Early Bronze Age riverine Settlement

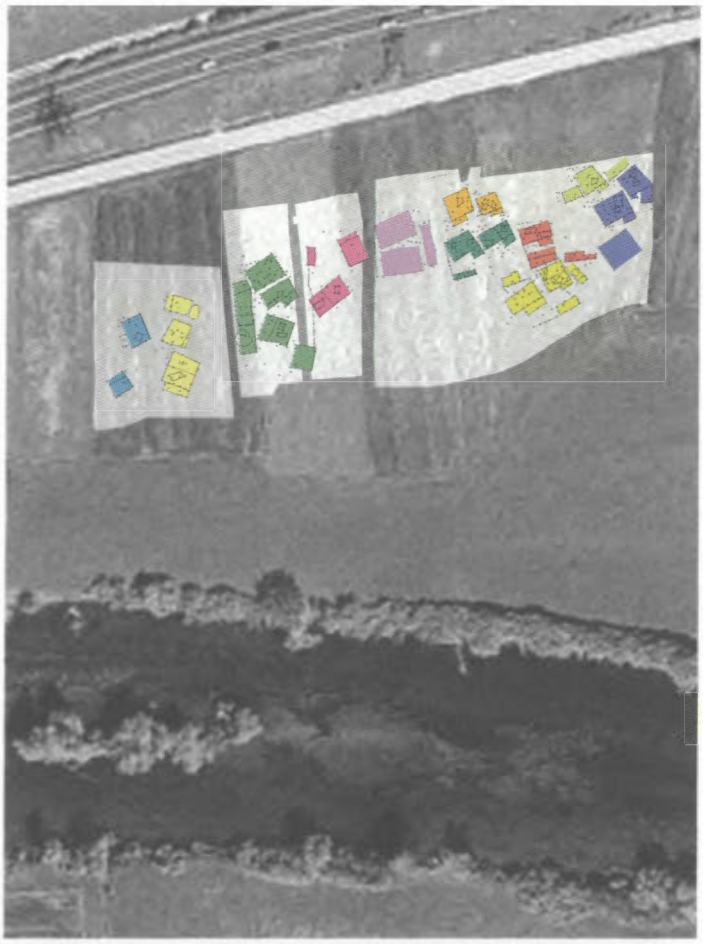
IRN 15511	Ruhna Vas – Loke archaeological site
Location	Bela Cerkev
Site type	Settlement
Excavated area	12,000 m²
Date	1700–1500 BC
Period	Early Bronze Age
Excavation director	Milena Horvat
Date of excavation	2002

The Early Bronze Age site at Loka between the villages of Bela Cerkev and Stranje is located on the extreme western part of the extensive Krško lowland – the southernmost part of Slovenian Pannonia, in the area where the river Krka comes closest to the Krško Hills.

▲ View of the site (Photograph by R. Urankar)

◄ View of the site in September 2003 and its ideal reconstruction

The inhabitants exploited the natural advantages of the area for their settlement: the small valley of the Cedilnik stream with its permanent watersource and the banks of the river Krka. The Cedilnik valley was carved in the colluvial slope of the low hills on the northern side of the Krka valley. Its shape indicates that it it was formed by the backward erosion that caused the developement of an alluvial-colluvial mound (153 m above sea-level), which extended as far as the Krka river bank. It was on this mound that the settlement developed. The western



Interpretation of the structures as farmsteads (Drawing by M. Horvat)

part of the mound was still safe from the frequent floods of the Krka, despite its direct proximity. The eastern part expanded c. 350 m further away from the settlement, but remained unoccupied. This part was less appropriate for settlement from a geological and morphological perspective, because it is frequently subject to flooding or heavy waterlogging from surface and ground water.

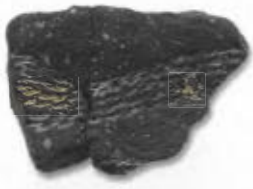
The remains of the settlement cover an area of c. 9,600 m². There are no traces indicating fortifications surrounding the settlement – a ditch or palisade. Therefore it was an open settlement located by the river and con-

sisted of a high density of planned buildings. They were arranged relatively regularly surrounding one of the larger village squares, to which village paths led, built along natural lenticular areas of gravel in the clay subsoil. Thus the paths remained relatively dry even in bad weather.

The distribution of the buildings renders the impression that they formed closed residential-economic units. The one- to three-room buildings were of various sizes and functions. Individual units consisted of one to two houses and one to two outbuildings. Each of the units had an internal courtyard of its own. Residential houses regularly had one or two rooms with a special entrance hallway and only rarely was this replaced by a projecting roof. The interior of the houses featured a hearth in one of the two rooms as well as a smoke structure – a kind of chimney conducting the smoke out of the room. A low bed built on posts sunk into the ground was located in the adjacent room. The associated outbuildings were smaller in size, as well as being narrower and more oblong in shape.

The houses had ridged roofs. The structure of the houses differed. In smaller houses the ridge beam was supported by a single line of posts, while larger ones had two lines of posts. The outbuildings were covered either with lean-to roofs or with protective roofs supported by four to six posts.

The orientation of the houses in a south-easterly/north-westerly direction is interesting. The reason for this was probably the wind, still blowing heavily from the east. All the entrances were therefore built on the southern side. The entrance to the building, however, was probably built in the western wall of the entrance hallway.



Potsherd with Litzen decoration (Photograph by P. Korošec)

The buildings were not renovated. Their distribution inside the framework of units indicates that they probably comprised individual farms with several outbuildings. It seems that the settlement did not expand through time but was built within a single generation.

Archaeologically detected economic activities comprised stock-breeding, arable cultivation and pottery production. Xylotomic analyses (i.e. analyses of charred wood) indicate that anthropogenic encroachments in the wooded surroundings were fairly strong. The forest was felled in order to obtain open spaces for pastures and fields, which indirectly indicates extensive stock-breeding and cultivation of land. Evidence for arable farming is provided by modest plant macro-remains (cereal grains), as well as a fragment of a bronze sickle and numerous fragments of quern fragments. The preliminary analyses of the animal bone from the site indicate that the inhabitants of the settlement also practised hunting and stock-raising. A com-

Potsherd with Litzen decoration (Photograph by P. Korošec)

plex of larger pits discovered inside one of the dwellings in the western part of the settlement (house No. 7) can be associated with pottery or even house building (walls daubed with clay). A 20 cm thick layer of heavy clay of exceptional quality that could easily be formed was preserved at the bottom of one of the pits. Other economic activities could not be documented in the settlement. Heavy degradation of the forest could perhaps indicate metal working. The fact that larger amounts of firewood were required for smelting ore and metal in the Bronze Age, which would have caused deforestation, cannot be disregarded. However, there is no direct evidence of the extraction of metals in the settlement.

The settlement is defined as originating from the Early Bronze Age (1,700 to 1,500 BC). The finds of Litzen pottery and a part of a sickle (handle) facilitate a more precise dating of the settlement to the turn of the Early Bronze Age (BZ A2 according to Reinecke) or Ig C or LBVII according to Parzinger (Gabrovec 1983; Parzinger 1984). Apart from the decoration made in the twisted cord technique, the typical feature of Litzen pottery is the vessel form. The selection of shapes at the Loke site is limited to bowls, dishes and jugs. They all have a funnel-shaped neck and more or less globular body with a ribon handle on the jugs. The motifs are also typical: transverse and wave-like bands, short vertical bands and an independent transverse line. The motifs are distributied on the entire surface of the neck, in a narrow band or in two lines beneath the rim, and also in vertical bands on the shoulder of the vessel. The discovery of the bronze sickle within a Litzen context is of exceptional significance. According to the valid chronology, sickles of this type should only have appeared during the Middle Bronze Age. The sickle from Loke is thus the earliest find of this tool type not only in Slovenia, but also in the area of the south-eastern Alpine region.

There are several known sites with Litzen pottery in Slovenia: Notranje Gorice, Ig, Krtina, Slivnica near Maribor, Brinjeva Gora, Grofovsko, Ajdovska jama near Nemška vas, etc. Litzen pottery is most common in Austria, Slovakia, Hungary and Croatia.

The newly discovered site of Loke facilitated an insight into the internal organisation and structure of an Early Bronze Age settlement in the lowlands of Dolenjska. Previous excavations have been concentrated on upland settlements in this region. However, the most recent excavations on the motorway route in Dolenjska have revealed the existence of Bronze Age settlements in lowlands as well (Sela near Dob – phase IV, Col near Čatež – later phase, Loke and Loka).

Bronze sickle handle
(Photograph by P. Korošec)

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