Prehistoric settlement at Ribnica near Brežice (south-east Slovenia)

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Prehistoric settlement at Ribnica near Brežice (south-east Slovenia)

Prapovijesno naselje u Ribnici kod Brežica (jugoistočna Slovenija)

Prethodno priopćenje > Prapovijesna arheologija
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Ključne riječi: prehistoric settlement, Eneolithic, Bronze Age, La Tène period, material culture, remains of the well

The archaeological site of Ribnica near Brežice has been known to the general public since the mid-1950s as the location of the Roman roadside station Romula. Between 2001 and 2004, extensive archaeological excavations took place on the site because of the planned construction of the Ljubljana – Obrežje highway; among other things, it proved that this location was attractive not only to the Romans, but also to settlers in prehistory, the Middle Ages, and modern times. The earliest archaeological remains at Ribnica date to the Eneolithic period, followed by the Bronze Age settlement and a few pits from the La Tène period. Among the prehistoric finds, those from the Bronze Age are the most numerous, while those from the Eneolithic and the La Tène period appear only sporadically. Although two decades have passed since the excavations at Ribnica, the research results have not been published yet. In this paper, we provide an overview of the prehistoric remains discovered in Ribnica near Brežice.

Key words: prapovijesno naselje, eneolitik, brončano doba, laten, materijalna kultura, ostatci zdenca

Arheološko nalazište Ribnica kod Brežica poznato je u javnosti od sredine pedesetih godina 20. stoljeća kao lokacija rimske cestovne postaje Romula. Između 2001. i 2004. na nalazištu su sprovedena opsežna arheološka istraživanja zbog planirane izgradnje ceste Ljubljana–Obrežje, a između ostaloga se pokazalo da je ta lokacija bila privlačna ne samo Rimljanima, nego i doseljenicima u prapovijesti, srednjem i novom vijeku. Najstariji arheološki ostatci u Ribnici potječu iz eneolitika, a zatim slijedi brončanodobno naselje i nekoliko jama iz latena. Među prapovijesnim nalazima najviše je onih iz brončanog doba, dok se oni iz eneolitika i latena javljaju samo sporadično. Iako su od istraživanja u Ribnici protekla dva desetljeća, rezultati istraživanja još nisu objavljeni. U ovom članku dajemo pregled prapovijesnih ostataka otkrivenih u Ribnici kod Brežica.

Introduction

The archaeological site of Ribnica near Brežice, also known as Ribnica near Jesenice in Lower Carniola, is generally known as the area of *Romula*, a Roman roadside station.[1] However, *Romula* received much attention in the archaeological community even before it was pinpointed by Peter Petru in the present-day village of Ribnica (Petru 1961: 193–202) due to the question of its exact location. In fact, *Romula* was mentioned twice in ancient sources, both times in Roman itineraries (Šašel 1975): the Tabula Peutingeriana and the Itinerarium Antonini from the end of the 3rd century. Based on them, Müllner placed it in the fields between Mokrice and Jesenice in Lower Carniola (Müllner 1879: 104), even though there was no archaeological evidence for this. Another possible location was Prilipe near Čatež, close to Brežice.

The first pieces of archaeological evidence for the existence of an archaeological site at Ribnica near Brežice came to light at the beginning of the 20th century, when farmers frequently came across archaeological finds in the fields. However, it was only in the late 1950s that the site of Ribnica near Brežice was attested as the actual location of the ancient *Romula* station, when Peter Petru discovered the foundations of several ancient buildings, a cemetery with 41 graves, and the remains of a Roman road, during the archaeological rescue excavations before the construction of the Ljubljana – Zagreb main road (Petru 1961; 1962; 1969).

The majority of the finds discovered during these early excavations were from the Roman period, but some fragments of prehistoric pottery were found as well (Petru 1975: 259). Since the construction of the new highway would destroy a large part of the site of Ribnica near Brežice, a follow-up of the preliminary archaeological excavations determined the final extent of the archaeological site between 1999 and 2004. There were extensive and intensive field surveys and geophysical surveys. They confirmed the remains of an extensive residential area of *Romula* on the second Sava terrace north of the Ljubljana – Zagreb main road, some indications about the course of the Roman road, and the cemetery south of and under the Ljubljana – Zagreb main road (Breščak 2004; Lazar 2020: 390). The preliminary archaeological excavations also brought to light some prehistoric finds (Breščak 2004).

Geographic position of the site

The archaeological site of Ribnica near Brežice is located in the south-eastern part of Slovenia (Map 1), on the plateau above the River Sava, between the villages of Ribnica near Jesenice and Podgračeno, north and south of the route of the former Ljubljana – Zagreb main road, on the southern edge of the Krško basin or the Krško – Brežice fields (Fig. 1). It spreads over the narrowest part between the River Sava and the northernmost slope of the Gorjanci Mountains. The area is cut by the torrential stream of Gračenica, which flows from under the ridge of Cirnik, between the nearby hills of Kincelj and Škofljančeva Gabrina. The rapid flow of the Gračenica stream as it joins the Sava lowered part of the second Sava terrace almost to the height of the first, and, especially in its lower course (Verbič 2001), formed a microrelief of gentle slopes on which the Romans built the central part of the settlement.

It is a strategic location, protected by the nearby hills, with important water and land connections. Both heights commanded the entire surrounding landscape. From the top of Kincelj and Škofljančeva Gabrina, the view stretches west to Čatež near Brežice, the greater part of eastern Brežiško – Krško Polje, and east to and across Zagreb and the entire Sava plain. In the north, the view extends to Bizeljsko Hribovje beyond the town of Brežice, while the northern slopes of the Gorjanci Mountains protect the southern side. The location of the site was of exceptional importance from prehistory onwards.

Archaeological excavations between 2001 and 2004

Between 2001 and 2004 the Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, Območna enota Novo Mesto, carried out archaeological rescue excavations of the entire area in five excavation phases under the leadership of Danilo Breščak. A large professional and technical team was engaged to carry out extensive archaeological research, and students from Brežice and the surrounding areas performed the physical work.

The archaeological excavations, in terms of the scope of research, the size of the expert team, and the duration, were among the most extensive archaeological investigations carried out at a Slovenian archaeological site. The total length of the investigated area was 1740 m, with the addition of several individual probes outside the central excavation field, measuring more than 2 km in length. The width of the excavation field varied between 4 m and 7 m on the southern side and between 20 m and 40 m on the northern side. The widest strip of the research area was in the central part of the excavation field near the Gračenica stream and covered an excavation field 122 m wide. If the course of the Gračenica stream, crossing the narrowest part between the River Sava and the slopes of the Gorjanci Mountains, is taken as the central point of the site, then the archaeological excavations reached as far as the village of Podgračeno to the west, with a total length of approx. 1020 m, and to the village of Ribnica to the east, with a total length of approx. 720 m (Fig. 1).

To facilitate the research process, the excavation area was divided into 25 sectors:

1 In the Register of the Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Slovenia, the site is registered as Ribnica near Brežice - Archaeological site of Romula, under EID 9335.

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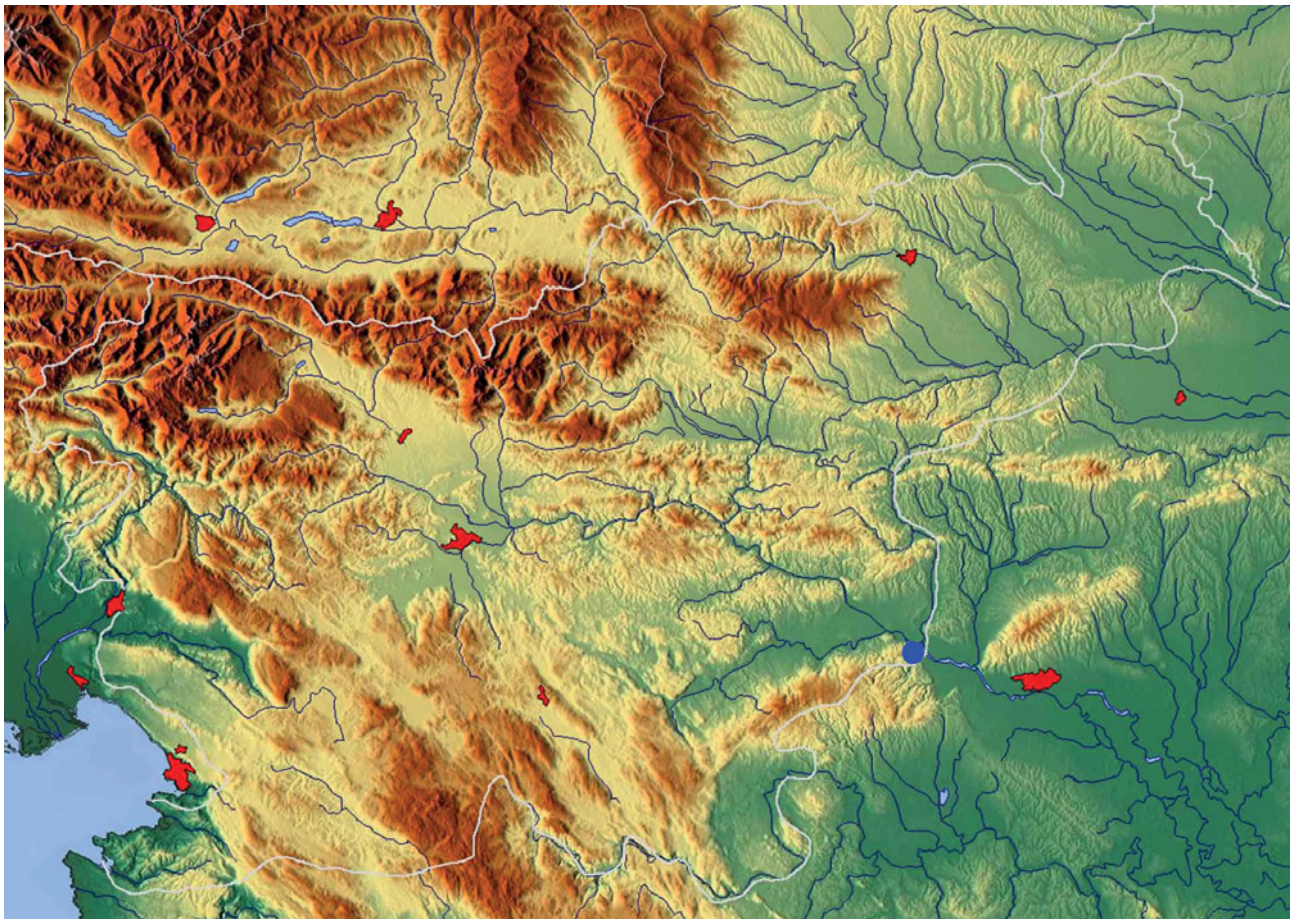

Map 1 Map of Slovenia with location of the Ribnica near Brežice site (made by: A. Ogorelec; map source: Maps for free, CC0)
Karta 1 Karta Slovenije s lokacijom nalazišta Ribnica kod Brežica (izradio: A. Ogorelec; izvor karte: Maps for free, CC0)

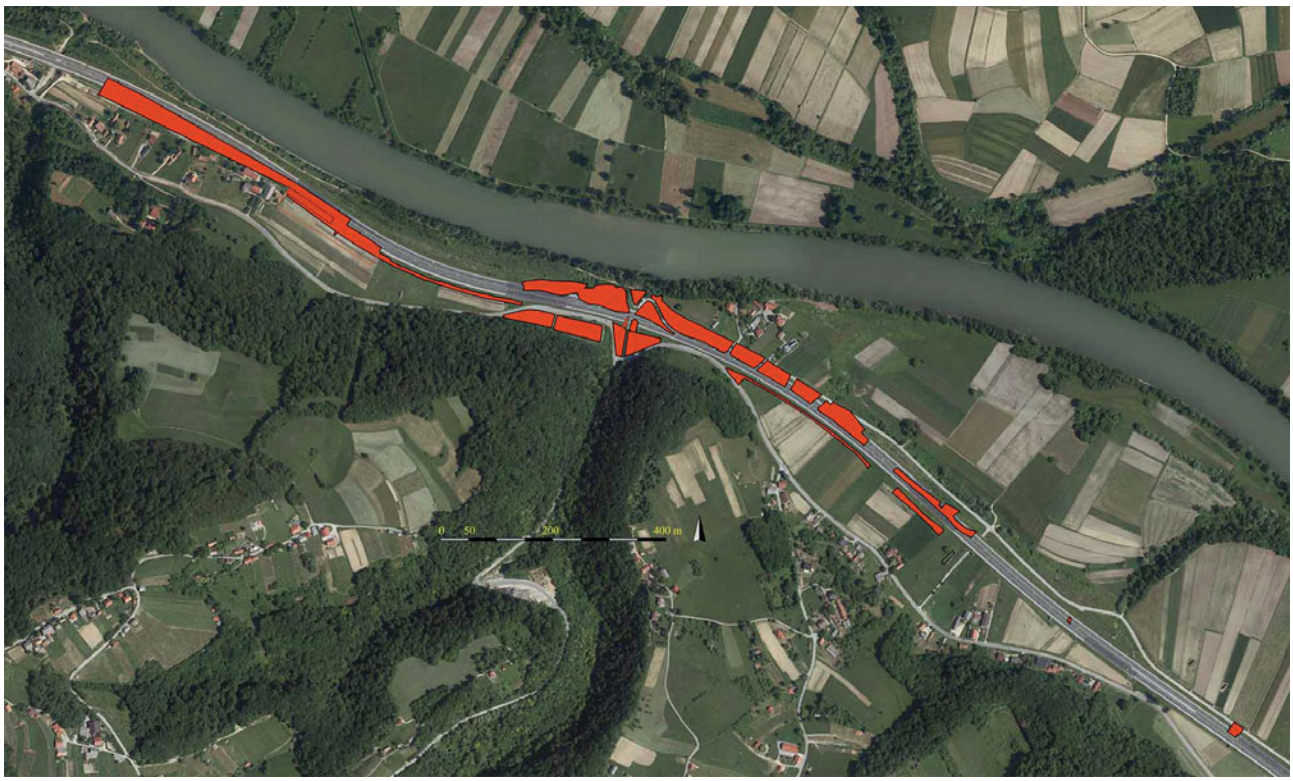

Fig. 1 Ribnica near Brežice. View of the site's excavation area on the orthophoto image (made by: A. Ogorelec; image source: GisKD pregledovalnik, ©Republika Slovenija, Ministrstvo za kulturo)
Sl. 1 Ribnica kod Brežica. Prikaz istražnog polja lokaliteta na ortofoto sliki (izradio: A. Ogorelec; izvor ortofoto snimka: GisKD pregledovalnik, ©Republika Slovenija, Ministrstvo za kulturo)

24 labelled with Roman numerals from I to XXIV, and the last one bearing the name "Petričev Grič." The size and boundaries of the sectors were determined according to the criteria of natural or physical boundaries on the ground itself, or arbitrarily where necessary. These are extremely diverse micro-geomorphological areas that were exposed to various geological and infrastructural influences in the past.

The easternmost part of the site was Sector XIX, covering the areas on both sides of the Ljubljana – Zagreb main road. Westwards and north of the main road up to the Gračenica stream, there were Sectors X, IX, VIII, XIV, XV, XIII, and XII. To the south of the main road, a very narrow strip along the road covers Sectors XVII and XVI to the west. Sectors I, III, XVIII, IV, and XI covered the central part of the site, in the area where the Gračenica breaks through the mountains and flows into the Sava. In this part, the geomorphological terrain was more rugged. Hence, the shapes of the sectors adapted to this. Sectors I and III covered the area south of the Ljubljana – Zagreb main road, forming a triangle with the Čatež – Mokrice local road and the underpass under the main road. When the highway was already under construction after removing the overpass, Sector XVIII covered this area. On the northern side of the main road, in the central part of the site, lay Sectors XI and IV. Sector XI, which lay east of the underpass, was shaped by the main road and the local road, which connects the residents living north of the main road with the Čatež – Mokrice local road through the underpass. On the western side of the underpass lay Sector IV. Westwards of Sector IV, north of the main road, extends the area of Petričev Grič. Sectors VI and VII cover a narrow strip south of the Ljubljana – Zagreb main road, west of Petričev Grič. Sectors V and XX – XXIV cover the westernmost excavation area south of the main road, while Sector II extends north. The individual sectors were further covered with a quadrant grid to help record the distribution of archaeological remains and small finds and to facilitate the organization of spatial documentation. However, due to the size and diversity of the terrain, this was not uniform for the entire site but was adapted to individual sections of the site.

Each sector was excavated by an expert team consisting of the head of the sector, two technicians, and a number of workers depending on the need (Breščak 2004; Lazar 2020).

The archaeological excavation method included the removal of the upper layer and grass rubble with construction machinery, followed by the manual stratigraphic excavation of the entire area. To determine the final depth of the archaeological excavation and the stratification in individual sections of the site, the complementary method of excavating test probes was used in several cases (Breščak 2004; Lazar 2020). The documentation of each archaeological context included the situation upon discovery, during the cleaning process, and upon its removal. The documentation system was uniform in all sectors except for Sector XIX and implemented on multiple levels: descriptive, visual-graphic, and photographic. Classic field technical drawings and photographs were created together with the written lists of the produced documentation. A trained team performed geodetic measurements with the help of an electronic tachymeter (Breščak 2004).

As already mentioned, the majority of the archaeological remains uncovered at Ribnica near Brežice belonged to the Roman period; however, the excavations proved that the area was also settled in prehistoric times, not to mention several pits belonging to the Early Middle Ages, a quite intriguing medieval metallurgical area, and the remains of an early modern mill (Breščak 2004).

Remains of a prehistoric settlement

At the site of Ribnica near Brežice, prehistoric finds were already known since the beginning of the 20th century (Petru 1975: 259), and many more were documented during the excavations in 2001–2004. These were not chronologically homogeneous and belonged to different periods of prehistory, ranging from the Copper and Bronze Age to the La Tène period. Prehistoric finds were discovered almost in the entire site area, mainly in the secondary position within the younger Roman layers, testifying that the prehistoric settlement remains were damaged mostly during the Roman times but also in younger periods. The preserved remains of prehistoric pits and other structures discovered in the fields above the River Sava prove that the settlement and economic activities in prehistory took place mainly in the eastern part of the site (Fig. 2).

Remains of Eneolithic activities in the site area

The oldest archaeological remains discovered at Ribnica near Brežice belong to the early phase of the Copper Age. Sector XIX (Fig. 3), where the area between the River Sava and the Gorjanci Mountains widens again, contained the remains of three pits (PO 1, PO 20 and PO 34). Based on the pottery assemblage within the fills of these pits, their formation belongs to the early Copper Age. The remains of the pits were otherwise modest; in fact, only the parts dug into the geological base were preserved.

The pits were of irregular shapes and cross-sections and were filled with sandy loam of a brown to yellow-brown colour. In pit PO 1, it was somewhat compacted, while in the remaining two, there was no significant filling compaction. The dimensions of the pits varied significantly, from a diameter of 0.45 m (PO 34) to a size of 1.98 m × 1.24 m (PO 1). The preserved depths also differed considerably, from 0.27 m to 0.05 m; post-depositional processes likely destroyed the upper parts of the pits, leaving only the bottoms intact, as the area in question was known for its agricultural economies for several millennia.

The assemblages discovered in these pits were relatively small. They consisted of a few

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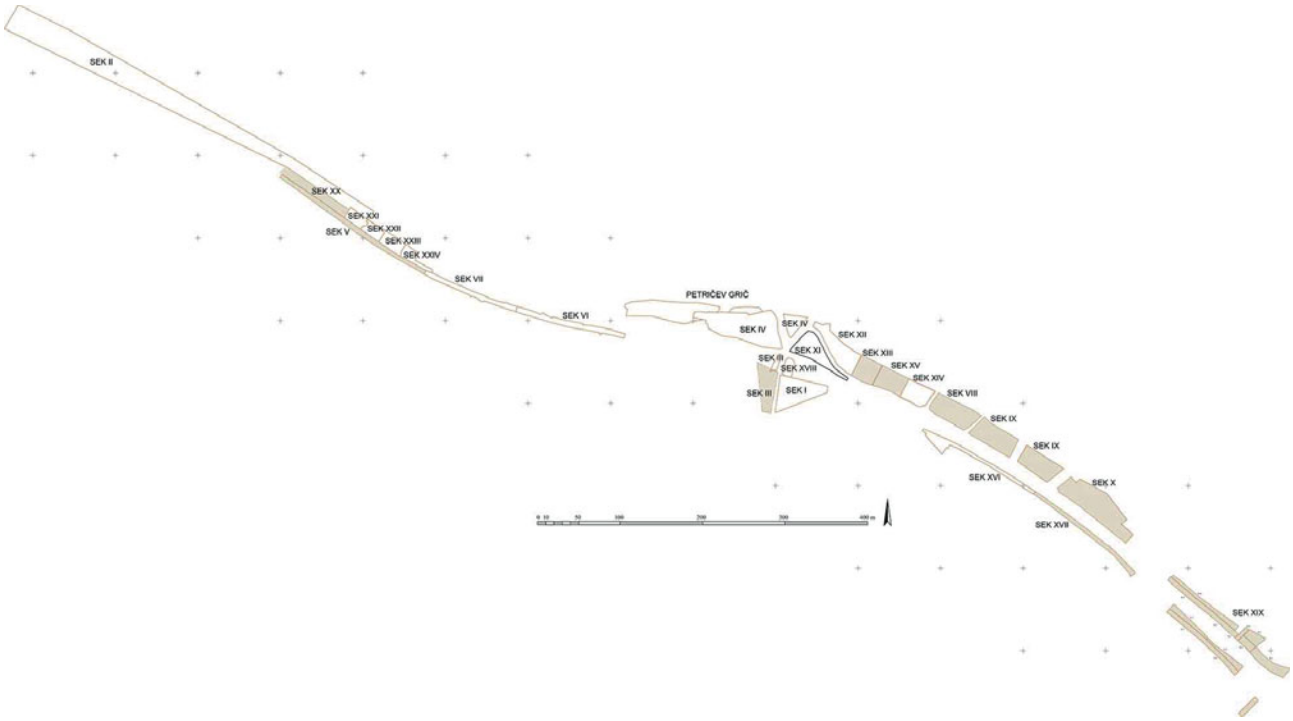

Fig. 2 Ribnica near Brežice. Division of the site into sectors. Distribution areas of Prehistoric remains are coloured (made by: A. Ogorelec)
Sl. 2 Ribnica kod Brežica. Podjela nalazišta na sektore. Obojena su područja rasprostranjenosti prapovijesnih ostataka (izradio: A. Ogorelec)

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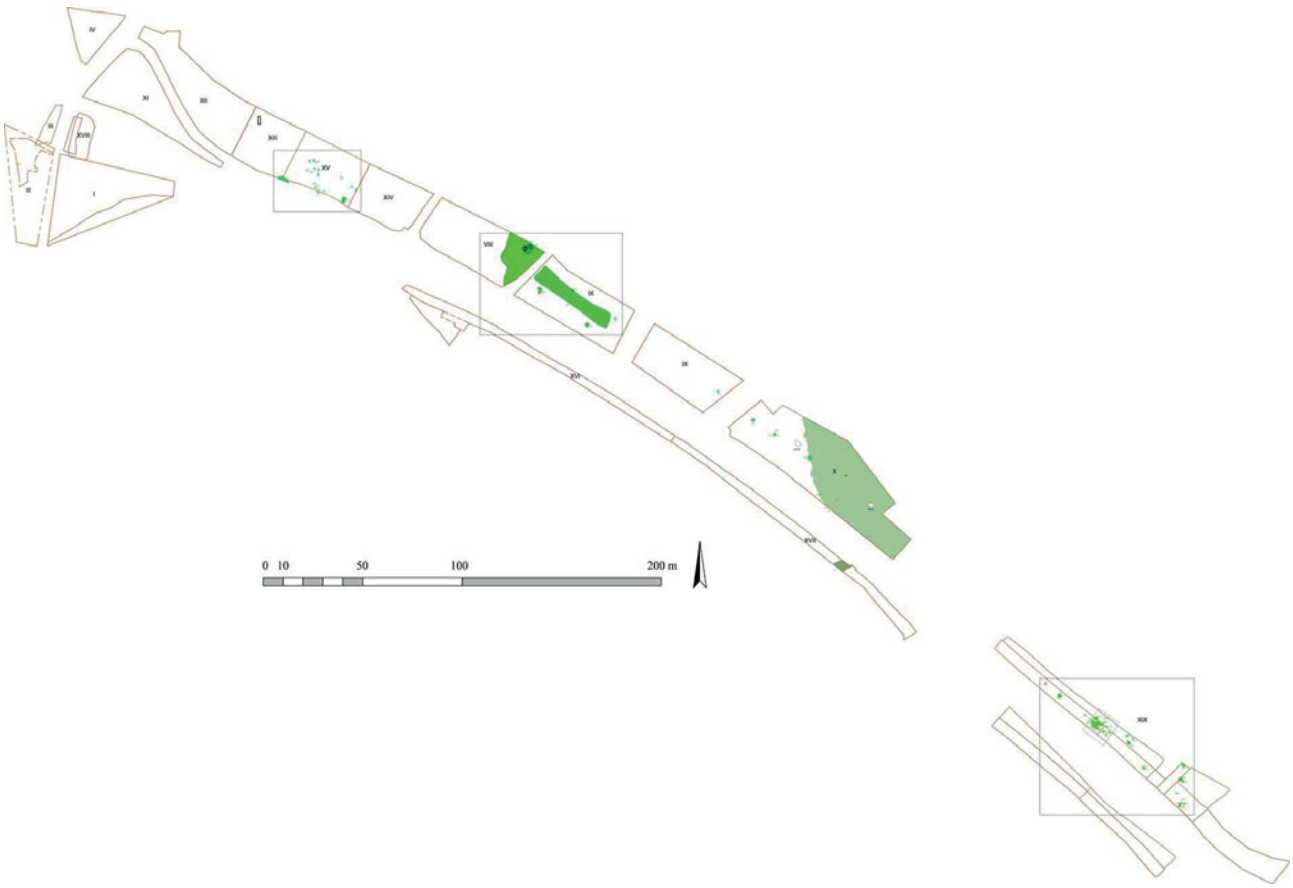

Fig. 3 Ribnica near Brežice. Plan of the prehistoric remains at the site, with marked sections of Figs. 4–6; legend: Copper Age: gray, Bronze Age: green, La Tène period: red (made by: A. Ogorelec)
Sl. 3 Ribnica kod Brežica. Plan prapovijesnih ostataka na lokalitetu s označenim dijelovima sl. 4–6; legenda: bakreno doba: siva, brončano doba: zelena, latensko razdoblje: crvena (izradio: A. Ogorelec)

poorly preserved potsherds and, in some pits, of a few examples of stone tools (Pl. 1). Among the ceramics there are a few fragments of biconical pots (Pl. 1: 1, 2, 4–5, 7), fragments of bowls with short and slightly everted vertical rims (Pl. 1: 3), and a fragment of a hollow foot with a slightly curved standing surface, belonging to a pedestalled vessel (Pl. 1: 6). The Eneolithic pottery from Ribnica is made predominantly of coarse-grained fabrics, with a few cases of fine-grained and middle-grained fabrics. The fabrics usually contained admixtures of sand consisting of quartz and mica, as well as occasional iron oxide particles. The pottery has surfaces that are well-finished and, in some cases, decorated with circular or oval appliqués and, in one case, with fingernail impressions. Only one pot specimen was decorated more elaborately with clusters of oblique incisions and of horizontal awl impressions. Only the assemblage of pit PO 20 contained seven stone tools, including one atypical scraper (Pl. 1: 8), some retouched flakes (Pl. 1: 9–11), and some cores.

The Eneolithic ceramic finds are very modest and poorly preserved, exhibiting only some typical characteristics which allow us to determine their cultural and chronological background. Ceramic manufacturing techniques, some pottery shapes, and decoration, suggest they belong to the early Eneolithic Lasinja culture. Bowls with short and slightly everted vertical rims are typical bowls (Pl. 1: 3), found in Lasinja contexts at several sites: for example, at the Obrežje site (Mason, Kramberger 2023: G14–G16), which is located nearby. Similarly crafted bowls are also known from the early Eneolithic sites from the Prekmurje region, such as Turnišče (Tomaž 2012: G95, G490, G489–G501), Gorice near Turnišče (Plestenjak 2010: G24, G36), Brezje near Turnišče (Novšak et al. 2013: G136), or Kalinovnjek (Kerman 2012: G81, G294). The Obrežje site included some examples of hollow feet with a slightly curved standing surface belonging to the pedestalled vessels such as our specimen (Mason, Kramberger 2023: G5–G9). Moreover, such feet are frequent in Prekmurje at sites such as Gorice near Turnišče (Plestenjak 2010: G28–G30), Brezje near Turnišče (Novšak et al. 2013: G215), or Kalinovnjek (Kerman 2012: G26, G141, F175). A pot fragment with an elaborated decoration on the shoulders has several analogies within the contexts of Lasinja culture sites, already noticed by Bekić (Bekić 2006: 239). A similar pot was found at the site of Col near Podgračeno (Horvat 2020: G70); however, the remains from this site are dated to the late Neolithic.

Bronze Age settlement remains

In contrast to those from the Eneolithic, Bronze Age settlement remains were more frequent at the site of Ribnica near Brežice (Fig. 3). The majority of them were located in Sectors XV (Fig. 4) and XIX (Fig. 5). At the same time, the remains of some pits, two water wells, and

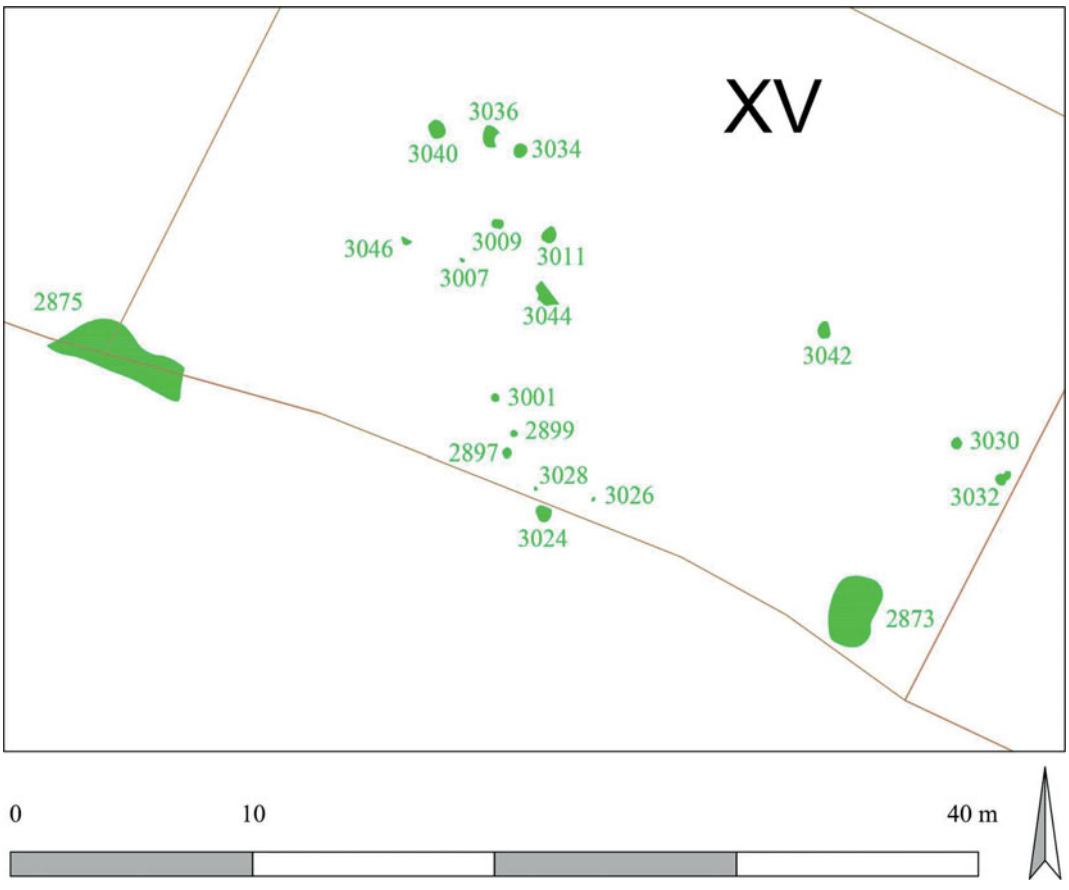

Fig. 4 Ribnica near Brežice. Plan of prehistoric remains in Sector XV (made by: A. Ogorelec)
Sl. 4 Ribnica kod Brežica. Plan prapovijesnih ostataka u sektoru XV (izradio: A. Ogorelec)

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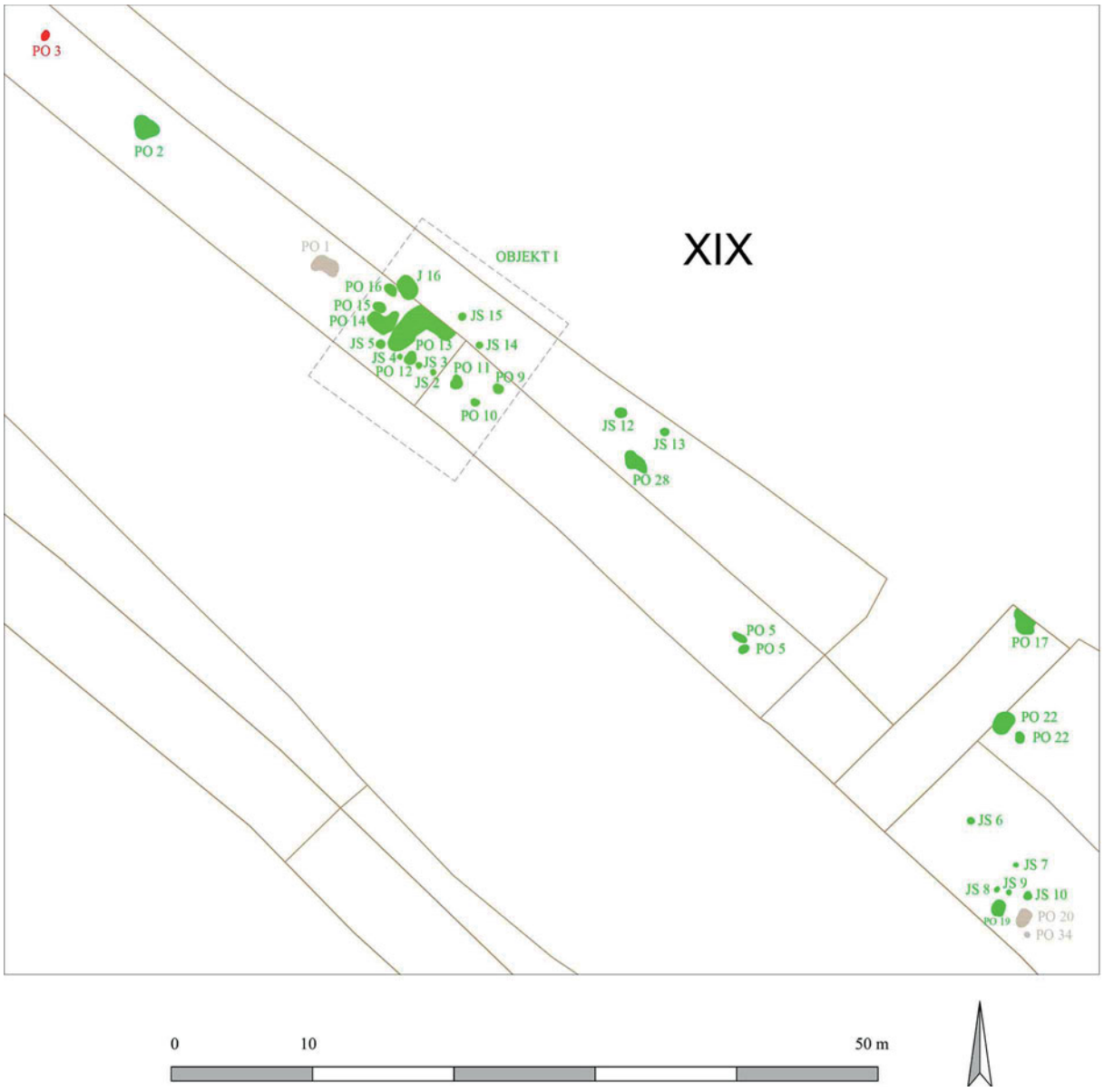

Fig. 5 Ribnica near Brežice. Plan of Prehistoric remains in Sector XIX; legend: Copper Age: gray, Bronze Age: green; La Tène period: red (made by: A. Ogorelec)

Sl. 5 Ribnica kod Brežica. Plan prapovijesnih ostataka u sektoru XIX; legenda: bakreno doba: siva, brončano doba: zelena, latensko razdoblje: crvena (izradio: A. Ogorelec)

colluvial layers, were discovered in Sectors VIII, IX, and X (Fig. 6). All these sectors cover the area north of the Ljubljana – Zagreb main road, where the River Sava moves away from the foothills of the Gorjanci Mountains and creates an area of fertile fields on the second Sava terrace.

Sector XIX in the eastern part of the site contained a dense concentration of Bronze Age pits, most of them lying around or near Structure One, which covered a complex of interconnected depressions, possibly the remains of a semi-subterranean building. Some pits, possibly also with individual postholes, were scattered in more distant parts of Sector XIX (Fig 3; Fig. 5). The remains of Structure One were mutually unrelated and consisted of nine pits of various shapes and sizes and eight postholes. The remains of Structure One were located just below the arable soil and were exposed to many years of ploughing, as a result of which only the lower parts of the pits and postholes were preserved. The pits were filled with greyish brown sandy loam, which sometimes also contained pieces of charcoal, fragments of Bronze Age ceramics, pieces of flint, and in one case, the bones of a sheep or goat, and in another, the bone remains of a young pig (*Sus scrofa, L.*).[2]

The second concentration of the remains of Bronze Age pits was discovered in the area of Sector XV. The pits were of different shapes (from round to irregular) and sizes (from 0.18 m to 1.95 m in diameter), but as a rule, they were circular to oval, with sloping walls and rounded bottoms. They were dug into the geological base. Most of them were also very shallow, which indicates

2 The animal bones were determined by Zdravka Hincak.

that only their lower parts were preserved. Most were filled with greasy loam, and the fills could contain tiny fragments of Bronze Age pottery.

Sectors VIII, IX, and X also contained several preserved Bronze Age pits and alluvial layers. Similar to Sectors XV and XIX, the preserved pits had different sizes and shapes. As a rule, they were shallow, with brown clay fills, which could also contain fragments of Bronze Age pottery and small fragments of burnt clay.

The ceramic finds from the fills of these pits were usually very fragmented and preserved in tiny pieces; however, they had a relatively homogeneous manufacture, forms, and decoration.

Remains of two wells

The discovery of the remains of two wells in Sector VIII was fascinating (Fig. 6 – Fig. 9). The remains of Water Well One (SU 1090/ 1081/ 1088/ 1089), of an oval plan, slightly irregular, with steep walls and a sharp narrowing in the lower part, were dug into the geological base. The size of the well was 5.42 m × 4.49 m, and its depth reached 3.82 m. In the middle of the well, there was a preserved layer of charcoal or greasy charcoal up to 10 cm thick, which is assumed to be the remains of the wooden structure of the well. The outer fill of the well consisted of grey–brown greasy loam, which adapted to the outer boundary of the well and the wooden structure placed inside. The fill contained individual ceramic fragments and remains of well-preserved grains of cereals, lentils, and peas.[3] The inner fill of the well inside the wooden structure consisted of a dark brown greasy loam containing numerous fragments of Bronze Age pottery (Pl. 25). The remains of the wooden structure of the Well One were radiocarbon dated[4]. They gave an age of 3360 ± 80 BP[5]. Charcoal from the SU 1081 outer fill was also dated, giving an age of 3355 ± 95 BP[6] (Fig. 10).

Water Well One was covered by an alluvial layer (SU 1048), which covered the entire eastern part of Sector VIII and consisted of dark

3 The macrobotanical analyses were performed by Tjaša Tolar (Tolar 2021).

4 The dates were obtained twenty years ago and have a large standard deviation. Also, in both cases there is a high probability of the old-wood effect.

5 Z-3375 (Rudjer Bošković Institute, Zagreb); charcoal (Samp. 232).

6 Z-3162 (Rudjer Bošković Institute, Zagreb); charcoal (Samp. 221).

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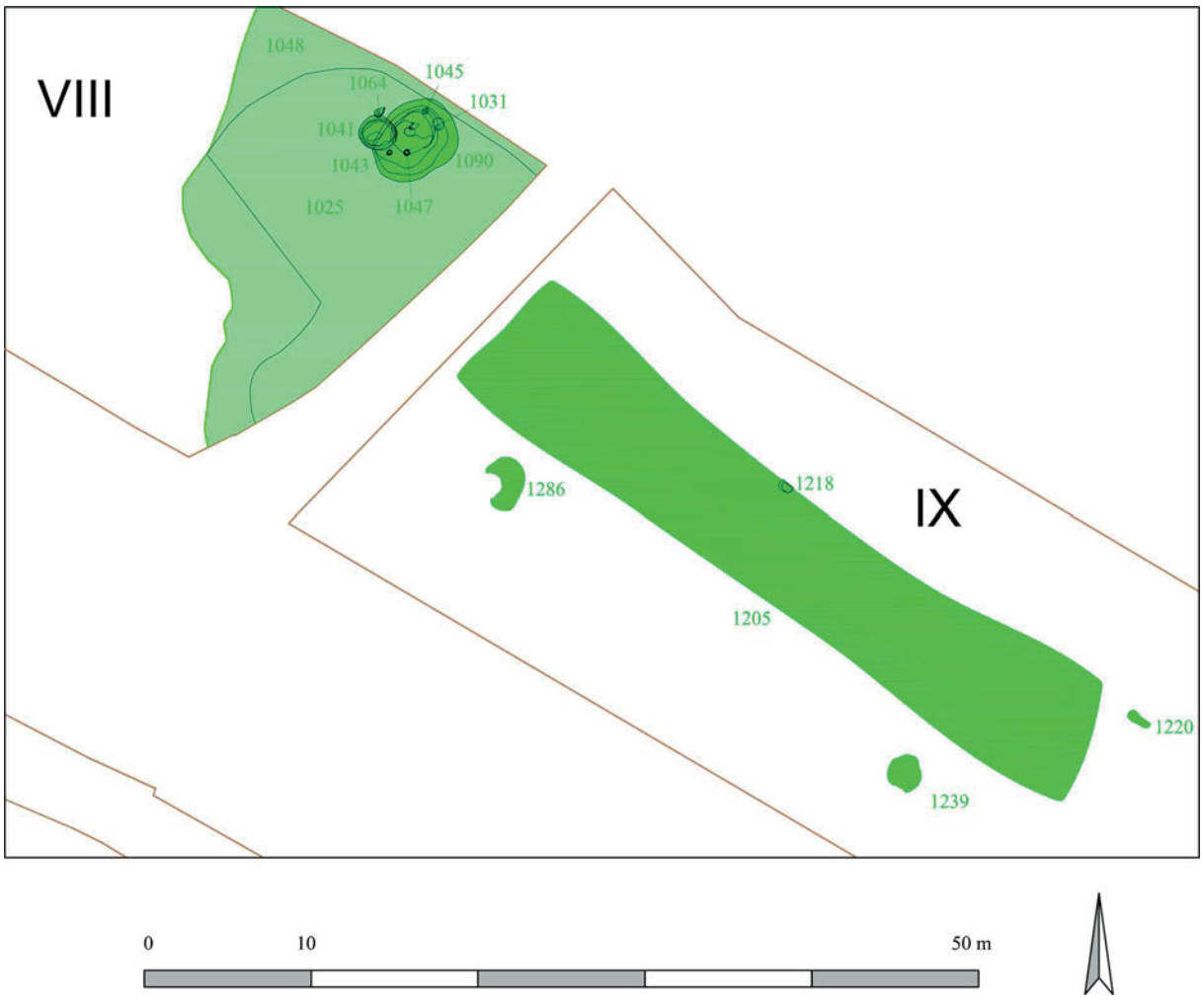

Fig. 6 Ribnica near Brežice. Part of the plan of the prehistoric remains at the site, in sectors VIII and IX, with the location of the Bronze Age wells (made by: A. Ogorelec)
Sl. 6 Ribnica kod Brežica. Dio plana prapovijesnih ostataka na lokalitetu, u sektorima VIII i IX, s lokacijom brončanodobnih bunara (izradio: A. Ogorelec)

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Fig. 7 Ribnica near Brežice. A view of a partially excavated Bronze Age Well One (photo by: F. Aš)
Sl. 7 Ribnica kod Brežica. Pogled na djelomično iskopani brončanodobni bunar 1 (snimio: F. Aš)

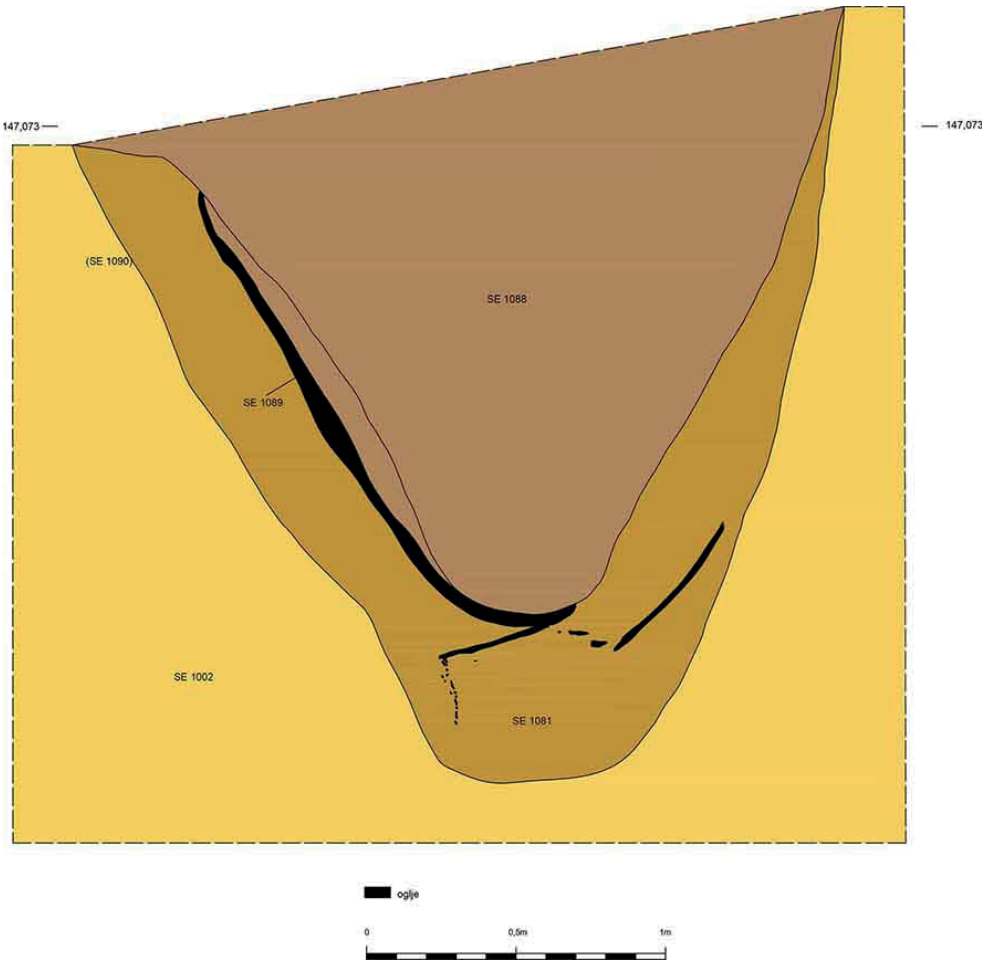

Fig. 8 Ribnica near Brežice. Bronze Age Well One, a drawing of a cross-section (made by: A. Ogorelec)
Fig. 8 Ribnica kod Brežica. Brončanodobni bunar 1, crtež presjeka (izradio: A. Ogorelec)

Fig. 9 Ribnica near Brežice. Bronze Age Well One, detail (photo by: F. Aš)
Fig. 9 Ribnica kod Brežica. Brončanodobni bunar 1, detalj (snimio: F. Aš)

brown, greasy, compacted loam with charcoal and fragments of atypical Bronze Age ceramics. A layer that varied in thickness between 0.20 m and 1.89 m covered the geological base and Well 1.

Water Well Two (SU 1041/ 1040/ 1068) was dug into the alluvial layer SU 1048 at approximately the same location as Water Well One. It was round in plan with steep walls and a flat bottom, sized 2.37 m × 2.25 m, and with a depth of 1.46 m. The pit had two fills. A light olive brown oily loam, with stones, ceramics, and charcoal, was the outer fill of the well. It also contained charred remains of cereals. The inner fill of the well consisted of dark grey olive brown greasy clay loam with Bronze Age pottery, stones, and charcoal. The remains of Water Well One partially intersected with the later excavation for Water Well Two.

The discovery of the remains of the two wells is fascinating, not so much because of the wells themselves, but because their stratigraphic situation testifies that the sequence of the process of building Well One, its destruction by the alluvial layer, and the rebuilding of Well Two in almost the same place, must have happened in a relatively short time, as evidenced by the finds from both wells.

Numerous fragments of ceramics were discovered in the fills of both wells. Unlike the ceramics from the Bronze Age pits, the ceramics in the well were better preserved in larger fragments, so that it was possible to reconstruct the shape of the vessel in several cases, and two pots were preserved in their entirety (Pl. 3: 4–5). Among the finds from the wells there are simple spherical bowls with a flat or rounded mouth (Pl. 2: 1; 3: 3; 5: 3), conical bowls with a thickened rim (Pl. 3: 1), conical bowls with a pronouncedly everted rim (Pl. 3: 2; 5: 2), globular pots with an everted rim (Pl. 3: 4, 5), one of them decorated with a circular appliqué on the neck (Pl. 3: 4), pots with a horizontal incision on the shoulder (Pl. 2: 3), pots with an accentuated transition to the shoulder (Pl. 5: 4), pots with slightly everted rims and ribs with impressions, sometimes also with one or two handles (Pl. 2: 2; 4: 1, 2, 4; 5: 1), pots with pronouncedly everted rims and ribs with impressions (Pl. 4: 3), pedestalled vessels with a semi-full foot (Pl. 2: 4), small flat lids with a strap handle (Pl. 4: 5), and others. The decoration of ribs with impressions was done in a variety of forms. There are horizontal ribs (Pl. 2: 2; 4: 1, 2; 5: 1), vertical ribs (Pl. 4: 3), and also a combination of both (Pl. 4: 4). Impressions were done in different manners, with fingernails and with an awl, producing different visual effects.

The ceramics from both wells can be compared with the ceramics from many sites in Slovenia. Although some sites with comparable pottery were not radiocarbon dated, such as Oloris near Dolnji Lakoš (Dular et al. 2002), they are essential since the majority of the pottery from the wells exhibits similar traits in terms of pottery forms as well as decoration. At Oloris there are globular pots with everted rims (Dular et al. 2002: T. 23: 3), pots with an accentuated transition to the shoulder (Dular et al. 2002: T. 7: 4; 10: 5), and pots with slightly everted rims and ribs with impressions, sometimes also with one or two handles (Dular et al. 2002: T. 10: 11; 23: 4). There are also many fragments with ribs with different impressions (Dular et al. 2002: T. 1: 13–15; 21: 5–6, 15–16; 22: 1–4; 46: 1–19). There are also pedestalled vessels with semi-full feet (Dular et al. 2002: T. 8: 5; 20: 13; 27: 14–15) and simple spherical bowls with a flat or rounded mouth (Dular et al. 2002: T. 8: 5; 20: 13; 27: 14–15).

At Gomile near Lenart, in eastern Slovenia, we found globular pots with an everted rim (Tomaž 2010: 51, G1), similar to ours (Pl. 3: 4–5), also with a circular appliqué but on the shoulder. Many fragments are decorated with ribs with impressions (Tomaž 2010: 55, G18–G23). There are three AMS dates available for the Gomile site, obtained from the charcoal: 3158 ± 35 BP (PO 148), 3164 ± 34 BP (PO 149), and 3050 ± 26 BP (PO 235) (Tomaž 2010: 89–90; 2014: 194–195) (Fig. 10).

Another site exhibiting pottery similar to pottery from the Ribnica wells is Pod Grunti – Pince, near

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Lendava in the Prekmurje region (Kerman 2014a; 2018). A fireplace (SE 400, SE 503) contained similar pottery as the one in Ribnica, such as globular pots with everted rims (Kerman 2014a: 47, Fig. 1.14: 2–3), fragments of a two-handled pot with slightly everted rims and ribs with impressions (Kerman 2014a: 47, Fig. 1.14: 18), and simple spherical bowls with a flat or rounded mouth (Kerman 2014a: 47, Fig. 1.14: 16). Another pit (SE 1057) included globular pots with everted rims (Kerman 2014a: 47, Fig. 1.14: 2–3) and pots with slightly everted rims, one handle and rib with impressions (Kerman 2014a: 49, Figs. 1.15: 2–3; 1.15: 1). Pit SE 1369 contained fragments of simple spherical bowls with a flat or rounded mouth (Kerman 2014a: 49, Fig. 1.15: 17–18), conical bowls with a pronouncedly everted rim (Kerman 2014a: 49, Fig. 1.15: 12), as well as some fragments of vessels, with ribs with impressions (Kerman 2014a: 49, Fig. 1.15: 22–23). All three contexts were radiocarbon dated, and charcoal samples yielded dates between 3070 ± 30 BP (SE 400, SE 503), 3060 ± 30 BP (SE 1057), and 2965 ± 25 BP (SE 1369) (Kerman 2014a: 58–59) (Fig. 10).

Pots with slightly everted rims and ribs with impressions, sometimes also with one or two handles, similar to ours (Pl. 2: 2), were also found in pit SE 337 at the Pod Kotom – Sever site near Murska Sobota (Kerman 2014b: 162, Fig. 7.4.3: 7, 11; 2011a), and the radiocarbon dating of the charcoal sample produced the date of 3365 ± 45 BP (Kerman 2014b: 166) (Fig. 10).

The site of Podsmreka pri Višnji Gori contained a wealth of ceramics similar to the Ribnica Wells in hut 2 (concentration 9A) (Murgelj 2014), such as pots with a horizontal incision on the shoulder (Murgelj 2014: 441, Fig. 24.3: 1) like ours (Pl. 2: 3), conical bowls with a thickened rim (Murgelj 2014: 441, Fig. 24.3: 6) similar to ours (Pl. 3: 1), and fragments decorated with ribs with impressions (Murgelj 2014: 441, Fig. 24.3: 8–9). The radiocarbon dating made on a charcoal sample produced the date of 3080 ± 40 BP (Murgelj 2014: 448) (Fig. 10).

The most numerous comparisons to our ceramics can undoubtedly be found among the sites that were attributed to the late part of the Middle Bronze Age – the Oloris-Podsmreka Horizon (Črešnar, Teržan 2014: 681–689), but some ceramic pieces are also comparable to the finds from the site of Pod Kotom-Sever, which were initially attributed to the Early Middle Bronze Age (Kerman 2011b; 2014b: 162, Fig. 7.4.3: 7, 11). If we take into consideration the radiocarbon dates produced by the Ribnica wells charcoal samples, it would certainly seem that both sites are contemporaneous and that Ribnica was, in fact, slightly older than the Oloris-Podsmreka Horizon proposed by Matija Črešnar and Biba Teržan (Črešnar, Teržan 2014: 681–689). However, the radiocarbon dates from Ribnica were made twenty years ago and have a significant standard deviation. Also, the dates came from charcoal samples from a watery

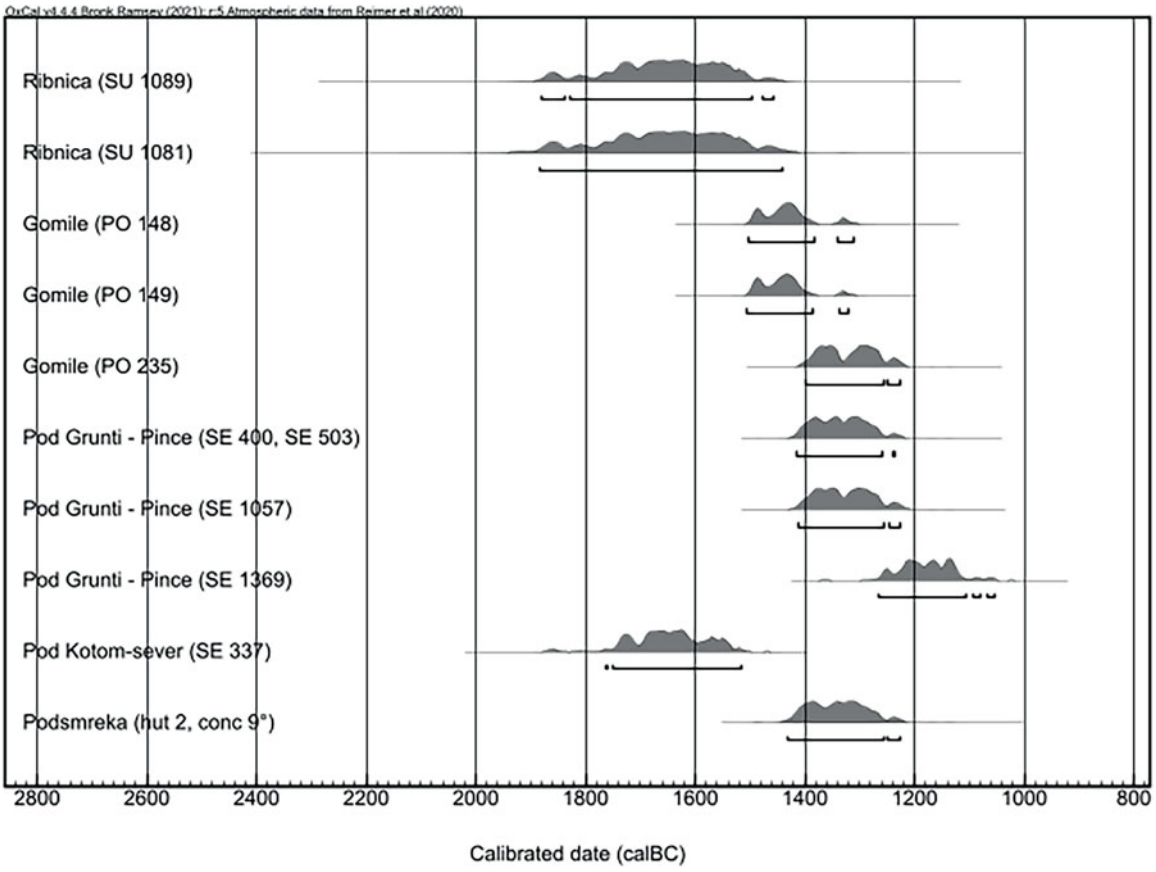

Fig. 10 Calibrated ^{14}C dates from sites mentioned in text (OxCal v 4.4.4 Bronck Ramsey (2021); r:5 Atmospheric data from Reimer et al. 2020)

Fig. 10 Kalibrirani ^{14}C datumi s nalazišta spomenutih u tekstu (OxCal v 4.4.4 Bronck Ramsey (2021); r:5 Atmospheric data from Reimer et al. 2020)

environment. Therefore, we should be careful with their use. In this case, we can very likely assume that the old wood effect is possible. Therefore, we conclude that the finds from the wells from Ribnica most likely indicate that they were created during the Late Middle Bronze Age, during the Oloris-Podsmreka Horizon.

In the territory of present-day Slovenia, several remains of prehistoric wells have been uncovered. The earliest one, at the Popava 1 site, dates to the Copper Age (Šavel, Karo 2012: 27). Six similar structures as ours, oval or round in plan and of considerable depth, have been unearthed at the site of Za Rašico (Šavel, Sankovič 2010: 37–38), the researchers interpreting them as a water reservoir. Based on the ^{14}C dates, they were constructed in the early Bronze Age. Another example of a prehistoric Water Well, somewhat different in shape, was discovered at Oloris (Dular et al. 2002: 25–26). The Oloris well dates to the Middle/Late Bronze Age, and had a square, well-made wooden construction in the middle. Another well from the Late Bronze Age is also known from the site of Pod Kotom – Sever (Kerman 2011a: 35). There are also some examples from the Iron Age. One of them, similar in shape to ours, was discovered at Kotare – Baza near Murska Sobota (Kerman 2011b: 30), and several are known from Ormož, all dated to the Ha B3 period (Dular, Tomanič Jevremov 2010: 81, Abb. 93). The appearance of wells at all these sites is not directly linked to the lack of water in the settlements, as they all lie close to running water, but their occurrence must be understood in the context of a better management of the water supply, perhaps also for the needs of economic activities.

Finds from the La Tène period

Of all the archaeological remains discovered at Ribnica near Brežice, only two pits which can be attributed to the La Tène period have been preserved (SE 248 / 249 with posthole SE 246 / 247 in Sector III and PO 3a / PO 3 in Sector XIX). The fill of these pits contained typologically insignificant fragments, which were ascribed to the La Tène period only because of their technological characteristics. However, many ceramic fragments in the La Tène tradition were discovered in the oldest Roman layers throughout the excavation field, deposited in a secondary context, most probably testifying to a denser settlement or at least to the use of space in that period.

Conclusion

Ribnica near Brežice is a site that was known for many years mainly for its remains from the Roman period. *Romula*, a Roman-era roadside station, was already known from written sources, and the excavations of Peter Petru confirmed its actual location at the end of the 1950s. Single prehistoric finds were sporadically discovered at the location of the site. The extensive excavations carried out between 2001 and 2004, which explored the 2 km strip along the former Ljubljana–Zagreb main road, also discovered prehistoric remains in situ for the first time. Admittedly, there were not many of them. However, the relatively frequent finds in the secondary context indicate that the prehistoric settlement in the investigated area of the site must once have been significantly more intensive than was detected during the excavations. We can reasonably assume that the settlement and the use of the space during the Roman period destroyed the remains of the prehistoric settlement in some parts of the site and caused considerable damage in others.

The prehistoric remains discovered at the site are from different periods. The three oldest and unconnected pits belong to the Early Eneolithic period based on the ceramic material discovered in them; culturally, they belong to the Lasinja culture.

The Bronze Age remains were much denser and preserved in two significant concentrations in Sectors XV and XIX. Pits of various sizes, from small ones in the form of postholes to large pits of irregular shapes, can be linked to economic activity in the area. In no single case were the pits arranged so that they could represent the remains of above-ground structures; in the case of large pits, they are most probably the remains of waste pits. Moreover, the remains of some pits, two water wells, and colluvial layers, were also discovered in Sectors VIII, IX, and X. All these sectors cover an area north of the Ljubljana – Zagreb main road, where the River Sava moves away from the foothills of the Gorjanci Mountains and creates an area of fertile fields on the second Sava terrace. The fascinating discovery of two water wells testified to an environmental event in the late part of the Middle Bronze Age. In fact, the stratigraphic situation of both wells testifies to the sequence of the digging of Well One, its destruction by the alluvial layer, and the digging of Well Two in almost the same place. The stratigraphic sequence was formed in a very short time, as testified by the fragments of ceramics from the fills of both wells. The ceramics from Ribnica near Brežice show characteristics that are most similar to the ceramics at sites attributed to the late part of the Middle Bronze Age, the Oloris-Podsmreka Horizon.

The remains from the La Tène period at Ribnica near Brežice are relatively modest. However, a few more finds from this period in a secondary context indicate that the La Tène settlement in the area may have been more extensive once.

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Sažetak

Arheološko nalazište Ribnica kod Brežica, poznato i kao Ribnica kod Jesenica u Dolenjskoj, općenito je poznato kao područje rimske cestovne postaje *Romula*. U Registru kulturne baštine Republike Slovenije, to je nalazište zabilježeno kao Ribnica kod Brežica – Arheološko nalazište Romula, pod brojem EID 9335. Zbog nepoznate lokacije, Romula je u arheološkoj zajednici privlačila pažnju i prije nego što je Peter Petru iskopao arheološke ostatke u današnjem selu Ribnici. Naime, Romulu spominju Tabula Peutingeriana i Itinerarium Antonini s kraja 3. stoljeća, što je poticalo razne istraživače da pokušaju odrediti njezin točan položaj (Lazar 2020).

Do prvih arheoloških iskapanja u Ribnici došlo je pedesetih godina 20. stoljeća, kad je Peter Petru otkrio temelje više antičkih građevina, groblje s 41 grobom i ostatke rimske ceste tijekom zaštitnih arheoloških istraživanja zbog izgradnje glavne ceste Ljubljana – Zagreb (Petru 1961; 1962; 1969). Nalazi su uglavnom bili iz rimskog razdoblja, ali pronađena je i prapovijesna keramika (Petru 1975: 259). Drugo opsežno istraživanje arheološkog nalazišta sprovedeno je između 2001. i 2004. (Breščak 2004; Lazar 2020: 390).

Nalazište Ribnica kod Brežica smješteno je na uzvišici iznad rijeke Save, između sela Ribnice kod Jesenica i Podgračenoga, sjeverno i južno od nekadašnje glavne ceste Ljubljana – Zagreb na jugoistoku Slovenije (karta 1). Proteže se po najužem dijelu između Save i najsjevernijeg obronka gorja Gorjanci (sl. 1). Potok Gračenica, koji teče između obližnjih brda Kincelj i Škofljančeva gabrina, dijelio je nalazište na dva dijela. Lokacija nalazišta imala je iznimnu važnost još od prapovijesti.

Između 2001. i 2004., Zavod za varstvo kulturne dediščine Slovenije, Območna enota Novo mesto, sproveo je zaštitna arheološka istraživanja cijelog područja pod vodstvom Danila Breščaka. Ukupna dužina istraženog područja pokrivala je više od 2 km (sl. 1). Područje istraživanja podijeljeno je na 25 sektora, od kojih su 24 bila obilježena rimskim brojevima od I do XXIV, dok je zadnji nosio ime „Petričev grič".

Većina arheoloških ostataka iskopanih u Ribnici kod Brežica pripada rimskom periodu, ali istraživanja su pokazala da je to područje bilo naseljeno već u prapovijesti, a tu je i nekoliko jama iz ranog srednjega vijeka, zanimljiva srednjovjekovna metalurška zona i ostatci mlina iz ranog novoga vijeka (Breščak 2004).

U nalazištu Ribnica kod Brežica, prapovijesni su nalazi bili poznati još od početka 20. stoljeća, a još ih je mnogo dokumentirano u istraživanjima 2001. – 2004. Kronološki nisu bili homogeni i pripadali su različitim razdobljima prapovijesti, od bakrenog i brončanog doba do latena. Nalazi su uglavnom otkriveni u sekundarnom položaju unutar mlađih rimskih slojeva u gotovo cijelom području nalazišta. Međutim, sačuvani ostatci prapovijesnih jama i drugih objekata pokazuju da su se prapovijesno naseljavanje i gospodarske djelatnosti uglavnom odvijali na istočnom dijelu nalazišta (sl. 2).

Najstariji arheološki ostatci, ili bolje rečeno, ostatci korištenja prostora, pripadaju ranoj fazi bakrenoga doba. U sektoru XIX (sl. 3), gdje se područje između Save i gorja Gorjanci opet proširuje, otkriveni su skromni ostatci triju jama. Jame su bile nepravilna oblika i ispunjene smeđom i žućkastosmeđom pjeskovitom ilovačom. Inventar otkriven u tim jamama bio je relativno malen i sastojao se od nekolicine loše sačuvanih ulomaka keramike i, u nekim jamama, od nekoliko primjeraka kamenih alata (T. 1). Tehnike proizvodnje keramike, neki keramički oblici, kao i ukrasi, ukazuju na to da keramički nalazi iz tih jama pripadaju ranoj eneolitičkoj lasinjskoj kulturi.

Brončanodobni ostatci, od kojih se većina nalazi u sektorima XV (sl. 4) i XIX (sl. 5), bili su češći na nalazištu Ribnica kod Breižca (sl. 3). Jame raznih veličina, od malih ukopa stupova do mnogo većih jama nepravilna oblika, mogu se povezati s gospodarskim djelatnostima u tom području. Ni u jednom pojedinom slučaju jame nisu bile raspoređene tako da predstavljaju ostatke nadzemnih objekata, a u slučaju mnogo većih jama, najvjerojatnije su to ostatci jama za otpad. Osim toga, ostatci nekoliko jama, dva zdenca za vodu i koluvijalnih slojeva pronađeni su u sektorima VIII, IX i X (sl. 6). Svi ti sektori nalazišta smješteni su sjeverno od glavne ceste Ljubljana – Zagreb, gdje se tok Save odmiče od obronaka gorja Gorjanci i stvara područje plodnih polja na drugoj savskoj terasi. Keramički nalazi iz zapuna brončanodobnih jama obično su bili jako fragmentirani i sačuvani samo u komadićima; ipak, imali su relativno homogenu fakturu, oblike i ukrase.

Otkriće ostataka dva zdenca u sektoru VII bilo je zanimljivo (sl. 6–7) jer je dalo stratigrafski niz koji svjedoči o događaju u okolišu u kasnom dijelu srednjeg brončanoga doba. Ostatci Prvog zdenca ukopani su u geološku osnovu. U zdencu su otkriveni ostatci drvenih struktura, a rupa zdenca bila je ispunjena raznim zapunama. Sprovedeno je radiokarbonsko datiranje ostataka drvene strukture. Dobivena je starost od 3360 ± 80 BP. Sprovedeno je i datiranje ugljena iz vanjske zapune Prvog zdenca i dobivena je starost od 3355 ± 95 BP. Prvi zdenac bio je pokriven aluvijalnim slojem, koji je prekrivao cijeli istočni dio sektora VIII i sastojao se od tamnosmeđe, masne, natisnute ilovače s ugljenom i fragmentima netipične brončanodobne keramike. Zatim je u aluvijalni sloj ukopan Drugi zdenac, otprilike na istom mjestu kao Prvi zdenac. Ostatke Prvog zdenca dijelom je presijecao mlađi iskop za Drugi zdenac. Otkriće ostataka ta dva zdenca je zapanjujuće – ne toliko zbog samih zdenaca koliko zbog njihove stratigrafske situacije koja svjedoči da se niz u kojem je Prvi zdenac izgrađen, zatim uništen aluvijalnim slojem, te je izgrađen Drugi zdenac gotovo na istom mjestu, moralo odvijati u relativno kratkom vremenu, kao što pokazuju nalazi iz oba zdenca. U zapunama oba zdenca pronađeni su brojni keramički fragmenti. Keramika iz oba zdenca može se usporediti s keramikom s mnogih nalazišta u Sloveniji, kao što su Oloris kod Dolnjeg Lakoša (Dular et al. 2002), Gomile kod Lenarta (Tomaž 2010; 2014), Pod Grunti – Pince kod Lendave (Kerman 2014a; 2018), Podsmreka pri Višnji Gori (Murgelj 2014) i druga. Najviše usporedaba s našom keramikom može se bez sumnje naći među nalazištima koja su pripisana kasnom dijelu srednjeg brončanoga doba – horizontu Oloris-Podsmreka (Črešnar, Teržan

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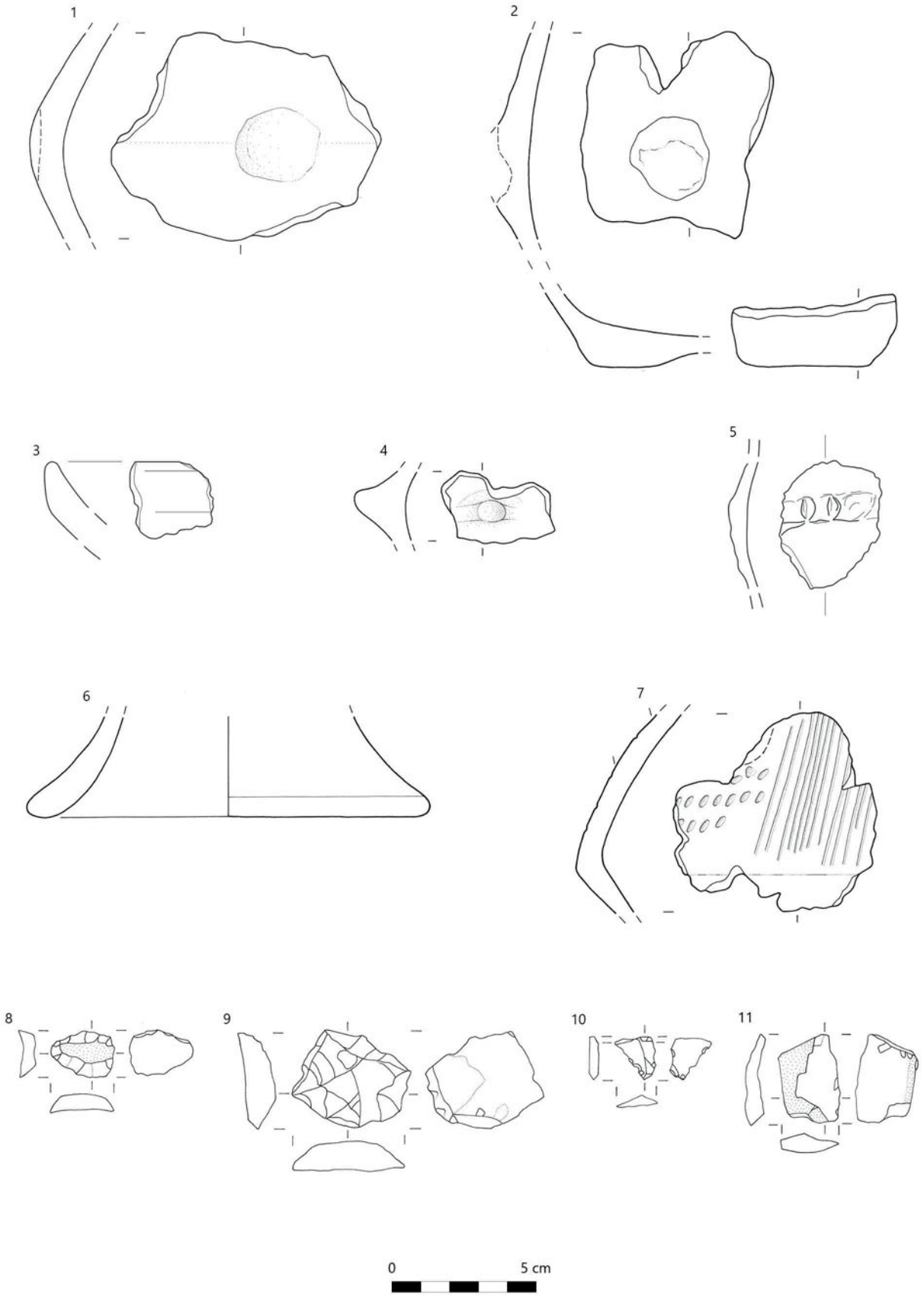
2014: 681–689), ali neki se ulomci keramike također mogu usporediti s nalazima na nalazišta Pod Kotom Sever, koji su isprva pripisani ranoj fazi srednjeg brončanog doba (Kerman 2011b; 2014b: 162, sl. 7.4.3: 7, 11). Ako uzmemo u obzir radiokarbonsko datiranje koje je dobiveno od uzoraka ugljena iz zdenaca u Ribnici, svakako se čini da su to dva istovremena nalazišta i da je Ribnica zapravo malo starija od horizonta Oloris-Podsmreka, koji predlažu Matija Črešnar i Biba Teržan (Črešnar, Teržan 2014: 681–689). Međutim, radiokarbonsko datiranje iz Ribnice sprovedeno je prije dvadeset godina i ima znatnu standardnu devijaciju. Osim toga, datiranje je sprovedeno na uzorcima ugljena iz vodenog okoliša. Možemo pretpostaviti da je u ovom slučaju moguć efekt starog drva. Stoga zaključujemo da nalazi iz zdenaca u Ribnici najvjerojatnije ukazuju na to da su stvoreni u kasnom srednjem brončanome dobu, za vrijeme horizonta Oloris-Podsmreka.

Latenski su nalazi u Ribnici kod Brežica rijetki zato što se samo dvije sačuvane jame mogu pripisati latenu, a sadrže samo tipološki beznačajne keramičke fragmente. Međutim, mnogi su keramički fragmenti iz latenske tradicije otkriveni u sekundarnom kontekstu, što svjedoči o vjerojatno gušćem naselju ili bar o korištenju prostora u to doba.



Pl. 1 Ribnica near Brežice. Selection of ceramic finds from PO1 (1–2), PO 20 (3–4) and PO 34 (7); and stone tools from PO 20 (8–11) (made by: A. Ogorelec; drawings by: J. Tratnik Šumi and A. Tomaž)
T. 1 Ribnica kod Brežica. Izbor keramičkih nalaza iz PO1 (1–2), PO 20 (3–4) i PO 34 (7); i kamenog alata iz PO 20 (8–11) (izradio: A. Ogorelec; crteži: J. Tratnik Šumi i A. Tomaž)

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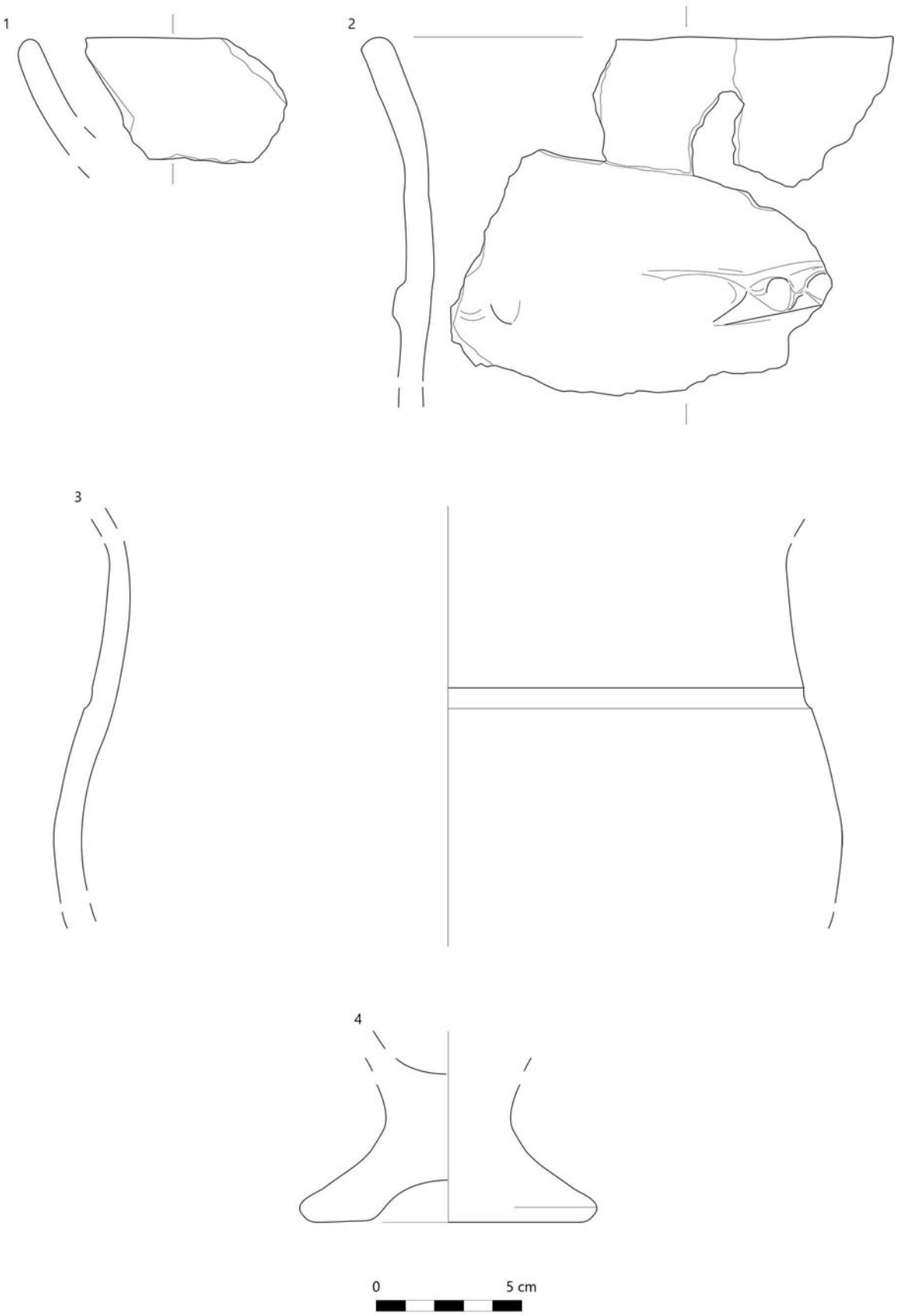
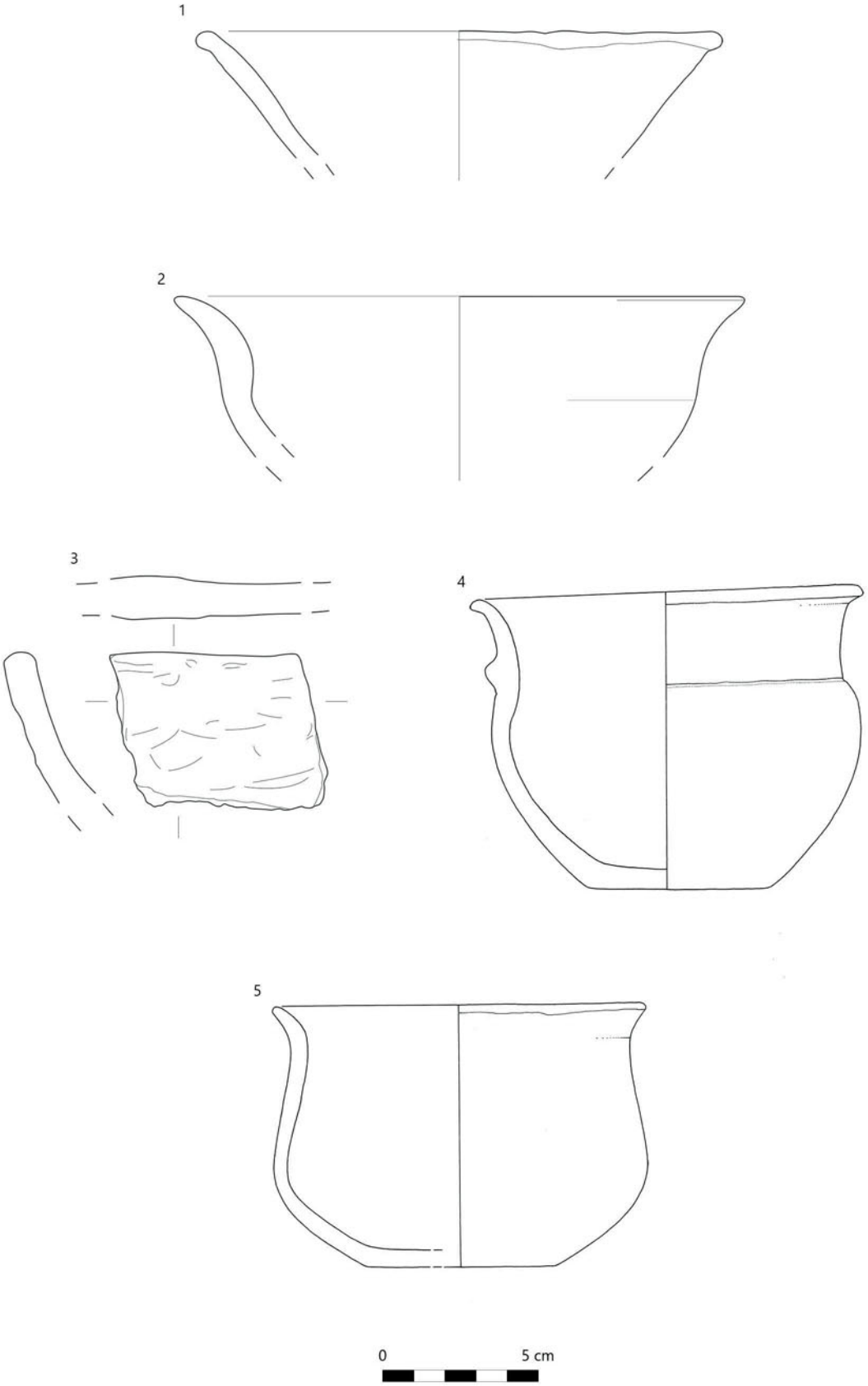


Pl. 2 Ribnica near Brežice. Selection of ceramic finds from SU 1081 (made by: A. Ogorelec; drawings by: J. Tratnik Šumi and A. Izlakar)
T. 2 Ribnica kod Brežica. Izbor keramičkih nalaza iz SJ 1081 (izradio: A. Ogorelec; crteži: J. Tratnik Šumi i A. Izlakar)



Pl. 3 Ribnica near Brežice. Selection of ceramic finds from SU 1088 (made by: A. Ogorelec; drawings by: J. Tratnik Šumi)
T. 3 Ribnica kod Brežica. Izbor keramičkih nalaza iz SJ 1088 (izradio: A. Ogorelec; crteži: J. Tratnik Šumi)

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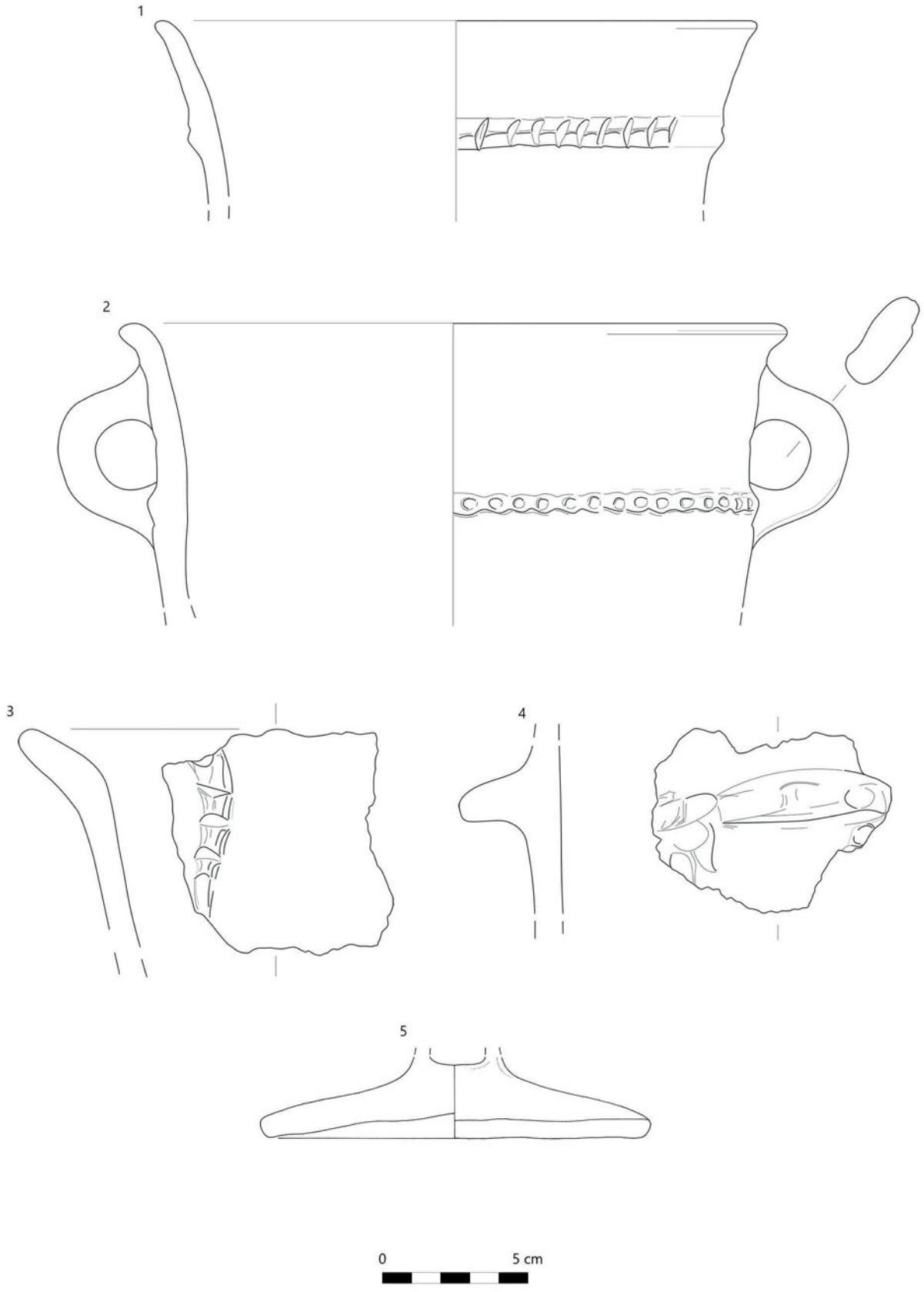
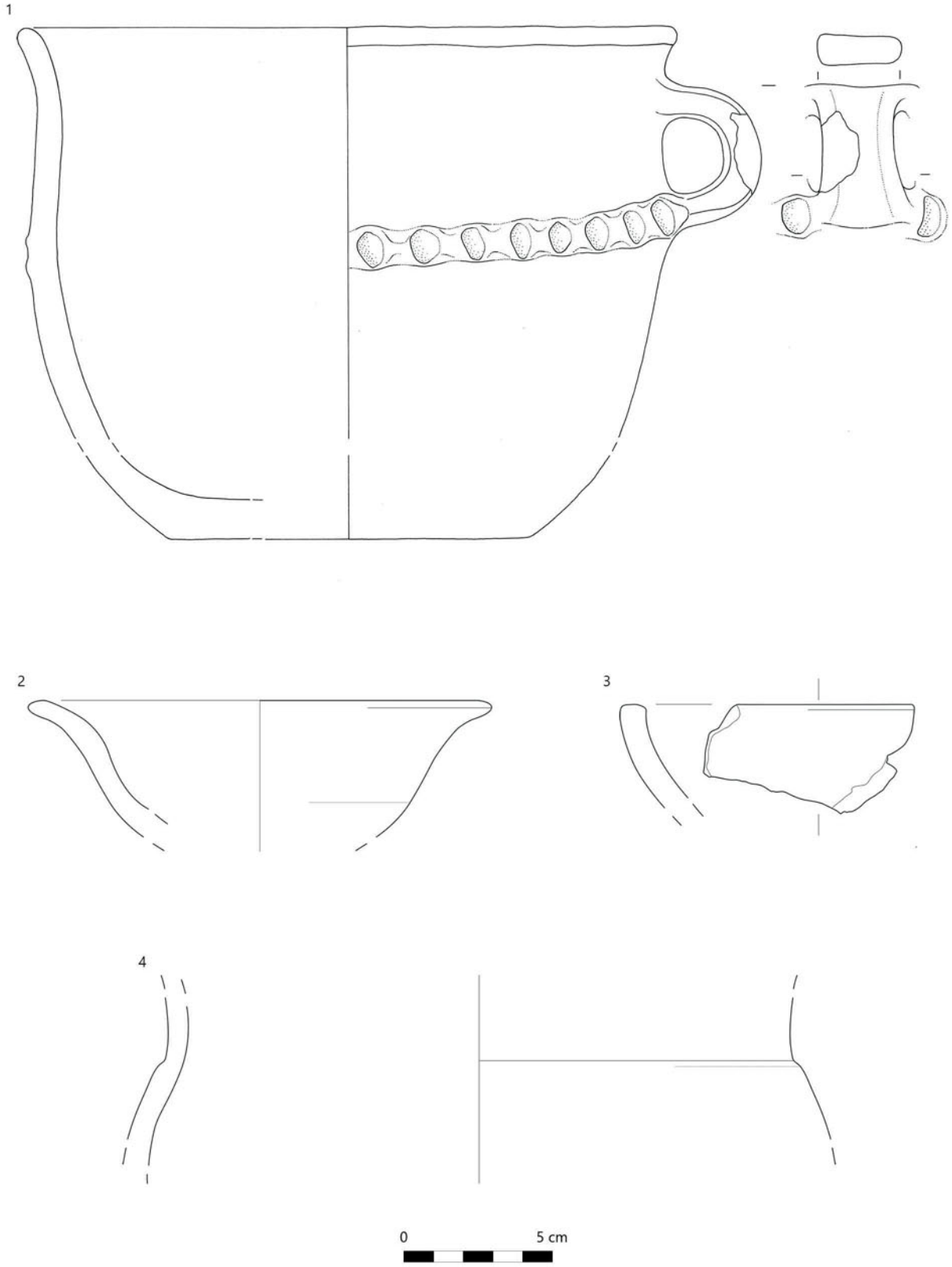


Pl. 4 Ribnica near Brežice. Selection of ceramic finds from SU 1088 (made by: A. Ogorelec; drawings by: A. Izlakar)
T. 4 Ribnica kod Brežica. Izbor keramičkih nalaza iz SJ 1088 (izradio: A. Ogorelec; crteži: A. Izlakar)



Pl. 5 Ribnica near Brežice. Selection of ceramic finds from well 2: 1 SU 1041 + SU 1081 + SU 1088; 2–4: SU 1068 (made by: A. Ogorelec; drawings by: J. Tratnik Šumi and A. Izlakar)
T. 5 Ribnica kod Brežica. Izbor keramičkih nalaza iz bunara 2: 1 SJ 1041+ SJ 1081+SJ 1088; 2–4 SJ 1068 (izradio: A. Ogorelec; crteži: J. Tratnik Šumi i A. Izlakar)

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