

# THE TRANSFORMATIONS IN ROMAN IDENTITY IN SOUTH-EASTERN ALPS DURING THE MIGRATION PERIOD

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**Abstract:** The author<sup>1</sup> discusses some questions on the transformation of Roman identity in the south-eastern Alps and the neighbouring regions, which in late Antiquity represented an area of constant transition. How people dealt with quickly changing powers is an important point of view in the identity discourse, not so much the identity of an individual, but of a population. In the discussed territory it seems Roman identity, such as it was, gradually became something we read as mostly Mediterranean and Christian. It probably goes beyond the kingdoms that followed Rome and most probably even beyond strict 'Roman-ness'.

**Keywords:** identities, Roman, migration period, late Antiquity, south-eastern Alps

More than ten years have passed since the publication of Timothy Insoll's reader on identities<sup>2</sup> and we can confirm that identities are still a 'hot topic', perhaps even hotter, at least in late antique and early medieval archaeology.<sup>3</sup> In this contribution I shall try to discuss some questions on the transformation of Roman identity in the territory of south-eastern Alps and the neighbouring regions, which in late Antiquity represented an area of transition, migration, incursion, of arriving and leaving and also staying because of their specific geographical position. The area around the main connection roads between the eastern and western hubs of the very large Empire between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> c. constantly witnessed moves of people and armies of very different provenience and it is therefore a good case study when talking about changing identities. How people dealt with quickly changing provinces, empires, kingdoms and rulers, foreign or less foreign armies and attackers is an important point of view in the identity discourse, not so much the identity of an individual, but of a population.

To be able to discuss Roman identity and its transformations we should first define *what it actually is (or was)* in the discussed region<sup>4</sup> and *how we believe it was reflected in the archaeological sources*.<sup>5</sup> Of course a common consensus is rare. Perhaps in historical studies Roman identity could be described as a set of characteristics; citizenship, certain rights, legal status etc. that can define reasonably well a person's being Roman. I agree identities are first and foremost social constructs,<sup>6</sup> but not as flexible as to lose all relevance<sup>7</sup> so I also believe they can be discussed on the basis of written sources. But how easy will it be to find their footprints in archaeology? Again,

<sup>1</sup> *Editors' note:* The present paper was given at the conference "Facing and Transforming the Roman Tradition in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages", held at Budapest on 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> November, 2016, and hosted by the Institute of Archaeology, RCH HAS. The proceedings of the conference were published in the periodical *Antaeus* (35–36, 2017–2018). Although for organizational reasons the present study could not have been included in the proceedings of the original meeting, the editors of the present journal consider it as a most valuable contribution, for which they invited the author to

publish her paper in this periodical. We are indebted to her for accepting our invitation.

<sup>2</sup> INSOLL 2007.

<sup>3</sup> POHL–MEHOFFER 2010; BRATHER 2004; CURTA 2013; LÓPEZ QUIROGA *et al.* 2016.

<sup>4</sup> ŽUPANEK 2018; MASON–ŽUPANEK 2018 with cited lit.

<sup>5</sup> POHL 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Conf. GEARY 1983.

<sup>7</sup> POHL 2010, 12.

perhaps in the first four centuries AD and for somebody living in a Roman town, in a village or a villa, observing the laws, the cults and so on. But even if this first definition were easy to make (and I do not believe it is), things get complicated when we pass the point of the official collapse of the western part of the Empire and the end of this administrative unit, the state.

We must consider the time it first took people in newly conquered or annexed provinces to accept Roman identity (a notoriously debatable point<sup>8</sup>). How long did that last and how deep did it go? Here I am of course not speaking of the colonists and veterans but of the indigenous population of a certain region, which had had approximately 400 years to 'become' Roman so that it could, mixed with the descendants of the original Latini and the occasional Barbarian, start transforming or even losing this identity in later decades. This is not the place to further explore this question, but it defines the starting point. How and in which sense were the people I am going to talk about *Roman* in the first place? One curiously telling expression is the terminus many of us have been using rather uncritically, 'Romanized indigenous population' (*romanizirani staroselci* in Slovenian). This expression in itself carries the conviction the process of acquiring the Roman identity was not complete by the time it started to fall apart.

However that may be, these communities had been living within the Empire for approximately 450 years when the western half officially collapsed, and by outward appearances they lived and used typical Roman towns, houses, temples and were embedded in the Roman state and system to at least a very large degree, if not completely. Also the countryside gives the same impression.<sup>9</sup> So I shall take as my starting point that the "Roman-ness" was embedded firmly enough to be able to be transformed.

A very important characteristic of the territory in question when compared to other regions is the dramatic shift in settlement pattern. Between the late 4<sup>th</sup> and mid-5<sup>th</sup> c. the urban and rural lowland Roman settlements were completely abandoned. A part of the population died or was taken captive in the tumultuous period of civil wars and barbaric attacks, some migrated to the safer regions such as Italy or Istria. The rest of the population moved to naturally better defended positions on hilltops in remoter areas.<sup>10</sup> Even after many years of meticulous excavations within Roman towns and in the countryside, we still cannot conclusively show any significant signs of life in the lowlands after 450 AD at the latest, possibly even some decades earlier.<sup>11</sup> The exceptions here seem to be a few cemeteries of communities of foreigners, representatives of eastern Gothic and Lombard states, who were posted near the most important roads (Dravljje near Ljubljana; Solkan, Miren, Bilje near Nova Gorica<sup>12</sup>). The reasons for this are complex and most probably not linked only to the danger of living along the main incursion routes to Italy, but I shall leave them aside in this paper.

Due to this seemingly complete settlement shift from lowlands to hilltops, the identities linked to specific characteristics such as Roman town organization and villa economy must have undergone a rather significant change quite early on. Between the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> c. and the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. most lowland forms of living ceased to function normally (some villae even earlier) and what people remained in the region moved to hilltop sites where new settlements were built.<sup>13</sup> The time of construction of hilltop sites is difficult to pin down. They existed around year 500, a little earlier or a little later, but the process of transition between towns and hilltop sites is less than clear, not least in terms of dating. Some of them show an earlier late Roman phase also in architecture (not datable in itself); small finds put this late Roman phase to the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. at the latest.<sup>14</sup> Thus, mid-5<sup>th</sup> c. remains as a gap of transition when the abandonment of the old and the construction of the new settlements must have taken place.

This shift, even if it took some decades (a generation?) to complete and was thus not sudden, was drastic in the sense of civilisation (no more aqueducts, thermal baths, large public buildings, large scale organized food supply etc.). The change in Roman towns began earlier of course, abandonment of town quarters, instalment of graves in the disused buildings, decrease in trade and production, ravages of wars.<sup>15</sup> All these were felt, but still these were townspeople, reliant on their surroundings and long-distance trade for food and used to a Mediterranean standard of life, which the Romans brought into all parts of their Empire.<sup>16</sup> The new hilltop sites were adaptations,

<sup>8</sup> See for example POHL 2014 and DZINO–DOMIĆ KUNIĆ 2012 with further references.

<sup>9</sup> HORVAT–SAGADIN 2017.

<sup>10</sup> CIGLENEČKI 1999.

<sup>11</sup> CIGLENEČKI 2008; CIGLENEČKI 2011a.

<sup>12</sup> SLABE 1975; OSMUK 1987; KNIFIC–SVOLJŠAK 1985; TRATNIK–KARO 2017.

<sup>13</sup> CIGLENEČKI 1999, 290–292.

<sup>14</sup> MILAVEC 2017.

<sup>15</sup> CIGLENEČKI 2011b.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. WARD–PERKINS 2006.

perhaps made in a hurry, of previous refuges, based on remains of prehistoric settlements, and military posts, which were enlarged, additionally defended and equipped with the inevitable signs of time – the churches.

Before I enter the main body of text, it is necessary to point out that in Slovenian archaeology not much has been written on similar topics<sup>17</sup> and that most late antique archaeologists were and are focused on the basics, settlements and small finds. This attempt will also be coloured by the author's experience and the state of research which does not always allow identity discourse to go on as desired (see below).

I shall try to consider these four main questions:

1. Who were the people we are discussing?
2. Was 'being Roman' important to them?
3. How much of their identity can be reached through the archaeological record?
4. Do we have enough data to discuss identities in the region discussed?

### 1. Who were the people we are discussing?

In the few written sources at our disposal Latin names for the people of this territory do not change from the earlier Roman period;<sup>18</sup> we find *Romani*, also sometimes *provinciales*, *Norici*, *Pannonii*. Greek *Romei* do not really apply, since this region was never a part of Byzantine Empire long enough (probably roughly between 540s–560s) for the people to adopt this identity. Even in cases of longer rule people sometimes never adopted the identity of the rulers.<sup>19</sup>

Archaeologists call them "Romanized autochthonous/indigenous people" more specifically. This is a definition that not everybody is happy with.<sup>20</sup> I absolutely agree with H. Fehr<sup>21</sup> in that we should be more aware of the fact we are dealing with *termini technici* here, which merely help us express ourselves, and that we are not consciously trying to impose an identity onto the people whose remains we are working on.

As already pointed out above, looking at the situation broadly, it was a mixture of people to start with, they had undergone the process of Romanisation in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD. Yet still, how far Romanised were they in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. and how far in the 6<sup>th</sup> c.? It is interesting to note that historians find mentions of Illyrian language being spoken among the provincial aristocracy in 375 AD and a language of the Bes in Thrace in the 6<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>22</sup> I do not intend to argue with the Roman identity of the people on the whole. We should merely keep in mind that behind the imperial facade there was a diversity of languages, cults, ethnic and other groups, that formed various identities and sub-identities which modern scholarship sometimes attempts to identify with ethnicity or ethnicities.

Awkward as it may be, 'Romanized autochthonous people' is a modern umbrella term for those who were at home in the region under discussion, in contrast with the ones who arrived during their lifetimes. Also, those who arrived in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. century could be quite 'Romanised' and 'autochthonous' by the 6<sup>th</sup> c., such as the *antiqui barbari* from the letter of Theodoric<sup>23</sup> perhaps, or even more. Those who did not live in large groups could have been swallowed up quickly. As another example, we never mention the Jews, because we so rarely see them in the archaeological record, but they were probably present. Therefore, I propose to keep the umbrella term since the reality could have been as colourful as ours is now, and decidedly too colourful for an archaeologist to discern. The material culture in this case does not reflect all the nuances in a region so many people were crossing year after year, decade after decade.

The Roman state and the lifestyle it brought with when settling in at a given territory gave people a (sense of) common identity. After the state was officially supplanted by a Germanic kingdom the identity automatically persisted, but for how long? In the discussed area people were moving away, probably according to what they could afford. The affluent ones to Italy, Dalmatia, Istria or the coast and the less well-off built new homes on the hilltops. Looking at those people very closely, at first they were of course the same people as before. Later came those who were born on the hilltops. How did their perception of the Roman world change? We are looking at a time span of

<sup>17</sup> MIRNIK PREZELJ 1998; MIRNIK PREZELJ 2000; MIRNIK PREZELJ 2002.

<sup>18</sup> BRATOŽ 2014.

<sup>19</sup> STOURAITIS 2004, 182, 200–201.

<sup>20</sup> With further references: HEINRICH-TAMÁSKA-SYRBE 2016, 36–38.

<sup>21</sup> FEHR 2008.

<sup>22</sup> LOTTER *et. al.* 2005, 131.

<sup>23</sup> ŠAŠEL 1990; CASTRITIUS 1994.

200 to 250 years, approximately between 450–650 AD, that is 5 or 6 generations. Then again, how did it change between those generations who built the hilltop settlements and the ones who left them, probably sometime in the course of the 7<sup>th</sup> c.? Those people lived in a very different world from 450 AD. They could have felt far less “Roman” than the first generation born in the hills who, to put it more vividly, probably had their heads full of their parents’ stories of the ‘old life’.

Written documents in the early Middle Ages mention *Romani tributales* in Bavaria in 8<sup>th</sup> c. AD in the context of donations to various monasteries. What was it that made those people *Romani*? The written official language, their names? Did they speak a remnant of Latin in everyday life? Even less clear are the interpretations of *Romani* from *Breves Notitiae* where only the supposedly Roman names indicate their link to Roman-ness but they are not mentioned as *Romani*.<sup>24</sup>

## 2. Was ‘being Roman’ important to the people we are trying to study?

Which identities do we think were important to the people we are trying to study? Local, regional, Roman? Was someone from Emona (present-day Ljubljana) more an *Emonensis* or belonging to a certain village or simply ‘Roman’? It surely depended heavily on the context and the prominence of one’s identities shifted as ours do today. It shifted according to the status one achieved and the society one moved in. The hilltop people were apparently a common lot. It is assumed from the written sources that most of the elites moved away to Italy, Istria or the coast and the ones who remained were probably those who did not want to or could not move.<sup>25</sup> Thus I would argue local and regional identities were in the forefront in everyday life and even those not in every context.

What did for example people living in *castellum Carnium* (today Kranj in western Slovenia) think of their roots? How far did they remember their shared past or had they been Romans ‘since always’? Was that important to them at all? Identities are a hot topic now, but how were they relevant to the people we are dealing with in our studies? I guess a way an archaeologist can hope for an answer to these questions is by looking at how they presented themselves, never forgetting that we only see a small part of their world and through our own eyes, biases and paradigms.

Identities, and especially Roman identity, presented itself most clearly in the dichotomy with the freshly foreign arrivals (being “barbarian” as opposed to “Roman”) or in contact with the representatives of the Gothic or Lombard state (“military” as opposed to “civilian”) as they belonged to a different group of king’s subjects (or were at least perceived as such by administration), held a different social position, spoke a different language and were of a different religion.<sup>26</sup> In this case it was not so much the actual inherent feeling of belonging to an extinct Roman state as the difference from the ‘barbarian other’ that made *being Roman* important at all.

## 3. How much of their identity can be reached through the archaeological record?

What can/do archaeological sources say about identity?<sup>27</sup> What material culture do we think can reveal identities in this case? Which ones? In this paper I am interested in a common, shared identity of a region, of many communities, so I had a look at the region as a whole and tried to see what common characteristics could be discerned in what remains of the people studied. There are a few tricks at this point I believe we are not giving enough attention to. When trying to look at what messages we can read in what people left behind, we must ask ourselves about conscious and unconscious display. There are messages they wanted to convey and then there are also messages they simply forwarded to us. Architecture of ordinary dwelling structures and imported commodities I would sort into the category of unconscious display in this case. The most recognizable features of conscious display I believe are cult buildings and burial. Dress items such as fibulae (brooches) may be ambiguous – see below.

<sup>24</sup> BRATOŽ 2014, 141.

<sup>25</sup> BRATOŽ 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Note the possible existence of churches of both orthodox and Arian communities at certain hilltop sites: Rifnik, Hemmaberg: GLASER 1997.

<sup>27</sup> Through the viewpoint of the author in his or her present paradigm, of course.

Looking at **architecture** first, we can see the hilltop people were making an effort to maintain the building techniques and lifestyle similar to that of the Roman lowland settlement. This was not always successful, the more luxurious amenities (mosaics, aqueducts, sewer systems, baths) were eventually abandoned, but they did try to maintain what was available. There are attempts at central heating, sometimes failed from the beginning (Ajdovski gradec above Vranje near Sevnica,<sup>28</sup> Rifnik above Šentjur,<sup>29</sup> Kučar near Podzemelj<sup>30</sup>), there are churches covered with *tegulae* (Tonovcov grad near Kobarid<sup>31</sup>), while most buildings had roofs made of some organic material, there are stone built houses and churches (with rare exceptions), there is window glass commonly used in homes and ecclesiastical buildings.<sup>32</sup> Overall it seems these are very simplified versions of lowland settlements.

Apart from defence structures, in almost all settlements most effort and probably resources went into ecclesiastical architecture, as is the case in the whole former and still Roman world from the 4<sup>th</sup> c. on.<sup>33</sup> In my opinion, this is a very important point, an expression of the communities' priorities, which on the one hand speaks of their internal sense of what mattered, and on the other hand of what they were communicating outward. To show that you were a Christian was important, churches are the largest and best quality structures in the settlements, usually represented with at least two, sometimes more buildings. Apart from intentional statement, one also has to consider that the Church was the only organization actually present in this region and it could follow it was also most conspicuous in outward appearance. Whichever way, the result is similar, Christian identity was one of the most expressed ones in the time and space discussed here.

If we want to understand the outward message of the settlements, we should naturally take a look at who funded/built them. They were constructed probably during the still existent Western Empire or at least in the time of Theodoric's kingdom. Thus in the beginning, a central power was most probably involved, but to what extent? The only historical information for the broader region in question we can speak of is king Theodoric's advice to the people of Tridentum (Trento) to build a hilltop refuge to protect themselves from enemy attacks.<sup>34</sup> Even though Theodoric praises himself for his wise forethought to provide for the safety of his subjects, there is no indication that he helped with the execution or funding. In most cases it was probably the remnants of elites and the representatives of the church who organized and paid for the construction work. Was the community not involved at all? The varying ground plans and solutions, completely tailored to every individual settlement and adapted to the natural conditions with hardly any sign of the conquering mastery of the Roman construction of the previous centuries speak for more localised organisation. To better defend or move settlements to higher ground was a widespread phenomenon around 500 AD (earlier or later in other parts of the Mediterranean<sup>35</sup>), but it happened in different ways suited to specific cases. The tendencies appear much more functional than linked to an expression of a given community. It had to be effective and completed as fast as possible, and the individual executions varied greatly, even in the relatively small region under discussion.

The only hint for a date for an eventual restructuring of hilltop sites is the presumed short period of Byzantine presence in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> c., which in some cases could be linked to renovations and additions in architecture, mainly strengthened defences and additions to ecclesiastical buildings.<sup>36</sup> In those cases it is safe to assume some organised Eastern Roman actions were taking place, officials and military moved in the region. But the question is how far did the inhabitants identify with those people, probably speaking mainly Greek and concerned with a broader outlook the local people perhaps did not feel very interested in? Did they perceive the Byzantines as less foreign than the officials of Theodoric's and Lombard kingdoms?<sup>37</sup> This period was probably the last that connected the region to the disappearing Roman world in the western Mediterranean. It lasted a few years at most and according to archaeology it did not affect the whole territory but only the southern and western parts.

One of the main problems with trying to use **small finds** to read identities is that they do not seem to reflect the above outlined changes in time. Our typo-chronologies for late Antiquity are sometimes embarrassingly wide and '4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> c.' is often the only available dating for less specific small finds such as tools (shaped by func-

<sup>28</sup> KNIFIC 1994, 216.

<sup>29</sup> BOLTA 1981, 42.

<sup>30</sup> DULAR *et al.* 1995, 104–114.

<sup>31</sup> CIGLENEČKI *et al.* 2011, 201.

<sup>32</sup> MILAVEC 2015.

<sup>33</sup> CIGLENEČKI 2000; CIGLENEČKI 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Cassiod., *Var.* III.48.

<sup>35</sup> CIGLENEČKI 2014.

<sup>36</sup> E. g. Tonovcov grad, a spatheion with a coin of Justinian dug under the altar of the main church, dating last renovations to the ecclesiastical complex : CIGLENEČKI *et al.* 2011, 203–204.

tion), simple jewellery and architectural furnishings (see below question no. 3). In a large part of material culture nothing much changed for quite a while, but that is also interesting!

What everyday objects can tell us about identities can perhaps best be read from jewellery and fibulae.<sup>38</sup> The taste was apparently prevalently for the Roman tradition and the echo of court fashions, which is obvious in the objects no matter how modest they may be in execution (and this phenomenon persists far into the early Middle Ages). At this point we must ask ourselves how much of our preferences in things we wear are a matter of what we are used to and not at all intentional perhaps? I ask for such-and-such a ring because that is 'what rings are like' and 'always have been', not because this is the shape I specifically want and which would be seen as reflecting my self-representation as a post-Roman Roman? A part of tradition is always just being used to something and not a conscious representation of an idea. Also, how much is a shape of a brooch or an earring I can buy influenced by what is available and how much by what I actually want to wear? Who was in fact responsible for the shapes of objects (the not strictly functional ones)? We are facing in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. so many objects bearing Christian symbolism – who was responsible for that? Was it the customers, the workshops, or were the artisans encouraged to produce such forms by the most influential presence of the time, the clergy themselves? Apart from expressing 'spatial' identities, were they worn as expressions of faith, as apotropaic objects<sup>39</sup> or perhaps only decorative ones? There were no more coins with imperial propaganda widely in circulation but there is perhaps a strong Christian one in other everyday objects.

Looking at very roughly fashioned distribution maps of some types of so-called autochthonous fibulae (Greek crosses, bronze sheet crosses and birds) we see that some can mostly be found in the mountainous region (where indeed we expect the preponderance of Romanized people)<sup>40</sup> while others have different distributions limited to a geographical region (bronze sheet fibulae). Others again have an ex-Western empire-wide distribution even in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. (full-figure birds and horses).<sup>41</sup> I suppose very different reasons are behind these distributions; workshops, taste, influence? They all can be linked to Christian symbolism, but how far was that important and was it the most important factor? I seriously doubt that. Most people, I would argue, could not have afforded to be concerned with their regional identities on every day level. Pragmatism must have played a role, too, if only in the sense of preferring a certain fibula due to its apotropaic role, not necessarily as a pure expression of faith.

After the transition to the early Middle Ages we find ourselves among the ethnically and culturally mixed *Carniolenses* and Carantanians. But the symbolism and motifs on their material culture is still leaning towards the Roman/Byzantine iconography.<sup>42</sup> What does that tell us? I think it speaks of other reasons for the use of such motifs and forms. Other identities than Roman or non-Roman. Could it have more to do with fashion? Or templates on books, frescoes, coins or other available kinds of propaganda for people with little access to the outside world – or so it seems from the viewpoint of archaeology. How did images reach common people? Probably in church, only very little remains for the archaeologists of today to find. Again, the important questions are who decided about the iconography on display in the churches – and also on the fibulae and earrings. Customers or artisans or somebody else? The ones making the templates perhaps? The questions of production and workshops are more important for the identities debate than it seems. In late Antiquity and early Middle Ages of the discussed territory we do not understand how the objects came to be shaped and distributed and this represents another obstacle in understanding to what extent they could regulate what they wanted to express.

On the other hand, when looking at pottery and glass, they seem to tell a different story. In late Antiquity at least, imported goods (wine, oil) still arrived in amphorae from North Africa and eastern Mediterranean, at least until the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>43</sup> Until the mid-5<sup>th</sup> c. some pottery as such (glazed, burnished) was supplied and used in military and civilian contexts.<sup>44</sup>

The same is valid for glass. Recent studies (only two case studies so far) show that fresh supply of primary glass from the Levant and Egypt was available and recycling did not reach very high levels until the early Middle Ages. Hilltop sites produced and used the usual drinking sets of goblets, beakers and bottles and also glass lamps and window glass. In this they did not differ from the rest of the Mediterranean world.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>37</sup> In fact it is quite possible they felt no bond to the representatives of the ruling elite, cf. STOURAITIS 2014, 200–203.

<sup>38</sup> E. g. typical hilltop material: MILAVEC 2017, figs 4, 6.

<sup>39</sup> See BOLLÓK 2016.

<sup>40</sup> KNAPIČ 2005, map 1.

<sup>41</sup> KNAPIČ 2005, map 2.

<sup>42</sup> E. g. EICHERT 2016.

<sup>43</sup> MODRIJAN 2011; MODRIJAN 2014; MODRIJAN 2015; MODRIJAN, *forthcoming*.

<sup>44</sup> MODRIJAN 2009.

<sup>45</sup> ŠMIT *et al.* 2013; MILAVEC–ŠMIT 2018; MILAVEC–ŠMIT 2020; MILAVEC 2015.

Thus, at least a part of the population of hilltop sites could keep a certain way of life, cuisine if you want, that included olive oil, wine, unrecycled glass vessels and windows. Such goods represented only a limited assortment of what used to be available to the inhabitants of south-eastern Alps, but were still coveted and apparently available at least to some. Recent research indicates more and more strongly they were mostly available to the representatives of the ecclesiastical organisation, who apparently had their own means of supply. It is as yet unclear to what extent these goods were available on the open market and if some of the more military sites were still supplied by the (eastern Roman) state.<sup>46</sup>

Coarse wares always reflect more regional or local relations. In the region under discussion, regional connections are discernible in the late Roman phase and much more local production in the 6<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>47</sup> As in other 'home-made' finds categories the self-reliance and perhaps a partial economic isolation of people in hilltop sites is evident.

**Burials** are naturally an important means of self-expression, in the region and time under discussion they do not differ very much from the 4<sup>th</sup> c. ones. There are no more gravestones and no more 'real' grave goods. There is a difference in types of objects we find in graves between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> c. graves, but the difference is widely similar in the whole post-Roman western Mediterranean. The graves remain modestly furnished and the deceased buried with few dress accessories in most cases, with fibulae, jewellery and belt sets or buckles, combs, spindle whorls, sometimes tools. Often of course, the dead were buried without any objects at all, at least such ones as would survive the centuries. Except in Kranj-Lajh there are no very rich burials, this difference can be linked to the castrum's regional prominence and 'international' character of its inhabitants.<sup>48</sup> Which identities are reflected in the burials? At first glance they seem to be as loosely Mediterranean as the hilltop architecture and the desire for wine and olive oil. A recent study showed very little common characteristics can be gleaned from the published cemeteries. The only group of graves with above-average grave goods proved to be women in child-bearing age, a pattern which can be observed elsewhere in late antique Europe.<sup>49</sup> The hotly discussed topic of the difference between barbarian and Romanised dress items in graves is problematic at most hilltop sites as objects from both groups appear regularly. An interesting difference can be observed in Kranj for example, with the large and very 'international' cemetery at Lajh outside castrum's walls and a small cemetery with no 'barbarian' artefacts at all on the other bank of the Sava River at Križišče-Iskra cemetery.<sup>50</sup> In this case, perhaps we can observe an actual difference in the expression of two communities, one an important regional centre and the other a small local settlement across the river.

#### *4. Do we have enough data to discuss identities in the region discussed?*

I am not questioning the relevance of the identity discourse. It is something much more basic: seeing our typo-chronologies do not seem to work all that well, that the changes in the settlement pattern are not sufficiently well dated and understood,<sup>51</sup> that a large part of material culture is possibly also reflecting other background stories, how can reliable conclusions about identities be made from the available archaeological data?

How can we, for example, discuss the people of the 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> c. when they are actually almost invisible to use archaeologically? I firmly believe should work on the foundations first and then continue. For the future, these are the topics we should devote more attention to:

- Working on the chronology, economic situation and settlement archaeology to understand the settlement changes better
- Radiocarbon dating of graves with no grave-goods to avoid the vicious circle of automatically dating them to the 'missing' 5<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> c.
- Understanding the workshops and distribution methods
- Understanding how production and distribution worked
- Understanding possible military/ecclesiastic supply of late antique sites

With more knowledge on these basic topics we will probably be able to answer identity-related questions better as well.

<sup>46</sup> MODRIJAN, *in press*; MILAVEC–ŠMIT 2020.

<sup>47</sup> MODRIJAN 2011, 205–212.

<sup>48</sup> STARE 1981.

<sup>49</sup> PAVLETIĆ 2018; HALSALL 1996, 19–20.

<sup>50</sup> STARE 1982; SAGADIN 1988.

<sup>51</sup> Overview of main problems in MILAVEC, *forthcoming*.

## CONCLUSION

Roman identity, such as it was (Roman or only Romanized), when the official end of the western Empire came, gradually became something we read as mostly Mediterranean and Christian and – with variations of course – spread all across the shores of the ex-Empire. It probably goes beyond the kingdoms that followed and most probably even beyond strict ‘Roman-ness’. Working with archaeological sources, it is impossible to say whether they saw this Mediterranean identity as ‘Roman’. It is a common identity and has been so even while the state still functioned. People accepted the best of its component parts and clung to them, then also clung to the only power that was left to provide for the people. At least that is what it looks like from the discussed viewpoint.

And the ‘others’? Present-day Slovenia was most certainly one of the most affected regions in the Migration Period due to its geography, a kind of promenade for armies and migrants alike. The region saw a large number of ‘foreigners’ since the 4<sup>th</sup> c. The hilltop sites and especially Kranj yield a very colourful mix of material culture, which seems to stem from different geographical regions and is usually linked to foreigners either conquering or maintaining their rule and peace in the newly established organizational units.<sup>52</sup> It is in confrontation with them that the ‘Roman’ or ‘non-barbarian’ identity was probably most prominent.

The difficult part of (barbarian) identity-related discussions is always the duration of an identity. Undoubtedly, people came and went and some remained. How long was the memory of that and how long was it important? What happened to identities of people who married into a different community? What was the identity of the children from such marriages and who (considering the pressure on the part of the community) actually gives one an identity or can you choose it yourself at a certain point? Necessarily, from our scholarly viewpoint we often see people as blocks but especially in such regions of transition ethnic and other identities were especially fluid and adaptable. I believe it is not naive to say that Mediterranean and Christian identities remained as a link between people that had no more Empire and lived in a series of fast changing kingdoms. In the discussed region, Theodoric’s state lasted during his lifetime, Byzantine rule perhaps 20 years, Lombard presence a little longer. For a person living through changing politics it must have been difficult and even very unwelcome to adapt to continuously changing circumstances so perhaps one preferred to identify with something that lasted and held at least a distant echo of political stability?

And, looking ‘back’ from the early Middle Ages, does the infamous reuse of late antique settlements during the early Middle Ages<sup>53</sup> have anything to do with the famous “Roman” past, or just with the past, with no ‘Roman’ added? Is it just a late perception of those sites as *lieux de memoire*, places of links with traditions and power? Or is it simply the link to stone built architecture as we sometimes see in burial practices (early medieval graves in the ruins of Roman villae<sup>54</sup>). Hope of a church as the rare stone built structure in a large part of the early Middle Ages? Is it coming back for the descendants of the people who used to live there or perhaps they developed a tradition that their ancestors came from those places a long time ago?<sup>55</sup> In some places, as had been suggested before, very old traditions and beliefs flourished, not only persisted. In other, the functionality of place perhaps overrode the other meanings.

<sup>52</sup> KNIFIC 1995; KNIFIC 2005; CIGLENEČKI 2005; CIGLENEČKI 2006.

<sup>53</sup> See e.g. papers from the International Round Table Siedlungsfund, Opfer, Schlachtrelikt? In Wildon, Austria: DIESENBERGER *et al.* 2020.

<sup>54</sup> For example 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> c. graves dug into the ruins of the Roman villa Radvanje near Maribor: ŠTRMČNIK GULIČ 1991.

<sup>55</sup> Some ideas given in MILAVEC 2012.



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