, bone, teeth, and horns; also, they probably invented the spear, and later the harpoon, boomerang, and bow. They used a bone needle: indeed, the world's oldest bone needle has been found in Slovenia's Potočka zijalka. For shaping bones, teeth, and horns they used chisels, and for hides they employed fine as well as rough scrapers. Hides were used for clothing, bedding, and tents. During warmer periods, the Cro-Magnon people even climbed to higher caves, such as Potočka zijalka (1,700 m) on Mt. Olševa, and Mokriška jama (Mokrica Cave, 1500 m) on Mt. Mokrica. At Potočka zijalka, the first Paleolithic site discovered in Slovenia, teeth of the musk ox—a characteristically arctic animal—have been found, and more recently those of yet another arctic species, the

wolverine. Inside the cave, in addition to 80 pieces of stone tools and large quantities of bear bones, another 134 bone artifacts (mostly points) have been discovered, including the celebrated flute made from a bear's jawbone.

The Late Upper Paleolithic period (20,000 to 10,000 years ago) was characterized by fast, major changes in the natural environment (glaciation, warming trends, and the extinction of great beasts). The hunting-gathering economy was at its height, and people lived in open-air settlements. The richest site is Ciganska jama (Ciganska Cave), near Željne (Upper Gravettian). During the Middle Stone Age (the Mesolithic period and the beginning of the Holocene period, about 11,000 to 7,000 years ago) the environment, including human life, began to undergo significant changes. Forests considerably expanded, and forest animals multiplied. People, using the microlithic tools of the time, still did not have permanent settlements, and subsisted largely by hunting first the mountain goat (ibex) and later deer; snail-shells indicate that they also fed on snails. At this time, wolves began to be domesticated, and the first dogs appeared. The transition to the Mesolithic period is not well known in Slovenia, and Mesolithic sites are generally rare; Špehovka, Mala Triglavca, and Viktorjev and Jamnikov spodmol are among the most significant ones. People now began to turn to farming and raising livestock.

HERDERS AND AGRICULTURALISTS OF THE NEOLITHIC AND COPPER AGES

The end of the Ice Age brought great changes: the sea encroached on what had hitherto been the continental bay of Trieste, glacial lakes emerged in the Alps, and fauna and flora were altered. People began to establish permanent settlements, and their numbers greatly increased, since cultivation and animal husbandry provided extra food supplies. This development signified a vital advance, perhaps even a revolution, in the Neolithic period. People began cultivating specific species of cereals, such as wheat and barley, and raising domesticated animals like goats, sheep, pigs, and cattle.

The Near East had already been taken over by Neolithic man in the 8th millennium BC and there was initial evidence of agriculturalists in Greece early in the 7th millennium, although they were not yet making clay vessels. Inhabitants of the upper Danubian region, however, were tilling the land during the 6th millennium and knew how to make ceramic dishes, which they decorated with uniform patterns. Approximately at that time, a Neolithic population inhabited the central Balkans, characterized by the Vinča culture

and named after the Serbian site of Vinča, near Belgrade. Influences from the Carpathian basin and the eastern Adriatic coast also reached Slovenian territory. The oldest open settlement discovered so far lies in western Slovenia, in the foothills of Sermin near Koper (the region of Capris, present-day Koper), and dates from the 6th or early 5th millennium BC. Thus far, the only other finds from the oldest Neolithic period are in the caves of the Karst hinterland of Trieste. This area was probably still settled by hunters, who came into contact with herders from the Gulf of Kvarner and Dalmatia, from where sheep and goat herders brought Danilo ceramics and Hvar pottery to the Karst region. (The ceramics are named after Danilo, a site near Šibenik, while the pottery is named after the island of Hvar.) The Sermin site suggests that the herders had settled permanently in the littoral. Interesting information about the Eneolithic (Copper Age) period in western Slovenia comes from cave sites (at Mala Triglavca and Podmol near Kastelec), which were still the main shelters for people who mostly raised livestock and hunted. Zoological and botanical studies provide evidence that herdsmen spent some time in several of the caves. The remains of sheep and goat feces in caves, the presence of grass pollen in the Neolithic cultural strata at Podmol, as well as the presence of mixed oak forest and typical pasture vegetation indicate that herds grazed near the cave. Bones provide further evidence that sheep, goats, pigs, and domestic cattle were raised.

Stone tools of the time were mainly fashioned from local stone;[4] the finds of crucibles (vessels used for smelting) indicate that Copper Age metal workers probably smelted the ore in open fireplaces. By blowing they could increase ventilation and thus accelerate the smelting process. Ventilation aids included elongations for bellows and blow pipes. The oldest copper finds at Slovenian sites are from the first half of the 4th millennium BC and include axes and daggers, probably fabricated in the east. Domestic crafts began to develop somewhat later, as evidenced by the remains of smelting vessels with traces of copper; they originate in the mid-4th millennium BC and are from Hočevarica in the Ljubljansko barje area (Ljubljana Marshes). Remnants of a clay mould

[4] They suggest that smaller stone quarries were in use in the 5th millennium BC, although there is still no direct evidence. Stone tools, mainly axes, from this time have also been found on the slopes of Pohorje, in Slovenske Gorice, in the Prekmurje region, and elsewhere. The first copper artifacts were supposedly brought from the east by metallurgists searching for copper ore in these areas. Copper in its elementary state is rarely found in nature, and oxidic carbonate and sulphite copper ores are important for its production. Slovenia does have underground sulphite deposits. See in general Anton Velušček, "Neolithic and Eneolithic Investigations in Slovenia (Neolitske in eneolitske raziskave v Sloveniji)," *Arheološki vestnik*, no. 50 (1999): 59–79.