

# *Identity of Females Buried at Colonia Iulia Emona*

## *Rekonstruiranje identitet žensk z emonskih nekropol*

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**Abstract:** The contribution discusses two groups of female burials that could be distinguished from the body of the graves of *Colonia Iulia Emona*, Slovenia. The town's cemeteries yielded a rich collection of material remains, mainly published in the form of a catalogue and partially in studies on typology and chronology. They provide an excellent source for further interpretations in the field of Roman funerary archaeology. One of these is a re-evaluation and an attempt at a reinterpretation of the existing data regarding the two groups of burials. The contribution is a preliminary report based on my ongoing PhD part of my PhD project.

**Keywords:** funerary archaeology, Roman period, identity, liminality

### *Introduction*

The first aim of my research was to identify and then to analyse the graves of women from *Colonia Iulia Emona*. Of the over 3,000 graves at Emona, approximately 80% are cremations. Hence, the sex of the deceased is less obvious and where the excavation reports do not state it (Petru 1972, 11), I resorted to establishing the gender on the basis of the grave goods. The criteria for gender determination will be discussed below. Of the graves identified as female, I will particularly discuss two groups, of 'adolescent women' and of 'married women' (Stemberger 2013, 42–65). Together, they represent a small part of the burials at Emona. The group of 'married women' is the larger of the two, with 159 graves, while the group of women who were possibly in their late teens or early twenties is represented by 8 graves.

### *Theoretical background*

I consider the changes in burial related to age and sex to be reflections of the changes in status that occurred during the life of an individual due to different roles that he or she was required to assume. I do not exclude other interpretations, e.g. the influence of social standing, ethnicity and religious affiliation (Puttock 2002), but I base my discussion on the study of life course tradition and rites of passages originating in Van Gennep's (1960) tradition with modern applications in Roman funerary archaeology (e.g. Scheid 2008). Life course tradition discusses how identity changed for the studied individuals in time and how their roles in society changed. In my study, I strongly relate to the concept of liminality underlined by Martin Kilcher (2000), Oliver (2000) and others, in which the changing and undefined identity of a person

**Izveček:** V prispevku bom obravnavala dve skupini ženskih grobov iz emonskih nekropol. Velika večina gradiva je bila do sedaj obravnavana le kataloško in deloma v okviru študij tipologije in kronologije, ponuja pa še bogastvo možnosti za diskusije in interpretacije v okviru rimske pogrebne arheologije. Na kratko bom predstavila svoj poskus interpretacije tovrstnih grobov. Prispevek je del nastajajoče doktorske disertacije.

**Ključne besede:** pogrebna arheologija, rimsko obdobje, identiteta, liminalnost

undergoing the transition from one stage of life to another is discussed and observed in the archaeological record. I argue that artefacts were placed in graves before the final separation of the dead from this world and before their initiation into the group of ancestors, following the view expressed by Scheid in his study on Roman burials (2011, 269–271). Accordingly, the items placed in the grave were associated with the deceased when he or she was still perceived as an individual rather than belonging to the ancestors, *Manes*, as a collectivity (Hertz 2005; Parking 2012, 108).

I agree with Parker Pearson who argues that grave goods are not always to be understood in straightforward terms as they appear in graves, but should be discussed in a broader context (2003, 9), i.e. what such objects represented in everyday life and what their significance might have been in a funerary setting. Moreover, I agree that objects can have more than one meaning and those meanings are not necessary mutually exclusive.

My interpretations are largely based on Roman law and written sources. It is important to note that although Emona is sometimes interpreted as a provincial town, it was in fact part of Regio X both geopolitically and culturally (Šašel Kos 2002). It also had the presence of the military, although probably only for short periods, which is documented, for example, at the Tribuna site (Šašel Kos 2013, 88) and also represented a vehicle for the spread of Roman culture. Tombstones from the first half of the 1st century reveal the presence of veterans from *legiones XV Apollinaris* and *VIII Augusta* (Šašel Kos 1997, 34), although Marjeta Šašel Kos argues that Emona was probably never a veteran colony (Šašel Kos 2013, 89). The names on the tombstones show that Emona's inhabitants

were mostly immigrants from modern-day Italy. The majority came from the Po valley, some also from southern Italy and Gallia Narbonensis (Šašel 1968, 565). Despite the presence of a population of Celtic origin, I believe that a significant portion of the town's inhabitants followed the Roman tradition, had access to Roman literature and observed the Roman law. The town being built in the vicinity of an Iron Age site, we can expect remnants of local, prehistoric practices, possibly expressed as a certain continuity in the early graves with weapons (Gaspari *et al.* 2014b, 162; Gaspari *et al.* 2014a). Graves also revealed some elements of Norico-Pannonian costumes. The distinction between the goods from the cemeteries of Emona and those from other towns in Slovenia, such as *Neviodunum*, *Celeia* or *Poetovio*, is nevertheless clear (Šašel 1968, 565)<sup>1</sup> allowing for interpretation of the burials from Emona in the context of Roman law and literature.

The cemeteries of Emona were located outside the city walls, following the Roman law and customs. Burials were probably most numerous in the northern and eastern cemeteries, as the land to the south of the town was mostly unsuitable for burials due to waterlogging (Plesničar Gec 1999, 43). In the east, burial space was limited by the hill.

The available dataset includes more than 3,000 graves and 15,000 associated artefacts (Vičič 2003, 39). This large number of grave goods offers a solid base for statistical analyses and for establishing chronology. The dataset does, however, come with certain problems. There is also a great lack of tombstones or other grave markers. They were for the most part reused as construction material from the medieval period onwards; eventually, the modern city covered the cemeteries entirely. Few grave plots can be reconstructed with any certainty,<sup>2</sup> while the outlines of most graves are easily discernible.

1 The difference in material culture between Emona and other sites is also discussed in pottery studies (Plesničar Gec 1977, 66) and studies of glass (Lazar 2003); in this study, however, Emona is not included). In comparison with Ptuj, the graves of Emona do not include as many elements of the Norico-Pannonian costume (although the connecting element might be the fabrics, but very little of them survives) as e.g. the western cemetery of ancient Ptuj (Istenič 1999).

2 All positively identified grave plots were found in recent excavations, although several old excavation reports also mention discernible grave plots.

The main problem of the dataset is its lack of uniformity, as the graves were excavated from the 18th century onward. Catalogues covering the excavations until the 70ies were published without osteological reports and with only partial stratigraphies (Petru 1972; Plesničar Gec 1972). The lack of osteological analyses is especially difficult to overcome in establishing the identities of the deceased from the perspective of life course studies. I reconstructed the identities primarily on the basis of artefacts and bone size as reported by excavators and archaeologists in the catalogues, combining this with the information on the sex and age of the deceased where available. The determination of sex and age using anthropological methods has been done for the sites at Potniški center and Kozolec. For the latter, only a summary of statistical data has been published, but not data for individual graves (Tomazo Ravnik, 2012). For Potniški center, the basic anthropological report for the 91 skeletons presents seven age-related (Table 1) and four sex-related categories.<sup>3</sup> For comparison, I took into consideration sites where age and sex were scientifically determined.

For the identification of sex, I used and further developed the methods of Sonja Petru (1972, 16). Her observations may be old (Petru 1972, 16), but the approach itself and the results it yields are useful for initial analyses. They do, however, need to be supported with parallels from more recent studies of material culture, paying special attention to the role of individual grave goods (e.g. Martin Kilcher 2000; Migotti 2007; Oliver 2000; Puttock 2002; Swift 2009). I strove to find parallels with other cemeteries so as to confirm gendered and age-related objects and thus avoid circular arguments. In this paper, I will discuss not only how to use these studies in the interpretation of the material culture from the cemeteries of *Colonia Iulia Emona*, but also to assess their strengths and weaknesses.

As stated above, I proceeded to identify the sex of the deceased on the basis of the classification adopted by Sonja Petru (1972, 16) with certain modifications. She determined women's graves on the basis of the presence of items such as necklaces, pendants and hairpins, while graves containing one brooch, a knife, an axe or other 'traditionally male artefacts', using the author's own words (Petru 1972, 16), were considered male. I agree

3 Sex-related categories are male, female, child and unknown (Mulh 2008, 267).

that jewellery is a female attribute, including hairpins and certain toiletry items like mirrors. The latter two were also typical female attributes in the necropolises of Ptuj (Istenič 1999; *ibid.* 2000), where the sex of the deceased was established on the basis of osteological observations. I reinterpreted some of the objects previously identified as hairpins (Petru 1972; Plesničar Gec 1972) as distaffs and spindles based on analogies with the Boccone D'Aste cemetery, Rome (Auriscchio *et al.* 2002).

Combs were never discussed as a gendered item since there are not many of them in the graves of Emona. They can, however, quite positively be interpreted as female items taking into consideration both the associated grave goods and the parallels from Winchester (Ottaway *et al.* 2012, 352, T. 59), and even more so from the Lankhills cemetery (Booth *et al.* 2010, 273). Excavation data from the latter showed that spindle whorls (Booth *et al.* 2010, 274–245 and T. 4.18) were also consistently deposited in female graves. While most jewellery is traditionally associated with women, there are exceptions: rings and certain types of brooches (i.e. crossbow brooches, as well as certain types of belt sets)<sup>4</sup> can also be found in male graves. A general typology of the belt sets from Slovenia was published by Sagadin in 1979, but it is mainly focused on chronological elements without relation to gender. Various elements of military equipment and tools are a reliable indicator for male burials. The same goes for razors and large knives. In connection with the latter, I am of the opinion that not all graves with knives are to be interpreted as male, as some knives are too small to be anything but toilet knives. There are, however, cemeteries where knives were indeed predominantly male artefacts, e.g. at Lankhills (Booth *et al.* 2010, 276–277). Based on an isotope analysis of bone samples, Cool interprets adding knives into the graves at Lankhills as an ethnic tradition that originated in central Europe (Cool 2010). Emona, although part of Italy, certainly suits the criteria of being located in central Europe in Roman times. In short, graves with knives should be interpreted based on their size and function, as well as on the basis of associated goods, which often seem to have been overlooked or ignored in the case of the cemeteries of Emona (Petru, 1972).

4 Military belt sets are traditionally regarded as male, while Norican-Pannonian belt sets are typically female items. The latter occur at the cemeteries of Emona less frequently than e.g. at Ptuj (*Colonia Ulpia Traiana Poetovio*) and other cemeteries east of Emona (Istenič 1999; 2000).

Having identified burials of women among the body of graves, I proceeded to discern individual groups. I found that the burials include two distinct groups. The first one is rather small and consists of burials with high-quality gold jewellery and frequently dresses of precious materials, but not a lot of other grave goods. The second, so-called 'married women' group lacks expensive jewellery, but has other toiletry items such as hairpins and mirrors.

### *Burials of 'unmarried women'*

To determine the first group, namely of 'unmarried women', I used the Martin Kilcher (2000) identification method that is based on the presence of gold jewellery, apotropaic objects or *crepundia* and miniature objects.

The presence of gold jewellery in graves, especially in combination with semiprecious or precious stones and pearls, can indicate that the deceased women had no children, because the jewellery would otherwise most likely have become part of their heirloom. If a girl died young, expensive adornment could calm her spirit (Martin Kilcher 2000, 65). There are several graves with gold jewellery known at the cemeteries of Emona. But not all of this jewellery is found in combinations with objects that would suggest extraordinary practices such as in the graves discussed here.

Apotropaic objects served to protect the deceased. Sometimes, a particular array of objects called *crepundia* can be found in graves of adolescent women. It was supposed to serve as protection for the living from the deceased. The spirits of people who died a premature or violent death were dangerous to the living (Hope 2007, 9–46). Such objects were also found in the graves of unmarried women and children (Martin Kilcher 2000, 67). *Crepundia*, as defined by Martin Kilcher, are ritual objects which satisfy one or more of the following criteria (2000, 66): they make noise, are made from precious materials, or have an unusual, yet meaningful shape.

Miniature objects made from lead are mostly copies of furniture, vessels and other utility items. They were usually interpreted as toys, but are more likely to have served as ritual objects which protected the living from the dead. In Emona, only three miniature glass vessels were found, curiously enough in otherwise ordinary graves with no

other goods that would stand out, and in isolation.<sup>5</sup> This is in sharp contrast with the exceptionally rich graves in which such miniature objects appear in Italy and the provinces (Martin Kilcher 2000, 66).

At Emona, eight graves stand out from the rest for their prominent jewellery (Table 1).<sup>6</sup> I argue that these are burials of high-status women in the time around their marriage. Although gold and silver jewellery was found in several other graves as well, e.g. Northern Cemetery 220 and 223 (Plesničar Gec 1972, 48–49), Titova cesta 690 (Petru 1972, 66) and others,<sup>7</sup> it was always in smaller amounts. Of the clothes of these eight deceased women, only a scrap of a scarlet fabric survived in one of the graves, though gold appliquéés do indicate that the women wore precious dresses at the time of burial. Prestigious objects in these graves mostly comprise various types of jewellery, while high-quality vessels and furniture were not present (with the exception of one bronze *patera*). Of spinning equipment, only one amber spindle whorl was recovered.<sup>8</sup>

Aside from a hair comb and a mirror found together in one of these graves,<sup>9</sup> there is a complete absence also of cosmetic sets, jewellery boxes and other objects that one might expect in female graves, usually at least a mirror and one or more hairpins. Jewellery, however, was found in abundance.

In the graves of ‘ordinary’ women, no more than a few small pieces made of precious metals<sup>10</sup> and no objects that could be classified as *crepundia* were found. Although the eight exceptional graves might seem insignificant in number compared to the more than 3,000 burials in total, their concentration is actually one of the highest in the Roman Empire. Furthermore, some of them even predate

the 2nd century, which is the established date after which such burials start occurring (Martin Kilcher, 2000). There are several theories as to the occurrence of this kind of graves, but it is generally agreed that women buried in such a way died in their late adolescence (Martin Kilcher 2000). The grave with dolls and potentially the grave with *lunula* speak in favour of this theory, especially if the dolls were perceived not only as ritual objects, but also as toys. To the contrary, one of the burials from Ljubljana contradicts this theory as the deceased was supposedly roughly 40 years old (Petru 1972, 127).

It is most commonly assumed that in such graves, the buried individual had died prematurely - more specifically, just before the wedding.<sup>11</sup> This hypothesis, common to all interpretations, rests on the quantity of costly grave goods. I found the explanations from the perspective of life course studies, such as Oliver’s (2000) and Martin Kilcher’s (2000), most feasible: they argue that if the women had been married and would have had children, these objects would have become part of the heirloom. Indeed, ancient authors wrote about deceased adolescents as having almost reached their potential, and having died just before it would have been realised. Such children were, economically speaking, a lost investment to the parents. Premature death also affected potential marriages and, in turn, social and political alliances and possible economic contributions (Hope 2007, 61). These prematurely deceased women fall in the category of *mors immatura*.<sup>12</sup> It is generally held that girls became adults after they were married (Harlow, Laurence 2002; Vidal Naquet 1988, 196).<sup>13</sup> After that, the period of being neither a child nor an adult was presumably finished and the status of the woman undisputed. We can speculate, however, as to whether the transformation could possibly have lasted until the first childbirth. Emperor Honorius’s wife Maria was obviously married, yet childless, and buried with abundant jewellery and dolls (Martin Kilcher 2000, 66). The approximately 40-year-old woman from grave 1489 also seems to support the latter speculation (Petru 1972, 127).

5 In graves 490, 789 and 791 from Titova cesta (Petru 1972, 51, 71).

6 Grave 1501 was not included in this research as three individuals were buried in the same sarcophagus and it is impossible to say to whom the artefacts belonged (Petru 1972, 126). Grave 1481 was left out of the discussion as the report is incomplete (Petru 1972, 124).

7 The grave numbers and site names follow those used in the catalogues by Plesničar Gec (1972) and Petru (1972), except where translations of site names into English were appropriate.

8 In grave Potniški center 31 (Mulh 2008, 60). It is not clear whether spindles from Emona had actually been used or were made especially for the burial. A similar object from Boccone D’Aste was found to have been used prior to burial (Aurischio et al. 2002). Whorls recovered at Aquileia were sometimes intentionally broken prior to deposition (Calvi 2005, 71–73).

9 Both found in grave 75 from Lenarčičev travnik (Petru 1972, 99).

10 The richest grave included 4 earrings.

11 This also includes the women in the liminal period just after wedding but before childbirth.

12 This category was reserved for those who died violently, for children and mothers who died during or soon after childbirth and for children who did not live to be married (Martin Kilcher 2000, 63).

13 More accurately, after the ritual of giving fire and water to the bride, when the marriage became legally valid (Hersch 2010, 184).

| Grave no.                         | Burial manner                    | High value grave goods   | Date                              |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Potniški center 31                | Stone chest, cremation in urn    | Bone hairpins covered with gold foil, amber spindle whorl, gold ring, high-quality urn (Mulh 2008, 60)   | Unknown                           |
| Potniški center 412               | Simple grave pit, inhumation     | Three bronze and one glass bracelet, five gold beads, two gold earrings, three hairpins of bronze, silver and ivory respectively (Mulh 2008, 229)  | Unknown                           |
| Titova cesta 894                  | Inhumation                       | Silver bead, silver <i>lumula</i> , 2 bronze earrings with seashells, silver bracelet, 2 gold earrings, necklace of glass beads, earth mixed with gold dust (Petru 1972, 82), necklace of silver coins ( <i>denarii</i> ), one for Faustina (Schmid 1907, 3) | 2nd c. AD                         |
| Tržaška cesta 6 (1341)            | Stone slabs, inhumation          | Silver cist, gold necklace, four gold-plated hairpins, gold ring, gold hairnets (Petru 1972, 120)  | 1st c. AD                         |
| Lenarčičev travnik 75 (1080)      | Internal construction, cremation | Comb, mirror, gold thread, two silver hairpins, gold flakes, small gold plates in the grave with approx. 30 different objects (Petru 1972, 99–100)   | End of 1st or beginning of 2nd c. |
| Tavčarjeva ulica - sodnija (1489) | Lead coffin, inhumation          | Gold hairnet covering four hairpins, 3,000 rectangular gold leaves, gold necklace with beads, two gold rings (one with an emerald), seashell, panther figurine, amber fitting, bronze <i>patera</i> (Petru 1972, 127)  | End of 3rd or beginning of 4th c. |
| Karlovška cesta 2 (1338)          | Stone coffin, inhumation (child) | Two dolls, amber bracelet and gold chain consisting of thin links (Petru 1972, 123)  | End of 3rd or beginning of 4th c. |
| Karlovška cesta 1                 | Stone coffin, inhumation         | Necklace of glass medallions, gold coins of Gallienus, necklace of amber beads, gold earrings (Petru 1972, 123)  | End of 3rd or beginning of 4th c. |

Table 1. List of graves with prominent jewellery.

Tabela 1. Seznam grobov z opazno izstopajočo količino zlatega nakita.

If such practices are to be understood as a way of dealing with an unfinished rite of passage, I propose the following: legal rules governing the end of the transition during the wedding might not have coincided with the liminal period within the conventional concept of the whole ritual of passage as proposed by Hersch (2010, 190), whose interpretative idea is based on studies of law (Crook 1967) and costumes (Swift 2003b). I propose that the dress worn during the wedding served as a symbolic protection<sup>14</sup> for the brief time when a woman did not have a male guardian while passing from her father's to the groom's house.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the marital rite of passage

might have been considered to need confirmation in the form of the birth of a child, after which the mother would be expected by law to pass her jewellery onto her offspring. A married yet childless woman would thus have been buried with her jewellery due to tradition.

Another important and surprisingly often overlooked fact is that putting extraordinary amounts of gold and silver jewellery in a grave was a considerable expense for the family of the deceased. Only the wealthiest inhabitants of Emona could afford such objects to be deposited. The furnishing of the graves in terms of quantity and quality is one of the factors to be observed when discussing the status of the deceased, besides the grave markers, the treatment of the body and any containers for human remains (Philpott 1991, 119). Unfortunately, most tombstones from Emona are now lost as they were reused as construction material from the medieval period onwards and the cemeteries were eventually entirely covered

<sup>14</sup> I am referring to the traditional Roman 'wedding dress' consisting of *tunica recta*, *flammeum*, *cingulum* and *vittae* (Hersch 2010).

<sup>15</sup> This tendency for strictly defining the status of the bride is mostly attributed to social factors, but it was more likely motivated by legal precautions. Precisely regulating the time and place of the change in the legal status of the bride helped avoid potential incidents (and legal disputes).

over by the modern city (Gaspari 2010). Information on the treatment of the bodies (in terms of embalming or plastering) was not noted in the publications concerning Emona's cemeteries, but reports do mention containers. The remains of the deceased from Potniški center 31 (Mulh 2008, 60) and both graves from Karlovška cesta, for example, were placed in stone coffins (Petru 1972, 123). The remains in grave Lenarčičev travnik 75 were stored in a glass urn inside a stone construction (Petru 1972, 99–100). The woman from grave 1489 was placed in a wooden coffin covered with lead plates. Despite the missing tomb markers and unknown body treatment, these burials may thus still be interpreted as having been a statement of high social status. The latter was reflected or perhaps asserted in the lavish displays of objects before and during such burials (Swift 2009, 107). Stone and lead containers are rare in Emona. They indicate wealth as they were used in association with expensive and exceptional manners of burial. The importance of the deceased is evident from the position of their graves, mainly found in relative proximity of the road, which is considered to have been an expression of a high social status (e.g. Hope 2007, 145)

### *Burials of 'married women'*

The second group of 159 burials that I set apart in this contribution is that of married women. I identified them on the basis of traditional female grave goods such as jewellery, hairpins, mirrors and wool-working objects like distaffs, spindle whorls and needles. These objects seem to have been placed in the graves so as to emphasize the women's actual or metaphorical role of weavers. Toiletry items helped construct the female identity as their appearance signalled family status and social values related to families.

The majority of these graves can be attributed to the 1st century AD. The earliest are three graves from the Tiberian period. Eleven graves date to the reign of Claudius and thirty-four to the second half of the 1st century. This time period probably stands out because the jewellery followed quite specific and quickly changing fashion trends, thus easily distinguishable as to its date. Fifteen graves date to the transition from the 1st to the 2nd century, six to the 2nd, ten to the 3rd and one to the transition period between the 2nd and the 3rd centuries. Three graves can be dated to the 4th century and a single grave to Late An-

tiquity. The decline in grave numbers of married women's graves can be explained by the overall decline of population already noted by Županek (2002). However, the rich graves of 'unmarried women' span the centuries and do not decline till the 4th century AD. This chronological overview was made on the basis of previous studies of the material and will be improved further, as point dating does not assess the grave group as a whole, but rather puts a date on objects with a known date.

Personal belongings of a woman are closely related to her social role. According to Wyke, a woman in ancient Rome was closely associated with reproduction not only in regard to bearing children, but also in the sense of multiplying everything that allows the family to prosper. By extension, the objects she wore and used could bear the same meaning (1994, 11). Sometimes those objects are depicted on tombstones without any inscriptions.<sup>16</sup> The depicted objects represent the woman as a symbol of beauty and fidelity, as well as her tasks of sewing and spinning (Kampen 1981, 96). The latter two can be understood both literally as well as metaphorically: that women were the weavers of life, family and society.<sup>17</sup> Grave goods which point to married women include mirrors and hairpins, sewing and spinning tools, as well as jewellery boxes.

A wedding ring would obviously also indicate marriage, but they are usually difficult to identify positively.<sup>18</sup> From the Emona necropolises, we have no records of rings with the *dextrarum iunctio* motif. The closest one was found in grave 16 in Ribnica.<sup>19</sup> The ring from grave Titova cesta 932 (Petru 1972, 87) with a red intaglio and the depiction of a hand bears little resemblance to the one from Ribnica.

16 A tombstone depicting a distaff and a spindle, and bearing an inscription was found in Maribor (Hoffiller and Saria 1938, 120: AIJ 264).

17 The family was considered the basic unit of society and a building block of the Roman Empire (Kehoe 2011; Osgood 2011).

18 The simple iron rings which were worn as wedding rings in the 1st century AD cannot be distinguished from the iron rings worn solely as ornaments. Wearing a gold ring would have been a general statement of status. Furthermore, a handshake signifies agreement over a contract and such rings could be worn by men as well (Hersch 2010, 41).

19 The grave, which is dated to the end of the 3rd century and belonged to a young woman (Petru 1969), can serve as a basis for identifying other engagement rings: a gold ring with an engraved depiction of a handshake was found in the grave along with other gold jewellery, similar to my 'unmarried women' group (Petru 1961, 224).

Hairpins were used for pinning the hair and were called *acicula*. The length of the hairpins and the shape of their heads varied through time and the changing hairstyle fashions (Swift 2003b, 40). The pointed end, *acus discriminialis*, was used for dividing hair in order to make uniform locks (Dular 1979). The Emona cemeteries yielded 106 hairpins. Most are bone (75) and a smaller portion of bronze (15), iron (5), ivory (3), silver (3) and horn (1). Some were probably also fashioned from organic materials, mainly wood, which has not survived.

As for mirrors, the Emona graves yielded a total of 82 such items. Two of them were presumably unearthened in male graves, identified as such on the basis of associated goods.<sup>20</sup> The majority of them were either silver (32) or bronze (31), with three of the latter silvered and one gilded. We can roughly divide them into three groups: round ornamented,<sup>21</sup> plain (Riha Type B)<sup>22</sup> and those made of a very thin sheet of metal which was most likely mounted on a perishable material and probably handleless (Istenič 1999, 64). None of the mirrors was found in children's graves.

Mirrors played an important role in changing identity through appearance. With their help, women could construct their image (Mihajlović 2011, 187). Mirrors were used in rituals related to temporary or permanent changes of identity such as initiations to adulthood, weddings and funerals (Hales 2010). They were among the items carried to the new home after weddings (Mihajlović 2011, 188). They were thus also symbols of metamorphosis and, as such, potentially magical objects (Taylor 2008, 7–10). Mirrors sometimes appear on tombstones depicted in association with distaffs, baskets, needles and hair combs, so they had to play a role in the funerary ritual, most likely in establishing the identity of the deceased (Kampen 1981, 96). They might have signified a certain stage in the life of the deceased, i.e. only certain age groups of women could have them in their graves. At the same time, they probably expressed the social status of the deceased, especially when made of precious materials. Mirrors are missing in all exceptionally rich burials at Emona's cemeteries, but are present in the group of 'married women' (with one exception in grave Titova

cesta 894). Written sources are silent on the subject of such exceptional funeral practices.

The cemeteries of Emona also revealed three jewellery boxes. Their remains can most likely be reconstructed into small wooden boxes with metal fittings, locks and handles. Women probably used them to store jewellery or money. They were unearthened in graves Northern Cemetery 405 and 700 (Plesničar Gec 1972, 81, 117) and Titova cesta 803 (Petru 1972, 72). In all cases, only a simple ring and no other typical female objects were found in the grave. Similar boxes were found in the cemeteries at Križišče (Novšak 2010, 65–66), Štalenska gora (Diemel 1987) and Ptuj (Istenič 1999, 64). They sometimes appear on tombstones across the Empire. No such find is known from Emona, while some are known from the neighbouring Noricum. The women depicted there hold a jewellery box in one hand and a mirror in the other (Garbsch 1965, 116–117, T. 1–2). Burnt remains of jewellery boxes and other female-related objects are known from sites in Noricum or near it, e.g. in the cemetery at Križišče in Regio X (Novšak 2010), but they were not limited to it and sometimes retrieved from sites further away, such as from the Porta Nocera cemetery in Pompeii (Brives 2013).

Wool-working carried a strong symbolic meaning in ancient Rome and Greece, and played a significant role in everyday life (Cottica 2007, 220) since wool was the primary textile fibre. It was usually associated with the virtues of Roman women and formed part of their education (Larsson Lovén 2007, 229–230).<sup>23</sup> Wool-working also played a symbolic role in marriage rituals of the Early Roman period (Cottica 2007, 221). It was a synonym for chastity and femininity and was carried out in the atrium,<sup>24</sup> an open space where women and their work were potentially visible to passers-by. In that way, labour imposed an informal control over women (or so the Romans believed) as they were occupied with wool-working and therefore did not have time or opportunity to engage in unchaste behaviour (Larsson Lovén 2007, 231). It was perceived as an 'old tradition' and was particularly encouraged in the times of the Augustan moral restoration; part of the imperial propaganda was the notion that

20 Graves 650 and 1091 (Petru 1972, 16).

21 Riha Type C, which is typical of the 1st century (Riha 1986, 13–14).

22 Riha Type B, which is typical of the 1st and 2nd century (Riha 1986, 13).

23 *Lanam fecit*, frequently used in both funerary inscriptions and *elogia*, is most likely a formula for expressing the virtues of the deceased (Cottica 2007, 220).

24 The loom was traditionally positioned in the atrium (Freisenbruch 2011, 49).

Augustus' clothes were produced by Livia, Octavia and Iulia (Freisenbruch 2011, 49).

Wool-working was closely tied to the Roman mythology. Several goddesses from the Greek pantheon, such as Hera, Aphrodite, Athena and Artemis, were associated with spinning and were later adopted by the Romans. The three *Parcae* (*Moirai* in Greek) spin, measure and cut the thread of life; the goddess Fortuna had a similar role (Hope 2007, 48). Different heroines, e.g. Ariadne and the Nereids, were also linked to wool-working.

Wool-working tools in graves have multiple potential meaning and are a typical indicator of womanhood. Women with such objects can be thought of as 'spinnors' of life and a connection between life and death, if read in the context of mythology. Distaffs in graves can be interpreted as a symbol of motherhood as mothers spin new life by giving birth (Stemberger 2013, 145). At the same time, elaborate tools made of precious materials, i.e. amber or ivory distaffs which I discuss below, were an expression of the social status and wealth of the deceased and her family which could afford to put such objects into her grave (Cottica 2007, 221).

The tools used in the process of spinning and weaving are spindles (*fusus*), distaffs (*colus*) and baskets (*quasillum*) (Cottica 2007, 221). They are often represented on tombstones, but are also part of grave good assemblages. The latter often contain spindles, distaffs and spindle whorls (Cottica 2007, 224), but not baskets, as these either did not survive or were not put in the graves in the first place. Spindle whorls and distaffs, especially ones made of amber, were often misinterpreted as amber beads and hairpins, e.g. in Ljudmila Plesničar Gec's report (1972). The three objects incorrectly identified as hairpins at Emona consist of amber beads on an iron wire.<sup>25</sup> A similar object was found in grave 75 from Tenuta Boccone D'Aste, in northeast Rome, identified as a distaff used for hand wool-spinning and dated to the 2nd century AD (Aurisicchio et al. 2002). Grave 813 from Emona is earlier than the Italian one, as it dates to the second half of the 1st century AD, while grave 303 falls between the two and dates to the transition from the first 1st to the 2nd century AD. In Slovenia, similar objects are known from a grave at Ptuj that is dated to after AD 251 (Bertoncelj-Kučar

1979, 263). Bertoncelj Kučar (1979, 263) interprets an object from grave 1337 as such a distaff, although it is mentioned as a necklace in the excavation report.

Ritter (1889) interprets distaffs as cult objects that served as sacrificial items during the funeral. On the other hand the distaff from Rome, however, shows marks of wool-working (Aurisicchio et al. 2002, 115). Generally, no connections with any particular female age group have yet been established anywhere in the Roman Empire (Cottica 2007), but evidence from Emona might suggest that the distaffs were grave goods reserved for the group of 'married women', who were not buried with rich jewellery.

A few bone objects interpreted as hairpins were probably distaffs as well.<sup>26</sup> They are generally larger than the hairpins, approximately 20cm long, and have two heads. In Slovenia, they were in use in the 1st and 2nd century AD, with the earliest ones documented in the Claudian period (Dular 1979, 279). It should be noted that the two heads could get entangled in the locks of hair and fastening the hairpin would have been potentially painful. Objects described as bone distaffs were also unearthed at the 'Potniški center' site in graves 271 and 368 (Mulh 2008, 166, 210).

Of other wool-working artefacts, needles were found in fourteen graves at Emona. One was metal and the others bone. They cannot be precisely dated because their style changed little through time (Novšak 2010, 65). Needles with more than one hole were probably used for multicolour embroidery. They could also be used to hold the wick in oil lamps. Parallels for three-holed needles were found at Ptuj, Dobova, Pula, Aquileia, and Windisch. In Slovenia, they are most common in graves from the time of the Flavian dynasty, but they can already be found in the time of Tiberius and Claudius (Dular 1979, 284–285).

Generally, the richer the grave, the more objects of the same type (e.g. hairpins, mirrors, toiletry items) were added to it, but curiously, this rule does not apply to jewellery. Grave Northern Cemetery 732, although belonging to the 'married women' group, contains an unusually large quantity of precious grave goods. In this regard, it resembles the 'unmarried women' group, but the array of objects is different (Plesničar Gec 1972, 122); while

<sup>25</sup> Amber distaffs were found in graves Titova cesta 303 and 813 (Petru 1972, 43, 74), as well as Potniški center 168 (Mulh 2008, 121).

<sup>26</sup> I propose that the hairpins from graves Northern Cemetery 383 and 385 (Plesničar Gec 1972, 98), Titova cesta 551, 622, 833, 908 and 920 (Petru 1972, 56, 60, 76, 84, 86) are, in fact, distaffs.



the objects in the second group were golden and meant for adorning the body, grave 732 contains mostly silver objects, two brooches, a cosmetic spoon and two silver mirrors, most of which were functional as well as decorative. The style of burial, however, resembles the rich graves and is indicative of the high social standing of the deceased.

### Conclusion

The cemeteries of *Colonia Iulia Emona* yielded a substantial number of graves, although not many have been subjected to osteological analyses. In spite of this, however, at least two distinctive groups of female burials can be identified. The first group is rather small and consists of burials with high-quality gold jewellery and frequently also dresses of precious materials, but not many other grave goods. Although the group only numbers eight to nine graves, their concentration is actually one of the highest in the Roman Empire. Some of them also predate the limit set by Martin Kilcher (2000). There are several theories offering possible explanations for the occurrence of such graves, but it is generally agreed that women buried in such a way died in their late adolescence (despite one of the burials from Ljubljana contradicting this theory, as the deceased is supposed to have been approximately 40 years old). I argue that such burials represent high-status women in the time around their marriage.

The second group – ‘married women’ – lacks expensive jewellery, but has other toiletry items such as hairpins and mirrors. In this group, there is a strong emphasis on gendered objects, especially hairpins, in the 1st and 2nd century, with a hiatus during the Flavian period when haircuts were most elaborate. Some of these items are quite elaborate and it is thus not excluded that these women belonged to the upper social classes, though they generally lack expensive jewellery. In later times, the burial rite changes from mainly cremation to mainly inhumation and grave goods became scarcer. Consequently, burials of ‘married women’ without gendered artefacts and osteological reports may pass unnoticed by archaeologists.

Of all the burials in Emona, gendered objects represent a minor part of the recovered grave goods. The gender and age of the deceased being known at the time of burial, the question is why was it necessary to underline gender and the roles of the deceased in afterlife treatment. The

straightforward answer would be that it was done for the people who could afford this kind of treatment. Women would be further divided according to their identity in terms of age, linked to rites of passage, i.e. married women were given different treatment than unmarried women or those with a liminal status between those two stages.

In addition to that, the pattern of artefacts deposited in the graves changed in time. The largest number of female burials also corresponds with the period in which burial activity was at its peak.

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## *Rekonstruiranje identitet žensk z emonskih nekropol*

*(Povzetek)*

Med izkopavanji emonskih nekropol je bilo odkritih več kot 3000 grobov z več kot 15000 pripadajočimi artefakti. Objave starejših izkopavanj, ki zajemajo večino arheološkega gradiva, namenjajo le malo pozornosti skeletnim ostankom. Starost in spol sem za potrebe te študije določila primarno na podlagi izkopanih artefaktov.

V pričujoči študiji na podlagi gradiva prepoznam dve skupini žensk. Prva, veliko večja, je skupina „poročenih žensk“. Tipične najdbe v njihovih grobovih so igle lasnice, ogledala in v nekaj primerih skrinjice za nakit. Nakit, kjer je bil priložen v grob, ni prisoten v velikih količinah in je navadno izdelan iz nežlahtnih kovin.

Drugo skupino, ki jo tvori osem grobov z izjemnimi grobnimi pridatki, lahko datiramo med prvo in četrto stoletje našega štetja. Izstopajo tako po količini kot po kakovosti pridatkov, posebej zlatega nakita. Skupina izstopa tudi zaradi svoje številčnosti in zgodnjega pojavljanja – že v prvem stoletju našega štetja. Praviloma se tovrstni grobovi pojavljajo šele v drugem stoletju. Prepoznavni so po večjih količinah zlatega nakita, včasih v kombinaciji z jantarjem in zlatim lasnim okrasjem – iglami s pozlačenimi glavicami, mrežicami za lase ali zlatim prahom. Kljub temu grobovi v Emoni praviloma niso povezani z ogledali, šatuljami in toaletnim priborom.

V prispevku bom predstavila pomen obeh skupin ter možne razlage za njun nastanek. Poskusila bom razložiti, zakaj se pojavljajo razlike med skupinama tako glede števila kot narave pridatkov ter načina pokopa. Gre za študijo arheologije spola v kontekstu rimske pogrebne arheologije.

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