LIFE AT THE RESTLESS CROSSROADS: THE SLOVENIAN TERRITORY DURING THE MIDDLE AGES AND THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

On the political map of medieval Europe, the Slovenian territory was destined to become an exposed and frequently quite vulnerable strategic crossroads in the Eastern Alps. With Charlemagne's conquests, the majority of this region fell under the suzerainty of the Kingdom of the Franks, later the Kingdom of Germany or the Holy Roman Empire. The cultural environment of the mostly German-speaking but distinctly multi-ethnic milieu of Central Europe, therefore, exerted a decisive influence on the Slovenian lands until the demise of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918.

This highly transitional territory became an intersection of communication lines connecting profoundly diverse regions of Europe. In the west, it bordered on Italy, creating an intermediate buffer zone in which the traditions of ancient Rome persevered much longer than in the continental Slovenian hinterland. The Romanised population of the urban communes along the Adriatic coast mostly retained its identity even after the arrival of Slavic settlers. From the end of the 11th century and until its dissolution in 1420, the Patriarchate of Aquileia played a key role in the religious, cultural, and even political life of Friuli. Nevertheless, the Patriarchate's power was waning steadily towards the end of the Middle Ages. At the beginning of the 13th century, the County of Gorizia was able to gain independence at the expense of the Patriarchate, while the remainder of its territories was ultimately annexed by the Venetian Republic embarking on an increasingly ambitious course of expansion.

The gradual growth of Venetian power resulted in a successful takeover of virtually the entire north-eastern Adriatic coast and Istria with the notable exception of Trieste, since 1382 the only major Adriatic port under Habsburg control, as well as the eastern part of Istria with the County of Pazin, which was linked closely to Carniola. The struggle for control over the Adriatic coastline had escalated dangerously in 1463 with the failed Venetian siege of Trieste and finally led to the breakout of a deadly Venetian-Habsburg war in 1508–1516. After the end of the conflict, the Habsburg annexation of the upper Isonzo valley and the key stronghold in Gradisca secured the political border along the

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III. ARMOUR IN THE SLOVENIAN LANDS DURING THE MIDDLE AGES AND THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

FIG. 69. Guards at the Holy Sepulchre on a fresco of the Resurrection in Muljava, 1456. (© ZRC SAZU UIFS, photo: Andrej Furlan)

FIG. 70. Soldiers on scenes from the Passion of Christ in Štantahor, ca. 1460. (Photo: Andrej Jazbec)
making style include the statues of St Florian and St George from the altar of the church of the Holy Cross above Kojsko, made by a Villach artist in 1515. Stylistically, the panoply of St George still resembles the armour of a somewhat older form, but the vertically fluted breastplate worn by St Florian clearly signals the changes in contemporary fashion.

A rather more mature version of Maximilian armour is shown on the marble tombstone of Achaz Metnitzer, created some time around his death in 1526 and now fixed in the exterior wall of the church of St John the Baptist in Bad Radkersburg. Overall, Achaz's suit of armour is still characterised by slender, vertical lines but includes a modern close-helmet, pauldrons fitted with tall hauteur-pieces and bear-paw sabatons. Decoration of the armour consists mainly of radial ribs adorning the plackart, tassets, couters, gauntlets, and the upper portion of the leg harness.

A plate harness of a similar configuration is shown on the effigy of Erasmus Wagen from the church of St Martin in Šmartno near Litija. The carving, made circa 1522, is not particularly realistic yet conveys a reasonably accurate impression of field armour from the end of the first quarter of the 16th century. Its distinguishing element is the rounded, globular breastplate, fitted with a lance rest near the right armpit. Vertical fluting is restricted to narrow bands across the fauld and tassets, but the surface of the breastplate is largely smooth, decorated only with radial ribs flaring above the waistline. The decedent is depicted wearing a beret, though he would surely have been wearing a close-helmet on the battlefield.

Armour of similar style appears on several other carved tombstones in Slovenia. One example, now on the ground floor of the Stara Loka castle, belonged to Wilhelm Gothold and was created during the 1530s. The effigy depicts Wilhelm carrying a war hammer and a sword, wearing a complete suit of Maximilian armour and a close-helmet with a raised visor. The pauldrons and rerebraces are decorated with dense vertical fluting, while the breastplate is adorned above the waistline in a fanned pattern. Across the fauld, tassets, and poleyns, the fluting is arranged vertically, but the cuisses are decorated in a radial pattern much like the breastplate. The groin is protected by mail, apparently tight-fitting breeches rather than a loose skirt.

An even better-known depiction survives in the church of SS Hermagoras and Fortunatus in Gornji Grad, a carved tombstone created in the memory of the Carniolan provincial governor and famous general Hans Katzianer. This masterfully carved work of art, made circa 1540 by Osbald Kitell, is renowned as one of the most beautiful knightly effigies in Slovenia. The captain-general of the Habsburg forces along the Hungarian and Croatian borders is shown wearing a realistically depicted armour of a heavily armed...
FIG. 184. Cutting a ring from wire coil. (Photo: Tomaž Lazar)

FIG. 185. Punching a slit-shaped or round hole through the overlap. (Photo: Tomaž Lazar)

FIG. 186. Making of wedge rivets. (Photo: Tomaž Lazar)

FIG. 187. Joining rings with a wedge or round rivet, respectively. (Photo: Tomaž Lazar)
To some extent, these divergences reflected contrasting craftsmanship traditions and workshop organisation, as well as different climate conditions and styles of warfare. However, they were also clearly influenced by the contemporary fashion and civilian attire, a model consistently emulated in the design of protective equipment. Altogether, these factors can help explain why plate armour was worn in somewhat different configurations across Europe, tailored to suit the local needs and tradition. In general, however, the two main styles of plate armour developed in North Italy and South Germany soon overshadowed other local variations as products from these leading manufacturing regions dominated by far the largest share of the European market.

Master armourers of the Italian school had developed a distinct design pattern of the plate harness by the 1420s. Italian armour of this period was characterised by rather bulky, rounded shapes, giving the impression of a robust, aesthetically pleasing yet utilitarian panoply. Its surface was generally smooth, polished to a high sheen but otherwise plain and devoid of any ostentatious decoration. However, the unique style perfected by Italian armour-makers was defined not only by the external appearance of the finished product but also – and perhaps even more importantly – specific construction features of the harness as a functional whole.

Arguably the most recognisable of these traits was the asymmetrical design of the arm defences. This was a logical response to the needs of a contemporary man-at-arms trained to wield his offensive weapon primarily in his right hand, while the left side of his body bore the brunt of defence. To this end, Italian craftsmen enlarged the left pauldron to quite massive proportions, and often reinforced it with an additional plate that covered the entire armpit area as well as a substantial portion of the chest. Towards the end of the 15th century, the tip of the shoulder defence was typically lengthened even further into a vertical flange, or haute-piece, to protect the neck. In contrast, the right pauldron was made much smaller to allow better mobility of the shoulder joint and fitted with a cut-out for the lance shaft below the armpit.

Similar asymmetry distinguished other elements of the arm harness as well. The left couter was usually quite massive, of single-piece construction, while the right was notably more compact and composed of multiple elements; its shell-like elbow cop was fitted with a somewhat elongated side wing that protected the inner bend of the elbow joint. Throughout Italy, the older forms of fingered gauntlets were abandoned in favour of heavy mittens fitted with long cuffs, by the middle of the 15th century extending almost to the tip of the elbow and covering most of the lower cannon. The gauntlet for the right hand was assembled from multiple lames articulated over the palms and fingers, while the construction of the left gauntlet was more rigid and commonly made of just two large plates.

The second identifying characteristic of the Italian style was the two-piece construction of the breastplate. Its upper portion, the breastplate proper, was originally quite large, curved along the contours of the torso from the neck to waist, and was often fitted under the right armpit with a lance rest. The lower element, or the plackart, was correspondingly smaller and covered only the abdomen. Both parts were joined on the outside with one or more leather straps and buckles, a solution that permitted considerable freedom of movement along the vertical axis. Over time, the relative proportions of the breastplate and plackart began to shift. The plackart terminated at the top into a sharp point, which was gradually extended higher and reached almost to the neck by the 1450s. Over the course of subsequent decades, the tip of the plackart grew wider and eventually covered virtually the entire upper breastplate. At this point, the two-piece construction had evidently lost its practical purpose, and was replaced circa 1490 with a rounded one-piece breastplate.
32. Lobster-tailed pot
NMS, Inv. No. N 5040.

Iron, leather, l. 37.0 cm, w. 21.1 cm, h. 21.7 cm, wt. 1.38 kg.
German, mid-late 16th c.

An early version of the lobster-tailed pot, or Hungarian burgonet. The round skull is forged from a single sheet of iron, slightly stepped up in diameter along its upper portion. The crown is topped by a small rondel terminating into a knob-like finial. A wide peak is riveted to the brow of the skull, fitted with a long, curved nasal bar retained by a screw. A laminated four-piece tail is riveted to the back of the skull, and a pair of cheekpieces pierced with round holes are suspended from leather strips attached above the temples. The helmet was presumably blued, but any trace of the original surface treatment has been removed over the course of conservation treatments.

Publication:

Bibliography:
**Table 1.** Results of hardness testing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harness component</th>
<th>Average hardness (HV 20 N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right section of the skull (exterior)</td>
<td>144.6 ± 14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left section of the skull (exterior)</td>
<td>168.4 ± 17.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helmet skull (interior)</td>
<td>102.1 ± 11.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Right section of the breastplate (exterior)</td>
<td>150.5 ± 18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left section of the breastplate (exterior)</td>
<td>146.7 ± 23.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Left section of the breastplate (interior)</td>
<td>111.1 ± 38.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Backplate (exterior)</td>
<td>150.8 ± 17.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Backplate (interior)</td>
<td>121.5 ± 39.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culet (exterior)</td>
<td>141.0 ± 20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left tasset (exterior)</td>
<td>104.7 ± 20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left tasset (interior)</td>
<td>134.7 ± 22.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Right arm harness (exterior)</td>
<td>191.0 ± 89.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Right arm harness (interior)</td>
<td>213.9 ± 105.9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**FIG. 2.** Measured thickness of steel sheet:
a) helmet skull, b) visor, c) breastplate, d) right tasset, e) left tasset.

(Photo: Tomaž Lazar)