

INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTLEMENT OF THE EASTERN ALPS IN EARLY MIDDLE AGES

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Settlement of Eastern Alps in the Early Middle Ages is an edited volume with eight authors contributing nine chapters in total, each covering different aspects of the subject. It is the culmination of extensive research endeavours into the Early Medieval archaeology of the Eastern Alps, synthesising the collaborative efforts of four research projects¹ with scholars from two countries over several years.

The focus is on an area on the eastern fringes of the Alps, which lies in present-day Slovenia and parts of Austria. The three micro-regional studies are located near Bled (Slovenia), in the Drava Plain (Slovenia) and in the Leibnitzer Feld (Austria). The case study chapters focus on Upper Styria, also known as Austrian Styria (*Fig. 1*).

This collective endeavour represents, we trust, a significant contribution to the scientific community, reflecting a judicious investment in the advancement of knowledge. However, there is also a downside to such collective endeavours. As the authors are at different stages of their careers and come from various academic backgrounds, the content may lack the coherence one might ideally desire. Therefore, the volume is best described as an edited volume rather than a monograph, which is also reflected in its design. Nevertheless, we believe that the versatility in approaches is an enriching factor rather than a limiting one.

Early Medieval archaeology – sixth to eleventh century in the Central European context – historically focussed on the analysis of cemeteries, settlements, and hoards. A review of the literature pertaining to the

Eastern Alpine region reveals a predominant emphasis on cemetery studies. However, the past two decades have witnessed a paradigm shift towards settlement archaeology. Building on this trend, the objective of this volume is to offer a comprehensive synthesis of settlement patterns in the Eastern Alps during the Early Medieval period, incorporating cutting-edge digital tools and landscape analyses. In so doing, the book draws several conclusions that are important for the wider field of Slavic studies and Early Medieval archaeology, for example with regard to the processes of transition from Late Antiquity to Early Middle Ages and the Slavicisation.

To contextualize the thematic focus of this book, first an introductory overview of the historical trajectory and current state of Early Medieval archaeology in the Eastern Alps is needed. As mentioned, in the Central European archaeology and in particular in the archaeology of the Eastern Alps the Early Medieval Period is largely understood as a period between the sixth and eleventh centuries AD. The archaeology of this period commenced with the discovery of “unusual enamelled jewellery” unearthed in 1853 at Köttlach in Lower Austria and documented by Franck (1854). He posited a query concerning the identity and era of the individuals associated with these artefacts and thus set the research agenda for the subsequent century and a half. The proliferation of analogous discoveries expanded the scope of this phenomenon, necessitating elucidation. Prior to and following the Second World War, the principal research challenge was the classification of the archaeological culture these objects presumably represented, including its chronological and ethnocultural dimen-

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sions. Gradually it became evident that these artefacts originated from the Early Medieval period. Nonetheless, in alignment with the cultural-historical perspective on archaeological finds prevailing at the time (for a historical overview see e.g. Štular 2025), a debate emerged concerning the ethnicity of the individuals to whom this enamelled jewellery was attributed. Some academics posited that these artefacts were Slavic in origin, while others contested this exclusive attribution, and further researchers interpreted the same items as indicative of an Early Medieval Germanic presence in the Eastern Alps. This scholarly discourse spanned various periods and a markedly dichotomous interpretation during and subsequent to the Second World War (an overview of the period up to the First World War: Pleterski 2001; distinctively dichotomous understanding during and after the Second World War: Dinklage 1941a; 1941b; 1941c; 1943; Korošec 1947).

Over the course of time, specific terminologies have been established, such as *Carantanian* referencing the Early Medieval Duchy of Carantania (Schmid 1910–1911), *Köttlach* denoting the site bearing this name, and the *Carantanian-Köttlach* culture. Within historiographical discourse, the associated populace was designated as Alpine Slavs (Grafenauer 1954; cf. Kahl 2002). The compendium of the Carantanian-Köttlach archaeological culture as it was understood at the time, encompassing its sites and artefacts, was meticulously compiled by Paola Korošec (1979). In her analysis Korošec highlighted inherent chronological and cultural variances, i.e., two main subphases were elucidated. In a nearly concurrent timeframe, J. Giesler presented the essays (1980; 1997) on the identical subject matter, proposing a significantly divergent chronological assessment, i.e., he proposed around one century later dating.

This divergence in chronological interpretations exacerbated the rift among scholars, indicating a necessity to reconstruct the discourse from its foundational elements. In response to this need, the ZBIVA archaeological database was established at ZRC SAZU in 1980s, designed to encompass a comprehensive array of data pertaining to literature, sites, graves, and artefacts relevant to the Early Medieval archaeology of the Eastern Alps. Currently ZBIVA encompasses information on 3,900 sites (Štular, Belak 2022), marking a substantial increase from the 242 sites described by Korošec in 1979. This expansion is attributed not only to the discovery of new sites but also, and more significantly, to a prolonged and systematic approach towards data aggregation. Utilizing this dataset, for instance, facilitated an analysis of Early Medieval church groupings (Pleterski, Belak 1995) and recently to elucidate the Slavic migration into the Eastern Alps (Štular et al. 2022).

In recent times, a significant paradigm shift has taken place regarding the conceptual tools available to archaeologists, notably concerning the association

of archaeological cultures with ethnic identities. This traditional expectation has been critically reassessed and largely debunked, with scholars like Brather (2000) and Härke (2007) leading the discourse. An archaeological culture is perceived as a construct that broadly categorizes material culture based on various, potentially unrelated characteristics such as chronology, technology, economy, social structures, and religious practices (e.g. Klejn 1988; Jones 2003; Barceló et al. 2019; Štular 2025).

This shift in perspective renders a century-long debate over the ethnic affiliations of the Carantanian-Köttlach material culture — whether it was Slavic, Germanic, or indigenous — as methodologically flawed and outdated. The emancipation from the erstwhile ethnic imperative enables researchers to pose new inquiries, such as exploring the nature of people's lives and their self-identification mechanisms (e.g. Losert, Pleterski 2003; Brather 2008; Pleterski 2010a; Pohl, Mehofer 2010).

Addressing these novel research questions has led to the adoption of methodologies such as the archaeology of micro-regions. Taylor (1974), in his foundational work, advocated for a “total archaeology” approach that aims for a comprehensive understanding of landscapes and their origins, treating the landscape itself as an historical artefact. Following this approach, the Bled region has been the focus of intensive study as a micro-region since 1978. This sustained research effort, involving several generations of Slovenian Early Medieval archaeologists, has yielded a rich body of work. Notably, it facilitated the development of methods such as retrograde land-cadastre analysis (Pleterski 1995) and provided insights into the dynamics of an ancient Slavic *župa*, including its development and decline (Pleterski 2013a).

The realm of digital methodologies, commonly referred to as digital archaeology, represents another notable area of advancement within the field, as evidenced by works such as those by Lock (2003), Siart et al. (2013), and Benardou et al. (2017). In the context of the imminent prospects for Early Medieval archaeology in Central Europe, the application of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) stands out prominently. During the 1990s and 2000s, GIS facilitated unprecedented insights into the interplay between cultural phenomena (for instance, settlements) and their surrounding environments, whether natural or economic, in terms of both depth and scope (Stančič, Gaffney 1991; Štular 2006; for a list of tools with references, see Štular, Eichert 2020). It is crucial to acknowledge, however, that the efficacy of GIS is intrinsically linked to the quality and quantity of the underlying data.

Fortuitously, this domain has experienced significant advancements over the last decade. A pivotal development in data acquisition, particularly within the densely wooded regions of the Eastern Alps, is the employment of airborne Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) technology, as detailed by Lozić and Štular

(2021 with references). Excellent examples of implementing LiDAR data in Early Medieval archaeology is work by Lozić (2021; 2024 in this volume)

Furthermore, the significance of typo-chronological dating in archaeology must be underscored. Despite the contemporary emphasis on direct dating methodologies such as radiocarbon dating (C14) and dendrochronology, the reality remains that the majority of archaeological sites and assemblages under investigation lack such direct dating evidence (*cf.* Guštin 2002 for an attempt to establish a sequence of C14 dated sites). Nevertheless, recent advancements in Early Medieval archaeology within the south-eastern Alpine region have facilitated the establishment of a C14-dating-based typo-chronology, specifically for pottery (Pleterski 2010b with references) and certain types of jewellery (Pleterski 2013b with references; Rihter 2023).

As mentioned above, the Central European Early Medieval archaeology has historically focused on the analysis of cemeteries, settlements, and hoards with a predominant emphasis on the former.

The study of Early Medieval cemeteries in Eastern Alps, as documented by a range of scholars including Franck (1854), Reinecke (1899), Šmid (1908), with comprehensive overviews provided by Friesinger (1971–1974), Friesinger et al. (1975–1977), Korošec (1979), Szameit (2000), Eichert (2010), and Obenaus (2010), reveals a classification into three size categories: small, medium, and large.

The majority of cemeteries (323), are small, typically comprising up to several dozen burials, as highlighted in studies such as those by Nowotny (2005) and Karpf, Meyer (2010). In contrast, only three medium-sized cemeteries, each with over 300 burials, have been identified: Krungl in Austria (Breibert 2022), Ptujski grad (Korošec 1999), and Pristava at Bled in Slovenia (Korošec 1999; Kastelic, Škerlj 1950; Kastelic 1960; Knific 1983; Leskovar et al. 2024). The largest, by a significant margin, is the Župna cerkev cemetery in Kranj, with over 1000 Early Medieval burials (Štular et al. 2013; Pleterski et al. 2016; Pleterski et al. 2017; Rihter 2023). This is a notable deviation from the neighbouring Pannonia where large cemeteries are more commonplace during this era (e.g. Garam 1995; Kiss et al. 1996; Kiss 2001; Bardos, Garam 2009).

Traditionally, cemetery research has predominantly focused on the analysis of grave goods, leading to typo-chronological classifications of jewellery (e.g. Korošec 1979; Giesler 1980; Eichert 2010; Obenaus 2010; Pleterski 2013b) or very precise chronology of a cemetery (Štular 2022) with ever more advanced analytical tools (Achino et al. 2019). On occasion, this research has also yielded insights into social structures (Pleterski 2002; Eichert 2011; 2012), expansive Europe-wide exchange networks (e.g. Knific, Mlinar 2014), facets of religious

beliefs (Pleterski 2014; Štular 2022), and the ecclesiastical network (Sagadin 2008).

Although hoards from this period are less prevalent, their documentation is relatively comprehensive, as illustrated by works such as Pleterski (1987), Giesler and Kohoutek (2014), and Bitenc, Knific (2015), with Štular (2020) providing a brief overview. The study of these hoards has facilitated typo-chronological classifications of weapons (for instance, Karo, Knific 2015), elucidated the composition of weapon and tool assemblages (Pleterski 1987; Curta 2011; Müllerová 2014), and offered insights into the patterns of monetary circulation during the period (Curta, Gândilă 2012).

Settlements are increasingly recognized as pivotal for advancing future research in Early Medieval archaeology. However, until quite recently, knowledge was limited and comprehensive publications of such sites were rare (e.g. Gutjahr 2006; Pleterski 2008). The primary obstacle to the systematic discovery of Early Medieval settlements in the Eastern Alpine region has been their low archaeological visibility, largely due to the sparse archaeological record: there are all but no architectural remains, pottery is scarce, especially when compared to sites from other periods such as the Roman or late medieval eras, and metal finds are exceedingly rare.

The presence of above-ground building floors and surface-floor structures (i.e., those not featuring sunken floors) constitutes a primary distinguishing characteristic of settlement archaeology within the Eastern Alpine region, in contrast to its counterparts, such as contemporaneous settlements in Slovakia. In the latter, sunken-floor buildings, known in German as *Grubenhäuser*, are prevalent, leaving a more pronounced archaeological footprint. While similar structures resembling sunken-floor buildings have been identified at the eastern peripheries of this region (e.g. Pavlovič 2017), they are not characteristic (in the sense of Šalkovský 2001) and defy straightforward classification (following the criteria of Donat 1980; Milo 2014).

An additional challenge in uncovering settlements in the region is their continuous occupation, a phenomenon observed in both urban centres — such as Kranj (Sagadin 2008), Ljubljana (Leghissa 2018), Ptuj (Korošec 1999), and Graz (Gutjahr 2007) — and rural locales, including Bled (Pleterski 2013a) and Virgen (Tischer 2018). Modern infrastructure development in these locations significantly impedes archaeological exploration, rendering the detection of above-ground building remnants nearly impossible. Furthermore, the construction of high medieval castles atop Early Medieval settlements has obliterated much of the evidence of the latter, with only a few fortunate exceptions (e.g. Ptujski grad, Schwanberg, Frauenburg/Unzmarkt, and recently Wildoner Schlossberg, see Koch in this volume). Detached Early Medieval settlements, removed from

current habitation zones, have frequently been compromised by agricultural ploughing (e.g. Pavlovič 2013).

Owing to these factors, the identification of settlements in substantial numbers has long remained elusive, even with the application of advanced prospection methodologies such as systematic archaeological surveys, geophysical techniques, or aerial photography.

Over the last three decades, however, there has been a notable increase in the number of recognized settlement sites within the Eastern Alpine region, with 47 documented in Slovenia and 53 in Austria. This surge in discoveries has been facilitated foremost by advancements in heritage management practices insisting on extensive excavations undertaken as precursors to subsequent construction projects. Among these findings, some have yielded exceptional insights. For instance, comprehensive radiocarbon dating conducted on a substantial settlement in Nova tabla (Slovenia) unveiled the remarkable presence of the earliest wave of new settlers, identified with Slavic origins, during the initial third of the sixth century (Pavlovič 2017). This singular discovery prompted a reevaluation of the dynamics occurring in the sixth and seventh centuries. Furthermore, several recent studies analysing selected micro-regions were able to draw primarily from such settlement data (Bekić 2018; Guštin 2018; Kerman 2018; Mason 2018; Udovč 2018; Gutjahr 2020; Pavlovič 2023).

Concluding this state-of-the-art overview, it is evident that the field of Early Medieval archaeology in the Eastern Alpine region is poised at a pivotal juncture. With a comprehensive database, radiocarbon-dating-based typo-chronology, sophisticated tools for data management and analysis, and a refined methodology at our disposal, the groundwork has been laid for an inaugural comprehensive synthetic study that will elucidate the development and dynamics of Early Medieval settlement in this area.

Our book was an attempt of such study. It encompasses a comprehensive examination of Early Medieval settlement dynamics, agricultural practices, and socio-cultural transformations across the Eastern Alps, as delineated through seven meticulously researched chapters. Each chapter, contributed by experts in the field, employs innovative methodologies such as LiDAR data analysis, GIS tools, and archaeological expertise in material culture to elucidate the complex interplay between human settlements and their environmental contexts.

The archaeological data were examined either in microregional or regional contexts (Fig. 1). The scope of the region to be analysed was determined by the dataset contained in ZBIVA. As mentioned, ZBIVA's inception in 1987 was deeply rooted in the scientific context of the time. Its spatial and temporal content was conceived for the study of the so-called *Carantian-Köttlach* archaeological culture. This means that its chronological focus

was on the period from the settlement of the Slavs (as perceived in the 1980s) in the sixth century to the end of the habitual deposition of grave goods in the eleventh century. It mainly contained data from the settlement area of the Alpine Slavs (as perceived in the 1980s), which includes present-day Slovenia, Austria, north-west Croatia, and a small part in north-east Italy (Štular, Belak 2022; see Pleterski in this volume).

In addition, three microregions were selected that best represent the different landscape types and historical conditions in the Eastern Alps (Fig. 1). The Bled microregion (Slovenia), located at the foot of the Julian Alps, was chosen because it covers the entire territory of *župa*, which was the smallest administrative entity of the Early Medieval Slavs. In addition, Bled possibly has the most complete archaeological record in the region. The Leibnitzer Feld microregion (Austria) is located in the valley of the Mur/Mura river. It includes the site Schlossberg of Wildon, which is the most convincing Early Medieval hillfort of the entire region. The Drava plain (Slovenia) is the presumed territory of an Early Medieval principality with the central hillfort settlement and its medium-sized cemetery, hoards and several lowland settlements.

Thematically, the book is divided into three parts. While the length of individual chapters varies, the three parts are as balanced as possible given the subject matter.

The first part consists of a relevant methodological introduction followed by three microregional studies and a chapter that looks for common features of these studies and builds on the results.

The second part consists of an extensive contribution by a single author who analyses the Eastern Alps as an archaeological region, again with the methodological introduction.

The third part presents an extremely detailed analysis of Austrian Styria in Late Antiquity and Early Medieval period.

PART 1: MICRO-REGIONAL ANALYSES

This part begins with a brief methodological introduction titled *Methodology: Archaeological LiDAR and GIS Analysis of the Early Medieval Settlements* authored by Edisa Lozić in which methods used in more than one chapter are described to avoid repetition.

In the second chapter discussing a microregion, titled *Location Preference Analysis of Early Medieval Sites on Leibnitzer Feld (Austria)*, authors Edisa Lozić and Iris Koch delve into a critical role of spatial data in contextualizing archaeological findings within specific environmental settings. They highlight how the examination of soils, vegetation, geology, and physiographic characteristics of landscapes can offer fresh interpretive frameworks for understanding archaeological sites and artifacts. Through the generation of maps and interpre-



Fig. 1: Locations of the regional (red line) and micro-regional analyses (black squares) presented in this book.

tive visuals, the study provides a bird's-eye perspective that enhances the recognition of patterns across the distribution of sites within the study area.

Utilizing LiDAR data, Lozić and Koch were able to analyze the microenvironmental characteristics surrounding Early Medieval sites, facilitating the identification of settlement patterns. The use of tools from the Geographic Information System allowed the placement

of archaeological sites within their spatial context, the delineation of economic zones, and the pinpointing of associated environmental variables. The outcomes of this research offer insights into the societies of the time, their interaction with the physical environment, and the underlying factors that influence their choice of settlement locations. The successful validation of these results underscores the adaptability of this methodologi-

cal approach, suggesting its applicability to the analysis of different regions and historical epochs.

In the chapter titled *Agricultural Dynamics of Bled Microregion (Slovenia)*, Edisa Lozić explores the transformative role of topographic airborne LiDAR data in the field of archaeological prospection. This chapter is an abridged version of the article published in 2021, but it is reprinted here because of its integral importance to the book as a whole. Lozić argues that while LiDAR data is conventionally employed to detect archaeological features within landscapes, its potential in landscape reconstruction and situating archaeological sites within their environmental context remains largely unexplored. By adopting an innovative methodology, Lozić utilizes LiDAR data to uncover, document, and interpret patterns of agricultural land use, specifically by identifying significant environmental variations within a microregion. This is achieved through the integration of LiDAR-derived Digital Elevation Model (DEM) derivatives with archaeological, geological, and soil data. The chapter introduces two methodological advancements: a modified wetness index that enhances soil quality prediction by combining LiDAR-derived precision with the accuracy of soil's effective field capacity, and a revised landform classification that merges topographic position index with visual geomorphological analysis to predict plant species distribution effectively.

Lozić's investigation is exemplified through a case study of Early Medieval settlements in the Bled micro-region of Slovenia, focussing on agricultural land use. The findings suggest that Early Medieval communities preferred areas with light and high water retention soils, conducive to barley cultivation, a key staple crop in the subalpine climate of the period. The chapter also notes a significant shift in the eleventh century towards the colonization of soils with lower water retention capacities, possibly indicating a move towards more advanced agricultural organization and the adoption of wheat as a primary cereal.

In the chapter titled *The Dynamics of the Early Medieval Settlement Development in the Drava Plain in Connection with the Pedological Analysis of Arable Land*, Andrej Magdič examines the evolution of Early Medieval settlements in the Drava Plain, emphasizing the relationship between the spatial and temporal development of these settlements and the pedological characteristics of their potential arable lands, as determined through archaeological dating. Magdič traced the origins of Early Medieval settlement in the Drava Plain to the late sixth or early seventh century, noting that the initial settlers were not constrained by the choice between previously cleared and subsequently re-forested lands, since the agricultural fields from the Roman era had been abandoned and overtaken by forests for more than two centuries.

The study reveals that the dynamics of settlement during this period were closely tied to environmental

factors, with the pedological makeup of the soil in relation to the landscape being of particular significance. A key finding of Magdič's research is that the Early Medieval inhabitants selected settlement locations that were optimally suited to their agricultural technologies and practices. Initially, settlements were established in dry areas on the lower slopes of the hills, where loose sandy soils could be easily tilled with basic tools such as hoes or simple ploughs, with rainwater from the hills providing the necessary moisture for crops. By the end of the seventh century, settlements expanded into more humid areas with clayey soils, necessitating the adoption of more sophisticated agricultural techniques and the use of a plough that not only cut and crushed the soil, but also turned it, enabling the effective cultivation of the expansive river plains of the Pannonian Basin. We may add that this is likely to be the Alpine plough mentioned in the following chapter.

In the chapter concluding the microregional studies, titled *Becoming Slav (Archaeological Evidence): Agricultural Anti-Revolution and Acculturation in the Eastern Alps*, authors Benjamin Štular and Edisa Lozić delve into the complex phenomenon of Slavicisation in the Eastern Alps from the sixth to the eighth century by building on the results of the previous three micro-regional studies. The study characterizes the Slavs as a secondary, relational in-group, distinguished by their language, housing culture, dress, sustenance, and a web of social relations, including genetic lineage, specifically focusing on Alpine Slavs who spoke Slavic and shared a common ancestry, migrating to the Eastern Alps during the sixth and seventh centuries.

Štular and Lozić argue that while migration contributed to the Slavicisation of the Eastern Alps, the more critical factor was the ensuing acculturation process. The chapter aims to shed light on the sustained success of Slavicisation by exploring the dynamics of acculturation through a proposed four-stage model. Initially, Slavic colonisation of marginally used Late Antique fields facilitated peaceful coexistence. The superiority of the Slavic agricultural system then led the Late Antique inhabitants to adopt this new approach, albeit at the cost of their social status. This adoption, alongside shared resources, knowledge, and living spaces, precipitated an intensive acculturation phase termed inverse integration, where the host community assimilated the dominant immigrant culture's norms while maintaining their cultural identity, leading to biculturalism or the coexistence of two initially distinct cultures.

PART 2: REGIONAL ANALYSIS

In the chapter titled *Images behind the Archaeological Curtain: Vlachs, Slavs, župas, principalities, Carantania*, Andrej Pleterski embarks on an explora-

tion to decipher the historical and cultural dynamics of the Eastern Alps from the fifth to the eleventh century through archaeological site analysis. Analysing a selection of 1105 relevant sites from the Zbiva database, Pleterski offers an exhaustive survey of the Early Medieval Eastern Alps. The chapter commences with a succinct presentation of the methodology employed, followed by an overview of the evolutionary trajectory of the archaeological landscape, encapsulated in phases the author describes as the decline of the Roman world, the arrival of the Slavs, and their westward expansion.

Pleterski then delves into selected thematic areas, including the examination of burial sites within a geomorphological framework, the interplay of cemeteries and geomorphology, and the process of Christianization, with a particular focus on the relationship between burial sites and churches, especially in the Klagenfurter Becken/Celovška kotlina area which is relevant for the historical extent of Carantania. The author also scrutinizes the local communities or *župas* of the Early Middle Ages, specifically Bled and *Dežela*, introducing a model to comprehend the evolving interactions between the Slavs and the Vlachs and the sacralization of spaces, exemplified by the Gorjanci Mountains and Krško-Brežice polje.

A pivotal section of the chapter addresses the strategic placement of power centres within the landscape, shedding light on the intricate socio-political and cultural fabric of the period. Through this comprehensive analysis, Pleterski aims to reconstruct a vivid tableau of the Early Medieval socio-political landscape in the Eastern Alps, highlighting the significant roles of Vlachs, Slavs, *župas*, duches, and the principality of Carantania.

PART 3: CASE STUDIES

The in depth analysis of the Upper and Central or Austrian Styria begins with the chapter titled *From Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: The 'Dark Centuries' in Styria (400–650 AD) and the 'New Beginning' of Settlement in the 7th Century*. The authors Christoph Gutjahr, Stephan Karl, and Christian Greiner examine the transformative period from Late Antiquity (circa 380 AD) to the initial phase of Early Medieval settlement in what is now the province of Austrian Styria. The scarcity of archaeological finds from this era, particularly between 450 and 650 AD, underscores the transitional nature of the period. The chapter presents an analysis based on select categories of artifacts, such as Late Antique lead-glazed and burnished pottery, coins, and jewellery and dress accessories, to illustrate the near-disappearance of Roman rural structures after the fourth century.

Furthermore, the chapter notes the minimal impact of movements by the Lombards, Ostrogoths, early Avars, and other ancient groups on the Styrian landscape dur-

ing this time. The focus then shifts to the onset of Slavic settlements in Styria in seventh and first half of the eighth century, with archaeological evidence becoming more discernible around 700 AD. These early Slavic settlements, characterised by pit finds from locations such as Komberg, St. Ruprecht an der Raab, and Enzelsdorf, are highlighted for their limited material culture and geographical confinement to western and central parts of Austrian Styria. The findings from Komberg and St. Ruprecht suggest a settlement timeline in the mid to late seventh century, while ongoing excavations in Enzelsdorf point to a continuous settlement from the seventh to the early eleventh century, offering new insights into the region's transition from Late Antiquity to the Early Medieval period.

The final chapter of the book is titled *Early Medieval Settlement in Styria: Considerations on Settlement Patterns and Land Use*. The author Iris Koch delves into the settlement dynamics of the Early Medieval period within the Austrian province of Styria. Using archaeological data, the analysis aims to discern patterns and concentrations of settlements, as well as to evaluate the strategic placement of these settlements within the landscape. Koch emphasises the importance of considering a broad spectrum of parameters for a comprehensive site assessment, including terrain features, altitude, proximity to water bodies, historical settlement patterns, available resources, and inter-settlement relations.

The chapter successfully identifies regions with increased site density, indicative of settlement clusters and potential local or regional hubs. A notable pattern observed is the strategic selection of elevated terrains, such as hilltops and crags, for settlement sites, a practice that dates back to at least the eighth century. Furthermore, the chapter reveals a tendency for Early Medieval communities to reoccupy sites that were significant during prehistoric and Roman times, attributed to the enduring appeal of these locations and possibly deliberate choices for reoccupation.

Koch enhances the archaeological perspective with findings from related fields such as archaeozoology, archaeobotany, and anthropology, revealing a multifaceted approach to land use that includes agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting, and the exploitation of other natural resources. This comprehensive examination sheds light on the complex interplay between Early Medieval settlers in Styria and their environment, illustrating how they adapted to and transformed their landscape to suit their needs.

We are confident that the above announced content of the book promises to be an indispensable resource for scholars and enthusiasts alike, offering fresh perspectives on the Early Medieval period through a blend of archaeological evidence and environmental analysis.

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