

# **Archäologie in den Alpen**

## **Alltag und Kult**

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## The archaeology of Velika planina

The high plateau of Velika planina (1450–1667 m a. s. l.) holds a prominent position within the southern part of the Kamnik and Savinja Alps. This is the largest plateau, with the best and most extensive pasturelands within this mountainous area and has a long and special Alpine economy<sup>1</sup> tradition that spans throughout the Medieval and Modern era.<sup>2</sup> The recent archaeological investigations at Velika planina were extremely intensive and provided evidence of long-term land-use trends in the high altitude areas of the Kamnik and Savinja Alps (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup>

The Kamnik and Savinja Alps mountain range rises on the northeast edge of the Sava river basin. The mountains are relatively easily accessible from the plain in the south, from where it takes one day by foot to get into the areas above the forest line (between 1550 and 1650 m a.s.l.) The highest peak is Grintovec, 2558 m a.s.l. The bedrock in the area consists of limestone, which provides for the appearance of karst phenomena and rare water sources. The meadows above the forest line are few and small, and they are surrounded by mountain ridges. No large ore deposits can be found in the Kamnik and Savinja Alps. Most high altitude areas are located far away from the main traffic routes.<sup>4</sup>

### Prehistory

Pečice (1550 m a. s. l.) is a low hill situated in the central area of Velika planina, in the vicinity of the largest modern herdsmen's settlement Veliki stan and the modern chapel of St. Mary of the Snow. Pečice is positioned approximately 10 metres above its surroundings and offers a good view across most of the plateau. Picturesque vertical rock towers, several metres high, rise on top the hill and large stones are scattered between the rocks (Fig. 2).<sup>5</sup>

Prehistoric pottery and stone flakes were found on the top and the southern base of Pečice. Following the field survey three archaeological trenches were dug. Two were located on the top of the hill - in level areas that were predominantly clear of large stones. The third trench was located at the southern base.

A layer containing prehistoric pottery and stone flakes has been excavated in all three trenches. However the trenches did not show any structures or important concentrations of finds. According to the even distribution of finds and the modest presence of charcoal, Pečice appears to be a settlement, positioned on the top of the hill, along the southern slope and at the southern base (extending over an area of approximately 50 x 50 metres).

The prehistoric pottery has been fired in an unstable or alternating atmosphere. The pots are decorated with broad oblique grooves, nipples, rough barbotine and brushing. The rims are plain, bear simple impressions on the outer edge or they are thickened with a dissected rib (Fig. 3).

The large fine vessel decorated with broad oblique grooves (Fig. 3: 4, 6) could probably be dated to the Urnfield period when this type of decoration was frequently used.<sup>6</sup>

Rims with a dissected rib (Fig. 3: 1–2) appear in several periods and cultural groups throughout central Slovenia. For example, they were found in the Eneolithic „Horizon of pottery with furrowed incisions“ dated back to the second quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC<sup>7</sup> and they were also frequent finds at the Early Bronze Age sites that belong to the Somogyvár-Vinkovci Culture (in the 25<sup>th</sup> century BC).<sup>8</sup> This rim type was also discovered in a pit located at the high altitude site Kal in the Julian Alps. With the use of radiocarbon dating two charcoal samples originating from the pit have been dated back to two different periods (to between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> mil-

1 The expression „Alpine economy“ is used here in the sense of the German „Almwirtschaft“.

2 Cevc 1993.

3 Cevc 1997, 28–45; Cevc 2000a; Horvat 1999a; Horvat 1999b; Horvat 2002a; Horvat 2002b; Horvat 2006; Železnikar 2006; Železnikar 2008.

4 Perko – Orožen Adamič 2001, 108–121.

5 The geographical name „Pečice“ originates from the

Slovenian name „Peči“ for rocks.

6 I. e. BA D and Ha A: Dular 2002, 205; Ha B: Črešnar 2006, 139.

7 Velušček 2004, 184–212.

8 Velušček – Čufar 2003.



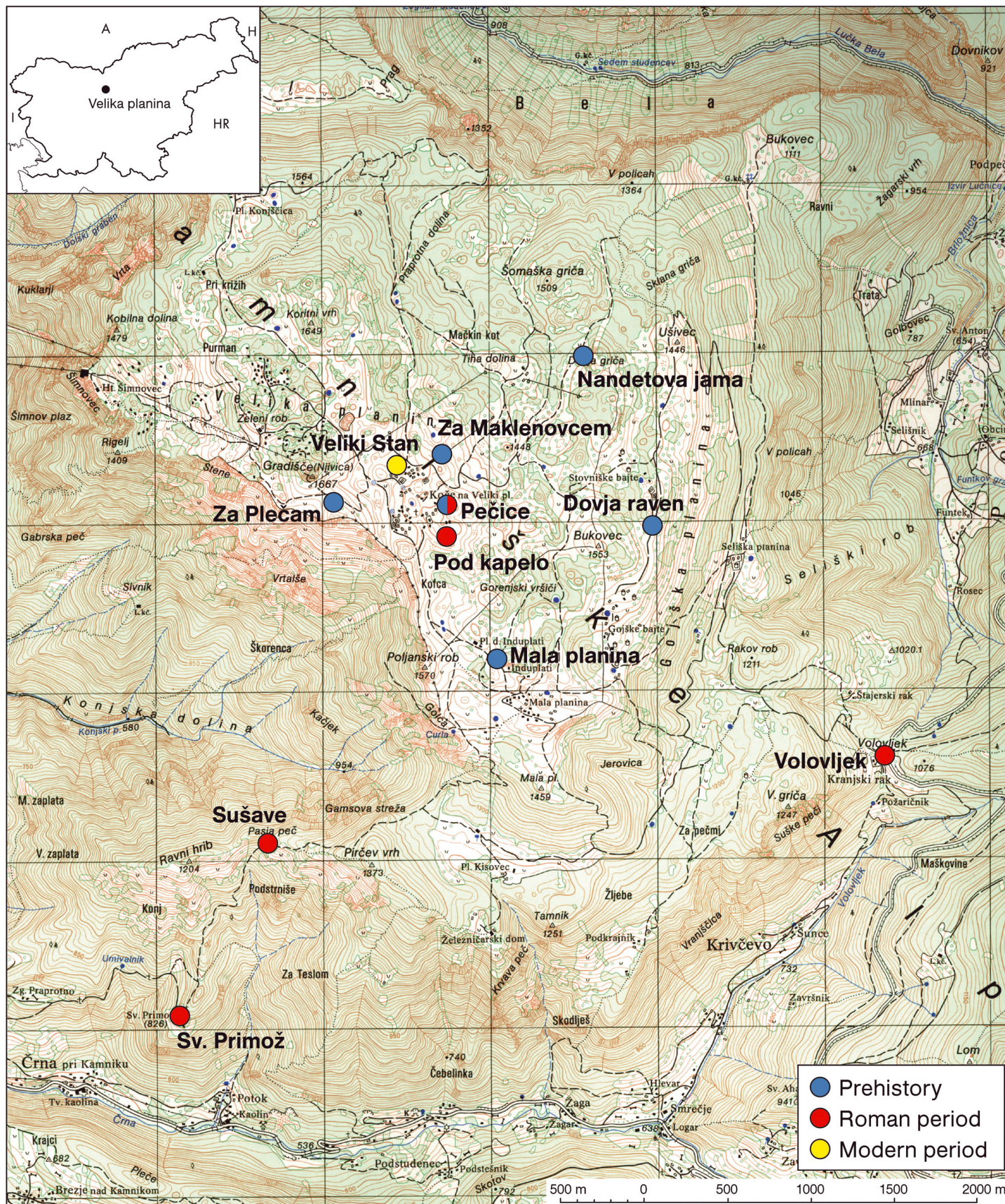


Fig. 1: Archaeological sites on the Velika planina plateau. Source: DTK 25 © 1976, The Surveying and Mapping Authority of the Republic of Slovenia





Fig. 2: Pečice

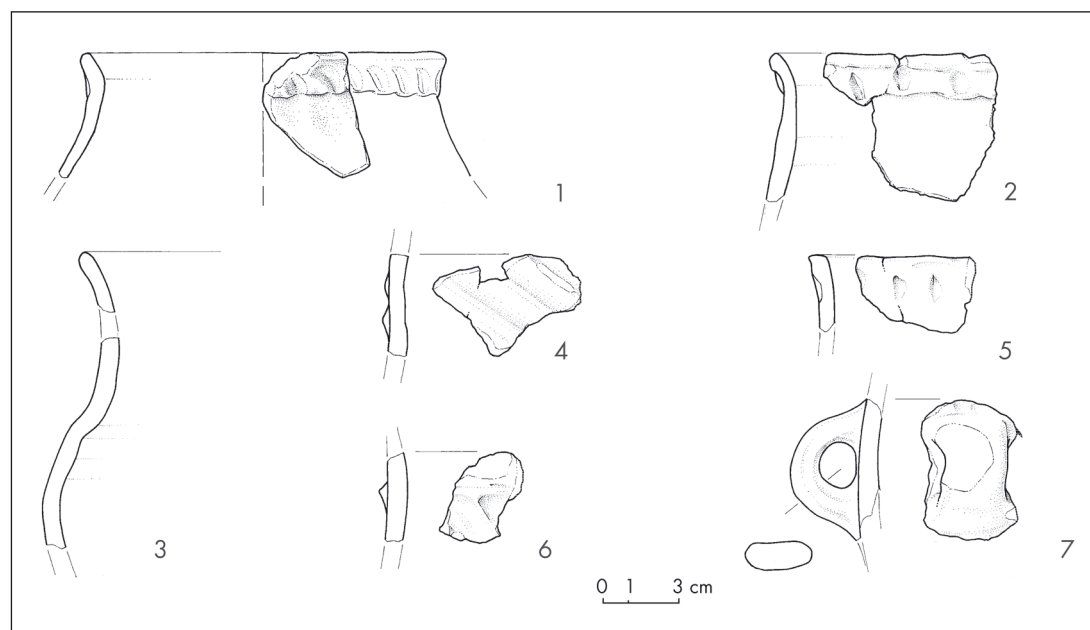


Fig. 3: Prehistoric pottery from Pečice. Scale 1:3

lennium BC, and between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century BC).<sup>9</sup>

Following the uncertain chronology of coarse pottery and taking the fine vessel decorated with oblique grooves into account all prehistoric pottery from Pečice should be dated back to the Bronze Age.

A bronze winged axe (Fig. 4: 1) from the beginning of the Late Bronze Age (BA D, Ha A, 13<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century BC) represented an accidental find in the vicinity of the Pečice site, approximately 250 to

400 m away (Za Maklenovcem).<sup>10</sup> The axe seems to be contemporary with the settlement site.

Scarce pottery and stone flakes and no settlement structures were discovered on Mala planina (approx. 1 km south of Pečice). The site shows evidence of occasional human presence.<sup>11</sup> A few prehistoric pottery fragments originate from the cave known as Nandetova jama.<sup>12</sup> A socketed axe (Fig.

<sup>10</sup> Šinkovec 1995, 51, pl. 9: 53.

<sup>11</sup> Cevc 2000a, 113; Horvat 2002a, 120; Horvat 2002b, 195; Horvat 2006, 24.

<sup>12</sup> Leben 1967.

<sup>9</sup> Ogrin 2006, 100–101.

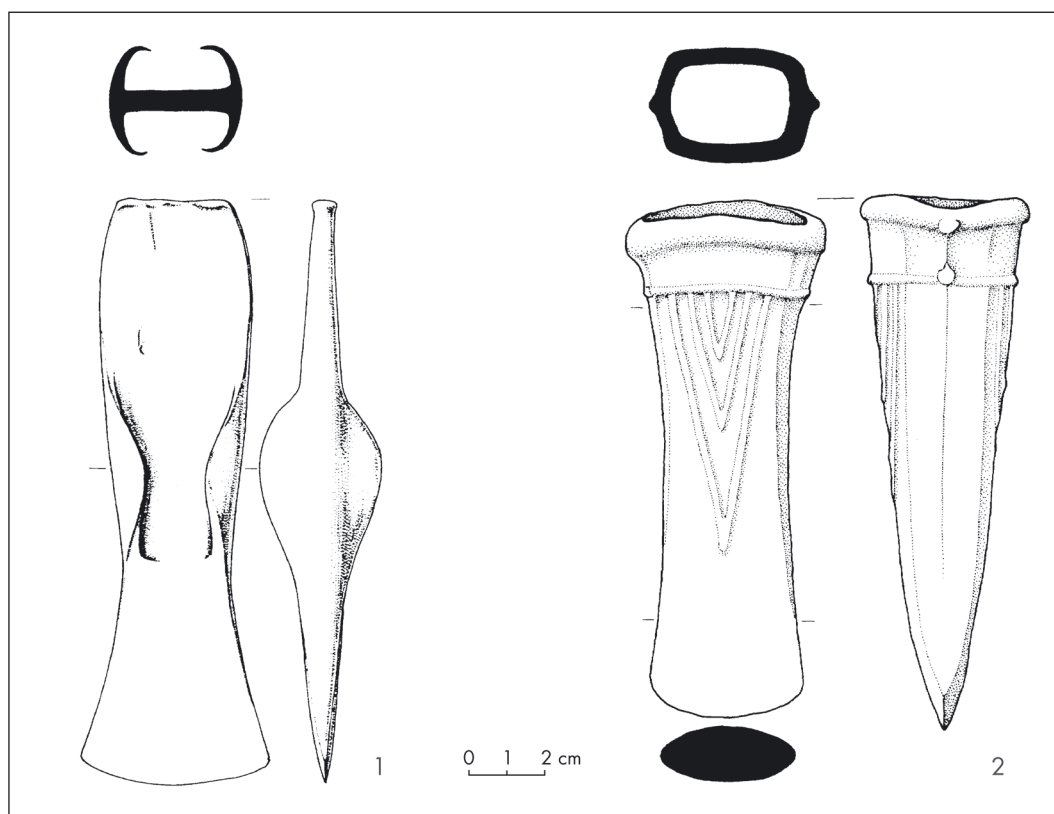


Fig. 4: Individual bronze finds from Velika planina. 1 Za Maklenovcem, 2 Dovja raven. After Šinkovec 1995, pl. 9: 53; 14: 81. Scale 1:2

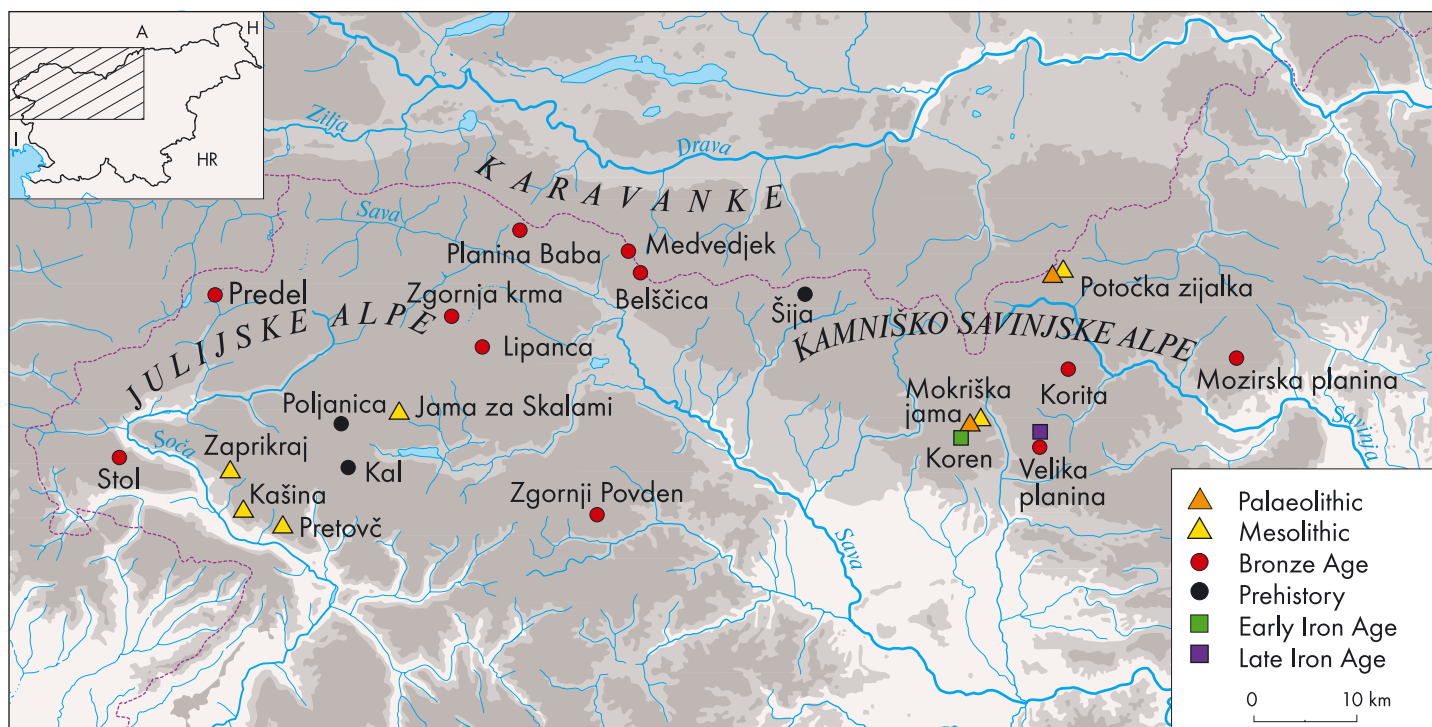


Fig. 5: Prehistoric high altitude sites in the south eastern Alps. After Horvat 2006, 23, fig. 1

4: 2) from the older Late Bronze Age (Ha A, 12<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century BC) represented an accidental find on Dovja raven at the eastern edge of the plateau.<sup>13</sup>

Thus Velika planina exhibits three types of prehistoric sites that were observed elsewhere in the south eastern Alpine area: seasonal settlement site, site of temporal human presence or activity and the deposition of an individual object.

<sup>13</sup> Šinkovec 1995, 60, pl. 14: 81.



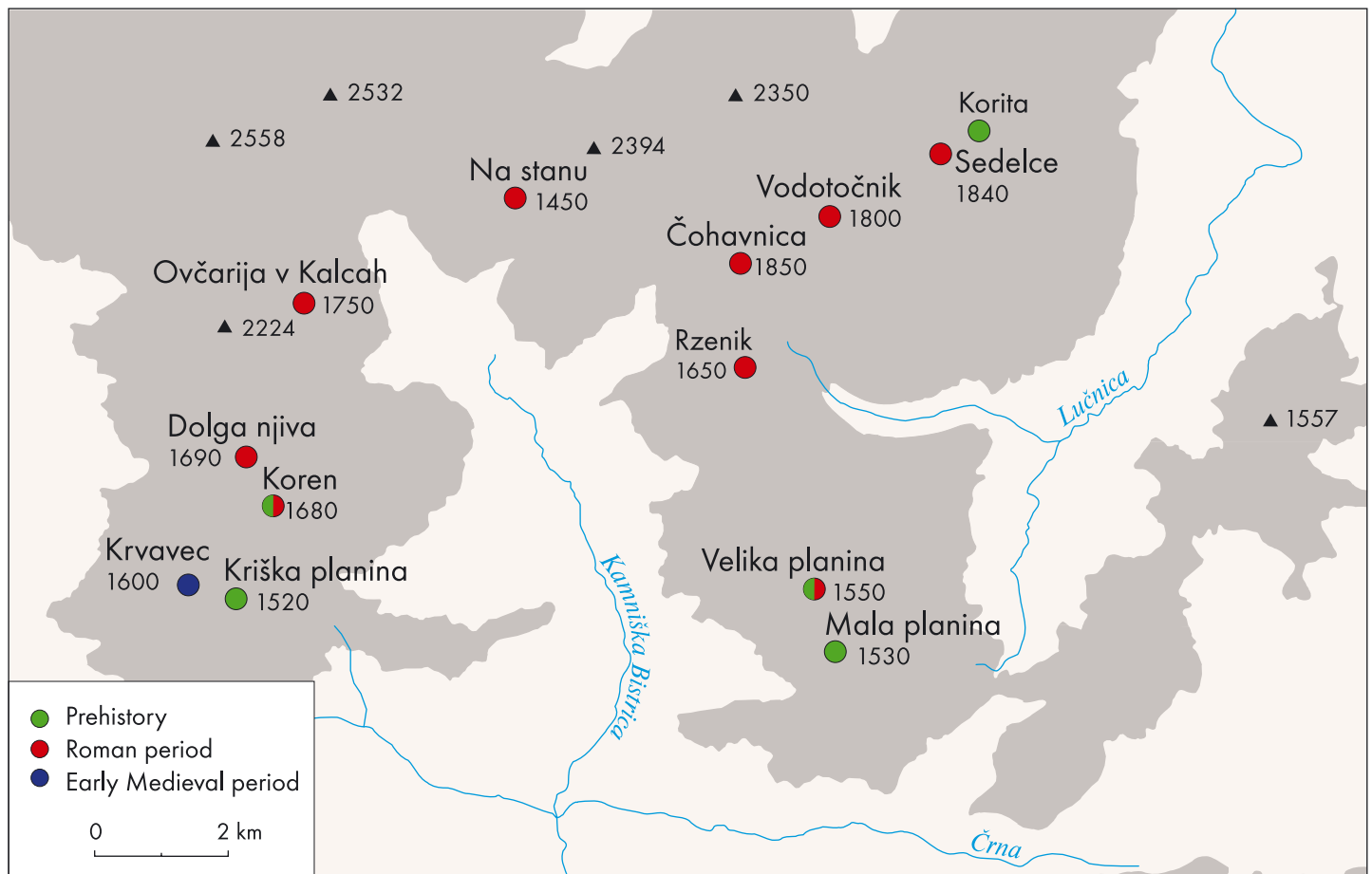


Fig. 6: Prehistoric, Roman and Early Medieval sites in the Kamnik and Savinja Alps

There are only a few prehistoric settlement sites similar to Pečice in the south eastern Alps (Fig. 5): Lipanca, Kal and Poljanica on Lepa Komna in the Julian Alps,<sup>14</sup> and Šija in Karavanke.<sup>15</sup> They are always located on grassland areas close to the forest line. No stone foundations or ground levelling activities have been noticed so far. This could be an indication that simple wooden architecture or even tents were used. A similar situation as at Pečice, i.e. a probable relation between the settlement and the individual metal object in the vicinity (accidentally lost or intentionally deposited) also appeared in Lipanca on the Pokljuka plateau in the Julian Alps.<sup>16</sup>

The scarce archaeological vestiges in Mala planina can be compared with the Bronze Age site of Zgornji Povden in the Julian Alps, where a temporary shelter has been discovered in the vicinity of a large rock.<sup>17</sup>

#### Accidental finds of bronze objects near the

mountain routes and on passes as well as on the remote plateaus in the south eastern Alps could often be interpreted as offerings, however it is possible that some of the isolated objects were accidentally lost.<sup>18</sup>

Hoards and individual deposits of weapons and tools disappeared at the end of the Bronze Age. This might be one of the reasons why Iron Age remains are rarely discovered in high altitude areas. Koren in the Kamnik and Savinja Alps represents the only known Early Iron Age high altitude site (Fig. 6). A settlement layer including ceramics and a pit was discovered within the archaeological trench. The two Certosa type fibulae date the site into the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>19</sup>

It is possible that the iron knife that was an accidental find on Velika Planina originates from the

14 Šribar 1955; Ogrin 2006, 99–101.

15 Horvat 2006, 23, fig. 1.

16 Šribar 1955; Šinkovec 1995, 99–100, pl. 28: 194; Horvat 2002a, 120; Horvat 2002b, 195; Horvat 2006, 24.

17 Turk – Šercelj 1988.

18 Šinkovec 1995, 51, 53, 55, 60, 82, 97, 99, 109, pls. 9: 53; 10: 61; 11: 67; 14: 81; 23: 145; 27: 188; 28: 194; 32: 216; Šinkovec 1996; Teržan 1996, 254–257; Horvat 2006, 22–23.

19 Cevc 1997, 68–73; Horvat 2002a, 122; Horvat 2002b, 196; Horvat 2006, 26, fig. 4; fibulae chronology: Teržan 1976, 323–324, 352–353 (type 5), 331–336, 364–368 (type 10).

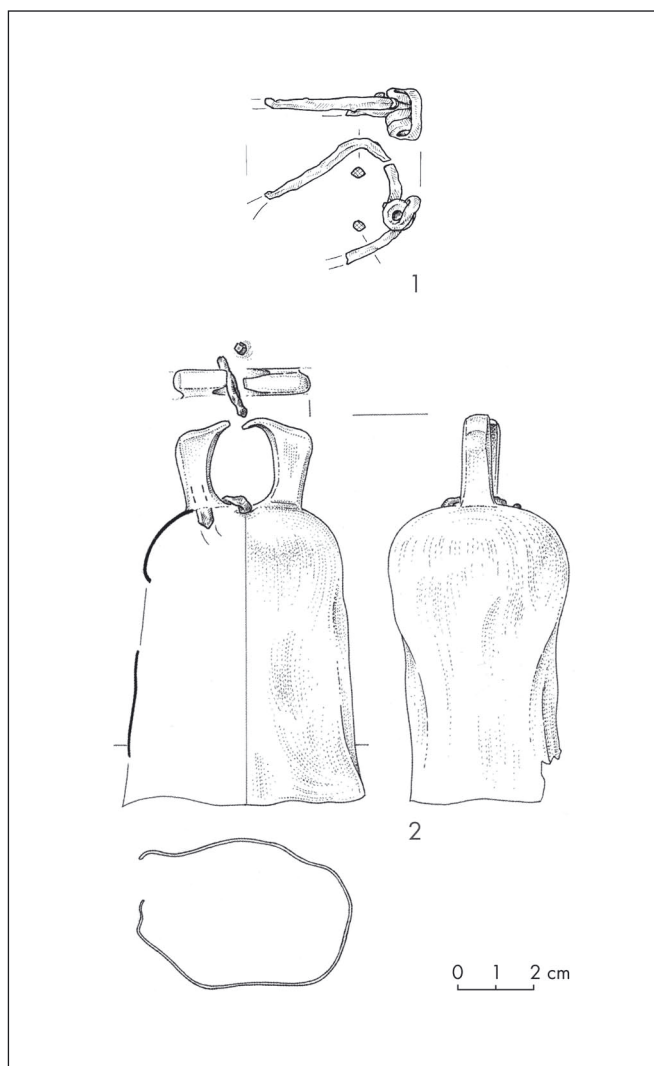


Fig. 7: Velika planina. 1 – Za Plečam, iron; 2 – Sušave, bronze. Scale 1:2

Early Iron Age.<sup>20</sup> An isolated iron fibula (Fig. 7: 1; Za Plečam) is proof of human presence in the Late La Tène period.<sup>21</sup>

### Roman Period

The number of high altitude sites significantly increased during the Roman period.<sup>22</sup> Such evidence is especially frequent in the Kamnik and Savinja Alps, however this is due to the more intensive archaeological investigations (Fig. 6).

Pečice on Velika planina provided scarce Roman finds. Fragments of Roman coarse pottery, a group of seven whetstones (Fig. 8: 1–2) as well as small metal objects were found on the top of the hill.

An intentionally deposited silver ring fibula – probably a votive offering – dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century AD was discovered under a large stone (Fig. 8: 3).<sup>23</sup> However, no Roman settlement structures were detected. The small finds probably indicate traces of human activities and the vicinity of a settlement.<sup>24</sup>

An isolated coarse pot (Fig. 9) was found 200 m south of the Pečice site (Pod kapelo). The pot is decorated with wavy lines created with a brush-like implement. In the south eastern Alpine area this type of decoration is dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, i.e. to the Late Antiquity period.<sup>25</sup>

A bronze bell (Fig. 7: 2) was an accidental find on the path to Velika planina (Sušave).<sup>26</sup> Although the exact location of the find is not known, it was probably found in an area with no settlement traces. Its form is typical for the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.<sup>27</sup>

A pair of golden Norico-Pannonian fibulae (Fig. 10) was discovered in the vicinity of the Volovljek pass (Kranjski Rak, 1029 m a. s. l.), i.e. close to one of the routes leading to Velika planina.<sup>28</sup> This fibula type is dated to the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>29</sup> Such fibulae belonged to the attire of the indigenous women, however they were rarely made from gold and the location of the find on the pass is also an exception. Taking into account the circumstances, the pair of golden fibulae from Volovljek should be considered as a votive offering.<sup>30</sup>

The archaeological sites in the broader Velika Planina area provide evidence that the plateau was frequented during the entire Roman period (from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century), which is also confirmed by the settlement in the vicinity of Pečice and the two routes that lead to the plateau. The practise of votive offerings was recorded at least at two locations (Pečice, Volovljek).

The discoveries in the central part of the Kamnik and Savinja Alps, i.e. in the area between the river valleys of Kokra and upper Savinja, clearly supplement the data from Velika planina. The positioning of the Roman high altitude sites was observed on the basis of the present-day environment. It was as-

23 Horvat 1999a, 186; Cevc 2006c, 130, fig. 8; Sellye 1990, 25, 29, 53; Wiewegh 2002–2003, 77–79.

24 It is possible that the inhabitants of the Medieval and Modern herdsman's settlement that emerged in the immediate vicinity used the stones from hypothetical Roman buildings.

25 Rodriguez 1997; Modrijan 2008, 118–121.

26 Cevc 2006c, 132, fig. 11; Knific 2006, fig. 2: 7, 3: 2.

27 Božič 2005, 315–319.

28 Horvat 2002b, 197–198, fig. 7; Horvat 2006, 29–30, fig. 7.

29 Garbsch 1965, 68–69, type A 238 p.

30 Pauli 1986, 843–844, pl. 9: 2.

20 Cevc 2000a, 113, 115, fig. 4.

21 Horvat 1999a, 185; Horvat 1999b, 65; Horvat 2006, 26, fig. 4: 5.

22 Horvat 2006, 27–28, fig. 5.



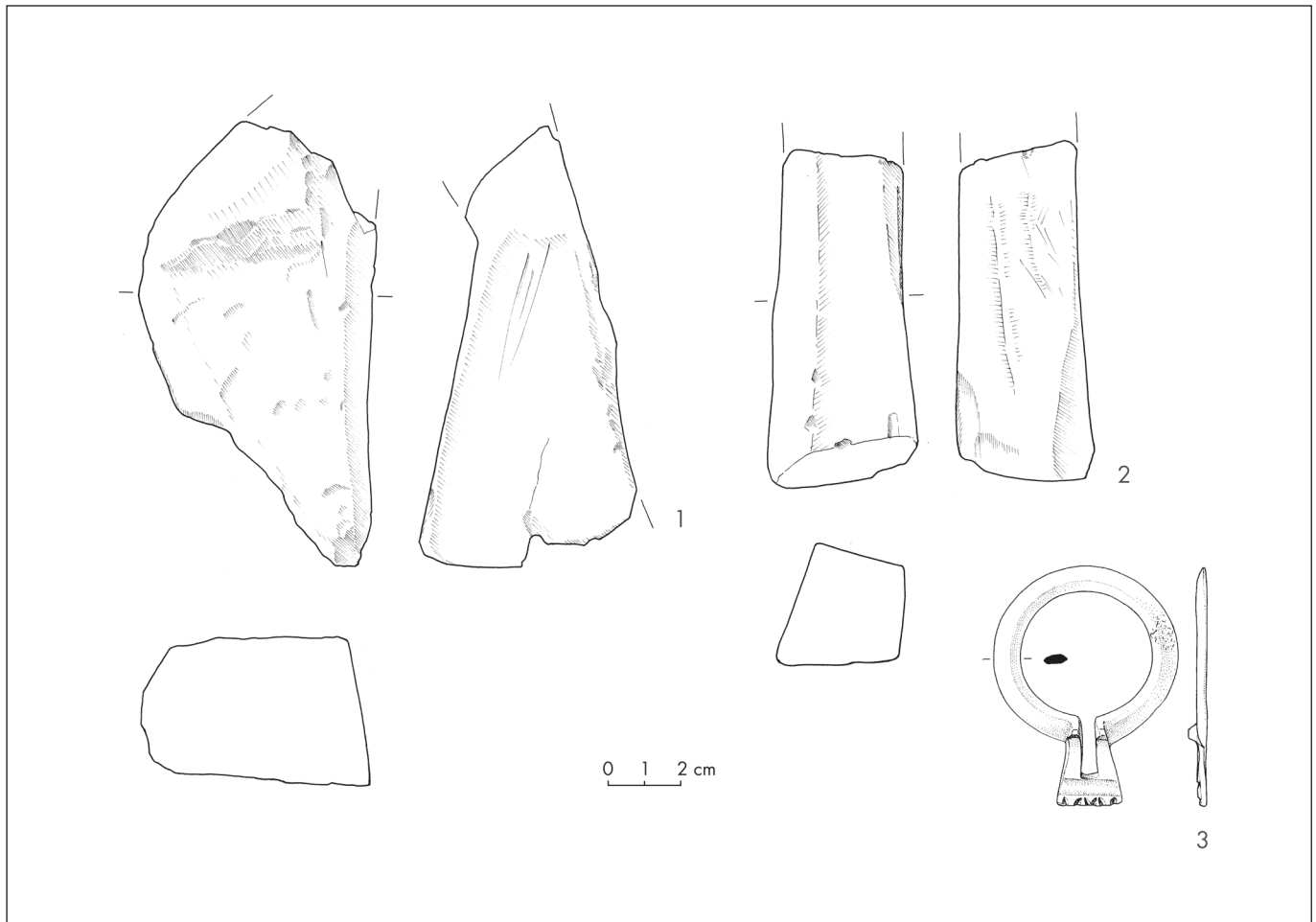


Fig. 8: Pečice on Velika planina. 1–2 stone, 3 silver. Scale 1:2

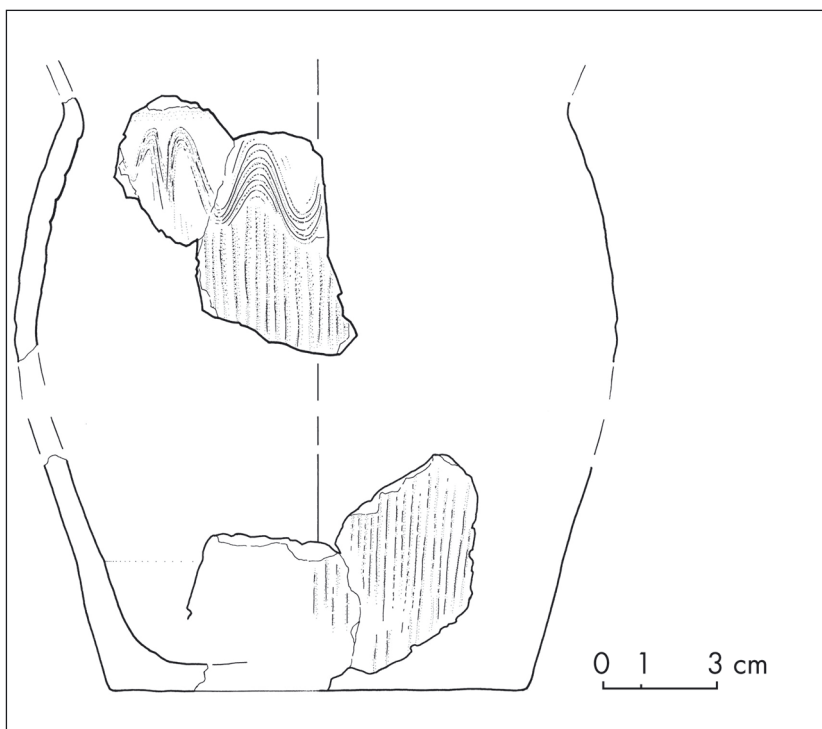


Fig. 9: Pod kapelo on Velika planina. Pottery. Scale 1:2

sumed that the basic landscape characteristics remained the same for the last two millennia.

The Roman sites were typically located in the grasslands in the vicinity of the forest line. The presence of a large grass area (or the possibility of obtaining it by deforestation through fire) seems to be the most important natural precondition for the positioning of the seasonal (summer) habitation. It appears that a single Roman hut was built at each favourable location. These areas were separated from each other by high ridges or desolated rocky landscapes and it took at least two hours by foot to get from one site to the other.

These habitations were often located on the edges of ancient and modern grazing areas. The locations were exposed to the sun and sheltered from the strong winds. The sites had a good view of the pastureland and the entrance from the valley. Safety was of great im-

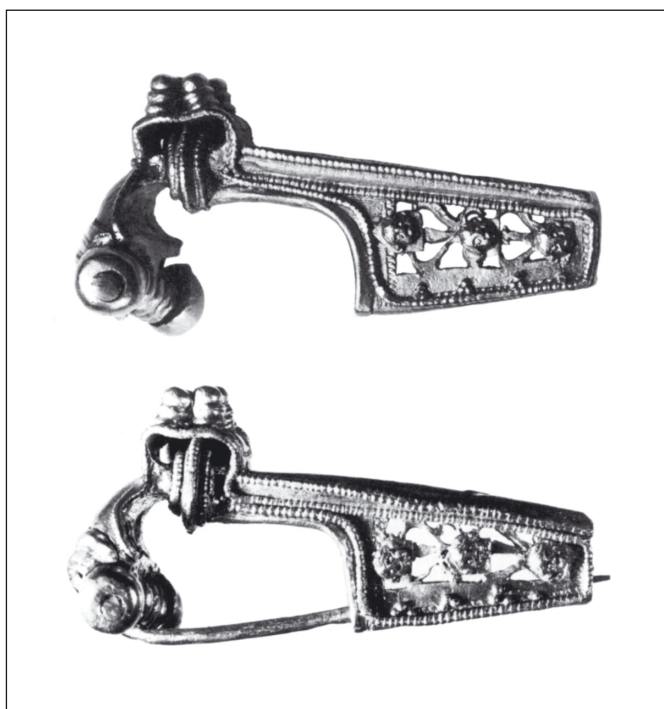


Fig. 10: The golden fibulae from the Volovljek pass. After Pauli 1986, pl. 9: 2.

portance, for there was a risk of avalanches, landslides and inundation of rain waters. A water source could often be found in the vicinity, however not all locations had a spring. It is possible that water was sometimes collected in artificial ponds.<sup>31</sup>

A Roman hut dated back to the Late Antiquity period (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century AD) was excavated in Dolga njiva. The log cabin with a fireplace was probably erected on stone foundations (5.10 x 4.40 m).<sup>32</sup>

Coarse kitchenware pots dominate at all Roman high altitude sites, and other forms of vessels are extremely rare. The absence of plates, cups, bowls and jugs seems to be significant, as this demonstrates a very modest lifestyle. Whetstones, iron knives, iron and bronze bells and coins can be found at most sites. Fibulae, belonging to men's and women's clothing, necklace beads, finger rings and belt plates are also common finds.<sup>33</sup> The absence of weapons is worth noticing for this could indicate the insignificance of hunting.

It can be concluded from the locations of the settlements (Fig. 6) that summer grazing was the main economic interest of the Roman exploitation

of the high altitude areas in the Kamnik and Savinja Alps, for they correspond nicely to the positioning of the Late Medieval pasturing areas (Fig. 11). This interpretation is backed also by other evidence. The high altitude area of the Kamnik and Savinja Alps has no important ore deposits, nor was it crossed by transit traffic routes. The commonly found iron and bronze bells could be evidence of herds.<sup>34</sup>

Finds originating from the early Roman period are generally scarce in high altitude sites. It seems that the Early Roman remains are often overshadowed by the Late Roman and Late Antiquity traces. The finds of the period span from between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century and can be found at almost every high altitude Roman site.<sup>35</sup>

In the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century the lowland settlements in the Sava basin were abandoned and new fortified settlements were constructed on protected elevated positions in the remote hilly areas. These permanent settlements also appeared at the foothills of the Kamnik and Savinja Alps where they were located at altitudes of up to 1000 m.<sup>36</sup> The Late Antiquity settlement of Sv. Primož was built on the slopes of Velika planina (850 m a.s.l.).<sup>37</sup> The small seasonal high altitude sites in the Kamnik and Savinja Alps (as well as in Karavanke) were positioned between 500 and 1000 metres above the Late Antiquity permanent settlements. It is assumed that the two types of settlements had a close connection. The permanent settlements were probably dependent on summer grazing in the Alps and functioned as bases for the seasonal high altitude posts. The density of the Late Antiquity high altitude sites could be a result of the intensive exploitation of the relatively stable and protected resources in high altitude areas.<sup>38</sup>

### Early Medieval Period

In the 7<sup>th</sup> century the Slavic population immigrated to the south eastern Alpine area. The permanent Roman hilltop settlements were abandoned or destroyed.<sup>39</sup> The seasonal high altitude settlements were also abandoned.

The old Roman population gradually mixed with the newcomers. The pre-Slav mountain names have remained and many Slovene words connected with the alpine economy were borrowed from the

31 Cevc 1997; Horvat 2002a, 122–124; Horvat 2002b, 196–197; Horvat 2006, 27; Bremšak 2006.

32 Cevc 1997, 74–80; Horvat 2002a, 126–129; Horvat 2002b, 198–201; Horvat 2006, 30–33.

33 Cevc 1997; Horvat 1999a, figs. 6–7; Horvat 1999b, figs. 5–6; Horvat 2002a, 124, fig. 4; Horvat 2002b, 197, figs. 6, 10; Horvat 2006, figs. 6, 10.

34 Knific – Murgelj 1996; Knific 2006; Cevc 2006b, 118.

35 Horvat 2002a, 124; Horvat 2002b, 197; Horvat 2006, 27.

36 Ciglencečki 1987; Ciglencečki 1999; Ciglencečki 2008.

37 Cevc 1997, 25–27.

38 Horvat 2002a, 129; Horvat 2002b, 199; Horvat 2006, 33, fig. 5.

39 Ciglencečki 1999, 300; Ciglencečki 2008, 489–490.



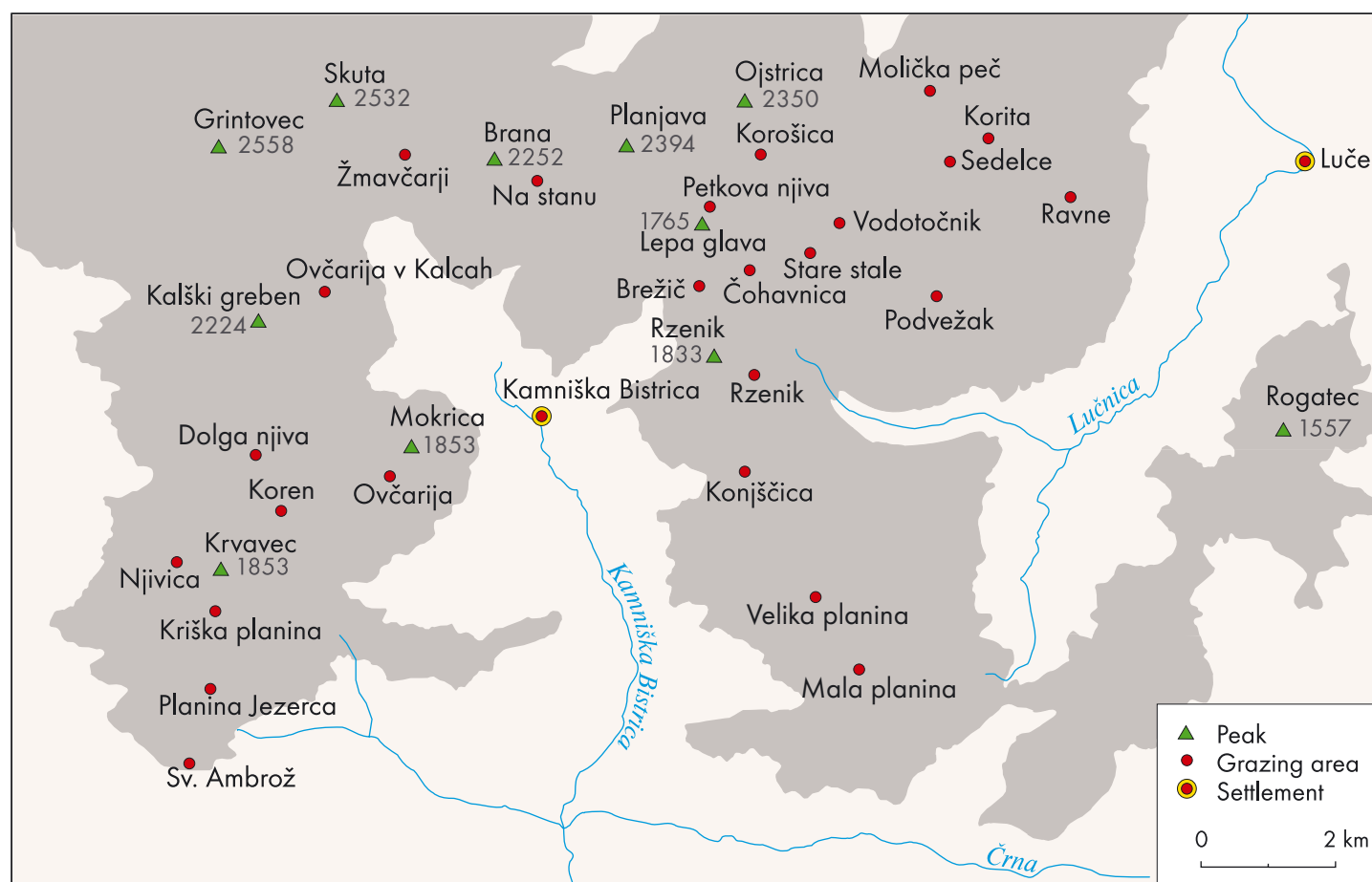


Fig. 11: Late Mediaeval and Early Modern high altitude pasturelands in the Kamnik and Savinja Alps. After Cevc 2000c, 31, fig. 22

Romanic languages.<sup>40</sup>

Only a few Early Medieval high altitude archaeological sites are known: Klek and Pečana in the Julian Alps<sup>41</sup> and Krvavec in the Kamnik and Savinja Alps.<sup>42</sup> So far no traces of Early Medieval occupation of Velika planina have been discovered.

Klek and Pečana are both situated in areas rich in iron ore deposits and both provided evidence of Roman and Early Medieval settlement, however certain proof of continuity has so far not been discovered.

### Medieval and Early Modern period

Written documents are the most important source of knowledge on Late Medieval Alpine grazing areas that were densely spread across the Kamnik and Savinja Alps (Fig. 11). The first time Velika planina appeared in written sources was in 1539 when it was called „die gross ross albenn“ (the Great

horse pasture land),<sup>43</sup> however the accidental finds of Medieval horseshoes indicate that it was used much earlier.<sup>44</sup>

The Late Medieval and Early Modern sites on Velika planina and elsewhere in the Kamnik and Savinja Alps demonstrate a different range of ceramic forms when compared to Roman sites. Besides cooking pots, deep and shallow bowls and lids also appeared in significant numbers. Cheese strainers in the form of a mould were also found. Bowls and strainers are probably evidence of cheese production. This means that a true Alpine economy took place here, including seasonal pasturing and milk processing.<sup>45</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a unique type of a herdsman's hut was discovered on Velika planina. It consisted of a central rectangular room for the herdsman that was encircled by an oval shed for the livestock. Both parts were covered by the same roof. As the

<sup>40</sup> Cevc 2000b.

<sup>41</sup> Ogrin 2006, 103–105.

<sup>42</sup> Cevc 2003; Pleterski 2006; Persič 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Cevc 1993, 13–14.

<sup>44</sup> Dated approximately between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century. Cevc 1997, 38–39, fig. 43: 1–2; Clark 1995, 75–123 (similar to types 1 and 3); Štular 2009, 96–98.

<sup>45</sup> Cevc 2000c; Cevc 2004; Cevc 2006d; Predovnik 2006.

origin of this oval building is unclear, archaeological investigations have been instigated. Stone foundations have been excavated at Veliki Stan, not far away from Pečice. A rectangular room (4.40 x 4.80 m) together with a rectangular open fireplace (1.30 x 1.10 m) close to the entrance was discovered. The central room was surrounded by an oval shade (9.20 x 8.60 m). The structure is extremely similar to the modern herdsmen's buildings, however the pottery fragments indicate that it was erected in the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century and was no longer in use after the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

The archaeological sites on the Velika planina plateau demonstrate long-term frequentation and use of the high altitude areas in the Kamnik and Savinja Alps. The first intensification of human presence can be observed in the Late Bronze Age. The next peak came in the Roman period. The density and distribution of Roman sites is similar to those of the Late Medieval and Early Modern period. However, there are certain differences in the Roman and Medieval small objects that probably indicate different types of exploiting the high altitude areas.

## Summary

The archaeological sites on the Velika planina plateau demonstrate long-term frequentation and use of the high altitude areas in the Kamnik and Savinja Alps (northern Slovenia). The first intensification of human presence can be observed in the Late Bronze Age through three types of archaeological sites: seasonal settlement, site of temporal human presence or activity and the deposition of an individual object. The plateau was frequented during the entire Roman period. The practise of votive offerings was recorded at least at two locations. The density and distribution of Roman sites in the Kamnik and Savinja Alps is similar to those of the Late Medieval and Early Modern period. However, there are certain differences in the Roman and Medieval small objects that probably indicate different types of exploitation of the high altitude areas.

## Zusammenfassung

Die archäologische Fundorte auf dem Velika planina Plateau deuten auf die lange Anwesenheit des Menschen in den höheren Gebieten der Kamniker Alpen in Nordslowenien hin. Die erste intensive Anwesenheit ist in der jüngeren Bronzezeit mit drei Typen von Fundstellen dokumentiert: die Sommersiedlung, der Ort der kurzfristigen Anwesenheit oder Aktivität und die Deponierung von einzelnen

Gegenständen. Während der ganzen römischen Epoche wurde das Plateau regelmäßig besucht. Die kultische Deponierung wurde in zwei Fällen festgestellt. Die römischen Fundorte in den Kamniker Alpen entsprechen in Ausbreitung und Dichte sehr den spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen. Die Unterschiede zwischen römischen und mittelalterlichen Kleinfunden deuten vielleicht auf die verschiedene Art der Nutzung der Hochalpengebiete.

## Povzetek

Arheološka najdišča na Veliki planini dokazujejo dolgotrajno človekovo prisotnost na visokogorskih območjih Kamniško-Savinjskih Alp. Močnejšo izrabo območja lahko opazimo v pozni bronasti dobi s tremi tremi vrstami arheoloških najdišč: sezonska naselbina, območje občasne prisotnosti ali dejavnosti in zakop posameznih predmetov. Ljudje so bili prisotni na Veliki planini v vsem rimskem obdobju. Na vsaj dveh točkah je bil tudi ugotovljen običaj odlaganja votivnih darov. Gostota in razporeditev rimskih najdišč v Kamniško-Savinjskih Alpah je podobna tisti v poznem srednjem in v zgodnjem novem veku. Razlika med drobnimi najdbami rimskega in srednjeveškega obdobja verjetno nakazuje različen način izrabe gorskega sveta.

46 Cevc 2000a; Železnikar 2006; Železnikar 2008.



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