SUMMARY

Incomplete croatization of parts of eastern Slovenia between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries

Tracing the linguonym 'Croatian' and ethnonym 'Croats' in White Carniola (Bela krajina), Kostel, Prekmurje, and Prlekija

Every national historiography has its overlooked issues that remain unaddressed either because of a lack of documentary evidence or "political correctness." These often include names for languages, territories, or groups of people when they spoil the established concept of the ethnogenesis and creation of a particular modern nation. Slovenes and Croats are no exception in this regard. Croatian historiography thus continues to marginalize the self-designation *Slovenci* (literally, 'Slovenes') used by the inhabitants of the historical province of Slavonia with its center in Zagreb and the name of their (Kajkavian) language, which was still called *slovenski* (literally, 'Slovene') well into the modern era. A similar phenomenon has challenged Slovenian historiography, in which no systematic study has ever been carried out on why and when the inhabitants of White Carniola/Bela krajina and Kostel began to identify themselves in the early modern era as Croats and to call their language Croatian, as also already discussed in Janez Vajkard Valvasor's *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola* (1689). What is more, in recent decades publications of various sources have provided confirmation of the presence of the name 'Croatian' in two other Slovenian border areas: as a linguonym and ethnonym in Prekmurje, and only as a linguonym in Prlekija.

Using comparative methods and drawing on the widest possible spectrum of sources, this discussion sheds light on the reasons for the appearance and disappearance of the term 'Croatian' in four Slovenian border areas. Its main conclusion is that the term 'Croatian' in the areas under discussion established itself as a transitional phenomenon substituting for the original term 'Slovene'(noun) or 'Slovenian' (adjective), the area being at the time replete with "prenational" significance and embraced by a good part of modern Croats as their own. The spread of the term 'Croatian' to the Slovenian border areas was part of a broader and prolonged process of nominal Croatization of medieval Slavonia (in present-day northern Croatia) with its center in Zagreb; such was taking place against the backdrop of tectonic geopolitical shifts resulting from Ottoman territorial gains in the Balkans and the Pannonian Plain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the historically Slavonian territory, thenceforth even more closely tied to the remnants of the original Kingdom of Croatia (in the Adriatic area), the designation 'Croatian' had been established by the eighteenth century in place of the previous designation 'Slovene', first as a political designation for the territory and its inhabitants and only later on as a designation for its language, Kajkavian (today a Croatian dialect), which was still called 'Slovene' for a long time to come.

The fundamental questions in this discussion are why the term 'Croatian' was also able to establish itself in part of the Slovenian territory in the early modern era and why it disappeared with the passage of time. The three areas under discussion – Prlekija, Prekmurje, and White Carniola – were the last to be included together with the rest of the Slovenian ethnic territory in a shared state framework: White Carniola and Prlekija circa 1300, and Prekmurje no earlier than 1526. However, they were never an integral part of historical Croatia nor had they been settled by a population that would call their language Croatian and themselves Croats. On the other hand, for centuries all four of these border areas fostered a lively cultural interaction with present-day Croatian territory, which was facilitated above all by language similarity and, in the case of Prekmurje, a shared Hungarian political framework. In all four areas in the early modern era, the combination of two closely interrelated factors – the linguistic factor and the cultural-linguistic factor – led to different degrees of Croatization of the linguonym 'Croatian' and in three areas also to the appearance of the ethnonym 'Croats'; however, in the eighteenth century both began to dwindle rapidly and eventually died out.

Apart from Kostel, the only area directly bordering the original medieval Kingdom of Croatia, the closest region to Croatia geographically was **White Carniola**,

the southeasternmost part of the province of Carniola and present-day Slovenia, whose "Croatian character" is best known by way of the work of Valvasor. The region obtained its present name in the first half of the nineteenth century, after it had been called Metlika (Germ. *Möttling*) from at least the thirteenth century onward. In 1689 the polymath Valvasor stressed in particular that this area was *then* generally called *Croaten* or *Crabaten*, even though the actual Croatian territory lay on the other side of the Kolpa River. In his opinion, the reason for such a name was the Croatian language, customs, and the dress of the inhabitants, which he also mentioned in the descriptions of several White Carniolan castles and two local towns. In doing so, he clearly equated the Croats and their language on either side of the Kolpa River; that is to say, the Carniolan Croats were also claimed to speak "proper Croatian." According to two of Valvasor's almost identical descriptions of the place where the Carniolan Croats lived, they dwelled "in the vicinity of Metlika, Podbrežje, Vinica, Črnomelj, and in those parts," and were clearly distinguished from the local Orthodox Vlachs or Uskoks.

Two hundred years later (in 1873) the Slovenian historian and writer Janez Trdina wrote with equal clarity that the White Carniolans of his time regarded themselves neither as Carniolans nor as Croats. In his opinion, they were called such only by their neighbors, inhabitants of Lower Carniola/Dolenjska, who presumably called them 'Croats' in the first place. Conversely, in defense of their "Slovenian identity," Trdina said nothing about White Carniolans using this name in reference to themselves at any time and in any form whatsoever; although he must have known that the inhabitants of at least some parts of southern White Carniola still called their local dialect Croatian and this despite the fact that he as a historian was very familiar with Valvasor.

Trdina (1830–1905), a child of the "age of nationalism," may be counterposed by the "unburdened" seeker of truth, Valvasor (1641–1693), although regarding the latter one cannot ignore the question of whether he might have exaggerated in the opposite direction, so that White Carniolans in his days were no more and no less Croats than before or after. As it has turned out, contemporary "neutral" sources have testified in Valvasor's favor. Namely, in 1725 the designation 'Croats' for White Carniolans was confirmed in a report by the physician Franc Zalokar from Novo mesto; in the mid-eighteenth century the provincial designation *Kroaten* was documented for the White Carniolan area in the land registers of the Auersperg (Slov.: Turjak) seigniory; and at the end of the century the linguonym 'Croatian' appeared in an ecclesiastical source, this one only limited to the local dialect of the Parish of

Vinica ob Kolpi, situated right on the border between Carniola and Croatia. The most important source on the Croatian self-identification of White Carniolans, however, is the registers of the Universities of Vienna and Graz, in which one can follow changes in the identity of White Carniolan intelligentsia throughout the centuries. Until the first half of the seventeenth century, White Carniolans were identified as Carniolans by their provincial affiliation (*Carniola*, *Carniolanus*), exceptionally as *Sclavus*, and most often after their locality as *Metlicensis* 'from Metlika'. Then between 1643 and 1712, during Valvasor's era, there came a period during which White Carniolans identified themselves as Croats. No fewer than thirty out of thirty-four altogether declared themselves as *Croata* in these sixty-nine years, and only four as *Carniolus*. However, by the first half of the eighteenth century the views of affiliation began to change rapidly again. Between 1719 and 1800 only a little less than one-fifth of White Carniolan university students were classified as *Croata* (five out of twenty-six), the last one in 1783, while one in 1773 was accompanied by the academic designation 'Dalmatian'. An interesting picture is revealed by the appellations of clerics ordained by their local bishop, the Patriarch of Aquileia in Udine (Slov.: Videm, in present-day Italy). During the fifty-year period from 1698 to 1749, a large majority in the northern part of White Carniola declared themselves to be Carniolans (26 out of 33), and a large majority of clerics in the southern part still identified themselves as Croats (15 out of 17). However, after White Carniola was brought under the Archdiocese of Gorizia (1751), the appellation *Croata* had by 1758, a matter of only a few years, been completely supplanted by the designation 'Carniolan'. Confirmation that the term 'Croatian' had almost completely disappeared by the end of the eighteenth century can be found in contemporary local-studies literature on Carniola, that is, in topographic descriptions by Franz Anton Breckerfeld and Heinrich Georg Hoff. According to Breckerfeld, around 1790 the language, dress, and customs in some places across White Carniola still had a Croatian or fairly Croatian air about them (*Sprache, Tracht und Sitten lassen sich (ziemlich) kroatisch*), whereas Hoff had more limited information of this sort in 1808, making not a single mention of Croatian as one of the vernaculars of Lower Carniola. "Neutral" reports, too, would thenceforth only speak of similarities between the local dialects of White Carniola and Croatia.

So, what was happening with the self-identification of White Carniolans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – a period during which the White Carniolan landscape experienced practically no demographic or ethno-linguistic change? The pivotal shifts reach back to the sixteenth century, after the post-1526 state border on

the Kolpa River became an internal border within the framework of the Habsburg dynasty, and after White Carniola underwent a significant demographic change with the influx of South Slavs fleeing from the Ottomans. Their shared fate and the mixed population brought the area closer to the territory on the other side of the Kolpa River, to which it geographically gravitated. However, it is impossible to attribute the decisive role in the spread of the ethnonym 'Croats' to these immigrants, who were ethnically, linguistically, and religiously a very heterogeneous crowd. According to sources from the second half of the sixteenth century, the language of White Carniolans was then called Slovene (*Windisch*), and the founder of standard Slovene, Primož Trubar (1508–1586), placed White Carniolans – referred to as *Möttlinger* 'natives of Metlika' – within the area of his "Carniolan Slovenian language." However, conditions already began to change in the same century. The area was closely connected with the Reformation in Croatia as well as with the Military Frontier, a defensive buffer against the Ottoman Empire. From the mid-sixteenth century onward, its nobility experienced major shifts as well: the Croatian Counts of Erdődy and Frankopan were based in White Carniola for several decades; the region was a place of residence for various noble families that had business connections with the Military Frontier; and Croatian literary production in the castles was continuously documented from the mid-sixteenth to the eighteenth century, first in the older Croatian Glagolitic and later in Latin script.

Nevertheless, the Croatian nobility and its administration only exerted limited influence over the identity of the population. There are still fewer indications that the establishment of the ethnonym 'Croats' and the linguonym 'Croatian' was associated with the activities of Croatian priests, who were extremely rare in White Carniola. Thanks to the Teutonic Order, which enjoyed a high degree of autonomy from the local bishop, the Patriarch of Aquileia, most priests operating in White Carniola were born there. The spread and cultivation of the designation 'Croatian' should in fact be ascribed to them. Known information regarding their studies in Zagreb, the ordination of clerics with *tituli mensae* of the Croatian nobility, the work of numerous priests from White Carniola in the Zagreb Diocese, and, after the beginning of the eighteenth century, the absence of White Carniolans among the students in the Ljubljana Jesuit Seminary as well as other facts all testify to White Carniola's close ties to Zagreb as an educational and spiritual center.

The factors that turned White Carniolans into Croats for at least one century could be summarized as follows: 1) linguistic similarity between the indigenous and especially the immigrant population of White Carniola and the inhabitants of

Croatia on the other side of the Kolpa River, who already in the sixteenth century called themselves Croats and their language Croatian; 2) significantly increased affiliation of White Carniola with the Croatian milieu after the inclusion of the remaining parts of the lands of the Hungarian and Croatian crown in the Habsburg dynastic framework (1526/27); and 3) related unobstructed openness of the area to cultural and language influences from the south and east, which also drew institutional support from domestic, organizationally autonomous ecclesiastical structures that had their roots in White Carniolan soil and spiritual ties with the Zagreb Diocese. Only a combination of all three factors could lead to the result as observed by Valvasor in the second half of the seventeenth century.

There were undoubtedly a number of reasons that the linguonym 'Croatian' and ethnonym 'Croats' dwindled in the eighteenth century and nearly died out at the end of the century, but administrative and political reforms have a special place among them. In a matter of a few decades, between the 1740s and the 1790s, White Carniola directly attached itself to the new political, educational, and ecclesiastical centers in Carniola, especially Novo mesto (from the mid-eighteenth century onward the district capital with a newly established high school) and Ljubljana (the diocesan seat of White Carniola after 1787). Although still perceived as Croats by their neighboring Carniolans and not feeling like "true" Carniolans either, the inhabitants of White Carniola identified themselves less and less with the Croats, and ultimately became Slovenes. In the first half of the nineteenth century (1845) they were documented for the first time as *beli Krajnci*, 'White Carniolans'.

Also considered at that time as *beli Krajnci* were the inhabitants of a small border territory in northeastern Lower Carniola, between the Krka and Sava rivers and the Gorjanci hills, where a "Croatian dialect" was spoken. Even though the first settlement of Krško polje by a larger group of Croats fleeing from the Ottomans was documented in 1534 and Valvasor emphasized one hundred and fifty years later (1689) that "everything was already Croatian" in nearby Čatež and its surroundings, there is no evidence to suggest that the local population identified itself with the Croats or named its language Croatian. The circumstances for the spread of the term 'Croatian' to the autochthonous population were far less favorable than in White Carniola and Kostel, especially in light of the lack of institutional support (clergy).

In **Kostel**, a small piece of border territory in southern Carniola on the Kolpa River, the reasons for the spread as well as decline of the linguonym 'Croatian' and ethnonym 'Croats' were basically the same as in White Carniola. However, the

conditions for their introduction were even more favorable because Kostel directly bordered the original medieval Kingdom of Croatia, and after the German colonization of Gottschee County (Slov.: Kočevska) in the fourteenth century, it became a kind of a pocket between the German-speaking Gottscheers and the linguistically similar population of the neighboring Croatian area on the other side of the Kolpa River. In the sixteenth century the area experienced a significant demographic change with the arrival of refugees fleeing from the Ottomans, mostly Croatian Catholics, who brought the name 'Croatian' with them. Moreover, in the sixteenth century the inhabitants of Kostel and the Croats just across the Kolpa River were united under the Parish of Kostel for a while. There was hardly any other place along the Kolpa River where the population that considered itself Croatian merged as completely with the inhabitants of the Carniolan side of the river as in Kostel. Consequently, the Parish of Kostel was already documented as Croatian (*Croatarum*) in 1598, the year of the earliest appearance of the term 'Croatian' in any of the four areas under discussion. Given the small size of Kostel, the linguonym 'Croatian' and ethnonym 'Croats' were indeed less documented, but they did reveal the same development as in White Carniola. The main narrative source attesting to the Croatian character of Kostel is Valvasor's *The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola* (1689), describing the area as "Carniolan Croatia" and assigning its inhabitants the Croatian language and dress. In the first half of the eighteenth century one can find confirmation of Valvasor's assertions in "neutral sources": self-declarations by a few intellectuals (1722–1735) and statements by inhabitants maintaining that their language was Croatian (1721). Later on, the appellation 'Croat' was no longer documented in reference to intellectuals, but Kostel's attachment to Croatian territory was nevertheless evident from the designation of a Graz student from Kostel as a 'Dalmatian' (1780). Reports from the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century narrowed their focus to the special features of the local Kostel dialect, and to the similar language, dress, and customs shared by the inhabitants of Kostel and the Croats.

Compared to White Carniola and Kostel, the ethnonym 'Croats' and linguonym 'Croatian' gained much less ground in **Prekmurje**, a traditional region in the northeasternmost part of present-day Slovenia and that which constituted the only part of Slovenian ethnic territory under the Hungarian crown. Prekmurje had no common name until the nineteenth century; it did not even constitute a political-administrative whole until 1919 or an ecclesiastical entity until the establishment of the Szombathely Diocese in 1777. For centuries it was divided by the east-west

county and diocesan boundary: upper Prekmurje belonged to Vas County (Slov.: Železna županija) and the Győr Diocese, and lower Prekmurje to Zala County (Slov.: Zalska županija) and the Zagreb Diocese. However, the Zagreb Diocese also staffed the upper part of the region. Unlike White Carniola, the spread of the term 'Croatian' to Prekmurje may be seen as the work of priests from Croatia. The linguonym 'Croatian' spread to this area naturally, through the Kajkavian liturgical language, which was still called 'Slovene' well into the seventeenth century (just as the inhabitants of Prekmurje called their own language), and by the eighteenth century Kajkavian had become the standard language of Prekmurje. What is more, since the sixteenth century the inhabitants of Prekmurje had lived between two Croatian entities: the indigenous Burgenland Croats to the north (who fled from the Ottomans in the sixteenth century and settled the present-day border area between Austria and Hungary and who were likewise attached to the Kajkavian cultural area), and in political terms Croatia (former Slavonia) to the south, which in the seventeenth century also "de facto" incorporated Medžimurje (the northernmost part of present-day Croatia), thus reaching as far as the natural border of Prekmurje along the Mura River. The introduction of the term 'Croatian' was certainly facilitated by their common political affiliation to the Hungarian kingdom, particularly in combination with the weak cultural-linguistic ties between Prekmurje and the Slovenes in the Habsburg hereditary lands on the other side of the Mura River as the border between the Holy Roman Empire and Hungary.

Given that the inhabitants of Prekmurje were designated in university registers as *Ungarus*, it is all the more important to note that in the mid-seventeenth century, only a few years after the first White Carniolans declared themselves to be *Croata*, two Graz students from Murska Sobota did the same, both at the time when Murska Sobota was ecclesiastically Protestant. That the ethnonym 'Croats' not only crossed the diocesan and county boundary but also overcame the religious division is also evident from Archdeacon Stefan Kazó's ecclesiastical visitation of the Diocese of Győr in upper Prekmurje dating from 1698, the most valuable source on the term 'Croatian' in Prekmurje in general. In upper and still predominantly Protestant Prekmurje, the majority of Catholic priests, teachers, and licentiates declared themselves to be *Croata* and only a minor part as *Ungarus*. Among the declared Croats were, apart from four priests from Croatia, inhabitants of both parts of Prekmurje, including an Evangelical catechist. The visitation less clearly defined the name of the language spoken in the upper Prekmurje parishes, which were classified as *slavonico-croatica*. As the compound word implies, the term 'Croatian' for the language of the

inhabitants was used alongside the predominant term 'Slovene'. This is confirmed by the fact that in some cases only *s(c)lavonica* was indicated as the language of the parish or sermons. Croatian as the language of sermons was first documented in 1688 in Dobrovnik in lower Prekmurje, and as the parish language in 1714 in upper Prekmurje; specifically, in the Parish of Gornja Lendava (present-day Grad).

Apparently, the term 'Croatian' first began to dwindle in the upper part of Prekmurje, where, based on currently available information, it was last attested in 1714. The Protestant literature of Prekmurje, which marked its beginnings with its first printed material one year later, exclusively called its language 'Slovene', and even Catholic Latin sources, both ecclesiastical and secular, thenceforth only referred to it as *lingua Vandalica*. The crucial event that turned the inhabitants of Prekmurje away from the Croatian cultural area even faster was the rearrangement of diocesan boundaries in 1777, placing all of Prekmurje under the newly-established diocese in Szombathely. With the approval of its first bishop, János Szily, Catholic Prekmurje literature was instituted three years later, drawing on Protestant examples and the same dialect base (that of upper Prekmurje) as its Protestant counterpart. As evident from Szily's first visitation in 1778, the language of the inhabitants was called Slovene (*Vandalica*) in the upper Prekmurje parishes, and Croatian (*Croatica*) in lower Prekmurje, which until then had been ecclesiastically centered on Zagreb. Nonetheless, such a dichotomy should primarily be seen as a result of lower Prekmurje's recent affiliation with the Zagreb Diocese. Namely, in Hungarian topographic descriptions and local studies before the end of the eighteenth century, Croatian is only indicated as the language for some villages in lower Prekmurje and Slovene (*vend*) for most of them. The linguonym 'Croatian' was last mentioned in 1811 as the language spoken by the inhabitants of three villages in the Parish of Dolnja Lendava, which lies on the present Slovenian-Croatian border on the Mura River. The natural (and, since 1777, also diocesan) border with Medžimurje on the Mura River became a boundary between the two standard languages and later between the two nations, the Slovenes and Croats.

In the fourth border area, **Prlekija**, the northeastern part of Slovenian Styria bordering Prekmurje, the term 'Croatian' was confirmed (albeit rather late) for local dialects, but not the ethnonym 'Croats' for the inhabitants. For a long time all that was known was that two market-town scribes in Središče ob Dravi described the local dialect in the 1780s as Croatian, which the linguist Jakob Rigler accurately linked to the spread of the designation 'Croatian' to the neighboring language area around 1700. Today it is known that the linguonym 'Croatian' was not confined to

Središče ob Dravi but covered a significantly wider area of eastern Prlekija and was documented over a considerably longer period of time. The first evidence originated from the small town of Ormož, where the form of oath taken by newly admitted burghers, most probably dating back to before 1710, was referred to as *Juramentum Ciuis Croaticae,* the 'Croatian burgher's oath'; the last two mentions of the term 'Croatian' date back to between 1785 and 1788 and refer to the language spoken by the inhabitants of the market town of Središče ob Dravi. The link between the Ormož oath form and documents testifying to the existence of the Croatian language in Središče ob Dravi is provided by the third most important source: the visitation minutes of the parishes under the Salzburg Archdeaconate between the Drava and Mura rivers of 1760–1764. The extent of the area in which visitators documented the presence of the linguonym 'Croatian' on the basis of statements provided by priests and the local population can be fairly accurately delimited towards the north and west, following the parish boundaries. This was a compact area not associated with any political-administrative or ecclesiastical, historical, or dialect basis. Therefore, it appears that the term 'Croatian' in Prlekija dwindled in simple correlation with the geographic distance from the Croatian and Hungarian borders. Apart from the natural language factor, its occurrence was governed by similar aspects as its counterpart in Prekmurje: the activities of Croatian priests and priests that had received their education in Croatia, Kajkavian as the standard language, and most certainly the influence from nearby Varaždin – the secondary-school center and alternative capital of the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia.

The decisive period for Prlekija to move away from the influence of the Kajkavian cultural-linguistic area was the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Parallel to the ecclesiastical school reforms were also successful efforts to create a special eastern Styrian variant of standard Slovene. This and similar changes ultimately placed Prlekija outside the Croatian-Kajkavian cultural circle, and the designation 'Croatian' for the language of the inhabitants of Prlekija disappeared before it even gained ground.

Conclusion: The reasons for the establishment of the term 'Croatian' in place of the original 'Slovene' were similar in all four border areas under discussion but also specific to each one. The areas differed with respect to the time frame in which the term 'Croatian' was documented and also with respect to its rootedness. The designation first appeared in Kostel, as early as the end of the sixteenth century (1598), last in Prlekija, being no earlier than the beginning of the eighteenth century, and was documented for the longest period in the southernmost part of Prek-

murje (1811). The ethnonym 'Croats' and linguonym 'Croatian' gained the most ground in White Carniola and Kostel; in Prekmurje, they reached various degrees of acceptance, depending on the ecclesiastical as well as religious division of the area, whereas in Prlekija, there were only records of the linguonym. The dwindling and disappearance of the term 'Croatian' until circa 1800 related to a number of factors. A very important role was played by political-administrative and ecclesiastical reforms that pulled the border areas under discussion from Croatian cultural and educational centers, and the emergence of two Slovenian regional standard languages – the Prekmurje and eastern Styrian language. The ultimate disappearance of the designation 'Croatian' was largely a result of the fact that the areas under discussion were never integrated into the Croatian political milieu.