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Evidence for a very late Republican siege at Grad near Reka in Western Slovenia

Introduction

Grad near Reka is situated in Western Slovenia, high above the gorge of the River Idrija, a tributary of the River Soča (Fig. 1). It lies at the southern end of a north-south ridge, which slopes away to the south (Fig. 2). The ridge has three peaks; these are from north to south Velika Lipa, Mala Lipa and Grad. On the east side, the steep slopes of Grad descend towards the Kozarska stream, and on the west towards the Poličanka rivulet, which forms a gorge with water-falls and joins the River Idrija below Grad. The site of Grad has an excellent strategic position because the River Idrija forms a bend around it. A considerable quantity of metal work has been collected by unauthorised amateurs using metal detectors at Grad and its slopes, at the slopes of the ridge up to the saddle between Mala and Velika Lipa as well as at the northern part of the adjacent western ridge, called Ajdovo brdo, and at the south-eastern slope below Poličko polje (Police plain). No excavations have been carried out.

In 1988, the National Museum of Slovenia acquired the accessible finds and published them in 1994–1995. These objects, as well as several others in private collections, were also discussed by Dragan Božič1. In 2002 the National Museum of Slovenia acquired, or at least recorded, numerous new archaeological finds from Grad and other sites in its immediate neighbourhood. These finds included many early Roman military objects. The author, other staff from the National Museum of Slovenia, and also Dr. Dragan Božič and Dr. Tomaž Podobnikar from the Institute of Archaeology visited the site with the finder and tried to reconstruct, as far as possible, where the items had been found. GPS was used to locate the find-spots and plot them on the 1:10.000 map, currently the most accurate survey of the region2.

The finds

Among the pre-Roman finds, just a few can be dated to the Early Iron Age and the rest belong to the late La Tène period. They indicate the presence at Grad of an indigenous population (‘Idria group’) in the 1st century B.C. This can be probably related to Reka, a cemetery situated immediately below Grad3.

Early Roman finds predominate, of which militia constitute a clear majority. These comprise oblong lead slingshots, iron catapult-bolts with sockets, iron catapult-bolts with pyramidal heads and rod-like tangs, tri-lobed tanged (iron) arrow-heads, single-lobed tanged arrow-heads, simple tanged ‘irons’ with asymmetrical heads, tanged pila with a single-lobed barb and shoe nails (Figs. 3–5).

1 Božič 1999.
2 A detailed report on the finds and their find-spots is in preparation.
Fig. 1: Grad near Reka: the wider geo-political situation before Octavian’s Illyrian wars.

**Militaria: parallels and dating**

By far the most important published comparable assemblage comes from Andagoste in NW Spain. At this site, four (out of the eight) types of militaria documented at Grad find close matches. These comprise: catapult-bolts with rod-like tangs and others with sockets, oval slingshots, and also shoe nails with characteristic ‘decoration’ on the underside. Both sites also have in common a brooch of the Alesia group⁴. Andagoste was interpreted as the site of a battle and there also seems to be evidence of a Roman camp, very briefly occupied (o.c.). From the numismatic evidence the site was dated to 40/30 B.C., most probably about the middle of that period (i.e. circa 35 B.C.).

Several types of militaria known from Grad also find parallels at other late Republican sites such as Alesia and Osuna (besieged by Caesar in 52 B.C. and in 46/45 respectively), and also at Augustan sites such as Döttenbichl, which is dated at 15 B.C. (see below). These parallels are briefly outlined below.

The tri-lobed tanged iron arrow-heads (Fig. 3, 1–16) with light convex lobes and barbs correspond well to Werner Zanier’s Type 1a, which is well known on middle-late Augustan sites⁵; they were found in an early Augustan context at Biberlikopf-Walensee⁶. From the drawing, the tri-lobed arrow-head (perhaps badly preserved) from Andagoste⁷ does not have the characteristics of Zanier’s Type 1a, but rather corresponds to his broadly dated Type 1 or perhaps to his Type 3⁸.

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⁴ Ocharan Larrondo – Unzuata Portilla 2002, Fig. 2, 1–7, 10–12.
⁵ Zanier 1988, 6.
⁶ ibid. 6 fn. 14.
⁷ Ocharan Larrondo – Unzuata Portilla 2002, Fig. 2, 6.
⁸ Zanier 1988, 6.
The tanged arrow-heads with one-lobe (Fig. 3, 17–21) find good parallels at Alesia, although it is not clear whether they were used there by the Romans or the Gauls. Larger points (103–150 mm long) of the same form are known among the Roman weapons from Osuna. At Osuna, there is evidence to suggest that they were used to set fire. The simple tanged ‘irons’ with asymmetrical heads (Fig. 3, 22–27) find their best parallels at the Republican site of Grad near Šmihel (Slovenia), which is dated to the 2nd century B.C. or slightly earlier. Suggestions have been made as to their purpose, arrow-heads or stimuli being the most plausible. In view of the range of weapons from Grad, their use as arrow-heads seems the most likely.

For the two tanged pila with a single-lobed barb (Fig. 3, 28–29), only relatively distant parallels could be found. These come from the excavation of an early Augustan tower at Voremwald, near Filzbach in Switzerland.

The socketed catapult-bolts with pyramidal heads from Grad (Fig. 4, 1–5) find relatively good analogies at Alesia, Osuna, and also among material thought to be connected with Octavian’s siege of Metulum, the present-day hillfort of Viničica, to the south of Ogulin, in Croatia. The only published example, from Andagoste, also corresponds...
Fig. 3: Grad near Reka: the finds (all iron). Scale 1:2.
very well in form, but is considerably shorter. When compared with Republican examples, catapult-bolts of the early Principate evidently had longer, less massive heads\textsuperscript{18}. For the iron artillery-bolts with pyramidal heads and rod-like tangs (Fig. 4, 6–10), the best parallels are to be found at Andagoste\textsuperscript{19}. More or less similar catapult-bolts are rare in late Republican contexts such as Numanthia\textsuperscript{20}, Alesia\textsuperscript{21} and Osuna\textsuperscript{22}. At Quasar Ibrim in southern Egypt, a site where a Roman military presence is dated to c. 23/21 B.C., were found two bolts of this same form, but with distinctly narrower heads and faceted tangs. A wooden foreshaft from the same site indicates that this kind of bolt formed part of a composite weapon, the rod-like tang being inserted into a foreshaft, and this then being attached to a main shaft\textsuperscript{23}. Other Augustan rod-tanged catapult-bolts have longer heads of slightly convex form and an octagonal section at the base. They are known from Döttenbichl (with a stamp of the 19th legion), Haltern, Sisak and several other sites\textsuperscript{24}. The lead slingshots from Grad (Fig. 4, 11–20) have an oblong, slightly biconical form which is evidenced in Roman contexts from the 3rd century B.C. to the 2nd century AD as well as from a late Roman context\textsuperscript{25}. They have close parallels at Alesia\textsuperscript{26}, Andagoste\textsuperscript{27} and at many other sites. The shoe nails (about 20 mm in diameter) with characteristic ‘decoration’ on the underside (Fig. 5, 1–13), most probably indicate the presence of Roman soldiers. Their size, shape and ‘decoration’ correspond exactly to examples from Andagoste\textsuperscript{28} and Alesia\textsuperscript{29}. Augustan shoe-nails seem to have been smaller and their ‘decoration’ limited to small circles (cf. Dangstetten\textsuperscript{30}). In this particular context, the two brooches (Fig. 5, 14–15) belonging to the vast Alesia Group\textsuperscript{31} also seem most likely to have been worn by Roman military personnel. Unfortunately, the relatively poor dating-evidence for this group of brooches provides only a broad dating horizon in the middle and the second half of the 1st century B.C.\textsuperscript{32}. The high number of brooches of the Alesia group in Slovenia and western Croatia might be connected to Octavian’s military activity in this region between 35 and 33\textsuperscript{33}. A brooch belonging to the Alesia Group was found also at Andagoste\textsuperscript{34}.

Discussion

It seems highly probable that the Grad military objects discussed here relate to the same military event and are contemporary. The clear preponderance of artillery missiles (such as catapult-bolts), lead slingshots and arrowheads presumably indicates a Roman siege at the site. As five out of eight categories of military equipment have close parallels at Andagoste and, because, in contrast, links with assemblages from Caesarean and

\textsuperscript{18} Bishop – Coulston 1993, 55–57. 80–81 Figs. 27, 3; 45, 3; Feugère 1994, 9–10 Fig. 7.
\textsuperscript{19} Ocharan Larrondo – Unzueta Portilla 2002, Fig. 2, 2–4.
\textsuperscript{20} Luik 2002, Fig. 90, 199–200.
\textsuperscript{22} Sievers 1997, 62–63 Cat. No. 55.
\textsuperscript{23} James – Taylor 1994; cf. Feugère 1993, Fig. on p. 217.
\textsuperscript{24} Zanier 1997, Fig. 1.24, 3; Zanier 1994, 589–590 Fig. 2; Radman Livaja 2001, 132–133. 138 Pl. 3, 4.
\textsuperscript{25} Völling 1990, 34–35 Type II; Horvat 1993.
\textsuperscript{26} Sievers 2001, Pl. 85, 724–737.
\textsuperscript{27} Ocharan Larrondo – Unzueta Portilla 2002, Fig. 2, 7.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid. Fig. 2, 11–12.
\textsuperscript{29} Brouquier-Reddé – Deyber 2001, 294. 303 Pl. 93, 138 D.
\textsuperscript{30} Harnecker 1997, Pl. 69, 754–755; Poux 1999, 88–91.
\textsuperscript{31} Demetz 1999, 156–164 Types Alesia Ia3 and Ila (= Guštin Variant I) Pls. 40–41 Maps 52–53.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid. 163–164.
\textsuperscript{33} Guštin 1986, 684; Guštin 1999, 203.
\textsuperscript{34} Ocharan Larrondo – Unzueta Portilla 2002, Fig. 2, 10.
Fig. 4: Grad near Reka: the finds (all iron). Scale 1:2.
Augustan sites are much weaker, we may assume that the Roman military actions at Andagoste and Grad were roughly contemporary (i.e. they should be dated to the 4th decade B.C.). The numismatic evidence from Grad, although relatively tiny, would support a pre-Augustan date for the siege.

In the hinterland of the River Soča valley, beside the site of Grad near Reka, also at Gradišče in Cerkno (Fig. 1), treasure hunters have recovered several La Tène finds ('Idria group') and Roman military objects of the same types as those recorded at Grad near Reka. They include: oblong/slightly biconical lead slingshots, iron catapult-bolts with pyramidal heads and sockets or rod-like tangs, as well as simple tanged 'irons' with asymmetrical heads. Also recorded are a number of Roman Republican coins, among them a hoard of 12 denarii, the latest dating to 47/46 B.C., but no Augustan coins. These finds confirm that the Roman sieges at Gradišče in Cerkno and Grad near Reka were roughly contemporary and probably formed part of wider military activity.

The most logical access for the Romans to the area was via the valley of the River Soča. At Most na Soči (Fig. 1) a tombstone was found of a man from the 15th Legion which dates to 53/36 B.C. and suggests that the River Idrijca valley came under Roman control.

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36 Among the 11 Roman coins recorded from the site, five are Republican, the latest dating to 56 B.C. One of them has been halved which seems to suggest its use in the Early Imperial period. Of the remainder, the next oldest coin is Vespasianic (FMRSI III 4–1, IV 2, V 2–1; information on the unpublished coins: Numismatic Cabinet, National Museum of Slovenia).

37 Full report on early Roman finds from Gradišče in Cerkno is in preparation.

38 FMRSI I 2/1, 2/2; FMRSI III 2, 3.
in the late Republican era, probably in the Caesarean period. Seen in a broader historical context, the pacification of the hinterland of the Soča Valley, which was vital for the safety of Italy, seems to have been a logical step, necessary, at the latest, before campaigning could have been undertaken at Siscia in 35 B.C. There is, indeed, a passage in Appian's *Illyricum*, which could refer to Octavian's military action in this region. Appian mentions the *Carni* among the tribes who were defeated during Octavian's Illyrian wars in 35/33 B.C. (Illyr. 16,46). The valley of the River Idrijca and the surrounding mountains probably lay in the territory of the Carni, who occupied the region around the northern Adriatic, from the River Livenza in the west to the Alps in the north. Their centres were Tergeste and *Italium Carnicum* (Zuglio), both in Italy. To the east, they extended perhaps as far as Notranjska (Lower Carniola) and Carnium (present-day Kranj). Thus it seems most logical that Appian's war against the Carni probably refers to the region under discussion. Appian's inclusion of the Carni in his second group of tribes (i.e. the group which put up notable resistance to Octavian's army) corresponds well with the archaeological record at Grad near Reka and Gradišče in Cerkno, because of the large amounts of Roman *militaria* found there.

If we accept the hypothesis that Octavian's war against the Carni, mentioned by Appian, was fought at Grad near Reka and at Gradišče in Cerkno (among other locations), we can date it to 35 B.C. According to historical analysis, the Carni, Taurisci, Iapodes and Segestani were most probably subdued in 35 B.C. In the cemeteries of the La Tène local population ('the Idria group') in the Idrijca valley, at Reka near Cerkno and Idrija pri Bači, there are Augustan graves with Roman weapons, which are, typologically early Augustan or more often middle Augustan. These may be interpreted as the burials of local men recruited into auxiliary units. They fit well within the scenario described here, that is the Roman military conquest of the region during the Octavianic period.

**Conclusion**

The Roman military assemblages found at Grad near Reka and Gradišče in Cerkno probably relate to a single event which, from the archaeological finds, should be placed in the period 40/30 B.C. Appian's mention of the Carni among the tribes who were defeated by Octavian probably refers to this region, an area which includes the valley of the River Idrijca and the surrounding mountains. This most probably happened in the first year of Octavian's Illyrian wars, i.e. in 35 B.C. Early Augustan weapons in the graves of probable auxiliary soldiers from the region suggest that Octavian's conquest of the region was decisive.

The logical and most probable Roman approach to the Valley of the River Idrijca is from the valley of River Soča. The Roman military occupation of its hinterland in the Octavianic period, suggested from evidence for a siege at Grad near Reka and Gradišče in Cerkno probably in 35 B.C., supports the idea that the valley of the River Soča was already included in *Gallia Cisalpina* in Caesar's time.

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39 Šašel Kos forthcoming.
40 Ibid.
42 Cf. Šašel 1995.
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Zusammenfassung


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Fig. 1: By Janka Istenič, layout Roman Hribar, National Museum of Slovenia; Fig. 2: Archive of the National Museum of Slovenia, photograph by Jože Hanc, layout by Roman Hribar, National Museum of Slovenia; Fig. 3: Drawn by Ida Murgelj, National Museum of Slovenia: no. 29 after Božič 1999, Fig. 3, 1; Fig. 4: Drawn by Ida Murgelj, National Museum of Slovenia; nos. 1–3 after Božič 1999, Fig. 3, 2–3; Fig. 4, 1; Fig. 5: Drawn by Ida Murgelj, National Museum of Slovenia.

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