

## PRINTED MATERIAL AND THE MASS EMIGRATION OF SLOVENES

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The individual's decision to leave his home and settle in another country, whether for a long period or a short one, has always been subject to the influence of the various types of information received at the time, either orally, via private correspondence, or, most importantly, from the press, in the broadest sense of the word. The following paper devotes itself to an outline of the various types of printed matter that existed and the visual material that appeared in public.

During the period of mass emigration of Slovenes (from around 1890 to 1914, or 1924) many different **newspapers** were available, and literacy was relatively high. I should note in passing that most emigrants were from rural areas (76 per cent in 1890, 73 per cent in 1900, and 67 per cent in 1910). These people had learnt the basics of reading and writing in elementary school. The simultaneous growth in the number of local newspapers in Slovenia indicates that reading culture was also spreading among this section of the population. Newspapers in Slovenia published a large amount of information about the USA and the Slovene immigrants living there. This might take the form of letters, travel writing, 'news' from America (and to a lesser extent from Germany and Egypt), warnings and information from state and church authorities and critical intellectuals, the advertisements of emigrants' societies, or literary works by emigrants. Immigrants' newspapers in the USA likewise published many articles about the 'old homeland'. The mutual exchange of newspapers from both sides of the Atlantic was an established practice, something confirmed by the fact that prices were quoted in both US dollars and German marks at the head of newspapers in Slovenia. Through this connection via newspapers of the 'old' and 'new' homelands, a special cultural or media-based connection between the two worlds was established, which cannot be traced before this time and which disappears after the end

of the period of mass emigration. During the period in question Slovenes were well informed about America, about working conditions and living conditions there, about wages, political conditions, economic crises, et cetera, and thus their image of it was far removed from the unrealistic picture of 'a rich country across the Atlantic' which people still cherished in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The power of the press was also much greater at that time because it was in fact the only public medium. Not until the 1920s were newspapers joined by radio and the increasing use of visual material such as film. Almanacs providing useful information (e.g. exchange rates, US measures, postage rates, et cetera) as well as specialist papers and creative writing with the emphasis on the life of people in the old and new homelands, were popular on both sides of the Atlantic.

During the period in question there were also a number of small presses publishing brochures, booklets or information sheets. Foremost among these were **travel instructions** (two examples being *Kažipot* and *Reiseführer*) in which the emigrant was given advice and basic information about the journey. We should remember that most emigrants were ignorant of the languages of the countries through which they travelled, and indeed very few even spoke English. Instructions written in their native language were accordingly extremely welcome. Even on Ellis Island many emigrants were given bilingual **handbooks** such as Viktor Kubelka's *Slovene-English Conversations* (1912). These contained simple dialogues which immigrants needed to know in order to communicate in their new environment. Numerous brochures were published in America, too (e.g. **instructions on how to apply for American citizenship** and the **statutes and rules** of sundry societies), along with **posters** for society events, **wall calendars**, et cetera. However this is already material which relates to the emigrants' new life in America and as such requires special treatment.

Besides newspapers, Slovenia was inundated in this period with a great deal of other printed matter incorporating all the technical innovations of the day, e.g. photography, colouring, coloured print and suchlike. The walls of every village inn were hung with **posters** proclaiming the enticing offers of various shipping lines (I should mention in passing that the advertisements of shipping companies also appeared in newspapers, even in those which opposed emigration. Money, after all, is money!). Many of the posters featured drawings or photographs of steamers. It was no coincidence that the inn was chosen as the location for distributing this type of printed material. Archive sources tell us that many innkeepers in Slovenia also played the role of 'intermediary', in other words they directed travelling emigrants to specific shipping company agents. We also know

of an example of pictures of steamers hanging in a school classroom, which made many teachers very angry.

**Advertisement brochures, leaflets, and railway and shipping timetables** were also circulated which interested parties received on request by post or were given on trains and in other public places. Archive sources contain extensive reports of how Ljubljana's police force pursued those supplying this material on the trains which passed through the city. (Ljubljana was an important railway junction of the Zagreb–Trieste and Vienna–Trieste lines and the line running towards Switzerland and France.) Many of those leaving were also found to be in possession of letters from foreign (European) agencies written in Slovene relating to their journey across Europe or across the Atlantic. The letters of these agencies bore decorative letterheads providing basic information – the letter of Ivan Bihel on the Swiss–Austrian border, for example, which proclaimed 'Serbo-Croatian, German, Slovene and Italian spoken'. The use of Slovene (and often also of Croatian) indicates the interest of these agents in obtaining as many customers as possible from the countries where large-scale emigration was taking place. They often employed a Slovene-speaking clerk for this work and for the reception and dispatching of Slovene emigrants (for example Albin Kunc at the Zwilchenbart agency in Basle, who handled travellers for the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique in Paris. This agency even had a **sign** bearing the word *Izseljevanje* (Emigration) on the front of its building at the main railway station in Basle). We know that even in Ljubljana there were **signs on railings or the fronts of buildings**, especially in Kolodvorska Street, where most travel offices for emigrants were located. These signs unfortunately no longer exist. One sign on the railing of Number 41, Kolodvorska Street even led to the prosecution of an emigration agent called Edvard Kristan, the representative of the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique in Paris. Even more elaborate in terms of written and visual material, were the windows and frontages of the emigration offices, all of them competing with each other to attract emigrants into their offices to buy tickets.

Discoveries of pictures on religious buildings and private buildings are fairly rare. We do know of a case of a rural chapel painted with the representation of a transatlantic steamer (with two funnels) and a Madonna and Child. This chapel stands in the Savinja valley region, near the village of Kokarje in the Dreta valley in Štajerska. Another example is a house in the village of Selišče in Dolenjska, which is decorated with a painting of a four-funnelled steamer by local artist Jakob Kobe.

Another special group of printed items includes **passports, tickets, various certificates** from the journey (such as the 'Inspection Card' proving that the holder had undergone a medical examination), forms from police records on illegal emigrants. These items are little works of art in themselves, from the *fin de siècle*, a period in which it was customary to make even perfectly dull documents look beautiful. The addresses of agents and pictures of ships were also printed on the waxed **canvas pouches** used to hold travel documents – those supplied by Edvard Tavčar, for example, an agent with offices at Number 35, Kolodvorska Street and the representative of Bremen-based Norddeutscher Lloyd.

In this period special printed **advertisement cards** were also common. These took the form of large visiting cards with a drawing on one side and text on the other. One surviving example is the card of Franz Missler of Bremen, with a colour picture of the agent himself and a picture of a steamer on the front, and an invitation in Slovene on the back. A **label** stuck in the hatband or pinned to the coat identified the men and women who worked as agents of the shipping companies and who waited for their passengers at the railway stations and ports. The label, either of paper or cloth, bore the name of the shipping company or travel agent, while some also had a drawing of the ship.

**Maps** of Europe and America showing railway connections and providing other information such as journey times, ticket prices, et cetera, were also quite common. These were published by individual shipping companies. Emigrants used them in order to familiarise themselves with the journey they were to make, while the maps also served as an advertisement for the companies which published them.

The period of mass emigration was a golden age for the picture postcard industry in Europe, and also in Slovenia. Emigration agencies and shipping companies printed postcards as a form of advertisement. These were bought by (or given to) emigrants and posted home during the journey. Most depicted either an emigration office or a liner. Many were posted from the ship, since the larger liners had their own post offices. At home these postcards also served as advertisements, since they were circulated around the village. Their function as advertisements is confirmed by the fact that the front or picture side of the postcard also carried information from the shipping company about, for example, the speed of the passage, the comfort afforded by the steamer, and so on. Sending postcards from America was also very common among Slovenes. In addition to American postcards depicting towns and cities, this period also saw the appearance of Slovene postcards showing Slovene churches, the premises of societies and other

buildings, groups of emigrants, et cetera. Many sent home **photographs** of themselves as postcards, and these photographs thus acquired a 'public' role.

A special area is represented by the literature and rare specialist works which at this time appeared in Slovenia and in the USA and which were mainly concerned with the themes of emigration and emigrants. Their purpose was in the main pedagogical, and many also struck a warning note (e.g. the book by Jakob Alešovec with the telling title *Ne v Ameriko / Don't Go to America*, 1883, 1912) and stressed the importance of preserving a national consciousness and the Catholic faith. These were often ideologically and politically coloured, and also informative, for example the work by Jurij Trunk entitled *Amerika in Amerikanci* (America and the Americans, 1912) intended for American Slovenes and people in the old homeland. Overall, though, it would be fair to say that the period of mass emigration from Slovenia did not produce a very substantial body of work on the phenomenon itself, while the response to it in Slovene music and art was even smaller.

In this paper I have mentioned just a few items of printed and visual material. These can also be seen in my book *Pot slovenskih izseljencev na tuje* (The Journey of Slovene Emigrants to Foreign Lands, 1991). The diversity of printed material during the period of mass emigration of Slovenes points to a unique boom in the printed word and pictures and photographs industry, especially in relation to the advertisements of emigration agencies on the one hand, and the warnings of the Church and the state on the other. As I have already mentioned, the press at that time connected Slovenia with America and Europe, something still too little researched by historiography in Slovenia. The main purpose of my article, however, is to draw attention to those items of printed matter which were mass produced during the period of mass emigration, but which today are rare, since very few of them are to be found in archives, libraries and private collections. They are also important as museum pieces, since we do not have a museum dedicated to emigration in Slovenia, and general national and local museums devote little attention to this material. That, however is another story.