STUDI DI FRONTIERA

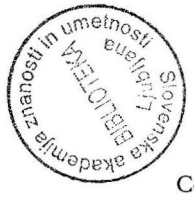
I

Le aree montane come frontiere

Spazi d'interazione e connettività,
Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Udine, 10-12 dicembre 2009

a cura di
Stefano Magnani

con la collaborazione di Paola Mior e Leonardo Gregoratti



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00173 Roma
(06) 93781065

ISBN 978-88-548-6509-9

I edizione: ottobre 2013

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ISBN 978-88-548-6509-9
DOI 10.4399/97888548650998
pag. 141–153 (ottobre 2013)

Roman sites in the high altitude areas of Slovenia[1]

Jana Horvat

The archaeological investigations in the last two decades have provided evidence of long–term frequentation and land–use trends in the high altitude areas of the south eastern Alps — in the regions of the Eastern Julian Alps, the Karavanke Alps and the Kamnik–Savinja Alps.

The bedrock of all the three mountain ranges consists mostly of limestone that provides the appearance of karst phenomena and rare water sources. The forest line lies at an altitude between 1200 m and 1800 m. The meadows above the forest line are relatively small, except on the high plateaux of Komna and Pokljuka in the Julian Alps and Velika planina in the Kamnik–Savinja Alps.[2]

A series of high altitude archaeological sites was discovered by archaeological prospecting. The data about the chronology and function of the sites were obtained by digging small trenches.[3] The results concerning the Roman period are presented in this paper.

1. Roman period at the foothill of the Alps

The south eastern Alpine area lay outside the main communication lines (Fig. 1). The road Aquileia — Emona — Celeia crossed the re-

1. I would like to thank to Zvezda Modrijan, who contributed valuable comments. The figures were prepared by Mateja Belak and Dragotin Valoh. For editing of the English text, I am grateful to Alan McConnell Duff.

2. Perko, Orožen Adamič 2001, 34–71, 96–121.

3. Cevc 1997. *Človek v Alpah* 2006. Horvat 1999a. Horvat 1999b. Horvat 2002. Horvat 2006b. Ogrin 2006.

gion south of the Alps, and the road Aquileia — Virunum used the Valcanale valley.[4] Only the minor roads were crossing the Alpine area. The road from Forum Iulii towards the north followed the deep valleys of the Nadiža (It. Natisone) and Soča (It. Isonzo) Rivers and crossed the Predel pass (It. Predil; 1156 m a.s.l.). Although not known in the itineraries, this road seems to be especially important at the beginning of the Roman period (1st century BC) and in the Late Antiquity.[5] Another route that was probably directed from Emona towards the north led without any difficult passages along the Sava River to the Camporosso and Gailitz area in Noricum.[6] The connection of Emona territory with southern Noricum functioned also over the passes of Jezersko (Ger. Seeberg; 1218 m a.s.l.),[7] Ljubelj (Ger. Loiblpaß; 1369 m a.s.l.)[8] and probably Koren (Ger. Wurzenpaß; 1073 m a.s.l.) in the Karavanke Alps.

There were no large urban centres in the Alpine area. The territory of the Emona colony comprised the whole Ljubljana basin that is positioned among all the three mountain ranges (the Julian Alps, Karavanke and Kamnik–Savinja Alps). This is the present day region of Gorenjska (Upper Carniola). The border of Emona (and Italy as well) with the province of Noricum possibly followed the watershed of the Sava and the Drava Rivers in the area of the Kamnik–Savinja and the Karavanke Alps (similarly as the Medieval border between Carniola and Carinthia).[9]

The Ljubljana basin was most probably settled by the Taurisci.[10] A small number of epigraphic monuments and epichoric names could be evidence of the slow Romanisation processes and infrequent immigration from Italy.[11] A fortified settlement was situated at Carnium (Kranj) during the Augustan period, when it played a significant military–strategic role in the consolidation of Roman authority.

4. Bosio 1991, 156–171. Horvat, Bavdek 2009, 141–143.

5. Bosio 1991, 192–199. Maggi, Žbona Trkman 2007, 63–66. Horvat, Bavdek 2009, 143–144. Ciglenečki 2008, 511–524.

6. Lux 2008, 163. Lovenjak 2007.

7. Šašel 1970, 1570–1571. Šašel 1970–1971, 35.

8. Šašel Kos 1999, 20–22. Šašel Kos 2000, 30–31.

9. Šašel Kos 1997, 287–288. Horvat 1999c, 227.

10. Božič 1999, 192–201.

11. Šašel Kos 1997, 287–288, 300–301.

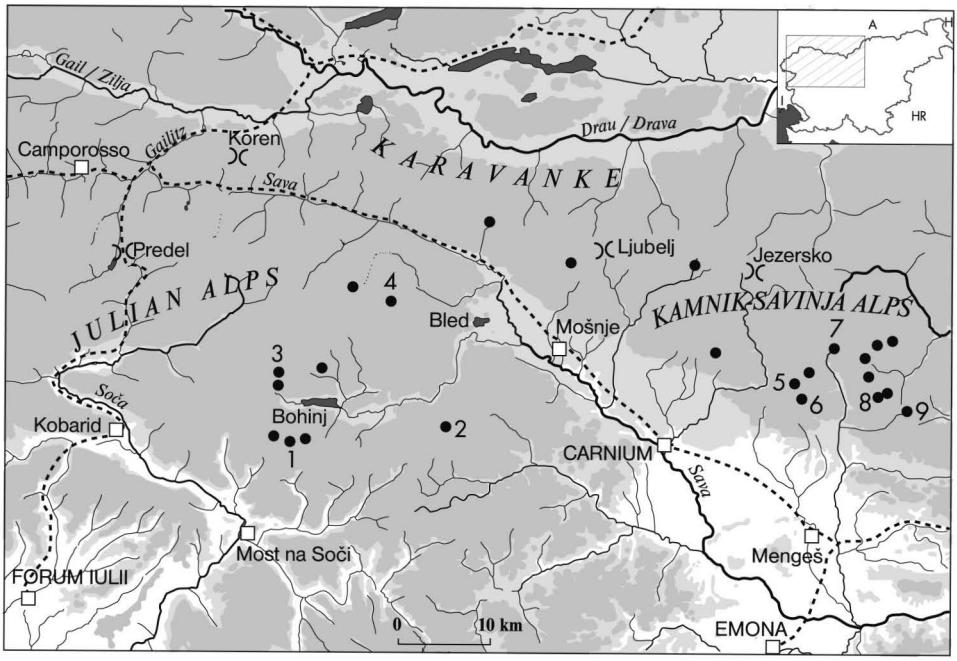

Figure 1. Roman high altitude sites in the south eastern Alps mentioned in the text: 1 Kal, 2 Pečana, 3 Vodene rupe, 4 Klek, 5 Dolga njiva, 6 Koren, 7 Na stanu, 8 Velika planina , 9 Volovljek. The Roman sites in the lowlands, Roman routes and the most important Alpine passes.

Carnium was already abandoned in the first half of the 1st century AD, but was revived again in Late Antiquity.[12] The modest villae rusticae dominated the plains, developing from the first half of the 1st century AD.[13] A large settlement (probably a vicus) existed at Mengeš[14] and a possible road station has been discovered in Mošnje.[15]

The upper Soča valley had always strong connections with the Friuli plain and probably belonged to the territory of Forum Iulii.[16] The river basins of the Soča and Idrijca were probably settled by a part of the Carni.[17] The central pre–Roman and Roman settlement was at

12. Sagadin 2003. Horvat 2010b, 372. Ciglenečki 2001, 190.
13. Sagadin 1995a; Horvat 2006c.
14. Sagadin 1995b.
15. Lux 2008.
16. Discussion: Zaccaria 2007, 138.
17. Božič 1999, 203.

Most na Soči, at the confluence of the Soča and Idrijca Rivers.[18] An important sanctuary was located near Kobarid in the Soča valley.[19]

The administrative appurtenance of the Bohinj basin that is isolated among the mountain ranges of the Julian Alps is not known. During the Iron Age, Bohinj had a strong connection with the area of the upper Soča valley across the very high Alpine passes.[20] It is supposed that the iron ore mining and the metallurgical industry were the main economic bases of the Bohinj area from the Early Iron Age to the 19th century.[21]

2. High altitude areas

Human presence in the high altitude areas of the south eastern Alps is documented by small settlement sites and presumably ritual depositions of bronze objects in the Middle and Late Bronze Age.[22] On the other hand, the evidence of the Iron Age sites is very scarce, possibly due to the omission of ritual depositions.[23]

The archaeological evidence in the well researched areas of Velika planina, Kal and Koren shows that they were frequented both in prehistory and in the Roman period.[24] Therefore a kind of continuity is possible, but not certain. On the other hand, the number of Roman sites greatly exceeds the prehistoric ones.[25] Only Roman and later sites were found in the well researched areas of Dolga njiva, Na stanu, Klek and Pečana.[26] This fact can be partly the consequence of the state of research. The stone foundations of Roman buildings and slight ground levelling are easier to prospect than the prehistoric sites that do not exhibit any traces on the surface.

18. Mlinar, Pettarin 2007. Maggi, Žbona Trkman 2007, 68–70.

19. Osmuk 1987.

20. Gabrovec 1974. Vičič 1983.

21. Gabrovec 1974, 303–304. Mohorič 1969.

22. Horvat 2002, 118–122. Horvat 2010a, 89–94. Ogrin 2006, 99–101. Ogrin 2010, 201–202.

23. Koren: Horvat 2002, 122.

24. Velika planina: Horvat 2010a. Kal: Ogrin 2006, 100–102; Ogrin 2010, 201–202. Koren: Horvat 2002, 122.

25. Horvat 2002, fig. 1, 3. Horvat 2006a, fig. 1, 5. Horvat 2010a, fig. 5–6.

26. Dolga njiva: Horvat 2002, 126–128. Na stanu: Cevc 1998. Klek: Ogrin 2010, 202–206. Pečana: Ogrin 2010, 206–207.

The Velika planina plateau in the Kamnik–Savinja Alps provided evidence of human frequentation already in the Bronze Age.[27] Two early Roman isolated objects have been discovered in the area. A fibula from the second half of the 1st century BC (Fig. 2: 1) was found on top of the plateau (Za plečam, approx. 1600 m a.s.l.) and a bronze bell from the first half of the 1st century AD was discovered on the path leading towards the plateau (Sušave, approx. 1200 m a.s.l.).[28]

Na stanu (1450 m a.s.l.) is a well documented Roman site in the Kamnik–Savinja Alps. Small metal objects, parts of attire and a refuse pit full of ceramics were discovered in the vicinity of a probable building with stone foundations. The fibulae forms from the site are dated to the end of the 1st and up to the 2nd century (Fig. 2: 2–4) and two coins to the 4th century.[29]

The site of Vodene rupe (1780 m a.s.l.) in the Julian Alps provided probably two buildings on stone foundations, a bronze bell with an inscription VRS and a fibula from the 2nd century.[30]

Not all the finds could be interpreted as settlement sites or accidentally lost objects. In Pečice (1550 m a.s.l.) on Velika planina plateau, a silver ring fibula (3rd—4th century) was found under a large stone (Fig. 2: 5). It was possibly a votive offering.[31] A pair of golden fibulae of norico-pannonian type (beginning of the 2nd century), a chance find from Volovljek pass (1029 m a.s.l.), could be also considered as an intentional deposition, because of the exceptional use of gold and the provenience from the pass.[32]

Two 1st–2nd century fibulae from Klek (1550 m a.s.l.) in the Julian Alps might also represent an intentional deposition as they were not associated with any contemporary settlement site.[33]

During the Late Antiquity the living conditions and the settlement pattern changed radically in the broad area of the south eastern Alps. The towns and villae rusticae in the plain were abandoned during the crisis in the middle of the 5th century. The population was concen-

27. Horvat 2010a, 89–94.
28. Horvat 2010a, 94, fig. 7: 1–2. Fibula type Kostrzewski M–a1: Sedlmayer 2009, 18.
29. Cevc 1998. Horvat 2002, 124–125.
30. Ogrin 2010, 203–206.
31. Horvat 2010a, 94–95.
32. Horvat 2010a, 94, 96, fig. 10.
33. Ogrin 2010, 202–206, pl. 1: 5, 7. Pavlin, Dular 2007, 72–73.

trated at the foothills of the Alps, that is at the margins of Ljubljana basin, in the Bohinj area and in the upper Soča valley. The new hill–top settlements were constructed on well–protected and hidden positions, at altitudes approx. between 400 to 1100 m a.s.l.[34]

It seems that the number of the Alpine high altitude sites (approx. 1400 to 1900 m a.s.l.) significantly increased in the same period of time.[35] They were positioned immediately above the Late Antiquity permanent settlements at the foothills of the Alps.[36] The quantity of the high altitude sites may suggest intensification of the economic exploitation of the high mountains area.

The main characteristics of the Roman and Late Antiquity high altitude sites are approximately the same. Their position at high altitudes indicates their use only during the summer seasons. The natural grazing area seems to be the most important precondition for choosing the position of the habitation. The locations were carefully selected: near the forest line, with a good overview, exposed to sun and sheltered from wind, avalanches, landslides and water torrents. A water source is often found in the vicinity, but not always. The existence of artificial water ponds is presumed on some locations. The foundation of only one isolated building was observed on most of the sites.[37] Two buildings appeared extremely rarely (probably at Vodene rupe).

The Late Antiquity building excavated at Dolga njiva had foundations constructed from untreated stones without mortar, the walls probably made of horizontal beams and only with one room (5.1 x 4.4 m). A hearth was found in the interior (Fig. 2).[38] The one–room building in Kal had also foundations of untreated stones (4 x 3.8 m). It was probably built in the Late Antiquity (as testified from a 4th century coin) and still used in the Early Medieval period (8th–9th century; since the radiocarbon dating of the charcoal from the hearth) .[39]

The small finds from the Roman and Late Antiquity high altitude sites consist mostly of coarse cooking pots. Other vessel forms are

34. Ciglenečki 1999. Ciglenečki 2008.

35. E.g. Kal, Poljanica, Klek and Zgornja Krma in the Julian Alps; Dolga njiva, Koren, Na stanu, Čohavnica and Velika planina in the Kamnik–Savinja Alps.

36. Horvat 2002, 128–129.

37. Horvat 2002, 122–124. Horvat 2010a, 95–96.

38. Horvat 2002, 126–128. Horvat 2006a, 30–33.

39. Ogrin 2006, 100–102. Ogrin 2010, 201–203.

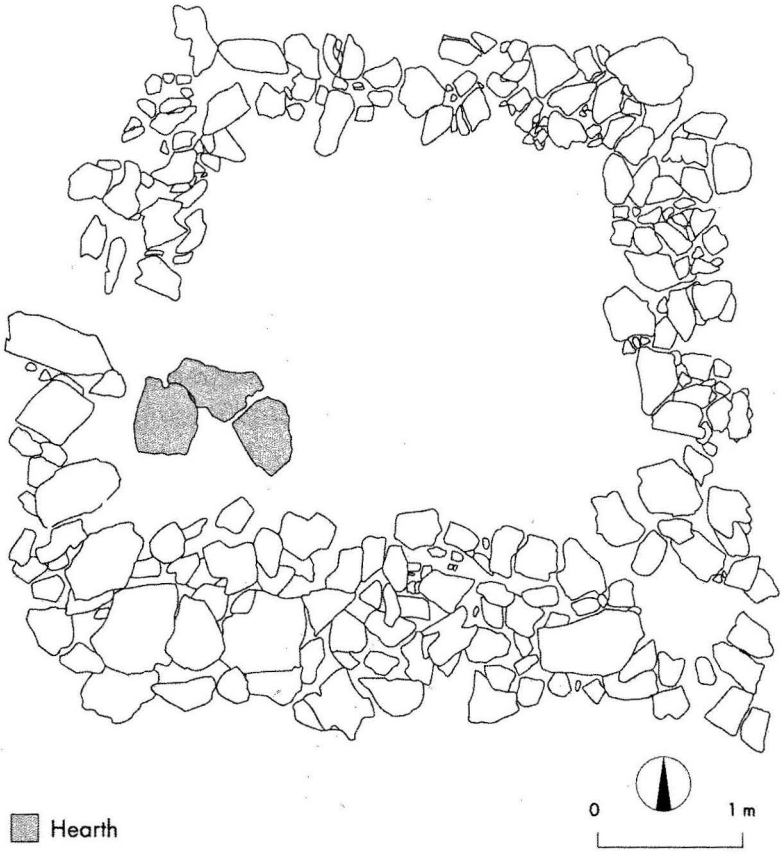

Figure 2. Dolga njiva, the Late Antiquity building. Stone foundations and the position of a hearth.

extremely rare, such as a tip of an amphora and a fragment of a glass beaker from Dolga njiva.[40] The tools are represented mostly by whetstones and bronze or iron bells. Metal parts of attire are often found: fibulae, belts, finger rings, pendants. The norico–pannonian fibulae that exclusively belonged to women's dress appear along with the fibulae types used by both sexes (Fig. 2).[41]

40. Horvat 2006a, 30–33.
41. Cevc 1997. Cevc 1998. Horvat 2002. Horvat 2010a.

The simple architecture and reduced spectrum of vessel forms indicate extremely modest conditions of living at the high altitudes that differ much from the way of life in the plains.

The economic function of the high altitude sites is not easily discernible. The position of the sites in the grassland areas and the frequent appearance of bells suggest that summer pasturing was one of the main economic activities.[42]

The absence of weapons shows that hunting was not important. On the other hand, a skeleton of an elk with an injury caused by an iron projectile was found in area of Soriška planina. The skeleton was radiocarbon dated around 400 AD, thus demonstrating the practice of hunting in the remote areas of the Julian Alps.[43]

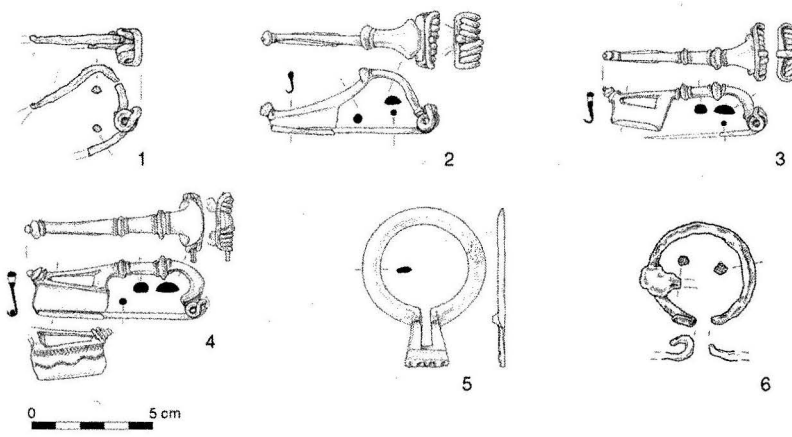

Figure 3. Roman fibulae from the high altitude sites: 1, 5. Velika planina; 2-4.Na stanu; 6. Dolga njiva. 1, 6. iron; 2–4. bronze; 5. silver.

The prospecting and gathering of iron ore was another possible activity in the high altitude areas. Iron mining was spread over all parts of the south eastern Alps in the Medieval and early modern periods.[44] On the other hand, wide–spread iron production is presumed, but

42. Knific 2006.
43. Jamnik, Kljun 2004, 266.
44. Mohorič 1969.

not well established by evidence in the prehistory and in the Roman period.[45]

The iron–working industry existed in some of the small Roman settlements in the Ljubljana basin, e.g. vicus of Mengeš, villae rusticae in Zasip and Rodne.[46]

Several archaeological sites in the Julian Alps are located in the extensive grassland areas that are at the same time rich in iron ore. Klek on Pokljuka plateau provided Early Roman individual finds, a Late Antiquity building (6th century) and a settlement site of the Early Medieval period (9th to 10th century). An accumulation of iron ore pieces was found together with the Roman and Early Medieval material.[47] The vestiges of the Medieval and early modern iron ore extraction are seen everywhere in the Klek area.[48] Pečana in the Julian Alps provided the Roman and Early Medieval settlement finds on the same location. Important mining activity developed there in the Medieval and early modern periods[49].

The connection of archaeological sites with iron mining is thus possible. It might be possible as well that there was a continuity in the economic exploitation between the Late Antiquity and Early Medieval periods.[50]

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45. Gabrovec 1974, 303–304.
46. Sagadin 1995b, 225, 232. Sagadin 1995a, 16, 21.
47. Ogrin 2006, 103–104. Ogrin 2010, 202–206.
48. Bizjak 2004, 133–134.
49. Ogrin 2006, 105. Ogrin 2010, 205–207.
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