INTRODUCTION

The phrase “(Slovene) medieval history” in the book’s subtitle should be understood in its geographical, not ethnic sense: it does not mean that the papers deal with the history of the Slovenes, but rather with historical developments and phenomena from the Middle Ages in the area that is today associated with (the Republic of) Slovenia. At the same time, we must be aware that even such a geographical definition can only be approximate and provisional: the contemporary framework of the state certainly should not limit our view or research when dealing with remote periods, when many political, linguistic, ethnical, and other borders differed essentially and the area had a different structure. The developments in the coastal towns of present-day Slovenia, for instance, cannot be adequately understood and described without knowledge and consideration of the conditions in the whole of Istria, the historical province that is today divided between Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia, or without giving due consideration to the roles played by the Byzantine, Frankish, or Venetian authorities in the peninsula. To quote another example, the situation is similar to that of Styria (or Carinthia, or Gorizia, etc.). Since 1918, that historical Land, formed in the 12th century, has been divided between two states, Austria and Slovenia (Yugoslavia) into Austrian and Slovene Styria, and the latter occupies about one third of the former Land. It is clear, then, that we can research and describe some chapters from its history only if we focus on Styria as a whole, regardless of its current borders; or, in other words, if we view it – and this is true of everything in history – as a variable historical category that cannot be treated outside the context of the period we are interested in.

The region addressed in individual chapters of this book is therefore generally wider than the Slovene territory, which is however their principal focus. This region extends from the Northern Adriatic in the south to the Danube in the north, and from Friuli and Venetia in the west to western Hungary or Pannonia in the east. It is largely identical with the term “Alpine-Adriatic” as it was defined in an extensive monograph by several authors on the history of the Alpine-Adriatic region published a few years ago.\(^1\) It is also a region that virtually defies any

\(^1\) Moritsch 2001.
definition in terms of geographical, historical, or cultural criteria, but is nevertheless a region marked throughout history by intensive communications at very diverse levels. Furthermore, the region has always been open: individual parts were associated with centres lying beyond its borders, and they enjoyed more intensive communications with those centres than with other parts of the Alpine-Adriatic region or with centres located in the region itself. Though this facilitated a fast spread of external influences, it also turned the Alpine-Adriatic region, which is located anyway on the periphery of four great European geographical systems (the Alps, the Mediterranean, the Pannonian steppe, and the Dinaric Mountain Range), into a peripheral area of great political, cultural, and economic realms. One might even say that its peripheral nature was an outstanding characteristic of this otherwise quite centrally located European region. But as soon as we speak of a peripheral area, we take for granted contacts and encounters, since that too is a function of every periphery, and it bestows onto the idea of periphery a much more positive meaning than we usually associate with it. Those characteristics of the Alpine-Adriatic region are reflected in the following chapters in their own, specific way.

I likewise hope that the chapters of this book will show quite clearly that we cannot deal with the Middle Ages within coordinates or in ways set by a national, or rather nationalized, view of history. Numerous studies published in recent decades have made it perfectly clear that entire edifices of nationally conceived histories rest on extremely shaky foundations, and that the claimed ancient histories of nations largely obtained their image as late as the 19th century: their purpose was to awaken nationalism(s), historically legitimate the emerging nations, and satisfy their needs for historical consciousness as part of their national identity.² The notions we have of the past are not so much history in the sense that we would try to understand what once was, but rather visions of the past, nurtured by individual national elites at the time of the formation of their nations and related to their political-national ideals; visions which have remained largely unchanged through the following periods and into the present. Given the rapidly dwindling persuasive power of nationally conceived histories, their imaginations from the repertoire of ethnic-national and state-national historical interpretations – drawing borders where none existed before,