



Roman Settlement and cemetery

IRN 15513	Zagorica near Veliki Gaber – Zagorica – Bič archaeological site
Location	Zagorica – Bič
Site type	Settlement, cremation cemetery
Excavated area	25,500 m ²
Date	2500 BC–9th century AD
Period	Prehistory, Roman, early Middle Ages
Excavation director	Boris Vičič
Date of Excavation	2002

Dobska Uvala is one of the basins in the Dolenjska system of valleys. It is located between Dob near Šentvid pri Stični in the west and Medvedjek in the east. It is surrounded by isolated hills, which rise to a height of up to 100 m in the south and east. The bedrock consists of Jurassic limestone and clay. The floor of the uvala has been formed by numerous hydrologically active karst caves with swallow-holes, vent-holes and ponds, which contain water all year round. The Zagorica site is located at the eastern part of the basin between the villages of Bič and Zagorica, at the base of Medvedjek. The terrain is relatively level.

The earliest settlement traces were discovered on the elevated terrain at the foot of Reber and date to the La Tène period. The associated cemetery of 20 cremation graves with rich grave goods was excavated in the lowland area. It is dated to the 2nd century BC or the beginning of the 1st century BC. The Roman period settlement is located on the formerly flooded basin bottom and partly extends over the La Tène cemetery. The associated cemetery was excavated on the eastern edge of the settlement. The lowland location was abandoned in the 3rd century AD. The settlement focus was transferred to the former site on the elevated terrain at the foot of Reber in the Late Roman period and the Early Middle Ages.

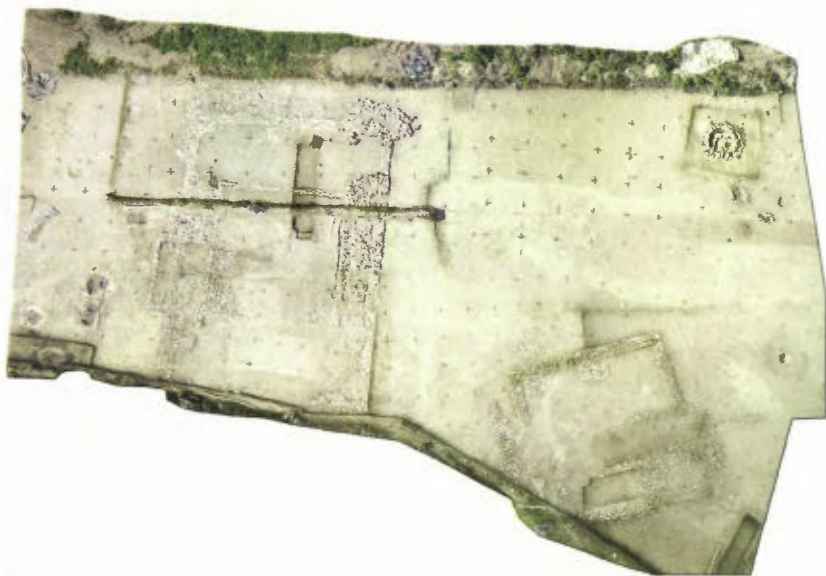
The Roman settlement was adapted to the shape of the terrain and did not exhibit a geometric layout. The buildings were mostly timber-built with a vertical post structure, but four of the buildings had river cobbles foundations. It is suggested that this is probably related to functional differentiation within the settlement area. Both building types have adjacent shallow storage or refuse pits. A wooden fence may have enclosed a courtyard in one part of the settlement. The original ground



▲ View of the site (Photograph by D. Grosman)

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

or utilisation surfaces are not generally extant, neither are the remains of the building superstructures. This means that inferences about the appearance are very limited due to the lack of closed collapse and rubble contexts containing finds. The extant “negative” structures permit the following hypotheses. The Three large buildings with foundations (Nos. 1–3, characteristic size c. 20 x 15 m) can be interpreted either as the cores of basic family residential/economic units with associated smaller wooden outbuildings and manipulation space



Part of the excavated architectural remains (DFG Consulting, M. Erič)

or farmyards, or as functionally different buildings within a unitary country estate. It is posited that the external walls of the houses and the internal dividing walls were of horizontally mounted timber that could also have supported the roof structures.

The date and position of the two fibulae from the centre of building no. 1 confirm the two-phase development of the structure. The earlier phase is dated on the basis of a two-button Noric-Pannonian fibula to the end of the 1st and partly the 2nd century AD, while the second phase is dated by a coin of Antoninus Pius (minted after 141 AD) and an Almgren type 84 fibula to the middle or second half of the 2nd century AD, or perhaps to the beginning of the 3rd century AD.

Structure no. 4 stands out from the rest of the structures (1–3), due to its size and internal structure. It is located to the east of building no. 1, on the southern edge of the cemetery and the waterlogged area, which extends in the direction of the present pool. It has an almost square ground plan (11.70 x 11.35 m) with two internal dividing walls aligned in an east-west direction. The interior



Bronze brooch,
2nd–3rd century AD
(Photograph by B. Vičič)

contained four fairly large pits (up to 2 m long) by the northern and southern walls. The pits were filled with mortar and stone (finds: pottery and an iron carpenter's axe). It is suggested that these were plinths for some form of craft production, if it was an out-building, or pedestal bases for free-standing stone monuments, if it was a building for cult practices.

All the graves in the small cemetery to the north of building no. 4 were cremations. The most elaborate grave was a circular, domed tomb. Such tombs are char-



Circular, domed tomb – later phase, 2nd–3rd century (Photograph by M. Brenk)

acteristic of the Dolenjska region, the example from this site being the most western example. There are no finds from the period of the tomb construction, but the grave goods from the later phase (a flask, two Almgren type 84 fibulae and a bronze *as* of Hadrian, struck between AD 117 and AD 138) are dated to the second half of the 2nd or beginning of the 3rd century AD. The rest of the graves are modest: two are square, stone-built with a ledge for grave goods, two are simple pits cut into the clay. The grave goods have not survived, but all the graves contained cremated remains.

The excavated structures are part of an extended settlement or estate from the end of the 1st, 2nd and beginning of the 3rd century AD. The settlement was clearly bounded on the west and east inside the excavated area and undoubtedly extended outside the area to the north and south. The pottery finds indicate an entirely indigenous population structure, steeped in the Celtic tradition. The settlement was locat-



Bronze brooch,
2nd–3rd century
(Photograph by B. Vičič)

ed away from the *Emona–Siscia* state road and dominated an agricultural settlement zone in the area between places that are known by name in the written sources, i.e. *Acervo* (site in the area of present-day Stična, which is not yet precisely located) and *Praetorium Latobicorum* (Trebnje). A local road probably branched off somewhere near Šentvid in the direction of Sele pri Dobu (a Roman building with an iron foundry and a smithy was excavated here prior to motorway construction), going towards Zagorica and then running on towards Medvedjek, the site of a known Roman cemetery. The area seems to have been fairly densely occupied, because Roman finds are by no means rare. The area belonged in an administrative sense to the territory (*ager*) of the town of *Municipium Flavium Latobicorum Neviodunum* (modern Drnovo near Krško), one of four Roman towns in the area of modern Slovenia. The *ager* extended from Višnja Gora in the west to the river Sava in the north and the region of Bela Krajina in the south. It formed part of the province of *Pannonia*. It was settled by the romanized Celtic Latobici tribe. The initial analysis of the finds suggests that the settlement was founded during the creation of a municipia out of the Latobici tribal territory, and the administrative reorganisation of their peregrine community into a civic community with its centre in Neviodunum in the second half of the 1st century AD. The conditions on the site suggest that the area was not deliberately destroyed, but was abandoned. The reasons for this could have been economic and political (e.g. an economic breakdown or social differentiation), demographic (possibly epidemic diseases, similar to those that devastated the area in the middle of the 2nd century and later), or even environmental. The latter may be supported by evidence from several sites in Slovenia that show a change in hydrological or local climatic conditions.

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References

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