

Permanent exhibition of the Medieval Collection: guide

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medieval collection

A close-up photograph of a medieval metal helmet, likely made of iron or steel. The helmet features a complex, raised pattern of interlocking bands or ridges. Several gold-colored metal pieces are attached to the helmet, including a large, curved piece on the left side and several smaller, circular pieces with blue gemstones or enamel inlays. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the metallic textures and the intricate details of the helmet's construction.

GUIDE

archaeological
museum
in zagreb

**PERMANENT
EXHIBITION
OF THE MEDIEVAL
COLLECTION**

GUIDE

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PERMANENT EXHIBITION OF THE MEDIEVAL COLLECTION

GUIDE

**archaeological
museum
in zagreb**



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INFORMATIONAL PANELS WITH TEXT AND MAPS





**THE MEDIEVAL
DEPARTMENT OF
THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MUSEUM IN ZAGREB**



Zagreb —
Stenjevec,
grave find
S-circlet
ca. 1995.

The history of medieval research in continental Croatia is closely linked to the history of the present day Archaeological Museum in Zagreb and its Medieval Department. Individual objects from the medieval period began arriving in Zagreb, to what was then the National Museum, in the first half of the 19th century, while the first excavations of medieval sites in continental Croatia began in 1871 and continued in the following decades. Simultaneously with the discovery of Branimir's inscription in Gornji Muć, which remains one of the most important early medieval monuments, the first archaeological excavation of an early medieval site in continental Croatia was carried out by Šime Ljubić in Veliki Bukovac in the Drava River basin in 1871, where several graves were discovered of what was later to be called the Bijelo Brdo Culture in Croatia. As the director of the Museum (1871–1892), Ljubić significantly contributed to the development of the institution by organizing the collection of material and its publication in the museum journal. He also established and developed a network of museum commissioners, which was particularly active and effective during the period of his successor, Josip Brunšmid (1893–1924), who organized large numbers of people from different professions (teachers, doctors, priests, merchants, etc.) with the task of visiting local sites and collecting material, or if necessary, excavating endangered sites, and then donating or offering the material to the Museum. This was also encouraged by the decree of Ban Khuen Hedervary from 1 December 1898, according to which all archaeological finds from Croatia and Slavonia had to be sent to the National Museum, which significantly contributed to the growth of the museum holdings. For a long time, the Museum was responsible for a very large area *from Zemun to the Sutla River, from the Drava River to the Croatian Littoral*, so in cooperation with its many commissioners, it began investigating sites in northern and eastern Croatia. The system of commissioners was abolished in 1931. J. Brunšmid's contribution to medieval archaeology is very important because as director of the Museum and professor of the Department of Classical Archaeology at the University of Zagreb he initiated the first systematic excavation of medieval sites in the Museum's area of responsibility (Bijelo Brdo near Osijek, Svinjarevci near Vukovar, Podum near Otočac, Velika Gorica).

The period between the two world wars, when the museum was headed by Viktor Hoffiller (1901–1951), was not particularly fruitful for archaeology in terms of collecting material, but still the Museum received some very valuable items found by chance or hoard finds, such as the silver jewelry from Čadavica in the Drava River basin. After the Second World War, due to new legal requirements, the situation throughout the Republic of Croatia changed, and the Office for the Protection of Cultural Monuments was founded, according to which the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb was responsible for investigations in the regions of Zagorje, Slavonia, Banija, and Lika. In addition, after moving in 1945 to the present museum building, the Vranyczany-Hafner Palace at 19 Nikola Šubić Zrinski Square, the need arose for more favorable conditions for the systematization of the museum collections and their systematic processing, while guidelines were created that generally favored the development of medieval archaeology. Excavations in this period were led by Zdenko Vinski (1945–1979), Ksenija Vinski-Gasparini (1944–1979), and Slavenska Ercegović (1953–1965), particularly important ones being the Avar period cemetery at Bijelo Brdo near Osijek (under the leadership of the then Yugoslav Academy of Science and Art in cooperation with the AMZ), the lowland fortification at Mrsunjski lug near Brodski Stupnik, the early medieval cemetery at the site of Lijeva Bara in Vukovar, and the small Avar period cemetery at the site of Plana in Brodski Drenovac. These intensive and fruitful post-war field investigations significantly enriched the museum's collection of medieval objects, and even today the finds from these sites are of great interest to the professional public and represent indispensable parts of the permanent exhibition.

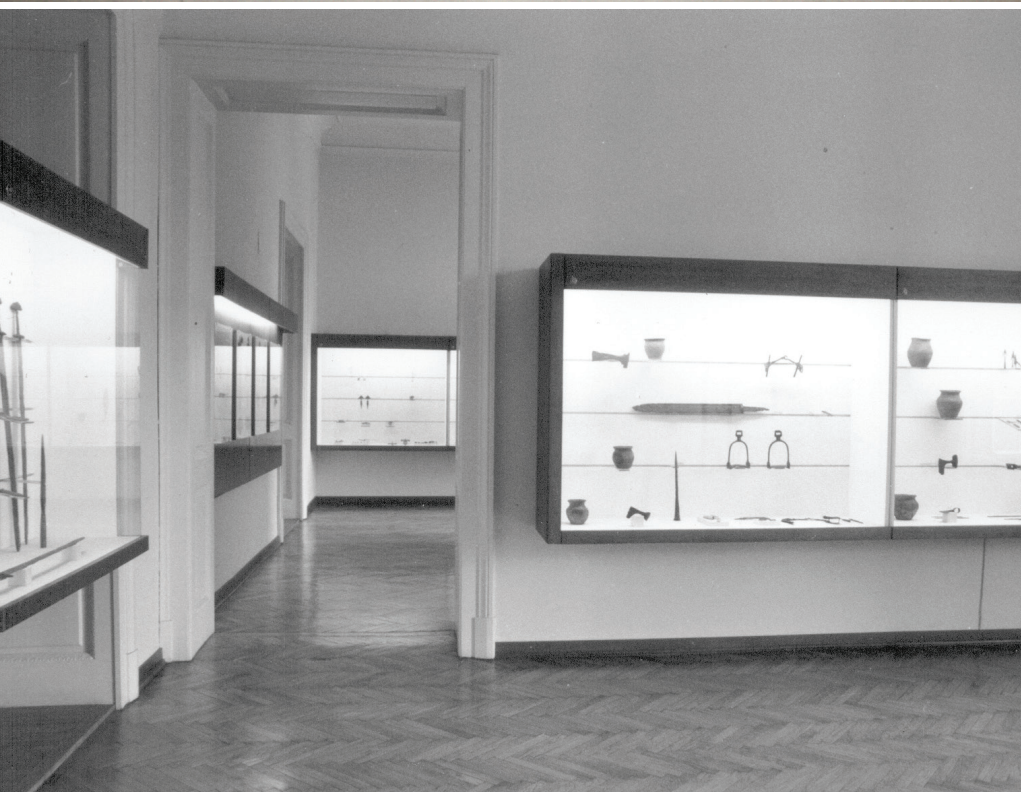
In museum terms, the title of the collection as medieval (rather than early medieval) began to be used in the late 1960s, when an independent department was also established, primarily referring to the reinventorizing of the museum holdings completed in the late 1970s. The department was afterwards led by Katica Simoni (1973–2008) and Željko Demo (1979–2016), and their field work in the city of Zagreb was particularly important — the early medieval cemetery at Stenjevec on the western periphery of the city, and in the very center, the late medieval cemetery at Opatovina in front of the Church of St. Francis, where scarce but very significant remains were found of the early medieval settlement.

The department's collections contain about 6,000 varied objects made of stone, pottery, metal (iron, bronze, silver, and gold), bone, and textile from the 5th to the 16th centuries. Compared to the other collections of the Archaeological Museum, as well as the medieval collections of other national museums, it is not large in size, but in terms of content it is very complete, clear, and valuable, and offers an excellent overview of the Middle Ages in continental Croatia (and even areas presently outside its borders).

Bijelo Brdo —
Venice Street,
locals watching
the excavations
ca. 1900.

Brodski Stupnik —
Mrsunjski lug,
excavation
1949





On the scene — the presentation of the material

The exhibition
*The Slavic
Necropolis
in Vukovar*
1978

This valuable material has been on display to the interested public since 1946 (in the present museum building) through permanent and temporary exhibitions. The first medieval temporary exhibition displayed the results of excavations (the year before, in 1949) of the fortified settlement site at Mrsunjski Lug near Brodski Stupnik. Afterwards other sites that were excavated by museum staff were also presented in this manner. Individual artifacts from the collections, the most attractive and well-known, were often also on display in the framework of major Croatian or foreign thematic exhibitions. Permanent exhibitions were changed, supplemented, or relocated to other spaces several times (1946, 1950, 1952, 1955). A more complete permanent exhibition with many new finds on display was opened at the end of 1982, but was removed to safety at the beginning of the Homeland War. A temporary exhibition was opened in 1996, but was soon closed due to museum renovations in 2002.

The design and construction of a new permanent exhibition for the medieval collection was intensively addressed in 2016. It occupies five exhibition rooms on the western side of the second floor of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb. The exhibition is divided into several chronological and thematic units with a total of 1673 items (including a coin hoard) on display that encompass the archaeological heritage of the numerous peoples, tribes, and ethnic groups that were settled or only briefly dwelled in Croatia in the period from the 5th to the 15th/16th centuries.

The permanent
exhibition
1982

The first room traces the Migration Period through thematic units related to individual nomadic and Germanic peoples (Huns, Ostrogoths, Gepids, Lombards, Heruli), Byzantine supremacy, and the period of the invasion of the Avars and the settlement of the southern Slavs. In the second room the early medieval period is also presented thematically — the Slavs, the Franks in southern Pannonia, Sisak, fortresses and missionary centers, the Hungarians in the Carpathian basin, and the Bijelo Brdo Culture as the most significant theme from this period, presented through finds from cemeteries in Bijelo Brdo (Venecija St.), Vukovar (Lijeva Bara), and Zagreb (Stenjevec). An interesting group of finds consists of items from the Byzantine-Bulgarian circle, most of them presented to the public for the first time, as well as a considerable number of pottery vessels from the Early and High Middle Ages. The third room presents the archaeological material of the early medieval period from the regions of Dalmatia, Lika, and the Kvarner, with the central area occupied by a reconstruction of an altar screen that evokes the appearance of the interior of the pre-Romanesque Church of St. Peter in Gornji Muć, the original site of one of the most beautiful early medieval carved stone monuments — a fragment of a beam with the inscribed name

arheološki muzej u zagrebu • trg nikole zrinjskog 19



srednji vijek

stalni postav muzejske zbirke • otvorenje 15. prosinca 1982.

Poster for
the opening of
the permanent
exhibition
1982

The exhibition
*Gold and Silver
of the Middle Ages*
in the Archaeological
Museum in Zagreb
2014

of the Croatian ruler Branimir and the year 888. Pre-Romanesque art is further displayed by other stone monuments from the vicinity of Knin, and adornment and attire from the same period are shown by finds of earrings, probably recovered from destroyed female graves.

The fourth exhibition space (hallway) and the fifth room present the period of the High and Late Middle Ages, through a selection of the most important objects and sites, although this period is represented in the collection by a slightly smaller amount of artifacts in comparison to earlier periods. Through several smaller segments (religion and art, weaponry, jewelry, and everyday life), an outline was attempted of the previously mentioned diversity of this part of the collection. It should be noted, however, that this last part of the exhibition contains an improvised choice of material due to limited temporal and financial circumstances, and it will subsequently require amendments and supplementation.

The new permanent exhibition presents to the public the archaeological heritage of the Middle Ages of continental Croatia, and to a lesser extent that of Dalmatia, and the Lika and Kvarner regions, but also neighboring countries, and although many objects on display were already more or less well known, the exhibition is supplemented by items from newly explored sites and by newly acquired chance finds.





THE MIGRATION PERIOD AND THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

5th-9th cent.



THE MIGRATION PERIOD — THE END OF THE OLD AND THE BEGINNING OF A NEW AGE

(ca. AD 380–454)



In the middle of the 4th century, the Roman Empire had already been on the defensive for many long years, but despite numerous interior conflicts and problems it managed to function and exist by continuously adapting the military organization of the defense of its huge borders (*limes*), more or less constantly exposed to pressures, threats, and invasions by the neighboring barbarian peoples. Within the European boundaries of the Empire, these barbarian people were mostly of Germanic origin. On the Lower Danube border, the most numerous and most powerful were the eastern Germanic Goths, who had gradually migrated for more than two centuries from their Scandinavian homeland, through present-day Poland and the Ukraine, and even before the mid-3rd century AD they had ended up on the Black Sea

-  GERMANIC PEOPLES
-  EASTERN ROMAN EMPIRE
-  WESTERN ROMAN EMPIRE
-  WESTERN GOTHS (VISIGOTHS) 376–478
-  VANDALS, ALAMANNI AND SUEVI 406–439
-  HUNS 370–452
-  OTHER PEOPLES
-  IMPORTANT BATTLES

coast. There they grew into a dominant force at the end of the 3rd and during the 4th centuries. The Roman Empire at times fought with them and at times made peace and formed alliances — until the early seventies of the 4th century, when the Goths' eastern borders were threatened by the nomadic Huns. This new situation, and the ever increasing conflicts with the neighboring Alans and subsequently with the Huns, soon became unbearable for the Goths. After a series of lost battles and unsuccessful resistance to the Huns, a Gothic refugee wave of massive proportions followed, and spilling over the Danube borders, it caused insecurity and chaos in both Lower Danube dioceses of the Roman Empire (Thrace and Dacia). In these circumstances, tensions and disagreements between the Roman natives and the refugee Germans became increasingly frequent, and clashes with the Roman army became inevitable. The largest and most significant battle took place at Hadrianopolis, now Edirne in European Turkey, on the 9th of August 378. In combat with the Goths, aided by the Alans and Huns, the Roman army suffered a crushing defeat and the Empire lost the Emperor Valens (364–378), many members of the administrative and military elite, and a significant portion of its most tested and most loyal military resources stationed in the Balkan southeast. The next four years were characterized by pronounced instability and conflicts throughout the prefecture of Illyricum, which the newly chosen Emperor Theodosius I (379–395) quieted and placed under control only in the autumn of 382, by signing a contract of federation (*foedus*) with the Goths. In return, the Goths as allies (*foederati*) settled within the Empire acquired the right to own a piece of land, on which they had the right to live according to their laws and under the direction of their own leaders, but were required to militarily serve the Roman Emperor whenever necessary or when it was demanded. The fulfilment of such allied obligations was further supported by abundant material resources with which the emperor sought to secure his concept and strengthen the peace and cooperation of the newcomers. When these funds for some reason were not satisfactory or sufficient for the new allies, rebellions would occur, with renewed conflict and brutal looting raids often directed towards Italy and its centers of imperial power. The raids and devastation in Italy in 401/402 and 405/406 were also felt in Gaul and on the Rhine *limes*, where the defence of local borders was weakened by the departure of some military units sent to Italy or the even more distant Balkans. In such circumstances, one event on the Rhine *limes* further influenced the course of historical events: on New Year's Eve in 406 the Vandals, Alans, and Suebi crossed the frozen Rhine without authorization and permission, invaded Gaul and settled there, and Europe both in the east and in the west suddenly found itself in a new historical period — the Migration Period.

Foederati/Allies

(ca. AD 380 to ca. AD 420/430)

In the Late Imperial period, *foederati* (allies) together with highly mobile military troops (*comitatenses*) and border garrisons (*limitanei*) were an integral part of the military structure of the Roman Empire. The cooperation of these three components of the Late Roman military organization had been successfully tested with the Franks settled in northern Gaul in 358, and the Empire tried to apply this in Pannonia, where from the end of the 4th and throughout the entire first quarter of the 5th century various entire nations poured in from the east, mainly Germans and Alans fleeing from the Huns. After crossing the Danube, the new arrivals were usually settled along the Danube border, where on land granted to them they organized their own settlements, locating them in the vicinity of settlements of the Late Roman indigenous inhabitants. The imperial government that at the end of the first decade of the 5th century still occasionally succeeded in building or renovating fortresses in Pannonia guaranteed them paid military service, supplies, and food, and added them as *foederati* to the probably already scarce mobile (*comitatenses*) and border troops (*limitanei*). In this, both one and the other, because of poor connections with the centers of imperial power and the overall decline of monetary circulation, could depend only on the material possibilities and support of the local community, in the form of the local already decaying system of large agricultural estates, and the increasingly small, few, and partly depopulated urban centers. Despite this, in addition to on the borders, the presence of *foederati* is also evident in logistical centers in the hinterland of the limes, and recent archaeological research has shown that they were deployed or dwelled in strategically important fortifications, guarding them as well as the main transportation routes in the interior of Pannonia (*Pannonia Savia*). They buried their dead in the same cemeteries as the local Late Roman population, at first according to their own habits and rituals, but adapting them through time, partly or wholly, to the customs and practices of the Roman or Romanized indigenous inhabitants.

The archaeological finds of this group typically consist of long swords, rarely shields, knives, and utilitarian objects, sometimes sections of horse equipment, as well as various appliqués, buckles, mounts, or belt parts, while the jewelry includes torcs, sometimes bracelets, earrings with solid metal polyhedral pendants, and various forms of fibulae, along with single and double combs, glass cups, pottery vessels, and other items.

- A Umbo of a shield
iron
Dalj
early 5th cent.
- B Sword (*spata*)
detail
iron
Ilok
beginning of the 5th cent.
- C Fibula in the shape of a cicada
silver
Novi Banovci (Serbia)
4th–5th cent.
- D Torc
detail
silver
Novi Banovci (Serbia)
end of the 4th cent.



A



B



C



D

The Huns and the Hunnic period Germans (ca. AD 420/430 to 454/455)

The name the Huns, used by historians to denote the main initiators of the processes known as the *Great Migrations*, refers to the dominant group of steppe warriors present in the Eurasian steppes in the period from the 4th to 6th centuries. At the beginning of the last third of the 4th century, the Huns spread towards the west, crossing the Volga and Don Rivers, and the first to feel their assaults were the Iranian-Sarmatian Alans (370). The next to be attacked were the neighboring eastern Germanic Goths on the Dnieper and Dniester Rivers (375–376), first the Ostrogoths (Greuthungi) and soon afterwards the Visigoths (Thervingi). After the Huns broke through to the Danube, the displacement and relocation of various peoples gradually affected almost all of Europe. The Huns initially had their center in the Black Sea steppes and from there organized and commenced military strikes against the Roman Empire, but in the first decades of the 5th century, after the establishment of a split government, the western center was transferred in 426/433 to the Pannonian plain, most likely in the central part of the territory between the Danube and Tisa Rivers. At that time, the Huns offered support on several occasions as auxiliary troops for the Western Roman army in Gaul and Italy, and through an alliance made with the Western Roman Empire in 434, the Huns acquired the formal right to occupy and settle in the province of *Pannonia Valeria*. Here, under their most famous ruler, Attila, also known as the Scourge of God (*Flagelum Dei*), they achieved overall dominance over the indigenous Romanic and newly arrived mostly Germanic inhabitants, and until Attila's death in 453 the Huns represented a constant threat, first to the Eastern Roman Empire (447) and subsequently to the Western Roman Empire (451–452).

— The military
campaigns
of Attila
447–452



A



B

C



The Hun period finds in Pannonia mostly come either from the graves of the Hunnic military elite or from sacrificial places related to Hunnic burial rituals, so many “chance finds” can in fact be connected to the above. Most often these finds consist of decorative items made of gold decorated with garnets (belt buckles and mounts, parts and fittings of horse harness, saddle fittings, gold torcs and bracelets, diadems, earrings, etc.), and weapons are also frequent (long two-edge swords, reflex bows, arrowheads), along with silver and bronze clasps in the shape of cicadas, and bronze and lead mirrors. The settlement finds usually include finds of bronze cauldrons or parts of them. The appearance of deliberately deformed skulls is also related to the Hunnic settlement in Pannonia.



D

-
- A **Fibula in the shape of a cicada**
silver
Novi Banovci (Serbia)
first half of the 5th cent.
 - B **Fittings for a sword scabbard**
bronze, gold, garnets
Zmajevac
first half of the 5th cent.
 - C **Mirror**
silver
Novi Banovci (Serbia)
first half of the 5th cent.
 - D **Gold coin of the Eastern Roman Empire**
Zmajevac

THE GERMANIC
PEOPLES —
THE RULERS
OF PANNONIA

(AD 454/5 – 568)



Bow fibula
silver, gilt
Zemun (Serbia)
second half
of the 5th cent.

The sudden death of Attila in 453, whether by natural or violent causes cannot be established with certainty, prompted the revolt of the Pannonian Germans in 454 against the autocratic Hunnic rulers and Attila's sons, led by Ellak. The decisive battle took place on the Nedao River, Ellak died in the battle, and the victorious Germanic coalition, led by the Gepids and their king Ardaric († ca. 454–460), succeeded in crushing the Hunnic dominance in Pannonia and provided the Germanic participants in the rebellion, the Gepids, Sciri, Rugi, Heruli, and Suevi, their so desired independence. The only nation whose participation in this famous battle remains in question were the Ostrogoths, who in contrast to the other Germans settled in the Pannonian plain had already in 456/7 received permission to settle in Pannonia from the Eastern Roman emperor Marcian (450–457), renewing the *foederati* status that they had previously been granted during the reign of emperor Theodosius I (in 382). With the departure of the Huns, the rulers of Pannonia became the Germanic peoples, who would reign over the Roman regions of Pannonia and the areas east of the Danube and Tisa Rivers until the arrival of the Avars in 568.

**The Ostrogoths — from Attila's bulwark
and Eastern Roman border guards (ca. AD 450–473)
to the rulers of the Western Roman
prefecture of Italy (AD 489/493–552/555)**

In the circumstances arising after the collapse of Hun supremacy, the Ostrogoths were allotted the southern parts of *Pannonia Prima* and *Pannonia Valeria* from Late Balaton to Syrmian Pannonia and the area between the Drava, Danube, and Sava Rivers. Authority over this occupied region was divided among half-brothers: the oldest Valamir (†469) received Srijem/Syrmia, Teodimir the area near Lake Balaton, and the youngest Vidimir was assigned the region located between the areas of the above two. At the same time, Pannonia north of Lake Balaton was occupied by the West Germanic Suevi, and to the west of them the Eastern Germanic Heruli settled. The Scirii were positioned in the Pannonian plain east of the Danube (to ca. 569), with the Iranian Sarmatians and remnants of the Alan settled to the north of them, while to the east of them, constantly spreading towards the west and south, were the increasingly aggressive and powerful Eastern Germanic Gepids. The situation changed completely in 473, when the Ostrogoths left Pannonia, a smaller group led by Vidimir going to Italy and further into Spain, while the larger group led by Theodimir (†475) and his son Theodoric moved to the Balkans (Moesia), where they remained until AD 488. In that year, the Ostrogoths again were on the move, this time from Svištovo (*Novae*) in Bulgaria, passing through Pannonia to Italy. On this journey, they first defeated the Gepids in Syrmian Pannonia in a battle on the Vuka River, and after three years of battles, the Ostrogothic king Theodoric (475/493–526) killed Odoacer, King of Italy, in Ravenna, fulfill-



A

B



C



ing in this manner the orders of the emperor Zeno (474–491). The Eastern Roman empire annexed the Prefecture of Italy, which in addition to Italy itself also included considerable sections of Western Illyricum, with the provinces of Dalmatia, Pannonia Savia, and Syrmian Pannonia. These parts of Western Illyricum would remain under the rule of the Ostrogoths to ca. 537/538, while the Ostrogothic kingdom in Italy was to disappear in the reconquest by Justinian in 552/555.

The male graves of the Ostrogoths, in contrast to the other Germanic peoples, do not contain military equipment. On the other hand, the female graves of wealthier members of the Ostrogothic community in the middle and third quarter of the 5th century as parts of typical Ostrogothic attire contain a pair of large silver fibulae on the upper part of the body and a silver belt buckle. Elements that are often added include ornaments for the head, neck, and arms, such as polyhedral earrings often made of precious metals and stones (gold, silver, garnets), necklaces with beads of amber and multicolored glass, and silver or bronze bracelets with widened ends. As a legacy of the Hunnic period, the appearance of deformed skulls is frequent both in male and female Eastern Germanic graves in the last quarter of the 5th century. By a decree of King Theodoric dated to AD 507/511, it was forbidden for Ostrogoths to place any objects in their graves, and particularly those made from precious metals. The Ostrogoths minted gold, silver, and bronze coinage in mints in Italy at Milan (*Mediolanum*), Pavia (*Ticinum*), Ravenna (*Ravenna*), and Rome (*Roma*), according to models based on the Eastern Roman and early Byzantine monetary production, and occasionally the former Pannonian mints in Sisak (*Siscia*) and Sremska Mitrovica (*Sirmium*) were also used to mint Ostrogothic coinage.

A Pectoral with bird fibulae
gold, semi-precious stones
Potoci — Vrba
(Bosnia and Herzegovina)
end of the 5th cent.

B Spoon
silver
Sisak
first half of the 5th cent

C Pair of bow fibulae
silver, gilt
Ilok
ca. 450 AD

D Gold coin
of the Ostrogoths
Solin

E Ring in the
architectural style
gold
Samobor
beginning of the 5th cent.



Batajnica (Serbia)
finds from
a warrior grave
middle of the 6th cent.

- Umbo of a shield
iron
- Vessel
pottery
- Horse bit
iron
- Spearhead
iron
- Fragment of
chainmail
iron



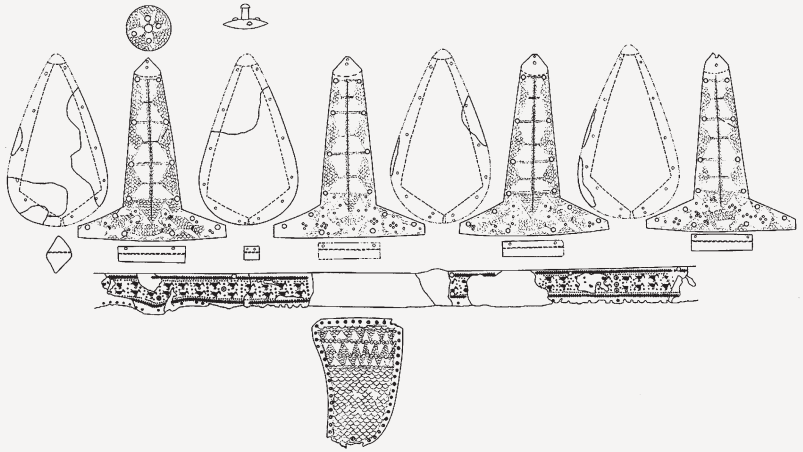
The Gepids — the rulers of Transylvania, the Tisa River basin, and Syrmia/Srijem (AD 454–567)

Unlike the other Eastern Germanic peoples, the territory of the Gepids during the Hunnic dominance in Pannonia was located in the northeastern part of the Pannonian plain and the upper Tisa River basin. Although they participated as Hunnic vassals in Attila's raids against the Eastern and Western Roman Empires during that time, the Gepids gained historical fame by their leadership and success in the rebellion against Attila's successors in AD 454. After that, they spread throughout the Tisa River basin, and twenty years later, when the Ostrogoths abandoned Pannonia, the Gepids continued their expansion towards the south, taking the opportunity, with the permission of the Eastern Roman Emperor Leo I (457–474) or perhaps even without it, of occupying Syrmian Pannonia, which they ruled to 504. The return of the Ostrogoths to Syrmian Pannonia divided the Gepid nation into two parts, but the Gepid position in the Tisa River basin and Transylvania was not weakened. On the contrary, archaeological data show that from the end of the 5th century and in the first third of the 6th century the contacts of the Gepids, first with Theodoric's Ostrogothic Kingdom in Italy, and also with the Western German peoples (Franks, Alamanni, Lombards), the Germanic peoples in Scandinavia, and the Byzantine Empire to the south, existed and were continuously maintained. These certainly very positive conditions for the Gepids were not disturbed even by the events in northwestern Pannonia, where the arrival of the Lombards and their victory over the Heruli in ca. 508/509 marked the end of the idyllic alliance of the Suevi and Heruli and the dominance that these two Germanic peoples had achieved in the last quarter of the 5th century and the beginning of the 6th century in the areas of the former Roman provinces of Pannonia Prima and Pannonia Valeria (473–ca. 508/510). The increased strengthening of the Lombards in Pannonia at first did not represent a problem to the Gepids, but things changed when the Byzantine Emperor Justinian embraced the Lombards after the Gepids had again occupied Sirmium and Syrmian Pannonia in 535/536, ten years later granting the Lombards the status of allies (*foederati*), and with this the right to settle in the already occupied parts of Pannonia (ca. 546). From that time onwards, tension, aggravation, and conflicts continued to grow between these two only remaining Germanic kingdoms in the Pannonian plain, and after repeated Gepid support for the Slavs and Kutriguri against the Lombards, the relations with the Byzantine emperor Justinian became damaged beyond repair. When even the new Byzantine emperor Justin II (565–578) did not succeed in AD 566 in convincing the Gepid King Cunimund to leave Sirmium and return it to Byzantine forces, the Avars were called upon, who together with the Lombards defeated the Gepids in 567, killing Cunimund and destroying the Gepid kingdom, seizing their land and possessions. Just a year later, in fear of their new neighbors, the Avars, after Easter Day in 568 the Lombards left Pannonia and moved to northern Italy.

Thanks to the excavations of sites in the main Gepid territories in the Tisa River basin and Transylvania, the collected material remains of this eastern German people are numerous and quite well known. Gepid settlements were usually located on elevated positions in the vicinity of a river or other water course, and they were accompanied by cemeteries with rows of graves, with the burials oriented east–west. The male deceased were buried according to pagan customs, despite Arian Christianity having been accepted and already widespread (at the beginning of the 6th century), with weapons and military equipment (sword, shield, spear, helmet, armor), horse equipment (bits), adornment (buckles and belt decorations), personal items, and also pottery vessels, sometimes with stamped decoration, which like the undecorated vessels contained food and drink as provisions for the afterlife. The jewelry in female graves frequently consisted of earrings, pairs of bow fibulae, necklaces of beads, bracelets, and belt buckles. The Gepids under King Cunimund minted silver coins in Sirmium with a royal monogram, and an Arian bishop was active in the city, given that the Gepids, like the majority of the East Germanic peoples, belonged to Arian Christianity.

Gepids or Heruli in eastern Syrmia/Srijem (the first half of the 6th century)

The eastern Germanic Heruli, with a possible Scandinavian origin, are the source of many uncertainties and numerous, varied, and often conflicting theories. It is known that during the Late Imperial period they were present in various parts of Europe, and they participated in some of the most important military expeditions of the Huns. In the second half of the 5th century, the Heruli formed a kingdom in southern Moravia and Lower Austria, and supported Odoacer's usurpation of the western Roman throne and power in Italy in the last quarter of the 5th century. They came into conflict with the Lombards in 508/509, and suffered a heavy defeat in battle, in which they lost their king (Rodulf). The defeat caused the dissolution of their kingdom, and the Heruli became divided into at least three groups, one group joining the Ostrogothic King Theodoric (493–526) in Italy, a second group leaving for Scandinavia in the north, while the third (and probably largest) group travelled to the east along the Danube, and remained for some time in the lands of the Gepids. The Heruli soon came into conflict with them, and went further south, where they requested and received from Emperor Anastasius (491–518) permission to remain in the Byzantine Empire, on land along the border in the vicinity of ancient *Singidunum* (Belgrade). As the Byzantine Empire had succeeded in retaining part of Syrmian Pannonia east of the ancient *Bassianae* (Petrovci near Ruma) through a peace treaty with the Ostrogoths (512), it is believed that this part of the border, as well as the section east of *Singidunum* (Belgrade) all the way to *Viminacium* (Kostolac) was entrusted to the Heruli to guard and defend.



A



B

C



- A A drawing of the helmet from Batajnica (Serbia)
- B Fibula with bird heads
bronze
Novi Banovci (Serbia)
ca. 500 AD
- C Silver coin of the Gepid Kingdom
Srijemska Mitrovica (Serbia)

Jakovo — Kormadin is one of the sites in the vicinity of Belgrade where some archaeologists are convinced that sections were used by the Heruli (in addition to Gepids) for the burial of their dead during the first third of the 6th century. A bow fibula from Sisak decorated with a dotted swastika can be related to the Heruli groups that after 508/509 sought refuge in ancient *Siscia*, which at that time was a part of Theodoric's Ostrogothic Kingdom.

-
- A Bow fibula**
silver, gilt
Sisak
beginning of
the 6th cent.

Jakovo — Kormadin
(Serbia)
finds from graves
first half of
the 6th cent.

- B Bead**
chalcedony
- C Belt buckle**
bronze
- D Sword**
iron
- E Spearhead**
iron
- F Comb**
bone
- G Belt buckle**
bronze,
garnets,
gilt,
silver-plated



A



B



C



D



E



F



G

The Franks, Alamanni, and Thuringians — Western Germanic Peoples in southern Pannonia

The Salian Franks were the first powerful Western Germanic group that the Roman Imperial authorities allowed to settle (in 358) in the northern part of Gaul in Toxandria, a Roman border region south of the Rhine River (southern Netherlands and the northern part of Belgium). In the 5th century, they spread to the south and established their capital in present day Belgium at Tournai (*Tornacum*). They were allies of the Romans against the Huns in the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains in 451, and later in the 460s when led by Childeric (457–481/482), the founder of the Merovingian dynasty, they fought against the Visigoths and Saxons together with the remains of the Gallic-Roman army. In completely new circumstances twenty years later, with Clovis I (481/482–511) at the helm, in the battle at Soissons in 486 they fought the last remnant of the Gallic-Roman military authorities, defeated them, and expanded the borders of the Frankish kingdom into the region of central Gaul, moving their capital to Paris. On the eastern side of their kingdom, they were occasionally in conflict with the Alamanni from the 480s onwards, and in response to the frequent Alamannic expansion in the central Rhine basin and attacks on the Ripuarian Franks there, battle was joined and in 496 the Alamanni were defeated at the legendary battle of Zülpich (*Tollbiacum*), lost their independence, and became part of the Frankish kingdom. The defeat was devastating for the Alamanni, as it caused territorial changes and led to Frankish settlement, but also forced many Alamanni to depart for foreign, neighboring countries, including a significant part of the Alamannic ruling class. The expansion of the Franks to the east was interrupted by conflicts with the Burgundians and Visigoths to the south and southwest, which ended in vassal status for the former sometime after the year 500, and expulsion from Gaul over the Pyrenees for the latter in 507. At the end of the first third of the 6th century, the Franks continued their expansion to the east, and in a battle on the Unstrut River in 531 they defeated the Thuringians and annexed their kingdom, while in the following year they turned south, attacked the Burgundians, and in 534 incorporated Burgundy to the Frankish Kingdom.

Objects of Western Germanic provenience are more common among the finds collected in the continental regions of Croatia and the neighboring eastern Symria/Srijem, while they are represented in smaller numbers among the finds from Dalmatia. Jewelry is most numerous and most frequent (various forms of clasps and bracelets), while other finds include parts of horse harnesses and weapons, among which the *francisca* axe stands out, a typical offensive weapon from the Frankish-Alamannic region. The earliest finds come from the second third of the 5th century, but the majority were certainly later, dated to the second half of the 5th century, the end of the 5th century, and the beginning or even first half of the 6th century.

A **Harness
strap separator**
bronze, gilt
Sisak
ca. 500 AD



A

B **Axe (*francisca*)**
iron
Nartski Novaki
first half of
the 6th cent.



B

C **Pair of bracelets**
silver
Solin
second half of the 5th-
middle of the 6th cent.



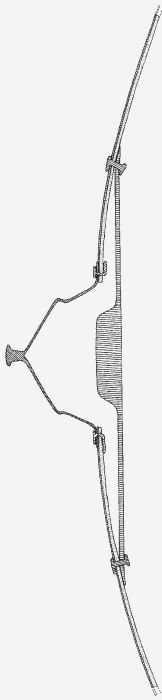
C

The Lombards or *Langobardi* (6th century)

The last large Germanic group of participants in the Great Migrations, who after Easter 568 set off from Pannonia for northern Italy with the intention of settling permanently there, was headed by the Lombards or *Langobardi*, the “long-bearded” people. Centuries earlier, according to oral traditions that they themselves preserved, they lived in Scandinavia and were called the *Winnili*, while in the middle of the 1st and in the 2nd centuries AD they are mentioned as *Langobardi* by Roman writers, who placed them in the lower Elbe River basin in northeastern Germany. For several centuries no news and no historical data worth mention exist for them, and then in 489 the Lombards suddenly appeared, and led by King Tato († ca. 510), they defeated the Germanic Rugians and occupied their lands in Lower Austria. This brought them into conflict with the neighboring Heruli, who they defeated around 508/509, which enabled them, if they so wanted, to expand and become the dominant force in the central Danubian region. Their new, ambitious, and long-lived King Waccho (ca. 510–540) dedicated himself to this intention, allying with all who seemed sufficiently important and strong (Thuringians, Franks, Gepids, Byzantium), so that soon he could accomplish his plan and ca. 526 or earlier lead the Lombards into occupying the northern parts of Pannonia. By occupying Pannonia — nothing is known of any resistance from the Suevi settled in these regions — the Lombards did not merely enter the sphere of interest of Byzantium, but rather came into direct contact with the Byzantine Emperor Justinian, who at the beginning of the 530s was already greatly involved in preparing for the reconquest that he intended to begin in Africa with an attack on the Vandals. The good relations between the Byzantines and the Lombards continued under King Waltari (540–547), as was confirmed by Justinian’s permission granted to the Lombards in the mid 540s to take control, in addition to the already occupied regions, of certain other parts of Noricum and Pannonia — in Pannonia all that remained unoccupied at that time were the areas south of the Drava and Sava Rivers (*Pannonia Savia*). From then until Justinian’s death in 565, the Lombards were reliable allies of Byzantium in Italy and Persia, while in the central Danubian region they kept their neighbors, the Eastern Germanic Gepids, with whom both they and the Byzantines had hostile relations, under constant pressure. Under the Emperor Justin II (565–578) the support for the Lombards weakened, and in their war against the Gepids they were forced to seek new allies. They found an ally in the nomadic Avars under Khan Bayan (before 562 to after 582), and despite their brilliant victory over the Gepids in 567, only a year later they left their lands in Pannonia to the Avars, and led by the legendary King Alboin (560–572) set out to conquer Byzantine Italy.

Ščitarjevo —
Elementary
School,
finds from
a warrior
grave
ca. 550 AD

- A Reconstruction of the shield of a Lombard warrior
- B Spearhead iron
- C Belt buckle silver
- D Belt buckle bronze



A



B



C



D

Archaeological data based primarily on excavations of cemeteries have shown that in occupied Pannonia the Lombards only settled in areas previously inhabited by their Germanic predecessors (Ostrogoths, Suevi), avoiding settlement in places where the provincial Roman population (Romani) had remained in great numbers. They directed their attention primarily to cities, settlements, and fortresses along or in the vicinity of the Danube River border (*limes*), and in the interior, according to a similar model, they usually settled by transportation routes, attempting to control strategically important positions and roads. In contrast to the archaeologically very well explored region of northern Pannonia to the south of the Danube (*Pannonia Prima* and *Valeuria*), there are still very few archaeological indicators of the Lombard occupation of the southern Pannonian region south of the Drava and Sava Rivers (*Pannonia Savia*). In this sense, one significant and important find was discovered in 2007 at Ščitarjevo near Velika Gorica, the Roman period town of *Andautonia*, 20 km south of Zagreb, where a grave was found containing the burial of a male ca. 190/195 cm tall, 30–35 years old at death, with equipment typical for graves of Lombard warriors in the period around the middle of the 6th century and later: an iron spear, a shield (iron umbo preserved), an iron sword and dagger (?), and one silver and one bronze belt buckle.

THE EARLY
BYZANTINE
EMPIRE
AND ITS
ROMANIC
POPULATION

(5th–7th centuries)



In 395, the Emperor Theodosius divided the Roman Empire between his two sons, granting to the elder, Arcadius (395–408), the eastern part of the empire with Constantinople, and the younger, Honorius (395–423), the western part of the empire with Rome and Ravenna. Soon after its establishment, the Western Roman Empire began to disintegrate, and up to 480, when the last legitimately installed Western Roman emperor Nepos died in Dalmatia, it was left without Britannia and Hispania, as well as large sections of Gaul and Africa, and parts of Pannonia. In the meantime, the Eastern Roman Empire managed to survive despite the numerous problems they also constantly encountered, and during the reigns of the Emperors Leo I (457–474) and Zeno (474/476–491) determining who would rule the Western Roman Empire first represented and then became the guarantee for the idea of a unified Empire. From then onwards the Eastern Roman Empire — better known to historians as Byzantium or the Byzantine Empire — based its territorial, political, and ideological connection with the former regions of the Western Roman Empire on the historical heritage, social context, and religious values, formally and legally codifying these views and aspirations in the endeavor called *Renovatio imperii* or the Reconquest of Emperor Justinian (527–565). By that time, the former imperial areas in the West to a great extent had already been transformed into Germanic kingdoms, and were thus lost forever. Therefore, an effective restoration was feasible only in the Mediterranean regions of the former imperial West. The Reconquest was largely successful there, with the annexation of Ostrogothic Italy with Rome, and the Vandalic and Moorish coastal sections of Africa with Carthage, Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica, and substantial areas on both sides of the Straits of Gibraltar. The Reconquest in 535–537/538 encompassed almost the entire region of present day Croatia, until then a part of the Ostrogothic Kingdom, as well as areas along the coast and in its hinterland (*Histria* and *Dalmatia*), as well as more distant regions in the continental section (*Pannonia Savia*), while eastern Croatia and Syrmia/Srijem (*Pannonia Sirmiensis*) remained up to 567 in the framework of Cunnimund's Gepidic Kingdom.

Pin with a
songbird-shaped
head
bronze
Solin
5th–6th cent.

Archaeological finds of the early Byzantine period are mostly related to large provincial urban centers (*Solin/Salona, Vid/Narona, Sisak/Siscia, Osijek/Mursa*) or the fortresses on the Danube *limes* (*Novi Banovci/Burgenae, Surduk/Ritium*). The collected material contains rare examples of early Byzantine military equipment (helmets of the Baldenheim and Narona types). In contrast to these, finds of various types of jewelry are much more common: for the head, with several exceptional goldworking examples (basket-shaped earrings), for the torso, including numerous objects with recognizable Early Christian symbolism (bird and cross shaped fibulae), decorative attire elements (decorative pins, pendants, belt buckles, belt fittings), while finds of individual utilitarian objects are rare but interesting (monetary weights and commercial weights).

A



A Earrings with a basket-shaped pendant
gold, pearl
second half of the 6th cent.
Umljanović,
Sisak,
Dalmatia

B Commercial weight,
wt. 3 ounces
bronze, silver
Solin
6th cent.

C Cross-shaped
fibula
silver
Sisak
second half of
the 6th cent.

D Fibula in the form
of a bird of prey
with outstretched
wings
bronze
Sisak
6th cent.

E Belt strap end
bronze, glass
Sisak
6th cent.

F Belt buckle
(*Corinth type*)
bronze
Sisak
middle to the end
of the 7th cent.

G Coinage weight,
wt. 1 gold coin/
nomisma, marked N
bronze
unknown site
6th cent.

B





C



D

E



F



G



The territory
of the Avar
Khaganate

- THE AVAR
REGION
DURING
THE FIRST
KHAGANATE
- THE AVAR
REGION
DURING
THE SECOND
KHAGANATE

to the archaeological Early Avar and Middle Avar periods. There, as is shown by historical sources and confirmed by archaeological finds, they organized a hierarchical society of a dominant elite of nomadic warrior-horsemen, which was joined either voluntarily or by force by other nomadic peoples (Sabirs, Kutrigurs, Onogurs, Bulgars), in individual areas occupied by the Avars the already present or newly arrived Slavs, the not exactly scarce remains of the Transylvanian and Pannonian Germans (Gepids, Lombards, etc.), and Romanic populations previously remaining in Pannonia or recently enslaved from the Balkans. The activities of the Avars were oriented almost exclusively to war, allied with but also against Byzantium, in the period from 568 to 626, where first the border towns and fortresses suffered (*Sirmium*, *Singidunum*, etc.), followed by many settlements and places in the interior of the Balkans. Archaeological indicators increasingly show that in the background of the war events in the regions occupied by the Avars, there was a constant settlement, relocation, or displacement and regrouping of the previous and newly arrived inhabitants. However, the most comprehensive and important military campaign was undertaken by the Avars in 626, when they attacked the very heart of the Byzantine Empire, but failed to conquer Constantinople. This failure brought to light the already existing dissatisfaction with the role of the Khagan and the organization of the Khaganate, which resulted in the independence of individual non-Avar groups within the Khaganate (Bulgars), but also those settled along its western and southern outskirts (Slavs). This tumultuous upheaval was followed by a period of the peaceful evolution of Avar society, open to influences both from the Merovingian circles of western Europe as well as those from Byzantine southeastern Europe. Some of these trends were to continue in the transitional Middle Avar period, which ended around 670/680, when new nomadic groups arrived in the Avar region from the east, so that at the turn from the 7th to the 8th centuries the outlines are already becoming visible of a new Avar period social organization, known as the Second Avar Khaganate, in archaeological terms the Late Avar period, where the numerous archaeological finds offer much more information than the historical sources. In the 8th century, the Avars and their neighbors enjoyed a relatively peaceful existence, with rare conflicts limited mainly to the Bavarian-Slavic-Avar boundaries (ca. 713/714 and 744), up to 788, when a major Avar-Frankish conflict occurred in the north of Italy that ended in the defeat of the Avars. Three years later the Frankish King Charlemagne (771–814) launched a war against the Avars that lasted (with interruptions) until the total collapse of the Avar Khaganate in 811. The remaining Avars retained some sort of independence only in the area east of the Danube, where an Avar presence could be noted for the last time in the third decade of the 9th century.

Avars, Early Slavs, Antes, and Byzantium (ca. 568 to 670/680)

The most luxurious finds from the Early Avar period come primarily from graves discovered in Hungary in the area between the Danube and Tisa Rivers, which leads to the conclusion that this had been the center of the First Avar Khaganate. The same can be said for finds of poorer graves of ordinary early Avar warriors, so it is not surprising that very few finds of the earliest Early Avar period have been discovered in continental Croatia. Rare individual Early Avar finds south of the Danube come from Syrmia and eastern Slavonia, and only a small number can be associated with the Avars, Avar warriors, or their military activities (the brick from *Sirmium*, equestrian spear, three-bladed arrow), and a greater number with other ethnic groups connected or adjacent to the Avars, i.e. the Slavs (bow fibulae, pottery vessels made by hand) or the Romanic population living in the near or somewhat distant vicinity of the Avars (molds for pressing, individuals forms of jewelry for the head or chest). A new wave of nomadic newcomers in the last decades of the 7th century strengthened the Avar position in Pannonia, but also caught the attention of the neighbors of the Avars in the Merovingian West and the Byzantine South. The revival of Byzantine interest in events in regions on the southern periphery of the Avar Khaganate is shown by the silver objects with Byzantine and Byzantine-Pontic characteristics discovered at Čadavica, located in the Drava River section of present-day western Slavonia.

-
- A Mould for pressing decorative saddle fittings
bronze
Čitluk
7th cent.
 - B Avar period arrowheads
iron
Beli Breg (Serbia)
6th–8th cent.
 - C “Slavic” bow fibulae
bronze
Zagreb—Stenjevec
last third of the 6th and first third of the 7th cent.
 - D Earring in the form of inverted pyramid
gold
Velika Kladuša (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
second quarter of the 7th cent.



A



B



C



D



Sirmium (Srijemska Mitrovica)

From the arrival of the Romans in Pannonia, *Sirmium* (Srijemska Mitrovica) was considered an important center of the province: in the early Roman period it was the center of Lower Pannonia, and in the late Roman period the center of Second or Syrian Pannonia and the Illyrian prefecture in the mid-4th century. It was under the control of the Eastern Empire from 427, it was conquered by the Huns in 441, and then several times during the 5th and 6th centuries it was ruled by the Ostrogoths and Gepids, while after the collapse of the Gepid kingdom in 567, it was under Byzantine control. In 568, it was besieged by the Avars under Khagan Bayan, but they were not successful. Almost fifteen years later, they did succeed, but only after a siege that lasted from 580 to 582. During one of these two Avar sieges, a brick was carved with an inscription in the Greek alphabet:

Χρ(ιστὲ) Κ(ύρι)ε. Βοήτι τῆς πόλεος κ'ἔρυξον τὸν Ἄβαριν κὲ
πύλαξον τὴν Ῥωμανίαν κὲ τὸν γράψαντα. Ἄμῆν

[*Lord Christ, help the city, smite the Avars, and
protect the Romans and the one who wrote this*].

Brick with
an inscription
clay
Srijemska Mitrovica
(Serbia)
568 or 582 AD



ΚΕΡΡΟΤΗΤΟΤΑ

ΛΕΣΚΕΡΥΣΟΝΤΟΝΑΒ

ΚΕΡΡΟΤΗΤΟΤΑ

ΛΕΣΚΕΡΥΣΟΝΤΟΝΑΒ

ΚΕΡΡΟΤΗΤΟΤΑ

ΛΕΣΚΕΡΥΣΟΝΤΟΝΑΒ

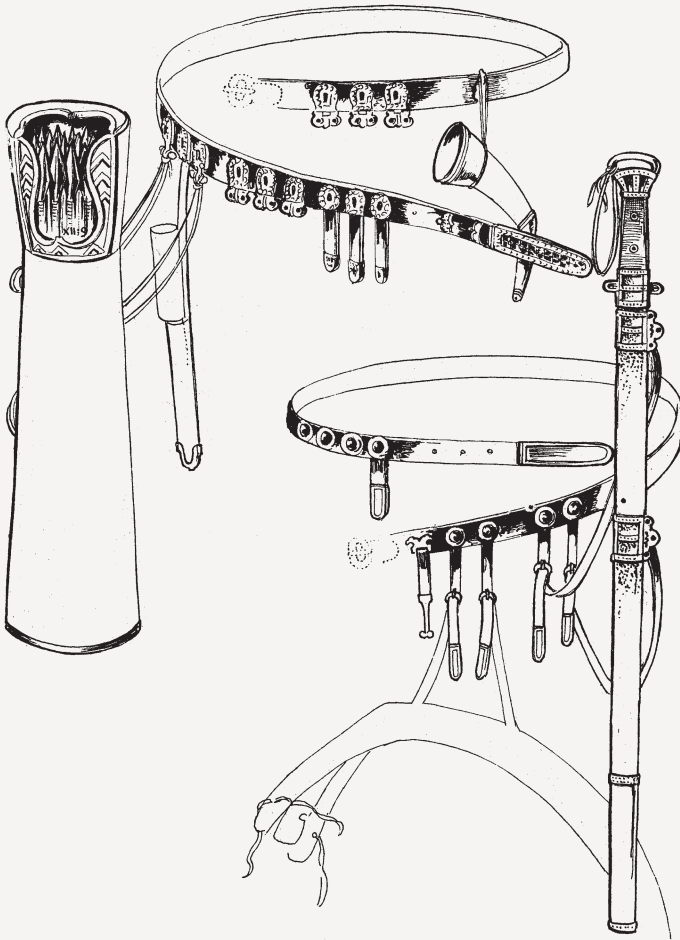
Čađavica, a group of objects (jewelry) found by chance — an individual grave, a cemetery, or a hoard?

A group of silver objects were found in 1929, in not entirely clear circumstances, near the village of Čađavica (a pair of silver star-shaped earrings, a pendant for a necklace, a torc, a buckle and fitting for a belt, three belt strap ends, and a pair of bracelets). They were the work of skilled master craftsmen and were made from high quality silver, and it is justifiably thought that they were produced by some of the leading Byzantine metalworking centers. In terms of composition, the most similar are two hoards of silver objects, one from Zalesie in southwestern Ukraine, and the other from Zemianski Vrbovok in southern Slovakia, because of which the find from Čađavica is dated to the third quarter of the 7th century, and by some is considered to be related to the arrival of new nomadic groups and the settlement of the Slavs.

Jewelry and
attire from
a grave find
or a hoard
silver,
gilt,
glass
Čađavica
third quarter
of the 7th cent.



Reconstruction
of the belt
and military
equipment
of an Avar
dignitary
6th/first half
of the 7th cent.



Avars and Avar-period Slavs of the Middle Avar and Late Avar periods (ca. 670–680 to ca. 800)

The organization and structure of Avar society, as well as the lifestyle, beliefs, and social relations among the ethnically and socially heterogeneous population of the Avar Khaganate, are best shown by the data offered by finds gathered through excavations of Avar period graves, of which more than sixty thousand have been discovered in the areas occupied by the Avars in Pannonia and the neighboring regions. It is considered that at least a third of these graves belonged to the Early and Middle Avar periods, but only a very small quantity have been discovered and investigated to the present in continental Croatia in the area between the Sava and Drava Rivers, particularly in eastern Slavonia and Syrmia. Despite this, the finds offer a picture that matches that in other parts of the Khaganate in the sense of the structure of the cemeteries, the burial customs and rituals, and the grave goods found in the graves, which given the lack of historical data represent the usual indicators of the social position and role of individuals or groups in the Avar-period local community or beyond. In areas under the control of the Khaganate, individual burials of Avar-period elite, small family or clan cemeteries, and cemeteries of settlements with several hundred and sometimes several thousand graves have been registered, the latter usually located in the immediate vicinity of the settlement. The deceased were usually placed in a rectangular or oval grave pit — in the Tisa River basin more complicated forms of graves were also frequent (tunnels, niches, step-like additions) — where a greater depth reflected the higher social status of the deceased in the Early Avar period. Especially deeply dug graves with walls coated with wood were intended for the burial of a horseman and his steed, and even the placement of the deceased was not rare in wooden coffins carved from a trunk or composed of boards sometimes fastened with iron clamps or nails. In the Late Avar period, the deceased was often placed on a burial platform, which were then buried together, indicating the ceremonial character and complexity of the Avar burial rituals, worship of the dead, and belief in some form of afterlife. The dead were buried, in accordance with their age and social position, in their best attire. The male deceased were accompanied by their most valuable belt sets, and the weapons and battle equipment that they had used (saber or sword, bow, quiver, arrows, spears, battle axe), the tools that they had used (axes/billhooks, fire steels, knives, etc.), and the jewelry and ornaments that they had worn. Female graves primarily contained jewelry for the head, chest, and arms of precious and non-precious metals (various forms of earrings, necklaces of varied and multicolored beads, bracelets, and rarely,

rings) and objects that served as decorative or functional attire elements (buckles, pendants, *agrafe* or hook and loop elements, etc.) or were added for certain other reasons (amulets and talismans). The graves contained the usual offerings of food and beverages, from which bones remained (cow, sheep, goat, pig, poultry) as well as pottery vessels (pots, jugs, amphorae), and testimony to various forms of superstitions include finds of colored eggs, old coins, sharp objects, fire steels, and other items. Considering the multiethnic character of both Avar khaganates, it is possible to perceive in the composition of the grave goods, their placement in the graves, and recognizable burial customs at Avar-period cemeteries the possible ethnic identity of the deceased in the sense of attributions to Avar, Germanic, Romanic, or Slavic populations, the latter only becoming recognizable in the Late Avar period.

Parts of
a belt set
from a
destroyed
grave
bronze
Dalj — Bogaljevci
8th cent.





Horse burials at Avar-period cemeteries in Pannonia

Historical sources at the end of the 6th or beginning of the 7th centuries mention numerous details related to the Avar cavalry, who were trained from an early age, and hence displayed an understandable closeness and connection between the horseman and his horse (*Strategikon*, XI/2). This is confirmed by numerous examples of the burials of riders and horses at Avar-period cemeteries throughout the Pannonian Plain practiced in both Avar Khaganates and during all Avar-period times. The greatest variety in the burial ritual, including horse burials, was noted in the Early and Middle Avar periods, i.e. in the period from 568 to ca. 670/680 (cremation, the rider and the horse — or parts of the horse — in the same grave, the horse alone, the horse skeleton over the human skeleton, the rider and horse in a grave vault, and a human skeleton with two or more horses). In the Late Avar period, with only rare exceptions, the horses were usually buried with accompanying equipment (bits, parts of harness, saddle with fittings, stirrups), placed in the grave on the right of left side of the horseman, as a rule equipped with warrior equipment (saber, spear, battle axe, etc.). In this period, even the burials of horses by skeletons of female individuals or children were not rare.

Osijek — Zeleno polje

The Avar cemetery in Osijek was apparently located east of Roman period Osijek (*Mursa*). Around 1900 in unknown circumstances, objects attributed to an equestrian grave of the Middle Avar period with partially preserved parts of a gilded belt set of a rider decorated with a notched braid and pressed decorations of the horse harness.

A



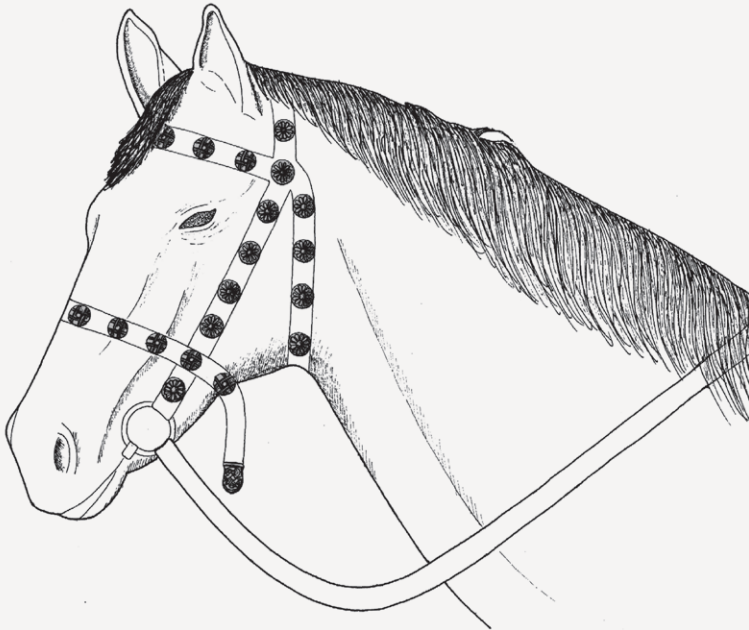
Osijek
(Zeleno polje?)
finds from
a destroyed
equestrian
grave
second third
of the 7th cent.

- A Conical rosette
bronze, gilt
- B Square mount;
Belt strap end
bronze, gilt
- C Reconstruction
of horse harness
decoration

B



C

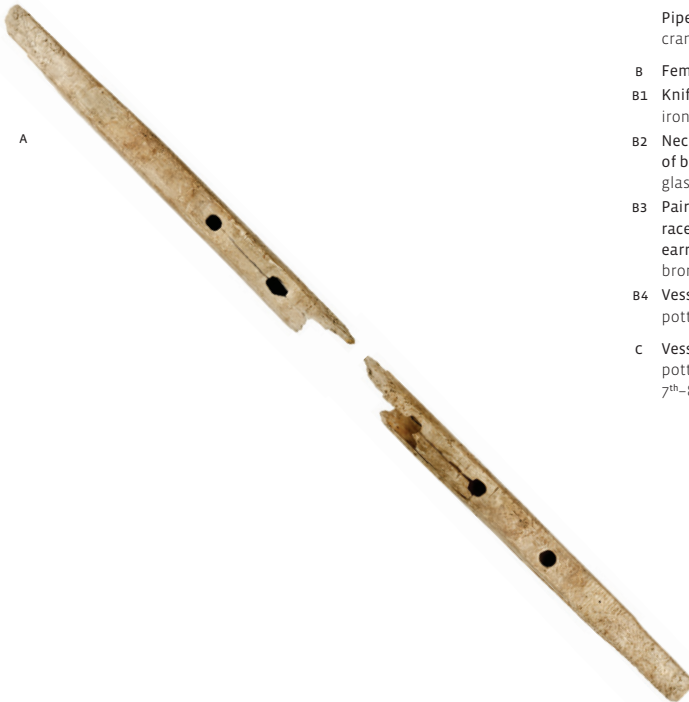


Bijelo Brdo — Bajer

Bijelo Brdo is located 15 km east of Osijek, adjacent to an earlier course of the Drava River located 1.5 km further north. By the banks of the oxbow (*Bajer*), the remains of a badly damaged Avar-period cemetery were discovered and excavated on two occasions in 1948, which contained rare Early Avar (two graves) and primarily Late Avar burials from the last third of the 7th and the 8th centuries. A total of 66 graves were documented, but 64 graves were archaeologically excavated, with finds consisting of objects of everyday use (knives, spindle whorls, fire steels, awls), weapons (parts of a reflex bow, arrowheads, battle axes), and horse equipment (bits, harness separators, stirrups, saddle fittings), jewelry for the head and chest (earrings, necklaces of glass beads, pendants), attire elements (belt buckles and belt strap fittings), and pottery vessels (jugs, pots, bowls), along with an exceptional and rare example of a musical instrument (flute). In addition to those listed, the most significant finds are considered to be those from two Early Avar graves (equestrian grave 49 and female grave 2), along with the chance find of a Late Avar strap end of the Hohenberg-Záhony type.

Bijelo Brdo — Bajer

- A Male grave finds
 - Pipe
 - crane bone
- B Female grave finds
 - B1 Knife
 - iron
 - B2 Necklace of beads
 - glass
 - B3 Pair of raceme earrings
 - bronze, glass
 - B4 Vessel
 - pottery
 - C Vessel
 - pottery
 - 7th–8th cent.





B1



B2



B3

B4



C



Zagreb — Kruge

In the Kruge district of Zagreb at a position called Štrbac (*sand-bar*) a skeleton grave was discovered in 1911 with finds of an axe and a pot, along with a “piece of a red fired earthen vessel”. The excavations were continued by the Archaeological-Historical Department of the Croatian National Museum (today the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb), and another three graves were uncovered, two without finds (gr. 2 and 3) while grave 4 was an equestrian grave rich in finds that included the weapons and attire elements of a warrior and the equipment of his horse. The burials at Kruge are considered to belong to the last quarter of the 8th or even the first quarter of the 9th centuries. Unfortunately, the exact position of this extremely important site for Croatian history has never been established even to the present day.

Zagreb — Kruge
Rider and
horse equipment
end of the 8th to the
beg. of the 9th cent.

- A Spearhead with
a square socket,
detail
iron, bronze, wood
- B Sax, single edged
iron
- C Bit
iron
- D Belt strap end,
one-part
bronze
- E Thatching
loosener
bone
- F Plating of
a reflex bow
bone
- G A square buckle
with a U-shaped
mount
bronze
- H Pair of stirrups
iron





B



C

D



E



F



G



H





A



B

C



D



E



Novo Čiče — Ježevo gravel pit

Novo Čiče —
Gravel pit
Ježevo
grave finds

A Vessel
pottery

B Axe
iron

late 8th cent.

At Novo Čiče, located 4 km southeast of Velika Gorica, during expansion of the diggings for the Ježevo gravel pit in 1962, skeleton burials were discovered with finds attributed to the early medieval period. It was noted that two skeleton burials were destroyed on that occasion, while *“from the third a small iron battle axe and a pottery vessel of the hill-fort type were preserved”* (grave 1). An eyewitness also claimed that the skeleton *“lay in an ordinary earthen pit on its back, oriented west (head)–east (feet)”*. In the only archaeologically excavated grave (grave 2), a pottery vessel was found on the left side of the head, and half an animal head had been placed on the legs of the skeleton as provisions for the afterlife. The graves were dated to the end of the 8th century or around the year 800.

Finds of the Hohenberg-Záhony type and objects of the Blatnica jewelry style (second half of the 8th and early 9th centuries)

C Belt
strap end,
single-part
bronze, gilt

Bijelo Brdo —
Bajer
end of the 8th
to the beg. of
the 9th cent.

The Hohenberg type, named after the Austrian village of Hohenberg in northern Styria, refers to belt strap ends from luxurious belt sets of Italo-Byzantine origin made of gilded bronze and dated to the mid-8th century. Examples were found there in 1894, supposedly together with an early medieval sword of the Mannheim type. Their few Late Avar variants would have been manufactured according to this model — according to some at approximately the same time, and others in the later 8th century — among which the example from Záhony in northeastern Hungary stands out in terms of quality. Several more similar strap ends have been discovered in Hungary, and at least two come from Croatia: one from the cemetery of Bijelo Brdo — Bajer in eastern Slavonia, and the other from Bribirska Glavica in Dalmatia, both chance finds and both made from gilded bronze.

D Belt
strap end of
trapezoidal
shape
bronze
Velika
Horvatska

E Shield-
shaped
mount
bronze
Lika
region

The Blatnica jewelry style received its name from Blatnica near Martin in Slovakia, where a group of diverse early medieval objects were discovered, which were long thought to represent the inventory of the grave of a Slavic warrior buried around the year 800. As a supposed grave find, it was purchased for the National Museum in Budapest in the 1860s, and until recently it was considered significant as it contained artifacts with chronologically different decorative characteristics: Late Avar (fittings and a globular button), early Carolingian (a type D sword with a richly decorated grip and suspension elements), and local Slavic (horse harness fittings). The Late Avar cast horse harness fittings from the Blatnica find (7 pcs.) are decorated with carved palmettes and half-palmettes on an incised background, a distinctive decorative motif that is represented by numerous examples at late Avar sites in Slovakia, northwestern and southern Hungary, eastern Syrmia (Serbia), and eastern Croatia, and sporadically in other parts of Croatia (Zagorje, Lika, Primorje).

The Late Avar cemeteries (second half of the 8th and early 9th centuries)

Velika Gorica — Visoki Brijeg

A cemetery with a continuity of burial from prehistory to the early medieval period was discovered in 1908 in Velika Gorica near the local hospital at the site of Visoki Brijeg. Of the 67 graves excavated there from 1908 to 1927, an early medieval identity was confirmed for five skeleton graves (gr. 16–20), only one lacking finds (grave 19). Standing out among the finds are pottery vessels, a bucket with iron fittings and a handle, various forms of iron axes, swallow-tail arrowheads, a necklace of beads, and a rare one-part silver strap-end with images of a griffon on one side and circular tendrils on the other. This cemetery is dated to the last quarter of the 8th and the first quarter of the 9th centuries.

Velika Gorica — Visoki Brijeg

A Female grave finds

A1 Necklace of beads
glass

A2 Bucket
wood, iron
(reconstruction)

A3 Axe
iron

B Male grave finds

B1 Axe
iron

B2 Arrowhead
in the shape
of a swallowtail
iron

B3 Three-lobed
arrowhead
iron

B4 Belt strap end,
single-part
silver



A1



A2

A3





B1



B2



B3



B4

Brodski Drenovac — Plana

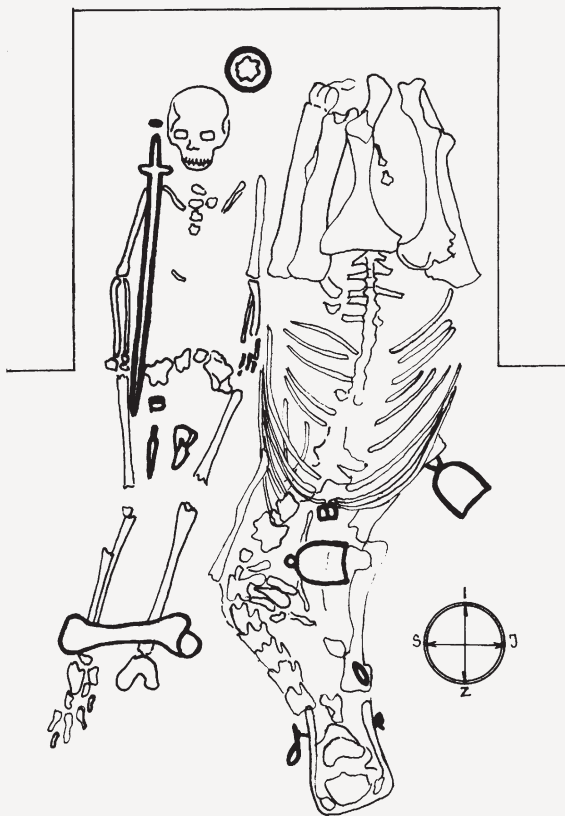
In 1952 and 1953, a partially destroyed early medieval cemetery was excavated at the site of Plana in Brodski Drenovac. The discovered 32 graves included three with equestrian burials (gr. 1, 13, and 14), two with the burial of a head without a body (gr. 2 and 12), and one with traces of massacre and decapitation (gr. 32). Food was usually placed by the deceased, as is indicated by the bones of domesticated animals, and in one case chicken eggs. The finds consist of weapons (saber, single-edged sword, knives), horse equipment (bits, stirrups), many pottery vessels (with one example of the secondary use of a Roman-period jug), jewelry for the head, neck, and hands (wire earrings, simple circlets and circlets with joints with or without glass pendants, O-circlets, circlets with multiple S-shaped endings, bead necklaces, bracelets, rings), objects of everyday use (needle case), and belt decorations (propeller-fitting, perforated fittings, and a Blatnica style fitting)—objects that indicate an Avar-Slavic cultural identity during the Late Avar and upcoming Early Slavic period in the last quarter of the 8th and first half of the 9th centuries.

Brodski Drenovac — Plana

- A Saber, detail
iron
- B Drawing of
an equestrian
grave
- C Female grave finds
- C1 Belt fitting in
the perforated
technique
bronze
- C2 Needle case
bone
- C3 Necklace of beads
glass
- C4 Bucket
wood, iron
(reconstruction)

A





B

C1



C2



C3



C4





THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES IN CONTINENTAL CROATIA

9th-12th centuries



The Early Slavic cultures in central and eastern Europe in the second third of the 6th century

- KORČAK-PRAGUE CULTURE
- KOLOČIN CULTURE
- PENKOVKA CULTURE
- AVAR TERRITORY DURING THE FIRST KHAGANATE
- THE BORDERS OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE



The Early Slavs — evidence of Slavic presence and settlement (6th–8th/9th centuries)

Early Slavs is the term used for members of ethnically and linguistically related clan-based communities existing beyond the Carpathian Mountains (during the period of the Great Migrations inhabiting the areas east of the upper courses of the Elbe, Vistula, and southern Buga Rivers to the Pripyat, Dniester, and the central Dnieper Rivers), parts of whom moved among other directions to the south, gradually occupying the northern parts of the Carpathian basin. Their appearance (i.e. the appearance of material of the Prague-Korchak Culture) in these newly occupied areas in the last quarter of the 5th century coincides with the equally gradual retreat of the Germanic Lombards and Gepids during the first half of the 6th century from the northern parts of the Carpathian Basin, the former to the area south of the Danube, and the latter to central parts of Transylvania and the Tisza River Valley. As early as the middle of the 6th century, the Byzantine writers Jordanes and Procopius recorded an ethnonym for these new arrivals, who they called *Sklabenoī/Sclavenī*, describing not merely events related to them but also some of their common features, customs, and forms of social behavior. In the same period, in addition to the already mentioned Prague-Korchak Culture, another two quite similar Eastern European Early Slavic cultural groups are archaeologically recognizable: the more easterly Penkova Culture (Antes) and the northeastern Kolochin Culture. By the middle of the 7th century, the cultures of the early Slavs encompassed the areas of Belarus and Ukraine in the east to central Germany and Lower Austria in western Europe, and from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Adriatic and Aegean Seas in southern Europe.

The archaeological appearance of the Early Slavic Prague-Korchak cultural groups involves the organization of the settlements, the methodology of the manufacture, shape, and arrangement of dwellings, the burial customs, the spatial relations of settlements and cemeteries, and the most common elements of the material culture, such as undecorated hand-made pottery (vessels with low necks, baking pans), bow fibulas, necklaces, and so forth. The settlements of the Early Slavs were of the open type (unfortified) and were usually located near or on the terraces of large or small rivers and streams, extending over an area from ca. 0.5 to 2 hectares. They were composed of semi-subterranean houses of small dimensions, mostly square or rectangular, known as pit-dwellings (Ger. *Grubenhaus*), with an area ranging from about 4 to 20 m², which therefore were sufficient only for the basic needs of a nuclear family (parents with their biological or adopted children). In one of the corners of the pit-dwelling, usually opposite the entrance, a stone hearth was built in the earlier periods, while later the hearths were more frequently or exclusively made of clay. In addition to the pit-dwellings, the settlements also contained a central area intended for gathering and mutual or ceremonial activities, while separate from this, and also the residential areas, was an area intended for production activities. The fortification of early Slav settlements began in the 9th century, seemingly first in the regions of the Western Slavs.

Velika Gorica—
Pleso

A



- A Two-sided comb, fragment bone
- B Vessel pottery

B



It is commonly thought that in the period from the 5th to the 8th/9th centuries the Slavs had mostly cremated their dead. It is also considered that this custom ceased somewhat earlier among the South Slavs (e.g. Croats) due to influences from the Christianized indigenous Romanic population, and that in areas controlled by the Avars, the Slavs generally accepted and utilized Avar burial rituals (some of the Lower Pannonian Slavs, for instance). Despite certain clearly borrowed customs, as well as an evidently subordinate position within the Avar state, the Slavs nonetheless seem to have succeeded in creating some kind of sufficiently valued form of coexistence that enabled their language to become the *lingua franca* of the various ethnic populations that inhabited Avaria. With the fall of Avaria in the late 8th and early 9th centuries, the names of individual Slavic groups emerged into the light of day, some of which would survive and in time be used to designate modern nations in southeastern Europe.

Settlement finds of pottery characteristic for the Early Slavs from the late 6th and first half of the 7th centuries in continental Croatia are still very rare and are limited so far to only a few sites in northwestern Croatia (Jakopovec — Blizna, Varaždin — Brezje, Šemovec — Šarnjak) and the vicinity of Velika Gorica (Petrovina). Finds and sites of the later 7th and 8th centuries are more common, and considerable quantities have been discovered and excavated in continental Croatia in the last several decades.

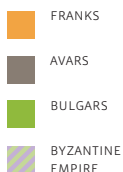
Velika Gorica — Pleso/Airport

Pleso is located in the plain on the southern side of the Sava River, and is administratively a part of the city of Velika Gorica, some ten kilometers southeast of the center of Zagreb. Reconstruction and expansion of the airport at Pleso led to rescue archaeological excavations in the autumn of 2013 at three positions in the area of the planned passenger terminal. Settlement remains were documented from the Bronze Age, the late Iron Age, and the early Middle Ages. The discovered parts of the early medieval settlement consisted of seven shallow semi-subterranean structures and the remains of a domed oven, located twenty meters to the south of the group of structures. Their layout fits into the already established model of early medieval Slavic settlements, which consists of several small groups of pit-dwelling structures. The finds mostly consist of pottery fragments from pots, while one edge fragment was preserved from a baking dish — a shallow vessel of circular shape. The pottery was mostly decorated with the usual variants of combed wavy lines and zones of horizontal lines, or a combination of the two decorations. A fragment of a tripartite bone comb with two rows of teeth represents a rare find. This partially excavated settlement is dated to the period from the end of the 7th to around the middle of the 8th centuries.



The Franks and southern Pannonia — influence, presence, and archaeological traces (from the last third of the 8th century to the first decades of the 10th century)

Franks,
Avars
and Bulgars
ca. 800 AD



The Frankish interest in the Pannonian regions, whose southern section composes present-day continental Croatia, became recognizable if not during the reign of Pepin the Short (751–768), the founder of the Carolingian dynasty, then certainly during the early years of the reign of his far more famous son and heir, Charlemagne (king 768–800; emperor 800–814). In order to even reach Pannonia, the Frankish authorities first had to overthrow the Lombard Kingdom, in friendly relations with the Avars, which was achieved in AD 774, as well as fifteen years later the Bavarian Duchy of Tassilo (788), together with the previously subjugated Carantania of the Slavic prince Borut (749–751) and his successors Gorazd (+752) and Hotimir (+769). The liquidation of the Lombard Kingdom and the Frankish expansion into the northern Adriatic disturbed the Byzantine Empire, while with their expansion in the direction of Pannonia, the Franks threatened the Avars, who answered by forming alliances, first with the Lombards in 744, and later with the Bavarians in 787/788, provoking conflicts that would continue and ultimately lead to a Frankish large scale response in AD 791. In the war with the Avars, the Franks succeeded in transferring the brunt of warfare into Avar territory with campaigns that were particularly fierce in 795, 796, 799, and 802, while the war concluded in AD 803 with a Frankish victory and the occupation of almost all of Pannonia (on the right bank of the Danube), which was confirmed in the same year by an mission to Emperor Charlemagne in Regensburg of the most prominent Avars and their primarily Slavic allies.

The Frankish wars and occupation of Pannonia resulted in new administrative and religious organization, with Pannonia divided in 803/811 into *Upper Pannonia* north of the Drava River, annexed to the Bavarian Margraviate and the Metropolitan of Salzburg, and *Lower Pannonia* south of the Drava River, annexed to the Friulian Margraviate and the Aquileian Patriarchy. The stability that despite everything had been promised by the peace agreement between the Frankish Empire and the Byzantine Empire in Aachen in 812 was short-lived, as it was first shaken by the rebellion of the Frankish vassal Prince Ljudevit from 819 to 822 in the western part of Lower Pannonia, and after this in 828 the invasion by the Bulgars and the occupation of the eastern parts of Lower Pannonia, particularly the region of the former Roman-period *Syrman Pannonia* (Syrmia and eastern Slavonia). The territorial division of Lower Pannonia into Frankish and Bulgarian sections was to continue all the way to the second third or middle of the 10th century and would significantly influence changes and dynamics in the structuring of administrative and religious authority, both those just recently established as well as those inherited from previous periods.

Sword
(blade)
with the
inscription
ULFBERHT
(type K)
iron
Prozor —
Gornja Luka
end of the 8th
and beg. of
the 9th cent.



- A Medvedička
grave find
- A1 Sword, detail
iron
- A2 Belt strap end
bronze,
gilt
end of the 8th cent.
- B Winged spear
iron
Dugo Selo
second half
of the 8th
to the beg.
of the 9th cent.
- C Pair of earrings
with three joined
annular hoops
silver
Istria
second half
of the 9th cent.

A2



B



In such conditions two more or less clearly recognizable early feudal primarily Slavic entities were formed on the territory of Croatia and became visible as early as in the first decades of the 9th century: one in Lower Pannonia in the second half of the 9th century, known as the kingdom between the Sava and Drava (*regnum inter Savum et Dravum*) in the Croatian north, and the other on the Adriatic coast and its hinterland in the present-day Croatian south, ruled at the beginning of the 9th century by Borná (ca. 810–ca. 821), Duke of Dalmatia and Liburnia (*dux Dalmatiae atque Liburniae*), and only thirty years later in the middle of the 9th century by Duke Trpimir (845–864), who already then explicitly called himself duke of the Croats (*Chroatorum dux*). Trpimir's successors in the second half of the 9th century directed their interest towards the areas north of Dalmatian Croatia, confirmed for the last quarter of the 9th century and the first third of the 10th century by finds of archaeological material with Early Croatian features found not merely at sites in the Croatian Sava River basin (e.g. Sisak), but also at sites in the neighboring Sava River region in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Frankish saber rattling on the Avar borders, which, as the course of events showed, soon turned into war, the establishment of a new administrative system, and the intensive (re)Christianization of occupied region left its mark among the archaeological finds in the southern Pannonian area. Finds of weapons (swords, spearheads, axes) and military equipment (buckles and belt decorations) dominated, along with objects of everyday use (knives, pails) and implements and tools (awl, plow), while there were few and so far quite rare examples of jewelry (rings). The collected items were either individual and found by accident or were groups of objects uncovered by chance representing the inventory of most often already considerably damaged early medieval graves, the following standing out in importance and significance: graves of warriors outfitted with a sword, axe, belt buckle, fittings, and strap ends, and a pail (Zagreb — Podšused; Medvedička — house no. 38), individual finds of Early Carolingian swords (Zagreb — Jarun) and spears (Gradac — Kupa River, Dugo Selo — vicinity), and part of a supposed hoard of implements and tools (Nartski Novaki). Beyond the southern Pannonian area of continental Croatia, significant finds include two Early Carolingian swords from the Lika region, one with the inscription ULFBERHT (Prozor — Gornja Luka; Dabar — Gradina Korač), and a pair of exceptional silver temple-rings with three annular hoops (Istria — unknown site).

c



Sisak, fortresses (*castra*), and missionary centers of Pannonian Croatia

Sisak, the city located on the Kupa River 50-some kilometers south of Zagreb, is the only settlement of Late Antiquity that the written sources, recording events in *Pannonia Savia* long after the Roman period, still called by its old name — *Siscia*. At the beginning of the 9th century, Frankish sources (Einhard) added the term *civitas* to this ancient name, identifying the early medieval Sisak settlement as urban, Christian, potentially or actually an episcopal seat, and an established administrative center for a broader social community. During almost the entire 9th century, Sisak was the center of the Principality of Lower Pannonia, first partially or fully independent, and later a vassal entity under Frankish rule. In the last quarter of the 9th century and in the 10th century it was the secure stronghold of the Lower Pannonian Prince Braslav (ca. 882–896), while after his disappearance, natural death, or death in some battle with the Hungarians, it came under the authority of the Croatian rulers. Matters would become significantly different for Sisak only after the death of the Croatian King Zvonimir († 1089), when the Hungarians began to rule over the former Lower Pannonian Principality at the end of the 11th century. One of the first political moves of these new rulers, but certainly not the only one, was the elimination of the diocese of Sisak and the creation of a new bishopric at Kaptol in the fifty-some kilometers more northerly Zagreb.

The early medieval archaeological material from the area of the city of Sisak for which the site of discovery is known or hypothesized is nowhere as numerous as that from the earlier period of the Great Migrations (5th–6th cent.). These earlier finds, as well as those from later Avar periods (7th–8th cent.), at present indicate a continuity of settlement on the left bank of the Kupa River, i.e. in the area and immediate vicinity of the Roman period, Late Antiquity, and Early Byzantine *Siscia*. Finds from the late 8th and 9th centuries are rare but significant as they show the diversity of influences that brought from the Croatian coast to the Sisak region objects with Byzantine characteristics while from the Frankish west weapons and equestrian equipment arrived. The existence of some pre-Romanesque church is indicated by a stone fragment(s) from an altar screen (and other items of church furnishings), as well as recent finds of individual burials without finds but accompanied by fragments of pottery vessels decorated with combed wavy lines. Four-beaded earrings shaped according to the Early Croatian model belong to a group of luxurious jewelry created in Sisak workshops or brought from the Croatian south at the end of the 9th and in the first half of the 10th centuries, after which the jewelry forms of the Bijelo Brdo cultural circle become predominant (S-circlets, cast raceme earrings with a pair or two pairs of joints, two-part pendants), along with some somewhat later Early Croatian forms of earrings (granulated earrings). These include examples manufactured in Sisak workshops of cast jewelry as is shown by the discovery of a mould and examples of unsuccessfully cast raceme earrings.



A



B

A Four-beaded earring
silver
Sisak
first half
of the 10th cent.

B Mould for casting earrings
limestone
Kupa River, Sisak
10th-11th cent.

C Fragment of a stone pluteus
sandstone
Sisak
9th cent.

C





A

A Pottery fragments
Zagreb —
Kaptol/St. Francis
second half
of the 8th cent.

B



Zagreb — Kaptol/
Bakačeva Tower
bronze

B Earring
with
a three-sided
star-shaped
pendant
second half
of the 8th cent.

C



C Circlet
with
a chain
pendant
9th cent.

D



D Circlet
with
a spiral
ending
9th cent.

E



E Earring
with
a raceme
pendant
second half
of the 10th cent.

If a later Hungarian historical source is to be believed — the work of an anonymous notary of the Croatian-Hungarian King Bela III created at the end of the 12th century — at least another three fortresses existed at the beginning of the 10th century in the region between the Sava, Drava, and Danube Rivers: Zagreb, Požega, and Vukovar. This first early medieval data mentions Zagreb as a fortress called Zabrag (*castrum Zabrag*), which together with two others (*castrum Posaga et castrum Vlcou*) were occupied by the Hungarians at the end of the first half or middle of the 10th century while returning from one of their military raids in western Europe. While no early medieval finds have yet been discovered in the city of Požega that would substantiate this claim, archaeological finds from Zagreb and Vukovar indicate the existence of early medieval settlements whose beginnings were certainly earlier than the first half or middle of the 10th century.

Very few archaeological finds from the Migration Period and Early Middle Ages have been discovered in the area of present-day Zagreb. These consist primarily of finds from the suburb called Kruge not far from the Sava River, where late Avar period graves from the 8th century were discovered in 1911, while several years earlier, in 1906, bronze jewelry manufactured and used throughout a lengthy chronological span, from the end of the 8th to the second half of the 10th centuries, was said to have been found on the hill of Kaptol in front of the Cathedral of Zagreb. In the complete absence of any other archaeological data, this jewelry (four earrings) served for decades as support for the hypothesis that the “original nucleus of the Zagreb settlement” was located in the Early Middle Ages on this “bishop’s hill”. This continued until the spring of 2002, when during rescue excavations in Opatovina Street, a historical street of Zagreb in the western part of the hill of Kaptol, in front of the Church of St. Francis, part of a late and post medieval cemetery of the 14th–16th centuries was first uncovered. During the excavations, in addition to the cemetery, numerous settlement strata disturbed by burials were documented, with many finds of pottery fragments and remains of residential structures from the Early and High Middle Ages (11th–13th centuries), for whose existence there had never previously been any findings. Additionally, in the very deepest layers of the site, the remains were discovered of the stone hearths of two pit-dwellings, characteristic components of the Early Slav settlements of the Prague or Prague-Korchak Culture of the 6th and 7th centuries. Finds of fragments of undecorated coarse pottery, pottery decorated with shallow combed wavy lines, dense rows of shallowly grooved horizontal lines, alone or in combination with perpendicular rows of sickle-shaped decoration, as well as other forms, all showed that a settlement certainly existed of Slavic newcomers at the Zagreb site of Opatovina, in the middle and the second half of the 8th century if not earlier. This quickly became or eventually grew into a Slavic (Croatian) parish center, and at the end of the 11th century, on the initiative of the Hungarian King Ladislaus (1077–1095), this settlement took under its wing the diocese abolished in Sisak and “transferred” to Zagreb.

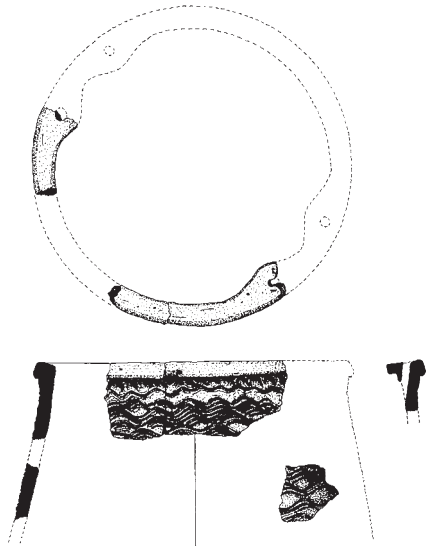


A



B

C



Finds from the Late Avar period dated to the 8th century have been documented at several places in the city of Vukovar. It is certain that some of these finds came from destroyed Late Avar graves, but the specific position of any Avar period settlement has not yet been established. Hence the finds collected near the bank of the Danube (Bajer, ca. 1896) are of particular importance, consisting of fragments from vessels with settlement characteristics. These had evidently been washed down from the nearby elevation located above the influx of the Vuka River into the Danube. It was easy to control the route that crossed the Vuka River from this extensive plateau, protected by loess cliffs on three sides, along with one ditch (*surduk*) widened and deepened by diggings. The strategic location of the site would certainly have been of equal importance during the Frankish-Avaric Wars at the end of the 8th and the beginning of the 9th centuries, when the Frankish army passed through these regions, but also later after the fall of Avaria, whose collapse aided the Bulgars in their campaigns in 803–805 led by Khan Krum (†814) to take Transylvania, as well as eastern Syrmia, from the Avars. The advance of the Bulgars towards the west and the conquest of eastern Slavonia all the way to the borders of the former *Pannonia Sirmiensis* was continued by Khan Omurtag (814–831) a quarter century later, while wars between the Bulgars and Franks, in which the local or neighboring Slavs (Timochani, Croats, etc.) regularly participated, were frequent in the following decades. This all increasingly contributed to the strategic value of the extensive plateau site described above, where as early as the first third of the 9th century, the Franks, Slavs, or Bulgars had built and fortified the settlement at Vukovar. This probably well-fortified settlement still remained strategically important in the middle of the 10th century, as is indicated by the noted interest of the Hungarians to grab it at some point.

In the last third of the 10th century, in the vicinity of the early medieval settlement of Vukovar, the burial of deceased individuals began at the site of Lijevo Brdo, which after a short-lived Early Hungarian phase, eventually grew into an extensive cemetery of the Bijelo Brdo cultural group where burial ceased in the first quarter of the 11th century.

-
- A Vessel
pottery
Vukovar — Šamac
12th–13th cent.
 - B Earring with joints
bronze
Vukovar —
Franciscan
Monastery
9th cent.
 - C Reconstruction
of a pottery
cauldron
Vukovar —
Danube River bank
10th–11th cent.



Very little is known about the ecclesiastic missionary centers in continental Croatia in the 9th century, whose task included the Christianization and pacification of the newly occupied regions in the eastern part of the state of Charlemagne. The former Lower Pannonia at that time was assigned to the Aquileian missionary region, and in addition to *Siscia*, this area included the recently well-known and to a great extent archaeologically investigated fortified plateau with the Church of Our Lady of the Mountains at Lobar, located thirty-some kilometers northwest of Zagreb. On a dominant elevation that controlled the road from *Poetovio* to *Siscia* there once existed a Roman period shrine dedicated to the goddess Diana (?), while thanks to recent archeological investigation it was discovered that in the Early Christian period a basilica with an octagonal baptistery stood there (5th–6th cent.), followed by a pre-Romanesque three-nave church with an antechamber and belltower with next to it a single-nave wooden church with a square apse (9th cent.), and above the pre-Romanesque church a late Romanesque single-nave church with a semicircular apse (12th/13th cent.), followed by the presently existing Gothic church (14th/15th cent.), later renovated in the Baroque style (18th cent.). At Lobar a fragment of a beam (architrave) of an altar screen was discovered in 1946 with the inscription +SVMME, which is interpreted and read as an abbreviated invocation of the longer form *In nomine summe Trinitatis* or the even longer *In nomine summe et individue Trinitatis* [In the name of the highest and undivided Trinity], known from medieval documents. The architrave fragment would apparently belong to the pre-Romanesque church built in the first third of the 9th century.

Fragment of
a stone beam
with an inscription
marble
Lobar —
Shrine of Our Lady
of the Mountains
first quarter
of the 9th cent.

A



B



**The Hungarians in the Carpathian basin
and the establishment of their strongholds
in the Croatian Danube region and eastern Syrmia
(the last third of the 10th century)**

The last quarter of the 9th century in the neighboring region of Pannonia across the Drava River was marked by the strengthening and expansion of the Great Moravia state of King Svatopluk (870–894), the disintegration of the upper Pannonian parts of Eastern Francia after the death of the Bavarian King Carloman (†880), and the arrival of the Hungarians, who had occasionally raided into the central Danubian region since 862 from the area beyond the Carpathian Mountains, fighting as mercenaries, sometimes on the side of the Franks, and sometimes on the side of the Great Moravians. The Hungarians began to abandon their legendary homeland beyond the Carpathians (*Etelköz*) in 895, and moving to the west, they successfully occupied the northeastern part of present-day Hungary. Not stopping there, they consolidated their acquisition and soon continued to expand to the west and south, taking advantage of the weak position and quarrels of the heirs of Carloman (Arnulf, Odo) and the discord among the sons of Svatopluk (Mojmir II, Svatopluk II, Predislav?). The Franks, aided by the Pannonian Slavs, reacted with war, but in a battle at the still unidentified site of Brezalauspurc (often referred to as the Battle of Pressburg/Bratislava) in 907, they experienced a major defeat, which enabled the Hungarians to carry out unhindered pillaging raids into the west of Europe. The Croatian King Tomislav (910–928) prevented the Hungarians from occupying the region of the former Lower Pannonia on several occasions, but their incursions to the west were permanently stopped only by the victory of the German King Otto I (936–963; Holy Roman Emperor, 963–973) at the battle of Lechfeld near Augsburg in 955. Hungarian campaigns to the east against Byzantium ended fifteen years later with their defeat at Lüleburgaz (*Arcadiopolis*) in European Turkey in 970. During the attacks against the Byzantines (959–970), or after the cessation of hostilities and in the period of the weakening of the Bulgarian central authority in the middle of the seventies and in the eighties of the 10th century, the Hungarians established footholds on the right, then Bulgarian overseen bank of the Danube in the present-day Croatian Danubian region and Syrmia, as is indicated by individual archaeological finds from the last third of the 10th century (for example, at Vukovar — Lijevo Bara in the Croatian Danube region and Surduk in eastern Syrmia).

-
- A Decorative set
for the head and chest
silver, gilt
Surduk (Serbia)
second third
of the 9th cent.
- B Reconstruction
of a headband

The Bijelo Brdo Culture

The Bijelo Brdo Culture is the official term for the multi-ethnic early medieval archaeological material that in the north of Croatia, in the region between the Mura, Sava, Drava, and Danube Rivers, comes mostly from skeleton graves arranged in more or less recognizable rows in cemeteries without churches, and is represented by various objects of similar traits characteristic for the Pannonian plain and sites in Hungary, southern and south-western Slovakia, western Romania, northern and northwestern Serbia (Vojvodina and Srijem), northern and northwestern Bosnia, northeastern Slovenia, and eastern and southeastern Austria in the period from the second half and last third of the 10th century to the last quarter and end of the 11th century, and in places to the beginning and early 12th century. This cultural phenomenon from the later early medieval period and beginning of the developed Middle Ages was given its name by Czech archaeologists in the 1920s on the basis of the eponymous site at Bijelo Brdo in eastern Croatia (Slavonia). Despite attempts made then and also later to depict the Pannonian plain as the starting point of the Bijelo Brdo Culture, and to present the Pannonian Slavs as its creators and main bearers, or, on the contrary, to deny the Slavs any importance or role and attribute the creation of the Bijelo Brdo Culture exclusively to the events and period of the origin of the medieval Hungarian kingdom, for Croatian medieval archaeology the Bijelo Brdo Culture represents both title and content, and is useful and practical, as in the typological and chronological sense it contributes to a more effective distinction of the archaeological material in the northern part of Croatia from the contemporary but often different archaeological material in the southern part of Croatia (Dalmatia).

Female and child graves, in contrast to male graves, contain more finds, primarily bronze, silver, and iron objects dominated by jewelry for the head, neck and chest, and hands, as well as decorative elements and parts of attire and belts: ordinary circlets, S-circlets, and O-circlets, raceme earrings, torcs and necklaces of glass, bone, and stone beads, bronze pendants, lunular pendants, small enclosed bells, Roman imperial bronze coins, and cowrie shells, as well as bracelets and rings, and two-part pendants and button-pendants, and belt buckles, fittings, circlets, and strap ends. Male graves, more often than female ones, contain objects of everyday use, predominantly items of personal equipment, tools, implements, and instruments, agricultural tools, items for hunting and fishing, toiletries, and other objects, such as knives, flints and strikers, spindles whorls, thatching needles and thatch looseners, presses, needles, awls, scrapers and files, sickles, sling-shot projectiles, hooks, tweezers, and so forth. Other than the above, grave also can contain large or small



Sites and finds of the Bijelo Brdo Culture in the collections of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb

fragments or entire pottery vessels and silver, often perforated coins of the Hungarian Arpad dynasty kings. Rare finds of weapons in Bijelo Brdo graves in Croatia (reflex bow, rhomboid arrowheads) — found so far only at the western Syrmian site of Vukovar — Lijeva Bara — are tied to the early Hungarian settlers from the pre- and early Bijelo Brdo period, and are not earlier than the middle and second half of the 10th century.

Among the most important sites of the Bijelo Brdo Culture in Croatia, the following have been archaeologically excavated: the large cemetery of Vukovar — Lijeva Bara in western Syrmia, the eponymous site of Bijelo Brdo — Venecija St., the partially excavated cemeteries of Svinjarevci — Studenac, Zvonimirovo — Veliko Polje, and Vinkovci — Meraja in eastern Slavonia, Đakovo — All Saints in central Slavonia, and Zagreb — Stenjevec — Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Lohor — Shrine of Our Lady of the Mountains in northwestern Croatia. Unsystematic archaeological excavations also are important for significant finds from the cemeteries of Veliki Bukovec — Church of St. Francis of Assisi and Klostar Podravski — Pesci in northwestern Croatia, while the numerous chance finds include objects from the sites of Sisak — King Tomislav St. in the Sava River valley, Ludbreg — Parish Church in the Drava River valley, and Josipovo — Mesarna in western Slavonia.

Lijeva Bara has been known as an archaeological site from the end of the 19th century, when it was still covered with vineyards, and was visited as a possible prehistoric settlement by the famous Croatian archaeologist Josip Brunšmid, who recorded it in his field notes as “Gradac” or “Gradac Janković”. The Archaeological Museum in Zagreb carried out systematic excavations at Lijeva Bara in 1951–1953 in an area of 3050 m² uncovering the remains of a prehistoric cemetery of the Dalj Culture from the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages (ca. 1000–550 BC) and an early medieval cemetery of the Bijelo Brdo Culture (second half of the 10th to the first quarter of the 11th cent. BC). Only much later was the existence noted of a damaged and disturbed settlement from the Late Iron Age (1st cent. BC–1st cent. AD), as well as a few but valuable settlement finds from the Late Copper Age Kostolac Culture (ca. 3300–3000 BC).

No trace was left on Lijeva Bara by Roman civilization or the tumultuous Migration Period, and only in the Early Middle Ages, in the second half of the 10th century, did this position become a cemetery for a local agricultural community of the bearers of the *Bijelo Brdo Culture*. They buried their dead in simple grave pits (with no traces of grave structures) at an average depth of somewhat less than 70 cm. Most of the deceased were buried on their backs, often with one or both forearms placed on the upper part of the trunk. The skeletons were oriented W–E (head–feet) with major or minor deviations towards the north or south. In an area representing only one half of the actual extent of the cemetery, 438 graves were discovered, 191 of them containing finds (43.61%). Finds were most common and numerous in female graves, somewhat rarer and less numerous in male graves, and most scarce in child graves. Male graves were related to finds of weapons and military equipment (bow, quivers, arrowheads) and, to a somewhat lesser extent, objects of everyday use (knives, fire steels, razor). Jewelry was the main inventory of female, as well as child graves, while it was far more rare in male graves (circlets with and without pendants, O- and S-circlets, circlets with a pyramidal pendant, raceme earrings, torcs, necklaces and pendants, bracelets, and rings). Elements of attire were more numerous in child graves and only somewhat less numerous in male and female graves (two-part pendants, appliqués, button-pendants, belt buckles, clasps, fittings, strap ends, and so forth). The amount of the few objects of cult character was greater in child graves than in male or female graves (pottery fragments, osteological remains of victuals for the deceased). The presence of Christianity is indicated by finds of cross-pendants, and still present pagan beliefs by some of the pendants on necklaces (pierced coin, bell-shaped pendant, lunular pendant, small closed bell, and some secondarily utilized objects). Burial ceased at Lijeva Bara during the first quarter of the 11th century.

A



B



C



Vukovar — Lijevo Bara

- A Quiver of an early medieval warrior
reconstruction according to the grave finds
- B Raceme earrings (pair) with joints
silver
- C Cross-pendant
bronze

Bijelo Brdo —
Venice St.

A



A Ring of
braided wire
silver

B



B Bracelet of
twisted wire
bronze

C



Kloštar
Podravski —
Pijeski

C Earrings (pair)
with a
hammered
crescent
silver

D



D Lunular
earring
bronze

E



E Ring
bronze

Bijelo Brdo — Venice Street

In the Middle Ages the area of the present-day settlement of Bijelo Brdo, located 15 km east of Osijek, was called the village of Trnovac (Hungarian *Dor-no*). Under the Ottoman occupation, Orthodox Christian settlers were introduced from Bosnia in the 16th century. After the defeat of the Turks and the liberation of Slavonia, a new settlement was established at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th centuries, which later received its present name. The existence of a medieval settlement with a church and its possible location is indicated by the toponym Mala Klisa (Klisa = *ecclesia* = church), which was still recorded in the census as a separate settlement from 1880 to 1910.

At the end of the 19th century, a cemetery from the Early Middle Ages was discovered in Bijelo Brdo, which was archaeologically excavated on four occasions (1896 — twice, 1897, and 1907). The cemetery contained 221 early medieval graves of the Bijelo Brdo cultural group and 15 prehistoric, mostly cremation, graves from the Middle Bronze Age. The richness and diversity of the early medieval finds, mostly jewelry, were recognized as bearing a special cultural and historical significance, and similar archaeological artifacts from the same period are today interpreted as products of the Bijelo Brdo Culture, which gradually spread during the 11th century from the eastern parts of Croatia and the nearby Hungarian region across the Drava River towards the west and south in the region between the Sava, Drava, and Danube Rivers, already then settled mostly by Slavs (Croats) and Slavicized Romanic inhabitants.

Kloštar Podravski — Pijeski

In the Middle Ages, the area of Kloštar Podravski was called Gorbonok (Gorbonuk), with a fortified moated manor mentioned for the first time in 1264, and on an estate nearby a Franciscan monastery mentioned for the first time in 1292, and somewhat to the south of this, a parish with the church of St. Adrian, first mentioned in 1334. The fact that the settlement at Kloštar Podravski was at least two and a half centuries older than its first mention is proven by the early medieval cemetery uncovered in 1885 at the position called Pijeski (*Dunes*) located about 2 kilometers north of the center of Kloštar. On four occasions from 1885 to 1890, no less than forty and no more than one hundred graves were excavated there, with finds characteristic for cemeteries of the early medieval Bijelo Brdo Culture. They primarily consisted of jewelry for the head, chest, and hands made of silver and bronze: very numerous S-circlets (large and small format), cast and filigree raceme earrings, crescent-shaped cast earrings and lunular earrings belong to the Köt-tlach Culture, openwork earrings of filigree wire, two-part pendants, necklaces of glass beads (and metal pendants), a cross-pendant, small closed bells, closed and open-ended rings, and an iron arrowhead with a rhomboid blade and a socket (found among the chest bones of a skeleton). The collected artifacts show that the early medieval cemetery at Pijeski was in use throughout almost the entire 11th century.



A



B



C

Zagreb — Stenjevec/ Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Ever since the 18th century, important and interesting ancient objects had been found periodically at different but not too distant positions in the region of the present Zagreb residential quarter of Stenjevec, and hence Stenjevec was long ago listed among known and significant archaeological sites, first as Roman and later as medieval. In the last two decades of the 20th century, the medieval cemetery in the orchard of the parish Church of the Assumption of the BVM was systematically excavated, with occasional interruptions. A total of 193 graves were excavated in an area of 479 m². The deceased were buried in an E-W orientation (heads to the west) in pits without any recognizable grave structures. Only in individual graves were the skeletons partially enclosed by irregularly worked stone placed by the head, pelvis, or feet, and rarely by the entire body of the deceased. Traces of wood (the planks on which the deceased was placed) were noted in only two graves. Attire elements were discovered with the deceased, specifically various types of jewelry forms characteristic for the Bijelo Brdo Culture. The most frequent jewelry, for the head, was most often made of silver, including various types of temple-rings, from the simplest forms (S-circlets) to the most luxurious shapes (cast raceme temple-rings and temple-rings with beads of filigree wire), while finger rings of silver and bronze were less commonly found. Rare or even individual finds included knives and buckles and a friesacher pfennig, a silver coin minted ca. 1170–1200 for the Salzburg Archbishop Adalbert II of Bohemia (1168–1177; 1183–1200).

Burial at this Bijelo Brdo cemetery in Stenjevec began in the first quarter of the 11th century and continued until the end of the 12th or the very beginning of the 13th centuries.

Zagreb — Stenjevec

- A Temple-rings
with three
openwork
beads
silver
- B Necklaces of beads
amethyst,
rock crystal
- C Raceme earrings
with two pairs
of joints
silver



A



B



C



D



E

Lesser known sites and finds of the Bijelo Brdo Culture in continental Croatia

- A Ring with a domed crown
bronze
Svinjarevci
11th cent.
- B Necklace of polyhedral beads
glass, crystal
Josipovo — Mesarna
second half of the 11th cent.
- C Chain with button pendants and the lower part of a two-part pendant
bronze
Josipovo — Mesarna
second half of the 11th cent.
- D Two-part pendant
bronze
Dalj
end of the 10th and first quarter of the 11th cent.
- E Lunular pendant
bronze
Slavonia or Syrmia
early 11th cent.

In addition to the most important sites of the early medieval Bijelo Brdo Culture (Vukovar — Lijeva Bara, Bijelo Brdo — Venecija Street, Kloštar Podravski — Pijesci, and Zagreb — Stenjevec/Church of the BVM), the Medieval Department of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb possesses a significant number of valuable artifacts associated with the Bijelo Brdo Culture that came from less well known but equally important sites. To mention just a few, let us start with Veliki Bukovec, where in 1871 the first professional excavation of an early medieval cemetery with Bijelo Brdo Cultural characteristics took place in northern Croatia, and Svinjarevci — Studenac in western Syrmia in the eastern part of Croatia, where at the end of the 19th century graves of the later periods of the Bijelo Brdo Culture were excavated, often dated by Hungarian coins from the second half of the 11th century. Similarly important and significant are finds from the eastern Slavonian site of Josipovo — Mesarna, west of Osijek, and from the vicinity of Slavonski Brod, while in the western part of continental Croatia, decorative objects from Bučička Slatina, Cetingrad, and Kiringrad are also important, and beyond present Croatian borders, the objects and finds from Novi Banovci in eastern Syrmia (Serbia). Finds of Bijelo Brdo two-part pendants for decoration of the heads, chest, and upper parts of the attire of Bijelo Brdo girls and women from the end of the 10th century to the end of the first third of the 11th century are particularly interesting. They are significant as they enable recognition of regional differences both in workmanship and the manner of their use.



A

B



C



D



E



F



G



P

Bulgars, Byzantium, and objects of the Byzantine-Bulgarian cultural circle (9th–11th centuries)

- A Spearhead, winged iron
Grgurevci — Suljam (Serbia)
9th–10th cent.
- B Earring with three joined beads
gold
Novi Banovci (Serbia)
first half to the mid 11th cent.
- C Cross-pendant (crescent above the patibulum)
bronze
Novi Banovci (Serbia)
end of the 10th and beg. of the 11th cent.
- D Cross-enkolpion with an image of Christ
bronze
unknown site
10th–11th cent.
- E Ring with a pentagram in a border
bronze
unknown site
10th–11th cent.
- F Lyre-shaped buckle
bronze
unknown site
10th–12th cent.
- G Ring with an image of an eagle with spread wings
bronze
unknown site
10th–11th cent.

The eastern parts of Frankish Lower Pannonia (the area of the Roman period *Pannonia Sirmiensis*) were raided and partially occupied by the Bulgars in 829, after a series of unsuccessful attempts to discuss and agree on an acceptable border with the Frankish King Louis the Pious (814–840), probably a linear border such as was agreed upon while concluding the Thirty Year Peace of 816 between the Bulgarian Khan Omurtag (814–831) and the Byzantine Emperor Leo V the Armenian (813–820). In the occupied region, the Bulgars found Slavs subject to the Franks (*Sclavos in Pannonia sedentes*), and after expelling the Slavic rulers (*duces*), replaced them with their governors (*Bulgaricos rectores*). How far the Bulgars penetrated into the western part of Lower Pannonia and how large an area was actually occupied are unknown, because this is not mentioned by written sources. It is evident that a few years later the Franks nonetheless concluded a peace treaty that was more or less successfully renewed during the 9th century (such as in 843/845, 863, 892/893). No news is available about the eastern Slavonian and western Syrmian regions of Lower Pannonia in the 10th century, but during the second third of the 10th century the Hungarians certainly passed through these regions on one of their military campaigns against the Byzantine Empire (934–970). They brought into question Bulgarian stability and facilitated the increasingly present internal political tensions, but this stability was most affected by the invasion of the Pechenegs (944), the military campaigns of the Grand Prince of Kiev Sviatoslav I (965–971), and more than anything else the once again powerful Byzantine Empire, ruled by Basil II (976–1025). His lengthy war campaigns in the Balkans brought down the Bulgarian Emperor Samuel (986–1014) and his weak successors, and restored Byzantium to its former Danube border. In these new circumstances, in the northwestern part of the defeated Bulgarian Empire the extensive Byzantine Syrmium theme (*thema Sirmioui*) was founded (1018–1071), and after many centuries direct contact was once again established between Byzantium and the Pannonian Danube region and its neighboring areas.

Objects of the Byzantine-Bulgarian cultural circle are represented by a small amount of weapons from that time (spear, mace), a large number of decorative elements and jewelry for the head and hands (earrings, cross-shaped and lunular pendants, enkolpions, bracelets, and various rings), and various forms of individual elements of male attire (belt buckles and strap ends). Lyre-shaped buckles were usually utilized to fasten horse harnesses.

Finds of pottery from eastern Slavonia and western Sylvania (11th–13th centuries)

Pottery vessels from the early and high Middle Ages stand out in terms of their abundance and state of preservation. On display are 40 vessels (pots and beakers) from nine sites in eastern Slavonia and western Sylvania. They arrived in the museum in the period from 1896–1912 mostly through purchase, with the occasional gift, from museum associates or local residents. Pottery vessels comprise the most numerous group of finds at medieval settlements, and although the exact context is not known for these vessels they are considered settlement finds. Pots are among the most represented forms of pottery vessels, followed by lids, bowls, and cups, and they were most often made on a potter's wheel. The pots are decorated with incisions on the entire surface or merely in the upper section with motifs of wavy lines, horizontal lines, horizontal interrupted lines made with a tool (wheel), oblique lines, and often a combination of the above. The bases of vessels can also feature various motifs (most often a cross, circular hollows, and webs).

Vessels
pottery
11th–13th cent.

- A Sotin
- B Sarvaš
- C Sotin
- D Sotin
- E Svinjarevci

A



B



C



D



E





THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES IN COASTAL CROATIA

9th–12th centuries

The Croatian
principdom
in the second half
of the 9th century



The Croatian Early Middle Ages

The Croatian Early Middle Ages represented a long era in the development and formation of Croatian society. It was marked by two important processes: the immigration of the Slavs to the Roman provinces of Pannonia and Dalmatia at the end of the 6th and during the 7th centuries and the accession of the Hungarian Arpad dynasty to the Croatian throne in 1102. The Croats first appeared on the Dalmatian coast of Croatia and its interior at the dawn of the early medieval period, as one of the Slavic communities. However, neither material remains nor written sources offer insight into the period before AD 800, and the circumstances surrounding the existence of the Croats in the 7th and 8th centuries are still unknown and unclear.

Despite the fact that this period is not mentioned by any historical source from that time, theories about the migration and settlement of the Croats are numerous. Important information is located in the work "On the Governance of the Empire" (*De administrando imperio*), written in the middle of the 10th century by the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913–959), according to which the Croats *fought the Avars for some years and then prevailed...*, while by mandate of the emperor Heraclius they settled down in that same country of the Avars where they now dwell. On the other hand, the first written mention of the name Croat (*dux Chroatorum*) comes from Trpimir's Charter of 852, or rather between 839 and 842 according to more recent research.

The existence of the Croatian Early Middle Ages is quite discernable from the middle of the 9th century. In that period, the first Croatian cultural landscape was initiated, formed, and continued to develop, composed of the legacy of classical civilization, the traditions of the autochthonous Romanic population, and the cultural elements and social context that the newly arrived Croatians had brought from their own ancient homeland. This was a period of the unification of tribes and clans into a single entity, resulting in the creation of a social elite and the establishment of a strong state organization that with time grew into a hierarchy headed by a prince. The preserved sources describe the Princedom as the reign of a ruler over the people (*dux Croatorum* or *dux Sclavorum*), and the ruler's titles that are cited are *comes*, *dux*, and *princeps*. Along with the ruler and the ruling house, prefects representing their districts (*župan*) and the Ban (governor) who ruled over Krbava, Lika, and Gacka were also closely related.

Early medieval Croatia was marked by the confrontation of two great powers: the powerful Frankish Empire in the west and the weakened Byzantine Empire in the east. By 803, the Franks had overcome the Croatian Princedom, while the Dalmatian cities remained under the rule of Byzantium. The Byzantine-Frankish conflict ended in 812, with the Treaty of Aachen, according to which Istria and Croatia were under Frankish control, and Venice and the Dalmatian cities under Byzantine control. This resulted in a division between the coast and the hinterland, which is evident in later periods and greatly marks the period of the Croatian Early Middle Ages.

During the first half of the 9th century, the Frankish and Byzantine influences were both constant and very strong, after which this impact decreased and weakened, caused by divisions and internal struggles both in the Frankish and Byzantine Empires. Given such conditions, the Croatian Princedom established its own foreign policy and gained independence, confirmed by papal authority. This act leading to independence took place during the reign of Prince Branimir, and the new order was successfully preserved by his successors.

The period of the reign of Prince Mislav (ca. 835–845) and Prince Branimir (879–892) was characterized by a process of intensive Christianization, as is attested by the funerary customs of the time, as well as the flourishing of the distinctive pre-Romanesque art and architecture. The process of Christianization was paralleled by an expansion of literacy, resulting in the first written monuments in Latin, today representing an exceptionally valuable epigraphic heritage.

The nucleus of Croatia in the 9th century was the immediate hinterland of the Adriatic coast between the Cetina, Krka, and Zrmanja Rivers. The area where it extended encompassed the area bounded by the eastern coast of the Adriatic on one side, and the Pannonian basin on the other: the area of western Herzegovina, western and central Bosnia, the central Lika, Gacka, and Krbava plains, to coastal areas — Vinodol and Labin. Only at the end of the Early Middle Ages (end of the 11th–beginning of the 12th centuries) did the cities of Byzantine Dalmatia come under the control of the Croatian rulers, while the eastern continental section of present-day Croatia (Slavonia) began to be called Croatia only in the High Middle Ages.

In the 9th century, urban entities began to be created as centers of trade and religious or state power. Nin, Biograd, Skradin, Karin, Knin, Livno, and Šibenik are some of these cities in the Croatian political arena that were key points of maritime and overland communication.

The Croatian state was first led by a prince, and from the mid-10th century by a king. The first ruler to be called a king by the papal offices, according to a letter from Pope John X, was Tomislav (910–928). Although there is no confirmation that he was formally crowned, from his reign onwards Croatia was called a kingdom (*regnum Croatorum*). At that time, Pannonian Croatia was also under the control of the Croatian rulers, where conflict broke out on the northern border with a new military force in Europe — the Hungarians. The extent of Croatian military power at that time is indicated by Tomislav's victory over the Bulgarian army, which after conquering Serbia intended to conquer Croatia.

The period from the reign of Tomislav to that of Stjepan I (1030–1058) is considered a period of stagnation, as few inscriptions in stone are known from this time. Recovery seems to have begun at the begin-

ning of the mid-11th century, and culminated during the reigns of Petar Krešimir IV and Dmitri Zvonimir, when Croatian society underwent a period of progress and the transformation of spiritual life. Private property increased, the number of inhabitants grew, and the first signs of feudalization appeared. This economic upturn was manifested in the form of intensive construction, while the numerous preserved records attest to the sale and donation of land. The entire 11th century is considered to be the “golden age of Croatian religious life”, as the Croatian rulers built monasteries or allocated privileges and land to various orders. Ecclesiastic properties expanded, the establishment of monasteries was encouraged, as was the holding of church councils, new dioceses were created, and a new artistic and architectural style appeared — the Romanesque.

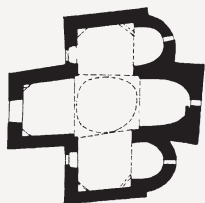
During the reign of Petar Krešimir IV (1058–1075), the region of Croatia and Dalmatia was considered entire for the first time, as the kingdom extended on land and on sea (*regnum Dalmatiae et Croatiae*), the Neretva principedom had been annexed, and the king himself in 1070 appointed the Slavonian Ban (vice-regent) Zvonimir as his co-ruler and heir.

King Dmitri Zvonimir (1075–1089) was crowned king of Croatia and Dalmatia in 1075 in the church of SS. Peter and Moses in Solin by Abbot Gebizon, the envoy of Pope Gregory VII. During the reign of this last powerful ruler, the affirmation of the Croatian language began. The epigraphic heritage in Croatia to the end of the 11th century was mostly in Latin, but thanks to the intensive development of autochthonous literacy, at the end of this century the first monuments written in the Glagolitic script appeared (the Valun tablet, the Krk and Plomin inscriptions, the Baška slab). Glagolitic, as an original Slavic alphabet and script, was most widely present in the Kvarner Bay and in Istria, and only sporadically appeared in Dalmatia.

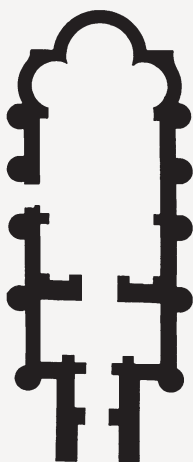
After Zvonimir's death and the brief reign of Stjepan II (1089–1091), battles for the Croatian throne began. The Hungarian Arpad (Árpád) dynasty laid claim to the throne through Queen Jelena, the wife of Dmitri Zvonimir. The Hungarian king Coloman (1095–1116) attempted to conquer the Croatian territories in 1102, and despite the original opposition from the Croatian nobility (*the association of the twelve Croatian tribes*), he nonetheless succeeded in obtaining an agreement set out in the document *Qualiter*, better known as the *Pacta Conventa* (preserved in a copy from the 14th century). According to this document, the association of Croatian nobility, with certain concessions, accepted Coloman's right to the Croatian throne, who was crowned in Biograd na Moru as the king of Croatia and Dalmatia, thus meaning Croatia entered into a dynastic union with Hungary. The arrival of the Arpad dynasty on the Croatian throne marks the end of the Croatian Early Middle Ages.



A



B



C

Plans of
pre-Romanesque
churches

- A the Holy Trinity in Split
- B the Holy Cross in Nin
- C the Holy Saviour
at the source of
the Cetina River
at Vrh Rika

Ecclesiastic architecture and sculpture of the 9th and 10th centuries

The pre-Romanesque, the stylistic period that characterized the 9th and 10th centuries, resulted in numerous monuments in the form of sacral structures and sculpture, including furnishings and decorative architectural elements that decorated the interiors of churches. The foundations of Croatian culture and art were established in the pre-Romanesque period not merely as results of re-Christianization and strong Frankish influence, but also political-economic stability both in the principedom of Croatia itself as well as in its relations with the Byzantine-ruled coastal cities.

From the second half of the 19th century, when fragments of church furnishings began to be discovered in the coastal cities of Dalmatia at one point under Byzantine rule (Zadar, Trogir, Split) and in their hinterland, in the region of the Croatian principedom, and particularly those with the inscriptions of rulers or prominent secular or clerical individuals from the 9th or 10th centuries such as Branimir (Gornji Muć, 1871), Trpimir (Rižinice, 1892), Muncimir (Uzdolje, 1892), Jelena (Solin, 1989), and many others, interest in investigating national archaeology and the specific architecture and sculptural elements related to it has never ceased.

Pre-Romanesque architecture is characterized by a variety of forms, and the typologically varied structures as a rule are of smaller dimensions, while the larger churches of the basilica type are represented in a smaller number. In addition to the many new churches that were built, individual Early Christian churches or other Roman period structures were often adapted from the second half of the 8th century, and very frequently in the 9th century.

The earliest reliably dated church in the Principedom of Croatia is the church of St. George at Putalj (Kaštel Sućurac), which was built by Prince Mislav (ca. 835–ca. 845), while other significant churches include St. Mary at Biskupija near Knin, St. Martha in Bijaći near Trogir, the church at Rižinice near Solin (first half of the 9th cent.), the church of the Holy Cross in Nin (9th or 11th centuries?), as well as the church of St. Mary on Our Lady's Island in Solin (10th cent.), and finally the private endowment of the district prefect Gostiha or Gastica — the church of the Holy Savior at the source of the Cetina River at Vrh Rika (Vrlika), as the best preserved pre-Romanesque ecclesiastic building with the earliest bell tower (the second half of the 9th century).

Several exceptional examples of six-apse churches with a central dome from the second half of the 8th and beginning of the 9th centuries on the Dalmatian coast have been preserved, such as the church of the Holy Trinity (St. Donatus) in Zadar, one of the most distinctive churches in the eastern Adriatic, as well as the Holy Trinity in Split, St. Mary (Stomorica) in Zadar, and St. Mary in Trogir.

For the construction and furnishing of a church, along with the donator, priests and master stonemasons were also necessary, whose numerous works show a high level of craftsmanship. Some churches were renovated several times architecturally as well as in terms of decoration. The church furnishings, depending on the size of the church, contained various elements (liturgical equipment), such as altar screens with distinctive triangular gables, ciboria, fonts, chandeliers, altars, windows, columns, doorways, stone stands for books, and more rarely sarcophagi, and so forth. All the stone surfaces of the church furnishings were decorated with various motifs carved in bas relief, most often dense and complicated geometric interlacing (circles, squares, and diagonals), but sometimes vegetal patterns (grape vines, palm branches) and depictions of animals (peacock, lion) closely related to Christian symbolism. The scarce preserved polychromatic traces indicate that the furnishings had been painted, mostly in blue, red, and gold.

A special feature of the decoration, although mostly in a documentary sense, is represented by the carved inscriptions in Latin, often called an *archive in stone*. These were the earliest written mention of the Croats covering the period of the 9th–11th centuries. Around 400 fragments have so far been found at over 50 sites in the area of the Croatian Princedom.

The name of Prince Branimir was recorded on the greatest number of stone monuments documented to the present, but numerous inscriptions are also known that cite other rulers (for example, Mutimir, Trpimir, Svetoslav, and Držislav), as well as regional prefects (Gastika and Priština).

The Archaeological Museum in Zagreb also is home to a small number of fragments of various parts of ecclesiastic furnishings (pilaster, pluteus, gable, capital) from the site of Kapitul near Knin, and two sites in Biskupija near Knin (Stupovi and Crkvina), which arrived at the end of the 19th century as a gift from the Croatian Antiquities Society, then led by Fr. Lujo Marun.

- A Fragment of a pilaster decorated with a row of three-banded circles and rhombs
limestone
Knin — Kapitul
third quarter of the 10th cent.
- B Fragment of a pilaster or pluteus decorated with a composition of rows of three-banded figure-eights
limestone
Knin — Kapitul
third quarter of the 10th cent.
- C Fragment of a gable decorated with a partially preserved cross and a bird (dove) on its left side
limestone
Knin — Kapitul
middle of the 9th cent.
- D Fragment of a pluteus decorated with a three-banded row of interlaced and knotted circles
limestone
Knin — Kapitul
third quarter of the 10th cent.

Stone monuments with the name of Branimir

So far seven inscriptions have been found that mention Duke Branimir. On one of them, the name of the Croats appears for the first time carved in stone (Šopot), while on another the first dating according to the Christian era was recorded (Muć). Along with the five inscriptions that have long been present in the scholarly literature, and which are located on sections of pre-Romanesque altar screens (Gornji Muć, Nin, Šopot, Otres, Ždrapanj), two inscriptions discovered more recently (in 2002 at the site of St. Martin in Lepuri near Benkovac, and in 2015 in the interior of the Church of SS. Joachim and Anne at the site of Bribirska Glavica) were located on the edge sections of secondarily utilized Roman sarcophagi.



A



B



C



D

C

D

The inscription from Gornji Muć

Gornji Muć (Roman *Andetrium*) is located 30 km northwest of Split and is one of the most prominent sites from the period of Early Croatian history. The chance find of a beam (architrave) with the name of Duke Branimir while digging new foundations for the Church of St. Peter in 1871 inspired general scientific interest at the end of the 19th century in the Croatian cultural heritage but also further excavation at this site. A multistrata archaeological site was discovered with continuity from the Roman period to the modern age. In the Roman period a extensive complex of a Roman rural estate (*villa rustica*) existed here, which was partially renovated for religious purposes in the early medieval period, and a pre-Romanesque church dedicated to St. Peter was constructed. An altar screen was placed in the interior during the reign of Branimir, as indicated by the inscription.

This fragment of an altar screen with an inscription and decoration is an example of the most beautiful preserved early medieval stonework. The decoration consists of two rows of different ornaments. The first row contains twelve identical hooks slanted to the right, with the other decoration of three-banded ribbons interlaced into knots or “pretzels”. The inscription was placed under the decorations, but apparently could not completely fit on the front side, so part is located below, on the lower surface of the beam. This unique monument is extremely important, not merely for Croatian history, but in general as a Slavic epigraphic monument, as it recorded a historical fact, namely that in 888 (Duke) Branimir ruled in Croatia.

... BRANIMIRI ANNOR(vm) CHR(ist) /
SACRA DE VIRG(ine) CARNE VT SV(m)PS(it) S(vnt) DCCCLXXX
ET VIII VIQ(ve) INDIC(tio)

*In the time of the lord (ruler?) Branimir,
888 years from when Christ was incarnated
into the Holy Body from the Holy Virgin
and in the 6th indiction.*



BRANNOXATISLEPVGARITVS S. LXXX

ET VIII VI Q. INDIC

Early Croatian Cemeteries

Early medieval cemeteries in Croatia (dated to the 8th–11th cent.), mostly comparable to contemporary cemeteries in neighboring countries and beyond, are usually referred to with the term *Early Croatian cemeteries* because of their distinctive features and appearance in the region of the Croatian Principality/Kingdom. They were mostly row cemeteries. Along with the first churches, but also at positions without churches, cemeteries were created and expanded, indicating the continuity and density of settlement, while the material remains discovered in them aid in understanding the social and cultural conditions in the early medieval period in Croatia. The abandonment of row cemeteries and the beginnings of compulsory burial alongside churches was caused by social-economic changes and religious reforms in the second half of the 11th century. Most of the cemeteries around churches display a continuity of burial that lasts until the Late Middle Ages.

The deceased were usually buried in an extended position on their backs (rarely otherwise), with their heads in the west and their arms extended alongside the body (rarely on the thighs, abdomen, or pelvis). In general, only a single deceased individual was buried in a grave, but even graves with a large number (at most four) of deceased individuals (probably family graves, either buried at the same time or subsequently) are not unknown. Customs and beliefs changed from the arrival of the Slavs/Croats to the High Middle Ages, and hence so did the cemeteries. Cremation cemeteries are considered to be the earliest (mostly burials in pottery urns, 7th–8th cent.), and then row inhumation cemeteries appear, at first with pagan characteristics (first half of the 8th–mid 9th cent.), followed by those with both pagan and Christian characteristics (first half of the 8th to the end of the second third of the 11th cent.), and finally cemeteries with exclusively Christian forms of burial (turn of the 9th–10th to around the middle of the 11th cent.).

At cemeteries with pagan burials, the graves can be of different types, the most usual an ordinary earthen pit, a pit partly lined with stone or wood (or a coffin), or with a stone lining (perpendicularly placed stone slabs, and a cover, and sometimes a covered base), while graves dug into bedrock, with dry-stone borders, or even walled, are rare. Funerary customs widely distributed throughout the entire Slavic world, such as lighting pyres and breaking vessels, along with the placement of food and beverages in the grave (finds of pottery vessels and pails), have been noted at pagan cemeteries.

At cemeteries with Christian burial customs, graves almost exclusively had pits lined with dry-stone or perpendicularly placed stone slabs. These graves contained the personal jewelry and functional or decorative parts of the clothing/attire of the deceased. The jewelry mainly consisted of earrings and rings. The diverse earrings come in numerous variants, made in different techniques (casting, filigree, granulation, embossing, gilding, etc.) and materials (bronze, silver, gold). Most often they were ordinary circlets or earrings with one or with four equally



- A Earring with one decorated bead,
detail
silver, bronze, gilt
Konjevrate
10th–11th cent.
- B A pair of earrings with four decorated beads
bronze
Ličko Lešće (Gornje)
10th–11th cent.
- C A pair of earrings with one decorated bead
silver, gilt
Kompolje
10th–11th cent.

A



B



A Byzantine emperor
Constantine V
Copronymus
(741–775)
AV, solidus
Syracuse
741–775
Lika

B King of the Franks
and Holy Roman
Emperor Louis I
the Pious
(813/814–840)
AR, denarius
Venice
822/823–840
Coll. J. Catti,
Rijeka

sized beads. Rings feature simple and less decorated variants (from hammered sheet metal or cast) and rings with a domed crown. More scarce items include necklaces (metal or beads), appliquéés, buttons and various pendants, parts of belts or footwear, and so forth. The warrior equipment mostly consisted of Carolingian type weapons (two-edged sword), while the equestrian equipment consisted of spurs with accessories for fastening. Battle axes and daggers, and arrow and spear heads were the remaining types of weapons found in male graves, and knives and fire-steels were also frequently found. With the exception of the spurs, such finds in male graves appeared considerably more often at cemeteries with a pagan burial rite.

Despite a lack of data about the settlements in this area, the cemeteries offer much information about the population at that time and various aspects of their lives: the material remains, cultural trends, trade contacts, craft activities, the spread of Christianity, and so forth.

The earrings mainly come from graves found by chance in the Lika region (Kompolje, Ličko Lešće, Otočac, Podum, Pribudić), the Croatian Littoral (the Vinodol area), and northern Dalmatia (Konjevrate, Prvić Luka).

Coinage in the early medieval Croatian principedom/kingdom

Still very little is known about coinage, its use and circulation, and monetary-goods relations in the early medieval Croatian principedom, and later in the Croatian kingdom. It has nonetheless been noted that on the eastern Adriatic coast, where after the Slavic and subsequent Croatian settlement in the area of the former Late Roman and early Byzantine province of Dalmatia, Byzantine bronze, silver, and gold coins mostly circulated uninterrupted in large or small amounts, while in the continental hinterland and the interior, Byzantine coins were only occasionally present. Among these quite rare coin finds are the gold coins of three Byzantine rulers: gold coins (*solidi*) of the emperors Constantine V Copronymus (741–775) and Theophilos (829–842) belong to the second half of the 8th century and the first half of the 9th century, and gold coins (*hissamenoi*) of the emperor Romanus III Argyrus (1028–1033) to the second quarter of the 11th century. The golden denarii of the Abbasid Caliphate from the second half of the 8th century, found in Knin, one of the early Croatian ruling centers, represent a numismatic curiosity. On the contrary, the scarce finds of silver coins (*denarii*), more often chance finds and more rarely grave goods, of several Carolingian rulers, from Charlemagne (768–814) and Louis the Pious (814–840) and Lothar I (840–855) to Charles the Simple (898–923), discovered or collected in the area of the early Croatian state, represent a valuable testament to contacts between the Croats and the Franks and the Frankish state during the 9th and early 10th centuries.



THE HIGH AND LATE MIDDLE AGES

12th-15th centuries



Croatia
in the mid-14th
century

- THE CROATIAN-HUNGARIAN KINGDOM
- THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE OF THE GERMAN NATION
- THE REPUBLIC OF VENICE
- BOSNIA DURING THE REIGN OF KING STJEPAN II KOTROMANIĆ (1322–1353)
- SERBIA DURING THE REIGN OF KING STEFAN DUŠAN (1331–1355)
- THE REGION UNDER THE RULE OF THE BANATE OF MAČVA
- STATE BORDERS
- PROVINCIAL BORDERS



Political circumstances in Croatian regions

The beginning of the High Middle Ages in Croatia coincides with the establishment of a new, Hungarian dynasty of the Arpad family, when Koloman acquired the title of the King of Croatia and Dalmatia in 1102 and thus founded a multinational entity — the Hungarian-Croatian Kingdom, which would continue with varied political directions in Croatia and Slavonia until the Austro-Hungarian agreement in the 19th century, under which the Croatian territories entered the large dynastic community of the Habsburg Monarchy. In this manner, Croatian territory was united under the rule of one king, but in the 12th and 13th centuries, a strong decentralization occurred under his successors, which reached its peak during the reign of Bela IV (1235–1270), and after the invasion of the Tatars in 1242 to 1260, Croatian territory was finally divided into two separate countries — Croatia and Slavonia, which were afterwards ruled by the Slavonian *ban* or viceroy on behalf of the king. The borders of Slavonia almost coincided with the borders of the Zagreb diocese, and it remained intact in this form until the Ottoman invasion of its territory in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. New counties were established, but during the 13th century they passed via royal grants into the hereditary possession of noble families who became politically independent over time — the Babonić dynasty ruled south of the Sava River, north of the Sava the Kőszegi (Gisingovci) family, and in Vukovar and Syrmia/Srijem counties the Ugrin (Ilok) branch of the ancient clan of Csák. The collapse of these powerful nobles was brought about by King Charles I, who placed the counties of Vukovar and Syrmia/Srijem under the ban of Mačva (until the 15th century). In the coastal area, the Croatian princely families of Kačić, Šubić, and Frankopan became prominent.

Sudden and widespread social and demographic growth represented the main features of the High Middle Ages. A colonization movement from the west reached Slavonia, with the settlement of numerous immigrants (Saxons, Walloons, French, Czechs, Italians) into the vast relatively empty areas full of potential on the eastern edges of Europe. The most important consequences of this immigration were the development of towns, the establishment of trade and craft centers, and the associated economic prosperity.

The Angevins ruled for most of the 14th century — Charles Robert (1301–1342) and Louis I (1342–1382). The era of Louis's rule for the Croatian countries marked in many ways the peak of the Middle Ages, resulting in political stabilization, strong economic growth, the foundation of new cities, and further development of old ones erected along the main trade routes that connected the interior with the Adriatic cities, which further led to cultural development. This prosperity was endangered by a major plague epidemic (especially in Western Europe) that claimed many lives in the mid-14th century, while at the end of the century there were signs of stagnation and crisis. This period marks the beginning of the Late Middle Ages (from the end of the 14th to the first third of the 16th centuries),

a time of hardship and destruction and a major social crisis involving the feudal system. A struggle for the throne took place after the death of Louis, and finally Sigismund of Luxembourg (1387–1437) occupied the ruling position. His policies resulted in the surrender of Dalmatia to Venice, the consolidation of the Ottoman position in the Balkans, and the rise of certain aristocratic and noble families.

During the reign of Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490), large estates in Slavonia were held by his son John (Ivaniš), while in the easternmost areas between the Sava, Drava, and Danube Rivers they were held by the powerful dukes of Ilok. The crisis of government in the Kingdom of Hungary and Croatia was intensified by the constant attacks and conflicts on the eastern and southern borders with the newly arrived superpower, the Ottoman Empire. Although Matthias Corvinus succeeded in slowing the Ottoman advance towards the west, which had captured large segments of Bosnia and the former Mačva Banate (Lower Syrmia), this continued during the reigns of King Vladislaus II Jagiellon (1490–1516) and Louis II Jagiellon (1516–1526). Constant looting and incursions were carried out tactically for several decades, leading to depopulation and economic exhaustion, and by the time of the Battle of Mohács in 1526, Croatia had lost almost all its territory south of the Velebit Mountains and the Zrmanja River. The Croatian nobility, dissatisfied with the extent of Hungarian help in defending the borders from the Ottoman army, turned to the Habsburgs for help, which culminated in the sabor (parliament) in Cetina in 1527, when the Croatian nobles, after the death of King Louis II at the Battle of Mohács, elected Ferdinand I of Habsburg as their new ruler. This marked the beginning of a period of building a defensive system against the Ottomans, including the creation of the Military Frontier, which lasted until the final de-militarization of the region at the end of the 19th century.

The material remains allow us to follow life in that period as expressed through religious and spiritual existence, and the arts and also crafts closely intertwined with this, as well as through the weaponry and equipment of warrior/horsemen, and also through elements of the everyday and the afterlife. Although it was mentioned earlier that the medieval collection of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb numerically contains fewer objects from these periods, which is partly the result of earlier practices referring to the divisions and boundaries of archaeological and/or historical periods and the historical formation of the collection, archaeological investigation into rural settlements, noble castles and fortresses, churches, monasteries, and cemeteries from the period of the High and Late Middle Ages have recently become quite common, and along with valuable results and abundant archaeological material, they have illuminated aspects of the intensive life in medieval Slavonia and the northwestern parts of the Hungarian-Croatian Kingdom.

Religious and Spiritual Life

The founding of the Diocese of Pécs in 1009 and the founding of the Diocese of Zagreb (no later than 1094) in the west of the regions between the Sava, Drava, and Danube Rivers played an important role in the religious and spiritual life of Slavonia and the southeastern parts of Pannonia. Both dioceses were under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Kalocsa, so ties with Hungary were strong both in political and cultural terms. The seat of the Bosnian diocese had been located in Đakovo since 1247.

Ecclesiastic and knightly orders contributed greatly to the social and cultural development of Croatia, including, in addition to construction activities (churches, monasteries, fortresses), the roots of an educational system (monastic and cathedral schools). While the Benedictines appeared and remained in the eastern Adriatic zone in the early Middle Ages, the creation of a monastery network in the continental region began with the Templars (12th century) and the Cistercians (end of the 12th century), was continued by the Paulines (13th century), while it was completely formed afterwards by the Franciscans and Dominicans (13th and 14th centuries).

The artistic styles that marked the High and Late Middle Ages are the Romanesque (11th–13th centuries) and the Gothic (13th–16th centuries), and their most beautiful expressions were achieved in sacral architecture, expanding under the influence of the above mentioned religious orders. While Romanesque buildings in the Adriatic cities have been preserved in large numbers, in the continental part of Croatia, although it is known that they were also numerous, monuments of Romanesque architecture were either destroyed during the Tatar invasion and later the Ottoman conquests, had disappeared due to weaker building materials (sandstone or even wood), but they also often became less visible due to later alterations and additions. Ecclesiastic and secular architecture, particularly that with a fortified character, cannot be strictly distinguished because together they formed the nucleus of settlements, as well as the entire medieval landscape.

A column with a relief depiction (pilaster)

Discovered at the end of the 19th century in the courtyard of the Franciscan monastery of St. John of Capistrano in Ilok, this square column (pilaster) was probably located on the wall of the Romanesque church that must earlier have been located in the near vicinity. It is decorated on the front and one side. The upper part of the front depicts the Lamb of God (*Agnus Dei*) with its head turned back, kissing the cross it holds with one leg. It stands on spirally twisted columns with emphasized capitals and bases, while the central column ends in a point. The side panel is decorated with a three-ribbon interlaced element.

Column
with a relief
depiction
(pilaster)
limestone
Ilok
12th cent.



Stone Head

The archaeological site of Rudina is located on the southern slopes of Psunj Mountain, north of the village of Čečavac and 25 km northwest of Požega. The toponym Rudina was mentioned in the sources for the first time in 1210, and the abbey itself in 1250 in a document by King Bela IV. The construction of this earliest monastery in Požega County — the Benedictine Abbey of St. Michael — is dated to the second half of the 12th century. The abbey of Rudina represents a rare example of a monastery complex built in the Romanesque style in the edge region of the former medieval Slavonia. It was damaged in the mid 15th century during an Ottoman raid into the region, and it ceased functioning in 1536.

The site became well-known primarily for exceptionally interesting examples of stone sculpture. The stone consoles were known prior to excavations, as they had been found reused in nearby villages, and the greatest number were found in that manner, while a further four consoles were found during excavations outside the apse of the church. The “Rudina heads” are considered masterpieces of Romanesque stylization, and nineteen have been found to date. Only one head is on display in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, one is in a private collection, and the rest are in the Municipal Museum in Požega. Originally colored, these stone consoles decorated the cornice of the apse. It is generally thought that they are completely unique and that this distinctive form of expression originated in this area. Although they lack direct comparisons, these relief depictions are related to European Romanesque art, especially 12th century monuments.

Head
limestone
Rudina
12th cent.



Processional cross

A relief portrayal of the crowned, crucified, but still alive Christ, who through his position and wide-open eyes defies and defeats death (*Christus triumphans*). It was created in the famous Romanesque workshops of Limoges in France, and it has remained the only find of this kind in Croatia. On the basis of the iconographic and stylistic characteristics, it should be considered a product of the second half of the 12th century. During the period of the Tartar invasions in 1242, it could have been lost together with the structure in which it was usually kept, or it could have been merely temporarily stored for safety but never recovered.

Processional
cross
bronze, gilt
Sisak
12th cent.



Fittings for book covers

Metal, usually bronze, fittings strengthened and decorated leather-covered books, usually of liturgical character. Although examples used to strengthen the corners are more numerous, central fittings, as well as those on the side for closure, are also part of such equipment. Such objects are found in the context of religious centers (monasteries, churches) or at courts, indicating that their owners belonged to the highest secular or ecclesiastical classes and bearing witness to the elevated cultural and artistic level of life and medieval literacy in general.

- A Decorative fitting for the cover of a book
bronze
Sotin
15th cent.
- B Decorative mount for the cover of a book
bronze, gilt
Rakovac (Serbia)
12th cent.

Luxurious silver and gold jewelry (13th–15th centuries)

Luxurious jewelry made of precious metals was very popular and highly valued among the wealthier strata of society from the end of the High Middle Ages and in the Late Middle Ages, when all of Europe experienced pronounced economic growth, expanding trade and commerce, as well as an increasing intensification in the mobility of people and goods.

High-quality gold and silver examples of various types and forms of jewelry occupy a significant place in the collections of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, and two hoards stand out in particular.

A rich and very distinctive hoard of jewelry and coins was discovered in 1943 at the site of Zgruti near Mekiš nearby Podravske Sesvete. It consisted, among other things, of a pair of very refined and luxurious temple-rings with a pendant in the form of birds facing each other and six attached long chains. There were also three silver rings with a circular or oval hammered crown and a thin banded hoop, one with an image of a double cross in a medallion surrounded by letters, the second very similar but with an irregularly formed cross, and the third with an image of a bird. In addition to this exceptional jewelry, this hoard also contained 464 examples of Slavonian Banovac coins—silver medieval coins minted for Ban Nikola Omodejev (1322–1324). According to the finder, the objects were wrapped in cloth and placed in a pottery vessel, buried underground by someone at the end of the 13th or beginning of the 14th centuries.

- C Hoard of jewelry and coins
silver
Mekiš—Zgruti
end of the 13th–
beg. of
the 14th cent.



C

A



B



C



C



Another very important hoard of jewelry was found in 1893 in the Sarmian village of Slakovci near Vinkovci. It was composed of 68 silver objects, some of them gilded. Three pairs of different variants of the same type of temple-rings with three two-part, biconical, and separated beads stand out, along with six pins with rosettes that served to clasp or attach a shawl, cloak, or some other element of female attire. A similar purpose (but possibly for male attire) can be attributed to a six-pointed clasp decorated with the then popular motif of lilies on the ends of the arms. A ring with depictions of fantastic animals on the crown is also interesting, while in terms of quantity, three variants of circular buttons and button-like pendants predominate. A small number of objects are damaged and incomplete, consisting of four types of appliqués for head-coverings that differ in terms of the motifs on them — lilies, fantastic animals, and geometric-vegetative designs. The hoard was probably hidden at the end of the first and the beginning of the second third of the 15th century or at the earliest at the end of the 14th century.

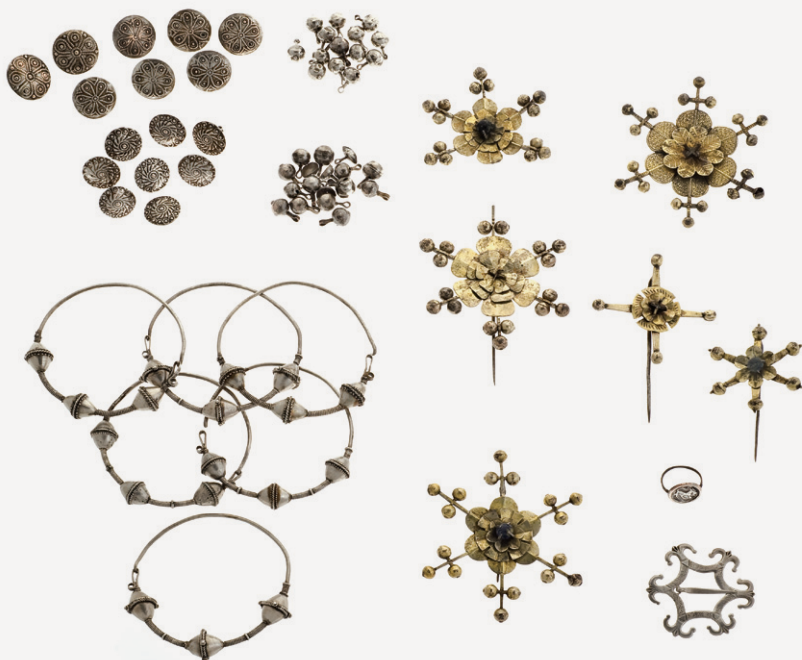


Rings are a quite well-represented and important category of finds because of their widespread use in the medieval period. They were worn for various reasons — as decoration, as a symbol or a seal, or for protection. The most luxurious example, but also important in many other aspects, is the gold seal ring of Tryphon Bucchia (1341–ca. 1399), a prominent citizen of Dubrovnik, originally from Kotor, who at one point was in the service of the Bosnian King Tvrtko I (1377–1391). It is the only example in this collection of rings where the name of the owner is known. Rings with an inscription, heraldic elements, personal names, or just a monogram were a common attribute but also status symbol for the elite in the Late Middle Ages. This ring bears a biblical text — *IESUS AUTEM TRANSIE[N]S PER MEDIUM ILLORUM IBA[N]T AME[N]* / *Jesus passing through the midst of them went his way* — which was usually utilized on various types of jewelry by merchants, soldiers, and travellers in the hope that in this manner they would ensure divine protection.

The collection also contains a large number of diverse silver and more common bronze rings with the usual late medieval motifs featuring geometric, floral, zoomorphic, Christian, or heraldic designs.

- A Ring with
an inscription and
heraldic image
gold, niello
Bosnia
end of the 14th cent.
- B Ring with
a floral motif
silver
Tompojevci
14th–15th cent.
- C Ring with
a monogram
silver
Dalj
14th cent.
- D Hoard of jewelry
silver, gilt
Slakovci
end of the 14th–
beg. of the
second third
of the 15th cent.

D





Fortifications

The invasion of the Tatars into the Hungarian and Croatian regions during the reign of Bela IV (1235–1270) represented a strong reason for the construction of fortified structures. Medieval castles, fortresses and other fortified structures represent a very widespread type of architectural heritage throughout Croatia. Fortifications are usually located on prominent elevated positions, and they are often limited in size because of defence and security. They are mainly located in strategic positions such as mountain passes, but also positions along watercourses and important roads. They began to be built from the second half of the 13th century, and with certain changes they were constructed and utilized all the way to the 18th century, when danger no longer existed from the Ottomans. A diversity of shapes and sizes can be noted in reference to the nature of the terrain. Solid construction, mostly in stone, but also in brick or wood, ensured that despite the centuries of destructive activities on the part of mankind (secondary use of stone, conversion, reuse) and nature, some greater and some lesser, these structures still dominate the landscape. In the lowlands, different construction methods were utilized, where mostly moats (water barriers) or additional towers served for defensive purposes. Fortification architecture is an indispensable, valuable, and at the same time quite endangered segment of the medieval immovable cultural heritage, and attention particularly always should be paid to it.

Medvedgrad
view of the
northeastern part
of the fortress
with the chapel
of SS. Philip and James

The moated fortified manor at Mrsunjski lug (11th–14th centuries)

While marking out the route for the Zagreb–Belgrade highway in the summer of 1949, a moated manor was discovered at Mrsunjski lug near Brodski Stupnik. As it was impossible to change the route, it had to be excavated in a very short period of time, which was successfully carried out. Even today this is considered one of the most important sites related to large infrastructure projects, particularly because it was the first medieval settlement of this type that had been completely excavated.

This lowland fortress of irregular circular shape, with a diameter of 77 meters, was probably the seat of someone who enjoyed noble status. It consisted of a central earthen elevation with a broad and deep moat filled with water, surrounded by a simple rampart, also earthen, about two meters in height, and a shallow exterior ditch. The central plateau with an area of ca. 600 m² was fully excavated, while test excavation was carried out on the rampart, as well as the entrance area, but without archaeologically significant findings. The cultural stratum (20–80 cm thick) contained preserved remains of highly developed and organized wooden dwellings. However, their dimensions and shape could not be established as they had been destroyed by fire, but evidence remained in the form of daub remains and the large number of forged iron nails. The remaining metal objects included strap hinges and mounts, locks, diverse types of tools, knives, and various types of arrowheads. Fragments of pottery vessels were discovered as well as a large number of stove tiles—the structural components of tiled stoves of large dimensions probably placed on Roman bricks and stones. The few preserved examples of jewelry include fragments of two silver raceme earrings and three rings of the Bijelo Brdo Culture.

This fortified settlement existed from the end of the 11th to the end of the 14th centuries, while individual finds indicate that some form of settlement at the site itself or in its nearby vicinity was present both in earlier and later centuries.



Mrsunjski lug

- A Lock
iron
- B Spoon for casting, nails
iron
- C Cup-shaped stove tile
ceramic
- D Bulb-shaped stove tile
ceramic
- E Key
iron
- F Padlock
iron

14th–15th cent.



B



C



D



E



F

A



B



Weaponry

Knighthood and chivalric culture is inextricably linked with the development of feudalism, while the status of a knight, a professional cavalry warrior, was defined as belonging to the nobility. Knighthood played an exceptional role in the spiritual and cultural life of the Middle Ages. Thanks to the influence of the Church and Christian values, chivalry was associated with a special code of honor. Historically, however, this phenomenon resulted in many more serious consequences in the framework of the Crusades. The expeditions of Western Christians to the Near East in the desire to free the site of the life and death of Jesus Christ from non-Christians and take them into Christian hands were nevertheless primarily of a plundering nature involving the conquest of new areas. The warring in the Near East occupied the popes and European rulers from the end of the 11th to the end of the 13th centuries, and the flourishing of chivalry coincided with the peak period of the crusading idea. Numerous crusading armies on their way from Europe to the Levant also crossed through Croatia.

Swords and spurs, as knightly insignia, were very common types of weapon and equestrian equipment in this period. Swords were precious and especially valued, and everything about them, from their manufacture to their eventual deposition, was imbued with symbolism. Arrowheads, with their numerous variants of shape and dimensions, were certainly the most represented weapons, while they also differed for the long bow and the crossbow. Other types of cold steel weapons, such as spearheads and maces, are somewhat less frequently found.

- A Arrowheads
iron
Banat (Serbia)
Beli Breg (Serbia)
Banat (Serbia)
Mrsunjski lug
Krapina
10th–15th cent.

- B Sword
iron, wood
Zagreb — Blato
12th cent.

- C Spur
iron
Ribnjača (Popovača)
second half
of the 13th cent.







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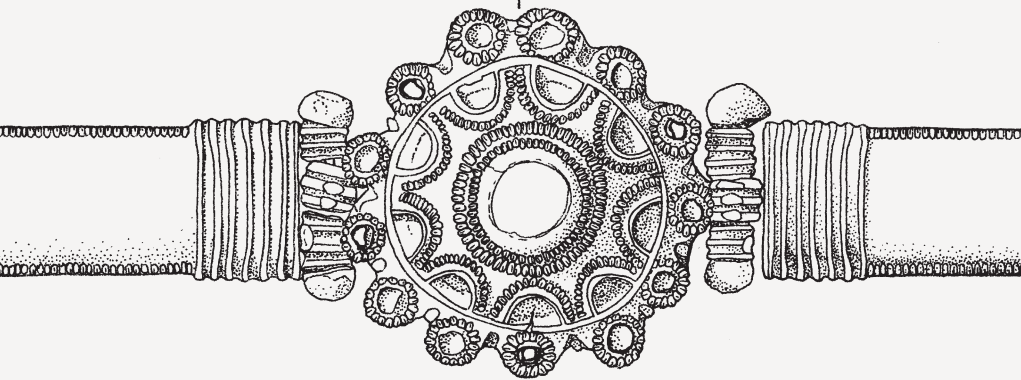
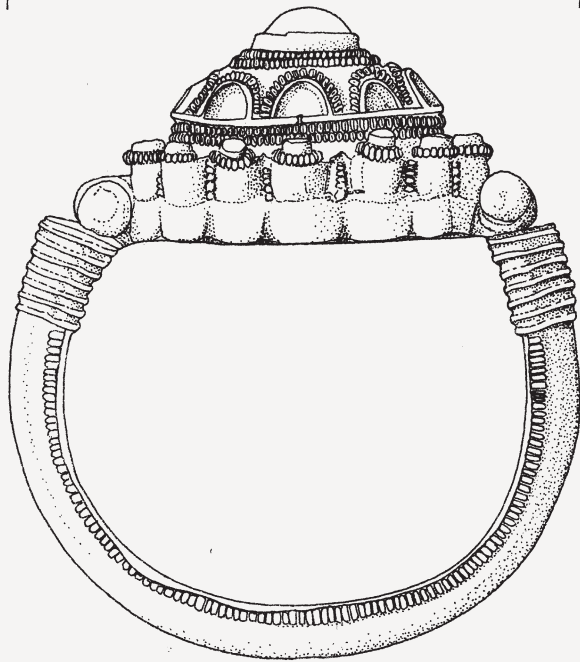
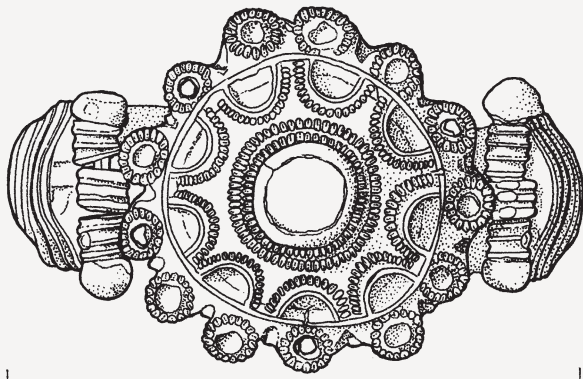
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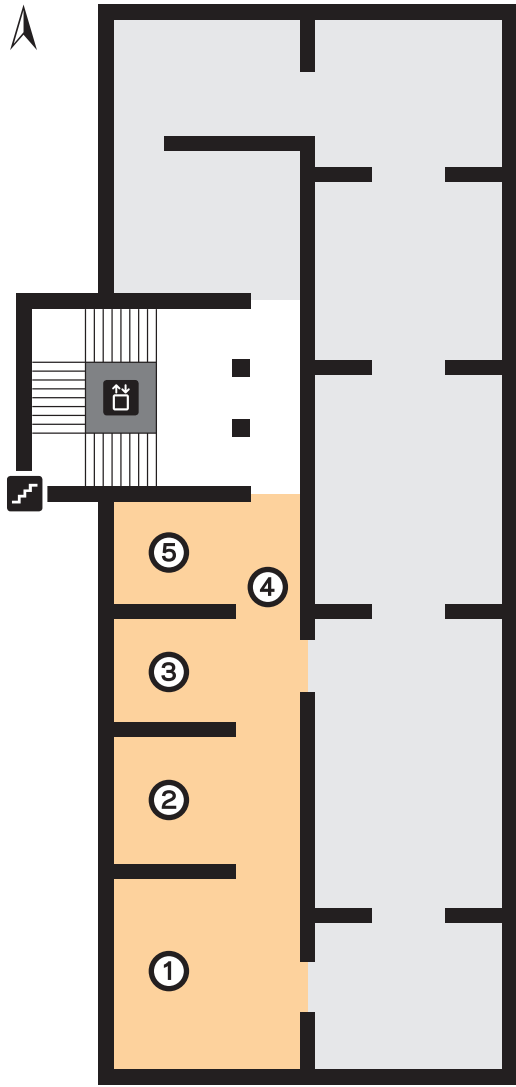
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