

Janka Istenič

EARLY ROMAN GRAVES WITH WEAPONS IN SLOVENIA: AN OVERVIEW

Janka Istenič
Narodni muzej Slovenije
Prešernova 20
SI-1000 Ljubljana
SLOVENIA
janka.istenic@nms.si

1. INTRODUCTION

The gradual spread of the Roman influence to the south-eastern Alpine region started with the foundation of the Roman colony of *Aquileia* in north-eastern Italy in 183/181 BC and ended by the end of the Augustan period, when the whole territory of present-day Slovenia was under Roman control.¹

The involvement of the Roman army in the process seems logical and is also indicated by archaeological finds. Among them, the hoard of weapons from the Iron Age hillfort Grad near Šmihel is the earliest,² probably from the period that followed the foundation of *Aquileia*. The hillfort controlled the important pass of Razdrto (Roman *Ocra*) on the main route from *Aquileia* to *Nauportus* and further to the Balkans, as well as to the middle Danube. *Ocra* was under Roman control from the end of the second century BC onwards at the latest.³

Later finds of pre-(middle) Augustan Roman military equipment comprise a few items from the River Ljubljanica⁴ and Ljubljana,⁵ as well as artillery missiles such as catapult bolts, lead slingshots, arrowheads, and other finds from Grad near Reka and Gradišče in Cerkno in the mountainous region around Idrija (western Slovenia). Finds from these two sites indicate Roman military actions, which were most probably related to Octavian's Illyrian wars of 35/33 BC.⁶ The same applies to the hobnails from Žerovnišček.⁷

Roman weapons and other military equipment from the middle and late Augustan period or the first half of the first century AD are much more frequent. They come from military sites such as the forts at Obrežje and Čatež-Sredno polje along the River Sava in the Brežice Gates area (south-eastern Slovenia),⁸ from the two successive forts recently excavated at the right bank of the River Ljubljanica at Ljubljana/*Emona*,⁹ from Ptuj/*Poetovio*, where in the first century AD a fortress was situated at a not (yet) determined exact location on the western bank of the River Drava,¹⁰ and further from prehistoric hillforts (e.g. Žerovnišček,¹¹ Ambrožovo gradišče¹²), Roman settlements (e.g. Vrhnika,¹³ Ljubljana¹⁴), unknown archaeological contexts (e.g. a dagger from the vicinity of Štanjel¹⁵), and graves. The latter shall be discussed in detail.

⁸ Obrežje: MASON 2006; MASON 2008; MIŠKEC 2009, 288-289, figs. 7, 8 (dating of the coins); small finds, including the items of Roman military equipment, have not been published yet. Čatež-Sredno polje: GUŠTIN 2002.

⁹ Short description of the forts: HVALEC et al. 2009, 3, 4 (small finds, including the items of Roman military equipment, have not been published yet, except for two photographs in o.c., p. 4). Cf. also military finds from an alleged fabrica: VIČIČ 2002, 195-196, pls. 12-13.

¹⁰ HORVAT et al. 2003, 156, 173; Roman military equipment: MIKL 1960-61, 156-157, pl. 3: 1; KÜNZL 1996, 454-455, M 11, pl. 53: 2; 2010.

¹¹ LAHARNAR 2009, 106-108, pl. 5: 4-17.

¹² HORVAT 1995, pl. 14: 11-22 (presumably Augustan); LAHARNAR, in this volume.

¹³ HORVAT 1999 pl. 23: 1, 3, 5, 6 (perhaps from the Ljubljana); ISTENIČ 2009b, cat. 51 (presumably Augustan).

¹⁴ GASPARI 2010, pls. 5: 14, 23, 27, 28, figs. 52, 54; VIČIČ 1994, 49-50, t. 3: 20, 21; VIČIČ 2002, 195-196, 200-201, 203-204, pl. 12, 13: 6-7, 9-12.

¹⁵ ISTENIČ 2009d.

¹ HORVAT 1999, 218-219; HORVAT 2009; ISTENIČ 2006, 42-43; ISTENIČ 2009a, 861-862.

² HORVAT 2002.

³ HORVAT - BAVDEK 2009.

⁴ ISTENIČ 2009b, 86, fig. 85; ISTENIČ 2009c, cat. 67.

⁵ VIČIČ 1994, 48-49, pl. 1: 10: 8-10.

⁶ ISTENIČ 2005

⁷ LAHARNAR 2009, 107, 115, pl. 5: 1-17.

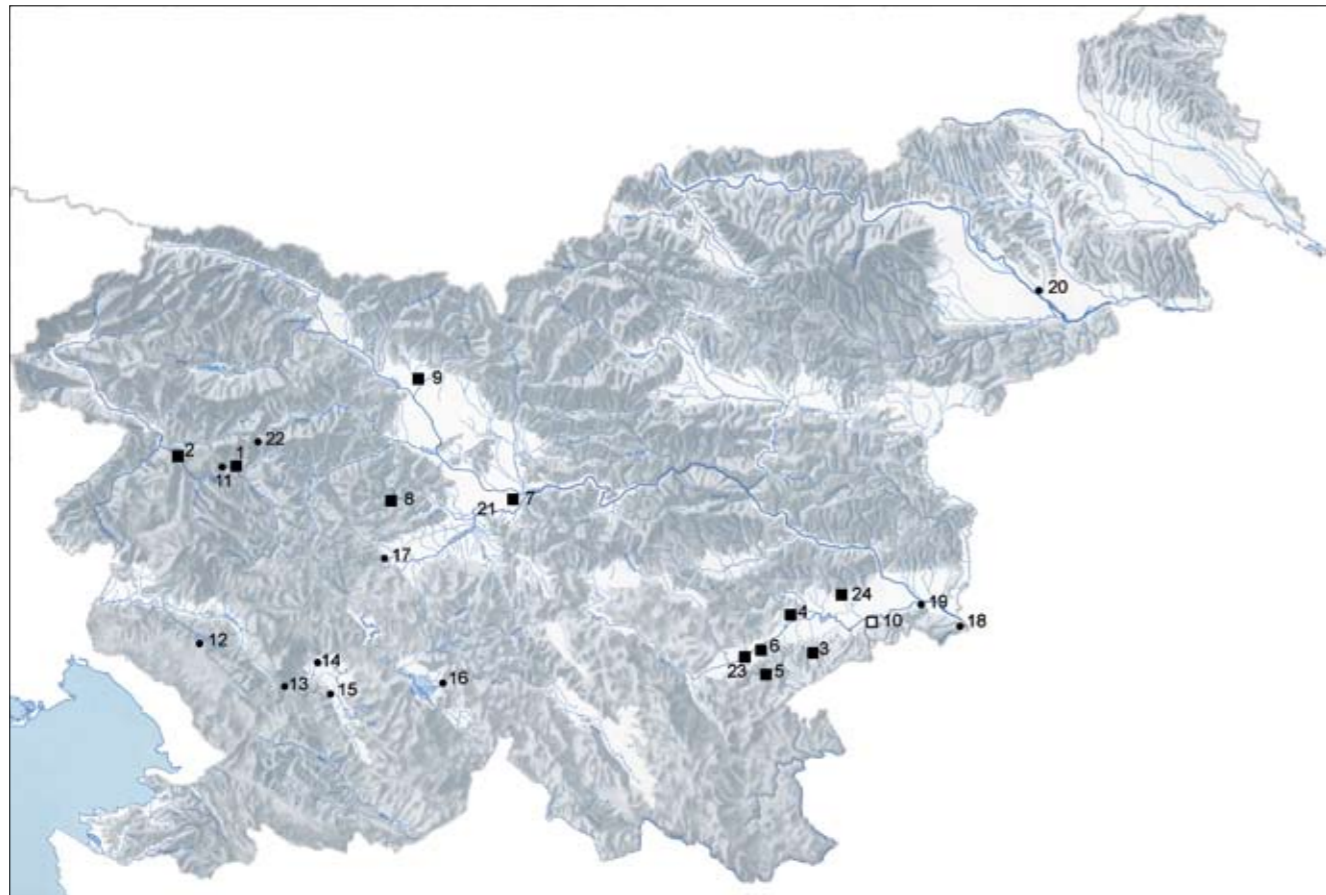


Fig. 1. Slovenia, sites with graves which comprise early Roman weapons (■;□) and other sites with items of Roman military equipment mentioned in the text (●). 1. Reka near Cerčno, 2. Idrija pri Bači, 3. Mihovo, 4. Strmec above Bela Cerkev, 5. Verdun near Stopiče, 6. Smolenja vas near Novo mesto, 7. Ljubljana, 8. Polhov Gradec, 9. Bobovk near Kranj, 10. Stari Grad nad Podbočjem, 11. Grad near Reka, 12. vicinity of Štanjel, 13. Razdrto, 14. Grad near Šmihel, 15. Baba pri Slavini, 16. Žerovnišček, 17. Vrhnika, 18. Obrežje, 19. Čatež-Sredno polje, 20. Ptuj, 21. the River Ljubljanica, 22. Gradišče in Cerčno.

Graves with early Roman military equipment come mainly from two regions of present-day Slovenia, that is, the mountains around Idrija in western Slovenia and Dolenjska (roughly southern Slovenia; Fig. 1: 1-6).

In western Slovenia graves with early Roman weapons are known from two cemeteries, Reka near Cerčno and Idrija pri Bači (Fig. 1: 1, 2), excavated in the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century. Both include the La Tène period and early Roman graves.¹⁶ Their grave-groups consist of items that are chronologically inhomogeneous, a feature that seems to be characteristic of the Idrija group.¹⁷

¹⁶ GUŠTIN 1991. The finds are kept in the Naturhistorisches Museum and the Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte at Vienna and in Musei Civici di Storia ed Arte at Trieste.

¹⁷ Cf. TURK et al. 2009, 48-54, 61.

The cemetery of Reka near Cerčno (14 cremations were excavated) is situated immediately below the site of Grad near Reka (see above). Roman weapons were found in two graves. In addition to tools, a metal vessel, and other items, Grave 3 comprises Celtic (La Tène) and Roman military equipment: a Celtic sword in a Roman scabbard, probably of early Mainz type (both the sword and the scabbard were intentionally bent),¹⁸ two spearheads,¹⁹ and a Celtic shield buckle²⁰ which has parallels in Grave 169 from Beletov vrt, dated to La Tène D1,²¹ as well as metal parts of Roman and Celtic belts (Fig. 2).²²

¹⁸ GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 30: 1; the flat knob at the end of the scabbard resembles the "fan-shaped" knobs (cf. the example from Magdalensberg, dated between ca. 30 and 20 BC: DOLENZ 1998, 49-53, pl. 1: M1) and suggests a rather early dating.

¹⁹ GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 30: 2, 3.

²⁰ GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 30: 4.

²¹ KNEZ 1992, pl. 61: 2; dating: BOŽIČ 1999, 198; BOŽIČ 2008, 112.

²² GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 31: 8, 10.

In Grave 11 a shaft and a boss of a Roman shield,²³ a brooch of the Aucissa type,²⁴ a helmet of the Port type,²⁵ a non-Roman brooch characteristic of the northeast Adriatic hinterland in the last two centuries BC,²⁶ and also, according to Guštin, a head of a pilum (Fig. 3)²⁷ were found. In our opinion it would be very surprising to find a pilum in a grave, as they seem to have been used exclusively by Roman legionaries.²⁸

In the Idrija pri Bači cemetery 47 cremations, spanning Late Early Iron Age to the Augustan period, were excavated.²⁹ Two of them, Grave 11/12 and Grave 17,³⁰ comprise items of Roman military equipment.

A sword and metal remains of the associated scabbard, both of the Mainz type, were found in Grave 11/12 (Fig. 4).³¹ The round hand-guard (turned upside down on the drawing) finds parallels among the items from the ship that in the middle-Augustan period sunk at Comacchio (northeastern Italy).³²

In addition to non-Roman items, such as the brooch of the Idrija type and the tools, Grave 17 includes items of Roman military equipment: a helmet of the Weisenau type, a sword and scabbard of the Mainz type (with a circular hand-guard³³), a shield-buckle, a buckle, a brooch of the Alesia type, and button-and-loop fasteners (Fig. 5).³⁴

In southern Slovenia (Dolenjska) graves comprising early-Roman military finds come from the cemeteries at Mihovo, Strmec above Bela Cerkev, Verdun near Stopiče, and Smolenja vas near Novo mesto (Fig. 1: 3-6).

²³ GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 33: 15, 34: 2; cf. DEMETZ 1998, 84, pl. 18, 19, M 220-223.

²⁴ GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 34: 5.

²⁵ GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 34: 1.

²⁶ GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 34: 4; cf. BAVDEK et al. 2010, 47.

²⁷ GUŠTIN 1991, 26, pl. 33: 14.

²⁸ BISHOP - COULSTON 2006, 225-259.

²⁹ GUŠTIN 1991, 30-33, pls. 1-27.

³⁰ GUŠTIN 1991, pls. 11: 5-14, 12: 3, 15-17.

³¹ GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 12: 3.

³² INVERNIZZI 1990, 101, 103, 258, 260, fig. 3, pl. 68: 227; dating: BERTI 1990, 72-75; for the problems regarding the possible remains of the associated scabbard cf. ISTENIČ 2000a, 176, fn 4; Istenič 2000b, 6, fn. 33.

³³ Cf. fn. 32.

³⁴ GUŠTIN 1991, pls. 15-17. For the buckle (GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 17: 12) cf. DESCHLER-ERB 1999, 66-67, pl. 40. For the brooch of the Idrija type see BOŽIČ 2008, 98-100, 104-105, 110, fig. 50: 4, and for the head and bow fragment of the Alesia type brooch (the foot on the drawing GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 17: 10: cannot be part of the brooch, but the fragment in the form of a bird's head, GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 17: 11, might represent the foot of the brooch) see BOŽIČ 2008, 106-109.

At Mihovo around 400 graves from the Early and Late Iron Age as well as from the Roman period were excavated in the nineteenth century.³⁵ They were the subject of a PhD thesis³⁶ which remained unpublished; it includes a catalogue of the grave goods with rather schematic drawings and very brief descriptions. Roman military equipment from the cemetery comprises swords of the Mainz type and typologically earlier swords with or without scabbard remains,³⁷ the remains of a hilt of a sword,³⁸ and one or two shield-bosses.³⁹ Other weapons from the graves follow the La Tène tradition.⁴⁰

Early Halstatt period, Late La Tène, and Roman graves from the cemetery Strmec above Bela Cerkev, situated on the southern slopes of the hillfort at Vinji vrh, were excavated in the nineteenth century.⁴¹ The excavations were poorly documented, neither of the two institutions keeps records of grave-groups, and only a few could be (partially) reconstructed.⁴² This is also the case of a grave which includes remains of a Mainz-type sword scabbard and a shield handgrip (Fig. 6).⁴³ A fragment of a Mainz-type sword sheath and perhaps also a dagger typical of the early Principate⁴⁴ might also come from the cemetery.

More than 200 graves spanning the second half of the first century BC to the second century AD were excavated at Verdun (Fig. 1: 5). Unlike the graves mentioned earlier, the ones from Verdun were excavated about 20 years ago and are well documented. From the published evidence,⁴⁵ which is preliminary and includes only a few graves,⁴⁶ it seems that the cemetery comprises several graves with Roman weapons such as swords, remains of shields (bosses and handgrips), helmets, and spears from the middle Augustan period to the first half of the first century.

³⁵ History of research, topography, and archival sources: see DULAR 2008, 111-121 (with quoted earlier publications). Most of the finds are kept in the Naturhistorisches Museum at Vienna.

³⁶ WINDL 1975.

³⁷ WINDL 1975, Grave 1656/59, pl. 21:1, Grave 1657/16, pl. 28:1, Grave 1846/3, pl. 61: 5; cf. also pl. 74:1.

³⁸ WINDL 1975, Grave 1657/59, pl. 43: 2.

³⁹ WINDL 1975, pl. 80: 5 and perhaps also Grave 1657/16, pl. 27: 3.

⁴⁰ Ex. helmets of the Novo mesto type - see MIHALJEVIČ - DIZDAR 2007, 124 (for their dating also ISTENIČ 2010, 140-142).

⁴¹ DULAR 1991, 54-59, 87-97; BOŽIČ 1999, 208. The grave goods are kept in the Naturhistorisches Museum at Vienna (DULAR 1991, pls. 51-82) and in the National Museum of Slovenia at Ljubljana (STARE 1973).

⁴² DULAR 1991, 87-97, pls. 51-52, 55-62.

⁴³ BOŽIČ 1992, 75, pl. 17: 1-6.

⁴⁴ DULAR 1991, 81, 98-99, pls. 41: 1, 63: 9.

⁴⁵ BREŠČAK 1989; 1990.

⁴⁶ See BREŠČAK in this volume.

A Mainz-type gladius (Fig. 7) and a spearhead were found in a cremation grave in Smolenja vas near Novo mesto (Fig. 1: 6).⁴⁷ The gladius was subsequently acquired by the Dolenjski muzej.⁴⁸

The remains of a blade of a Mainz-type gladius from Stari grad above Podbočje (Fig. 1: 10),⁴⁹ acquired by the National Museum of Slovenia in 1897, might also come from a grave.⁵⁰

From other parts of Slovenia there are three Roman cemeteries with graves that comprise early Roman weapons, namely from Ljubljana, from Bobovk near Kranj, and from Polhov Gradec (Fig. 1: 7-9).

During rescue-excavations at Kongresni trg in Ljubljana (Roman *Emona*; Fig. 1: 7), on the left bank of the River Ljubljanica, in 2010/2011 two graves with Roman military equipment were discovered. The grave goods of one of them comprised a sword of the Mainz type with remains of the scabbard, an umbo, and two spearheads; a brooch of the Aucissa type and two spearheads were found in the another grave.

At the Bobovk cemetery, situated near Kranj (Fig. 1: 9), 29 cremations were reported to have been excavated.⁵¹ One of them, Grave 1, contained a rich grave assemblage. In addition to a sword of the Mainz type (without any remains of the scabbard; Fig. 9) it comprised a glass urn, two glass vessels, imported thin-walled pottery, a poor quality oil lamp of the Loeschcke IX type, knives, and many metal remains of what was probably a wooden box.⁵² The oil lamp and thin-walled pottery suggest that it may be dated to the Flavian period or the first half of the second century, and that the sword was an old object when it was deposited in the grave.⁵³ It is the latest Principate grave with weapons from the territory under discussion.

⁴⁷ The author would like to thank Dragan Božič for drawing her attention to the find and for the invaluable unpublished information regarding the grave.

⁴⁸ KRIŽ et al. 2008, 334, No. 22. The author would like to thank Borut Križ for providing the photograph of the sword and the permission to publish it in this paper, as well as for the information regarding the circumstances of the acquisition of the sword.

⁴⁹ GUŠTIN et al. 1993, 12, 34-35, fig. 20: 20.

⁵⁰ BOŽIČ 1993, 139.

⁵¹ PETRU - VALIČ 1958-1959.

⁵² PETRU - VALIČ 1958-1959, 133-136, pls. 1-4; PETRU 1958-1959, 15, fig. 2.

⁵³ For the dating of the lamp see ISTENIČ 1999, 150-151.

At Polhov Gradec (Fig 1: 8) several high quality ceramic, glass, and metal vessels and lamps, dated mostly to the period between the end of the first century BC and the first half of the first century AD, were found in 1913 and 1914. Iron finds include a shield-boss and three spearheads (Fig. 8).⁵⁴ The finds probably originate from several graves,⁵⁵ not from a single very rich grave.⁵⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Graves with early Roman weapons in the southeastern Alpine region are concentrated in two regions: Dolenjska and the region around Idrija, which are associated with the Mokronog and Idrija cultural groups in the La Tène period.⁵⁷ Dolenjska was inhabited by the *Taurisci*, while the Idrija region was probably the easternmost territory of the *Carni*.⁵⁸

Graves with Roman weapons from Dolenjska and the region around Idrija come from cemeteries which comprise Late La Tène burials with Celtic weapons. In most of the graves, Roman weapons are associated with Celtic weapons or other items that follow the indigenous, pre-Roman tradition. From this it can be concluded that these graves with Roman weapons should be linked to indigenous men, partially or completely (as indicated by the published graves from Verdun) armed with Roman weapons, which would suggest they were auxiliary soldiers. Fan-shaped ending on the sword scabbard from Grave 1657/16 at Mihovo⁵⁹ and a similar ending from Grave 3 at Reka near Cerčno might suggest that the earliest among them may have joined the Roman army in the early Augustan period.⁶⁰ The majority of graves with Roman weapons are middle Augustan to Tiberian and probably reflect vast recruitment in that period.

⁵⁴ LOŽAR 1938; PETRU 1974, pls. 10-11; MRÁV 2005.

⁵⁵ BOŽIČ in this volume.

⁵⁶ Cf. MRÁV 2005.

⁵⁷ BOŽIČ 1999, 192, 203.

⁵⁸ BOŽIČ 1999, 203; ISTENIČ 2005; ŠAŠEL KOS 2005, 413, 416; ŠAŠEL KOS 2010, 211-212.

⁵⁹ WINDL 1975, pl. 28:1-3.

⁶⁰ Cf. BERGER - HELMIG 1991, 9, fig. 10: 17; DOLENZ 1998, 49-53, fig. 19, pl. 1: M1; DECHEZLEPRÉTRE - ADRIAN - ROUDIÉ 2008, pl. 5: 3. In the case of Grave 3 from Reka near Cerčno a relatively early date is also indicated by old objects in the grave, such as the shield-buckle (GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 30: 6) with parallels in Grave 169 from Beletov and a brooch (GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 29: 9).

The regions where the graves with Augustan weapons in Slovenia are concentrated came under firm Roman control during Octavian's Illyrian wars of 35/33 B.C.⁶¹ Appian mentions the *Carni* and *Taurisci* among the second group of peoples defeated during Octavian's Illyrian wars in 35/33 B.C., that is, the ones that offered considerable resistance (*Illyr.*, 16, 46).⁶² The discussed graves with Roman weapons from Dolenjska and the Idrija region suggest that warriors of the defeated tribes started to fight alongside the Romans in the middle or perhaps already in the early Augustan period. In the case of the *Taurisci*, the recently published results of a research into a group of Late La Tène style swords and associated sheaths with openwork decoration⁶³ point to the beginning of military collaboration of the *Taurisci* with the Romans in the early Augustan period at the latest. Recruitment contributed to the Romanisation of the region and provided manpower for the huge needs of the Augustan army, which culminated during the Pannonian-Dalmatian Revolt (AD 6-9).

The two graves with Roman weapons from Ljubljana should also be related to auxiliary soldiers, probably from the middle or late Augustan period, when there were two successive military forts at Ljubljana on the right bank of the Ljubljanica and when the new, regularly planned town enclosed by stone walls was built.⁶⁴ The sword from Bobovk might indicate a grave of an old soldier or perhaps his heir. In the case of weapons from Polhov gradec, their interpretation as hunting gear cannot be excluded, although it does not seem probable.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Cf. ISTENIČ 2005.

⁶² ŠAŠEL KOS 2005, 412-414, 416.

⁶³ ISTENIČ 2010.

⁶⁴ ISTENIČ 2009, 103; HVALEC 2009; GASPARI 2010.

⁶⁵ Cf. MRÁV 2005.

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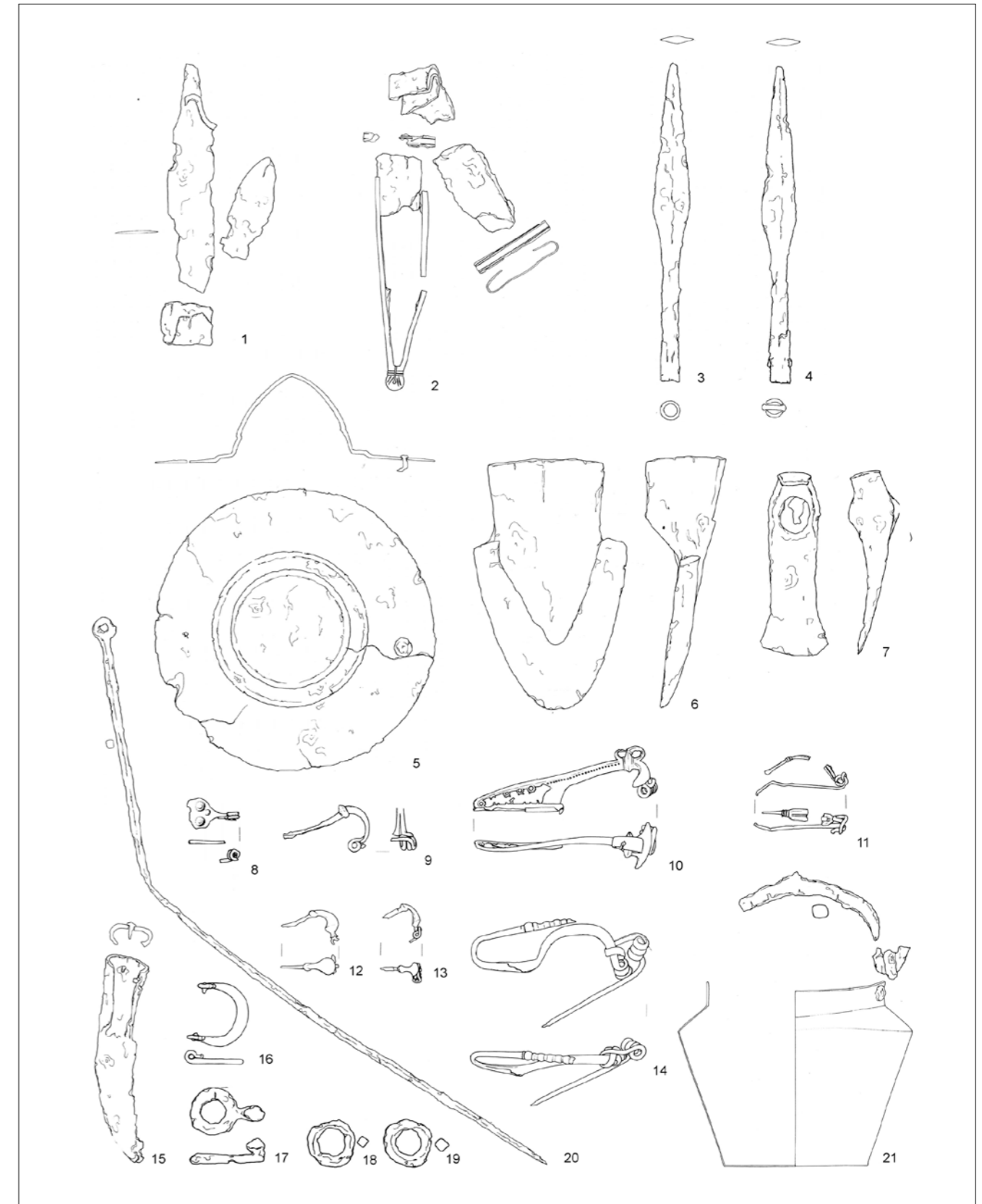


Fig. 2. Reka near Cerkno, Grave 3. Various scales (from GUŠTIN 1991, pls. 29-31).

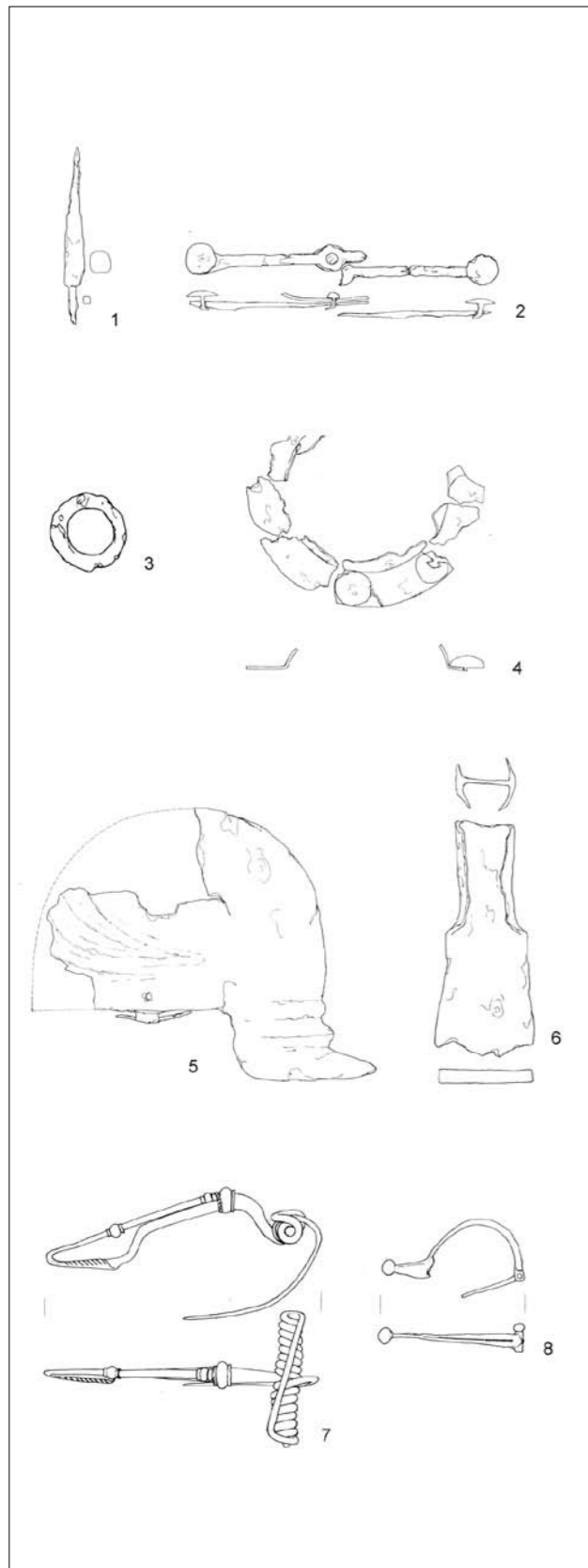


Fig. 3. Reka near Cerkno, Grave 11. Various scales (from GUŠTIN 1991, pls. 33: 14-16, 34: 1-5).

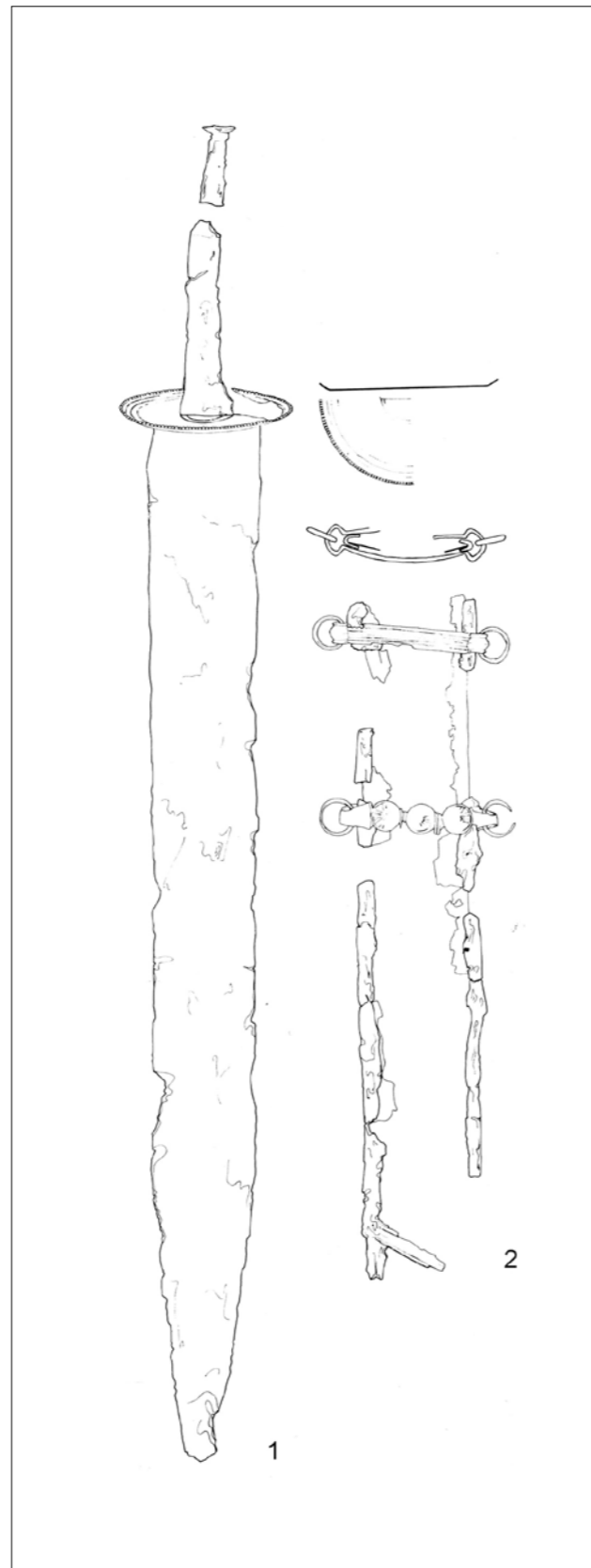


Fig. 4. Idrija pri Bači, Grave 11/12. Scale 1 : 6 (from GUŠTIN 1991, pl. 12: 3).

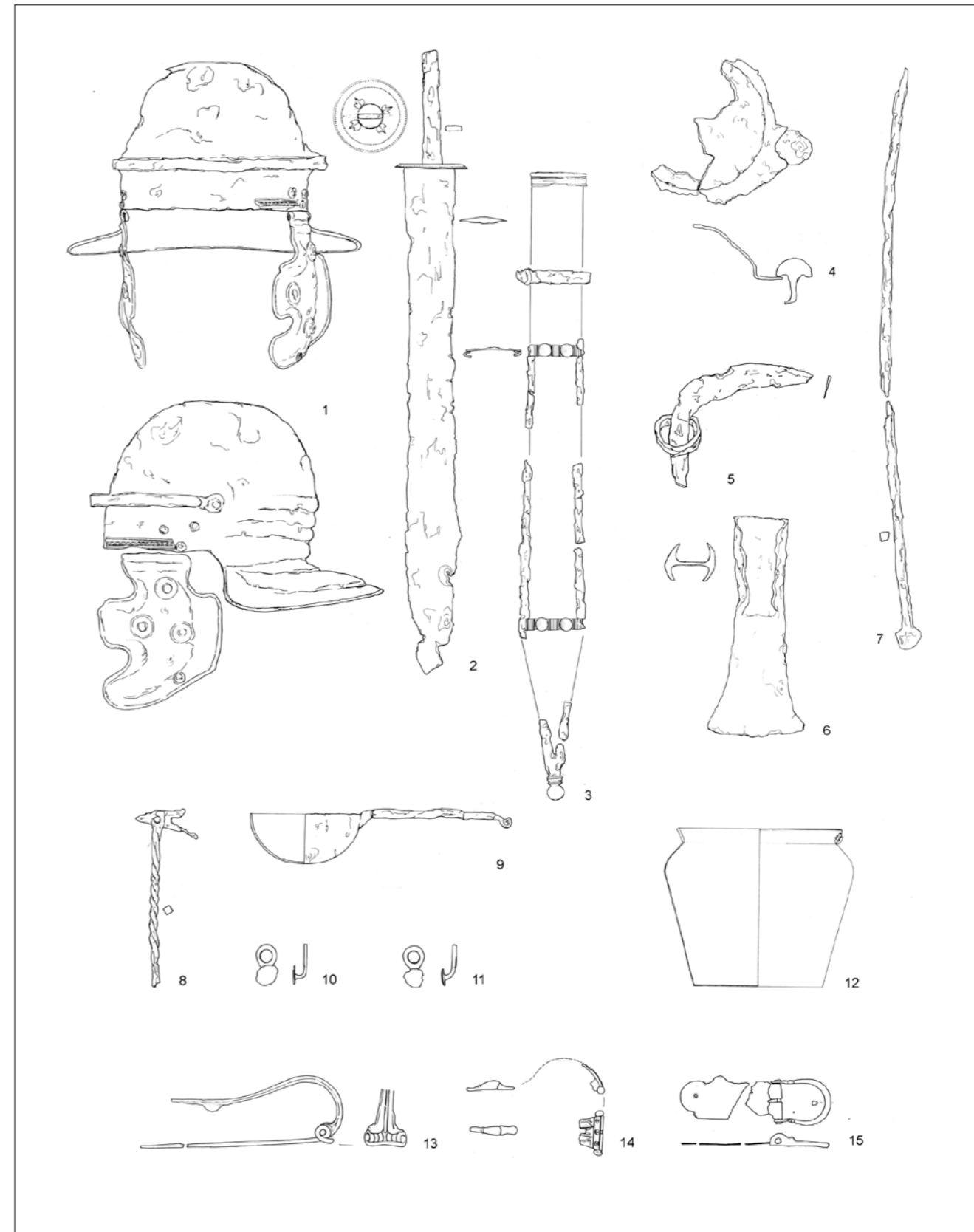


Fig. 5. Roman military equipment and several other items from Idrija pri Bači, Grave 17. Various scales (from GUŠTIN 1991, pls. 15: 3, 5, 16, 17: 1, 4, 5, 6, 8-13).



Fig. 8. Grave 1 from Bobovk near Kranj. Photograph by Tomaža Lauko, Narodni muzej Slovenije.

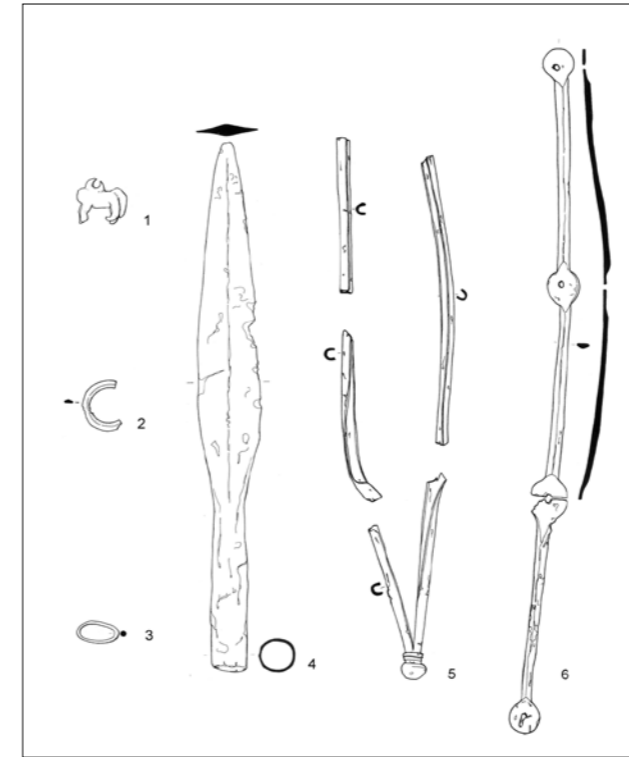


Fig. 6. Strmec above Bela Cerkev, grave with Roman weapons. Scale 1 : 4. After BOŽIČ 1992, pl. 17: 1-6 and DULAR 1992, pls. 65: 14, 70: 36, 73: 29, 78: 3, 75: 18-23, 78: 3.



Fig. 7. Gladius from Smolenja vas. © Dolenjski muzej.

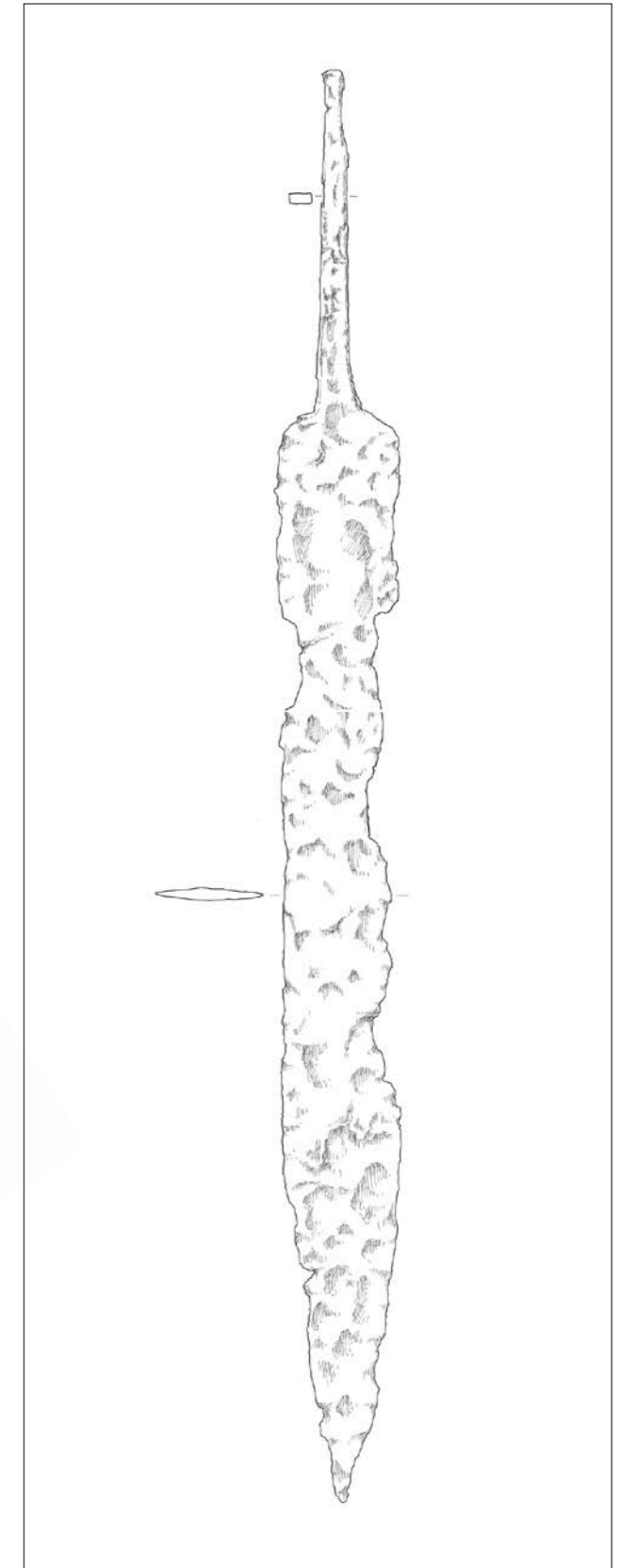


Fig. 9 Bobovk near Kranj, Grave 1: the sword. Scale 1 : 3. Drawing by Ida Murgelj, Narodni muzej Slovenije.