

Defence of the Eastern Border of Northern Italy in the Early Middle Ages

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to discuss the role the territory of present-day western Slovenia played in the defence of northern Italy in the Early Middle Ages. In Slovenian early medieval archaeology, we are focused mainly on local and regional topics, but in this paper the author suggests we observe the turbulent political and historical context of the northeastern Italy in the 9th and 10th centuries. The western part of the now Slovenian territory in particular represented a significant transit area which retained an important strategic position until the southeastern border of the Holy Roman Empire moved further towards Pannonia and the Krka River Valley. In the light of the active control and defence of transport and communications by the representatives of the state, we could perhaps understand the renewed use of hilltop sites in this period.

Keywords: Slovenia; Friuli; Early Middle Ages; hilltop fortifications

Izvleček

Obramba vzhodne meje severne Italije v zgodnjem srednjem veku

Prispevek se osredotoča na vlogo obrambe severovzhodnih dostopov v Italijo, ki jo je prostor današnje zahodne Slovenije ohranil verjetno še globoko v zgodnji srednji vek, vsaj dokler se konec 10. stoletja meja cesarstva ni preselila dlje proti Panoniji. Zgodnjesrednjeveška arheologija v Sloveniji se osredotoča predvsem na notranje teme, v tem prispevku pa avtorica poskuša na današnji slovenski prostor pogledati v kontekstu politično-zgodovinskega dogajanja v severovzhodni Italiji predvsem v 9. in 10. stoletju. Obe stoletji sta Furlanijo in Benečijo zaznamovali s pestrim notranje- in zunanjepolitičnim dogajanjem, pri katerem so bile pogosto ključne povezave preko Alp. Poleg drugih prometnic so tudi tiste, ki so vodile preko današnjega slovenskega prostora, zahtevale nadzor in obrambo, saj so še vedno nudile lahek dostop do severne Italije. V luči tega dogajanja morda lahko razumemo tudi ponovno uporabo višinskih točk, ki so lahko služile najvišjim oblastem pri nadzoru prometa v dolinah.

Ključne besede: Slovenija; Furlanija; zgodnji srednji vek; višinske utrdbe

One of the many research interests of Jaroslav Šašel was the question of the defence of the north-eastern border of Italy.¹ He was mainly concerned with the Late Roman period and the phase of the Ostrogothic Kingdom in Italy, but his work also extended into the Early Middle Ages. In this contribution I would like to return to this topic and discuss why the importance of present-day western Slovenia as a frontier zone may have continued into the 9th and 10th centuries, and how this could shift our perception of a certain type of archaeological site.

Early medieval archaeologies are prone to serving as national archaeologies, and have the potential to significantly influence our mental maps.² The historically reported Slavic settlement around AD 600 might have actually had a greater impact on our perception of the period than on the people living in the region at the time. If Slovenian Late Antique archaeology is still almost as fully incorporated into research on the Mediterranean as it is that on the Roman period, then after the 6th and 7th centuries the focus shrinks within today's national borders, with the notable exception of Carantania and Bavaria. There is no getting away from the fact that the 7th and 8th centuries brought about some irreversible changes in the region, and a discontinuity in settlement patterns. But the lack of information from written sources and the general air of danger and darkness from the Slavic regions in the perception of our non-Slavic and Christian neighbours continues to foster a localized and at best regionalized view of early medieval Slovenia.

Maps of early medieval sites in Slovenia show concentrations especially in the north-west, in Gorenjska, and since the 2000s also in the north-east, in Štajerska and Prekmurje.³ These regions are historically and interpretatively linked to other Slavic lands, Bavaria and Pannonia, and have attracted the most interest among Slovenian scholars working on this period. Only recently has research in the south-east, and specifically Dolenjska, record many cemeteries and settlements, while Notranjska still remains relatively empty,⁴ and as yet both areas more or less evade inclusion into a broader historical or archaeological narrative. Istria and western Slovenia stand slightly apart in this context, with a certain amount of historical and archaeological data existing, albeit rarely linked to the main, Slavic or any other narrative.⁵ The barrier of the Slavic frontier seems to be just as impermeable when approached from the side of Italian scholarship, which very rarely attempts to cross the present-day state border. While not trying to deny the impact of the post-600 population and economic changes further to the east, I intend to argue that the mountainous eastern hinterland of Friuli, especially the Soča River Valley, was not affected by the same transformation as elsewhere on the land of today's Slovenia, and retained the political identity and transitory and defensive roles from the

¹ Šašel 1975; Šašel 1988.

² Barbiera 2010; Glaser 2015; Betti, Borri, Gasparri 2024.

³ Cf. Božič, Dular 1999, 375, Guštin 2007, fig. 1; Knific, Nabergoj 2016, 64; Mason 2018, fig. 4.

⁴ Mason 2018; Pavlovič, Vojakovič, Toškan 2021.

⁵ Among exceptions: Svoljšak 1970–1971; Svoljšak, Knific 1976; Cunja 1996; Štih 1999a; Štih 2005; Štih 2010; Boltin Tome 2024.



Fig. 1: Map of the discussed region with the main roads and sites mentioned in text. Shaded areas represent approximate extension of territorial units.

previous period. Seen from this angle, the early medieval reuse of hilltop sites can be explained by the continued need to control the access routes from the east.

In the paper I will first take a look at the road network, and make a brief historical summary of the historical and political aspects of the early medieval centuries in Friuli in order to emphasize the need for control here. I will then take a look at how early medieval finds at hilltop sites are viewed in Italian, Austrian and German research, and then present the relevant sites in present-day Slovenia and try to integrate them into the overall context.

Frontiers and roads (Fig. 1)

The territory of the Alpine passes (in the Roman sense) and the Soča River Valley represented a border territory between ‘Italy proper’ and the ‘hinterland’ for a very long time, certainly in a more pronounced way since the late 3rd century, when the *Claustra* fortification system began to be constructed. Even if in certain periods, for example during that of Ostrogothic rule, the frontier function was less in the foreground, the transitional character of the territory remained just as important. The Lombard Kingdom again bordered on the Avars and Slavs in the same area, while

the Carolingian conquests blurred the political borders for a while within the large March of Friuli.⁶ But after the system of large Carolingian political units and partly independent Slavic polities on its borders fell apart in the 9th century, the territory was again (on) the north-eastern border of an Italian kingdom. The sources do not reveal the exact administrative organization of the region, but according to most authors either the Soča River Valley or the Alpine passes represented the frontier of Italy,⁷ although some authors push it as far east as the Upper Sava River Valley.⁸

The main roads across the Central Alps ran along the Reschen, Brenner and Tauern Passes (and others in western Alps).⁹ In the eastern Alps the Monte Croce Carnico Pass road was the main link between the sea and central Europe in the Roman period, but it needed regular maintenance as it runs at an elevation of 1,357 m.a.s.l. Several authors stress the rising importance of once secondary roads between northeastern Italy and Styria, Carinthia and Carniola in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, such as the Val Canale/Valle del Ferro road with the Camporosso Pass (816 m.a.s.l.) and the Predel Pass road (1156 m.a.s.l., passing the Upper Soča Valley and Cividale) with the fork across the Škofja Loka–Cerkno hills (Škofjeloško hribovje, Cerkljansko hribovje) towards the Upper Sava Valley and Kranj. These were commercial links, providing Friuli with northern goods and allowing Mediterranean goods to continue travelling north, as they had since Strabo's time. Historical sources also mention travellers, pilgrims and military conflicts along these routes.¹⁰ For Friuli and Cividale these roads – and the road through Vipavska dolina – were crucial, as were the eastern Alpine passes. It is also important to remember that these roads continued towards the coast and the recovering Aquileia, temporary Comacchio and rising Venice, thriving on (maritime and) river transport, and the long-distance trade across the Alps. In this context it is important to stress that late 10th century toll stations were situated in Cividale (and Aquileia), indicating the preference of the Predel road over the one along Val Canale and Valle del Ferro. In the early 11th century the opening of iron mines in Carinthia prompted the reconstruction of and renewed preference for the Val Canale/Ferro road.¹¹

On the present-day Slovenian side along the above-mentioned corridors between Friuli and Carniola, we find early medieval (hilltop) sites, unfortunately most often evidenced by metal detector finds with little or no context. These sites are difficult to integrate into the standard narratives focused on the local and regional situation in Slovenia, a fact reflected in the many different interpretations offered.¹² This in order

⁶ Štih 1999b.

⁷ E.g. Štih 1999b, 121; Dolinar et al. 2011; Cavada 2016, fig. 1; Nabergoj 2017.

⁸ E.g. Barbiera 2010, 189.

⁹ Heitmeier 2013, fig. 1.

¹⁰ Kosi 1998, 245–247; Magrini, Kruh 2007, 184–485; Faleschini 2013; Oitzl 2018, 89; Minguzzi 2023, 31.

¹¹ Minguzzi 2023.

¹² Macháček, Pavlovič 2018; contributions in Diesenberger, Eichert, Winckler 2020 with further bibliography.

to develop my argumentation, I need to mention very briefly the political situation in northern Italy in the 9th and 10th centuries.

Friuli after the early Carolingians

After the death of Louis II in 875, the Italian throne was empty. The candidates for a new king were the great-grandchildren and even great-great-grandchildren of Carolingians along the female lines. Among the most ambitious was Berengar I, the second son of Eberhard, Margrave of Friuli, from a powerful Frankish family on his father's side and son of Charlemagne's grand-daughter. Even though also the Margrave of Friuli, his ambition took him to establish a more permanent base in Verona from where he managed several internal and external conflicts, with the Dukes of Spoleto, Kings of Burgundy and Provence and with his distant relatives, the Emperor Charles the Fat and Arnulf of Carinthia, even with the Moravians. Until his death in 925 he maintained numerous relations that reached across the Alps. Most of the crossings to sustain these connections, at least the ones we can assess from the locations of his allies and opponents, or actual mentions of movements in written sources, took place in the central and western Alps. The eastern Alpine area was most relevant around 900 on account of his contracts with the Hungarians who crossed between Pannonia and Carantania and northern Italy a number of times. In particular, the secondary roads in western Slovenia may have been used in their excursions from the direction of Carantania.¹³

While the battles for the Italian throne were underway more to the west, another power rose rapidly in Friuli – the Patriarch of Aquileia. Besides being a religious authority, the patriarch began to receive lands and donations from local rulers, and from a historical point of view more or less single-handedly ruled in Friuli in the late 9th and 10th centuries in the virtual or actual absence of the margrave.¹⁴

The patriarchs had been residing in Cividale from the early 8th century on. According to preserved written sources they only acquired land on the left bank of the River Soča and the area around Gorizia after 1000, but they may have had a significant political influence or even been active in governing the territory before that, as the Ottonian donations are often perceived as confirming their already existing status. Minguzzi¹⁵ even speculates that the absence of 10th century donations to the patriarch in Carnia simply means the region was already firmly under his control at the time, because of the importance of transalpine communications and the important economic role of forests and pastures. Both arguments could actually be used for our region, too.

The Upper Soča Valley lay directly behind the back of the seat of the patriarch in

¹³ Krahwinkler 1992; Štih 1983.

¹⁴ Piuzei 2000; Gasparri 2001.

¹⁵ Minguzzi 2023.

Cividale. It was particularly exposed to the outlet of the road along the Natisone Valley from the direction of Kobarid. The Vipava River Valley, most often cited as the main entrance to Italy and main incursion route, runs into the plain only about 20 km towards the south. While this admittedly remains in the field of speculation, I find it very hard to imagine that these roads were left completely unattended, unsupervised or unprotected in the centuries of severe internal and external conflict for northern Italy and Friuli.

However, in a research context this issue does not seem to be approached from this perspective in northeastern Italy, and there is a gap between two research foci, that on the Late Antique castra of the 6th century and that on the ‘incastellamento’ with firmly attestable architectural remains of the first castles not earlier than the 12th and 13th centuries. For the centuries in-between, continuity is assumed more on the basis of the repeated use of the same locations and roads than firm archaeological evidence at individual sites. At certain locations of later castles, 9th to 11th century finds or mentions in written sources exist, and these are interpreted as early fortifications made of perishable materials with wooden palisades or similar, which were mainly destroyed by later construction activities.¹⁶ In the sources there are a few mentions of private fortifications in the time of Berengar I, who allowed a certain Pietrus to fortify Motta del Savorgnano in 922. Most texts testify to repeated donations of properties from Berengar I and the Ottonians to the patriarch in the 10th century, but the archaeological investigations of the sites in question do not exist or are only partially published.¹⁷ Rare cases demonstrating an early medieval phase are Colle Maz  t, along the road to Monte Croce Carnico / Pl  ckenpass, Motta di Savorgnano overlooking the River Torre, and 7th and 8th century finds from destroyed contexts under the Ahrensperg Castle in the Natisone Valley. On the other hand, research has until now concentrated mostly on the castle sites in the valley and foothills of this area, and the uplands or mountain valleys have received much less attention. Importantly, Italian researchers also emphasize the role of castles for controlling the waterways, and not only roads, between the Alps and the lagoon.¹⁸

Along the transalpine roads but on the other side of the Alps, in Austrian Carinthia, Bavaria and other regions of present-day Austria and Germany, historical and archaeological evidence for fortification and (re)use of earlier Roman castella and hilltops sites from the late 8th to 10th centuries is more abundant. Individual site dating and interpretations vary, the earlier cases are usually linked to either Carantanian or late Carolingian consolidation (in Bavaria after the submission of Tassilo III), or to internal political strife and power negotiations in the second half of the 9th century.

¹⁶ Baccichet et al. 2018, 944–946; Minguzzi 2019.

¹⁷ Piu  zzi 2000; Francescutto 2012, 63–64, 73.

¹⁸ Minguzzi 2023.

Sites associated with the first half of the 10th century are usually explained by the need to defend against Hungarian invasions.¹⁹

Early medieval fortifications between Friuli and the East?

In present-day Slovenia (and elsewhere in Europe) there are several cases of the early medieval reuse of prehistoric or Late Antique hilltop sites which are almost always difficult to interpret, as most of the early medieval finds had been discovered by metal detectorists. The topic has already been dealt with by several authors²⁰ and various explanations were offered, ranging from settlements, Carolingian fortifications, forts of local Slavic elites, refuges or votive/sacred sites. And most certainly, one explanation will not fit all sites. My attempt at interpretation includes four of these sites in the hinterland of Friuli, namely Tonovcov grad near Kobarid, Gradec near Drežnica, Gradišče above Trebenče and perhaps Sv. Pavel near Vrtovin (*Fig. 1*).

Tonovcov grad above Kobarid is a well-researched and published site with well-documented Late Roman and Late Antique settlement phases. After the end of the Late Antique settlement, a phase of reoccupation or perhaps several short-term phases of reuse were established. Small early medieval finds (fittings, a knife, knife-sheath fragments, a segmented bead, arrowheads), pottery and hearths were discovered in the not fully collapsed remains of a Late Antique house, in an already empty water cistern and in one of the three churches. Several graves were also found, radiocarbon dated to the 8th to 10th centuries, positioned close to the Late Antique churches and buildings with the uppermost destruction layer covering them.²¹

Gradec near Drežnica is located in the Upper Soča Valley, a narrow rocky ledge protected by sheer slopes above the Kozjek stream on one side and a rampart on the other. Ciglencečki reported finding Late Antique pottery at the site, and interpreted it as a possible refugium in the sixth century.²² At that time Tonovcov grad represented the central settlement of the region, positioned just across the River Soča with good visual connection to Gradec. After a number of early medieval metal finds (militaria, but also tools, keys and accessories) had been discovered, Gradec was excavated to a small degree and yielded further early medieval material, including pottery and animal bones. The results of excavations are not yet fully published, but the early medieval phase was dated to the 9th and 10th centuries.²³

Tonovcov grad and Gradec above Drežnica form a pair on both sides of River Soča, with one having a more pronounced settlement and burial function while the other

¹⁹ Gleirscher 2000; Gleirscher 2012; Eichert 2012; Ettel 2014; Kühtreiber, Obenaus 2017; Later 2020.

²⁰ Ciglencečki 1992; Osti 2009; Maurina, Postinger 2012; Diesenberger, Eichert, Winckler 2020.

²¹ Ciglencečki, Modrijan, Milavec 2011; Milavec 2020; Milavec 2024.

²² Ciglencečki 2011, 43–44, figs. 1.26–1.27.

²³ Knific et al. 2021, 41–45; Karo, Knific 2020, 196, Pl. 12.

has more of a refuge/control natural predisposition and finds. Together they could supervise and close the Soča Valley at the point where it narrows significantly at Kobarid. Gradec near Drežnica also overlooks the natural pass towards Drežnica plateau below the Krn mountain range which probably offered relatively favourable settlement conditions and the transition towards summer mountain pastures, which may have represented an important part of the economy in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.

Gradišče above Trebenče lies in the Cerkno hills, the mountainous region between Soča River Valley and Carniola. A large number of metal detector finds have been discovered here, including horse and rider's equipment, weapons, tools, keys, accessories and pottery. The dating of the finds covers a large span between Late Antiquity and the Late Middle Ages, with a strong emphasis on the second half of the 9th to early 11th centuries.²⁴ Gradišče above Trebenče is located at a communications hub roughly at the watershed of Soča and Sava rivers, along the shortest route between the Bača Gorge and the Poljanska Sora Valley with its continuation towards Carniola. This area played an important part in road control in crucial parts of regional history, in the Augustan conquests and the organization of Late Roman *Claustra* (e.g. the nearby site of Mali Njivč near Novaki).²⁵ Perhaps it was even a part of the *no man's land* between Friuli and Carniola? This could be indicated by the western border of the Carniolan land Emperor Otto II gave to the bishop of Freising in 973, which lies only a few kilometres to the east from Trebenče.²⁶ Similarly, the medieval border between the patriarch's and the Freising territory was at Kladje, located ca 12 km to the south-east from Trebenče as the crow flies. Kladje represents the highest section of the Carniola-Friuli road running from Škofja Loka to Cerkno, Zakriž, and on to Kojca and the Bača Gorge, thus passing Trebenče.²⁷ It is not impossible that Trebenče was already on the patriarch's territory. As these are only speculations, the map in *Fig. 1* retains the more conservative limits of early medieval Carniola and Friuli.

The small finds of all three sites are roughly similar in that militaria (arrowheads, large knives and knife sheaths, belt set parts, horse tack, spurs, stirrups etc.) is found at all of them, but in various quantities. There are also agricultural and woodworking tools and miscellaneous household equipment (keys, needles, hinges, pottery). It is precisely these categories of finds that – despite the lack of remains of any permanent buildings on the surface – indicate that some sort of buildings in perishable materials existed at these hilltops, even if they seem extremely difficult to detect. They also seem to indicate at least periods of everyday life at the sites.

The more datable finds at all three sites span between two to four centuries, from the late 8th to 11th centuries with an emphasis on the second half of the 9th and the 10th.

²⁴ Karo, *Knific* 2020, 194; Bitenc, *Knific* 2021.

²⁵ Istenič 2015, 373–374.

²⁶ Bitenc, *Knific* 2021, 202.

²⁷ Kosi 1998, 248.

In my opinion this shows a prolonged, probably periodical use of these locations, and not only in Carolingian period. It is vital to note that material dating to significantly earlier and later periods is also found at some sites, such as Late Antique and late medieval finds from Gradišče above Trebenče,²⁸ which shows just how precarious interpretations of partially published sites can be.

Sv. Pavel above Vrtovin is located in the lower Vipava River Valley, on a prominent rocky plateau that is easily visible from afar and with an excellent view of the valley. Small-scale excavations and recent surveys have revealed the remains of a large settlement with defence walls, terraces with buildings and at least two or three churches. Dating is sketchy, a 6th century main settlement phase seems confirmed,²⁹ while the later use is documented by at least one grave (Grave 4)³⁰ and a part of a glass goblet which can most probably be dated to the 9th century and was found in an early medieval context.³¹ Individual early medieval finds without context may not be enough evidence for a more intensive or prolonged use in the period under discussion, but they deserve a mention. Horse and rider's equipment, arrowheads, keys and coins, specifically dirhams from late 8th and 9th centuries, have been discovered.³² These add an element of status and perhaps trade to the site, both of which are not surprising given its location on the wide threshold to (and out of) Italy. The mere strategic location on the main road raises the probability that we are once again looking at a post, perhaps even a settlement, which functioned in the early medieval period with a rather definite goal of control, and perhaps also a temporary refuge for the lowland population, some of which is attested under the hilltop (Gojače).

Discussion

The archaeological evidence for the Upper Soča Valley and the mountains to the east of it does not show a dense settlement pattern. Even more, the presented sites are more or less the only early medieval sites apart from individual finds and later graves around churches which appear from the 10th century on.³³ The early medieval settlement density is slightly higher in the Vipava Valley, but not significantly.

In my opinion the sites described above could fit into a system of early medieval defence of Friuli against external threats from the north-east and east, but also control of the roads for civil purposes. A late 10th century source indicates the Predel Pass

²⁸ Bitenc, Knific 2021.

²⁹ Svoljšak 1985; Ciglencečki 2021; Ciglencečki 2024.

³⁰ Svoljšak 1985; Milavec 2024.

³¹ Milavec 2018.

³² Bitenc, Knific 2015.

³³ Knific, Mlinar 2014.

road was also a commercial link between Carinthia and Friuli,³⁴ and the potential civil and logistic function of this route must not be forgotten.

These need not have been permanently manned forts. The cavalry attested at these locations could have been dispatched in times of danger, periodically, not continuously, over centuries, perhaps until the border zone moved further towards the east.³⁵ After the Hungarian incursions ended under Otto I and the administrative situation began to change considerably, the stabilization allowed for lowland settlement (so far mainly evidenced by 10th- and 11th-century graves around churches) and reduced the need for hilltop control. It is important to bear in mind that not even all the metal detector finds have been published so far, so the picture necessarily remains incomplete and the total time-span of the use of individual sites unknown. As already discussed by Špela Karo, the period of Hungarian invasions was decidedly one when Europe took protective measures against the attackers.³⁶ In the archaeology of the lands on the other side of the Alps, authors are not afraid to make the connection when faced with similar sites and finds as we are discussing here. The different geography allows for different fortification systems, mainly earthen ramparts and wooden palisades. Some forts are even mentioned in written sources.³⁷

The naturally and sometimes artificially fortified sites existed in the region discussed here, some partly in ruins, but still in strategic positions in relation to the road system. In the case of Tonovcov grad and Gradec near Drežnica we can perhaps even observe the changed function of sites, the settlement perhaps retaining a periodical settlement and burial use and the previous refuge turning into an observation post. In the Škofja Loka–Cerkno hills perhaps the run of the road changed slightly over time, and thus military control moved from the Late Roman Mali Njivč to Trebenče over the centuries. And in the wide Vipava Valley Sv. Pavel offers an unparalleled position to oversee the valley and the road, and so offer protection to a large number of people if necessary.

After the reorganization on the empire's eastern frontiers in the early 9th century this region was hardly politically independent, and its role as the hinterland of the Friulian plain and transitional region between Pannonia and Italy remained (or returned), albeit now within a different political organization.

Another factor, seemingly half-forgotten in Slovenian early medieval research, is long-distance trade and the famous Amber Road, this despite the fact that foreign authors see our region as crossed by several important commercial routes, a view supported by Carolingian, Byzantine and Arabic coins, centres such as Ptuj with the bridge across the River Drava, and even early medieval finds from the River Ljubljaničica.³⁸ In the period of the rise of Venice we must not forget how close this city lay

³⁴ Kosi 1998, 245.

³⁵ Nabergoj 2017.

³⁶ Karo 2021.

³⁷ Pollak 2007; Ettel 2014.

³⁸ McCormick 2001, 369–376; Cirelli 2021, fig. 9.4.

to Slovenia even in the Early Middle Ages, and how far its influence radiated. Admittedly, when working mainly with early medieval cemeteries many questions are difficult to address, but with this contribution I wish to at least bring attention to a neighbourhood which may have influenced the region of present-day Slovenia in the Early Middle Ages, and more strongly than is currently maintained.

It would be possible to focus on the Pannonian part of Slovenia in a similar manner. The sites with the largest amount of early medieval militaria seem to be located approximately along the main corridors of previous Roman roads (for example Ljubična above Zbelovska gora), and may – in a very sketchy way – indicate an attempt to control these communications, perhaps also for logistic purposes. We tend to brush aside trade and travel along these roads and focus on local situations. But the exquisite militaria found at such sites could also have ended up on these hilltops due to a functioning trade network. The deposition pattern, sometimes interpreted as votive hoards, could just as well be the result of storing goods, for example sets of rider's equipment on the way from production centres to the consumers.

Conclusion

Early medieval reuse of hilltops in western Slovenia does not make much sense when viewed only from the Carantanian and Carniolan angle. However, by bringing into focus the political events in northern Italy and the persisting frontier/transitional function of western Slovenia, I have tried to incorporate the sites in the Soča Valley, Škofja Loka–Cerkno hills and Vipava Valley into the defence strategies of Friuli as organized by the main force at the time, the patriarch. That said, any conclusions must remain preliminary as we really know very little about some sites, and the existing information can be used to support several different interpretations.

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