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## IN MEMORIAM

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### KARL KASER (1964–2022)

On 11 April 2022 the prominent historian Karl Kaser of the University of Graz, one of the foremost experts on the history of southeast Europe, passed away in Piran. He made considerable contributions to the history of family and kinship, migration, historical anthropology, visual culture, and many other areas as he expanded his interests from the European southeast to the Near East. He led numerous research projects in these fields, and for many of them, he was the pioneer, motivator, and innovator.

Karl Kaser was born in 1954 in Pischeldorf in the southeastern Austrian state of Styria. After completing his studies in History and Slavic Studies, he earned a doctorate in 1980 after successfully defending his thesis “Die serbischen politischen Gruppen, Bewegungen und Parteien und ihre Programme in Bosnien-Herzegowina 1903–1914” [Serbian Political Groups, Movements, Parties, and their Programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1903–1914]. His academic career began in 1988 at the Department for the History of Southeast Europe at the Karl-Franzens-University Graz as part-time teaching assistant, and in 1996 he became its chair. He completed his habilitation (Univ.-Doz.) in 1985 with the publication “Freier Bauer und Soldat. Die Militarisierung der agrarischen Gesellschaft an der kroatisch-slawnischen Militärgrenze (1535–1881)” [Free Peasant and Soldier: The Militarization of Agrarian Society along the Croatian and Slavonian Military Frontier] (Graz 1986; Böhlau: Wien-Köln-Weimar 1997).<sup>1</sup> In this book, Kaser innovatively presented in his own concept of social development in the Military Frontier from its beginnings in the 16<sup>th</sup> century until it was abolished in 1881. This work had a significant influence on future research into topics connected to the frontier. Croatian and Serbian historiography has long been indebted to him after he published his book “Popis Like i Krbave 1712. godine. Obitelj, zemljišni posjed i etničnost u jugozapadnoj Hrvatskoj” [The 1712 Census of Lika and Krbava: Family, Property, and Ethnicity in Southwest Croatia], which he and his colleagues published in Zagreb in 2013. This book was connected to earlier research into the Balkan family, about which he published many works, including the monograph „Porodica i srodstvo na Balkanu. Analiza jedne kulture koja nestaje” [Family and Kinship in the Balkans: An Analysis of a Disappearing Culture] (2002), which was translated into Serbian.

Of his more recent monographs, “Patriarchy After Patriarchy: Gender Relations in Turkey and in the Balkans, 1500–2000” (2008); “Balkan und Naher Osten. Einführung in eine gemeinsame Geschichte,” translated into English as “The Balkans And the Near East: Introduction To A Shared History” (2011); “*Andere Blicke: Religion Und Visuelle Kulturen Auf Dem Balkan Und Im Nahen Osten*” (2013); “Hollywood auf dem Balkan: Die visuelle Moderne an der europäischen Peripherie (1900–1970)” [Hollywood in the Balkans: Visual Modernism in the European Periphery (1900–1970)] (2018); and “Femininities and Masculinities in the Digital Age: Realia and Utopia in the Balkans and South Caucasus” (2021).

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<sup>1</sup> The book was published in Croatia in 1997 by Naprijed, under the title “Slobodan seljak i vojnik. Povojačenje agrarnog društva u Hrvatsko-slavonskoj Vojnoj krajini (1535–1881)” [Free peasant and soldier – the militarization of the agrarian society in the Croatian and Slavonian military borders 1535–1881], and in Japanese translation by Isao Koshimura in 2013.

My personal interactions with Karl Kaser followed two paths of shared interests. One was environmental history, a topic on which Kaser had published an article as far back as 1987 in the journal *Historijski zbornik*: “Uništenje šuma na obalnom kraškom području hrvatske Vojne krajine u prvoj polovici 18.stoljeća. Njegovi demografski, privredni i socijalni uzroci” [Destruction of Forests in Coastal Karst Area of the Croatian Military Frontier in the Early 18<sup>th</sup> Century: Demographic, Economic, and Social Causes]. Although I was already familiar with his work through the international research project Triplex Confinium, I first met him face-to-face in 2000 at the first conference on environmental history in southeast Europe, organized in Zadar, Croatia by the same project. From 2002 on, I regularly spent my summers conducting research in the Graz archives, so were able to chat during our breaks. During one of these conversations, we arranged for him to attend a second conference on environmental history in southeast Europe that was being held in Koprivnica, Croatia in 2003. There he presented the paper “Mensch und Ökologie aus historisch-anthropologischer Perspektive” [Humankind and Ecology from a Historical and Anthropological Perspective], published in the journal *Ekonomika i ekohistorije*, which prof. Kaser had supported from the beginning and served on the editorial board from the first issue.

The second area of interest we shared was the Military Frontier. He offered helpful advice when I was writing a book about the fortification in Koprivnica in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when it was part of the Military Frontier, which I developed from my master’s thesis and was published by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. I also discussed my doctoral dissertation with him, and he found my idea of comparing the Varaždin Generalate with Križevci County in the 17<sup>th</sup> century quite interesting. He helped me tremendously with getting copies for me of many documents from the Austrian archives and with creating the concept for my dissertation. Finally, as a reviewer, he supported the publication of my dissertation in book form as “Pogranična društva i okoliš. Varaždinski generalat i Križevačka županija u XVII. Stoljeću” [Border Society and the Environment: The Varaždin Generalate and the County of Križevci in the 17<sup>th</sup> century].

Apart from Graz and Zagreb, we also met at other places where we presented at conferences (Belgrade) and at meetings connected to the joint master’s program for southeast European studies (Sofia, Novi Sad, Regensburg, and Cluj) that he successfully coordinated.

Karl Kaser nurtured numerous historians, and some of them, like Ulf Brunnbauer or Hannes Grandits, are now among the leading researchers of southeast European history. The Department of Southeast European History and Anthropology at the University of Graz’s Institute of History the was unavoidable place of communication for many historians who shared an interest in history and the historical anthropology of the European southeast. In addition, he directly or indirectly influenced many younger colleagues in almost all parts of southeast Europe in many other ways, so the death of Prof. Kaser is a great loss and has left a void in the historiography of these areas.

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