

Carneola? The Settlement Pattern of Western and Central Slovenia in the 6th Century

Zvezdana MODRIJAN

Abstract

The *Cosmography* of the Anonymous Geographer of Ravenna constitutes one of the rare Late Antique sources referencing the territory of present-day Slovenia. The work includes a mention of the region of Carneola, located between Italy and Illyricum. Within this context, the geographer enumerates 25 settlements, of which only Carnium – modern-day Kranj – can be identified with certainty. The section, dealing with Carneola was most likely composed in the first half of the 6th century at the Ostrogothic court in Ravenna.

The Late Antique settlement pattern of central and western Slovenia displays marked regional variation. Gorenjska and the Soča Valley appear to have retained relatively high population densities, whereas the Ljubljana Basin and Notranjska underwent significant demographic decline. The persistence of dense habitation in Gorenjska may be attributable to its strategic geopolitical location, while in the Soča Valley, certain settlements likely endured due to their remote geographic position. The abandonment of settlements in the Ljubljana Basin is generally interpreted as a consequence of their exposed position. In Notranjska, depopulation is thought to have resulted from the declining strategic relevance of the region and the cessation of state-sponsored supply.

Keywords: *Cosmography*; Anonymous of Ravenna; Carneola; Carnium; fortified hilltop settlements; settlement; Late Antiquity

Izvleček

Karneola? Poselitvena slika zahodne in osrednje Slovenije v 6. stoletju

Delo Kozmografija Anonimnega geografa iz Ravene je eno redkih poznoantičnih virov za območje današnje Slovenije. V njem avtor na prostoru med Italijo in Ilirikom omenja deželo, imenovano *Carneola*, v njej pa našteva 25 naselij, od katerih je zanesljivo identificiran samo *Carnium* kot današnji Kranj. Del, ki obravnava Karneolo, je verjetno nastal v prvi polovici 6. st. na vzhodnogotškem dvoru v Raveni.

Poznoantična poselitev osrednje in zahodne Slovenije se na različnih delih kaže različno. Medtem ko sta Gorenjska in Posočje še relativno gosto poseljena, kažeta Ljubljanska kotlina in Notranjska precejšno depopulacijo. Gosta poselitev Gorenjske je verjetno povezana z njenim geopolitičnim položajem, medtem ko v Posočju nekatere naselbine preživijo tudi zaradi odmaknjene lege. Propad večine naselbin v Ljubljanski kotlini razlagamo z njihovo izpostavljenostjo, na Notranjskem pa z upadom strateškega pomena ozemlja in prenehanjem državne oskrbe večine postojank.

Ključne besede: Kozmografija; Anonimni geograf iz Ravene; Carneola; Carnium; višinske utrjene naselbine; poselitev; pozna antika

Among the many topics explored by Jaroslav Šašel was the geographical position and administrative status of Carneola, as conveyed in the *Cosmography* of the anonymous geographer of Ravenna.¹ This work was compiled on the basis of earlier sources, among which are those from the Early Roman, Ostrogothic, and Early Medieval periods. There is no complete consensus as to when these sources were integrated into the *Cosmography*, with scholarly opinions ranging from the early 8th to the early 9th century.² The amalgamation of sources of varying origin and age led to numerous errors within the text; nevertheless, the work remains an important source of information for a period otherwise characterised by a marked scarcity of written records.³

The aim of this article is to compare the data presented in the *Cosmography* concerning the region between Italy and Illyricum in the 6th century, with the results of archaeological research. In recent decades our understanding of settlement patterns in the south-eastern Alpine region during Late Antiquity has advanced considerably and the archaeological data available for the entire area under discussion are today significantly more extensive than what was accessible to Jaroslav Šašel.

Carneola and the *Cosmography*

The section of the *Cosmography* that discusses Carneola is based on a list of settlements attributed to the Gothic scholar Marcomirus (*Marcomirus Gothorum philosophus*), and ranks among the most original parts of the *Cosmography*.⁴ The list was likely compiled in the first half of the 6th century at the Ostrogothic court in Ravenna, although some scholars allow for the possibility that it was created as late as the end of the 6th century.⁵

Carneola, consistently referred to by the geographer as *patria*, lies between Venetia and Histria, the land of the Corontani, Liburnia Tarsaticensis, Pannonia, and Valeria. It is said to have formerly been called *Alpes Iuliana*, and the geographer also uses the terms *Carnech/Carnich* and *patria Carnium* in reference to it. Within this territory, he lists 25 settlements (*civitates*).⁶

The name Carneola is thought to derive from the Carni, a Celtic tribe mentioned as late as the 6th century by Procopius.⁷ The settlement names are likewise believed to be of Celtic origin.⁸ Jaroslav Šašel proposed that the location of Carneola corresponded to the area of present-day western Slovenia, more precisely the regions of Gorenjska

¹ *Cosmographia*; Šašel 1970; Šašel 1970–1971.

² Staab 1976, 31; Staab 1998, 104; Bratož 2014, 387.

³ Bratož 2014, 395; Kovács 2020; Szántó 2021, 112.

⁴ Bratož 2014, 389.

⁵ Staab 1998, 104.

⁶ *Cosmographia* 4.21.

⁷ Bratož 2014, 388.

⁸ Bratož 2014, 388.

and large parts of Notranjska. The core area is believed to have comprised the plain between Kranj and Ljubljana and a large part of Notranjska, with the term “valley” possibly referring to the Upper Sava Valley. Most scholars agree with this broader location in western Slovenia or within the region of the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*, although opinions vary somewhat regarding its precise extent and function.⁹

The list of 25 settlements in Carneola is divided into two parts. The first begins with Carnium, followed by six other settlements. After an ambiguous spatial designation, rendered as “in the valley of this land” or, according to more recent readings, “in the other part of this land,”¹⁰ the list continues with 18 additional settlements. It concludes with a mention of an unnamed alpine lake and several rivers, one of which is identified by name: *Corcac*. This has been identified as the Kokra, a river which flows through a deep canyon past Kranj and joins the Sava River just south of the town.¹¹

As the settlements are not recorded in any earlier or contemporary sources, and since the criteria for their inclusion remain unknown, their identification is nearly impossible. The only exception is the first settlement mentioned, Carnium, which has been identified as present-day Kranj.¹²

In comparison with the neighbouring units of Valeria and Liburnia Tarsaticensis, the number of settlements mentioned in Carneola is notably high. In Valeria, seven settlements are listed between Siscia and Emona, all of which have been identified,¹³ while Liburnia includes 19 settlements.¹⁴

The archaeological picture of the region

As it is not possible to define the exact boundaries of the land of Carneola, I will attempt in what follows to analyse the Late Antique settlement pattern of north-western and central Slovenia on the basis of the current state of archaeological research.¹⁵ The area under consideration will be bounded to the north by the Karavanke massif, which forms a prominent natural border. Although several routes likely continued to lead northwards across the range even in Late Antiquity (notably via the Jezerski vrh / Seebergsettel, Ljubelj / Loiblpass, and Korensko sedlo / Wurzenpass passes), there

⁹ Wolff 2000, 103–105; Bratož 2014, 383–391.

¹⁰ *Cosmographia* 4,21: *Item in ali<part>eiusdem patrie*.

¹¹ Šašel 1970, 588; Wolff 2000, 104, Note 31.

¹² Šašel 1970–1971, 35.

¹³ *Cosmographia* 4,20. For the problem of Valeria, see most recently Kovács 2020; for the position of Emona in Valeria, see also Bratož 2014, 392, Note 78.

¹⁴ *Cosmographia* 4,22.

¹⁵ Archaeological data were extracted from databases Zbiva: <https://zbiva4.zrc-sazu.si/>) and Arkas: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/9bcce19f3dbb4c88ac718b02174d7d3e>

is – unlike in the Julian Alps – very little evidence of high-altitude land use in the Karavanke during this period.¹⁶

To the east, the natural demarcation is less clearly defined; however, it is probable that Carneola did not extend beyond the former boundary between Italy and Noricum at Atrans. The Roman settlements along the main road from Emona to Celeia and Poetovio largely fell into decline before the mid-fifth century,¹⁷ and with their abandonment, the maintenance of the road itself ceased. Following the disuse of the route across Trojane (Atrans), one of the eastern routes likely shifted to the Tuhinjska dolina Valley. To the south, the analysis will include the area of the former Alpine barriers (*Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*) in Notranjska, while to the west it will encompass not only the Julian Alps and the pre-Alpine hills, but also the Soča Valley.

Carnium, mentioned first among the settlements in Carneola, has long been identified with present-day Kranj – primarily on the basis of name similarity and the large cemetery below it.¹⁸ In recent decades, substantial settlement finds have confirmed the existence of a large, walled settlement on the rocky promontory above the confluence of the Sava and Kokra rivers, with a large Early Christian church in the heart of the settlement.¹⁹ The finds further suggest that this was an ethnically diverse community which, uniquely within the territory of present-day inland Slovenia, may still be regarded as a town even in the Late Antique period.²⁰

The absence of the settlements mentioned in the *Cosmography* in earlier written sources is, in fact, not surprising, given the near-total discontinuity observed between Late Roman and Late Antique settlement patterns in the south-eastern Alps. The settlement landscape began to change in the final third of the third century,²¹ with the emergence of the first temporary refuges on fortified hilltop sites, followed by the fortification of the region through the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* defensive system.²² In the first half of the fourth century, archaeological evidence reveals the final flourishing of Roman towns and rural settlements, while some hilltop outposts also became permanently inhabited for the first time. Thus, the area was in the Late Roman period home to numerous settlements of various types (*Fig. 1*).

The period of settlement prosperity was short-lived; by the mid-5th century, there is no longer archaeological evidence of continuous urban habitation. Likewise, most rural settlements had collapsed, with the exception of some coastal towns and sites in Istria.

¹⁶ Horvat 2020, Tab. 5, 6.

¹⁷ Collected at Ciglenečki 2023, 32–36.

¹⁸ Stare 1980; Vinski 1980.

¹⁹ Sagadin 1991; Sagadin 2008; Pflaum, Sagadin 2016; Sagadin 2017; Urankar 2021.

²⁰ Ciglenečki 2023, 111–112.

²¹ This time is also thought to mark the boundary between Roman and late Roman periods. An overview of chronologies and terminologies in Ciglenečki 2023, 11–13.

²² Šašel, Petru 1971, 11–15; Kos 2012; Kos 2014; Kusetič et al. 2014; Ciglenečki 2015; Ciglenečki 2016.

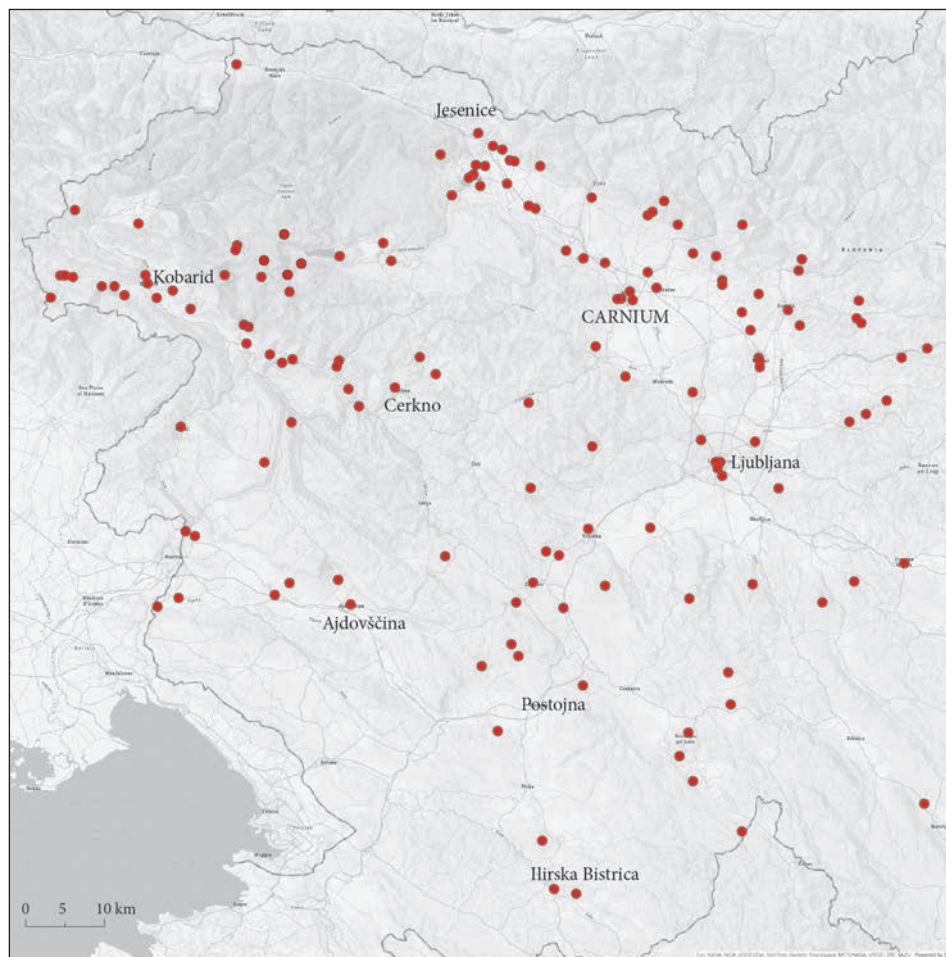


Fig 1: Settlement of the area in question between the middle of the 4th and the end of the 6th centuries. Source: <https://zbiva4.zrc-sazu.si/>; <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12102/Arkas>

During the Ostrogothic rule – and even more markedly in the second half of the 6th century – the territory of inland western Slovenia featured only Carnium and a number of fortified hilltop settlements of varying forms and functions, alongside modest rural lowland habitation. Among these elevated fortified sites, we may search for the settlements listed in the *Cosmography*. Yet, with the exception of Carnium, all of these sites disappeared with the end of Late Antiquity or following the Slavic settlement of the region, preventing their names from being transmitted into the medieval period.

According to the current state of research, there are about 30 known sites in the

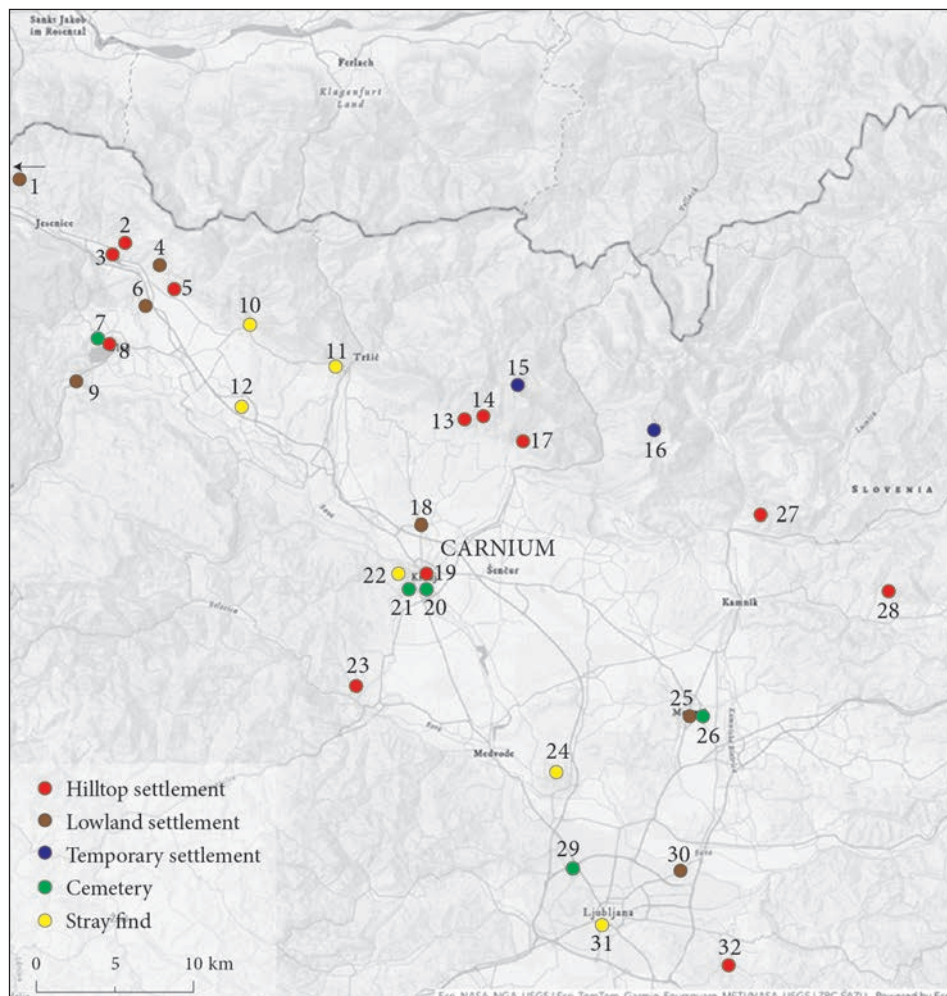


Fig. 2: Archaeological sites in Gorenjska and the Ljubljana Basin, mid-5th to late 6th century. Source: <https://zbiva4.zrc-sazu.si/>

1 – Žale (Rateče); 2 – Ajdna; 3 – Gradišče (Soteska); 4 – Žirovnica; 5 – Sv. Lovrenc (Zabreznica); 6 – Sv. Radegunda (Breg); 7 – Grad (Bled); 8 – Pristava (Bled); 9 – Sv. Marjeta (Bohinjska Bela); 10 – Previs pod Jamarskim vrhom (Begunje na Gorenjskem); 11 – Bistrica pri Trziču; 12 – Mošnje; 13 – Sv. Lovrenc (Bašelj); 14 – Gradišče (Bašelj); 15 – Kališče (Bašelj); 16 – Dolga njiva (Kokra); 17. Sv. Jakob (Potoče); 18 – Sv. Tomaž (Britof); 19 – Kranj / Carnium; 20 – Lajh; 21 – Sv. Martin (Križišče Iskra); 22 – Šmarjetna gora; 23 – Puštal (Trnje); 24 – Šmarna gora; 25 – Mengeš; 26 – Zavrti (Mengeš); 27 – Sv. Primož (Črna pri Kamniku); 28 – Sv. Miklavž (Gradišče v Tuhinju); 29 – Dravlje; 30 – Dragomelj; 31 – Ljubljana; 32 – Molnik.

area of present-day Gorenjska and the Ljubljana basin,²³ where finds confirm their use between the middle of the 5th and the end of the 6th century. These include a few stray finds (primarily coins), several cemeteries, and 18 settlements (Fig. 2).

The settlement is particularly dense in the vicinity of Kranj, where several fortified hilltop settlements have been identified, and some scholars have attempted to associate the first six settlements listed after Carnium in the *Cosmography* with them. Andrej Valič hypothesized one such settlement on the hill of Sv. Jakob above Potoče.²⁴ Timotej Knific expanded the list to include Gradišče above Bašelj, Sv. Lovrenc above Bašelj, Šmarjetna Gora above Kranj, Puštal above Trnje, and Šmarna gora. The settlement on Šmarjetna gora has not yet been archaeologically confirmed, and is inferred based on a cemetery below it, while Šmarna gora is included due to its strategic location and stray finds.²⁵ Puštal controlled access to the Selška dolina Valley and the route towards the Soča region, with finds indicating a strong presence at the end of the 5th and into the 6th century.²⁶ A similar function may be ascribed to the fortified site on Sv. Jakob, which controlled the entrance to the Kokra Valley and, via Jezersko / Seeberg, access to Noricum.²⁷ Although Gradišče is more remote and less strategically placed, it may have been linked to minor mountain passes towards Carinthia,²⁸ as suggested by one of the rare high-altitude sites in the Karavanke at Kališče.²⁹ Sv. Lovrenc, given current findings, appears to have had a more refugial character.³⁰

While it is currently difficult to confirm whether all the aforementioned sites are among those listed in the *Cosmography*, both Puštal and Sv. Jakob exhibit several features – such as strategic positioning and indications of the presence of foreign ethnic groups – that support this possibility.

The Upper Sava Valley is thought to correspond to the “valley”, mentioned in *Cosmography*, where most of the remaining settlements should be sought. Although ten sites in the Upper Sava Valley show evidence of settlement or use during the 6th century, few appear to correspond to geographer’s *civitates*. The only substantial settlements in the area were Ajdna above Potoki and Bled Castle.

The settlement at Bled Castle (Blejski grad) lay somewhat removed from the main routes in use during the 6th century. Its structure and function remain largely unknown, though its extent seems significant, covering the western peak, the saddle, and

²³ Due to differences in settlement patterns, the text distinguishes between Gorenjska (roughly north of the confluence of the Sava and Sora rivers) and the Ljubljana Basin (Ljubljana and its wider surroundings), although geographically the Ljubljana Basin also covers a large part of Gorenjska.

²⁴ Valič 1990.

²⁵ Knific, Lux 2015.

²⁶ FMRSI III, 71/16; Ciglencečki 2006; Ciglencečki 2015, 419; Knific, Lux 2015, 36–37.

²⁷ Valič 1990; Valič 1999.

²⁸ Knific 1999; Valič 1999; Karo, Mlekuž 2015.

²⁹ Horvat 2020, 23, Tab. 4.

³⁰ Knific, Lux 2015, 39–39; Karo, Mlekuž 2015, 35–36.

the eastern peak.³¹ It is dated to the 6th and early 7th centuries, primarily on the basis of an associated cemetery at Pristava,³² which reveals a strong indigenous component and few connections with Gothic or Lombard newcomers. This dating is corroborated by two Byzantine coins found at the presumed settlement site – one of Justinian and the other of Heraclius.³³

The site at Ajdna, in contrast, is smaller and perched on a naturally well-defended hill high above the Sava Valley.³⁴ It likely controlled, together with a smaller outpost at Gradišče above Soteska, a key communication route running northwest from Carnium along the Sava River.

In addition to the mentioned fortified hilltop settlements, there are a few modest remains of lowland habitation at Breg pri Žirovnici,³⁵ Bohinjska Bela,³⁶ and Rateče.³⁷ The absence of sites from this period in the Bohinj basin is surprising, as this is where the old prehistoric connections with the Posočje region run, which were still in use at least in the late Roman period.³⁸ While these routes were probably not entirely abandoned later, they no longer required state (i.e., military) control or provisioning, and thus leave only faint traces in the archaeological record.

Two finds of Byzantine coins – from Mošnje and Bistrica pri Tržiču³⁹ – lack broader archaeological context, with no other finds from this period known in the vicinity. These coins may relate to the route along the Sava River (in the case of Mošnje) and the road that branched off towards the Ljubelj Pass (in the case of Bistrica pri Tržiču).

The area east of Carnium is the most easily traversable, being largely flat. It is therefore striking to find evidence of 6th-century lowland habitation in Mengeš, where the remains of pit-houses – resembling those found in Kranj – have been discovered.⁴⁰ A few contemporaneous graves were also uncovered nearby.⁴¹ In the more remote hilly landscape below Velika planina, traces of Late Antique settlement are known from Sv. Primož above Črna pri Kamniku,⁴² and in the Tuhinjska dolina Valley from Sv. Miklavž above Gradišče.⁴³

The area south of Carnium is not thought to be part of Carneola, as Emona (present-day Ljubljana) is listed in the *Cosmography* (under the name Atamine) as a town

³¹ Knific 2004, 102; Knific 2008; Pleterski 2008, 159–161; Jerala, Orehek 2017; Gaspari et al. 2019.

³² Knific 2004, 102; Pleterski 2008, 159–161.

³³ FMRSI IV, 51/9; FMRSI V, 46.

³⁴ Leben, Valič 1978; Sagadin 1987; Vidrih Perko, Sagadin 2004, 219–221; Sagadin 2006a.

³⁵ Sagadin 1996; Sagadin 1998; Sagadin 2000, 151–152.

³⁶ Leben, Lux 2007.

³⁷ Sagadin 1993, 140; Sagadin 1998, 719.

³⁸ Ciglencečki 2011a.

³⁹ Mošnje: Jamnik 1995, 180–181; Bistrica pri Tržiču: FMRSI III, 72.

⁴⁰ Sagadin 1995; Sagadin 2020.

⁴¹ Rozman, Podobnik 2024.

⁴² Cevc 1997.

⁴³ Sagadin 2006b.

in Valeria.⁴⁴ However, this classification is likely derived from a source dating to the early Imperial period and does not reflect the actual situation in the mid-6th century. The Geographer probably copied the list of stations between Siscia and Emona, but did not take into account the border crossing between Savia and Venetia and Histria east of Višnja Gora.⁴⁵ This section does not reflect the actual situation in the mid-6th century, when the boundary between Carneola and Valeria likely ran south of Emona.⁴⁶ By this time, Roman Emona had already been abandoned, with only sporadic finds reported from the area. A small cemetery from the late 5th and early 6th centuries in Dravljje, attributed to the Ostrogoths,⁴⁷ may suggest that the road from Emona to Carnium was still under surveillance (Fig. 2).

According to the alternate name for Carneola, as recorded in the *Cosmography – Alpīs Iulīae* – most researchers assume that it also encompassed the territory of the Late Roman fortifications known as the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*. However, a marked decline in settlement is evident in the area of present-day Notranjska after the end of the 4th century (Figs. 1, 3). At that time, the defensive barriers lost their military function and were subsequently abandoned. Some settlements in the hinterland (e.g., Šmarata, Rodik, Štanjel, Povir) appear to have remained inhabited until the mid-5th century,⁴⁸ yet by the 6th century, only two settlement sites are known in the entire region of present-day Notranjska: a hilltop settlement on Križna gora⁴⁹ and a cave settlement at Predjama.⁵⁰

The remains of an early Christian church with an apse were also discovered beneath the current Church of St Martin at Šilentabor.⁵¹ The associated settlement was probably located on the nearby site of Gradišče at Šilentabor, from which a shield-shaped belt buckle pin was recovered as a stray find.⁵² A solidus of Emperor Zeno is said to have originated from Ulaka near Stari Trg pri Ložu, though the location is not reliable.⁵³ That the area was not completely deserted is further suggested by the discovery of solidi of Emperor Justinian at Trnovo near Ilirska Bistrica, likely part of a hoard.⁵⁴ In addition, a number of inhumation burials without grave goods, radiocarbon-dated to Late Antiquity, were found at the nearby Gradišče above Trnovo.⁵⁵

The described depopulation of the area in Late Antiquity indicates a loss of its stra-

⁴⁴ *Cosmographia* 4,20.

⁴⁵ Bratož 2014, 392.

⁴⁶ Bratož 2014, 392; Wolff 2000, 99, 103.

⁴⁷ Slabe 1975.

⁴⁸ Vidrih Perko, Župančič 2005; Modrijan 2023.

⁴⁹ Urleb 1968; Modrijan 2023.

⁵⁰ Korošec 1956.

⁵¹ Božič, Ciglencečki 1995, 256–257.

⁵² Laharnar 2022, 89.

⁵³ Božič, Ciglencečki 1995, 262; FMRSI IV, 42, 132; Laharnar 2022, 225.

⁵⁴ FMRSI I, 77/2.

⁵⁵ Bavdek, Tecco Hvala 2025, 146–148. Although there were 20 inhumation burials within the prehistoric cremation burial site, only three have been radiocarbon dated.

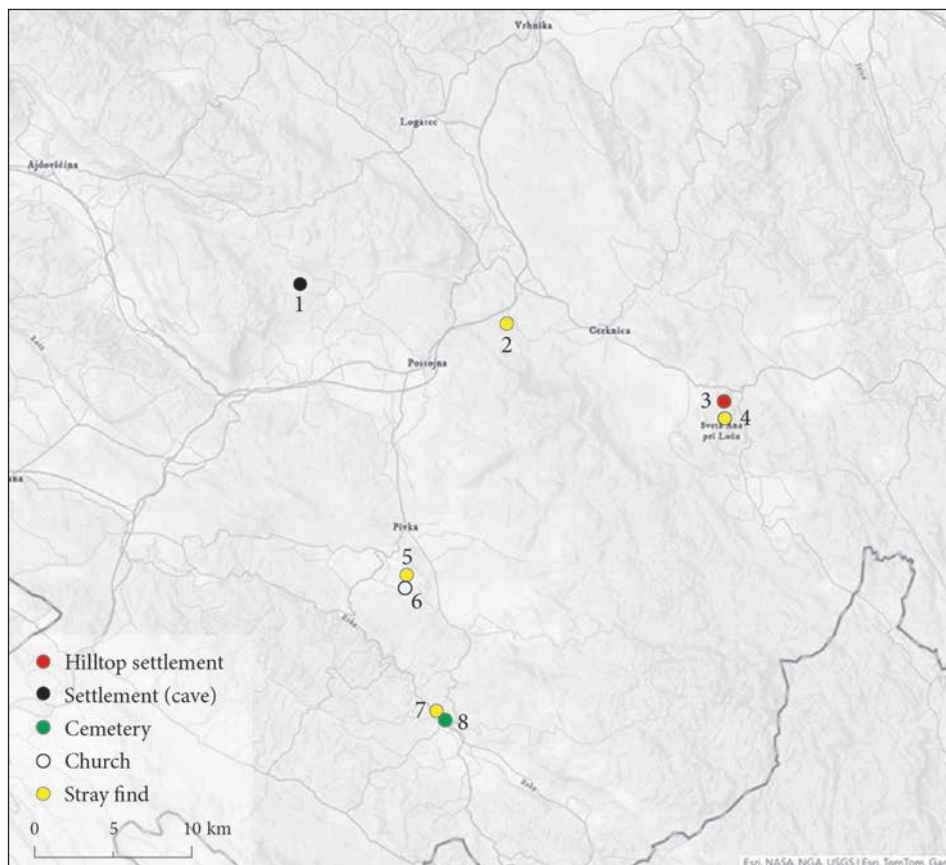


Fig. 3: Archaeological sites in Notranjska, mid-5th to late 6th century. Source: <https://zbiva4.zrc-sazu.si/>
 1 – Jama pod Jamskim gradom; 2 – Sv. Kancijan (Rakov Škocjan) 3 – Križna gora; 4 – Ulaka; 5 – Gradišče (Šilentabor); 6 – Sv. Martin (Šilentabor); 7 – Trnovo (Ilirska Bistrica); 8 – Gradišče (Ilirska Bistrica).

tegic significance following the end of the Late Roman period, a conclusion further supported by the absence of any significant role for this territory in the Byzantine-Gothic War, according to available sources.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, a few settlements endured in this largely deserted landscape, presumably overseeing routes to the east and south. Their integration into the state system of Late Antique territorial control is evidenced by finds of Mediterranean transport amphorae⁵⁷ and Byzantine coinage.

It appears unlikely that one could identify 25 settlements in Gorenjska and Notranjska worthy of inclusion on such a list. Is it therefore feasible to extend the search west-

⁵⁶ Bratož 2014, 391.

⁵⁷ Vidrih Perko, Župančič 2005; Modrijan 2023.

wards? The reading of the *Cosmography* passage as “in the valley of this land” has traditionally limited a significant portion of Carneola to the Upper Sava Valley. However, interpreting it as “in the other part of this land” opens the possibility of considering regions beyond the Alps and the Idrija-Cerkno Hills, up to the Soča Valley (Fig. 4). Important communication routes from Gorenjska to this region existed as early as prehistory. These routes ran along the Sava Bohinjka River and over Alpine passes, through the valleys of Selška dolina and Poljanska dolina,⁵⁸ all converging along the River Soča and continuing towards Friuli. These routes lost some of their importance with the establishment of several new roads during the Early Roman period,⁵⁹ leading to a general decline in the strategic relevance of the region. It is not known whether the region belonged to the urban area of Forum Iulii or Emona in the Roman period.⁶⁰

The importance of the ancient connections between the Soča Valley and central Slovenia – routes that, unlike those of the Roman period, followed naturally advantageous terrain and thus required less maintenance – was revived in the Late Roman period. Their course is confirmed by the northern section of the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* system,⁶¹ several other outposts established in strategic locations, and stray finds from this era.⁶²

The decline in settlement during the latter half of the 5th and into the 6th century in the Soča Valley was not as pronounced as, for instance, in Notranjska. During this period, a considerable number of settlements – both hilltop and lowland – existed on both banks of the River Soča. Burial grounds, stray finds, and even seasonal dwellings in the highlands (Fig. 4) are known from this area.

The central settlement of the Upper Soča Valley during Late Antiquity was located at Tonovcov grad above Kobarid. In the 6th century, it fulfilled the administrative, ecclesiastical, and defensive functions of the wider region.⁶³ It oversaw the road along the River Soča via the Predel / Predil Pass, and also controlled an important Late Antique route towards Cividale (Forum Iulii). Smaller settlements or refuges were also situated at Veliki Gradec near Drežnica⁶⁴ and at Gradec near Logje⁶⁵ in the Breginj area. In this remoted region, life from the Late Roman period continued at the unfortified site of Na mlakah near Homec, and it is possible that the inhabitants occasionally sought refuge in the nearby hilltop settlement of Gradec near Sedlo.⁶⁶ Stray finds

⁵⁸ Ciglencečki 2011a, 260–268, Fig. 5.1.

⁵⁹ In particular, the new connection between Friuli and Noricum via the Fella Valley (Faleschini 2018, 227).

⁶⁰ Zaccaria 2007, 138–139; Bratož 2014, 390.

⁶¹ Kusetič et al. 2014, 101–102.

⁶² Ciglencečki 2011a, 259–271.

⁶³ Ciglencečki, Modrijan, Milavec 2011; Modrijan, Milavec 2011.

⁶⁴ Osmuk 1985a; Ciglencečki 2011b, 45.

⁶⁵ Osmuk 1985b; Ciglencečki 2011b, 45.

⁶⁶ Osmuk 1997; Mlinar, Gebec, Laharnar 2014, 18.

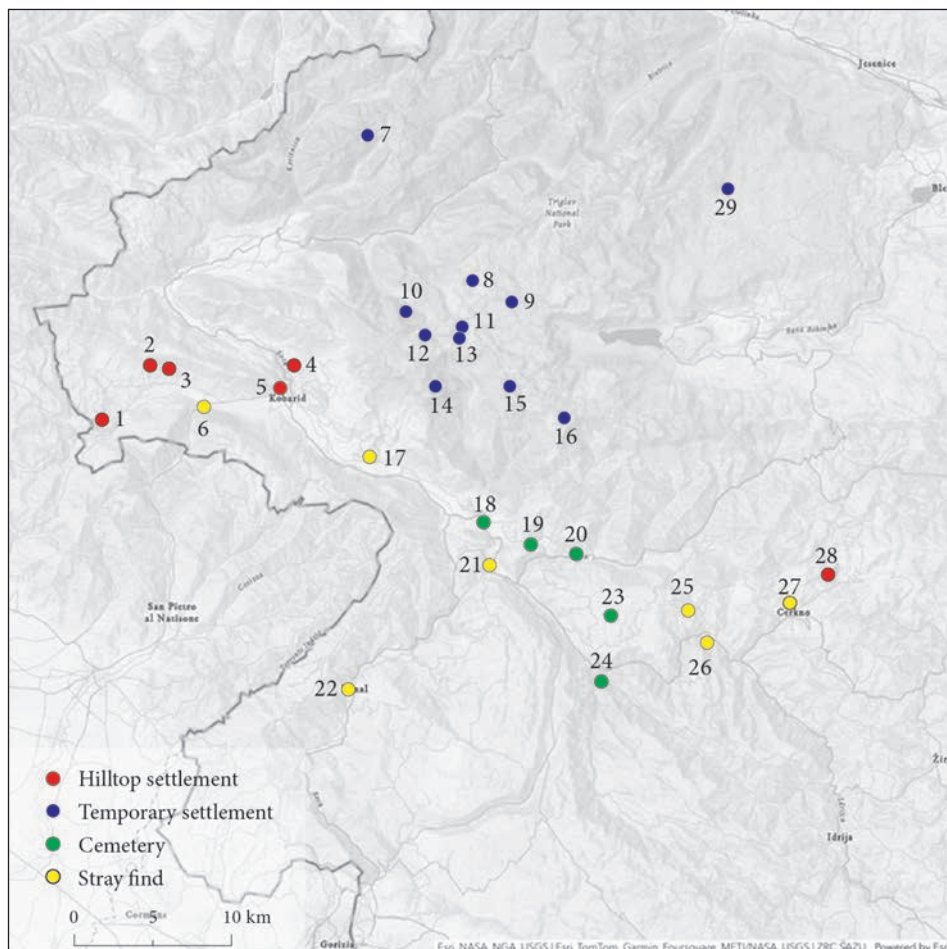


Fig. 4: Archaeological sites in Upper Soča valley and the Julian Alps, mid-5th to late 6th century. Source: <https://zbiva4.zrc-sazu.si/>

1 – Gradec (Logje); 2 – Gradec (Sedlo); 3 – Na mlakah (Homec); 4 – Veliki Gradec (Drežnica); 5 – Tonovcov grad; 6 – Sv. Volar; 7 – Lašte pod Bedinjim vrhom; 8 – Za bajto pod Čistim vrhom; 9 – Gorenja predolina; 10 – Goričica; 11 – Pod Veliko Monturo; 12 – Doliči; 13 – Mali Lepoč; 14 – Palec; 15 – Pod zelenim vrhom; 16 – Krnica pod Voglom; 17 – Selce; 18 – Rodne (Poljubinj); 19 – Na mirih (Ljubinj); 20 – Bukovčevo brdo (Podmelec); 21 – Most na Soči; 22 – Kanal; 23 – Kaplanije (Pečine); 24 – Prvejk (Dolenja Trebuša); 25 – Prhurnik (Police); 26 – Divje Babe (Reka); 27 – Gradišče (Cerkno); 28 – Mali Njivč (Dolenji Novaki); 29 – Klek.

also point to Late Antique activity at the strategically exceptional site of Sv. Volar above the Nadiža River.⁶⁷

During Late Antiquity, increasing importance was attributed to a route diverging from the River Soča near Tolmin, passing across Hum and descending via Kneža to the Bača Valley, from where it proceeded towards central area of Carneola. This route is primarily evidenced by burial sites. At its beginning near Tolmin, an older find of a Germanic grave at Rodne⁶⁸ is known, while a smaller burial ground dating from the second half of the 6th and the early 7th century was excavated at Na mirih near Ljubinj.⁶⁹ Another cemetery from the late 6th century was found on Bukovčevo brdo above Podmelec, where a nearby settlement is also presumed.⁷⁰ Yet another burial site from this period was located on the plateau of Šentviška planota at Kaplanija near Pečine.⁷¹

In the highlands of the Julian Alps, a different category of archaeological site stands out: high-mountain settlements situated at elevations between 1,400 and 2,000 metres above sea level.⁷² These were mostly seasonal dwellings, though some stray finds likely indicate the existence of routes or passes through the mountainous terrain. The habitation of high-altitude areas also indirectly confirms the presence of settlements in the lowlands.

Conclusion

From the overview presented above, it is clear that in the 6th century a relatively dense settlement network existed in Gorenjska and Posočje. Both regions exhibit a similar pattern of settlement, characterized by fortified hilltop sites, while more remote areas also reveal sparse traces of lowland habitation. Communication between these regions is evidenced by outposts at strategic locations on both sides, along with graves and stray finds.

That the central area of ancient Carneola lay in present-day Gorenjska is confirmed by the size and multi-ethnic structure of the town of Carnium and the network of surrounding settlements. These served both to house the autochthonous Romanized population and to control the territory. The same is likely true for the site of Ajdna, while Bled Castle (Blejski grad), for instance, appears more as a refuge removed from the main communication routes. None of the strategically located settlements can be interpreted solely as military outposts, and all represent a blend of civilian and military functions.

⁶⁷ Mlinar, Gerbec, Laharnar 2014, 13.

⁶⁸ Ciglencečki 2011b, 49–50.

⁶⁹ Knific 2010.

⁷⁰ Šribar 1967.

⁷¹ Knific, Svoljšak 1979.

⁷² Horvat 2020, 21–22.

In contrast to Gorenjska and the Soča Valley, the Ljubljana Basin and Notranjska in Late Antiquity experienced significant depopulation in comparison to the Late Roman period. In the Ljubljana Basin, this is undoubtedly linked to its vulnerable position on the transit route to Italy. Notranjska, however, presents a different picture: in the Late Roman period, it formed a core area of *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*, with a hinterland populated by numerous settlements of evidently mixed civilian and military use, integrated into a state-supported supply network.⁷³ The relatively large number of hoards and stray finds of Late Roman tools⁷⁴ indicate, on the one hand, a developed agricultural and artisanal economy, and on the other, confirm the instability of the period. When the territory lost its strategic significance in the early 5th century, state provisioning ceased, and most settlements were abandoned. Nevertheless, some strategically located sites – such as Križna gora, which controlled one of the alternative routes from Dolenjska towards the west⁷⁵ – persisted and, even in the 6th century received goods from the Mediterranean as part of an organized state system.

Although the data from the *Cosmography* leave many open and often unresolvable questions, the work nonetheless provides extremely rich topographical information for the territory of present-day Slovenia, which is corroborated by the archaeological record. This evidence indicates that, by the end of the 5th and into the 6th century, the region was densely populated with fortified hilltop settlements. These offered refuge to the indigenous population while allowing the authorities of the time to station small military units. Though insufficient for large-scale conflicts, these units were adequate for maintaining territorial control and securing communication routes. The boundaries of the regions in question may not have represented clear demarcations, and instead in Notranjska and the Soča Valley one may speak of a kind of transitional zone connecting with Liburnia and Venetia and Histria.

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⁷³ Vidrih Perko, Župančič 2005; Modrijan 2023.

⁷⁴ Laharnar 2022, 155, Note 153; 143, Fig. 3: 68; 147, Note 323–324; 185, Note 406–408; 317–319.

⁷⁵ Ciglencečki 1985.

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Zvezdana Modrijan
Znanstvenoraziskovalni center SAZU
Inštitut za arheologijo
Novi trg 2
SI-1000 Ljubljana
zvezdana.modrijan@zrc-sazu.si
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5097-5522>