

## Early Medieval finds and contexts from the hilltop settlement of Tonovcov Grad near Kobarid

Early medieval reuse of late antique hilltop settlements, which was the topic of the 2013 meeting in Wildon, is an interesting research question. In Slovenia it has mostly been the impressive small finds that have held our attention<sup>1</sup> and very little has been written on their archaeological context. Often the context is, in fact, unknown as many finds are the result of unsupervised metal detecting.

In this paper we would like to present a site where excavations have uncovered stratigraphic evidence of an early medieval reuse of a late antique settlement and which can perhaps offer interpretative help for some of the as yet uncontextualised sites.

### TONOVCOV GRAD NEAR KOBARID

The site of Tonovcov grad lies in the Soča/Isonzo river valley in a naturally well-protected location on the communication route between Italy and Noricum across the Predel/Predil pass (Fig. 1). It was systematically excavated between 1993 and 2005 by a team from the Institute of Archaeology at the ZRC SAZU led by Slavko Ciglencečki. The results have been fully published in two monographs,<sup>2</sup> but the early medieval remains have not yet been given proper attention.<sup>3</sup>

The site was periodically settled in prehistory and the early Roman period, but the main occupation phase begins in the late Roman period when the site most probably functioned within the *claustra Alpium Iuliarum* defence system of Italy. The late Roman phase is dated between the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. and the third decade of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. and consists of traces of two buildings (remains of walls under late antique buildings) and of typical militaria, coins etc. found in later layers. These remains were heavily damaged by the next building phase, which took place after a short period of disuse in the middle of

<sup>1</sup> Slavko Ciglencečki, *Tracce di un insediamento tardo (VI–IX sec.) nei siti della tarda antichità in Slovenia*, in: *Il territorio tra tardoantico e altomedioevo: metodi di indagine e risultati*, ed. Gian Pietro Brogiolo/Lanfredo Castelletti (Biblioteca di archeologia medievale 9, Firenze 1992) 53–59; Timotej Knific, *Arheološko najdišče Gradišče nad Bašljem*, in: *Preddvor v času in prostoru*, ed. Tone Roblek (Preddvor 1999) 55–67; Timotej Knific, *Zgodnjerednjeveški pozlačeni predmeti z Gradišča nad Bašljem (Slovenija) / Early mediaeval gilded artefacts from Gradišče nad Bašljem (Slovenia)*, in: *Prilozi Instituta za arheologiju u Zagrebu* 24 (2007) 317–326; Timotej Knific, *Early mediaeval hoards of iron items in Slovenia*, in: *Archaeologia Adriatica* 4 (2011) 85–99; Špela Karo/Timotej Knific/Zoran Milić, *Pokositreni železni predmeti z Gradišča nad Bašljem*, in: *Argo* 44/2 (2001) 42–45; Špela Karo/Timotej Knific/Marija Lubšina-Tušek, *Predmeti avarskega izvora z arheoloških najdišč v Sloveniji*, in: *Vjesnik Arheološkog muzeja u Zagrebu* 44 (2011) 131–159; Špela Karo, *Die Typologie der frühmittelalterlichen Steigbügel aus slowenischen Fundorten*, in: *Zbornik na počest Dariny Bialekovej*, ed. Gabriel Fusek (*Archaeologica Slovaca monographiae, Communicationes Instituti Archaeologici Nitriensis Academiae Scientiarum Slovacae* 7, Nitra 2004) 165–173; Špela Karo, *Oprema jahača i konja s Gradišča nad Bašljem (Slovenija)*, in: *Dani Stjepana Gunjače 2: Hrvatska srednjovjekovna povijesno-arheološka baština, međunarodne teme*, ed. Tomislav Šeparović/Nikolina Uroda (Split 2012) 297–315; Špela Karo, *Zgodnjekaroliške najdbe s slovenskih najdišč*, in: *Emona: med Akvilejo in Panonijo = between Aquileia and Pannonia*, ed. Irena Lazar/Bernarda Županek (Koper 2012) 447–458.

<sup>2</sup> Slavko Ciglencečki/Zvezdana Modrijan/Tina Milavec, *Poznoantična naselbina Tonovcov grad pri Kobaridu. Naselbinske najdbe in interpretacija / Late Antique settlement Tonovcov grad near Kobarid. Settlement remains and interpretation* (*Opera Instituti archaeologici Sloveniae* 23, Ljubljana 2011); Zvezdana Modrijan/Tina Milavec, *Poznoantična naselbina Tonovcov grad pri Kobaridu. Najdbe / Late Antique settlement Tonovcov grad near Kobarid. Finds* (*Opera Instituti archaeologici Sloveniae* 24, Ljubljana 2011).

<sup>3</sup> For an attempt to look at the site within its Friulian early medieval context, see Tina Milavec/Zvezdana Modrijan, *The transition between Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages in western Slovenia and Friuli*, in: *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 20/1 (2014) 260–271.

the 5<sup>th</sup> c. The late antique phase is dated between the late 5<sup>th</sup> and the early 7<sup>th</sup> c. and represents the main occupation phase of the site. There was a large settlement with c. 30 structures (2 houses and a water cistern were excavated), defence walls and a complex of three churches on the highest plateau of the settlement (Fig. 2). The location, architecture and a large number of small finds suggest this was an important regional centre of the autochthonous population with a temporary presence of Germanic military elites of the time, the Eastern Goths and the Longobards.

Tonovcov grad is very close to and probably functioned within the administrative unit of Friuli with Cividale as its late antique capital (20 km between the sites as the crow flies). Even though the Soča Valley and the other south-western regions of present day Slovenia were not settled by the Slavic waves of the 7<sup>th</sup> c. and, in fact, there is hardly any evidence of their presence until the 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> c., Tonovcov grad as a late antique settlement appears to have been abandoned by the beginning or mid-7<sup>th</sup> c. A more exact dating is difficult to establish, because of the general lack of well-datable material from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> c. in the whole region. The latest ceramic imports and datable metal small finds from the last settlement layers on the site can be traced to the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> c. Since there is a notable discontinuity between the late antique and early medieval strata in the stratigraphy of the excavated buildings, we can, for now, conclude that the abandonment of the site must have occurred somewhere in the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> c. at the latest.

There is evidence of occupation of the disused and half-collapsed structures in building 1, in the main church and in the water cistern on the highest part of the hill (Fig. 2). Also, some graves inside the settlement can be linked with the post-late antique phase(s).

## EARLY MEDIEVAL CONTEXTS

### BUILDING NO. 1

Within the half-collapsed late antique house (a one room structure with a small lean-to) we documented a couple of layers: SU 9 (in the lean-to, not shown in Fig. 3) and 10 (main room Fig. 3) with early medieval material. It is obvious from the section in Fig. 3 that at the time of the formation of the layer SU 10, the plaster (SU 08) had already fallen off the walls. A layer of charred material (SU 11) underneath the plaster and the early medieval layer is presumably the result of a fire which destroyed at least a part of the building. Among Roman and late antique finds in SU 9 and 10 we found metal parts of a knife sheath, a glass bead and pottery which belong to the early medieval period. The knife sheath parts (Fig. 4: 2–4) date to the late 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>4</sup> The four-partite blue glass bead (Fig. 4:5) can be dated to the time between the late 8<sup>th</sup> and the first third of the 9<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>5</sup> The typologically and technologically uniform coarseware was not present in the late antique layers of the settlement. It consists of pots with a long everted rim, a pronounced concave long neck and a spherical body and bowls with conical or very slightly curved walls which transform directly into the rim. The time frame for comparable early medieval pottery in Slovenia and Friuli, where the best parallels can be found, is quite wide. In Friuli it is most often found in contexts dated after the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> c., and it does not appear in typical contexts of the late 8<sup>th</sup>–early 9<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>6</sup>

The early medieval layer in house no. 1 (SU 10) can thus be dated to the early Carolingian period or maybe a little later, according to the metal and glass finds. The pottery would suggest an earlier date, but unless there were two shorter phases which we missed during excavations, the early Carolingian period is indicated.

Of the unstratified (found in the top humus layer) early medieval finds, a large knife of a type common in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> c. graves<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 4: 1), an early Carolingian belt end<sup>8</sup> (Fig. 4: 3) and a large bronze-sheet

<sup>4</sup> Karo, *Oprema* 304–305.

<sup>5</sup> Milavec, Metal finds, in: Modrijan/Milavec, *Tonovcov grad*, Finds 34.

<sup>6</sup> Modrijan, Pottery, in Modrijan, Milavec, *Tonovcov grad*, Finds 170–173 (type 1c bowls), 192–193 (type 6 pots).

<sup>7</sup> Karo, *Oprema* 304.

<sup>8</sup> Ulrike Giesler, *Datierung und Herleitung der Vogelförmigen Riemenzungen*, in: *Festschrift für Joachim Werner zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Georg Kossack/Günter Ulbert (Münchner Beiträge zu Vor- und Frühgeschichte. Ergänzungsband 1/II, München 1974) 521–543.

crescent-shaped earring with embossed decoration (Fig. 4: 7) were found in the vicinity of house no. 1. The best parallels for the earring can be found in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>-c. sites in Friuli,<sup>9</sup> and it is impossible to say whether it belonged to the late antique settlement or to the later occupation of the site.

The nature of the finds allows us to assume that someone arranged a living space within the half-collapsed late antique house of which the roof may still have held. As it was made of some organic material, we cannot tell for certain, but the top destruction layer (not shown in Fig. 3) lay on top of the early medieval one, so the building collapsed after these late visitors had left as well.

#### MAIN CHURCH

In the north-western corner, beside the entrance into the main church (Fig. 2: 4 – the middle church of the three) a hearth was discovered.<sup>10</sup> It lay directly on the mortar floor of the late antique building and it was covered by plaster, which had fallen off the walls, and by the topmost destruction layer of tegulae and large stones. Fragments of pots of the same type (type 6) as those from house no. 1 were found in the hearth. There were no other small finds, but the burning of fire in a church indicates profane use. The building must have been still standing and was apparently in relatively good condition when it was used as a temporary shelter.

A small, undecorated bronze sheet finger ring with a rivet lay in the upper destruction layer of the church complex (Fig. 4: 6). Such finger rings can be found in early medieval graves in the Gorenjska (Upper Carniola) region, where they are dated to the time between the mid-8<sup>th</sup> and early 9<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>11</sup>

#### WATER CISTERN

On the floor of the water cistern, in this case on top of fallen-off water-resistant plaster, another hearth with pottery was found, covered by the upper destruction layer. Among the pottery there were again the type 6 pots which appeared in house no. 1 and in the main church, as well as a piece of a kettle with a perforated handle. Such kettles are found in northern Italy and western Slovenia and are usually dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>12</sup> One example is known from an earlier context, a grave presumably from the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>13</sup>

A wooden roof must have covered the water cistern during the late antique period of use, and it may have still been there when the empty (but not collapsed) structure was used as a temporary shelter. When that happened is difficult to say. The same types of pottery appearing in all three reused structures could indicate contemporaneity, but, on the other hand, the main period of use for the pottery kettles is generally quite late.

#### GRAVES

The main necropolis of the late antique settlement has not yet been located. There are a number of graves (mostly children) in and around the churches, none of which contain grave goods, but stratigraphy shows they belong to the time of use of the churches. Apart from these, there are a few graves of a later date.

Behind the wall of the lean-to of house no. 1 a grave was found (grave no. 1a). A male skeleton lay on bare bedrock; it was covered by a thin layer of soil and then by the upper destruction layer of house no. 1.<sup>14</sup> The grave contained no grave goods that would help with dating, but its position and the lack

<sup>9</sup> Milavec, Metal finds, in: Modrijan/Milavec, Tonovcov grad, Finds 38.

<sup>10</sup> Ciglencečki/Modrijan/Milavec, Tonovcov grad, Settlement 128.

<sup>11</sup> Milan Sagadin, The early medieval cemeteries of Komenda and Zgornji Brnik in the Gorenjska region, in: *Arheološki vestnik* 64 (2013) 249–298, at 284–285.

<sup>12</sup> Modrijan, Pottery, in: Modrijan/Milavec, Finds 182.

<sup>13</sup> Sandro Colussa/Paola Saccheri/Luciana Travan, Brevi riflessioni sulle sepolture con corredo di vasi in ceramica grezza provenienti dall'area cimiteriale della chiesa di San Martino a Remanzacco (Ud), in: *Forum Iulii* 33 (2009) 151–168, at 152, Fig. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Ciglencečki/Modrijan/Milavec, Tonovcov grad, Settlement 94–95.

of a proper grave construction makes it probable that the man was put or left behind the house when it was no longer in use.

A small group of graves was found behind building no. 2, very close to the church complex. Building no. 2 was at one point interpreted as a baptistery, but the evidence to support this theory is very scant and a use for economic purposes in the late antique period is much more probable.<sup>15</sup> Behind the south wall of this structure four graves have been dug into sterile clay and partly laid on the bedrock.<sup>16</sup> Three of them are graves of adults and one that of a child. Graves 15, 19 and 20 had no grave goods. Grave no. 18 (adult male) contained a knife, a small iron strap-end with a rivet and a green glass bead (Fig. 5: 5–7). The strap-end and the bead are unusual for this region and have no analogies in Slovenian early medieval material. In northern Germany such strap ends are dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>17</sup> The bead belongs to the late 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>18</sup> This group of graves is covered by the upper destruction layer of both building no. 2 and the north church, so the graves must have been placed there while both buildings were to some extent still standing, and judging by grave no. 18 that may have been in the 8<sup>th</sup> c.

Grave no. 21 was found in one of the destruction layers (SU 64, Fig. 6) between the main and south churches. This space, originally cut into the bedrock and apparently empty during the existence of the church complex, was later filled with the destruction layers of the churches: tegulae, stones, fallen-off plaster and small finds such as pottery and glass. Dug into one of the topmost layers was the grave of a woman with an odd array of grave goods. She was buried with a small knife at her left shoulder, a bronze sheet finger ring with a rivet of the same type as the one found in the ruins of the main church (see above), thin bronze wire earrings in her mouth and a bronze fibula of type Keller 1a<sup>19</sup> in her right hand (Fig. 5: 4, 8–9). The early 4<sup>th</sup> c. fibula must have been an heirloom or a find from the Roman settlement and sanctuary under present-day Kobarid.<sup>20</sup> The finger ring is of the same type as the one found in the ruins of the church complex (see above) and dates to the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> c. or a little later.<sup>21</sup> The earrings were unfortunately lost during conservation.

There is another grave close to the churches, grave no. 3.<sup>22</sup> It was placed next to the outer wall of the narthex of the southern church while the church was evidently still standing, but it is impossible to say whether it was still in use. In this grave a woman was buried with bronze wire earrings, a silver finger ring with a blue (probably glass) inlay (Fig. 5: 1–3) and a necklace of tiny blue and green glass beads. The first careful dating of the finds placed them at the beginning or mid-7<sup>th</sup> c.,<sup>23</sup> but since then a radiocarbon dating of a collar bone from the grave showed that the date should be moved to the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> c. at the earliest, possibly later. The earrings were made of simple loops of thin bronze wire (there are scant remains of probably a small glass bead on one of them, not drawn in Fig. 5). Both earrings were fastened by two small hooks. In fact, they most closely resemble the head circlets from the so-called Carantanian phase of the early medieval cemeteries in Gorenjska (Upper Carniola). Such circlets were used in the 8<sup>th</sup> and until the 9<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>24</sup>

The grave was not dug into destruction layers; it was neatly constructed leaning on the narthex wall. On the other side of the church complex the similarly-dated group of graves behind house no. 2 follows a similar scenario. Our belief that the churches were used till the mid-7<sup>th</sup> c. at the latest is based on the

<sup>15</sup> Ciglencečki/Modrijan/Milavec, Tonovcov grad, Settlement 198.

<sup>16</sup> Ciglencečki/Modrijan/Milavec, Tonovcov grad, Settlement Fig. 2.44.

<sup>17</sup> Jörg Kleeman, *Grabfunde des 8. und 9. Jahrhunderts im nördlichen Randgebiet des Karolingerreiches* (Dissertation, Bonn 1992) Fig. 6: type 8b.

<sup>18</sup> Hermann Dannheimer, *Lauterhofen im frühen Mittelalter*, in: *Materialhefte zur bayerischen Vorgeschichte* 22 (Kallmünz 1968) 77, pl. 1: 57; Andrej Pleterski, *Lauterhofen. Strukturen des frühmittelalterlichen Gräberfeldes und chronologisches Verhältnis zu Altenerding*, in: *Slovenska archeologia* 56 (Nitra 2008) 61–80, at 64, Fig. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Philipp Pröttel, *Zur Chronologie der Zwiebelknopffibeln*, in: *Jahrbuch des römisch-germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 35/1 (Mainz 1988) 347–372.

<sup>20</sup> Ciglencečki, *The Posočje area during late antiquity*, in: Ciglencečki/Modrijan/Milavec, Tonovcov grad, Settlement 35.

<sup>21</sup> Sagadin, *Komenda* 284–285.

<sup>22</sup> Ciglencečki/Modrijan/Milavec, Tonovcov grad, Settlement 140, Fig. 2.76.

<sup>23</sup> Milavec, *Metal finds*, in: Modrijan/Milavec, Tonovcov grad, Finds 71–73.

<sup>24</sup> Andrej Pleterski, *A step towards the chronology of early medieval head ornaments in the Eastern Alps*, in: *Arheološki vestnik* 64 (2013) 299–334. It was A. Pleterski who first pointed out to me that these could be early medieval circlets and he bore very patiently my persistent doubts, even in the face of the radiocarbon date, for which also I am grateful to him.

lack of any later evidence of ceremonial use. The church complex was well built, and it probably took quite a long time for the tegulae-covered roof and the walls to collapse. There is a charred layer on the mortar floor in the main church, linked to its destruction and abandonment, but the fire had not destroyed the building completely, as the tegulae and the topmost destruction layer also lay on top of the early medieval hearth by the entrance to the main church. Also, the stratigraphy in the space between the main and the southern churches indicates a gradual decay of the ecclesiastical structures (Fig. 6).

On the other hand, grave no. 21, so far also dated approximately to the 8<sup>th</sup> c., was dug into the remains of the collapsed churches. This could either mean that it was later or that the other graves were in fact dug into the top destruction layers, but we failed to see the grave pits during excavations, which is, of course, not impossible.

We have already speculated about the possible meaning of the early medieval graves from Tonovcov grad.<sup>25</sup> The position of graves near the churches, the Roman fibula and the obolus-like gesture of the earrings in the mouth of the woman in grave no. 21 are all very reminiscent of Roman tradition. Her finger ring and the circlets in grave no. 3 have close parallels in the region of Gorenjska, which is not surprising, as both regions had maintained contact since prehistory.

We tried to present the early Medieval traces in some order but still they remain confusing. The graves can be dated relatively reliably to (the second half of?) the 8<sup>th</sup> century, but they could also be later. The layers in late antique buildings contain pottery which is generally dated a little earlier (7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> c.), but metal and glass finds in house no. 1 point to the early Carolingian period. Stratigraphy shows that the reuse and burying took place during different stages of decay of the buildings. We may be looking at one or more phases of reuse, and the graves may belong to the same people who used the temporary shelters, but not necessarily so.

Traditional research has not yet fully taken into account that some of the hilltop settlements, usually dated up to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> c., may have functioned longer than that, perhaps only to a limited extent. The largest problem, as often pointed out, is the absence of material that could be securely dated to the late 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> c.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The layers in house no. 1, the change of function of the water cistern and the hearth in the main church all seem to point not to continuity, but to a re-use of the site after a period of abandonment. Apart from the knife, sheath parts and strap-end there are no finds of pronounced military character such as the ones usually referred to when speaking of early medieval phases in late antique settlements.<sup>26</sup> This site was reused to be lived in (probably for a short time) and buried at.

The settlement at Tonovcov grad had strong links with Friuli, where there is also no evidence of settled newcomers in the 7<sup>th</sup> c., and we might think that settlement changes as observed in central and eastern Slovenia were not necessary. But a closer look at Friuli<sup>27</sup> reveals that even in the parts that were only exposed to incursions, there were significant settlement changes: rural churches abandoned, disuse or at least a period of discontinuity in hilltop sites, even towns. The substitution of stone architecture by simple wooden constructions, burials within urban centres and other changes characteristic of the Early Middle Ages are all evidence of some general changes between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> c., and the Slavic movements were only a part of those changes.

Was Tonovcov grad reused during a period of crisis when a flight to the naturally defended site was necessary again? Were people only using the once important ecclesiastical centre for burials in a period when Christianity in the region suffered a setback? There is no evidence of lowland churches in the Soča Valley until the 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> c., so perhaps the late antique ones were still remembered and sometimes visited – but not maintained.

<sup>25</sup> Tina Milavec, *Sacred places? Eighth century graves near sixth century churches at Tonovcov grad (Slovenia)*, in: Rome, Constantinople and newly-converted Europe: archaeological and historical evidence, U źródeł Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, ed. Maciej Salamon/Marcin Wołoszyn/Alexander Musin/Perica Špehar (Leipzig 2012) 475–487.

<sup>26</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>27</sup> Milavec/Modrijan, *The transition*.

A review of similar Friulian contexts did not answer these questions, but it did show the same lack of military context. In this, the Friulian and western Slovenian hilltop sites (also e.g. Sv. Pavel above Vrtovin in the Vipava Valley<sup>28</sup>) differ from sites such as Gradišče above Bašelj (and others, see below) or those in Carinthia.<sup>29</sup> Also, in eastern Slovenia certain hilltop sites revealed no militaria, only a tendency to use the late antique (or late Roman) structures in the Early Middle Ages. The analysis of pottery from Rifnik near Šentjur showed types of pots that are consistent with early Slavic pottery in form. Some are also consistent in fabric, but some pots show the same fabric as typical late antique production at the settlement. The contexts of these finds are not discussed in detail; the available evidence shows some of them were found on or in late antique layers directly under the humus in different parts of the settlement. Dating of analogies for these pots ranges from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> c. Two pots were found in graves from the (otherwise 6<sup>th</sup>-c.) necropolis (graves 6 and 22). The skeletal remains of both inhumation graves were badly preserved. Grave no. 22 contained only a pot and grave no. 6 a pot, a couple of silver wire circlets and a glass bead.<sup>30</sup> In view of these finds, perhaps the late dating (second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> c.) of one of the Lombard coins from grave no. 39 also seems more acceptable.<sup>31</sup> In any case, the situation at Rifnik deserves closer reconsideration.

The site of Tinje above Loka near Žusem had been systematically researched, and beside the late antique settlement (house nos. 2 and 4), an early medieval occupation, dated between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> c., was discovered (house nos. 5, 6, 7). Houses 5 and 7 contained mostly early medieval pottery, while house no. 6 yielded a considerable quantity of late antique sherds as well and may have already been used in the previous phase with a later reoccupation or even continuity. The evidence does not allow for conclusions as to whether there was actually any contact between the late antique and early medieval inhabitants, but it is possible.<sup>32</sup>

Ančnikovo gradišče near Jurišna vas was already abandoned in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. and settled again after a longer gap, between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> c. Some of the late Roman structures were probably reused while some of the wooden houses leaning on the defence walls were constructed anew and iron-working activities are reported.<sup>33</sup> At Tinje and Ančnikovo gradišče the early medieval settlement was more permanent than at Tonovcov grad, but owing to the wide dating of coarsewares, a more precise time frame remains elusive.

If we look at sites with the impressive early medieval militaria from Slovenia, only a few lines about contexts have been written so far. For Ajdna above Potoki and Bašelj in north-western Slovenia (Gorenjska), the excavators reported that the early medieval finds were found in a thick (charred) layer on top of the ruins of the late antique settlement; there is no mention of reuse of late antique houses.<sup>34</sup> From Ajdna only early 9<sup>th</sup> c. militaria and an earring are published, but from Bašelj there are a number of finds of a domestic character – keys, locks, door hinges, metal parts of wooden trunks and similar<sup>35</sup> – as well as the luxurious equestrian gear and weapons, which speak for a more permanent form of living

<sup>28</sup> Drago Svoljšak, Sv. Pavel nad Vrtovinom. Rezultati sondiranja leta 1966, in: *Arheološki vestnik* 36 (1985) 195–236 (with German Summary).

<sup>29</sup> Stefan Eichert, Zur frühmittelalterlichen Besiedlung des Ostalpenraums am Beispiel Kärntens, in: *Untergang und Neuanfang*, eds. Jörg Drauschke/Roland Prien/Sebastian Ristow (Hamburg 2011) 107–124.

<sup>30</sup> Maja Bausovac, *Študija poznoantične lončenine iz utrjene višinske naselbine Rifnik pri Šentjurju* (Celje 2011) (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Ljubljana 2011) 95–96, 126; Lojze Bolta, Rifnik pri Šentjurju. Poznoantična naselbina in grobišče/Rifnik – spätantike Siedlung und Gräberfeld (Katalogi in monografije 19, Ljubljana 1981), Pl. 1: 6; 4: 22.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Kos, Neue langobardische Viertelsiliquen, in: *Germania* 59/1 (1981) 97–103.

<sup>32</sup> Ciglencečki, *Tracce*, 56; Slavko Ciglencečki, Tinje nad Loko pri Žusmu / Tinje oberhalb von Loka bei Žusem (Opera Instituti Archaeologici Sloveniae 4, Ljubljana 2000), 153–156.

<sup>33</sup> Mira Strmčnik Gulič/Slavko Ciglencečki, Ančnikovo gradišče pri Jurišni vasi: poznoantična in zgodnjemedievalna naselbina na Pohorju/late antique and early medieval settlement on Pohorje (Slovenska Bistrica 2003); Mira Strmčnik Gulič, Ančnikovo gradišče – nekaj novosti o naselbinski podobi, in: *Scripta in honorem Bojan Djurić*, ed. Branka Migotti et al. (Monografije CPA 1, Ljubljana 2012), 205–214 (with English summary); Zvezdana Modrijan, New military finds from Ančnikovo gradišče, in: *Ad Amussim, Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Franz Glaser*, ed. Ines Dörfler et al. (Kärntner Museumsschriften 85, 2017), 159–174.

<sup>34</sup> Ajdna: Verena Vidrih Perko/Milan Sagadin, Gorenjska v antiki, in: *Kamniški zbornik* 17 (2004) 207–224 (with English summary); for Bašelj see footnote 1 and the contribution of Karo and Knific in this volume.

<sup>35</sup> Nika Veršnik, *Gradišče nad Bašljem v luči drobnih vsakdanjih predmetov in nakita* (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Primorska, Koper 2009) with English abstract.

quarters. The early medieval layer from Bašelj is radiocarbon-dated to the late 8<sup>th</sup>–late 10<sup>th</sup> c. Some small finds from the site are as late as the 11<sup>th</sup>c.

Two sites with large quantities of military finds in eastern Slovenia are almost as conspicuous as Bašelj, even if the settlement contexts are not known. At Ljubična above Zbelovska gora some trial trenches have been attempted, but most of the small finds were discovered by metal detectors. They show a settlement peak in the late Roman period, sporadic use in the late 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> c. and, again, a strong early medieval phase dated between the late 8<sup>th</sup> and early 10<sup>th</sup> c. A large number of militaria were discovered, but also finds of domestic character and jewellery, even a half-finished bronze sheet finger ring, which could indicate a more permanent settlement with perhaps local production.<sup>36</sup> At Sv. Lambert near Pristava above Stična construction of later buildings (castle, church) destroyed all previous settlement traces, and all the small finds were found by metal detecting on the slopes of the hill. A long settlement history is indicated by small finds ranging from the late Roman to the medieval period; the Early Middle Ages are represented by militaria dated to the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>37</sup>

In Carinthia,<sup>38</sup> sites with early medieval militaria are explained as traces of military actions in the period between 770 and 828, which, in light of the finds and history, seems a plausible explanation. The Slovenian side of the Alps is not entirely in accordance with this explanation, perhaps because it does not share the Carantian history. The development of Carniola and other potential political entities was different, and the sites show a different picture (no churches with interlace decoration or richly furnished graves). Bašelj may have functioned during the whole of the Carolingian period or even longer and appears to have been positioned on the road north to Carinthia. In a similar fashion, the sites on the south-eastern frontier are oriented towards Pannonia (Ljubična, also Svete gore above Bistrica on Sotla,<sup>39</sup> Zidani gaber above Mihovo<sup>40</sup>). Other hilltops with fewer finds, a more limited time frame and no traces of everyday life may have been used as short-term posts.

We do not believe we can yet say who it was that sat on those hilltops. Throughout the region of present day Slovenia, early medieval people never adopted the custom of burying their men with weapons and other military gear as can, for example, be observed in Carinthia or Dalmatia. Even in regional centres and their large cemeteries, militaria are never (Kranj<sup>41</sup>) or very rarely (Ptuj<sup>42</sup>) found. So it is difficult to link the militaria-laden hilltop sites with the general settlement pattern.

Other, apparently non-military hilltops are located in the hinterland and may have represented desirable settlement locations either quite early, when the late antique population could have still been present (Rifnik, Tinje, also Pristava at Bled<sup>43</sup>), or a little later (Tonovcov grad, Ančnikovo gradišče). They were systematically excavated and in most cases show an actual adaptation and reuse of earlier structures or even construction of new houses, at Tinje and Ančnikovo gradišče even metalworking, which would tie them to some lowland settlements (e.g. Pržanj<sup>44</sup>) and to the general importance of metalworking activities in the Central European Early Middle Ages.

<sup>36</sup> Ciglencečki, Tinje 76, 82–83; 155; Karo, Die Typologie 169–170; Špela Karo, Ozemlje današnje Slovenije med avarskimi vojnami in madžarskimi vpadi v luči arheoloških najdb (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana 2007) 77–82, with English summary; Karo/ Knific/Lubšina-Tušek, Predmeti.

<sup>37</sup> Karo, Die Typologie 166; Karo, Ozemlje 123–124; Karo/ Knific/Lubšina-Tušek, Predmeti.

<sup>38</sup> Eichert, Zur frühmittelalterlichen 119–123.

<sup>39</sup> Karo, Ozemlje 120–123.

<sup>40</sup> Knific, Early mediaeval hoards 87–88; Karo, Ozemlje 143–145; Karo/ Knific/Lubšina-Tušek, Predmeti.

<sup>41</sup> Andrej Valič, Staroslovanski Kranj/Das altslawische Kranj, in: Arheološki vestnik 18 (1967) 417–425; Andrej Valič, La nécropole slave à Kranj (Inventaria Archeologica 21, Ljubljana, Beograd 1978).

<sup>42</sup> Paola Korošec, Nekropola na Ptujskem gradu, turnirski prostor/Das Gräberfeld an dem Schlossburg von Ptuj:Turnierplatz (Ptuj 1999).

<sup>43</sup> Andrej Pleterski, Zgodnjesrednjeveška naselbina na Blejski Pristavi. Najdbe/Frühmittelalterliche Siedlung Pristava in Bled. Funde (Opera Instituti archaeologici Sloveniae 14, Ljubljana 2008); Andrej Pleterski, Zgodnjesrednjeveška naselbina na Blejski Pristavi. Tafonomija, predmeti in čas/Frühmittelalterliche Siedlung Pristava in Bled. Taphonomie, Fundgegenstände und zeitliche Einordnung (Opera Instituti archaeologici Sloveniae 19, Ljubljana 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Ivan M. Hrovatin/Peter Turk, Pržanj pri Ljubljani. Naselbinska jama 17, in: Srednji vek. Arheološke raziskave med Jadranskim morjem in Panonsko nižino/Mittelalter. Archäologische Forschungen zwischen der Adria und der Pannonischen Tiefebene, ed. Mitja Guštin (Ljubljana 2008) 145–151 (with German summary).

## SUMMARY

Tonovcov grad near Kobarid is a fortified hilltop site in western Slovenia in the Soča/Isonzo valley. It was settled periodically from prehistory to the Middle Ages, but its main phase of occupation belongs to Late Antiquity (late 4<sup>th</sup> to early 7<sup>th</sup> c. AD).

In the destruction contexts of the last late antique settlement phase (late 5<sup>th</sup>–early 7<sup>th</sup> c. AD), some small finds, layers and graves were found, which indicate that after the partial collapse of the buildings the settlement remains were occupied again for a short period (or periods) in the Early Middle Ages.

The exact date and nature of these occupation remains are not yet certain, but the metal finds and pottery point to a time between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9/10<sup>th</sup> c. AD. Here, Tonovcov grad is similar to other fortified hilltop settlements in the south-eastern Alps, where early medieval contexts are often found on top of late antique layers.

In the case of Tonovcov grad, the ruins of the late antique regional and ecclesiastical centre seem to have been used as living quarters, as no finds suggesting pronounced military or ritual use have been recovered so far.