
House Urns in the Burial Practices of the Western Necropolis of *Romula*
(NW Pannonia)
Hišaste žare v pogrebnih praksah zahodnega grobišča Romule (SZ Panonija)

Irena Lazar in Alenka Tomaž

Univerza na Primorskem, Fakulteta za humanistične študije

Izvleček

Med letoma 2001 in 2004 je bila na lokaciji Ribnica pri Brežicah ob cesti Aquileia–Emona–Siscia raziskana obcestna in carinska postaja Romula, ki jo omenjajo že rimski itinerarji. Odkriti so bili večji del naselja, ostanki rimske ceste in zahodna nekropola s 131 grobovi. Tako kot na več grobiščih jugovzhodne Slovenije in severozahodne Hrvaške, so bili tudi v Ribnici odkriti štirje grobovi, v katere je bilo priloženih osem hišastih žar. Hišaste žare zasledimo pretežno v bogatejših grobovih, kar je izraženo tako z grobno arhitekturo samo kot tudi z grobnimi pridatki. Časovni razpon grobov s priloženimi hišastimi žarami na grobišču Romule sega od sredine 1. stoletja do konca 2. stoletja. Po obliki, okrasu in načinu izdelave hišastih žar iz Ribnice ne moremo v celoti vzporejati z najdbami z drugih najdišč, npr. bližnjih Dvorce pri Čatežu, Drnovega ali Drage pri Beli Cerkvi. Še najbolj se zdijo sorodne tistim iz Velikega Kamna in pabelokranjskim primerkom iz Rosalnic ali Borštka pri Metliki, četudi lahko tudi pri teh primerjavah opazimo marsikatero razliko.

Ključne besede: Romula, Pannonia, obcestna postaja, carinska postaja, zahodna nekropola, hišaste žare, Latobiki

Abstract

Between 2001 and 2004, the roadside and customs station of *Romula*, which is mentioned in Ancient Roman itineraries, was excavated at the site of Ribnica near Brežice on the *Aquileia–Emona–Siscia* road. The more significant part of the settlement, the remains of the Roman road, and the western necropolis with 131 graves were uncovered. At Ribnica, as at several other burial sites in south-eastern Slovenia and north-western Croatia, four graves were discovered, containing eight house urns altogether. House urns are predominantly found in the richer graves, which is reflected both in the grave architecture itself and in the grave goods. The time span of the burials with house urns at *Romula* ranges from the mid-first century to the end of the second century. Regarding form, decoration, and method of manufacture, the house urns from Ribnica cannot be fully compared with finds from other sites, such as the nearby Dvorce near Čatež, Drnovo, or Draga near Bela Cerkev. They seem to be most closely related to those from Veliki Kamen and to the Bela Krajina specimens from Rosalnice or Borštek near Metlika, although even in these comparisons, many differences can be noted.

Keywords: Romula, Pannonia, road station, customs station, western necropolis, house urns, Latobici

Introduction

‘House-shaped’ urns or house urns, also known in the literature as *Latobici* ‘House’ urns, are one of the more interesting and intriguing ceramic forms found in Roman-period graves in south-eastern Slovenia and north-western Croatia.¹

The first specimens of house urns were discovered in present-day Slovenia more than two hundred years ago (Petru 1971, 9), and they aroused considerable interest at that time. Karl Dežman was the first to write about them in detail (Deschmann 1886, 17), and his work was followed by many others. We should mention Peter Petru, who published several works about house urns (Petru 1966) and discussed them separately in detail in a comprehensive study in 1971 (Petru 1971). In this work, he not only collected all the known specimens of house urns up to that time but also gave a detailed overview of the history of their research, as well as examples of house models and house urns from prehistoric contexts in the wider European area. He devoted considerable attention to their manufacture, design development, and decoration in a separate chapter. He was also interested in the social position of the users of the house urns, their distribution, and their historical background (Petru 1971). More than fifty years after publication, some of his theses no longer seem relevant. However, his remarkable contribution to the knowledge of the subject itself cannot be overlooked.

Interest in house urns has remained steady over the years, with numerous scholars continuing to contribute. Notable among them are Zoran Gregl (1997; 2007), Borut Križ (2003), and Phil Mason and Bernarda Županek (2018), each adding their unique perspectives to our understanding of house urns.

House urns are a form of ceramics found exclusively in Roman-period graves in south-east-

ern Slovenia and north-western Croatia. Their geographical distribution coincides to the greatest extent with the area inhabited by the Celtic group *Latobici* before the arrival of the Romans, hence their frequent designation in the literature as *Latobici* house urns. In his study, Peter Petru collected almost 100 house urns from 22 reliable sites and three unverified sites (Petru 1971, 12). In recent decades, primarily, but not exclusively, during highway excavations, several new sites have been discovered where house urns have been added to the grave. Among them, we highlight Ribnica near Brežice, where during excavation between 2001 and 2004, four graves were found to contain eight specimens of house urns.

Romula (NW Pannonia) – Ribnica near Brežice

The Settlement

Roman *Romula* is located in the village of Ribnica near Jesenice in Dolenjska (Lower Carniola) (Petru 1975, 259), or Ribnica near Brežice, as the site came to be known during the latest archaeological research (2001–2004). *Romula* was twice mentioned in ancient sources, in two Roman itineraries (Šašel 1975): the *Tabula Peutingeriana* and *Itinerarium Antonini* from the end of the third century. The former (IV, 3) places it as a road station on the main *via publica* through *Aquileia–Emona–Siscia–Sirmium*, 10 miles from the *Neviodunum* municipium and 14 miles from the *Quadrata* station, while the latter marks it under the number 274.4 on the II *Aquileia–Senia–Siscia* road, 10 Roman miles from *Bibium* and 14 miles from the *Quadrata* station (Šašel 1975, 76–77). It was built at the beginning of the Pannonian Plain. The settlement developed at the strategically exceptionally favourable point at the passage from the valleys of the Krka and Sava Rivers to the Pannonian Plain at the foot of the Gorjanci hills, at the passage into the plain of the Sava River (*Savus*). On the narrowest part of the terrace between the Sava River and the Gorjanci slope ran the *via publica*

¹ In his study of house urns, Peter Petru included some specimens from Austria, Germany, and Hungary in similar house-shaped urns. However, they seem to be quite different in form from those from graves in south-eastern Slovenia and north-western Croatia (Petru 1971, 50–52, 66).

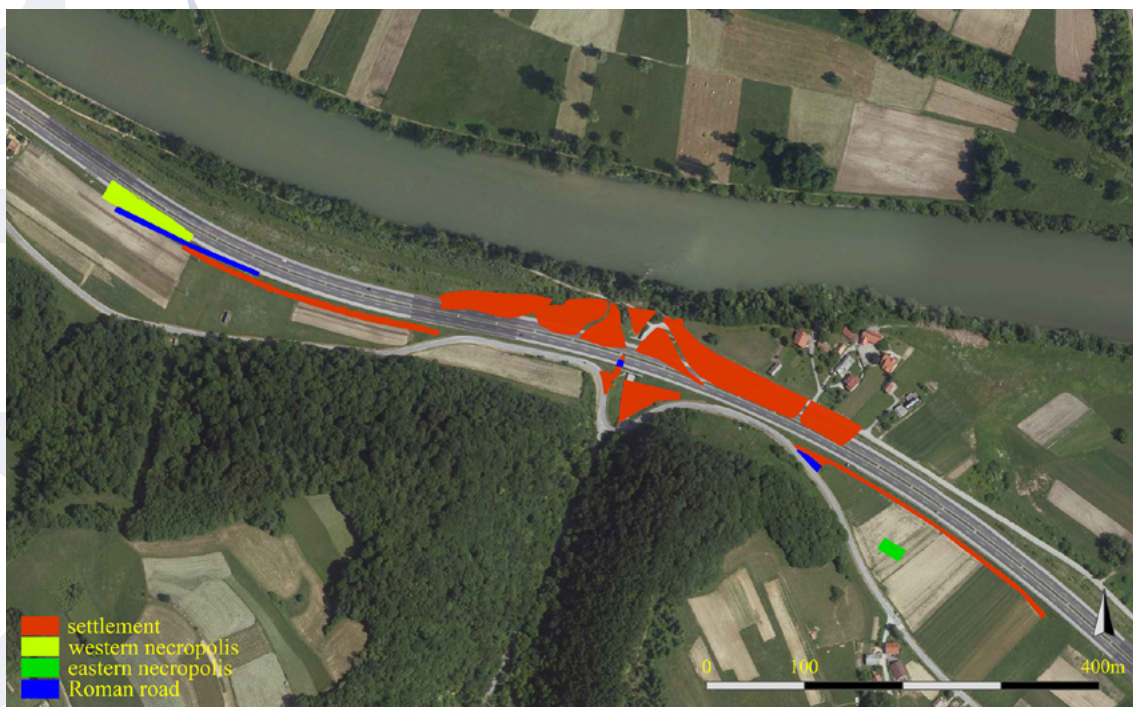


Figure 1: Ribnica near Brežice, Location of the settlement, Roman road, western and eastern burial site on a digital orthophoto image, ©Google Satellite

Emona–Siscia; from the peaks and hills on the outskirts of Gorjanci hills, the view spreads west, east and to the north, while the slopes of Gorjanci protect the south side. The settlers built their settlement on the narrowest section between Gorjanci and the Sava River, which allowed them to supervise the river traffic along the Sava River. In this way, the *Romula* road station linked the entrance to Italy with the Balkan Peninsula and was marked in the aforementioned itineraries.

New and extensive research (2001–2004) revealed a large settlement area with prominent public buildings, part of the Roman road *Emona–Siscia*, and a large part of the western necropolis (Figure 1). It is important to single out the find of a votive inscription to Silvanus Augustus, dedicated by the slave of the customs officers' society, and an inscription ROMVLA on a lead tablet. These findings are essential for defining the administrative status of the settlement and confirming its location.

The Via Publica Emona–Neviodunum–Siscia

The Roman Road *Emona–Neviodunum–Siscia*, which led in Roman times through present-day Dolenjska, was originally a *via militaris*, which means that during the conquest of the Western Balkans, it was founded, laid out, and to a large extent probably also built by the Roman army for its conquest campaigns and other needs (Šašel 1977, 459, 466). The lack of epigraphic finds means it cannot be known exactly when the road was built. During the reign of Emperor Augustus, this part of today's Dolenjska was included in Illyricum, a particular area founded before the establishment of the independent province of Pannonia. Considering the political events in the empire and its strategic needs, it can be concluded that the road was already built in the Augustan period. At that time, there was no doubt that enough military units or legions were present in this area, which were prerequisites for the implementation of such



Figure 2: Composite photograph of burial plots A and B (photo: Franci Aš)



Figure 3: Composite photograph of burial plots C and D (photo: Franci Aš)



Figure 4: Ribnica near Brežice, western necropolis, Grave 1 (photo: Franci Aš)

a demanding construction undertaking. Initially, these units were involved in Octavian's war in Illyricum (35–33 BC), then during Tiberius' operation in Illyricum between 15 and 9 BC, and finally during the Pannonian-Dalmatian rebellion in the years between 6 and 9 AD (Lovenjak 1997, 90).

The Roman road *Emona–Neviodunum–Siscia* route was first confirmed by archaeological research in 1958 when the Eastern *Romula* necropolis was discovered, which lay in a narrow strip along the road (Petru 1969). During the 2001–2004 excavations, the route of the road was again documented in several places, which enabled the reconstruction of its course through the entire settlement (Figure 1) (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming).

The Cemeteries

The Eastern Necropolis (researched 1958–1960) lay east of the settlement and was partially exca-

vated in a narrow strip south of the *Emona–Siscia* road (Petru 1969, 21). In the Eastern cemetery, 41 graves, 5 of which were inhumations, one grave plot, and one built tomb were unearthed. They belong to the period from the early first century to the beginning of the third century.

The Western cemetery, near the village of Podgračeno, was excavated between 2002 and 2004, stretching along the Roman road on its north side. A strip up to 1.50 m wide separated the western cemetery from the *Emona–Neviodunum–Siscia* road, eventually covered by road fill. The surveyed area where the burials were located was 336 m long, with a maximum width of up to 16 m, but most of the burials, including the four burial plots, were spread along a length of 99m. The orientation of all the graves more or less respected the course of the road. A total of 131 graves were discovered, 99 of which were cremation graves, 2 were cremation graves with the addition of uncremated teeth, 20 graves were

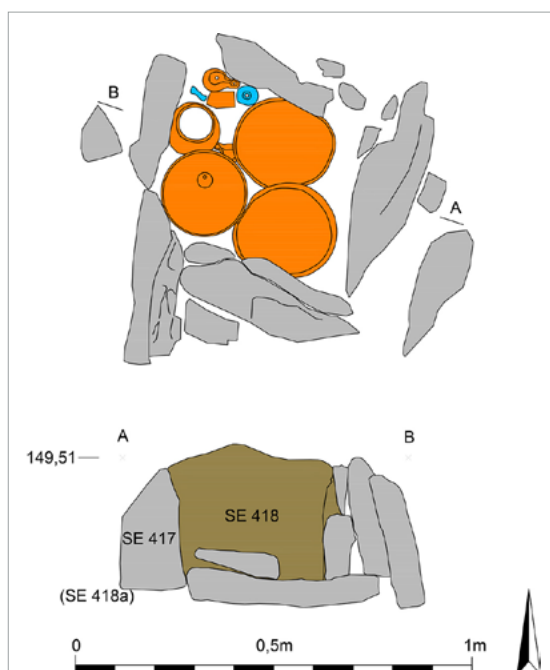


Figure 5: Ribnica near Brežice, western necropolis, drawing of Grave 1 (prepared by: Aleš Ogorelec)

inhumations, and 6 contained inhumation burials and cremation residues. Four graves contained no human remains or grave goods and were interpreted as either epitaphs or pre-prepared graves (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming). In more than twelve instances, graves also contained several burials.²

Apart from individual or group graves, four larger grave plots (A, B, C, D) (Figures 2 and 3) with several individual graves and two built tombs were also explored. One of the latter lay within grave plot B, and the other was built individually in the far western part of the necropolis. The documented forms of cremation graves are pretty diverse, and we can divide them into six more significant groups: 1 – a burial in a simple grave pit and a *bustum*; 2 – a burial in an urn; 3 – a grave with tiles structure; 4 – a burial in a stone walled grave pit; 5 – a burial in a square chest-like grave made of stone slabs (Figure 4); 6 – a rec-

² The data is based on a partially completed anthropological analysis and the interpretation is therefore only preliminary.



Figure 6: Ribnica near Brežice, western necropolis, Grave 7 within the grave plot B (photo: Franci Aš)

tangular built tomb. Skeleton graves were documented as: 1 – simple grave pits; 2 – burials with tile construction; and 3 – burials with stone slabs construction.

House Urns from the Western Necropolis of *Romula*

Eight house urns were discovered in four different graves at the Western cemetery of *Romula*³: Grave 1 (Figures 4 and 5, Tables 1–6), Grave 2, Grave 7 (Figure 6) and Grave 30. The proportion of graves with house urns is small, representing only three percent. Three were added to Grave 1 (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 55–57), one was added to Grave 2 (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 78), two were added to Grave 7 of rectangular built Tomb 1 (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 156–157), and two were also added to Grave 30 (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 476–477).

Based on the urn shape, the so-called ‘door opening’, the shape of the roof, and the button or finial, house urns can be grouped into three primary forms with several variations (Figure 7). House

³ Petru mentions several fragments of House urns from the eastern necropolis of *Romula* in his study (Petru 1971, 50), although they were not documented by drawing. He also mentions an indication that a house urn from grave 35 from Ribnica near Brežice was supposed to be in the museum collection in Samobor. However, this information later proved to be inaccurate (Petru 1971, 50).

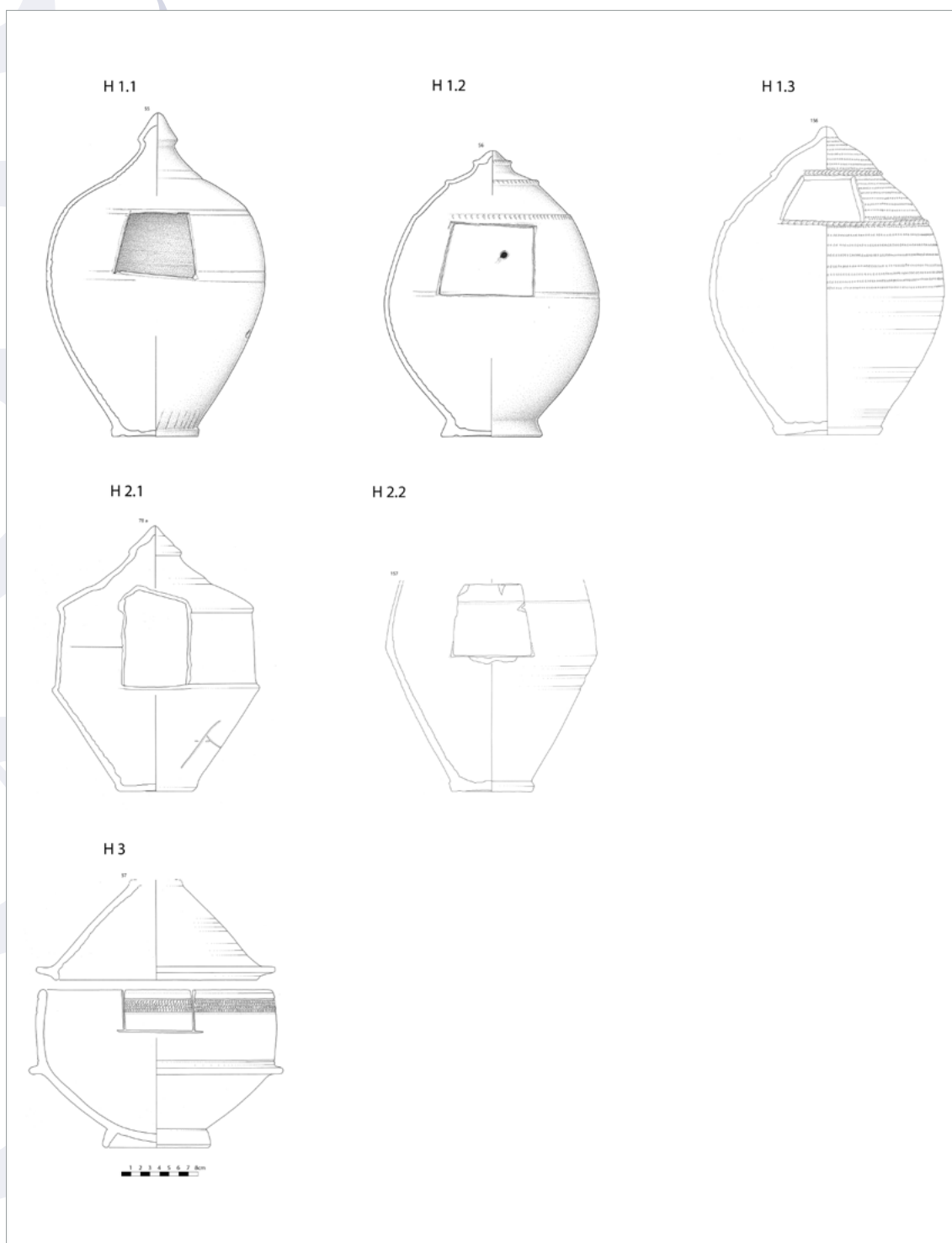


Figure 7: Comparative overview of house urn forms at Ribnica near Brežice (drawings: Janja Tratnik Šumi; prepared by: Aleš Ogorelec)



Figure 8: House urn from grave 1 (10)
(photo: Aleš Ogorelec)



Figure 9: House urn from grave 1 (11)
(photo: Aleš Ogorelec)

urns with rounded oblong forms are grouped into form H 1 with three variations.

Variant H 1.1 includes house urns with rounded oblong forms tapering towards a low-ringed base. The upper parts represent a conical roof with an accentuated finial with a pointed knob. The 'doors' are placed in this variant in the upper part of the vessel and are trapezoidal. The decoration is usually incised in horizontal arrays.

House urns of form H 1.1 were found in Grave 1 (Figure 8) (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 55) and Grave 30 (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 477). House urns of form H 1.2 have a strongly rounded, elongated, slightly biconical shape, which gently tapers towards a low ring-shaped base. The upper part is formed into a profiled conical roof form, which is divided into three parts by segmented plastic ribs. The roof ends in a flat-

tened button. The trapezoid-shaped door with a hole is in the central part of the urn. Such an urn was placed in Grave 1 (Figure 9) (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 56). The House urns of form H 1.3 have a bellied shape. The part with the door opening is separated from the rest of the vessel by two horizontal segmented ribs. The upper part (roof) has two parts; the top is spherical with a small rounded conical knob. The opening is high in the urn's upper part and trapezoidal in shape. The base of the urn is concave. This shape of urn was added to Grave 7 (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 156).

The house urns of biconical shapes, more rigid and with flat or cylindrical form, are grouped in the form H 2. The biconical house urns with a cylindrical central part of the body and a square or rhomboidal opening are grouped in form

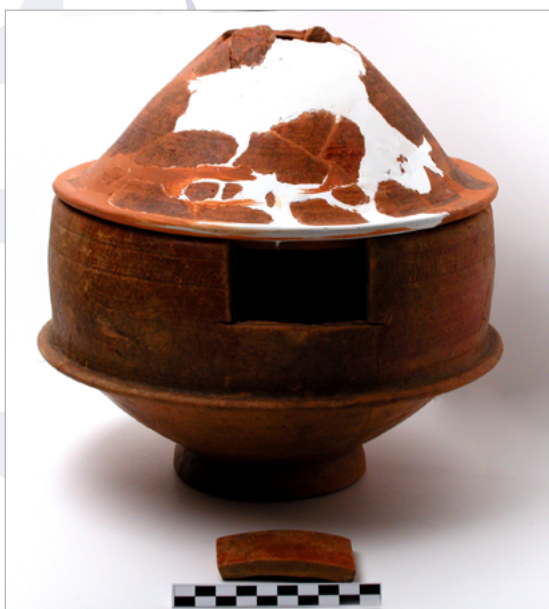


Figure 10: House urn from grave 1 (12)
(photo: Aleš Ogorelec)

H 2.1. The roofs of these urns are conical, and the knobs are large and roof-shaped. Urns of this shape were found in Grave 2 (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 78) and Grave 30 (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 476). Another variant of the biconical house urn is one with a cylindrical central part that tapers slightly towards the top (shape H 2.2). The central part of the urn has a trapezoidal door. The upper part unfortunately is not preserved in this variant. An urn of this shape was found in Grave 7 (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 157).

The most exciting form, however, is the house urn of the form H 3. This urn, composed of two parts, has the lower part made of a simple serving bowl (type Drag. 25) with a subsequent cut-out door of a regular rectangular shape. For the upper part of the urn, a simple conical lid with a horn-shaped rim was used (the handle is missing). An example of a two-part house urn of the form H 3, which ingeniously joined two pieces of regular serving vessels to achieve or recreate this very characteristic and specific form of the vessel, was discovered in Grave 1 (Tomaž,

Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 57). This urn from Ribnica near Brežice is the only known example of a two-part house urn (Figure 10).

The house urns from Ribnica near Brežice are made of finely refined clay without any visible inclusions. In all cases, they are wheel-thrown and fired in an oxidizing atmosphere. The colour of the surface and its inner layer is reddish yellow. They have a soft surface, which may be coated with a dark red (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 55 and 157), red (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 476–477), orange-red (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 56), light brown-orange (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 78) or red-orange slip (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 57). The slip may be applied on the outer surface, inner and outer surfaces, or on part of the outer surface (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 476). In one case, there was no coating (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 156), and in most cases, the coating is preserved only in traces.

In several cases, house urns from Ribnica near Brežice are decorated with horizontal incisions highlighting individual sections of the urn, such as the urns from Grave 1 (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 55) and Grave 30 (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 477), which both belong to the urn form H 1.1. They may also be decorated with horizontal grooves, such as the urn of form H 1.2 from Grave 1 (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 56) or the urn of form H2.2 from Grave 7 (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 157). The house urn of form H 1.3 is a richly decorated urn with segmented plastic ribs and impressions in the upper part of the body (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 156). However, the only decoration on the two-part house urn from Grave 1 is the original decoration of the serving bowl, which was used to create the urn's lower part (Tomaž, Lazar, and Breščak, forthcoming, cat. no. 57).

Discussion

Comparisons to the house urns found at Ribnica near Brežice can be found at several Roman sites in south-eastern Slovenia and north-western Croatia. The closest to Ribnica finds were the house urns discovered during the excavations of the necropolis at Dvorce near Čatež in the 1990s. Five house urns are known from the site, but unfortunately, they have not yet been fully published. At this site, urns were buried in rectangular, stone slab-lined graves and circular walled tombs (Bavec 2016).

Many house urns were also discovered during the recent excavations of Roman cemeteries in the Drnovo area. In total, nine house urns were discovered in six rectangular stone-built tombs, with one house urn added to four tombs (tombs 1, 16, 17, 18), two house urns added to tomb 14, and three house urns added to tomb 7. The graves from the Drnovo 2 site are dated to the second and third centuries (Vojaković and Novšak 2022, 107). However, researchers assume that some of the tombs were looted in the Roman or semi-transitional period due to the scarce grave goods in the individual tombs (Vojaković and Novšak 2022, 105).

The settlement and necropolis area of Drnovo or *Neviodunum* stands out in terms of the number of known house urns. Sonja and Peter Petru published them in 1978 (Petru and Petru 1978). Their publication is based mainly on the Pečnik excavation collection from the Drnovo area, currently held by the National Museum of Slovenia. Due to the historical circumstances, the museum material does not have information on the exact archaeological context or preserved burial complexes. Identification and interpretation could, therefore, be based primarily on a formal analysis of the findings. These finds were also the basis for Petru's study on the *Latobici* house urns (Petru 1971).

The following nearby site, where house urns are present in most of the discovered graves, is Veliki Kamen (Uršič 1985, 19). Here, five round and square-built tombs were discovered dur-

ing protective excavations in 1962. As many as nine house urns were discovered in four graves. In Grave 1, a single house urn was added; however, in Grave 3, there were four of them, and in Graves 2 and 5, two house urns were placed (Uršič 1985, 21–25).

A Roman-period burial site and parts of a road station (probably *Crucium*) were discovered in Draga near Bela Cerkev on the Ljubljana–Obrežje motorway route and excavated in 2002 (Križ 2003; Udovč 2022). At this burial site a burial plot, eleven walled tombs, ten cremation and five inhumation graves were found (Udovč 2022, 23). There were also house urns in seven graves among the elaborate grave goods. In three graves, only one house urn was placed (Graves 3, 20, and 21); three graves contained up to two urns (Graves 7, 10, and 14); and three house urns were added in Grave 1 (Udovč 2022).

To the southeast of *Romula*, we should also mention the site of Gornja vas near Žumberk in neighbouring Croatia, where seven stone tombs were found to contain various forms of house urns. Most of them were placed to the tombs individually, but in two tombs two house urns were discovered in each tomb (Gregl 1997, 57). Based on the grave finds, the authors conclude that the burial site was in use from the middle of the first century until the time of the Marcomannic Wars (Gregl 1997, 79).

In addition to the highlighted sites, where house urns are represented in more significant numbers, it is worth mentioning that they are also found in other cemeteries in the Dolenjska and Posavje regions. However, they occur in smaller numbers, or the sites still need to be fully published. These include Zloganje near Škocjan (Breščak 1981), Straža near Novo mesto (Knez 1965; Križ, Stipančič, and Škedelj Petrič 2009, 359, cat. no. 4), the Škobernetov vrt site (Križ, Stipančič, and Škedelj Petrič 2009, 359, cat. no. 1, 3a, 3b), the Beletov vrt site (Knez 1992) and Ljubljanska cesta site in Novo mesto (Božič 2008), Mačkovec near Novo mesto (Mason 2012; Mason and Županek 2018), a single grave from Šahovec near Dobrnič (Slabe

1975), Medvedjek–Gmajna (Stemberger Flegar and Predan 2022) and others. In the area of Bela Krajina, graves with house urns were also found at Borštek near Metlika (Dular 1974), Rosalnice (Dular 1976), Otok near Podzemlje (Dular 1976), Štrekljevec (Dular 1976) and at the site of Hrast near Jugor (Dular 1976). Some individual finds of house urns from other sites, however, were already mentioned and described by Peter Petru in his study (Petru 1971, 14–52).

All comparable house urns are technologically very diverse, sharing only the use of generally refined clay admixtures and often a coating on the outer and/or inner surface. At Drnovo 2, for example, house urns are included among the tableware with a coating as a separate functional-typological group (Vojaković and Novšak 2022, 68, cat. no. 12, 18, 50–52, 75, 97, 101, 118–122, 133, 149, 177, 184, 201). They are mostly made of refined clay admixture, with rare to moderate inclusions. They have a light-coloured inner core and a red-to-dark-red slip on the vessel's outer and/or inner surface. They are most often decorated with painted decoration, occasionally with incisions or ribs, and the visual appearance is complemented by the so-called window openings and the rooster-shaped button on the top of the urn (Vojaković and Novšak 2022, 68).

At the Draga cemetery near Bela Cerkev, 12 house-shaped urns were unearthed, each with its own unique features. Some are adorned with rectangular 'window' openings on the back, and their button may end in the form of a rooster (Udovč 2022, cat. no. 68–69, 142) or a moulded button (Udovč 2022, cat. no. 102–103, 159). They may be coated with a red coating, have a decorated upper part or roofs, and some have a central part where the doors are located with a rib below and above, accentuated or separated (Udovč 2022, 84). In individual cases this part may also be separated by a groove (Udovč 2022, cat. no. 30–31, 48).

Upper part of the house urn from the Medvedjek–Gmajna site is also wheel-thrown and made from a medium- to fine-grained clay ad-

mixture but with frequent inclusions of chamotte. The outer surface also has a red slip (Stemberger Flegar and Predan 2022, cat. no. 8).

Most house urns from the site Dvorce near Čatež are similar in appearance and production technology to those found at Ribnica near Brežice, Drnovo 2, and Draga near Bela Cerkev. They are wheel-thrown and made from fine-grained clay. They are coated with a red slip and fired in an oxidizing atmosphere. On some, painted decoration is visible (for example, urns from Grave 2 and Grave 5). However, there is also a specimen from Grave 10, which is uncoated and fired in a reductive atmosphere so its colour is not bright orange but brown (Bavec 2016).

At the Veliki Kamen site, Grave 3 contained, in addition to a house urn of grey fired clay with a red coating, an urn of grey-black fired clay with a black coating, which has a spruce twig motif incised on both sides of the door opening (Uršič 1985, 22).

House urns made of grey-black fired clay occur, among others, at the site of Gornja vas in Žumberak. In Grave 24, a black-fired urn decorated with incisions and rouletted ornament and with eight X signs above the door opening was found (Gregl 2009, 48, Grave 24: cat. no. 1). In the same grave, a grey-fired house urn was also found (Gregl 2009, 48, Grave 24: cat. no. 4). The house urn from grave 40 is also black-fired, decorated with horizontal grooves and rouletted ornament (Gregl 2009, 62, Grave 40: cat. no. 2). The remaining urns at the site of Gornja vas at Žumberak are light-toned, fired in an oxidizing atmosphere and coated with a red slip. Among them, the urn from Grave 36 stands out, with a prominent decoration on the cylindrical central part of the lining. In addition to the horizontal grooves and lines of impressions, it has an incised figural decoration. On each side of the door opening stylized human figures are carved, which, according to the researcher's interpretation, represent the door guards. In addition, X-shaped symbols are carved on the door and on the cylindrical central part of the urn's body (Gregl 2009, 57, vol. 31: 1).

Site	Grave number	Grave construction	Number of house urns	Oil lamps				Glass			Dating	Publication	
				stamped	others	fibulae	iron knives	amber	balsamarium	vessels			coins
Ribnica near Brežice - western cemetery	Grave 1	grave pit enclosed with stone slabs	3	2				1	3	2		unpublished	
	Grave 2	grave pit enclosed with stone slabs	1							3			
	Grave 7	rectangular stone-built tomb	2			4				1	1		141
	Grave 30	simple grave pit	2			2					1		98–117
Draga near Bela Cerkav	Grave 1	walled stone chest with a stone lid	3	1		1		1					Udovč (2022), Križ (2004)
	Grave 3	chest made of tegulae with a stone lid	1	2		2					2	140–144	
	Grave 7	tomb with a dome and an entrance	2		1		1				1	1. half of 3. century	
	Grave 10	tomb with a dome and shaft entrance	2	1	1		1				3	270–275, 275	
	Grave 14	tomb with a dome and shaft entrance	2	1		1	1						
	Grave 20	tomb with a dome and shaft entrance	1	1		4	2				1	138–161	
Veliki Kamen	Grave 21	circular tomb with a dome	1	1		2	3				1	98–117	Uršič (1985)
	Grave 1	circular stone-built tomb	1										
	Grave 2	rectangular stone-built tomb	2			2							
	Grave 3	circular stone-built tomb	4			1							
Drnovo 2	Grave 5	not preserved	2			1							Vojaković and Novšak (2022)
	Tomb 1	stone-built rectangular tomb	1										
	Tomb 7	stone-built rectangular tomb	3										
	Tomb 14	stone-built rectangular tomb	3	1									
	Tomb 16	stone-built rectangular tomb	1								2	147, 125–128	
	Tomb 17	stone-built rectangular tomb	1										
Gornja vas near Žumberak	Tomb 18	stone-built rectangular tomb	1	1									Gregl (1997; 2007)
	Grave 24	circular stone-built tomb	2			1		1		1	86	1. – 2. century 41–50, 69–81, 80–81, 125–128 1. – 2. century 1. – 2. century 1. – 2. century 1. – 2. century	
	Grave 32	destroyed structure	1										
	Grave 36	circular stone-built tomb (dry stone) with a dome	1			7		1	4	1			
	Grave 40	ellipsoidal stone-built tomb	2	1		1	1						
	Grave 40a	urn on the outside of Grave 40	1										
	Grave 43	rectangular stone structure	1		1								
Grave 62	stone construction	1											

Individual black, brown, and grey-fired urns are also known from Drnovo (Petru and Petru 1978, 70), while grey and grey-black-fired urns have been found in Grave 10 in Rosalnice (Dular 1976, 192).

Given the recently discovered house urns, their number, diverse shapes/forms, production technology, decoration, and their long-lasting use, we can assume that they were made in different workshops. For this reason, Petru's hypothesis about a centre for house urns production in Roman *Neviodunum* (Petru 1971) no longer seems justified. Instead, it appears they were made upon the buyer's order, judging by their extraordinary diversity in the details.

Graves from the western necropolis in *Romula*, where house urns are found, can be chronologically placed from the mid-first century to the first half or mid-second century, based on the composition of grave goods and the coins found. Considering the chronologically definable grave complexes from other well-dated sites, the graves from Ribnica are among the earliest. The graves from Veliki Kamen, which contained House urns, could be dated from the late first century to the end of the second century, but no coins as additional support for possible dating were not found (Uršič 1985, 35).

The newly discovered graves from Drnovo show a modest range of finds that would allow for a more precise chronological placement; only in tomb 16 do two coins help to roughly date it to the mid-second century (Vojaković and Novšak 2022). The graves with house urns from Draga near Bela Cerkev are dated from the late first century to the end of the third century, based on the grave goods and the accompanying coin finds (Križ 2003; Udovč 2022).

The latest finds and new grave complexes indicate the use of house urns in burial cults over a relatively wide time span (Table 1). The earliest finds are known from Ribnica and date to the mid-first century, while most well-dated grave contexts originate from the second century. The youngest grave contexts with accompanying house urns come from the cemetery at Draga

near Bela Cerkev and date to the end of the third century (Križ 2003; Udovč 2022).

The burial architecture of the graves, particularly those housing urns, serves as a significant indicator of the social status of the deceased. This architectural aspect suggests that the individuals were part of a wealthier social class, capable of commissioning or constructing masonry tombs with square or circular floor plans, or lining grave pits with stones or stone slabs. A notable exception is a single case from Ribnica, where urns were placed in a simple grave pit (Grave 30), a rare occurrence that stands out among the findings.

The composition of grave goods at five cemeteries examined in more detail reflects a diverse and high-quality assortment of local and imported items (Table 1). Most commonly found alongside house urns in graves are oil lamps with stamps, likely associated with burial rituals, as well as items of personal adornment, with fibulae standing out in both number and variety of forms. A unique feature regarding the grave goods in graves with house urns is represented by the graves from Draga near Bela Cerkev, as five contained iron knives (Udovč 2022). Among the high-quality imported items, it is worth mentioning the amber items from Grave 1 in Ribnica near Brežice and glass vessels in Graves 1, 2, and 7, as well as Graves 24 and 36 from Gornja vas near Žumberk (Gregl 2007). The ceramic grave goods are primarily of a local or regional character, with hardly any imported Italic pottery (Table 1).

Conclusion

The problem of interpreting house urns in the region of south-eastern Slovenia and north-western Croatia has been addressed by numerous authors in the past. The first comprehensive study of house urns, as a distinctly local element of Roman graves in the area of present-day south-eastern Slovenia, was contributed by Peter Petru (Petru 1971), as already mentioned. He linked house urns to the community of the Celtic tribe of *Latobici*, which inhabited this area from

the second half of the first century BC onward (Petru 1966; 1971). His thoughts and conclusions have largely been summarized in the publications of Zoran Gregl (Gregl 1997; 2007; 2009). Borut Križ, in the exhibition catalogue for Draga near Bela Cerkev, contemplated how urns represent a particular form of final resting place in a spiritual-religious sense and indicate a strong belief in the afterlife (Križ 2003, 24). A more recent study by Phil Mason attempted to connect the occurrence of house urns spatially and ideologically to the settlement patterns of the younger Iron Age and the contemporary Celtic communities (Mason 2012).⁴ Phil Mason and Bernarda Županek, in their article from 2018, link house urns to the elements of the Norico-Pannonian tradition and highlight the mixing of local cultural identities with new ones brought by Romanization (Mason and Županek 2018). However, they all agree that house urns played an important role in burial rituals.

The current state of newly discovered necropolises and their material culture, temporal occurrence, spatial distribution, and, last but not least, the stylistic and technological diversity of house urns suggest that we could examine their role in the context of burial practices from a different perspective, not necessarily in connection with prehistoric tradition.

The following facts and observations support this. The oldest contexts in which house urns appear date back to the mid-first century when the Romanization of present-day Slovenia

was already in full swing or was even slowly concluding. House urns are, for the most part, unknown in Late La Tène and early Roman burial sites in Dolenjska. At several Roman period burial sites in Dolenjska, an area inhabited by the *Latobici*, house urns do not even appear in graves (for example, at the *Praetorium Latobiorum* – Trebnje). The emphasized elements of the indigenous Celtic communities, as reflected in the epigraphic and onomastic materials during the first century, significantly declined and nearly disappeared by the second century, and only exceptionally are they present in the third century, as evidenced by the case of *Celeia* (Šašel Kof 1984). In contrast, house urns remain in graves until the end of the third century.

So, are house urns genuinely connected with the tradition of *Latobici*, the indigenous community in this area? Do house urns really highlight the complexities of how different cultures approached death and commemoration, by blending traditional customs with the influences of Roman ideology? What direction does the current state of research and the presented facts indicate? Perhaps it would be worthwhile to consider different aspects and beliefs of individual groups of inhabitants who marked the uniqueness of their beliefs or attitudes towards burial practice with the use of house urns, in which the souls of the deceased found a characteristic and familiar residence.

New and in-depth research may help answer or dismiss this provocative suggestion.

4 The possibility of origins of Roman house urns in prehistoric contexts of Dolenjska, specifically from the late Bronze Age, has also been investigated by Ana Kovačič, Bine Kramberger, and Kaja Stemberger Flegar (2023, 17).

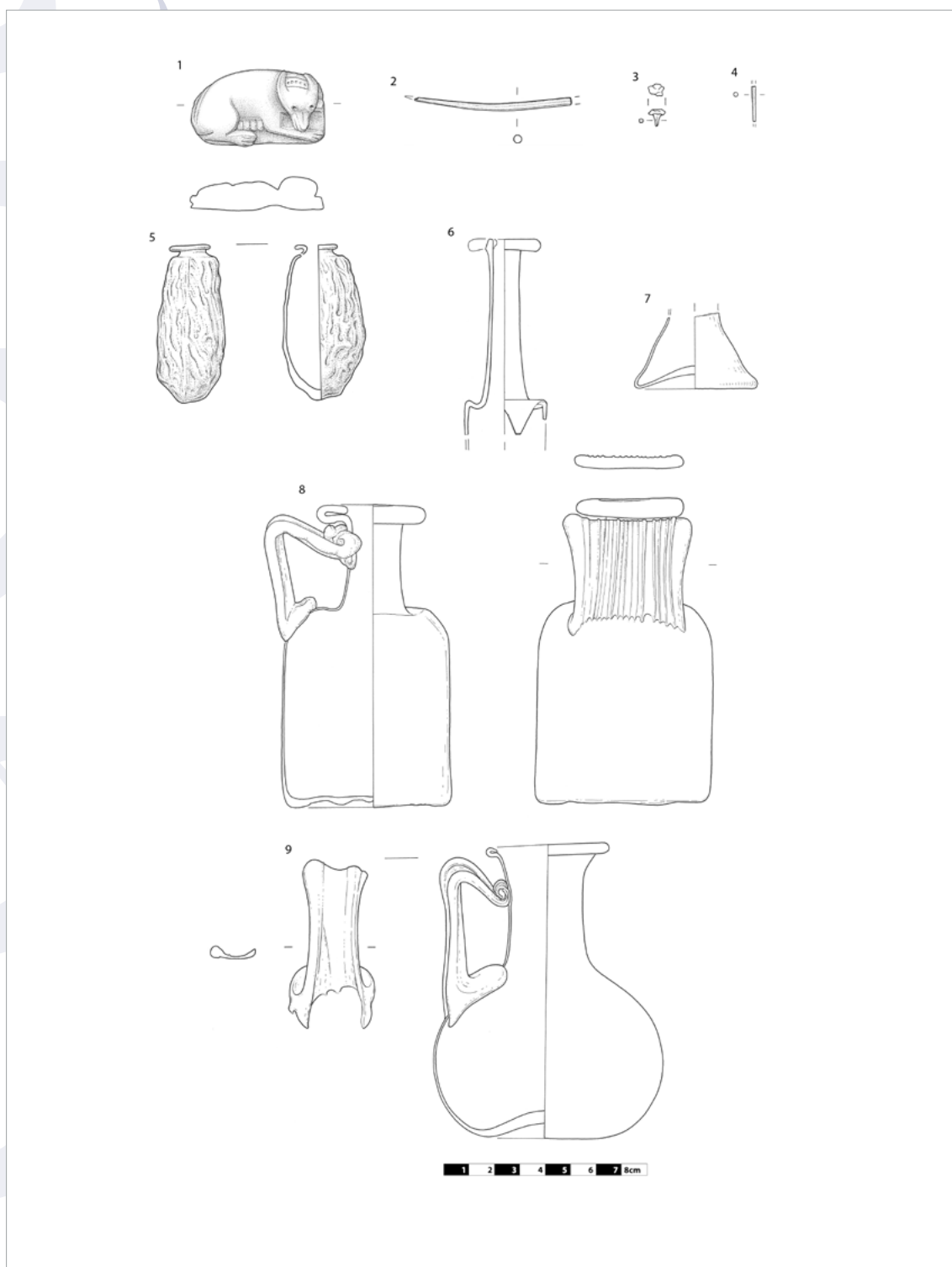


Table 1: Ribnica near Brežice, finds from Grave 1 (drawings: Janja Tratnik Šumi; table prepared by: Aleš Ogorelec)

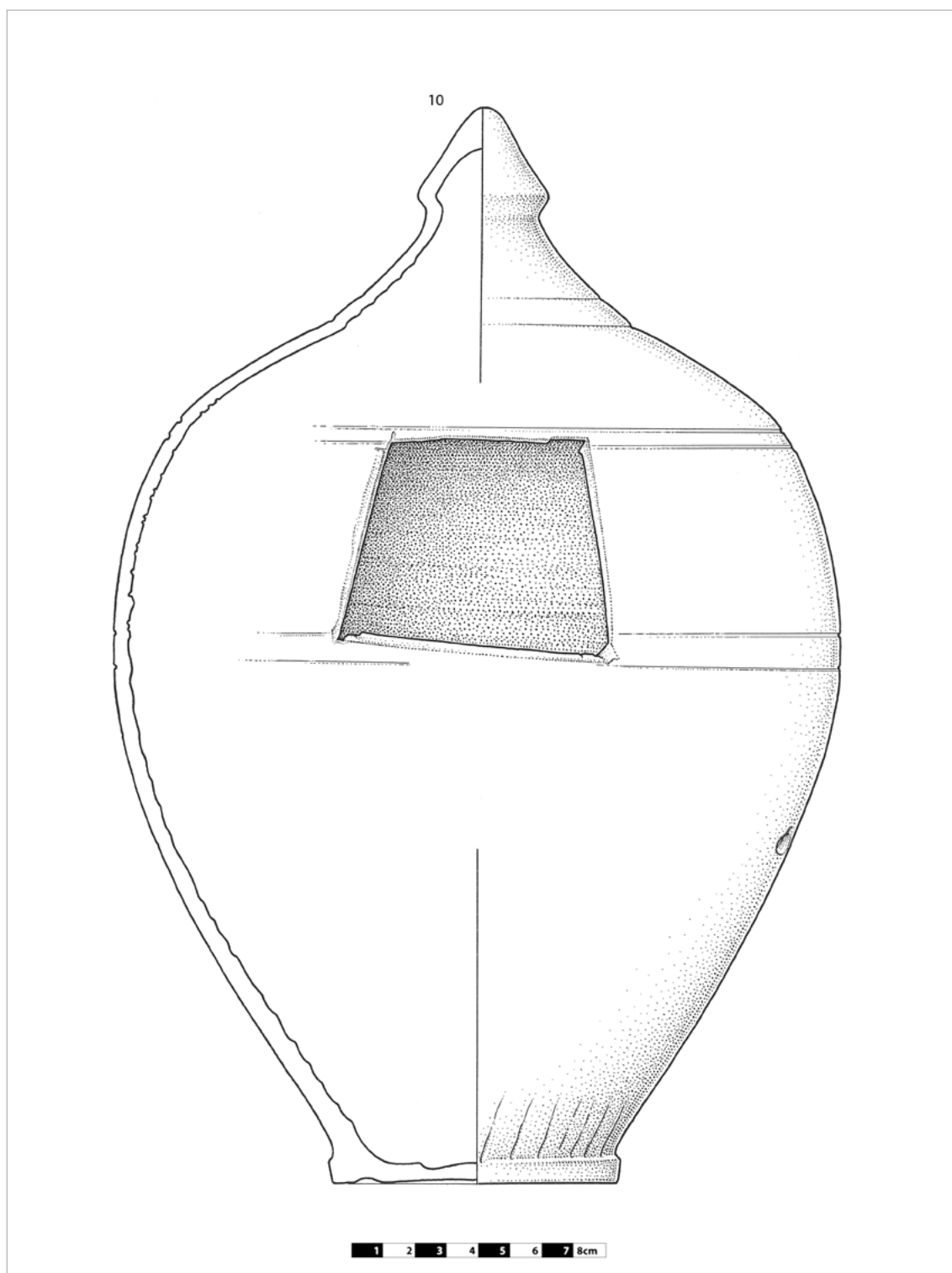


Table 2: Ribnica near Brežice, finds from Grave 1 (drawings: Janja Tratnik Šumi; table prepared by: Aleš Ogorelec)

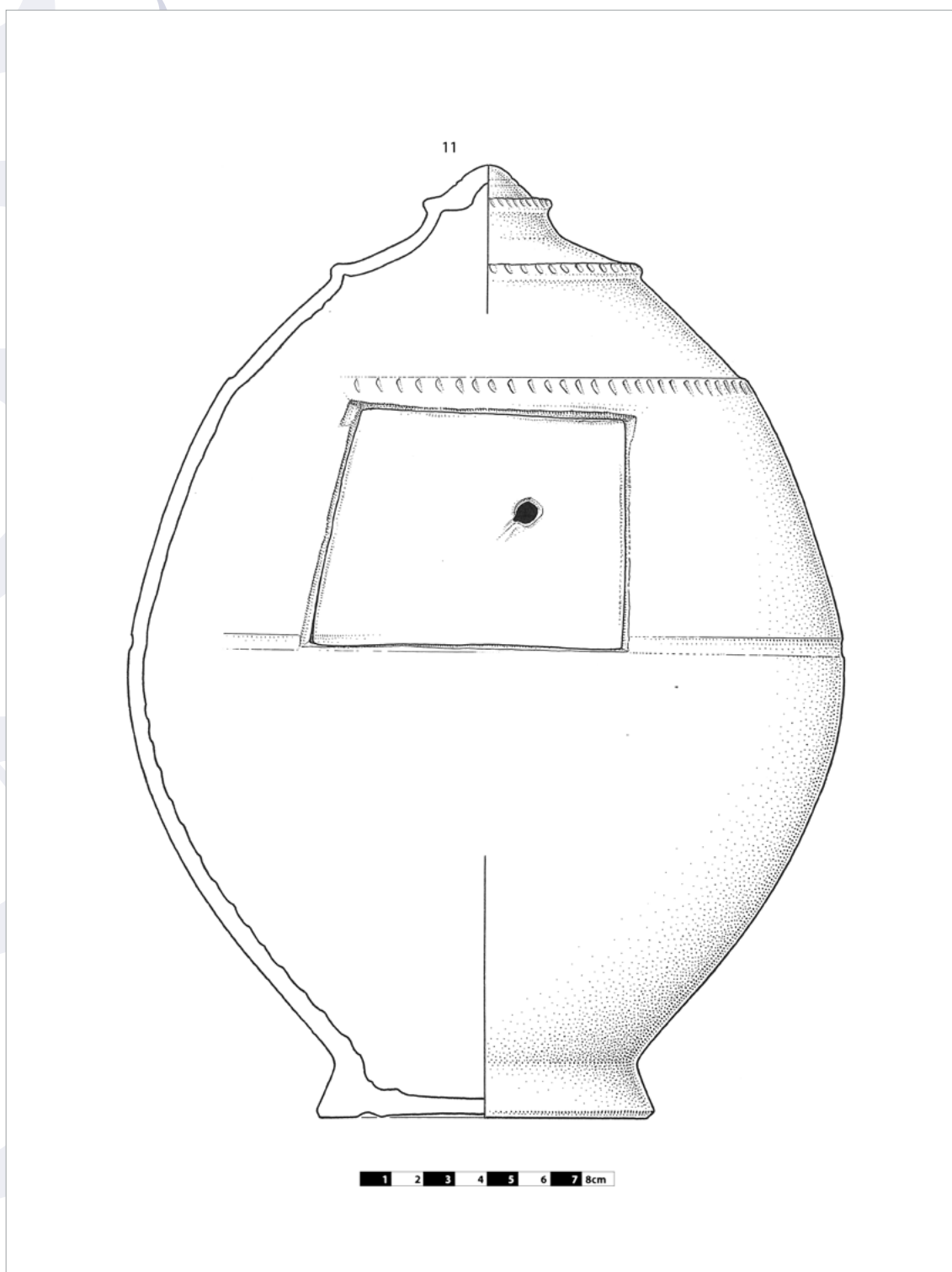


Table 3: Ribnica near Brežice, finds from Grave 1 (drawings: Janja Tratnik Šumi; table prepared by: Aleš Ogorelec)

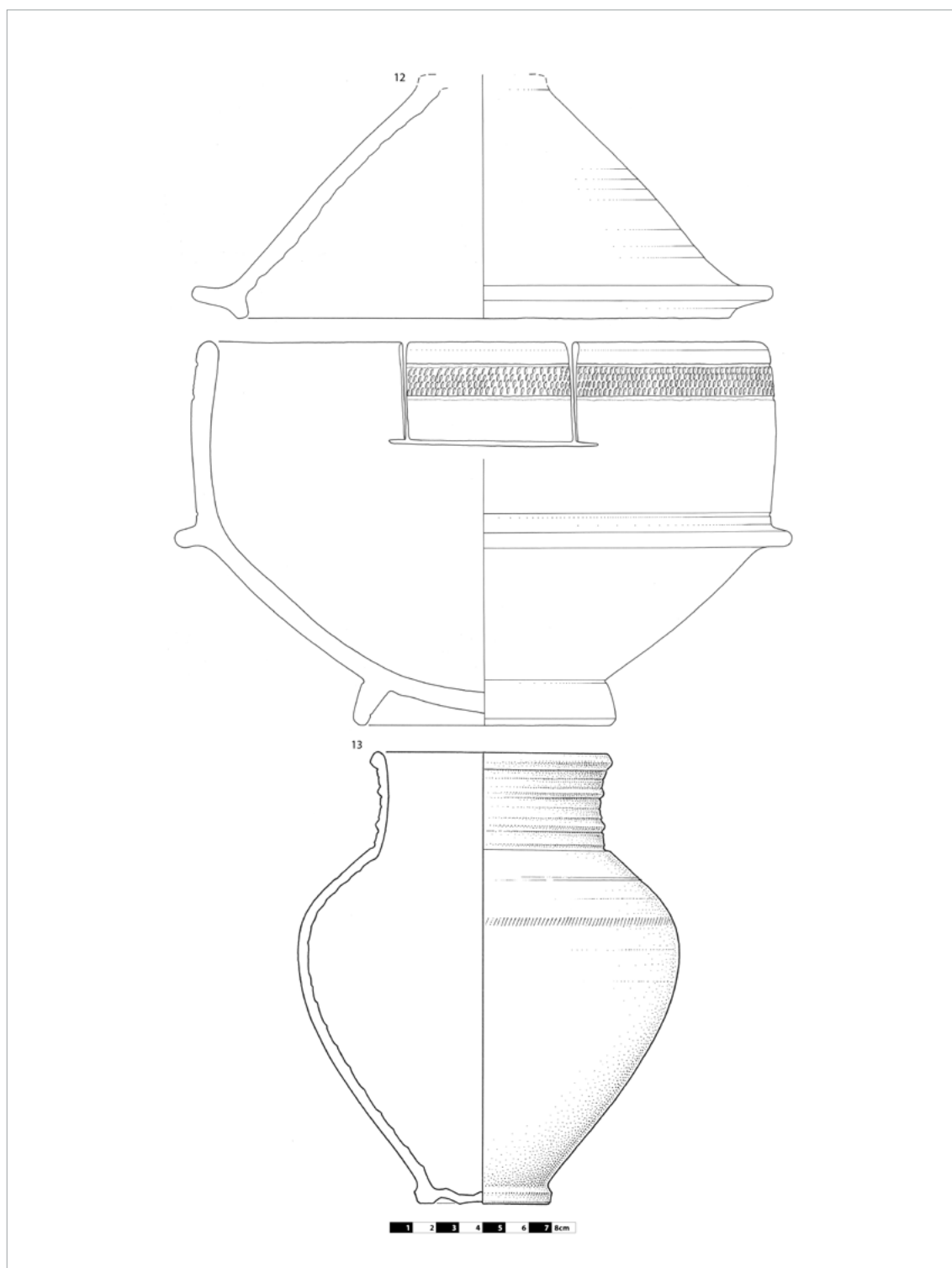


Table 4: Ribnica near Brežice, finds from Grave 1 (drawings: Janja Tratnik Šumi; table prepared by: Aleš Ogorelec)

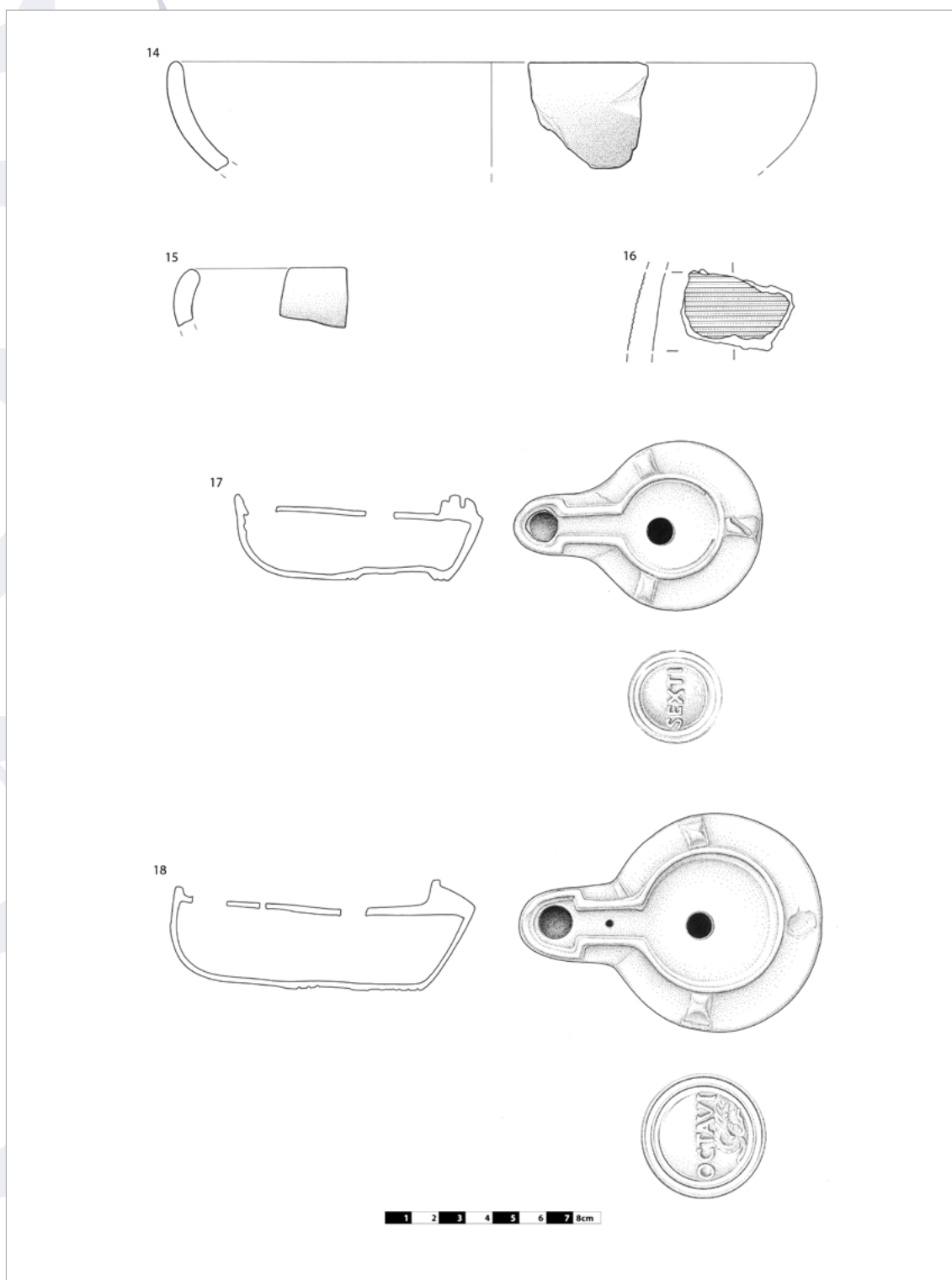


Table 5: Ribnica near Brežice, finds from Grave 1 (drawings: Janja Tratnik Šumi; table prepared by: Aleš Ogorelec)

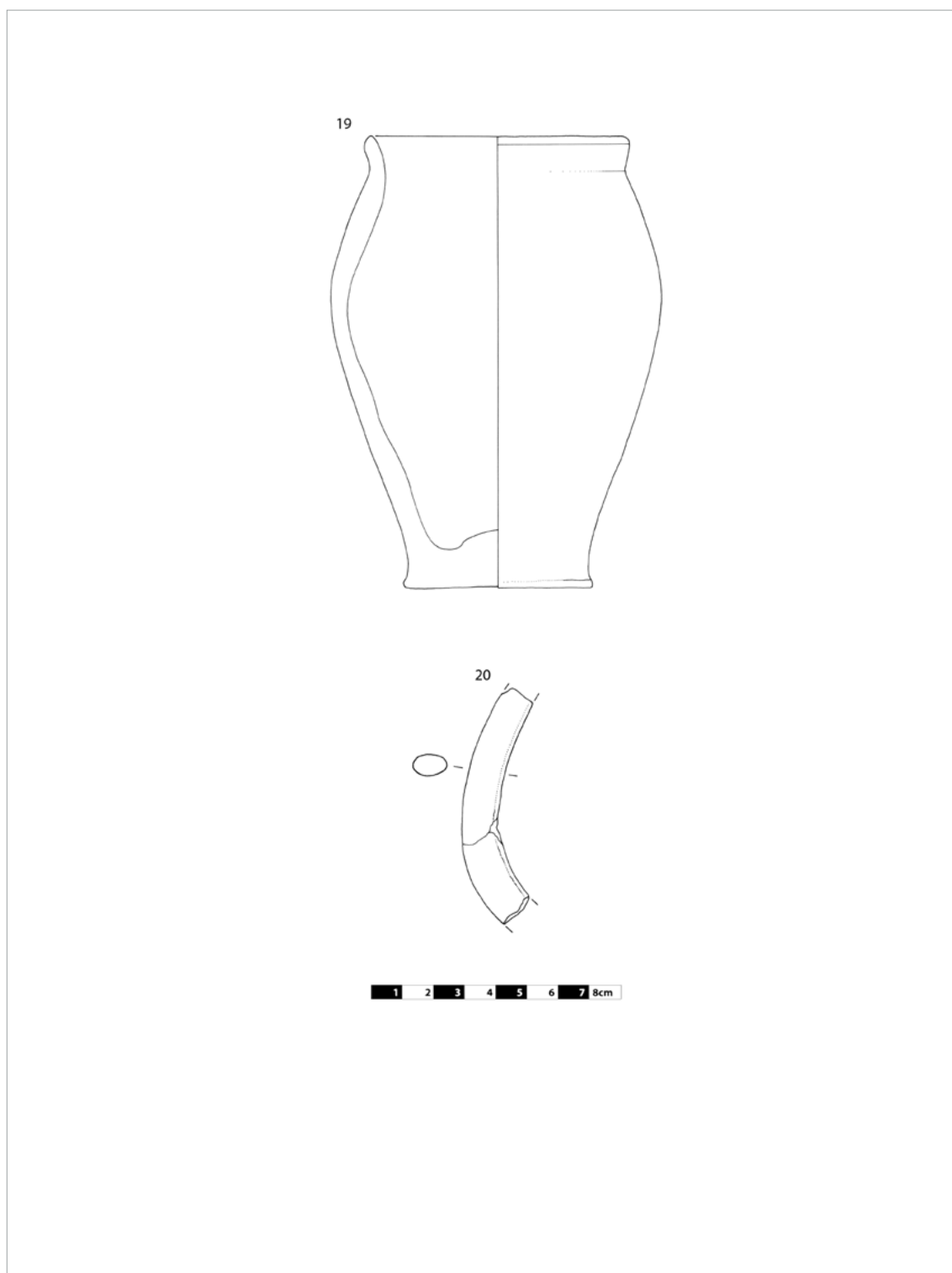


Table 6: Ribnica near Brežice, finds from Grave 1 (drawings: Janja Tratnik Šumi; table prepared by: Aleš Ogorelec)

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Summary

Since their first discovery over 200 years ago, house-shaped urns, or simply House urns, have aroused considerable attention. Numerous researchers have written about them, with Peter Petru's work from 1971 particularly standing out in the field of study.

During archaeological research at the site of Ribnica near Brežice (the Roman roadside station of *Romula*) between 2001 and 2004, extensive settlement remains of the station and part of the Roman road *Emona–Neviodunum–Siscia* were excavated, along with the western necropolis of *Romula*, which featured four

burial plots and 131 graves. Eight House urns were also placed in four of these graves. The proportion of graves containing House urns at Ribnica near Brežice represents only three percent of all graves. Based on the walls' shape, door openings, and the roof and button-like finish, they can be classified into three basic forms with several variations (H 1: H 1.1–H 1.3, H 2: H 2.1–H 2.2, and H 3). The most exciting form of House urn is form H 3, which consists of two parts. The lower part was made using a bowl of the Drag 25 type, into which doors were subsequently cut; the upper part of the urn utilized a conical lid with a horn-shaped curled edge. So far, the find from Ribnica near Brežice is the only known example of a two-part House urn.

The problem of interpreting House urns in the region of south-eastern Slovenia and north-western Croatia has sparked a lively debate among numerous authors. They generally agree that these urns played a significant role in burial rituals. Peter Petru, in his work from 1971, linked House urns to the community of the Celtic tribe *Latobici*, which inhabited this area from the second half of the first century BC onward. His thoughts and conclusions have been summarized by numerous other authors, including Zoran Gregl. Borut Križ speculated that the urns, in a spiritual-religious sense, represented a special form of final resting place and indicated a strong belief in the afterlife. Phil Mason attempted to spatially and ideologically connect the occurrence of House urns to the settlement patterns of the younger Iron Age and the contemporary Celtic communities. Later, he and Bernarda Županek linked House urns to the elements of the Noric-Pannonian tradition, highlighting the mixing of local cultural identities with new ones brought by Romanization.

Given the newly discovered House urns, their number, diverse shapes, production technology, decoration, and the longevity of their use, we are faced with a compelling need for further research. We assume that these urns were produced in different workshops, which challenges Petru's hypothesis about a centre for the production of House urns in the area of Roman *Neviodunum*. Instead, it seems they were made upon the buyer's order. The latest reflections on them also suggest that we could view their role in burial practices from a different perspective, not necessarily in connection with prehistoric tradition, primarily evidenced by their tem-

poral occurrence. Furthermore, at several Roman-era burial sites in Dolenjska, namely an area inhabited by the *Latobici*, house-shaped urns do not appear in graves at all (for example, at the *Praetorium Latobicorum* – Trebnje). Thus, are House urns really connected with the tradition of the *Latobici* or the indigenous communities of this area? It would be worth considering different frameworks or beliefs of individual groups of inhabitants who marked the uniqueness of their beliefs or their relationship to burial practices by using House urns in which the souls of the deceased found a characteristic and familiar residence. New and in-depth research may help to answer or dismiss this provocative suggestion.

Povzetek

Hišaste žare vse od prvih odkritij pred več kot 200 leti vzbujajo precejšnjo pozornost. O njih so pisali številni raziskovalci, zlasti pa izstopajo dela Petra Petruja; za poznavanje tematike je še zlasti pomembno njegovo delo iz leta 1971.

Med arheološkimi raziskavami na najdišču Ribnica pri Brežicah (rimska obcestna postaja Romula), med letoma 2001 in 2004, je bilo poleg obsežnih naselbinskih ostalin postaje in dela rimske ceste Emona–Neviodunum–Siscia raziskano tudi zahodno grobišče Romule s štirimi grobnimi parcelami in 131 grobovi. V štirih izmed njih je bilo položenih tudi osem hišastih žar. Delež grobov, v katerih so bile pridane hišaste žare, v Ribnici pri Brežicah predstavlja zgolj 3 % vseh grobov. Na osnovi oblikovanosti ostenja, odprtin za vratca in strehastega oz. gumbastega zaključka smo jih lahko razvrstili v tri osnovne oblike z več različicami (H 1: H 1.1–H 1.3, H 2: H 2.1–H 2.2 in H 3). Najzanimivejša oblika hišastih žar je oblika H 3, ki je sestavljena iz dveh delov. Za spodnji del je bila uporabljena skleda, posnetek oblike Drag. 25, v katero so bila naknadno izrezana vratca; za zgornji del žare pa je bil uporabljen konični pokrov z rogovilastim izvihanim robom. Zaenkrat je najdba iz Ribnice pri Brežicah edini znan primerek dvodelne hišaste žare.

S problemom interpretacije hišastih žar na območju jugovzhodne Slovenije in severozahodne Hrvaške so se ukvarjali številni avtorji, ki se večinoma strinjajo, da so imele pomembno vlogo v pogrebnih ritualih. Peter Petru je v svojem delu iz leta 1971 hišaste žare povezal s skupnostjo keltskega plemena *Latobikov*, ki je to ob-

močje poseljevala od druge polovice 1. stoletja pr. n. št. dalje. Njegove misli in zaključke so povzeli številni drugi avtorji, med njimi tudi Zoran Gregl. Borut Križ je razmišljal v smeri, da so v duhovno-religioznem smislu žare predstavljale posebno obliko zadnjega počivališča in obenem nakazovale močno vero v posmrtno življenje. Phil Mason pa je skušal pojavnost hišastih žar prostorsko in idejno navezati na poselitveni vzorec mlajše železne dobe ter tedanjih keltskih skupnosti. Kasneje sta z Bernardao Županek hišaste žare navezovala na elemente noriško-panonske tradicije in izpostavljala mešanje lokalnih kulturnih identitet z novimi, ki jih je prinesla romanizacija.

Glede na novoodkrite hišaste žare in njihovo število, raznoliko obliko, tehnologijo izdelave in okras pa tudi dolgoživost njihove uporabe domnevamo, da so jih izdelovali v različnih delavnicah, zaradi česar se Petrujeva hipoteza o centru izdelave hišastih žar na območju rimskega Nevioduna ne zdi več upravičena. Prej se zdi, da so bile izdelovane po naročilu. Najnovejši razmislek o njih kaže tudi, da bi na njihovo vlogo v pogrebnih praksah lahko pogledali tudi z drugega zornega kota in ne nujno v povezavi s prazgodovinsko tradicijo, za kar priča predvsem njihova časovna pojavnost. Prav tako se na več rimskodobnih grobiščih Dolenjske, torej na območju, ki so ga poseljevali *Latobici*, hišaste žare v grobovih ne pojavljajo (primer *Praetorium Latobicorum* – Trebnje). Torej, ali so hišaste žare res povezane s tradicijo *Latobikov* oz. z avtohtonimi skupnostmi tega prostora? Veljalo bi pomisliti tudi na drugačne okvire oz. verovanja posameznih skupin prebivalcev, ki so posebnost svojega verovanja ali odnosa do pogrebnega kulta v pogrebnem ritualu obeležili z uporabo hišaste žare, v kateri je duša pokojnih našla značilno in prepoznavno prebivališče. Nove in poglobljene raziskave bodo morda pomagale odgovoriti ali pa opustiti ta provokativen namig.