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The »Warrior Grave« from Rassach (Austria) Reconsidered: Male Tribal Elite Identity in South-eastern Noricum at the Threshhold of the Late La Tène to Early Roman Period

Das »Kriegergrab« von Rassach nochmals betrachtet: Die Identität der männlichen Stammeselite im südöstlichen Noricum an der Schwelle von der späten La-Tène-Zeit zur frühen Römischen Kaiserzeit[1]

Introduction

As part of my diploma thesis[2] in the early 2000s, I intensively studied the Roman, so-called Norico-Pannonian, barrows[3] in what is now Styria (Austria). One area of interest was the barrow cemetery at Rassach in western Styria, which was the subject of two articles published in the journal *Fundberichte aus Österreich* in 2003 and 2004. While I covered the excavations from 1984 in the first article[4], the second paper, with Gerald Fuchs as the main author, presented the results of rescue excavations carried out in 2001[5].

In the following, I would like to return to the barrow or tumulus no. 1 published in the second article, in particular to the artefacts from the burial and their interpretation. This project was especially inspired by a conference entitled »Archäologische Denkmalpflege in der Weststeiermark (Archaeological Monument Preservation in Western Styria)«, which was organised in 2025 by the Abteilung für Archäologie (Department of Archaeology) of the Bundesdenkmalamt (Federal Monuments Authority Austria) in Deutschlandsberg (Styria). After more than 20 years, I again gave a lecture on the subject[6], which resulted in this third paper. There are two main reasons why I am re-examining the so-called Rassach warrior grave: Firstly, it seems appropriate to combine the results from 2004 with the current state of research. Secondly, the grave and its publication at the time received little attention from national and international research, even though it is a key find context. It is not only of outstanding importance for the development of a type of grave specific for the region, but also reflects the cultural and historical transformation processes experienced by rural communities in the southeastern Alpine region at the end of the Iron Age and the beginning of the Roman period.

The Site

The Rassach barrow cemetery is located in the district of Deutschlandsberg (KG Rassach, MG Stainz, PB Deutschlandsberg), east of the B76 road in the Johngraben/Rassachegg section (fig. 1).[7]

Over 50 barrows were recorded at the site at the end of the 19th century, and 37 were still noted in the 1980s (fig. 2). The first excavations with scientific ambitions were carried out shortly before the middle of the 19th century by the military doctor Ferdinand Unger and in 1881 by the lawyer Johannes Dworschak. Moreover, in 1938/1939 road construction works are said to also have unearthed a skeleton, »sabres« and swords. More recently, field research was carried out in 1978 by the Burgmuseum Deutschlandsberg in barrow no. 8, in 1984 by the Landesmuseum Joanneum[8] in barrows nos. 2, 17, 19 and 20[9], and finally in 2001 by ARGIS on behalf of the Federal Monuments Authority Austria in barrows nos. 1 and 7. While the excavations in 1984 revealed cremation graves and stone cists[10], the rescue excavations in 2001 uncovered findings that were previously unknown in connection with the so-called Norico-Pannonian barrows. Three square foundation trenches, which are probably the remains of small funerary monuments, have shown that a Norico-Pannonian barrow cemetery could contain structures different from the typical artificially raised barrows.[11] However, the most significant

1 Anm. der Redaktion: Auf ausdrücklichen Wunsch des Verfassers wird die folgende Abhandlung ausnahmsweise in Englisch abgedruckt; eine deutsche Zusammenfassung findet sich am Ende des Beitrags. Das englische Korrektorat wurde dankenswerterweise von Tim Juckes (Bundesdenkmalamt) übernommen.
2 Hinker 2002a.
3 Still fundamental: Urban 1984. – Supplementary: Hinker 2005. – Hinker 2015/16.
4 Hinker 2002b (published 2003).
5 Fuchs and Hinker 2003 (published 2004). – The barrow no. 1 was briefly mentioned again in: Hinker 2006b, 119, figs. 1–2.
6 Lecture on 15th May 2025: »Das Schwertkriegergrab von Rassach (Weststmk, AT) nochmals betrachtet (The Warrior Grave of Rassach [Western Styria, Austria] Reconsidered«. I would like to thank Bernhard Hebert for inviting me to the aforementioned conference and for providing photographs and plans for this article. He not only supervised my diploma thesis, but also encouraged my interest in this research topic in many ways.
7 Detailed information on the location of the site and its research history: Hinker 2002b, 167–171.
8 Since 2009: Universalmuseum Joanneum.
9 Barrow no. 18 proved to be artificial, but contained no burials.
10 Hinker 2002b, 171–180.
11 Fuchs 2003, 119–135, figs. 12–25. – Such funerary monuments in the context of Norico-Pannonian barrows: Artner 2005, 287, note 13–16.

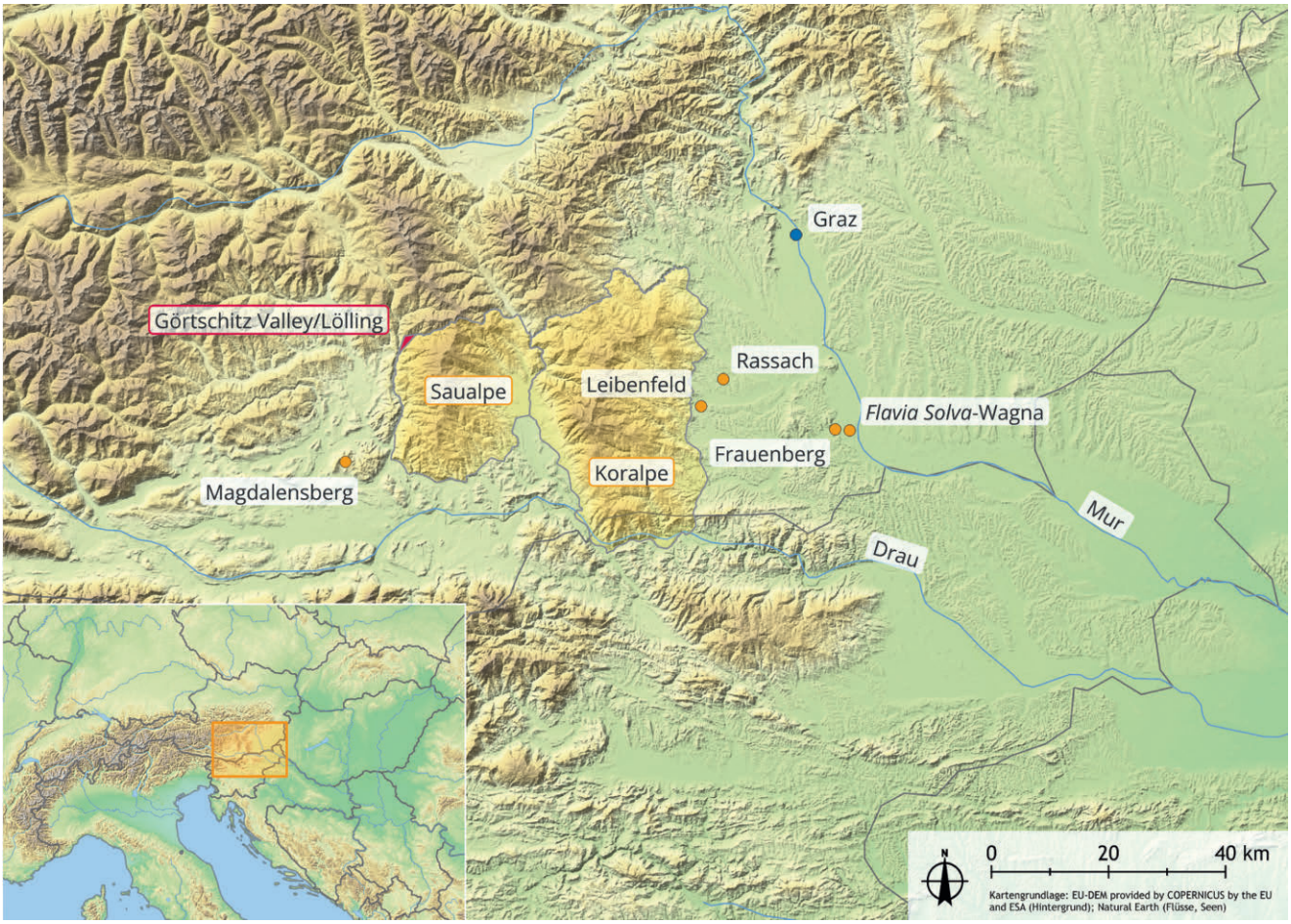

Fig. 1: Rassach. The location and important sites mentioned in the text.

archaeological finding from the excavations in Rassach is certainly the burial with weapons in barrow no. 1, the so-called warrior grave, which will be discussed in detail below. Apart from the aforementioned old reports, it is the only known grave in this cemetery so far in which weapons were found.

The barrow cemetery at Rassach was probably used as the burial site of one or even several small rural settlements in the surrounding area throughout at least the entire 1st century AD.[12] Of the archaeological sites known in the area based on surface finds, two in particular are likely to be Roman provincial settlements.[13]

The Find Context

The following section focuses on barrow no. 1, which was excavated in 2001 and is the northernmost preserved barrow in the Rassach burial ground.[14]

At the time of excavation it still had a diameter of approximately 11 m and a maximum height of 0.7 m. Beneath the barrow a shallow grave pit with a square layout and dimensions of approximately 1.8 × 1.8 × 0.15 m was uncovered. It contained the cremation burial consisting of charcoal, cremated human remains and grave goods (figs. 3, 4). Remains of the funeral pyre were still visible in the form of burnt clay and charred wooden remains, which formed a rectangular structure measuring approximately 5 × 2.5–3 m. Since the cremation undoubtedly took place at the burial site, it could be described as a bustum[15], although the use of this or other Latin terms *(rogus, tumulus)* does not mean that Roman burial customs were involved[16]. Three find zones can be separated within the cremation debris, two of which may be attributable to the spatial separation of functionally different grave goods on the funeral pyre. The deposition of the burnt debris in the pit probably reflects this arrangement. The spearhead (no. 61), the sword with scabbard (no. 62), a single-handled jug (no. 50) and the pedestal jar (no. 48)[17] are objects that were probably of great personal meaning to the deceased. The weapons and vessels for consuming alcoholic beverages, especially imported wine, had been status symbols during his lifetime and may therefore have been placed at the centre of the funeral pyre, i.e. close to the body. A tripod bowl (no. 47) and a barrel-shaped pot (no. 46) form a second group of functionally complementary finds, presumably consisting of a cooking vessel and a storage vessel. It is possible that these grave goods were donated by relatives and placed at the edge of the funeral pyre. The third find zone, a concentration

12 Hinker 2003, 145.
13 Hinker 2002b, 169.
14 The description of the features and stratigraphy is based on: Fuchs 2003, 115–124, figs. 5–11.
15 McKinley 2017, 258. 266–269. – Further reading: Hinker et al. 2018, 155, note 39.
16 Weekes 2008, 149.
17 Most of the sherds from this vessel were found next to the weapons, with a smaller number found near the tripod bowl and the barrel-shaped pot, i.e. they were spread across two find zones.

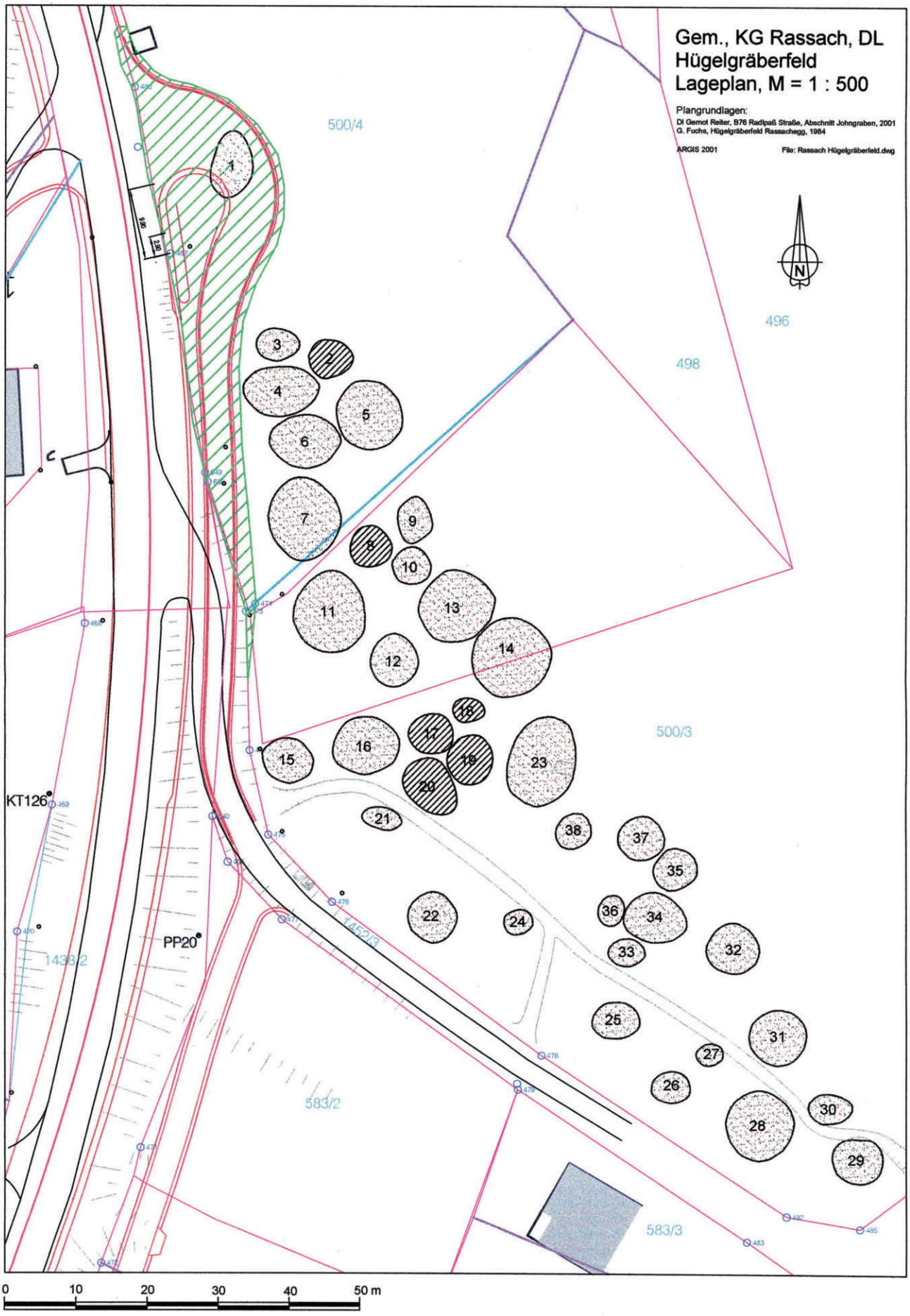

Fig. 2: Rassach. Map of the barrow cemetery.

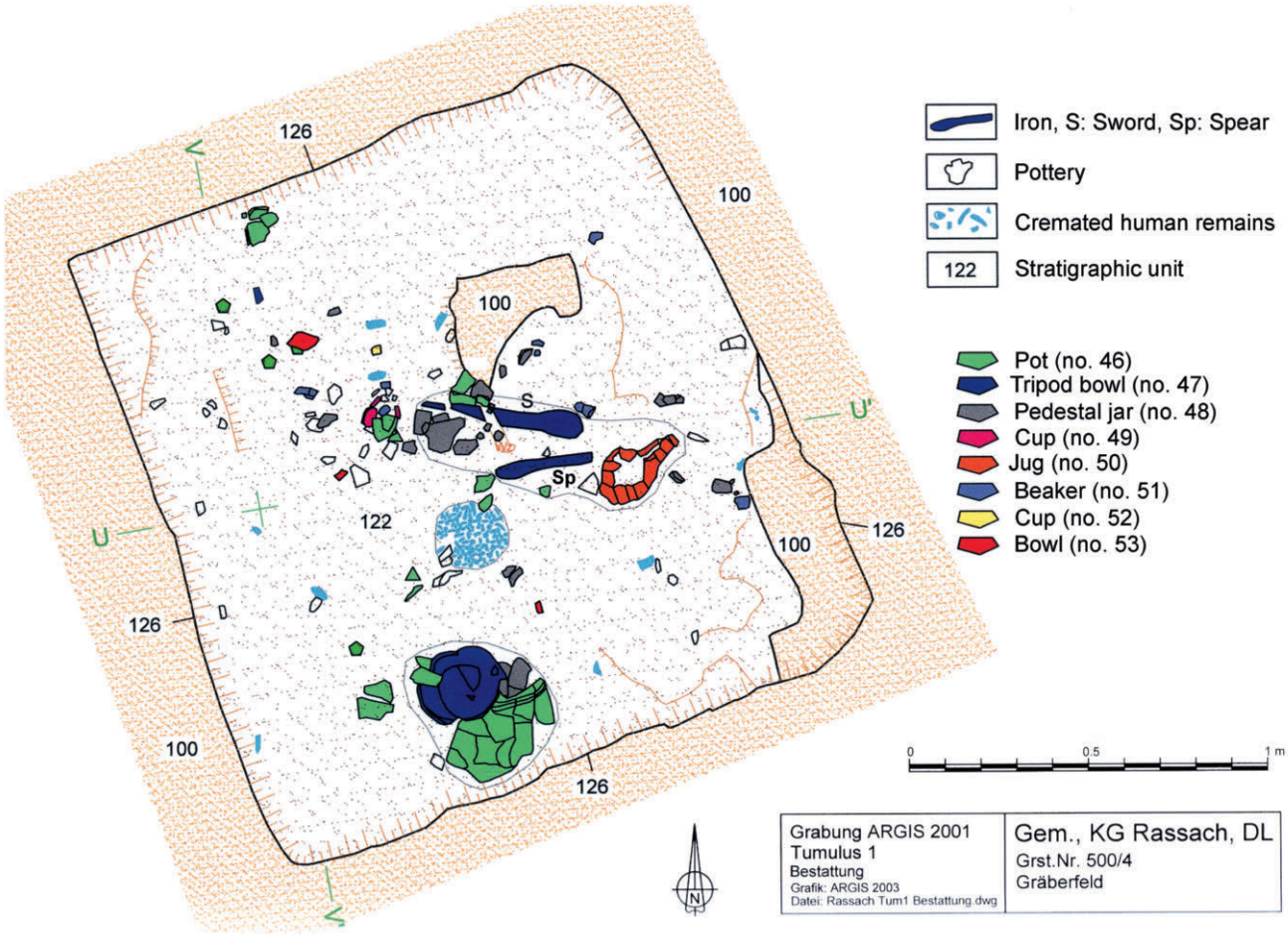

Fig. 3: Rassach. The burial of barrow no. 1.



Fig. 4: Rassach. The burial of barrow no. 1.

of cremated human remains, shows that the burnt bones of a man who died between the ages of 31 and 40[18] were partially collected after the cremation and placed separately in an urn positioned in or on the cremation debris. This form of post-cremation manipulation has also been documented in the context of other bustum burials.[19] As no urn survived it must have been an organic container.[20] The recovered cremated human remains weighed approximately 602 g, which probably corresponds to about 20–25 % of the total weight. Further analysis revealed that the person was of strong build.

During the excavation of the barrow, three features were uncovered that so far could not be explained convincingly. They are probably related to the burial or construction of the barrow. Beneath the eastern section of the barrow, a small pit measuring 0.3 m in diameter and approximately 0.1 m in depth was recognizable by a circular concentration of charcoal. It can be interpreted as the remains of a wooden panelling or a wooden bucket, barrel or similar object. In the southwestern part of the barrow, a rectangular area measuring 1.2 × 2.5+ m was enclosed by gneiss slabs. These stone slabs may have served to keep a wooden box in place.[21] The function of a shaft with wooden panelling, which was installed above the burial when the barrow was raised and then backfilled, remains unclear.

18 Renhart 2003.
19 McKinley 2017, 267–268.
20 Hinker 2003, 144, fig. 42.
21 Gerald Fuchs has made clear that the very small quantities of cremated human remains found within the structure do not belong to a burial or secondary burial, but are isolated particles of human bones, as are ubiquitous in a Roman provincial cemetery with cremation graves: Fuchs 2003, 116, note 5. Nevertheless, Georg Tiefengraber considered that this feature represented the actual burial of the barrow and further concluded that the warrior's grave could be an independent older flat grave beneath the barrow: Tiefengraber 2015, 642–643. However, Tiefengraber later contradicts his own »flat grave theory« when he considers barrow no. 1 in a broader context (Tiefengraber 2015, 673): »Klar ist, dass in den *tumuli* keine römischen Zuwanderer o. ä. bestattet werden, worauf am deutlichsten das waffenführende Kriegergrab aus Rassach hinweist, das ein latènezeitliches Ausstattungsmuster besitzt« (»it is evident that no Roman immigrants or similar individuals are buried in the *tumuli*, as is most clearly demonstrated by the grave of the armed warrior from Rassach, whose grave goods are typical of the La Tène period«). – In this context, it is worth mentioning a recently discovered La Tène period (LTC1) grave containing weapons, which was uncovered in the centre of barrow no. 9 of the Lang/Schirka (Austria) burial ground. In addition to the aforementioned La Tène barrow, this burial ground also includes other barrows and several La Tène flat graves: Bernhard 2012; Mauthner 2021, 28–30; Mauthner 2024, 147–149; Mauthner 2025, 133–134. – Even if Tiefengraber's »flat grave theory« cannot be completely ruled out, it seems unlikely. While there is no solid evidence to support the interpretation of the rectangular stone structure as a grave or possibly a robbed grave, the cremation grave of the warrior is undoubtedly a burial and thus also the only feature that can plausibly be considered a burial for the barrow. Assuming a flat grave would also imply that the grave of a warrior, i.e. an important member of the community, had already been forgotten or ignored when the barrow was erected. Even though the Lang/Schirka burial ground has not yet been fully explored, the topographical survey indicates that either flat graves were created between existing barrows or, conversely, existing flat graves were taken into respect when constructing barrows.

The Grave Inventory

The grave goods from barrow no. 1 in Rassach can be classified into different categories according to their manufacturing materials and techniques, provenance and function (fig. 5).[22]

Pottery

The most extensive group consists of eight pottery vessels (nos. 46–53). Of these, four (nos. 46–47, 49, 51) can be classified as autochthonous coarse ware and three (nos. 48, 52–53) as autochthonous fine ware, i.e. products that can be assumed to be of local or regional origin. Only the single-handled jug (no. 50) is very likely to be an imported item.

The four coarse ware vessels were produced without the use of a potter's wheel (nos. 47, 49) or were finished by slow rotation (nos. 46, 51). Particularly the tripod bowl (no. 47; fig. 6) differs significantly from later examples in terms of its manufacturing technique.[23] It was modelled by hand without the use of a potter's wheel, and its feet were also shaped separately and attached to the base of the bowl, rather than being cut out of a base ring. Several tripod bowls that were made using this primitive technique, are known from present-day western Styria.[24] Comparable hand-built tripod vessels can also be found on the Gracarca[25] (Carinthia) and in the burial grounds of Mihovo, Novo Mesto and Verdun (all Slovenia)[26]. In connection with the emergence of this typical Norico-Pannonian vessel type, tripod bowls from the late La Tène to early Roman settlement of Puch (Salzburg)[27] and the oppidum of Bratislava (Slovakia)[28] are noteworthy (fig. 7).

The grave goods made of coarse ware served various purposes. The barrel-shaped beaker (no. 51) and the cup (no. 49) are probably drinking vessels. The decoration on both vessels ensures a non-slip surface and safe handling, which, in addition to the shape and size of the vessels, makes them ideal for use as a drinking vessel. For tripod bowls (such as no. 47), research has now established the interpretation as cooking vessels.[29] The vessels usually come with a matching lid, hence it is noticeable that such a lid is missing from the presented find material. The barrel-shaped pot (no. 46) was probably also used as a cooking vessel, but could equally have been a storage vessel.

22 The catalogue numbers provided refer to: Hinker 2003, 138–144; 157–162, pls. 6–11. They only start with no. 46, as finds nos. 1–45 were attributed to other features and graves in the burial ground. Renumbering starting with no. 1 was avoided in order to prevent unnecessary concordances or overlaps between this publication and Hinker 2003. The dimensions of the finds, which can be consulted there, are only repeated if the information is relevant for a more detailed description of individual artefacts, e.g. weaponry.
23 Schörgendorfer 1942, 12–13; 135–136, pls. 8–9/119–128.
24 Hinker 2006a, 55–56, tab. 6.
25 Gamper 2015, 42–44, fig. 17/2.
26 Mihovo: Windl 1975, 65. pl. 28/10 (grave 17, hand-built work). – Novo Mesto: Božič 2008, 153, fig. 76; 203, pl. 3/6 (Ljubljanska cesta/grave 2, hand-built tripod). – Verdun: Breščak 2015, 77; 89; 113, pl. 19/7 (grave 98, probably LT D2); Berden and Breščak 2026, 256; 353, pl. 65/7 (grave 98, dated in this publication from the reign of Augustus to the middle of the 1st century AD).
27 Moosleitner 2004, 177; 179, fig. 3/1 (graphite pottery).
28 Čambal et al. 2015, 227–228, fig. 2/3 (grey ware).
29 Zabehlicky-Scheffenegger 1997, 127. – Swan 2009, 14–15; fig. 1/1–5; 18–19. – Borgers et al. 2023, 2.

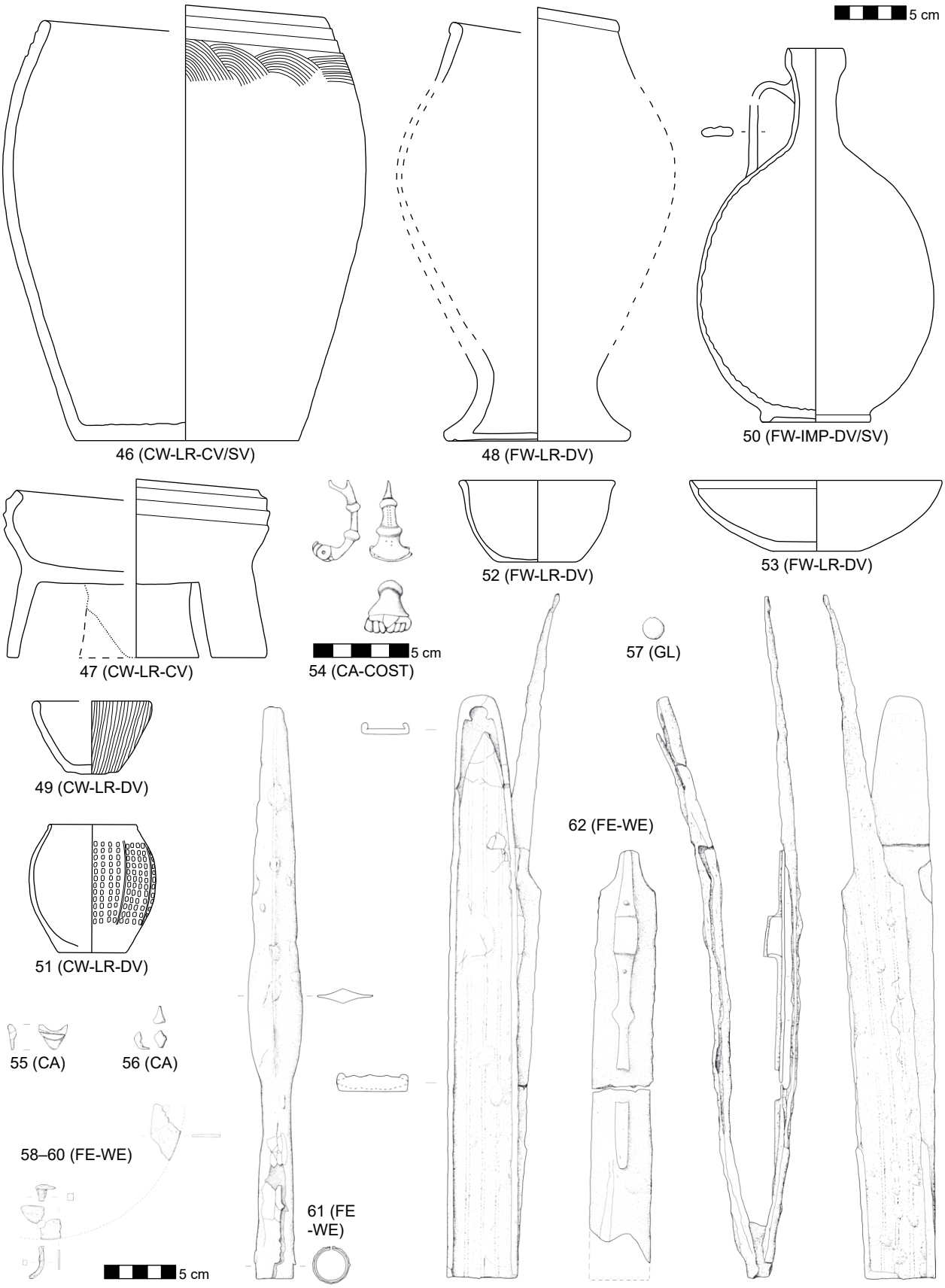

Fig. 5: Rassach. The grave goods (CA – copper alloy, COST – costume accessory, CV – cooking vessel, CW – coarse ware, DV – drinking vessel, FE – Iron, FW – fine ware, GL – glass, IMP – import, LR – local/regional provenance, SV – storage vessel, WE – weapon). Scale 1 : 3 (copper alloy, glass), 1 : 4 (iron, pottery).



Fig. 6: Rassach. The tripod bowl (no. 47).

Of the coarse ware vessels, the tripod bowl is the most significant in terms of chronology.[30] It can be compared with three close parallels from *Flavia Solva*/Wagna (Austria) and Leibenfeld (Austria), which can be dated more precisely by their respective find associations (see fig. 7). The one from *Flavia Solva* originates from Horizon 1, i.e. the earliest phase of timber construction beneath insula XL, which, based on finds of tableware from northern Italy, can be dated to the middle to late Augustan period.[31] Two similar tripod bowls were found in barrow no. 19 of Leibenfeld. Based on the other grave goods, in particular four double-knob brooches, specimens A 237, and two graphite pottery spindle whorls, Erich Hudeczek has dated the grave to »somewhat earlier than the late Augustan period«.[32]

The three vessels made of autochthonous fine ware (nos. 48, 52–53) were produced on the fast-rotating potter's wheel. The pedestal jar or ovoid chalice (no. 48), the cup (no. 52) and the relatively flat bowl (no. 53) are probably drinking vessels. The shape of the cup (no. 52) may have been inspired by imported cylindrical cups without barbotine or notch decoration, such as specimens MB-DwGk 28/50/68, which were very common and widespread in the early imperial period.[33] Of the fine ware vessels, the ovoid chalice (no. 48; fig. 8) is the most significant in terms of chronology. It can be compared to vessels that August Schörgendorfer described as »Form XI.1: schlauchförmige Urnen mit eingezogenem Rand (tubular urns with indented rims)« and had already identified as late La Tène vessels.[34] As the ovoid chalice from Rassach and other examples from western Styria, e.g. from Södingberg and Teipl[35] (fig. 9), show, the distribution of the vessel type »similis Schörg. XI.1/278–285« is not limited to eastern Carinthia (Globasnitz, Magdalensberg[36], St. Peter am Wallersberg/Watzelsdorf[37], Zollfeld). The association of finds and dating of the burial in barrow no. 1 in Rassach indicate that these vessels were probably in use beyond the La Tène D2 period and at least until the middle to late Augustan period.

The single-handled jug (no. 50; fig. 10) is probably the only pottery vessel from barrow no. 1 that does not originate from local or regional production, but can be classified as an imported item. The possible regions of origin are likely to be Italy and the northern Adriatic coast, with wine as a content, although olive oil cannot be ruled out. If the assumption that it is a wine jug is correct, the vessel would belong to the category of drinking table ware. It was made on the fast-rotating potter's wheel. Comparable single-handled jugs with pear-shaped bodies, foot rims, triple-profiled strap handles, relatively long and slender necks, and slightly protruding, vertically raised rims have been found in Julio-Claudian find contexts, for example in *Emona*/Ljubljana (Slovenia; fig. 11).[38]

Metal

The grave goods made of metal include iron weapons or weapon components, i.e. the so-called Dreierausrüstung (three-component weaponry) consisting of a shield (nos.

30 Csapláros et al. 2012, 238.
31 Hinker 2006a, 98; 141, fig. 18; 173, pl. 32/224. – Hinker 2016, 64, fig. 3; 66.
32 Hudeczek 1997, 65–67, fig. 2/2–3, 8–13.
33 Schindler-Kaudelka 1975, pl. 7, pl. 10, pl. 13. – Schindler-Kaudelka 1998, 411–412, figs. 2–3. – Hinker 2016, 74–75.
34 Schörgendorfer 1942, 30–31; 76; 107–109; 195; pls. 20–21/278–285.
35 Södingberg: Wagner 2000, 445; 447; 507, pl. 3/5; Steinklauber and Hebert 2001, 274, fig. 3. – Teipl: Artner 1996, 10, fig. 2/1; Artner 1997, 20; pl. 1/1; Artner 1998, 57–58; 62, pl. 1/1.
36 Schindler-Kaudelka and Zabehlicky-Scheffenegger 1995, 180; 187, no. 24 (tall, slender oval pots without any particular rim forming, but with an accentuated base; fine grey ware).
37 Dolenz 1960, 629, fig. 3/14; 633; 635, fig. 5/2; 638–639.
38 Ljudmila Plesničar-Gec had already recognised the early imperial dating of these jugs based on finds from the necropolises of *Emona:* Plesničar-Gec 1972, 252; pl. 168/9 (grave 730, about Tiberian–Claudian, find association: Consp. 4.6, OCK 879; Consp. 6.2, OCK 962) = Plesničar-Gec 1975, 16–18, fig. 1/1 = Plesničar-Gec 1977, 77; 106; pl. 3/1; pl. 9. – Vičič 1993, 177–178; pl. 5/5; pl. 6/11–16; pl. 12/1, 7–9 (early Roman house, about Augustan–Tiberian). – Mikl Curk 2006, 90. – Gaspari 2010, 40; 42; 48, pl. 11/8278 (well backfilling, as of Augustus, Dressel 6B, Isings 17, about Tiberian–Neronian). – See also: Schindler-Kaudelka 1989, 110–111, pl. 9; 174–175, pl. 41/9/56 (Magdalensberg, rim fragment, orange-pink, until around 15 AD).

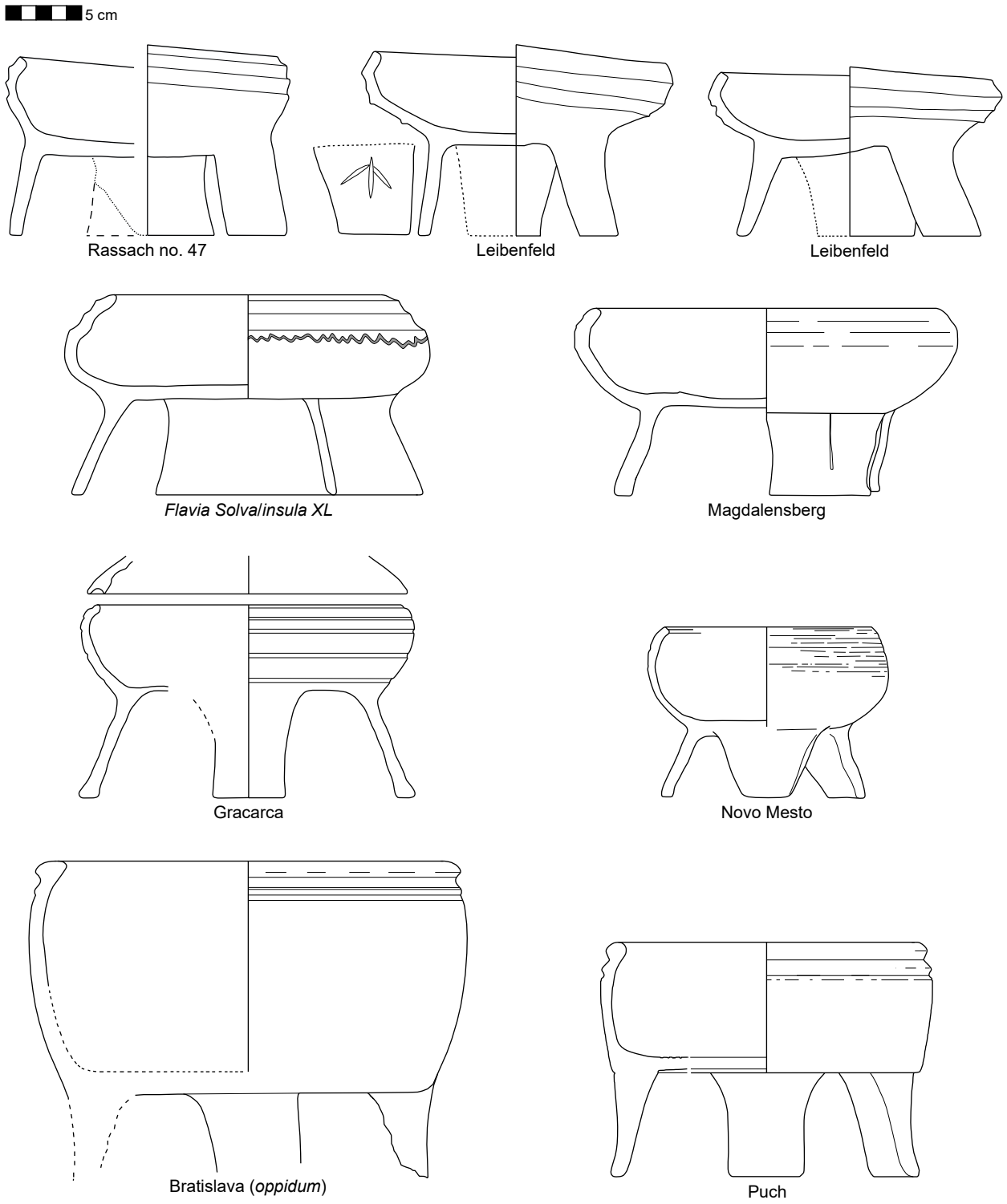

Fig. 7: Similar tripod bowls. Scale 1 : 4.

58–60), sword (no. 62) and spear (no. 61)[39], as well as a costume accessory, more precisely a bow brooch (no. 54), and two small fragments made of copper alloy (nos. 55–56), which cannot be identified more precisely.

Iron

Only a few flat fragments from the edge and nails remain of the round shield boss (umbo; nos. 58–60), which has been reconstructed as approximately 20 cm in diameter. Similar late Iron Age shield bosses were most recently compiled and referred to as »Novo Mesto 169 type and its variants«.[40] However, due to its poor state of preservation, it is not possible to determine whether the boss from Rassach was hemispherical or pyramid-shaped. No information can be provided about the shape of the shield, i.e. whether it was round, oval or hexagonal. The fragmentation of the artefact

39 De Navarro 1972, 74.

40 Gaspari et al. 2013, 62–74, figs. 5–7.



Fig. 8: Rassach. The pedestal jar/ ovoid chalice (no. 48).

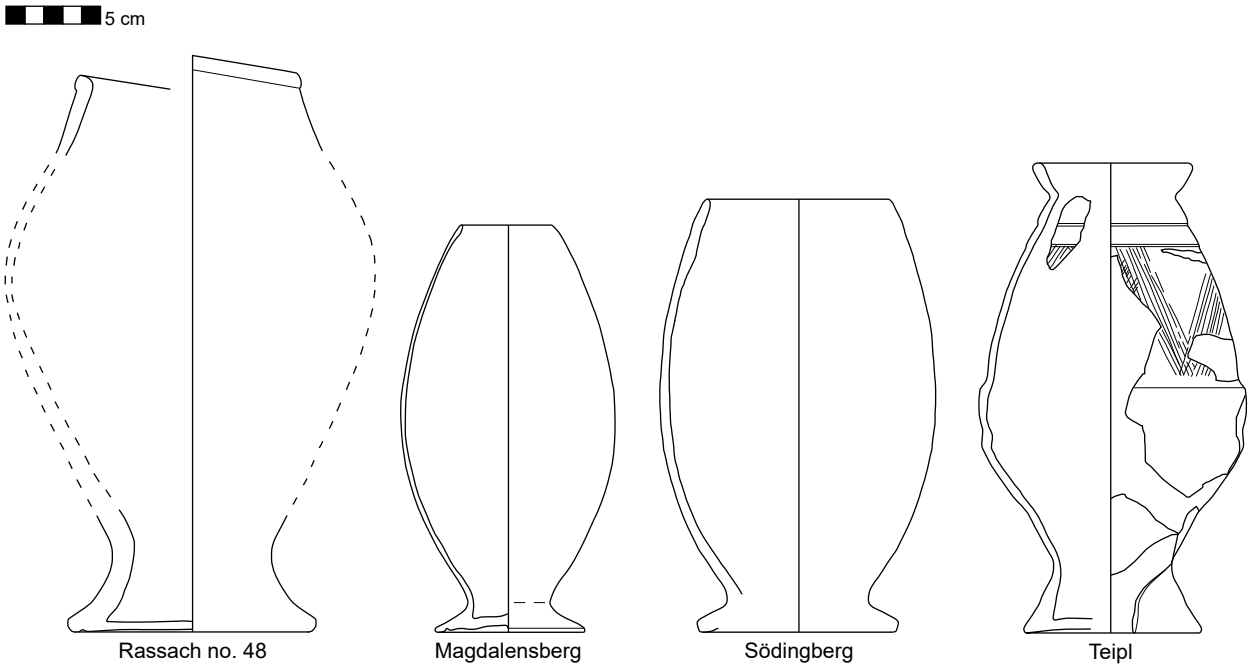

Fig. 9: Similar pedestal jars. Scale 1 : 4.

indicates the intentional destruction of the shield and shield boss as part of the burial rite.

The iron sword with scabbard (no. 62; fig. 12), folded once approximately in the middle, is certainly the find from Rassach that has received the most attention in specialist literature.[41] Although archaeological research has repeatedly and intensively studied swords and scabbards from the late Iron Age[42], no exact parallels can be found for this weapon. Only individual components of the scabbard match other finds (fig. 13). Two weapons are particularly striking in this regard. A sword with a scabbard was found as early as 1897 in a burial, known as grave 1 of the Košak B plot in Strmec near Bela Cerkev (Slovenia).[43] Like the find from Rassach, it has a U-shaped, rounded, tapered chape with horn- or crescent-shaped end, a campanulate scabbard mouth and a similar, long, riveted suspension plate with rectangular loop. However, both the scabbard plates and the suspension loop plate of the sword from Bela Cerkev/Strmec are made of brass.[44] Another similar find has been made in grave 108 of

41 Czarnecka 2017, 64–65, fig. 6/2, fig. 7/1. – Gaspari 2017, 261; 263–264, fig. 8.

42 Brunaux 1990. – Haffner 1995. – Lejars 1996. – Böhme-Schönberger 1998. – Biborski 1999. – Poux 1999, 55–62. – Łuczkiewicz 2000, 362–380. – Guillaumet and Szabó 2002. – Pieta 2005. – Schwab 2005. – Stead 2006. – Łuczkiewicz and Schönfelder 2008, 172–182. – Pernet 2010. – Miks 2015. – Czarnecka 2016. – Teleaga 2016. – Duppe 2020.

43 Stare 1973, 56; 66, no. 101; pl. 7/3. – Recently: Istenič 2010, 127–131, figs. 4–7.

44 Šmit et al. 2010, 169, tab. 2. – Istenič and Šmit 2014, 210–211, tab. 1.



Fig. 10: Rassach. The single-handled jug (no. 50).



Fig. 11: Similar jugs. Scale 1 : 4.

Zemplín (Slovakia).[45] The scabbard fragment in question has a chape that, as on the find from Rassach, is shaped like a crescent. The fragment from Zemplín is also made of copper alloy, probably brass.[46] A third find that could be considered a parallel is a fragment of a scabbard, supposedly from a cremation grave in Kohldorf (Carinthia), which could possibly be dated to the late La Tène or early Augustan period.[47] This artefact also has a similar chape and is made of copper alloy.

The differences between the scabbard from Rassach and the cited parallels therefore mainly concern the manufacturing material. In terms of the metals used, the scabbard from Rassach is more similar to those found at other sites in Slovenia (Bevke/Ljubljanica and Verdun/grave 131) and in the region of the Treveri, where the front plate and decorative fittings are made of copper alloy, while the back plate, suspension loop plate and chape are made of iron.[48] In terms of its shape, the scabbard from Rassach has features that are particularly comparable to brass scabbards (Bela Cerkev/Strmec/grave 1, Zemplín/grave 108), while the use of iron for

45 Cosack 1977. – Budinský-Krička and Lamiová-Schmiedlová 1990, 260–261; 280–281; 334, pl. 15/30–31. – Recently: Czarnecka 2017.

46 Czarnecka 2017, 61–62, fig. 2.

47 Gamper 2015, 333–334, fig. 159/1. The dating is uncertain and is based on the possible find association with a plate, probable a specimen Consp. 1.1.3 or a local imitation of it, found at the same site.

48 Haffner 1995, 140–142, 144, 147, 150. – Istenič 2010, 125, 135, 139. – Berden and Breščak 2026, 264; 380, pl. 92/3.



Fig. 12: Rassach. The bent sword and scabbard (no. 62).

the preserved scabbard parts corresponds more to scabbards of a different shape, namely those with spur- or boat-shaped ends and laddered chape.[49] Regarding the material from which the scabbard was made, the question arises as to whether the outer side, which has not been preserved, was partly made of brass with elaborate openwork (opus interrasile), as is the case with the two comparative pieces from Slovenia and Slovakia mentioned above. In this respect, it is noticeable that the find from Rassach is missing not only the outer scabbard plate but also the left and right iron fastening rails. Both rails are broken off at the same height, i.e. at about two-thirds of the length of the scabbard, or may have been deliberately cut off at that point in order to remove a possibly elaborately crafted scabbard plate. A scabbard plate from Eggeby (Sweden)[50] and a sword with scabbard from the antiquities trade[51] show that silver, as well as brass, was used as a manufacturing material. Therefore it is reasonable to speculate that a component of the scabbard from Rassach, possibly made of precious metal, was carefully removed before the cremation due to the high value of the material, which consequently did not enter the burial. Alternatively, the act of keeping parts of grave goods was also interpreted as a way of preserving the memory of the deceased.[52] Even though these considerations and compared finds indicate that the outside of the scabbard from Rassach may have been produced using the openwork technique, it should be noted that neither traces of opus interrasile could be found on the artefact, nor are there any unrecognisable molten residues in the cremation debris that would suggest this.[53]

Considerations regarding the possible design and decoration of the scabbard can be linked to assumptions about the provenance of the weapon. Based on the openwork on brooches and belt fittings of the so-called Norico-Pannonian women's costume on the one hand, and references to ferrum Noricum in ancient literature on the other, it has been assumed that the swords and scabbards were of Norican origin.[54] In this regard, it is worth noting the geographical proximity of western Styria to the Görtschitz Valley (Carinthia). Iron ore was smelted in this area[55], which lies only about 45 km west of Rassach in a straight line (see fig. 1). The significance and quality of the »Norican steel« recorded in ancient writings, a high-quality material used in the production of weapons and tools, has already been discussed in detail by research.[56] With regard to the considerations concerning the scabbards made of brass and in opus interrasile, it was recently pointed out that »Celts […] could not make brass, while the Romans began producing and using it in the time of Caesar, probably around 60 BC. We therefore suppose that such scabbards and swords were made by the Romans according to Celtic taste and were offered to the Celtic elites […]«.[57] This does not fundamentally contradict a »Norican origin«. It is possible that such swords and scabbards were produced locally, i.e. in a Norican centre, in cooperation between Celtic and Roman craftsmen forging »Norican steel« and melting »Roman brass«.[58] It has already been pointed out that high-quality swords with elaborately designed, multi-part scabbards probably required the collaboration of various specialised craftsmen.[59] The emporium on the Magdalensberg

49 Istenič 2010, 140.
50 Böhme-Schönberger 2001a.
51 Gaspari 2017.
52 Haffner 1989, 209.
53 It certainly makes sense to include the find from Rassach in a distribution (map) of scabbards with non-ferrous openwork mouth mounts, but it should be followed by a question mark: Gaspari 2015, 265, fig. 9/20.
54 Werner 1977, 374–379, 381, 386–389. – Böhme-Schönberger 1998, 239–240; 243–245, fig. 8; 247, fig. 10. – Böhme-Schönberger 2001a, 84, 86. – Böhme-Schönberger 2001b, 288–289. – Gaspari 2017, 255; 258–259, fig. 6.
55 Cech 2008. – Cech 2017.
56 Straube 1996. – Hofeneder 2017.
57 Istenič 2015b, 25.
58 Sealey 2007, 21: »In its early years, say Augustan times, brass was state controlled and employed in the coinage and in military fittings, a little later in specific brooch types«. – Istenič 2010, 123, 143: »Pure brass gained from brass ingots with a zinc content of approximately 20 %«. – Istenič and Šmit 2014, 208, 214. – Istenič 2015a, 756, 758. – Remains of brass, although of a different composition (12.74 %/43.65 % Zn), were recently attested in so-called *Tüpfelplatten* (casting moulds for the production of coin blanks) from the hilltop settlement on the Frauenberg (Styria): Modl 2019, 165–166, nos. T10–11; 168, fig. 101. – Further reading: Giumlia-Mair 2025, 359–362.
59 Wyss 1968, 678, 680.

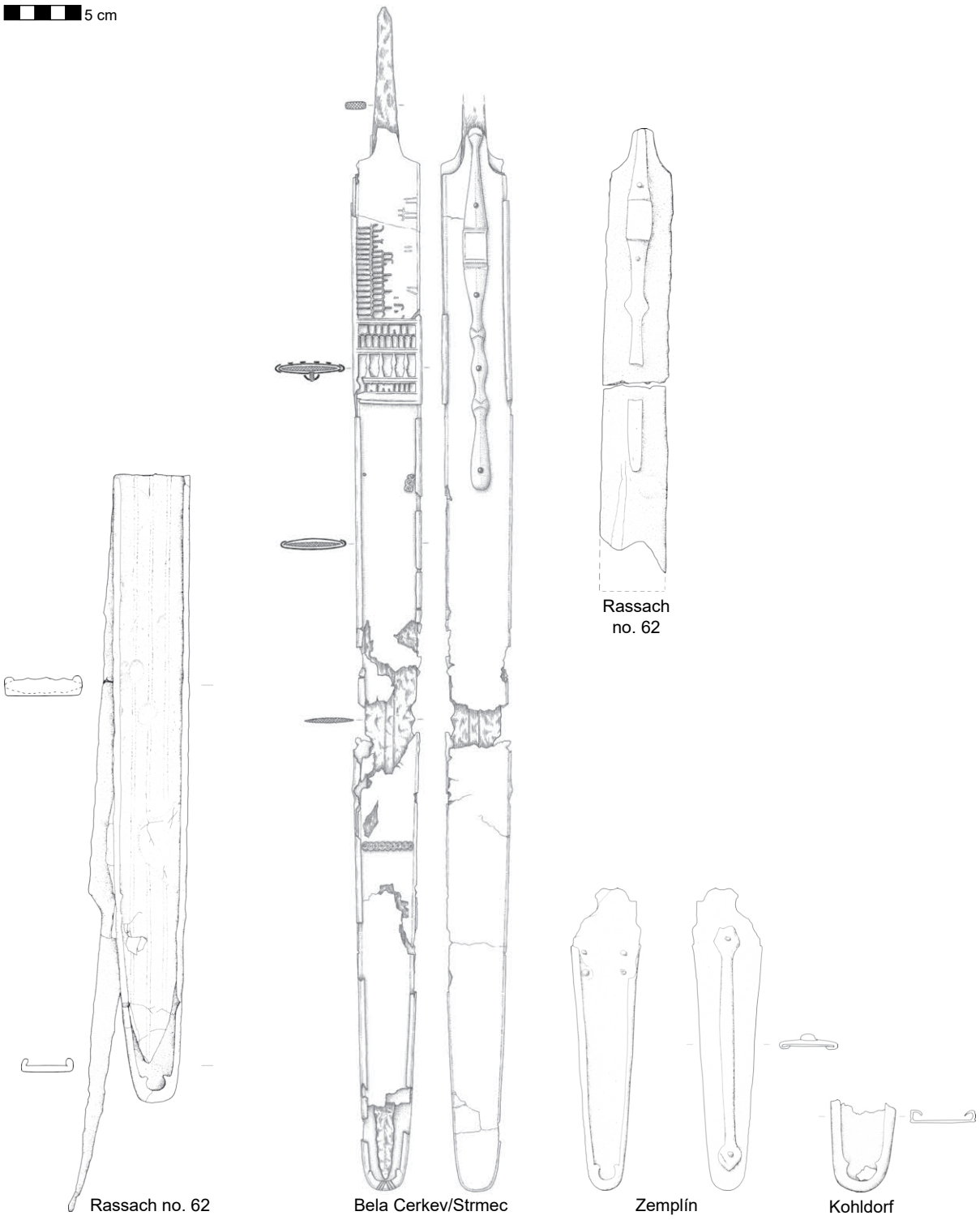

Fig. 13: Similar scabbard parts. Scale 1 : 4.

(Carinthia) would be a particularly suitable production site for this. There the raw product extracted in the Görtschitz Valley was further processed in forges. Economic relations between the regnum Noricum, the Magdalensberg and the Roman Empire have already been thoroughly researched.[60] It is logical that these trade contacts also led to the transfer of technologies between craftsmen of different origins.

The decades before the Roman occupation, from around 60/50 to 15 BC, have been identified as the production period for such swords and scabbards.[61] The end of production was equated with the year 15 BC, i.e. with the historical date of the occupation of the regnum Noricum by Rome, because it was assumed that these were weapons originating from autonomous Celtic manufacture, the production of which was prohibited under Roman

60 E.g.: Schindler-Kaudelka and Zabehlicky-Scheffenegger 2006. – Gostenčnik 2010. – Gostenčnik 2016.

61 Böhme-Schönberger 1998, 243. – Detailled discussion: Istenič 2010, 140–142.

occupation.[62] If it is taken into account that such swords can be traced back to a combination of Celtic and Roman know-how and that these weapons were produced under Roman supervision for the purpose of equipping loyal Celtic elites, it seems possible that the production period extended beyond 15 BC, i.e. into the early and middle Augustan period. The period of use for the swords and associated La Tène style scabbards with openwork components has accordingly been most recently specified as »roughly between 40/30 and the first few decades AD«.[63]

Noteworthy is the deliberate, single fold of the weapon, which points to the preservation of Celtic burial rites from the late Iron Age in Rassach. In the process, the sword in the scabbard was bent in the area above the middle so that the handle rod-tang protruded beyond the opposite chape. In addition, the bending was carried out in such a way that the formerly outward-facing front side of the scabbard remained on the outside even after the weapon was folded, while the formerly inward-facing side, i.e. the side of the scabbard with the suspension loop plate, remained on the inside. It is likely that the weapon was tempered in the fire on the funeral pyre or by a blacksmith in order to reduce the amount of force required to bend it.[64] The length of the sword can no longer be determined precisely due to the folding and the slightly bent or curved condition of the weapon in several places, but it is likely to have been approximately 87–89 cm including the handle rod-tang.[65] The dimensions indicate that this is a long sword (spatha), i.e. a weapon used by cavalry soldiers, designed to be wielded from horseback.[66]

Apart from the shield and sword, another weapon, a spear, was found in barrow no. 1 in Rassach. The almost completely preserved spearhead (no. 61; fig. 14) is 40.5 cm long.[67] It is relatively narrow and has a rhombic cross-section. A spearhead from grave 71 in Novo Mesto/Beletov vrt (Slovenia) can be cited as a parallel (fig. 15), which corresponds to the weapon from Rassach in terms of dimensions and shape.[68] Unlike the sword, scabbard and umbo, the spearhead shows no signs of intentional destruction. However, the wooden shaft of the spear, which was not preserved and was probably completely burned at the funeral pyre, could have been broken once or several times in a ritual manner.

Copper Alloy

Although the foot and pin are missing, the double-knob brooch (no. 54) can be identified as a specimen of type A 236c, whose dating range extends over the entire 1st century AD.[69]

This type of brooch has been attested at Magdalensberg since at least the late Augustan period.[70] In the later ager of *Flavia Solva*, which also includes the Rassach site, specimens of the type A 236c are quite common, and there is also evidence that this type was manufactured in the region.[71] The burial offering of a single double-knob brooch in a man's grave containing weapons may seem surprising at first glance, given that double-knob brooches are typical accessories of the Norico-Pannonian women's costume. From barrow 19 in Leibenfeld (Styria), already mentioned in connection with the tripod bowl (no. 47), which is probably roughly contemporary with barrow no. 1 in Rassach, there are, for example, four of these brooches (probably specimens A 237b), usually worn in pairs on the shoulders by women and girls.[72] Even though there is no anthropological data available for the Leibenfeld find context, it can be assumed that this is a double burial of two women or girls, as indicated not only by the two pairs of brooches but also by textile processing tools, specifically two spindle whorls. In this context, it is important to take into account that Norico-Pannonian brooches and women's costume were still in their early stages of development during the period to which the two burials at Leibenfeld and Rassach belong. Several male burials from the southeastern Alpine region, dating primarily from the mid- to late Augustan period, contain weapons as well as single double-knob brooches. Specimens A 236c, A 237a and A 237b can be referred to from grave 1042 in *Emona*/Ljubljana-Kongresni trg, grave 3 in Reka near Cerkno and graves 1, 37, 41 and 131 in Verdun near Stopiče and maybe from Mihovo (all of them in Slovenia).[73] It can therefore be assumed that these pieces of jewellery, which later became characteristic accessories of the Norico-Pannonian women's costume, were also very likely worn by men during this early period.[74] In general, these brooches are suitable for fastening thicker textiles, such as coats.

Glass

A small ball (no. 57) measuring 1.1 cm in diameter and made of light green glass is the only grave good from barrow no. 1 in Rassach that was not cremated.

The artefact has no perforation, and is therefore not a bead. Its function cannot be determined with certainty; it could be an amulet[75] or a piece of jewellery. Small, mostly blue glass balls with a diameter of between 0.5 and 1.0 cm are much less common in the middle and late La Tène period than glass beads.[76] At the time of the barrow no. 1, vessels and other artefacts made of glass were already known in what is today western Styria, but were probably still something exceptional, as the few finds in the area suggest.[77]

62 Böhme-Schönberger 1998, 243, note 80.
63 Gaspari 2017, 250, 255.
64 Westphal 1998, 248. – Of different opinion: Uran 1986, 308.
65 The sword cannot be assigned to either of two subgroups, one measuring approximately 82 cm and the other approximately 90–95 cm, which were defined based on sword lengths: Istenič 2010, 140.
66 Argumentation pro: Fischer 2012, 203–204, 215. – Argumentation contra: Sealey 2007, 34–35.
67 The length stated as 49.5 cm is incorrect: Gaspari et al. 2015, 158.
68 Knez 1992, 40; pl. 27/4.
69 Garbsch 1965, 29–32; 78, fig. 41.
70 Sedlmayer 2009, 27, 88.
71 Hinker 2017, 38–39, fig. 3; 46; 72.
72 Hudeczek 1997, 65–67, fig. 2/10–13. – About this type of double-knob brooch: Demetz 1999, 52, 232–233; map 10.
73 Ljubljana, Kongresni trg: Gaspari et al. 2015, 134–135; pl. 2/12; 142. – Reka: Gaspari 2008, 39, tab. (umbo, A 236). – Verdun: Breščak 2015, 85, no. 8; 96, pl. 2/9; 87, no. 13; 105, pl. 11/5; 88, no. 13; 106, pl. 12/7; 90, no. 11; 117, pl. 23/2; Berden and Breščak 2026, 233; 289, pl. 1/1; 244; 321, pl. 33/5; 244; 323, pl. 35/2; 264; 379, pl. 91/1. – Mihovo: There, double-knob brooches are found in several graves alongside other brooches, additional costume accessories and weapons. However, it does not always seem certain that the finds from the old excavations belong together; some of the graves may also be multiple burials, as shown, for example, by grave 63, from which several brooches, two belt buckles (G2), a sword, a shield boss and a spindle whorl, among other artefacts, have been recovered: Windl 1975, 98–100; pl. 44.
74 Demetz 1999, 53. – Hinker 2017, 87.
75 Glass beads, which were considered to have »amuletic properties«, are attested from the Iron Age, but mainly in the graves of children and young women and only very rarely in warriors' graves: Pauli 1975, 131.
76 Zepezauer 1993, 91–93, 211–212; pls. 13–14.
77 Wagner 2000, 440–441 (Södingberg: glass bangle). – Heymans 2008, 154–156 (Frauenberg/object 2/amphora cellar and object 1/cistern: beaker, finger ring and gaming pieces).



Fig. 14: Rassach. The spearhead (no. 61).

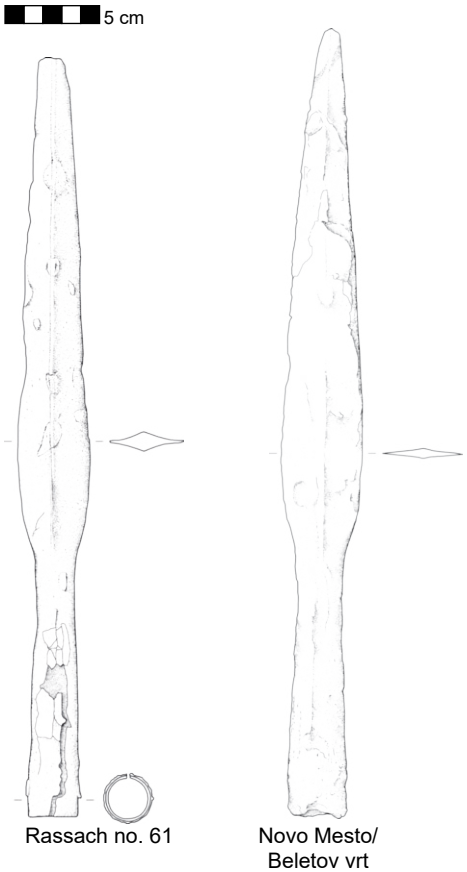

Fig. 15: Similar spearheads. Scale 1 : 4.

Perhaps the glass ball was used to decorate the chape of the scabbard with its crescent-shaped design serving as a setting. However, the intact glass ball would then have had to be removed from the sheath before cremation and placed separately in the grave, which would be consistent with the considerations regarding the missing sheath plate. It is noteworthy that unlike the other grave goods the ball was not cremated on the funeral pyre, but was later placed in the grave, which could indicate that this artefact had a different meaning for the burial ritual.[78]

Absence of Evidence

In addition to objects that have been verified by actual finds, the absence of evidence can also be revealing when evaluating the cultural and historical significance of the grave goods.

Neither a horse nor a chariot can be indirectly identified by animal bones, spurs, harness or chariot parts.[79] Furthermore, there is no evidence of additional military items, such as a helmet or sword belt. The fact that no obolus coin was found, as was customary in Roman-Mediterranean culture, fits in with the overall picture of a grave that appears to be predominantly determined by local Celtic culture. In this regard, it is also noticeable that, apart from the single-handled jug, other imported drinking vessels or tableware made of Terra Sigillata or other fine pottery is missing. The same applies to vessels made of copper alloys, for instance a so-called symposium set. While it can be assumed that the items listed above were never part of the grave goods, it remains impossible to verify the presence of further grave goods made of organic materials, such as drinking-horns, since these would have been completely cremated.

The Dating

For barrow no. 1 and the warrior grave in Rassach, I would still like to assume an Augustan date[80], with the time around the birth of Christ or the first decade after the turn of the era seeming most likely to me.

78 Aarts and Heeren 2017, 136–137: »[…] different phase in the rite of passage«.
79 Late La Tène period weapon graves without horse gear, especially among the Scordisci: Teleaga 2016, 308, 312.
80 Hinker 2003, 145.

This dating is based primarily on the pottery and the brooch. These artefacts are assumed to be approximately contemporary with the burial, although this does not necessarily apply to the other grave goods, i.e. the weapons. In the case of the sword, shield and spear, a longer period of use should be taken into account. It is possible that the warrior buried in Rassach, who died at around the age of 31 to 40[81], had already been equipped for military service in his youth, i.e. around 15 to 25 years prior to his death. If this approach is accepted, the weapons could date back to the years immediately before or after 15 BC. If the weapons are dated even earlier, it becomes difficult to explain the chronological gap between the pottery and brooch on the one hand and the presumed late La Tène weapons from around 60–30/25 BC on the other, except perhaps by assuming that they are heirlooms. The dating of the weapons, especially the sword, is certainly an important question that needs to be discussed (see the previous section *The Grave Inventory*), but it is of secondary importance for the dating of the grave. In any case, it is not the weapons but the most recent grave goods that are relevant for dating the grave. Both the typological classification of the brooch and the shape of the single-handled jug clearly contradict the dating of the grave to the pre-Augustan late Iron Age. A grave from this period would have contained a different type of brooch, characteristic for the late Iron Age, as well as a jug of Hellenistic or late Republican shape. Therefore, in the present context, the so-called Dreierausrüstung (three-component weaponry) and the bent sword and scabbard do not indicate a »late Iron Age grave of a distinctly late date«[82], but rather late Iron Age traditions in a grave that, from a chronological and historical perspective, was erected one or two decades after the Roman conquest/occupation in 15 BC, i.e. in the earliest Roman period. The barrow no. 1 in Rassach is therefore not »the latest La Tène grave in Styria«[83], but the oldest known grave in the Rassach burial ground and one of the oldest Roman, so-called Norico-Pannonian barrows discovered to date.

Questions of Identity

Based on archaeological findings, in particular the burial rites, the type of grave and the grave goods, it is possible to gain a clearer picture of the individual buried in barrow no. 1 in Rassach.

Several pieces of evidence suggest that it was a man of local origin. The fact that simple barrows were erected over Roman burials in what is now western Styria is now widely regarded as an autochthonous development by research, which arose mainly in imitation of the mounds of the early Iron Age and largely independently of the influence of Italian-Roman tumuli.[84] In addition, the grave goods consist partly of weapons in the late La Tène tradition and partly of pottery vessels, almost all of which are products of local origin. The transformation of sword and scabbard through intentional folding corresponds to a central element of the Celtic burial rite. The origin of the single double-knob brooch can probably be assumed to be in the southeastern Alpine arc between the rivers Mur, Drau, Savinja, Sava and Krka, which roughly spans the south and southeast of the later Roman province of Noricum and the southwest of the later province of Pannonia.[85] The local pottery vessels found among the grave goods indicate that the warrior buried in Rassach and his relatives probably lived in a contemporary rural settlement in the immediate vicinity. This may refer to a fortified manor house.[86] Comparable enclosed settlements have now been put forward for discussion for two sites in western Styria: Södingberg and Leibenfeld.[87] Within the autochthonous Celtic social order, the man buried in barrow no. 1 in Rassach belonged to the upper class.[88] The armament shows that he was a warrior who was not only equipped with a spear and supplemented by a shield, but probably a cavalryman who owned an elaborate sword as a status symbol. Considering the cost of maintaining a war horse, it seems likely that within his rural setting this man may have belonged to the tribal elite.[89] The fact that he had reached an age of over 30, possibly up to 40, also suggests that he was an older, battle-hardened veteran. The single-handled jug also indirectly indicates that the deceased was probably a person of high standing within rural society. The deceased himself or the circle of people to which he belonged had access to imported goods, which was exceptional for the period of the burial and in the rural environment.[90] Current research on the area that is now western Styria suggests that during the Augustan period, large quantities of imported goods, especially pottery, only reached the hilltop settlement on the Frauenberg and the nearby early Roman trading post on the site of what later became insula XL of *Flavia Solva*.[91] The middle to late Augustan vicus, probably located at a ford across the Mur river, is a particularly likely distribution centre of Roman cultural goods, such as the single-handled jug, and thus also a mediator for Roman culture. In this regard, it is noticeable that the vessel ensemble from the grave contains drinking vessels of local origin, but apart from the jug no other imported pottery vessels like drinking cups and bowls or a scyphus, which would complement the jug functionally and fit better into the picture of consumption following Roman-Mediterranean role models. On the one hand, this could be the result of limited access to imported goods. On the other hand, it may be explained by the rural setting of the deceased, where imported Mediterranean foods such as wine enhanced the status of a host, but their consumption took place within a framework defined by traditional values, and therefore local drinking vessels were preferred. Compliance with such conventions may have been taken into account particularly in the selection of grave goods.

81 Renhart 2003.
82 Tiefengraber 2015, 643.
83 Mauthner 2024, 147.
84 Nagy 2002, 311–312. – Hudeczek 2004, 533–534. – Schrettle 2007, 118. – Similar reasons to those behind the emergence of the Norico-Pannonian barrows were also considered for the development of small mounds with surrounding ditch in the *civitas Batavorum*, i.e. »ancestor worship, group identity und territorial claims«: Aarts and Heeren 2017, 130, 149. – See also: Županek and Sivec 2017, 102. – Barrow no. 9 of the Lang/Schirka (Styria) burial ground now provides the first concrete evidence that barrows from the Younger Iron Age can also be expected in what is now western Styria, which, like those from the Older Iron Age, could have served as archetypes for the Roman-era, Norico-Pannonian barrows: Mauthner 2025.
85 Garbsch 1965, 29; map 7.
86 On the relationship between weapon graves and farmsteads in the hinterland (Rhineland-Palatinate): Oesterwind 2007, 357; 359, fig. 304.
87 Tiefengraber 2009.
88 Schrettle 2007, 118.
89 Dizdar 2012, 120: »The most prominent position had the warrior elite, with a prominent role of warrior-cavalrymen […]«.
90 Access to Roman imports as a privilege of the autochthonous elite: Mráv 2005, 333.
91 Hinker 2016, 73–85.

At first glance, the aforementioned single-handled jug appears to be the only grave good that indicates connections between the warrior buried in barrow no. 1 and Roman culture. Looking at the grave goods, especially the sword and scabbard from barrow no. 1, in light of the current state of research on contemporary weapon graves and swords in the southeastern Alpine region, the question arises whether it is the burial of a Celtic horseman who had served as a Roman ally or recruit and, as such, had been equipped or rewarded with a splendid sword, combining Celtic taste and Roman know-how. In connection with the dating of the burial to the period approximately one to two decades after 15 BC, the question also arises as to who in Noricum under Roman occupation was still permitted to carry weapons and be buried with them. It must probably be assumed that such a permission was only granted to selected individuals who had close ties to the Roman military or administration.[92] Possible relationships between Norican warriors and the Roman army can be traced by embedding archaeological findings in the larger historical context before, during, and after the occupation period. It is recorded that in the 1st century BC, the regnum Noricum had a well-equipped and operational cavalry. In 49 BC, a Norican king was able to send around 300 equites to *Corfinium*/Corfinio in *Aprutium*/Abbruzzo (Italy) to support Caesar in the civil war.[93]

The importance of the cavalry as military power base of the regnum Noricum is also reflected in the iconography of numismatic sources from the late Iron Age. The reverse side of so-called East Norican (or Tauriscan) coins depicts individual horses, while the reverse side of so-called West Norican (or Norican) coins depicts individual horsemen.[94] Norican equites could have been involved in further military campaigns by Rome after *Corfinium*, even if this is not explicitly mentioned in written sources. While before the occupation in 15 BC military alliances between Rome and the late regnum Noricum placed local cavalrymen in Roman service under their own leaders and with their own weapons and fighting methods[95], afterwards Norican units whose leaders had proven loyal to Rome during the incorporation into the Roman Empire may have been systematically integrated into the Roman army. The Pannonian-Dalmatian uprising of 6–9 AD is one possible event in which Norican units may have fought on the Roman side or served as recruits.[96] Various epigraphic and iconographic sources fit into this picture and reflect the long tradition of Norican mounted soldiers, dating back to the occupation and early provincial period of Noricum. In this context, one example is the funerary stele of Tiberius Claudius Attucius, *a missicius cohortis I Noricorum* from St. Veit an der Glan (Carinthia), which probably dates to the late Claudian or early Neronian period and depicts an armed horseman in the image below the inscription, presumably the aforementioned man of autochthonous background, who served in this cohors equitata.[97]



Fig. 16: Funerary stele of Caius Romanius Capito.

An ala Noricorum is attested for the Germanic provinces. The well-known funerary stele (fig. 16) of Caius Romanius Capito, which dates to the reign of Nero, shows a soldier from this unit who originated from *Celeia*/Celje (Slovenia) in the southeast of the Roman province of Noricum.[98]

It seems possible that the warrior buried in Rassach belonged to an early auxiliary force from the occupation period, e.g. the aforementioned ala Noricorum or a similar troop.[99] In the case of the aforementioned ala, this would presuppose that this unit was established immediately after the occupation in 15 BC and that, before its transfer to the Germanic provinces or to the territory of the Roman province of Germania superior, which was established somewhat later, it was still stationed in occupied Noricum.[100] This would suggest that the man buried in Rassach may have joined the auxiliary unit as a young man. His armament fits in with the picture that, in the late Republican to Augustan period, no specifically Roman armament of the auxilia, especially alae, had yet been developed.[101] However, funerary steles from the 1st century AD that could be attributed to cavalry soldiers are missing from the area that is today western Styria[102] and finds of early imperial militaria that can be linked to the presence of ›Roman‹ cavalry soldiers are very rare. The discovery of an iron cheek piece with the outline of a human ear in a

92 Oesterwind 2007, 355.
93 Gaius Iulius Caesar, *De bello civili*, I.18.5.
94 Krmnicek 2010, 40–41, note 158–161.
95 Waurick 1994, 1.
96 Cf. Dizdar 2012, 128: »[…] the Pannonian revolt in which the Scordisci and Taurisci fought on the side of the Romans, either as allies or recruits in auxiliary formations«.
97 Piccottini 1982/85. – Piccottini 1985. – Piccottini 1994, 103–104; pl. 77/635. – Hainzmann 2020, 154–155, no. 6. – Friederike Harl and Ortolf Harl, *Ubi Erat Lupa*, http.//lupa.at/2390 [access: 23. 7. 2025]. – Regarding a funerary stele for horsemen of legio VIII Augusta and other funerary steles for members of cohors I montanorum from Magdalensberg, see: Pochmarski 2001.
98 Schleiermacher 1984, 110–112, no. 27. – Selzer 1988, 72, fig. 48; 156, no. 87. – Friederike Harl and Ortolf Harl, *Ubi Erat Lupa*, http.//lupa.at/15806 [access: 27. 10. 2025].
99 Hinker 2015/16, 215; 217, note 74.
100 Holder 1980, 224: Julian-Claudian period: Germania superior; Flavian-Trajanic period: Germania inferior. – Spaul 1994, 165–166.
101 Fischer 2012, 203–204.
102 Zehentner 2011, 116.

pit on the summit plateau of the Frauenberg is a revealing exception in this regard.[103] The find can be identified as part of a helmet, probably worn by cavalrymen in the Augustan period, which Thomas Fischer has labelled as the Kalkriese type, i.e. a variant of the Weisenau type.[104] The backfilling and levelling of the pit, interpreted as a cistern, can be dated relatively precisely to the late Augustan or early Tiberian period, around 15 AD.

Based on the overall impression gained from the preceding considerations, the interpretation that barrow no. 1 in Rassach is the grave of a member of the autochthonous, rural, south Norican (cavalry) warrior elite in Roman service seems plausible. The Rassach site should therefore be added to the list of somewhat contemporary southeastern Alpine weapon graves[105], which have recently been interpreted as the graves of auxiliary soldiers or Roman allies, all of whom were of autochthonous origin and mainly are attested at necropolises located in rural environments in what is now western (Idrija pri Bači, Reka near Cerkno) and southern Slovenia (Mihovo, Strmec above Bela Cerkev, Verdun near Stopiče).[106] While the sites in Dolenjska (Slovenia) are considered to be the graves of Tauriscan warriors[107], the question of the exact ethnic affiliation of the Rassach warrior cannot yet be answered conclusively and can only be vaguely described as »Norican«[108], as the area of today's western Styria later became part of the Roman province of Noricum.

Abstract

Rescue excavations carried out in 2001 on behalf of the Department of Archaeology of the Federal Monuments Authority Austria in Rassach (Styria, Austria) also affected the northernmost barrow of a Roman provincial barrow cemetery known since the 19th century. During the excavation of barrow no. 1, the cremated remains of an adult male were discovered, along with remarkable grave goods. In addition to several pottery vessels of local origin, an imported jug, a copper alloy brooch and a small glass ball, the grave contained several iron weapons. In addition to a shield boss and a spearhead, a sword with its scabbard is particularly noteworthy, which was bent according to Celtic burial rites. The pottery and brooch indicate that the burial dates approximately to the birth of Christ or the first decade thereafter. The identity of the man buried in barrow no. 1 is a question that can only be discussed on the basis of archaeological sources and assumptions derived from them. The fact that the deceased was buried honourably according to traditional autochthonous values suggests that he was a member of the local Celtic warrior elite, probably the cavalry.

Contacts with Roman culture, whether through commercial relations or military service, are proven by the consumption of Mediterranean foods. Recently, graves in the southeastern Alps and the Balkans containing similar find associations have increasingly been interpreted by research as the burials of tribesmen loyal to Rome or even auxiliary soldiers. These interpretations are also likely to apply to the grave context of Rassach, if various considerations are taken into account and the archaeological finding is embedded in the historical context. Comparable swords and scabbards are no longer regarded by research as purely Celtic artisan products, but are now associated with Roman metalworking or workshops operated under Roman supervision, where they were produced for the purpose of equipping a Celtic warrior elite loyal to Rome. This fits in with the consideration that the warrior of Rassach was buried at a time that already lay about one to two decades after the occupation of the regnum Noricum by Rome in 15 BC, i.e. in a period for which it can be assumed that the possession of weapons was regulated by the Roman administration. It therefore seems likely that the warrior of Rassach belonged to that section of the local Celtic elite which, through political foresight and military alliances with Rome, had succeeded in transferring its privileges and position from the late La Tène period into the beginning of the Roman period.

Zusammenfassung

Im Jahr 2001 wurden im Auftrag der Abteilung für Archäologie des Bundesdenkmalamtes Denkmalschutzgrabungen in Rassach (Steiermark) durchgeführt, die auch den nördlichsten Grabhügel eines seit dem 19. Jahrhundert bekannten Hügelgräberfeldes betrafen. Bei der Freilegung dieses Grabhügels Nr. 1 wurde die Brandbestattung eines erwachsenen Mannes entdeckt, die außergewöhnliche Grabbeigaben enthielt. Abgesehen von mehreren Keramikgefäßen autochthoner Provenienz, einem importierten Krug, einer Fibel aus Kupferlegierung und einer kleinen Kugel aus Glas wurden mehrere Waffen aus Eisen aufgefunden. Neben einem Schildbuckel und einer Lanzenspitze ist ein Schwert mitsamt Schwertscheide, das nach keltischem Grabritus einfach gefaltet war, besonders bemerkenswert. Die jüngsten Grabbeigaben weisen auf eine Datierung der Bestattung um Christi Geburt oder in die erste Dekade danach hin, das heißt in den historisch betrachtet äußerst dynamischen Zeitraum am Ende der La-Tène-Zeit und Beginn der Römerzeit.

Die Identität des in Grabhügel Nr. 1 von Rassach bestatteten Mannes ist eine Frage, der man sich auf Grundlage der archäologischen Quellen und daraus abgeleiteter Annahmen nur annähern kann. Der Umstand, dass der Verstorbene nach traditionellen, einheimischen Wertvorstellungen ehrenhaft bestattet wurde, spricht für einen Angehörigen der lokalen, keltischen Kriegerelite, wahrscheinlich der Reiterei. Kontakte zum römischen Kulturkreis, sei es durch Handelsbeziehungen oder Militärdienst, sind durch den Konsum mediterraner Lebensmittel zu belegen. In letzter Zeit werden Gräber im Südostalpen- und

103 Heymans 2008, 151–152, fig. 10; 184, pl. 1/1.

104 Fischer 2012, 203–205, fig. 297. – Regarding the type Weiler or Weiler/Koblenz-Bubenheim cited by Hannes Heymans in connection with the find: Cf. Voß 1994, 264–267, figs. 3–4 (Hagenow, grave II/1899, period B2). – Regarding this type and the Bassus variant: Cf. Fischer 2012, 206–208.

105 Mráv 2005, 345. – Gaspari 2008, 48. – Gaspari et al. 2013, 78. – Gaspari et al. 2015, 156. – Somewhat younger is grave 1 from Bobovek (Slovenia), which dates to the second half of the 1st century AD: Stemberger and Perko 2016. – Further reading: Schumacher 1989 (middle Rhine area). – Poux 1999, 120–127 (Paris/*puits funéraire*). – Moosleitner 2004, 181–182, fig. 5 (Salzburg/Liefering). – Mráv 2010/13 (northern Pannonia). – Mráv 2013. – Tonc et al. 2013 (Sveta Trojica, Croatia). – Dizdar and Radman-Livaja 2015, 216, 220 (southeastern Pannonia/Croatia). – Miks 2015, 296.

106 Istenič 2013. – Gaspari et al. 2015, 160.

107 Istenič 2010, 145.

108 It is not possible to answer this question solely on the archaeological findings from barrow no. 1 in Rassach. Most recently, the discussion about linking the area of present-day western Styria, the Frauenberg and *Flavia Solva* with a traditional tribal name has been taken up again by archaeologists, with repeated references to the Taurisci: Schrettle 2007, 122, 124; Tiefengraber 2015, 672–673. – On the localisation of the Taurisci in the southeastern Alpine region: Dizdar 2012, 118, fig. 1.

Balkanraum, die mit vergleichbaren Grabbeigaben ausgestattet waren, von der Forschung zunehmend als Bestattungen von romtreuen Stammesangehörigen oder Auxiliarsoldaten gedeutet. Diese Interpretationsansätze sind grundsätzlich auch für das vorliegende Grab wahrscheinlich, wenn man verschiedene Überlegungen berücksichtigt und den archäologischen Befund in den historischen Rahmen einbettet. Inzwischen werden vergleichbare Schwerter und Schwertscheiden von der Forschung nicht mehr als rein keltische Handwerksprodukte angesehen, sondern mit römischen oder unter römischer Aufsicht geführten metallverarbeitenden Werkstätten in Verbindung gebracht, wo sie zum Zweck der Ausstattung einer Rom loyal gesinnten keltischen Kriegerelite erzeugt wurden. Daran anzuknüpfen ist die Überlegung, dass der Krieger von Rassach bereits etwa ein bis zwei Dekaden nach der Okkupation des Regnum Noricum durch Rom im Jahr 15 v. Chr. bestattet wurde, also in einem Zeitraum, für den davon auszugehen ist, dass der Besitz von Waffen durch die römische Administration reglementiert war. Es erscheint insofern wahrscheinlich, dass der Schwertkrieger von Rassach jenem Teil der einheimischen, keltischen Elite angehörte, dem es durch politischen Weitblick und militärische Unterstützung römischer Interessen gelungen war, seine Vorrechte und Stellung von der ausgehenden La-Tène-Zeit in die früheste Römerzeit zu übertragen.

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According to the abbreviations commonly used in the journal *Fundberichte aus Österreich* (see list of abbreviations in this volume), the following English abbreviations are used here: ed(s). – editor(s), et al. – and others, fig(s). – figure(s), no(s). – number(s), pl(s). – plate(s), tab. – table.

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