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## The Alps as a frontier (A.D. 168-774)

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Th. ULBERT, *AD PIRUM (HRUŠICA). SPÄTRÖMISCHE PASSBEFESTIGUNG IN DEN JULISCHEN ALPEN — DER DEUTSCHE BEITRAG ZU DEN SLOWENISCH-DEUTSCHEN GRABUNGEN 1971-1973* (Münchner Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Band 31, C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, München 1981). Pp.246, 36 figs., 58 plates and 4 fold-outs. ISBN 3 406 07981 4. DM 88.-

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### Introduction

The books which form the basis for this article bring into greater relief the rôle of the Alpine range as a frontier to Italy, particularly for the period c.A.D. 300-700. The foci of the studies in question are two key sites in the northeast Alpine range, *Hrušica-ad pirum* (Ulbert 1981) and *Invillino-Ibligo* (Bierbrauer 1987, 1988), examined by excavation in the 1960s and early 1970s. Taken together, they provide important new insights into the sequence of settlement and defence in the Alps as a whole, challenging the long-accepted historical framework established by Schneider and Hartmann, who were particularly keen to trace Byzantine origins.<sup>1</sup> This paper seeks to offer a rough framework to the structure of Roman and post-Roman settlement and defence in the Italian Alpine territories based on these excavations and on other recent research.

The northeast Alps are well documented archaeologically due to the fact that this lower-lying sector formed the principal point of access into Italy from central and eastern Europe, whether for traders, Roman troops, or barbarians. This documentation is fairly coherent for most of the period under study here, and particularly so for the 4th and 7th c. Extant structural remains and a reasonably healthy, if scattered, archaeological record exist for the related zones — notably Italian Friuli.<sup>2</sup> To the west, in contrast, written documentation is sparser and the archaeological contribution more limited: many towns have seen some excavation, but they generally provide little information regarding their status after the hey-day of Rome; the evidence from burials is similarly weak.<sup>3</sup>

The Alps themselves have rarely been viewed as a frontier (and have thus rarely featured in the numerous *Limes* conferences). It is hoped that the following will show that well before the end of Roman

1 F. Schneider, *Die Entstehung von Burg und Landgemeinde in Italien* (Berlin 1924); L. M. Hartmann, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der byzantinischen Verwaltung in Italien, 540-750* (Leipzig 1889); id., *Geschichte Italiens im Mittelalter I-III* (1897-1903).

2 For general considerations of this zone, see A. Degrassi, *Il confine nord-orientale dell'Italia* (Berne 1954); T. Ulbert, "Zur Siedlungskontinuität im südöstlichen Alpenraum (vom 2. bis 6. Jahrhundert n.Chr.)" in J. Werner and E. Ewig (edd.), *Von der Spätantike zum frühen Mittelalter* (= *Vorträge und Forschungen* 25, München 1979) 141-57. For Friuli, a useful source of information is P. M. Moro, *Iulium Carnicum (Zuglio)* (Roma 1956); while M. Brozzi, *Il ducato longobardo di Friuli* (Udine 1981) gives a detailed summary of the post-Roman archaeology, comprising principally a wide scatter of burials, both indigenous and Longobard.

3 For Longobard period burials, see the Schede published in *Studi Medievali*: O. von Hessen, "Schede di archeologia longobarda in Italia, II, Piemonte," *StMed* 15.1 (1974) 497-506; C. Calderini, "Schede ... III, Lombardia," *StMed* 15.2 (1974) 1107-28; C. A. Simoni, "Schede ... Trentino," *StMed* 27 (1986) 901-55. On urban archaeology, see G. P. Brogiolo, "Le città tra tardo antico e alto medio evo," in *Archeologia urbana in Lombardia* (Modena 1985) 48-55.