

review article
received: 2008–09–22

UDC 903.5(497.4)Jerovca)

JEROVCA AT ŠENTVIŠKA PLANOTA – NEWLY DISCOVERED IRON AGE CEMETERY

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ABSTRACT

In 2007 a cemetery from the early Iron Age was accidentally discovered at Šentviška planota in the Tolmin area. During intervening excavations 22 cremation graves were investigated. In most graves the charred remains were merely strewn about the grave pit, in only one example a ceramic pithos was used as an urn. Three graves were covered with a limestone slab.

Among the few metal and earthenware finds were also two fragments of a three-knobbed and Certosa fibula, which prove the use of the cemetery in the 6th and 5th century BC. The fertile, arable land, abundance of wood and, supposedly, also iron ore deposits at the Šentviška planota surely presented a natural economic hinterland for the early Iron Age St. Lucia and late Iron Age Idrija culture groups.

Key words: Šentviška planota, Jerovca, flat cremation cemetery, early Iron Age, St. Lucia culture, economy

JEROVCA SULL'ALTIPIANO DI ŠENTVIŠKA PLANOTA – RECENTEMENTE SCOPERTA NECROPOLI DELL'ETÀ DEL FERRO

SINTESI

Sull'altipiano di Šentviška planota è stata per caso scoperta nel 2007 una necropoli dell'età del ferro. Durante gli scavi archeologici sono state scoperte 22 tombe ad incinerazione. Nella maggiorparte dei sepolcri le ceneri erano sparse sul fondo di essi tranne in uno, dove le ceneri erano custodite nell'urna. Tre delle tombe erano coperte con lastre di calcare. Tra i pochi oggetti di metallo e ceramica c'erano frammenti di una fibula a tre bottoni e una di tipo Certosa, che provano l'utilizzo della necropoli nel 5 e 6 secolo a. C. Il terreno fecondo e coltivabile, l'abbondanza di legno e presumibilmente i minerali di ferro che si trovano su Šentviška planota hanno rappresentato un retroterra economico naturale per il gruppo culturale di Santa Lucia della prima età del ferro e il gruppo culturale di Idria della seconda età del ferro.

Parole chiave: altipiano di Šentviška planota, Jerovca, tombe ad incinerazione, età del ferro, economia

Seldom has a year passed without news of a new Iron Age archaeological site having been discovered in Posočje in the North-west of Slovenia. Most often these were discovered by chance; in only some cases small-scale archaeological sampling lead to a discovery. Among them are the cemetery at Srpenica in the upper Soča valley, and the prehistoric settlement Grašišče near Grgar (Mlinar, 2004, 129–141; Bratina, 2006, 47–49). New information has also been made available by the publication of materials from the archaeological sites Špeter – Sv. Kvirin/San Pietro al Natisone – San Quirino and Dernazzacco in the Nadiža/Natisone valley, which represent the western border of the St. Lucia cultural group (Pettarin, 2006).

A completely fresh and surprising find is an Iron Age cemetery in Jerovca on the Šentviška planota plateau. This article presents the results from an archaeological intervention in this cemetery carried out a few days after its discovery in 2007. At this moment, the archaeological material is in the conservation process and mostly unresearched. This is why this article will only present the main characteristics of the burial ground and its significance in constructing a comprehensive picture of the St. Lucia Hallstatt Culture.

On March 17th 2007 during archaeological topog-

raphical prospecting Boštjan Laharnar unexpectedly discovered an Iron Age cemetery on Jerovca fallow near the village Gorski Vrh. At the forest's edge created by machine excavation grave pits and fragments of prehistoric pottery were visible in cross-section and on the bottom surface.

Emergency excavations were carried out by the Tolmin museum's team and the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage from Nova Gorica.

The newly discovered site is located in the centre of the elevated part of the Šentviška planota plateau (790 m above sea level), a varied Karst landscape above the valleys of the lower Idrijca and Bača rivers. It lies in a small karstic dale flanked by a forest-clad ridge on one side and the Dobje hillock on the other. While some archaeologically indicative toponyms (e.g. Zagomilca, Grudnica) have been observed in this part of Šentviška planota, no archaeological sites had yet been discovered. The Šentviška planota does not possess permanent water sources; there are only a few meagre springs and some swifts that come alive with heavy rainfall. The plateau has a favourable strategic position and gentle, fertile slopes exposed to the sun. Therefore, it provided favourable conditions for settlement in prehistoric times, as proven also by the newly-discovered site.

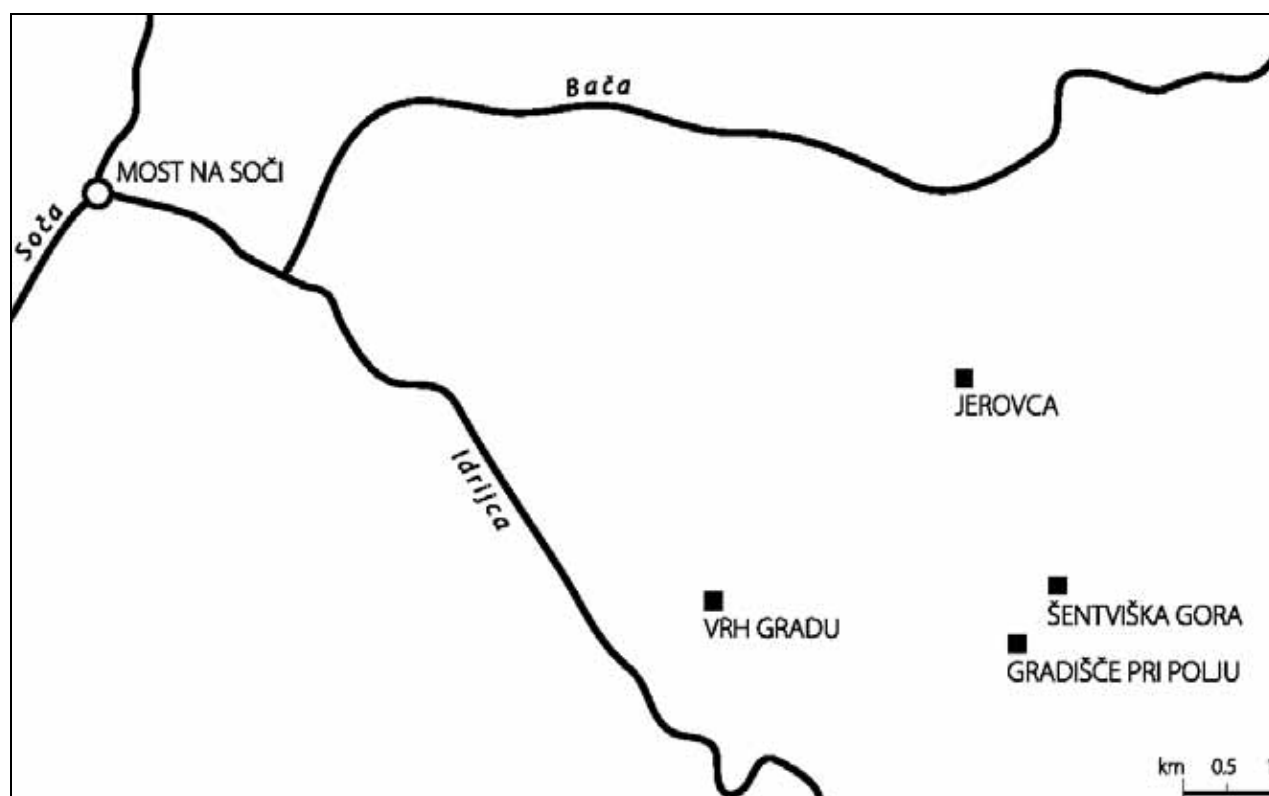


Fig. 1: Archaeological sites on Šentviška planota plateau mentioned in the text (drawing: A. Hawlina).

Sl. 1: V besedilu omenjena arheološka najdišča na Šentviški planoti (risba: A. Hawlina).



Fig. 2: Cross-section of grave 1 (photo archive of the Tolmin museum).

Sl. 2: Prerez groba 1 (fotografski arhiv Tolminskega muzeja).

The Iron Age cemetery in Jerovca lies upon an artificially levelled terraces at the foot of the Dobje hill. Only a small part on the northern edge of the terraces covering the slope has been researched up till now. The cemetery was once clearly limited in the North-west by a presently dry brook. The total surface damaged by machine digging spans some 270 m². Of this only the area containing already damaged and directly endangered graves was archaeologically examined. In total, 6 graves were researched (graves 1 to 6), with the excavated surface containing signs of grave pits spanning 15 x 6 m. Within this area graves 9 to 14 a, b and 15 to 21 were documented. In total, 22 graves were found; three of them were still covered by a limestone plate.

All the uncovered graves are cremation graves. The cremated remains were simply put onto the bottom of the grave pit; only grave 1, damaged by the machines, contained an urn – a ribbed ceramic *pithos*. Most graves did not contain any grave goods. The grave pit had round edges and was cut into a layer of sterile clay up to a depth of 45 cm. The burnt human bones and charcoal lay on the bottom of the urn, preserved in fragments. The urn also contained bronze grave goods. Wet sifting

of the cremated material also revealed a plum pit. Grave no. 2 was also severely damaged by the machines and only part was preserved. The grave pit had round edges and was cut into sterile clay up to a depth of 17 cm. The preserved portion of the cremated material contained part of a three-knobbed fibula. Another remarkable grave is no. 16; the cremated material was covered by a vessel made of fragile, easily broken earthenware.

Metal grave goods are poorly preserved as they were severely corroded due to the acidity of the soil. Osteological remains are also meagre. All decorative objects show signs of having been burnt and were most likely part of the deceased's attire during their cremation. Fragments of bronze fibulae and bracelets, a fragment of a yellow glass bead with wart-like protrusions, glass beads made of blue glass paste were also found. The ceramic material is scarce in the examined part of the cemetery. Beside the already mentioned *pithos* and vessel, a shard from grave no. 20 perhaps belonging to a cup with an upswung handle is worth mentioning.¹

The three-knobbed and Certosa fibula (Fig. 4) are the most important items in our efforts to define the period of the cemetery's use. Judging by the finds from the ex-

1 The nearest comparison can be found in grave no. 288 from Most na Soči (Teržan et al., 1984, T. 28: F3).

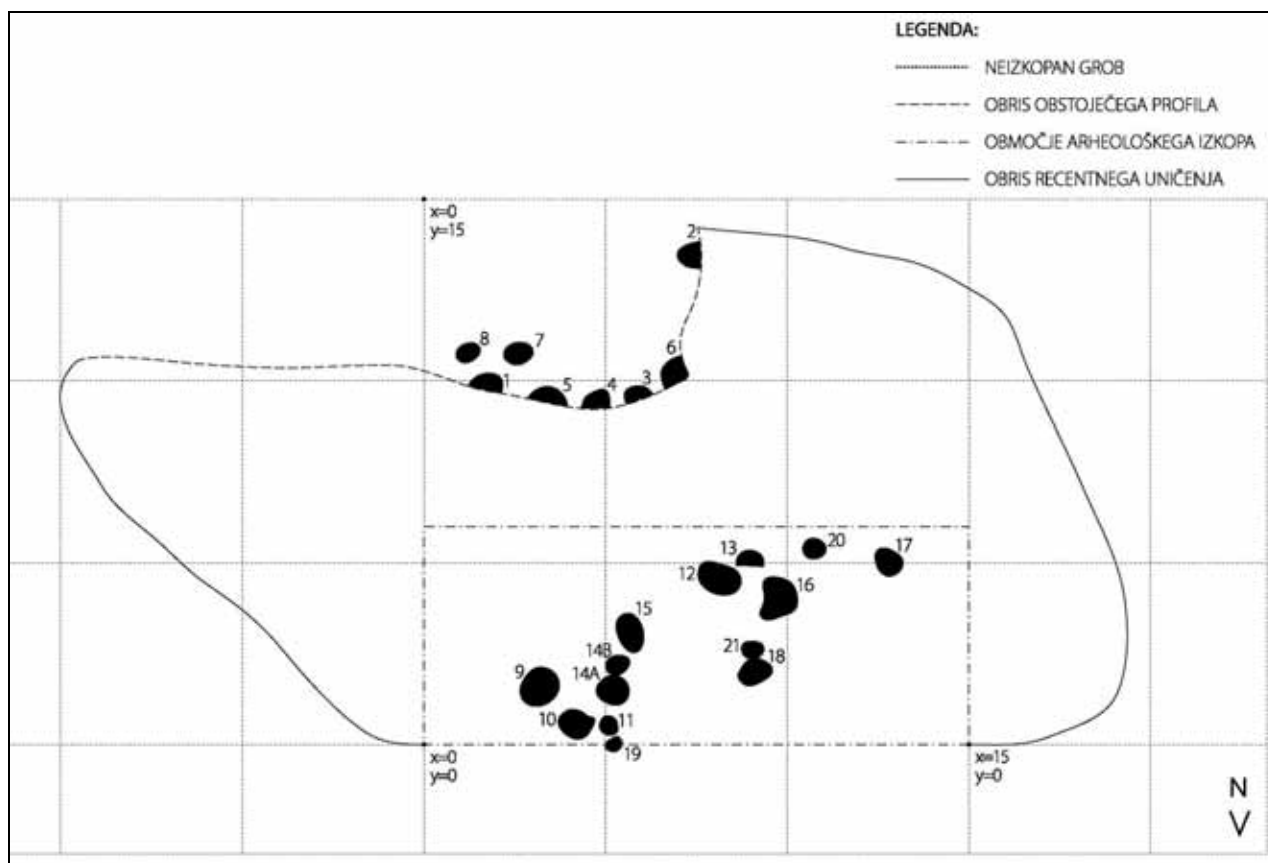


Fig. 3: Plan of cemetery (drawing: T. Gerbec, M. Jereb, B. Laharnar; computer processing of a drawing: A. Hawlina).

Sl. 3: Načrt grobišča (risba: T. Gerbec, M. Jereb, B. Laharnar; računalniška obdelava risbe: A. Hawlina).

amined part of the burial ground, the older grave, no. 2, containing a fragment of a three-knobbed fibula, corresponds in shape and decoration (consisting of imprinted circles on the foot) to fibulae from Vinica in Bela krajina and Bitnje in Bohinj (Gabrovec, 1966, T. 14: 3; Ogrin, 1998, 108, fig. 10c; Gabrovec, 1974, T. VII: 6). The first

belongs to type IIc according to Ogrin, known from Bela krajina and Lika, the second to Ogrin's type IIa, also popular in Posočje (Ogrin, 1998, 108–109). Such fibulae belong to the period of the St. Lucia IIa phase (6th century BC). They can, however, also be a somewhat older (Gabrovec, 1974, 300–301; Grahek, 2004, 145).

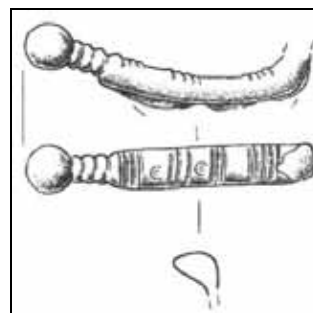
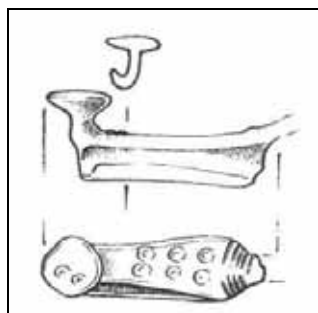


Fig. 4: The Certosa and three-knobbed fibula, scale = 1:1 (drawing: M. Lavrinc).

Sl. 4: Certoška in trojasta fibula; M = 1:1 (risba: M. Lavrinc).



Fig. 5: Iron semi-finished product from Gradišče pri Polju (photo: B. Laharnar).

Sl. 5: Železni polizdelek z Gradišča pri Polju (foto: B. Laharnar).

The material from grave no. 1 contained a burnt fragment of a Certosa fibula, type VI according to Teržan; its exact variant cannot be determined as the spring was not preserved. Such fibulae have an extended arch with a rhomboid cross-section with rounded edges; they are often decorated by imprinted circles and V-cuts. This type of brooch was developed by the St. Lucia cultural group,² while examples can also be found between the Dolenjska and Veneto regions (Pettarin, 2006, 209, n. 72). E.g. a brooch from a male cremation grave no. 1656 from Most na Soči shares some characteristics with the Jerovca fibula; the former was part of a grave goods assemblage also including weapons, a bracelet with snake-head ends and an undecorated situla within a ceramic *pithos* (Teržan et al., 1984, T. 156). These

characteristics are typical of the youngest period of the First Iron Age St. Lucia culture (phase IIc). Often two or perhaps even three such fibulae can be found together within graves containing weapons and can thus be construed as part of men's attire.

The cemetery in Jerovca belongs to the Iron Age St. Lucia cultural group. Cremation burials in a *pithos* are characteristic for wealthier graves from Most na Soči, Kobarid, Koritnica, Špeter and Šentviška gora,³ which belong to the peak period of the group. The remaining grave goods confirm the placement of the Jerovca cemetery into the 6th and 5th centuries BC. The material from cremation graves excavated by Carlo Marchesetti at the closest comparable sites near the village Šentviška Gora, where at least 28 graves from the sites Prevala and

2 They appear in the St. Lucia IIb2 phase and are still used in the St. Lucia IIc phase (Teržan, 1976, 324–325, 355–356). This type of fibula was also found in Bodrež (Guštin, 1991, T. 39: 15), unknown sites from the area of Cividale (Pettarin, 2006, Tav. VI: 79–80) and Caverzano in Veneto Region (Nascimbene, 1999, 74, fig. 14: 140–141).

3 Most na Soči (e.g. Marchesetti, 1893, Tab. I, 4; II, 1; Teržan et al., 1984, T. 7: 40A, 11; 18: 176A,3; 29: 325F,2; 35: 433B,4; 39: 487B,2; 49: 585G,5; Mlinar, 2002, 47–48), Kobarid (Gabrovec, 1976, T. 1: 1), Koritnica ob Bači (Kos, 1973, T. 1: 1), Špeter (Pettarin, 2006, 53), Šentviška gora (Rutar, 1894, 122).

Ajdovski britof were researched at the end of the 19th century (Marchesetti, 1891, LII; Much, 1902, 119),⁴ also belongs to the same period.

The Iron Age settling on the Šentviška planota can be interpreted through the ironworks industry and deposits of iron ore. The main mining region of the St. Lucia cultural group was in fact Bohinjski kot, geographically separated by mountains. The developers of this culture colonised it in the St. Lucia IIa period. The reason behind colonisation was without doubt the great need for iron ore (Teržan, Trampuž, 1973, 436; Gabrovec, 1974, 303). Stane Gabrovec called attention to the fact that there were most likely several small iron ore deposits in Posočje that were already being exploited in the prehistoric period. These deposits are not included on geological maps as they are too poor and probably severely exhausted (Gabrovec, 1987, 142).

The new evidence from Šentviška planota could be indicative of the prehistoric mining and metallurgy in Posočje. Iron ore in pellets can be found near the Polje and Daber villages. Stories of the "*kroparji*" tell of the people who dug and processed iron ore in the vicinity of the Daber settlement many years ago (Trošt, 1968, 400, 431). In addition to Iron Age finds, an iron semi-finished product was also found in Gradišče pri Polju,⁵ and iron slag⁶ was discovered in Vrh Gradu near Pečine along

with Iron Age and Roman finds (Božič, 1999, 71–79). Collectors of waste materials from the 1st World War also discovered several pieces of iron slag in the broader vicinity of the Jerovca site. In the vicinity, Grudnica, a slope with a characteristic toponym, is located. Remains of surface mining can be seen there, which can be interpreted as remains of iron ore quarries.⁷

The Šentviška planota plateau, with its fertile slopes, deposits of iron ore and timber reserves, without doubt formed a natural economic base of the Early Iron Age St. Lucia culture and also of the Late Iron Age Idrija culture group. An important traffic connection and cargo route led through Šentviška planota up until the end of the 19th century and connected Posočje with central Slovenia (Kofol, 1998, 77–78). This route was perhaps already used in prehistoric times; this theory is further supported by the wide spread of archaeological sites and the difficulty of passage through the canyon in the Idrija river valley. This is where paths connecting the central St. Lucia area and the iron ore deposits in the vicinity of Cerkno and Idrija probably ran.⁸

There is no doubt that the attractiveness of this part of Šentviška planota was further increased by the vicinity of a water source, which had always been and still is a crucial factor in the life on Šentviška planota.

JEROVCA NA ŠENTVIŠKI PLANOTI – NOVO ODKRITO ŽELEZNODOBNO GROBIŠČE

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POVZETEK

Leta 2007 je bilo v višjem delu Šentviške planote, pri domačiji Jerovca, naključno odkrito do sedaj neznano grobišče iz časa starejše železne dobe.

Pregled izkopa zemlje na robu gozda ob vznožju kopaste vzpetine imenovane Dobje, je razkril grobove, tako v preseku kot v tlorisu izkopa. Sledilo je interventno arheološko izkopavanje in zaščita najdišča, ki ga je izvedla ekipa Tolminskega muzeja in Zavoda za varstvo kulturne dediščine Slovenije, OE Nova Gorica.

4 The materials are kept by the Trieste museum Museo civico di Storia ed Arte and it has not yet been processed and categorised. The approximate dating of the finds was provided by Anna Crismani and we are sincerely grateful for that.

5 The iron axe and bronze strap divider are kept in the National Museum of Slovenia in Ljubljana and the iron semi-finished product in the Tolmin museum (unpublished).

6 Several pieces of iron slag from this site are kept in the Tolmin museum.

7 Such pits are typical of mining areas in the Julian Alps (Bizjak, 2006, 85–94).

8 Idrija mercury is renowned; deposits of copper ore in the vicinity of Cerkno are also well-known (Drovenik 1987, 24–29).

Raziskan je bil le manjši, s strojnim izkopom poškodovan severni del grobišča, ki se terasasto širi proti jugu. Proti severozahodu je bilo grobišče jasno zamejeno z nekdanjo strugo danes presahlega potoka.

Večina izmed 22 raziskanih grobov je imela žganino nasuto na dno grobne jame, le v enem grobu je bil kot žara uporabljen narebren keramičen pitos. Kovinsko gradivo in kostni ostanki iz grobov so slabo ohranjeni. Vsi kovinski predmeti kažejo vidne znake ožganosti in so bili najverjetneje del noše umrlega med sežigom. Odkriti so bili odlomki bronastih fibul in zapestnic, odlomek rumene steklene jagode z bradavičastimi izrastki, stekleni jagodici iz modre steklene paste ter odlomki keramičnega posodja. Odlomka bronaste trortaste in certoške fibule dokazujeta uporabo grobišča v 6. in 5. stol. pr. n. š.

Poselitev Šentviške planote v železni dobi morda lahko razumemo tudi v luči izkoriščanja železove rude. Ljudsko izročilo namreč govori o iskalcih železove rude, t. i. kroparjih. V okolici vasi Polje in Daber so nahajališča železove rude v obliki bobovca, na Gradišču pri Polju je bil odkrit železen polizdelek, na Vrhju gradu pri Pečinah in v okolici grobišča Jerovca pa železova žlindra.

Šentviška planota je z rodovitno zemljo, lesom in najverjetneje tudi železovo rudo zagotovo predstavljala naravno gospodarsko zaledje posoške železnodobne kulture.

Ključne besede: Šentviška planota, Jerovca, plano žgano grobišče, starejša železna doba, svetolucijska kultura, gospodarstvo

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