

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

From Prehistory to the arrival of Slavs

Life in the area of Primorsko-goranska County existed already in Prehistoric times. Traces of Prehistoric inhabitants of the area can be found in Lopar, on the island of Rab, on Osorčica, on the island of Lošinj, on the slopes of Ćićarija and especially in the areas of Brseč, Mošćenice and Lovran. Traces can also be seen from Kastav to Rijeka and all the way to Lokve in Gorski kotar.

Many settlements, i.e. caves, were used also in the subsequent periods and in the Middle Ages, although at that time urbanized settlers inhabited this region. Among them the most famous are the first settlers – the Illyrians: Histrians inhabited Istria and Liburns occupied the southern areas. They influenced the emigration of Yapods from this region. The matriarchy, shriveled burial and vessels are the basic characteristics of the millennial life of this part of the Illyric tribe. Very early in time, the Hellenic tribes also began to sail into the bay of Rijeka. Some of their legends testimony to that fact, as for example about the creation of the Apsirtides – the Kvarner islands, of

which Cres and Lošinj were called Apsoros. Later on the channel of Osor was made creating from Apsoros the two islands of Cres and Lošinj.

The harmonious life of Liburns and Greeks was not substantially disrupted by the Celtic invasions in the 4th century B.C. Longstanding consequences were brought by the new Mediterranean power, the Romans that first came by sea, across the Adriatic, breaking the existing southern Illyric states, while in the 3rd century B.C. they also invade by land, from the north, and conquer the Histrians in the year 177. Gradually they also subjugate the Liburns. Octavian Augustus, the first Roman emperor, crushed the Illyric resistance, but the Liburns were never fully incorporated in the life of the Roman Empire. They had to surrender to the Romans most of their fortified settlements: Rab, Krk, Fulfinum (by Omišalj), Osor, Tauress (by Crikvenica), Bakar, Tarsatika and Lovran.

The Romans build roads and among them also the large transversal going from Aquileia, across Trieste, Kastav, Rijeka, Tauress and Senj towards the south, towards Dalmatia. Near Kastav

this road was connected to that leading towards Pula, while from Senj there was a road going towards the continent.

The major changes begin with the ethnic migrations, with the invasions of the so called barbarians from the east and the north, especially in the 4th century with strong Gothic strikes against the Empire. By the end of the century Tarsatika is revitalized but this time as a town for army purposes. Liburnia saw the final collapse of the Ancient world with the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century.

In the meantime many worshipers of Christ settled in the region founding new religious communities and building many churches.

These were the circumstances in the region when the Slavs appeared. Their arrival on the Adriatic was recorded for the first time in Istria in some ecclesiastic documents at the end of the 6th century.

After the Longobards passed across the area of Primorje and Istria, there came the Slavs that did not care for the rule of the Eastern Roman Empire, or Byzantine Empire, with the seat in Constantinople. The area of today's County was settled by the Croat Slavic tribe and they took over the whole area

except the large fortified towns of Osor, Krk and Rab. The other settlements and fortifications fall into their hands and the inhabitants soon become croatianized - these were mainly Liburns and members of other ethnicities inhabiting the former Roman Empire. The Croats later take over also the three aforementioned towns.

The Franks – a new European power – suffered a defeat in the area of the bay of Rijeka while trying to conquer the Croatian lands. In this area their leader, the Friulian margrave Erik, was killed in the year 799. At the beginning of the following century the Franconian state took over Istria and Liburnia, while the three large island towns remained in the hands of Byzantium. In the meantime, the Croats permanently settled these lands, which is testified by numerous archeological findings especially in the area of Vinodol. According to the title of the Croatian prince Borna from central Dalmatia – *dux Dalmatiae atque Liburniae* – it is evident that also the area of Rijeka was part of his state in the first half of the 9th century. Parallel to the rise of the Croatian Principality, on the western side of the Adriatic there rose a new enemy, the republic of Venice, and thus began the centennial fight for the supremacy over the Adriatic.

Croatian states on the eastern side of Adriatic disputed that right to the Venetians with arms and even Byzantium had to admit the power of Croats. In the 9th century Byzantine rulers decided that their towns, namely Cres, Rab and Krk, together with Split, Zadar and Trogir should pay tributes to Croatian rulers.

These rulers from Dalmatia and the Kvarner littoral continued fighting for the supremacy over the rich island towns, which influenced greatly the life of the islands and the nearby coast.

By the end of the 9th century Christianity prevailed in the whole region, but with a strong influence of the followers of brothers Cyril and Methodius from Salonika. The Glagolitic priests, after the failure of their mission in Moravia, came to Istria and the area of Kvarner. The island of Krk became their stronghold. The most numerous and the most important monuments of Old Slavic religious services were the texts written in glagolitic script using the Croatian language and they are the tablet of Valun (island of Cres), the scripts from Krk and Plomin, the fragments from Jurandvor (island of Krk) all dating from the 11th century. The tablet of Baška, the most important such monument, dates back to the year 1100 and was found in

Jurandvor. On it for the first time we find the term Croatian connected to the name of the Croatian king Zvonimir. The Croatian Glagolitic movement was so strong in this area that even the Pope had to support it. Such a policy was strongly supported, in the 11th century, by the bishop of Osor Gaudencije (later was proclaimed saint).

Venice, after establishing itself in some parts of Istria, continued waging wars to spread its dominance. In such attempts it had to fight all the time against the kingdom of Croatia, therefore the islands kept passing from hand to hand but the Croatian influence over them was always evident.

The Middle Ages

At the end of the 11th and the beginning of the 12th century, the Croatian Kingdom fell in the hands of the Hungarians. The island of Rab was shortly under the rule of the Arpads but it was soon overtaken by the Venetians. It is believed that the rest of today's county territory was part of the Croatian-Hungarian Kingdom. Such a situation lasted shortly because, in the name of the Patriarch of Aquileia, the noblemen from the area of Trieste occupied part of the area around the river Rječina and therefore that part of

the county was under the influence of German countries. Gradually, the area of the bay of Rijeka becomes a triple frontier between the Venetians, the German feudal lords and the Croatian-Hungarian Kingdom. The ecclesiastical organization of this territory changes also and the area west of Rječina belongs to the episcopate of Pula (which is under the authority of the patriarch of Aquileia, to whom periodically belong also the area of Čabar and Gerovo), while east of Rječina belongs to the newly founded episcopate of Krbava under the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Split. Along with the town of Krk, with strong vestiges of roman traditions, new communes are formed in the area, namely that of Baška, Vrbnik, Dobrinj and Omišalj. On the island of Cres the villeinage service and the merchandise rent were substituted by currency payments. There were also frequent clashes between different parts of island societies since these were still strictly divided into noblemen and commoners.

On the mainland the lands owned by the counts of Duino, west of Rječina, and the lands of the princes of Krk, east of the river, developed strong feudal relations. The power of the princes is testified by the creation of

the Statute of Vinodol in 1288. This is one of the oldest and the most important Croatian legal and historical monument, but it also has cultural importance and its value is often compared to similar statutes written elsewhere in Europe at that time. The text was written in Novi Vinodolski, in the presence of prince Leonard and his courtiers and the representatives of the free communes of Ledenice, Bribir, Grižane, Drivenik, Hreljin, Bakar, Trsat and Grobnik.

In the 13th century the first followers of St. Francis appeared in these lands and they settled on the island of Krk. The princes of Krk soon started worshipping the Madonna on Trsat where they also invited the Franciscans and thus they created one of the oldest pilgrimage sites and oldest sanctuaries of St. Mary in Croatia.

In the same century the settlement on the right bank of Rječina 'rises' again under the name of Rika, or Flumen, or Fiume, and often with the addition of the name St. Vid. Even though the Venetians want to destroy it, the settlers initiate the development of the town by means of trade. The powerful castle of Trsat, rising above town and in the hands of the princes of Krk, is

not a threat and for some time the town is also in the hands of the princes.

The fight for the throne of the Croatian-Hungarian Kingdom gave the opportunity to the Venetians to conquer, with money and force, the islands of the region. Besides Krk, which continued to be in the hands of the princes of Krk, in these fights great damage was done to Rab, while Osor was shaken by the plague and the Genovese fleet and its role was taken over by Cres. The princes of Krk also reach the climax of their power – they were also the kings of Croatia, had family relations with many European noble families and possessed land in Croatia, Bosnia, Slovenia, Austria and Italy. In mid-15th century this noble family falls apart and with their decline the vast possessions also disintegrate. Moreover, the Turks take over part of their lands and Venice in 1480 takes over also their native land, namely the island of Krk, as the last island of the Adriatic that was not in their possession. Even though some family members remained powerful, the family as a whole was in decline. At the same time, the then Rijeka of St. Vid becomes powerful together with the town of Bakar. For the first time some settlements in Gorski kotar are mentioned – Delnice (1438) and Lokve

(1454) through which the trade routes towards the Croatian continent passed. The town of Rijeka acquires some self-governing rights. In the second half of the 15th century the Habsburgs arrive on the Adriatic. They took over the municipalities of Kastav, Veprinac, Mošćenice and Trsat. To the municipalities in their possession they granted by statutes some old municipal rights while modernizing the life with new laws.

This period is also marked by Turkish invasions into Croatian lands and the conquering of some of them. The refugees from other parts of Croatia, Bosnia and other east-Balkan lands, were settled by the Francopans in Gorski kotar and the island of Krk. The way of life in part of Gorski kotar is testified in the Francopan terrier with data from Vrbovsko, Bosiljevo, Lukovdol and Gomirje. In Lič the Francopans extract and process the ore, while elsewhere also other minerals as well as silver and gold. The Turks, across Grobnik and Klana, invade Slovenian and Italian territories, ravaging on their way Gorski kotar. The defeat of the Croatian nobility in the battle of Krbava, at the end of the 15th century, brought a long and tragic period for these lands and even the

bishop of Modruš had to change his seat and he came to Novi Vinodolski.

The arrival of the Habsburgs (15th-16th Century)

This period in the region is marked by Turkish invasions and conquests and by the interests of the Venetians and the Austrians. The easternmost part of Istria belonged to the Austrians and Rijeka was fiercely attacked by the Venetians.

The Francopans still own part of Gorski kotar and the coastal region of Kvarner, but their incomes are much smaller. Because of Turkish ravaging, the economy is very slow and the number of inhabitants of Gorski kotar diminishes by half. On the greater part of the territory, in the second half of the 16th century, the Francopans are replaced by the more resourceful Zrinski family. They started the trading routes between Vinodol, across Gorski kotar, and the Croatian interior and with Slovenia and Hungary. Their stronghold, Bakar, becomes a rival town of the Habsburg Rijeka. Nevertheless they returned part of their possessions to the Francopans, and thanks to a better organized defense against the Turks, the whole region recovers, which is testified in many terriers of the period (Bakar, Hreljin,

Novi, Grobnik etc.). The recovery was enhanced by the return of part of the autochthonous inhabitants, as well as the arrival of new settlers. Amongst them there were many Serbs and Vlachs; their important religious center becomes the monastery of Gomirje.

This period marks the end of the Uskoks' supremacy on part of the Adriatic, partly thanks to the inhabitants of the coastal areas but partly because of a terrible war. The Venetians, on more than one occasion, completely block the ports. The Uskoks raid the islands and the Istrian hinterland, which led to the War of the Uskoks (1615-1617). Among other things, Volosko and Lovran were burnt to the ground, Bakar was ravaged and Mošćenice was occupied. At the end the Uskoks were sacrificed, but the war brought long lasting damages to many areas.

The recovery was accelerated thanks to Gorski kotar, where the Zrinskis enhanced the economy, developed the transportation and made Bakar a strong center. They started exploiting the forest wealth, timber and ore; The Zrinskis bring experts from Slovenia, Germany and Bohemia. The settlements of Lič, Čabar and Fužine develop strongly.

The area of Rijeka and Liburnia recovers as well, but with strong resistance and even uprisings against the new feudal lords, the Jesuits that came to the region at the beginning of the 17th century. Armed rebellions against them, their seat being Rijeka, were undertaken by the inhabitants of Veprinac, Mošćenice and Kastav because they refused to accept the old serf obligations. At the same time these highly educated priests developed the education system by founding the Gymnasium in Rijeka in 1627. They also complete the church of St. Vid in Rijeka (built over 104 years) but did not manage to finish building the church in Kastav that was supposed to be the largest in western Croatia and southern Slovenia.

The fall of the aristocratic families Zrinski and Francopan

Gradually the pluricentennial rule of two great feudal families – the Zrinski (of Bribir, Šubić) and the Francopan (princes of Krk) comes to an end. By mid 17th century the Francopans held only Novi Vinodolski. At the same time, the Zrinski family reaches again a climax by owning greater parts of Gorski kotar and Primorje, and they are even Captains of Senj. They instigated economic changes and thus

Bakar became the most important port in the Croatian part of the Habsburg monarchy. The importance of Kraljevica rises as well and cultural wealth from all over the world is gathered there. But, to the global politics of the Habsburgs, the strengthening of the Zrinski and Francopan families did not suit. They tried to save their possessions, and with them the rest of Croatia, from Turkish invasions but also from evident German pretensions over these lands. Zrinski, together with the Slovenian-German and Hungarian aristocrats, prepared a resistance against the court-German politics and he was supported by Francopan. On their estates in the region they began gathering the insurgents. The Court radically solved the problem; in 1670 they confiscated the property of the insurgents in the name of the Hungarian Chamber. Only walls remained standing from the once wealthy town of Kraljevica owned by the Zrinski family. The following year, the leaders of the insurrection were executed, thus ending the Zrinski family, while a branch of the Francopan family (until today) remained in Furlania.

The beginning of the 18th century was, for many reasons, the turning point for

the entire region. Charles VI, in 1771, proclaimed the free navigation in the Adriatic ending the centennial wrongful claiming of the Venetians of that right. Two years later, the same ruler, proclaimed Rijeka a free port. These changes satisfied the interests of the distant Austrian, but especially Hungarian circles in the eastern part of the monarchy. To the Hungarian part of the monarchy belongs Gorski kotar and the coastal area of Kvarner, without the islands (owned by the Venetians), while the small town of Rijeka (still just on the right bank of the Rječina river) has stronger ties to the Austrian part of the monarchy.

Several years afterwards the so called Carolina road was built connecting the bay of Rijeka – starting on the left bank of Rječina, on the foothills of Trsat – along the coast and through Gorski kotar, with the Croatian hinterland. The orientation of Vienna towards the sea is very obvious – they build in Kraljevica, very close to the island of Krk, which was still in the hands of a weak Venice, the first military harbor with a shipyard.

The Austro-Hungarian rule

In this part of Croatia the beginning of changes is influenced by long napoleonic wars and the rule over the

region passes from French to Habsburg hands and vice versa. In 1797 the centuries old Venetian republic is destroyed by the French and Vienna took over the Kvarner islands. Subsequently the whole area passed into French hands and this is why the region is also attacked by the English fleet, which often blocked the traffic routes. In the end the whole area of today's county, in 1815, came under the Austrian rule.

In this period another road starting at the foothills of Trsat is completed, the Luisiana road, a swifter and more modern connection between the coast and the hinterland.

The strengthened economic resources and the rising nationalism of the Hungarians influenced the inclusion of 'their lands' into the commercial routes of the period, and thus of Civil Croatia; the littoral is therefore called 'the Hungarian coast'. But, the Illyrian movement, that is the Croatian national revival in the first half of the 19th century, influenced the awakening of the national consciousness in this part of fragmented Croatia as well. Until 1848 the Civil Croatia was considered as the mother country of all Croats and the Viceroy Josip Jelačić managed to unite it with Gorski kotar and the littoral, with Rijeka, but without the

islands and the Liburnian Istria. In this part of Istria there was the first massive outburst of Croatian national feelings.

At the end of the 1860s the weakened Vienna was forced to divide the Habsburg monarchy into two entities, thus creating the Austro-Hungarian Empire; the area of the county became divided and Rijeka was extrapolated from Civil Croatia and in 1868 put under the rule of Budapest. From then on the Hungarians focused on the development of Rijeka neglecting other parts of the region. Rijeka soon became a large trade and port center, as well as a powerful maritime and industrial emporium, but solely for Hungary.

In the neighboring margravate of Istria and the islands (since the 1860s it had the seat in Poreč) continues the development of the island of Lošinj, which becomes a known maritime and shipbuilding force and by the 1870s it becomes renowned all over the world. Unfortunately, at that time the sailboats loose the supremacy to steamboats and therefore the Croatian capital invested in this industry goes wasted.

The first and second World Wars

The consequences of the First World War in the region were catastrophic and long lasting partly because of the

new international setup. After the disintegration of Austria-Hungary, in 1918, and the creation of the State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, which later merged with the Serb Kingdom to create the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, the Kingdom of Italy did not recognize the newly created state and occupied a greater part of the territory of today's county and other parts of Croatian (and Slovenian) coast.

Italy with all its summer resorts did not need Rijeka and Opatija and therefore these two world renowned resorts swiftly declined. Particularly drastic was the decline of Rijeka testifying to the fact that its greatness was based on the artificial support from faraway Hungary. At the same time the new rulers started to Italianize the inhabitants and to persecute 'foreigners'; first Hungarians, then Germans, Czechs etc. followed by many Croats. In the ecclesiastical organization, this area was taken away from the diocese of Modruš and Senj and the new diocese of Rijeka was constituted. At the same time Sušak, across Rječina from Rijeka, supported by the large, natural hinterland becomes a leading Yugoslav port and receives the status of town.

In the Second World War Italy occupied a large portion of Gorski kotar and Primorje of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The annexation of these territories was 'legalized' by the quisling state, the so called Independent State of Croatia. The fascist Italian regime ruled over this region as it did for years in some parts of Istria, i.e. Italianizing by force and economically depleting the land. The fascist empire fell in 1943 and the region was taken over by Nazi Reich whose seat for this area was in Trieste. Since the beginning of occupation, in 1941, in the region flourished the antifascist movement led by the communists. That movement turned into a communist revolution in 1944. Many Italians emigrated from Rijeka and other neighboring towns.

Parts of the county's territories that were, since 1918, under the occupation of Italy or that were annexed by Rome in 1941, were formally returned to the mother country of Croatia and with that to the newly forming Yugoslavia in 1943 by the national liberation movement. In 1945, after long struggles, the Nazi-fascist enemy was finally defeated.

The reconstruction of devastated territories began immediately, but just the Paris peace conference in 1947

confirmed the results of the anti-fascist war and especially the long struggle with Italian pretences over these lands. In 1948 the towns of Sušak and Rijeka were merged into a natural unity, into the city of Rijeka. This event determined, together with a strong hinterland, the creation of a strong industrial centre and the largest port in the region. With the reconstruction of old industries and the creation of new ones, the town spreads towards the area of Grobnik and Kastav. Opatija and the island of Rab regain their tourist splendor and are joined also by Crikvenica, the islands of Krk and Lošinj etc. Unfortunately, the area of Gorski kotar remains underdeveloped. The flourishing of the united town of Rijeka, together with the development of the whole region (except Gorski kotar) is also marked by the creation of the archdiocese-metropoly of Rijeka (comprising the dioceses of Modruš and Senj, of Krk and of Poreč) and the University with colleges and departments in Rijeka, Opatija, Pula and Gospić.

The Republic of Croatia

The Croatian people and the democratically oriented citizens of Croatia created an independent state after years of war, years of suffering

and hardship. From 1991 to 1995 many young people gave their lives for freedom, many people were forced out of their homes, many remained disabled, widowed and many children lost their parents.

Even though this area was not directly affected by the war, the Primorsko-goranska County contributed greatly to the Patriotic war, to the freedom and independence of Croatia. Many people from this region were killed or wounded in action. Due to the war and its consequences, the economy was very much slowed down. In the administrative division of the Republic of Croatia, from Gorski kotar and a greater part of the coastal area of Kvarner (except the Senj region and the island of Pag), and the eastern part of Istria, in 1993, the Primorsko-goranska County was created with the seat in Rijeka and with over 320 000 inhabitants. The County with its Government and Assembly is a unit of local government and with the administrative system is a transmission of the state administration. Since its foundation the County is headed by the center-left coalition.

The Primorsko-goranska County with its significant resources, which place it among the most developed counties of Croatia, will contribute to a swift and

efficient recovery of Croatia and its inclusion among democratic and developed European countries. From 1999 the Primorsko-goranska County is the member of the Assembly of European Regions.