

Missionary Work in Wonsan: A Picture Postcard and Catholic Journals in Slovenia

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Abstract

In the Cartography Department of the National and University Library (NUK) in Ljubljana, there is a single picture postcard showing a black and white photo of the Benedictine abbey in Tokwon near Wonsan, today's North Korea. The postcard was printed in Slovenia, or by a Slovenian printing house, because the caption is in Slovene. This picture postcard was not mailed, and there is no additional information regarding who possessed the card and when.

In relation to the missionaries posted to Korea during the early twentieth century, it is known that the Vatican divided the Korean region into three, for the French, American and German missionary orders.

In the library NUK, there are many similar missionary postcards from other parts of Asia, particularly from India and Ceylon; that is, showing local scenes in relation to missionary works with captions in Slovenian.

This paper is a report on further research about the activities of Slovenian missionaries. Was there anybody from the Slovenian region stationed in Tokwon in the 1930s? Or perhaps only the printing of the postcards took place?

Keywords: Christian missionary, Tokwon, 1930s, picture postcards, postcard printing in Slovenia

Misijonsko delo v Wonsanu: razglednica in katoliške revije v Sloveniji

Izvleček

Na Oddelku za kartografijo Narodne in univerzitetne knjižnice (NUK) v Ljubljani je ena sama razglednica s črno-belim posnetkom benediktinske opatije v Tokwonu, v bližini Wonsana, v današnji Severni Koreji. Razglednica je bila natisnjena v Sloveniji oziroma jo je natisnila slovenska tiskarna, saj je napis na njej v slovenščini. Ta razglednica ni bila poslana po pošti, zato ni dodatnih podatkov o tem, kdo in kdaj jo je posedoval.

V zvezi z misijonarji, napotenimi v Korejo v začetku 20. stoletja, je znano, da je Vatikan razdelil korejsko regijo na tri dele, in sicer za francoski, ameriški in nemški misijonski red.

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V knjižnici NUK je veliko podobnih misijonarskih razglednic iz drugih delov Azije, zlasti iz Indije in s Cejlona; to so razglednice, ki prikazujejo lokalne prizore v povezavi z misijonskimi deli in imajo napise v slovenščini.

Prispevek je poročilo o nadaljnjem raziskavanju o delovanju slovenskih misijonarjev. Ali je bil v tridesetih letih 20. stoletja v Tokwonu nameščen kdo iz slovenske regije? Ali pa je morda prišlo le do tiskanja razglednic?

Ključne besede: krščanski misijon, Tokwon, trideseta leta 20. stoletja, razglednice, tiskanje razglednic v Sloveniji

Diaspora and Missionary

The word “diaspora” means either the movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country, or the people themselves who have moved away from their own country (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 2020). The word was first used to indicate the dispersion of the Jews beyond Israel, but today it is used to mean the dispersion or spread of any people from their original homeland. For example, the Korean diaspora usually refers to Korean people who are both descendants of early emigrants from the Korean Peninsula, as well as more recent emigrants from Korea. Today, it is said that the most numerous Korean diasporas are found in China, the United States, Japan, Canada, and former Soviet Union countries such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan (National Atlas of Korea 2022). Such modern diaspora movements occur mainly because of economic, social, political, or cultural difficulties experienced by individuals in the home country.

This paper is a case study of exchanges between Slovenia (as a part of Central Europe) and Korea in the years between the First and Second World Wars. The focus is not on the “Korean diaspora” as described above, but about a Central European diaspora in Korea. There were some individuals who were sent as religious missionaries from Europe to Korea in the interwar years. An active and strong diaspora community in the form of Catholic missionary was thus present in Tokwon 덕원 德源 near the port city Wonsan 원산 元山 (or Port Lazarev) on the East Sea (Sea of Japan), but abruptly dissolved as a result of political changes after the Second World War.

Since the focus of attention is on some individuals who moved away from their place of origin with a certain aim to achieve within a set period of time, they may be called “expatriates”, a term that often refers to a professional, skilled worker, or student who intends to return to their country of origin after completing their purpose for residency in another country (Rogers, Castree, and Kitchin 2013, 143). How to define and categorize missionaries within the framework of diaspora is

still not certain. Religion is “a classic form of identity” and “one of the most prominent idioms through which diasporas come to produce shared consciousness, and shared practice” (Hausner and Garnett 2010, 1).

However, “religion has often been a concept ‘set apart’ in the arts, humanities and social sciences, and has certainly received much less theoretical attention in diaspora and transnational studies than the closely related notions of ethnicity, race, nation and hybridity” (McLoughlin 2013, 125) Further, McLoughlin states:

Theorizations of religion and diaspora have often focused on the question of whether a particular religious tradition, type of religion, or religions in general, can properly or usefully be described in terms of the concept of diaspora. (Ibid., 134)

This paper presents some of the facts discovered during my research based on my curiosity triggered by one simple picture postcard found in Slovenia. Since the story is related to the shared consciousness and shared practice of missionary workers, I believe that it can be discussed in the context of diaspora in a broad sense of the word.

Background: Research on Old Picture Postcards

Picture Postcards from Asia

I began my research on picture postcards more than ten years ago when I was invited to present a paper at an international conference on the theme “Koreans and Central Europeans” by the Koreanology of the University of Vienna. Since then, I have learned a lot from picture postcards, with the golden age of these items now more than a century ago, from towards the end of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century. Even in this small corner of Central Europe, today’s Republic of Slovenia, there are many picture postcards from East Asia from that period, and to date we have identified at least 700 or 800 such postcards from East Asia—that is, from China, Taiwan, Korea and Japan. If we are to include the postcards from South Asia, some 1,000 examples from Asia as a whole can now be found in various archives in Slovenia, mainly in museums and libraries, but some of them are also in private hands. Most of these picture postcards are photographs of landscapes, city scenes and tourist destinations, but there are also ethnographic photos of the local people showing their traditional clothes and activities such as farming, manual work, work in factories and everyday businesses, like small specialized shops. There are also picture postcards of theatre, dance and music performances (Shigemori Bučar and Veselič 2021, 125–27).

Picture postcards offer manifold facts and information. First of all, the photograph or the picture on the postcard offers some information on the scene shown, which was chosen according to some purpose or the demands of the time. The printing technique is also a clue for the approximate time and place of production. If there is a printed caption or explanation on the front and reverse of the postcard then it can help us identify the motivation for the postcard's production, together with some marks or names of the printing house. In the case of Japanese picture postcards, we have also identified the time of production by analysing the orthography, according to the changes in the postal system and the governmental regulations. If the postcard was sent and has writing on one side then it offers much more information: about the person who wrote the message, about the addressee, and about the context in which the postcard was used (*ibid.*, 45–68).

Korea-related Picture Postcards in Slovenia

In some of my past research papers I have classified picture postcards according to the institutions where the postcards are archived, and the individual collectors who collected them. Among the more numerous Japanese and Chinese picture postcards in the museums and libraries, I also found some with Korean motifs. They are in three different institutions: the “Sergej Mašera” Maritime Museum in Piran, the Regional Museum in Celje, and the National and University Library (NUK) in Ljubljana (see Table 1 below for details).

The first contacts between the Slovene ethnic region and East Asia, as observed through the identified picture postcards, were in the context of maritime activities. The first institution mentioned in the above table is the Maritime Museum in Piran, a small town in Slovenia on the Adriatic coast. This museum specializes in the history of maritime activities in the region, firstly in the time of Austro-Hungarian Empire and later in the time of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later called Kingdom of Yugoslavia), and up to the time of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. What follows are some of the characteristics of these oldest Korea-related picture postcards found in Slovenia, and which were used by officers and members of the Austro-Hungarian navy: the two postcards mentioned in Table 1, used by the navy officer Anton Haus, both showed a hand-drawn map of Korea made in Vienna and used within the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy (fig. 1); and among the next three in the Koršič collection,¹ one was most probably

1 Ivan Koršič was a military chaplain in the navy. Though he never travelled to East Asia, he received picture postcards from other members of the navy and collected them in albums. See more on this in Shigemori Bučar (2019a; 2020).

Table 1: Korean Postcards Archived in Slovenia (Shigemori Bučar 2019a, modified)

Institution	Collection (collector/ use’s name)	Number	Used or collected in	Made and printed in
“Sergej Mašera” Maritime Museum Piran	Anton Haus	2	1904	Austria-Hungary
	Ivan Koršič	3	around 1906	Russia in 1904
			1906	Japan
			sent from Kobe in 1906	photographed in Joseon and printed in France
Viktor Kristan	4	1908–1909	Japan	
Regional Museum Celje	Alma Karlin	18	1923	Japan
NUK, Ljubljana	?	1	not used	made after 1931? in Slovenia
	government (?) of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia	6	1988	Korean Publication Exchange Association, North Korea

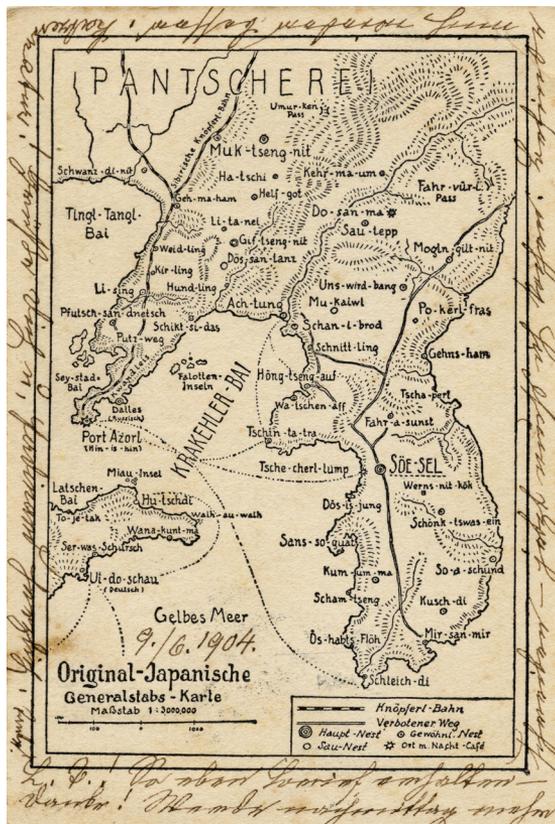


Figure 1: The postcard used by Anton Haus. (Source: “Sergej Mašera” Maritime Museum Piran)



Figure 2: Postcard in Korsič collection. (Source: “Sergej Mašera” Maritime Museum Piran)



Figure 3: Port of Chemulpo (Inchon) in Korsič collection. (Source: “Sergej Mašera” Maritime Museum Piran)



Figure 4: Postcard printed in France in Korsič collection. (Source: “Sergej Mašera” Maritime Museum Piran)



Figure 5: Postcard showing warships in Inchon, Kristan collection. (Source: “Sergej Mašera” Maritime Museum Piran)

made in Russia (fig. 2), the second in Japan (fig. 3), and the last one was printed in France but used and sent from Japan (fig. 4). In case of the Kristan collection, the postcards carry captions in the Japanese language and were obviously made and printed in Japan, or at least printed by a Japanese printing house (fig. 5). In 1908, the Korean peninsula was already in the process of being annexed to Japan, and so the cards could have been printed there.

As for the picture postcards in the Regional Museum in Celje, they are all made in the same format as the ones from the Kristan collection. They were collected and some of them used by the female adventurer Alma Karlin, who stayed in Japan for about a year in 1922 to 1923, and travelled through the Korean peninsula in 1923, when it was under Japanese occupation.²

A Picture Postcard Printed in Slovenia—Tokwon Abbey

In the National and University Library (NUK) in Ljubljana, i.e. the last of the three institutions mentioned in Table 1, I have identified seven picture postcards with motifs from Korea. They are all from a later time period compared to the ones found and archived in Piran and Celje. None of the postcards in NUK have been used for correspondence (and thus there are no traces of correspondence or postmarks). The six of them with the inventory marking “Korean Publication Exchange Association” from the year 1988 were obviously printed in North Korea for propaganda purposes. They are coloured photos of some natural landscapes and city sites in Pyongyang and North Korea.³

There now remains one single black-and-white picture postcard in NUK, which is in focus of my present research (fig. 6). This is the only postcard carrying some printed explanation of the photo on the reverse in the Slovene language (fig. 7), which reads:

Azija, Koreja: Benediktinski samostan v zimskem miru (Asia, Korea:
Benedictine monastery in winter peace)

The postcard is a photograph of the monastery in snow. After some research, it became clear that the photo is of Tokwon Abbey near Wonsan in today's North

2 Details about these older picture postcards are in my research papers, see Shigemori Bučar (2019a; 2019b; 2020).

3 The Potong River in Pyongyang, Pison Falls in Mt Myohyang, Lake Samji, “The Water of the Fatherland”, Pyongyang Department Store, and Chilsong Gate of Moran Hill (Shigemori Bučar 2019a, 160).



Figure 6: The black-and-white picture postcard in NUK. (Source: NUK)

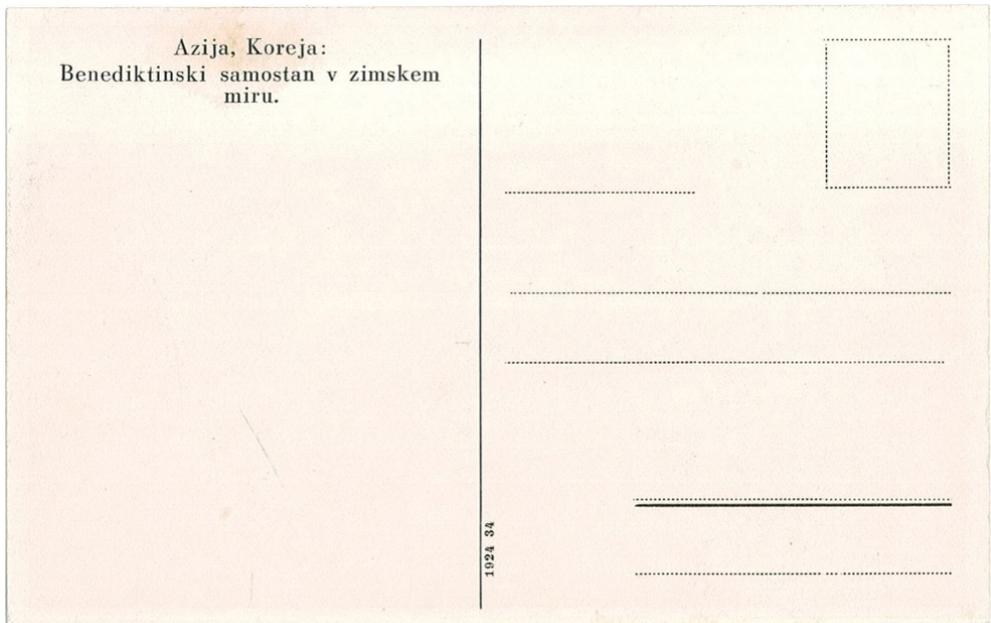


Figure 7: The reverse of the postcard of figure 6. (Source: NUK)

Korea.⁴ Our postcard in NUK has not been used, and according to the library there is no additional information regarding who possessed the card and when. There is not even an inventory stamp or other marking from the library, although one of these is usually made when objects are registered.

Tokwon Abbey was constructed in the years between 1927 and 1931. So, we can guess that our postcard was printed most probably in the 1930s. This abbey, due to the political conditions during and after the Second World War, ceased to function in 1949 (Mahr 2009, 22–52).

In relation to the missionaries posted to Korea during the early 20th century, in his article about Austrian missionaries Koidl states, based on his careful research, that:

The Vatican had carved up Korea amongst various missionary orders, with French missionaries responsible for the southern regions of the peninsula, Americans for the northwest, and the German Missionary Benedictines for the northeast, in addition to southeastern Manchuria. [...] In 1927, they [the Germans] moved their main abbey from Seoul to the newly built headquarters in Tokwon, near Wonsan. (Koidl 2020, 30)

There are many similar missionary postcards from other parts of Asia in NUK in Ljubljana,⁵ particularly from India and Ceylon: they show local scenes in relation to missionary work with captions in the Slovene language. The existence of these picture postcards suggests that some Slovene Christian organization published postcards of various missionary-related scenes, including monastery buildings, perhaps as curiosities for the Slovene public, particularly in the context of Christian churches, in the days before the Second World War.

In the context of East-West exchanges, this unused black-and-white picture postcard raises many questions, such as the following: (1) Was there anybody from the Slovene region stationed in Tokwon in the 1930s? Or perhaps the postcard was only printed there? (2) Who took the photo used for the postcard? And who printed the postcard and where? (3) Are there other picture postcards from Tokwon printed in the same manner? (4) How close and how concerned were the Slovene missionary workers with the missionary work in Tokwon, or in Korea as a whole?

4 A photograph, also black and white, on the Internet site of the B.C. Catholic and titled “North Korean Abbey Speaks Through its Architecture” shows the same building in summer (without snow) and with the same shapes of hills in the background (Sonnen 2018).

5 Four postcards showing China (with the name of the printing house “p. Domžale” on the reverse), 11 showing India, Bengal or Ceylon (with the inventory marking “Prinesel Fr Dobrovoljc, 1.XII 1950” or “Brought back by Father Dobrovoljc”), all with captions or explanatory text in Slovene.

Missionary Centre and Slovene Missionary Journals

Missionary Centre in Ljubljana

In order to answer at least some of these questions, I contacted the Missionary Centre (*Misijonsko središče*) in Ljubljana.⁶ In response to my explanation of the background of this project and my list of questions, I was told that there is no exact list or data about all past missionaries from the Slovene ethnic region, but perhaps I should look through the journals *Katoliški misijoni* (*Catholic Missions*) and *Misijonski koledar* (*Missionary Calendar*) from that period.⁷ These are general yearly journals about missionary work published in interwar years, with the subscription for *Misijonski koledar*, for example, being 12 Yugoslav dinars per year at the time. These journals in the interwar period contain many photographs from Asia and Africa, where the Catholic Church and its missionaries from Slovenia were quite active.

We can find a complete set of both journals in the library of the Missionary Centre in Ljubljana. They are written entirely in the Slovene language and there are many photos, drawings and maps, probably in order to educate and attract the attention of lay readers. Some of the articles are translations from German and/or other European languages in which some missionaries wrote to European missionary centres. There are reports on Christian missionaries from all non-Christian parts of the world, about their histories, current situations and activities, as well as simple descriptions of local life and customs from various regions of the world. In each journal excerpts of missionaries' letters are printed, and China, India and Africa are mentioned in particular as places where the Slovene missionaries are active. As for Korea and Japan, most of the news stories are translations from German or English missionaries. It is also mentioned in the colophon of one of the editions of a journal that it includes photos sent by missionaries (*Misijonski koledar* 1930, 78). It may be that these journals were written and printed in a hurry or with only a few editors, as I often noticed inconsistencies or mismatches between the text and photos, and many of the images were inserted into pages where they do not illustrate what is written there. I also noticed that some photos were used repeatedly in other editions of the same journal just to make each one more interesting, but without necessarily illustrating the accompanying text.

6 I am grateful for Dr Helena Motoh's help in this context, as she advised me to contact the Missionary Centre and gave me some preliminary information.

7 I am also grateful for the prompt reply to my e-mail messages from Ms S. Žuntar of the Missionary Centre and the possibility of research in their archive.

Reports and Photographs from Korea and Wonsan

However, among photographs which illustrate the missionary work in China and Japan or more generally in the Far East, four from Korea were found in the journal *Misijonski koledar*.

One is a photo of a festival procession in Korea⁸ (fig. 8), inserted into a longer description of the religious situation in China (*Misijonski koledar* 1927, 63). Three more photographs from Korea are found on pages where a longer Japanese story is written (*ibid.*, 1934). Both instances are the typical mismatch between the photos and the text in this journal. However, these three photos are obviously important for the present research, since they show some scenes of Christian churches in Korea at the time of publication.

One is a scene inside a church, most probably the church in Tokwon, with men and women on both sides of the aisle facing the altar (fig. 9). The Koreans are all clad in white, the women with veils over their head, the men with the typical Korean hat but in white. Another photograph shows the first Christian church meeting in Korea in the year 1931⁹ (fig. 10). On the left side of the photo is Bishop Mutel¹⁰ speaking in front of European and Korean men. The last of the four photos shows six young Korean men practicing music in a seminary room in Wonsan (fig. 11). The caption under the photograph says “Wonsan, Korea: A music group of the pupils of the theological seminary”¹¹ (*Misijonski koledar* 1934). After a careful search, I found a few paragraphs about the general situations in Korea and Japan, separated by a few pages from these photos: the text mentions the first meeting in Korea as well as the death of Bishop Mutel. A photo of Korean students with musical instruments and sitting arranged like a small orchestra was found on the calendar page of *Misijonski koledar* much later, for March 1940. The caption says: “Missionary students’ band in Korea”¹² (fig. 12).

We can read some short reports on the Benedictine missionary in Wonsan in some numbers of the other journal, *Katoliški misijoni*, published in years 1930-1931, 1931-1932 and 1933-1934. For example, in edition No. 5 of the year 1930-1931, we can read that the first Korean students completed their studies in Tokwon. On the same page it is mentioned that Fr Leopold and Fr Fabian are visiting

8 “Prizor iz praznoverskega sprevoda na Koreji” (A scene from a superstitious procession in Korea).

9 The caption says “Prvi cerkveni zbor na Koreji l. 1931; govori škof Mutel”. (The first church assembly in Korea in 1931; Bishop Mutel speaks).

10 Gustave-Charles-Marie Mutel (1854-1933), the Apostolic Vikar of Seoul between 1911 and 1933. He was criticized for condemning An Chunggun for assassinating Itō Hirobumi in 1909.

11 In Slovenian: “Vonsan, Koreja. Godba gojencev škofijskega semenišča.”

12 In Slovenian: “Godba misijonskih gojencev na Koreji.”



Figure 8: Festival procession in Korea. (Source: *Misijonski koledar* 1927, 63; Missionary Centre in Ljubljana)



Figure 9: Inside the church most probably in Tokwon. (Source: *Misijonski koledar* 1934, 57; Missionary Centre in Ljubljana)



Figure 10: The first church assembly in Korea in 1931; Bishop Mutel speaks. (Source: Misijski koledar 1934, 72; Missionary Centre in Ljubljana)



Figure 11: Young Korean men practicing music in a seminary room in Wonsan. (Source: Misijski koledar 1934, 58; Missionary Centre in Ljubljana)



Figure 12: Missionary students' band in Korea. (Source: *Misijonski koledar* 1940, 8; Missionary Centre in Ljubljana)

outposts in the region almost every month. The number of outposts had increased to 22 by then, and almost every one had an evening school, similar to an elementary school in a small, simple room owned by a local convert. Some advantages of these evening schools compared to the local public schools are also mentioned.

A few photos introducing Korean traditional customs were also found, titled “In Korea, the bride is carried to the wedding in a carrier”¹³ and “A young Korean Catholic newlywed with gifts from relatives and friends (Wensan)”.¹⁴ There seems to be a mistake in the latter caption, as “Wensan” should be “Wonsan”, the place where the wedding took place.¹⁵ The same place name is sometimes spelled Vonsan in the Slovenized spelling.

Finally, on page 95 of edition Number 6 of the year 1932–1933 of the journal *Katoliški misijoni*, I found exactly the same photo as that of the picture postcard archived in the Ljubljana National and University Library, that is, the photo of the Benedictine monastery in snow. The caption to the photo in the journal says: “Benedictine settlement of Wonsan, Korea (Winter picture from the month of Dec.)”¹⁶ (fig. 13).

13 In Slovenian: “Na Koreji nesejo nevesto k poroki v nosilnici.”

14 In Slovenian: “Mlada korejska katoliška novoporočenca z darili sorodnikov in prijateljev (Wensan).”

15 This is most probably the wedding reported by Kwon in 2020.

16 In Slovenian: “Benediktinska naselbina Vonsan, Koreja (Zimska slika iz meseca dec.).”

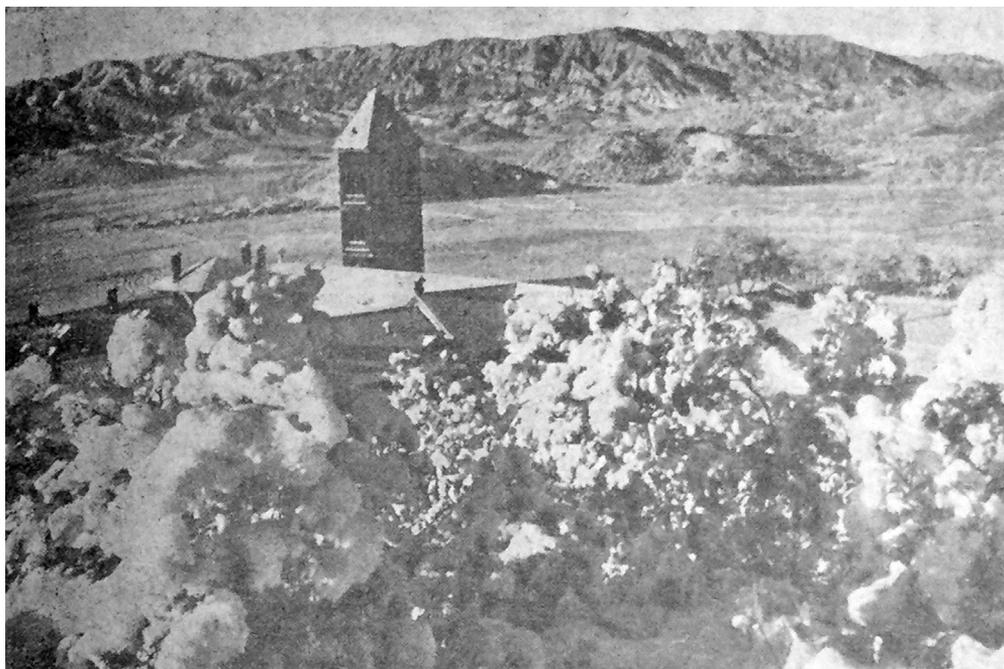


Figure 13: Photograph in Journal *Katoliški misijoni* (1932-1933). (Source: *Katoliški misijoni* 1932-1933, 95; Missionary Centre in Ljubljana)

To our disappointment, the photo is inserted into a longer description of the missionary work in India, another mismatch of the photo with the text. The printed photo is a lower quality reproduction than the picture postcard.

The Roman Catholics started their missionary work in Korea much earlier than the Protestants (Yun 2004, 7). In the Slovene Catholic journals, the 100-year anniversary of the establishment of the Korean Catholic Church in September 1931 is mentioned. Though there was no Slovene-speaking priest in Korea, the Slovene missionary journals were eager to report some news from the peninsula. Most probably the Missionary Society translated the news and missionary reports that were sent from Korea in the German language. From today's point of view, some of the news with photos were not very accurate, but the general Slovene public could still read interesting stories from this distant land, together with some visual information. The photos of the seminary and landscape from Wonsan were taken most probably by the German or Austrian priests and sent to the St Ottilien convent near Munich. We may guess that these were then sent further to Ljubljana to be used for the Slovene journals.

The Printing Office in Groblje

The printing office of the Missionary Society of Lazarists (Misijonska družba lazaristov) was quite active in interwar years. In 1920, the Missionary Society moved into the old gothic castle in Groblje in Domžale, not far from the city of Ljubljana, and in 1929, the missionary editorial office and its large library also moved into the complex in Groblje, where it operated until the end of the Second World War. It is said that the period between the wars was the most flourishing time for missionary work in Slovenia (Kolar 1998, 10, 186).

Since we have found the same photo of the Wonsan monastery in snow in the journal as well as on the picture postcard, and because similar postcards were printed with the abbreviation of the printing house “p. Domžale”, we may conclude that these are the products of the active Missionary Society in Ljubljana, Slovenia, during the time of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Tokwon Abbey

With regard to Tokwon Abbey, and as Koidl (2020) also uses as one of his references, there is a three-volume book published by the St Ottilien Benedictine Congregation in Upper Bavaria, Germany, which was founded in 1884 and is still active today.

The Congregation of Missionary Benedictines of St Ottilien arrived in Seoul in 1909. In 1920 the Vatican created the Apostolic Vicariate of Wonsan, with the monastery as its administrative and spiritual centre. The priests chose a beautiful location near Tokwon in today’s North Korea for the new abbey, a rural area very close to the Sea of Japan (the East Sea), with a view of cropland and mountains to the west and the sea to the east. The monks constructed a suitable four-storey monastery complex with a matching neo-Romanesque chapel, which they completed in the early 1930s. The property included a seminary and a nearby convent, along with a carpentry shop and a trade school. The parishioners of the monastery chapel were local farmers and fishermen, while the monks and nuns came from various countries, including Germany and Switzerland (Sonnen 2018).

The second volume of the previously mentioned publication with the title *Dis-solved Houses: Benedictine Missionaries in East Asia* (*Aufgehobene Häuser: Missions-benediktiner in Ostasien*), written by Johannes Mahr (2009), carries the subtitle “The Abbeys of Tokwon and Yenki”. Already in the first pages of the work Mahr describes, on the basis of church records and letters from the missionaries at that time, all the details of the plan, negotiations, and actual work to build the

monastery with a seminary in Tokwon near the port of Wonsan. All the names of the monks who were involved in this project are mentioned in the description of how they decided on a certain style and plan for this new abbey. Although there are no names of Slovene origin among these, there is one surname of Belgian origin, d'Avernas, for two brothers, Kanut and Leopold d'Avernas, from a family who resided in Apače, or in German Schirmdorf, in 1870s and 1880s.

Due to the circumstances at the end of the Second World War, all the missionary workers in Tokwon had to flee from the monastery. The Soviets then entered North Korea and occupied the monastery for a short time. In May 1949, it is said that there were 60 monks and 20 nuns at the monastery, but the North Korean secret police invaded the monastery and arrested all of them. Some of them were executed after having been sent to prisons and internment camps. Those who were killed in confinement or died of starvation or illness or in hard labour in the camps in Korea are now in the process of beatification, which started in 2007. One of the priests listed today as one of the "Martyrs of Tokwon" is Fr Kanut, whose full name is Benedikt Graf des Enffans d'Avernas, born 11 March 1884 in Schirmdorf or Apače in Slovenia (Hagiography Circle n.d.).

Fr Kanut Born in Apače

My research around a picture postcard led me to a person who was born in a small town in what is today Slovenia, a place now called Apače, but once known as Schirmdorf when it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. I have further looked into the history of this place, and the biography of this man, who was born there in 1884.

The small town of Apače is just on the south side of the river Mura (German: Mur) in today's Republic of Slovenia. According to Ščap (2018), the settlement "Scirmdorf" was first mentioned in a written document in the year 1124. Before the year 1615, the mansion (or a small castle) Freudenau in Apače was still under construction (Ščap 2017).

The d'Avernas family, as their surname suggests, came from Brabant, today's Belgium (Wiesflecker 2004, 21). Adrian des Enffans d'Avernas (1771–1863) came to settle down in Steiermark in the Habsburg monarchy in 1805. He served as the imperial and royal treasurer (*k. und k. Kämmerer*). His descendant Heinrich Graf (Count) des Enffans d'Avernas and his wife Anna (born Countess Plaz) had five children, of which three became Catholic priests. Their second son, Benedikt, later with the missionary name Kanut, was born on March 11, 1884 in the mansion Freudenau.

In those years in the beginning of 20th century, the parish was a part of Austria-Hungary, with most of the inhabitants being German-speaking. According to sources (Ščap 2018; Wiesflecker 2004), Fr Kanut's parents, Graf Heinrich de Avernas and Anna Plaz, were married in 1876 in the chapel of the mansion Freudenau in Apače. According to the records from the year 1880, the village had 413 inhabitants and all declared that they were Christian. Of these, 393 of them were German speaking, and three were native speakers of Slovene. Ten years later, in 1890, the records say that there were 439 inhabitants, all Catholic, 410 of them declared to be German speaking, and eight were Slovene speaking (Ščap 2018, 135). Those were the days when the family d'Avernas resided in the mansion Freudenau and where Benedikt (later Fr Kanut) was born. It is also known that the mansion was sold to a new owner, Franz Pfannl, in 1885. This may mean that the d'Avernas family did not stay in this place for a long time, and moved to somewhere else in Central Europe. It is said that our central figure, Benedikt (later Fr Kanut), received his education in the Jesuit gymnasium Stella Matutina in Feldkirch in Vorarlberg, then in the Lycée in Dillingen, and at the University in Munich. He was admitted to the St Ottilien order in 1911. The family may have changed their place of residence so as to enable a good education for their children. Benedikt had a younger brother, Klemens (Fr Leopold), who also joined the St Ottilien convent and was sent to Korea a little before him. In January 1921, the older brother was also sent as Benedictine priest to Seoul (P. Kanut d'Avernas OSB). The brothers worked in the same monastery in Tokwon from the very beginning in 1928, but the younger brother died in 1944 due to a fall on an icy road during his journey to the outposts in the northeast Korean missionary area (Koidl 2020, 31). Fr Kanut continued with his missionary work in Wonsan and eventually had to flee from the monastery at the end of Second World War.

It is thus confirmed that there was at least one person who was born in today's region of Slovenia and was later active as a missionary in Korea, firstly in Seoul and later in Tokwon Abbey. But the postcard archived in NUK was not brought back by this person. Fr Kanut was unwell in those difficult years, and after his escape over the river Yalu to China he broke down in captivity in Manpo, and died on November 6, 1950.

In May 2007 the beatification process began for the 36 monks and nuns from Tokwon Abbey who were martyred during the wave of anti-Christian persecution under the rule of Kim Il Sung. Father Kanut d'Avernas is found on the list of martyrs from Tokwon (St Ottilien) and is remembered in prayers among Slovene Catholics as one of the priests from Slovenia. (e.g. a notice of the diocese Župnija Škofljica 2022)

Conclusions

I have also looked into several written sources in order to understand the position and circumstances of the Catholic missionary work that took place on Korean soil, work which was carried out under great pressure due to the social and political situation on the peninsula. Catholic priests (or any missionary workers) usually have certain ideals and goals with regard to carrying out their activities in the region they are sent to. They also have to deal with the local and the national governments of the country, and often need to make compromises.

However, the Slovene Catholic journals hardly mention the difficulties the missionaries faced in relation to the political situation in Korea. The Koreans were not happy with the Japanese colonial government's policy, and the Christian Church helped the Koreans to raise their national spirit under some challenging conditions (Yi in Yun 2004, 63–69). The compulsory worship of Shintō shrines in the 1930s also caused many conflicts. The Benedictine missionaries had to deal with the Japanese officers and local government officials on one hand, and with the lay Koreans on the other. Around 1940, as one of the difficult compromises that was made, the missionary workers and seminary students made field trips to Shintō shrines, and organized Shintō ceremonies in the seminary (Mahr 2009, 324–27).

In fact, both social and political conditions were changing quickly at both ends of the world. The Missionary Society with the printing office in Slovenia was confiscated by the Nazis in 1941, and though the Slovene journals were still published for three more years on a smaller scale, communication with other missionary centres was not possible (Kolar 1998, 188–89).

It should be concluded that while the Slovene public was informed of various missionary activities around the world, little information was available with regard to the work in Korea. After the Second World War, the editorial office of the Missionary Society went into exile, first to Rome, and later to Argentina (*ibid.*, 189).

Among the questions I raised in relation to the picture postcard of Tokwon Abbey, I am able to answer the first, and partly also the second.

The main discovery so far is the fact that there was at least one person who was born in the Slovene region and became active between 1921 and 1949 in Tokwon. His activities in cooperation with other monks from other European regions, along with Koreans, are described in the existing literature, particularly from the St Ottilien order in Germany, but less accurately in Slovene Christian journals. In the course of this research, I have also become aware that the printing office of the Missionary Society of Lazarists in Slovenia was quite active in the interwar years.

The journals and other Christian materials were printed there, and most probably all or most of the missionary picture postcards I have seen so far.

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