

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Identity Through the Looking Glass: How the Perception of Identity in Roman Funerary Archaeology Developed in Slovenia

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This paper addresses how the changes in Slovenian politics have been influencing the interpretation of identity in the sphere of Roman mortuary archaeology. The paper starts with an overview of the political history of Slovenia, separated into three phases: the period until 1945, the Yugoslav period (1945–1990), and independent Slovenia (1991–present). The second part of the paper focusses on theoretical studies directly discussing identity of the deceased in Roman period Slovenia. The majority of such studies is centred on the material from larger cemeteries, notably those of *Colonia Ulpia Traiana Poetovio* (modern Ptuj) and *Colonia Iulia Emona* (modern Ljubljana), of which the latter is better documented and researched. The paper concludes with a discussion of the potential for future studies.

Keywords: Roman archaeology; History of archaeology; Identity

Introduction

This article aims to examine how the context—political, cultural, ethnic, historical, personal—of the researcher as an individual human being influences their work. The idea sprouted from a study on the role of communication and linguistic theory in archaeology (Stemberger Flegar 2020), which discussed the ways in which language and communication can influence understanding of the theory. It soon became clear that language is only one of the factors which affect our understanding of the world.

Just as the notion of 'others' is informed by our own experience, so the researchers interpreting the people long gone, piecing recovered artefacts and preserved cultural traditions together, can or even inevitably do add, consciously or unconsciously, parts of their own worldview and perceptions into this interpretation. Therefore, I argue that, while the archaeological facts may be impartial, the interpretations are not. This notion is well aligned with the teachings of modern hermeneutics (e.g. by Paul Ricoeur; Thompson 1981; Kearney 1996). In order to understand where the interpretations originate from and what shapes them, one must understand the general setting in which they were formed, and at least the general mind set of the researchers.

This article is a case study of the research done on Colonia Iulia Emona, mainly in forms of catalogues or Fundberichte. While Emona is but one of many important Roman settlements found in Slovenia, it has some of the largest excavated cemeteries and is arguably the most comprehensively documented, most well-studied site in Slovenian archaeology, not least owing to its location in the centre of the country's capital—Ljubljana. Even in an international context, Emona stands out with its significantly more than 3,000 excavated Roman graves, which place it among the largest excavated Roman mortuary sites such as Viminacium. Ongoing fieldwork and research of its cemeteries continue to increase the already sizeable dataset, but beyond a handful of mentions and cursory studies, it has so far eluded international attention.

This paper aims to provide a concise overview of the history of Roman archaeology in Ljubljana, as well as its implications for the work done by modern Slovenian scholars. It is the author's hope to kindle an interest for the topic in readers not yet familiar with Emona or Roman archaeology in Slovenia. For this reason, and in order to remain within the intended scope of the article, international parallels with the material

and study of Emona are kept to a minimum. The territory of present-day Slovenia, and Emona in particular, has been a crossroads of cultural influences since the Roman period, and to understand its complexity, one has to examine the history of how Roman culture in Slovenia has been explored. During the course of the turbulent 20th century, various external and internal factors have exerted considerable influences on the development of Slovenian archaeology.

Study of the Roman Period in Slovenia

The interest in Roman culture in the territory of modern Slovenia predates the modern state of Slovenia, founded in 1991, by many centuries. Apart from the writings of contemporary Roman and Greek authors,¹ there has been a continuous interest for everything Roman-related in Slovenia since the earliest mentions in mediaeval texts and maps.

The present discussion of the history of Roman studies in Slovenia is based on Predrag Novaković's comprehensive 2002 overview of Slovenian national archaeology. It is also based on the seminal work by Ana Plestenjak (2013), which could be classified as one of the first reception studies in Slovenia, where the author discusses how Roman Colonia Iulia Emona, whose remains lie under the present capital of Slovenia, Ljubljana, was viewed under different political regimes. Plestenjak provided a detailed account of when and how the modern institutions developed, and how this influenced the research on Emona in the context of three periods of recent history (2013: 68):

1. The period until 1945
2. The Yugoslav period (1945–1990)
3. The Slovenian period (1991–present)

This basic framework is adopted here as it is immensely helpful in understanding the development of Roman archaeology in Slovenia in general.

Plestenjak's first period focusses on the evolution of archaeology from antique collecting to a modern study discipline. The Slovenian territory underwent several regime changes during these years, including Austria-Hungary (1867–1918), the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians (1918–1929; henceforth Kingdom of SHS), and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929–1945).

The earliest mentions of Emona come from the 15th century, found amongst other entries in the travel journals of Paolo Santonino (1991). Interest in Roman culture in Slovenian lands resurfaced again in the 17th century with the works of scholars Janez Vajkard Valvasor and Janez Gregor Dolničar, the latter of which recorded the first allegedly Roman graves inside Roman walls. The focus in the 17th as well as the 18th century was on specific forms of material culture, mostly epigraphy, and finds were generally described as curiosities. An abundance of finds in the late 18th century in the Habsburg Monarchy resulted in the first laws being introduced regarding historical artefacts (the first such law dates to 1782) and the first institutions being established to house them. Nevertheless, in these pioneering times not everything was being preserved in the institutions or even recorded in the territory of Slovenia. In their first versions, the laws covered only coin finds, but were expanded in 1812 to include other artefacts.

Initially, the majority of archaeological finds from Slovenian lands was sent to Vienna (Plestenjak 2013: 70). This changed somewhat in 1811 with the founding of the *Landesmuseum Joanneum* in Graz, a city in present-day Austrian Styria with much historical significance to Slovenian culture. The circumstances changed again, ten years later, when the Provincial Museum of Carniola, later also known as the *Rudolfinum*, was established in Ljubljana (it eventually became the National Museum of Slovenia in 1921, 100 years after its founding). Up until the beginning of the 19th century, however, the best finds were still going to Vienna (Baš 1955: 15), as the two regional museums were also poorly staffed and underfunded (Slapšak and Novaković 1996: 275). Alfons Müllner, who was head of the Provincial Museum of Carniola from 1889 to 1903, even reinstated the practice of transporting all new finds to Vienna. He was also at odds with many contemporary researchers, who, instead of handing their material to Müllner's museum, were sending it directly to Vienna themselves (Ložar 1941: 16–17; Gabrovec 1971: 41–42; Slapšak and Novaković 1996: 281; Plestenjak 2013: 80). Furthermore, due to various administrative errors and the reorganisation of the permanent exhibition under Müllner in the late 19th century, a large number of artefacts from both mortuary and non-mortuary sites was isolated from their original context and rearranged according to their typology without the accompanying documentation (Ložar 1941: 21–22; Gabrovec 1971: 40). In this stage of development, Slovenian archaeology was very much dependent on the decisions and actions of a handful of individuals. The arrival of Walter Schmid, who succeeded Müllner in 1905 as the head of the museum in Ljubljana, marked the beginning of a very productive period in Slovenian archaeology. Among other things,

he pushed for the preservation of certain finds *in situ* in Ljubljana, which brought him into frequent conflict with the local authorities who wanted to make space for new buildings (Plestenjak 2013: 91). Unfortunately, due to personal circumstances, he was removed from office in 1909 and left for Graz.

In the early 20th century, Slovenian intellectual life was still heavily influenced by the dominant Austrian culture, which is reflected in the language and methodologies used. The archaeological documentation from this and earlier times directly reflects the Austrian methodology that developed from historiography and antiquarian methods. The reports were written in German and, less frequently, Italian (Novaković 2002: 324), as the relatively small number of researchers who worked within the boundaries of modern-day Slovenia belonged to a much bigger institutional framework. As Božidar Slapšak and Predrag Novaković point out, the turn of the 20th century is also the time when the emerging Slovenian national movement mounted a serious challenge to the state-imposed 'German' identity (Slapšak and Novaković 1996). It is worth noting that the first three directors of the National Museum were educated in Austria and fluent in both German and Slovenian. This was typical of Slovenian intellectuals since, in the centuries of Austrian rule, a situation of diglossia had developed in Slovenian lands wherein German was the prestigious language used in formal and official situations, while Slovenian was reserved for everyday communication and was yet to fully develop as a standard and official language.

The influence of the Slovenian national movement continued growing and in 1918, after WW1, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians was established. New finds from Slovenian lands stopped haemorrhaging across the newly established border with Austria and the Provincial Museum of Carniola became the National Museum in 1921. However, the new political reality also meant that Slovenian archaeology as a discipline was cut off from the Austrian institutions, and the new capital, Belgrade, initially failed to provide an adequate state apparatus regarding archaeological heritage (Slapšak and Novaković 1996: 282). The most visible result was that the vacancy at the helm of the National Museum resulting from Schmid's dismissal in 1909 was only filled in 1928 by Rajko Ložar (Slapšak and Novaković 1996: 282–283; Nabergoj 2005: 160). On the other hand, several Slovenian institutions such as the newly-founded University of Ljubljana (1919) promoted the development of Slovenian archaeology as well as the Slovenian sense of national identity in general (Novaković 2002: 330).

The main questions of the time in terms of Roman archaeology were focussed on Roman politics, namely the location of Emona within the Empire and its geopolitical influence, as well as the presence of the Roman army.

Yugoslav Period

The Second World War inflicted a deep wound on Slovenian archaeology. Numerous scholars were either dead or had fled. The collections were also damaged as several museums were looted during the war (Plestenjak 2013: 109). The western part of Slovenia, up to and including Ljubljana, was occupied during the Second World War by Italy, likely because Ljubljana's Roman precursor, Emona, was the easternmost Roman town still located in Italy proper and not in the provinces. However, the geopolitical position of Emona within *Regio X* was definitively established in Slovenian archaeology only several decades later, in 2001, with the discovery of the Bevke boundary stone (Šašel Kos 2002; 2003). On the other hand, there are records of WW2-era German excavations aimed at proving ethnic German presence on the territory of Slovenia, and in 1941 Hitler proclaimed in Maribor 'Make this land German again' (Slapšak and Novaković 1996: 287).

In the wake of the war, Socialist Yugoslavia carried out a massive reorganisation and systematisation of archaeology on the federal level. From 1950 onwards, regular congresses were held (Korošec 1950, which resulted in prolific publications, including comprehensive studies covering the entire Yugoslav territory, as well as plans to engage the public (Korošec 1950: 214–215; Plestenjak 2013: 112). With new researchers and the new political order came a new official research focus—in the case of archaeology, this was the 'south Slavic' identity. Ironically, this 'unifying of the nations' was in certain respects eerily similar to the nationalistic ideas that predated it (Slapšak and Novaković 1996: 288). Researchers such as Grafenauer (1951) voiced their opposition to the methodological preference for Kossina's *Siedlungsarchäologie* (Slapšak and Novaković 1996: 286) as well as to the chronological preference for studies and excavations of the Slavic material (Plestenjak 2013: 94), but this had limited effect at the time. For the most part, Roman archaeology officially fell from favour in post-war Yugoslavia, but it was generally not suppressed. Particularly, excavations at Emona could not be avoided as the Roman town lay directly under the developing capital of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia. The material from Emona thus continued to be studied while also benefitting from the well-organised academic and institutional framework of Yugoslavia. From this period came extensive publications on various parts of Emona² as well as its cemeteries (Petru 1972; Plesničar Gec 1972).

The 1980s were a decade of modernisation in Slovenian archaeology and heralded the coming period. Although Yugoslav borders had never been completely shut since it was not behind the Iron Curtain, and although control had always been particularly lax in the case of Slovenia, the mobility of academics nevertheless increased in this decade as the borders were becoming increasingly permeable. New theoretical ideas and narratives were adopted, predominantly from the United Kingdom and the United States, including theoretical archaeology, methodology, and non-invasive surveys, as well as GIS. Still, these predominantly postgraduate exchanges were limited to a small circle based at the University of Ljubljana (based on Novaković 2002: 348).

A politically dictated preference for studying a particular period of history is far from unique. It is frequently related with origin myths and can play an important part in nation building (as demonstrated by various papers in Hingley 2001). However, in line with socialist philosophy, the ideological focus of Yugoslavia was on the future rather than the past. The past was described as the 'great other' (Jović 2006, 9) from which society has since progressed, but because it represents shared heritage and a common history, it could nevertheless be used for national unification.

Slovenian Period (1991–Present)

The current period began with Slovenian independence, proclaimed in 1991 when the former Socialist Republic of Slovenia left the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and transformed into the sovereign Republic of Slovenia, which functions as a parliamentary democracy. Our national heritage is regulated by the Heritage Act of 1999 (*Zakon o varstvu kulturne dediščine*). Joining the European Union in 2004 meant that European conventions regarding the protection of archaeological heritage had to be included in our legislation by 2008. Particularly the last two decades are marked by an abundance of excavations in general, and Emona in particular has received a lot of attention in the last 10 years. A significant factor promoting nation-wide excavations was the construction of motorways across the entire country, where construction work was invariably preceded by archaeological excavations along planned routes.

Publications, however, have been lagging behind. The last comprehensive overview of Roman archaeology in Slovenia, covering the period from 1965 to 1999, was written by Horvat (1999). This overview of what the author terms 'provincial archaeology' points out the progress made in excavations of the major city centres (such as *Neviodunum*, *Celeia*, and *Poetovio*). At the time this volume appeared, publications on Emona and other Roman cemeteries were still up to date, albeit predominantly either in the form of find catalogues with limited comments (e.g. Petru 1972; Plesničar Gec 1972; Istenič 1987; Slabe 1993; Bavdek 2005) or focussed on small finds. Since 1999, even excavation reports are not regularly published.

On the other hand, more general publications such as Andrej Gaspari's overview of Emona aimed at both academic and general audiences are a welcome contribution (Gaspari 2014). Other exceptions to this generalisation are also found; there are several publications discussing Roman funerary archaeology that go beyond being *Fundberichte* by exploring in greater detail one or more topics included in the catalogue. A typical example of this is Janka Istenič's study of the Western cemetery of *Poetovio* (1999; 2000), for which she recovered data from older excavations and linked them with the material stored in the Ptuj Museum. Besides providing a chronology for the graves and a good overview of the finds, the author also explores ceramics in terms of technology, firing, and clay analyses. Another comprehensive and exemplary publication is that of the villa cemetery from *Križišče* near *Spodnje Škofije*, which features extremely thorough grave descriptions including details of grave interiors and microstratigraphies, osteological and botanical analyses, as well as solid interpretations (Novšak et al. 2019). These are not the only examples of their kind, but they do stand out in their quality of research.

How do the Romans Fit In?

The most direct way in which politics has influenced Slovenian archaeology, including studies of the Roman world, has been through funding and the general organisation of the discipline. More indirectly, the various political contexts have affected the development of the discipline and its methodology. This paper is by no means the first to discuss the influence of politics on Slovenian archaeology. A very illustrative paper by Verena Vidrih Perko focussing on a Roman inscription from *Rodik* (CIL 5, 698) examines the various interpretations favoured by several researchers in different time periods and regimes concerning the very same object (Vidrih Perko 2006).

In order to differentiate between what is a product of political and personal priorities and what can be attributed to general cultural trends and 'Zeitgeist', I examined the quality of the existing data in the sense of what was written and, perhaps more importantly, what was left out of the *Fundberichte* part of the

existing data. I further examined which theoretical topics were addressed and how, so that I could attempt to reconstruct the ways in which the Romans were perceived by Slovenian researchers.

Fieldwork and Fundberichte

The earliest reports and collections focussed heavily on epigraphy, among which mortuary inscriptions featured prominently. Up until the 20th century, ancient inscriptions were frequently incorporated into buildings such as the Ljubljana Cathedral, where it can still be seen today. They were recognised as something important, but in the beginning there was no museum in which they could be stored, hence they were displayed in prominent locations. Apart from the research of the epigraphic evidence, mortuary archaeology was of secondary importance to early Slovenian scholars due to several factors (see below). With the cultural influence of Ljubljana growing, the main archaeological discussions centred around the political significance of Emona and its geographical location. The main issues of the time were whether or not Emona was in Ljubljana itself (Müllner wrongly located it to the immediate south of Ljubljana, in a settlement called Ig), whether or not it was in Roman Italy or one of the provinces, and what its significance was to the Roman military. Cemeteries that were excavated under Karl Deschmann (alternatively Karel Dežman), the first head of the Provincial Museum of Carniola, and Müllner were only partly published in the form of notes with many illustrations lacking (Petru 1972: 7). Additionally, the documentation of several excavated sites was probably lost (as assumed on the basis of excavation diaries and notebooks by e.g. Balduin Saria, see Petru 1972: 7).

Funerary archaeology, especially at Emona, came to the forefront after two comprehensive catalogues were published in 1972, covering all excavations up until then. The majority of my data comes from these two major publications. The first is Sonja Petru's (1972) compilation of all known excavation reports between 1635 and 1960. The material was partly sorted by Jaroslav Šašel, whom she replaced at the National Museum (Petru 1972: 7). Petru attempted to link the catalogued artefacts stored in the National Museum whose documentation was lost with the excavations during which they were unearthed. Accordingly, graves from Petru's publication are usually referenced with the NM (Narodni muzej, i.e. National Museum) prefix in Slovenian publications. Her volume covers the work of several authors and is separated in four parts. The earliest excavations that took place between the 17th and 19th century were rightfully treated by Petru as amateur antiquarianism (Petru 1972: 7, 123–129). The first systematic excavations took place under Alfons Müllner in 1898 at two major sites called Graisarjev travnik (Petru 1972: 101–110) and Lenarčičev travnik (Petru 1972: 91–101), two relatively small areas alongside the main Roman road leading north from Emona. Major excavations took place under Walter Schmid, who excavated the site known as Titova cesta (a road now named Slovenska cesta in Ljubljana) that encompasses large parts of Emona's northern cemetery (Petru 1972: 28–90). He planned to publish his finds in the form of a catalogue, but his manuscript was destroyed during World War I. His notebooks and field reports are handwritten in German and stored in Graz's Joanneum to this day. Petru notes that several precious and promising objects seemed not to have been stored properly and are now lost (Petru 1972: 7). The last two parts of Petru's catalogue comprise graves excavated between 1908 and 1960 (Petru 1972: 110–122). The second 1972 catalogue by Ljudmila Plesničar Gec details the material from excavations stored in the City Museum of Ljubljana (Mestni muzej). The corresponding graves are in Slovenian literature usually referenced with the MM prefix. Plesničar Gec's catalogue covers her own excavations that took place in 1961 and 1962 at the northern cemetery of Emona. It is, somewhat misleadingly, titled *The northern necropolis of Emona*, which can give the false impression that all previous excavations took place on other parts of Emona's cemeteries. In addition, there were several (comparatively) smaller publications of minor parts of Emona's cemeteries (e.g. Plesničar Gec 1967; 1980; Slabe 1968).

The sheer number of graves unearthed at Emona—more than 3,000 and counting, as excavations are still taking place today—has made Emona's graves a basis for material culture studies (e.g. Bertoncej-Kučar 1979; Budja 1979; Dular 1979; Mihovilič 1979; Sagadin 1979) and for developing typologies (most notably Plesničar Gec (1977), to a lesser degree also Plesničar Gec (1974; 1976) and Petru (1974)). Excavations that were conducted more recently are mostly only published as preliminary reports (e.g. Mulh 2008; Hofman 2009; Tomažinčič 2011),³ with several papers covering a small selection of graves from individual sites (e.g. Gaspari et al. 2015; Tomažinčič 2018) or focussing on specific types of artefacts (Puhar 2016). Recently, a smaller portion of the cemetery to the north of Emona was published (61 graves in total) in comprehensive form (Miškec et al. 2020) including stratigraphy, a discussion of different groups of material culture and manner of burial, and osteological analyses which is hopefully the first stepping stone on the road to publishing the rest of the excavated areas.

The two major 1972 catalogues offer brief overviews in their introductions (Petru 1972: 7–17; Plesničar Gec 1972: 9–12), mainly concerning burial manner and grave goods. The burial manner typology in both publications is aligned with the German tradition of describing variation using a comprehensive, rigid, and complex classification framework. Despite its accuracy and the numerous interpretational possibilities that such a system offers, the main drawback is the need of constant revision in the face of new material that doesn't fit the existing scheme if the framework is to remain accurate, and from this stem the problems of classifying data from older publications where the graves were not described in such detail (e.g. Petru 1972: 123–139). Petru and Plesničar Gec's typology is likely an elaboration of the work of their predecessors since their two catalogues had been planned a long time in advance.

The continued reliance on German methodologies was on several occasions held against Slovenian academic archaeologists, mainly by amateur researchers who flourished in the 1980s and contended that institutional researchers were biased against Yugoslavia (Slapšak and Novaković 1996: 288). While this conclusion is certainly misplaced and exaggerated, it does perhaps contain a grain of a different truth. An example I could adduce are the ceramics from the graves of Emona. An entire book was written about the pottery from Emona's graves (Plesničar Gec 1977), and a lot of imported ceramics had received ample attention in separate articles before as well as after the publication of this volume (e.g. Plesničar Gec 1976; 1987; 1992; Mikl Curk 1979). But there is also a numerous group of objects belonging to the so called 'renaissance of prehistoric forms', which mimics certain types of local prehistoric forms, mainly related to the mortuary context, that was never explored in any detail (e.g. Plesničar Gec 1977: 62–63). Even nowadays I could only find parallels for such practices in Spain (Jiménez 2008). The prevalent academic interest is certainly more biased towards 'Roman' types of objects and tends to deal only in passing with the more modest, yet also more numerous 'prehistoric' forms.

In Roman mortuary archaeology in particular, the first professional excavations systematically noted only manner of burial and grave goods. The former is typically divided into inhumation and cremation; the use of additional descriptions, particularly for special containers, seems to have been applied only when a burial was considered 'out of the ordinary'. For example, if a cremation was covered with an amphora, this was noted, while different manners of storing the cremated remains in an upright amphora were all listed simply as amphora cremations. Similarly, multiple inhumations were noted, but the sex and age of the deceased were recorded only in a handful of cases. The major exception to this were notably rich graves, especially the case (Grave 1489 from Tavčarjeva ulica (Petru 1972: 129)) where the hair of the deceased was still preserved. It can be concluded that the excavators had a developed sense of what was an 'ordinary grave' and what constituted deviations, which were noted, especially if they were extreme. This does not hold for body manipulations, however, where only skull burials were noted,⁴ yet we know from modern excavations that various types of body manipulations were present in Emona's burials, for example stones inserted into eye sockets and mouth cavities (Tomažinčič 2011).

The range of described grave goods varies considerably as well. From the earliest documented excavations, there is little or no record of grave goods (again with the exception of rich graves). A simple comparison with findings from later excavations shows that certain groups of artefacts must have simply been omitted from the documentation. An example are plates, which are almost completely absent from Petru's 1972 dataset covering older excavations, but are rather common among Plesničar Gec's artefacts (1972; see **Figure 1**).

The older documentation that served as the basis for Petru's 1972 volume presents further challenges. Since a unified terminology was yet to evolve, the various authors of the original reports used different names for the same objects (see **Table 1**). Furthermore, there are no illustrations which could help clarify what exactly the early researchers were describing with a certain term. As in many other disciplines, German has exerted a significant influence on the nascent Slovenian standard language, but the two are very different in nature. German allows for very terse and descriptive compound words, whereas Slovenian requires the use of derivational affixes or qualifying adjectives. A difference in size can in Slovenian thus be expressed with diminutives ('jar' and 'beaker' for example may be expressed as *lonec* and *lonček*, with the latter diminutive). In other cases like *steklenica*, meaning 'bottle', the material is implied in the name of the form—the underlying base word *steklo* means 'glass', but bottles are not necessarily made of glass, and the absence of an additional qualifier can either mean that the bottle is in fact made of glass or simply, as with any other term, that the description refers to the form regardless of material. This is compounded by the fact that sometimes 'atypical' grave goods were discarded (Petru 1972: 7) and, conversely, that 'typical' grave goods were just not described, which pertains especially to the material Petru lists in the first two parts of her catalogue which includes the works of archaeologists such as Müllner and Deschmann (Petru 1972: 123–129). Even though Schmid voiced his plan of founding a Museum of Emona and engaging the general public (Schmid 1913: 62; Plestenjak 2013: 91), one is left with the strong impression that the reports from

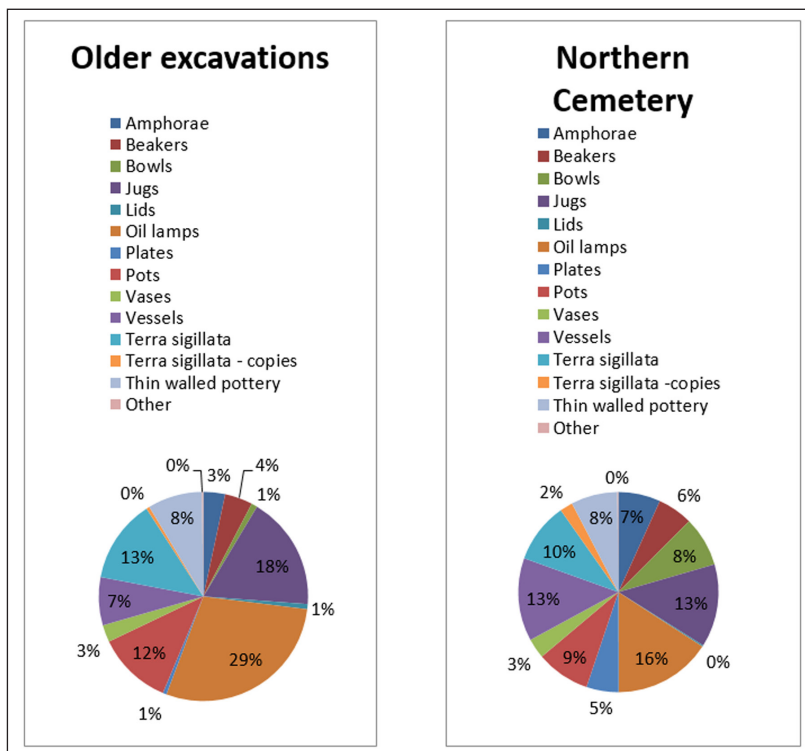


Figure 1: Proportions of ceramic objects in Petru’s (1972) and Plesničar Gec’s (1972) catalogues (Stemberger 2018: 171).

Table 1: Examples of inconsistent and imprecise terminology from Slovenian reports (Stemberger 2018: 134).

Standard term	Terms used by early Slovenian archaeologists
Beaker (ceramic, glass, or thin walled)	Čaša, lonček
Bowl (ceramic, glass, or terra sigillata)	Skleda, skodela, krožnik
Cup (glass or thin walled)	Skodela, skodelica, čaša, posodica
Jug (ceramic, glass, or metal)	Vrč, steklenica, posoda
Plate (ceramic, glass, or terra sigillata)	Krožnik, skodela
Jar (ceramic, glass)	Lonec, lonček, posoda
Vase (ceramic)	Lonec, lonček, posoda

this period were written by a small circle of people, who knew what was being excavated, for precisely this small circle of people.

In theory

What, then, about more theoretical works on identity in Slovenian archaeology? First, one has to recognise that identity as a concept in theoretical archaeology is a relatively recent, post-2000 topic in Slovenia. I use the term identity here, as elsewhere in my writings, in its broader sense, as a ‘set of characteristics’ as defined by Tamar Hodos (2010: 3) with subsequent interaction or communication between an individual and their social environment. An individual can assert multiple roles at the same time, and these do not necessarily conflict with each other. Specifically, I aim to examine all the aspects of an individual that can be obtained or reconstructed from the archaeological record, such as social standing, cultural affiliation, employment, sex, gender, age etc. In other words, identity is thus an umbrella term for the combination of these factors. I do recognise that one identity is a relatively recent and predominantly Western concept that I am likely biased towards since I cannot relate my personal experience to other conceptions of identity such as multiple, shared, and fractal identities (see Fowler 2004: 24–25).

Few works have been produced in Slovenian archaeology to address one or more topics of identity, sometimes in name only. One such topic is social status, which has specifically been addressed by three papers. The first by Iva Mikl Curk (1985) advances interpretations of the identity of some of the people buried in the Western cemetery of Poetovio. The author provides a clear description of her methodology, including which objects form the basis of her argument and how common they are in the graves.⁵ She notes that several groups of graves were damaged, and that the excavators probably did not take into account broken pottery (Mikl Curk 1985: 170–171), a practice known from the older excavations at Emona as well (see **Figure 1**). The richest graves of Poetovio are described as belonging to the upper circles of Poetovio's urban population. Most importantly, she compares a well-furnished tomb with a relatively poorly furnished veteran grave, noting that even though both graves contained the remains of individuals that would have held a high social status in life, this did not translate into the funerary context (Mikl Curk 1981: 173).

The second study dedicated to 'status', written by DeMaine and colleagues (1999), covers the sites of Emona, Celeia, and Šempeter, but concentrates specifically on the 'middle classes'. The authors rely on counting grave goods to determine the status of the deceased: 5–15 objects are categorised as 'middle class', and 16–50 objects as 'upper middle class' (DeMaine et al. 1999). The study, which includes two graves from Emona, concludes that there is no substantial difference between the 'Romanised' middle and middle-upper classes as defined by the authors (DeMaine et al. 1999: 41–43). There are several problems with this study, the most obvious being the simple assumption that the number of grave goods translates directly into status (and even ethnicity, according to the authors). This notion was criticised at the time of publication and more broadly in recent years (e.g. Parker Pearson 1982; 2003; Pearce 2013; 2016), but was pointed out as problematic even in Slovenia before that time (e.g. Grafenauer 1951). Nevertheless, it feels like the echo of simplified socialist perspective (see Slapšak and Novaković 2002). What I find even more interesting is the terminology chosen by the authors to describe social classes. While there is no explicit mention of 'lower classes', it is probably safe to assume that the hundreds of graves from Emona alone without any (preserved) grave goods would fit this category. However, unlike in Mikl Curk's 1981 study, there is no mention of any 'upper classes' in DeMaine and colleagues' article (1999). At the time this study was published, Slovenia had been independent for less than eight years. The socialist past is to this day reflected in a less stratified society and there are much lesser class divides than for example in the UK or USA. Even in centuries past, Slovenia had precious little of its own aristocracy, and the political and economic elites were traditionally foreign—Austrian, Italian, Hungarian, Serbian. It is hard to overlook the analogy with the, possibly subconscious, view of Slovenian researchers that the 'real' Roman elites were in Rome itself or at least closer to the heartlands of the Empire, while the best Emona's local elite could hope for was 'upper middle class', even though the most well-furnished grave known from Emona included in the study contained about 60 artefacts.

The third study on the topic of social standing was published in 1985 by Ljudmila Plesničar Gec. The discussion of social status is rather cursory and the main focus is in fact ethnic affiliation. The topic of ethnogenesis was prominent in Yugoslavia after World War II, especially in the fields of prehistoric and Slavic archaeology, but Slovenian academics largely avoided it (Slapšak and Novaković 1996). One of the reasons why the Yugoslav authorities didn't promote Roman archaeology is the fact that there was a clear influx from the West of Roman items and new technologies that were missing in the pre-Roman period. Moreover, there is written evidence of migration to the area, lending support to the simplistic notion that a stark and binary divide existed between the 'Romans' and the 'natives' in Roman-period Slovenia. In the case of Emona, for example, members of trade families from Northern Italy such as the Caesernii and Barbii make a strong appearance (Šašel 1960; 1966). In Slovenian archaeology, the topic of ethnic affiliation has thus been strongly tied to the colonialist concept of Romanisation. Since the beginning of the 'Romanisation' debate in Slovenia, many excavations have unearthed material dating to the 'transitional period' from pre-Roman to Roman culture, but its potential for providing nuanced insights into what must have been complex, bidirectional interactions between the 'indigenous' peoples and the Roman newcomers remains largely unexplored. Typically, it is used to justify simpler preconceptions about a lopsided relationship between superior conquerors and primitive natives. A good example of this practice is a series of articles that originated from a symposium on Celts and Romanisation (*Arheološki vestnik/Acta Archeologica* 47, 1996). These articles present the finds and provide updated chronologies, but do not tackle any theoretical issues.

There are a few 'niche' works that were clearly influenced by more recent theories of the Anglo-American archaeological tradition such as concepts of bricolage like Nicola Terrenato's (1998; e.g. Županek 2008; Sivec and Županek 2013), creolisation like Jane Webster's (2001; e.g. Vidrih Perko and Stemberger 2015), and life course approaches centred on rites of passage (Stemberger 2013), where different age groups were discussed and identified for Emona, Šempeter, and Križišče, which was later followed by a closer examination

of married and unmarried women from Emona (Stemberger 2014). The later PhD (Stemberger 2018) focusing on the older excavations of Emona⁶ and their potential for interpretations of identity in terms of social status, religious affiliation, and age and gender, is also predominantly based on life course approaches such as Oliver's (2000) and Martin-Kilcher's (2000) combined with ideas of fluid identities such as Antonaccio's (2010: 44) and including modern approaches to Romanisation (e.g. Versluys 2014).

The more recent excavations at Emona were explored using a similar approach by Bernarda Županek, with an additional focus on the topic of religion (2018): the predominance of inhumation at Emona in the 3rd and subsequent centuries AD and its assumed connection to Christianity, which has been discussed before and since (Mikl Curk 1997; Stemberger 2018; Stemberger Flegar 2020; *forthcoming*; Županek 2018), while Županek's notion of the potential presence of a Jewish community at Emona demonstrates the scope for further research. On the other hand, the Norico-Pannonian costume has been at the forefront of identity debates and the introduction of new concepts in Slovenian archaeology since 2015; more specifically, Norico-Pannonian brooches have been explored in terms of the fluidity of identity and its expressions (e.g. Stemberger 2015; Mason and Županek 2018; Stemberger 2020).

However, as the reader can observe, this is predominantly the work of two researchers. In general, most discussions still revolve around the binary opposition between 'native Celts' and the 'Roman newcomers' (more in line with what has been criticised in e.g. Mattingly's 1997 volume on Romanisation) even in relatively recent publications (e.g. Istenič 2013; Gaspari et al. 2015). This originates partly in the Yugoslav-era division between the archaeologies of different periods, which is also reflected fully in the curriculum of the University of Ljubljana: Prehistory, Roman archaeology, and the Mediaeval period are studied independently of each other, and there is little discussion or collaboration between the disciplines. Since the issue of Romanisation is by definition at the intersection of the Prehistoric and Roman periods, the frequently adopted binary opposition could be seen as a case of oversimplifying 'external' factors in order to focus more on the chosen subject, in this case Roman culture. Similarly, the Roman and Late Roman period are also studied separately—the latter together with the early medieval and Slavic periods, with which it coincided. However, it is self-evident that the Late Roman material is relevant to the study of Roman Slovenia in general, and studies such as Kaja Pavletič's work on the social structures of Late Roman cemeteries (2018), where she focuses on interpretations based on Heinrich Härke (1993 and other bibliography cited by Pavletič 2018), should certainly be integrated into discussions about Roman status.

Furthermore, cultural affiliation and ethnicity are typically conflated in Slovenian archaeology. This 'cultural-ethnic' identity, along with various other aspects of identity such as social status or occupation, are also perceived in quite rigid and deterministic terms (Stemberger Flegar 2020), meaning that they are seen as binary 'yes' or 'no' properties. This can lead to singular interpretations (e.g. Mikl Curk 1996; Istenič and Štekar 2002) that leave no room for degrees, layered identities, ambivalent cases, fluidity over time etc. Even though Emona is known to have been located in Italy and at the same time close to the provinces of Noricum and Pannonia, we still talk about provincial archaeology, as evidenced by the titles of Petru's 1964/1965 and Horvat's 1999 overviews: 'Various issues of provincial Roman archaeology in Slovenia' and 'Roman Provincial Archaeology in Slovenia Following the Year 1965', respectively.

The lack of distinction between cultural and ethnic identity is particularly surprising considering that for a very long time in history, ethnic Slovenians were culturally and politically part of larger, ethnically foreign spheres of influence. Generations of our scholars were educated in Vienna in particular, all were fluent in at least two languages, and the administrative capital was geographically remote—not at all unlike what must have been the reality of many inhabitants of Roman-period Slovenia. The main difference is that the basis upon which the relatively young Slovenian national identity is built is not an 'origin myth', but our language (Grđina 2003).

Proverbially, we see ourselves as part of Central Europe and not the Balkans, and drawing on the Roman past enables us to align ourselves more with central European culture in terms of identity, especially since Slovenia joined the European Union in 2004. It is no wonder then that so much of the research of Roman culture has been appearing in our media (e.g. National Geographic,⁷ social media such as Facebook and Twitter). But hopefully, other aspects of our identity and past will receive more attention as we try to find our voice in the broader political and cultural landscape of Europe. With the opening of new study possibilities such as the Erasmus exchange programme, modern theories including globalisation, glocalisation, and creolisation might finally be fully adopted into Slovenian archaeological theory as their personal relevance to the researchers grows. For this to happen, archaeologists and other heritage workers will have to address problematic aspects more publicly (as for example proposed by González-Ruibal et al. 2018) and give a voice to marginalised groups as well. The Slovenian public has not been nearly as vocal as in e.g. Britain (Hanscam

2019) with debates on multiculturalism, in my opinion at least partly due to the facts that Slovenian archaeologists themselves do not frequently tackle such subjects and that archaeology is still perceived more or less as dealing with curiosities instead of topics relevant to modern everyday life, but this might change in the wake of challenges that transcend small-scale politics such as the recent refugee crisis, which sparked a host of heated, if not always constructive debates in Slovenia. In terms of opening debates on topics that very much need to be publicly debated in Slovenia, it is experts and students of the relatively new field of museology and heritology who are increasingly stepping forward (Vidrih Perko *et al.* 2019). The pioneering works of Verena Vidrih Perko (e.g. 2014; 2018) and her students (e.g. Furlan 2014; Jereb 2014; Fras 2016) are forging ahead in new and original ways and prioritising dialogue with local communities.

It is true that there is a genuine, pragmatic need for a framework in which non-theoretical publications can exist, where general comments can be made on what was excavated, and where, for the sake of overview, objects can be labelled on the one hand as 'Roman' in the sense that they were novel at the time and 'non-Roman' on the other hand, meaning their presence in the area can be traced further back. Not all designations of items or concepts as 'Roman' or 'non-Roman' by Slovenian researchers need to be seen as having colonialist undertones. On the other hand, it is crucial that these and other concepts not be taken at face value or simply transplanted into theoretical archaeology. On the contrary, it should be theoretical works that draw the limits of their usefulness and adequacy through extensive discussions. These should necessarily consider in detail also the broader social, cultural, and political context—both modern and historical—of the phenomena the terms describe. Equating the origin of objects with cultural or even ethnic identity is obviously misguided in a modern context: someone is not necessarily Chinese simply because objects found all over their house say they were made in China. Likewise, in Roman-period Slovenia, 'Roman' objects were of course made in the Roman Empire, but the reasons for choosing them could be just as varied and complex as they are today. Besides expressing cultural or ethnic identity, objects could be and were chosen—and placed into graves—for other purposes such as signalling status or religious beliefs, due to a simple personal preference for a certain type of objects, or for purely practical reasons (e.g. in burials, the food in the vessels was likely more important than the vessels themselves in most cases).

Slovenian theoretical archaeology must therefore adopt, more decisively and thoroughly, further elements of modern frameworks such as globalisation and glocalisation (e.g. Pitts and Versluys 2014) even if this could make interpretations less 'clear cut' or feel less 'solid'. As noted by Versluys, the avoidance of 'Romanisation' leads nowhere as we just avoid one word while lacking the terminology to describe what we have in front of us. His proposal of globalisation in the sense of diversity within a single cultural framework with material culture studies (2014: 70) could generally work in Slovenian archaeology as well.

Conclusions

With the abundance of sites and finds related to Roman-period Slovenia that has had even primary reports lagging behind field work for some decades now, it is to be expected that material find publications will overshadow the theoretical work in volume. The last comprehensive overview of Roman archaeology in Slovenia was written in 1999. More importantly, similarly to Petru's overview from 1964/1965, it not only assessed the status of the research, but also outlined the general areas that need to be further explored, both in terms of material culture as well as theoretical work.

The predominantly 'antiquarian' mindset of the nascent discipline of archaeology in Slovenian lands under Austrian rule was followed, after the end of the First World War, by two decades in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, during which time many institutions were established or became independent, such as the University of Ljubljana and the National Museum of Slovenia. The Second World War left them weakened since many researchers had died or fled. Socialist Yugoslavia set a clear preference for the South Slavic material, but did not suppress other studies, and was significantly more open and tolerant than the stereotypical 'Eastern Bloc' state. The wave of liberalisation which started in the 1980s and rapidly gained pace after the dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991 brought a greater freedom of movement to scholars, which resulted in the introduction of many modern theoretical frameworks in Slovenian archaeology. This also fuelled considerable interest in identity studies, but after the initial excitement and innovation, Slovenian scholarship has been slow to import ideas, with post-2000 works rarely finding their way into recent theoretical discussions. Although it could be said that Roman archaeology now occupies a prestigious position in Slovenia, even comprehensive primary publications have unfortunately not been keeping pace with the many excavations undertaken in the last two decades.

The different layers of Slovenian political history can be traced in all works produced by Slovenian researchers, from the documentation to the theoretical studies. The latter are more difficult to tap into as there are simply fewer publications on purely theoretical issues, and a lot of information is still hidden in comments

or left implied. But the fact itself that our current reality as well as our history, both individual and social, both personal and political, influence our research work, is yet to be explicitly acknowledged, discussed, and accounted for. We are simply not separated from the time and culture we are writing and researching in, or from what came before. Therefore, writing about any period, even one's own, is skewed no matter how objective one is striving to be.

Notes

- ¹ Such as Pliny, Herodian, Latinus Pactus, Zosimus, Sozomen.
- ² Important sites include: Trg republike (1961), Titova cesta and Konzorcij (1963), Emona's north wall and gates (1963–68), Plečnikov podhod (1964), Majda Vrhovnik primary school (1967), where a baptisterium and early Christian centre was uncovered (Plesničar Gec 1973), and Šumi (1972). Insulae XVIII, XXIX, XXX, and XXXI were also unearthed, as well as the northwest defensive structures of Emona (Plestenjak 2013: 127).
- ³ While these preliminary reports are interesting in their own right and can serve as indicators of how much field work has been done, they vary widely in terms of the amount and kind of data they contain. In many cases, they are also very difficult to gain access to.
- ⁴ I include in this category cases where the mandible was possibly missing, since based on the state of the preserved documentation it is not possible in the majority of cases to reconstruct whether the mandible was present or not.
- ⁵ E.g. coins were found in 20% of all documented graves, 30% of graves contained glass objects etc. (Mikl Curk 1981: 171).
- ⁶ Predominantly on Petru's (1972) and Plesničar Gec's (1972) work.
- ⁷ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/2019/01/mystery-woman-cemetery-ljubljana-slovenia-archaeology/>.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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