

1.01 Izvirni znanstveni članek

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## **Zgodbe z meje imperija. Grad Vinica in Semeniči, začetki in prvi posestniki v luči novih arhivskih virov**

### IZVLEČEK

*Prispevek se ukvarja z začetki in prvimi posestniki gradu Vinica v Beli krajini. Starejši avtorji so na podlagi obstoječega arhivskega gradiva in gradbenih prvin začetke gradu postavili v čas med sredino 15. in 16. stoletja. No-woodkrito gradivo iz arhiva Pruske kulturne ustanove, ki omenja posestni spor med Semeniči in Nemškim viteškim redom v začetku 16. stoletja, te domneve dopolnjuje. Postavitvev gradu in tabora sega v zadnjo četrtino 15. stoletja, ko sta se viniški duhovnik Viljem Graman in Viljem Semenič dogovorila, da bosta Nemški viteški red in rodbina Semenič skupaj postavila novo grajsko poslopje in tabor za zaščito svojih podložnikov. Po Gramanovi smrti so si grad prilastili Semeniči, kar je vodilo v pravdo z Nemškim viteškim redom. Grad je bil leta 1500 zaplenjen, do dvajsetih let 16. stoletja pa vrnjen Semeničem, ki so ga posedovali do začetka 17. stoletja.*

### KLJUČNE BESEDE

*Bela krajina, Metliško, Vinica, Semeniči, Nemški viteški red*

### ABSTRACT

#### STORIES FROM THE BORDER OF THE EMPIRE: THE VINICA CASTLE AND THE SEMENIČ FAMILY, BEGINNINGS AND FIRST OWNERS IN LIGHT OF NEW ARCHIVAL SOURCES

*The article describes the beginnings and first owners of the Vinica Castle in White Carniola. Based on available archival materials and construction elements, early authors dated the origins of the Vinica Castle to somewhere between the mid-15th and 16th century. The recently discovered archival materials from the Prussian Cultural Institution (Preussische Kulturstiftung), that contain a reference to a property dispute between the Semenič family and the Teutonic Order in the early 16th century, substantiated these assumptions with new data. The construction of the castle and the fortifications dates back to the last quarter of the 15th century, when a priest from Vinica, Wilhelm Graman, and Wilhelm Semenič agreed that the Teutonic Order and the Semenič family would join efforts in erecting a new castle building and fortifications to protect their serfs. After Graman's death, the Semenič family laid claim to the castle and thus initiated a property dispute with the Teutonic Order. The castle was seized in 1500 and by 1520 returned to the Semenič family, in whose possession it remained until the beginning of the 17th century.*

### KEY WORDS

*White Carniola, Metlika area, Vinica, Semenič family, Teutonic Order*

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## S U M M A R Y

## STORIES FROM THE BORDER OF THE EMPIRE:

## THE VINICA CASTLE AND THE SEMENIČ FAMILY, BEGINNINGS AND FIRST OWNERS IN LIGHT OF NEW ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Based on available archival materials and construction elements, early authors dated the origins of the Vinica Castle to somewhere between the mid-15th and 16th century, the time of mounting Ottoman pressure on Carniola and neighbouring

lands, which forced the province to set up defense structures and fortifications and reinforce medieval castles. The development of Vinica as a market town was inextricably connected with the development of its fortifications, also known as *tabor*, and its castle. The first owner of the Vinica Castle was believed to be a man named Kraljič, who was succeeded in the 16th century by the noble family of Semenič, and in the 17th century the castle fell into the ownership of the families Kanižar and Purgstall. Recently discovered archival material of the Prussian Cultural Institution (*Preussische Kulturstiftung*) from Berlin throws new light on the beginnings of the Vinica Castle, its builders and first owners, and improves the current knowledge on the history of this castle building situated in the southeasternmost part of present-day Slovenia. A reference to a property dispute that erupted between the Semenič family and the Teutonic Order in the early 16th century linked the newly-built castle to the Gramans, a family of townsmen from Metlika, and the noble family Semenič, as well as threw new light on the role of the Teutonic Order and provided valuable new knowledge concerning their estate and presence at Vinica.

The Turks resumed with almost annual incursions into the territory of Metlika in the second half of the 15th century. The Kolpa River, which constituted the border between Carniola and Croatia, Holy Roman Empire and The Lands of the Crown of St. Stephen, was usually crossed at shallow parts of the river (fords), that facilitated the development of medieval villages. As an incursion venue the ford at Vinica greatly increased the exposure of Vinica and the surrounding villages to the Turkish threat. According to Valvasor, the latter found its clearest manifestation around Vinica in 1469, when the Turks “ravaged the local area into a most deplorable state and revealed themselves as despicable Scythians that they were.” In the middle of the century, Wilhelm Graman, a citizen of Metlika served as a local parish priest. He heard stories of the first Turkish raids at the onset of the 15th century and probably personally witnessed the horrors of such an incursion in 1469. Graman wanted to protect the parish and particularly the estates, and the serfs obtained a little less than fifteen years prior in the nearby village of Drenovec. Soon after the Turkish raid of 1469, Graman and Wilhelm Semenič, a distinguished nobleman from Metlika, as well as the owner of the largest estate in Vinica and the majority of serfs, concluded an agreement to erect a tower or a small castle to protect their serfs as well as other local inhabitants. The agreement between Graman and Semenič most probably stipulated that Graman would see to the construction of the castle building and Semenič would provide the land on which the building was to be built on. The most suitable was the location of St. Catherine’s chapel in an open and well-protected

part of Vinica, where the construction works began soon after 1469. The chapel was extended and a tower was added, therefore gaining a more defensive character. Until 1472, the construction of the Vinica tower was completed and Graman memorialised the event by mounting a plaque with a coat-of-arms (Jesus’s head?) and an inscription of the year in Gothic alphabet. The tower remained in his hands until his death at the end of the 15th century; from time to time, it most certainly provided protection to him and his parishioners against the hereditary enemy of the Christian name. The Vinica tower was erected on a plot of land that belonged to the Semenič family. After Graman’s death and given the lamentable state of the Teutonic Order in the province of Metlika, whose law began to disappear but was not yet properly supplanted by Carniolan law, the Semenič family saw their opportunity to seize the tower, for which they also had completely sound legal grounds. Three Semenič brothers, the oldest Wilhelm, and the younger Nicolas and Albrecht, built a house in the newly fortified settlement, and resolved to lay their hands on the castle at the first fitting opportunity. Soon after Wilhelm Graman’s death, when the Komtur of the Teutonic Order in Metlika ordered one of the Knight-Brothers to seize the building. However, when he came to Vinica and laid claim to the tower, Semenič brothers chased him away, thus initiating a dispute over the estate. The dispute soon escalated, as may be gathered from the decree of Emperor Maximilian I in April of 1500, ordering Sigmund Piers, the governor (*hauptmann*) of Metlika, to seize the Vinica fortification on his behalf and hold it under his control until the dispute was solved. This is the oldest document containing a reference to the tabor fortifications in Vinica. Piers fulfilled the order and sent his bailiff Jacob Kraljič to take hold of the tower and drive out the Semenič brothers on Emperor’s behalf. The brothers tried every possible means to demonstrate their rightful claim to the castle, which stood on their land. Available sources do not provide any information on what served as evidence and how it was presented, but what is certain is that the brothers successfully proved that the Vinica Castle was indeed built on their land and the bailiff Kraljič turned the tower over to them no later than 1522. In the 16th century, the castle and the fortifications at Vinica, situated only fifteen kilometres away from the Ottoman Empire, were an important centre in the immediate hinterland of the Military Frontier, which contributed to the growth and development of the village. Thus, in 1583 Vinica first appears in sources as a market town. The Vinica Castle remained in the possession of the Semenič family until 1602, when they sold it to Michael Kanižar, but reclaimed it before 1618.