

SLOVENSKA AKADEMIJA ZNANOSTI IN UMETNOSTI
ACADEMIA SCIENTIARUM ET ARTIUM SLOVENICA

RAZRED ZA ZGODOVINSKE IN DRUŽBENE VEDE
CLASSIS I: HISTORIA ET SOCIOLOGIA

RAZPRAVE
DISSERTATIONES

45

OMNIA TEMPUS REVELAT

Uredniki / Editors:

Milan Lovenjak, Alenka Cedilnik, Andrej Gaspari, Jana Horvat



LJUBLJANA
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Uredniki / Editors:
Milan Lovenjak, Alenka Cedilnik, Andrej Gaspari, Jana Horvat

Recenzenta / Reviews:
Anja Ragolič, Matej Petrič

Jezikovni pregled / Proofreading:
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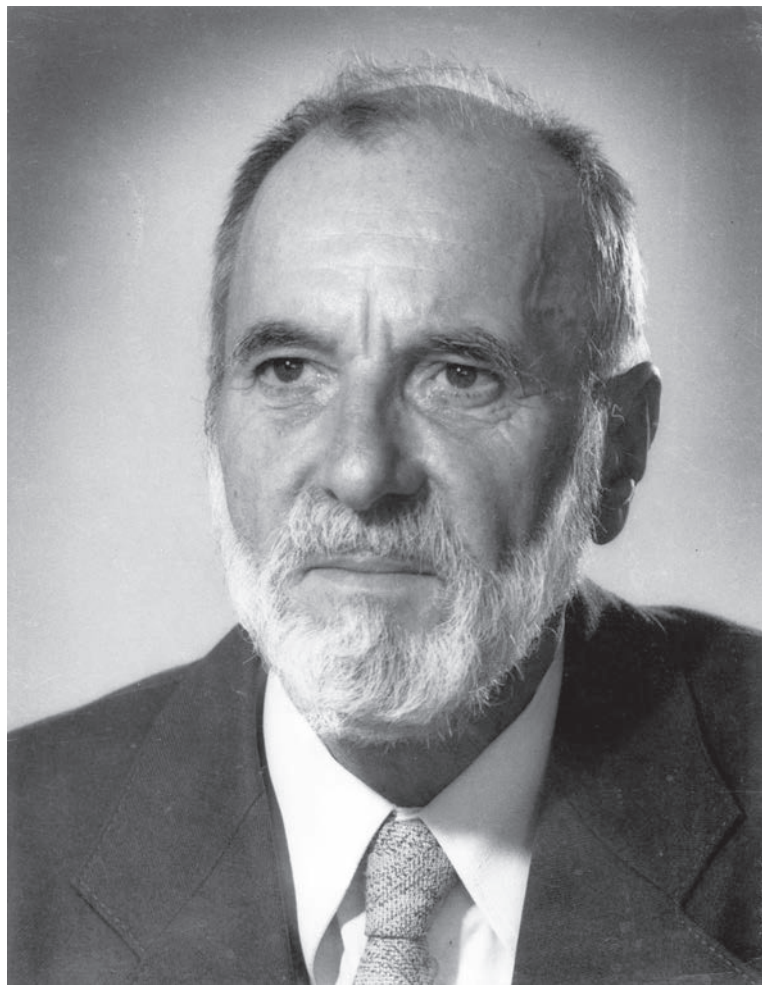
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Jaroslav Šašel
(1924–1988)

Preface

This volume is dedicated to the memory of Jaroslav Šašel, a distinguished scholar of Antiquity, known to researchers today through his work. He was a member of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Arts, and then from 1961 onward of the Archaeological Section at the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (later the Institute of Archaeology at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts). In his professional field, he established the foundations for a broad range of research and became a leading expert in the areas he was involved in. He attended numerous congresses at home and abroad, and he was a member of several professional associations and academies. In 1992, a selection of his works (*Opera selecta*) was prepared by Rajko Bratož and Marjeta Šašel Kos. It comprises ninety-two articles from a total of 160 published between 1953 and 1990.

Šašel's research particularly focused on the role of the Eastern Alpine region and the Balkans in the history of the Roman Empire. Drawing on epigraphic material, the writings of ancient authors, and archaeological evidence, he wove these sources into a broad and coherent historical narrative. Through onomastics and prosopography, he explored ancient society in depth, tracing the destinies of families and individuals alike. He devoted his attention to military and administrative history, the Romanization of prehistoric communities, urban life, rural settlement, spatial organization, and the road network. His oeuvre also extended to the study of the decline of Antiquity and the beginnings of the early Middle Ages.

Šašel was guided by clear objectives and an unfailing sense of what was historically significant. Many of the hypotheses he advanced based on epigraphic and literary sources were subsequently confirmed by archaeology through new discoveries. The questions he posed remain relevant, as do the answers he provided. Even after more than four decades, Šašel's work retains fundamental importance and continues to serve as an invaluable guide for further scholarship.

The centenary of Šašel's birth offered a welcome occasion to pursue further the themes to which he dedicated so much of his work. On 5 and 6 September 2024, the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts hosted an international scholarly conference, *The Roman Period and the Early Middle Ages in the Eastern Alps, Northern Italy, and the Western Balkans*, which provided the impetus for this volume. Bringing together seventeen contributions by twenty authors, the volume reflects both the geographical breadth and thematic diversity characteristic of Šašel's own scholarship.

It presents the results of research on literary and epigraphic sources as well as archaeological material.

The articles in the first part address the beginnings of the Roman period and the Principate, and those of the second part offer new insights into the Late Roman period, Late Antiquity, and the transition to the Early Middle Ages. Together, they add new insights to a field of research whose contours were first outlined by Jaroslav Šašel. We hope that this book will encourage further research on one of the most pivotal regions of the Roman Empire: at the crossroads between Italy and the Balkan Peninsula, between the Mediterranean and Central Europe.

This volume has been prepared and published by the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, with support from the Department of History and the Department of Archaeology at the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Arts, and from the Institute of Archaeology at the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

Ljubljana, 25 August 2025

*Milan Lovenjak, Alenka Cedilnik,
Andrej Gaspari, Jana Horvat*

Child Emperors in Rome or The Domestication of an Exception

Aleš MAVER

Abstract

Child or underage rulers were not uncommon in ancient times, and can be found in almost all ancient cultures. The decisive step in “domesticating the exception” was taken by Valentinian I, the founder of a short-lived Roman dynasty. In AD 367, he immediately appointed his eight-year-old son Gratian as *Augustus*, the “higher” ruler (albeit in his own, western half of the empire). Valentinian’s seed fell on fertile ground. It was adopted by other rulers and associates of his and Theodosius’ dynasty, who rushed to appoint young descendants as *Augusti*. Valentinian’s younger son, Gratian’s half-brother and Valens’ nephew Valentinian II, can be considered the prototype of the late antique child emperor. His reign combined all the negative features of this model of government. The trend established by Gratian and Valentinian II continued for some time in both halves of the empire. Despite the fact that the appearance of child emperors in the fifth century seemed much more common than a century earlier, late antique writers remained reserved about it.

Keywords: child emperors; dynastic principle; imperial succession; Severan dynasty; Constantine the Great; Valentinian II

Izvleček

Otroški cesarji v Rimu ali udomačevanje izjeme

Otroški ali mladoletni vladarji v starem veku niso bili redkost. Najdemo jih v skoraj vseh starodavnih kulturah. Razmere v Rimu so bile v tem pogledu drugačne. Odločilni korak pri “udomačevanju izjeme” je naredil Valentinijan I., ustanovitelj ene kratkotrajnih rimskih dinastij. Leta 367 je svojega osemletnega sina Gracijana takoj imenoval za avgusta, “višjega” vladarja (čeprav le v svoji, zahodni polovici cesarstva). Valentinijanov recept je padel na plodna tla. Prevzeli so ga drugi vladarji in sopotniki njegove in Teodozijeve dinastije, ki so kot za stavo imenovali otroške potomce za avguste. Valentinijanov mlajši sin, Gracijanov polbrat in Valensov nečak Valentinijan II., lahko velja za prototip poznoantičnega otroškega cesarja. Njegova vladavina je združevala vse negativne značilnosti tega modela vladanja. Trend, ki sta ga vzpostavila Gracijan in Valentinijan II., se je nekaj časa nadaljeval v obeh polovinah cesarstva. Čeprav je bil pojav otroških cesarjev v 5. stoletju zato običajnejši kot stoletje prej, so poznoantični pisci ostali do njega zadržani.

Ključne besede: otroški cesarji; dinastično načelo; nasledstvo na prestolu; dinastija Severov; Konstantin Veliki; Valentinijan II.

Child or underage rulers were not uncommon in ancient times, and can be found in almost all ancient cultures. In ancient Egypt, they included Pepi II from the late Old Kingdom (probably 2278–2214 BC), who some credit with a mythical 96 years of rule, although he probably occupied the throne for “only” a good 60 years. Tutankhamun (1332–1323 BC), the most famous pharaoh – through no merit of his own – can also be placed in the same category. However, while the two Egyptians mentioned above have been given reserved assessments by historians, Thutmose III (1479–1425 BC) and perhaps Ramesses II (1279–1213 BC) began their careers as child kings but went on to be much more successful in adulthood.¹

Josiah, king of the peripheral Near Eastern kingdom of Judah (king 640–609 BC), was nine years old when he ascended the throne. If it is true that he was the “driving force” behind the emergence of Deuteronomistic historiography in the Old Testament,² as some researchers still claim, then despite his insignificance in the broader context of ancient political history, he is one of the most influential figures in Western culture. Of course, children and young people on the throne can be found in many places in Greece, and suffice to mention the Spartan King Pleistarchus (reigned 480–458 BC), son of Leonidas I, who was assisted by the successful military leader Pausanias as regent.³ Among his Macedonian colleagues were Amyntas IV (who lived around 365–336 BC), who was replaced by Philip II, and Alexander IV (who lived 323–309 BC), the posthumously born son of Alexander the Great.⁴ Of course, neither of the two Macedonians survived the struggles of their more powerful contemporaries, although Amyntas was considered dangerous enough to be executed only by Alexander III, but not yet by Philip.

The exception in Rome

The situation in Rome was different in this respect, as child rulers or emperors appeared relatively late. There are probably several reasons for this, not least the way in which the Principate was established under Octavian, as the latter was able to closely observe Caesar’s failure,⁵ which is why he refused to directly transfer monarchical models from the East to the Roman context. Therefore, the first *princeps* cloaked his monarchy in a distinctly republican façade.⁶ It is not easy to answer the question of when exactly the Romans recognized, even in a conceptual sense, that they were living in a monarchical system.⁷ In any case, Augustus’ definition from the end of his

¹ See for the mentioned cases Van De Mieroop 2011, 84–86, 171–175, 206 ff., 215.

² Cf. for different contemporary theories in this regard Braulik 2011, 233–254.

³ Cf. Bradford 2011, 95 ff.

⁴ Cf. Parker 2014, 274, 322, 332.

⁵ Cf. Brandt 2021, 71 ff.

⁶ Cf. Eich 2019, 11 ff.

⁷ Eich 2019, 54. But cf. Brandt 2021, 100 ff.

life, although valid only on paper, persisted for a long time, stating that *auctoritate omnibus praestiti, potestatis autem nihilo amplius habui quam ceteri qui mihi quoque in magistratu conlegae fuerunt*.⁸ If a child came to the highest position in the empire, the premise of preserving republican institutions would collapse on its own.

Regardless of this, the dynastic idea, which is a basic prerequisite for the rise of a child to a leadership position in any community, had taken root in Rome much earlier. Its origins can be found in the crisis of the Roman nobility in the late 2nd second century BC. At that time, the position of the republic's more or less "collective" leadership, within which a relatively large number of aristocrats were able to take on demanding military and administrative tasks in the growing republic, began to be occupied by charismatic "professional" military leaders.⁹ Their soldiers, who were increasingly dependent on their success, began to rally around them (and not around the abstract republic). This development made it possible for the nineteen-year-old Octavian, who was exceptionally young according to established Republican rules, to take advantage of Caesar's legacy.¹⁰ The veterans of the latter gave him preference over the experienced right-hand man of the dictator, Mark Antony, even though they knew him from the battlefield.¹¹ It is therefore not surprising that the *princeps* did not shy away from the possible succession of his young relatives, his nephew and grandsons, as long as they were available.¹² In the end, he was succeeded by his 56-year-old stepson Tiberius, with whom he had a rather difficult relationship.¹³

Regardless of the strength of the idea of dynastic succession, Roman dynasties during the Principate were short-lived, not only in comparison with those of the European Middle Ages or the modern era, but also with some of those of antiquity. The most enduring was the first, known as the Julio-Claudian dynasty. However, its founder, Augustus, was most responsible for its duration of just under a century, as he ruled the Roman Empire as *princeps* for more than two-fifths of its time. The events following the violent death of Caligula on January 24, AD 41,¹⁴ were very instructive for the context in which child rulers could later emerge. At first glance, there were no living relatives of Augustus who were suitable to take power. However, the Senate's deliberations on alternative solutions were thwarted by the Praetorian Guard's determination to support the stuttering and lame Claudius, Caligula's uncle, as *princeps*.¹⁵ Later, he had to prove his ruling competence with a military campaign in Britain, and

⁸ R. Gest. div. Aug. 34.3. *I excelled all in influence, although I possessed no more power than others who were my colleagues in the several magistracies.*

⁹ Cf. particularly Blösel 2021, 168 ff.

¹⁰ Cf. Galinsky 2013, particularly 38 ff.

¹¹ Cf. Osgood 2018, 187.

¹² Cf. Eich 2019, 55.

¹³ Edelmann-Singer 2017, particularly 23–24.

¹⁴ See Suet. *Claud.* 10 and *Ios. ant. Iud.* 19.162 for a description.

¹⁵ Cf. Eich 2019, 69–71.

in the end his reign was relatively successful.¹⁶ The story of Claudius himself does not belong in the category of child emperors, as he was already over 50 years old at the time of the events described. However, the fact that a candidate of suitable origin was given preference over a possible alternative who was not related to Augustus' family, even though he had previously been considered unfit to take power, indirectly paved the way for the idea of succession by a child, although this was still a long way off. Yet Claudius' successor, the son of his last wife Agrippina the Younger, Nero, was by far the youngest *princeps* at the time of his accession to the throne at the age of 16. Already Roman historians linked Claudius' death by poisoning to fears that Nero's half-brother Britannicus (who died in AD 55 under mysterious circumstances) would come of age.¹⁷

The dynastic principle demonstrated similar strength in the final phase of the period of the adoptive emperors as it had during the first crisis of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Marcus Aurelius was accused in antiquity of enabling the rise to power of his son Commodus, who was considered unsuitable, because he broke with the decades-old tradition of adopting the "most capable" heir.¹⁸ The description of *Historia Augusta* is quite merciless: *Iam in suos tanta fuit benignitate Marcus, ut cum in omnes propinquos cuncta honorum ornamenta contulerit, tum in filium et Commodum quidem - scelestum atque impurum - cito nomen Caesaris et mox sacerdotium statimque nomen imperatoris ac triumphis participationem et consulatum. Quo quidem tempore sine - imperator filio ad triumphalem curram in circo pedes cucurrit.*¹⁹

However, neither the philosopher emperor nor his entourage apparently gave serious thought to any other solution, as Marcus Aurelius had a biological son. He had already appointed him *Caesar* in 166, when he was five years old, and on January 1, AD 177, he made him co-emperor, while reserving for himself, as in the time of Lucius Verus' co-reign, the position of supreme priest of the Roman cults (*pontifex maximus*).²⁰ When Aurelius died three years later, there was no doubt about the succession. Nevertheless, Commodus could be classified as one of the predecessors of the child emperors. In any case, Alexander Demandt's observation that no Roman emperor recognized anyone other than his own son as the most suitable candidate for succession,²¹ if he had one, remains valid for Marcus Aurelius.

¹⁶ Cf. Brandt 2021, 177–178.

¹⁷ Cf. Suet. *Nero* 7–9. Cf. also Cedilnik 2011, particularly 34.

¹⁸ Cf. Eich 2019, 199–200.

¹⁹ SHA *Aur.* 16.1–2. *Such was Marcus' kindness toward his own family that he bestowed the insignia of every office on all his kin, while on his son, and an accursed and foul one he was, he hastened to bestow the name of Caesar, then afterward the priesthood, and, a little later, the title of emperor and a share in a triumph and the consulship. It was at this time that Marcus, though acclaimed emperor, ran on foot in the Circus by the side of the triumphal car in which his son was seated.*

²⁰ Cf. Brandt 2021, 404.

²¹ Cf. Demandt 2007, 256.

Changes during the 3rd century

At least some changes were brought about by the Severan dynasty. The increased role of Eastern influences, embodied by the Syrian Julia Domna during the reign of her African-born husband Septimius Severus,²² may have contributed to the Roman environment becoming more open to the rule of minors. However, as already indicated above, dynastic thinking was decisive. After the violent death of Caracalla in AD 217, there were no biological relatives of the dynasty's founder left. The leading position was taken over by Julia Domna's sister, Julia Maesa, who successively brought her two daughters' sons to power, first Elagabalus and then Severus Alexander.²³ Both were around 14 years old when they took office, which meant they were of age according to the customs of the time.²⁴ In addition to their power-hungry grandmother, they were greatly influenced by their mothers, her daughters.²⁵ The influence of mothers was also pronounced at the time when the phenomenon of child emperors reached its peak at the end of the 4th and during the 5th century.²⁶

Gordian III should also be included among the early very young rulers. His reign is interesting because it coincided with what was probably the last major attempt by the Senate to independently decide on the ruler of the Roman Empire. During the civil war with the first military emperor, Maximinus Thrax, the Senate first chose Gordian I, the grandfather of Gordian III, as emperor, who then chose his son Gordian II as co-ruler. Their reign, which began in January AD 238, was short-lived. When Gordian II fell in battle against troops loyal to Maximinus, Gordian I committed suicide. Their son and grandson, respectively, was proclaimed as ruler (at least on paper) thanks to the army's loyalty to the dynastic principle. The Senate chose its members Balbinus and Pupienus as *Augusti*, equal successors to the older Gordians.²⁷ However, the Praetorian Guard and some Roman citizens were dissatisfied with this, and forced the appointment of the young, 13-year-old Gordian as *Caesar* and *princeps iuventutis* (a title that had also been given to Commodus, a few months before being appointed his father's co-ruler in AD 177). In the spring of 238, the military emperor Maximinus was killed, and soon after the Praetorian Guard killed the two emperors who had been appointed by the Senate. This made Gordian III the sole *Augustus*.²⁸ The portrait of his six-year long rule in the sources is relatively favourable, but it is also clear that he did not have much real say during his time as emperor.²⁹ *Historia Augusta* also expresses such views, summarizing his tenure as follows: *Post quod non puerile iam*

²² Cf. Eich 2019, 216.

²³ Brandt 2021, 464 ff.

²⁴ Cf. Beard 2015, 311 f.

²⁵ Cf. Kulikowski 2016, 143.

²⁶ Cf. Leppin 2003, 105.

²⁷ Cf. Sommer 2020, 32–34.

²⁸ Cf. Eich 2019, 257–259.

²⁹ Cf. Kulikowski 2016, 178.

*et contemptibile videbatur imperium, si quidem et optimi soceri consiliis adiuuaretur, et ipse pro parte aliquantulum saperet nec per spadones ac ministros aulicos matris vel ignorantia vel coniventia venderetur.*³⁰ He most likely lost his life in early 244 in a battle between the Roman and Persian armies at Misiche, near Fallujah in present-day Iraq.³¹ Persian sources attribute his death to his own weapons, while Roman sources blame Philip the Arab, who succeeded Gordian III.³²

Diocletian inadvertently contributed greatly to the establishment of the model of child emperors with his tetrarchic system. With his reforms, he weakened the role of the Senate and thus the illusion of the “peculiarity” of the Roman monarchy from the Principate period, which had already almost completely disappeared by the 3rd century.³³ There is no consensus among contemporary historians about the relationship between Diocletian’s tetrarchy and the dynastic principle, and some see it as an attempt to permanently abolish this principle.³⁴ However, Corcoran’s assumption that the reformer of the Roman Empire (temporarily) avoided it only because he had no biological male heir and only a daughter seems quite plausible. On the other hand, he was certainly not immune to family ties when it came to the composition of the first tetrarchy. He was indeed linked to his first co-ruler Maximian by a joint military experience, but Constantius Chlorus was Maximian’s and Galerius his own son-in-law.³⁵

From Constantine to Theodosius

Diocletian’s seemingly very clever system of rule over the empire was challenged by the dynastic principle just one year after the successful first “change of guard”, when soldiers elevated Constantine, who was not part of the tetrarchic system, to power.³⁶ At the same time, the ruler was inspired by his predecessor’s model to replace the “artificial” tetrarchy with a “natural” one based on biological kinship. This tendency is evident in his plans for succession after his death. He was to be succeeded by four biological relatives,³⁷ but his nephew Dalmatius was eliminated immediately after the emperor’s death.³⁸ With this plan, Constantine finally opened the door to the reign of “true” child emperors. Both he and his last remaining co-ruler (and rival) Licinius

³⁰ SHA Gord. 23.7. *After this his rule seemed not in the least that of a child or contemptible, since he was aided by the advice of this excellent father-in-law, while he himself, on his own account, developed considerable sagacity and did not let his favours be sold by the eunuchs and attendants at court through his mother’s ignorance or connivance.*

³¹ Brandt 2021, 498.

³² Cf. Sommer 2020, 39.

³³ Cf. Kuhoff 2001; Bratož 2014, particularly 53–57.

³⁴ Cf. Demandt 2007, 257.

³⁵ Cf. Corcoran 2008, 232.

³⁶ Cf. Brandt 2006, 30, where Constantine is explicitly declared an usurper.

³⁷ (Ps.-)Aur. Vict. *epit. Caes.* 41.19–20.

³⁸ Cf. Hier. *chron.* ad a. 338.

sought to secure their positions by appointing their biological descendants as co-emperors at an early age, contenting themselves with granting them the title of *Caesar*. Similarly, these children and adolescents had not yet gained any real influence over the administration of the Roman Empire during their fathers' lifetimes.³⁹

The death of the powerful ruler in May AD 337 initially created a visible vacuum. As a result, the intended successors did not assume the title of *Augustus* until almost four months later. In the meantime, Dalmatius was eliminated, as already mentioned, and the remaining surviving Constantine's relatives were massacred, with the exception of his sons and their cousins Gallus and Julian.⁴⁰ There are different interpretations of the circumstances surrounding these bloody events. It is probably indisputable that Constantine's middle son Constantius had a hand in it, but it cannot be ruled out that the late assumption of the pagan historian Zosimus from around AD 500 about the major role of military discontent, because the dead emperor was not succeeded solely by his sons, is true.⁴¹ This would be consistent with the military preference for solutions in which power is inherited by the closest biological relatives. In Constantine's case, these remained in power, but their joint rule was fraught with mutual conflicts, which did not change even after the surviving cousins entered the administration of the Roman Empire. However, none of Constantine's sons had his own son whom he could proclaim co-emperor while still a child.

The next step in "domesticating the exception" could therefore only be taken by Valentinian I, the founder of the next short-lived Roman dynasty. In 367, he immediately appointed his eight-year-old son Gratian as *Augustus*, the "higher" ruler (albeit in his own, western half of the empire).⁴² Two circumstances probably prompted him to abandon usual reservations about at least the formal rule of children, which his predecessors had held. The first was a life-threatening illness he had just survived,⁴³ and the second was the usurpation of Julian's relative Procopius, which his brother and co-ruler in the east, Valens, had to deal with. The decisive battle took place in May 366 at Tyatira in Lydia.⁴⁴

Valentinian's seed fell on fertile ground, and was adopted by other rulers and associates of his and Theodosius' dynasty, who rushed to appoint young descendants as *Augusti*. Valentinian's younger son, Gratian's half-brother and Valens' nephew Valentinian II can be considered the prototype of the late antique child emperor, with his reign demonstrating all the negative features of this form of government. In his case, it was unusual that his half-brother and uncle, the *Augusti* at the time, were not interested in proclaiming him *Augustus* after his father's death in 375, when he was only four years old. Nominal power over a portion of the western part of the empire

³⁹ Cf. Demadt 2007, 88.

⁴⁰ Cf. Kulikowski 2016, 349 and the following pages.

⁴¹ Zos. 2.40.3. Cf. also Demandt 2007, 104; Bratož 2014, 115.

⁴² Amm. 27.6.

⁴³ Amm. 27.6.1.

⁴⁴ Cf. Errington 2005, 349–351.

was granted to him by the troops, which clearly wanted to avoid the direct control of Valentinian's already more independent older son, Gratian.⁴⁵ Their expectations were fulfilled, as the new *Augustus* became little more than a puppet passed around by various military commanders. Besides that, once again in the history of the Roman child emperors, his mother, Valentinian's widow Justina, wielded considerable influence. The most important monument to her and her alleged misguidance of her son was erected by Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, who had been bishop in Valentinian's capital since 374.⁴⁶ After Justina's death and the victory over the usurper Maximus, his eastern colleague Theodosius I effectively ruled over the part of the empire that was nominally ruled by the young emperor. Upon his return to the East, he appointed the military commander Arbogast as a kind of supervisor in Gaul, who ensured that Valentinian was unable to exercise any real power even after reaching the age of 20.⁴⁷ To improve his position, the young man decided to be baptized. However, Ambrose's arduous journey to perform the baptism was in vain. Valentinian II had most likely passed judgement on himself and committed suicide in his palace in Vienna in May 392.⁴⁸ Although there were also explanations circulating that blamed Arbogast directly for his death, it is not difficult to imagine the situation in which the humiliated young man, without any political influence, saw no other way out than to leave the world (honourably).⁴⁹

It was probably stories similar to that of Valentinian that late antique critics had in mind when they criticized the rule of children in the Roman context. Among them, Latinus Pacatus Drepanius, a panegyrist from Gaul at the end of the 4th century, deserves special mention. In his panegyric addressed to Theodosius, he outlined the weaknesses of the child emperor: *At quanto aliter illorum principum mos fuit (quos loquar, notum est), qui maiestatem regiam imminui et vulgari putabant, nisi eos intra repositum Palatinae aedis inclusos tamquam aliquod Vestale secretum veneratio occulta consuluisse, nisi intra domesticam umbram iacentes solitudine provisa et silentia late conciliate vallassent.*⁵⁰ Probably written at around the same time, the *Historia Augusta* projected this phenomenon into the 3rd century and justified the choice of the elderly military commander Tacitus as emperor in AD 275 by saying that soldiers did not want to entrust the throne to a child, since: *Dii avertant principes pueros et pa-*

⁴⁵ (Ps.-)Aur. Vict. *epit. Caes.* 45.8–10. Cf. Brandt 2023, 66.

⁴⁶ Cf. Leppin 2003, 105–107.

⁴⁷ Cf. Kulikowski 2019, 136.

⁴⁸ Cf. Leppin 2003, 204.

⁴⁹ Cf. for examples Greg. Tur. *Franc.* 2.9. The theory of Arbogast's immediate fault was e. g. exposed by Oros. 7.35.10, although he also mentions other explanations.

⁵⁰ *Paneg.* 2.21.3. *But how different the custom of other emperors (you know of whom I speak) who considered their royal majesty diminished and cheapened unless they were shut up within some remote part of the palace, as if in some sanctuary of Vesta, to be consulted with reverence and in secret, and unless a carefully arranged solitude and widely imposed silence protected them like a rampart as they lay buried in the shade of their abode.*

*tres patriae dici inpuberes et quibus ad suscribendum magistri litterari manus teneant, quos ad consulatus dandos dulcia et circuli et quaecumque voluptas puerilis invitet.*⁵¹

A slightly different image of Valentinian II can be gleaned from Ambrose's letter, in which he reports on a meeting of the Crown Council devoted to the question of Victoria's statue in the Senate chamber. There, the bishop emphasizes the young man's independent decision, in accordance with his Christian faith: *Lecti sunt libelli mei in consistorio, aderat amplissimus honore magisterii militaris Bauto comes, et Rumoridus, et ipse eiusdem dignitatis gentilium nationum cultui inserviens a primis pueritiae suae annis. Valentinianus tunc temporis audivit suggestionem meam, nec fecit aliud, nisi quod fidei nostrae ratio poscebat. Acquieverunt etiam comiti suo.*⁵² However, Ambrose's main intention in presenting the events in this way was to strengthen his own position on the matter of the mentioned statue.

Conclusion

The trend established by Gratian and Valentinian II continued for some time in both halves of the empire. Arcadius and Honorius, who became *Augusti* at the ages of 11 and eight, respectively, were quite "mature" compared to Arcadius' son Theodosius II.⁵³ The latter was appointed *Augustus* by his father at the age of nine months. At the age of seven, after his father's death, he assumed rule as a sole emperor, at least on paper.⁵⁴ His "record" of being appointed *Augustus* was only broken four centuries later by the Eastern Roman emperor Michael III – "the Drunkard" – who became co-emperor with his father and *Augustus* in May 840 at the age of approximately four months.⁵⁵ Despite the fact that the appearance of child emperors in the 5th century seemed much more common than a century earlier, late antique writers remained reserved about it.⁵⁶ This is probably because none of the rulers mentioned, like Valentinian II, developed an independent ruler profile, even though they reached adulthood and even a mature age on the throne. None of them lived to a particularly old age, however, not even Michael III, but Theodosius II was 49 (for instance) when he died. He, along with Valentinian II, is perhaps the most typical figure of the former child

⁵¹ SHA Tac. 6.5. *May the gods forbend that we should give the title of prince to a child or of Father of his Country to an immature boy, whose hand a schoolmaster must guide for the signing of his name and who is induced to confer a consulship by sweetmeats or toys or other such childish delights.*

⁵² Ambr. epist. 57.3. *My petitions were read in the Consistory. Count Bauto, a man of the highest military rank, and Rumoridus, himself too of the same dignity, and from the first year of his boyhood attached to the Gentile worship, were present. Valentinian then listened to my suggestion, and did nothing but what our faith reasonably required. And they submitted to his officer.*

⁵³ Cf. Demandt 2007, 170 and the following pages.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, 195.

⁵⁵ Cf. Preiser-Kappeler 2023, 148.

⁵⁶ Cf. Molè Ventura 1992, *passim*.

emperors. Until the end of his reign, he remained in the shadow of his relatives and their associates. In his case, his older sister Pulcheria was the main source of influence (also due to his mother's early death), and after his death he was succeeded by her husband Marcian.⁵⁷

In the European Middle Ages and the early modern period, a somewhat different principle gradually gained acceptance, namely that a monarchy dependent on a capable monarch was doomed to failure. This view left more room for child (nominal) rulers. A typical example is the French King John I Posthumous, born five months after the death of his father Louis X the Quarrelsome on 15 November 1316. He became king on the same day and died after only four days of his "reign" on 19 November.⁵⁸ The story of the Hungarian, Croatian and Czech king Ladislaus V Posthumous, son of Albert of Habsburg and Elizabeth of Luxembourg, was similar. His father died at the end of October 1439, and his son was born at the end of February 1440. His supporters crowned him king in May of the same year, but his nominal authority was challenged by the Polish King Vladislaus III until the former's death in the Battle of Varna in 1444. Before Ladislaus could truly take the reins, he died at the age of 17.⁵⁹ The career of the last Count of Celje, Ulrich II, was closely linked to his fate.

⁵⁷ Cf. Demandt 2007, 195.

⁵⁸ Cf. Bradbury 2007, 281 and the following pages.

⁵⁹ Cf. Štíh 1999 for details.

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Aleš Maver
Univerza v Mariboru
Filozofska fakulteta
Koroška cesta 160
SI-2000 Maribor
ales.maver@um.si
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9826-0534>

The Calpurnii Pisones. Family History and their Presence in Istria and Liburnia

Robert MATIJAŠIĆ

Abstract

Following Šonje's publication of a votive inscription discovered on the island of Pag, Jaroslav Šašel published two brief studies (in 1963 and 1964) analysing the dedicant, Calpurnia L. Pisonis Auguris filia, and suggesting the broader significance of her family. The gens Calpurnia first appears in written sources in the 3rd century BC and gave numerous consuls during the late Republic and early Principate. Their prominence is reflected in the abundance of historiographic and epigraphic data, particularly concerning important figures from the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD. However, only a few members of the family can be directly linked to Istria and Dalmatia.

Keywords: Calpurnii Pisones; prosopography; Istria; Dalmatia; Pag

Izvleček

Calpurnii Pisones. Zgodovina družine ter njihova prisotnost v Istri in Liburniji

Po Šonjevi objavi votivnega napisa, odkritega na otoku Pagu, je Jaroslav Šašel v dveh kratkih študijah (leta 1963 in 1964) analiziral posvetilo Kalpurnije, hčere Pisona Avgura (*Calpurnia L. Pisonis Auguris filia*), in nakazal širši pomen njene družine. Rod Kalpurnijev se v pisnih virih prvič pojavi v 3. st. pr. n. št. in je v pozni republiki in zgodnjem principatu dal številne konzule. Njegov vpliv se odraža v obilici historiografskih in epigrafskih podatkov, zlasti o pomembnih osebnostih iz 1. st. pr. n. št. in 1. st. n. št. Vendar pa je le nekaj članov družine mogoče neposredno povezati z Istro in Dalmacijo.

Ključne besede: *Calpurnii Pisones*; prosopografija; Istra; Dalmacija; Pag

The anniversary of Jaroslav Šašel – a scholar whom some of us remember not only for his writings but also as a person – has provided the perfect opportunity for me to explore a question that has been on my mind for several years. In 1963, Šašel published a short text (as was his custom) on the Calpurnii, in *Živa antika* (*Antiquité vivante, Living Antiquity*),¹ expanding his findings the following year at the Akten des IV. internationalen Kongresses für griechische und lateinische Epigraphik (1964).² Both works were later reprinted in his *Opera Selecta* (1992). In these studies he examined the votive inscriptions dedicated by Calpurnia L. Pisonis Auguris filia from Caska on the island of Pag, and compiled epigraphical evidence for members of the family in Istria, Dalmatia and the Danubian provinces. A Calpurnius L. f. Piso is attested in the inscription on the Arch of Hercules in Pola,³ fundamental for understanding the foundation of the colony.⁴ Calpurnia dedicated at least four votive altars in Caska on the island of Pag – two discovered in 1904,⁵ a third in 1955,⁶ and the fourth more recently,⁷ all within the same bay of Caska near Novalja. Despite the already extensive bibliography on the subject, these inscriptions have once again renewed interest in Calpurnia and her family.

The Calpurnii were a long-lived and extensive family of plebeian origin,⁸ with at least four branches that emerged between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC, among which the Calpurnii Pisones were the most powerful and numerous. Alongside them were the Calpurnii Lanarii, Calpurnii Bestiae, and Calpurnii Bibuli.⁹ They claimed descent from Calpus, a son of king Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome, but some scholars have supposed an Etruscan origin of the name, judging from the *-urn-* element in the family name,¹⁰ although epigraphical evidence from later centuries indicate the presence of the family also in Sabina, the origin of the Numa Pompilius.

The first Calpurnius appears in written sources only in 258 BC, M. Calpurnius Flamma, military tribune in 258 BC.¹¹ He was a hero of the First Punic War, as Livy reports that he led a detachment of 300 volunteers near Camarina in Sicily, which helped relieve the consular army that had fallen into an ambush. He was seemingly the sole survivor of the entire group, though gravely wounded.¹²

The next figure in the sources is C. Calpurnius Piso, who served as *praetor urbanus*

¹ Šašel 1963, 387–390 (= Šašel 1992, 75–78, in English, the original text is in Slovenian).

² Šašel 1964, 363–367 (= Šašel 1992, 90–94).

³ CIL 5, 54; Inscr. It. 10, 1, 81.

⁴ Fraschetti 1983, 77–101.

⁵ Sticotti 1940, 179–181.

⁶ Šonje 1958, 312–314.

⁷ Grisonic et al. 2022, 232–236; Cesarik et al. 2024, 15–18.

⁸ Hofmann-Löbl 1996.

⁹ Zmeskal 2009, 57–62.

¹⁰ More in Forsythe 1990, 296–297.

¹¹ F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1373 (Calpurnius 42); Broughton MRR 1, 207.

¹² The episode is mentioned several times in the sources: Liv. 20, 60, 11; Frontin. *Str.* 5, 15; Flor. I, 18, 13; Ampel. 10, 5; Oros. 4, 8, 2; Plin. *HN* 22, 11; [Aur. Vict.] *De vir. ill.* 39, 3; Zonar. 8, 12.

in 211 BC.¹³ Captured by the Carthaginians in the Battle of Cannae, he was sent back to Rome to negotiate the release of prisoners in exchange for a ransom,¹⁴ though the deal ultimately fell through. He later served as *propraetor* in Etruria and Capua.¹⁵ It appears he had two sons, one of whom, C. Calpurnius C. f. C. n. Piso became *praetor* in 186 BC. In 184 BC he achieved a triumph over the Lusitanians and Celtiberians. In 181 BC, he was involved, as *triumvir*, in founding the colony of Gravisca,¹⁶ and was elected consul in 180 BC.¹⁷ However, he died in office during the epidemic that broke out in Rome that same year.¹⁸

The second son, L. Calpurnius Piso is known only for his role as an envoy to the meeting of the Achaean League in 198 BC.¹⁹ He had a son, L. Calpurnius L. f. C. n. Piso Frugi, who became consul in 133 BC. According to current prosopographical research, his career marked the beginning of a new sub-branch of the family: the Calpurnii Pisones Frugi. Born around 180 BC, Piso Frugi was plebeian tribune in 146 BC and played a role in suppressing of the Sicilian slave rebellion in 139 BC.²⁰ He later became *praetor* in 136 BC, consul in 133 BC²¹ and censor in 120 BC.²² In addition to his political career, he was a historian of the annalistic tradition, whose text is preserved in nearly 50 fragments²³ of his work covering Roman history from the origins to the mid-2nd century BC. It is believed that he completed the manuscript after the censorship, as many fragments reflect on his experiences in that role. As tribune in 149 BC, he was responsible for passing the *lex Calpurnia de pecuniis repetundis*,²⁴ a law directed at curbing abuses committed by provincial governors.

It is possible that the three Pisones who served as consuls in 148, 139, and 135 BC, were sons of Piso, the consul in 180 BC, making them cousins of the Frugi consul in 133 BC. While this is an appealing hypothesis, it cannot be firmly proven. However, it may serve as a working theory for further research. L. Calpurnius C. f. C. n. Piso Caesoninus, consul in 148 BC, was clearly adopted into the family, as indicated by his agnomen, which suggests he was originally a member of the Caesonius family. The Caesonius family was an undistinguished plebeian lineage that only rose to relative political prominence much later, in the 1st and 2nd century AD.²⁵ The name

¹³ F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1376 (Calpurnius 61); Broughton MRR 1, 272–280; Liv. 25, 41, 12.

¹⁴ Liv. 22, 61, 6.

¹⁵ Liv. 26, 28, 6; Liv. 27, 6, 1.

¹⁶ Liv. 49, 29, 2.

¹⁷ F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1376 (Calpurnius 62); Broughton MRR 1, 387.

¹⁸ Liv. 40, 37, 1.

¹⁹ Broughton MRR 1, 331; Liv. 32, 19, 11; Forsythe 1994, 8–9.

²⁰ Flor. 2, 7, 7.

²¹ F. Münzer, C. Cichorius, PWRE, III, 1, 1392–1395 (Calpurnius 96); Broughton MRR 1, 492.

²² Broughton MRR 1, 523.

²³ Forsythe 1994.

²⁴ Richardson 1987; Betts, Marshal 2013.

²⁵ PWRE III, 1, 1317–1318 (F. Münzer, E. Groag, A. Stein), 12 people.

likely derives from the praenomen Caeso,²⁶ also the root of the gentilium Caesius.²⁷ However, no prominent member of the Caesonius family is known from this period, leaving his origins unclear. Piso Caesoninus gained recognition for his military campaign in Spain as praetor in 154 BC,²⁸ though he was less successful during the Third Punic War when he campaigned around Carthage as consul.²⁹ His presumed brother, L. Calpurnius Piso, consul in 139 BC,³⁰ is scarcely mentioned in the historical sources. Valerius Maximus notes that during his consulship, the *praetor* ordered the expulsion of “Chaldeans” – oriental astrologers and magicians – from Italy.³¹ The third brother, Q. Calpurnius C. f. C. n. Piso, consul in 135,³² also failed to distinguish himself. He fought in Spain but achieved little success.³³

Caesoninus, the consul of 148 BC, had a son of the same name, L. Calpurnius L. f. C. n. Piso Caesoninus, who later became consul in 112 BC.³⁴ He died in 107 BC while serving as a legate in Gaul,³⁵ and had a son of the same name, who is only recorded as having served as *quaestor* in 100 BC.³⁶ According to Cicero, this *quaestor* married a daughter of Calventius, a merchant from Placentia in northern Italy (Gallia Cisalpina),³⁷ and was involved in weapons manufacturing during the Social War.³⁸ The *quaestor*’s son, L. Calpurnius L. f. L. n. Piso Caesoninus, became consul in 58 BC.³⁹ He is the best-documented of his lineage, as he was active during the most turbulent years of the Late Republic. His political stance and actions often clashed with those of Cicero, who frequently criticized him in his speeches and writings. Piso is also well known for marrying his daughter, Calpurnia, to Julius Caesar, although he remained a reserved and cautious member of Caesar’s political circle.⁴⁰ After serving as *praetor* in 61 BC, and consul in 58 BC, he was appointed governor of Macedonia.⁴¹ His tenure led to charges of extortion, but he was acquitted, thanks in part to the support of Julius Caesar.⁴² Caesar’s backing was also instrumental in Piso’s election as

²⁶ Chase 1897, 119.

²⁷ PWRE III, 1, 1312–1317 (E. Groag, F. Münzer, A. Stein, F. W. Conbruch), 30 people.

²⁸ App. *Hisp.* 10, 56.

²⁹ App. *Pun.* 16, 109–114.

³⁰ F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1382 (Calpurnius 73); Broughton MRR 1, 481; some sources bring Cn. as praenomen.

³¹ Val. Max., 1, 3, 3.

³² F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1386 (Calpurnius 86); Broughton MRR 1, 488.

³³ App., *Hisp.* 13, 83; Obs. 85.

³⁴ F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1386–1387 (Calpurnius 88); Broughton MRR 1, 538.

³⁵ Caes. *B Gall.* 1, 12, 7; Oros. 5, 15, 23; App. *B Civ.* 3.

³⁶ F. Münzer PWRE III, 1, 1387 (89); Broughton MRR 1, 576.

³⁷ Cic. *Pis.* 6, 23; Asc. *Pis.*, p. 5, ed. Orelli; Cic. *Prov. Cons.* 4; Cic. *Sest.* 9.

³⁸ Cic. *Red. sen.* 13, 15; *Pis.* 53, 67, 87; *QFr.* 3, 1, 11.

³⁹ F. Münzer, PWRE III, 1, 1387–1390 (Calpurnius 90); Broughton MRR 2, 193.

⁴⁰ Syme 1960b, 62 and 135.

⁴¹ Bloch 1940, 487–488.

⁴² Caes. *B Gall.* 1, 12, 7; Plut. *Vit. Cat. Min.* 33, 3; Val. Max. 8, 1, 6.

consul, alongside Pompeius' preferred candidate.⁴³ Additionally, Piso sought support from Cicero, as his daughter Tullia was married to C. Calpurnius Piso Frugi,⁴⁴ the son of the Piso Frugi who had served as *praetor* in 74 BC.⁴⁵

In the other branch of the family, Piso Frugi, the consul of 133 BC and historian, had a son who fought alongside him in the slave uprising in Sicily in 139.⁴⁶ As *praetor* in 112 BC, this son later campaigned in Spain, where he died in battle.⁴⁷ His own son, the *praetor* in 74 BC, served as *triumvir monetalis* (mintmaster) during the Social War, later accused P. Gabinius of *repetundae* (extortion and/or corruption),⁴⁸ and became *praetor* alongside Verres, whom he frequently opposed.⁴⁹ Some scholars believe that this Calpurnius Piso was the *tribunus plebis* in 89 BC, who proposed the establishment of two new tribes and granting of citizenship to soldiers.⁵⁰ Others, however, question whether this was the same person.⁵¹ Cicero refers to the *praetor* of 74 BC as his friend, making the marriage between their children unsurprising, as such unions were often a means of solidifying political alliances. If this reconstruction is correct, there were the two main sub-branches of the Calpurnii Pisones – the Caesonini and the Frugi – at the very end of the Republic. The consul of 58 BC and Tullia's husband were fourth cousins.

The consul of 58 BC aligned himself with the tribune Publius Clodius against Cicero, who, in response, fiercely criticized him in his speeches and writings – likely with considerable exaggeration. One of the most unusual accusations concerned the consul's Epicurean protégé Philodemus.⁵² Nevertheless, Cicero's texts provide abundant details about the consul, making him the most prominent member of the Calpurnii in the mid-1st century BC. Elected censor in 50 BC, he is not explicitly mentioned in the sources as a duumvir of Pola, but it is now almost universally accepted that his name appears on the inscription of the Gate of Hercules in Pula,⁵³ alongside that of L. Cassius C. f. Longinus,⁵⁴ brother of one of the leading conspirators in the assassination of Julius Caesar on March 15th, 44 BC. Given that they would not have held such a position together after Caesar's death, this suggests that Pola was founded between 47 and

⁴³ Caes. *B Gall.* 1, 6, 4; Ascon. *Mil.* 37; Suet. *Iul.* 9; Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 14, 8; Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 48, 3; Plut. *Vit. Cat. Min.* 33, 3; App. *B Civ.* 2, 14; Dio Cass. 38, 9, 1 and 38, 13, 2.

⁴⁴ Cic. *Att.* 1, 3, 3. They were married in 67 BC. F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1391 (Calpurnius 93): he was *triumvir monetalis* in 61 BC.

⁴⁵ F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1395–1396 (Calpurnius 98).

⁴⁶ Val. Max. 4, 3, 10; Plin. *HN* 33, 38.

⁴⁷ F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1395 (Calpurnius 97); Cic. *Verr.* 4, 56; App. *Hisp.* 99.

⁴⁸ Cic. *Div. Caec.* 64.

⁴⁹ Cic. *Verr.* 1, 119.

⁵⁰ Sisenna fr. 17. Cf. Broughton MRR 2, 33–34.

⁵¹ Syme 1955, 58.

⁵² Cic. *Pis.* 68; Syme 1989, 345.

⁵³ CIL 5, 54; Inscr. It. 10, 1, 81.

⁵⁴ PIR² C 288; PIR² C 504.

45 BC.⁵⁵ Moreover, he disappears from historical records after the spring of 43 BC, his last recorded appearance is in the Senate on August 1, 43 BC.⁵⁶ He had a daughter, Calpurnia, who became Caesar's wife, and a son, L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, who later became *pontifex* and consul in 15 BC.⁵⁷ As the son was born 25 years after the daughter, it is likely that the consul had a second marriage.⁵⁸

In the Frugi branch of the family, after the Calpurnius, who married Tullia, the genealogical thread is lost, making it impossible to reliably connect him to Cn. Calpurnius Piso Frugi, consul in 23 BC.⁵⁹ This Piso was a Republican who sided with Pompeius during the civil war and later joined the faction of Caesar's assassins. However, after their downfall he was pardoned and withdrew from political life until Augustus appointed him as *consul suffectus* in 23 BC.⁶⁰ It was to this Piso and his two sons that Horace dedicated his poem *Ars poetica*, written between 20 and 10 BC. In his study on Calpurnia L. Pisonis Auguris filia, Jaroslav Šašel cautiously observes that 'there are no definitive arguments' as to whether the poem was dedicated to Piso, consul in 23 BC, or to Piso, the *pontifex*,⁶¹ though he favours the former.

Piso Caesoninus, consul in 58 BC, had a son, L. Calpurnius L. f. L. n. Piso Caesoninus Pontifex, who was consul in 15 BC. He took part in Augustus' wars against the Alpine tribes, served as proconsul of Transpadana, and was governor of Pamphylia (and likely Galatia). In 11 BC he distinguished himself by successfully suppressing unrest.⁶² His proconsulship in Asia and the office of legate in Syria remain subjects of debate.⁶³ However, as Tacitus records, he later served as *praefectus urbi* for nearly 20 years and died in AD 32.⁶⁴ The suburban Villa dei Papiri near Herculaneum, renowned for its extraordinarily rich library of Greek and Latin texts,⁶⁵ is commonly associated with Calpurnius Piso Pontifex. However, it was likely inherited from his father, who was well known as a patron of philosophers, although his son probably shared the same intellectual and artistic interests, as was customary in aristocratic circles of the Augustan age. Not only has Horace's *Ars poetica* been linked to him, but Antipater of Thessalonica also dedicated several epigrams in his honour. His title of *pontifex* earned him the nickname that distinguished him from his distant cousin, the Augur.

L. Calpurnius Piso, the Augur, served as consul in 1 BC, he was later charged for

⁵⁵ Fraschetti 1983; Zecchini 2014.

⁵⁶ Cic. *Fam.* 12, 2, 2; Cic. *Phil.* 12, 3.

⁵⁷ E. Groag, PWRE III, 1, 1396–1399 (Calpurnius 99): E. Groag has Frugi, not Caesoninus; cf. PIR² C 289.

⁵⁸ Syme 1989, 330.

⁵⁹ F. Münzer, PWRE III, 1, 1391–1392 (Calpurnius 95); PIR II² C 286. See also Syme 1960a, 12.

⁶⁰ Dio Cass. 53, 30; Syme 1960b, 334–335.

⁶¹ Šašel 1963, 387 (= Šašel 1992, 75); PIR² C 280.

⁶² Dio Cass. 54, 34, 5–7; Vell. Pat. 2, 98, 1, 2; Flor. 2, 27; Liv. *Per.* 140; Zonar. 10, 34.

⁶³ Syme 1960b, 398; Syme 1989, 333–334.

⁶⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 6, 10; Vell. Pat. 2, 98; see also Syme 1989, 348–342 and Eilers 1996.

⁶⁵ Longo Auricchio et al. 2020; Fleischer 2021.

treason (*maiestas*) and committed suicide in AD 24.⁶⁶ His likely older brother, Cn. Calpurnius Piso, was consul in 7 BC,⁶⁷ and subsequently governor of Hispania, Africa and later Syria. While in Syria, he came into conflict with the immensely popular Germanicus, and when Germanicus died in AD 19 in Antioch, Gnaeus was accused of having played a role in his death. Facing trial, he took his own life in AD 20.⁶⁸ The remarkable discovery in the province of Baetica of bronze tablets with the text of the *Senatus Consultum*⁶⁹ concerning Piso's trial (which was carried out after his death) has raised many questions and sparked extensive scholarly debate.⁷⁰ Piso was married to Munatia Plancina, granddaughter of L. Munatius Plancus, consul in 42 BC and censor in 22 BC. They had two sons,⁷¹ M. Calpurnius Cn. f. Cn. n. Piso,⁷² and L. Calpurnius Piso, who became consul in AD 27,⁷³ later serving as *praefectus urbi* in AD 36–37,⁷⁴ and as governor of Africa the following year. His son was Calpurnius, consul in AD 57.⁷⁵

In the Caesonini branch of the family, L. Calpurnius Pontifex had a daughter – Calpurnia, who married L. Nonius Asprenas, consul in AD 6. He also had a son – L. Calpurnius Piso,⁷⁶ and adopted M. Licinius Crassus, who became consul in AD 27, together with L. Calpurnius Piso of the Frugi branch.⁷⁷ Crassus' reclaimed the Calpurnii family name, becoming L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi Licinianus. He was exiled by Nero, recalled by Galba, who even adopted him as his intended successor to the throne, although this plan was never realized, as both were murdered in AD 69. It is possible that C. Calpurnius Piso Crassus Frugi Licinianus, *consul suffectus* in AD 87,⁷⁸ was his son, but this remains unproven.

However, the list does not end here, as there are other Calpurnii from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd centuries who cannot be definitively placed within the family tree (or trees; *Fig. 1*). One such figure is a C. Calpurnius Piso, who served as *consul suffectus* AD 42,⁷⁹ and was likely governor of Dalmatia between AD 42 and 50.⁸⁰ He took part in the conspiracy against Nero in AD 65, was even considered its leader, and committed suicide

⁶⁶ Dio Cass., index lib. Iv. See Syme 1989, 367–381. PIR² C 290.

⁶⁷ F. Münzer, PWRE III, 1, 1380–1382 (Calpurnius 70); PIR² C 287.

⁶⁸ Shotter 1974.

⁶⁹ Eck et al. 1996; EDH 030785.

⁷⁰ Damon, Takács 1999; Cooley 2023.

⁷¹ Syme 1980.

⁷² E. Groag, PWRE III, 1, 1386 (Calpurnius 85); PIR² C 296.

⁷³ E. Groag, PWRE III, 1, 1383–1384 (Calpurnius 76); PIR² C 293.

⁷⁴ Joseph. *AJ* 18, 169.

⁷⁵ PIR² C 294.

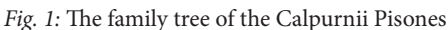
⁷⁶ PIR II² C 292.

⁷⁷ Syme 1960, 424.

⁷⁸ Aur. Vict. *Epit. de Caes.* 12; Cass. Dio 68, 3, 16; Grainger 2003, 69–72.

⁷⁹ E. Groag, PWRE III, 1, 1377–1379 (Calpurnius 65).

⁸⁰ Betz 1938, 31–32; Tončinić 2011, 167; CIL 3, 12794. Wilkes 1969, 83 thinks he was the consul of AD 27.



after the plot was uncovered by the emperor.⁸¹ Tacitus provide extensive details about his life, but not enough to firmly establish his place within the genealogical lineage of the Calpurnii Pisones, despite mentioning that he was *consobrinus* (maternal cousin) of the Calpurnius who was consul in AD 57.⁸² It is likely that a panegyric in verse, *Laus Pisonis*,⁸³ attributed to Calpurnius Siculus or Lucan (though other authors have been suggested),⁸⁴ was dedicated to him. His son, Calpurnius C. f. Piso Galerianus, was murdered in AD 69.⁸⁵ The poet Calpurnius Siculus, author of seven pastoral poems (*Eclogues*) and possibly the *Laus Pisonis*, was active in the Neronian period (mid-1st century AD).⁸⁶ His cognomen may suggest a servile origin, indicating that he could have been a freedman of an otherwise unknown Calpurnius.

Four more Calpurnii are recorded in the sources from the late 1st century AD to the early 3rd century AD.⁸⁷ A fragment of the *Fasti Ostienses* indicates that a Calpurnius Piso served as *consul suffectus* in AD 97,⁸⁸ a C. Calpurnius Piso was consul in AD 111,⁸⁹ L. Calpurnius Piso held the consulship in AD 175,⁹⁰ during the reign of Commodus, and Ser. Calpurnius Domitius Dexter was consul in AD 225.⁹¹ This survey of all relevant Calpurnii from the senatorial elite⁹² underscores the prominence of the gens, whose wealth and influence were considerable. Their extensive landholdings in Italy and various provinces likely contributed to the large number of freed Calpurnii and their descendants attested in epigraphic records.

* * *

Our Calpurnia from Pag was the daughter of the Augur, and thus cousin of her uncle's two sons. She left her name on four altars dedicated to oriental deities in Caska, on the island of Pag. These altars are well known – three have been discussed by Jaroslav Šašel, while the fourth was examined more recently in a paper and a monograph.⁹³ Her devotion to oriental gods is evident, despite the fact that the Emperor Tiberius had banned such cults by decree in AD 19.⁹⁴ The first two inscriptions, noticed at the beginning of the 20th century, are now lost, and we rely on transcriptions made

⁸¹ Tac. *Ann.* 15, 48–59; Suet. *Ner.* 36, SHA *Pesc. Nig.* 9, 2; SHA *Clod.* 12, 10.

⁸² Tac. *Hist.* 4, 49.

⁸³ Verdière 1954.

⁸⁴ Champlin 1989, 101–102.

⁸⁵ Tac. *Hist.* 4, 11; PIR² C 301.

⁸⁶ Baldwin 1995.

⁸⁷ Syme 1960b, 497.

⁸⁸ PIR² C 248; Zevi 1973, 127–137.

⁸⁹ F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1379 (Calpurnius 66); PIR² C 285.

⁹⁰ E. Groag, PWRE III, 1, 1386 (Calpurnius 82); PIR² C 295; SHA, *Comm.* 12.

⁹¹ E. Groag, PWRE, III, 1, 1370–1371 (Calpurnius 33).

⁹² In PIR² C 240–334, there are 94 male and female members of the gens (not only the *Pisones*), and the list is certainly not complete.

⁹³ Grisonic et al. 2022; Cesarik et al. 2024.

⁹⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 2, 85; Joseph, *AJ*, 17, 3; Suet. *Tib.* 36.

soon after their discovery. Their texts are identical, and the name of the deity (or deities) is missing. Calpurnia is identified as L. Pisonis Auguris filia, Cn. Pisonis Neptis.

The text of the third inscription is challenging but largely readable, except for the first line, which appears to be encrypted – likely due to the imperial ban.⁹⁵ However, the openly written epithets in lines 2–6 clearly indicate an oriental cult. The fourth inscription is explicitly devoted to Isis, and both inscriptions contain the same formula of Calpurnia's name. It has been correctly suggested that the fourth inscription was consecrated towards the end of Tiberius' reign, implying that Calpurnia likely resided in Caska for an extended period. However, whether she lived there permanently or intermittently — as was common among the Roman elite — remains unknown. It appears that she never married, and she inherited her father's estate on Pag.⁹⁶

The Calpurnii Pisones came into possession of estates on the island as a gift from Augustus, either to the consul of 23 BC or to his sons – the Augur (father of Calpurnia) and his brother. The chain of events that led to the latter's death by suicide in AD 20 is described in details by Tacitus,⁹⁷ as it was the consequence of the death of Germanicus, an affair that has drawn significant attention in modern historiography,⁹⁸ particularly following the discovery and publication of bronze tablets with the text of the *senatus consultum*.⁹⁹ The trial took place despite the defendant's suicide, and the verdict included a ban on mourning him, the removal of his statues and inscriptions, and a prohibition on using his *imagines* in the family's funeral processions. Additionally, his estates were confiscated 'with the exception of the lands which were in Illyricum', as they had been granted to his father (the consul 23 BC) by Augustus himself.¹⁰⁰ The Senate decreed that these lands in Illyricum were to be divided: half to his son (consul AD 27), who was required to change his *praenomen* from Gnaeus to Lucius,¹⁰¹ the other half to his brother M. Calpurnius. However, from their joint property one million sesterces were to be given to Calpurnia, daughter of Cn. Calpurnius, about whom no further record exists.¹⁰²

The fate of L. Calpurnius Piso Augur (consul AD 1), who was later accused of treason and committed suicide in AD 24, is not well documented. However, if Augustus donated lands in Illyricum to the elder Cn. Calpurnius (consul 23 BC), then half would have also belonged to the Augur. That the Calpurnii owned an estate (or estates) on Pag is beyond doubt. To expand upon the picture, Jaroslav Šašel produced,

⁹⁵ Grisonic et al. 2022, 242–244; Cesarik et al. 2024, 49.

⁹⁶ Grisonic et al. 2022, 247.

⁹⁷ Tac. *Ann.* 2, 34–84, 3, 1–18.

⁹⁸ Shotter 1968; Rapke 1982; Bird 1987.

⁹⁹ Eck et al. 1996; EDH 030785; Damon, Takács 1999; Mackay 2003; Lovenjak 2016; Pigoń 2023; Taterka 2023; Cooley 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Eck et al. 1996, lines 84–85.

¹⁰¹ Eck et al. 1996, lines 99–100.

¹⁰² Eck et al. 1996, lines 102–105.

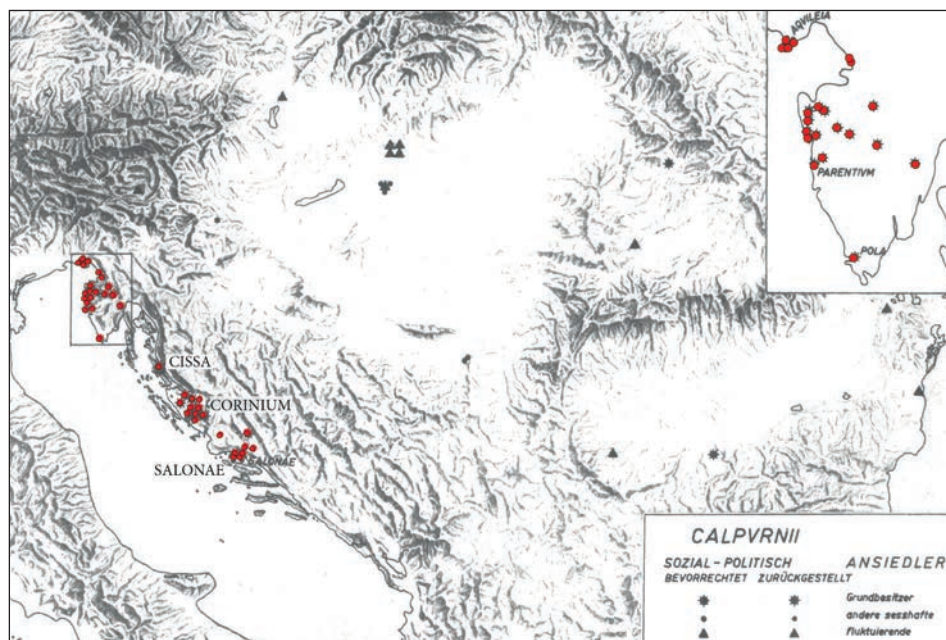


Fig. 2: Distribution of the Calpurnii in Istria and Dalmatia (Šašel 1964, T. XVII)

in *Probleme und Möglichkeiten onomastischer Forschung* (1964; Fig. 2),¹⁰³ a list of 48 Calpurnii in Istria and Dalmatia, along with 26 in the Danubian provinces. Of these, 21 are from Istria (including Aquileia), 14 from Liburnia (including Pag) and 13 from the rest of Dalmatia. After 60 years, hardly any new names can be added to the list, meaning that the statistical distribution remains largely unchanged. In the last column of the list (*Charakteristik*), Šašel attempted to classify individuals according to their social position based on the categories explained in the legend.¹⁰⁴ For clarity, I present these in pairs: landowners – settlers (meaning those who did not own the land), privileged – disadvantaged, sedentary – fluctuating.

Three concentrations on the eastern Adriatic are clearly evident: northwestern Istria from Koper to Umag and Novigrad, including Aquileia; Corinium (Karin) in southern Liburnia; and Salona with its surroundings. Caska, on the island of Pag, stands out as an isolated case but remains our most significant source for the family's history on the eastern Adriatic coast. Particularly interesting is the appearance of C. Calpurnius C. Frugi libertus, at Koper,¹⁰⁵ the only explicit reference to a member

¹⁰³ Šašel 1964, 363–367.

¹⁰⁴ Šašel 1964, 364–366.

¹⁰⁵ CIL 5, 495; Inscr. It. 10, 3, 15. Šašel erroneously gives Grožnjan as provenance.

of this branch. The name Caesoninus also appears in two fragmented inscriptions from Pola, which are absent from Šašel's list. These fragments seem to mention a Caesoninus,¹⁰⁶ but it is impossible to determine the precise individual. It could refer to the consul of 58 BC or the *pontifex*, and the fragment is too small to identify the type of inscription with certainty.

Šašel's swift analysis of the Calpurnii in Istria, Dalmatia and Pannonia led him to conclude that in Istria and Dalmatia they were firmly rooted in the land, whereas in Pannonia they appeared later (in the 2nd century AD), sporadically and temporarily, primarily engaging in administration or military service. A third nucleus of numerous epigraphic attestations of the Calpurnii is found in the western part of Regio Decima (Brixia, Verona, Vicetia), with nearly 20 recorded names. These attestations also provide evidence of family estates in the region. Given the many branches and sub-branches of the Calpurnii, their significant presence in the epigraphic record should not come as a surprise, although they represent just one of many examples of the Roman elite's economic interests in both Italy and the provinces, as economics has always been the foundation of politics – the two being inseparable. However, a deeper analysis of this relationship lies beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁰⁶ *L. Calpurnius L. f. Piso Cae(soninus)*; CIL 1, 2512; Inscr. It. 10, 1, 65; ...*L. Cal)purn(ius L. f. Cae)son(inus cos? ... vel II vir ? ...*; Inscr. It. 10, 1, 708?; ILJug 417.

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Abbreviations

Broughton MRR = T. Robert S. Broughton, *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic*, American Philological Association (1952–1986).

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berolini 1863–.

EDH = *Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg*, Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. <https://edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/home?lang=de> (last access 15 July 2025).

Inscr. It. = *Inscriptiones Italiae*, Roma 1916–.

PIR = E. Groag, A. Stein (eds.), *Prosopographia Imperii Romani saec. I. II. III, Editio altera, Pars II*, Berlin, Leipzig 1936.

PWRE = A. Pauly, G. Wissowa (eds.), *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Stuttgart 1894–.

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Robert Matijašić
Juraj Dobrila University of Pula
Zagrebačka 30
52100 Pula, Croatia
robert.matijasic@unipu.hr
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0140-7617>

Spectacles and Private Munificence in the Light of the Epigraphical Material of Cisalpine Gaul. Financial Aspects Regarding *Spectacula* and Buildings for Entertainment

Renate LAFER

Abstract

Numerous inscriptions from Cisalpine Gaul indicate euergetic activities, especially among the local aristocratic elite. However, with regard to the maintenance of buildings for spectacles and sports, as well as the financing of games, the amount of epigraphic documentation is rather small, which is strange compared to other well-Romanized provinces such as those in North Africa. An analysis of the epigraphic evidence from the four northern Italian *regiones* can clarify why this might be the case, and how the lack of involvement of private sponsors perhaps was compensated.

Keywords: spectacles; theatre; amphitheatre; circus; athletic competition; benefactors; private munificence; Gallia Cisalpina

Izvleček

Spektakli in zasebno donatorstvo v luči epigrafskega gradiva Cisalpinske Galije. Finančni vidiki javnih predstav in gradenj, namenjenih zabavi

Številni napisi iz Cisalpinske Galije kažejo na donatorsko dejavnost (euergetizem), zlasti med lokalno aristokratsko elito. Vendar pa so glede vzdrževanja stavb za predstave in športne prireditve ter za financiranja iger epigrafski viri dokaj skromni, kar je nenavadno v primerjavi z drugimi dobro romaniziranimi provincami, na primer v severni Afriki. Analiza napisnih pričevanj iz štirih regij severne Italije morda lahko pojasni, zakaj bi temu lahko bilo tako in kako je bilo morda nadomeščeno pomanjkanje vključevanja zasebnih donatorjev.

Ključne besede: predstave; gledališče; amfiteater; cirkus; atletska tekmovanja; donatorji; zasebno donatorstvo; Cisalpinska Galija

Introduction

From the four regions of Cisalpine Gaul – *Aemilia* (*regio* VIII), *Liguria* (*regio* IX), *Venetia et Histria* (*regio* X) and *Transpadana* (*regio* XI) – there are quite a lot of known archaeological remains regarding buildings for entertainment, as well as inscriptions concerning spectacles. As far as spectacles are concerned, the terms *spectacula* or *ludi* were generally used, which meant performances in the theatre, fights in the amphitheatre, circus races and athletic competitions. Among them, theatre performances were particularly popular, as is commonly known, as the many remains of theatres, critical statements – especially by later Christian authors – and references in inscriptions show.¹ With regard to the Gallia Cisalpina, it can be said that the theatre buildings have in most cases been excavated completely, or at least partially, and can therefore be very well located and dated. Many of them can be dated back to the Republican period² or especially from the beginning of the Imperial period onwards. Today some of them are not visible any more,³ or they can only be assumed from the outlines of buildings⁴, while others are known only from inscriptions.⁵

Besides *ludi scaenici* performed in theatres, *venationes* (hunting, or the killing of wild beasts) and *munera* (gladiatorial combats) held in amphitheatres were also popular. However, amphitheatres have not been found as frequently as theatres, although some remains of arenas do exist.⁶ Some of the amphitheatres were built in the Augustan period, but usually they can be dated to later times.⁷ However, it must be taken into consideration that gladiatorial games could also have taken place on the forum or in the theatre, as will be shown below.

The situation is different with *ludi circenses*, and for circus races there is only

¹ For spectacles in general cf. Weeber 1994. For literary sources, in particular Christian authors compare, for example, Lafer 2005. Regarding the distribution of theatres in Cisalpine Gaul see Tosi 2003, 451–586; see also the solid documentation of sources regarding theatres on <https://www.theatrum.de/7.html>. Theatrum.de is a project of the Landesarchäologie Mainz, which intends to examine the theatre of Mainz by collecting and comparing information and literature about other theatres in the western part of the empire. According to this project there are about 24 theatres known in Cisalpine Gaul. For inscriptions in connection with spectacles, cf. Lafer 2009.

² For example, the theatres of Aquileia, Pola, Bononia, Mediolanum, and Verona. For details see Verzàr-Bass 1990, 414–424; Goffin 2002, 95, fn. 561.

³ Some theatres are known from documentations in earlier centuries. The theatre of Atria, for example, is known from a 17th century document, cf. Tosi 2003, 504–506.

⁴ For example the theatre of Vicetia, cf. Tosi 2003, 545.

⁵ For example Dertona, cf. Tosi 2003, 568.

⁶ For the distribution of amphitheatres in Cisalpine Gaul cf. Tosi 2003, 451–586; see also <https://amphi-theatrum.de/1366.html>. Amphitheatrum.de is another project of the Landesarchäologie Mainz. The goal is the gathering of information about several amphitheatres in the western part of the empire, although in Mainz no amphitheatre has yet been found. According to this project there are known about 16 amphitheatres in Cisalpine Gaul; for amphitheatres in general see, for example, Bomgardner 2000; Hönle, Henze 1981; Welch 2007.

⁷ Cf. Goffin 2002, 99.

sparse archaeological evidence. It is known that in Cisalpine Gaul there were *circi* in Aquileia, Mediolanum and Ravenna, although there are almost no archaeological remains of them today. As Letzner states in his monograph on circus complexes, the *circi* in Aquileia and Mediolanum, for example, date from the Late Roman period and are partly connected to tetrarchic palace complexes.⁸ The circus of Ravenna, on the other hand, is only known from later literary sources.⁹

Finally, athletic competitions are documented almost exclusively in epigraphic material, while archaeological remains such as stadiums, in which they were usually held in the eastern provinces, are not known. In the western part of the empire athletic activities were usually performed in public *thermae* or sometimes in so-called *gymnasia*, which, however, cannot be found in inscriptions of Cisalpine Gaul, although they are mentioned in inscriptions relating to the Africa Proconsularis.¹⁰

A few mentions of two kinds of facilities in the epigraphic documentation of North Italy – called *campi* and *xysti* – with great probability indicate the presence of physical training facilities in this region.¹¹ Goffin thinks that the expression *campus* was used for sports fields for young people in the cities, which were located outside of the city walls,¹² as can be seen by the archaeological situation in Albingaunum (Albenga), where an inscription mentioning a *campus* was also found.¹³ In many cases *campi* possessed a *piscina* and a *porticus*, as is mentioned for the *campus* of Verona.¹⁴ *Xysti*, which can be found in numerous inscriptions of Cisalpine Gaul,¹⁵ might have had a similar function: they apparently also served as sports venues for physical activities, possibly with covered porticos for training in winter or in rainy weather, as indicated by the Greek term *xystos*, from which the term is apparently derived.

Spectacles and private munificence in Cisalpine Gaul

As Livio Zerbini pointed out in several publications about private munificence in Cisalpine Gaul,¹⁶ aspects of euergetism can be found in numerous inscriptions. These documents inform us that wealthy individuals, mostly belonging to the local mu-

⁸ Letzner 2009, 123. For the circus of Aquileia, cf. also Tosi 2003, 500–503; for Mediolanum cf. Tosi 2003, 575–577.

⁹ Tosi 2003, 465.

¹⁰ Regarding the terminus *gymnasium* and the discussion about its distribution and meaning, cf. Lafer 2013.

¹¹ For the epigraphical documentation of *xysti* and *campi*, in North Italy see Goffin 2002, 98–101.

¹² Goffin 2002, 98.

¹³ AE 1994, 650 (Albingaunum). For the archaeological situation and the localization of the *campus* of Albenga cf. Mennella, Spadea Noviero 1994, esp. 134 ff.

¹⁴ CIL V 3408 (Verona).

¹⁵ For the inscriptions mentioning *xysti* see Goffin 2002, 99. Among others they can be found in Verona or Placentia.

¹⁶ Zerbini 1990; Zerbini 1994; Zerbini 2008.

nicipal aristocracy, sponsored the construction or restoration of public buildings like forums or public baths, or they donated statues of gods or other monuments within the sacred sphere. In any case, private munificence was an important component for the social and financial life of the cities, as a large quantity of inscriptions shows.¹⁷

Compared to the high number of documents referring to the practice of euergetism in this region, there are not many references regarding private munificence concerning spectacles. This situation seems a little strange, as from other provinces of the western part of the empire, in particular from the provinces of North Africa or those of Spain, a multitude of such inscriptions exist.¹⁸

According to the municipal statutes, emperors and magistrates were obliged to give spectacles *ob honorem* or to finance the restoration of sites used for entertainment. Wealthy individuals, aristocrats, priests and magistrates are also mentioned in several inscriptions as benefactors *sua pecunia* or *impensa sua*.¹⁹ However, sometimes it is not clear whether the *munificentia* is related to the official function of a magistrate, in particular if the inscription is very fragmented.

Spectacles were often given on festivities in order to inaugurate construction projects or erections of statues.²⁰ Sometimes a sum of money is mentioned, with which *ludi* and *epula* (official banquets) should be organized. In some cases a sum of money is donated to mark a certain occasion, such as the *dies natalis* of the person who is honoured in the inscription that states a *spectaculum* should take place. Thus the benefactors gained prestige in public, they could preserve their memory, and sometimes also received a statue because of their generosity.

Private munificence in epigraphic documentation

From all four *regiones* of Cisalpine Gaul inscriptions testify to the existence of private munificence.²¹ Most of the epigraphic documents come from the *regio Venetia et Histria* (*regio X*) and concern theatres (for details see *Table 1*, Overview of the inscriptions on private munificence in Cisalpine Gaul).

Starting with the *regio Aemilia* (*regio VIII*), there are only six inscriptions which indicate private munificence. All of them are dated very early to the beginning of the Imperial or even the end of the Republican period. A very fragmented building

¹⁷ Cf. also Engfer 2017.

¹⁸ Regarding the inscriptions from North Africa, cf. Lafer 2009.

¹⁹ Engfer 2017, 182–183.

²⁰ Engfer 2017, 183.

²¹ The inscriptions were analysed using the Clausss-Slaby database (EDCS): <http://www.manfredclausss.de/>. For all inscriptions cited here, the EDCS-number is given, which means that not all publications of the inscriptions discussed here are listed, but can be found under the EDCS-number (see also *Table 1*).

Table 1: Overview of the inscriptions on private munificence in Cisalpine Gaul

Regio	City	Source	Building of entertainment/spectacle	Status	Dating
VIII	Ariminum	AE 1961, 135 = AE 1965, 283 = EDCS-13400190	theatre (frgmt.)	?	?
	Claterna	CIL XI 683 = EDCS-20402112	...ludos fec(it); gladiatorial games?	s[e]xvir	early 1 st century AD
	Claterna	ECDS-84600049	...[l]udos fec(it); gladiatorial games?	sexvir	early 1 st century AD
	Placentia	CIL XI 1219 = EDCS-20402670	...bis xystum cu[m st]a/ tuis et ornamentis / V[3]E[3]ens(ibus?) ded(it)	IIIvir iu(re) d(icundo) / augur prae(fectus) fabr(um) cons(ularis)	Augustan period
	San Possidonio	CIL XI 948 = EDCS-20402391	...[i]n xystos August[os(?)] / [no]vis operib[us] / [ex]struendos(?) ornand[osq(ue)]	?	first half of 1 st century AD
	Forum Popilii	AE 1987, 248 = EDCS-07400181	... decrevit et locum [3] / in campo	?	AD 79–81
IX	Dertona	CIL V 7376 = EDCS-05400625	...porticum vet[ustate] / [corruptam refecit] forum s(ua) p(ecunia) rest[ituit] / [in cuius dedi]catione epulum inter / spectacula et [3] HS col(oniae) / dedit	decur[iones] et pl[ebis] col(oniae Iuliae A) ugus(tae) Derton(ae)	22 BC
	Albingaunum	AE 1994, 650 = EDCS-00380250	...campum maceriis [saeptum(?)] / [su]a pecunia populo / [de]dit in perpetu[um]	IIIvir aed(ilicia) pot(estate)	early 1 st century AD
X	Aquileia	CIL V 1021 = EDCS-01600299	por]ticum dupl[icem 3] / [3]o sternendas [	?	end of 2 nd century BC (?)
	Augusta Taurinorum	AE 1994, 753 = EDCS-12700213	...port]icum cum [suis ornamentis et do]mus dederunt	ordo equester	middle of 1 st century AD
	Brixia	CIL V 4392 = EDCS-04203444	...ob liberalita[tem eius quod] / in opus amp[hitheatri]	libertus; ornamentis / decurion(alibus) Brixia[ae] / Veron(ae) Cremon(ae) [honor(ato)]	end of 2 nd century AD

Regio	City	Source	Building of entertainment/spectacle	Status	Dating
X	Tergeste	CIL V 534 = EDCS-04200623 Cf. CIL V 535 = EDCS-04200624; Cf. InscrIt-10-04, 00034 = EDCS-04600011	theatre – extensive restructuring ...dedit [idemque dedicavit]	<i>p(rimus) p(ilus) bis / leg(ionis) XII Fulm(inatae) et leg(ionis) I Adiu[t] ric(is) trib(unus) mil(itum) coh(ortis) V vig(ilum) / tr(ibunus) coh(ortis) XII urb(anae) tr(ibunus) coh(ortis) V pr(aetoriae) pr[oc]urator divi Nervae et Imp(eratoris) Caesaris / Nervae Traiani Aug(usti) Germ(anici) provin[c(iarum) Hi]spaniae citer(ioris) Asturiae et / Callaeciarum flamen divi Claud[i]</i>	AD 98–102
	Iulia Concordia	AE 1995, 586 = AE 2008, 568 = EDCS-51400946	...lu]do[s cum ve]nat(ione?) ex HS [3] /...	<i>aed(ilis) II[vir i(ure) d(icundo)]</i>	2 nd century AD
	Iulia Concordia	AE 1959, 273 = AE 1976, 240 = EDCS-13302736	Frgmt. ...scaen[am(?) Restoration of scaenae frons	?	end of 1 st century AD
	Iulia Concordia	CIL V 1897 = EDCS-04200956	... in] ludos [et] in / c[enam et i]n epulum / [HS CCC]C(milia)... dari iu[ss]it...	Augustalis	1 st /2 nd century AD
	Verona	CIL V 3348 = EDCS-04202394	...theatrum...	patronus, ordo equester	2 nd half of 1 st century AD
	Verona	CIL V 3408 = EDCS-04202453	...[id]em in porticu quae / [d]ucit at ludum public(um) / [c]olumn(as) IIII cum superfic(io) / [e]t stratura pictura / [v]olente populo dedit	...equo publico / honorib(us) omnib(us) / municip(alibus) functus	1 st century AD
	Verona	CIL V 3441 = EDCS-40200160; EDCS-40200161; EDCS-40200165; EDCS-40200166; EDCS-40200163; EDCS-40200162; EDCS-40200167; EDCS-40200171; EDCS-40200172	names on pillars in theatre	?	2 nd half of 1 st century AD
	Verona	CIL V 3863 = EDCS-04202915	...p[edes] / XXXX / [porti]cum xystu[m	?	1 st century AD (?)

Regio	City	Source	Building of entertainment/spectacle	Status	Dating
XI	Eporedia	CIL V 6798 = EDCS-05400042	theatre (fgrmt.)	patronus	early 2 nd century AD
	Augusta Taurinorum	AE 1994, 00753 = EDCS-12700213	...port]icum cum [suis ornamentis et do]mus dederunt	ordo equester	middle of 1 st century AD

inscription from **Ariminum** (Rimini)²² reports the decoration with ornaments of the rather poorly preserved theatre of Ariminum, which was built in the first decades of the 1st century AD, according to the epigraphic documentation.²³ Better preserved are two almost identical boundary stones for a burial district from **Claterna** (Ozzana dell Emilia)²⁴ in the neighbourhood of Bologna, which are also more interesting. They mention a *libertus* named P. Camurius Nicephor, who organized games (*ludi fecit*) for six days. It is difficult to say which games they were, since there is no archaeological evidence of a theatre, amphitheatre, or circus in Claterna.²⁵ Usually, however, the term *ludus* refers to performances in theatres or circus races.²⁶ As they lasted for six days and therefore would have been very expensive, circus races in my opinion can be excluded. Zaccaria²⁷ suspected *ludi scaenici*, but perhaps we can also think about gladiatorial games – in a provisionally erected amphitheatre? – as the background of the inscription is a funerary one. What is interesting in any case is the fact that Publius Camurius Nicephor seems to have been a wealthy freedman, who wanted to show off his wealth by financing games lasting several days.

Regarding athletic activities, three inscriptions exist, which mention *xysti* and perhaps a *campus*.²⁸ As stated above, they are difficult to locate, as there are no archaeological remains. However, the well-preserved inscription from **Placentia** is interesting because of the social status of the donor of a *xystus cum statu*s and further *ornamenta* – it is Sextus Petronius Lupus Marianus, a member of the local aristocracy, who held high municipal positions as *IIIvir iure dicundo* and *augur*, and even an equestrian position as *praefectus fabrum consularis*.

If we look at the **regio Liguria** (*regio IX*), we can also find two very early inscriptions on private munificence dating to the end of Republican era and beginning of the Imperial period. The first document, fragmented in the first few lines, was found

²² AE 1961, 135 = AE 1965, 283 = EDCS-13400190.

²³ Tosi 2003, 452–453.

²⁴ CIL XI 683 (p 1238) = EDCS-20402112 and ECDS-84600049; cf. also lupa 33426 and 33427.

²⁵ Tosi 2003, 458.

²⁶ Engfer 2017, 173–174.

²⁷ Zaccaria 1994, 74, 82.

²⁸ CIL XI 1219 = EDCS-20402670 (Placentia); CIL XI 948 = EDCS-20402391 (San Possidonio); AE 1987, 248 = EDCS-07400181 (Forum Popilii).

in **Dertona** (Tortona)²⁹ and mentions an unknown person, who among other things, restored the *forum sua pecunia*. On this occasion he also gave an official banquet (*epulum*) *inter spectacula* as well as an unknown sum of money. In return he received this inscription from the *decuriones* and *plebs*, and perhaps also could expect the erection of a statue with public finances. It is not clear which games are meant by the term *spectacula*, since no structural remains of buildings have been found in Dertona so far. Tosi and Zaccaria combine this inscription with the possible existence of a theatre, thus relating the mentioned *spectacula* to theatre performances.³⁰ However, the question cannot be definitively resolved.

Finally, in the second inscription coming from **Albingaunum** (Albenga)³¹ a municipal official gave a *campus sua pecunia* to the *populus*. The location of this *campus* was discussed by Menella and Spadea Noviero in connection with the discovery of the inscription in the 1990s, but still not many details are known.³²

However, most of the inscriptions on euergetism in Cisalpine Gaul come from the **regio Venetia et Histria** (regio X).

Of particular note here are theatre buildings, which underwent restorations or decorations through euergetic activities, especially in the 1st century AD. Epigraphic evidence of these remains comes from Verona, Tergeste and Iulia Concordia. However, the earliest inscription that gives us information about private munificence, and can probably be dated to the end of the 2nd century BC, is found in **Aquileia**.³³ This is a building inscription that has only been preserved in fragments, and which mentions construction measures on the *porticus duplex* and paving work by an unknown benefactor due to the poor state of preservation.³⁴

Although the famous amphitheatre, a theatre, and an odeon in **Verona** can be located based on archaeological remains,³⁵ only a few inscriptions indicate euergetic activities. This particularly applies to the theatre probably already built in the late Republican period.³⁶ Several inscriptions on pillars in the western part of the upper gallery bearing the names of leading families of the city, including the very influential *gens Gavia*, according to Goffin,³⁷ may be linked to construction work on the theatre. Furthermore, perhaps

²⁹ CIL V 7376 = EDCS-05400625 (dat. 22 BC). Dertona is sometimes located in the *regio XI*, see e.g. Tosi 2003, 568 and theatrum.de: <https://www.theatrum.de/1218.html>.

³⁰ Tosi 2003, 568; Zaccaria 1994, 74; <https://www.theatrum.de/1218.html>

³¹ AE 1994, 650 = EDCS-00380250.

³² For the discussion of the inscription and the archaeological situation regarding the *campus* of Albingaunum see also Mennella, Spadea Noviero 1994. The only remains we have in Albingaunum belong to an amphitheatre, which is dated rather late to the second or third century AD; cf. Tosi 2003, 473–474.

³³ CIL V 1021 = EDCS-01600299; cf. Goffin 2002, 96.

³⁴ Goffin 2002, 96 thinks that with *porticus duplex* the *porticus post scaenam* was meant. Tosi 2003, 499–500.

³⁵ Tosi 2003, 535–545.

³⁶ Regarding the discussion about the dating cf. Tosi 2003, 539.

³⁷ Cf. Goffin 2002, 96; CIL V 3441.

interesting is an honorary inscription, the first lines of which are missing, but it is clear from what remains that a member of the *ordo equester* probably carried out construction or restoration work on the theatre in the 1st century AD.³⁸

Finally, another two inscription fragments can also be dated to the 1st century AD. One mentions a *ludus publicus*,³⁹ which was obviously equipped, among other things, with columns by an unknown donor, and can be connected with gladiatorial games, and the other is a very fragmented inscription mentioning a *xystus*.⁴⁰

Similar to Verona, **Tergeste** also had a theatre building at an early stage, possibly since the Julio-Claudian period, on which extensive restoration work was carried out by a highly decorated *eques* at the end of the first century AD. This was the well-known Quintus Petronius Modestus, who announced his construction activities (*dedit idemque dedicavit*) above the entrances to the theatre in the form of several identical inscriptions.⁴¹

The third theatre dating from a very early period, from which there are also some indications of private munificence, is that of **Iulia Concordia**. The location of this theatre, possibly dating back to the Augustan period, of which a few architectural traces have survived, is known.⁴² The existence of an amphitheatre, which was also discussed in the literature by some scholars based on the epigraphic material, has not yet been proved.⁴³

Only a few remains of an originally monumental building inscription on the architrave of the *scaenae frons* of the theatre have survived, which mention a Lucius Minic[ius ---], but of whom nothing else is known beyond that due to the very fragmented state of the inscription.⁴⁴

Two other, more informative inscriptions, although also very fragmented, most likely refer to the financing of performances in the theatre. In the first text, an *aedilis* and *IIvir iure dicundo* donated a sum of sesterces for *lu]do[s cum ve]nat(ione?)*, the exact amount of which cannot be determined because of the bad conservation state of the inscription.⁴⁵ However, as there are many gaps in the inscription, it is difficult to determine whether this was given as part of his *summa honoraria* or perhaps as private munificence. What is interesting is the mention of apparently theatrical

³⁸ CIL V 3348 = EDCS-04202394; see also Goffin 2002, 96; Zaccaria 1990, 152, No. 122.

³⁹ CIL V 3408 = EDCS-04202453; Bomgardner 2000, 72; <https://www.amphi-theatrum.de/1369.html>

⁴⁰ CIL V 3863 = EDCS-04202915.

⁴¹ CIL V 534 = EDCS-04200623; CIL V 535 = EDCS-04200624; InscrIt-10-04, 00034 = EDCS-04600011; see also lupa 16150 and 30956. Quintus Petronius Modestus followed an equestrian career from *primus pilus* of two legions to *tribunus militum* resp. *tribunus cohortis* of the three *cohortes* in Rome: of the *vigiles*, *cohors urbana* and *praetoria*. At the top of his career he was *procurator* in Hispania Citerior under Nerva and Claudius. For the theatre of Tergeste see also Tosi 2003, 530–534.

⁴² Tosi 2003, 512–513.

⁴³ Cf. the discussion in Tosi 2003, 512.

⁴⁴ AE 1959, 273 = AE 1976, 240 = EDCS-13302736; Goffin 2002, 97.

⁴⁵ AE 1995, 00586 = EDCS-51400946.

games in connection with animal hunts. As some examples from Africa Proconsularis show, animal hunts could also take place in the theatre, although probably only in exceptional cases.⁴⁶ Therefore, we can perhaps assume that animal hunts occasionally also took place in the theatre in Iulia Concordia.

The second epigraphic document is an honorary inscription inscribed on an altar, now preserved in the Museo nazionale Concordiese di Portogruaro. The monument was reconstructed and restored in 1954.⁴⁷ On the front and back of the altar one can read almost the same inscription in different fragments: "Honoured is Marcus Acutius Noetus, Augustalis, who left 400,000 sesterces to the colonia Concordia by his will for games (*ludi*), for a dinner (*cena*) and for an official banquet (*epulum*)."⁴⁸ As already explained above when discussing the inscription from Iulia Concordia, it can be assumed that these *ludi* took place in the theatre, as Claudio Zaccaria also supposed.⁴⁹

Finally, one fragmented document from Brixia should also be briefly mentioned, in which reference is made to games in the amphitheatre. At the end of the 2nd century, the amphitheatre in Brixia, dating from the Julio-Claudian period, was restored by Publius Atilius Philippus, originally a freedman who evidently achieved extraordinary success, receiving the *ornamenta decurionalia* in Brixia as well as in Verona and Cremona. He was subsequently publicly honoured at the explicit request of the people (*ex postulatione plebis*).⁵⁰

Finally, as far as the *regio Transpadana* (*regio XI*) is concerned, there are two inscriptions which also indicate construction or restoration measures on the theatre by private activities. From **Augusta Taurinorum** (Torino), a monumental building inscription mentions Caius Iulius Donnus II, the son of the last ruler of the Alpes Cottiae, king Cottus⁵¹, and his son, Marcus Iulius Cottius II, who had the *actorum domus*

⁴⁶ ILAfr 400 = EDCS-10300728: Carthage – the inscription mentions two-day games in the theatre, which were interrupted by animal hunts and gladiator performances (*interposita venation(e) et gladiator[um]*), presumably performed also in the theatre. ILAfr 400 = EDCS-10300728: Madauros (present-day Algeria), where only a theatre is archaeologically documented, in which apparently *ludos cum venat[ione populo et sportulas(?)] decurionibus* were performed by the local *flamen perpetuus* on the occasion of the dedication of a statue to Mars.

⁴⁷ CIL V 1897 = CIL V 1898 = CIL V 1899 = CIL V 1900 = CIL V 8664 = EDCS-04200956. For details regarding the history of the monument and its fragments cf. lupa 29150; Bonfanti 2023, 18–19.

⁴⁸ Four hundred thousand sesterces is certainly a very large sum of money; according to Duncan-Jones 1982, 77, it was enough to build a theatre in Madauros (North Africa) in the early third century AD.

⁴⁹ Zaccaria 1994, 74, 82, 86–87.

⁵⁰ CIL V 4392 = EDCS-04203444.

⁵¹ It is supposed that between 9 and 8 BC he became a Roman citizen after establishing a Roman alliance with the Emperor Augustus, whereafter his name was Latinized as Marcus Iulius Cottius and he was appointed *praefectus civitatum*, a position which was also held by his son Caius Iulius Donnus II mentioned in AE 1994, 753.

and the *porticus post scaenam* of the theatre built from their own resources during the Augustan or Tiberian period.⁵² The second epigraphic document, which comes from **Eporedia** (Ivrea), is very fragmented, but according to Goffin, an unknown *patronus* seems to have carried out restoration work on the theatre in Hadrianic times.⁵³

Conclusion

Although a relatively large number of theatre and amphitheatre buildings have been archaeologically documented in Cisalpine Gaul, the number of inscriptional references to construction and restoration measures based on private munificence is quite small. Most of the references concern theatre buildings, especially in the *regio X*, but for circus events the inscriptions are completely missing. With a few exceptions, the inscriptions can mostly be dated as very early, to the beginning or within the 1st century AD, which is of course also related to the fact that the corresponding theatre buildings were built in the Republican or early Imperial period and then, accordingly, underwent repairs a few decades later. Compared to other parts of the western half of the empire, such as North Africa, which is extremely rich in inscriptions, the large amount of epigraphic evidence of private munificence as documented there can usually be dated from the 2nd century onwards.

Regarding the social status of the benefactors, it can be said that in North Italy those acting as *euergetes* were mostly members of the municipal aristocracy who also held various offices, but sometimes (rich) freedmen in their function as *seviri* or *Augustales* and people from the *ordo equester* could also be generous, as the epigraphical documents show.

The relatively small number of inscriptions with euergetic content is particularly striking if we compare the amount of epigraphic evidence with that relating to private foundations in North Italy in general. This may be due to the fact that in Italy the maintenance of buildings for entertainment and the organization of games were mainly the responsibility of magistrates, such as *aediles*, and were not based so much on private initiative, as was the case, for example, in the North African provinces. This probably also included the frequently mentioned *curatores theatri*⁵⁴ as officials responsible for everything which was connected with the theatre, and the *munerarii*,⁵⁵ responsible for the gladiatorial games.

⁵² AE 1994, 753 = EDCS-12700213; Goffin 2002, 96.

⁵³ CIL V 6798 = EDCS-05400042; Goffin 2002, 97.

⁵⁴ Cf. InscrIt-10-01, 00101 = EDCS-04300032; InscrIt-10-01, 00102 = EDCS-04300033 (Pula).

⁵⁵ Cf. CIL V 4399 = EDCS-04203451 (Brixia); CIL V 563 = EDCS-04200653 (Tergeste); CIL V 6842 = EDCS-05400088 (Aosta).

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Abbreviations

- AE = *L'Année Épigraphique*, Paris 1888 ff.
 CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin 1862 ff.
 EDCS = *Epigraphische Datenbank Clauss – Slaby* – <https://db.edcs.eu/epigr/hinweise/hinweis-de.html>
 ILAfr = *Inscriptions latines d'Afrique (Tripolitaine, Tunisie, Maroc)*, Paris 1923.
 ILAlg= *Inscriptions latines d'Algérie*, Paris 1922 ff.
 InscrIt = *Inscriptiones Italiae*, Roma 1931 ff.
 lupa = *Ubi Erat Lupa*, F. and O. Harl, <https://lupa.at/> (Bilddatenbank zu antiken Stein-
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Renate Lafer
Universität Klagenfurt
Institut für Geschichte, Abteilung Alte Geschichte, Altertumskunde und Archäologie
Universitätsstraße 65-67
A-9020 Klagenfurt
renate.lafer@aau.at

Administrative Organization of Roman Silver Mines in Pannonia

Amra ŠAČIĆ BEĆA

Abstract

Numismatic and epigraphic sources confirm that the Pannonian silver mines (*argentariae Pannonicae*) formed a distinct mining district in the Early Roman Empire. Special coins with inscriptions like *metalli Pannonicae* and depictions of Diana indicate a closed economic system. Inscriptions from Algeria, Turkey, and Serbia mention procurators of these mines, whose careers suggest elite status. The administrative centre was in Sirmium, while lower officials lived in *vicus metalli Gensis* along the *Argentaria–Sirmium* road. Until AD 161, the mines had separate administration, after which all mines in Pannonia and Dalmatia were unified under a single procurator based in Domavia. Further reforms under Commodus and Diocletian expanded and centralized the mining administration, creating the larger district of *Argentaria*. This paper traces the administrative evolution of the Pannonian silver mines, showing their strategic importance and the adaptability of Roman mining governance.

Keywords: Pannonia; *Gensis*; mining; administration; *argentariae Pannonicae*; silver; *procurator argentariarum*; *procurator argentariarum metallorum*; *territoria metallorum*

Izvleček

Upravljanje rimskih rudnikov srebra v Panoniji

Numizmatični in epigrafski viri potrjujejo obstoj panonskih rudnikov srebra (*argentariae Pannonicae*) kot samostojnih rudarskih območij v zgodnjecesarskem obdobju. Posebni novčni kovi z napisi kot je *metalli Pannonicae* in upodobitvami Diane nakazujejo njihov zaprt gospodarski sistem. Napisi s prostora današnje Alžirije, Turčije in Srbije omenjajo prokuratorje teh rudnikov, katerih kariere odsevajo elitni status funkcije. Upravni center rudarskega območja je bil Sirmij, medtem ko so nižji uradniki prebivali v *vicus metalli Gensis* ob cesti *Argentaria–Sirmium*. Do leta 161 so imeli rudniki ločeno upravo, po tem pa so bili vsi rudniki Panonije in Dalmacije podrejeni skupnemu prokuratorju s sedežem v Domaviji. Nadaljnje reforme pod Komodom in Dioklecijanom so rudniško upravo razširile in centralizirale v okviru večjega območja *Argentaria*. Ta prispevek se osredotoča na administrativni razvoj panonskih rudnikov srebra, ki odseva njihovo strateško pomembnost in prilagodljivost rimskega upravljanja rudnikov.

Ključne besede: Panonija; *Gensis*; rudarjenje; uprava; *argentariae Pannonicae*; srebro; *procurator argentariarum*; *procurator argentariarum metallorum*; *territoria metallorum*

Introduction

Mines from the provinces of the Middle Danube region were an important source of metals for the Roman Empire, and thus control over these resources was important in Roman imperial policy. It should be noted that the mining areas (*territoria metallorum*) represent separate administrative systems within the Roman provinces because of their specific administration. As such, the mining laws discovered in the area of the Roman province of Hispania (*lex metalli Vipascensis* (LMV) and *lex metallis dicta* (LMD)) similarly suggest that *territoria metallorum argenti Pannoniarum* was an administrative district with its territory.¹ In practice, this means that it is a clearly defined mining area that was managed by the procurator with applicable special mining legal regulations. We should note that the Pannonian silver mines were organized into a separate district, probably from the reign of the Flavians until that of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus.² Although there are no new epigraphic and numismatic finds that could shed additional light on the issues of administration in the Pannonian silver mines, we will attempt to use the existing information to present the administrative organization of the *argentariae Pannonicae* from the first to the fourth centuries. The relatively brief period during which the Pannonian silver mines functioned as an independent district likely accounts for the scarcity of information regarding their existence and administrative structure prior to their incorporation into the Dalmatian mining system.

¹ Hirt states that the *lex metalli Vipascensis* (LMV) and *lex metallis dicta* (LMD) distinguish between three territorial units: “settlement” (*vicus*), “mining” (*metallum*) and “mine territories” (*territoria metallorum* or *finis metallorum*). While the LMD regulated issues exclusively within one district, namely *metallum Vipascense*, the LMD was probably applied to several mining areas in southern Spain. From the text of the *metallum Vipascense*, we learn that even taxes were defined within the district. For example, it states that *intra fines metalli Vipascensis* contracts – “within the boundaries of the Vipasca mines” – were subject to a 1% tax. This indicates that the *metallum Vipascense* represented a clearly defined mining zone, i.e. *finis metalli* (Hirt 2010, 48–51). *Metallum Vipascense* (sometimes called *metalla Vipascensia* in the plural form) is evidence of the extraterritorial status of the Roman mine (Edmondson 2020, 184). Since *Metallum Vipascense* was a district where silver was mined from the first to the third centuries, the laws relating to silver mines can serve as an analogy for studying the Pannonian silver mines.

² Pannonia as a civilian province did not exist before the reign of Vespasian, as indicated by military diplomas as official documents. Moreover, the first confirmed governor of Pannonia (*legatus Augusti pro praetore Pannoniae*), originating from the reign of Vespasian is mentioned on an epigraphic monument from Italy (AE 1966, 0068 = AE 1941, 0011 = CIL 10, 06225; Šašel 1989, 57–61; Šašel Kos 1986, 188–190; Šašel Kos 1997, 33–42; Šašel Kos 2010, 123–130; Šačić Beča 2022a, 72–73; Cesarik 2022, 18–21). The latest inscription mentioning the governor of the consolidated mines (*procurator metallorum Pannonicorum et Dalmaticorum*) dates from the reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (AE 1956, 0123 = AE 1991, 1691 = AE 1992, 1866).

Pannonia – a land of mines?

Greco-Roman authors spoke of Pannonia as a mountainous and cold country where vines do not thrive (Strabo, Pliny the Elder, Dio Cassius).³ They then mentioned how rivers freeze in Pannonia in winter (Pliny the Younger, Herodian).⁴ They also spoke of Pannonia as an extremely wooded and marshy land (Pliny the Elder, Florus, Appian, Herodian, Dio Cassius).⁵ However, classical authors never described Pannonia as an area rich in ores. In the context of Roman mining, Hispania, Moesia, Dacia, Noricum and Dalmatia were much more famous than Pannonia.⁶ Nevertheless, modern research has confirmed that the Pannonian area was rich in iron, lead, and silver. Recently, gold mining in western Pannonia, or Pannonia Superior, has been confirmed archaeologically.⁷ A possible reason for the lack of knowledge of Roman mining in Pannonia is that almost all Pannonian mines were located in the areas bordering provinces characterized as mining ones in Roman public discourse. Such a narrative has also influenced modern research.⁸ Therefore, in modern historiography and archaeology, the administrative organization of Pannonian mining districts has not been researched as a separate issue.

With the help of contemporary archaeological and epigraphic research, we know today that the iron mines from north-western Bosnia administratively belonged to Pannonia and not Dalmatia, as previously thought.⁹ These are mines from the valley of the Sana and Japra Rivers, which are apparently mentioned on the votive monu-

³ Strabo, 7.5.10; Dio Cassius, 49.36; Plin. *HN* 3.147.

⁴ Plin. *Pan.* 12.3; Hdn. 6.7.6.

⁵ Dio Cassius, 49.36; Strabo, 7.5.2–3; Tac. *Ann.* 1.17; App. *Ill.* 22; Hdn. 6.7.6; HA *Prob.* 21.2.

⁶ This primarily refers to Dalmatia. Already in the first century the Romans described Dalmatia as a land rich in minerals (Flor. *Epit.* 2.25.12; Plin. *HN* 33.67; Stat. *Silv.* 3.3.89; Mart. *Epigr.* 10.78.5–8). Numerous epigraphic monuments, numismatic and archaeological finds confirm the writings of ancient authors. Compared to Moesia Superior, Dalmatia is also more recognized in narrative sources as a mining province. In the modern literature there is information that the Roman jurist *Claudius Saturninus* stated that Moesia was considered a land of mining, just as Africa was considered a land of grain (Dušanić 1980, 25; Šajin 2014, 145; Božić 2014, 96; Milovanović 2017, 9). However, the quoted text from the *Digest* does not mention Moesia at all (*Dig.* 48.19.16.9). Mysia is mentioned, not Moesia. This source is important for our understanding of Roman legal provisions in general in the mining districts, as it is stated that there were greater penalties for counterfeiting money than in other regions (*Evenit, ut eadem scelera in quibusdam provinciis gravius plectantur, ut in Africa mesium incensores, in Mysia vitium, ubi metalla sunt adulteratores moneta*).

⁷ Cech 2012, 66.

⁸ In the works of authors such as Mócsy, Dobó, Fitz, and Škegro, we can notice the denial of the existence of Pannonian mines (Mócsy 1962, 592, 674; Dobó 1968, 177; Fitz 1980, 325; Škegro 1999, 72). Migotti states that in the literature dealing with Roman Pannonia, the area of southern Pannonia is largely neglected compared to other parts of the province (Migotti 2012, 6). This was reflected in the understanding of Roman mining in Pannonia because most of the mines were in south-eastern Pannonia.

⁹ Dušanić 1977, 83–84; Šačić Beća 2022a, 254–274.

ment from Virunum as *ferrariae Pannonicae*.¹⁰ All Pannonian mines were located in border areas between Roman provinces. In addition, other indicators suggest that a Pannonian mining district existed. For example, the votive monument dedicated to Jupiter mentions the conductor *ferrariarum Pannoniarum* from Mursa (present-day Osijek).¹¹ This is the same conductor *Caius Iulius Agathopus* who is mentioned on an inscription found in Ljubija, where the monument *Terra Mater* was erected for his health.¹² The monuments date to the same period, i.e., the beginning of the third century, which confirms that the iron mines were the north-western Pannonian mines (*ferrariae Pannonicae*). Analogously, the term *procuratores argentariarum Pannonicarum* which appears on epigraphic monuments also indicates their separate administration of the Pannonian silver mines and their administrative autonomy.¹³

A brief overview of earlier research

Pannonian silver mines were mostly addressed in the context of broader studies on Roman provincial mining. We should single out several scholars who made a significant contribution to the study of this topic. The administration of Roman mines was an indispensable topic of extensive research on the administration of the Roman Empire, such as the works of Otto Hirschfeld and Michail Rostovtzeff.¹⁴ Mining in Pannonia received only limited attention in the works of Václav Radimský, András Mócsy, Sławomir Mrozek, Géza Alföldy, John Joseph Wilkes, and Jaroslav Šašel.¹⁵ We should note that Šašel made a significant contribution to future research because he systematically collected a large number of epigraphic monuments in three volumes.¹⁶

Greater interest in the administrative organization of the Pannonian silver mines appeared in the second half of the 20th century. This is primarily visible in the works of Dimitrije Sergejevski, Esad Pašalić, Ivo Bojanovski, Slobodan Dušanić, and Ante Škegro.¹⁷ Esad Pašalić focused on various aspects of mining organization, studying the participation of the Romans in the expansion of mining in Illyricum. Based on the analysis of primarily epigraphic and numismatic sources, Bojanovski addressed the administrative organization of the Pannonian and Dalmatian silver mines in the

¹⁰ CIL 03, 4809 = EDH 042469 = EDCS-14500108 = lupa 5764.

¹¹ AE 2006, 01094 = EDH 057009 = EDCS-44200272 = lupa 5690.

¹² ILJug II, 779 = AE 1973, 0411 = EDCS-10000791 = EDH 011306.

¹³ Škegro 1999, 72–76.

¹⁴ Hirschfeld 1905; Rostovtzeff 1904; Rostovtzeff 1957.

¹⁵ Radimský 1891; Radimský 1894; Mócsy 1974; Mrozek 1968; Mrozek 1977; Alföldy 1965; Wilkes 1969; Šašel 1974.

¹⁶ ILJug I–III.

¹⁷ Pašalić 1954, 55–64; Pašalić 1967, 124–132; Sergejevski 1957, 110–120; Sergejevski 1963, 85–102; Bojanovski 1972, 38–44; Bojanovski 1982, 94–106; Bojanovski 1988, 193–203; Bojanovski 1999, 135–141; Dušanić 1977, 66–70; Dušanić 1980, 21–22; Dušanić 2004, 251–253; Škegro 1995, 175–176; Škegro 1998, 90–92; Škegro 1999, 70–86.

Drina River Valley and its eastern tributaries. In his studies, he clearly distinguishes the Pannonian mining district from the Dalmatian one.¹⁸

In general, Slobodan Dušanić made the greatest contribution to the study of the administrative organization of mines in Illyricum. This scholar tried to identify the borders of the mining districts of Pannonia and show the main characteristics of the mining administration. In the methodological sense, Dušanić's research was very advanced and today it is fundamental for the study of this issue. By studying various aspects of Roman mining in the area of Pannonia, he proved that it was a highly organized system. By using different sources, Dušanić concluded that two mining districts that belonged to different provinces could have been united if they produced the same type of metal.¹⁹ He mostly addressed issues related to the administrative organization of the Pannonian silver mines in the works.²⁰

At the end of the 20th century, Ante Škegro published papers on the Roman mines of Pannonia and Dalmatia, with an overview of the results of previous research. He only occasionally addressed the administrative organization of the Pannonian silver mines, because the focus of his research was the Dalmatian mines.²¹

Among the more recent works that deal with the organizational aspects of the Pannonian mines, the book by Alfred M. Hirt stands out in particular.²² He paid special attention to the role of the procurator in the organization of the Pannonian mines, and concluded that the silver mines in Pannonia had a separate administration until the mid-second century.²³ Finally, we should mention Željka Šajin, who addressed the administration in the Pannonian mines in her PhD thesis.²⁴ However, it should be emphasized that Šajin provided a detailed prosopographical analysis of the procurator of the Pannonian silver mines.²⁵ She also indicated the possible reasons for the consolidation of the administration of the Pannonian and Dalmatian mines in the second century.

The location of the Pannonian silver mines

Efforts to localize the Pannonian silver mines are shaped by the ongoing interpretation and reconstruction of the borders between Pannonia Inferior, Dalmatia, and Moesia Superior. Archaeological and historiographical evidence shows that the bor-

¹⁸ Bojanovski 1988, 198–199; Bojanovski 1999, 141–142.

¹⁹ Dušanić 1980, 8.

²⁰ Dušanić 1977, 66–68; Dušanić 1980, 21; Dušanić 2004, 250–253.

²¹ Škegro 1988, 90–91; Škegro 1999, 70–76.

²² Hirt 2010, 133–140.

²³ Hirt 2010, 139–140.

²⁴ Šajin 2014, 112–140.

²⁵ Šajin 2014, 133–122.

der of Pannonia was much further south than previously thought.²⁶ Classical sources, such as Strabo and Ptolemy, shared certain guidelines that the southern border of Pannonia should be sought in the mountain ranges of the Dinaric Alps.²⁷ It can be concluded that the eastern border followed the northern slopes of the Dinaric Alps (Uzlomac, Borja, Ozren, Konjuh, and Javornik) that encircle the territory of Bosnian Posavina and Semberija.²⁸ The eastern border of Pannonia with Moesia crossed the Drina River. The mountains Medvednik, Jablanika, Povlena, Maljen, and Suvobor were the eastern border.

Most scholars agree that *Argentariae Pannonicae* should be located in the lower course of the Drina River in Bosnia and Serbia. The eastern portion of this mining district included the region around the city of Ruma, the area around Zajača and Krupanj, and part of the Kolubara region (today's Valjevo and Loznica).²⁹ The borders of *Argentariae Pannonicae* were determined based on earlier research by Šašel, Dušanić, and Škegro (Fig. 1).³⁰ We should mention that Fanula Papazoglu and Miroslava Mirković advocated the thesis that the mines of Kosmaj, Avala, and Rudnik from central Serbia were also part of *Argentariae Pannonicae*.³¹ Those mines were located in the province of Moesia Superior, not Pannonia.

Argentariae Pannonicae as a separate district

Numismatic and epigraphic finds suggest that the Pannonian silver mines were consolidated under the administration of a single procurator until the beginning of the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. Throughout the first century until the mid-second, the administration in the Pannonian silver mines was independent of the administration in the Dalmatian mines. It is assumed that the lower-ranking mining officials were housed in *vicus Gensis*. *Gensis* is mentioned on *Tabula Peutingeriana* as a way station on the Roman road *Argentaria* (Sase near Srebrenica) – *Sirmium* (Sremska Mitrovica).³² The *Gensis statio* is located in Lešnica on the right bank of the Drina

²⁶ Dušanić 1977, 64–65; Bojanovski 1977, 147–148; Bojanovski 1988, 329; Milovanović 2017, 39.

²⁷ *Upper Pannonia is bounded by the Cetium mountain and partly by Carnanica, from the south by Istria and part of Illyria, on the opposite side from the west a parallel line joining the Albanian mountains to the Bebian mountains and the mountains of Lower Pannonia, holding the position 41°30' 45°20' (Ptol. Geog. 2.14.1; translated by Louis Francis). Immediately below Nauportus the Noarus is further increased in volume by the Colapis, which flows from the Albian Mountain through the country of the Iapodes and meets the Danuvius near the country of the Scordisci.* (Strabo, 7.5.2; translated by Horace Leonard Jones).

²⁸ Šačić Beća 2022a, 78–81.

²⁹ Dušanić 1971, 34–35; Imamović 1999, 50; Milovanović 2017, 39.

³⁰ Dušanić 1980, 21; Šašel 1989, 61; Škegro 1999, 72.

³¹ Papazoglu 1957, 144–122; Mirković 1969, 239–262.

³² *Tab. Peut.* 5.4–6.2.



Fig. 1: Borders of the *Argentariae Pannonicae* (ca. AD 69–161)

River.³³ The thesis that *Gensis* was *vicus metalli* is based on analogous examples from Dalmatia and Moesia Superior.³⁴ Some of the *vici metallorum* later became significant urban centres, and Domavia is a good example of this.³⁵ The mining administration was headed by *procurator argentariarum*. However, the seat of his office was not in *vicus metalli* but in the important Roman colony of Sirmium.

The earliest corroboration of the existence of *Argentariae Pannonicae* comes from the period of Trajan's reign. These are two series of coins that have the text *Metalli Ulpiani Pannonici* and *Metalli Pannonici* on the reverse.³⁶ The third series of coins with the text *Metalli Pannonici* was minted during the reign of Emperor Hadrian. The latest

³³ The majority of authors support the thesis that the *Gensis* road station is located at the Lešnica site based on the information that this station was 30 Roman miles from Sirmium (Bojanovski 1981, 190; Bojanovski 1984, 247–248; Dušanić 2004, 25; Petrović 2015, 42). Based on the archaeological finds, Popović offered a new location for the *Gensis* road station. This author believes that the location could be on the Vidojevica hill east of Lešnica (western Serbia) or the Pačići site west of Janja (northeastern Bosnia and Herzegovina) (Popović 2019, 62). Apart from Popović's work, the issue of Roman roads in this part of Pannonia is not the subject of contemporary research, and the authors mostly base their conclusions on research from the last century.

³⁴ Dušanić 1995, 221; Dušanić 1997, 34; Petrović 2015, 117, 120.

³⁵ Bojanovski 1988, 200; Bojanovski 1999, 136.

³⁶ Dušanić 1971, 550; Dušanić 1980, 10–12; Glicksman 2018, 273–274.

series of coins features the image of the goddess Diana, symbolizing silver ore. Coins of the mines, i.e., *nummi metallorum*, were minted for the purposes of mining administration in mining districts.³⁷ It should be emphasized that recent research shows that these copper coins of small denominations, or *nummi metallorum*, did not circulate only in mining areas.³⁸ However, the demand for money was particularly high in those regions, which can be linked to the creation of closed economic systems in the mining districts.³⁹ Accordingly, the issuing of a series of coins mentioning the term Pannonian mines, as well as the appearance of Diana on the obverse of those coins, are clear confirmation of the existence of a separate Pannonian district of silver mines.

So far, three inscriptions have been found that mention the procurators of the Pannonian silver mines (*procuratores argentariarum Pannonicarum*). These monuments are dated to the period of AD 130 to 160. The first procurator whose name has been preserved was Lucius Crepereius Paulus who came from a prominent family from the province of Pamphylia.⁴⁰ Before becoming the procurator of the Pannonian silver mines, Paulus had a significant military career. The jurisdiction of the silver mine procurator of Pannonia was his first civil function. Paulus was the procurator of the Pannonian mines from AD 130 to 150.⁴¹ His associates were experienced imperial freedmen and slaves who gained work experience in the mining districts of Hispania.

An inscription dedicated to Marcus Antonius Fabianus was found in Viminacium, whose *cursus honorum* mentions that he was the procurator of the *argentariarum Pannonicarum*.⁴² Marcus Antonius Fabianus was also a *conductor portorii Illyrici*. This means that he was a wealthy Roman citizen who was a lessee of the Illyrian customs. The monument was erected by the freedman (*libertus*) Mercator around AD 160.

³⁷ Dušanić concluded that all *nummi metallorum* were minted in the city of Rome in the same mint because the alloy and production techniques are the same for all coins (Dušanić 1971, 536; Dušanić 1980, 10). There are also theories that the *nummi metallorum* were minted in the mining districts or that the coin dies were made in Rome and brought to Viminacium where the coins were minted (Škegro 1995, 175).

³⁸ Woytek 2004, 52–54.

³⁹ According to Glicksman and Hirt, the minting of these coins solved the problem of the difficulty of obtaining money for salaries in the districts that were relatively empty. The assumption is that most of this money was spent on food, drinks, the purchase of tools, and payment for services (baths, hairdressers, cobblers) within the mining district. There is a possibility that in this way it was controlled that the mine workers spent money on food and tools from approved suppliers. In this way, the counterfeiting of coins was reduced, because the text of the *Digest* suggests that counterfeiting was widespread in the vicinity of the mines (*Dig.* 48.19.16.9–10; Hirt 2010, 66; Glicksman 2018, 275).

⁴⁰ [L(ucium) Crepereium L(uci) f(iliu)m] Sergia Paulum praef(ectum) coh(ortis) I --- tribunum militum leg(ionis) II Adiutr(icis) --- praef(ectum) alae I Cannene-/fatium proc(uratorem) Aug(usti) argenta[riarum] / [P]annonicar[um] / [---] per Lucium Decimium Apronianum le[gat]um (AE 1915, 46 = EDH 029307 = EDCS-16202022).

⁴¹ Lőrincz 2001, 72; Šajin 2014, 114.

⁴² M(arco) Antoni(o) / M(arci) f(ilio) Fabia / Fabiano proc(uratori) / XL Galliarum / et portus item / argentariar(um)⁵ / Pannonicar(um) / c(onductori) portorii Illyrici / patrono bono / Mercator lib(ertus) (AE 1905, 0152 = IMS 2, 069 = EDH 030468 = EDCS-11201576 = lupa 5423).

Mercator probably led Fabianus's household in Viminacium. We cannot determine which *portorium* area Fabianus was leasing. A *statio* in Viminacium is a possibility. Since he was the procurator of the Pannonian silver mines, it is reasonable to assume that Fabianus leased the *portorium* area that was closest to the mines.⁴³ The original function of the *Portorium Illyrici* was to collect *portorium* on goods imported into Italy from the north-eastern provinces of the Roman Empire.⁴⁴ The Antonius family, from which Fabianus descended, was one of the two families whose members leased *Portorium Illyrici* during the second century.⁴⁵ Before becoming the procurator of mines, *Marcus Antonius Fabianus* was the procurator of customs in the customs district named *quadragesima Galliarum et Portus*. That district comprised a total of 40 customs districts, which covered the territory of Gaul and the Alps.⁴⁶ The appointment of a person with extensive experience in administration shows the importance of the Pannonian silver mines. Unlike the Pannonian iron mines, whose procurators were mostly freedmen, the procurators of *Argentariae Pannonicae* came from the upper strata of Roman society.

The latest inscription mentioning the procurator of the Pannonian silver mines was found in the territory of present-day Algeria (the Roman province of *Mauretania Caesariensis*). The name of the last known procurator can only be partially constructed: *Lucius Sept[imius?] Petronianus*.⁴⁷ In the literature, there are differing dates proposed for the period during which he was procurator of *argentariarum Pannonicarum*. Hirt believed that he assumed this position after AD 143 as the successor of the previously mentioned *Lucius Crepereius Paulus*.⁴⁸ Šajin dated his arrival at the position of *procurator argentariarum Pannonicarum* later, and connected it with the beginning of the reign of Marcus Aurelius. The predecessor held the rank of *sexagenarius*, while *Lucius Sept[imius?] Petronianus* held the rank of *centurion*.⁴⁹ The increase in salary possibly preceded the consolidation of the mining administration. *Petronianus* has a very interesting *cursus honorum*. The last duty he performed was as the governor of the Roman province of *Mauretania Caesariensis*.

Unfortunately, apart from the names of the three procurators, today we know nothing about the organization of the administration in the Pannonian silver mines, al-

⁴³ Ørsted 1985, 329–330.

⁴⁴ Chalupa et al. 2024, 1.

⁴⁵ Patsch 1893, 197; De Laet 1949, 399.

⁴⁶ Šajin 2014, 116.

⁴⁷ *L(ucio) Septi[mio] --- f(ilio)] / Petro[niano] / praef(ecto) co[h(ortis) c(ivium) R(omanorum)] / volun[tarior(um)] / trib(uno) m[il(itum) leg(ionis)]⁵ / secund[ae] Trai(anae)] / fortis pra[ef(ecto) al(ae) II] / Agrippian[ae] Flaviae?] / archistato[ri] Augusti] / praef(ecto) cla[s(sis) ---]¹⁰ / a com[mentariis] / praef(ecto) [praetorio] / proc(uratori) M[oesiae] / inferio[ris] / proc(uratori) argentar(iarum)¹⁵ / Pannonicar(um) / proc(uratori) provin-/ciae Mauret(aniae) / Caesariens(is) / [[Cl(audius) Quintilius]]²⁰ / d<e=I>c(urio) alae Thrac(um) / strator eius / ob merito* (AE 1958, 0156 = AE 1961, 0227 = AE 1960, 0245 = EDH 019912 = EDCS-13302474).

⁴⁸ Hirt 2014, 139.

⁴⁹ Šajin 2014, 117–122.

though there were certainly lower-ranked officials who managed the process of metal production and processing. These were probably the *vilici* in charge of overseeing the process of mining and transporting the metal.

Argentariae Pannonicae during the reign of Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius

Epigraphic monuments imply that the administration not only of silver mines, but also copper, iron, and gold mines in the provinces of Pannonia and Dalmatia, were consolidated during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. This thesis is supported by inscriptions that mention persons who held the title of *procurator metallorum Pannonicorum et Dalmaticorum*. The use of the general term *metalla* in the procurator's title suggests that the procurator was in charge of all mines (*metalla*), not just silver mines.⁵⁰ In the first years of the reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (c. AD 161–164), the office of procurator of the consolidated mines of Pannonia and Dalmatia was held by *Tiberius Claudius Proculus Cornelianus*, whose monument was discovered in the area of present-day Algeria (*Lambaesis*).⁵¹ The second monument that mentions the procurator of the consolidated mines of Pannonia and Dalmatia is the subject of debate among scholars,⁵² and this will be discussed later in the text.

There is also a thesis that a monument from Glamoč mentioned the procurator of the consolidated mines, but this is difficult to prove.⁵³ In modern scholarship, this view is represented by Škegro, whereas Dušanić, referring to Alföldy's interpretation, rejected it.⁵⁴ More specifically, Dušanić believes that the person whose name is mentioned in this inscription was in fact a procurator of mines located near *municipium Salvium*, and not the united mines of Pannonia and Dalmatia.

The centre of the consolidated mining administration of the three Illyrian provinces (Dalmatia, Pannonia Superior, and Pannonia Inferior) was Domavia (Sasa near

⁵⁰ Bojanovski 1982, 103; Škegro 1998, 97, no. 72; Šačić Beća 2022b, 182.

⁵¹ *Ti(berio) Cl(audio) Proculo / Corneliano / praef(ecto) coh(ortis) II Bra(carum) / trib(un)o coh(ortis) mil(iariae) Ael(iae) / Dacor(um) praef(ectus) al(ae)⁵ / Sulpiciae proc(uratori) / provinc(iae) Syriae / ad rationes putandas / proc(uratori) metal(li) Pannonic(or)um / et Dalmaticorum proc(uratori)¹⁰ / kalend(arii) Vegetiani Hisp(aniae) / item ad dilectum cum / Iulio Vero per / Italiam tironum / II leg(ionis) Italicae¹⁵ / proc(uratori) regionis / Thevestinae / proc(uratori) IIII p(ublicae) A(fricae) / Inventus / Aug(usti) lib(ertus) tabul(arius)²⁰ / [[leg(ionis) III]] Aug(ustae) (AE 1956, 0123 = AE 1991, 1691 = AE 1992, 1866 = EDH 018033 = EDCS-13600416).*

⁵² *L(ucio) Domitio / {I} Eroti vi-/ro ex eques-/tribus tur-/mis egregio⁵ / procuratori / metallorum / [P]annon(iorum) / [et] Delmat(or)um. Mi-/r]ae integritatis¹⁰ / [e]t bonit[a]tis / M(arcus) Aur(elius) Ru[s]ticus / v(ir) e(gregius) ducen(arius) amico / praestan[tissimo] (CIL 03, 08361. (B) = CIL 03, 12721. (B) = EDH 057727).*

⁵³ *[---]atis praecipu[---] / [---] magneque in[---] / [---]bus equo et dile(?)[---] / [---]ntio princ(eps?) m[unicipii] / [---] omni]bus honori]bus⁵ / [per]functo ex pro[cura]/[to]re(?) metalloru[m] ---] / [---] api[-----] (ILJug III, 1655 = EDH 033953 = EDCS-10100634 = TM 182547).*

⁵⁴ Alföldy 1965, 164; Dušanić 1977, 85, fn. 210; Škegro 1999, 109.

Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia).⁵⁵ The reason for consolidation should be sought in the context of the military policy of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius. The emperor needed money for the war against the Parthians, Marcomanni, Vandals, Quadi, and Iazyges,⁵⁶ and this required the arrangement of state finances. One such step was the reform of the Illyrian mines.

Argentariae Pannonicae under Commodus

During the reign of Commodus, copper, iron, and gold mines were excluded from the duties of the procurator whose seat was in Domavia. This administrative change should be observed in the context of the general economic circumstances of the Roman Empire under Commodus. Namely, due to the constant wars with the Sarmatians, Marcomanni, and Quadi, Commodus had to find a more adequate way to get money for the army faster. In order to obtain money from the consolidated mining administration as soon as possible, he excluded the iron mines.⁵⁷ Based on an inscription from north-western Bosnia, we know that Commodus leased the iron mines to private lessees.⁵⁸ The district comprising the silver mines of Pannonia Inferior and Dalmatia was called *Argentaria*. Therefore, the term *Argentaria* should not be used for the silver mines of Dalmatia and Pannonia before the reign of Commodus. The district with that name was established during the reign of Commodus.

The first inscription that mentions a procurator in charge only of the silver mines of Dalmatia and Pannonia dates from the reign of this emperor (*procurator argentariarum metallorum Pannonicorum et Dalmaticorum*). It is an inscription dedicated to *Titus Claudius Xenophon* that was found in Ephesus in present-day Turkey.⁵⁹ Based on *cursus honorum*, we can conclude that Xenophon was in charge of the Pannonian and Dalmatian silver mines in the mid-80s of the second century.⁶⁰ He also had extensive experience, as he had previously administrated the gold mines in Dacia.

⁵⁵ Dušanić 1977, 67; Bojanovski 1999, 135–136; Imamović 1999, 48; Škegro 1999, 78; Hirt 2010, 71–73; Petrović 2015, 120; Šačić Beća 2022b, 182–183.

⁵⁶ Škegro 1999, 76; Veletovac 2014, 115.

⁵⁷ Dušanić 1977, 88; Šačić Beća 2022a, 256–257.

⁵⁸ *Terrae / Matri / [s]acrum / pro salut[e] / C(ai) Iul(i) Aga⁻⁵/thopi con(ductoris) / ferrar(iarum) / Callimo[r]-phus vil(icus) / v(otum) s(olvit) XI K(alendas) Ma(i)as)]¹⁰ / [Muc]iano et Fabian[o co(n)s(ulibus)]* (ILJug II, 779 = AE 1973, 0411 = EDH 011306 = EDCS-10000791 = lupa 30745).

⁵⁹ *T(ito) Claudio T(iti) f(ilio) Papiria / Xenophonti / [pro]c(uratori) Aug(usti) ad bona co-/[ge]nda in Africa proc(uratori) / provinc(iae) Asiae subpraef(ecto)⁵ / annonae urbis proc(uratori) Illyri-/ci per Moesiam inf(eriorem) et Dacias / tres proc(uratori) argentariarum Pan-/noniarum et Dalmatiarum / proc(uratori) Daciae Apulensis proc(uratori)¹⁰ / in Aegypto ad epistrategiam / septem nomorum et Arsinoitum / proc(uratori) viarum urbis / Salvianus Aug(usti) n(ostr)i vern(a) dis-/pensator rationis extraord(inariae)¹⁵ / provinc(iae) Asiae* (CIL 03, 06575 = CIL 03, 07127 = EDCS-27800685).

⁶⁰ Šajin 2014, 128–129.

Argentariae Pannonicae in the third century

Imperial procurators administrated the mines headquartered in Domavia during the Severan dynasty. Domavia had the status of a *municipium* under the Severan dynasty, but in the mid-third century it became a *colonia metalla*.⁶¹ The oldest inscription mentioning the term *colonia metalla* dates back to the period from AD 251 to 253, that is, during the reign of Trebonianus Gallus and his son Veldumnianus Volusianus.⁶² The name itself clearly shows that Domavia was not an ordinary colony of Roman citizens, but that it was administratively connected to the mines.⁶³ Procurators who administered Pannonian and Dalmatian silver mines mainly appear on inscriptions in connection with the renovation of public buildings in Domavia. The last *procurator argentariarum* is also mentioned in this context, as the last epigraphic testimony from Domavia mentioning the imperial procurator for silver is an honorary inscription for Emperor Aurelian from AD 274 that was carved into a wall of a public facility. The inscription mentions that the procurator for silver mines (*procurator argentariarum*) Aurelius Verecundus ordered the exterior of old baths to be restored (*balneum vetustate conlapsum ad pristinam faciem reformare curavit*).⁶⁴ It

⁶¹ C(aio) Iul(io) Silvano / Melanioni eq(uo) / publ(ico) flam[i]ni Po-/m[o]nali [---]VR om-/nibus eq[ue]s[tri]-⁵/bus militiis [fu]nc(to) / proc(uratori) Aug(usti) [---] / [---]RC per provin(cias) / XXIII proc(uratori) Augu(sti) / [ra]tionis [---]¹⁰ / [---]RCIIRO / [pr]oc(uratori) O[---] / [---]IC[---] / [patrono] muni[cipii]¹⁵ / [Do]maviano(rum) / [---]NI I[---]E / [---] patrono / [---] provinc(iae) / [---] V[---]²⁰ (AE 1893, 0129. (B) = CIL 03, 12732. (B). AE 1893, 0129. (B) = CIL 03, 12732. (B) = EDH 052634).

The Greek inscription discovered during excavations at the site of Roman city of Segobriga (Cuenca, Spain) in 1995 contains a dedication to Zeus Theos Megistos by Caius Iulius Silvanus Melanio. This finding prompted Abascal and Alföldy to reconstruct the dedicator's *cursus honorum* by comparing it with other inscriptions mentioning this dedicator. Their analysis showed that Melanio was an iron and silver mine procurator in various provinces at the end of the second century and beginning of the third (Abascal, Alföldy 1998, 160–168). They offered somewhat different reconstructions of the text compared to previous readings:

C(aio) Iul(io) Silvano / Melanioni eq(uo) / pub(lico) flam[i]ni Po-/monali [in] u(rbe) R(oma) (?), om-/nibus equestri-⁵/bus militiis func-/t[o] proc(uratori) Aug(usti) [fe]rr(ariarum) et/ arg(entariarum) (?) per prouin-/cias XXIII proc(uratori) Aug(usti) / [rationis] [priua-¹⁰/tae per p]rovinc(ias) (?) / [... p]roc(uratori) C[---] / proc(uratori) pro[ui]nc[---] (?) ---/ ---ic[---] / ---ic[---]¹⁵ / --- in] muni-/cipio Do[maviano] / [---]ni [---]++[---]++[---] / [---] patron / [optimo?] pro- [u]inc(iae)²⁰ / [Dalm]a[tiae] (Abascal, Alföldy, 1998, 159–160)

⁶² Imp(eratori) C(aesari) / G(aio) Vibio / Traebo-/niano(!) / Gallo P(io)⁵ / F(elici) Inv(icto) Aug(usto) / ordo dec(urionum) / col(oniae) m(etallae) D(omaviana) (CIL 03, 12728 = EDH 055815).

Imp(eratori) C(aesari) / G(aio) Vibio / Traebon(iano)(!) / Veldum(niano) / Volusi-⁵/ano P(io) F(elici) / Inv(ictis) Aug(ustis) / ord(o) dec(urionum) / col(oniae) m(etallae) D(omaviana) (CIL 03, 12729 = EDH 055822).

⁶³ Bojanovski 1982, 102–103; Imamović 1999, 54; Petrović 2015, 121; Šačić Beća 2022b, 191; Šabanija Softić 2024, 81.

⁶⁴ [[[Imp(eratore) Caes(are) L(ucio)] D[o]m[iti]o [Au]re[li]ano [A]u[g(usto)]]] / II et Capitolino co(n)s(ulibus) / Aur(elius) Verecundus v(ir) e(gregius) pro(curator) / argentariarum balneum / vetu-

is apparent that the production in silver mines around Domavia was intensified under Aurelian, and that the mining administration invested funds in the maintenance of public facilities in the colony of Domavia. Aurelian's interest in the metal ores from eastern Bosnia might have been even greater than that of his predecessors given that the Romans left Dacia in AD 271, thus losing large mineral resources. Moreover, it is well-known that there were 11 mints during Aurelian's reign.⁶⁵

Procurators in the third century do not have the term *Pannonicorum et Dalmaticorum* in their title, but are titled only as *procurator Augusti* or *procurator argentariarum*. Some scholars assume that *procurator Augusti* administered the entire mining district of *Argentaria*, whereas *procurator argentariarum* administered only individual silver mines.⁶⁶ All the procurators from the third century in the silver and lead mines of Dalmatia have the title of *vir egregius* in common, which means that they came from a military class.

Based on one piece of information from the biography of Claudius II Gothicus, preserved in *Historia Augusta*, some scholars assume that due to the crisis caused by the barbarian attacks, the mining administration was consolidated throughout Illyricum.⁶⁷ Specifically, *Historia Augusta* mentions the state supervisor of the mines in Illyricum, that is *curator Illyrici metallarius*.⁶⁸ However, this thesis is difficult to prove.

Argentariae Pannonicae in the fourth century

More recent research in the field of epigraphy concluded that one preserved monument from the Late Empire mentions the *procurator metallorum Pannonicorum et Delmaticorum*. This monument is located in Gradina in the village of Sase near Srebrenica and was erected in honour of *Lucius Domitius Eros*.⁶⁹ The knight of the highest rank (*ducenarius*) *Marcus Aurelius Rusticus* dedicated this monument. In earlier works, this monument was dated to the period between AD 170 and 250.⁷⁰ In present-day Turkey, an honorary inscription was discovered in 2002 in honour of Emperor Diocletian, which was apparently erected by the same dedicant, *Marcus Aurelius Rusticus*.⁷¹ Based on the comparison of these two monuments with the monument of the

*state conlapsum*⁵ / *ad pristinam faciem re-/formare curavit* (AE 1893, 0131. (B) = CIL 03, 12736 = EHD 055847 = EDCS-29900018).

⁶⁵ Škegro 1999, 89.

⁶⁶ Škegro 1998, 100; Šačić Beća 2022b, 190.

⁶⁷ Škegro 1999, 428.

⁶⁸ HA *Claud. Goth.* 15.4.

⁶⁹ *L(ucio) Domitio / {I} Eroti vi-/ro ex eques-/tribus tur-/mis egregio*⁵ / *procuratori / metallorum / [P]annon(iorum) / [et] Delmat(orum). Mi-/ [r]ae integritatis*¹⁰ / *[e]t bonit[a]tis / M(arcus) Aur(elius) Ru[s]ticus / v(ir) e(gregius) ducen(arius) amico / praestan[tissimo]* (CIL 03, 08361. (B) = CIL 03, 12721. (B) = EHD 057727 = EDCS-31400631).

⁷⁰ Bojanovski 1982, 103; Škegro 1998, 97.

⁷¹ Akyürek Şahin, Türkütüzün 2008, 143.

procurator argentariarum of Aurelius Verecundus, we can conclude that the consolidated administration of all the mines of the provinces of Pannonia and Dalmatia was re-established after the reign of Aurelian. The centralized administration of all mines in Dalmatia and Pannonia with headquarters in Domavia was introduced in the first years of the reign of Diocletian.⁷²

In the later period, i.e., in the second half of the fourth century, the mines from Pannonia were part of the administration of the Illyrian mines. *Comes metallorum per Illyricum* was at the head of the consolidated Illyrian mines. This official is mentioned in *Notitia Dignitatum*.⁷³ It is still not known what the administration was like in the Pannonian mines during the period of the barbarian invasions, but they probably continued their work in a smaller capacity.

Conclusion

Research on the administrative structure of the *argentariae Pannonicae* not only contributes to a better understanding of Roman exploitation of natural resources, but also indicates the complexity of Roman administration in the provinces. The analysis of epigraphic inscriptions clearly shows that the administrative organization of the Roman silver mines in Pannonia was part of a complex system of administration that developed and adapted to changes within the Roman Empire. Pannonian silver mines were not part of the provincial administration system. From the reign of the Flavians to Marcus Aurelius, this district was administratively part of the important Roman colony of Sirmium. However, mining activities were coordinated from *vicus metalli Gensis* (*Tab. Peut.* 5.4–6.2). Based on the analysis of *Tabula Peutingeriana*, scholars assume that *vicus metalli Gensis* was located in the village of Lešnica (near Loznica in western Serbia).

Between AD 69 and 161, the silver mines in Pannonia were administered by imperial procurators titled *procurator argentariarum Pannonicarum*. Their presence is confirmed by three preserved epigraphic monuments. All procurators of the Pannonian mining district originated from the upper classes of Roman society. We know that the earliest of them, *Lucius Crepereius Paulus*, came from a prominent local family from the province of Pamphylia, and his *cursus honorum* testifies to his very successful military career. The procurator *Marcus Antonius Fabianus*, who was a *conductor portorii Illyrici*, also came from a distinguished family, indicating great wealth and prestige. We can only partially reconstruct the name of the third procurator, but his *cursus honorum* shows, among other functions, that he was the governor of the Roman province of *Mauretania Caesariensis*. None of the inscriptions mentioning *procuratores* of the Pannonian silver mines have been discovered in Pannonia Inferior where the mines

⁷² Šačić Beća 2022b, 198.

⁷³ *Not. Dig. Or.* 42.26.

were located, but monuments dating from the reign of Hadrian to the joint reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus were discovered in *Attaleia* (*Lycia et Pamphylia*), *Viminacium* (*Moesia Superior*), and *Caesarea* (*Mauretania Caesariensis*). Their biographies, posts, and previous careers indicate that the Pannonian mines were highly valued within the imperial administrative apparatus.

In the second half of the second century, the administrative consolidation of silver mines, as well as those for other metals, occurred in the provinces of Pannonia and Dalmatia. At the head of the consolidated administration was a procurator with the title *procurator metallorum Pannonicorum et Dalmaticorum*, as can be seen from the inscription of *Tiberius Claudius Proculus Cornelianus*. After this, the administration of the Pannonian mines was no longer connected to Sirmium. Instead, Domavia became the administrative centre (Sase near Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia).

Changes in the administration of the mines during the reign of Emperor Commodus and later in the third and fourth centuries reflect the broader political and economic dynamics of the Empire. Commodus tried to rationalize the mining administration by separating the copper, iron, and gold mines from the jurisdiction of the consolidated administration while maintaining centralized control over the silver mines. We can assume that the *Argentaria* mining district was formed around that time (*Tab. Peut.* 5.4–6.2). Significant Pannonian and Dalmatian silver mines consolidated under the name *Argentaria*. This district was governed by the *procurator argentariarum metallorum Pannonicorum et Dalmaticorum*. The seat of the consolidated administration was located in Domavia, which turned from a *municipium* into a *colonia metalla* in the mid-third century, which further emphasized its connection with mining activity.

During the reforms conducted by Diocletian and Constantine, the mines of Illyricum were again consolidated under a single administrative body – *comes metallorum per Illyricum*, as confirmed by *Notitia Dignitatum*. At that time, the mining administration maintained its functionality and significance even though the Empire had already entered a phase of deep internal crises and external threats.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

AE = *L'année épigraphique*, Paris.

CIL 03 = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum III* (ed. Th. Mommsen), Berlin 1873; *Supplementa* 1889–1902.

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- lupa = *Ubi Erat Lupa*, F. and O. Harl, <https://lupa.at/> (Bildatenbank zu antiken Stein-
denkmälern).

Amra Šaćić Beća
Univerzitet u Sarajevu
Filozofski fakultet
Odsjek za historiju
Franje Račkog 1
BA-71.000 Sarajevo
amra.sacic@ff.unsa.ba
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4216-5463>

Heroic Deities in the Upper Adriatic Hinterland during the Late Iron Age and the Late Republican Period

Mitja GUŠTIN

Abstract

The article presents small votive bronze figurines from the eastern Upper Adriatic region, which allow us to trace, albeit indirectly, significant religious beliefs among the local population from the mid-first millennium BCE to the beginning of the Roman Empire.

Iron Age religious practices on the Apennine Peninsula and the fringes of the Eastern Alps included offerings of bronze figurines – mostly heroic warriors – used in sanctuaries to petition for prosperity, health, and success in battle. Among the Veneti, this belief system is reflected in sanctuaries filled with numerous votive offerings of figurines and plaques that illustrate their society's structure and spiritual life. However, with the establishment of the Roman emporium of Aquileia and the Roman expansion toward the eastern Alps, the 2nd century BCE marks a turning point: in the context of Romanization, the traditional offerings of local communities were gradually replaced by deities from the Roman pantheon.

Keywords: Venetic *ex-voto* bronzes; warriors; Hercules

Izvleček

Junaška božanstva v zgornjejadranskem zaledju v mlajši železni dobi in poznorepublikanskem rimskem obdobju

V prispevku predstavljamo votivne bronaste figurice z območja vzhodnega zgornjega Jadrana, s katerimi lahko posredno sledimo pomembnim verskim predstavam tamkajšnjega prebivalstva od sredine 1. tisočletja pr. n. št. pa do začetka rimskega cesarstva.

Železnodobne verske prakse Apeninskega polotoka in tudi obrobja vzhodnih Alp so poznale bronaste kipce, v največji meri herojske vojščake, s katerimi so v svetiščih priprošnjevali blagostanje, zdravje in srečo na bojnem polju. Pestrost tega verovanja se pri Venetih kaže v svetiščih s številnimi votivi v obliki kipcev in ploščic, ki ponazarjajo tamkajšnjo družbo in njeno verovanje. Z vzpostavitevijo rimskega emporija Akvileje in prodiranjem proti vzhodnim Alpam pa so v 2. stoletju pr. n. št. v kontekstu romanizacije stare daritve lokalnih skupnosti zamenjala božanstva rimskega panteona.

Ključne besede: Venetski *ex voto* kipci; bojevniki; Herkul

Among the personalities who have had a significant impact on the Slovenian and European historiography of earlier periods, it is impossible to overlook the scholarly legacy of Jaroslav Šašel. This memorial inspires us to choose a topic to which he, had he been able to edit these texts, would undoubtedly have contributed insightful comments that would have enriched and broadened the discussion. It is also important to emphasize his generosity in collaborating with peers and younger generations, and his efforts to integrate archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics, and written sources. He often encouraged us to do just this, but because of our narrow or highly specialized approaches, we, his successors, have not sufficiently managed to implement his vision, although it could have accelerated new research through a more collective approach.

For my own contribution to this work, I decided to use small votive figurines from the upper Adriatic region to illustrate how, in sanctuaries and in the context of Romanization, the old *ex-voto* offerings of local communities were replaced by figurines depicting deities of the Roman pantheon.

Collecting these specific bronze figurines has a long tradition in archaeological research.¹ These votive figurines, between 5 to 12 cm high, often lack reliable chronological anchors, and they undoubtedly had a very long lifespan. Moreover, a bronze figurine could be passed down through several generations within the same family before finally being deposited as an offering in a cult site or a sanctuary. Consequently, the dating of individual figurines must consider the general chronological framework for each typology and the historical and archaeological (contextual) circumstances surrounding each artefact.

Although the development of stylistic representations of figurines seems clear, the precise dating of these bronzes often remains elusive for various reasons. Dating is based on the canons of Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic art, which span centuries and do not allow precise chronological determinations, nor do they provide dates for the burial or offering of items. Sanctuaries are also generally of long duration, lasting for centuries, and typically lack chronological stratigraphy.

Different groups of similarly shaped figurines and plaques from Pre-Roman Venetic sanctuaries – for example, in Este and Padua – allow us to identify local workshops specialized in different cults and deities. During the Venetic Iron Age, figurines were found exclusively in places of worship or sanctuaries. Outside this spiritual and cultural area, the two warrior bronzes from Vače and Idrija pri Bači, found in graves, are an exception, as they were most likely used as the tip of a sceptre, a symbol of a leader (*primus inter pares*) of the local community.² In contrast, Roman deity figurines were found not only in places of worship, but also in homes as part of household shrines (*lararia*).

Among the figurines of the heroic deities in the sanctuaries of the Apennine Peninsula during the mid-first millennium BCE, the Etruscan production, developed under

¹ The article is based on the catalogue of bronzes, Guštin 2025, with relevant literature.

² Guštin 2025, 19–22, 27–31, figs. 6; 11: 1.



Fig. 1: Mars of Sanzeno (1; photo Museo del Castello del Buonconsiglio, Trento) and libation figure of San Pietro Montagnon (2; Montegrotto near Padua, photo Musei Civici agli Eremitani, courtesy of the Municipality of Padua – all rights reserved).

strong Greek influence, was very popular in the Italic world between the 7th and 5th centuries BCE. Realistically shaped representations of Mars, equipped with a helmet, composite armour, and greaves, prevailed. It is therefore not surprising that, following the passages across the Alps, we find two valuable Etruscan examples of this deity among the votive offerings in the prehistoric settlement of Sanzeno in Trentino (Fig. 1: 1).³

This expression of power strongly influenced the northern Italic world and the Alpine tribes. A fine local example of Etruscan derivation is a libation figure from the Padua region, holding a patera *mesomphalos* in his right hand and an Etruscan-style spouted pitcher in his left (Fig. 1: 2).⁴

The practice of offering small bronze figurines was widespread throughout the Apennine Peninsula, and it is possible to distinguish between examples belonging, for instance, to the Umbrians, Latins, Sardinians, or Picenes. The sanctuaries of the Veneti in Este, Padua, Montegrotto, and Altino, for instance, are particularly important for our discussion of the fringes of the Upper Adriatic hinterland, known for the rich votive offerings dedicated to numerous local Iron Age deities between the 7th and 4th centuries

³ Roncador 2017, 167–168, fig. 8.3; Guštin 2025, 42–44, fig. 19.

⁴ De Min 1976, 196, pl. 35: 31; Guštin 2025, 11, fig. 2.



Fig. 2: The *ex voto* warriors: 1 Este-Scolo di Lozzo (photo Museo Atestino Este); 2 Padua (photo Musei Civici agli Eremitani, courtesy of the Municipality of Padua – all rights reserved).

BCE.⁵ In addition to their long history, settlements and large necropolises with numerous cremation tombs and grave goods that largely reflect their way of life, the community of the ancient Veneti is also famous for its many sanctuaries with an unimaginable number of *ex-votos*, which give an insight into their sacred rites and the variety of votive objects that are one of the most valuable sources of knowledge about their religious life.

The votive inventory of the sanctuaries consisted not only of bronze figurines – small sculptures: ithyphallic figures, devotees, draped statuettes, warriors, and horsemen – but also of decorated bronze plaques depicting devotees and other various votive offerings such as ceramic vases, cups, bowls, and clay spindle whorls. Some *ex-votos* bear Venetic inscriptions with the names of the offerors and sometimes of the deities. At the same time, plaques depicting eyes or other anatomical parts testify to the healing properties of the sacred or thermal waters around which sanctuaries and places of worship were built.⁶

The Veneti did not include the burial of weapons in their funerary rituals, so our knowledge of their weaponry comes primarily from its abundant representation among votive offerings in sanctuaries (Fig. 2) and depictions on objects decorated in the Situla art style.⁷ Images of warriors equipped with a spear and a shield, either at rest or in the act of throwing a spear, or performing a libation with a bowl, the typical

⁵ Ruta Serafini 2002.

⁶ Càssola Guida 1978; Walde Psenner 1983; Dämmer, von den Driesch, Lazaro 1986; Zampieri 1986; Càssola Guida 1989; Jurgeit 1999; Fogolari, Gambacurta 2001; Chieco Bianchi 2002.

⁷ Cf. Turk 2005; Eibner 2018.

Italic patera in their hand, predominate (Fig. 2). To a lesser extent, figurines of worshippers holding only a cup, as well as athletes or standing male and female figures, also appear.

Votive figures are predominantly male, especially standing warriors – hoplites – and exceptionally horsemen on horseback. They are generally nude and ithyphallic, most of them depicted as ‘attacking warriors’ wearing a crested helmet with a spear in the right hand in a throwing position. Some are depicted as offering warriors in the act of libation, holding a bowl in their right hand. Their ithyphallism is prominently and meticulously represented, unlike situla art, where civilian men wear long tunics and warriors have their ithyphallic features ‘covered’ by a large shield.

Such *ex-votos*, consisting of bronze figurines depicting warriors, primarily from the sanctuaries of the Veneto region and the central Alpine areas, are important votive offerings from the Iron Age. They are crucial for understanding the identity and religious practices of the protohistoric populations that lived along the coast and inland areas of the Caput Adriae.

In this world of prehistoric rituals associated with the Iron Age societies of the Pre-Roman Venetic population and those of the neighbouring regions south of the Eastern Alps, the presence of *ex-votos* of the Hellenistic-Roman world gradually intensified.

Since the beginning of the 2nd century BCE, Aquileia, situated on the banks of the Natisone River, several kilometres from the large lagoons of the northern Adriatic, was undoubtedly a starting point for exploratory and military expeditions towards the Eastern Alps and further to Pannonia and the Balkans. Aquileia was also a centre for producing and distributing Late Republican Italic goods such as jewellery, various bronzes and ceramics, which significantly influenced the material culture of the indigenous communities.⁸ This vast area was gradually Romanized with the arrival of Roman legions and colonists from the central Apennine Peninsula.⁹

The Roman deities brought by the newcomers from their homeland, notably the legendary Hercules, typically depicted in an attacking pose with his club (Fig. 3: 1), as well as the two Beleno-Apollo bronze deities from the Ljubljana River,¹⁰ entered the eastern hinterland of Caput Adriae in full force. They more or less replaced the earlier Venetian warrior votive traditions, and began to appear in local sanctuaries in Carnia, the Soča Valley, and Carinthia (Fig. 4). They penetrated either as products of Italic workshops sent far to the east (Fig. 3: 1) or were produced in Aquileia and distributed in the hinterland of Caput Adriae (Fig. 3: 2) or even as locally produced imitations – clearly reflecting the intensity of Romanization even in the spiritual sphere (Fig. 3: 3).

In Pre-Roman/Roman sanctuaries, such as Kobarid-Gradič,¹¹ or Celtic/Roman

⁸ Zaccaria 2003.

⁹ Horvat, Bernardini, Belak 2023.

¹⁰ Gaspari, Krempuš 2002; Istenič 2002.

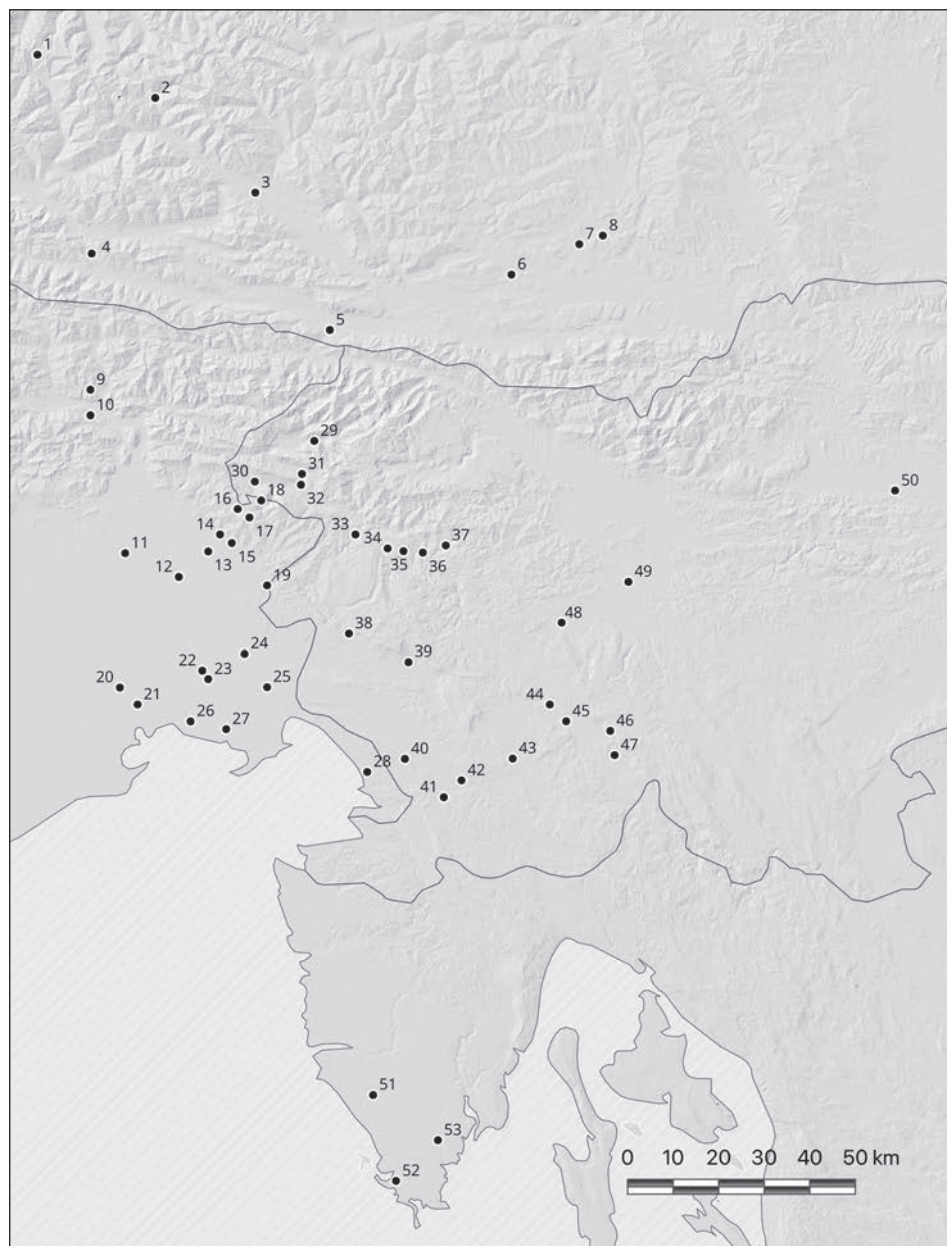
¹¹ Osmuk 1987.



Fig. 3: Hercules: 1 Celje (photo Pokrajinski muzej Celje). Votive donors: 2 Sežana (photo K. Brešan, Goriški muzej); 3 Gradič near Kobarid (after Osmuk 1987).

→ Fig. 4: The map illustrates the distribution of votive bronze representations of Roman deities and other Italic artefacts, found either as isolated discoveries or within the context of sacred places and sanctuaries in the eastern hinterland of Caput Adriae during the last two centuries BCE:

1 Hochtor-Glocknerweg, 2 Mallnitzer Tauern, 3 Teurnia, 4 Gurina, 5 Straßfried-Schloßberg, 6 Moosburg-Gradenegg, 7 Sankt Michael am Zollfeld, 8 Magdalensberg, 9 Raveo-Monte Sorantri, 10 Verzegnis-Colle Mazéit, 11 Fagagna and "near" Fagagna, 12 Udine-San Gottardo, 13 Gagliano-Santa Maria delle Grazie, 14 Lasiz, 15 Torreano di Cividale and agro di Cividale, 16 Monte Barda-Roba, 17 Costne-San Mattia, 18 *Schiavonia* (Valli del Natisone), 19 Prepotto, 20 Teor-Pizzat, 21 Muzzana del Turgnano, 22 Sevegliano, 23 Strassoldo, 24 Medea-Monte di Medea, 25 Redipuglia, 26 Scodovacca, 27 Aquileia, 28 Trieste-stipe di Gretta, 29 Bovec-Ravelnik, 30 Homec, 31 Kobarid-Tonovcov grad, 32 Kobarid-Gradič, 33 Most na Soči, 34 Pečine-Vrh gradu, 35 Šentviška Gora-Berlotov rob, 36 Reka-Grad, 37 Cerkno-Gradišče, 38 Loke-Kolenovca, 39 Lokavec-Kovačevše, 40 Sežana, 41 Rodik-Ajdovščina 42 Stara Sušica-Parti, 43 Slavina-Ambrožovo gradišče, 44 Unec-Stari grad, 45 Dolenja vas-Tržišče, 46 Bločice-Žerovnišček, 47 Stari trg pri Ložu-Ulaka, 48 Blatna Brezovica-Ljubljana, 49 Ljubljana-Grad and Dvorišče SAZU, 50 Celje, 51 Bale-Tujan, 52 Pula, 53 Nesactium (completed after Guštin 2025, fig. 42).



← Fig. 4

sanctuaries, such as Gurina,¹² Straßfried-Schloßberg bei Thörl-Maglern (Slov. Vrata-Megvarje)¹³ and Magdalensberg¹⁴ in the Eastern Alps, we also find locally produced, simple male and female figures, as well as the Roman deities. These artefacts represent local craftsmen's responses to the precious, high-quality Italic bronze statuettes. It is evident that some simply formed Roman deities were made much earlier and dedicated centuries later in sanctuaries, constructed long after the figurines were made.

The noble Hercules Dexiomenos, adorned with a rich crown of leaves from Gurina,¹⁵ is an example of the work of high-quality workshops, undoubtedly of Italic origin, and perhaps even from Aquileia, dating to the Augustan period prior to the destruction of the Roman settlement of Gurina in the earthquake of 14 CE.¹⁶ The stylized lion's head on the left shoulder resembles that of certain Hercules figures from the sanctuary at Gradič near Kobarid (*Fig. 3: 3*), and may have served as a model for their local production.

The Gradič hill in the Upper Soča Valley, now covered by a monumental ossuary for the fallen of the First World War, was used as a cult place from the end of the Early Iron Age onward, with intense sacral activity between the 2nd century BCE and the mid-first century CE. Among the 28 Hellenistic-Roman bronze figurines, products of different workshops, various deities are represented: Jupiter, Minerva, Diana, Venus, Mercury, Mars, Apollo, and multiple figures of Hercules Dexiomenos wearing a lion's skin and a crown of leaves.¹⁷ This sanctuary differs from other sanctuaries of the period in the hinterland of *Caput Adriae* due to the composition of its votive offerings and the complete absence of weaponry. It contains many Italic goods, such as pottery, bronze objects, and, above all, characteristic local depictions of Hercules holding out his right arm. This strong presence of Roman votive offerings is undoubtedly supported by the nearby Roman settlement and cemetery at Most na Soči, the graves containing Roman weapons in the Idrijca Valley and, from the mid-first century BCE onwards, also by nearby Roman outposts, later settlements such as the ones of Tergeste, Forum Iulii in Friuli, and Iulium Carnicum on the fringes of the Carnic Alps.¹⁸

Bronze figurines did not travel the world on their own. The Veneti brought them to sanctuaries and placed them in designated locations to be seen – both by the gods and the offerors. In the Late Republican period, merchants, legionaries, and travellers carried them, trusting in their power and hoping for a successful future – perhaps in battle, trade, or the colonization of new lands. In this way, each bronze figurine was a sign of the spirituality of its offeror, combining both fear of the unknown and hope for a good start in a new life.

¹² Jablonka 2001.

¹³ Schuchter 2023.

¹⁴ Gleirscher, Hinterfelder 2014.

¹⁵ Jablonka 2001, 209, pl. 138.

¹⁶ Gamper 2012, 81.

¹⁷ Osmuk 1987; see also Horvat 2018, 343–347.

¹⁸ Guštin 2024, 15–18.

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Mitja Guštin
Univerza na Primorskem
Titov trg 4
SI-6000 Koper
mitja.gustin@upr.si

The Route over the Alps: the Bovec Basin and the Predel Pass in the Roman Era

Jana HORVAT

Abstract

The Bovec Basin is the last relatively flat area before the route along the Soča and Koritnica rivers leads up to the Predel (Italian: Predil) Pass (1,156 m asl). At the entrance to the prehistoric fortified settlement of Ravelnik near Bovec, there was a Late Republican and Early Imperial cult place. With the offerings of the bronze statuettes, it resembles the cult place of Gradič near Kobarid, where votive objects imported from Italy have been used since the middle of the first century BC. At this time, the connection over the Predel Pass was probably of supra-regional importance as a fast link between Aquileia, Forum Iulii and the Norican Kingdom. In the second half of the first century AD, the focus of settlement in the Bovec Basin shifted to the site Devica Marija v polju. With the construction of the road through the Canal del Ferro and the Val Canale in the Early Imperial period, the route along the Soča and Koritnica and over the Predel Pass was probably reduced to a purely regional connection.

Keywords: Roman period; settlement; route; cult place; Bovec Basin; Ravelnik; Devica Marija v polju; Predel/Predil Pass

Izvleček

Pot čez Alpe: Bovška kotlina in prelaz Predel v rimski dobi

Bovška kotlina je zadnje razmeroma ravno območje, preden se pot po dolini Soče in Koritnice vzpne na prelaz Predel (1156 m n. v.). Pred vhodom v utrjeno prazgodovinsko naselbino Ravelnik pri Bovcu je ležalo poznorepublikansko in zgodnjecesarsko sveto mesto, ki je bilo po votivnih darovih poznorepublikanskih bronastih kipcev podobno svetemu mestu na Gradiču pri Kobaridu. Na Gradiču so se uvoženi in votivni predmeti iz Italije začeli v večjem številu pojavljati sredi 1. st. pr. Kr. Takrat je verjetno imela pot čez Predel nadregionalni pomen kot hitra povezava med Akvilejo in mestom *Forum Iulii* in Noriškim kraljestvom. Težišče poselitve Bovške kotline se je v drugi polovici 1. st. po Kr. preneslo na lokacijo Devica Marija v polju. Po izgradnji ceste po Železni in Kanalski dolini v zgodnjecesarskem obdobju je postala pot ob Soči in Koritnici ter čez prelaz Predel verjetno zgolj še regionalna povezava.

Ključne besede: rimska doba; poselitev; pot; sveto mesto; Bovška kotlina; Ravelnik; Devica Marija v polju; Predel

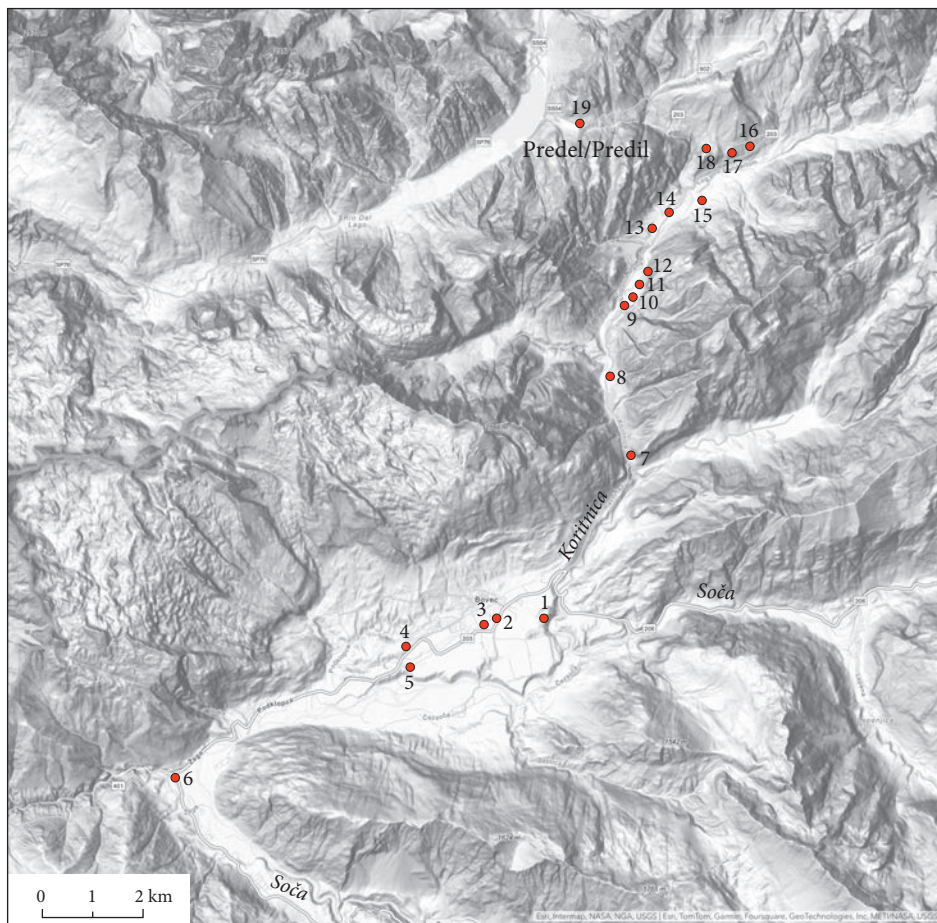


Fig. 1: The Bovec Basin with surrounding area: 1 Ravelnik, 2 Devica Marija v polju, 3 plot. no. 1593/1, Bovec cadastral community, 4 Na Raduljah, 5 Podklopce, 6 Žaga, 7 Kluže, 8 Pustina, 9–12 Tablana, 13–14 Log pod Mangartom, 15 Na Požarju, 16–17 path from Log to Strmec, 18 Strmec, 19 Predel.

The Bovec Basin is the last large open and relatively flat area on the upper reaches of the River Soča. It lies at an altitude of around 440 m asl and is surrounded by a chain of high and steep mountains of the Julian Alps, the highest of which is Visoki Kanin at 2,587 m asl. The Soča and Koritnica rivers flow together at the eastern edge of the basin. The agricultural opportunities in this area are relatively modest. The Soča Valley is a relatively easy passage to the south, which also brings with it Mediterranean climatic influences. All other connections to the outside world lead through gorges and over mountain passes. At 1,156 m asl, the Predel Pass (Predil in Italian) is the low-

est and most important pass connecting the upper Soča Valley with the Slizza Valley (Jiljica in Slovenian, Gailitz in German) and Carinthia.¹

The Bovec Basin has been an important settlement area since the Early Iron Age.² This article aims to enrich our understanding of the settlement landscape of the basin during the Roman period and to shed light on its role within the wider transportation network of the Eastern Alps. The focus is on new Roman finds from the settlements of Ravelnik and Devica Marija v polju, which are not the result of systematic archaeological investigations. Individual finds from other parts of the Bovec Basin were also included, as well as from the Koritnica Valley and the area around Žaga (Fig. 1).³

Ravelnik

On the right bank of the River Koritnica and near its confluence with the Soča, rises a solitary hill with two peaks: the northern and higher one is Ravelnik (also called Rabeljk or Rabelnik by the locals), the southern one is Stržišče (also called Stražišče). The well-preserved ramparts and terraces indicate that a fortified settlement with an area of around three hectares existed on Ravelnik (Fig. 2).⁴ The slopes of the hill are very steep, rising 40 to 70 metres above the plain in the west and 120 metres above the Koritnica gorge in the east. The settlement, which lies at an altitude of 490 to 520 m asl, slopes down to the southwest and is divided by a transverse embankment into a lower and a slightly larger upper part. The easiest access is via the saddle on the southwest side, where an entrance can be seen in the ramparts. The hill was considerably damaged by the construction of trenches during the First World War, and there was a military cemetery on the southern slope.⁵

To date, no archaeological excavations have been carried out in Ravelnik. However, small archaeological artefacts have been discovered on various occasions, mostly with metal detectors. These finds come from the northern part of the settlement (Fig. 2: 1,2) and from the area south of the settlement (Fig. 2: 3–5).

¹ Perko et al. 2001, 65–67.

² Svoljšak 2002; Mlinar, Tecco Hvala 2022.

³ The data on the artefacts and the circumstances of their discovery were provided by Fedja Klavora and Ivo Ivančič. From their collections, I present only those objects that I was able to place in archaeological periods.

⁴ Moser 1884; description by J. Szombathy in 1887 [Tagebuch 89 (Karton 14/2), Fundakten Archiv Wien (the help of Dragan Božič 2018)]. Marchesetti, 1903, 88–89; Vuga 1970; Vuga 1974, 98; Urleb 1975; Osmuk 1985, 223; Svoljšak 2002, 266, 270–271; Klavora 2003, 17–19, 21; Mlinar 2018, 53; Horvat 2018, 337; Klavora 2021, 111–114; Mlinar, Tecco Hvala 2022, 406–407, 431, fig. 5–6.

⁵ Osmuk 2005, 13. In the 18th century, a small church dedicated to St Sylvester still stood on the northern foothills of Stražišče: *Slovenija na vojaškem zemljevidu 1763–1787* (1804) Vol. 3, section 133; Svoljšak 2002, 270, 275, fig. 5; Klavora 2003, 19, 38.

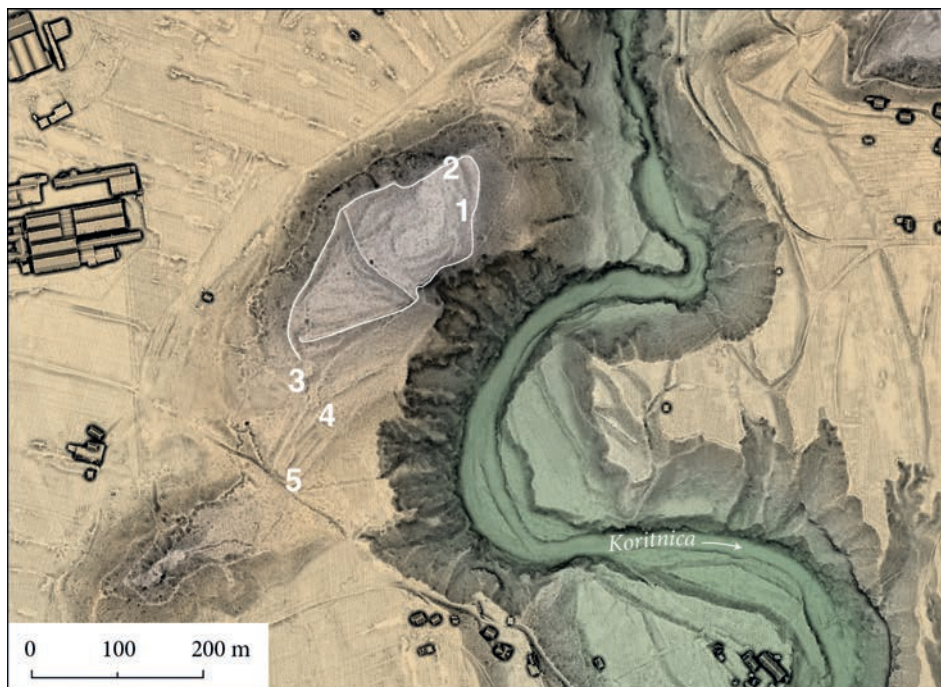


Fig. 2: Ravelnik. 1–5 locations of the archaeological finds.

Settlement

The artefacts were discovered on the terrace at the extreme northern edge of the settlement (Fig. 2: 1; 3: 1,7), immediately below the rampart on the northern slope (Fig. 2: 2; 3: 2–6,8–10; including two Celtic silver coins) and in the lower part of the northern slope (at least two Roman coins).⁶

A long-footed fibula (Fig. 3: 1) is dated to the Late Hallstatt period, namely to the Sv. Lucija IIa phase – 6th century BC.⁷

One of the Celtic silver coins belongs to the West Norican group and bears the Latin letters COP.⁸ This probably refers to the legend COPPO, which allows it to be dated to the first half of the 1st century BC.⁹

⁶ Klavora 2003, 28: a coin from the early 4th century, found at the foot of Ravelnik. Klavora 2021, 113: two unidentified Roman coins. Mlinar 2009a: a fragment of an iron ploughshare, from an unspecified location on Ravelnik.

⁷ Mlinar 2018, 53, fig. 5; Mlinar, Tecco Hvala 2022, 431, pl. 2: 5.

⁸ Klavora 2021, 113, fig. 5. The second silver coin has not been published.

⁹ Gorini 2005, 83–86; Gorini 2009.

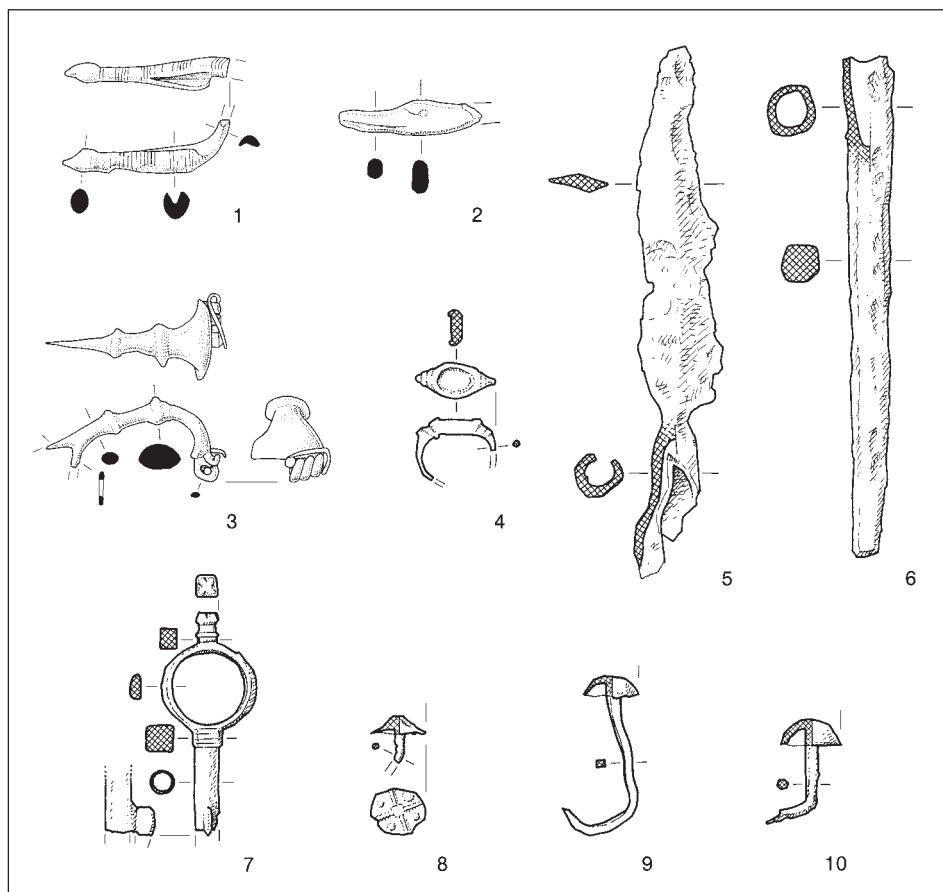


Fig. 3: Ravelnik. 1, 7: location 1; 2–6, 8–10: location 2. 1–3 bronze, 4–10 iron. Scale 1:2.

The bronze duck's head (Fig. 3: 2) is the end piece of an Aylesford-type ladle handle, which was widely used in northern Italy during the Lt D phase (from the late 2nd century BC to the early Augustan period).¹⁰

The hobnail (Fig. 3: 8) belongs to Type D from Alesia. Such hobnails were used in Roman military footwear from the second quarter of the 1st century BC to the second decade of the 1st century BC.¹¹

The fibula with two knobs (Fig. 3: 3) can be assigned to Type A 236 c, which was widespread in the 1st century AD, especially in Noricum, western Pannonia and in the eastern Alpine valleys of Italy.¹²

¹⁰ Feugère, De Marinis 1991, 98–102; Bolla, Castoldi 2016, 132–137.

¹¹ Istenič 2019, 273–279.

¹² Garbsch 1965, 29–32. Seidel, Lavarone 2008, 145–147.

The iron finger ring was originally set with a precious stone (*Fig. 3: 4*). The shoulder carination links the ring to the Types 3a–d classified by Guiraud, which are characteristic of the second half of the 2nd and the 3rd century AD.¹³ However, as the carination of the shoulder is still weakly pronounced, it could be an early stage in the development of this form.

The key (*Fig. 3: 7*) with a projection at the tip of the ring can be dated to the Roman period.¹⁴ The spearhead, spear butt, and the nails (*Fig. 3: 5–6, 9–10*), on the other hand, cannot be dated more precisely.

South of the settlement

In the area that rises from the saddle between Stržišče and Ravelnik to the ramparts, archaeological artefacts were found in three specific places: west (*Fig. 2: 3*) and east (*Fig. 2: 4*) of the modern path, and in the military cemetery from the First World War (*Fig. 2: 5*).

Metal and pottery (*Fig. 4b; 5: 2–9; 6: 2, 8*; including two identified and 15 unidentified Roman coins) were discovered on a smaller flat area to the west of the path and on the top of the westward sloping hillside (*Fig. 2: 3*). These items were dispersed in a 30 to 40 cm thick layer of black soil covering an area at least 30 m in diameter.¹⁵

Another group of artefacts was found on the heavily disturbed slope to the east of the modern path (*Fig. 2: 4; 5: 1, 10–11; 6: 1, 3–7, 9*; including an unidentified Roman coin). Fragments of amphorae, jugs and a brick (*Fig. 7*) were found either east or west of the path (*Fig. 2: 3 or 4*).

A statue of Minerva was recovered in the area of the excavated graves of the military cemetery (*Fig. 2: 5; 4a*).¹⁶

The two identified Roman coins (from *Fig. 2: 3*) are both asses; one was minted in AD 71 under Vespasian, the other in AD 190 under Commodus.¹⁷

Lead spindles (similar to *Fig. 5: 11*), whose function remains unclear, date from the Late Hallstatt to the Late La Tène period and are found in northern Italy and in the south-eastern Alps.¹⁸

Five bronze statuettes were discovered south of the settlement.¹⁹ The statuette of

¹³ Guiraud 1989, 185–186, 203, fig. 53; Riha 1990, 32, Type 2.1.7.

¹⁴ Feugère (M.), Gilles (A.), coll. Gagnol (M.), * Key rotation lock (artefacts: CLE-5007), <https://artefacts.mom.fr/result.php?id=CLE-5007>, 24. 02. 2025. Rokohl 2015, pl. 11: 3 – in a grave with Nero's coin; Cüppers, Neyses 1971, 170, fig. 13: 3.

¹⁵ Klavora 2003, 18, 29; Mlinar 2009a; Klavora 2021, 112–113. Pers. comm: Fedja Klavora.

¹⁶ Osmuk 2005.

¹⁷ Determined by Peter Kos, 2016. *Vespasianus*, 71, As, Roma, RIC 317, weight 7.22 g, axis: 6, worn. *Commodus*, 190, As, Roma, RIC 576, fragmented, weight 6 g, axis: 12, worn.

¹⁸ Laharnar 2009, 108, 133, pl. 7: 1; Laharnar 2022, 260–261.

¹⁹ Osmuk 2005; Horvat 2018. A lost bronze statuette from Bovec is mentioned in the *Soča* magazine of July 18, 1914, p. 2; the place of origin could be Ravelnik (pers. comm. Miha Mlinar).



Fig. 4: Ravelnik: a – location 5, Minerva; b – location 3, Hercules. Bronze. Not to scale.

Minerva (Fig. 2: 5; 4a) is cast in hollow bronze²⁰ and survives to the height of 19 to 20 cm. She wears a high-belted dress and a Corinthian helmet. In her right hand she holds a patera, in her left hand a short fragment of the spear shaft is still preserved. Statuettes of Minerva with the same dress and attributes were widespread in Italy in the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC,²¹ but none of them a very similar to the statuette from Ravelnik. To a certain extent, the statuette from Ravelnik resembles the Minerva from

²⁰ The term bronze is used in its general sense for any copper alloy.

²¹ LIMC II/1, 1059, no. 119; LIMC II/2, 777: 119h. Este: Chieco Bianchi 2002, pl. 58: 179.

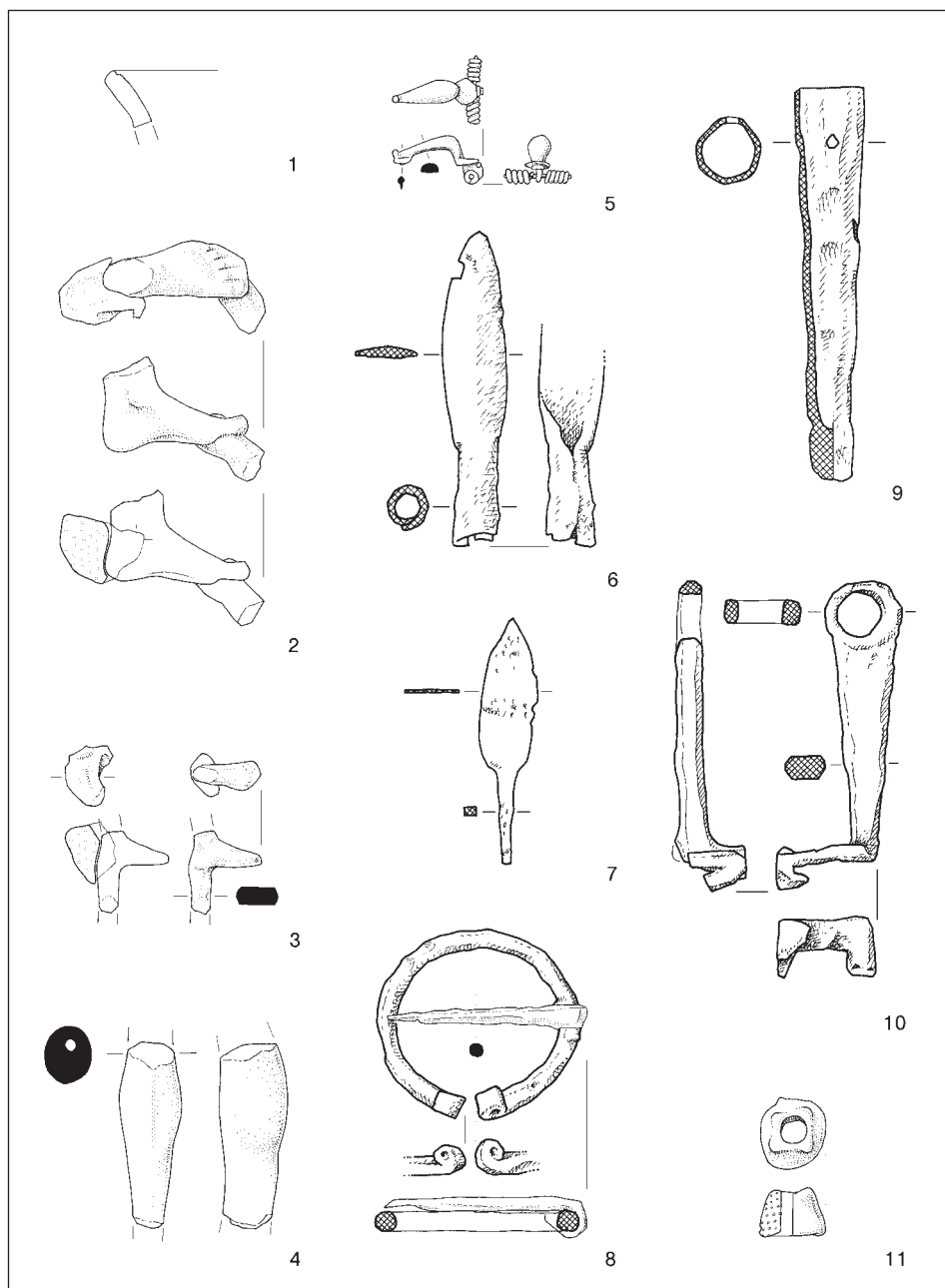


Fig. 5: Ravelnik. 2–9: location 3; 1, 10–11: location 4. 1 glass, 2–3 bronze and lead, 4–5 bronze, 6–10 iron, 11 lead. Scale 1:2.

the Roman fortress of Cáceres el Viejo, which was destroyed around 80 BC. This piece followed a Late Hellenistic model from the second half of the 2nd century BC.²²

The statuette of a male deity (*Fig. 2: 3; 4b*) is cast from solid bronze and measures 12.7 cm in height. The surface is damaged and the details are difficult to make out. He wears a wreath on his head and a cloak over his left shoulder and around his left arm. The statuette could depict a young, beardless Hercules wearing a lion skin over his left arm and a wreath on his head, and possibly holding a sacrificial vessel or club.²³

The statuettes of Minerva and Hercules in the Hellenistic-Roman style have no features that would allow a more precise dating, but only a very rough assignment to the Late Republican or Early Imperial period.²⁴

The fragments of the foot (*Fig. 5: 2*) and the tibia (*Fig. 5: 4*) belonged to high-quality statuettes. The height of the statuette (*Fig. 5: 2*) is estimated at 23 to 26 cm. The schematically modelled foot (*Fig. 5: 3*), on the other hand, belongs to a statuette of lower quality, which is frequently found at sites in north-eastern Italy and mainly dates to the Republican period.²⁵ The estimated height of this statuette is 12 cm.

The method of attaching statuettes to a stone or wooden base with the aid of sprues (remnants of the casting process) and lead dowels, as can be seen on the two feet (*Fig. 5: 2–3*), was widespread in the Italo-Etruscan area in the Late Republican period. It is also found on statuettes from the Eastern Alps dating from the period of early contacts with the Veneti and the Romans. Later, in the Roman Imperial period, the statuettes are usually soldered to the base.²⁶ The sprues on the feet are therefore a strong indication that the group of statuettes from Ravelnik can be dated to the Late Republican period.

The fibula (*Fig. 5: 5*) belongs to a group of very widespread knee fibulae, probably of the Jobst 13C type. The long crossbow spring and the small semicircular plate are characteristics of a special, rare variant that occurs mainly in Pannonia.²⁷ Knee fibulae of Type 13C in the south-eastern Alps have been dated to the late 2nd and first half of the 3rd century AD.²⁸

The iron penannular fibula with rolled ends (*Fig. 5: 8*) has a circular cross-section of the bow, which assigns it to variant 3b. It is dated in the Late Roman period, especially in the 4th century AD. The iron penannular fibulae were used by the autochthonous Roman population in Italy until the 7th century.²⁹

²² Blech 1984, 306–308, pls. 79–80; Horvat 2018, 340–342.

²³ Kaufmann-Heinimann 1977, 50–51, similar to Types IV A or V A; Hercules dexiomenos or bibax; Horvat 2018, 340–342.

²⁴ On the question of dating, see Kaufmann-Heinimann 1998, 56–59.

²⁵ E.g. Càssola Guida 1978; Càssola Guida 1989.

²⁶ Gschwantler 2014, 54–59.

²⁷ Jobst 1975, 65–66; Kovrig 1937, 121, pl. IX: 92.

²⁸ Gugl 1995, 34–36; Buora 2003, 503–511; Ortisi 2008, 43–44; Hinker, Bade 2022, 141–142.

²⁹ Höck 2013.

The key (*Fig. 5: 10*) has a very common Roman form.³⁰ The spearhead, spear butt, and the arrowhead (?) cannot be dated more precisely (*Fig. 5: 6,7,9*).

A rim fragment was made of dark blue, translucent glass (*Fig. 5: 1*). It belonged to a vessel that was probably cast in a mould. The colour and the manufacturing technique indicate that it was probably made in the 1st century AD.³¹

Auerberg-type jars (*Fig. 6: 1–3*) with a dark grey, hard and waxy surface were widespread in the 1st and early 2nd century AD, especially in the regions of Friuli, Noricum and Raetia.³² The connection to Noricum in the 1st century AD is evident in the deeply incised lid (*Fig. 6: 9*)³³ and in the deep bowls (*Fig. 6: 5–6*).³⁴ Further fragments of grey cooking pottery probably belong to the same context (*Fig. 6: 4,7,8*).

The double handle is part of a Dressel 2–4 type wine amphora (*Fig. 7: 1*). This type was produced in numerous centres around the Mediterranean from the mid-1st century BC to the end of the 2nd or beginning of the 3rd century AD. The characteristics of the ceramic fabric indicate that the amphora from Ravelnik was made in the Adriatic region.³⁵

The flat-bottomed amphora of the Forlimpopoli type (*Fig. 7: 6*) comes from the Emilia-Romagna region and is dated from the mid-1st to the mid-3rd century AD.³⁶ The handle of the amphora (*Fig. 7: 8*) could belong to an oil amphora Dressel 6 B (the larger variant), which was produced in Istria and the Po Valley from the late 1st century BC to the 3rd century AD.³⁷ A fragment of a base with a ring-shaped extension (*Fig. 7: 5*) probably belongs to a Knidian amphora, but cannot be dated more precisely.³⁸

Fragments of an amphora (*Fig. 7: 7*), jugs (*Fig. 7: 2–4*) and a tegula with a stamp (*Fig. 7: 9*) can also be dated to the Early Imperial period.

The surroundings of Ravelnik

A bronze cast fibula in the shape of a peacock was discovered near the western foothills of Stržišče (*Fig. 9: 5*).³⁹ Such fibulae were used by the Roman population, especially in the Eastern Alps and in Slovenia, in the second half of the 5th century and

³⁰ Schütz 2003, 97–102.

³¹ Rütli 1991, 111–117; Lazar 2003, 29–33.

³² Riccato 2020, 30–32.

³³ Dark grey pottery, very hard, with a coarse surface and numerous small white inclusions. Schindler-Kaudelka, Zabehlicky-Scheffenecker 1995, 183; Horvat 2012, 277.

³⁴ Dark grey pottery, very hard, with a coarse surface, numerous white inclusions, and fine mica. Schindler Kaudelka 1997, 81–83.

³⁵ Žerjal, Novšak 2020, 192.

³⁶ Panella 1989, 147–154; Žerjal, Novšak 2020, 192–193.

³⁷ Žerjal, Novšak 2020, 193.

³⁸ Light brown pottery, with rare small light inclusions. Empereur, Hesnard 1987, 20–21; Bezecky 2013, 53–56.

³⁹ Gerbec, Mlinar 2011b.

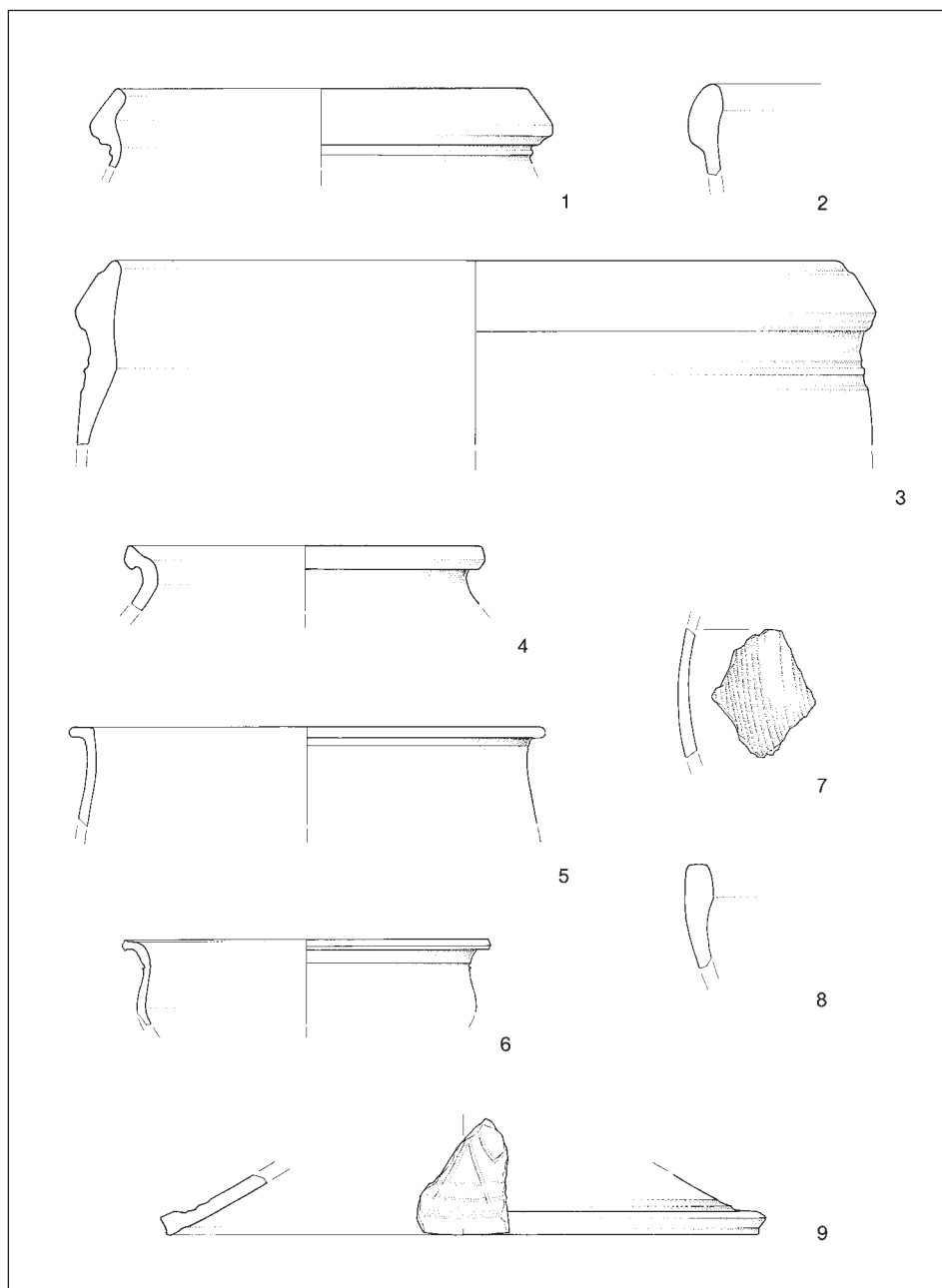


Fig. 6: Ravelnik. 2, 8: location 3; 1, 3–7, 9: location 4. Pottery. Scale 1:3.

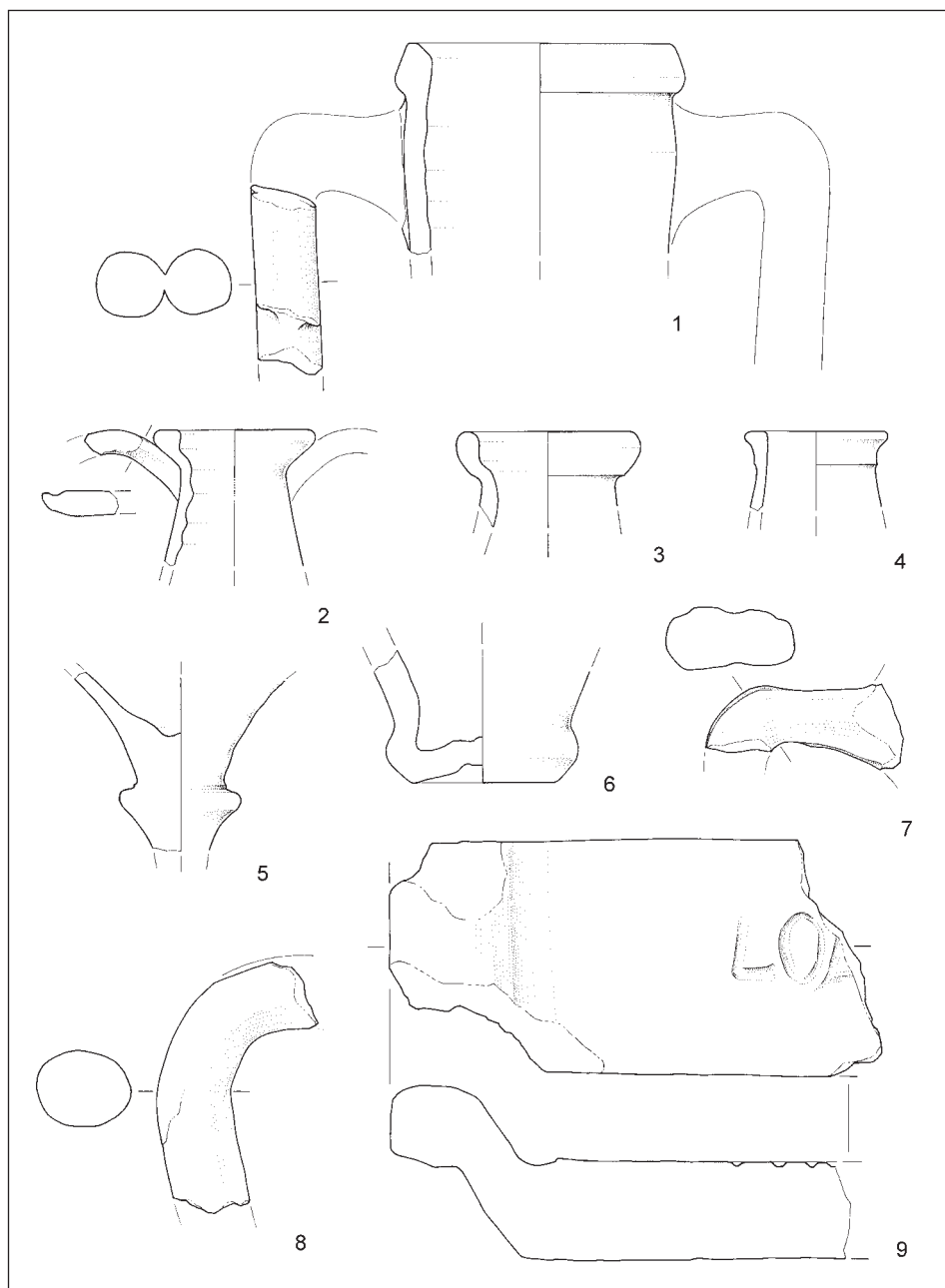


Fig. 7: Ravelnik, locations 3 or 4. Pottery. Scale 1:3.

into the 6th century.⁴⁰ Finds of Roman pottery have been reported on the northern ridge below Ravelnik.⁴¹ Roman pottery was probably also found south of Ravelnik and Stržišče.⁴² A fragment of a penannular fibula was discovered near the river Koritnica.⁴³

The area west of Ravelnik and Stržišče was called Gomilce (Small Mounds). Davorin Vuga discovered small, irregularly shaped mounds in this area, whose nature – whether natural or artificial – was unclear.⁴⁴ The area was levelled due to land reclamation works.⁴⁵

Settlement in Ravelnik

The shape and location of the settlement at Ravelnik indicate that it was probably founded in the Early Iron Age.⁴⁶ The fibula (*Fig. 3: 1*) could confirm this dating. The few finds indicate that the hill was also inhabited during the La Tène and Roman periods (*Fig. 3: 2–4, 7–8*, coins).

The artefacts found in front of the entrance to the settlement date from the 1st century BC to the 4th century AD. Most of them probably belong to the pre-Augustan period (*Fig. 4; 5: 2–4, 11*) and to the 1st century AD (*Fig. 5: 1; 6: 1–3, 5–6, 9*; a coin of Vespasian). Amphorae, jugs and a tegula can probably also be attributed to the Early Imperial period (*Fig. 7*). A coin of Commodus and a fibula (*Fig. 5: 5*) indicate a date in the late 2nd and first half of the 3rd century, while the most recent artefact is a penannular fibula from the second half of the 3rd or 4th century (*Fig. 5: 8*).

The focus of activity in front of the prehistoric settlement can thus be placed primarily in the 1st century BC and 1st century AD. This could be interpreted as a shift of the settlement area beyond the ramparts of the old settlement at the beginning of the Roman period, as was observed in some places in the south-eastern Alpine region (e.g. Gradišče above Knežak, Gradišče above Gornja Košana).⁴⁷ On the other hand, the site in front of the entrance to Ravelnik is very similar to a cult place in Gradič near Kobarid. Both sites are characterized by their location in front of the entrance to the prehistoric settlement, a thick layer of black earth, intensive use in the 1st century BC and 1st century AD and votive objects – mainly bronze statuettes imported from Italy.⁴⁸ On this basis, at least some, if not all, of the finds discovered in front of the entrance to the Ravelnik settlement can be linked to a cult place.

⁴⁰ Bierbrauer 2005, 58–61, fig. 10; Bitenc, Knific 2012, 433–435, 441–442.

⁴¹ Pers. comm. Fedja Klavara.

⁴² Location Vodenca, “Za Bovecem”: Osmuk 1985, 223; Svoljšak 2002, 267.

⁴³ Pers. comm. Fedja Klavara.

⁴⁴ Vuga 1974, 98; Svoljšak 2002, 271.

⁴⁵ Osmuk 1985, 223.

⁴⁶ Mlinar, Tecco Hvala 2022, 405–410.

⁴⁷ Laharnar 2022, 108–109, 130–131, 348–349, fig. 3.46, 3.60.

⁴⁸ Horvat 2018, 343–344.

Devica Marija v polju

The church of Devica Marija v polju (Church of Our Lady of the Fields) from the first half of the 16th century is located on the edge of a low terrace above the Gereš stream, which borders the flat land of Bovško polje to the northwest (Fig. 1: 2).⁴⁹ It is about 640 m away from the foothills of Ravelnik.

During the renovation works, the remains of an earlier stone wall, a layer of Roman rubble, pottery and coins were discovered near the northern wall of the church (Fig. 8: 1–18).⁵⁰ A total of 22 Roman coins from the period of Constantine I (AD 330–335) to Valentinian II (AD 378–383) were documented.⁵¹ A bronze bracelet with a boat-shaped widened ring (Fig. 8: 1) was a long-lasting form that ran from the end of the La Tène period through the entire Roman era.⁵² The base of a plate or bowl made of translucent blue-green glass (Fig. 8: 5) indicates that it was made in a mould. It is probably of the AR 14 type, which imitates ceramic products and is dated from the Flavian period to the middle of the 2nd century, although its use may have extended further.⁵³ A fragment of a hemispherical cup with an upright rib on the wall (Fig. 8: 3) resembles blown cups of the AR 61 type, which are dated to the second half of the 2nd century and the 3rd century.⁵⁴ Nine thin-walled cups (Fig. 8: 6–14) were decorated with grooves and rouletted or barbotine ornaments. The fine, grey pottery with dark grey slip corresponds to Fabric E from Magdalensberg in Carinthia. This group appears in the post-Tiberian period and is relatively poorly represented in Magdalensberg. It prevailed among the thin-walled pottery in the second half of the 1st century, and was also produced in the first half of the 2nd century. It comes from various workshops in northern Italy and later also in southern Pannonia.⁵⁵ Double-handled cups with rouletting (similar to those in Fig. 8: 7,8,10) were found in the tombs of Emona from the end of the 1st and the first half of the 2nd century.⁵⁶ The rim of a jug and fragments of coarse pottery (Fig. 8: 15–18) probably date from the same period as the thin-walled pottery.

A discovery of inhumation graves was reported for the area near the church.⁵⁷ In the plain between the church and Ravelnik, an inhumation grave was uncovered

⁴⁹ Höfler 1997, 75.

⁵⁰ Svoljšak 2002, 274; Klavara 2003, 29; Klavara 2021, 110–111.

⁵¹ FMRSI 6, 11–13; Bovec - Devica Marija v polju; Svoljšak 2002, 274. The coin found in 2013 was determined by Peter Kos in 2016: *Valentinianus I, Valens, Gratianus or Valentinianus II*, AE 3, 364–378, type: *Securitas Reipublicae*, weight: 1.22 g, axis: 12, worn. The coins are in a private collection.

⁵² Riha 1990, 62.

⁵³ Fünfschilling 2015, 106–110, 279.

⁵⁴ Fünfschilling 2015, 128–129, 334–335. Comp.: Lazar 2003, Type 2.6.3, pp. 84–85.

⁵⁵ Schindler-Kaudelka 1975, 33; Plesničar-Gec 1977, 13–26; Schindler-Kaudelka, Schneider 1998, 399–400.

⁵⁶ Plesničar-Gec 1977, 20, pl. 1: 76–78.

⁵⁷ Svoljšak 2002, 274; Klavara 2003, 29.

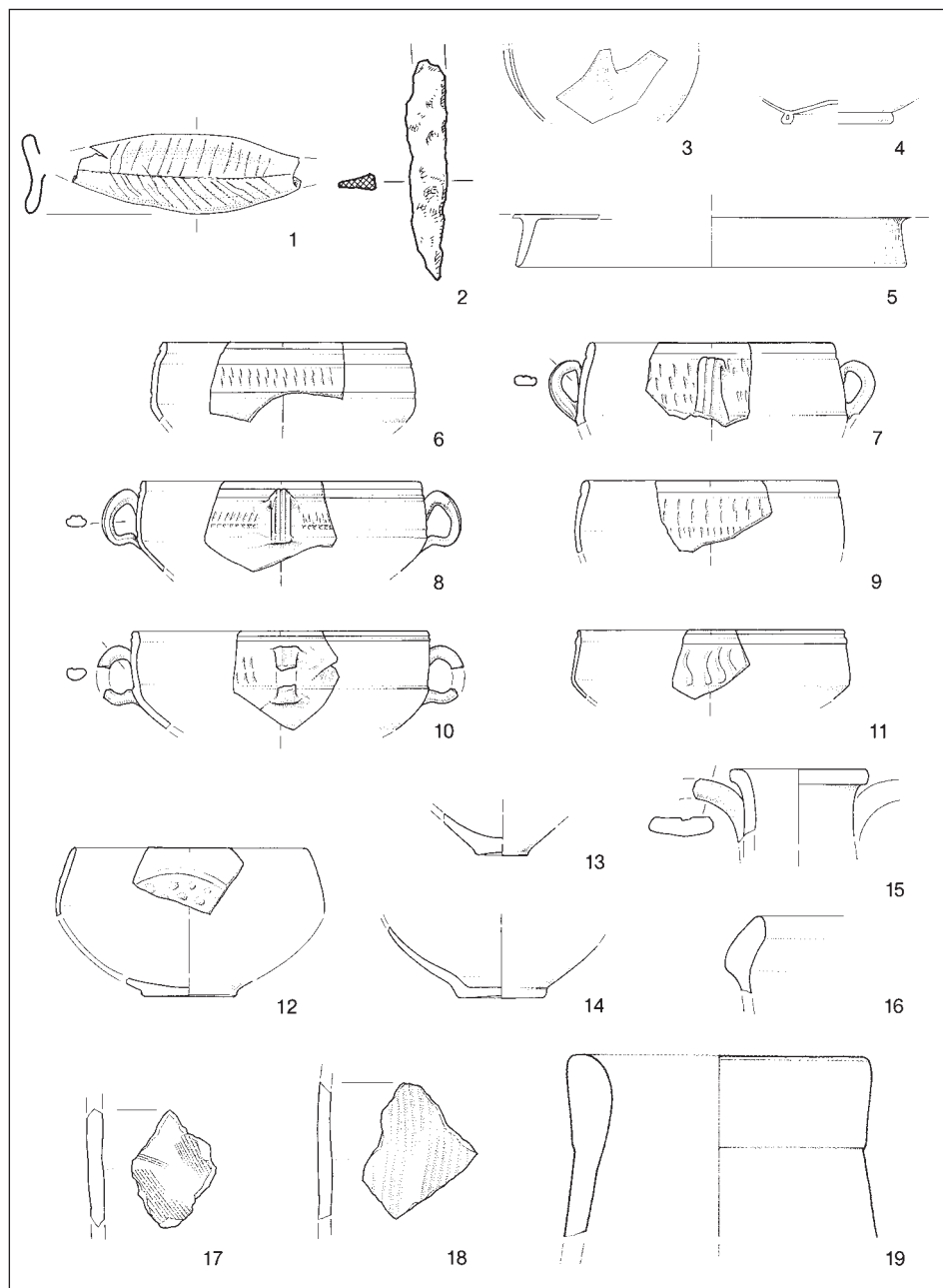


Fig. 8: Bovec. 1–18 Devica Marija v polju, 19 – plot no. 1593/1, Bovec cadastral community. 1 bronze, 2 iron, 3–5 glass, 6–19 pottery. Scale 1–2 = 1:2; 3–19 = 1:3.

which, according to a typical glass bead, dates to the middle or second half of the 8th century.⁵⁸

At the edge of the terrace about 320 m southwest of the church (*Fig. 1: 3*; plot no. 1593/1, Bovec cadastral community), a small test pit uncovered a 30 cm thick cultural layer containing Roman pottery in 2010.⁵⁹ Among the finds was a fragment of an amphora rim (*Fig. 8: 19*) of the Africana IID type (Bonifay 26), which were produced from the middle of the 3rd to the 4th century AD in what is now Tunisia.⁶⁰ A group of Roman artefacts (pottery, an iron sickle and a bolt) was discovered in a secondary location between the church and the site on plot no. 1593/1.⁶¹

The finds suggest a Roman settlement near the church of Devica Marija v polju, which existed from the second half of the 1st to the end of the 4th century AD. The location southwest of the church indicates another independent settlement nucleus or that a larger Roman settlement existed along the main road through the Bovec Basin.⁶²

Bovec

Various archaeological finds have been reported from the northern edge of the basin, where the modern town of Bovec is located, although these have not yet been precisely defined. A cremation grave, probably from the Early Iron Age, was discovered in Na Raduljah (*Fig. 1: 4*).⁶³ In three other areas of present-day Bovec, cremation graves are said to have been found, but no precise information is available.⁶⁴

A coin of Probus (276–282 AD) was found in Dvor,⁶⁵ and 21 coins from undetermined sites in the Bovec area date from the time of Aurelian (270–275 AD) to Honorius (408–423 AD).⁶⁶ Some of them may come from the vicinity of the Devica Marija v polju church.

Reports of inhumations covered with slate slabs indicate Late Antique or Early Medieval graves in the Visna area.⁶⁷

⁵⁸ Moser 1884, [10]; Svoljšak 2002, 265, 274, fig. 2, 4; Klavora 2003, 37–38.

⁵⁹ Gerbec, Mlinar 2011a.

⁶⁰ Bonifay 2004, 115–117; Žerjal, Novšak 2020, 194.

⁶¹ Mlinar 2016.

⁶² The presumed course of ancient routes: Svoljšak 2002, 263; Klavora 2003, 22, 30; Klavora 2021, 109–111. A potential Roman site is located near the former church of St Lawrence: Osmuk 1985, 290–291; Svoljšak 2002, 273; approximate location DT96/TM: E 388 311, N 133 494 (pers. comm. Fedja Klavora).

⁶³ Mozetič 1958–1959; Svoljšak 2002, 272–273; Klavora 2003, 19; Mlinar, Tecco Hvala 2022, 432.

⁶⁴ Visna, Ograjnice, Kasarne: Svoljšak 2002, 263, 266, 272–273, 276; Klavora 2003, 19–22.

⁶⁵ FMRSI 6, 11: Bovec. Mentioned in Klavora 2003, 22, 28; Klavora 2021, 110. The circumstances of the discovery are unknown; the coin is in a private collection.

⁶⁶ FMRSI 5, 17–19: Bovec.

⁶⁷ Svoljšak 2002, 276. The presumed Roman finds in the area of Bovec are mentioned in Klavora 2021, 109–110.

Individual finds from Žaga to Strmec

In the wider area of the Bovec Basin and the Koritnica Valley, individual prehistoric artefacts are rare (*Fig. 1: 14,18*), while several Roman artefacts are documented (*Fig. 1: 4–6,7–13,15–17*).⁶⁸ These objects cannot be associated with known settlements or graves.

A carpenter's axe (*Fig. 1: 6; 10: 2*) with a narrow asymmetrical blade and a slightly elongated back of the head was discovered in Žaga. It resembles the axes of Type 3 according to Pohanka or Type 5a according to Hanemann. This form is widespread in Noricum and Pannonia and is mainly dated to the Late Roman period.⁶⁹

A bronze fibula of the Hrušica type (*Fig. 9: 2*) was found east of the village of Podklopce (*Fig. 1: 5*).⁷⁰ The variant dates from the 4th century, but was used until the early 5th century. It was found most frequently in the eastern Alps and in Friuli.⁷¹

A hoard of Roman coins is said to have been discovered in Breg, east of Mala Vas, but no precise details are available.⁷²

An old path leading from the Bovec Basin towards Log pod Mangartom is barely recognizable today and ran along the left bank of the River Koritnica. At the end of the 19th century, a denarius from 91 BC was found near the Kluže fortress (*Fig. 1: 7*),⁷³ which is located at the narrowest point of the gorge. Reports also mention the discovery of other Roman coins in this area.⁷⁴ An iron finger ring with a lost gemstone was found nearby (*Fig. 9: 4*).⁷⁵ It is a characteristic Roman ring of Type 2a according to Guiraud, which appeared in Gaul in the second quarter of the 1st century BC and survived into the 2nd century AD.⁷⁶

An undetermined Roman coin was discovered above Pustina (*Fig. 1: 8*).⁷⁷ Five Roman coins were found in the area of Pod Planinco and Tablana (*Fig. 1: 9–11*),⁷⁸ including a Republican coin from the first half of the 2nd century BC.⁷⁹ A bronze bell with

⁶⁸ In addition to the objects already published, we are presenting several unpublished objects from a private collection.

⁶⁹ Pohanka 1986, 239–242; Pflaum 2007, 301–302, 323, pl. 2: 20; Hanemann 2014, 339–340.

⁷⁰ Mlinar 2009c. Mentioned by Klavara 2021, 110.

⁷¹ Höck 2008.

⁷² The dating and quantity are unknown. Mentioned by Klavara 2003, 28 (with the location marked on the map on page 22 – the site is situated in the extreme northeast); Klavara 2021, 114; pers. comm. Fedja Klavara.

⁷³ Svoljšak 2002, 266, 270; FMRS 1, 21: Bovec.

⁷⁴ Vertheidigung 1901, 14: coins from the time of Augustus and Marcus Aurelius. Fedja Klavara reports the discovery of a Roman coin near the fortress, on the left bank of the River Koritnica – the coin has not been identified.

⁷⁵ Gerbec, Mlinar 2013–2014.

⁷⁶ Guiraud 1989, 181–182, 203, fig. 53; Crausaz 2016, 39–40.

⁷⁷ Pers. comm. Fedja Klavara: nad Pustino Pr'kapel.

⁷⁸ Klavara 2021, 115; at a distance of approximately 270 metres (pers. comm. Fedja Klavara).

⁷⁹ The coin was determined by Peter Kos, 2016. Roman Republic, first half of the 2nd cent. BC, As, RRC?, weight 15.06 g, worn.

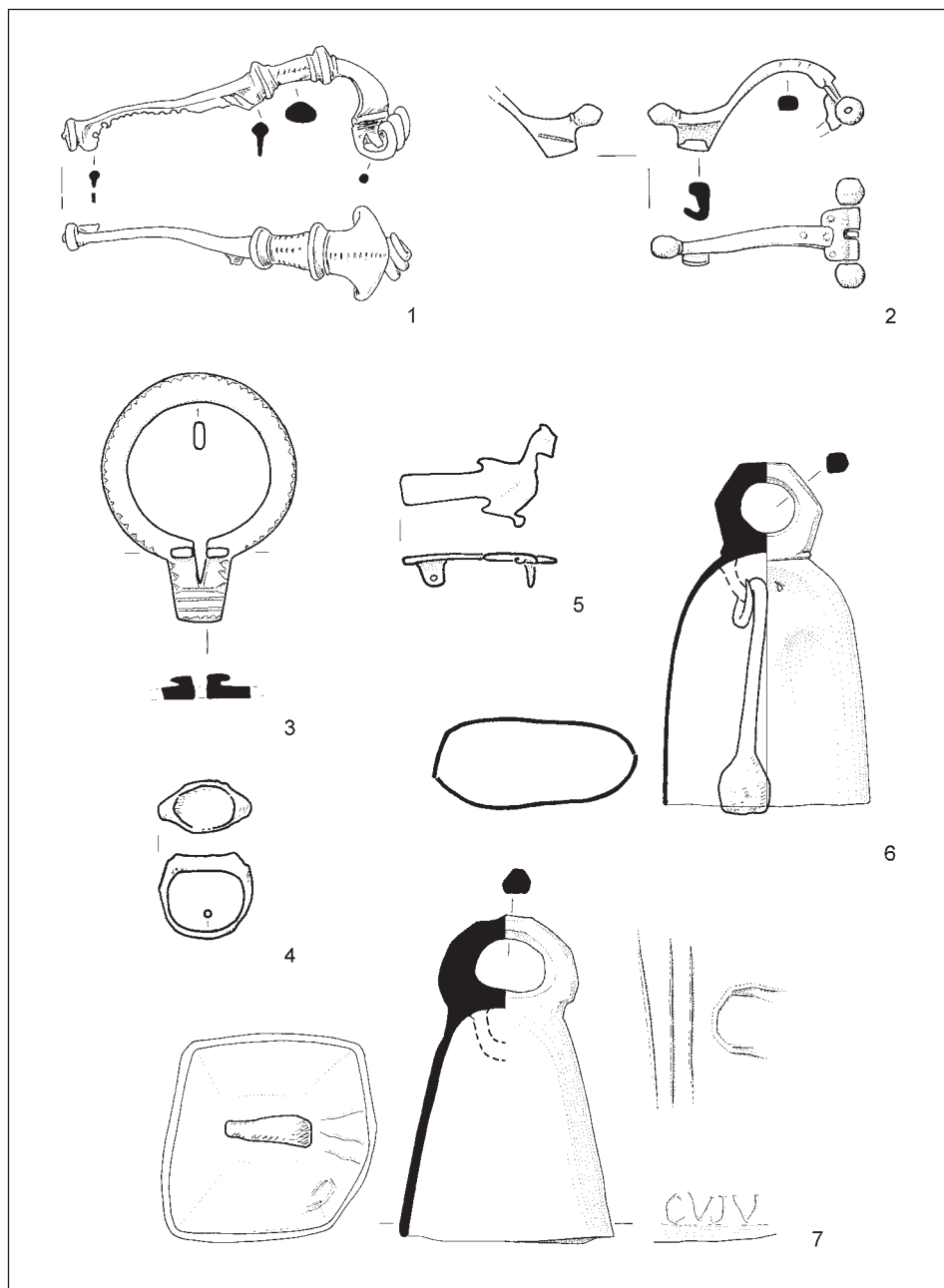


Fig. 9: From Žaga to Strmec. 1 Log pod Mangartom, 2 Klopce, 3 Na Požarju, 4 Kluže, 5 below Stržišče, 6 path from Log to Strmec, 7 Tablana. 1–3, 5, 7 bronze, 6 bronze and iron, 4 iron. Scale 1:2.

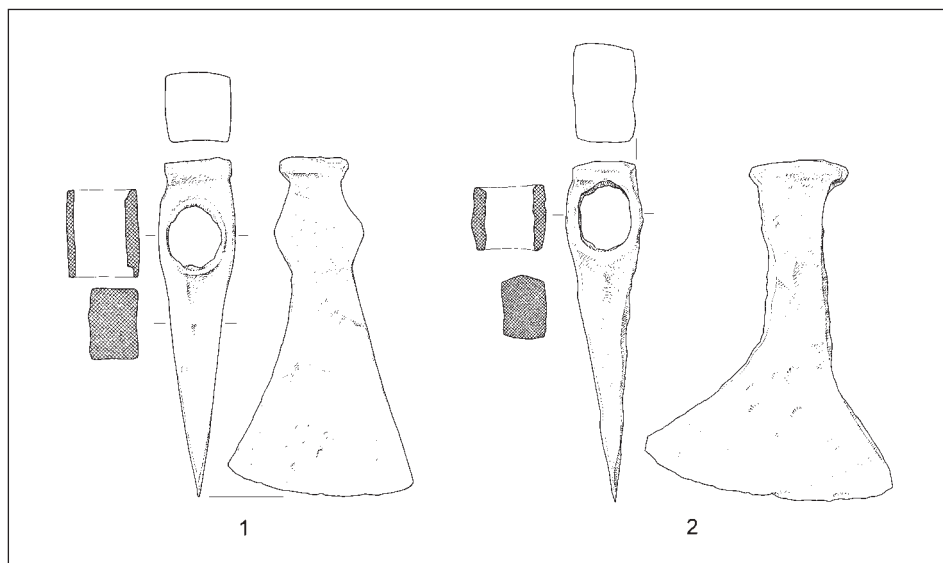


Fig. 10: From Žaga to Strmec. 1 path from Log to Strmec, 2 Žaga. Iron. Scale 1:4.

an oval loop and an elongated pyramid-shaped body with a rectangular base was also unearthed in Tablana (Fig. 1: 12; 9: 7).⁸⁰ Relief symbols are cast inside the bell: a C and three dashes. Letters are carved on the outer edge of the bell: possibly CVJV. Bells of this shape date from the second half of the 3rd century to the 4th century AD.⁸¹

Several archaeological artefacts are thought to have come from the area between Spodnji Log pod Mangartom and Gorenji Log pod Mangartom, but only two of them are currently known.⁸² The ribbed bronze bracelet (Fig. 1: 14) dates from the Late Hallstatt period, more precisely from the Sv. Lucija IIa phase (6th century BC).⁸³ The fibula with two knobs (Fig. 1: 13; 9: 1) can be assigned to Type A 236 c from the 1st century AD.⁸⁴

An annular fibula with a trapezoidal extension (Fig. 1: 15; 9: 3) was discovered in Na Požarju on the left bank of the River Koritnica.⁸⁵ It belongs to the Siscia type, which is widespread in the central Danube region and extends as far as the south-eastern Alps. It is dated to the second half of the 3rd century and the 4th century AD.⁸⁶

A Roman coin, a bell (Fig. 1: 16; 9: 6) and an axe (Fig. 1: 17; 9: 1) were discovered

⁸⁰ Klavara 2021, 115, fig. 7.

⁸¹ Božič 2005, 317–318.

⁸² Mlinar 2008.

⁸³ Mlinar 2008; Mlinar, Tecco 2022, 418–419, 432, fig. 11, pl. 1: 11.

⁸⁴ Mlinar 2000–2004; Garbsch 1965, 29–32.

⁸⁵ Mlinar 2009b. Pers. comm. Fedja Klavara.

⁸⁶ Koch 1974, 228, 232, 245, fig. 1: 10–11; 2; Sellye 1990, 25–29, type 1; Teegen 2013, 318–319.

along the old path from Log to Strmec.⁸⁷ The bronze bell has a cylindrical body, an oval base and a polygonal suspension. This form was produced in the Augustan period and in the first half of the 1st century AD, although it may have been in use for even longer.⁸⁸ The axe has a typical Roman shape, characterized by a triangular longitudinal section, a broad cutting edge, an oval eye and a hammer-like head. There are lugs on the sides of the eye. The axe is similar to the Roman axes of Type 3B classified by Hanemann, which typically have rectangular lugs at the opening.⁸⁹ The variant with triangular lugs is widespread in northern Italy and the south-eastern Alps during the Late La Tène period and possibly in the Early Imperial period.⁹⁰

At Strmec, about 100 metres below the Predel Pass, a bronze sword was found at the end of the 19th century (*Fig. 1: 18*). It belongs to the Late Bronze Age (Ha A, 12th–11th century BC) and is probably an isolated votive object.⁹¹

A silver coin (decadrachm) minted in Syracuse at the beginning of the 4th century BC was found during the construction of the border crossing at the Predel Pass (*Fig. 1: 19*).⁹²

Route over the Julian Alps

A natural connection runs from the eastern part of the Friulian plain to the north through the valleys of the Natisone/Nadiža, Soča and Koritnica rivers and leads over the Predel Pass. The most critical point of this route is Predel, which lies at an altitude of 1,156 m asl and is accessible from both sides via gorges and steep slopes. Behind the Predel Pass, the route leads down into the Slizza Valley, where the routes from the Val Raccolana and the Val Canale converge before opening up to Carinthia.

The oldest evidence of traffic over the Predel Pass is a sword from Strmec, which dates back to the Late Bronze Age.

In the Early Iron Age, the Posočje or Sveta Lucija group extended along the upper reaches of the Soča and Natisone/Nadiža rivers and along the Idrijca river with the central settlement in Most na Soči. The area was part of a complex network of con-

⁸⁷ Pers. comm. Fedja Klavara; Klavara 2021, 115, fig. 7; the coin was not identified.

⁸⁸ Božič 2005, 316–317.

⁸⁹ Hanemann 2014, 337–338.

⁹⁰ Reka pri Cerknem: Guštin 1991, 63–64, pl. 36: 3. Isola Rizza: Salzani 1998, 61–62, pl. 25: 16; 28: 8. S. Bernardo: Piana Agostinetti 1972, 103, 119, 123, 125, figs. 88, 114, 119, 121; pl. 14: 2,3. Persona: Graue 1974, pl. 67: 7; 71: 1. Tagliaferri 1986, 304–305, pl. 77 (Basso di Grupignano, Babanich di Ialmicco), 78 (Montagnon di Moimacco). Ljubljana: P. Bitenc in: Turk et al. 2009, 320–321, fig. 83: c; Gaspari 2009, 390, 393, fig. 5: 2. Ambrožovo gradišče: Laharnar 2022, 283, pl. 8: 64. Perhaps the axe from Magdalensberg also belongs to this group: Pohanka 1986, 232, pl. 43: 177; Dolenz 1998, 149–150, pl. 45: F12.

⁹¹ Svoljšak 1988–1989, 372, fig. 1; Šinkovec 1995, 109–110, pl. 32: 216.

⁹² Pers. comm. Miha Mlinar.

nections between northern Italian centres and continental Europe.⁹³ In the Late Iron Age, the Idrija group replaced the Posočje group.⁹⁴ In the Early Iron Age, two important settlements developed along the route to the north: Monte Barda near S. Pietro al Natisone (Špeter Slovenov in Slovenian) in the Natisone/Nadiža Valley and Gradič above Kobarid near the River Soča. Ravelnik near Bovec also fits well into this group; with an area of three hectares, it is slightly smaller than Gradič and is therefore one of the larger settlements in the Posočje group.⁹⁵ It was the last place before the route turns north into the Koritnica Gorge and leads up to the Predel Pass. Due to its location and size, we assume that Ravelnik was one of the central settlements and played an important role in connecting the Posočje region with Carinthia.

The cult place at the entrance to the settlement of Ravelnik provides information about the end of the Iron Age and the beginning of the Roman period. Bronze statuettes made in Italy in the late Republican period were offered at this cult place. The pottery found here, some of which comes from the Mediterranean (amphorae, jugs) and some of which has strong links to Noricum (cooking vessels), indicates that the cult place was still in use in the 1st century AD. The statuettes and the presence of pottery distinguish Ravelnik from most of the cult places in the Idrija group, which are often further away from settlements and mainly contain various metal objects such as votive plaques, jewellery, weapons and tools.⁹⁶ The custom of offering statuettes was widespread in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC on the Friulian plain and among the Veneti; on the upper reaches of the Soča, however, such offerings are only found in places close to the routes leading north. Among them, the cult place of Gradič near Kobarid stands out for the number of statuettes found there.⁹⁷ Italic statuettes also appear at cult places along other routes across the Eastern Alps, which were first used by the Veneti and later by Roman traders in the late Republican period (*Fig. 11*).⁹⁸

The imported and votive objects from Italy indicate that Ravelnik was an important stop on the trade route to the north and that the donors were probably travellers from Italy. Evidence for the route to the Predel Pass also includes isolated Republican coins in the Koritnica Valley. However, to better understand when exactly the changes in traffic and trade took place, other sites along the Natisone/Nadiža and Soča rivers provide clearer answers.

A hoard of 34 Republican coins and two small Celtic silver coins from Skrinjica near Gradič in the vicinity of Kobarid indicates trade between north-eastern Italy and the Norican kingdom in the second half of the 2nd century BC.⁹⁹

Roman weapons and military equipment found in the settlement of Monte Barda-

⁹³ Dular, Tecco Hvala 2018, 109–132; Mlinar, Tecco Hvala 2022.

⁹⁴ Guštin 1991; Mlinar 2020, 107–108, 153–154.

⁹⁵ Mlinar, Tecco Hvala 2022, 406–407, 428, 434, 451–452.

⁹⁶ Mlinar 2020, 94–96, 143–145; Mlinar, Tecco Hvala 2022, 420–423, 461–464.

⁹⁷ Osmuk 1987; Osmuk 1988; Horvat 2018, 343–345.

⁹⁸ Horvat 2018, 345–346; Guštin, Grisoni 2022, 149–154; Guštin 2023, 152–156.

⁹⁹ Kos, Žbona Trkman 2009; Laharnar et al. 2015, 249–251.

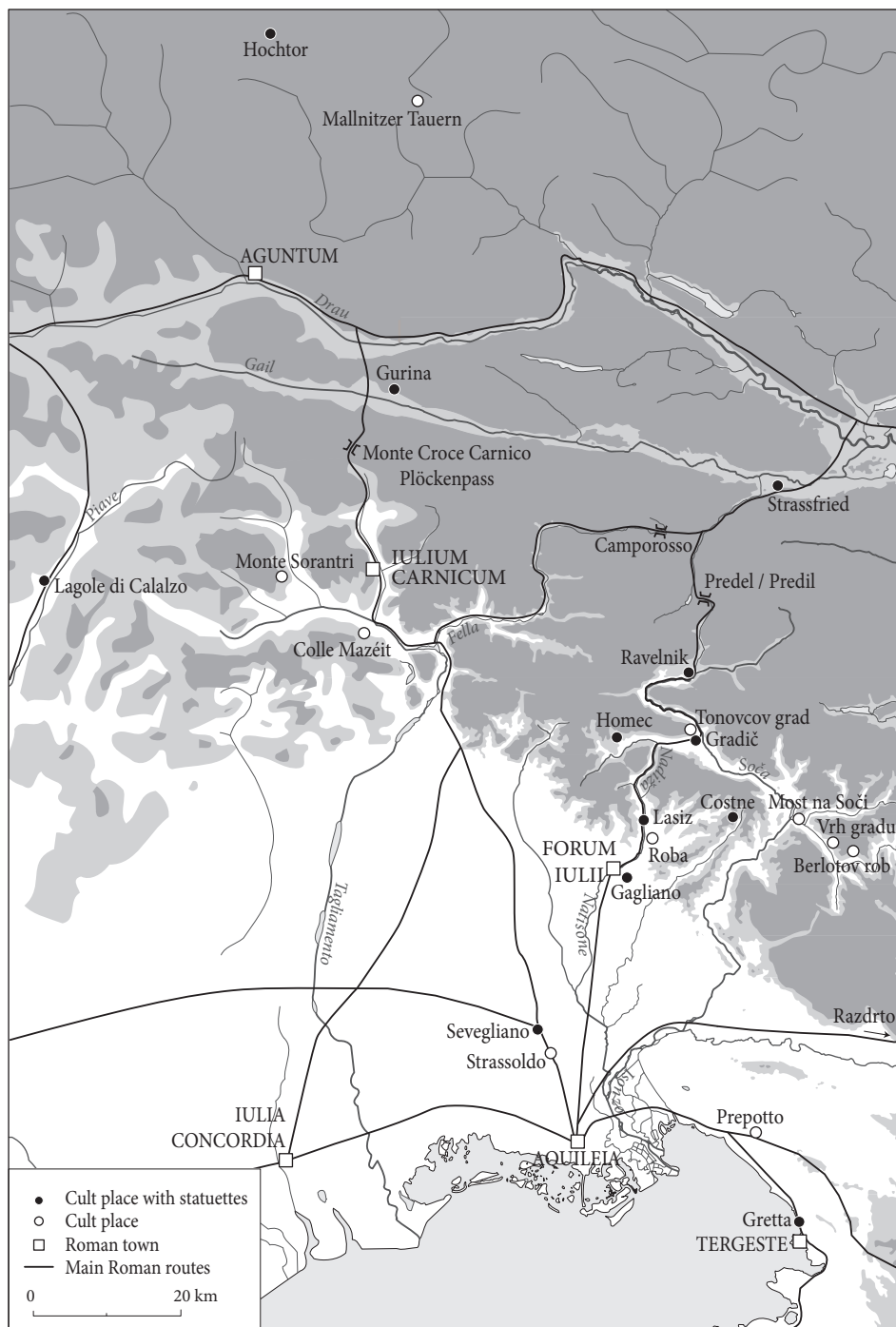


Fig. 11: Traffic routes and cult sites of the 2nd and 1st centuries BC in the Eastern Alps (supplemented after Horvat 2018, fig. 1).

Roba point to Roman military intervention in the Natisone/Nadiža Valley in the first third of the first century BC.¹⁰⁰ In the sixth decade of the 1st century BC, at a time when Julius Caesar was governing Cisalpine Gaul, the settlement of Forum Iulii was founded. Its strategic location at the outlet of the Natisone/Nadiža River into the Friulian plain and its initial status as a forum suggest that the settlement served to control trade and traffic along the river valley.¹⁰¹

There has been a cult place in the settlement of Gradič near Kobarid since the Late Hallstatt period. Originally, the offerings consisted mainly of pieces of costume and votive plaques, but no pottery has been found. The cult changed over the course of time, and bronze statuettes depicting various deities and ceramic drinking vessels imported from Italy appeared there. Among these vessels, the black slip pottery from the middle Po Valley (or porous fabric from the Magdalensberg) stands out in characteristic shapes: Lamboglia 28 bowls with a round or square profile. This fabric and these shapes can be dated to the mid-1st century BC, which allows us to indirectly date the change of the cult in Gradič.¹⁰² The changes can be linked to the active participation of the Italics in the rituals.

In establishing their trade network, the Romans took advantage of the old routes across the eastern Alps. The most important routes led through the Piave Valley, over the Monte Croce Carnico/Plöcken Pass, through the valley of the Fella River and over the Razdrto Pass (Odra) (*Fig. 11*).¹⁰³ The first Roman finds along these routes date back to the 2nd century BC.¹⁰⁴

The foundation of the Forum Iulii and the simultaneous presence of travellers from Italy in Gradič and Ravelnik indicate that the old connection between northeastern Italy and the Norican Kingdom was significantly strengthened by the sixth decade of the 1st century BC at the latest. At this time, the connection over the Predel Pass probably enjoyed supra-regional status as a fast route to the north. However, it was only a freight route that was not suitable for wagon traffic. On the other side of the first Alpine ridge, Roman emporia emerged in the Norican Kingdom at around the same time, specifically in Gurina and Magdalensberg.¹⁰⁵

The Soča river basin was incorporated into the Roman state shortly before the start of Octavian's wars in the western Balkans (35–33 BC).¹⁰⁶ Statuettes were probably no longer dedicated at the cult place in Gradič near Kobarid from the Augustan period onwards, and the rituals gradually faded away by the end of the 1st century AD. A

¹⁰⁰ Tagliaferri 1986, 121–126; Istenič 2019, 275.

¹⁰¹ Vedaldi Iasbez 2000, 345–350; Chiabà 2007; Magnani 2007, 133–135.

¹⁰² The publication of the sacred site at Gradič near Kobarid is in preparation. The chronology of black slip pottery, e.g.: Schindler 1986, 365–366, 369. Lamboglia 28 type: Griggio 2021, 46–48, 52–54.

¹⁰³ Zaccaria 1992, 85–86; Horvat, Bavdek 2009, 140–146.

¹⁰⁴ Vitri et al. 2007; Horvat, Bavdek 2009, 93–96, 142–146; Faleschini et al. 2009.

¹⁰⁵ Gamper 2015; Dolenz et al. 2024, 184–197.

¹⁰⁶ Istenič 2005.

similar change and the eventual abandonment of the cult place of Ravelnik can be deduced from the relatively few finds by the end of the 1st century AD at the latest.

The Roman road from Forum Iulii to the Natisone/Nadiža Valley is not mentioned in the Roman itineraries and is not documented by milestones. However, the remains of roads have been found on both sides of the River Natisone/Nadiža up to the bridge over the river at San Pietro al Natisone. The Roman paved road was discovered further upstream near Robič. It is assumed that the road between Forum Iulii and Kobarid was suitable for cart traffic.¹⁰⁷

No traces of Roman roads or paths have been found in the Soča Valley and along the ascent to Predel. The paths of various modern and earlier, even abandoned roads indicate the existence of the old main route.¹⁰⁸ The course of the Roman route is partially evidenced by isolated Roman artefacts from the 1st to 4th centuries AD, which cannot be linked to known settlements or burial sites. The connection with transportation is particularly likely in the case of the bells, which were often used to equip draught animals.¹⁰⁹

The settlement of Devica Marija v polju in the centre of the Bovec Basin was established in the second half of the 1st century AD at the latest, and existed at least until the end of the 4th century. It is assumed that the main road and possibly also the focus of the settlement shifted away from the old centre of Ravelnik during this time. The new settlement may have functioned as a roadside station.

In the Imperial period, the main connection between Aquileia and the province of Noricum ran along the Fella River through the Canal del Ferro and Val Canale valleys (Fig. 11). The road is mentioned in the *Itinerarium Antonini* and in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*; its importance is indicated by milestones, road and customs stations. The exact date of its construction is not known.¹¹⁰ The route along the Fella is somewhat longer than that along the River Natisone/Nadiža, the River Soča and over the Predel Pass, but it is much easier and has fewer ascents.¹¹¹ The highest pass at 816 m asl is Camporosso (Žabnice in Slovenian, Saifnitz in German) in the Val Canale Valley (Kanalnska dolina in Slovenian, Kanaltal in German). Traffic from a wide area converged in the Fella Valley, as it was directly connected to Aquileia and Concordia. In addition, the route from Aquileia to Noricum split at the confluence of the Tagliamento and Fella rivers; one led through the valley of the But via Iulium Carnicum to Aguntum and the other through the valley of the Fella to Virunum.¹¹²

The construction of the road and the development of settlements along the Fella

¹⁰⁷ Bosio 1991, 192–199; Montagnari Kokelj et al. 2007, 101–102; Magnani 2007, 135–143.

¹⁰⁸ Štular 2011; Mlinar, Tecco Hvala 2022, 423–425, 464–465.

¹⁰⁹ Božič 2005, 315.

¹¹⁰ Bosio 1991, 157–171; Faleschini 2013.

¹¹¹ Aquileia–Tarvisio (Trbiž in Slovenian): via Canal del Ferro 132 km, via Predel 124 km. Forum Iulii–Tarvisio: via Canal del Ferro 110 km, via Predel 78 km

¹¹² Bosio 1991, 159; Zaccaria 1992, 85; Montagnari Kokelj et al. 2007, 102–103.

River on the one hand, and the decline of the cult places in Gradič and Ravelnik on the other, point to changing traffic flows in the region. At the beginning of the Imperial period, the road along the Fella probably took over a large part of the traffic from Aquileia and from Forum Iulii to Virunum. The route along the Soča and over the Predel Pass was probably reduced to a purely regional or local connection.

As in other areas of the Eastern Alps, where many lowland settlements were abandoned in Late Antiquity, it is likely that the settlement of Devica Marija v polju was no longer inhabited by the early 5th century at the latest. The settlement and the cult place of Gradič near Kobarid were probably also abandoned at this time. From the second half of the 4th century and at least until the end of the 6th century, control of the route to the north was taken over by Tonovcov grad, a fortified outpost with an excellent natural defensive position that served as a settlement nucleus and ecclesiastical centre. This indicates the increasing importance of the connection over the Predel Pass in Late Antiquity, with Tonovcov grad protecting one of the entrances to Italy.¹¹³ The revival of the route is consistent with the strategic importance of Forum Iulii in Late Antiquity.¹¹⁴

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¹¹³ Ciglenečki 2011.

¹¹⁴ Ciglenečki 2023, 45–46.

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Jana Horvat
Znanstvenoraziskovalni center SAZU
Inštitut za arheologijo
Novi trg 2
SI-1000 Ljubljana
jana.horvat@zrc-sazu.si
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5512-6407>

Tombstone for Lucius Obulsius, Veteran of *legio XV Apollinaris* from the Northern Necropolis of Emona

Andrej GASPARI, Žan ŠPENDAL

Abstract

The contribution presents the tombstone for a veteran of *legio XV Apollinaris* that was unearthed in November 2017 during rescue excavations in the street of Gosposvetska cesta in Ljubljana. The tombstone of local Lower Jurassic limestone was reused as the cover of a masonry tomb in the Late Roman cemeterial complex in the broader area of the northern necropolis of Emona. Originally, it must have stood directly at the *via publica* Emona–Celeia.

Its inscription reveals it was erected for *Lucius Obulsius*, son of Lucius, of the Camilian voting tribe, whose home was in *Pisaurum* on the west coast of the northern Adriatic, that he was a veteran of *legio XV Apollinaris* who died at the age of 60 and had it put up according to his will. The simple rectangular shape of the slab devoid of any decoration, the shape and carving technique of the letters are all characteristic of the Augustan period, while broader considerations suggest Late Augustan or Early Tiberian period date (roughly AD 5/10–20/25).

The inscription is another cornerstone of epigraphic evidence on the soldiers of *legio XV Apollinaris* from Emona. It is particularly important because it is likely connected with the beginnings of the burial along Emona's northbound road, which roughly coincides with the end of the construction of the walled town in AD 14/15. The (partially supplemented) information on the findspots of other tombstones erected for the members of Illyrian army units, which were deployed to the area of the Ljubljana Gate in the time between the Pannonian Wars and Augustus' death, allow for the possibility that they were all originally erected along Emona's main approach roads. On a micro-topographic level, these roads are probably direct descendants of earlier military communications.

Keywords: Emona; Roman army; *legio XV Apollinaris*; funerary monuments; veterans; Early Imperial period

Izvleček

Nagrobna stela za L. Obulsija (*L. Obulsius*), veterana 15. Apolonove legije, iz severne emonske nekropole

Prispevek predstavlja nagrobno stelo za veterana 15. Apolonove legije, ki je bila najdena na območju severne emonske nekropole med zavarovalnimi izkopavanji pred prenovo Gosposvetske ceste v Ljubljani novembra 2017. Stela iz lokalnega spodnjekjurskega apnenca je bila sekundarno uporabljena kot pokrov zidane grobnice v sklopu poznorimskega pokopališkega kompleksa na za-

hodnem delu današnje Ajdovščine, prvotno pa je verjetno stala neposredno ob cesti iz Emone proti Celeji. Napis na plošči izdaja, da je bil Lucij Obulsij (*L. Obulsius*), sin Lucija, vpisan v volilno okrožje *Camilia*, doma iz Pizavra (*Pisaurum*) na zahodni obali severnega Jadrana, veteran 15. Apolonove legije, ki je umrl v starosti 60 let, in da je z oporoko sam poskrbel za postavitev plošče. Preprosta oblika pravokotne stele pokončnega obrisa brez okrasa ter oblikovanost in izvedba črk kažejo značilnosti avgustejskega obdobja, kot najverjetnejša pa se zdi datacija v poznoavgustejsko ali zgodnjeteriberijsko obdobje (okvirno 5/10–20/25 n. št.).

Najdba dopolnjuje obstoječo epigrafsko evidenco o aktivnih in nekdanjih vojakih legije XV *Apollinaris* v Emoni, še pomembnejša pa je verjetna povezanost spomenika z začetki pokopavanja ob severni emonski vpadnici, ki jih okvirno umeščamo v čas dokončanja gradnje mesta v letih 14/15 n. št. Tudi (deloma dopolnjeni) podatki o lokacijah odkritij ostalih nagrobnih spomenikov pripadnikov oddelkov ilirske armade, ki so v času med panonskimi vojnami in Avgustovo smrtjo opravljali naloge na območju Ljubljanskih vrat, ne nasprotujejo domnevi o njihovi prvotni legi vzdolž mestnih vpadnic, ki so verjetno tudi na mikrotopografski ravni neposredne naslednice starejših vojaških komunikacij.

Ključne besede: Emona; rimska vojska; 15. Apolonova legija; nagrobni spomeniki; veterani; zgodnjecesarstvo obdobje

Introduction

The rescue excavations in advance of renovations of the street of Gosposvetska cesta, in the western part of Ajdovščina within Ljubljana's city centre, took place between late August and early December 2017. They were conducted by the Archaeological Consortium for Ljubljana (Arheološki konzorcij za Ljubljano) under the direction of Martin Horvat from the Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana.¹ On 24 November 2017, archaeologists unearthed a tombstone in secondary use as the cover of a masonry tomb that contained two successive inhumation burials from the fourth century. The tombstone had originally marked the burial of a veteran of *legio XV Apollinaris* that has either not been identified or not yet discovered, but must have been located directly at the main road leading northwards from Emona, presumably in the area of the present-day road junction at Ajdovščina (*Fig. 1: 1*).²

The tombstone covered the tomb (SU 3021) widthwise and was placed next to a large stone slab of lighter limestone, presumably originally serving as the flooring of an earlier burial enclosure from the first or early second century. The two surviving slabs (SU 3315) were overlain with an up to 5 cm thick layer of lime mortar with inclusions of crushed brick and impressions of the cobbles that covered the tomb and formed the floor in the southeast part of the Late Roman cemeterial complex (*Fig. 2*).

¹ Research code 17–0313.

² On the rescue excavations that took place in 2017/2018 in the area of Gosposvetska cesta and the history of investigation in the wider area of Ajdovščina see Gaspari et al., *Late Roman Cemeterial Complex in the Area of Gosposvetska Street in Ljubljana: Archaeological Finds and Research on the Northern Necropolis of Emona at Ajdovščina (1635–2018)*, Documenta Archaeologica 2, Ljubljana, forthcoming.

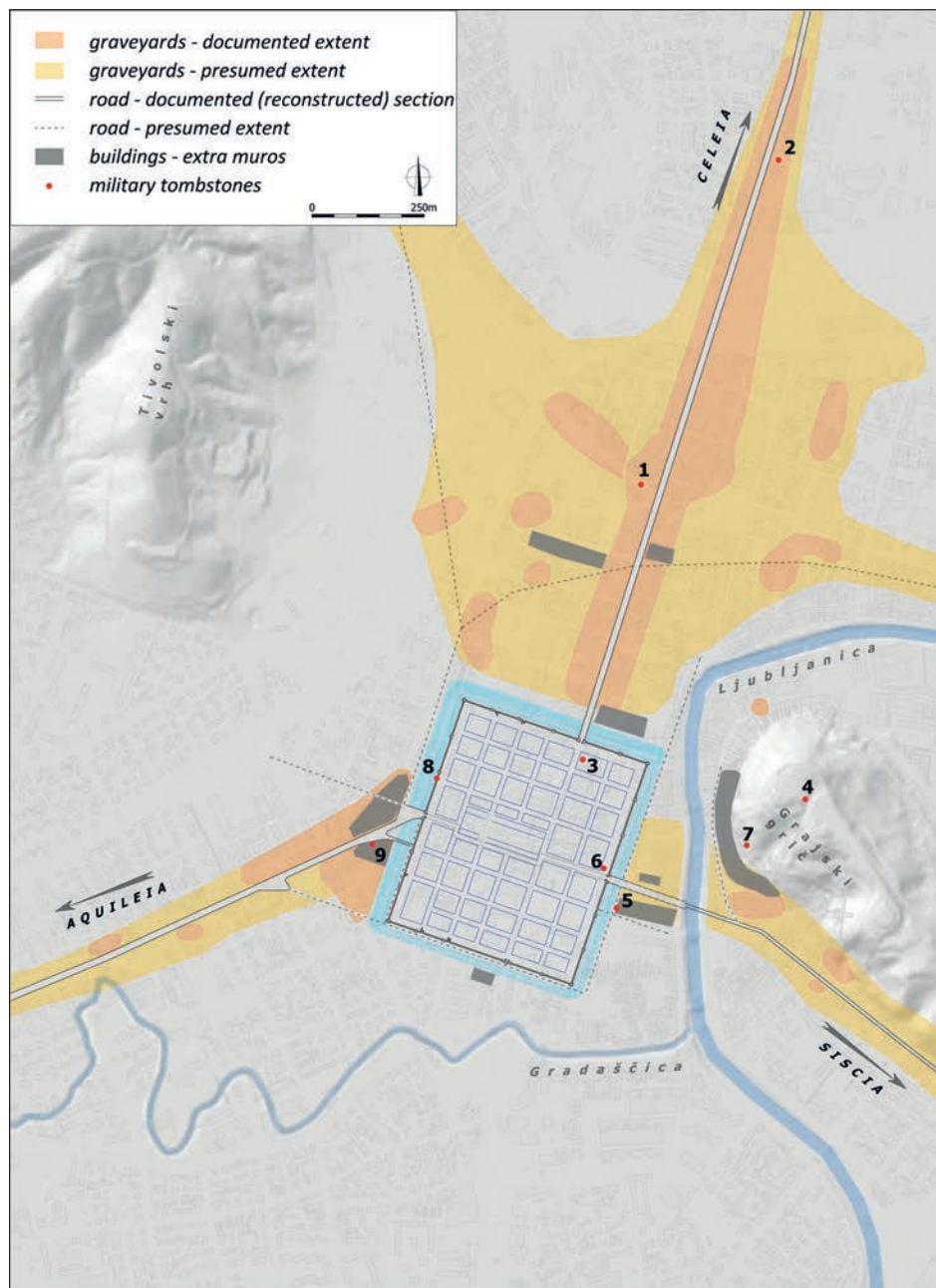


Fig. 1: Map of Ljubljana showing the walled town of Emona and its cemeteries (first to fourth centuries AD). Red dots and numbers mark the findspots of early military tombstones discussed in the text (idea: Andrej Gaspari; execution: Gregor Babič).



Fig. 2: Photogrammetric model of the Late Roman masonry tomb (SU 3021) with broken cover slabs (SU 3315); the Early Imperial tombstone for Lucius Obulsius was reused as the central slab (by David Badovinac).

The inscription slab, with the inscription facing upwards, and the other slab spanned the middle third of the burial chamber measuring 0.91 m in interior width and 1.58 m in surviving interior length, while the cover slabs at the east end and the whole west wall of the tomb had been removed during earlier earthworks at Gosposvetska cesta. The impressions in the mortar show a roughly 3 cm wide overlap of the inscription slab and the north tomb wall. A large patch of mortar survives in the lower right part of the upper right fragment of the slab, which even covered the last few letters of the inscription.

The inscription slab survives in four fragments with the lower end and entire back missing, the latter probably removed in the course of the secondary installation. Upon discovery, the parts of the reused slab were found collapsed into the interior of the tomb, with the two upper fragments leaning against the north wall of the tomb and the two lower fragments against the south wall.

A debris layer of dark humus with brick and mortar remains covered the collapsed slabs, as well as other Late Roman remains in the area, indicating that the tomb cover had already collapsed in Antiquity.

Tombstone

Description

The tombstone or funerary stela is a plain rectangular slab without any mouldings or decoration, only bearing the funerary inscription (*Fig. 3*). It is made of dark grey, almost black ooidal Lower Jurassic (Toarcian) limestone that in the Ljubljana area crops out at the area of Podpeč on the southern fringes of the Ljubljansko Barje (Ljubljana Marshes).³ The tombstone survives as four chipped conjoining fragments with missing lower end and back.⁴ The fragments together measure 101.5 cm in surviving height, 68–69 cm in width, up to 12.7 cm in surviving thickness and 108.69 kg in surviving weight; the original thickness is estimated at 20–25 cm. The inscription takes up the upper 36 cm of the slab and survives nearly complete, with the exception of the chipped top and bottom right corner letters.

All four original surfaces (front, top, sides) are heavily weathered, but not so fractured surfaces (bottom, back). The weathered surface also hinders an identification of the surface finish and tools used in production. The even surface of the front does suggest it was finely dressed, and there are no traces of a rougher finish at the lower end to indicate that part of it was inserted into a plinth or in the ground. The top and side surfaces are more coarsely dressed, using a pointed tool. None of the surfaces revealed the presence of smoothed edges. The back shows tectonic striae, indicating interstratum slips (fissures parallel with the stratification) along which the slab fractured at some time in the past.

The right edge of the back surface has a roughly 1.3 cm wide notch that may have been made intentionally, possibly so as to split the slab. The top surface holds two small round holes measuring roughly a centimetre across and 0.7–1 cm in depth. Their edges are chipped. They are made at a distance of 3.2 cm (left) and 5 cm (right) from the front edge, and 5.2 cm (left) and 8.5 cm (right) from the side edges. The feature is believed to be the part of the tombstone's original design and not evidence of its secondary use.⁵

Inscription

The text is centred and takes up the whole width of the slab. The letters are regular, carved very precisely and quite deep. They decrease in size and depth from the highest

³ The provenance of the rock was determined by Igor Rižnar and Luka Gale, forthcoming.

⁴ Top left and right from the spectator's point of view: PN 3402, DIS01170; bottom left and right: DIS0625; Inv. No. 510:LJU;0063840, kept by the Museum and Galleries of Ljubljana.

⁵ The similar simple stelae from the stone collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Aquileia do not have such holes (we wish to thank Andreja Maver for bringing this to our attention). We should also note that the lack of other indications renders the installation method of such stelae within cemeteries an open question.



Fig. 3: Photogrammetric model of the tombstone for Lucius Obulsius (by David Badovinac).

to the lowest line. The letters of the first line survive best and show a U-shaped cross section. The letters in the lower three lines are carved less deep and have a similar cross section. With the exception of the space between the voting tribe and the *origo* in Line 2, as well as the space between the type and number of the army unit in Line 3, individual words and abbreviations are separated by triangular interpuncts. The better surviving interpuncts resemble one-sided arrowheads with the tip facing left. They are positioned at different heights. Carved in the centre of the inscription (between Lines 2 and 3) are two separate horizontal lines above the type and the number of the army unit, with the space between the two lines corresponding to the space between the abbreviation of the type of unit and its number below. The ending of the last word in Line 2 is unreliable, as it can be reconstructed in two ways; one possibility is *Pisauro*, i.e. the *origo* of the deceased, the other is his *cognomen* derived from the geographical name with several possible variants. The last letter of the fourth line is missing as the fragment is chipped here, but was presumably the letter I based on the surviving interpunct following the letter F. Another palaeographic feature is the grammatical error in the first word of Line 2, where one letter L is superfluous.

Size of letters: Line 1: h. 7.2–6.8 cm/depth 0.5 cm; Line 2: h. 6.0–5.8 cm/depth 0.4 cm; Line 3: h. 5.4–5.2 cm/depth 0.3 cm; Line 4: h. 5.2–4.9 cm/depth 0.3 cm. Size of interpuncts: 1.5×1.5–2×1.5.

Inscription:

L(ucius) • Obulꝛsꝛius, • L(uci) • f(ilius)
Camil{ }ia, Pisaur(o?)
vet(eranus) • leg(ionis) XV • Apo(llinaris)
annorum • LX • t(estamento) • f(ieri) • [i(ussit)]

Translation:

Lucius Obulsius, son of Lucius, of the Camilian voting tribe, born at Pisaurum, veteran of Apollo's Fifteenth legion, aged 60, had (this) erected under his will.

Discussion

General

The simple form of the tombstone, the carving technique and style of the lettering, as well as the content of the inscription (the absence of a *cognomen*, funerary formula)⁶ suggest an Early Imperial date and corroborate the tombstone as a product

⁶ In contrast to the funerary monuments of the first century AD, the veteran tombstones from Italy dated between 47 and 14 BC (Keppie 1983) bear rather laconic inscriptions that for the most part only state the name of the deceased, the *praenomen* of the father, the voting tribe and legion,

from the initial period of stone production at Emona.⁷ The investigated slab is one of the earliest, if not the earliest known tombstone from Emona made of local limestone.

The simple, upright rectangular tombstones without a frame around the inscription are characteristic of the Late Republican and Augustan periods in the wider area of north-eastern Italy.⁸ The predominant shape of military tombstones in this area is a slender stela with either a flat⁹ or rounded upper end.¹⁰ According to Mosser, the stelae of the Late Augustan period are still simple and undecorated, but larger upright slabs.¹¹ The stone production at Aquileia supplied such funerary monuments to military customers in the nearby area even after the period of their greatest popularity,¹² while they practically no longer occur among the tombstones for the members of the Illyrian army after the end of the Augustan period.¹³ In the Tiberian-Claudian period in Pannonia, they are replaced by the characteristic structured and decorated stela with a framed inscription and either a pediment or flat top.¹⁴

A particular feature of the inscription is a very rare *nomen gentilicium*, the designation of a voting tribe that is written in full (with one superfluous letter), as well as the order of information in which the voting tribe is given in place of a missing (?) cognomen and directly succeeded by *origo*.¹⁵ Such a succession only becomes more prevalent around the end of the first century AD,¹⁶ raising the (albeit remote) possibility that the abbreviation 'Pisaur' alludes to a cognomen derived from a place name, such

rarely function (even then only for high-ranking soldiers such as *signifer*, *aquilifer*, *centurio*, *evocatus*) and who had the tombstone put up (*testamento fieri iussit* or – rarely – *heres faciendum curavit*). According to Mosser, the burials of the veterans engaged in the civil wars at the end of the Republic were marked with small and plain tombstones. The trend for formally rudimentary tombstones for soldiers, be it undecorated stelae with round tops or simple rectangular slabs with moulded frames, continues to the Middle Augustan period and lasts to the end of Augustus' reign, when the first higher and wider tombstones without a moulded frame begin to be erected. The inscriptions from the Late Augustan period are typically more exhaustive and also relate the names of the relatives; the formula *hic situs est* also appears there for the first time. The inscriptions from the Tiberian period more frequently state the voting tribe and origin, consistently state the function (*veteranus*) and increasingly frequently mention the heirs or family members that had the monument erected, while the formulas (*t f i* and *h s e*) remain the same (Mosser 2003, 137, 139, 144; Špendal 2022, 37–41).

⁷ Djurić, Rižnar 2017, 134, 139–140; Djurić et al. 2022, 180.

⁸ See Zaccaria 1989, 140, Figs. 10, 11.

⁹ E.g. *CIL* V, 8283 (= *lupa* 13545); *EDCS*-01401149 (= *lupa* 13587); *CIL* V, 904 (= *lupa* 15954); *CIL* V, 8274 (= *lupa* 17087); *CIL* V, 947 (= *lupa* 17093).

¹⁰ E.g. *CIL* V, 931 (= *lupa* 15986); *AE* 1977, 314 (= *lupa* 16203); *CIL* V, 947 (= *lupa* 17088).

¹¹ Mosser 2003, 139–140.

¹² E.g. *CIL* V, 927 (= *lupa* 15959); *CIL* V, 920 (= *lupa* 16034); *CIL* V, 911 (= *lupa* 15955); *EDCS*-04600016 (= *lupa* 16217).

¹³ E.g. Carnuntum (Mosser 2003, 167–168, No. 6; ib., 168, No. 7); Bruck/Leitha (*CIL* III, 14359; Mosser 2003 168–169, No. 8); Ptuj (*CIL* III, 10878 = *lupa* 1699; *AIJ* 262 = *lupa* 3749).

¹⁴ See Mosser 2003; Djurić 2008; Migotti 2016.

¹⁵ E.g. *CIL* XIII, 12048 (= *EDCS*-07800509): [---]rcu[-] / [---]s M(arci) [f(ilius)] / Camilia Pisa/uro mil(es) / leg(ionis) V[III].

¹⁶ Forni 1977, 95–96.

as *Pisaurinus* (?),¹⁷ *Pisauensis*,¹⁸ or *Pisaurio*.¹⁹ The geographical *cognomina*, which explicitly marked the Italic origin of an individual, were usual in the Late Republican and Early Imperial times.²⁰ The terminal formula *testamentum (titulus?) fieri iussit* and also the rest of the inscription indicate a single burial.²¹

Similar to the general form of the tombstone, the palaeographic features of the lettering also appear more archaic in comparison with those on the tombstones for Titus Iunius Montanus (Fig. 4: c),²² L. Oclatius Tarquiniensis (Fig. 4: f)²³ and Caius Clodius Secundus (Fig. 4: d).²⁴ In the shape and carving technique, they are very close to the letters on the boundary stone between the territories of Aquileia in Emona, recovered from the riverbed of the Ljubljana at Bevke and dated to the Augustan or, at the latest, the Tiberian period (Fig. 4: b).²⁵ With the exception of the tombstone of L. Oclatius Tarquiniensis, which was also made of Podpeč limestone, all of the above-mentioned monuments – as well as the tombstone of T. Caesernius Diphilus (Fig. 4: a)²⁶ – were carved from imported stone, primarily limestone quarried in and around Aurisina (Nabrežina) above the Gulf of Trieste (Tržaški zaliv). This shows that we may, with caution, see the tombstone for Obulsius as the earliest documented monument of local stone within the epigraphic body of evidence from Emona. The petrographic analyses of the inscription slabs from Emona and of the building material for the walls and communal infrastructure of the town on the left bank of the Ljubljana indicate that quarries in the wider area of Ljubljana were not activated prior to the Late Augustan period.²⁷

The absence of clear tool marks on the inscribed front of the tombstone allows for the possibility that it was carved from an exposed rock face or a large detached block, which may suggest an earlier date of production – within a context that, in the final decades of the first century BC and at least into the first decade CE, generally favored stone quarried in and around Aurisina for dedicatory and funerary monuments.²⁸ Neither does it contradict the tombstone's attribution to a time of a more intensive extraction of limestone for the needs of town construction, in a time between the

¹⁷ This form has as yet not been recorded.

¹⁸ There are five known brick stamps (*opus figlinae*) from Hispania Citerior featuring the name *L(uci) Rasini Pisau(rensis)*: Carthago Nova (Cartagena): *CIL* II, 6257,160a (= *EDCS*-32602443); *CIL* II, 6257,160b (= *EDCS*-32602444); Ilici (Elche): *CIL* II, 6257,160c (= *EDCS*-32602230); *CIL* II, 6257,160e (= *EDCS*-32602231) and Saguntum (Sagunt): *CIL* II, 6257,160d (= *EDCS*-32602118).

¹⁹ The only known example is on a monument (*ILJug* 1882 = *lupa* 24341) from Narona (Vid near Metković), on which a list of 18 individuals includes one L. Afidius Pisaurio.

²⁰ Farney 2011, 225; see also Kajanto 1965, 180–210.

²¹ See Buora 2003, 624–626.

²² See Fn. 130.

²³ See Fn. 119.

²⁴ See Fn. 108.

²⁵ *AE* 2002, 532 a–c; Šašel Kos 2002.

²⁶ See Fn. 125.

²⁷ Djurić, Rižnar 2017.

²⁸ Djurić, Rižnar 2017, 139–140.

Pannonian-Dalmatian rebellion and Tiberius' accession to power, as well as for other purposes. Even in the case of an earlier, individually placed order, the extraction of the slab demanded the identification of suitable rock, which may have meant the beginning of a quarry on that spot. Within this chronological framework, we may fairly reliably see the potential preliminary reconnaissance, the establishment of quarries and transport routes including partial engineering of the River Ljubljanica, as well as the stonemasonry production in a military context, possibly connected with the tasks of specialized members of the units of Pannonian legions deployed here prior to Augustus' death.

Nomen gentilicium

The *gentilicium* Obulsius is recorded in this form for the first time. The closest is the uncertain family name Obul<c=s>ii (?) written in the genitive on a now lost tombstone from the Urbino area.²⁹ A similar *gentilicium* Obulcius is known on five inscriptions in Picenum (Regio V), Umbria (Regio VI) and Emilia (Regio VIII),³⁰ while the form Obulaccus occurs once as a *cognomen* (Umbria).³¹ This shows a concentration of the *gentilicium* along the western coastline of the Adriatic and its hinterland, spatially delimited by Ravenna in the north and Pisaurum in the south. In addition, the presence of Obulcii on the Apennine Peninsula is attested with eight inscriptions in Latium and Campania (Regio I),³² most of them in Rome, while the *gens* is known outside Italy with two documents from both Moesia³³ and Stobi (Gradsko) in Macedonia,³⁴ as well as three inscriptions from Mauretania Caesariensis³⁵ and neighbouring Africa Proconsularis.³⁶ In his analysis of the Republican inscriptions of the Latin colony of Ariminum (268 BC) that predate 90 BC, Bandelli saw the *gentilicium* Obulcius as Picenian in origin and linked it to a *gens* of the local aristocracy that was entitled, as the leading class of an allied community (*socii nominis latini*), to settle in a newly founded colony.³⁷ Schulze ranks the name Obulcius among the Latinized forms

²⁹ CIL XI, 6094 (= EDCS-23100581); see also Schulze 1933, 200, Fn. 6.

³⁰ CIL XI, 84 (= EDCS-19800635); CIL XI, 400 (= EDCS-20401839); CIL XI, 401 (= EDCS-20401840); CIL IX, 5325 (= EDCS-15900614); AE 1993, 603 (= EDCS-10800053).

³¹ CIL I, 2774 (= EDCS-24700206).

³² Chioffi 2005, 190, No. 248 (= EDCS-34801119); CIL VI, 9689 (= EDCS-19400374); CIL VI, 23206 (= EDCS-13300400); CIL VI, 23207 (= EDCS-13300401); CIL VI, 23807 (= EDCS-13301004); CIL VI, 33023a (= EDCS-23500391); CIL VI, 33968, p. 3906 (= EDCS-24100474); CIL VI, 40671 (= EDCS-12200390).

³³ AE 2003, 1544 = EDCS-36600011 (most likely the same person known from the inscription CIL VI, 40671 = EDCS-12200390, found in Rome); CIL III, 8201 (= EDCS-29700258).

³⁴ AE 2012, 1318 (= EDCS-63202175); AE 2012, 1330 (= EDCS-63202184).

³⁵ Gsell 1893, 277–278, No. 329 (= EDCS-58500283); CIL VIII, 20608 (= EDCS-27800192).

³⁶ AE 1992, 1826 (= EDCS-04901057).

³⁷ Bandelli 1988, 109–110.

of the originally Etruscan proper names,³⁸ which as a derivative from the root *Obul-* is related to the *gentilicia*³⁹ of the families *Obulnii*,⁴⁰ *Obultronii*⁴¹ and *Obultronianii*,⁴² and with some reservations also the similarly sounding *gentilicia* *Ovolcii*,⁴³ *Obilenii*,⁴⁴ *Oblicii*⁴⁵ and *Obilii*.⁴⁶ According to de Bernardo Stempel and Wedenig, the last of these, i.e. *Obilii*, may form part of the group of names with a Celtic linguistic component.⁴⁷ Some interpretations⁴⁸ also allow for such a component in the root of the place name *Obulco* (*Porcuna*) in southern Hispania.⁴⁹ Even though the *gentilicium*

³⁸ Schulze 1933, 200.

³⁹ Also the form *Obelsianus*, noted as a *cognomen* in an inscription from Perugia, see *CIL* I, 2062, p. 1075 (= *EDCS*-22100158). Overview of the *gentilicia* with this root: Solin, Salomies 1994, 129–130.

⁴⁰ *Emporiae* (*Empūries*): *CIL* II, 6252,32 (= *EDCS*-30200531); *Ostia Antica* (*Ostia*): *CIL* XIV, 1420 (= *EDCS*-05701435); the rest Rome: *CIL* VI, 4624 (= *EDCS*-19101217); *CIL* VI, 11486, p. 3911 (= *EDCS*-17300049); *CIL* VI, 17041 (= *EDCS*-00600043); *CIL* VI, 23209 (= *EDCS*-13300403); *CIL* VI, 35959 (= *EDCS*-23702513).

⁴¹ Tac. *Ann.* 13.28: ... *Obultronium Sabinum aerarii quaestorem*...; Tac. *Hist.* 1.37: ... *occisi Obultronii Sabini*...; Roma: *CIL* VI, 1056, p. 3071, 3777, 4320 (= *EDCS*-43300144); *CIL* VI, 35959a (= *EDCS*-23702514); Regio I: *CIL* X, 5188 (= *EDCS*-20400984); *CIL* X, 5205 (= *EDCS*-20401001); *AE* 1946, 175 (= *EDCS*-15300345); *CIL* X, 8059,287 (= *EDCS*-23300148); Regio II: *CIL* IX, 6079,42 (= *EDCS*-17600248); NSA-1994/95-195 (= *EDCS*-53400840); Regio V: *EDCS*-68100058; *EDCS*-68100059; *CIL* IX, 6078,121 (= *EDCS*-17700697); Dalmatia: *CIL* III, 3184c (= *EDCS*-28600165); *CIL* III, 3092, p. 1646, 2328,18 (= *EDCS*-28400346); *CIL* III, 1939 (= *EDCS*-27500031); *CIL* III, 1976 (= *EDCS*-27500059); *CIL* III, 2294 (= *EDCS*-27900042); *CIL* III, 2444 (= *EDCS*-28000217); *CIL* III, 2445 (= *EDCS*-28000218); *CIL* III, 9003 (= *EDCS*-29200256); *CIL* III, 14278,1 (= *EDCS*-32201118); *ILJug* 2569ac (= *EDCS*-10101573); *CIL* III, 1801 (= *EDCS*-26600666).

⁴² Roma: *CIL* VI, 2340, p. 3828 (= *EDCS*-18300424); Salona (Solin): *CIL* III, 9334 (= *EDCS*-29500257).

⁴³ Roma: *CIL* VI, 23643 (= *EDCS*-13300839).

⁴⁴ Falerio Picens (Falerone): *CIL* IX, 5485 (= *EDCS*-16100836). See also the derivative of the name as a peregrine filiation of Obiledo Quint(i), known from Murstetten in Lower Austria (*CIL* III, 5653 = *EDCS*-14500944).

⁴⁵ Alba Fucens (Albe): *CIL* IX, 3942, p. 1899 (= *EDCS*-14804972); Puteoli (Pozzuoli): *EDCS*-34000045 (= *EDR*114484); Cirta (Bordj Saguier er Roum): *CIL* VIII, 7065 (= *EDCS*-13002094).

⁴⁶ Volci (Vulci): *CIL* I, 3345 (= *EDCS*-09400333); Roma: *EDCS*-60000038; *EDCS*-46700047 (the last two with near identical content); *CIL* VI, 12203, p. 3911, 3917 (= *EDCS*-15200003); Falerio Picens (Falerone): *CIL* IX, 5486 (= *EDCS*-16100837); Virunum (Sankt Veit an der Glan/Šentvid ob Glini): *CIL* III, 4979 (= *EDCS*-14500283); Virunum (Feldkirchen in Kärnten/Trg na Koroškem): *CIL* III, 6503 (= *EDCS*-14600014); see also the variant *Obilus* (Alföldy 1974, 236) known from the peregrine filiation of the name *Obilo Lusti* from Sankt Leonhard am Forst (*ager* of *Aelium Cetium*): *CIL* III, 5664, p. 2286 (= *EDCS*-14500954) and the reverse variant of filiation: *Secundinus Obilonis* in an inscription (*ILLPRON* 610 = *ILLPRON* 620–23 = *EDCS*-49100368) found at Töltschach/Teleče (*ager* of Virunum).

⁴⁷ de Bernardo Stempel, Wedenig 2007, 619–630, especially 625–626.

⁴⁸ Tovar 1952, 219–221; see also the overview in Untermann 2004, 199–214.

⁴⁹ Settlement mentioned in Strab. 3.2.2 C 141, 3.4.9 C 160; Plin. *HN* 3.10; App. *Hisp.* 68.290; Ptol. *Geogr.* 2.4.11 and in four inscriptions from Andalusia: *CIL* II, 2252 (= *EDCS*-09000407); *CIL* II, 2131 (= *EDCS*-09000106); *CIL* II-5, 159 (= *EDCS*-08700170); *CIL* II, 5496 (= *EDCS*-08700784). The root *Obulc-* is also present in the name of municipium *Ipocobulcula* (Carcabuey): *CIL* II, 1645

Obulcius may reflect a Celtic imprint and the cultural-historical context of the area *ab Utente flumine usque ad Aesim*,⁵⁰ where the Celtic community of the *Senones* moved from southern Gaul towards the end of the fourth century BC,⁵¹ the matter of its etymological origins remains unresolved.

Tribus Camilia

The *Camilia* voting tribe ranks among the earliest group of 17 *tribus rusticae* founded prior to 365 BC on the principle of territorial units and named after important *gentes* and *familiae* or locations.⁵² Initially, the territory of *tribus Camilia* lay in the north-eastern part of *ager Romanus* along the *via Tiburtina*. It subsequently came to only include towns in Italy, Pisaurum (Pesaro) as the first colony, later Alba Pompeia (Alba), Lupiae (Lecce), Ravenna and Tibur (Tivoli), and finally also Suasa (Castelleone di Suasa), Augusta Bagiennorum (Roncaglia) and Atria (Adria). It is, however, also attested in southern Istria, in the colony of Pola (Pula).⁵³ Starac⁵⁴ argues in favour of the possibility that the population of this colony, most likely founded under Caesar,⁵⁵ was enrolled in the *tribus Velina*,⁵⁶ though the surviving epigraphic evidence that include information on city magistrates that were part of the *Camilia*⁵⁷ and *Pupinia tribus*⁵⁸ does call for caution.⁵⁹ As for *Camilia*, the usual abbreviation in inscriptions is *Cam.*, rarely *Camil.*, and only exceptionally is it written in full.⁶⁰

Pisaurum

Pisaurum (present-day Pesaro) was a colony of Roman citizens founded in 184 BC on a small plain between two spurs of the Apennines in proximity to the mouth of the River Pisaurus (Forni), on the Umbrian coast of the Adriatic. It was the sister colony of Potentia (Potenza) in Picenum, founded in the same year and by the same IIIviri.

(= EDCS-08700228); *CIL* II, 1651 (= EDCS-08700291); *CIL* II-5, 288 (= EDCS-08700300), located some 70 kilometres from Obulco (Roldán Díaz et al. 2022, 170).

⁵⁰ Liv. 5.35.3.

⁵¹ Uggeri 2001, col. 420.

⁵² Taylor 1960, 43–44, 95.

⁵³ *CIL* V, 51 (= EDCS-04200051); see also Kubitschek 1889, 114, 270; Mommsen 1872 in *CIL* V, p. 3.

⁵⁴ E.g. Starac 1999, 92; ead. 2001, 21; ead. 2018, 81.

⁵⁵ Santangelo 2016, 124.

⁵⁶ *Velina*: *CIL* V, 35, p. 1016 (= EDCS-04200035); *CIL* V, 47 (= EDCS-04200047); *CIL* V, 52 (= EDCS-04200052); *CIL* V, 58 (= EDCS-04200058); *CIL* V, 60 (= EDCS-04200060).

⁵⁷ *CIL* V, 51 (= EDCS-04200051).

⁵⁸ *Pupinia*: *CIL* V, 234 (= EDCS-04200320); *Inscr. It.* X, 1, No. 67 (= EDCS-04300021).

⁵⁹ Mommsen 1872 in *CIL* V, p. 3; also Ferjančić 2011, 136.

⁶⁰ Kubitschek 1897, col. 1430; see also id. 1889, 270.

Each of the colonists was granted six *iugera* of land,⁶¹ or approximately 15,180 m². The colony was inscribed into the voting tribe *Camilia*.⁶² In spite of its advantageous location on the *via Flaminia*, the colony was not exactly thriving. Cicero⁶³ writes of it as a hotbed of discontent, full of men mixed in the intrigues of Catilinarian conspiracy (63 BC). In the early 50s BC, Catullus⁶⁴ describes it as 'sickly' (*moribunda*). It was temporarily captured by Caesar after crossing the Rubicon.⁶⁵ After the Battle of Philippi, it received a colony of Antony's veterans⁶⁶ and another one of Octavian that also gave it its official name *colonia Iulia Felix Pisaurum*.⁶⁷

An outline of the presence of legio XV Apollinaris in the hinterland of Aquileia prior to its transfer to the Danube, as indicated by the tombstones of the quintadecimani

It was Octavian who established the legion bearing the number XV, later given the divine epithet 'of Apollo', either in 41–40 BC or even earlier. It is not possible to either prove or disprove a direct continuity between the legion with the same number that Caesar reportedly established after the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC (or earlier), as compensation for the legions transferred to Pompey, and the Augustan XV *Apollinaris*.⁶⁸ After the Battle of Actium in the Ionian Sea (31 BC), the legion was incorporated into the regular Augustan army⁶⁹ and operated in the area between the north-eastern border of Italy and northern Illyricum or the Danube, with the sole excursion to the Iberian Peninsula to fight in Augustus' wars against the Cantabri, Asturii and Lusi-

⁶¹ Liv. 39.44.10.

⁶² Kubitschek 1889, 74, 270; Paci 2000, col. 1041; id. 2010, 19. According to one hypothesis (Sisani 2007, 135; see also Paci 2010, 19–20), we may see the settlement of the first colonists with Roman citizenship in the narrow area of Pesaro, who were enrolled in this *tribus*, as the consequence of the *adsignatio viritana* of the Gaulish countryside (*ager Gallicus*), conducted soon after 284 BC with the participation of *tribuli* from *tribus Camilia* (Paci 2010, 19–20). Moreover, we cannot exclude the possibility that their presence prior to the foundation of the triumviral colony, possibly in the form of a *conventus civium Romanorum* (Paci 2000, col. 1041), may be indicated by the group of 14 *cippi* from the third to second century BC (for the dating of this epigraphic complex, see also Coarelli 2000, 195–205; Paci 2010, 20) dedicated to divinities of central Italy (*ILS* 2970–2983 = *ILLRP* 13–26; Paci 2000, col. 1041) and found in the early 1780s *in loco prope Pisaurum* (Degrassi 1957 in *ILLRP*, p. 46).

⁶³ Cic. *Sest.* 9.

⁶⁴ Catull. 81.3.

⁶⁵ Caes. *Bell. Civ.* 1.11.4; Cic. *Fam.* 16.12.2.

⁶⁶ Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 60.2.

⁶⁷ This episode may indirectly be mentioned in Cass. Dio. 48.6. For the full name of the colony, see *CIL* XI, 6335, p. 1399 (= *EDCS*-23200627); *CIL* XI, 6377 (= *EDCS*-23200669). General overview: Richardson 1976, col. 714; Paci 2000, col. 1041; Dall'Aglia, Di Cocco 2004, 31–36.

⁶⁸ Šašel 1985, 547–555 (= *Opera selecta* 1992, 469–477), for counterarguments, see Wheeler 2000, 261–262.

⁶⁹ Šašel Kos 1995, 229; Wheeler 2000, 260–269; Mosser 2003, 136–138.

tanii (26–19 BC). This unit possibly controlled the eastern Alpine communications and adjacent areas along the Amber Route. It may have taken part in the Pannonian Wars, commanded by Agrippa and Tiberius between 14 and 9 BC, the planned offensive against the Marcomanni king Maroboduus in AD 6 and the suppression of the Pannonian-Dalmatian revolt in AD 6–9.⁷⁰

The numerous tombstones for active soldiers and veterans suggest that the Early Augustan camp of *legio* XV should most likely be sought in the wider area of Aquileia, where the *hiberna* of its Caesarean predecessor may already have been located⁷¹ and whence it could be deployed to Illyricum together with other units. When the theatre of war shifted towards the east and north-east in the Middle Augustan period, its base was probably also relocated, initially possibly to the area of the strategically important Ljubljana Gate (Italy), then (or already earlier) to the neuralgic western part of the Sava corridor towards southern Pannonia (the plain of Krško polje with the Brežice Gate, Siscia?).⁷² Epigraphic evidence supports the assumption that, of all the legions of the Illyrian army, XV *Apollinaris* was camped closest to Aquileia, while the immense military and logistic importance of the communication junction at Ljubljana in the time of the Pannonian Wars and later during the Pannonian-Dalmatian rebellion suggest a frequent presence of the legion or its detachments at Emona.

During the mutiny of the three Pannonian legions, one of them being XV *Apollinaris*,⁷³ they were stationed in a common summer camp somewhere in Pannonia (*castris aestivis tres simul legiones habebantur*), possibly in the wider hinterland of Poetovio (Ptuj) or, more likely, in the area of Siscia (Sisak).⁷⁴ From this, apparently very distant camp, detachments were sent to Nauportus tasked with constructing roads and bridges, as well as carrying out other commands.⁷⁵ Emona is not mentioned in the context of the mutiny, hence the prevailing opinion that Emona cannot be considered as a possible winter camp of XV *Apollinaris* in the period immediately preceding AD 14 even though the existence of a temporary camp of *vexillationes* in the wider area of Emona and Nauportus is highly likely. Already in AD 15, the legion may have been stationed at Vindobona⁷⁶ or in the area that Tiberius had used as a starting point for his campaign against Maroboduus on the Danube,⁷⁷ but was later (probably under

⁷⁰ Wheeler 2000, 270–274; Mosser 2003, 138–145.

⁷¹ Indirectly in *Caes. Bell. Gall.* 1.10.3: ... *et tres, quae circum Aquileiam hiemabant...*

⁷² On the subject of siting the military base, see Ritterling 1925, col. 1748–1750; Šašel Kos 1995, 236–237, 243–244; Wheeler 2000, 271; Radman-Livaja 2012, 162–164, 169.

⁷³ *Tac. Ann.* 1.16–30.

⁷⁴ E.g. Šašel 1970, 123 (= *Opera selecta* 1992, 286); id. 1974a, 734 (= *Opera selecta* 1992, 616); Šašel Kos 1986, 197; ead. 1995, 236; ead. 1998b, 328; ead. 2014, 83; Mosser 2003, 142; Radman-Livaja 2019, 161.

⁷⁵ *Tac. Ann.* 1.20.

⁷⁶ Mosser 2003, 134–151; Mráv 2013, 101–102.

⁷⁷ *Vell. Pat.* 2.110.1: *Praeparaverat iam hiberna Caesar ad Danubium...*

Caligula) transferred to its permanent camp in Carnuntum. The latter site has thus far yielded as many as 87 tombstones of the *quintadecimani*.⁷⁸

The life of Lucius Obulsius

The proposed dating of the tombstone to the end of the Augustan period or the first half of Tiberius' reign leaves several possible explanations of the historical and personal context of the veteran's settlement to Emona, which depend on the (unknown) duration of his active military service. Considering the established pattern of recruitment (*dilectus*),⁷⁹ Obulsius most probably volunteered for duty after having been found physically, intellectually and legally suitable (*probatio*).⁸⁰ The reason for his mobilization may tentatively be sought in the deprived circumstances in which he grew up.⁸¹ It is possible that, despite some restrictions on their personal freedom and being subject to a rigorous military order in accordance with the rules of service (*disciplina militaris*), the recruits recognized the advantages of enlisting in the army such as regular meals, pay, accommodation and free medical treatment,⁸² which they could not expect in the deprived environments such as Obulsius' hometown.⁸³

Presuming that Obulsius was recruited at the age of 20⁸⁴ and that he was honourably discharged after 20 years of military service, he would be roughly 40 years old when becoming a veteran. If his *honesta missio* dated to AD 5, he would have been born on the territory of Pisaurum during the Second Triumvirate (43–33 BC), recruited to XV *Apollinaris* in the mid-20s BC and died between AD 20 and 25. In another version of events, he would have been demobilized slightly later; it is known that the newly imposed regular discharges after 20 years of service were suspended at the outbreak of the Pannonian-Dalmatian rebellion (AD 6–9),⁸⁵ which was still one of the main complaints of the rebellious soldiers of the three Pannonian legions five years later.⁸⁶ Lucius Obulsius may thus have spent longer time in active service, which would place his retirement in the time of the construction of Emona (AD 5/10–15) and shorten the period he spent as a civilian.

Considering the chronological framework of the tombstone outlined above, which places the death of the 60-year-old⁸⁷ veteran around AD 20/25 at the latest, an explanation

⁷⁸ Mosser 2003, 15.

⁷⁹ Le Bohec 1994, 70–74.

⁸⁰ Roth 1999, 9.

⁸¹ Herz 2007, 307–308.

⁸² Herz 2007, 307; Wesch-Klein 2007, 436.

⁸³ E.g. Catull. 81.3.

⁸⁴ See Mosser 2003, 60, Tab. 65.

⁸⁵ See Wilkes 1969, 111; Malone 2005, 324.

⁸⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 1.17.

⁸⁷ This may not have been his actual age, as a person's exact date of birth was often unknown and

that is at least as plausible is an earlier regular discharge with *missio nummaria* after 16 years of service with the possibility of four or more years of extended service in *vexilla veteranorum* that possibly took place in the second half of the calm period between the end of the Pannonian Wars (14–8 BC) and the preparations for the campaign against Maroboduus in AD 6, which were suddenly brought to a halt⁸⁸ with the armed rebellion of the Pannonian-Dalmatian communities in Illyricum (AD 6–9).⁸⁹ Inextricably linked with the question of whether his *honesta missio* dates to around AD 14 or a decade earlier is the array of the possible reasons for his final decision to settle at Emona. In the event of an earlier demobilization, it may have been a business or otherwise motivated decision of taking up residence in the civilian settlement that grew up next to the army camp on the right bank of the Ljubljanka that possibly enjoyed the status of a *vicus* under military administration, or one of the other administrative forms of civilian settlements. In the event of a later discharge (i.e. in the time of the construction of Emona on the left bank), the spectre of the possible motives and their backgrounds widens. One certainly pertains to the although limited⁹⁰ agricultural potential of the territory of Emona and the land offered to the veterans of the Pannonian army prior to Augustus' death as part of *missio agraria*.⁹¹ The other possible motive is a new urban settlement with a camp-like layout that certainly had an appeal for former soldiers.⁹² In addition, Obulsius was familiar with the area where he had spent time during service and may have been further attracted by the similarity with his native Pisaurum.

After settling, the veteran remained enrolled in the voting tribe of his place of birth (*Camilia*) rather than being transferred to that of the inhabitants of Emona (*Claudia*). This means that he could take up neither the function of a member of the city councils nor one of the administrative offices.⁹³ There was a rule, in place up to the Claudian

there was a general practice to round the age at death up or down to a multiple of the number five (on the subject, see e.g. Duncan-Jones 1977, 333–353; id. 1990, 79–92; Edmondson 2014, 561; Šašel Kos 2016, 27–28, 33–34). The rounding practice is also corroborated by the results of the regional epigraphic analyses involving the veterans of the Roman army (e.g. Visočnik 2008, 344). The estimated average life span in the Roman period was 36 years for men and 33 for women, hence people over 40 years of age were not so rare, while those aged 50 and more are documented in considerably lower numbers. In spite of this, the age of Lucius Obulsius is not unusual; to the contrary, there are a fair number of even older individuals, particularly among the officers who had prolonged their military service; see e.g. Retonius Lucius – 58 years of service, died at the age of 78 (*CIL* III, 11031 = *HD*039534) and Aelius Silvanus – 61 years of service, died aged 86 (*EDCS*-32300568 = *lupa* 2949).

⁸⁸ Cass. Dio. 55.28.6–7.

⁸⁹ Overview in Dzino 2010, 137–155.

⁹⁰ A passage from Tac. *Ann.* 1.17: ... *uligines paludum vel inculta montium*... may suggest the area of the newly established town *apud horridas gentes* was of a lesser agricultural potential.

⁹¹ Šašel Kos 1995, 236–237; Keppie 1984, 77–78; id. 1997, 92–93.

⁹² See Gaspari 2010, 126.

⁹³ Forni 1966. The participation of Obulsius in Emona's political life is even statistically less likely, considering the estimates of Mrozewicz (1989, 64–80), who records a less than 6% share of documented actively participating legionary veterans in the structure of the local town magistracies during the first three centuries in the Danube Basin and Rhineland (Wesch-Klein 2007, 448).

period, of taking the voting tribe of the new community either in the case of a veteran's settlement to a new colony or his inclusion into an already existing community of citizens,⁹⁴ but we have no evidence to suggest it was observed at Aquileia and Emona at this time.⁹⁵ This speaks against the hypothesis that the deduction of both colonies was related to the settlement of retired soldiers.⁹⁶ The early inscriptions from Emona show that its inhabitants were mainly civilians from northern Italy, while veterans – predominantly also Italians from northern Italy – settled in the town individually, as was the case in Aquileia.⁹⁷ Furthermore, none of the funerary monuments from either town relate the phrase *deductus coloniam*, such as for example on the funerary inscription for Lucius Naevius Rufus, former soldier of *XV Apollinaris* from the Claudian colony of Savaria.⁹⁸

Military tombstones from the cemeteries of Emona

This segment of the present study focuses on elucidating the circumstances surrounding the discovery of early military tombstones, particularly in relation to the layout and development of the burial grounds at Emona (Fig. 1). The evidence on their original locations is scant and inconclusive, but does allow us to draw certain, albeit tentative conclusions that are based on several premises. These include the generally observed Roman principle of separating the habitation area from the burial grounds, locating their cemeteries along the roads leading to settlements and towns, as well as the legally prohibited desecration of a grave considered as a *res religiosae*.⁹⁹ With the exception of emergency situations,¹⁰⁰ this prohibition was largely respected throughout the Imperial period, though we do have several examples from its early part of disturbing clearly visible graves with new burials,¹⁰¹ as well as of apparently legitimate urbanizations of former cemeteries.¹⁰² At Emona, cemeteries extended along the main

⁹⁴ Forni 1966, 149–151.

⁹⁵ Šašel Kos 1995, 240; Todisco 1999, 127.

⁹⁶ As Keppie (1997, 93) proposes for Emona.

⁹⁷ Šašel 1968, 565 (= *Opera selecta* 1992, 573); Šašel Kos 1995, 232.

⁹⁸ Mosser 2003, 192, No. 56 (= *HD009598* = *lupa* 3335).

⁹⁹ *CIL* II, 5439, 73.2–5 (eds. Gabba and Crawford 1996, 403); see also Plesničar-Gec 1999, 92.

¹⁰⁰ These situations include renovating the bridges across the Isonzo/Soča near Mainizza/Majnica and Ronche/Ronke that had been destroyed as a measure against the advancing units of Maximinus Thrax (see Bratož 2014, 17–18; with references); the renovation works after the end of *bellum Aquileiense* reused many tombstones from the first and second centuries that had originally stood along the roads leading from Aquileia towards Emona and Tergeste (see Zaccaria 2012, 35; with references).

¹⁰¹ Some examples can be found from the cemetery at Haltern (Berke 2013).

¹⁰² See Ammann, Castella 2013, 26, Fn. 42; for the Tiberian-Claudian masonry tombs along the road leading from Celeia towards Poetovio (Gubčeva ulica site in Celje), which were built over with residential architecture during the expansion of Celeia at the beginning of the second century at the latest, see Kolšek 1970; ead. 1972.

arteries leading from the town on the left bank of the Ljubljana eastwards to Siscia, southwards to Aquileia and northwards to Celeia. We should note that these arteries probably succeeded the military lines of communication along the northbound Amber Route and the eastbound route towards the territory of Segestica dating to the time of the Roman conquests of northern Illyricum.¹⁰³

Another premise is that the funerary monuments were reused not far from their original locations or along the route of easiest transport. There are fairly numerous Late Roman examples in Emona of reusing Early Imperial funerary monuments, pieces of funerary enclosures¹⁰⁴ and of the architectural decoration from the forum for the reparations and new constructions dating to the fourth century, that as a rule disregarded the original function of the monuments and were presumably related to the logic of optimizing the effort that went into transporting material to the new location of use. Such logic of reuse is largely in the domain of speculation, for example based on the distance of findspots from the main gates to the cemeteries beyond them.¹⁰⁵ However, when funerary monuments such as the tombstone for Lucius Obulsius (Fig. 1: 1) are reused for the same, funerary purposes, this logic does seem sufficiently plausible.

The discussed tombstone is also significant because of its likely connection with the beginning of burial along Emona's northbound road. The beginning of burial along Emona's arteries is traditionally considered as an inextricable part of the design of the Roman town, the construction of which is archaeologically and epigraphically reliably dated between AD 5/10 and 15.¹⁰⁶ The unidentifiable place of Obulsius' burial, but presumably somewhere in the area of Ajdovščina, may also have belonged to one of few small groups of burials located immediately next to the northbound road, pos-

¹⁰³ Gaspari 2010, 130–131; Andrič et al. 2012, 414–415.

¹⁰⁴ The *Codex Theodosianus*, a compilation of legal documents dating between AD 321 and 425, considered the desecration of funerary monuments as a double crime, both against the deceased whose rest was disturbed and against the living who were contaminated with the objects obtained in this manner (*CTh.* 9.17.4). The profanation of graves was a most severely punishable offence with forced labour for the slaves and freedmen, as well as deportation and expropriation for the masters involved (*CTh.* 9.17.1). In the time of the Emperor Julian, this did not deter private individuals from wantonly using the 'funerary ornaments' (*ornamenta... de sepulchris*) to decorate their triclinia and porticoes. Examples of reported cases of legal spoliation in the public interest are the ordinances issued by governors of the province of Asia who, roughly between AD 350 and 370, ordered the destruction of almost 2,000 funerary monuments from the necropolis at Aphrodisia to use as building materials for the town walls. The workers sought to respect the peace of the deceased as much as possible, which is also visible in the low number of sarcophagi or their parts built into the walls in comparison with the number of tombstones (Marano 2012, 75–76). On the Late Roman legal grounds for spoliation, see also Alchermes 1994, 167–178.

¹⁰⁵ See Schmid 1913, 78, 102; Cuntz 1913, Nos. 2–4, 19; Klemenc 1950, Nos. 1–3; Šašel Kos 1997, 193–194, 201–203, 216–218, 225–226; 241–244, Nos. 41, 45, 52, 57, 68–70; Plesničar-Gec 1999, 36–42, Figs. 57–58; Lovenjak, Gaspari 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Plesničar-Gec 1977, 23, 61; ead. 2006, 26, 32, 65–66; Mikl-Curk 2006, 92–93; Kos 2006, 74–75; Gaspari 2009, 367–368; id. 2010, 78–79, 147–148; id. 2014, 141; Gaspari et al. 2013, 60; Gaspari et al. 2014, 146–152, 162–165; Slapšak 2014, 35–37; Gaspari et al. 2015, 163.

sibly starting in the years prior to the official end of construction of the walled town or very soon afterwards. This is also the timeframe for the tombstone, made of imported sinter,¹⁰⁷ discovered at the former filial church of St Christophe. It was put up for his sister Clodia Tertia by C. Clodius Secundus (Fig. 1: 2; 4: d),¹⁰⁸ the only epigraphically attested active soldier of XV *Apollinaris* in Emona. Mosser dates it to the Late Augustan period and associates it with the early period of the legion's post in a summer camp somewhere in southern Pannonia, while Šašel attributes it to the first third of the first century AD.¹⁰⁹ It was found in 1872 next to the street of Dunajska cesta while expanding the church cemetery onto the adjacent field, north of the existing burial grounds.¹¹⁰ The findspot lies next to the Roman northbound road, some 1,400 m from the town gates. Pending new discoveries that may corroborate the specific character of this burial or group of burials in the area of the filial church, it seems reasonable to infer that we are dealing with one of the above-mentioned early groups of burial as an integral part of the northern cemetery of Emona that appears to have been laid out in the Tiberian period at the latest. Considering the introductory premises, we may presume that the tombstone for Marcus An+[-], veteran of *legio VIII* (Fig. 1: 3),¹¹¹ dated to the first half or possibly even the beginning of the first century AD¹¹² and found in 1973 in a Late Roman layer of debris in Insula XXXIX at the north gates,¹¹³ may originally have marked a grave located close to the town's northern walls.

The road towards Siscia left the town at the east gates, crossed the River Ljubljanica and ran along the southern foot of the hill of Grajski grič past the old settlement and the abandoned base at Prule. This is probably the area of origin for several known military tombstones. Two were put up for the soldiers of XV *Apollinaris* and will be discussed below, one is a fragment of (probably local) limestone with the depiction of straps with phalerae as part of *dona militaria* (Fig. 1: 4), now built into the pentagonal tower at Ljubljana Castle,¹¹⁴ and the last candidate is the tombstone for C. Vettennius (Fig. 1: 5), veteran of an unspecified legion, that dates to the early first century and was found on the estate of the Teutonic Knights (Križanke?).¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁷ Djurić, Rižnar 2017, 136.

¹⁰⁸ *CIL* III, 10769 (= *EDR*129035). See Šašel Kos 1995, 240–241; ead. 1997, 186–187, No. 38; ead. 2024, 69–70, No. 57; Mosser 2003, 42, 94–95, 166–167, No. 4; Djurić, Rižnar 2017, 135, 139; Špendal 2022, 25, 347–351, No. 11.1.2.

¹⁰⁹ Šašel 1968, 565 (= *Opera selecta* 1992, 573).

¹¹⁰ Cf. the extent of the cemetery on the plans of Ljubljana from 1860 (Korošec 1991, 130–131) and 1883 (Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, AS 1068 5/110).

¹¹¹ Plesničar 1974, 200 (= *EDR*152903); see Šašel Kos 1995, 238–239; ead. 1998b, 322, No. 1; ead. 2024, 74–75, No. 61; Špendal 2022, 27, 356–358, No. 11.2.1.

¹¹² Šašel Kos 1995, 238–239.

¹¹³ Plesničar 1974, 200.

¹¹⁴ Maxfield 1986, 279–285 (= *lupa* 4708); see Gaspari 2014, 156, Fig. 167; Špendal 2022, 32, 379–383, No. 11.2.6; Šašel Kos 2024, 80–81, No. 67.

¹¹⁵ *CIL* III, 3848 (= *lupa* 4193); see Šašel Kos 1997, 191–192, No. 40; ead. 2024, 76–77, No. 63; Špendal 2022, 31, 376–378, No. 11.2.5.



Fig. 4: Inscriptions of the Early Roman epigraphic monuments from Emona: a – tombstone for Titus Caesernius Diphilus; b – boundary stone between the territories of Aquileia and Emona; c – tombstone for Titus Iunius Montanus; d – tombstone for Caius Clodius Secundus; e – tombstone for Lucius Obulsus; f – tombstone for Lucius Oclatius Tarquiniensis (a–c, f archives of the National Museum of Slovenia; d–e David Badovinac).

Another tombstone for a veteran of *XV Apollinaris* from Ljubljana was found in 1525 in the vicinity of Nemška vrata, today the area of a square called Trg Francoske revolucije. It is a stela for Titus Varius (Fig. 1: 6), whose home was in Narbo (Narbonne), southern Gaul, and who married a (local) woman called Petronia. Mosser¹¹⁶ saw the shape and the characteristic decoration of the pediment as evidence to date this tombstone of Podpeč limestone¹¹⁷ to the Tiberian period.¹¹⁸

The tombstone for L. Oclatius Tarquiniensis (Fig. 1: f), another veteran of *XV Apollinaris*, was put up at its own expense by Titus Calventius, veteran of *VIII Augusta*, and a freedwoman by the name of Expectata.¹¹⁹ The stela of Podpeč limestone¹²⁰ was found *in suburbio ante domum Knidasch*, just before the end of the 17th century,¹²¹ which corresponds to the house at Reber 11, located at the fork of a path that leads from the square of Stari trg towards the summit of Grajski grič,¹²² i.e. at the edge of the documented extent of the early settlement at Emona on the right bank of the Ljubljanica. In the Augustan period, the status and function of this settlement, but also the lives of its inhabitants, were presumably under a strong influence of the military base at Prule. The eastern cemetery of Emona apparently only spread onto the area of this settlement after it had been abandoned towards the end of the first or even in the second century.¹²³ This suggests that the above-mentioned tombstones belonged to the presumed early part of the cemetery located on the opposite, left bank of the Ljubljanica, between the main east gates and the bridge. The beginnings of Roman burial on the left bank are most likely related to the ancient cemetery with the centre at the edge of the river terrace between the square of Novi trg and Turjak Palace, close to the river crossing.¹²⁴ This may also be the likely origin of the tombstone of Aurisina limestone erected for T. Caesernius Diphilus, which was found during river engineering works in July 1935 three metres under the river bottom in proximity to Novi trg (Fig. 4: a).¹²⁵

The two conjoining fragments of the tombstone of Pudens (Fig. 1: 8), an active soldier of the II praetorian cohort born in Brixia (Brescia) who died aged 25,¹²⁶ were

¹¹⁶ Mosser 2003, 175, No. 19.

¹¹⁷ Djurić et al. 2022, 181.

¹¹⁸ *CIL* III, 3847 (= *lupa* 3689); see Šašel Kos 1995, 239; ead. 1997, 189–191, No. 39; ead. 2024, 71–72, No. 59; Mosser 2003, 175, No. 19; Špendal 2022, 30–31, 372–375, No. 11.2.4.

¹¹⁹ *CIL* III, 3845 (= *EDR*135194); see Šašel Kos 1998a, 336–337, No. 6; ead. 2024, 72–73, No. 60; Mosser 2003, 167, No. 5; Špendal 2022, 29–30, 365–371, No. 11.2.3.

¹²⁰ Djurić et al. 2022, 180.

¹²¹ Šašel Kos 1998a, 336.

¹²² Steska 1902, 94; Plot No. 28, cadastral municipality 1728 - Ljubljana mesto; see Suhadolnik, Anžič 2003, 124.

¹²³ Petru 1972, 128; Vičič 1993, 153–154, 156, 166; id. 1994, 25–26, 34–35; Plesničar-Gec 1999, 96.

¹²⁴ For the existence of a Late Hallstatt and La Tène cult place and cemetery at the river crossing see Gaspari 2014, 95, 101–102, 106.

¹²⁵ *AIJ* 176 (= *EDR*073326); see Šašel Kos 1997, 122–125, No. 3; ead. 2024, 86–87, No. 72.

¹²⁶ *AE* 1950, 42 (= *lupa* 4190); see Šašel Kos 1997, 185–186, No. 37; ead. 2024, 68, No. 56; Špendal 2022, 26, 352–355, No. 11.1.3. The tombstone from the beginning of the first century AD

later built into the first tower of the west town wall north of the main west gate. There are also rare surviving grave groups from the first century AD recovered in advance of the construction of the municipality building of Vič (1952)¹²⁷ and the Stan in dom building (1926).¹²⁸ All these suggest that burial began at the same time here as in the northern cemetery and also along the entire recorded stretch between the town gates and the junction of the roads Tržaška cesta and Idrijska ulica, some 750 m away.¹²⁹

One of the best known Early Imperial military grave inscriptions from the area of western cemetery is that for T. Iunius Montanus (Fig. 1: 9; 4: c), a high-ranking officer of equestrian order.¹³⁰ It was found in early September 1936 while laying gas pipes at street then named Groharjeva ulica (the south end of today's Prešernova cesta). Workers stumbled upon the remains of a building from the fourth century on the exterior side of the ditch along the south-western part of Emona's town walls, which held three burials in sarcophagi. A comparison of the photographs and the copy of the situation sketch in the 1972 publication has shown that the tombstone was used as a cover slab of the sarcophagus located in the corner of the of the south the two recorded rooms of the building. The inscription for T. Iunius Montanus, who possibly died at Emona, also relates he had the function of *pro legato*, which involved administrative, military and technical tasks in territories where Roman authority was yet fully consolidated.¹³¹ This fits well with the archaeological evidence on the Roman military presence at Emona and the associated discussions on the possible (temporary) measures concerning the administrative attribution of the politically and militarily sensitive sector of the border between Italy and Illyricum.¹³² It does not exclude the possibility of the deceased serving as the commander of a unit of the Illyrian army¹³³ performing tasks at the Ljubljana Gate¹³⁴ during the Late

is made of local Podpeč limestone (Djurić et al. 2022, 180). The presence of Pudens' unit in the area is generally seen as a measure to deal with the revolt of the Pannonian legions in AD 14, a task that Tiberius entrusted to his son Drusus accompanied by praetorians (Cass. Dio. 57.4.4) and Imperial Germanic bodyguard (Tac. *Ann.* 1.24) (thus already Klemenc in the first publication of the tombstone; 1950, 113–115, No. 1; Šašel Kos 1997, 185–186, No. 37). In contrast, Redaelli (2016, 126) does not exclude the possibility that this epigraphic trace is associated with the activities during the Pannonian-Dalmatian rebellion and the role that Emona played in them as an important logistics node (*statio*).

¹²⁷ Petru 1972, 120–122, Pl. CXIX: 6 (Grave 2=1429).

¹²⁸ Petru 1972, 122, Pl. CXIX: 1–3 (Grave 1=1343); CXIX: 4–5 (Grave 2=1344).

¹²⁹ Petru 1972, 119–122, 127–128; Plesničar-Gec 1999, 96.

¹³⁰ *AIJ* 173 (= *EDR073370*); see Saria 1937, 46–48; Šašel Kos 1997, 183–185, No. 36; ead. 2024, 66–67, No. 55; Špendal 2022, 24–25, 340–346, No. 11.1.1.

¹³¹ Šašel 1974b, 477 (= *Opera selecta* 1992, 315); Šašel Kos 1997, 184–185; see also Faoro 2017, 226–237.

¹³² Slapšak 2014, 33–35.

¹³³ The most recent findings (Faoro 2017, 229) suggest there is no tangible evidence to support the possibility that the duties of the office in question included the (deputy) command of the legion (as suggested e.g. in Saria 1937, 48; id. 1938, 253–254).

¹³⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 1.20.

Augustan period. The official powers that Montanus – a member of the equestrian order possibly originating¹³⁵ from Alexandria Troas (Dalyan) in Asia Minor – exercised on behalf of the legate can presumably be traced in the archaeological record exclusively with the series (?)¹³⁶ of Late Augustan/Early Tiberian¹³⁷ countermarked coins that, according to Kos,¹³⁸ are stamped with the abbreviations of Montanus' *nomen gentile* and *cognomen* (*I(unii) MO(ntani)*). The use of the genitive in these countermarks may betray their purpose, as one proposed interpretation suggests these coins were associated with monetary rewards or *donativa*¹³⁹ to the military detachments stationed in the area.

The proposed timeframe for the erection of Montanus' tombstone, a cenotaph, and the countermarks issued in his name corresponds with the chronology of the deposits from the time of the construction and the original ground surfaces of the walled town on the left bank of the River Ljubljana, but also the dating of two presumably identical imperial building inscriptions, which were placed above the town's main gates.¹⁴⁰ The combination of the spatio-temporal context of Montanus' activities and the frequent identification of delegated legates behind the establishment of colonies under Caesar and Augustus,¹⁴¹ also suggests the possibility that his sphere of competence included overseeing the religious and technical procedures involved in establishing the colony at Emona. Equally plausible explanations¹⁴² of the presence of a military-administrative operative with the executive power of a legate, based mainly on more recent interpretations of the function in question¹⁴³ and situational parallels,¹⁴⁴ presuppose his at least indirect control over the settlement (*vicus*?) next to the military base,¹⁴⁵ which, with its abundantly documented Middle and Late Augustan horizons (Phases IIIa and III)¹⁴⁶ is clearly linked to the roughly contemporaneous¹⁴⁷ military base at Prule.

¹³⁵ Halfmann 1979, 103; Devijver 1992, 67; Demougin 1992, 228.

¹³⁶ *FMRSI* I 155/47, 15a.

¹³⁷ Werz 2009, 371–372, No. 106.

¹³⁸ Kos 1986, 50–52; id. 1995, 27–29 in: Kos, Šemrov (1995).

¹³⁹ Werz 2009, 372.

¹⁴⁰ South gate: *AII* 170b (= *lupa* 9246); most recently published in Šašel Kos 2024, 58–60, No. 47. East gate: *CIL* III, 10768 (= *lupa* 9246); most recently published in Šašel Kos 2024, 60–61, No. 48. Inscriptions dated according to Šašel, Weiler 1963/64, 40–42 (= *Opera selecta* 1992, 277–279) and Mráv 2001, 81–98. On the presumed identical content of the two inscriptions, see Mráv 2001, 90.

¹⁴¹ Coles 2020, 61.

¹⁴² Špendal 2022, 344–345.

¹⁴³ Faoro 2017, 226–237.

¹⁴⁴ Tomas 2011, 155.

¹⁴⁵ Slapšak 2014, 27.

¹⁴⁶ Vičič 1994, 30–34.

¹⁴⁷ Gaspari et al. 2014, 135–165; Novšak et al. 2017, 9–52.

Conclusion

The tombstone for Lucius Obulsius is a new piece of evidence on *legio XV*. Martin Mosser brought together all the monuments pertaining to the legion in the monograph published in 2003, which also comprehensively discusses the body of evidence then comprising 196 funerary monuments, 17 dedications, four honorific and 17 building inscriptions. These document the history and deployments of the unit between Lusitania in the west and Armenia in the east, in a time spanning from the mid-first century BC to the end of the fourth century AD. Regionally, the tombstone for Lucius Obulsius is primarily important in its epigraphic contribution to our knowledge of the members of *legio XV* at Emona during the Early Principate. This epigraphic evidence now consists of three tombstones for veterans, one tombstone for an active soldier and a dedication of the legion's *frumentarius* to the goddess Ceres, though the last of the monuments may not be authentic.¹⁴⁸

Even more significant is the probable connection of the tombstone, the product of a local, possibly military stonemason's workshop, with the beginnings of burial along Emona's northbound road datable to a time before the finished construction of the walled town in AD 14/15 or immediately afterwards. The discovery circumstances of other military tombstones corroborate the hypothesis on their original location along the town's arteries, presumably direct successors of earlier military lines of communication. The military installations on the left bank of the Ljubljana correspond chronologically with the timeframe of the two camps at the foot of Grajski grič on the right bank. The preliminary study of the succession, function and design of the military installations on the left bank has shown that the orientation of the later walled town and its main streets, with the *cardo maximus* continuing into the northbound artery, probably respects the previous military infrastructure. For the time being, however, we lack sufficient evidence to go beyond mere conjectures on the existence of a more permanent camp that would correspond to the legion's *castra hiberna*.

The chronology of the early military monuments from Emona does not contradict the hypothesis that the members of *legiones XV* and *VIII* recorded on them served in the units and detachments of the Illyrian army deployed to the Ljubljana Gate between the Pannonian Wars and the revolt at Augustus' death. They may have died here on active duty¹⁴⁹ or settled in the area while their parent unit was still here, either prior to, during or soon after the construction of the walled town on the left bank of the Ljubljana, irrespective of whether this occurred as part of a new deduction, a reinforcement of the already existing community of Roman citizens or as an individual decision. According to one version of Lucius Obulsius' life, he spent at least part of his time after discharge

¹⁴⁸ CIL III, 3835 (= AIJ 151). See Šašel Kos 1995, 241–243; Mosser 2003, 200, No. 266.

¹⁴⁹ Schmid (1941, 47, Fn. 5) associates these tombstones with the time of the Pannonian-Dalmatian rebellion and chronologically parallels them with the cenotaph for Marcus Caelius, *triarius ordo* of *legio XVIII*, who died in AD 9 in the *clades Variana* (CIL XIII, 8648 = lupa 15513; see Schalles, Willer 2009).

close to his former unit, in a *vicus* attached to the military base, probably witnessed the finished construction of the new urban settlement on the left bank, possibly lived in it and was finally buried in its northern cemetery. The proposed dating and location of his burial support the hypothesis that Lucius Obulsius was a member of the first generation of inhabitants to live in the new urban settlement. Indirectly, this also confirms the validity of hypothesizing a close connection between the establishment and early fulfilment of urban functions on the new site of Emona, on the one hand, and the conferred colonial status, i.e. the deduction of a colony accompanied by the settlement of veterans and civilians as a constituent part of the new establishment, on the other.¹⁵⁰

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¹⁵⁰ Slapšak 2014, 29–31, 35–38; Gaspari 2010, 144–148; id. 2014, 148–149.

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Abbreviations

AE = *L'Année épigraphique*.

AIJ = V. Hoffiler, B. Saria, *Antike Inschriften aus Jugoslawien, Heft 1: Noricum und Pannonia Superior*, Zagreb 1938.

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*.

EDCS = Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss / Slaby (Manfred Clauss/Anne Kolb/Wolfgang A. Slaby). <https://db.edcs.eu/epigr/hinweise/hinweis-en.html> (2024-10-21).

EDR = Epigraphic Database Roma. <http://www.edr-edr.it/default/index.php> (2024-10-21).

FMRSI I = P. Kos, *Die Fundmünzen der Römischen Zeit in Slowenien I*, Berlin 1988.

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Andrej Gaspari
Univerza v Ljubljani
Filozofska fakulteta
Oddelek za arheologijo
Aškerčeva 2
SI-1000 Ljubljana
andrej.gaspari@ff.uni-lj.si
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8252-0258>

Žan Špendal
Univerza v Ljubljani
Filozofska fakulteta
Oddelek za arheologijo
Aškerčeva 2
SI-1000 Ljubljana
zan.spendal@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3712-3866>

Isis and Serapis in Poetovio

Inga VILOGORAC BRČIĆ

Abstract

The cults of Isis and Serapis have been attested in the Roman province of Pannonia in the Antonine period, peaking during the reign of Severan dynasty. According to epigraphic and other material evidence, Poetovio was one of the three most important cult centres in the province together with Savaria and Carnuntum. Here I shall present all inscriptions and figural representations testifying to the cults of Isis and Serapis found in the Poetovio ager. I shall describe all the aspects of the worship of Isis and Serapis and endeavour to determine the reasons for the appropriation of their cults in the ager. Non-reliable evidence, such as monuments bearing representations of Jupiter-Ammon or the crowns of funeral stelae with bearded male heads in relief interpreted as Serapis, will not be taken into consideration.

Keywords: Isis; Serapis; Egypt; Pannonia Superior; Poetovio; cult

Izvleček

Izida in Serapis v Petovionu

Kult Izide in Serapisa je bil v rimski provinci Panoniji prisoten že v antoninskem obdobju, vrhunec pa je dosegel za časa severske dinastije. Po epigrafskih in drugih materialnih dokazih je bila Petoviona, skupaj s Savarijo in Karnuntom, eno od treh najpomembnejših kulturnih središč. Na tem mestu so predstavljeni vsi napisi in figuralne upodobitve iz petovionskega agra, ki pričajo o kultu Izide in Serapisa. Opisani so vsi vidiki čaščenja in skušamo ugotoviti, zakaj sta bila njuna kulta prenesena v ager. Prispevek ne upošteva nezanesljivih podatkov, kot so spomeniki z upodobitvijo Jupitra-Ammon ali ovršja nagrobnih stel z bradatimi moškimi glavami v reliefu, interpretiranimi kot Serapis.

Ključne besede: Izida; Serapis; Egipt; Zgornja Panonija; Petoviona; kult

Introduction

The cults of Isis and Serapis gradually made their way across the Greek islands to Rome from Egypt during the Hellenistic era. While Rome was at first repelled by the cult, especially during the Late Republic and Early Empire, it probably became the official Roman religion during the reign of Vespasian: he promoted Isis and Serapis as the divine protectors of the new ruling dynasty. The popularity of the cults of Isis and of Serapis in particular peaked a second time under the Severan dynasty.

Although the cults of Isis in Pannonia flourished during the Severan dynasty, they were appropriated earlier, in the Antonine period. According to epigraphic and material evidence, Poetovio was one of three most important cult centres of the province.¹ Located between two important hubs of the cults of Isis, Aquileia and Savaria, it may be said that Poetovio served as an intermediary for their dissemination into Pannonia's provincial interior. I shall present all inscriptions and figural representations testifying to the cults of Isis and Serapis found in the Poetovio ager. Then I shall describe aspects of the worship of Isis and Serapis and endeavour to determine the reasons for the appropriation of these cults in the ager. Non-reliable evidence, such as monuments bearing representations of Jupiter-Ammon or crowns of funeral stele with bearded male heads in relief interpreted as Serapis, will not be taken into consideration.

Epigraphic evidence

Six altars, one statue base and two tabulae ansatae from the Poetovio ager bear inscriptions dedicated to Isis and Serapis.

1 The base of a statue of Isis with votive inscription was built into the Church of St Martin in Spodnja Hajdina, but has since been lost.

*Isidi / Aug(ustae) / signum / cum bas(i) / Victorin(us) / ex voto / posuit*²

Victorinus dedicated a statue with a base to Isis Augusta, according to a vow. He added the imperial epithet to Isis. It is impossible to precisely define the nature of gods with the imperial attribute, or to declare that they were identified with an emperor or that their cults had official status. Villaret sees the "Augustalization" of gods as a process of mediation between the gods and people via the emperor, and considers it a phenomenon of political, religious and social acculturation in the Western provinces:

¹ Selem 1980; Bricault 2003.

² Bibliography: Pichler 1879, 17; *CIL* III 4016; Drexler 1890, 24, no. 2; Saria 1937, 20, no. 2; Perc 1968, 185, no. 34; *SIRIS* 655; Selem 1972, 33, no. 18; Selem 1980, 14, no. 18; *RICIS* II, 613/0102; Bricault 2003, 217; *EDCS* 24400832; HD068878.

Augusti were usually the most popular and important regional gods, invoked more often for the health of individuals than the emperor's health. Nevertheless, it is certain that adding the imperial attribute to the name of a deity was an important way of expressing loyalty to a reigning emperor, assigning the power of the deity to an imperial house and therefore proving their relation to the imperial cult.³ The inscription dedicated by Victorinus has been dated to the 1st or 2nd century.

Two *tabulae ansatae* made of bronze were hung on the wall of the Isis sanctuary in Poetovio (Figs. 1 and 2). They were discovered in 1898 and 1935 at the Spodnja Hajdina site, near the Church of St Martin, in the vicinity of the Mithraeum and horrea. Among the architectural remains, the so-called W building contained an interior space (10 × 5.75 m) which was flanked on three sides by a corridor (width 2.8 × 3.75 m). Dedications no. 4 and no. 5 were discovered nearby.

2 The first *tabula ansata* bears a votive inscription (Fig. 1):

*Apollinar(is) / Isid(i) v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*⁴

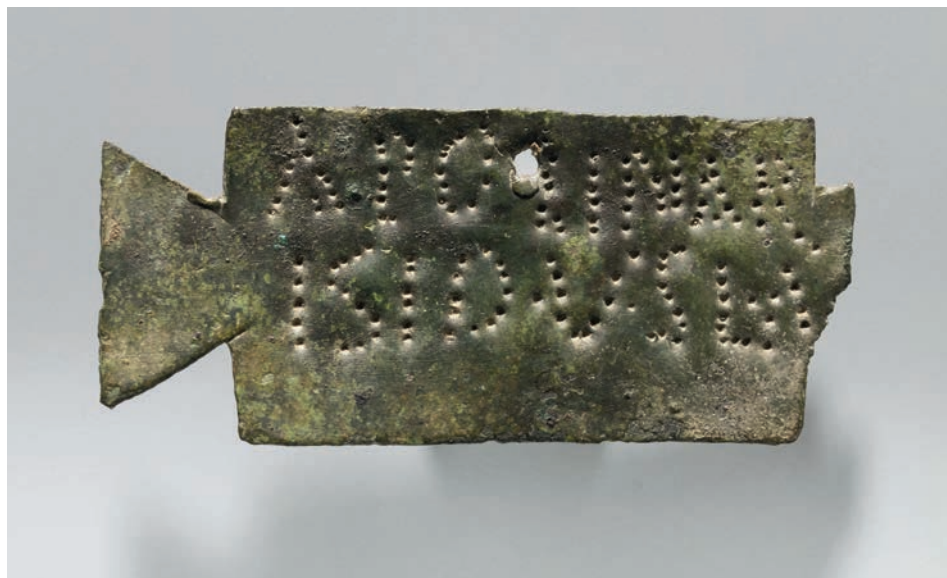


Fig. 1: *Tabula ansata* of Apollinaris (Archive of Regional Museum Ptuj - Ormož; photo: B. Farič)

³ Villaret 2019, 397–400.

⁴ Discovered in Spodnja Hajdina, 1898, Ptuj Regional Museum (inv. no. 1010). Dimensions: 0.025 × 0.055 m. References: *CIL* III 15184; Abramić 1925, 128, no. 134; *AIJ* 00270; Saria, 1937, 22, no. 5; Perc 1968, 189, no. 37; *SIRIS* 658; Selem 1972, 33, no. 18; Selem 1980, 15–16, no. 20; *RICIS* II 613/0105; *EDCS* 30200464; HD068555.

3 The second one is only partially preserved (Fig. 2):

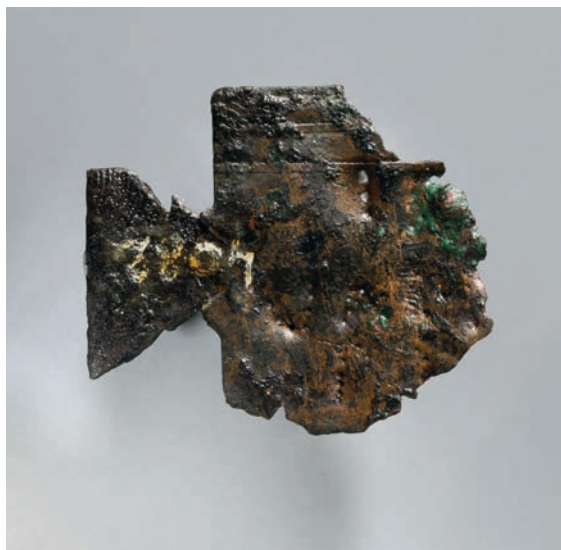


Fig. 2: Tabula ansata of Valerius
(Archive of Regional Museum Ptuj
- Ormož; photo: B. Farič)

*Is[idi] / Val(erius) A[---] / P(ublius) M[---]*⁵

The dedicant mentioned in the first inscription, Apollinaris, fulfilled a vow to Isis. The second inscription is considerably damaged and we can only suggest that two persons dedicated to Isis: Valerius (?) and Publius (?). The first tabula ansata has been dated to 1st/2nd century, and the second to the 2nd century.

4 The altar found in the Church of St Martin at Spodnja Hajdina has, unfortunately, been lost. It bears the inscription:

*Isidi / Aug(ustae) / sacrum / Marti / 5 alis / Firmini / Q(uinti) Sabini / Verani
/ t(ertiae?) p(artis?) II conduc(toris) / 10 portori / Illyrici / ar[k]ari vic(arius) /
voto / suscepto / 15 d(onum) d(at) / sac(erdotibus) T(ito) Fl(avio) / Martiale et
Fl(avio) Marul / lino fil(io).*⁶

It testifies that Martialis, *servus vicarius* (slave of a slave) of Firminus, who was the *arcarius* (treasurer) of *conductor* (leaseholder) Quintus Sabinius Veranus, presented

⁵ Discovered in Spodnja Hajdina, 1935, Ptuj Regional Museum (inv. no. 4082). Dimensions: 0.026 × 0.005 m. References: *AIJ* 00271; Saria 1937, 22–23, no. 6; Perc 1968, 189–190, no. 38; *SIRIS* 659; Selem 1972, 34, no. 18; Selem 1980, 16, no. 21; *RICIS* II 613/0106; *EDCS* 11300996; HD068556.

⁶ *CIL* III 04015; Drexler 1890, 24, no. 1; Saria 1937, 20, no. 1; Perc 1968, 185–186, no. 35; *SIRIS* 654; Selem 1972, 31–32, no. 18; Selem 1980, 11–12, no. 15; *RICIS* II, 613/0301; Bricault 2003, 217; *EDCS* 24400831; HD068877.

the altar as a gift to Isis Augusta in fulfilment of a vow. This occurred when Titus Flavius Martialis and Flavius Marullinus served as priests to the goddess. The dedicant, Martialis, like his colleagues Firminus and Quintus Sabinius Veranus, was an official of the *Publicum portorium Illyrici* – the Illyrian customs district. This institution was established in 1st century AD and its jurisdiction encompassed the tenth region of Italy and the following provinces: Raetia, Noricum, Dalmatia, the two Pannonias, the two Moesias, Dacia and Thrace. The customs office linked Poetovio to Aquileia, Celeia, Atrans and Ad Publicanos.⁷ It is well known that the officials of the *Publicum portorium Illyrici* promoted the cult of Mithras in Poetovio, which was very well documented there.⁸ This and the following inscription (no. 5) suggest that this was also the case with the cults of Isis.

The two priests of Isis serve as proof of an existing community of her followers and the temple where they performed their duties in Poetovio. Titus Flavius Martialis and Flavius Marullinus were father and son – the priesthood of Isis was hereditary, as confirmed elsewhere beginning in the Hellenistic era.

Finally, this is the second case of adding the imperial attribute Augusta to Isis. As we have already mentioned, it attests to the importance of the goddess' cult in Poetovio in AD 147 to 161.

5 The altar found at an unknown site in Ptuj in 1852, bears the inscription (Fig. 3):

[Is]idi / [my]riol[ny]mae / [pro] Fructo / [Sabi]ni Verani / [co]nduct(or)s⁹

Fructus was *servus vilicus* (intendant) of the same Quintus Sabinius Veranus, *conductor*, mentioned in the preceding inscription. Here it is also noteworthy that there are two more inscriptions discovered in Poetovio that mention Veranus: his slaves were followers of Mithras.¹⁰ It suggests not only the specific involvement of custom officers in “oriental” cults, but also a relationship between the worshippers of Isis and Mithras in Poetovio.

⁷ The officials of the *Portorium* were responsible for collecting taxes. The *Portorium* system was first entrusted to publican societies and, then, from Trajan's reign onwards, to individual leaseholders chosen by the state (*conductores*). At the end of the reign of Marcus Aurelius, or at the beginning of that of Commodus, these taxes were collected directly by the state and entrusted to *procuratores* of equestrian rank. The subordinate staff of the *Illyricum* customs district consisted mostly of slaves, *vilici* (intendants) or *contrascriptores* (comptrollers) (Van Haepelen 2024, 263–264).

⁸ On the employees of the *Publicum portorium Illyrici* as worshippers of Mithras, see Van Haepelen 2020; Van Haepelen 2024; Chalupa et al. 2024.

⁹ Joanneum, Graz, inv. no. 491. References: *CIL* III 4017; Pichler 1879, 40; Drexler 1890, 24, no. 3; Marić 1933, 81; Saria 1937, 20–21, no. 3; Perc 1968, 187–188, no. 36; *SIRIS* 00656; Selem 1972, 32, no. 18; Selem 1980, 12, no. 16; *RICIS* II 613/0103 = *RICIS*, Suppl. II, p. 294; *EDCS* 24400833; HD068868.

¹⁰ *CIMRM* II 1491; *CIMRM* II 1533.



For Fructus, the dedication to *Isis Myrionima* – Isis of a thousand names,¹¹ serves as evidence of worshipping the goddess in all of her manifestations. The same person made a dedication to Mithras (Muhlthal am Inn/Pons Aeni)¹² and to the nymphs (Balnea Romana Celeia)¹³ in Noricum. Fructus was therefore one of the slaves employed in the customs office of Poetovio. He worshipped “oriental” deities, Mithras and Isis. His inscription has been dated to AD 147 to 161.

Fig. 3: The altar of Fructus (Archive of Joanneum, Graz)

6 An altar discovered in Spodnja Hajdina is dedicated to Isis and Serapis (Fig. 4):

*C(aius) Ul(pius) Aur(elius) / Gaianu[s] / I(sidi) V(ictrici) et Ser(api) / pro
salu[te] / 5 s]ua suorum[q(ue)] / omnium / v(otum) / s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).*¹⁴

Gaius Ulpius Aurelius Gaianus fulfilled a vow to Isis Victrix and Serapis, *pro salute sua suorumque* – the dedication made for his personal health and the health of his family. Worshipping Isis as the patron or guarantor of health has been well attested since the pharaonic period. In Hellenistic Egypt there were major pilgrimage sanctuaries dedicated to Isis in Menoutis and to Osiris in Canopus, where both Isis and Serapis were worshipped as healing gods: sick people would spend the night in their sanctuaries expecting the gods to appear in dreams with the promise of a remedy.¹⁵

Gaianus is noted in two identical inscriptions discovered in Mediolanum¹⁶ and

¹¹ See Bricault 1994.

¹² [Inv]ic[to] | Mi[t]hr[ae] / [F]ructus Q. / [Sa]bini Verani / [con]d(uctoris) [p(ublici) p(ortorii) ser(vus), vil(icus)—]A / [—] DI [—] / [—] | — a]ramq(ue) m[—], AE 2008, 1020; EDCS 51400041.

¹³ Nymphis / Aug(ustis) / Fructus / Q(uinti) Sabini Verani / c(onductoris) p(ublici) p(ortorii) ser(vus) vilic(us) / posuit, CIL III 5146; EDCS 14500452.

¹⁴ Dimensions: 0.82 × 0.35 × 0.10 m, Ptuj Regional Museum, inv. no. 31. References: AIJ 269; Saria 1937, 23, no. 7, fig. 4; Perc 1968, 182–183, no. 32; AE 1937, 245; SIRIS 660; Selem 1972, 33, no. 18; Selem 1980, 13, no. 17; RICIS II, 613/0107 = RICIS, Suppl. II, p. 294; Bricault 2003, 217; EDCS 11300995; HD023613.

¹⁵ Bricault 2014.

¹⁶ CIL V 5797; ILS 4193.

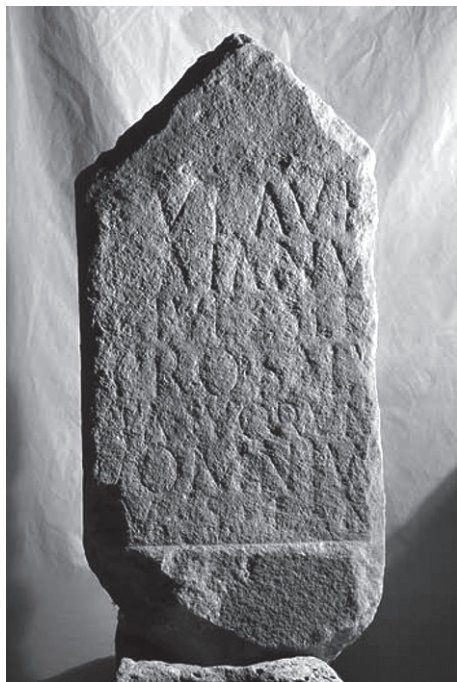


Fig. 4: The altar of Gaius Ulpius Aurelius Gaianus (Archive of Regional Museum Ptuj - Ormož)

Virunum,¹⁷ dedicated *Invicto Patrio* – he was also a worshipper of Mithras, and this would confirm the suggestion made above that the sanctuaries of Isis and Mithras were close by. Besides, a monument from Virunum was discovered, according to *CIL* III 4802, with “*una cum statua viri barbati modium habentis*” – the head of bearded man with a kalathos, which may have been the head of Serapis.

The inscriptions from Mediolanum and Virunum testify that he was *prae-fectus vehiculorum* (an official overseeing the *cursus publicus*, the state courier service), a title which implies that he was of equestrian rank. Gaianus was also a *iuridicus* in Alexandria in AD 167. This fact helps to date his inscription to the reign of Marcus Aurelius, and suggests an affinity with Isis Victrix and Serapis, which is also supported by his time in Egypt.

7 An altar built into the northern wall of the medieval tower in Slovenski trg (square) in Ptuj bears the votive inscription (Fig. 5):

*Serapi / Aug(usto) / sacrum / Epap(h)roditus / 5 Alexandri / Aug(usti) disp(ensatoris) / tabularius / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*¹⁸

Epaphroditus was a *tabularius*, a financial clerk in the Publicum portorium Illyrici. His superior was the imperial *dispensator* Alexander. Epaphroditus fulfilled a vow to Serapis Augustus, thus expressing his loyalty to his superior, who was employed as an imperial administrator, but also to the emperor, underscoring the high status of the cults of Isis in Poetovio, as in the previous cases (no. 1 and no. 4). The inscription has been dated to the latter half of the 2nd/first half of the 3rd century.

¹⁷ *CIL* III, 4802; *ILS*, 4193; *CIMRM* II 1439.

¹⁸ It was found “*in vestibulo aedium Ioannis Aurifabri*”. It is currently built into the base of a medieval tower in Slovenski trg in Ptuj. Dimensions: 0.94 × 0.49 × 0.24. References: *CIL* III 4044; *AIJ* 336; Drexler 1890, 24, no. 2; Saria 1937, 20, no. 2; Perc 1968, 185, no. 34; *SIRIS* 657; Selem 1972, 32, no. 18; Selem 1980, 14–15, no. 19; *RICIS* II 613/0104; *RICIS*, Suppl. II, p. 294; *EDCS* 26600453; HD068847.



Fig. 5: The altar of Epaphroditus (Photo I. Vilogorac Brčić)



Fig. 6: The altar of Publius Valerius Priscus (Photo I. Krajcar)

8 An altar recently discovered in Varaždinske Toplice (*Aquae Iasae*), in the Poetovio ager. It was built into the structure of the north wall of the spring pool (Fig. 6):

*Isidi et / Serapi Aug(usto) / sacrum / C(aius) V(alerius) Priscus / Aug(ustalis) c(oloniae) U(lpiae) / T(raianae) P(oetoviensis) et / Catienia / Fortunata con(iunx) / sive Oriclio*¹⁹

Gaius Valerius Priscus and his wife Catienia Fortunata made a dedication to Isis and Serapis Augustus after their health was restored at the thermal sanctuary of Isis

¹⁹ References: Kušan Špalj et al. 2014, 68–69, 93–95, no. 73; Kušan Špalj 2017, 291–292; *RICIS* III, 613/1001; *AE* 2014, 01048; *AE* 2017, 1142; *ROMIC* II, 35–35, no. 24; *EDCS* 68200018; HD074972.

and Serapis in Aquae Iasae. The altar's size²⁰ implies that it was intended for cult services in front of the sanctuary of Isis and Serapis, but its precise location in the thermal complex in Aquae Iasae is no longer known.

Gaius Valerius Priscus was a *sevir Augustalis*, an official of the imperial cult and he made a dedication to Serapis Augustus – further proof of the importance of the cults of Isis in the Poetovio ager. He was a member of the respected gens Valeria, whose members had moved to Poetovio in the 1st century AD. During the 2nd century they held some of the city's most important posts. His wife's name, Catienia Fortunata, is followed by a word of unknown origin: Oricclio. This may be her indigenous name, or even a local version of the word for spouse, *coniunx*, which precedes it. The altar has been dated to the late 2nd or the early 3rd century.



Fig. 7: The altar of Caecilius Saturninus
(Photo I. Krajcar)

9 Another altar from Aquae Iasae is considerably damaged, but it bears a discernable inscription (Fig. 7):

*Seraphi / sancto et / Nymphis / salutaribus / 5 Caecilius / Saturninus*²¹

Caecilius Saturninus made a vow to Sanctus Serapis and the Nymphs who bring good health. The form of the name *Seraphi* is unusual and has not been confirmed elsewhere. Perhaps this reflected local linguistic traits. The epithet Sanctus accompanying the name of Serapis has only been recorded on three more inscriptions found thus far.²² The unusual formula for the name of Serapis and the association of his cult

²⁰ Height 156 cm, base width 70 cm, base thickness 44 cm.

²¹ References: Kušan Špalj et al. 2014, 70, 95–96; Kušan Špalj 2017, 293–294; Bricault 2014, 193–194, 613/1002; ROMIC II, 36–37, no. 25; EDCS 68500330; HD074973.

²² RICIS 604/0101, 615/0101, 503/1111; Bricault 2016, 119, 122.

with the local Nymphs of Iasae may point to the hypothesis that the dedicant was an indigenous resident who had acquired Roman citizenship, and, together with his local faith, he also accepted the cult of Serapis the healer. However, he may have also been an immigrant or a visitor to the *thermae*, who sought the blessing of Serapis and of the local Iasae nymphs, whose cult he had accepted. The altar has been dated to the early 3rd century.

Epigraphic and material evidence from Aquae Iasae testify to the worship of Apollo, Aesculapius and Serapis there, which indicates the presence of the official religion, the imperial cult, primarily apparent in the emphasis on the divine nature of Emperor Caracalla.²³ Cassius Dio mentioned that Caracalla grew ill after the murder of his brother Geta, and desperately sought help from Apollo, Asclepius and Serapis (*Cass. Dio* LXXVIII, 5–7). During his travels, he would send votive offerings to the deities through his emissaries to various sanctuaries, and went there personally in the hope that he would be healed. It is assumed that Caracalla marched from Rome across Roman Gaul and Germania Superior in the spring of AD 213 to punish the Alemanni. The emperor stopped in Aquae (Baden-Baden) and Phoebiana (Faimingen), where a sanctuary of Apollo was located (Apollo Grannus).²⁴ One inscription found in the sanctuary of Aquae Iasae, commissioned by Caracalla's servant Avitianus for the emperor's health and victories,²⁵ implies the possibility that the ill emperor himself visited the sanctuary and made dedication to his favourite deities Asclepius, Apollo and Serapis after his war against the Alemanni in September of AD 213. The Aquae Iasae sanctuary is, thus far, the only sanctuary in Pannonia where all three of Emperor Caracalla's favourite deities, Apollo, Asclepius and Serapis, were worshipped.²⁶

Material evidence

It is surprising that no monumental representations of Isis and Serapis in Poetovio have thus far been discovered, given the richness of the epigraphic evidence of their cults and the fact that their sanctuary existed there. The only monuments are two terracotta lamps, which testify to the private sphere of the cult of Isis. One is decorated with a bust of Isis wearing the solar crown and a crescent moon. It was found in the Hajdina necropolis²⁷ together with a coin of Emperor Claudius, but there is insufficient evidence

²³ Kušan Špalj 2017.

²⁴ Mráv 2000, 86.

²⁵ Kušan Špalj et al. 2014, 72–74, 97–99; Kušan Špalj 2017, 273–275.

²⁶ Kušan Špalj et al. 2014, 97–99; Kušan Špalj 2017, 289–299. There is a relief representing Nymphs and a goddess which was identified as Isis-Fortuna by Kušan Špalj (Kušan Špalj et al. 2014, 62–65; Kušan Špalj 2017, 294–297). However, whether the knot of Isis is represented on her breast is uncertain, so I would not take this monument as reliable evidence of the cults of Isis in Aquae Iasae.

²⁷ It is held in the Joanneum (Graz, inv. no. 5683). References: Fischbach 1896, 37, no. 325; Saria 1937, 23; Perc 1968, 192, no. 40; Selem 1972, 34, no. 18; Selem 1980, 19, no. 31; Bricault 2003, 217.

to date the lamp in the first half of 1st century AD. The second has an identical depiction of Isis as the preceding one, but it was found elsewhere in the Hajdina necropolis.²⁸

There are two categories of monuments considered testimony to the cults of Isis in Poetovio, although there is no reliable evidence. The first group consists of the crowns of funeral stelae with a depiction of two lions holding ram's heads and a bearded male head between them, interpreted as Serapis.²⁹ There is no evidence that these reliefs represent the Egyptian god, for another Roman god or the deceased himself may have been placed in the same position on the crown. Djurić recently considered them representations of the older Dionysos or Dionysos Zagreus.³⁰ The second group consists of figural representations of Jupiter Ammon:³¹ there is no doubt that those are representations of a Hellenistic deity, but they were rendered as decorations and they are not evidence of the cult of Jupiter Ammon.

Appropriation of the cults of Isis and Serapis in the Poetovio ager

The rich epigraphic material provides insight into the reasons for the worship of the cults of Isis and the level of their appropriation in the Poetovio ager. No evidence has thus far been found that would attest to the official status of the cults of Isis with any certainty – all of the dedications have a private character. However, hereditary priesthood, indicated by inscription no. 4, assumes the constant need for the cult practices that were performed in the sanctuary. Although its precise location has not been reliably confirmed, the tabulae ansatae (no. 2 and no. 3) and inscriptions no. 1 and no. 4, found in Spodnja Hajdina, indicate that it was in the vicinity of the Mithraeum and horrea.

Five out of eight inscriptions point to a link between the cults of Isis and the imperial cult: Isis is twice called Augusta (no. 1 and no. 4), just as Serapis is called Augustus twice (no. 7 and no. 8). Isis is also revered as Victrix (no. 6), which implies the same, since it associates her with Venus, the mother of Aeneas and thus also the “mother” of the Roman nation. One dedicant was a *sevir Augustalis*, an official of the imperial cult (no. 8). It is thus evident that the cults of Isis and Serapis were well appropriated and distinguished in the pantheon of Poetovio. Adding the imperial attribute to their names was a way of underscoring the significance of their cult in Poetovio society, and a way of demonstrating loyalty to the reigning emperor. The attribute Myrionima, recorded in inscription no. 5, implies all manifestations of the goddess Isis for which she was worshipped there.

²⁸ It is held in the Joanneum (Graz, inv. no. 8310). References: Fischbach 1896, 37, no. 326; Saria 1937, 23; Perc 1968, 192, no. 41; Selem 1972, 34, no. 18; Selem 1980, 19, no. 32; Bricault 2003, 217.

²⁹ See Selem 1980, nos. 22–26.

³⁰ Djurić 2024, 110–111.

³¹ Two stone blocks and two terracotta lamps with the relief images of Jupiter Ammon. See Selem 1980, nos. 27–30.

Another important reason for the worship of Isis and Serapis, as attested by the inscriptions from the Poetovio ager, is for protection and a guarantee of health. It is well known that Isis and Serapis were worshipped as healing gods since the Hellenistic era, and there are many thus far attested vows for the health of an individual, family or the emperor. At this point, three dedications have been discovered that testify to the worship of Isis and Serapis as healers (nos. 6, 8 and 9).

The cults of Isis were well received in the customs office (*Publicum portorium Illyrici*): two *servi* (no. 4 and no. 5) and one *tabularius* of the imperial *dispensator* (no. 7) were worshippers of Isis and Serapis. Two employees of the portorium (no. 4) were *servi* of the same conductor who was a superior of two worshippers of Mithras – they all were obviously colleagues with an affinity for “Oriental” gods. The link between the cults of Isis and the very well-established cult of Mithras in Poetovio can perhaps also be stressed, given that the temple of Isis was in the area of Spodnja Hajdina, where evidence of two Mithraea has been found.

Finally, we can conclude that testimony to the sanctuaries of Isis and Serapis, hereditary priesthood and the significant community of worshippers, which includes an official of the imperial cult and employees of the customs office, clearly implies the prominence of their cults in the Poetovio ager from the 1st to 3rd centuries AD.³²

³² The paper was created within the Croatian Science Foundation project “Women and Changes: Women as Subjects of Historical Changes in Croatia” (IP-2024-05-3847).

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Abbreviations

AE = *L'Année épigraphique*.

AIJ = V. Hoffiler, B. Saria, *Antike inschriften aus Jugoslawien*, Zagreb 1938.

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*.

EDCS = *Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss / Slaby*. <http://www.manfredclauss.de/>

EDH = *Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg*, Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. <https://edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/home?lang=de>

lupa = *Ubi Erat Lupa*, F. and O. Harl, <https://lupa.at/> (Bildatenbank zu antiken Stein-
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Inga Vilogorac Brčić
Department of History
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Zagreb
Ivana Lučića 3
HR-10000 Zagreb
ivbrbic@ffzg.hr
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9197-5003>

Ariadne at St Margaret's (Kebelj, Slovenia) and the Promise of a New Life

Bojan DJURIĆ

Abstract

The walls of St Margaret's church in Kebelj above Oplotnica, in north-eastern Slovenia, incorporate two marble spolia with relief depictions, one showing the sleeping Ariadne abandoned by Theseus on the island of Naxos and the other the triumph of Dionysus. They are ash chest fragments that originally most likely formed parts of a single ash chest of the Poetovio production, as its right and left sides. The relief with the abandoned Ariadne on Naxos is the first recorded example of this mythological motif in the Norico-Pannonian sculptural production, which is well-known for its use of mythological iconography. The motif is quite rare in Roman sepulchral production in general, as the narratives on the sarcophagi focus more on the story of Dionysus, in which Ariadne appears as one of the participants. An eschatological reading of the motif provides the main argument for joining the two marble reliefs, though there are also other possible readings of the whole.

Keywords: Ariadne; Dionysus; ash chest; Pohorje marble; spolia; Kebelj

Izvleček

Ariadna pri sv. Marjeti (Kebelj, Slovenija) in obljuba novega življenja

V cerkev sv. Marjete na Keblju nad Oplotnico sta kot gradbena elementa vzdani marmorni spoliji, ena z reliefno upodobitvijo speče Ariadne, ki jo Tezej zapušča na otoku Naksos, in druga z upodobitvijo Dionizovega trumfa. Najverjetneje pripadata isti petovionski pepelnici, prva njeni desni in druga levi krajši stranici. Gre za prvi primer rabe tega mitološkega motiva v noriško-panonski kiparski produkciji, ki je sicer znana prav po rabi mitoloških motivov. Motiv Ariadne, ki jo Tezej zapušča na Naksosu, je v rimski sepulkralni proizvodnji dokaj redek, saj so rimski sarkofagi bolj osredotočeni na Dionizovo zgodbo, v kateri je Ariadna le eden od delov. Predvsem v eshatološkem branju motiva najdemo argument za združitev obeh fragmentov, ki gledalcu sicer puščata možnost tudi za drugačna branja celote.

Ključne besede: Ariadna; Dioniz; pepelnica; pohorski marmor; spolije; Kebelj



Fig. 1: Church of St Margaret of Antioch in the village of Kebelj above Oplotnica (photo L. Pukšič)

Many villages on the southern slopes of the Pohorje Hills have churches built in the Middle Ages of marble products from the Roman period, which were re-used for the quoins of their naves and bell towers, even the foundations. These marble pieces were taken primarily from the cemeteries of the Roman towns, villages and villas on the plain of Dravsko polje. The remains of the Roman colony of Poetovio (modern-day Ptuj) were undoubtedly the main source of this building material. Although there is no firm evidence, we may reasonably assume that these remains even provided a considerable source of income for the medieval inhabitants of Ptuj. Consequently, most sepulchral monuments built into the churches in and around Dravsko polje cannot be ascribed a local origin, though some such cases have been documented.¹ Instead, they should primarily be attributed to the cemeteries of Poetovio and the trade in building material organised in Ptuj.

Ariadne on Naxos

One of the Pohorje churches where Roman monuments of marble – predominantly lower parts of ash chests – were reused for its quoins is the church of St Margaret of Antioch in Kebelj above Oplotnica (Fig. 1). The restoration work of its exterior in 2003² revealed marble spolia that include a fragment of an ash chest with figural decoration (Fig. 2).

The fragment represents the right third or quarter of the lower part of a marble ash chest,³ with a figural relief on its right short side. It is missing half the bottom edge on the left and the upper left corner is crushed, suggesting that the right lateral panel of the presumably tripartite front – embedded into the wall and not visible – is severely

¹ The pieces built into the Church of the Nativity of Mary in Slivnica near Maribor, for example, have been shown to originate from the nearby cemetery of a Roman countryside villa excavated in 2007 by Primož Predan.

² Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, Maribor Regional Office, archaeologist Mira Strmčnik Gulič. For data, see Gulič 2006, 126.

³ Size 75 × 26 × 30 cm; Eastern Alpine marble with horizontal grey bands of mineral inclusions.



Fig. 2: Right side of a marble ash chest built into the SW corner of the church (photo author)

damaged. The rear side of the ash chest is finely dressed. The hole carved into the relief on the right side shows that the ash chest had previously been used as a trough. The figural scene has a simple frame, the lower section of which is broader than the lateral ones, as is characteristic of the ash chests (and sarcophagi) of Poetovio.⁴

The fragment bears slightly less than half of the entire relief. The surviving relief is vertically composed of two parts, with the upper part showing a reclining female figure occupying two thirds of the relief's width together with the rocky support on the right-hand side. She is depicted in a three-quarter view facing the spectator, draped in a cloak that covers her left shoulder, envelops her left arm and continues down her body so as to leave the part from her chest to her thighs exposed. Her left arm is bent at the elbow and supports the weight of her upper body, the forearm rests on the ground, the large palm is turned downward and the fingers are extended. Her left leg is extended, while her right leg is bent at the knee and positioned in front of the left. The right foot is the only bare part of her legs, protruding from beneath the cloak. The left third of the relief shows a male figure striding energetically toward the right and into the background. Only the bare legs up to the knees survive of this figure. His right leg is behind the reclining figure, hence only the calf is visible. The lower section of his left leg is touching the ground with the toes, the heel is raised. Behind his left leg is a narrow flat object, positioned diagonally to the leg. The bottom part of the relief is occupied by an elaborately shaped element resembling a horizontal palm frond with the tip on the right.

The reclining figure supported on a rock is shown in the foreground in a pose characteristic of sleeping or reclining male, and even more commonly female figures.⁵

⁴ See Djurić 2024.

⁵ For sleeping figures, see McNally 1985; Stafford 1993.

The missing head and right arm, as well as the damaged chest area prevent an immediate and clear identification of the figure; she could represent a sleeping maenad or nymph,⁶ Rhea Silvia,⁷ Venus⁸ or Ariadne,⁹ to name only the most common depictions. The identity of the male figure is equally uncertain; he could be Mars, a satyr, Theseus or someone else. Only the object beside his left leg is more easily identifiable, resembling a footbridge or gangway leading from the shore to a ship¹⁰ and suggesting the presence of a ship in the background. Individually, these three elements – a reclining figure on a rocky support, a striding male figure and a gangway – cannot be precisely identified. Jointly, however, this combination positively identifies the scene as that of a well-known mythological motif of Theseus abandoning Ariadne on the island of Naxos (*Dia*). In this interpretation, the bottom motif of a ‘palm frond’ also becomes clearer as a decorative rendering of Ariadne’s bed made of seaweed, similar to the depictions on the wall paintings from Pompeii, for example in the House of Caecilius Iucundus¹¹ or those recently found in House V 6, 2bis.¹²

The story of the sleeping Ariadne on Naxos forms part of both the myth of the Athenian hero Theseus and the myth of Dionysus. After the Cretan princess Ariadne helped Theseus slay the Minotaur, she fled with him aboard his ship. They landed on the island of Naxos in the middle of the Aegean Sea. There, Ariadne fell asleep on the shore. While she slept, Theseus quietly abandoned her and sailed away to Athens – according to the most widespread version of the story – at the urging of Athena. When Ariadne awoke, she searched for Theseus in despair, only to realise he had abandoned her. Exhausted and overcome by sorrow, she sank into a restless sleep. In this state, she was discovered by Dionysus, who seduced and married her. In this divine role, Ariadne henceforth appeared alongside Dionysus in his *thiasos*.¹³

⁶ See Fabbricotti 1976; Fabbricotti 1980.

⁷ Albertson 2012; Gersht, Mucznik 1988.

⁸ E.g. on the sarcophagus held in the cathedral in Amalfi; Robert 1904, 237, No. 193, Tab. 61, Fig. 193 a-b.

⁹ Wolf 2002.

¹⁰ E.g. on the reliefs showing Iphigenia at Tauris such as the stela from Székesfehérvár (Fitz 1976, 77, No. 27; lupa 3592) or the wall paintings from Pompeii and Herculaneum (cf. Parise Badoni 1990, Figs. 1–9).

¹¹ House of Caecilius Iucundus V 1, 26, Triclinium O, Wall E, central scene, now held in Napoli; Parise Badoni 1990, 76, Fig. 3.

¹² Catoni, Osanna 2018; Catoni 2020, Fig. 1.

¹³ The myth of Ariadne is incorporated in the myths of both Theseus and Dionysus. In literary sources, we already find it in Homer (*Odyssey* 11.320 ff) and Hesiod (*Theogony* 947 ff). For the myth of Theseus and the Ariadne story, see Plutarch (*Lives* 19–20) and Ovid (*Heroides* 10). For Dionysus and Ariadne, see Ovid (*Fasti* 3.459 ff). For the variants of the myth of Ariadne and the relevant ancient sources, see <https://www.theoi.com/Georgikos/Ariadne.html>.

History of the motif

The motif of the sleeping Ariadne appeared in art relatively late, only toward the end of the Archaic period in red-figure vase painting. It grew in popularity in the late fifth century BCE, when a monumental painted cycle was created in the temple of Dionysus in Athens. Pausanias,¹⁴ who describes this cycle, writes of “*Ariadne asleep, Theseus putting out to sea, and Dionysus on his arrival to carry off Ariadne*”. Some¹⁵ have interpreted this description as synchronous events depicted in a single painting, while others¹⁶ have seen it as a successive narrative represented in two separate paintings. Both types of depictions can be found on Apulian red-figure pottery of the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE.¹⁷

In the Roman milieu, the focus in the story of Theseus and Ariadne shifted onto Ariadne and her despair at Theseus’ deceitful departure,¹⁸ as expressed first in the poetry of Catullus¹⁹ and later Ovid,²⁰ and also frequently depicted in Pompeian wall paintings. In these painted versions, the two scenes – Theseus’ departure (Fig. 3a) and the arrival of Dionysus (Fig. 3c) – were consistently separated. There also appeared a third, entirely new iconographic motif of the awakened Ariadne, who weeps inconsolably upon seeing the departing ship (Fig. 3b).²¹

The classic iconographic composition of the first scene shows Theseus in the foreground, stepping onto or toward the ship while looking back at the sleeping Ariadne reclining in the foreground (Fig. 4). Their bodies are consistently oriented in opposite directions. In the background is the bow of the ship on one side, while on the other side we usually find a seated Athena, in some cases accompanied by the winged Hypnos next to Ariadne. The prototype of this composition can be seen on a stamnos kept in Boston. In Pompeian wall painting, Ariadne is most frequently depicted on the left side, while Theseus, stepping onto the ship’s gangway, is on the right; only in

¹⁴ Paus. *Description of Greece* 1.20.3; transl. W. H. S. Jones and H. A. Ormerod.

¹⁵ Simon 1954, 77; Brommer 1982, 90.

¹⁶ Salis 1910, 134; Lippold 1951, 49.

¹⁷ Theseus with Ariadne, Athena and Hypnos on a stamnos by the Ariadne Painter, held in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and Theseus with Ariadne and Dionysus on a bell krater in the Museo Nazionale in Taranto; cf. Bernhard, Daszewski 1986, Nos. 54 and 96. Catoni (2020) identifies a scene with Theseus, Ariadne and Dionysus on a fragment of the lid of an Attic lekanis from c. 400 BCE (Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum, Inv. No. 354) and argues it proves the existence of a composite motif also in Greece and supports the hypothesis of a single painting in Pausanias’ description.

¹⁸ Differently on the Campana reliefs, cf. Colpo 2012, 115.

¹⁹ Cat. 64.124–129 when describing the cover of a wedding bed, perhaps using a Hellenistic model.

²⁰ Ovid *Heroides* 10.47–48.

²¹ F. Parise Badoni (1990) writes that this motif only occurs in Pompeii in the paintings of the Fourth Style; e.g. in House VI 9, 2.13, House of Meleager; Napoli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Inv. No. 9051.



Fig. 3: (a) Theseus abandoning the sleeping Ariadne, Pompeii, House V 6, 2bis (photo M. Osanna); (b) weeping Ariadne, Pompeii, House VI 9, 2.14 (Naples, MANN 9051) (photo Marie-Lan Nguyen); (c) Dionysus discovering the sleeping Ariadne, Pompeii, House IX 3, 5 (House of Marcus Lucretius; MANN Inv. No. 9271) (photo Marie-Lan Nguyen)

the triclinium painting of the House of Caecilius Iucundus (V 1, 26)²² and the newly found painting in House V 6, 2bis do we see the depictions reversed.²³ In the opinion of Franca Parise Badoni, the prototype for all other depictions of this scene in Pompeii, which itself derived from an Apulian/Tarantine prototype, was the fragmentarily surviving scene in Hall A of the Imperial Villa.²⁴

In Pompeian painting, the sleeping Ariadne in the scene of Theseus' departure is most often shown in a calm pose, with her arms placed alongside her body or with her head resting on a bent arm. In contrast, the scenes with Dionysus show her in a dramatically erotic pose²⁵ of the famous Hellenistic sculpture of *The Sleeping Ariadne* (Fig. 5),²⁶ which served as the model for the later relief depictions of sleeping female figures ranging from Ariadne²⁷ to maenads and even Rhea Silvia. Of the wall

²² Parise Badoni 1990, Fig. 3.

²³ For a list of Pompeian depictions of this scene, see Parise Badoni 1990 (Series I) and Fontana 2022, 61–62. Franca Parise Badoni postulated the prototype for these Pompeian depictions not in the Classical Athenian painting, but in a prototype created in Apulia or, more precisely, Taranto (Parise Badoni 1990, 73–74).

²⁴ Parise Badoni 1990, 75.

²⁵ Sheila McNally (1985, 172) emphasises Ariadne's restless, oppressive sleep expressed with this pose.

²⁶ The Vatican, Museo Pio Clementino, Inv. No. 548; Hadrianic copy of a Hellenistic original from the Pergamene school, second century BCE; Wolf 2002; Valeri 2019. Copies held in Wilton House (GB), Prado, Louvre, Uffizi, San Antonio, Antalya.

²⁷ In Pannonia, the sleeping Ariadne discovered by Dionysus is depicted on a travertine relief from the foundations of the Roman bridge across the Drava at Osijek (*Mursa*). Kept in the Arheološki muzej Osijek. Zubčić 2011, Fig. on p. 31; lupa 26323. She also appears on two other reliefs, one from Dunaújváros (lupa 3967) and one from Tata (lupa 3860).



Fig. 4: Theseus abandoning Ariadne on Naxos, Pompeii, triclinium in the House of Caecilius Iucundus (V 1, 26) (photo Marie-Lan Nguyen)



Fig. 5: *The Sleeping Ariadne*, Vatican, Museo Pio Clementino, Inv. No. 548 (photo Wknight94 CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED)

paintings in Pompeii, only the Ariadne from the House of Caecilius Iucundus, of the Fourth Style, adopts the pose of the Hellenistic sculpture.

The posture of the Hellenistic Ariadne, with both arms bent and raised under and over her head, is used in the depictions of Ariadne in all three surviving reliefs on the Antonine sarcophagi featuring Ariadne and Theseus, namely the relief from Hadrian's Villa (Fig. 6a)²⁸, the Attic sarcophagus kept in the Istanbul Archaeology Museum (Fig. 6b)²⁹ and the garland sarcophagus from Capranica (Fig. 6c).³⁰ In all three reliefs, Ariadne lies in the foreground on the left, while Theseus in the background strides resolutely to the right toward the ship, of which only the bow is shown. The basic iconographic composition, which is a mirror version to that on the stamnos from Boston that later continues in Pompeian wall painting, clearly conveys the idea of separation with the divergent positioning of the main figures. All other figures, when present, only serve to clarify the scene (Athena and Hypnos in the relief from Hadrian's Villa) or add genre details (sailors in the relief from Istanbul).

The focus of these reliefs is primarily on the sleeping Ariadne rather than on Theseus, the latter characteristic of the Pompeian depictions of this scene. This shift in

²⁸ Now kept in the Vatican, Inv. No. 540; Bernhard, Daszewski 1986, 1058 No. 68 with bibliography.

²⁹ Right side, Istanbul Archaeology Museum, No. 125; Bernhard, Daszewski 1986, 1058 No. 70 with bibliography.

³⁰ New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Inv. No. 90.12a, b; Bernhard, Daszewski 1986, 1058 No. 69 with bibliography.

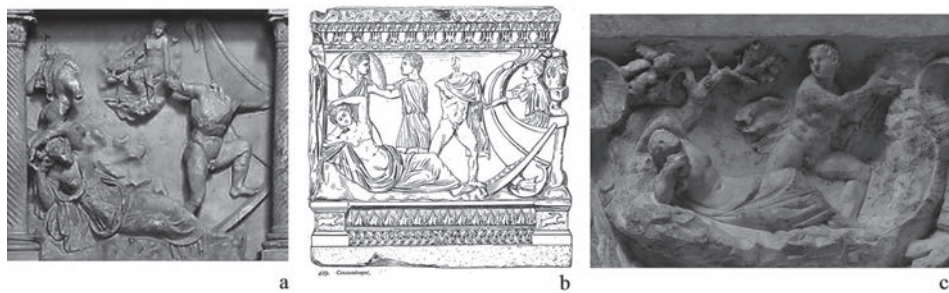


Fig. 6: (a) Plate from Hadrian's Villa, Vatican (from LIMC III2); (b) sarcophagus, Istanbul Archaeology Museum (from Robert ASR III.3, 429); (c) garland sarcophagus from Capranica, MMA New York, Acc. No. 90.12a, detail (photo MMA)

focus is the result of the different context, understanding and use of the topic, which in the sepulchral realm emphasises the correlation of sleep with death or transformation.³¹ In the case of Ariadne (as with Psyche), this transformation leads to the joining of the human and the divine. A spectator familiar with the mythological narrative knew that Ariadne would awaken and be united with Dionysus.

A different depiction and specific use of the motif is on the Gallienic sarcophagus from Castel Giubileo (*Fidene*),³² which Valeria commissioned for her son Artemidorus. Among other scenes on the sarcophagus, Theseus as the son is shown on the already departing ship, his gaze turned away from the abandoned Ariadne as the mother, who still sleeps on the shore in a pose with one arm extended and the other bent above her head.

The rather rare use of the motif of Theseus abandoning Ariadne on either the Roman Metropolitan or Attic sarcophagi of the Hadrianic-Antonine period is in stark contrast with the large number of sarcophagi depicting the scene of Dionysus discovering the abandoned and sleeping Ariadne; the scene occurs on the Metropolitan sarcophagi,³³ mostly made in the final decades of the second century CE. Attic sarcophagi, on the other hand, rarely feature Ariadne in any of the scenes.³⁴ It is therefore quite surprising to find one depiction of Theseus abandoning Ariadne on Naxos, that at Kebeļj, in the sepulchral production of Norican workshops, which were heavily influenced by Attic models.³⁵ Also surprising is the iconographic composition used in this depiction,

³¹ McNally 1985, 192.

³² Cliveden House, Buckinghamshire, England; Bernhard, Daszewski 1986, 1060 No. 92 with bibliography; Ewald in Zanker, Ewald 2012, 405–408.

³³ Koch, Sichtermann 1982, 193; “unter den dionysischen Mythen ist am zahlreichsten die Auffindung der Ariadne durch Dionysos vertreten, etwa 23 mal ...”.

³⁴ The above-mentioned sarcophagus No. 125 kept in the Istanbul Archaeology Museum or another, Antonine sarcophagus from Thessalonike kept in the same museum, Inv. No. 366; Bernhard, Daszewski 1986, 1063 No. 131 with bibliography.

³⁵ Pochmarski 2010.



Fig. 7: The sleeping Ariadne and a satyr on an Attic sarcophagus held in the Istanbul Archaeology Museum (from Matz 1968)

which was previously unknown – showing Theseus moving in the same direction as the reclining Ariadne, rather than in the opposite direction, as consistently shown in all other known examples. It is not possible to ascertain whether this indicates another, as yet unidentified prototype, or a deliberate modification in a Norican workshop of the established composition. The damage to the Kebelj relief also prevents us from identifying the position of Ariadne's right arm. Considering the position of her left arm, we might reconstruct it in accordance with the depiction on sarcophagus No. 366 in the Istanbul Archaeology Museum (Fig. 7) or in the sarcophagus from Castel Giubileo (now in Cliveden). The Kebelj relief may additionally have depicted a

third figure, such as Athena or Hypnos above Ariadne, although this is not crucial for the composition that could also be complemented by a landscape feature.

The presence of the Theseus-Ariadne-Dionysus iconographic motif on the Metropolitan sarcophagi of the Antonine period suggests that the marble ash chest from Kebelj, with the relief of Theseus abandoning Ariadne on Naxos, can be dated to the Late Antonine or (Early) Severan period. This is the time when the early ash chests were created in Poetovio.

The missing Dionysus

Of interest regarding the ash chest fragment with Ariadne from Kebelj is the associated relief on the other, left side, which presumably complemented the motif on the right side. It is highly probable that the left relief is related to Dionysus, which, in an eschatological sense, would complement Ariadne's departure-death motif with an element that implicitly or explicitly promises new life after death. This could be either the epiphanic motif of Dionysus discovering the sleeping Ariadne (and everything that follows from it),³⁶ the motif of the Indian triumph of Dionysus, en route to which

³⁶ This epiphanic motif is quite common on the numerous wall paintings from Campania and on the Roman Dionysian sarcophagi; see e.g. the sarcophagus in Rome, Palazzo Borghese (ASR IV.3, No. 223), or the sarcophagus in Paris, Louvre, Inv. No. Ma 1346 (Baratte, Metzger 1985, No. 067).



Fig. 8: Fragment of the left and rear sides of a marble ash chest built into the northwest corner of the bell tower of St Margaret church in Kebelj (photo author)

he finds Ariadne on Naxos,³⁷ or the motif of the Dionysian *thiasos* that features Dionysus and Ariadne on a 'wedding' chariot. These are also generally among the most frequently depicted motifs on Roman Dionysian sarcophagi.³⁸

Built into the bell tower of the church in Kebelj is a heavily damaged fragment³⁹ of the left side of a marble ash chest (Fig. 8). It bears a relief depiction of a two-wheeled chariot drawn by at least one large cat, most likely a panther, facing right (Fig. 9). The figures on the chariot are missing, with the possible exception of the lower part of an unidentifiable figure. The poor condition notwithstanding, the surviving elements do allow us to identify the motif as the Triumph of Dionysus, such as is known from several sarcophagi of the Metropolitan production (Fig. 10).⁴⁰ This motif in-

³⁷ A rare example of Dionysus accompanied in triumph by Ariadne on a two-wheel chariot (closer to the wedding motif in this respect) survives on a sarcophagus from the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, Ann Arbor, Michigan, Inv. No. 1981.1.31 (de Grummond 2000) (<https://kornbluth-photo.com/KelseySarcophagus.html>). See Leveritt 2016, 265 and Note 117.

³⁸ Matz 1968a; Matz 1968b; Matz 1969; Matz 1975.

³⁹ Size 50 × 16 × 63 cm.

⁴⁰ In the catalogue in Leveritt 2016, part of his Group A (Strongly Triumphal Sarcophagi): ASR IV.2 95, IV.2 96, IV.2 97, IV.2 98, IV.2 99, IV.2 100, IV.2 101; the animals pulling the chariot in all these cases are large cats, but the chariot with Dionysus is largely hidden behind individual figures and its shape unidentifiable.



Fig. 9: Surviving part of the left side of an ash chest with the relief of the triumph of Dionysus (photo author)



Fig. 10: Triumph of Dionysus, sarcophagus in the Musée et Théâtres Romains, Lyon, Inv. No. 2001.0.305 (CC BY 4.0 Mark Landon)

volves the triumphal two-wheel chariot (*currus triumphalis*) drawn by panthers and driven by Dionysus,⁴¹ who is depicted standing either alone or in the company of Victoria, rarely some other figure. The chariot has the characteristic elongated shape

⁴¹ Dionysus can be depicted clothed (Cambridge type), e.g. on the reverse of a coin of Marcus Aurelius minted in 161–162 CE in Methymna on Lesbos (RPC IV.2, 9752), or nude (S. Agostino type), as seen on the reverse of a coin of Commodus minted around 192 CE in Cyzicus, Mysia (RPC IV.2, 741), while there are also the Lyon and Lateran types (Leveritt 2016, 91–97). The very poor condition of the Kebelj relief prevents us from identifying the exact type.

of a 'fast' chariot,⁴² such as can be seen on a Late Antique floor mosaic from the Roman villa in Santa Cruz (Baños de Valdearados, Burgos), in Spain.⁴³ On sarcophagi, this chariot form is distinctly represented primarily when drawn by centaurs, in some cases also by elephants.⁴⁴ Only in one instance is such a chariot pulled by a panther and elephant;⁴⁵ in principle, this could also be the case on the Kebej relief. According to Leveritt's analysis,⁴⁶ panther-drawn chariots on sarcophagi are limited to the Late Antonine and (Early) Severan periods, which would also be the most likely time frame for the ash chest to which this fragment belonged.

It seems fairly likely that the two fragments built into St Margaret's church formed parts of the same relief-decorated ash chest, more precisely its left and right short sides. In addition to the related motifs, this hypothesis is supported by three other observations. The first is the fact that they belong to opposing short sides. The second is the identical surface finish of the rear side in both fragments. The third observation concerns the chest length, as the joint length of the two fragments measures around 100 cm, which is the most common length of the marble ash chests of Poetovio.⁴⁷

The mythological motifs on both sides complement each other and correspond with the motifs recurrent on the Dionysian sarcophagi from the Antonine and Severan periods. Their complementary reading can be eschatological, symbolising death and a new life thereafter, with Dionysus understood "as the god who comes to wake human beings to real life..."⁴⁸ The motifs can also be interpreted as representations of the deceased wife and mourning husband, in which the husband, in the guise of Dionysus, reunites with his beloved wife – Ariadne.⁴⁹ The images depend on the wishes and interests of the spectators, and are as such open to different readings, as outlined by Zanker and Ewald:⁵⁰

as comfort for the members of the family, that the wife, like Ariadne, after much suffering has found peace in death; as a eulogy in praise of the love that bound her to her husband; as the expression of how much the bereaved husband misses her; as the hope that the dead enjoy a blissful existence, or to illustrate the hope that the lovers will again be reunited.

The viewer may perceive all these possibilities equally well and simultaneously, as a melange of different emphases and meanings. The reliefs of such a non-finite nature

⁴² For Roman chariots, see Sandor 2012.

⁴³ Blázquez Martínez 2001.

⁴⁴ E.g. sarcophagi with centaurs: ASR IV.2 108, ASR IV.2 115, ASR IV.2 118, ASR IV.2 120, ASR IV.2 153, ASR IV.2 154, ASR IV.2 155.

⁴⁵ Rome, Villa Medici, ASR IV.2 130, 269–271, Pl. 158.1.

⁴⁶ Leveritt 2016, 99–101, Fig. 3.3.

⁴⁷ See Djurić 2024, Fig. 17.

⁴⁸ "... an interpretation that was already present in ancient mysteries, but that was particularly underlined in his comparison with Christ"; Hernández de la Fuente 2020, 226.

⁴⁹ Cf. Zanker, Ewald 2012, 161.

⁵⁰ Zanker, Ewald 2012, 161.

leave room for the imagination and knowledge of the viewer to complete and conclude the story according to their own wishes and perceptions. Given the widespread popularity of the Dionysian cult in the Severan period, also in Poetovio,⁵¹ it seems that the eschatological reading of both reliefs may have been the most dominant interpretation among the various possibilities.

Translated by Andreja Maver

⁵¹ See Djurić 2020; Djurić 2023.

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Abbreviations

ASR = *Die antiken Sarkophag-Reliefs*, Berlin.

LIMC = *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, Zürich-München.

lupa = F. und O. Harl, Ubi Erat Lupa (Bilddatenbank zu antiken Steindenkmälern).
<https://www.lupa.at>

RPC = Roman Provincial Coinage Online (RPC online). – <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/>

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Bojan Djurić
Univerza v Ljubljani
Filozofska fakulteta
Aškerčeva 2
SI-1000 Ljubljana
bojan.djuric@ff.uni-lj.si
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0137-2327>

Roman Finds from the Slopes of Trnovski gozd East of Ajdovščina

Ana KRUH, Andrej ŠEMROV

Abstract

The article presents the results of a preliminary analysis of the Roman artefacts found on the slopes of the Trnovski gozd plateau, above the village of Budanje near Ajdovščina. It was a local from Ajdovščina who unearthed them between 2016 and 2020 with the help of a metal detector, and brought them to the Regional Museum Goriški muzej. The oldest are hobnails of military footwear, which indicate the presence of Roman soldiers during the second third of the 1st century BC. The bulk of the finds, however, points to lively activities in the Late Roman period. This is not surprising given the location along the strategically important road connecting *Aquileia* and *Emona* in the immediate hinterland of the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* barrier system, just under four kilometres from the *Castra* fortress (present-day Ajdovščina). The habitation remains located in the vicinity of the present-day regional road date to the 4th, possibly already the late 3rd century, and may have been connected to the Roman army. Evidence further suggests that a battle was fought in this area in the 380s, perhaps as part of the civil war between Theodosius and Magnus Maximus in 388.

Keywords: Vipava Valley; Budanje; *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*; Late Roman period; Late Roman weapons and military equipment; military conflict

Izvleček

Rimske najdbe s pobočja Trnovskega gozda vzhodno od Ajdovščine

V prispevku so preliminarно predstavljeni rimski predmeti iz zbirke Goriškega muzeja, ki jih je domačin iz Ajdovščine s pomočjo detektorja kovin našel in izkopal na pobočju Trnovskega gozda nad vasjo Budanje pri Ajdovščini med letoma 2016 in 2020. Najstarejši predmeti so okovni žebeljčki z obuval, ki kažejo na navzočnost rimskih vojakov na tem območju v drugi tretjini 1. stoletja pr. n. št. Najdbe pričajo o burnem dogajanju v poznorimskem obdobju, kar povezujemo z dejstvom, da je šlo za lokacijo ob strateško izjemno pomembni prometnici (cesti *Aquileia–Emona*) v neposrednem zaledju zapornega sistema *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*, oddaljeno le slabe štiri kilometre od trdnjave *Castra* (današnja Ajdovščina). Na območju ob današnji regionalni cesti so bile ugotovljene sledi poselitve iz 4. in morda že poznega 3. stoletja, ki bi lahko predstavljale ostaline vojaške postojanke. V 80. letih 4. stoletja je bilo to območje prizorišče spopada. Hipotetično bi lahko šlo za dogodek v času državljanske vojne med Teodozijem in Magmom Maksimom leta 388.

Ključne besede: Vipavska dolina; Budanje; *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*; poznorimsko obdobje; poznorimsko orožje in vojaška oprema; vojaški spopad



Fig. 1: Northward view of the slopes above the village of Budanje, with the clearing at Laz in the foreground.

The Regional Museum Goriški muzej Kromberk - Nova Gorica keeps a large assemblage of archaeological finds that Primož Fučka from Ajdovščina unearthed on the slopes of the Trnovski gozd plateau between 2016 and 2020. Using a metal detector, he explored different areas above Ajdovščina and between the villages of Dolga Poljana and Budanje. Since 2022, the National Museum of Slovenia has been carrying out archaeological investigations here.¹ This article brings the results of a preliminary analysis of the artefacts recovered near the village of Budanje, which indicate an important archaeological site.

Description of the area

The artefacts came to light north of the Brith hamlet in Budanje, between the foot of a rocky slope (Reber) and the regional road Ajdovščina–Col, partly also south of the road (Figs. 1, 2). This is a landslide area mostly overgrown with mixed forest. Just above the regional road is a clearing or meadow with the microtoponym Laz. The scarp of a large landslide is visible to the north.

¹ Cf. Tratnik, Istenič 2025 (in this volume).

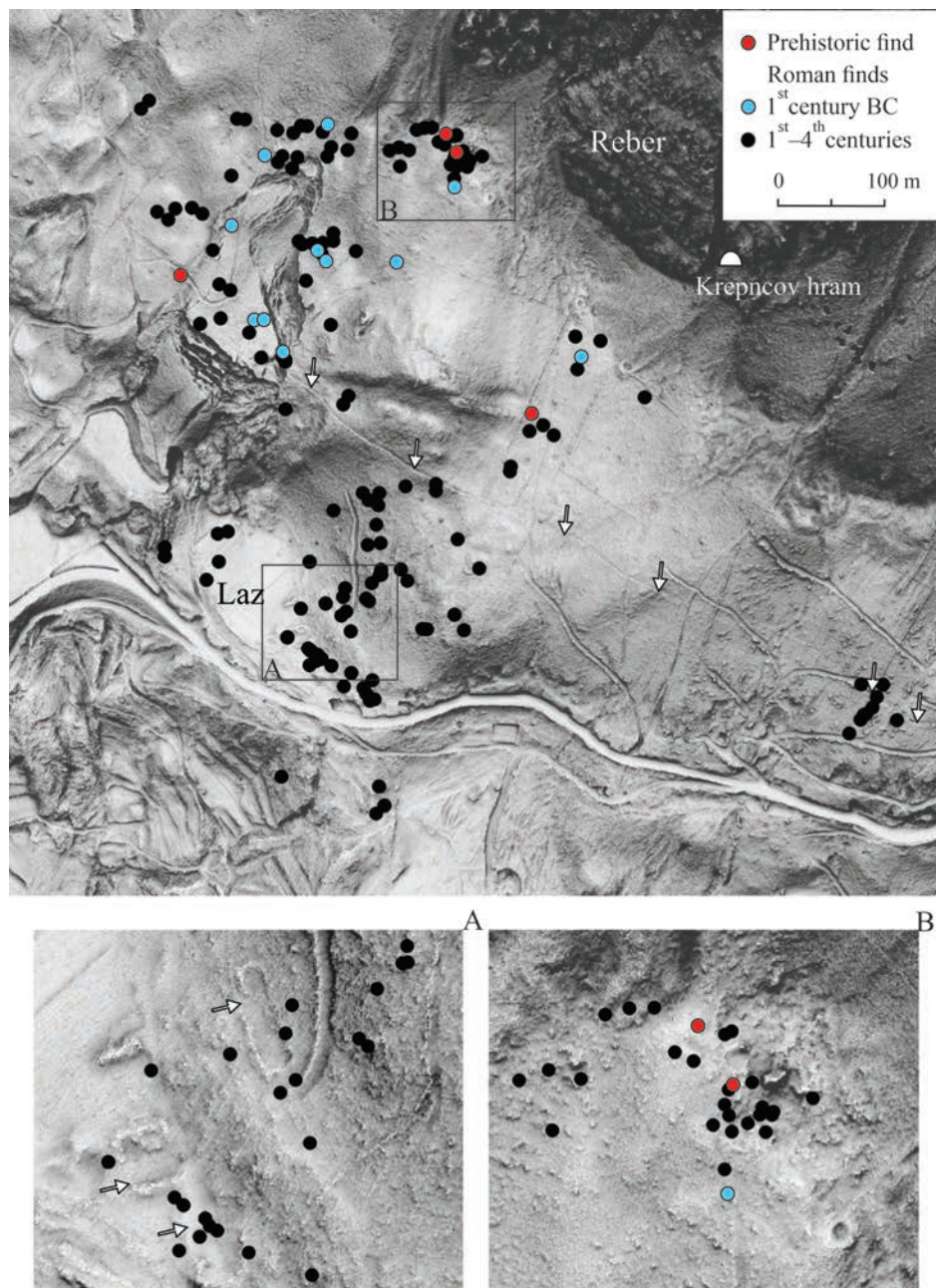


Fig. 2: Distribution of archaeological finds north of the Budanje village. White arrows mark the remains of buildings (A) and a path. Basemap: Lidar ©ARSO.

The analysis of the LiDAR data has shown possible traces of buildings at the eastern edge of the Laz meadow and on the slope further east (*Fig. 2: A*). Trial trenching has revealed the remains of a Late Roman or Late Antique masonry building (roughly dated between the 4th and the 6th centuries).² Higher up the slope, the LiDAR data show a linear feature indicating a path (*Fig. 2*); it is in part still possible to trace this path today. In 2022, a team from the National Museum of Slovenia excavated two trial trenches: the first in the area of the present-day path, next to the landslide, and the second on a levelled terrain approximately 0.5 km to the east. The findings suggest that the path was most probably created in the post-medieval period.³

The rocky slope named Reber holds the Krépnov hram cave (cf. *Fig. 2*) that revealed remains from prehistory⁴ (see Discussion).

Typo-chronological attribution of finds

The finds that Primož Fučka handed over to the Regional Museum Goriški muzej in 2020⁵ comprise four prehistoric, about 460 Roman and many post-medieval or recent finds; a few are also undiagnostic. Most finds come with precise findspot data, though it should be noted that Fučka mostly located the finds (with GPS coordinates) subsequently, by memory, and not in the field. While excavating, he also paid attention to the characteristics of the deposit and the position of the find, which in some cases enabled us to reconstruct the context.

The text below presents the results of a typo-chronological analysis of the Roman finds and also the most diagnostic artefacts. The finds are discussed according to types and chronological order, from the earliest to the latest.⁶

Coins

The assemblage includes 57 Roman coins spanning from the rule of Claudius I (41–54) to Theodosius (379–395), as well as five scatters of bronze coins (group finds) that the finder's data allow to be identified as purse contents (cf. *Fig. 9*).

Two of the scatters were found approximately 17 m apart on the slope east of Laz. The first consists of 44 coins scattered over approx. 1.5 m², at a depth of 0.1 to 0.2 m.

² Tratnik et al. 2023, 47–49, 55–59, Pl. 1; Tratnik, Istenič 2025, 229–231, Figs. 7: A; 8 (in this volume).

³ Tratnik et al. 2023, 47–54, 60; Tratnik, Istenič 2025, 229, Fig. 6 (in this volume).

⁴ Cf. Gerbec, Fabec 2024.

⁵ Fučka also excavated in this area later. With the exception of the finds from Krépnov hram (cf. Gerbec, Fabec 2024), these later artefacts have not yet been handed over to the Regional Museum Goriški muzej.

⁶ All artefacts were drawn by Nataša Grum.

The second one comprises 61 coins, most of which were scattered over an area measuring about 25 cm across, at a depth of 0.1 to 0.2 m, while two coins lay roughly a metre lower down the slope. The third scatter came to light above the landslide and contains six coins, which were scattered over roughly 1 m², at a depth of 0.1 to 0.15 m. The fourth scatter consist of four coins, if we also include a coin found during the 2022 investigations of the National Museum of Slovenia;⁷ the coins were unearthed roughly 0.1 m under the surface on a slope below the levelling (presumed path) 0.5 km east of Laz. The fifth scatter comprises seven coins, but their context is highly questionable as they were found on the landslide; the finder identified six coins unearthed at a shallow depth in two clusters, as well as one coin discovered at a distance of 2 m from the second cluster.

The results of the numismatic analysis of the coin scatters are presented below (see Discussion).

Brooches

One fragment belongs to a hinged Aucissa brooch (Fig. 3: 1). Such brooches are dated from the beginning of the Augustan period to the mid-1st century AD, with individual examples recorded up to the Flavian period.⁸ Aucissa brooches are common finds at Roman military sites and hence associated with Roman soldiers. However, they were also worn by civilians, both men and women.⁹

The finds include four *kräftig profilierte* brooches. Two identical and complete examples that came to light about 15 metres apart below Reber belong to the Almgren 68 type (Fig. 3: 2). The third example, excavated on the slope east of Laz, is different and has a less curved bow and an unperforated foot; it belongs to the Almgren 69 type (Fig. 3: 3). The Almgren 68 brooches were widely used from the Tiberian/Claudian period to the late 1st century,¹⁰ while those of the Almgren 69 type are believed to have been worn in the second half of the 1st and possibly the early 2nd century.¹¹

The brooch found next to the current path crossing the landslide is of the Almgren 84 type (Fig. 3: 4). The main characteristic of this type of *kräftig profilierte* brooches is the absence of the protective plate above the spring, which is substituted by an expanded head. Such brooches were very common in the Danubian provinces and in Barbaricum (present-day Slovakia, Moravia, Czechia, Poland), and are dated from the early 2nd century to the first half of the 3rd century.¹²

Found several tens of metres northwest was an annular brooch with a simple rect-

⁷ Cf. Tratnik et al. 2023, Cat. No. PN 1390.

⁸ Riha 1979, 114–115; Feugère 1985, 323–324; Laharnar 2022, 304.

⁹ Schmid 2010, 17.

¹⁰ Gugl 2008, 34; Sedlmayer 2009, 32–34.

¹¹ Gugl 2008, 35; Laharnar 2022, 308.

¹² Gugl 2008, 38; Petković 2010, 85.

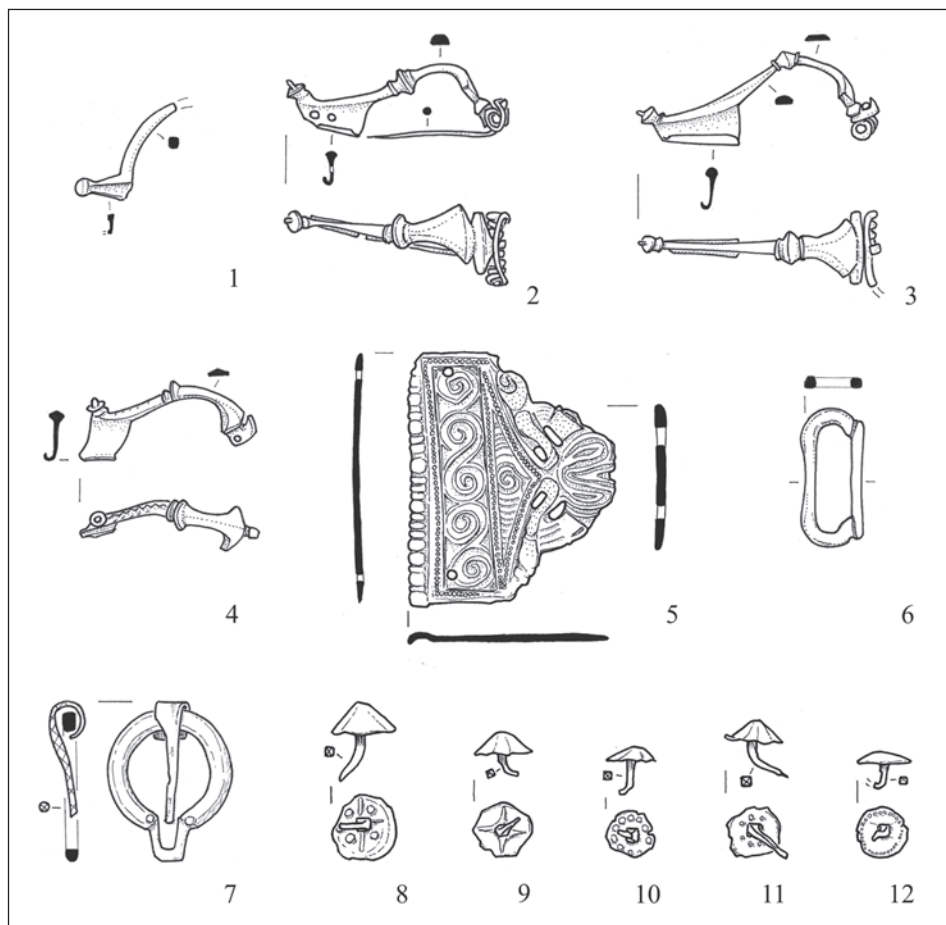


Fig. 3: Brooches, belt fittings, and hobnails. 1–6 copper alloy, 7 copper alloy and iron, 8–12 iron. Scale 1:2.

angular extension, ascribed to the Sellye 1 type (Fig. 3: 7).¹³ Parallels from northern Italy, western Slovenia and Hungary suggest that such brooches date from the late 3rd century to the end of the 4th century.¹⁴ They are associated with soldiers.¹⁵

¹³ Sellye 1990, 25, 29, 53–58, Cat. Nos. 1.2–1.12. For an updated typology, cf. Teegen 2013.

¹⁴ Sellye 1990, 53, 54, Cat. Nos. 1.3, 1.4; Buora 1996, 70–73, Cat. No. 47; Airoldi, Palumbo 2002, 84, Pl. 2: 6; Istenič 2015, 369, Pl. 1: 5–6; Tratnik, Žerjal 2017, 253, 262, Pl. 7: 92.

¹⁵ Teegen 2013, 323–324; Milavec 2020, 71–72.

Belt fittings

Two pieces of military belts were found at the eastern edge of Laz, where the remains of a Late Antique building were excavated in 2022. The first piece is a sub-oval buckle loop that is bent slightly inward on the outer side (*Fig. 3: 6*). Parallels from numerous sites reveal they were usually part of buckles with a rectangular or, more rarely, an oval plate. Both types are dated from the 4th to the first half of the 5th century, with the former supposedly very common in the second half of the 4th century.¹⁶ They are believed to have mainly been worn by ordinary soldiers or soldiers of lower ranks.¹⁷

An outstanding find is a pentagonal belt fitting made of copper alloy and bearing chip carved decoration (*Fig. 3: 5*). The design consists of a rectangular and a triangular field, both filled with a spiral pattern. The triangular field is flanked by a pair of heraldic reclining lions, facing each other and holding a palmette in their muzzle. The fitting was part of a three-piece belt set of Form B according to Horst Wolfgang Böhme. Such belt sets were produced in the last quarter of the 4th century, and were part of officers' outfits.¹⁸ Böhme identified the pentagonal fittings with two decorative fields and heraldic animals as the *Aquileia* form.¹⁹ He presumed them to be the products of as yet unknown workshops in the Danubian provinces.

Hobnails

The assemblage includes 150 iron hobnails, most with a raised pattern on the underside of the head: 19 examples have a cross and large dots (*Fig. 3: 8*), one only has a raised cross (*Fig. 3: 9*), five have a ring of large dots (*Fig. 3: 10*), 63 have a ring of small dots and 42 of these bear a densely spaced ring of very small dots (*Fig. 3: 12*). There are also 62 hobnails on which no pattern could be established, though the poor state of preservation allows for some of them to have originally had a ring of dots. The head diameter of the first two types is between 1.3 and 1.9 cm (most frequently between 1.5 and 1.7 cm), of the type with a ring of large dots it is between 1.3 and 1.5 cm, while of the type with a ring of very small dots it measures 1.2–1.4 cm. Standing out among the hobnails without a pattern are those with a roughly 0.8 cm wide head.

The first three forms could be identified as Alesia D, B, and C types according to the typology of the hobnails from Alesia,²⁰ while Federico Bernardini identified the examples with very small dots (unknown at Alesia) as Type E on the basis of the finds

¹⁶ Böhme 2020, 6, Fig. 1: 2–3.

¹⁷ Böhme 2020, 33.

¹⁸ Cf. Böhme 2020, 40–46, 57–64, 175–177, Figs. 20–21.

¹⁹ Böhme 2020, 58–59, Fig. 32: 1.

²⁰ Cf. Brouquier-Reddé, Deyber 2001, 303–304, Pl. 93.

from the Trieste Karst.²¹ The Alesia B, C, and D types are attested at Late Republican military sites from the time of Caesar's Gallic Wars to the Early Augustan period (20–15 BC), though Alesia D hobnails already began to be used in the late 2nd century BC.²² As for the Alesia C hobnails, they continued into later periods and have been found in the military fortresses from the Mid- and Late Augustan periods,²³ while their upper time limit is not clear. The hobnails of Type E began in the late 1st century BC and were used throughout the 1st and 2nd centuries AD; they are not associated exclusively with soldiers.²⁴ Hobnails without a pattern were used for a long time in the Roman period.²⁵

Precise findspot data exist for only a small number of hobnails, mostly those of the Alesia B and D types (Fig. 2: blue dots), while others only come with an approximate location. The hobnails with small dots on the underside and those without a pattern are represented throughout the area under discussion, i.e. everywhere that other Roman objects were also found.

Weapons and military equipment

The slope east of Laz revealed a combat knife with a 18.6 cm long blade, a long tang terminating in a separately made pommel (Fig. 5: 1), a curved back that is highest at mid-section, and an elaborate guard. The same type of knife was found about 15 km away, at Malovše near Gojače, together with metal objects interpreted as fittings of horse gear and a military belt, dating to the second half of the 3rd century.²⁶ Geographically close is also an almost identical knife from a grave at Unec, as well as two similar knives, one found at the hilltop settlement at Ajdovščina above Rodik and the other in a grave from the second half of the 3rd or early 4th century unearthed at Javor near Dolnji Zemon.²⁷ Both the grave from Javor (which included a crossbow brooch) and the assemblage of finds from Malovše indicate that such knives were part of soldiers' equipment.²⁸

The assemblage further includes 54 pieces of throwing weapons (primarily *plumbatae*) and different projectiles. Several *plumbatae* and projectile heads are bent or have damaged tips, which are clear signs of use.

Plumbatae are a type of Late Roman throwing weapon characterised by a lead weight attached to the shank/socket. They were in use from the late 3rd to the 5th cen-

²¹ Bernardini et al. 2023, 23–24, Fig. 4: E.

²² Istenič 2019a, 274–277; Bernardini et al. 2023, 24, 44; Laharnar, Istenič 2024, 180.

²³ Istenič 2019a, 276 with references.

²⁴ Bernardini et al. 2020, 7; Bernardini et al. 2023, 24, Fig. 4: E; Laharnar, Istenič 2024, 180, Fig. 4: 1, 9.

²⁵ Bernardini et al. 2020, 7.

²⁶ Horvat, Žbona Trkman 2016, 100–104, Fig. 3: 15.

²⁷ Slapšak 1999, 162, bottom left figure; Horvat, Žbona Trkman 2016, 113, 115, Figs. 9: 8; 13.

²⁸ Cf. Horvat, Žbona Trkman 2016, 104, 114–116.

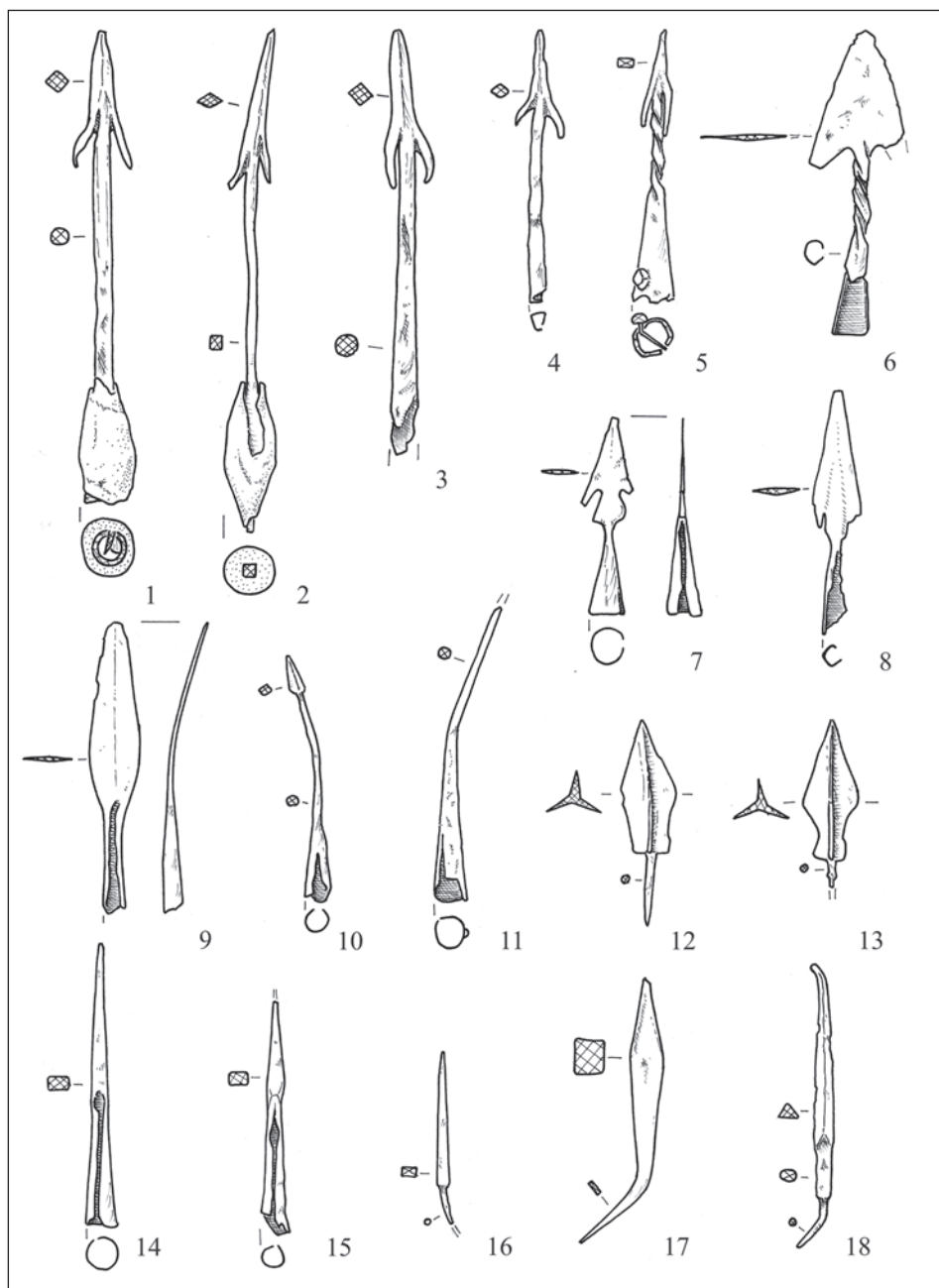


Fig. 4: Plumbatae and projectiles. 1–2 iron and lead, 3–18 iron. Scale 1:2.

ture.²⁹ The assemblage includes 16 examples, of which only a part of the lead weight has been preserved in four examples, while ten survive with a socket at the end of the shank. Their length varies between 9.7 and 16.7 cm. Most have a lozenge-sectioned barbed point and a round-sectioned shank (Fig. 4: 1). The lead weights are biconical. As a rule, they were fitted so as to cover the socket and part of the wooden shaft.

Three of the *plumbatae* differ slightly in that a spindle-shaped lead weight was mounted on a thin rectangular-sectioned shank (Fig. 4: 2). Their poor preservation does not allow us to ascertain the method of hafting. They could be similar to the 27 cm-long *plumbata* found in Sisak, which has a very long socketed shank.³⁰

Three socketed iron heads have the same barbed points as the *plumbatae*. One of these, surviving 11.3 cm in length (Fig. 4: 3), may actually be a damaged *plumbata*. The other two are smaller; one has a flat point, a short, twisted shank, and a socket measuring around 1 cm across (Fig. 4: 5), while the other has a lozenge-sectioned point, a longer rectangular-sectioned shank and a slender, 0.6 cm wide socket (Fig. 4: 4).

Other projectiles include two socketed arrowheads with prominent barbs and a twisted neck (Fig. 4: 6). Such arrowheads with or without a twisted neck are generally dated from the second half of the 5th century until the Middle Ages,³¹ although examples with shorter barbs were already in use in the Late Roman period (late 4th century).³²

Four arrowheads show a stepped transition from a flat barbed point to the socket. With one exception, the barbs are small (Fig. 4: 7, 8). Similar arrowheads are known from nearby sites (Hrušica area, Vodice near Kalce, Žlovberski vrh near Šmihel pod Nanosom), but also from Sermin in Slovenian Istria and Otok near Dobrava in the Dolenjska region.³³ The arrowhead from Sermin is broadly dated to the Roman period,³⁴ while others come from unknown contexts and are hence undatable.

There are three socketed arrowheads with a flat oval or deltoid point (Fig. 4: 9). This type of arrowheads was used for a long time, from Antiquity to the Middle Ages.³⁵

No close parallels could be found for the socketed head with a pyramidal point on a round-sectioned shank (Fig. 4: 10).

The socketed iron head with a round-sectioned point (Fig. 4: 11) is similar in the shape of the point to two javelins from the nearby sites of Ajdovščina and Hrušica.³⁶

There are also three socketed heads with a rectangular-sectioned point (Fig. 4: 14).

²⁹ Pflaum 2007, 296–297; Keszi 2018, 23.

³⁰ Radman-Livaja 2004, 32, 127, Pl. 9: 35.

³¹ Cf. Böhme 1974, 110, 157, Pls. 77: 15, 91: 5, 132: 5; Horvat 2002, 146–147, Fig. 6: 18–19, Pl. 21: 4; Bitenc, Knific 2021, 223, Pl. 2: 18–26.

³² Bierbrauer 1987, 170, Pl. 60: 6; Gschwind 2004, 189, Pl. 94: D481; Istenič 2015, 371, 373, Pl. 1: 16.

³³ Horvat 2002, 147, Pl. 21: 3; Stare 2004, 51, 57, Pl. 2: 11; Žerjal et al. 2012, 76, Pl. 7: 843; Švajncer, Švajncer 2024, 150, 151, 299.

³⁴ The arrowhead was found in the layer SE 3014, which contained several finds from the Roman period (Plestenjak 2012b, 37, 39; Žerjal et al. 2012, 76–77).

³⁵ Radman-Livaja 2004, 58, Pl. 20: 88–89; Milavec 2011, 49, Pl. 10: 10, 13–15.

³⁶ Giesler 1981, 172, Pl. 22: 178; the unpublished example from Ajdovščina is kept in the Regional Museum Goriški muzej.

Such heads had a long tradition in Roman weaponry, used from the Republican to the Late Roman period, but also in Late Antiquity (late 5th–early 7th century), as shown for instance by the finds from Tonovcov grad and Invillino.³⁷

The socketed head with a short rectangular-sectioned point (*Fig. 4: 15*) is similar to the projectiles found at Mali Njivč above Novaki and Gradišče above Trebenče near Cerčno.³⁸ The chance finds from Mali Njivč indicate habitation in the last third of the 3rd century and the last third of the 4th century.³⁹ The adjacent site at Gradišče mainly revealed early medieval (9th–11th centuries) finds.⁴⁰

Two heads have a rectangular-sectioned point and a tang (*Fig. 4: 16*). Similar heads, only with a larger point, were found at Castellazzo di Doberdò/Gradina pri Doberdobu, Concordia Sagittaria (*Iulia Concordia*) and Sisak (*Siscia*).⁴¹ The finds, primarily coins, suggest an outpost at Castellazzo that existed in the late 4th and the first half of the 5th century,⁴² while stratigraphic data from Concordia Sagittaria date the heads from the 4th to the 7th century.⁴³

There is also one tanged head with a pyramidal tip (*Fig. 4: 17*). Such heads, which are frequently defined as arrowheads but are probably mostly crossbow bolts or projectiles of some other artillery, are known from several hilltop settlements or outposts in the south-eastern Alps and generally date to the late 4th and the first half of the 5th century.⁴⁴ With the exception of Ajdovščina,⁴⁵ they are unknown at nearby sites from the Late Roman times (e.g. Hrušica, Vodice near Kalce, Brst near Martinj Hrib).

One tanged head has a long triangular-sectioned point with a rounded base (*Fig. 4: 18*). Similar, though somewhat smaller, projectiles are known from Mali Njivč and Castellazzo di Doberdò.⁴⁶

The finds include 15 three-bladed tanged arrowheads, of which 13 are considered a group find because they were found close together (in a 5 m-large area) on the slope below the levelling (presumed path), approximately 0.5 km east of Laz. Their position suggests the arrowheads were not fired, but rather deposited under different circumstances. They share the same shape, with blades that are widest in the mid-section, slightly concave near the base and clearly separated from the tang (*Fig. 4: 12–13*). Such heads, which include examples with a slightly longer and narrower points with blades that are mostly concave in the bottom third, are known from several Late Antique

³⁷ Cf. Bierbrauer 1987, 171, Pl. 58: 1–7, 9–10; Gschwind 2004, 187, Pls. 85–89: D216–D384; Milavec 2011, 50, Pl. 10: 1–2; Istenič 2015, 371, Pl. 1: 14.

³⁸ Istenič 2015, 376, Pl. 1: 13; Bitenc, Knific 2021, 233, Pl. 2: 14.

³⁹ Istenič 2015, 372–375.

⁴⁰ Bitenc, Knific 2021, 230.

⁴¹ Montagnari Kokelj 1989, Pl. 20: 6; Radman-Livaja 2004, 56, 128, Pl. 17: 64–68; Di Filippo Balestrazzi, Vigoni 2016, 72, Fig. 10: 1–3.

⁴² Maselli Scotti 1989; Buora 1991, 67–68.

⁴³ Di Filippo Balestrazzi, Vigoni 2016, 72, Fig. 10.

⁴⁴ Cf. Milavec 2020, 80, Pls. 13: 15, 27: 1–4, 33: 22.

⁴⁵ Unpublished finds, kept in the Regional Museum Goriški muzej.

⁴⁶ Buora 1991, 67, Pl. 3: 31; Istenič 2015, 371, Pl. 1: 12.

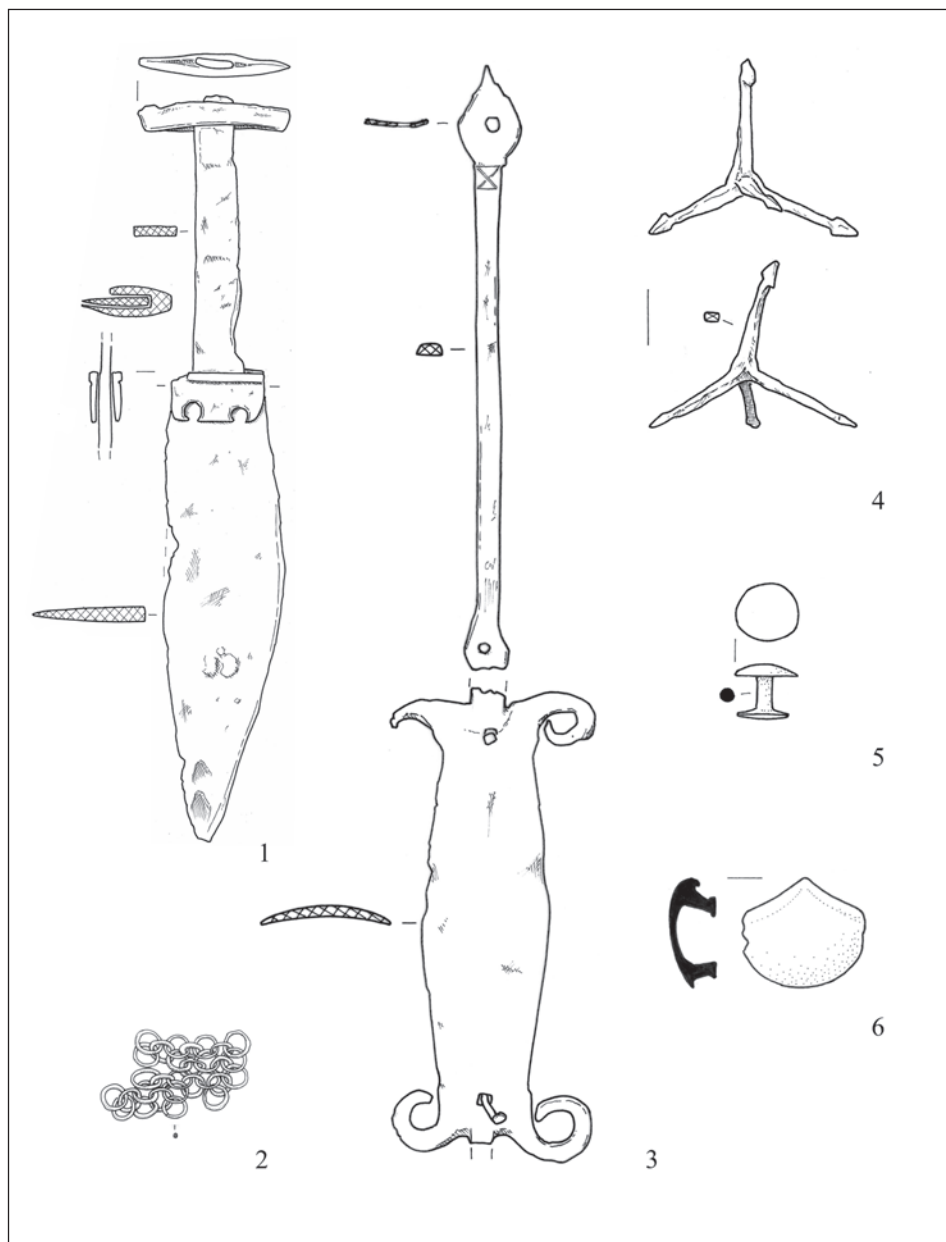


Fig. 5: Combat knife, parts of a shield grip, fragment of a chain mail, caltrop, as well as stud and fitting presumably belonging to horse gear. 1–4 iron, 5–6 copper alloy. Scale: 1= 1:3, rest 1:2.

sites in the area of the eastern Alps, but only rarely in contexts which would allow for narrower dating.⁴⁷ Parallels for the 13 arrowheads also come from Mali Njivč and Castellazzo di Doberdò,⁴⁸ two Late Roman sites that also yielded parallels for other types of projectiles (see above).

The remaining two examples of three-bladed arrowheads, one found on the slope east of Laz and the other higher up the slope above the path, are too damaged for a more precise typological identification, but certainly belong to a different type.

Two pieces of an iron grip of a shield (*Fig. 5: 3*) came to light below Reber. A shield grip of the same shape, but more valuable (the iron base is covered with a thin silver sheet), was discovered in a rich grave from the late 4th century in Vermand (France), the grave goods indicate the burial of an officer of the Roman army, who was most probably of Germanic origin.⁴⁹

A fragment of chain mail, made by interlocking five iron rings (*Fig. 5: 2*), was found east of the landslide. It is most probably the remains of a *lorica hamata*. Such protective equipment is attested in Roman armament from the Republican to the Late Roman period, and continued to be used into the Middle Ages.⁵⁰

The finds further include 14 caltrops (*tribuli*). With the exception of one piece found near Laz, all were recovered in the area of the eastern levelling (presumed path) and on the slope below it (see the description in the Discussion). Several caltrops have triangular spike ends (a single caltrop survives with all four spikes; *Fig. 5: 4*). The largest example has 3.1 cm long spikes, those on the smallest measure 2.2 cm. Some of the spikes are bent. Caltrops were used as effective obstacles against infantry and cavalry from the Republican to the Late Roman period, but also in the Middle Ages and the Modern Era.⁵¹

Horse equipment

Two copper-alloy studs (*Fig. 5: 5*), found in different spots on the slope above the regional road Ajdovščina–Col east of Laz, could have been parts of horse equipment or military belts. Such studs are a frequent find at sites dating between the second half of the 2nd and the mid-3rd century.⁵²

A copper-alloy fitting in the shape of a shell with two studs on the underside (*Fig. 5:*

⁴⁷ Cf. Buora 1991, 64, 67, Pl. 2: 14–15, 18–20, 26–27; Horvat 2002, 146, Fig. 6: 22; Milavec 2011, 49, Pl. 9: 16–17, 19; Istenič 2015, 370, Pl. 1: 11; Milavec 2020, 79, Pls. 3: 7, 19: 4, 33: 24.

⁴⁸ Buora 1991, Pl. 2: 14–15; Istenič 2015, Pl. 1: 11.

⁴⁹ Böhme 1974, 330–332, Pl. 137; Schorsch 1986, 18, Figs. 4–5.

⁵⁰ James 2004, 110–111; Radman-Livaja 2004, 76–77, Figs. 18–19.

⁵¹ James 2004, 70, 100, Cat. No. 370; Radman-Livaja 2004, 85, 131, Pls. 34: 191–199, 35: 200–201; Flügel 2010.

⁵² Oldenstein 1976, 170, Pl. 47: 494–503; James 2004, 54, 91–93, Fig. 42: 239–246, 254; Radman-Livaja 2004, 95, 134, Pl. 45: 299.

6) probably decorated a horse strap. Such fittings were widely used during the second half of the 3rd and the first half of the 4th century.⁵³

Equipment related to animals and vehicles

The two copper-alloy objects found below Reber were fittings of a (possibly the same) harness.⁵⁴ The first is a simple terret ring with a loop fitted into the wooden yoke (the loop is set perpendicularly to the ring) (*Fig. 6: 4*). The second terret ring was attached via a tang (*Fig. 6: 5*). Such fittings were used over a long period and can only be broadly dated to the Roman period.

Two pyramidal spikes of hipposandals (*Fig. 6: 3*) were found on the slope east of Laz and below the eastern levelling (presumed path), respectively. Hipposandals were primarily used on drought and pack animals. They appeared in the mid-1st century BC and were used in various forms until the end of the 4th century.⁵⁵

A cast copper-alloy bell with a circular base (*Fig. 6: 1*) was found in the vicinity of the path that today leads across the landslide. The exterior shows two bands comprising a pair of horizontal parallel incisions. The clapper and loop are missing. An identical bell, though tinned, was found during excavations in Ajdovščina, in a deposit containing coins from the late 3rd to the beginning of the 5th century.⁵⁶ Fragments of a slightly larger bell of the same shape were found above the regional road Ajdovščina–Col, just under 1 km west of our site.⁵⁷ More distant parallels come from *Vindobona* (Vienna) and a site in Lower Austria, dated broadly to the Roman period.⁵⁸ The size of the bell from Budanje suggests it was attached to a draught or pack, possibly even a riding animal.

The assemblage also comprises three almost complete bells of sheet iron (*Fig. 6: 2*), one found above the regional road east of Laz and the other two higher up the slope, near the path. The four iron clappers found in different spots below Reber and above or in the upper part of the landslide could also be parts of the same type of bells. The three bells mentioned reveal a typical manner of manufacture:⁵⁹ a single sheet of iron with symmetrical halves was folded and fastened together on both sides with a rivet at the bottom and folded over at the top. An iron loop was inserted through the top so that its upper part served for suspension and the lower, interior part served to hold the iron clapper. All the bells show the remains of copper-alloy plating. In the south-eastern

⁵³ Gschwind 1998, 116–120, 130–132; Vanhoutte 2023, 251, 282–283, Cat. Nos. CA.A/H52–CA.A/H57.

⁵⁴ According to the data of the finder, the objects were found a few metres apart.

⁵⁵ Pflaum 2007, 305–308; Horvat 2015, 182, Pl. 2: 4.

⁵⁶ Osmuk 1988, 234; unpublished, kept in the Regional Museum Goriški muzej.

⁵⁷ Unpublished, kept in the Regional Museum Goriški muzej.

⁵⁸ Pomberger 2016, 272, 273, 275, Pls. 37: 1, 11, 38: 8; Pomberger, Mühlhans, Mehofer 2022, 359, 368, 384, 387, Cat. Nos. 10, 22, Figs. 4b: 1, 8: 4.

⁵⁹ Cf. Knific, Murgelj 1996, 45; Hanemann 2014, 224, Fig. 191.

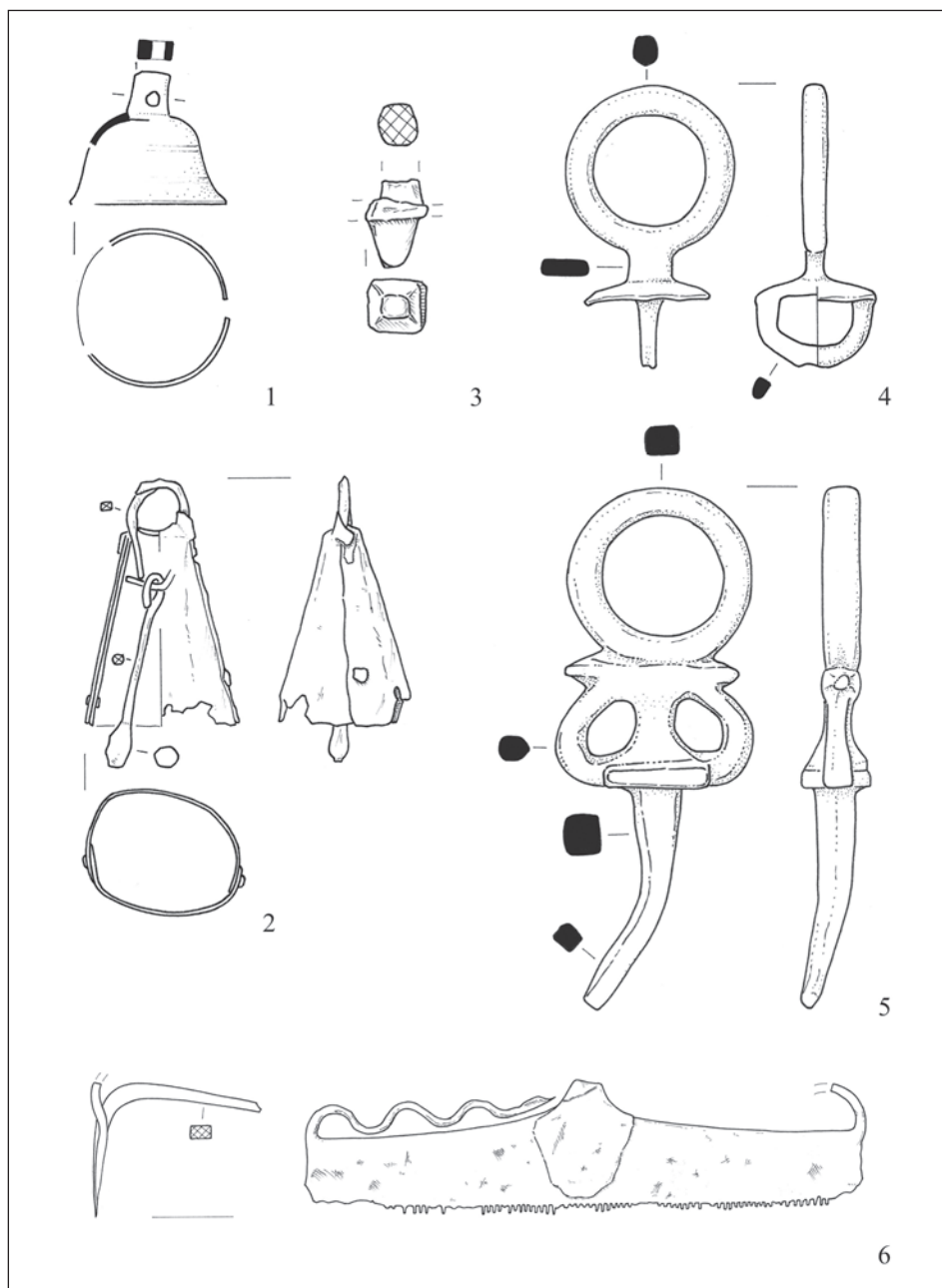


Fig. 6: Bells, fragment of a hipposandal, terret rings, serrated implement (presumed weaving tool). 1, 4-5 copper alloy, 2 iron and copper alloy, 3, 6 iron. Scale: 6= 1:3, rest 1:2.

Alpine area, such bells are known from numerous sites from the Late Roman or Late Antique periods.⁶⁰ It is assumed that most were used for livestock or draught animals.⁶¹

Tools and implements

The assemblage includes more than 20 examples of tools and implements used for everyday chores, with only a few of the diagnostic pieces presented below.

Several woodworking tools were recovered on the slope east of Laz, such as a fragment of an iron saw blade, a fragment of an axe blade, an auger, and a tool with a solid handle possibly used as a bradawl⁶² (Fig. 7: 1,2,4). There was also a group find comprising an iron adze and a peening hammer recovered southeast of Laz, a few dozen metres south of the regional road.

A 30 cm long double-sided tool (*dolabra*) (Fig. 7: 5) was discovered at the eastern edge of Laz, in the area where the 2022 trial trenching revealed the remains of a Late Antique building. It is a combination of axe and adze blades. The mid-section with an oval-shaped shaft hole is reinforced on both sides with lugs. Such double-sided tools (axe-pick, axe-adze, double axe) were used by soldiers, as well as civilians.⁶³ Parallels suggest that our *dolabra* was used for tillage. Similar tools are known primarily from civilian contexts, already appearing in the Early Imperial period, though most examples date to the 3rd and 4th centuries.⁶⁴

An implement with an elongated rectangular iron blade, finely serrated along one of its longer edges, with an iron tang for the handle and a prong in both upper corners that runs in a wavy line toward the handle (Fig. 6: 6), was found in the same spot as the *dolabra*. Similar objects are known from the south-eastern Alps to the Balkans and the Pannonian Plain, individual examples also from Italy, France, and Asia Minor.⁶⁵ They appeared in the second century and were most common between the 3rd and the 7th century.⁶⁶ Their purpose has not yet been clarified; they are most frequently identified as curry combs for horse grooming, or as wool combs.⁶⁷ However, Judit Pásztoókai-Szeőke analysed the archaeological contexts from Hungary and modern ethnographical parallels, and convincingly argued they were most probably implements used for beating the weft while weaving textiles on a vertical two-beam loom.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ Knific, Murgelj 1996, 46, Fig. 1.

⁶¹ Cf. Vanhoutte 2023, 274, 348, Cat. Nos. IR.H16–IR.H19.

⁶² Cf. Humphreys 2021, 185–187, Fig. 14.6: Types 2.1 and 3.

⁶³ Istenič 2019b, 102; Hanemann 2014, 419–424.

⁶⁴ Pietsch 1983, 17, Pl. 3: 46, 47; Hanemann 2014, 422–423, Fig. 357: 5.

⁶⁵ Bitenc, Knific 2001, 40–41, 55, Cat. Nos. 109–111, 153; Pásztoókai-Szeőke 2010, 3–4; Busuladžić 2015, 87–88, 181–182, Pls. 78–79.

⁶⁶ Pásztoókai-Szeőke 2010, 4.

⁶⁷ Cf. Harej 1989, 10, Pl. 1: 2; Pásztoókai-Szeőke 2010, 4–5; Busuladžić 2015, 86–87.

⁶⁸ Pásztoókai-Szeőke 2010, 5–10.

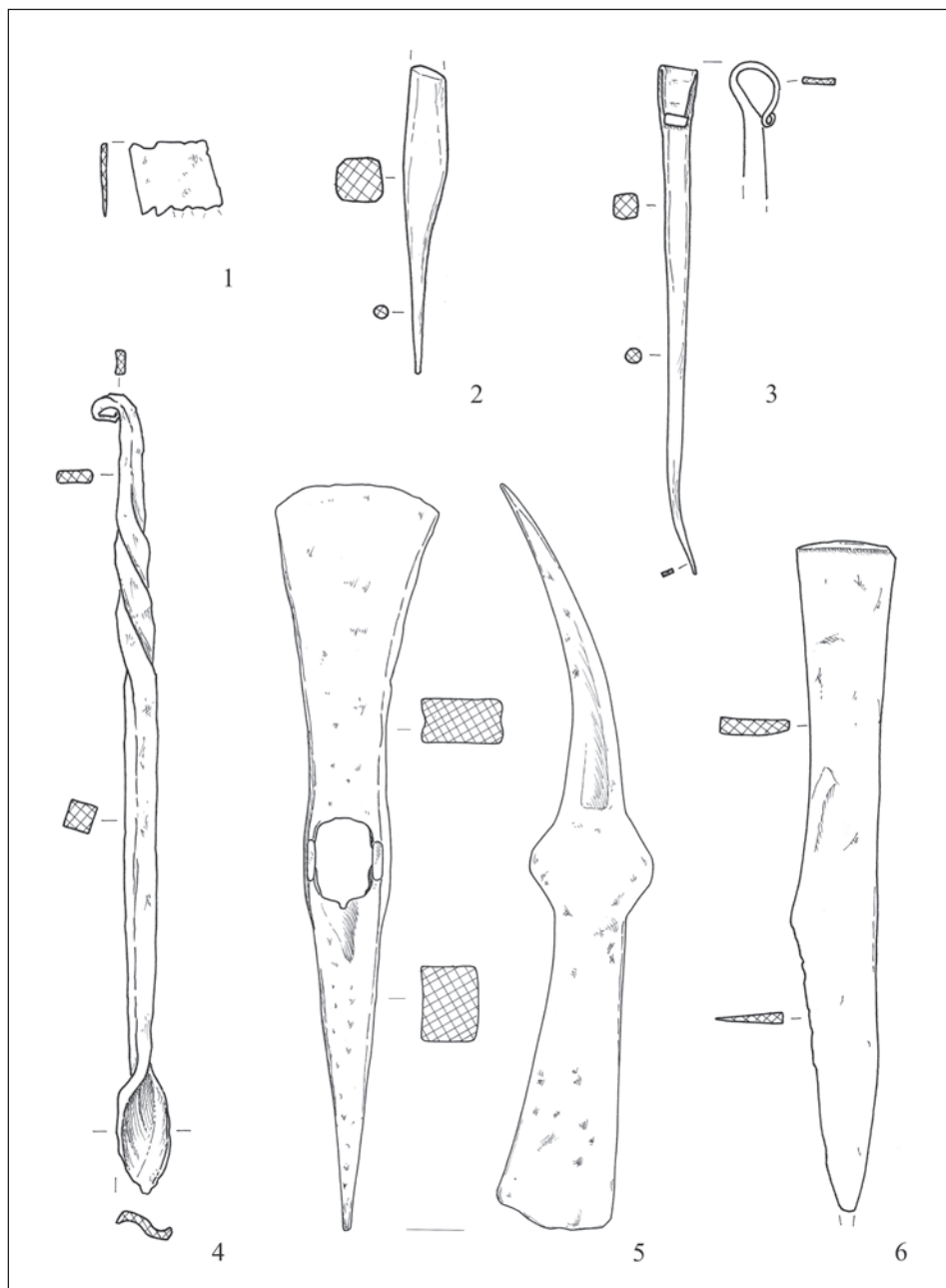


Fig. 7: A selection of tools comprising a fragment of a saw blade, bradawl, pointed object with a loop, auger, *dolabra*, and knife. All iron. Scale: 5= 1:3, rest 1:2.

A knife with a flat handle (Fig. 7: 6) was unearthed a few dozen metres southeast of the Late Antique building and near the regional road. It has close parallels from nearby sites in the Vipava Valley, Notranjska, and Cerkljansko, which are mostly dated to the Late Roman period.⁶⁹

There are also three pointed objects with a loop (Fig. 7: 3), two of which were excavated at different locations below Reber and one was found near the path above the regional road. Such objects are known from numerous sites, both graves and settlements, from the Late Roman period to the Middle Ages. Their identifications differ, from an awl to a fire striker, an object for sharpening blades or a peg.⁷⁰

Keys

The assemblage includes four iron keys with a flat loop handle that were used for pin tumbler locks (Fig. 8: 1).⁷¹ Two were excavated on the slope near Laz and the other two at different spots below Reber; their size suggest they were used to fasten doors or furniture. Tumbler slide keys were used throughout the Roman period.

Metal vessels

Especially interesting are two solid handles of *Blechkannen*, i.e. forged-sheet copper-alloy jugs (Fig. 8: 2).⁷² One handle was found at Laz and the other, only partially preserved, more than 450 metres further north below Reber. Margeritha Bolla classified jugs with such handles as Type IIc,⁷³ which have a biconical body and a conical neck terminating in a funnel-shaped rim, and were made from pieces of sheet metal fastened together with rivets. The solid cast handle was attached to the neck of the vessel via a strip of sheet metal, while the lid (also cast) was hinged to the handle. Bolla dated the production of such jugs, supposedly primarily used for hot water,⁷⁴ to the late 2nd and the 3rd century, though emphasising they could have been in use for a long time.⁷⁵ In fact, they are also known from the 4th–6th-century contexts, with several

⁶⁹ Harej 1989, 14, Pl. 1: 3; Slapšak 1999, 162, the left bottom figure; Pflaum 2007, 287, 299, Fig. 10: 13–14; Istenič 2015, 372, Pl. 3: 25; Laharnar 2022, Pl. 17: 73; Ajdovščina: 3 examples, unpublished, kept in the Regional Museum Goriški muzej.

⁷⁰ Horvat, Žbona Trkman 2016, 113, Fig. 9: 10; Milavec 2020, 82, Pls. 14: 9, 35: 9–10.

⁷¹ Cf. Hanemann 2014, 119, 121, Figs. 101: 6; 102.

⁷² Although generally defined as bronze vessels in the literature, analyses suggest that most of these jugs were made of copper (Bolla 2012, 288).

⁷³ Bolla 1979, 34–36, Pl. 5; Bolla 1989, 99–100, 108–109, Figs. 19–30.

⁷⁴ The remains of a calcite crust in the interior of some jugs indicate they contained hot water (Bolla 1989, 98, 100; Bolla 2012, 294).

⁷⁵ Bolla 1989, 99–100.

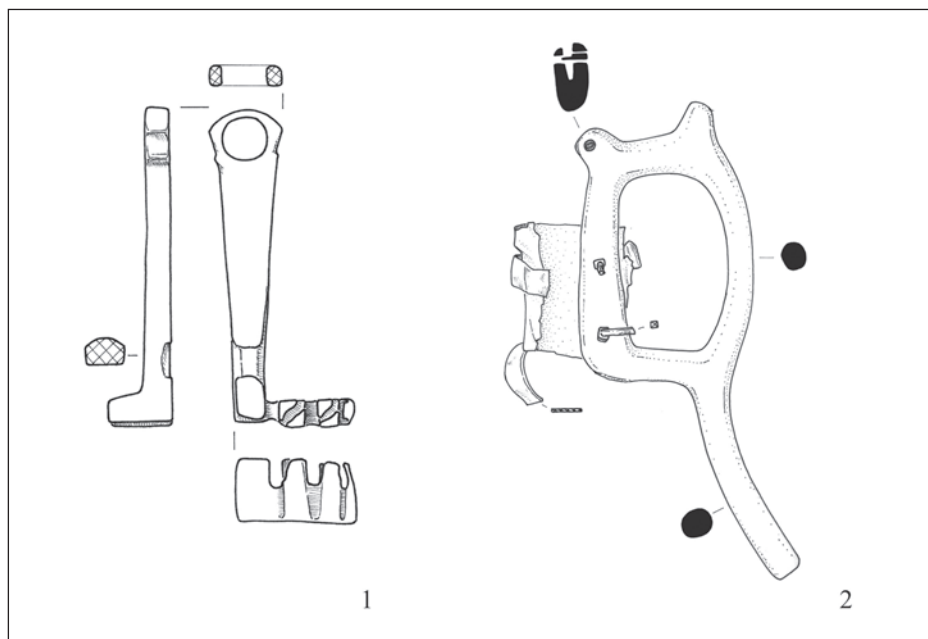


Fig. 8: Key and parts of a metal jug. 1 iron, 2 iron and copper alloy. Scale: 1= 1:2, 2= 1:3.

examples showing signs of antique repairs. Such signs are also seen on the example discovered at Laz, as two iron bands were subsequently attached to the metal strip wrapped around the neck of the vessel (Fig. 8: 2).⁷⁶

Other (metal) objects

The assemblage includes several finds which could indicate activities connected to metal processing or the manufacture of small metal objects. Pieces of bronze and molten lead were recovered in the Laz area, while an unworked piece of iron was found at the site where the 2022 trial trenching revealed the remains of a Late Antique building.

⁷⁶ The drawn reconstruction considered the finder's data about the position of the fragments upon discovery.

Discussion

Using the results of the typo-chronological analysis and the distribution of finds, we attempted to reconstruct past events in the discussed area, taking into consideration that we are working with finds from unknown contexts and with unreliable location data.

The fragment of a bronze flanged axe and a blade fragment of a bronze sickle indicate human presence in the area below Reber already in the Bronze Age. More reliable traces come from the early 1st millennium BC. These are surface finds of pottery sherds discovered in the interior and in front of the Krépnov hram cave (cf. Fig. 2), dated to the end of the Late Bronze and beginning of the Early Iron Age, i.e. between the 10th and the 8th century BC.⁷⁷ A bronze band earring discovered below Reber, less than 300 m west of the cave, is attributable to the 6th and 5th centuries BC. An iron wire brooch of the Middle La Tène construction could also indicate human presence in the Middle La Tène period.

The oldest Roman finds are hobnails (Alesia B and D types), which reveal the presence of Roman soldiers in the time between the 50s and 20s BC. The distribution map (Fig. 2: blue and red dots) shows that hobnails were found in the same area as prehistoric finds, i.e. from the path visible on the LiDAR visualisation to the foot of Reber. The 2022 trial trenching suggested this path dates to the post-medieval period.⁷⁸ However, we believe the finds indicate that a path might already have existed here in prehistoric times.

Several finds are dated to the second half of the 1st century. They include two Almgren 68 brooches, one Almgren 69 brooch, and three coins minted in the Claudian-Flavian period (cf. Figs. 3: 2–3; 9). A fragment of an Aucissa brooch and hobnails with small dots on the underside (cf. Fig. 3: 1,11–12) could also be dated to this period, though their general timespan is wider and they could be earlier, from the first half of the 1st century AD or even the late 1st century BC.

Attributable to the 2nd century are two individually recovered coins, as well as a *kräftig profilierte* brooch of the Almgren 84 type (Figs. 3: 4; 9), though the timespan of this brooch type is broader and it could also belong to the 3rd century.

There are several artefacts, such as those belonging to the equipment of draught or pack animals, that can only be broadly dated to the Roman period and could potentially be connected to the events taking place here in the 1st and 2nd centuries.

The distribution area of the finds from the 1st and 2nd centuries (cf. Fig. 9), including the hobnails with small dots on the underside,⁷⁹ is quite extensive. It reaches from the foot of Reber to the regional road, and partly also south of it. An archaeologically prominent area lies at the foot of Reber (Fig. 9: B), which is an area of levelled terrain

⁷⁷ Gerbec, Fabec 2024, 224.

⁷⁸ Tratnik et al. 2023, 47–51, 60; Tratnik, Istenič 2025, 227, Fig. 6 (in this volume).

⁷⁹ These hobnails are not mapped as we lack precise findspot data (see the description under *Hobnails*).

immediately below the scree, overgrown with sparse forest, with large rocks and boulders on the surface. Two Almgren 68 brooches and a coin of Claudius were excavated here. It is possible that other objects found in this part, currently only broadly attributable to the Roman period, date to the Early Roman period.

The interpretation of traces from the Early Roman period must also take into account historical and archaeological data for the wider area of the Vipava Valley.

The Vipava Valley came to the attention of Roman interests after the foundation of the Latin colony *Aquileia* in 181 BC. In the west, the valley opens towards the Friuli Plain, while in the east, via the Razdrto Pass, it affords the easiest passage towards the Ljubljana Basin. This was the principal connection between the Northern Adriatic and the Danubian region, which hosted a major trade route since prehistoric times.⁸⁰ Being the easiest also made it the most dangerous access to Italy and the Romans were keen to conquer it as soon as possible.

The Romans probably controlled the corridor to the Razdrto Pass (called *Ocra* in Antiquity) by the end of the 2nd century BC.⁸¹ The valley was likely annexed to Gallia Cisalpina, forming part of the territory of *Aquileia*.⁸² Gallia Cisalpina became a Roman province at the end of the second or in the first two decades of the 1st century BC. In 42 or 41 BC, it was annexed to Italy.⁸³

The trade route up to the Ljubljana Basin was under Roman control during Caesar's proconsulship of Gallia Cisalpina and Illyricum (59–49 BC). However, the situation in the region remained unstable as areas in the wider hinterland were home to indigenous communities hostile towards the Romans.⁸⁴ They were ultimately defeated during Octavian's War (35–33 BC).⁸⁵ These turbulent times are reflected in the finds from the sites around the Razdrto Pass and in the area from Planinsko polje to Loška dolina, which indicate conflicts between the locals and the Roman army.⁸⁶

In this period, as well as during the military campaigns in the Augustan period that include the Pannonian War (14–8 BC) and the Pannonian-Dalmatian rebellion (AD 6–9), we presume a strong presence of the Roman army in the Vipava Valley. Throughout this time, *Aquileia* was an important military and logistical base, and a point of departure for the military movements and the military supply route that continued across the valley to Razdrto and beyond.⁸⁷

A new section of the main road between *Aquileia* and *Emona* was constructed across Hrušica, presumably towards the end of the Augustan period.⁸⁸ It is believed that

⁸⁰ Cf. Horvat, Bavdek 2009, 129–130; Šašel Kos 2020, 37, 55, 86.

⁸¹ Šašel Kos 2020, 78, 102–103; Laharnar 2022, 358.

⁸² Žerjal, Tratnik 2020, 11.

⁸³ Šašel Kos 2020, 78, 90, 92.

⁸⁴ Šašel Kos 2020, 78, 92, 99, 102–105; Laharnar 2022, 358–360, 364.

⁸⁵ Šašel Kos 2020, 118–121; Laharnar 2022, 360.

⁸⁶ Laharnar 2022, 346, 348, 358–364, Fig. 4.24.

⁸⁷ Cf. Šašel Kos 2020, 118, 120–121, 147–148.

⁸⁸ Horvat, Bavdek 2009, 148.

it branched off the road towards Razdrto in the area of present-day Ajdovščina, led along the slopes of Trnovski gozd to the Hrušica Plateau and the Logatec Basin, where it joined the old road that ran further south across Planinsko polje, Postojnska vrata, and Razdrto.⁸⁹ The remains of the new road have so far been archaeologically documented in the areas of the present-day settlements of Col, Podkraj, Kalce and Logatec,⁹⁰ while its initial section between Ajdovščina and Col is as yet undocumented.

We presume that the initial section above the village of Budanje led south of and partly under the present-day regional road. Finds indicate human presence in this area from the mid-1st century onwards, when we assume the new road was already built and being used. Material evidence, especially coins and a brooch from the 2nd century, as well as later Roman finds, also indicate that the earlier, prehistoric path, which led higher up the slope, remained in use even after the new construction (cf. *Fig. 9*).

According to our analysis, almost two thirds of Roman finds from the discussed area date from the second third or second half of the 3rd until the end of the 4th century.

We used the type of artefacts, their distribution, the topographic characteristics of the area, and the archaeological features established by analysing LiDAR data to define several “areas of activity”. The combined evidence indicates the existence of the previously mentioned earlier path, a habitation area along the present-day regional road, as well as clear traces of a military conflict. It should be emphasised that, considering the available data, our findings remain at the level of hypotheses to be confirmed or rejected by new archaeological research.

Late Roman habitation is indicated by the finds excavated at Laz and on the slope immediately east of it (*Fig. 9: A*). The analysis of LiDAR data suggests at least two buildings, while trial trenching in the area of one of these revealed the remains of a Late Roman or Late Antique masonry building.

In addition to coins, objects that point to human habitation include various tools and implements of everyday use (woodworking tools, presumed weaving tool, knives, fire-making implement), keys, and parts of vessels⁹¹ (cf. *Figs. 6: 6; 7–8*). There are also finds associated with metal working or manufacturing small metal objects, as well as artefacts related to animal husbandry (iron bells). There is a clear concentration of finds in the area of the partly researched masonry building and around the rectangular structure/building slightly higher up the slope (*Figs. 2: A; 9: A*), though the age of the latter cannot be identified without further research. Several tools (an adze, a hammer and a presumed hone) also came to light roughly 100 m southeast of Laz (cf. *Fig. 9*).

There are a few finds from this area that point to the presence of Roman soldiers.

⁸⁹ Bosio 1991, 207, 209–210; Horvat, Bavdek 2009, 148–149; cf. Šinkovec 2020, 78, 83–84, *Fig. 1*.

⁹⁰ Pflaum 2007, 286; Svoljšak 2015, 359–361, *Figs. 25–27*; Košir 2020; Šinkovec 2020, 83–84, *Figs. 1, 2, 4*; Tratnik 2021, 161, *Fig. 8*; Tihle 2023, 12–13, 18, *Fig. 5*.

⁹¹ In addition to a metal jug (*Fig. 8: 2*), the handle of a pottery jug was also found in the area of the Late Antique masonry building that belongs to common tableware and can only broadly be dated to the Roman period.

Standing out among these are parts of military belts discovered in the area of the masonry building and a combat knife found slightly higher up the slope (Figs. 3: 5,6; 5: 1). Given that the finds recovered in the immediate vicinity, i.e. on the slope east of Laz, point to a battle, these and several other objects may also be associated with battle rather than with human habitation. Having said that, some of the finds from the Laz area may also be linked to road traffic if we assume that the road *Aquileia–Emona* ran in the vicinity.

Several Late Roman objects were found in proximity to the presumed earlier path higher up the slope (cf. Fig. 9): an annular brooch with a rectangular extension, several coins, a pointed object with a loop, two bells associated with draught/pack animals or grazing livestock, and a bronze bell possibly linked to horse equipment (Figs. 3: 7; 6: 1,2; 7: 3). Although the finds were most probably not found in their original position (excavated on the slope and in the landslide area), they could hypothetically still be objects lost or discarded while travelling along the path in the Late Roman period. An alternative interpretation proposes that at least some of the objects, such as the annular brooch associated with military outfit, the bronze bell as part of horse equipment, and coins, could be the remains of a battle.

The battlefield can be identified based on the finds of weapons. *Plumbatae* and various projectiles (Fig. 4) are especially indicative, with quite a few showing typical battle damage. Other obvious remains of a battle are parts of protective military equipment (shield grip, chain mail fragment) and *tribuli* (Fig. 5: 2–4). The distribution map reveals that these pieces were lying across a fairly extensive area, with two discernible concentrations, one on the slope below Reber, north and east of Laz, and the other approximately half a kilometre to the east, at the levelling where a path is presumed (Fig. 9). The same type of projectiles is represented in both areas, which supports the assumption that they belong to the same military event.

An important question is whether there are any other finds, in addition to weapons, that could be associated with a battle. This question is especially pertinent for coin finds, which offer a good time reference. As already indicated, such an interpretation is particularly risky for the finds from areas that revealed traces of other activities in the Late Roman period, for example the Laz area that was presumably inhabited and the area higher up the slope that held the earlier path. Another such location is below Reber, which yielded finds from the Early Roman period, but also some from the Late Roman period (cf. Fig. 9: B) that are not necessarily connected to a military event. Additional research is therefore needed to clarify the archaeological picture.

The types of weapons show that the battle took place in the second half of the 4th century. The coins can narrow down this dating. Some were found individually, though most significant are the four coin scatters interpreted as purse contents (see the description under *Coins*) (cf. Fig. 9). The presumed group find consisting of seven coins excavated in the landslide area was not considered due to an unclear context and apparent incompleteness.

The remains of two purse contents were found on the slope east of Laz; in the area

south of the path and near the habitation area. The numismatic analysis revealed that the first purse was lost after 383 and the second after 379. Based on the latest coin, the third purse, excavated above the landslide, where no other contemporary activities have been documented except the battle, is estimated to have been lost after 375. The fourth purse contents were found on the slope below the eastern levelling (presumed path), approximately 500 m east of the first two coin scatters, and are estimated to have been lost after 378.

The fourth scatter is particularly significant for the interpretation of the event. A *plumbata* was discovered on the levelling (presumed path) and a group of *tribuli* a few metres east of it (cf. Fig. 9). The scatter was found some 17 m below the levelling and 13 three-bladed arrowheads in its immediate vicinity, scattered across an area measuring roughly 5 m in length, while six *tribuli* were found some 5 m further down the slope. Of the weapons, we should also mention an arrowhead with prominent barbs and a twisted neck (Fig. 4: 6), which came to light a few metres northeast of the three-bladed arrowheads. After the assemblage was handed over to the Regional Museum Goriški muzej, several other artefacts (projectiles, two caltrops, coins, etc.) were found in this area that could also be associated with the battle.⁹²

Although the purses included coins of Constantine's family (Constantine II, Constantius II, and Constans; 337–361), their use can be placed in the early period of the Valentinianic-Theodosian dynasty (364–455) as they characteristically remained in circulation for a long time. Considering the latest coins (383) and the absence of the coins of the *Salus Reipublicae* type (388–403) that were minted in large numbers, we can date the loss of the purses and thus the battle between 383 and 388.

At the time outlined by the finds mentioned above, this area was the hinterland of the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* defence system ("the barriers of the Julian Alps"). The system was established in the late 3rd or at the beginning of the 4th century at the latest, with the purpose of protecting Italy from incursions from the east.⁹³ It consisted of a series of linear walls with towers closing the passages, as well as forts and fortresses defending the exposed sections.⁹⁴ The main route, from *Emona* to *Aquileia*, was fortified with three lines of defence. The first was a roughly 7 km long barrier wall with towers (Ajdovski zid) above Vrhnika, the second was a barrier wall with a fort at Lanišče in the vicinity of Kalce (this one was associated with the barrier wall that incorporated a fort at Brst near Martinj Hrib and protected the old road toward Razdrto), while the third, most heavily fortified, was the barrier wall with the *Ad Pirum* fort at Hrušica.⁹⁵ The *Castra* fortress in present-day Ajdovščina, located in the hinter-

⁹² Fučka found some artefacts (e.g. two caltrops and a socketed projectile with a rectangular-sectioned point) in autumn 2020. The 2022 investigations by the National Museum of Slovenia revealed a coin belonging to the fourth scatter, as well as a three-bladed arrowhead in its vicinity (Tratnik et al. 2023, Cat. Nos. PN 1389, PN 1390); Tratnik, Istenič 2025, Fig. 10: 4 (in this volume).

⁹³ Kusetič 2020.

⁹⁴ Kusetič 2020, 18–31, Fig. 1.

⁹⁵ Kusetič 2020, 18.

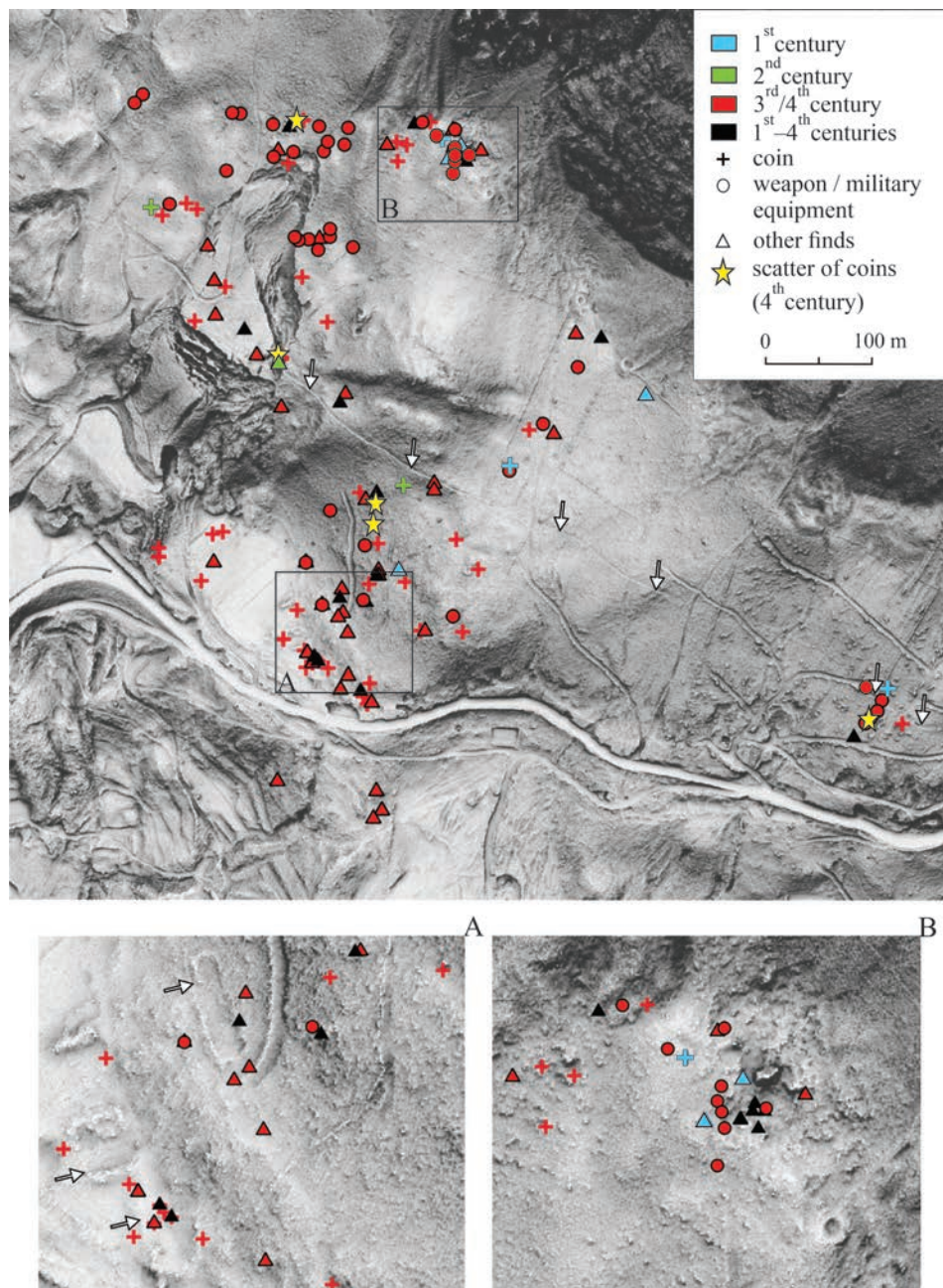


Fig. 9: Distribution of Roman finds north of the Budanje village. White arrows mark the remains of buildings (A) and a path. Basemap: Lidar ©ARSO.

land and approximately 18 km west of the fort at Hrušica, probably had a command and supply function.⁹⁶

When interpreting the Late Roman traces near Budanje, we must therefore keep in mind the location along a strategically vital road in the hinterland of this barrier system. The Budanje area is located some 14 km west of the last, third barrier wall at Hrušica with the *Ad Pirum* fort, which was probably the principal point of the entire system,⁹⁷ and in the vicinity of *Castra*. The data available for the habitation remains does not allow us to identify their exact nature. Given their location and the finds of a military character recovered here, it seems reasonable to presume that the remains were connected with the Roman army.

In regard to the military conflict dated between 383 and 388, the question arises whether it could be connected to any of the events mentioned in written sources as taking place in the area of the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* barrier system. One such event was the civil war between Emperor Theodosius and usurper Magnus Maximus, which broke out in the spring of 388. In the summer of 388, Theodosius' army crossed this area on its march towards *Aquileia*, where Magnus Maximus took shelter after his army was twice defeated in the Battles of Siscia and Poetovio.⁹⁸ According to literary sources, Maximus previously made a strategic mistake and decreased the defence of barriers, which enabled Theodosius' army to move quickly from *Emona* to *Aquileia*.⁹⁹ Especially based on Ambrose's Letter 40 to Emperor Theodosius from the end of 388,¹⁰⁰ in which he mentions the victory over Maximus, we can assume that the advance of Theodosius' army across the barriers likely involved minor conflicts.

Conclusion

The finds excavated on the slope above the village of Budanje near Ajdovščina shed light on the events in this area from prehistory to the Late Roman period. Since they were unearthed neither systematically nor from stratigraphically documented contexts, our findings remain at the level of hypotheses to be confirmed or refuted by future archaeological research.

They indicate that a path led here in prehistoric times, presumably traversing the slope approximately 200 m north of the present-day regional road. The finds of hobnails indicate the later presence of Roman soldiers and probable movements along this prehistoric path between the 50s and 20s of the 1st century BC. Considering the political situation at that time, when there was a strong presence of the Roman army in the region, this is not surprising. During Caesar's proconsulship (59–49 BC) and

⁹⁶ Kusetič 2020, 28.

⁹⁷ Kusetič 2020, 26.

⁹⁸ Bratož 2014, 150–157.

⁹⁹ Bratož 2014, 154, 156–157.

¹⁰⁰ Šašel 1971, 27.

Octavian's War in Illyricum (35–33 BC), several military operations were conducted in the hinterland of *Aquileia*. During these, the main body of the Roman troops moved from the military base in *Aquileia* along the road through the Vipava Valley and over the Razdrto Pass. They engaged the locals in the wider surroundings of the site, near the Razdrto Pass and Postojnska vrata, where several Roman battle sites have been documented.

Presumably in the Augustan period, a new section of the main road between *Aquileia* and *Emona* was constructed across the slopes of Trnovski gozd and Hrušica. Its route in the initial part (between Ajdovščina and Col) has not yet been established. The assemblage unearthed above Budanje includes no finds that could be reliably connected to the time of the new road's construction, and habitation traces are only attested after the mid-1st century.

Intense activities are evident in the Late Roman period, when this was the immediate hinterland of the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* defence system. There is a presumed habitation area at Laz, located some 4 km from the *Castra* fortress, dating to the 4th or possibly already in the late 3rd century. The available data do not reveal the nature of the habitation remains; they may represent an outpost, connected with the Roman army. The recovered finds also indicate that a battle took place in its vicinity between 383 and 388. Based on historical evidence, it may have been connected with the civil war between Theodosius and Magnus Maximus fought in 388.

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Ana Kruh
Goriški muzej Kromberk - Nova Gorica
Grajska cesta 1
SI-5000 Nova Gorica
ana.kruh@goriskimuzej.si

Andrej Šemrov
Narodni muzej Slovenije
Prešernova cesta 20
SI-1000 Ljubljana
andrej.semrov@nms.si

Late Roman Conflict Near Ajdovščina (*Castra*, Slovenia)

Vesna TRATNIK, Janka ISTENIČ

Abstract

The paper discusses the archaeological evidence unearthed over the past decade to the east and north of Ajdovščina (Vipava Valley, western Slovenia), with a focus on the Late Roman period. This evidence comprises numerous artefacts that a local enthusiast uncovered using a metal detector. They include an impressive assemblage of Late Roman projectiles, coin scatters, and isolated coin finds, which indicate a late 4th-century military conflict. In addition to evaluating this assemblage, the paper also outlines the results of the systematic archaeological fieldwork investigating this conflict landscape.

The archaeological remains examined in the paper represent the first artefactual evidence of a Late Roman military conflict in the wider Ajdovščina area, which is the likely location of the battle reported in ancient literary sources, fought in AD 394 between the forces of Theodosius and Eugenius.

Keywords: conflict archaeology; late 4th century; Ajdovščina; *Castra*; Battle of the Frigidus; plumbata

Izvleček

Poznorimski spopad blizu Ajdovščine (*Castra*, Slovenija)

Članek obravnava v zadnjem desetletju vzhodno in severno od Ajdovščine (zahodna Slovenija) odkrite arheološke ostaline, pri čemer se osredotoča na pozno rimsko dobo. Na teh območjih je domačin s pomočjo detektorja kovin odkril in zbral številne predmete, med njimi skupine novcev, posamične novce in razmeroma veliko število poznorimskih vojaških izstrelkov, ki kažejo na poznorimski vojaški spopad. Poleg analize teh najdb članek kratko predstavlja izsledke sistematičnih arheoloških terenskih raziskav krajine vojaškega konflikta.

Obravnavane arheološke ostaline predstavljajo prve materialne sledove vojaškega spopada na širšem območju Ajdovščine v Vipavski dolini, kjer se je najverjetneje odvil v pisnih virih izpričan spopad med Teodozijevo in Evgenijevo vojsko leta 394.

Ključne besede: arheologija konfliktov; pozno 4. stoletje; Ajdovščina; *Castra*; spopad pri Frigidu; plumbata

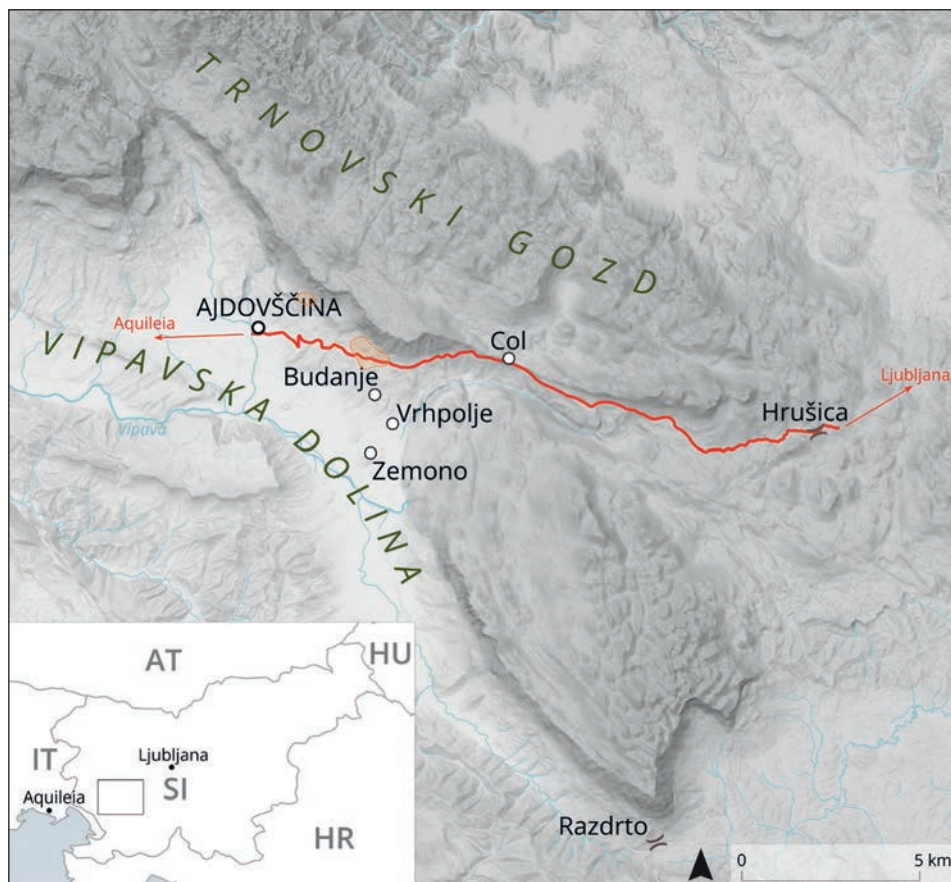


Fig. 1: The north-eastern Vipava Valley with the study area north of Budanje and northeast of Ajdovščina marked in orange, along with other sites and geographical units referenced in the text.

In late spring of 2021, Andrej Ferletic of the Goriški muzej (regional museum in Nova Gorica) brought to our attention a series of finds made by local history enthusiast Primož Fučka from Ajdovščina. Using a metal detector, Fučka unearthed numerous artefacts between 2016 and 2020 in the broader area of Ajdovščina (western Slovenia; Fig. 1).

An initial assessment of the documentation provided by the finder revealed that the assemblage included an exceptionally large number of *plumbatae*, several of which appeared bent upon impact, as well as a large number of Late Roman coins. Together with other artefactual evidence, these items appeared to indicate a Late Roman military encounter and suggested the site's supraregional archaeological significance. This observation prompted us to analyse the documentation supplied by Fučka, to design

a research framework focused on investigating the conflict landscape, and to proceed with its implementation in 2022. In this article, we briefly outline the research conducted up to September 2024, as well as its findings.

Assessment of Fučka's documentation on the conflict landscape

The archaeological evidence has been assessed based on the documentation provided by Fučka rather than on an artefact analysis with direct examination of the recovered finds. The latter was not possible as the artefacts have been stored in the Goriški muzej since May 2020, where access is limited. Artefact analysis based on their direct examination is, however, the subject of the paper by Ana Kruh and Andrej Šemrov in this volume.¹

Fučka's documentation comprises field diaries recording most of the artefacts with a brief description, date of recovery, depth from the current surface, GPS coordinates, a sketch (usually with at least one measurement), the object's weight, occasional sketch of the findspot, and often a proposed date. For coins, he typically drew both the obverse and the reverse sides, recorded their diameter, took a photograph and noted the minting period, which he established by consulting online sources.² The GPS coordinates were not recorded on site using a GPS device, but retrospectively (typically on the day of discovery or within a few days thereafter) by identifying the findspots on a LiDAR map and extracting the coordinates accordingly (Fučka, pers. comm.). His documentation also contains photographs of the artefacts. Fučka used the contextual data from his diaries and the photographs to create a manuscript catalogue of the artefacts he had placed in the care of the Goriški muzej.

After excluding undiagnostic objects lacking GPS data, our analysis considered more than 400 items from the area between Ajdovščina and Col, as well as from the north-eastern vicinity of Ajdovščina, as recorded in Fučka's manuscript catalogue. Roughly half of the artefacts are coins.

Based on typo-chronological criteria, we classified the artefacts according to their function (costume, tool, weapon, military outfit and equipment, coin, other, unidentified) and date. We used QGIS software to map their findspots.

Dating evidence

Fučka, who possesses a good knowledge of the artefacts, included in the manuscript catalogue all the finds that he positively or tentatively identified as prehistoric, Roman or early medieval, but excluded most objects he deemed later.

¹ Kruh, Šemrov 2025.

² He primarily made use of Tesorillo.com (<https://www.tesorillo.com/aes/home.htm>).

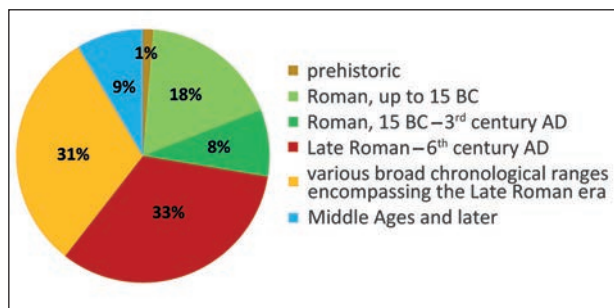


Fig. 2: Chronological incidence of the non-numismatic artefacts from the study area north of Budanje and northeast of Ajdovščina.

We were able to date approximately three-quarters of the non-numismatic artefacts, which range from the Bronze Age to the early modern period. Their chronological distribution is shown in Fig. 2.³

All but one artefact from the 1st century BC are Roman military hobnails of the Alesia B, C and D types.⁴ Their occurrence might suggest: i) Roman military activities in the wider area of the Razdrto/*Ocra* Pass, ii) the route that a possible south wing of the Roman army took in 35–33 BC when campaigning in the eastern hinterland of the middle reaches of the Soča or iii) the Roman army using the route across the Hrušica/*Ad Pirum* Pass prior to the construction of the Roman road, which presumably occurred towards the end of Augustus' reign.⁵ Roughly 8% of the dated finds in the assemblage range from the late 1st century BC to the 3rd century AD.⁶ Items dated from circa 15 BC through the 2nd century show no association with the Roman army, whereas all five artefacts from the 3rd century are military belt mounts or pieces of horse equipment.

A third of the dated finds from the assemblage can be attributed to the period from the late 3rd up to the 6th century. The assemblage is dominated by weapons and other artefacts associated with the Roman military. Offensive weapons are particularly well represented and include 17 *plumbatae* (Fig. 3: 1–4), four of which survive only as lead weights, and 13 three-bladed arrowheads (Fig. 3: 5).⁷

Another approximately one third of the objects is attributed to various broad chronological ranges that include the Late Roman period; the broadest of these spans from the Roman era to the post-medieval period. Roughly 9% of the finds are medieval or later.

³ Extensive information on the dating of artefacts discovered between 2016 and 2020 is provided in Istenič and Tratnik (2025).

⁴ Cf. Istenič 2019; Istenič 2025, 118, 123, Fig. 2: 33; Kruh, Šemrov 2025, 193–194, Fig. 3: 8–10 (in this volume).

⁵ According to Festus (*Breviarium* VII 51, 10–13), writing in the 4th century, the Romans built the road 'across the Julian Alps' in the time of Augustus. This refers to the road over the Hrušica/*Ad Pirum* Pass, which shortened the journey compared with the older route over the Razdrto/*Ocra* Pass.

⁶ Numerous hobnails dating to after circa 15 BC that cannot be more precisely dated within the Roman Imperial period (cf. Istenič 2019, 278–279) were not included in the analysis.

⁷ Cf. Kruh, Šemrov 2025, 194–199, Fig. 4: 1–4, 12–13 (in this volume).



Fig. 3: Study area north of Budanje, select artefacts that Fučka found between 2016 and 2020: *plumbatae* from Areas A (1–3) and C (4), with the length of 100 mm (1), 128 mm (2), 124 mm (3), 135 mm (4); arrowheads from Area C (5), with the example on the far left measuring 57 mm in length; shield handgrip from Area A (6), with a surviving length of c. 291 mm; caltrops (*tribuli*) from Area C (7), with the central caltrop measuring c. 45 mm in width. Iron and lead (1–4), iron (5–7). Not to scale.

Fučka discovered six scatters of Roman coins, possibly the contents of purses, each comprising between 3 and 61 coins. The latest coins from the scatters suggest that they were lost during or after AD 253–268 (one scatter), 348–354 (one scatter), 367–383 (three scatters), and 378–388 (one scatter). In addition, he found 76 individual coins dating from the 1st to the 4th century. Slightly fewer than two thirds of these can be dated to the 4th century. The latest Roman coin in the assemblage appears to be a *centenionalis* (Æ3) minted in Constantinople between AD 392 and 395, and attributable to Theodosius I, Arcadius, or Honorius (*RIC IX*, Constantinopolis, 89). The coins were identified prior to cleaning and conservation; a post-conservation examination would be necessary, as it could allow for a more precise dating of some of the coins.⁸

Plotting artefact findspots

The distribution of Late Roman and Late Antique artefact findspots suggests four concentrations: three situated north of Budanje and one to the northeast of Ajdovščina (Figs. 4, 5). By far the largest number of them derives from Area A, situated on steep, south-facing terrain. From north to south it measures approximately 320 by 250 metres and spans an altitude difference of around 70 metres. The area is bounded to the north by the foot of the escarpment of the Trnovski gozd karst plateau and is predominantly covered with sparse woodland. In parts of the terrain, downslope creeping is clearly visible (Fig. 6). Most of the recovered artefacts were located at depths of 5 to 15 cm below the present surface, with a few found at greater depths, reaching a maximum of 30 cm.

The Late Roman and Late Antique finds from **Area A** predominantly consist of projectiles: thirteen *plumbatae* (Fig. 3: 1–3) that include two only surviving as lead weights, a three-bladed arrowhead, and a tanged double-pyramidal point. At least four *plumbatae*, the arrowhead, and the double-pyramidal point exhibit damage presumably sustained upon impact. Additional finds include a large part of a handgrip from a shield (Fig. 3: 6),⁹ an annular belt buckle, twelve 4th-century coins, and two coin scatters comprising five and six coins respectively, which appear to have been lost during or shortly after AD 348–354 and 367–378. A further eight projectiles – either arrowheads or catapult bolts – are datable to broader chronological ranges that include the Late Roman period; at least four of these show signs of impact-related damage. The latest coin from the area dates to 392–395 (cf. Dating evidence above).

Area B begins approximately 100 metres downslope from Area A, along the same steep incline (Figs. 4, 5). It measures roughly 200 metres in length, 150 metres in width, and spans an altitude difference of around 60 metres between its upper limit and a clearing located in the lowest, south-western part. With the exception of the

⁸ Cf. Kruh, Šemrov 2025, 190–191, 209–212 (in this volume).

⁹ Cf. Kruh, Šemrov 2025, 199, Fig. 5: 3 (in this volume).

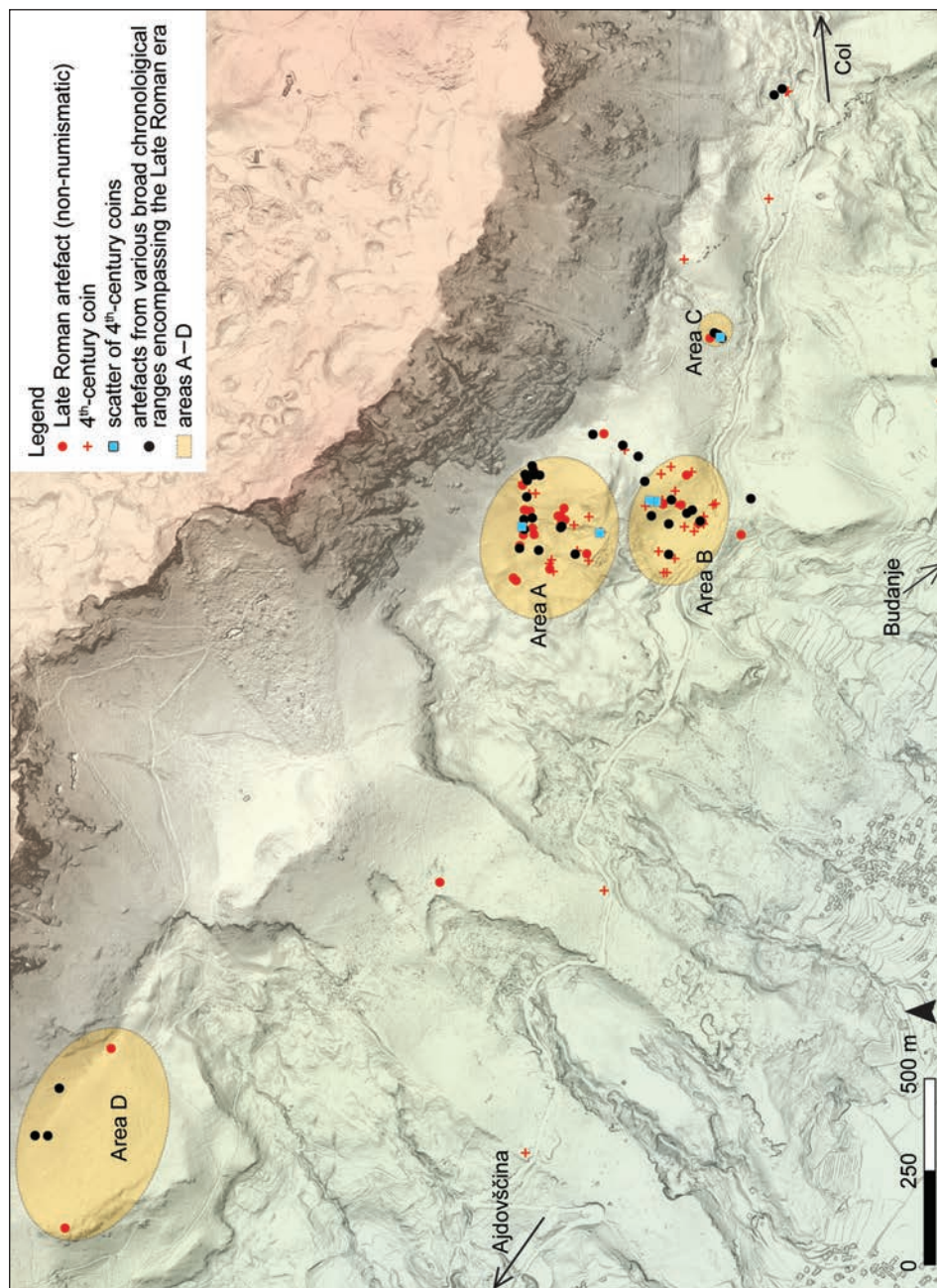


Fig. 4: Study area north of Budanje and northeast of Ajdovščina, showing the findspots of Late Roman artefacts as well as artefacts with various broader date ranges that include the Late Roman period, unearthed between 2016 and 2020 and concentrated in Areas A–D. Basemap: LiDAR © Arso, GURS.



Fig. 5: Northward view from the Vipava Valley showing Areas A–C, E on the slopes beneath the cliffs of the karst plateau of Trnovski gozd with the village of Budanje situated on the slope to their south. In the lower half of the photograph, the lowland parts of the Vipava Valley are visible, with the village of Vrhpolje on the right-hand side.

clearing, the area is covered with sparse woodland. Artefacts were recovered at depths of 5 to 15 cm, rarely deeper (maximum depth 45 cm). The assemblage includes two *plumbatae*, a three-bladed arrowhead, and two coin scatters, presumably lost during or shortly after 367–383. One *plumbata* exhibits impact-related damage. Additional finds from the area, which cannot be dated more precisely than to various broad chronological ranges encompassing the Late Roman era, comprise a caltrop, a razor, a key, an auger, several awl-like implements, and two bells.

The finds from the clearing in the south of Area B (Fig. 4) include 4th-century coins, a copper-alloy frame of a belt buckle, and a collective find of artefacts comprising a Late Roman belt mount with chip-carved decoration, a *dolabra*, and an iron curry-comb.¹⁰ Notably, no Roman weapons or other indicators of a military encounter were recovered from this clearing.

Area C is situated approximately 400 metres east of Area B (Figs. 4, 5), on a steep, south-facing slope covered with sparse woodland. Within a roughly 25 by 30 metre area, artefacts were recovered at depths ranging from 10 to 25 cm. They include three clusters of *tribuli* (Fig. 3: 7)¹¹ comprising seven, four, and two pieces respectively, a three-bladed arrowhead with a twisted neck, a bent *plumbata* exhibiting impact-related damage (Fig. 3: 4), and thirteen three-bladed arrowheads (Fig. 3: 5).¹² The latter were found within a five-metre-wide strip, accompanied by a scatter of three coins dating to 378–388.

Located on the same south-facing slope below Trnovski gozd, approximately 2 km northwest of Area A and about 1.6 km northeast of Ajdovščina, is Area D (Fig. 4). The slope here is less steep and terminates to the south at the edge of a cliff several metres high, offering a good view over the Vipava Valley. The Late Roman artefacts from the area include a *plumbata* weight, a poorly preserved Late Roman three-bladed arrowhead, and possibly an 'awl'.

A comparison with the spatial distribution of findspots of earlier Roman artefacts shows that the majority of the latter originate from Areas A and B. Military hobnails from the 1st century BC are primarily concentrated in Area A, whereas artefacts from the 3rd-century are mostly found in Area B. Notably, however, a scatter of 3rd century coins was found half a kilometre south of Area C.

The 2022–2023 field surveys

The primary objectives of the field surveys were: i) to verify the data in Fučka's documentation, ii) to gather comprehensive information about the area north of Budanje during the Roman period, with a particular focus on evidence related to Late Roman

¹⁰ Cf. Kruh, Šemrov 2025, 193, 202, Figs. 3: 5; 6: 6; 7: 5 (in this volume).

¹¹ Cf. Kruh, Šemrov 2025, 199, Fig. 5: 4 (in this volume).

¹² Cf. Kruh, Šemrov 2025, 196–199, Fig. 4: 12–13 (in this volume).

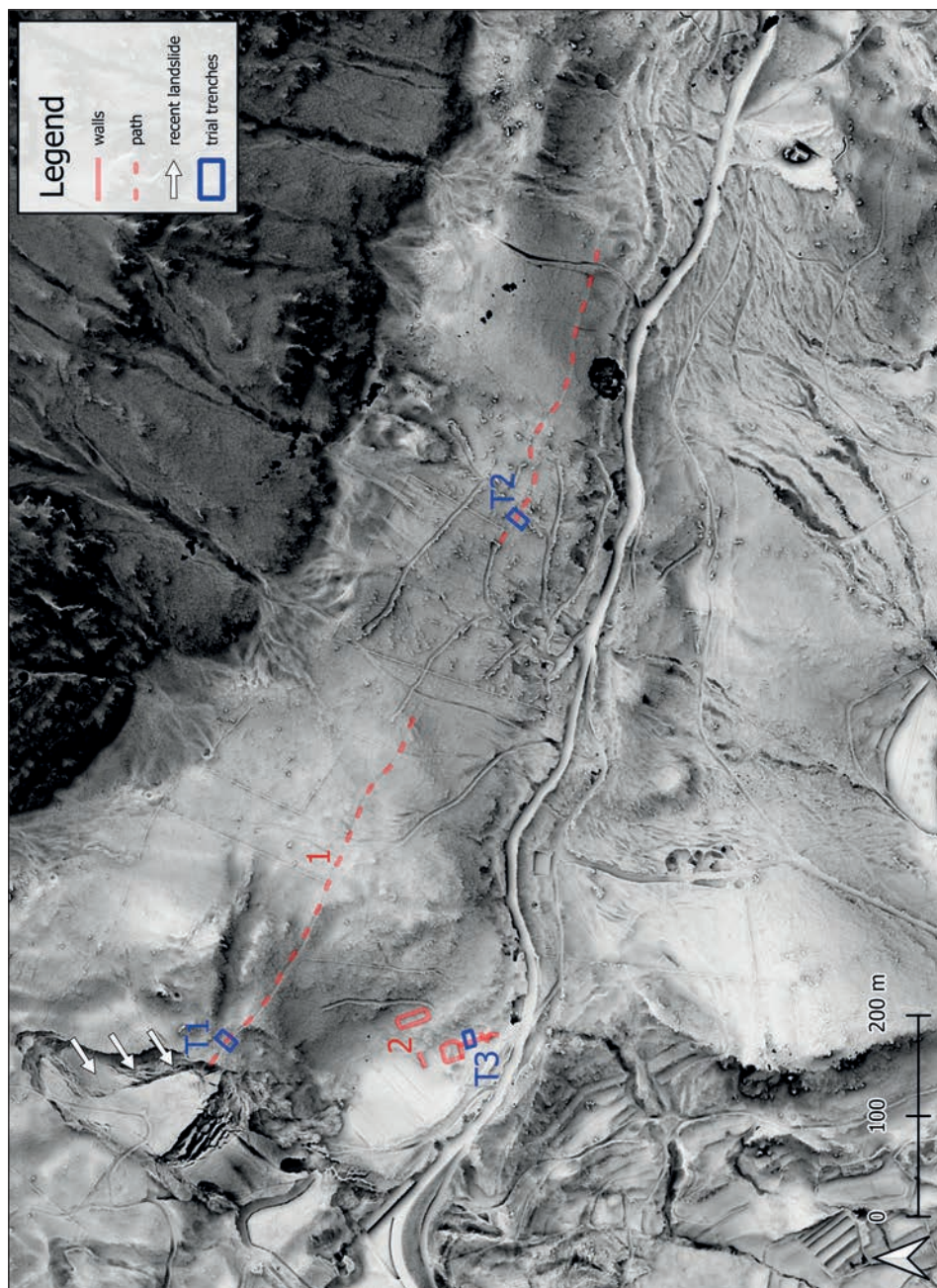


Fig. 6: Study area north of Budanje with the archaeological interpretation of the LiDAR-derived digital elevation model showing linear features indicating a path (1) and walls (2). The position of the trial trenches is marked with rectangles, the recent landslide scarp with arrows. Basemap: LiDAR ©Arso.

military activities, iii) to define the limits of the area that should be legally protected as an archaeological site.

The survey commenced with an analysis of LiDAR-derived data followed by geophysical surveys, targeted trenching, and systematic fieldwalking employing metal detectors.

Archaeological interpretation of the LiDAR-derived data

Upon reviewing different visualisations of the LiDAR-derived data from the area north of Budanje (Fig. 6), we observed that most features corresponded to modern activities. Nonetheless, certain elements were considered potentially relevant to Roman-period archaeology: i) a prominent linear feature traversing Areas A and C (Fig. 6: 1) suggesting a path, and ii) lines forming approximately rectangular shapes (Fig. 6: 2) suggesting remains of buildings.

Geophysical survey and trial trenching

The linear feature Fig. 6: 1 was investigated in two trial trenches (Fig. 6: T1, T2). Just below the turf in Trench 1, we unearthed a 1.7-metre-wide path of coarse gravel and artefacts from the post-medieval period. In Trench 2, the path was found immediately under the turf on a roughly 2-metre-wide levelled area. Unlike in Trench 1, the path here was of fine gravel and the only artefact found on it was a shrapnel fragment. The layer of turf above the path in Trench 2 was thin (5 cm), suggesting that a humus layer has not yet formed and the path is probably not ancient (Roman), but more recent, likely post-medieval.

A ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey was conducted in the area marked in Fig. 6: 2. It detected two architecturally complex structures (Fig. 7: A and B) and, to their north, an elongated feature with a less discernible plan (Fig. 7: C).¹³ Beyond the surveyed area, a rectangular structure is visible on the surface (Fig. 7: D).

A small portion of Building A was investigated in Trench 3 (Fig. 8), revealing evidence of two construction phases. The earlier phase comprises a wall and its foundation (Fig. 8: A), measuring circa 0.65 metres in height and 0.85 metres in width, both constructed from local stone and bound with mortar, along with an associated surface. The construction period of this wall is indicated by a fragment of a Dressel 30 amphora,¹⁴ a few pottery sherds, and an animal bone which was 14C dated with

¹³ Mušič 2023.

¹⁴ Bonifay 2004, 148–151 (dated to the second half of the 3rd and the 4th century AD).

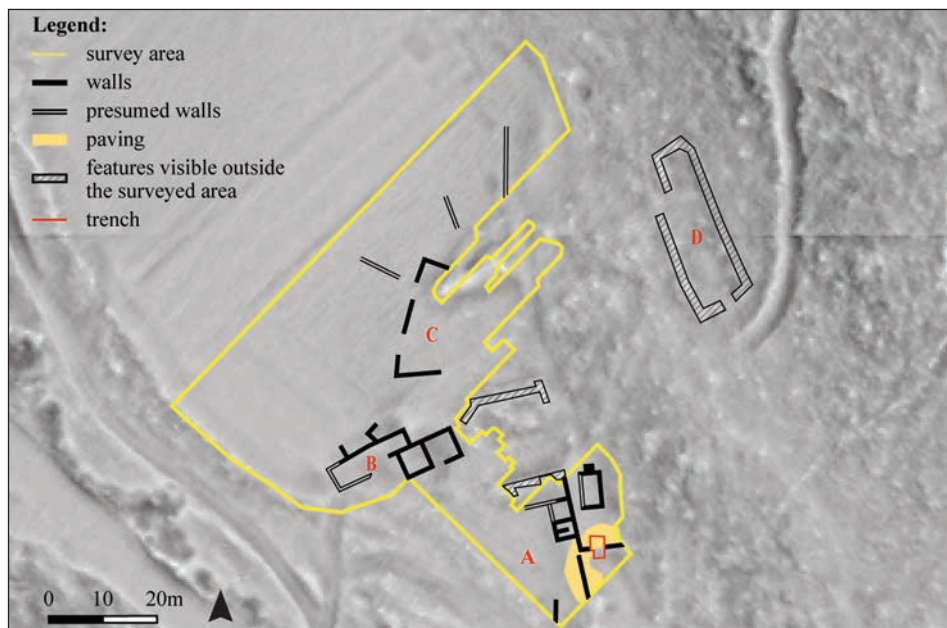


Fig. 7: Study area north of Budanje. Results of the ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey conducted in 2023: structures A, B, and C. Rectangular structure D is visible outside the surveyed area. Basemap: LiDAR ©Arso.



Fig. 8: Study area north of Budanje. Part of a building excavated in Trench 3 with a visible wall with foundations (A), a floor of stone slabs (B) built on a levelled bedding (C) and a thinner wall (D).

95.4% probability between cal AD 259 and 532 (1665 ± 30 BP).¹⁵ The associated surface yielded a Roman coin minted in AD 388–395.

The subsequent phase includes a floor of stone slabs laid onto levelled bedding (Fig. 8: B, C) and a thin wall (Fig. 8: D) built from mortar-bound local stone. An animal bone from the bedding was radiocarbon dated to between cal AD 423 and 561 (1575 ± 30 BP), with a 95.4% probability, indicating that the bedding layer was deposited during or shortly after this period.

Structures B and C (Fig. 7: B, C) are not yet dated; the distinct outlines of structure D suggest that it is unlikely to be of ancient origin.

Field survey using metal detectors

We began these surveys in 2022. The first step was to verify the information provided by Primož Fučka, which led us to examine the areas where he found most of the artefacts. The next step was to survey the areas not examined by Fučka, in order to obtain information on the extent of the artefacts and other evidence related to the Late Roman conflict landscape. The areas surveyed in 2022 covered the surface of approximately 10 hectares (Fig. 9). The surveys were carried out along a grid of parallel transects, each circa 5 metres wide. The length of the transects was suited to the specific areas, which were typically delineated by present-day property boundaries.

The GPS coordinates of artefact findspots, along with other contextual data, were documented on-site at the time of discovery. The majority of artefacts were recovered from depths ranging between 5 and 25 centimetres. Several artefacts originated from areas prone to downslope soil movement,¹⁶ indicating that they were likely not found in their original depositional contexts.

Of the 393 recovered artefacts, the vast majority are of post-medieval date or chronologically undiagnostic. Fifty objects (13%) date to the Roman period. In this, our assemblage is similar to that previously discovered by Fučka. In addition to numerous iron hobnails (two of which are of the Alesia D type from the 1st century BC), the finds include three Late Roman *plumbatae* (one clearly bent from impact) and a three-bladed arrowhead (Fig. 10: 1–4) of the same types as those in Fučka's assemblage (Fig. 3: 1–5). We also found several broadly dated arrowheads (Fig. 10: 5), including examples that exhibit damage consistent with impact.

Among the 13 Roman coins recovered, one dates to the 2nd century, three to the 3rd century, and nine to the 4th century. The most recent are two coins minted between

¹⁵ Poznań Radiocarbon Laboratory, Poland. All 14C dates were calibrated using the OxCal v4.4.2 software.

¹⁶ Verbič 2022. The landslide visible west of Trench 1 indicates recently active downslope processes, see Fig. 6.

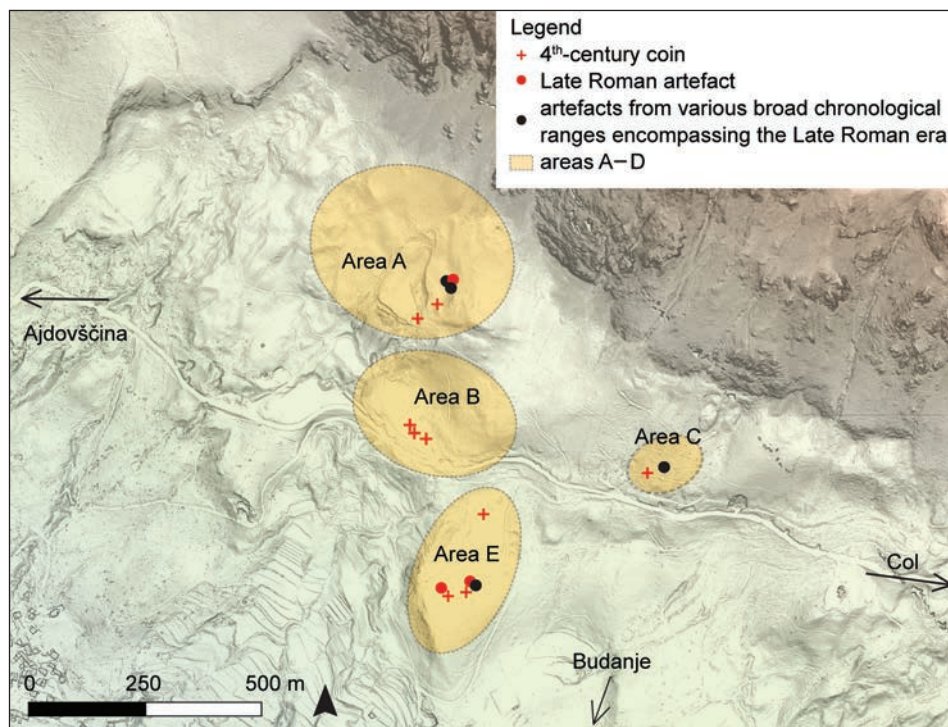


Fig. 9: Study area north of Budanje showing the findspots of Late Roman artefacts as well as artefacts from various broad chronological ranges encompassing the Late Roman era, unearthed during the 2022 field survey. Areas A, B, C and E of artefact concentrations are also indicated. Basemap: LiDAR © Arso.

388 and 395, with one found just west of building B (Fig. 7: B) and the other on the plateau south of the modern road (Fig. 9: E; see the following paragraph).

Late Roman projectiles were discovered in Area A (Fig. 10: 1), C (Fig. 10: 4), but also south of Area B where no Roman weapons had previously been reported. This newly defined area was designated as Area E (Fig. 9) and revealed two *plumbatae* and one arrowhead (Fig. 10: 2, 3, 5). The latest of the three 4th-century coins found in this area is the aforementioned example dated between 388 and 395.

Discussion and conclusions

The greatest number of chronologically diagnostic artefacts from the study area are Late Roman or Late Antique up to the 6th century and associated with the Roman military. *Plumbatae* and three-bladed arrowheads are particularly well represented;

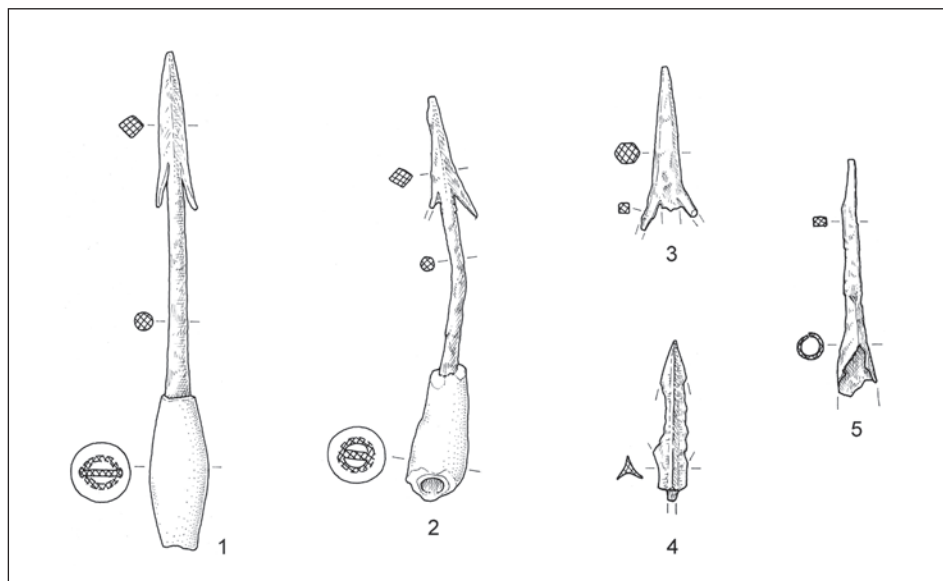


Fig. 10: Study area north of Budanje, artefacts found during the 2022 field surveys: *plumbatae* (1 – Area A; 2, 3 – Area E) and arrowheads (4 – Area C; 5 – Area E). Iron and lead (1–3), iron (4–5). Scale = 1:2.

they include examples with likely impact-related damage. All this indicates a Late Roman military conflict. Presumably also related to the conflict is a large portion of objects typo-chronologically dated to broader periods; this especially applies to the *tribuli* and arrowheads/catapult bolts, several of which show damage that was probably caused by hitting a target.

The handgrip of a shield (Fig. 3: 6) points to a conflict that took place in the second half of the 4th century,¹⁷ which aligns with the dating of the four coin scatters, possibly the remains of purse contents. The latest single coin find, minted between 392 and 395 and found in Area A, suggests that the conflict occurred after 392.

Except for Area D, the battle-related artefacts originate from areas near the probable route of the major Roman road connecting Aquileia (north-eastern Italy) and Emona (modern-day Ljubljana, Slovenia; Fig. 1). Buildings A, B and C were likely located in close proximity to this road (Fig. 7: A, B, C). Their location, removed from the fertile fields of the Vipava Valley, suggests that their primary function was not agricultural. Instead, the proximity of the Roman road implies they may have been

¹⁷ It finds a close parallel in a grave from the second half of the 4th century (Schorsch 1986, 18, 19, Figs. 4, 5).

public (state)-owned facilities, possibly serving as a roadside station (*mansio*) within the Imperial transportation and communication system.¹⁸

The Roman road between Ajdovščina and Ljubljana that led across the Hrušica/*Ad Pirum* Pass¹⁹ was built at the latest towards the end of the Augustan period.²⁰ It was part of the principal overland route connecting Italy to the Balkans and the eastern part of the Roman state. The road ran through Ajdovščina/*Fluvius Frigidus*, referred to as *Castra* in the Late Roman period,²¹ and past Col.²² Between Ajdovščina in the Vipava Valley and Col, located approximately 500 metres higher on the plateau, the road presumably mainly followed the line of the present-day road,²³ except for the initial stretch with two sharp bends east of Ajdovščina, where it seems reasonable to assume the Roman road ascended in a more or less straight line. Areas A, B, C, and E (Fig. 9) that revealed the greatest numbers of conflict-related artefacts are situated alongside the Ajdovščina–Col road north of Budanje, where the very steep climb up from the Vipava Valley ends. From here, the road ascends more gently, gradually gaining altitude as it leads to Col (Fig. 5) and further on to Hrušica. The slopes to the north and south of the road, which are moderately steep in the section just north of Budanje, become increasingly steep towards Col.

Both Ajdovščina and Hrušica were the sites of Late Roman forts.²⁴ These played an important role in the *claustra Alpium Iuliarum*, a Late Roman defence and control system of north-eastern Italy.²⁵ Ancient literary sources report numerous instances of Roman emperors and their rivals moving across this area, as well as other military activities.²⁶

Literary sources refer to one or perhaps two historical events in the late 4th century that included military encounters in the area between Hrušica and Ajdovščina. The first is the conflict between Theodosius I and Magnus Maximus, which took place in 388.²⁷ At that time, the usurper Maximus first fortified the Alpine passes,²⁸ then retreated to Aquileia after suffering military defeats at Siscia and Poetovio,²⁹ quickly pursued by Theodosius' army. Orosius states that Theodosius crossed the Alpine barriers unnoticed and without opposition,³⁰ Latinus Pacatus Drepanius reports that

¹⁸ Corsi 2020, 168; Lemcke 2016, 11–12.

¹⁹ Žerjal, Tratnik 2020, 15–18.

²⁰ Cf. Fn. 5.

²¹ Kos 2015, 41.

²² Šašel 1975, 74–88; Bosio 1991, 206–209; Gruden 2021; Tratnik 2021.

²³ Seek, Veith 1913, 461; Bosio 1991, 207.

²⁴ Ulbert 1981; Kos 2015; Svoljšak 2015; Urek, Kovačič 2020; Žerjal, Tratnik 2020.

²⁵ Šašel, Petru 1971; Kos 2012; Kos 2014; Višnjić, Zanier 2020.

²⁶ Šašel, Petru 1971.

²⁷ Šašel, Petru 1971, 28–29, source nos. 14 and 35–36, source no. 24.

²⁸ Šašel, Petru 1971, 35–36, source no. 24 (Paulus Orosius).

²⁹ Šašel, Petru 1971, 28–29, source no. 14 (Latinus Pacatus Drepanius).

³⁰ Šašel, Petru 1971, 35–36, source no. 24: Paulus Orosius: *Theodosius nemine sentiente, ut non dicam repugnante, vacuas transmisit Alpes*.

Theodosius' soldiers took only one day to travel from Emona to Aquileia,³¹ and Bishop Ambrosius described the events then taking place in the area of the eastern Alpine barrier system as Theodosius' victory without losses.³² Accordingly, in relation to the events of 388, literary sources make no mention of a major military engagement taking place in the area between forts of Castra and Ad Pirum.

To the second event literary source explicitly refers to as a battle, i.e. the Battle of the Frigidus. This conflict occurred in 394 and resulted in Theodosius defeating the usurper Eugenius.³³ Based on ancient literary sources and on military-strategic considerations, it has long been assumed that the battle took place in the lowland parts of the Vipava Valley, either directly south of Ajdovščina or approximately 5 kilometres to the east, between Vrhpolje and Zemono (*Fig. 5*).³⁴ The archaeological evidence found north of Budanje discussed in this paper may suggest that the conflict landscape of this engagement, for which no prior archaeological evidence has been identified, included areas higher up, along the likely course of the major Roman road from Ajdovščina (Castra) to Hrušica (Ad Pirum) in Areas A–C, E, and presumably also in Area D about 1.6 km northeast of Ajdovščina.

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³¹ Nixon, Rogers 1994, 506–508 (source Latinus Pacatus Drepanius, Panegyric of Theodosius).

³² Šašel, Petru 1971, 27, source no. 12a.

³³ Šašel, Petru 1971, sources listed on pp. 19–20; Bratož 1994; Bratož 2018; Springer 1996.

³⁴ Seek, Veith 1913; Bratož 1994, 30, Fig. 4; Bratož 2018, 18–21, Figs. 1–2.

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Vesna Tratnik
Narodni muzej Slovenije
Prešernova cesta 20
SI-1000 Ljubljana
vesna.tratnik@nms.si
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4279-3435>

Janka Istenič
Narodni muzej Slovenije
Prešernova cesta 20
SI-000 Ljubljana
janka.istenic@nms.si
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6705-4471>

Transformation of Military Fortifications in the Late Roman Period and the Fortification of the Northeastern Border of Italy

Slavko CIGLENEČKI

Abstract

During the Late Roman period, profound transformations took place within the military. With the implementation of defence in depth and the expansion of the army, fortifications of a more recognizable and monumental character were confined to the most critical communication routes and strategic nodal points. In the case of other, newly established fortifications, it is primarily their strategic positioning, along with archaeological evidence, that attest to their martial nature. The initial indications of these developments appeared as early as the final third of the 3rd century. Under the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine, efforts were renewed to consolidate the *limes* and secure key strategic locations within the empire's interior. However, the most extensive transformation unfolded in the second half of the 4th century, marked by the renewed fortification of the *limes* and an unprecedented wave of fortress construction deep within imperial territory. This study offers a concise overview of the fortification of the northeastern frontier of Italy, a region that vividly exemplifies these military developments. By the latter half of the 4th century, this frontier had evolved into a fully militarized zone, characterized by a network of defensive walls and numerous new fortifications.

Keywords: Late Roman period; Late Roman army; Late Roman fortifications; defence in depth; *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*; frontier defence (*limes*)

Izvleček

Preobrazba vojaških utrd v poznorimskem obdobju in utrjevanje severovzhodne meje Italije

V poznorimskem obdobju so se v vojaški organizaciji zgodile globoke spremembe. Z uvedbo globinske obrambe in povečanjem števila vojakov so bile bolj prepoznavne utrdbe prisotne predvsem ob pomembnejših komunikacijah in strateških vozliščih. Pri drugih novonastalih utrdbah pa le še njihova strateška lega, ostanki vojaške noše in orožje potrjujejo njihov vojaški značaj. Deloma so se te spremembe nakazale že v zadnji tretjini 3. stoletja. V času vladavine Dioklecijana in Konstantina so znova utrjevali *limes* in ključne strateške točke v notranjosti imperija. Največja preobrazba pa je nastopila v drugi polovici 4. stoletja, ko je prišlo do ponovne utrditve *limesa* in do množične gradnje utrdb globoko v notranjosti imperija. V študiji je kratko podan tudi pregled utrjevanja severovzhodne meje Italije, območja, ki nazorno ponazarja te vojaške spremembe. V drugi polovici 4. stoletja se je to obmejno območje razvilo v militarizirano cono, zaznamovano z mrežo zapornih zidov in s številnimi novimi utrdbami.

Ključne besede: poznorimsko obdobje; poznorimska vojska; poznorimske utrdbe; obramba v globino; *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*; obramba meja (*limes*)

The Late Roman period witnessed profound transformations that permeated all spheres of life, and the settlement landscape also underwent significant changes: Roman urban centres were increasingly fortified, while in rural areas, unprotected settlements were largely abandoned in favour of newly constructed, fortified dwellings. These shifts are particularly apparent in the military architecture of the period. Previously, Roman fortifications were characterized by their lowland locations, regularized layouts, robust curtain walls, and symmetrically organized internal structures, making them easily recognizable elements within the Roman settlement system. However, the features of military installations began to evolve rapidly by the final third of the 3rd century, accelerating even further in the latter half of the 4th century. Changes in military strategy and tactics, alongside the necessity for swift mobilization, increasingly obscured the formal characteristics that once rendered military fortresses readily identifiable.

Following the tumultuous military conflicts of the 3rd century, the army underwent comprehensive restructuring under the reforms of Diocletian and Constantine. Contemporary sources reveal significant shifts in military strategy, including the division between frontier troops (*limitanei*) and mobile field armies (*comitatenses*), the expansion of military manpower, the redistribution of legions, and their fragmentation into smaller, more flexible units.¹ However, the corresponding transformations in the siting, construction, and operational roles of military fortifications remain comparatively underexplored. While fortifications along the vulnerable Danubian *limes* were modified but continued to be clearly recognizable, those situated in its hinterland – and especially within the interior zones of the Eastern Alpine region – became notably more varied and increasingly difficult to interpret archaeologically.

To better grasp the complexity and scope of these developments, it is essential first to outline the evolution of military fortifications within the broader area between the Rhine-Danube frontier and Italy. Such an overview helps to elucidate regional distinctions in the conception, construction, and chronology of fortifications. The insights gained from this wider context will then be applied to the defensive network established in northeastern Italy, which functioned as a critical barrier against incursions from the north and east into the imperial heartland. While some fortifications are clearly identifiable in this region, many others remain less securely defined yet undoubtedly played a pivotal role in the defence of Italy during Late Antiquity. By examining several better-documented sites, this study presents their key features, including defensive architecture, spatial organization, proximity to strategically vital routes and passes, and associated military material culture such as weaponry and equipment.

The discussion is structured chronologically, as archaeological excavations – complemented by textual sources – have produced substantial bodies of data. These advances now allow for at least a preliminary reconstruction of major construction phases and provide a clearer understanding of patterns of military presence during this critical period of transition.

¹ Southern, Dixon 1996, 15–38; Wilkes 2005, 265–268.

Methodological challenges

Recent research on Late Roman fortifications has resolved many issues concerning their chronology, yet for many sites, their military character cannot be confirmed with full certainty. The problem of distinguishing between military, civilian, as well as hybrid or multifunctional installations, is frequently addressed in the scholarly literature.² In this context, we primarily rely on the layout of the fortifications, construction techniques, the positioning and design of defensive towers, the fortification of entrances, and the buildings within the interior. However, even these elements often provide only partial support for dating and identifying the character of these sites.³ In many cases, without extensive archaeological investigation it remains difficult to determine the true nature of these fortifications, as they are typically known only through the discovery of military equipment and weaponry, while characteristic defensive architecture is lacking. Are these fortified settlements, fallback military positions, or a combination of military and civilian functions? This is a problem encountered across much of the Late Roman world.⁴

A comparison between the better-documented military fortifications along the *limes* and those in the interior does not permit direct parallels. Undoubtedly, fortifications along the *limes* and its immediate hinterland were constructed by military engineers. This is evident in nearby Pannonia, as well as in the Norican-Raetian sectors of the *limes*, through the prevalence of distinct architectural features such as fan-shaped corner towers and U-shaped towers, which allow for at least approximate dating. In the interior of the Eastern Alpine region, however, such features are absent.

Numerous newly discovered, improvised fortifications vividly reflect the situation that emerged when the offensive phase of the Roman Empire came to an end, and the construction of fortifications extended into the interior regions. Raids by foreign ethnic groups from beyond the *limes* were unpredictable and, due to their scale, did not follow only the main invasion routes. These incursions were predominantly plundering expeditions, avoiding direct assaults on major fortresses and fortified cities, since the raiders lacked siege equipment. Instead, they targeted more accessible and poorly defended settlements and rural villas. Similar challenges arose when the region frequently became the theatre of civil wars, during which military detachments also plundered along secondary routes.

As a result, the network of temporary and often completely improvised fortifications had to be designed on a broad scale. These fortifications were built in haste, frequently making use of older, pre-Roman hillforts with naturally defensible positions and partially preserved ramparts. Since most of these sites lack characteristic defensive architecture, their identification relies primarily on finds of military equipment,

² Cf. Ciglenečki 2023, 327–329.

³ Cf. Petrikovits 1971, 179–181; Wilkes 2005, 263–264; Mackensen 2018, 49–51.

⁴ Cf. Poulter 2007, 92–93; Hunold 2011, 417–418; Possenti 2013, 28.

weaponry, and imported transport and tableware (such as amphorae and fine ware). This raises recurring concerns about the quality of data regarding small metal finds, as these were mostly recovered by non-professionals, often lacking precise find locations and archaeological context. Furthermore, identification is complicated by the frequent combination of military garrisons and civilian settlement at all three chronological stages discussed below.

Efforts to identify the full spectrum of Late Roman military fortifications are thus primarily limited to their location (strategic significance and communications), their spatial layout, defensive and residential architecture, and, above all, the increasingly abundant small finds and coinage evidence.

Recent investigations have increasingly clarified three significant phases in the development of military fortifications during the Late Roman period. However, at the regional level, these phases vary chronologically, as they correlate with different waves of incursions from beyond the imperial borders as well as the strategic objectives of Roman rulers. Each phase is marked by numerous changes in fortress construction and the organization of defence. A comparison of fortifications from the *limes* and the Eastern Alpine region clearly illustrates both imperial strategic planning and simultaneous local initiatives in settlement and militarization of the landscape.

The emergence of new military fortifications in the second half of the 3rd century

The incursions of foreign peoples across the *limes* in the second half of the 3rd century triggered the beginning of major transformations in the construction of fortifications. The fortification of Rome under Emperor Aurelian, with its imposing defensive wall, as well as the construction of walls in numerous other Roman cities, clearly attest to the widespread perception of threats from the north and east across much of the empire.⁵ One of the most notable developments in fortification construction was the relocation of military sites to naturally defensible elevations, where layouts were adapted to the terrain. Their overall size was reduced, but defensive architecture became more robust. Although the earliest changes were still relatively modest (utilizing lower elevations and straight walls), they marked the beginning of a thorough transformation of military architecture.

The line of the *limes* between the Danube and the Rhine was repositioned inland to a more secure so-called “wet frontier,” stretching from Lake Constance along the Iller River to the Danube. In this region, we observe notable innovations in the location and design of fortifications.⁶ The development of the fortress at **Vermania (Isny)** is well-documented (*Fig. 1: B*).⁷ Constructed on a low hill separated by ditches from

⁵ Johnson 1983, 113–121; Southern, Dixon, 1996, 128; Christie 2001.

⁶ Petrikovits 1971, 181; Mackensen 2018, 49–51.

⁷ Garbsch 1971.

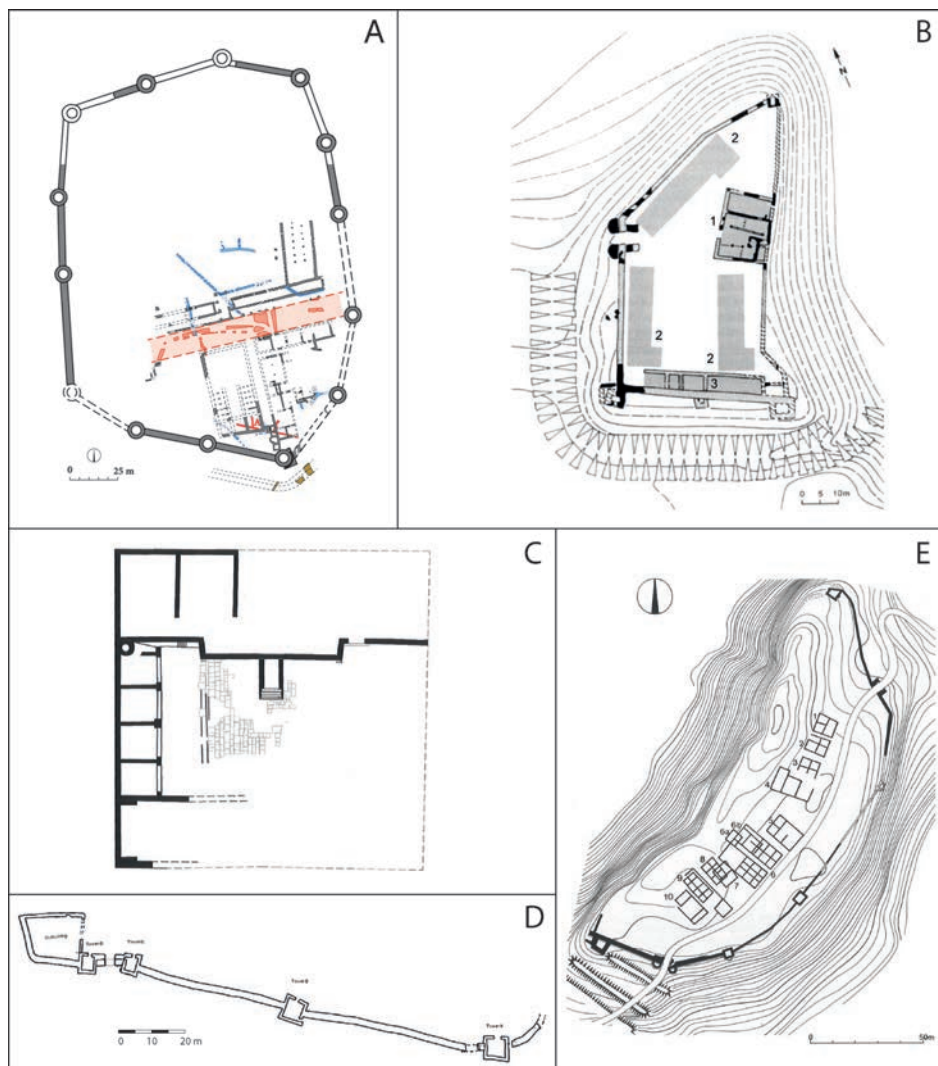


Fig. 1: Selection of better-researched military posts from the second half of the 3rd century (A Ajdovščina (*Castra*) (after Urek, Kovačič 2020, Fig. 1); B Isny (*Vermania*) (after Mackensen 2018, Fig. 5); C Rijeka (*Tarsatica*) (after Višnjic 2019, Fig. 7); D Solin (after Starac 2019a, Fig. 3); E Moosberg (after Ciglenečki 1987, Fig. 12).

the ridge, the fort conformed to the natural contours of the terrain, covering an area of 0.27 hectares. It featured walls up to 2.5 metres thick with several towers and a ditch on the exposed sides. Numismatic analysis has demonstrated the construction

of stone military barracks and fortifications during the reign of Aurelian, as there was a significant influx of coinage into the fortress during the early 270s.⁸

Around this time, fortifications such as the ditched and ramparted fort at Münsterkogel near Konstanz and the palisaded fort at Burghöfe were presumably also established.⁹ In the Norican section of the *limes*, for example at the castellum of Favianis, signs of construction appear in the final third of the 3rd century.¹⁰

Under Emperor Probus, civilian settlements such as Lorenzberg near Epfach and **Moosberg near Murnau** were fortified (Fig. 1: E).¹¹ These hinterland posts share many features with military forts. Particularly characteristic is the fortified settlement of Moosberg, which, in contrast to forts along the *limes*, had thinner walls - on average one metre thick, and up to two metres on exposed sections.¹² Rectangular towers were positioned centrally along the walls, while the entrance was reinforced with two transverse walls. On its more accessible side, it was protected by ditches and a stronger wall. Inside, wooden structures were distributed across much of the interior space.

These fortifications characteristically exploited elevated, naturally defensible positions, while remaining close to vital communication routes. They were protected by strong walls, often supplemented by ditches on the more vulnerable sides. The earlier standardized layouts gave way to designs increasingly dictated by local topography.

In the Eastern Alpine region, few fortifications can be reliably dated to this period (Fig. 6). The construction of forts at Vrhnika, Ajdovščina, and Hrušica during the reign of Gallienus was already hypothesized by Balduin Saria,¹³ and Jaroslav Šašel similarly proposed their establishment prior to the 4th century.¹⁴

Rescue excavations at **Ajdovščina (Castra)** have provided the first reliable data regarding the origins of the largest castellum within the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* defensive system (Fig. 1: A).¹⁵ Numerous coins, together with contemporaneous ceramic and metal finds - primarily military equipment - indicate that the fort's walls were likely erected in the 270s or towards the end of the 3rd century.¹⁶ Notably, it was strategically located at the confluence of the Hubelj and Lokavšček rivers and enclosed by walls up to three metres thick, complemented by 14 round towers and a ditch on the more accessible side.

At the southern extremity of the *Claustra* system, the Roman town of **Tarsatica (modern Rijeka)** was fortified in the final third of the 3rd century with a powerful

⁸ Kos 2019, 144–145.

⁹ Mackensen 2018, 51.

¹⁰ Ladstätter 2002, 310; Groh, Sedlmayer 2002, 559–560.

¹¹ Mackensen 2020, 31.

¹² Garbsch 1966.

¹³ Saria 1939, 146.

¹⁴ Šašel 1984, 116.

¹⁵ Osmuk 1997; Žerjal, Tratnik 2020; Urek, Kovačič 2020.

¹⁶ Žerjal, Tratnik 2020, 22–24; Urek, Kovačič 2020, 48–58.

city wall and a *principia* (headquarters building) at its centre (Fig. 1: C).¹⁷ At that time, the town was transformed into a major military base and command post, and it also served as the sole seaport within the defensive network. Excavators date the construction of the *principia* to between 260 and 270, while numismatic evidence suggests a period between 270 and 280.¹⁸ The partially excavated *principia* revealed a complex of buildings arranged around a large internal courtyard, with the administrative building located on slightly elevated ground. The city walls, indirectly dated through the construction of the *principia*, were further reinforced on the inner side during the 4th century. The Tarsatica *principia* was abandoned by the end of the 4th or the very beginning of the 5th century, marking the end of military presence in the town.

Likewise, the fortress at **Gradišće near Velike Malence** likely dates to the final third of the 3rd century. Noteworthy for its size (8 hectares) and strategic significance, it overlooked the Roman road from Siscia to Emona and the crossing over the Krka River.¹⁹ In its earlier phase, it likely featured only a 2.1-metre-wide wall without towers, with wooden barracks in the interior.²⁰ The pentagonal castellum at **Gradišće near Vrhnika**, though poorly understood, is probably of similar date based on its location and layout.²¹

Due to its brief occupation, the fort at **Pasjak near Klana**, along the itinerary road from Tarsatica to Tergeste, is of particular significance.²² Situated on a low hill, the remains of an approximately rectangular fort with 3-meter-thick walls and a tower were identified. The entrance was fortified with two transverse walls set perpendicular to the main wall. A thin cultural layer and a coin hoard beneath the collapsed wall have allowed for secure dating of the fort's construction and destruction to around 270.²³

Above the bay of Martinšćica near Rijeka (Tarsatica), a fortress at **Solin** was constructed between the second half of the 3rd and the early 4th century (Fig. 1: D).²⁴ Built on a steep hill, it featured 2-meter-thick walls with four rectangular towers and a fortified entrance. The fort served a dual purpose: it protected the local population and provided oversight of the important harbour at Martinšćica as well as the state road between Tarsatica and Senia. Sparse archaeological finds indicate that the fort was used only intermittently.

Given the challenges in distinguishing between civilian and military installations, it is necessary to consider sites lacking masonry defensive architecture but strategically located and yielding military-related finds. One such case is **Invillino**.²⁵ Exten-

¹⁷ Višnjić 2019.

¹⁸ Bekić 2009, 221; Kos 2012, 287.

¹⁹ Saria 1929; Saria 1930; Ciglenečki 2003, 586–587.

²⁰ Saria 1939, 144.

²¹ Horvat 2020, 104–105.

²² Starac 1993; Starac 2009, 286.

²³ Starac 2009, 286.

²⁴ Starac 2019.

²⁵ Bierbrauer 1987, 191–192; Martin 1992, 261.

sive investigations at the hillfort of **Kuzelin near Donja Glavnica**, on the edge of the Pannonian Plain, have identified a naturally well-defended site near the important road from Andautonia to Poetovio.²⁶ Coins ranging from Gallienus to Aurelian and residential structures paved with square bricks confirm occupation in the final third of the 3rd century. Defence appears to have relied solely on an earthwork with a palisade.²⁷

A particular challenge is posed by the function of outposts somewhat removed from major communication routes. At **Veliki vrh above Osredok**, traces of a thin cultural layer dating to the 260s and 270s, along with some artefacts suggesting a military presence, were identified on a prehistoric hillfort.²⁸ Improvised dwellings were found on the terraces, while defence relied exclusively on the prehistoric ramparts. Given its commanding views, the site likely served not only as a refuge but also potentially as a lookout or signal station.

A similar role is indicated for the panoramic prehistoric hillfort at **Pančičev vrh near Javorje**, where 34 coins, primarily from the mid- to late 3rd century, were discovered.²⁹ Trial trenching revealed only prehistoric ramparts and terraces.³⁰ Coins and small finds likewise point to activity at other prehistoric hillforts, such as Rudna,³¹ Dunaj near Mladevine,³² and the complex of sites above Mihovo in the Gorjanci Hills.³³

These outposts, located deep beyond the *limes*, reflect the protective reflex of the Roman Empire, already datable to the 270s and, in some cases, slightly later. This is supported primarily by numismatic analysis, which shows a marked increase in coin losses during this period (see diagrams; *Figs. 4, 5*). While an increase in coinage under Gallienus is characteristic of most archaeological sites, even in lowland regions, it is precisely the sites that were not reoccupied later that confirm settlement at this time. Fortifications such as Castra, Tarsatica, Pasjak, Solin, and possibly Vrhnika and Velike Malence reflect state responses to incursions from beyond the *limes*. Proximity to major roads was decisive, and minimal natural protection, heavily reinforced by artificial fortifications, sufficed for defence (*Fig. 6*).

In the second group of short-lived, improvised outposts, we may infer local initiatives that reutilized prehistoric hillforts as refuges for the civilian population. These sites could be temporarily used by the army for troop movements, route control, observation, and signalling (Invillino, Veliki vrh, Pančičev vrh). In contrast to the larger

²⁶ Sokol 1994; Sokol 1998.

²⁷ Sokol 1994, 202.

²⁸ Ciglenečki 1990; Ciglenečki 2008, 486.

²⁹ Šemrov 2010, no. 96.

³⁰ Pavlin, Dular 2007, 81–83.

³¹ Ciglenečki 1991; Kos, Šemrov 1995, no. 171; Šemrov 1998, no. 177; Šemrov 2004, no. 142; Šemrov 2010, no. 155.

³² Ciglenečki 1992, 24–27.

³³ Križ 2021.

masonry forts, which remained in use throughout the Late Roman period, these improvised fortifications in the interior were soon abandoned. Such an improvised character is not unusual when compared with sites along the Danube-Illyr-Rhine *limes*, where at Burghöfe (*Sumontorium*), a ditch associated with a palisade was dated to between 272 and 282.³⁴

Phase II of the transformation: the Diocletianic-Constantinian period

A comprehensive reorganization took place during the reigns of Emperors Diocletian and Constantine, which also encompassed a new approach to the defence of the empire.³⁵ Roman strategists restructured the military into two main groups: frontier defence forces stationed along the *limes* (*limitanei*) and mobile units deployed deeper within the empire, typically near imperial capitals. The system of fortifications along the *limes* was renewed (e.g. at Visegrád), while only a limited number of major fortresses were constructed inland at critical strategic points (e.g. *Ad Pirum*). The *limitanei* were stationed in older, partly refurbished, or newly built forts along the frontier line, whereas the forts of the mobile army remain poorly documented. For the Eastern Alpine region, three legions of *Iuliae Alpinae* are attested, of which one was a *comitatensis* and two were *pseudocomitatensis*. Jaroslav Šašel believed that the two Italian legions were headquartered at Castra or Forum Iulii, while the third *pseudocomitatensis* operated along the eastern approaches into Italy. He therefore proposed legionary commands in the cities of Emona or Tarsatica, as well as in the fortress at Velike Malence.³⁶ The increase in military material culture in these cities during the 4th and early 5th centuries supports their military presence.³⁷ Andrej Gaspari has hypothesized the at least occasional presence of one of these legions in Emona.³⁸

In the Eastern Alpine region, the construction of forts at strategically significant locations – such as at the Hrušica pass and at the confluence of the Sava and Ljubljana rivers at Zalog – can be observed at this time (*Fig. 6*).

Extensive fortification efforts along the *limes* under Diocletian are well-documented both in written sources and archaeological evidence, while for the time of Constantine, archaeological sources are predominant.³⁹ Numerous renovations of older forts, as well as new constructions featuring distinctive defensive designs, are known. In pre-existing forts, these modifications typically included the reinforcement of walls, blocking of gateways, and renovation or addition of towers. Specific features are no-

³⁴ Mackensen 2018, 50.

³⁵ Jones 1964, Vol. 3; Elton 1996, 89–101.

³⁶ Šašel 1988, 815; Bratož 2014, 199.

³⁷ Gaspari 2014, 235–238; Tomažinčič 2018.

³⁸ Gaspari 2014, 235.

³⁹ Cf. Soproni 1978, 194–195; Wilkes 2005, 265–267; Mackensen 2018, 51–60.

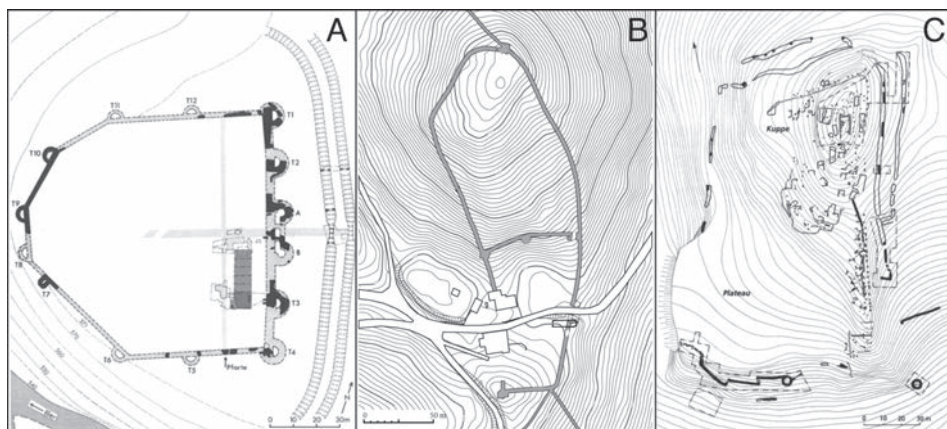


Fig. 2: Selection of better-researched military posts from the Diocletianic-Constantinian period: A Kellmünz (*Caelius Mons*) (after Mackensen 2020); B Hrušica (*Ad Pirum*) (after Kos 2020, Fig. 1; C Katzenberg near Mayen (after Hunold 2012, Fig. 2).

table in the Norican-Pannonian sector of the *limes*, such as fan-shaped corner towers and prominent U-shaped towers integrated into the curtain walls.

During the Tetrarchic period, several important *castella* were constructed along the Raetian *limes* and in its hinterland, utilizing lower elevations for defences. Recent research dates the construction of *castella* at Münsterhügel in Konstanz, Kellmünz (Fig. 2: A), Bürgle, and the significantly reduced *castellum* at Eining to the period between 295 and 300.⁴⁰

In northern Gaul, numerous elevated fortified outposts were established in the hinterland of the Rhine *limes* during Late Antiquity. These were initially interpreted primarily as settlements or civilian refuges.⁴¹ However, recent studies have revealed that they were predominantly military outposts established during the time when Augusta Treverorum became one of the empire's capitals. These numerous hilltop forts in northern Gaul were positioned along communication routes, especially rivers, and are now recognized as military fortifications integrated into a broader defensive system.⁴² They safeguarded civilian and economic life in the countryside and represented a key element of the in-depth military defence system of Late Antiquity.

The best-researched example is the fortification at **Katzenberg near Mayen**, which, with its location, defensive elements, domestic architecture, and small finds, strongly resembles fortifications in the Eastern Alpine region (Fig. 2: C).⁴³ Located on a natu-

⁴⁰ Mackensen 2018, 51–58.

⁴¹ Cf. Johnson 1983, 231; Gilles 1985.

⁴² Gilles 2008, 110–113.

⁴³ Hunold 2011; Hunold 2012.

rally defensible hill, it covered an area of 1.8 hectares. On its more exposed sides, it was enclosed by a 1-metre-thick dry-stone wall with two towers. The upper section was encircled by a wooden palisade – forming an acropolis of sorts – and contained the main building with stone foundations and a hypocaust system. Foundations of several smaller houses, cut into the bedrock, have also been preserved. A larger terrace below the summit, devoid of buildings, likely served as a refuge for residents of the nearby settlement. Based on the finds, the fortification was built around 300 and remained in use until the mid-5th century. Angelika Hunold has suggested that Katzenberg, along with similar sites, formed part of the Late Roman defensive system in northern Gaul, where the concept of defence in depth is clearly observable.⁴⁴

The long fortified frontier line along the Danube (*Ripa Pannonica*) was marked by numerous forts exposed to continuous pressure from the north and east beyond the *limes*.⁴⁵ In many locations, the trend from the final third of the 3rd century continued, with forts being built on elevated, naturally defensible sites. A typical example is **Sibrig domb near Visegrád**, which featured distinctive fan-shaped and U-shaped towers.⁴⁶ Constructed in the 320s on a high hill, it provided excellent oversight of the broader *limes* region in the bend of the Danube. In comparison to lowland fortifications, its defences consisted of walls only 1.1 metres thick.

Following Diocletian's reinforcement of the Danubian *limes*, conditions in the interior stabilized during the first half of the 4th century. In the Pannonian region, this period saw the construction of large so-called "interior fortifications" along major invasion routes toward Italy.⁴⁷ These sites functioned as centres of agricultural estates and administrative hubs. Their strategic locations, robust walls with numerous towers, and military finds indicate a strong military presence. In the literature, they are often described as logistical bases for the front line, accommodating both military and civilian elements. Excavations have revealed numerous residential and economic buildings within their walls, notably *horrea* (granaries). The well-defended and not fully built-up interiors provided shelter for the local population in times of danger. The best-known example of such a combined military-civilian post is **Keszthely-Fenékpusztá**, an entirely new Late Antique settlement covering as much as 15 hectares.

In contrast to the *limes* and its immediate hinterland, military posts from this period are exceedingly rare deeper within the Alpine and Pre-Alpine regions, with only a few strategic points being fortified. At the key military fortress of **Ad Pirum (Hrušica)**, signs of an increased military presence were already evident by the end of the 3rd century.⁴⁸ However, excavations have confirmed that its construction dates to the 320s (*Fig. 2*:

⁴⁴ Hunold 2012, 107.

⁴⁵ Soproni 1978; Soproni 1985; Visy 2003; Durr et al. 2022.

⁴⁶ Soproni 1978, 55–58.

⁴⁷ Tóth 2000; Heinrich-Tamáská 2015; Szabó 2022.

⁴⁸ Kos 2012, 285.

B).⁴⁹ Adapted to the terrain, the 1.5-hectare *castellum* was enclosed by walls 2.7 metres thick with towers. Excavations have revealed multiple renovations, well-dated by small finds and coinage.⁵⁰ An intensification of settlement activity during the Diocletianic-Constantinian period is also observable at Ajdovščina (*Castra*), Rijeka (*Tarsatica*), and at Gradišče near Vrhnika.

Near the confluence of the Sava and Ljubljanica rivers at **Zalog**, a Late Roman *castellum* was constructed, which Balduin Saria dated to the 3rd–4th centuries based on its construction technique.⁵¹ Trial excavations inside the fort suggest that it was established after the end of the 3rd century.⁵² This is supported by its relatively regular layout and walls over 2 metres thick.

The poorly understood, presumably military outpost at Čentur in the hinterland of Koper may have existed prior to 310.⁵³ The rich coin hoards found there, potentially representing a headquarters treasury, hint at an otherwise undocumented incursion by Licinius into Italy in the summer of 310.

Phase III of the transformation: second half of the 4th century / first third of the 5th century

In the second half, and particularly in the final third of the 4th century, renewed pressure from foreign ethnic groups and outbreaks of civil war led to an intensified construction of fortified outposts, both through the renovation of older fortifications and the building of new, often highly improvised positions. Under Emperor Valentinian, fortifications along the *limes* were restored and numerous *burgi* were built, representing the last grand-scale attempt to strengthen the empire's borders.⁵⁴

In the hinterland of the Raetian *limes*, characteristic small square *castella* with four corner towers (*quadriburgia*) were built at this time. These forts, with their storage facilities, enabled the supply of troops along the *limes*. The well-researched *castellum* at Schaan in Liechtenstein,⁵⁵ located along an important Roman road, is a prime example of this kind of structure, alongside similar forts at Aying, Irgenhausen, and Innsbruck-Wilten, the latter featuring two large *horrea*. To these can be added the harbour *castellum* at Bregenz-Leutbühel and numerous other *burgi*.⁵⁶

The well-excavated fort at **Tokod**, located at an important crossroads along the

⁴⁹ Ulbert 1981b, 43–44; Kusetič 2014, 94–95; Kos 2014; Kos 2020.

⁵⁰ Ulbert 1981a; Kos 2020.

⁵¹ Saria 1939, 147.

⁵² Mikl Curk 1986.

⁵³ Jeločnik 1973, 93, 180; Jeločnik, Kos 1983, 23–24, 39–40.

⁵⁴ Petrikovits 1971, 184–187; Johnson 1983, 193–194; Southern, Dixon 1996, 40–45; Mackensen 2018, 60–62.

⁵⁵ Overbeck 1982, 108–110; Wyss Schildknecht 2024.

⁵⁶ Mackensen 2018, 60–62.

Danube, has been dated to the Valentinian period.⁵⁷ This large fortress, with 1.6-metre-thick walls, was fortified with horseshoe-shaped, semicircular, and rectangular towers and housed a large *horreum* in its interior. Renovations were also evident in the so-called “interior fortifications,” and some, such as Kornye, were newly established during this period.⁵⁸

In the Eastern Alpine region, numerous fortifications were built in the final third of the 4th century, whose strategic positions, defensive architecture, and military finds attest to a strong, and in some cases exclusively military, purpose. Their construction corresponded to the historical events of the time. The Quadi and Sarmatians invaded during the reign of Valentinian, in 374, and following his death the Roman army suffered a catastrophic defeat at the Battle of Adrianople in 378.⁵⁹ This defeat allowed numerous ethnic groups led by the Goths to spread beyond the borders of the *limes*, penetrating deep into the interior of Illyricum and reaching the Julian Alps.⁶⁰

These invaders, often in smaller, mobile formations, avoided main invasion routes and dispersed across the countryside in search of plunder. The changing security situation demanded a new defence strategy, focusing on fortifying the empire's interior. Consequently, Roman military strategy emphasized establishing numerous outposts in depth, designed to protect the population and slow the advance of enemies. With this, military units often cohabited with civilians, while supplies for major forts were provided through a centralized system (*annona*).

On naturally protected sites with hastily constructed improvised defences, both civilians and military units could more effectively resist smaller raiding parties. Many of these fortifications were built hurriedly, often reusing locations that were already naturally well-defended, as had been the case in the late 3rd century. As previously emphasized, these forts lost the distinctive features of earlier Roman military architecture, being heavily adapted to the terrain, thus complicating the distinction between civilian and military posts.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the abundant military equipment found at many sites allows for a reliable identification of their military function.

The construction and duration of these fortifications are dated primarily through coin finds, which frequently indicate an intensification of settlement during the reign of Valentinian and shortly thereafter.⁶² The renewed military forts and the proliferation of new fortified spaces mark the onset of an improvised defence in depth.⁶³

At **Hrušica (Ad Pirum)**, renovations to the defensive tower indicate repairs during Valentinian's reign.⁶⁴ Large quantities of coins found in this fortress confirm intensi-

⁵⁷ Mocsy 1981; Soproni 1985, 58–60; Kocsis 2020.

⁵⁸ Tóth 2000, 35; Szabó, Heinrich-Tamáska 2011.

⁵⁹ Šašel Kos 1996, 154–173; Bratož 2014, 137–146.

⁶⁰ Bratož 2014, 136–146.

⁶¹ Overview: Ciglencečki 2023, 17, 342.

⁶² Kos 1986, 197; Kos 2012, 278–282.

⁶³ Šašel 1983, 108; Christie 1991, 420; Ciglencečki, Milavec 2009, 183–184.

⁶⁴ Svoljšak 2015.

fied occupation in the second half of the 4th century, similar to observations at Castra on the western side of the mountain pass. The large tower at Lanišče was constructed only in the 370s or 380s, as was the fortress at Martinj hrib, which secured a junction off the main route. Both were destroyed and abandoned before the end of the 4th century.⁶⁵

Renovations at **Velike Malence** may also belong to this wave of fortification efforts. Balduin Saria dated the second phase of construction to the late 4th or early 5th century, when the robust walls were further strengthened with towers, showing similarities with the “interior fortifications” of the Pannonian plain.⁶⁶ A solid foundation for an apse was discovered, likely the base for a substantial multi-story building – possibly the *principia* or *praetorium* – and not, as Saria once suggested, an early Christian church. However, based on the layout and tower positioning, a tighter dating of the second construction phase remains questionable.⁶⁷ In the absence of definitive material evidence, the middle placement of the towers might even suggest an earlier date, possibly in the early 4th century, during the Diocletianic or Constantinian periods.

The large fortress at Črnomelj (3 hectares) has been dated to the late 4th or early 5th century.⁶⁸ Surrounded by walls up to 2 meters thick and towers along the outer perimeters, its interior contained mostly wooden structures, as well as what is presumed to be an early Christian church. The abundant imported ceramics and transport amphorae indicate a centrally supplied garrison.

This group also includes the well-researched small fort at **Cuol di Castiel near Forni di Sopra** (Fig. 3: B), situated on a low hill along a secondary route.⁶⁹ Enclosed by walls up to 1.8 metres thick and reinforced with two towers and a ditch, it had a single entrance. Modest traces of wooden houses were found inside. Small finds confirm the presence of a small military garrison tasked with monitoring the road and defending against raids from the second half of the 4th and early 5th centuries. Imported *sigillata* and transport vessels indicate centralized provisioning.

Also noteworthy are the less robustly fortified outposts built or reinforced primarily in the final third of the 4th century. These sites feature simpler defensive architecture, typically consisting of 1-metre-thick walls and often reinforced gateways. More than the previously discussed forts, they conformed to the rugged landscapes of the Alpine and pre-Alpine regions, complicating their identification. It appears that Late Roman strategists managed to secure these exposed locations with minimal construction, creating posts capable of hosting military detachments and their families, and providing control over traffic and population movement. The arrangement of buildings along the defensive wall is similar. These structures likely accommodated small military units with their families, as well as providing space for refugees.

⁶⁵ Kos 2014, 34–35.

⁶⁶ Saria 1939, 145.

⁶⁷ Cf. Wilkes 2005, 261–264.

⁶⁸ Mason 1998; Ciglencčki 2015, 408–410.

⁶⁹ Gelichi et al. 2022.

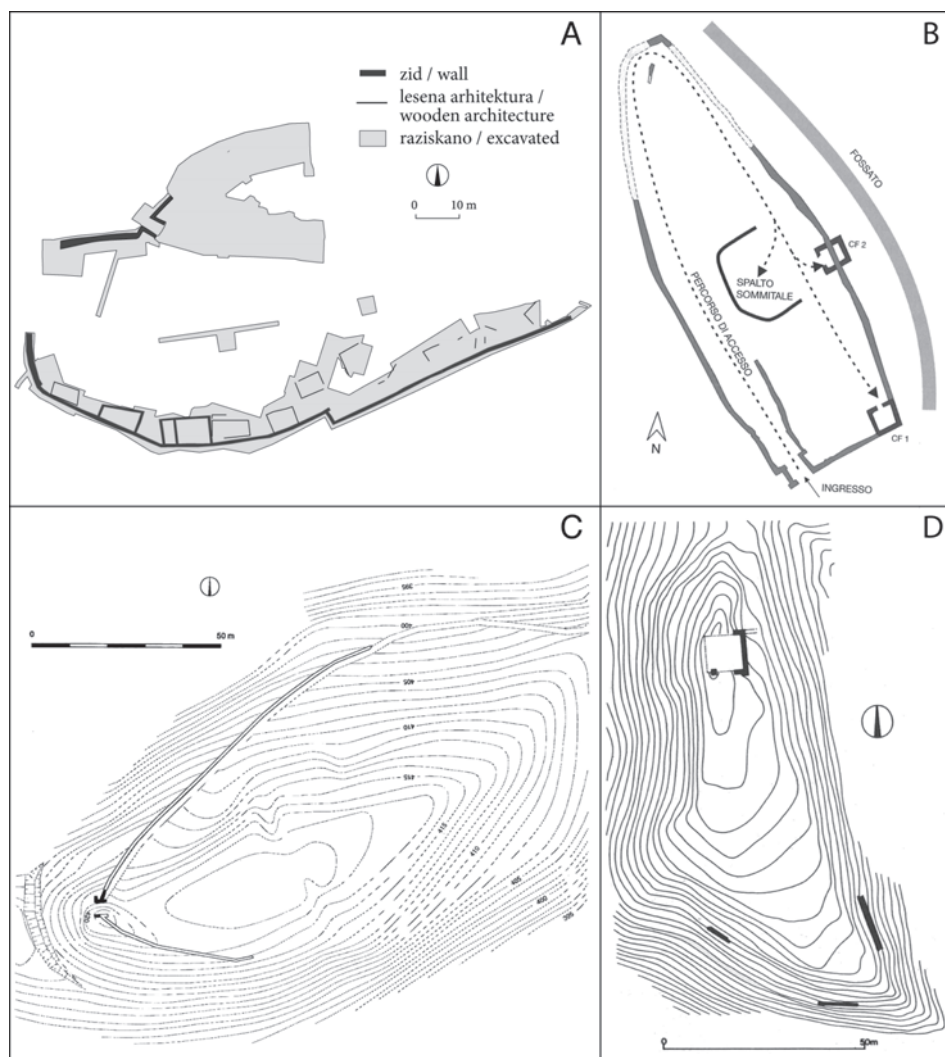


Fig. 3: Selection of better-researched military posts from the second half of the 4th / first third of the 5th century (A Ančnikovo gradišče (after Modrijan 2020, Fig. 3 with Strmčnik, Ciglencečki 2023, p. 48–49); B Cuol di Castiel (after Gelichi et al. 2020, Fig. 3); C Šumenje (after Breščak, Dular 2002, Fig. 17); D Gröbming (after Ciglencečki 1987, Fig. 18)

An example from Austrian Styria is **Schlossbühel near Gröbming**, situated on a

low but naturally defensible hill (Fig. 3: D).⁷⁰ It was surrounded by a 1-metre-thick wall and further secured with a tower on its more accessible side.

Extensive excavations at **Ančnikovo gradišče near Jurišna vas** (Fig. 3: A), located high above the valley traversed by the Poetovio–Aquileia road, revealed a fort whose summit was enclosed by walls 1.6 metres thick at the most exposed western side, and significantly thinner elsewhere.⁷¹ The entrance was fortified with two parallel walls (forming a gate tower). Adjacent to the walls were two larger stone buildings and several smaller wooden structures, while much of the interior remained open. The military garrison likely occupied the stone buildings along the most vulnerable section, taking advantage of the elevated position for observation and signalling. Wooden buildings were probably homes for farmers and shepherds, while the large open space could have accommodated refugees and livestock during times of danger.

At **Kuzelin near Donja Glavnica**, a strong wall was built during this phase, behind which the outlines of houses or tents, with only their floors preserved, were discovered.⁷² Numerous military items emphasize the fortress's role along the shortest route between Siscia and Poetovio, while small finds and a female grave reflect the presence of civilians. Concentrations of coins and other finds date this phase to the final quarter of the 4th and the first half of the 5th centuries.

Based on the nature of the finds and preserved defensive architecture, the fortified settlements at **Brinjeva gora**,⁷³ **Šumenje near Podturn** (Fig. 3: C),⁷⁴ **Ljubična above Zbelovska gora**⁷⁵ and **Crkvišće Bukovlje near Generalski Stol**⁷⁶ can also be included in this group. Stone defensive structures have also been suggested at the less known late Roman phases of **Tonovcov grad near Kobarid**⁷⁷ and **Puštal above Trnje near Škofja Loka**.⁷⁸

Particularly noteworthy is the large hilltop fortified settlement at **Ajdovščina above Rodik**.⁷⁹ Although its densely built interior complex was not enclosed by contemporary walls, it appears that the prehistoric ramparts sufficed. Rich small finds confirm the site's occupation from the 4th to the mid-5th century. Imported ceramics from the first half of the 5th century indicate centralized provisioning.⁸⁰

Prehistoric fortifications were also reused in Late Roman period at **Castelazzo near Doberdò del Lago**.⁸¹ Excavations revealed two phases of fortification of the pre-

⁷⁰ Modrijan 1978; Ciglenečki 1987, 28; Steinklauber 2005, 136.

⁷¹ Strmčnik Gulič, Ciglenečki 2003; Modrijan 2017; Modrijan 2020.

⁷² Sokol 1994; Sokol 1998.

⁷³ Pahič 1980; Pahič 1981.

⁷⁴ Breščak, Dular 2002.

⁷⁵ Ciglenečki 2015, 415.

⁷⁶ Azinović Bebek, Sekulić 2014, 167–168; Azinović Bebek, Sekulić 2019.

⁷⁷ Ciglenečki, Modrijan, Milavec 2011; Modrijan, Milavec 2011.

⁷⁸ Štukl 2004; Ciglenečki, Milavec 2009, 180.

⁷⁹ Slapšak 1978; Slapšak 1985, 136; Slapšak 1997.

⁸⁰ Vidrih Perko, Župančič 2003, 463–467.

⁸¹ Furlani 1969; Maselli Scotti, Montagnari Kokelj 1989.

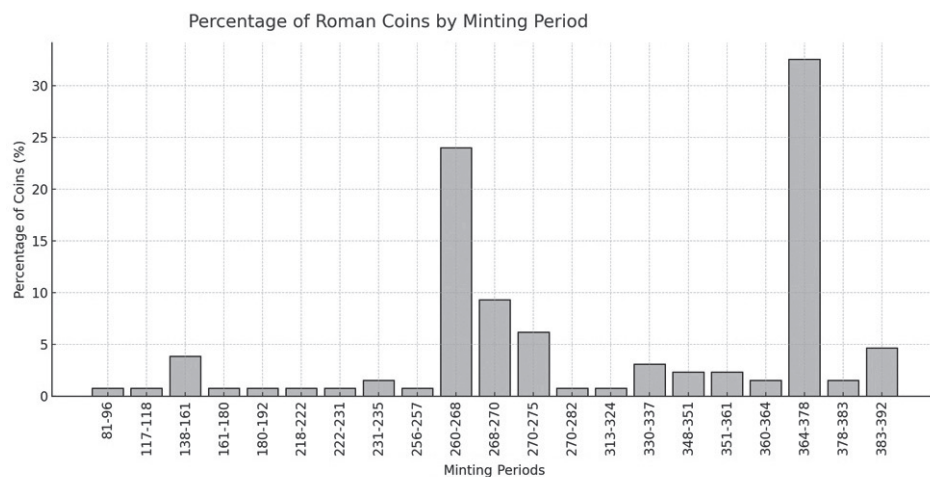


Fig. 4: Coin distribution diagram at the site Rudna near Rudnica.

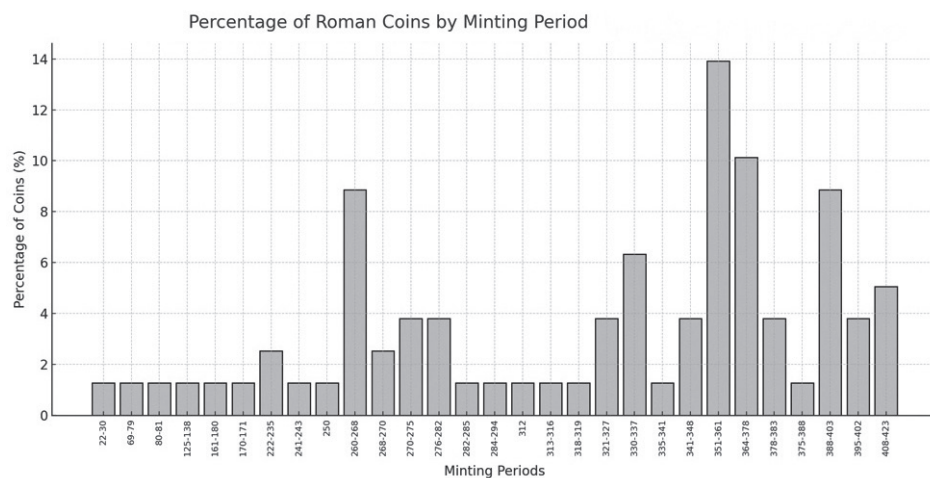


Fig. 5: Coin distribution diagram at the site Tonovcov grad near Kobarid.

historic rampart with a 3-metre-thick mortared wall. Early reports mention several towers and other structures, together with small finds that indicate a strongly fortified military outpost in the 4th and early 5th centuries, protecting the connecting road between the two main invasion routes into Italy from the east.

Finally, mention must be made of outposts without reliable traces of defensive architecture, relying instead on natural positions or prehistoric ramparts. These sites likely served as reserve positions that were used briefly during crises, primarily as refuges for local populations, temporarily reinforced by military detachments. Their locations along secondary routes and the discovery of military equipment and weapons from this period indicate such military outposts at **Mali Njivč near Novaki**,⁸² **Korinjski hrib**,⁸³ **Gradišče near Dunaj**,⁸⁴ and **Rudna near Rudnica**.⁸⁵ The difficulty in distinguishing civilian from military Late Roman outposts is particularly acute at **Zidani gaber**, **Gradec**, **Kozji hrbet**, and **Prag** on the steep northern slopes of the Gorjanci Hills.⁸⁶

The cave sites of **Predjama** and **Tominčeva jama near Škocjan** do not represent typical military fortifications, but finds of military equipment and higher-quality pottery suggest a military presence.⁸⁷ Although no contemporary domestic structures were identified, the caves likely provided at least occasional shelter for small military detachments.

Around the year 400, several major fortifications were destroyed or abandoned, particularly along the main route between Logatec and Ajdovščina (Hrušica, Martinj hrib, Lanišče), as well as at other less-documented sites (e.g. Velike Malence, Šumenje, Mali Njivč, Crkvišče Bukovlje). However, some forts established in the second half of the 4th century retained a partial military function into the first third of the 5th century, and a few even beyond.⁸⁸

Among the larger forts mentioned above, Tokod, Keszthely-Fenékpuszta, Ajdovščina (*Castra*), and Tarsatica, all situated at strategic locations along vital routes, stand out. Their garrisons were large enough to ensure effective defence, and they had sufficiently robust economic hinterlands.

At this time, smaller forts in the Eastern Alpine region with modest masonry defences gained importance.⁸⁹ These include Cuol di Castiel, Ančnikovo gradišče, Doberdò, Šumenje, and the two cave outposts at Predjama and Tominčeva jama near Škocjan. For the first three decades of the 5th century, their existence is confirmed by modest coin circulation and typical late military equipment, as well as imported ceramics representing the last traces of centralized military provisioning (*anona*). Here, military garrisons together with civilians formed the final bulwark of the core territories of the once-mighty empire.

The presence of early Christian churches within Late Roman military fortresses by the middle of the fifth century has not yet been convincingly confirmed anywhere.

⁸² Istenič 2015b.

⁸³ Ciglenečki 1985; Ciglenečki, Modrijan, Milavec 2020.

⁸⁴ Ciglenečki 1992, 25–27; Ciglenečki 1994, 242, Fig. 2.

⁸⁵ Ciglenečki 1992; Istenič 2015a, 157, Fig. 185, 188.

⁸⁶ Križ 2021.

⁸⁷ Korošec 1983; Protzel 1996, 140–143; Vidrih Perko, Župančič 2003, 463–467.

⁸⁸ Overview: Ciglenečki, Milavec 2009; Ciglenečki 2015, 423–424.

⁸⁹ Marcone 2004, 351; Ciglenečki 2007, 318–325; Gelichi et al. 2020, 490.

Along the Rhine *limes*, a few better-researched posts suggested their presence as early as around 400, but critical reassessments of older data have shown that early Christian structures were incorporated only after the fortresses were abandoned, mostly in the second half of the 5th century (Kaiseraugst, Zurzach, Boppard, and Schaan).⁹⁰ A particularly telling case is the site of Georgenberg, where the first (although still archaeologically unconfirmed) church building is mentioned during the visits of Saint Severinus in the 470s.⁹¹ This example clearly suggests that the construction of the first churches in fortresses should be expected only in the decade marking the final collapse of the Roman Empire. The supposed early Christian church at Črnomelj likely dates to the time when the fortress had already transformed into a civilian fortified settlement, and perhaps regained a stronger military character only in the Justinian period. A similar case is known at Tarsatica, where the church was built only after the site ceased to function as a military base.⁹² The Late Antique church historian Theodoret wrote around 450 that Theodosius spent the night in prayer in a church on the eve of the Battle of the Frigidus in 394. However, older accounts of the battle do not mention this, and archaeological investigations at Hrušica have not revealed any trace of a church.⁹³

A comparison of the eastern Alpine hilltop fortresses with the posts in the hinterland of the Rhine *limes* reveals notable similarities. The choice of location and construction techniques are comparable: walls were built only in exposed places and reached a thickness of about metre, while towers were rare. Sometimes entrances were reinforced with gate towers (Katzenberg, Cuol di Castiel, Ančnikovo gradišče, Šumenje). The interiors were built up to a limited extent, with buildings mostly aligned along the walls. Rare masonry structures were present alongside more common buildings made of perishable materials or even improvised constructions. Most fortresses featured a larger open space inside, intended for refugees and livestock.

In northern Gaul, military fortresses were already established around 300, safeguarding settlements and economic facilities in the lowlands. This represents a parallel existence of fortresses alongside still densely populated valleys. In the eastern Alpine region, settlement shifted back to the hills only in the last quarter of the 4th century, resulting in a combination of military and civilian settlements, with only occasional open spaces for refugees indicating nearby unprotected settlements. However, lowland settlements became significantly fewer, with most of the population by this time living only in Roman towns, a few rural villas, or poorly known locations away from major routes. Although the timing of fortification in the two compared areas differed, fortresses generally persisted at least into the first three decades of the 5th century (as indicated by coin finds), and some perhaps even until the mid-5th century.

⁹⁰ Prien 2012.

⁹¹ Ubl 1982, 85; Lang 2019.

⁹² Višnjić 2019, 96–98.

⁹³ Ulbert 1981b, 48.

The defence of northeastern Italy in the Late Roman period

Building on the development of Late Roman fortifications outlined above, we now briefly examine the fortification of the northeastern frontier of Italy. Efforts to defend the approaches to Italy can be traced back to the little-documented *praetentura* of Italy in the second half of the 2nd century.⁹⁴ The natural Alpine barrier was further strengthened during Late Antiquity. In the 260s or 270s, there was a brief phase of fortification at strategically vital points along key roads and passes (Castra, Tarsatica, Pasjak, Solin) (Fig. 6). This may correspond to a report in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, which states that in 269/270 the brother of Emperor Claudius II Gothicus, Quintillus, was commanding the defences of Italy (*Claustra Italiae*).⁹⁵

Following Diocletian's restoration of the *limes*, a few new fortifications appeared in the interior (e.g. Hrušica, and possibly Zalog) (Fig. 6). The strengthened frontier brought nearly half a century of peace, allowing for a final flourishing of both urban centres and rural areas. Although civil wars and internal conflicts led to some repairs and even the preventive construction of certain segments of barrier walls, their primary purpose at the time was traffic control. One such example is the southern branch of the linear wall with a gate tower, dating to the mid-4th century, which connects to the fortress at Hrušica.⁹⁶

Fortification efforts peaked in the second half of the 4th century, when the renewed and newly built fortifications along the *limes* were supplemented by the strengthening of the defensive system in the Julian Alps (Fig. 7). Evidence includes the renovation of the fortress at Hrušica (*Ad Pirum*) (with the Valentinian-era reconstruction of the southwestern tower), the construction of fortresses at Martinj hrib and Lanišče, as well as an extensive network of barrier walls with towers, watchtowers, and signal posts protecting Italy from eastern and northern incursions.⁹⁷

The issue of the linear barrier walls and their associated fortifications does not require detailed discussion here, as these structures have been addressed in numerous recent studies.⁹⁸ Archaeological evidence indicates that barrier walls along the main invasion route via Hrušica existed by the mid-4th century. Their abandonment, like that of the fortress at Hrušica itself, can be dated to the early 5th century, while smaller sites (Martinj hrib and Lanišče) were abandoned even earlier. However, the precise duration of other shorter sections of the barrier walls along secondary routes remains uncertain, though the associated fortifications persisted at least into the first three decades of the 5th century (e.g. Puštal above Trnje, Korinjski hrib).

As mentioned earlier, the road over Hrušica was abandoned by the early 5th cen-

⁹⁴ Šašel 1974a, 388–396.

⁹⁵ Šašel 1974b, 257.

⁹⁶ Kos 2012, 286.

⁹⁷ Kos 2014; Kusetič 2019.

⁹⁸ Kos 2012; Kos 2013; Poulter 2013; Kos 2014; Kusetič 2014; Ciglenečki 2015; Ciglenečki 2016; Kusetič 2019.



Fig. 6: Sites mentioned in the text from the second half of the 3rd century (red) and the Diocletianic-Constantinian period (black) in the southeastern Alpine region.

tury at the latest, while fortifications along secondary routes to the north and south of the abandoned main thoroughfare remained in use. With this layered defence in depth, the last military units – or at least local militias and *foederati* – secured all major passes leading into and out of the rugged, mountainous approaches to Italy. Among the already discussed sites, we should mention Tonovcov grad, Ajdovščina above Rodik, Predjama, Castellazzo near Doberdò, and Cuol di Castiel.

The discussion surrounding the *Claustra* reveals a wide range of interpretations, attributing to it various roles: from a significant, militarily organized line of defence,⁹⁹ to a system mainly employed during period of civil wars,¹⁰⁰ a means of controlling traffic and directing migrations.¹⁰¹ Recent decades of research, supported by both known sources and more reliable archaeological evidence, have confirmed both the military significance of the system and its chronology.¹⁰²

The surge in coin finds from the reign of Valentinian at many fortified sites indi-

⁹⁹ Šašel, Petru 1971; Ulbert 1981b, 42–43; Kos 2014; Bratož 2014, 194.

¹⁰⁰ Christie 1991.

¹⁰¹ Johnson 1983, 221; Poulter 2013.

¹⁰² Kos 2012; Bratož 2014, 194; Kos 2014.

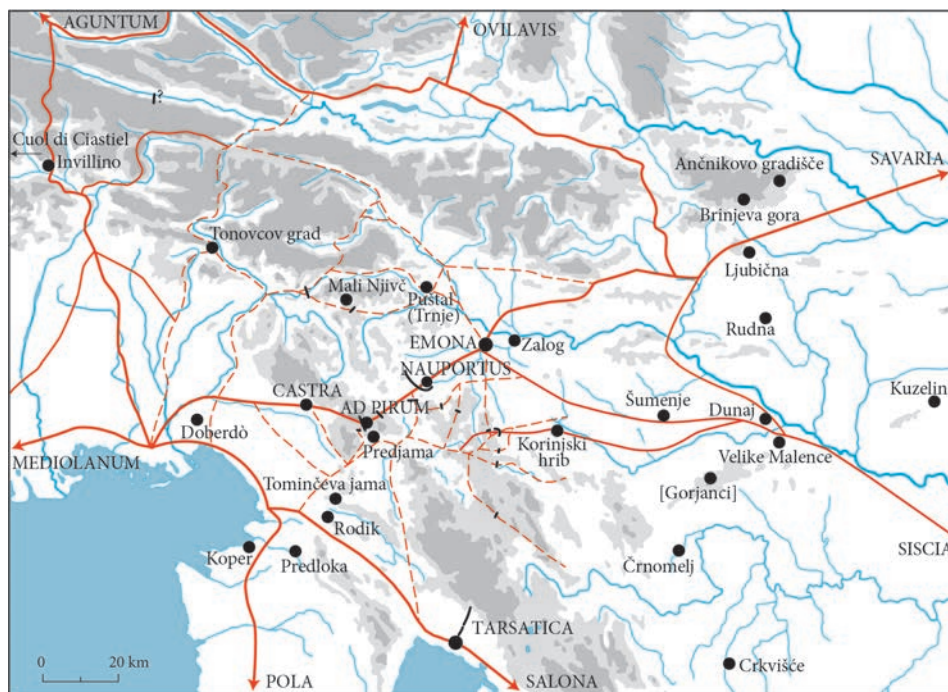


Fig. 7: Defensive walls (black lines), reconstructed road network (red lines), and sites mentioned in the text from the second half of the 4th and the first third of the 5th century.

cates an intensified military and civilian presence. Precise chronology remains elusive, as the dating relies primarily on numerous, often non-professionally recovered coins. While the exact timing of the construction of individual segments of the barrier system remains unclear, it is certain that the walls along the Hrušica route and the northern edge of Istria were at least contemporary with the Valentinian-era renovations. Research shows that fortification efforts intensified precisely when Gothic and other invasive groups dispersed across Illyricum. With main settlements along key roads depopulated, mobile raiding parties sought alternative routes toward Italy, making their protection essential. The expansive defensive system aimed to slow enemy advances, weaken their forces, and prevent the organization of battle formations until they could be confronted by the main Roman forces on Italian soil. Although some have proposed that this defence-in-depth strategy emerged only at the beginning of the 5th century, archaeological evidence supports an earlier inception.¹⁰³

This comprehensively conceived defence zone also included cities that hosted the main military forces, which in times of crisis were redeployed to smaller fortifications

¹⁰³ Cf. Christie 1991, 420.

at strategic points. We have already noted the example of Tarsatica, which by the final third of the 3rd century had been transformed into a major military headquarters. In the area ahead of the barrier system, we must also emphasize Emona, which represented the key to the central sector of the defensive zone. Numerous archaeological finds of military equipment, weapons, coin hoards, and some graves attest to a military presence.¹⁰⁴ Additional evidence includes the substantial quantities of imported ceramics and transport amphorae, indicating organized provisioning (*annona*).¹⁰⁵ During this period, the city's fortifications were strengthened, its gates walled up, and some public buildings renovated.¹⁰⁶ Among the excavated *insulae*, building XIII at the southwestern edge of the city stands out: due to its location and layout, several scholars have suggested a military function, and Peter Petru even identified it as a *praetorium*.¹⁰⁷ Although definitive proof is lacking, its proximity to the western gate and distinctive design suggest a special purpose. Individual burials both inside and outside the city hint at the presence of *foederati* units.¹⁰⁸

Some scholars have sporadically argued that the abandonment of the *Claustra* system coincided with the rise of hilltop settlements.¹⁰⁹ However, reliable archaeological evidence shows that population movements to fortified outposts were contemporaneous with the existence of the *Claustra* and, at least in the central defensive belt, formed an integral part of the barrier system.¹¹⁰

In addition to the fortifications already mentioned, at least two more sites within the defensive zone deserve attention. The remains of Roman military equipment found in the Roman villa on the large, unfortified plateau at **Predloka** suggest the presence of a unit that controlled two important routes. Matej Župančič identified features of military gear, including a *Muthmannsdorf*-type buckle common in the Rhineland, and hypothesized that this item may have arrived in Predloka only after Alaric's invasion of Italy in 401, when Roman troops were withdrawn from the Rhine for the defence of Italy.¹¹¹

The coastal zone also contained fortresses that persisted into the 5th century. In addition to the aforementioned Tarsatica, where military structures remained in use well into the 5th century, there was a fortress on the former island of present-day Koper, which controlled maritime traffic. Jaroslav Šašel had proposed its location at the highest point of the former island, a hypothesis confirmed by excavations in the 1990s.¹¹² Among the abundant small finds from the 4th and 5th centuries were items

¹⁰⁴ Schmid 1913; Plesničar 1997; Gaspari 2014, 235–238.

¹⁰⁵ Vidrih Perko, Župančič 2003, 262–263.

¹⁰⁶ Saria 1939, 144; Plesničar 1997; Gaspari 2014, 224–234.

¹⁰⁷ Schmid 1913, 96–102; Petru 1977; Gaspari 2014, 186.

¹⁰⁸ Vuga 1985; Knific, Tomanič-Jevremov 1996.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Christie 2001, 241; Vanesse 2007, 118.

¹¹⁰ Šašel 1971, 99–100; Ciglenečki 2008, 487–489.

¹¹¹ Župančič, 2002.

¹¹² Šašel 1974c, 453; Cunja 1996, 130.

of military equipment and weaponry, as well as numerous examples of tableware and vessels for transporting goods.¹¹³

A brief survey of the fortification of northeastern Italy reveals its origins in the 260s and 270s, with the construction of key outposts and a short-lived network of improvised positions. In the early 4th century, only the fort at *Ad Pirum* is reliably attested at a strategically crucial location. By the second half of the 4th century, the Romans had established a complex defensive network, including major military bases (e.g. *Castra*, *Tarsatica*, *Ad Pirum*), smaller camps and posts (Lanišče, Martinj hrib), fortified military-civilian settlements (e.g. Tonovcov grad, Puštal), and an extensive linear system of barrier walls and observation points. This system, known in the sources as the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*, was upgraded several times but abandoned in its central section along the main Hrušica route by the early 5th century. At that time, traffic shifted to alternative passes, while fortifications remained distributed in depth across the territory, and many persisted into the first half of the 5th century.

¹¹³ Cunja 1996, 193–194.

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Slavko Ciglenečki
Znanstvenoraziskovalni center SAZU
Inštitut za arheologijo
Novi trg 2
SI-1000 Ljubljana
slavko.ciglenecki@zrc-sazu.si

Theodore, the Bishop of Heraclea in Thrace, in the Service of Constantinople

Alenka CEDILNIK

Abstract

This article highlights the figure of Bishop Theodore of Heraclea in Thrace, who had a great influence on the course of the Arian controversy. He actively participated in the synods that reflected the convictions and interests of a very influential group of bishops gathered around Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople in the 330s, 340s, and 350s. This group, the Eusebians, had a decisive influence on the religious policy of both Constantine the Great in the last years of his reign and his successors in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, Constantius II and Valens. As a close associate of bishops Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople and Macedonius, who took over the leadership of the Constantinopolitan Church after Eusebius, Theodore of Heraclea supported Constantinople's position in the theological field and its efforts – as the new capital of the eastern part of the empire – to gain as much influence as possible in the ecclesiastical and political sphere. With these efforts, the bishop influenced events in the eastern Alpine region, northern Italy, and the western Balkans.

Keywords: Theodore of Heraclea; Athanasius of Alexandria; Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople; Macedonius of Constantinople; Arian controversy; Antioch; Aquileia

Izvleček

Teodor, škof Herakleje v Trakiji, v službi Konstantinopla

Članek osvetljuje lik škofa Teodorja iz Herakleje v Trakiji, ki je s svojim delovanjem pomembno vplival na potek arijanskega spora. Aktivno je sodeloval na sinodah, ki so v tridesetih, štiridesetih in petdesetih letih 4. stoletja predstavljale odraz prepričanj in interesov zelo vplivne skupine škofov, zbranih okoli Evzebijja iz Nikomedije/Konstantinopla. Ta skupina, imenovana evzebijjanci, je odločilno usmerjala versko politiko tako Konstantina Velikega v zadnjih letih njegovega vladanja kot njegovih naslednikov v vzhodnem delu države, Konstancija II. in Valensa. Kot tesen sodelavec škofov Evzebijja iz Nikomedije/Konstantinopla in Makedonija, ki je po Evzebijju prevzel vodstvo Cerkve v Konstantinoplu, je Teodor iz Herakleje podpiral stališča Konstantinopla tako na teološkem področju kot v prizadevanjih, da si kot nova prestolnica vzhodnega dela države tudi na cerkveno-političnem področju ustvari čim večji vpliv. V teh prizadevanjih je škof sooblikoval potek dogodkov, ki so se odvijali na ozemlju vzhodnih Alp, severne Italije in zahodnega Balkana.

Ključne besede: Teodor iz Herakleje; Atanazij iz Aleksandrije; Evzebij iz Nikomedije/Konstantinopla; Makedonij iz Konstantinopla; arijanski spor; Antiohija; Akvileja

The Arian controversy, which deeply divided the Church in the fourth century, also marked the politics of the Roman emperors of that time, who largely used it to achieve their political goals. The eastern Alpine region, northern Italy, and the western Balkans were also not spared by this controversy. Several key events relevant to the course of the conflict took place in this area (for instance the Synod of Milan in 345, the four synods of Sirmium in the 350s, and the Synod of Aquileia in 381). In addition, some crucial personalities that significantly influenced the development of events in this dispute – especially Valens of Mursa, Ursacius of Singidunum, and Ambrose of Milan – also came from this area.

The central topic of this article is Bishop Theodore of Heraclea in Thrace, who was not from the geographical area in question, but he nonetheless significantly influenced the course of the Arian controversy with his activities and actively participated in the events that took place there. Presenting his role during the first 30 years of the Arian controversy not only elucidates the events in the political and ecclesiastical sphere in the eastern Alpine region, northern Italy, and the western Balkans, but also reveals the role of Constantinople in those events. In the background of the bishops' activities, a constant striving for gradually strengthening this city's power is clearly revealed, not only in the political sense but also in the ecclesiastical domain. Although the bishops of Heraclea (Perinthus)¹ in Thrace had the right to appoint the bishops of Byzantium² and later Constantinople,³ the balance of power between the two cities began to change with the foundation of Constantinople. This was not achieved overnight, but gradually. After Constantine established the city as his new capital and a new decision-making centre, its bishops still had to acquire their future important role in the Church. The bishops of Heraclea actively participated in this process. In this development of events, the role of Theodore, who became the Bishop of Heraclea in the years when Constantinople was founded, stands out in particular.

¹ After 297, based on reforms carried out by Diocletian, Perinthus/Heraclea was the capital of the Roman province of Europe; von Bredow 2006. Constantinople had a special status in this system of administration from 359 onward; Olshausen 2011.

² Crawford 2013a, 229.

³ According to Zonaras (*Epitome historiarum* 13.3.29), Constantinople was previously a bishopric of Thracian Heraclea (Heracleia) because the city had been submitted to Perinthus by Severus. See also Amidon 2007, 127, n. 21. Philostorgius reports that the bishops of Heraclea had the privilege of playing the main role in installing the bishops of Constantinople; Philost. *h.e.* 9.10. Sozomen provides similar information. According to him, Paul succeeded Alexander as the Bishop of Constantinople against the advice of Eusebius of Nicomedia or Theodore of Heraclea. Because they both headed the episcopal sees closest to the new capital, Sozomen thinks they had the right to decide on the selection of its new bishop; Soz. *h.e.* 3.3.1. However, the selection did not proceed that way. Paul may have been appointed by Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, who passed through Constantinople in 337 on his way from exile to Alexandria; Crawford 2013a, 232. As Matthew R. Crawford correctly suspects, Athanasius's involvement in the consecration of the new Bishop of Constantinople could have been an attempt to extend his influence over the new capital. For the election of the new Bishop of Constantinople after Alexander's death, see also Cedilnik, Moreau 2024, 150–155.

Theodore of Heraclea and Athanasius's first exile

Theodore of Heraclea⁴ is first⁵ mentioned in written sources in connection with the efforts of the opponents of Athanasius, the bishop of the prominent episcopal see of Alexandria, to accuse him before Emperor Constantine because of his – as they sought to demonstrate – criminal offenses. According to Theodoret,⁶ Theodore was one of the leaders of this group together with Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicaea. Under the influence of their accusations, the emperor attempted to convene a synod in Caesarea, Palestine, in 334. Because Athanasius did not respond to the invitation to take part in it, Constantine ordered him to come to the synod in Tyre the following year.⁷ There Athanasius was condemned and deposed. Just like the year before, Theodore of Heraclea was again among his most important opponents at the Synod of Tyre.

Exactly ten years had passed since the First Council of Nicaea was convened by Emperor Constantine with the aim of unifying the positions of the bishops present regarding Arius's interpretation of the relationship between God the Father and His Son. The council did not achieve its purpose because the controversy spread and strengthened after it. Consequently, the Synod of Tyre deposed Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria, at that time the most prominent representative and defender of the resolutions adopted by the Council of Nicaea. Although Emperor Constantine insisted on the correctness of the decisions made at the council, his advisers on religious matters, among whom Eusebius of Nicomedia gradually became the most important, managed to convince him that it was necessary to exclude the bishops that did not want to cooperate with Eusebius and his associates to restore peace in the Church. In 335, Eusebius was still the Bishop of Nicomedia, but with the support of his adherents, the Eusebians (especially, as one may presume, Theodore of Heraclea⁸ and Macedonius, Eusebius's later successor on Constantinople's episcopal throne),⁹ he became the Bishop of Constantinople only two years later.¹⁰ After Alexander, who was the first Bishop of Constantinople, Eusebius was the first pro-Arian bishop of the new capital.

⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria (*ep. Aeg. Lib.* 7.2–6) lists Theodore among the bishops that received their episcopal consecration from the hands of Eusebius of Nicomedia and his supporters with the task of spreading the Arian heresy. Therefore, one might suppose that Theodore was ordained as bishop by Eusebius between 328, when the Bishop of Nicomedia returned from exile, and 334. See also Crawford 2013a, 230.

⁵ Although Anonymous (Gelasius) of Cyzicus (*h.e.* 2.7.43) reports that Theodore took part in the Council of Nicaea, this is probably not true because the lists of its participants include Paideros of Heraclea, Theodore's predecessor; *Socr. h.e.* 1.13.12. See also Schäferdiek 1996a, 51; Crawford 2013a, 229–230.

⁶ Thdt., *h.e.* 1.28.2. Schäferdiek 1996a, 51–52; Crawford 2013a, 229–230.

⁷ *Soz.*, *h.e.* 2.25.1. Simonetti 1975, 114–115; Barnes 1993, 21–22.

⁸ See n. 3.

⁹ For Macedonius's role in making Eusebius of Nicomedia the Bishop of Constantinople, see Cedilnik, Moreau 2024, 150–155.

¹⁰ Cedilnik, Moreau 2024, 154–155.

His activities before and after his appointment as the Bishop of Constantinople laid the foundations for the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Theodore of Heraclea was one of the most important supporters of Eusebius of Nicomedia. In 334 and 335, he participated in all key activities organized by the Bishop of Nicomedia that led to Athanasius's first exile. Not only did he participate in the Synod of Tyre as one of the leading figures of the "plot" against Athanasius,¹¹ but he was also a member of the commission sent to Mareotis near Alexandria to verify the credibility of the charges against Athanasius. This commission also included Theog(o)ni(u)s of Nicaea, Maris of Chalcedon, Macedonius of Mopsuestia, and two Illyrian bishops, Valens of Mursa and Ursacius of Singidunum.¹² It was based on this commission's findings from the scene of the crimes allegedly committed that the synod condemned Athanasius. However, the Bishop of Alexandria left Tyre before the sentence was pronounced at the synod and went to Constantinople to meet Emperor Constantine in person. His efforts to persuade the emperor of the injustice done to him were thwarted by the arrival of a group of bishops led by Eusebius of Nicomedia. According to Sozomen,¹³ one of those bishops was Theodore of Heraclea. Other sources do not mention him. However, they list other close associates of Eusebius of Nicomedia: Theognis of Nicaea, Patrophilus of Scythopolis, Eusebius of Caesarea, Valens of Mursa, and Ursacius of Singidunum.¹⁴ Regardless of whether Theodore was in this group of bishops or not, it can be concluded that, already in the period when the Bishop of Heraclea is first mentioned in the sources, he – as one of Eusebius of Nicomedia's closest collaborators – actively participated in Eusebius's efforts to prevent Athanasius of Alexandria from effectively participating in the endeavour to end the Arian controversy and to create conditions that would enable Eusebius to put his initiatives into action.¹⁵

His further conduct is in line with these efforts. This is evidenced by the events he took part in and the role he played in them:¹⁶ the Synod of Antioch (341), the election of the new Bishop of Constantinople (341), the mission to Emperor Constans in Trier (341/342), the Council of Serdica (343), the Synods of Heraclea (?) and Antioch (349), and the Synod of Sirmium (351).

¹¹ Ath., *apol. sec.* 77.2. Apart from him, Athanasius mentions Eusebius of Nicomedia as the leader of the group, as well as Theognis of Nicaea, Maris of Chalcedon, Narcissus of Eirenopolis/Neronias, and Patrophilus of Scythopolis.

¹² Theodore is listed second or third among the members of the commission; Ath., *apol. sec.* 28.1, 75.1; Socr., *h.e.* 1.31.3; Soz., *h.e.* 2.25.19; Thdt., *h.e.* 1.30.11. See also Schäferdiek 1996a, 52–53.

¹³ Soz., *h.e.* 2.28.13.

¹⁴ Socr., *h.e.* 1.35.1–2; Ath., *apol. sec.* 87.1. Athanasius does not list Maris of Chalcedon, whom Sozomen and Socrates mention in their lists, and neither of the two mention Eusebius of Caesarea.

¹⁵ See also Crawford 2013a, 231.

¹⁶ Although the sources do not mention Theodore's attendance at the Synod of Constantinople in 336, Matthew R. Crawford assumes that the bishop took part in it because Eusebius of Caesarea (*Marcell.* 2.4.29) reports the participation of the Bishop of Thrace, which could very well refer to the Bishop of Heraclea; Crawford 2013a, 231. The synod deposed Marcellus of Ancyra, appointed Basil as his replacement, and rehabilitated Arius; Barnes 1993, 56.

Athanasius's second exile and the Synod of Antioch (341)

After Constantine's death in 337, with the permission of Constantine II, the eldest of the late emperor's sons, the bishops condemned and banished by the series of synods in the East were allowed to return. Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, was also among the exiles that were returning to their episcopal sees. Because the amnesty proclaimed by Emperor Constantine II ignored the resolutions of the synods by which these bishops were condemned, it aroused fierce opposition among the bishops that had made the most efforts to expel them. As in the past, their undisputed leader was Eusebius of Nicomedia. In 337, he changed the place of his episcopal see for the second time¹⁷ and became the Bishop of Constantinople. He and his associates also managed to win the favour of the new ruler in the East, Constantius II, the younger brother of Constantine II. However, the return of the exiled bishops was against Constantius's interests as well. It would enable the rulers in the western part of the empire – his two brothers, Constantine II and Constans – to assert their influence in Constantius's part through the condemned bishops that had been exiled to the West and were now allowed to return. Athanasius certainly aroused bitter opposition upon his return to Alexandria in November 337.¹⁸ Theodoret¹⁹ reports that Eusebius of Nicomedia, Theognis of Nicaea, and Theodore of Perinthus (Heraclea), who resided near Constantinople, frequently visited Emperor Constantius II, trying to convince him that Athanasius's return was the reason for much trouble in the Church. Their efforts achieved their goal when a synod met in Antioch in the winter of 338/339 and condemned Athanasius again.²⁰ At this synod, Eusebius and his followers installed Gregory of Cappadocia as the new Bishop of Alexandria.²¹ When he entered Alexandria accompanied by soldiers in the spring of 339, Athanasius left the city again and withdrew to the West.²² By the end of 339 or the beginning of 340, he was already in Rome.²³

In such an atmosphere of tension, Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople and his

¹⁷ Eusebius of Nicomedia was initially the Bishop of Berytus, then of Nicomedia, and finally of Constantinople.

¹⁸ Brennecke et al. 2007, 137. As Matthew R. Crawford suggests, Theodore may have taken part in the synod that was probably held in Antioch in the winter of 337/338. The synod assembled at Eusebius of Nicomedia's initiative with the purpose of deposing Athanasius and installing his successor; Crawford 2013a, 232. The synod's attempt proved unsuccessful. Information about it is provided by a letter from the Synod of Alexandria that met in response to the renewed attempts to condemn and depose Athanasius of Alexandria after his return from exile; Ath., *apol. sec.* 3.2.

¹⁹ Thdt., *h.e.* 2.3.8.

²⁰ Socr., *h.e.* 2.8.6–7; Crawford 2013a, 233. Socrates partly confused his report on the synod with the synod that met in Antioch in 341; Barnes 1993, 45–46; Périchon, Maraval 2005, 37, n. 5.

²¹ Socr., *h.e.* 2.10.1. For a brief overview of the broader context, see Brennecke et al. 2007, 137.

²² Socr., *h.e.* 2.11.1–6. See also Crawford 2013a, 233; Brennecke et al. 2007, 137.

²³ For an overview of political and ecclesiastical affairs during the first years after Constantine's death, see Löhr 1986, 4.

followers, the Eusebians, hastened to justify their past conduct and to prove the correctness of their decisions. Theodore of Heraclea was also actively involved in these efforts. His name appears among the signatories of the letter sent to Julius,²⁴ the Bishop of Rome, probably in 341. Information about the letter comes from the report sent by the pro-Nicene bishops assembled at the Council of Serdica (343) to all the churches.²⁵ Apart from Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople, who is listed first, all the members of the commission sent to Mareotis except Macedonius of Mopsuestia are listed as the senders of this letter.²⁶ As can be understood from the report, they presented their reasons for the condemnation of Athanasius of Alexandria and Marcellus of Ancyra. Unlike Athanasius, who was convicted of various disciplinary offenses,²⁷ Marcellus was considered a heretic²⁸ by the eastern pro-Arian bishops. Because he himself defended the doctrine of the oneness of God in a hypostatic union, he was a staunch defender of the Nicene Creed. Consequently, he was initially strongly supported by the Nicene bishops. It is not known exactly when the letter was written. Based on the names of its signatories, however, it can be assumed that it was sent to Julius after the Synod of Rome met at the end of 340 or in the spring of 341,²⁹ and after the bishops gathered at the Synod of Antioch (341) had received Julius of Rome's response to their rejection of his invitation to the Synod of Rome.³⁰ This assumption

²⁴ It seems that Eusebius of Nicomedia and his followers wrote to Julius soon after the Synod of Tyre. Athanasius reports that this letter was delivered by the presbyter Macarius and two deacons, Martyrius and Hesychius, before Gregory's appointment as the Bishop of Alexandria; Ath., *apol. sec.* 22.3, 24.1. See also Brennecke et al. 2007, 137. Glen L. Thompson assumes that the letter was sent to Rome in the spring of 338; Thompson 2015, 28. As Julius writes in his letter to Dianius, Flacillus, Narcissus, Eusebius, Maris, Macedonius, Theodore, and other bishops gathered in Antioch, who had written to him first, Macarius, Martyrius, and Hesychius urged Julius, the Bishop of Rome, to write to Pistus, who was made the Bishop of Alexandria by Athanasius's opponents. It can therefore be assumed that Macarius, Martyrius, and Hesychius set off on their journey to Rome before Gregory, Pistus's successor, was appointed the Bishop of Alexandria. Glen L. Thompson dates the Synod of Antioch, which appointed Gregory as the new Bishop of Alexandria in the spring of 339; Thompson 2015, 28. Hanson 2005, 263, n. 98, and 267–268, assumes that Pistus was probably consecrated by Secundus of Ptolemais soon after the Synod of Tyre.

²⁵ Thdt., *h.e.* 2.8.6; Hil., *coll. antiar.* B II.1.2.

²⁶ The senders of the letter were Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople, Maris of Chalcedon, Theodore of Heraclea, Diognitus/Theognis of Nicaea, Ursacius of Singidunum, Valens of Mursa, Menophantus of Ephesus, and Stephen of Antioch; Thdt., *h.e.* 2.8.6. Hilarius of Poitiers (*coll. antiar.* B II.1.2) does not list the last two bishops. See also Brennecke et al. 2007, 190.

²⁷ Hil., *coll. antiar.* A IV.1.6–8.

²⁸ Hil., *coll. antiar.* A IV.1.2–5.

²⁹ Cedilnik, Moreau, 2021, 450–451, n. 15 and 16, 452, n. 22; Brennecke et al. 2007, 138.

³⁰ In his letter, Julius of Rome explicitly mentions only the letter that was brought to Rome by the presbyter Macarius and both deacons, Martyrius and Hesychius (Ath., *apol. sec.* 26.1). It is certainly not the letter sent by Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople, the members of the Mareotis commission, Menophantus of Ephesus, and Stephen of Antioch, because Stephen was not yet the Bishop of Antioch at the time the first letter was sent. One might assume that Julius would have mentioned the later letter from the Eusebians because he portrays them in his letter as the main culprits for

can be based on the fact that Stephen, who became the Bishop of Antioch after Flacillus's death, was also one of the signatories of this letter. Because Flacillus took part in the Synod of Antioch (341) – and, as the Bishop of Antioch, probably presided over it – it can be assumed that the letter was written after the end of the synod or at least after Julius had sent his letter to the participants of the synod, among whom Flacillus is also listed.³¹ Flacillus died soon after the Synod of Antioch (341).³² This letter that Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople and his adherents sent to Rome did not have the desired effect since the Synod of Rome (341), which rehabilitated the exiled bishops,³³ made them irreproachable in the eyes of the West.

Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople and his group of bishops wanted not only to prove that the banished bishops had been justly condemned, but also to demonstrate that their theological belief was the only correct one. With this purpose in mind, as reported by Socrates³⁴ and Sozomen,³⁵ Eusebius convened the (already mentioned) Synod of Antioch in 340/341.³⁶ Because it was held at the time of the dedication of the great church in Antioch,³⁷ it has been known as the Synod of Antioch *in Encaeniis* (i.e., at the dedication). It was attended by the emperor of the eastern part of the empire, Constantius II.³⁸ According to Socrates,³⁹ 90 bishops participated in the synod. Sozomen gives a slightly larger number: 97. He mentions some of them by name: Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople, Acacius of Caesarea, Patrophilus of Scythopolis, Theodore of Heraclea, Eudoxius of Germanicia, Gregory of Alexandria, Dianius of Caesarea in Cappadocia, George of Laodicea, and Eusebius of Emesa.⁴⁰ Theodore is listed fourth. Although there is no information about his role at the synod, it can be concluded that it was not insignificant, because he is not only mentioned by name but also quite near the top of the list of participants. There were no representatives from

the intolerable situation in the Church (Ath., *apol. sec.* 21–35). However, he mentions a letter he received (maybe already) some years ago and is silent about the more recent letter. Perhaps it could be assumed that the letter by Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople, Maris of Chalcedon, Theodore of Heraclea, Theognis of Nicaea, Ursacius of Singidunum, Valens of Mursa, Menophantus of Ephesus, and Stephen of Antioch was written at the same time as the Fourth Creed of Antioch.

³¹ For the year of Stephen's ordination as bishop, see Hanson 2005, 292, n. 61. Cf. Brennecke et al. 2007, 190, n. a, who suggest that the letter could have been written before the one mentioned in Ath., *apol. sec.* 22.3.

³² Hanson 2005, 292, n. 61.

³³ In addition to Athanasius, the Synod of Rome also rehabilitated the following bishops: Paul of Constantinople, Marcellus of Ancyra (Galatia), Lucius of Adrianople (Thracia), Cyrus of Beroea (Syria Coele), Euphratius of Balaneae (Syria Coele), Hellanicus of Tripolis (Phoenicia), and Asclepas of Gaza (Palestine); Opitz 1938, 111; Barnes 1993, 61; Brennecke et al. 2007, 13.

³⁴ Socr., *h.e.* 2.8.1–7.

³⁵ Soz., *h.e.* 3.5.1–3.

³⁶ For more details on the dating of the synod, see Brennecke et al. 2007, 138.

³⁷ Soz., *h.e.* 3.5.1.

³⁸ Soz., *h.e.* 3.9.1. See also Crawford 2013a, 233–234.

³⁹ Socr., *h.e.* 2.8.3.

⁴⁰ Soz., *h.e.* 3.5.10–3.6.1.

the West at the synod and, apart from Eusebius of Nicomedia, who was the Bishop of Constantinople at the time, Theodore was the only representative from the Balkans known to have participated in the meeting.

Based on the information provided by ancient authors, it is not clear whether the Synod of Antioch took place before the Synod of Rome. It is also possible that the two partially overlapped in time.⁴¹ However, Julius's letter inviting bishops of the East to the Synod of Rome was answered by the bishops that had already gathered at the Synod of Antioch. They understood Julius's writing as an insult, and "called Julius to account for having admitted the followers of Athanasius into communion, and expressed their indignation against him for having insulted their synod and abrogated their decrees, and they assailed his transactions as unjust and discordant with ecclesiastical right."⁴² The letter of the eastern bishops addressed to the Bishop of Rome has not been preserved, but a brief summary of its content appears in the Church histories of Socrates and Sozomen.⁴³ The report of the two historians does not mention the names of the signatories of the letter. This information is preserved in Julius's reply to their letter, written in the spring of 341.⁴⁴ He addressed his letter to Dianius, Flacillus, Narcissus, Eusebius, Maris, Macedonius, and Theodore, who had previously written to him from Antioch.⁴⁵ The Bishop of Heraclea is mentioned last among the addressees. Although Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople is only the fourth among the recipients of Julius's letter, he and his associates were presented in the letter as culprits in all the actions directed against Athanasius and his associates.⁴⁶ Athanasius writes the same in his *History of the Arians*. He singles out Eusebius and his followers as the main initiators of the proceedings directed against himself and his associates under Constantius II.⁴⁷ The letter of the bishops assembled at the Synod of Antioch (341), also failed to convince the Bishop of Rome that Athanasius and his associates had been justly condemned and exiled.

The efforts of the bishops gathered at the Synod of Antioch in 341 to present their theological belief as correct were similarly unsuccessful. As many as three creeds were written during that synod: the First, Second, and Third Creeds of Antioch. The First Creed of Antioch⁴⁸ was partially preserved in a letter sent by the Synod of Antioch to all bishops at the beginning of 341. Only a fragment⁴⁹ of this letter has survived; in

⁴¹ Brennecke et al. 2007, 138.

⁴² Translated by Chester D. Hartranft; Soz. *h.e.* 3.8.6: εἰς ἐγκλήματα δὲ προφέροντες Ἰουλίῳ τὸ κοινωνῆσαι τοῖς ἀμφὶ τὸν Ἀθανάσιον ἐχάλεπαινον ὡς ὕβρισμένης αὐτῶν τῆς συνόδου καὶ τῆς ὀποφάσεως ἀναιρεθείσης· καὶ τὸ γενόμενον ὡς ἄδικον καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ θεσμοῦ ἀπ᾽ ὅδον διεβαλλόν. See also Soz., *h.e.* 3.8.4-5, 3.8.7-8; Socr., *h.e.* 2.15.5-6; Ath., *apol. sec.* 22.6.

⁴³ Socr., *h.e.* 2.15.5; Soz., *h.e.* 3.8.4-8.

⁴⁴ Brennecke et al. 2007, 156.

⁴⁵ Ath., *apol. sec.* 21; see also Ath., *h. Ar.* 15.1; Ath., *apol. sec.* 21-35; Socr., *h.e.* 2.17.7-9.

⁴⁶ Ath., *apol. sec.* 22.3 and 5, 24.3, 26.1, 27.1.

⁴⁷ Ath., *h. Ar.* 9.1, 11.2, 15.1.

⁴⁸ For more information on the First Creed of Antioch, see Brennecke et al. 2007, 148-150.

⁴⁹ Ath., *syn.* 22.3-7; Socr., *h.e.* 2.10.4-8.

it, its authors reject the accusation of being Arians. It is likely that this creed was also attached to the letter in which the group of bishops gathered around Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople at the Synod of Antioch (Dianius, Flacillus, Narcissus, Maris, Macedonius, and Theodore) declined Julius's invitation to attend the Synod of Rome. However, the sources do not attribute the role of theological declaration of the Synod of Antioch to the First Creed, but to the Second Creed, also called the Dedication Creed. It was also written in early 341. According to Hilarius,⁵⁰ the reason for formulating it was the suspicion that one of the participants in the synod was a heretic. The suspicion probably referred to Theophronius of Tyana, to whom the Third Creed of Antioch⁵¹ is attributed. The most noticeable feature of this creed is its anti-Marcellan attitude, and it could be assumed that its basic purpose was to achieve a consensus on doctrinal issues among the bishops of the East.⁵²

In the spring or summer of 341, another creed was written in Antioch, called the Fourth Creed of Antioch,⁵³ although it cannot be directly linked to the Dedication Synod.⁵⁴ Compared to the Second/Dedication Creed, its goals were more far-reaching and ambitious. It was written with the intention of bringing the theological positions of the bishops from the East and West closer together. Because the pro-Arian bishops from the East failed to convince the bishops in the western part of the empire that the exiled pro-Nicene bishops had been justly condemned, they were considered innocent and unjustly exiled in the eyes of the Western bishops. This is also how the situation was understood by those assembled at the Synod of Rome in 341. Because their opposition to the decisions of the Eastern bishops was supported by Constans, who had been the sole ruler in the larger western part of the Roman Empire since 340, their position posed an increasing threat to the East. The purpose of the creed was therefore to convince the Western bishops that its authors were not Arians. If they could prove to the West that their theological belief was orthodox, the question of the exiled bishops would no longer be a reason for dispute. The authors of the Fourth Creed of Antioch tried to follow the formulation of the Nicene Creed as much as possible in their understanding of theological issues. Although they did not abandon their doctrine of the three hypostases, they did not mention them in the creed because they avoided the most controversial questions in order to create a text that would be as widely acceptable as possible.⁵⁵

It is not known who the authors of the Fourth Creed of Antioch were. However, it is known who was entrusted with the task of taking the creed to the imperial court. In

⁵⁰ Hil., *syn.* 29 (PL 10, 502A).

⁵¹ For more information on the Third Creed of Antioch, see Brennecke et al. 2007, 143–144.

⁵² For more information on the Second Creed of Antioch, see Brennecke et al. 2007, 144–148.

⁵³ For more information on the Fourth Creed of Antioch, see Brennecke et al. 2007, 176–178.

Timothy D. Barnes dates this creed to the summer of 342; Barnes 1993, 230. See also Crawford 2013a, 234.

⁵⁴ Löhr 1986, 5, 17.

⁵⁵ Brennecke et al. 2007, 176; Löhr 1986, 17–18; Hanson 2005, 291–292.

the summer of 341,⁵⁶ a delegation of four prominent eastern prelates travelled to the court in Trier⁵⁷ to introduce the creed to the emperor. In addition to Narcissus of Eire-nopolis/Neronias, Maris of Chalcedon, and Marcus of Arethusa, Theodore of Hera-clea was also a member of this delegation.⁵⁸ The mission did not achieve the desired success because it seems that Bishop Maximinus of Trier, who had already supported Athanasius during his first exile⁵⁹ and was still one of his most committed defenders, did not want to receive the delegation,⁶⁰ and the emperor dismissed them because he did not believe them.⁶¹ Thus, it was impossible for the mission to achieve what it wanted: to prevent the convening of another ecumenical council. At the invitation of the two emperors, Constans and Constantius II, this was held in Serdica in 343.⁶² The council did not resolve anything but only deepened the gap between the East and West. On the side of the Eastern representatives, several of Eusebius's close associates attended the council. Except for Theognis of Nicaea, who had already died, all the members of the commission sent to Mareotis in 335 were there: Maris of Chalcedon, Macedonius of Mopsuestia, two Illyrian bishops, Valens of Mursa and Ursacius of Singidunum, and of course Theodore of Heraclea. According to the sources, there were eighty bishops from the East at the Council of Serdica.⁶³ Important representatives that were present included Stephen of Antioch, Acacius of Caesarea, Menophantus of Ephesus, Narcissus of Neronias, Maris of Chalcedon, Basil of Ancyra, and Eudoxius of Germanicia.⁶⁴ It seems that the Western pro-Nicene bishops at the council – perhaps influenced by Athanasius of Alexandria⁶⁵ – attributed a particularly important role to

⁵⁶ Löhr 1986, 17. Hanson 2005, 293, assumes that the delegation arrived at Emperor Constans's court in Trier in early 342. For the delegation's time of arrival in Trier, see also Brennecke et al. 2007, 179.

⁵⁷ Ath., *syn.* 25.1. Socrates reports that the delegation of four bishops travelled to the West at Constans's request, but he does not specify where they met. Sozomen, on the other hand, states that the delegation arrived in Italy and met with the emperor there; Soz., *h.e.* 3.10.5.

⁵⁸ Ath., *syn.* 25.1; Socr., *h.e.* 2.18.1; Soz., *h.e.* 3.10.4. Among the four bishops, Theodore is listed second by Athanasius and third by Socrates and Sozomen.

⁵⁹ Ath., *apol. sec.* 87.2.

⁶⁰ Löhr 1986, 18; Barnes 1993, 68–69; see also Hil., *coll. antiar.* A IV.1.27.7.

⁶¹ Soz., *h.e.* 3.10.6.

⁶² Hil., *coll. antiar.* A IV.1.16. See also Brennecke et al. 2007, 180; Cedilnik 2004, 93. For more details about the synod, see Simonetti 1975, 167–187; Hanson 2005, 293–306; Barnes 1993, 71–81; Crawford 2013a, 236–238.

⁶³ The list of signatories of the Creed of the “Eastern” Council includes the names of 73 bishops, with Theodore of Heraclea listed tenth; Hil. *coll. antiar.* A IV.3.

⁶⁴ A list relying on Athanasius of Alexandria and compiled by David M. Gwynn presents the following bishops, whom Athanasius usually described as the Eusebians: Eusebius of Nicomedia, Asterius “the Sophist”, Theognis of Nicaea, Athanasius of Anazarbus, Maris of Chalcedon, Patrophilus of Scythopolis, Theodore of Heraclea, Narcissus of Neronias, Ursacius of Singidunum, Valens of Mursa, and George of Laodicea; Gwynn 2007, 115.

⁶⁵ *Quae enim fecerunt maledicae heresis Eusebii successores, Theodorus Narcissus Valens Ursacius et in omnibus pessimus Georgius Stephanus Acacius Minophantus et eorum collegae, nec vos ignoratis, dilecti, nam eorum dementia omnibus patefacta est*; the letter of Athanasius of Alexandria sent to

the Bishop of Heraclea. In their synodical letter, they listed him first among the bishops that, as they write, after the death of Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople and Eusebius of Caesarea, became leaders of those pro-Arian Eastern bishops that worked most actively against the pro-Nicene bishops.⁶⁶ He is followed by Narcissus of Eirenopolis/Neronias, Stephanus of Antioch, George of Laodicea, Acacius of Caesarea, Menophantus of Ephesus, Ursacius of Singidunum, and Valens of Mursa.⁶⁷ Because of their role in the Arian controversy (their pro-Arian theological beliefs, their activities against the Nicene bishops, and their refusal to take part in the council),⁶⁸ they were deposed by the Western bishops at the Council of Serdica. Among the deposed pro-Arian bishops, Theodore of Heraclea is again listed first, although the names of the other bishops do not follow the same order as when they were first mentioned in the same synodical letter as the successors of both bishops named Eusebius.⁶⁹

At the time of the council, Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople was already dead, having died in 341, and Macedonius then succeeded him as Bishop of Constantinople. It is likely that Macedonius had played a crucial role in the efforts that ultimately led to Eusebius becoming the Bishop of Constantinople after Alexander's death in 337.⁷⁰ In any case, Macedonius became the second pro-Arian Bishop of Con-

the presbyters and deacons of Alexandria in Brennecke et al. 2007, 240 (43.8.3); see also ibidem 240 (43.8.4) and 243 (43.8.8). In the letter that the "Western" Council of Serdica sent to the presbyters and deacons in Mareotis in Brennecke et al. 2007, 245 (43.9.7), Theodore is also listed first among those deposed, followed by Narcissus, Stephanus, Acacius, George, Ursacius, Valens, and Menophantus. He is also listed first in the letter that Athanasius of Alexandria sent to the presbyters, deacons, and lay people of the Church in Mareotis, only listing Theodore, Valens, and Ursacius by name among those deposed; in Brennecke et al. 2007, 247 (43.10.4). All the members of the commission sent to Mareotis that were still alive at the time (Theognis of Nicaea was already dead) were explicitly mentioned (although not by name) in the letter written by the Eastern bishops at the Council of Serdica as those who proposed that a new commission, in which the bishops of both parts of the empire should be represented, be sent to Mareotis to reinvestigate the accusations against Athanasius; Hil., *coll. antiar.* A IV.1.18; Brennecke et al. 2007, 263.

⁶⁶ Ath., *apol. sec.* 46.1; Thdt., *h.e.* 2.8.28; Hil., *coll. antiar.* B II.1.7.3.

⁶⁷ The same bishops – only George of Laodicea is missing – are also referred to as the leading representatives of the Arians in the letter that the Western bishops at the Council of Serdica sent to Constantius II; Hil., *ad Const. (appendix ad coll. antiar.* II. B 1.5.2): *nuper didicimus commenta haec fuisse inventa et a duobus Eusebiis et a Narcisso et a Theodoro et ab Stefano et Acacio et Menofanto et imperitis atque improbis duobus adulescentibus Ursacio et Valente.*

⁶⁸ Hil., *coll. antiar.* B II.2.3.2–3.

⁶⁹ Ath., *apol. sec.* 47.3; Thdt., *h.e.* 2.8.33; Hil., *coll. antiar.* B II.1.8.2. Theodore of Heraclea is not listed among the deposed bishops in the letter that the Western bishops at the Council of Serdica sent to Julius of Rome; Hil., *coll. antiar.* B II.3. For the reasons why Ursacius of Singidunum and Valens of Mursa are listed first in this letter, see Cedilnik, Moreau 2021, 452–454. In addition to Ursacius and Valens, the following bishops are also listed: Narcissus of Eirenopolis/Neronias, Stephanus of Antioch, Acacius of Caesarea, Menophantus of Ephesus, and George of Laodicea. See also Ath., *apol. sec.* 40.3. For the important role played by Bishop Theodore at the Council of Serdica, see also Schäferdiek 1996a, 57; Crawford 2013a, 236–238.

⁷⁰ Cedilnik, Moreau 2024, 150–155.

stantinople in 342. At the same time, it is also important that his ordination as bishop was made possible through the support of Eusebius's closest followers (Theognis of Nicaea, Maris of Chalcedon, Theodore of Heraclea in Thrace, Ursacius of Singidunum, and Valens of Mursa),⁷¹ who contributed decisively to his success.⁷²

To sum up, Theodore of Heraclea actively participated in all key events aimed at banishing the most ardent defenders of the Nicene resolutions and formulating the new creed, whose indisputable initiator and executor was – judging from the sources – Eusebius of Nicomedia, who, after 337, became the Bishop of Constantinople. His power and influence laid the foundations for the future Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The concluding events that allowed Athanasius's return to Alexandria in 346

After the Council of Serdica, which did not resolve any of the disputed issues, the eastern Alpine region, northern Italy, and the western Balkans became the scene of important decisions that led to a temporary agreement on the return of the exiled bishops and, for five years (345–350), left the victory in the conflict to the West. Those who were unable to return home after the end of the council also included Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria. At least three years had to pass⁷³ before he could return to Alexandria.⁷⁴ According to Athanasius, Bishop Gaudentius of Naissus in Dacia Mediterranea was the first to offer him hospitality during this time.⁷⁵ The available sources do not make it possible to determine more precisely how long he stayed there. However, it seems that he celebrated Easter of 344, which fell on April 15th that year, in Naissus.⁷⁶ In early 345 he

⁷¹ Socr., *h.e.* 2.12.3; Soz., *h.e.* 3.7.4.

⁷² *Historia acephala* is the only source that reports on Theodore of Heraclea's efforts to appoint Eudoxius, the Bishop of Germanicia, as the new Bishop of Constantinople after Eusebius's death; *Historia acephala* 1.4–5. This seems unlikely, because it would mean that the inner circle of Eusebius's followers acted in disagreement under the tense conditions that prevailed in Constantinople after the death of their leader and attempted to install two different candidates, Eudoxius and Macedonius, as Eusebius's successor. Cf. Crawford 2013a, 235. See also Barnes 1993, 216–217, who points to chronological errors in the passage and dates the episode to the year 349, when Paul was banished to Armenia, as is also reported in the same passage of *Historia acephala*.

⁷³ Athanasius returned to Alexandria on October 31st, 346; *Historia acephala* 1.1; Hieronymus, *Chronicon* ad a. 346. For Athanasius's journey back to Alexandria, see Simonetti 1975, 200; Duval 1985, 341; Barnes 1993, 91–92; Martin 1996, 442–447.

⁷⁴ According to Athanasius, his opponents at the Council of Serdica had laws passed calling for the decapitation of him and other priests if they, with the permission of the western part of the synod, attempted to return; Ath., *h. Ar.* 19.4.

⁷⁵ Ath., *apol. Const.* 4.4–5; Ath., *ep. fest.*, a. 344. See also Duval 1985, 341; Martin 1996, 436; Barnes 1993, 82; Bratož 2010, 28. In Hilary's list of signatories of the Council of Serdica, two bishops' names are written one after the other: Athanasius is listed as 31st and Gaudentius as 32nd; Hil., *coll. antiar.* B II.4.

⁷⁶ Ath., *ep. fest.*, a. 344. See also Simonetti 1975, 199, n. 100; Martin 1996, 436; Barnes 1993, 82.

was in Aquileia,⁷⁷ where he was a guest of Fortunatianus, the Bishop of Aquileia.⁷⁸ When he arrived in Aquileia and how long he stayed there cannot be accurately discerned. Without a doubt, however, he spent Easter of 345, which was celebrated on April 7th that year, in Aquileia.⁷⁹ Because Emperor Constans was also in the city during the Easter celebrations, one can be almost certain that the two met there at that time, although Athanasius does not write in detail anywhere when their meeting in Aquileia took place.⁸⁰ As he writes, he was waiting there for the outcome of the talks between Constans and the eastern mission, which was meeting with the western emperor in Poetovio. The leader of this mission was *comes* Thalassius, who is mentioned several times in the sources in the role of Constantius's reliable associate.⁸¹ Perhaps he came to the West in the company of four bishops sent by the Synod of Antioch (344) to inform those gathered at the Synod of Milan (345) of the decisions accepted by the Synod of Antioch and its formula, *Ekthesis macrostichos*.⁸² The members of this delegation were Demophilus of Beroea, Eudoxius of Germanicia, Martyrius, and Macedonius of Mopsuestia. All of them, like Theodore, were members of the Eusebian alliance.⁸³ As in 342, this mission's attempt to convince the West of the orthodoxy of the creed they were bringing was unsuccessful. Because the prevailing theological belief in the East at that time was still considered unacceptable for the West, the issue of the exiled bishops also remained unresolved. However, because the West was militarily and politically stronger than the East at that time, Constans had the ability to put pressure on his brother Constantius II if he did not bow to his demands – and this is exactly what happened. He threatened Constantius II with war if he did not allow the return of the exiled bishops. Although the events are not presented in detail in the sources, it may be assumed that it was in Poetovio that Constans handed Thalassius a letter in which the threat of war was stated.⁸⁴

While Athanasius was in the West during his second exile, as many as two missions

⁷⁷ Barnes 1993, 82; Cedilnik 2004, 141–142.

⁷⁸ Ath., *apol. Const.* 3.5–6.

⁷⁹ Ath., *apol. Const.* 15.4–5; Ath., *ep. fest.*, a. 345. See also Barnes 1993, 225.

⁸⁰ Ath., *apol. Const.* 15.4–5.

⁸¹ Cedilnik 2004, 143.

⁸² Barnes 1993, 88.

⁸³ Bishop Martyrius is otherwise unknown, and one can only speculate whether there is a connection between him and the deacon Martyrius, who was sent to Rome together with the presbyter Macarius and the deacon Hesychius to deliver the Eusebians' letter to Bishop Julius. In Julius's letter to the bishops gathered in Antioch, the deacon Martyrius is sometimes singled out as someone that is particularly closely associated with Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople and that played an important role in the mission; Ath., *apol. sec.* 22.3–4, 24.2–3, 27.4.

⁸⁴ Although Athanasius does not say much about these events, it can be assumed that at the Synod of Milan (345), which took place before Easter 345, the bishops assembled first had to reject the conclusions of the Synod of Antioch (344). Only then could Athanasius and Constans reach a final decision on the exiled bishops at a meeting in Aquileia. At the meeting in Poetovio, Constans ultimately handed Thalassius a letter in which he threatened war if the exiled bishops were not allowed to return. For a more detailed chronology of the events connected with Athanasius's return, see Cedilnik 2004, 141–148.

of Eastern bishops, which brought new creeds (the Fourth Creed of Antioch and the Formula Macrosthichos/*Ekthesis macrosthichos*) to the West, tried to smooth out the differences in understanding the Trinity among the bishops in both parts of the empire and to resolve disputes regarding the exiled bishops in this way. The authors of both creeds were representatives of the dominant theological orientation in the East, represented by Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople and his group of bishops, the Eusebians. The basis for creating the *Ekthesis macrosthichos* was the text of the Fourth Creed of Antioch from 341. Although Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople was no longer alive in 344, his theological beliefs in the Fourth Creed of Antioch thus helped shape the creed of 344. The members of both missions were also part of the same group of bishops. Macedonius of Mopsuestia already cooperated with the Bishop of Heraclea as a member of the commission sent to Mareotis in 335, and Theodore and Eudoxius had known each other since at least 341, when they attended the Synod of Antioch.⁸⁵ The next event at which Theodore met with the members of the mission to Milan was the Council of Serdica. Theodore attended the council, and all the members of the mission (Demophilus, Eudoxius, and Macedonius)⁸⁶ – except for Martyrius – were also there.

Neither of the missions, not the one sent to Trier nor the other sent to Milan, achieved their desired goals, and so in the East, which was weaker than the West at the time, Emperor Constantius II was forced to allow the exiles to return. Nevertheless, the efforts of both missions were not without consequences. In the West, the Church became attentive to the warnings against the heresy of Marcellus of Ancyra. Before returning to Alexandria in 346, Athanasius broke off his contacts with Marcellus and did not renew them later.

Theodore's role in further efforts to implement Eusebius's plans

After Athanasius was given permission to return to Alexandria, the pro-Arian bishops in the eastern part of the empire refused to receive him. Among them, Athanasius⁸⁷ singles out Theodore of Heraclea and the following Eusebians: Leontius of Antioch, George of Laodicea, Acacius of Caesarea, and Narcissus of Eirenopolis/Neronias. Under such circumstances, Athanasius was deposed again at the Synod of Antioch in 349. It is not known whether Theodore took part in the Synod of Antioch in 344, which vigorously warned against the doctrine of Marcellus of Ancyra and his disciple Photinus, because there is no information about the participants in the sources. However, what is known is that he participated in the synod that took place in the same city in 349.⁸⁸ According to Sozomen, around 30 bishops attended this synod

⁸⁵ Cedilnik, Moreau 2021, 450.

⁸⁶ Brennecke et al. 2007, 184.

⁸⁷ Ath., *h. Ar.* 28.1.

⁸⁸ Soz., *h.e.* 4.8.4. Cedilnik, Moreau 2024, 164; Crawford 2013a, 239. For the date of the synod, see Barnes 1993, 98–99.

and, among the five bishops mentioned, Theodore is listed second. The remaining bishops listed by name were Narcissus of Eirenopolis/Neronias, Eugenius of Nicaea, Patrophilus of Scythopolis, and Menophantus of Ephesus. They were all closely connected to the bishops of Constantinople, not only to Macedonius, the bishop of the eastern capital at the time, but the older bishops among them (Narcissus, Theodore, Patrophilus, and Menophantus) already had close ties with his predecessor, Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople.⁸⁹ In view of their close ties to Constantinople, it could be assumed that George, who was appointed the new Bishop of Alexandria by the Synod of Antioch in 349,⁹⁰ was elected in line with the interests of the Bishop of Constantinople.⁹¹

The result of Theodore's close collaboration with Constantinople is undoubtedly his participation in the synod that also took place in 349, but before the Synod of Antioch. This synod condemned and deposed Paul, the pro-Nicene Bishop of Constantinople, who had returned to his episcopal see in 346 for the third time⁹² with the support of Constans, just as Athanasius had returned to Alexandria with the emperor's support.⁹³ It is not clear from the sources where the synod met. However, it can be assumed, as also highlighted by Timothy D. Barnes, that the synod could have hardly taken place in Constantinople.⁹⁴ Given the riots that broke out in the city over the appointments of new bishops in the past, it is difficult to imagine that the bishop could have been condemned and deposed in the city where his episcopal see was located especially while Emperor Constans, who supported him, was still alive. Matthew R. Crawford's assumption⁹⁵ that the synod met in Heraclea therefore seems very plausible. Before the foundation of Constantinople, the bishops of Heraclea (Perinthus) appointed the bishops of Byzantium. In accordance with this tradition, Theodore's role in selecting the new Bishop of Constantinople is particularly emphasized in the sources, in the case of both Eusebius and Macedonius. It can thus also be supposed that Theodore might have acted as a host of the synod that condemned and deposed Paul. This assumption could be further supported by the fact that he is listed first, before the other two participants mentioned by name in the *Historia acephala*, Narcissus of Eirenopolis/Neronias and George of Laodicea. Bishop Macedonius of Constantinople is not mentioned as a participant in the synod, and no information is given about whether

⁸⁹ Cedilnik 2022, 93–98.

⁹⁰ Brennecke et al. 2014, 364, n. c, date the Synod of Antioch, which appointed George the Bishop of Alexandria, to the year 352.

⁹¹ Cedilnik 2022, 93–102.

⁹² After his exile in 337, Paul first returned to Constantinople after the death of Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople and then once again immediately after the Council of Serdica. He was banished again on both occasions.

⁹³ *Historia acephala* 1.2.

⁹⁴ Barnes 1993, 98. Timothy D. Barnes suggests Nicaea or Nicomedia or another nearby city as a possible meeting place.

⁹⁵ Crawford 2013a, 239.

he attended it. Not much is known about his activities in this period, and it seems that he deliberately avoided conflicts at a time when Constans, the emperor of the western part of the empire, could afford to impose his demands on the East. Under these circumstances, however, he would likely need a trusted representative to promote his interests. Theodore, the Bishop of a city near Constantinople, a reliable collaborator of Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople in the past and a bishop that actively participated in Macedonius's ordination as the Bishop of Constantinople,⁹⁶ would have certainly been a very suitable person for such a role.

The period of dominance of the West did not last long. In 350, Constans was killed, and his death also had a strong impact on the political and ecclesiastical sphere. Already in 351, a synod was held in Sirmium, at which the bishops assembled judged and deposed the local bishop Photinus, Marcellus of Ancyra's disciple. At least 22 bishops attended the synod, including Theodore of Heraclea,⁹⁷ the remaining three still living members of the commission sent to Mareotis (Valens of Mursa, Ursacius of Singidunum, and Macedonius of Mopsuestia), three members of the delegation sent to Trier in 341 (Theodore, Narcissus of Neronias, and Marcus of Arethusa), and three members of the delegation sent to Milan in 345 (Macedonius of Mopsuestia, Demophilus of Beroea, and Eudoxius of Germanicia).⁹⁸

Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople attended events important for strengthening the power of the Constantinopolitan See himself, whereas it seems that, in the 340s, his successor Macedonius preferred to send his representatives to important meetings. Therefore, Theodore may have also taken part in the synods of Serdica in 343, of Heraclea (?), of Antioch in 349, and of Sirmium in 351 as Macedonius's confidant. After the Synod of Sirmium, he is no longer found in the sources,⁹⁹ and it can be assumed that he died sometime before 355.¹⁰⁰ Thus, he did not live to see the moment when Athanasius, during the time of Constantius II's sole rule in the Roman Empire, was condemned again and had to leave Alexandria for the third time. Nevertheless, in his *Encyclical letter to the bishops of Egypt and Libya*, written shortly after his expul-

⁹⁶ Based on the sources, Narcissus of Eirenopolis/Neronias and George of Laodicea did not take part in the appointment of Macedonius as the Bishop of Constantinople.

⁹⁷ Theodore is listed second, after Narcissus of Eirenopolis/Neronias; Hil., *coll. antiar.* B VII.9. Socrates, who confuses the Synod of Sirmium in 351 with a later one in 357, lists Bishop Hypatian as the representative of Heraclea at the Synod of Sirmium in 351; Socr., *h.e.* 2.29.2. Matthew R. Crawford believes that Hypatian could be Theodore's successor; Crawford 2013a, 240.

⁹⁸ Hil., *coll. antiar.* B VII.9.

⁹⁹ For the possibility that he might have participated in the synods of Arles (353) and Milan (355), see Crawford 2013a, 241.

¹⁰⁰ Thdt., *h.e.* 2.16.10–11. In the fall of 355, Liberius, Bishop of Rome, who had been brought to Milan for resisting Emperor Constantius II's plans in the political and ecclesiastical field, speaks of Theodore of Heraclea and Theognis of Nicaea in his conversation with Constantius II as of men who were already dead at the time; Thdt., *h.e.* 2.16.11. See also Schäferdiek 1996a, 59–60; Crawford 2013a, 241–244.

sion from Alexandria in February 356,¹⁰¹ Athanasius counts Theodore among those who, in his opinion, had disturbed and disordered everything.¹⁰²

It can be definitely concluded that between 334 and 355 Theodore of Heraclea – who actively participated in Athanasius's first (335) and second (339) exiles, the trial against Paul and his deposition, and the campaign warning against the dangers of Marcellus's heresy, and who in general took part in important political and ecclesiastical events of his time in the vast area extending from Tyre, Antioch, and Constantinople to Trier, Serdica, and Sirmium – was certainly one of those bishops in the Balkan-Danubian area¹⁰³ who most actively supported the efforts to fulfil the political and ecclesiastical plans outlined by Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople and continued by his successors on Constantinople's episcopal throne.¹⁰⁴

However, the sources do not only highlight Theodore's role in ecclesiastical politics, as Jerome also remembers him as a prolific writer. In his work *De viris illustribus*, he writes the following about him: *Heracleiae Thraciarum episcopus, elegantis apertique sermonis, et magis historicae intelligentiae, edidit sub Constantio principe commentarios in Matthaeum, et in Joannem, et in Apostolum, et in Psalterium*.¹⁰⁵ Later, Theodore's literary activity is also mentioned by Theodoret. In his *Church History*, he reports that the bishop was highly learned and wrote an exposition of the Gospels.¹⁰⁶ Although Theodore of Heraclea was considered a heretic, his works were received with approval and respect by some pro-Nicene authors.¹⁰⁷ This is reflected in the fact that quite a lot of fragments of his works have survived, and his writings also influenced later authors.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ Gwynn 2007, 35–36.

¹⁰² Ath., *ep. Aeg. Lib.* 6.1, 7.3–6. Other bishops that Athanasius mentions in this passage, along with Theodore, are Secundus of Pentapolis, George of Laodicea, Leontius of Antioch, Stephanus of Antioch, Ursacius of Singidunum, Valens of Mursa, Acacius of Caesarea, Patrophilus of Scythopolis, Narcissus of Eirenopolis/Neronias, Eustathius of Sebasteia, Demophilus of Beroea, Germinius of Sirmium, Eudoxius of Germanicia, Basil of Ancyra, Cecropius of Nicomedia, Auxentius of Milan, Epictetus of Centumcellae, and George of Cappadocia. According to Athanasius, they were all made bishops by Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople and his followers.

¹⁰³ In addition to him, Valens of Mursa, Ursacius of Singidunum, Germinius of Sirmium, and Demophilus of Beroea were also very important.

¹⁰⁴ See also Schäferdiek 1996a, 60–61.

¹⁰⁵ Hieronymus, *De viris illustribus* 90.

¹⁰⁶ Thdt., *h.e.* 2.3.8: Θεόδωρος ὁ Περὶνθιος (ἐλλόγιμος δὲ διαφερόντως ὁ Θεόδωρος ἦν καὶ δὴ καὶ τῶν θείων εὐαγγελίων τὴν ἑρμηνείαν συνέγραψεν, Ἡρακλεώτην δὲ αὐτὸν ὀνομάζουσιν οἱ πολλοί).

¹⁰⁷ See also Crawford 2013a, 255–256.

¹⁰⁸ Many fragments from his works have been preserved, such as the fragments from his *Commentary on Isaiah*, which are collected in the PG 18, 1307–1378; Crawford 2013a, 244; Crawford 2013b, 543. For an overview of Theodore of Heraclea's exegetical works, the publications of their fragments, the theological emphases recognizable in them, and the reception of his works by later patristic authors, see Schäferdiek 1996a, 61–68; Schäferdiek 1996b, 69–87; Crawford 2013a, 244–257; Crawford 2013b, 543–544. Knut Schäferdiek and Matthew R. Crawford emphasize the significant influence of his writings on Gothic Bible interpreters; Schäferdiek 1996b, 70–71, 78–81; Crawford 2013a, 252. For Theodore's theological orientation, see also Crawford 2013b, 537–567.

Conclusion

To summarize the significance of Theodore of Heraclea's role in representing the interests of Constantinople, his main efforts in all his activities concerning church politics – in line with the conduct of Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople and his followers – were clearly directed against the three important representatives of the church of his time: Athanasius of Alexandria, Paul of Constantinople, and Marcellus of Ancyra. The purpose of these activities was to condemn and depose these bishops after 334, when the Bishop of Heraclea is mentioned for the first time. As far as can be inferred from the sources, Theodore not only took part in these efforts but also played a particularly prominent role. This can be assumed from the fact that in the sources he is usually mentioned at or near the top of the list of bishops who took part in a particular event or were mentioned in the sources for some other reason. This applies both to the time when Eusebius of Nicomedia/Constantinople was the main initiator of the activities directed against the pro-Nicene bishops and to the time when Macedonius became the Bishop of Constantinople after Eusebius's death. It could be assumed that, during the time when Macedonius was the Bishop of Constantinople, Theodore's role was even more significant because it appears that Macedonius remained in the background during the period when the two brothers, Constans and Constantius II, shared power in the empire. It is therefore possible that in the 340s and early 350s, when – judging from the sources – he was most active in the political and ecclesiastical field, Theodore acted as a representative of the Bishop of Constantinople's interests. Theodore was well suited for this task, both as the Bishop of a nearby city and as one who, according to tradition, had the right to appoint the bishops of Constantinople. This possibility is also supported by the fact that Theodore supported Eusebius's plans to strengthen Constantinople's role in the political and ecclesiastical sphere from the outset. It is therefore not surprising that the first activity the bishop was involved in was directed precisely against Athanasius, the bishop of the important see of Alexandria,¹⁰⁹ where Constantinople, it seems, was trying to assert its influence. Despite Constantinople's efforts during the time of Eusebius, Macedonius, and their Homoean successors to install a man of its own in Alexandria, Athanasius kept returning to his bishopric see until, after his return in 366, he was no longer expelled. Theodore was deeply involved in these efforts and in this way influenced the course of events in the eastern Alpine region, northern Italy, and the western Balkans, where Athanasius, while awaiting Constantius's permission to return from his second exile, was staying after the Council of Serdica.

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¹⁰⁹ The highly influential pro-Nicene Bishop of Antioch, Eustathius, was probably deposed as early as 330 or 331; Hanson 2005, 209.

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Alenka Cedilnik
Univerza v Ljubljani
Filozofska fakulteta
Oddelek za zgodovino
Aškerčeva 2
SI-1000 Ljubljana
alenka.cedilnik@ff.uni-lj.si
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9396-5277>

Jaroslav Šašel's *Antiqui Barbari* Half a Century Later. A Contribution to the Knowledge of the Late Antique Barbarian Settlement in Southern Pannonia

Hrvoje GRAČANIN

Abstract

The paper discusses Jaroslav Šašel's approaches and results in his 1979 paper "*Antiqui Barbari*", which is devoted to the settlement history of eastern Noricum and Pannonia in the fifth and sixth centuries. Šašel's paper was one of the first in-depth studies, based on the literary sources, of the presence of various non-Roman groups in late antique Western Illyricum. The paper pays a particular attention to the term *antiqui barbari* found in Cassiodorus Senator's sixth-century *Variae epistolae*, and a leitmotif of Šašel's study. The paper's aim is to readdress the question of identification of the *antiqui barbari*, reassess the proposal made by Friedrich Lotter and Helmut Castritius in their respective 1968 and 1995 studies, and offer a fresh look at existing literary evidence, as well as bring the archaeological evidence into the discussion.

Keywords: *antiqui barbari*; barbarian settlement; post-Roman southern Pannonia

Izvleček

Antiqui Barbari Jaroslava Šašla pol stoletja pozneje

Prispevek analizira pristope in rezultate Jaroslava Šašla v njegovem prispevku *Antiqui Barbari* iz leta 1979, ki je posvečen zgodovini poselitve vzhodnega Norika in Panonije v 5. in 6. stoletju. Šašlov prispevek je bil ena prvih poglobljenih študij, osnovana na literarnih virih, o prisotnosti različnih nerimskih skupin v poznoantičnem zahodnem Iliriku. Prispevek posveča posebno pozornost izrazu *antiqui barbari*, ki ga najdemo v spisih *Variae epistolae* Kasiodorja Senatorja iz 6. stoletja, in je vodilni motiv Šašlove študije. Cilj prispevka je ponovno pretresti vprašanja identifikacije skupine/skupin, imenovane/imenovanih *antiqui barbari*, presoditi predloga, ki sta ju podala Friedrich Lotter in Helmut Castritius v svojih študijah iz let 1968 oziroma 1995, ter ponuditi osvežen pogled na razpoložljive literarne dokaze, hkrati pa vključiti v razpravo tudi arheološko evidenco.

Ključne besede: *antiqui barbari*; naselitev barbarov; porimska južna Panonija

A few introductory remarks

The present paper has a twofold purpose. Firstly, it is intended as a basic deconstruction of Jaroslav Šašel's study on the history of late antique barbarian settlement in eastern Noricum and Pannonia during the fifth and sixth centuries. And secondly, it ventures to reevaluate a proposal for the identification of *antiqui barbari*, a designation mentioned in one of the epistles of Cassiodorus Senator dealing with fiscal and judicial issues in the late Roman province of Savia under the Gothic rule (*Variae epistolae*, 5.14). Jaroslav Šašel himself needs no special introduction, as his work on the history of Late Antiquity Eastern Alpine, Northern Adriatic and Western Balkan areas is well-known. Šašel's 1979 paper, fully titled "*Antiqui Barbari: Zur Besiedlungsgeschichte Ostnoricums und Pannoniens im 5. und 6. Jahrhundert nach den Schriftquellen*", and which is under scrutiny here, was among the first historical reconstructions that provided an overall picture of the presence of various barbarian groups in eastern Noricum and Pannonia from the late fourth until the mid-sixth centuries. The intended deconstruction of Šašel's paper is focused on identifying his fundamental assumptions and analytical approaches, presenting the research topics he touched upon, and pointing out the findings he arrived at. Of particular interest is Šašel's identification of *antiqui barbari*, the designation which he understood as a cover term for various barbarian groups settled in the region.

The second aim of the present paper derives its subject of inquiry from the hypotheses put forward by Friedrich Lotter and Helmut Castritius, who in their respective papers examined the evidence for the settlement of Suebi in the late Roman and post-Roman Middle Danube region. Lotter's 1968 paper, "*Zur Rolle der Donausueben in der Völkerwanderungszeit*", first draw attention to several sixth-century narrative sources rendering the name of the former late Roman province of Savia as Suavia or indicating the existence of a Suebic land in the region along the River Sava. Further developing his argument for a significant presence of Suebi in southwestern Pannonia, Lotter inferred in his 1985 paper that during the Gothic rule the late Roman province of Savia was generally known under the name of Suavia.¹ Building upon Lotter's conclusions about the land of Suebi in southwestern Pannonia and Šašel's proposal for the identity of *antiqui barbari*, Castritius' 1995 paper, "*Barbari – antiqui barbari: Zur Besiedlungsgeschichte Südostnoricums und Südpannioniens in der Spätantike (Ende des 4. bis Mitte des 6. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.)*", adduced more examples from the late Roman literary sources, or better said their early medieval manuscript tradition, for the province of Savia being called Suavia in post-Roman times, and refined the interpretation about the reasons for this, arguing that the *antiqui barbari* of the *Variae epistolae* should be identified with

¹ Cf. Lotter 1985, 46. He incorporated these findings – boosted with Castritius' arguments – in his later book about movements of peoples and the collapse of the Late Roman administrative and ecclesiastical organization in the East-Alpine and Middle Danube regions: Lotter 2003, 28, 36, 122–123, 125.

the Suebi living in southwestern Pannonia. Taking Lotter's and Castritius' assertions as points of departure, the intention is to readdress the question of Suebic presence in southwestern Pannonia in the fifth and sixth centuries and review the related proposition about the province of Savia being officially renamed as Suavia in Gothic times. Apart from an inspection of the literary evidence that has already been more or less considered by both Lotter and Castritius, the present examination aims at bringing into discussion the possible archaeological evidence for the Suebi in southwestern Pannonia, as well as exploring the use of the term Pannonia in the fifth- and sixth-century narrative sources, in an attempt to shed more light on the apparent change in the late Roman provincial nomenclature from Savia to Suavia.

Deconstructing Jaroslav Šašel's *antiqui barbari*

Jaroslav Šašel starts his relatively short but rich survey of the ethnic situation in the late Roman and post-Roman Western Illyricum with the year AD 377 and the federate treaty between the Romans and the groups of Huns, Alans and Visigoths (p. 125), and ends it with the year 548 and another federate treaty between the Romans and this time the Longobards (p. 139). For that time span of just above 170 years, he offers a coherent reconstruction of the regional vicissitudes brought about by the presence of various barbarian groups that were settled or passing through eastern Noricum and Pannonia. Basing his assumptions on the written sources, and drawing chiefly from German and Hungarian scholarship, Šašel makes lucid synthesizing observations, which reflect the then state of historical knowledge.

For his analysis, Šašel directly refers to a number of late antique and early medieval literary source, both Latin and Greek. His treatment of the literary evidence is rather straightforward, without taking into account their different genre characteristics, time of creation, or specific goals.

In his paper, Šašel touches upon a number of research topics. First he tackles the question of the settlement of the so-called Pannonian federates (Šašel never uses that historiographic label), who are said to have consisted of the Huns, Alans and Visigoths, and the effects that such an arrangement had on the provinces. Šašel remarks that the federate groups were settled in Pannonia, more precisely the provinces of Savia and Pannonia Secunda, on the strength of the testimony by Zosimos (pp. 125–126). Šašel connects the remark about Jerome's hometown of Stridon having been destroyed by Goths with the unruly behaviour of the federates, and believes their numbers to have swollen up due to passages of Theodosius I's troops through the region on his campaigns against Magnus Maximus and Eugenius, respectively, as the Emperor's army included many Germanic soldiers who may have also been recruited to some extent from among the federates (p. 126). In Šašel's view, Claudian's mention of General Stilicho's troubles with the barbarians on his move from Italy to Tessaly refers to Stilicho's having to deal with the Gothic federates in Savia (p. 126).

The second topic are the late fourth- and early fifth-century inroads and movements of various groups from across the Middle Danube or within the region. Šašel interprets Stilicho's designation by Claudian as the pacifier of the Rhine and Danube rivers to be an indication of the incessant pressure that the Germans exerted on the Roman frontier and the Danubian provinces with their inroads (p. 126). The first were the Vandals who are said to have been joined by the Alans in piercing the Danube limes, but were then persuaded by Stilicho to settle, probably in the province of Pannonia Prima, and assume protective duties. However, following the campaign of the Gothic King Alaric in AD 401, the Vandals attacked parts of Noricum and Vindelicia – Šašel never says that Vindelicia, i.e. the region of the Vindelici, had long since ceased to exist and was anachronistically used by the source for the province of Raetia Secunda – only to be persuaded again to accept the federate status, which Šašel interprets as a hint for a larger presence of the barbarian element in Noricum (p. 127). Next is the incursion in AD 406 of Radagaisus' army, whose defeat was in Šašel's view followed by another influx of barbarians in the region, as the remaining raiders were apparently stationed by Romans in Italy and Pannonia. Based on that, Šašel hypothesizes about the *hostes Pannonii* from Jerome's epistle as perhaps referring to those former raiders (p. 127). Alaric's campaigns of AD 401, 408 and 410 were facilitated by – as Šašel puts it – the Visigothic base in Savia, which was used by Alaric to impose the control over Dalmatia, Pannonia Prima, Histria, Noricum Mediterraneum and Noricum Ripense, while Savia was also the destination for a large body of Goths after they were expelled from Italy following Stilicho's demise in AD 408 (p. 127). An incursion of the Iuthungi in Raetia and Noricum in about AD 428 may have impinged on the local population not only in Noricum – General Aëtius is said to have had to deal with the rebellious Noricans in AD 429–431 – but also in the region between the Drava and Sava (p. 128).

The third topic, which is discussed by Šašel in detail, relates to the ethnic make-up of the fifth- and sixth-century population in the Pannonian Basin. In the early fifth century, Šašel notes a relatively dense barbarian settlement in southeastern Alpine and peri-Alpine regions (from the Julian Alps to the middle Sava Valley), which is identified as including the Gothic federates, Alaric's Visigoths, the groupings from Radagaisus' army, the Goths expelled from Italy and other splinter groups, as well as the old Suebic-Marcomannic tribes. In Šašel's opinion this may explain why a *magister militum* of barbarian descent was appointed in AD 409 with the authority over both Raetia and Illyricum, a move described as unusual from the administrative point of view (pp. 127–128). Those barbarian groups supposedly remained in the region – in their homes, burgs and forts as Šašel puts it – even afterwards, and this state of affairs continued to exist in Savia after the Romans ceded the provinces of Pannonia Secunda and Pannonia Valeria to the Huns in AD 433. Šašel places a particular attention on the regional ethnic picture after the collapse of the Hunnic-Germanic *Völkerbund* in AD 454 (pp. 128–133). Šašel lists various barbarian groups and their presumed footholds in the Pannonian-Carpathian area during the second half of the fifth and early sixth centuries: the Gepids in Transylvania and along the lower Tisza Valley, i.e. in western Dacia between the Tisza, Danube

and Olt, and the Carpathian Mountains, and, from AD 473, in Syrmia, too, as a result of the Gepids' local imperialist expansion, as Šašel terms it (p. 131), following the Ostrogoths' departure from Pannonia; the Slavs in western Dacia in the vicinity of the Gepids in AD 536, as well as close to Pannonia, as testified by Martin of Braga; the Sarmatians in the Great Hungarian Plain, where they clashed in AD 472 with the Ostrogoths on the latter's way to Lower Moesia (i.e. Moesia Secunda); the Sadagi in Pannonia northeast of Lake Balaton; the Herulians who were first located to the north of the Danube in Moravia and west Czechia, and Lower Austria as well, but after AD 505/508 and their defeat against the Longobards split into two groups, of which one reportedly returned to Scandinavia, while the other went to the Gepids and then, in AD 512, was settled in the Eastern Roman territory around Singidunum and in Pannonia Secunda; the Rugians who first lived west of the River Morava and in the Tull Basin but were vanquished by Odoacer in AD 487, after which the rest, as Šašel interprets it, joined the Ostrogoths under Theoderic in Moesia; the Scirians in Slovakia between the Váh and Ipel' rivers; the Suebi – said to have included the Alamanni, Quadi and Marcomanni – in western Pannonia between the Danube and Drava, and possibly Sava, of which the Quadi left for Hispania along with the Visigoths, while the Marcomanni let themselves be recruited in the Roman army and stationed in northern Pannonia, as shown by the *Notitia Dignitatum*, whereas the rest was eventually pushed into Pannonia Prima and Savia giving way to the Herulians, Rugians and Scirians to seize their former settlements, only to reappear in the second half of the fifth century under the leadership of Hunimund who tried to oppose the Gothic domination (Šašel never explicitly makes the connection in his text between the late fourth- and early fifth-century Marcomanni and Hunimund's Suebic group, but does so in the maps); and the Ostrogoths, who first dwelled in Pannonia between Lake Balaton and Slavonia and Syrmia in accordance with a federate treaty concluded with the Romans in AD 456, but obtained the control over an area toward Noricum Ripense – the peri-Alpine road, as Šašel refers to it (p. 131) – and then in AD 472 (*recte* AD 473) left Pannonia in two groups, of which one was headed west (to Provence and later Hispania), and the other east (Moesia Secunda). Šašel completes this ethnic picture for the first half of the sixth century by introducing the Longobards and Franks (p. 137). The Longobards are shown as occupying in the early sixth century the area once belonging to the Herulians before moving into Moravia, crossing the Danube and spreading all the way to the Sava, and eventually having been given the forts in Pannonia (for Šašel, Savia is meant by this) and the *pólis Nórikon* (which in Šašel's opinion should be identified either as Celeia/Celje or, more likely, Poetovio/Ptuj) as part of the agreement with the Eastern Empire in AD 548. On the other hand, the Franks emerged as powerbrokers in the bulk of Noricum Mediterraneum (excluding the portion handed over to the Longobards) and the whole of Noricum Ripense, the areas which they supposedly retained until the 570s. To additionally support such a distribution of various groups in the Pannonian Basin, Šašel adduces the testimony of Martin of Braga who is said to have preserved the memories of peoples with whom he apparently came into contact in his youth (p. 135). Šašel broaches the theme of the presence of the Roman

population as well, but unsystematically. He only points out that in the early fifth century the barbarians lived amongst the Romans (p. 127), mentions the resettlement by Odoacer of the provincial population from Noricum Ripense in AD 488 (p. 132), and defines the *Romani* in Cassiodorus Senator's *Variae epistolae* as "full-born Romanized natives" living in Pannonia, Dalmatia, Savia and Italy during the Ostrogothic rule in the late fifth and early sixth centuries (p. 135).

The situation in Noricum and Pannonia under the Ostrogothic rule is accorded special attention. After briefly outlining the extent of Theoderic's empire following his conquest of Italy, which included both provinces of Raetia, the whole of Noricum, Dalmatia (which, judging by order of mention in Šašel's text, was apparently captured even before the fall of Ravenna in AD 493), Pannonia Savia, and parts of Pannonia Secunda with Sirmium (the province is said to have been split between the Ostrogoths and the Eastern Empire), Šašel moves on to the legal and administrative as well as the social and ethnic identity labels found in the *Variae epistolae* in relation to Noricum, Pannonia, Dalmatia and Savia (pp. 134–135). Among the first group of identity labels Šašel lists the terms *provinciales*, *capillati*, *defensores*, *curiales*, and *possessores*, and believes them to be more or less self-explanatory, which is why he makes no attempt at defining them more closely. Much more focus is placed on the second group of identity labels mentioned in connection with Pannonia, Dalmatia, Savia and Italy, for which Šašel offers additional explanations. The *Romani*, as already indicated above, refers to the local autochthone Romanized population; the *barbari* denotes a category of inhabitants legally separated from the *Goti* and *Romani*, which appears to have been a newly formed non-Gothic and non-Roman group consisting in Šašel's opinion of the Suebi, Huns, possibly Scirians, and perhaps even the Slavs and other ethnic splinters, which all started to seep into the region after the Ostrogoths' departure from Pannonia in AD 472. The *Lucristani* signifies a precisely localized barbarian clan living in or above the Isonzo River Valley. The *Goti* relates to Theoderic's Ostrogoths. For the *extraneae gentes* Šašel offers no interpretation other than a hint to the label's connection with the Gothic empire in AD 526/7. A particular consideration is paid to the group marked as *antiqui barbari*. Šašel believes the adjective *antiqui* indicates that this group was older than the group classified only as *barbari*, which he interprets as signifying various Germanic-Hunnic ethnic fragments from Attila's *Völkerbund*, since the older splinters like the Marcomanni would have been fully assimilated by that time. Šašel suggests that some of the groups mentioned by Martin of Braga (*Alamannus*, *Saxo*, *Toringus*, *Pannonius*, *Rugus*, *Sclavus*, *Nara*, *Sarmata*, *Datus*, *Ostrogothus*, *Francus*, *Burgundio*, *Dacus*, *Alanus*) could have also been meant under the label *antiqui barbari*. With regard to the population in Noricum in Gothic times, Šašel only notes the passage in AD 507 of the Alamanni in the direction, as he interprets it, of Pannonia (pp. 136–137). As for the time of the Longobard presence in southern Noricum and Pannonia, Šašel assumes that as federates they only reinforced the groups of Goths, barbarians and old barbarians – possibly even including Alamanni and Suebi – still living in those areas (p. 137).

Šašel concludes his paper with two – as he puts it – provisional results, with a remark that the cultural-historical approach is an important component of both historical and archaeological reconstructions considering that the written sources are inconsistent and sporadically preserved. For the first phase (the late fourth/early fifth century), Šašel observes that the majority of the population comprised of Romans, but the interior of the provinces was to a large extent left to the federates who were given small settlements and hilltop places. The federates lived in isolation from the autochthone population not only due to political reasons, but also because of the mutual animosity between the locals and newcomers. For the second phase (the fifth to sixth centuries), Šašel stresses that, whereas Istria and Venetia as well as Dalmatia were not affected by barbarian invasions and wars, and thus remained firmly a part of the Roman world, which is also valid to some extent for both provinces of Noricum (less for Noricum Ripense than for Noricum Mediterraneum), Pannonia Savia and Pannonia Secunda underwent profound ethnic changes as the presence of barbarian groups was more pronounced, with a possibility in Šašel's opinion of the settlement of Goths and Suebi in a federate-like status in AD 377 or even earlier. Šašel posits that barbarian elements shrank with time due to assimilation, but they retained their strength thanks to new influxes and remained more or less in the same places. At the end, Šašel infers that the presence of Germanic groups in the region was constant and relatively intense, far from negligible, even though they were heavily intermingled with other barbarians and in a continuous rivalry with each other.

The Suebi in Pannonia, or how to geographically place a people with much confusion

When treating the topic of the Suebic presence in fifth- and sixth-century Pannonia, what inevitably comes to the fore is the fact that the Suebi only crop up in connection with the Middle Danube region in the late fourth- and early fifth-centuries Roman narratives. They seem to have been first mentioned in the relevant context in Claudian's *Panegyric on the Third Consulship of Emperor Honorius* (AD 395/396). Briefly touching upon Theodosius I's victorious clashes with the groups from north of the Danube, which is called Hister, a hydronym usually denoting the river's lower reaches, the poet refers to two pairs of barbarian foes: the Scythians and Gelonians, and the Dacians and Suebi (Claud. *Hon. cons. III*, 24–28).² The second pair may in geographical terms be brought into connection with the western part of the Pannonian Basin, which would place the Suebi close to the Middle Danube area if the likely listing of the groups in the east-west direction is assumed. Concurrently with Claudian's testimony, the Suebi figure in Ammianus Marcellinus' late fourth-century *His-*

² The Suebi mentioned in Claud. *Hon. cons. IV*, 652, 655, are those that crossed the Rhine in AD 406 and eventually settled in Hispania.

tory as raiders in Raetia during Emperor Constantius II's AD 357 stay in Rome, along with the Quadi attacking Valeria and the Sarmatians harassing Upper Moesia (Moesia Prima) and Pannonia Secunda (Amm. Marc. 16.10.20).³ It is clear that Ammianus depicts the situation developing along the Middle Danube from west to east, but he appears to place the Suebi more to the west than Claudian, and much like Paul the Deacon in his late eight-century *History of the Longobards* (see below). The collection known as *Historia Augusta*, dating probably from the early fifth century, apparently also contains a reference to the Suebi in relation to the Middle Danube. In the *Vita divi Aureliani* the Suebi are recorded in a paragraph recounting the campaigns of Emperor Aurelian (270–275) against them and the Sarmatians as well as the Marcomanni, who are said to have attacked Italy (*Hist. Aug. Div. Aurel.* 18.2–3). The coupling of Suebi and Sarmatians points to their geographical proximity and is likely to have been intended to indicate the emperor's activity in the Pannonian Plain.⁴ The next mention of the Suebi in relation to the Middle Danube area comes some half-century later in Sidonius Apollinaris' *Panegyric to the Emperor Majorian* (AD 458), which features the well-known catalogue of various groups that are presented as being in awe of the emperor's might (Sid. Apoll. *Paneg. Maior.*, 471–477). Although the groups seem to be listed rather haphazardly, the Suebi are positioned after the Bastarnae and before the Pannonians, which would again indicate their placement in the western part of the Pannonian Basin under the recurrent assumption of the listing of the groups in the east-west direction since they are all linked with the “seven-mouthed” Hister, i.e. the Danube Delta, as a starting geographical point. It may be that the Suebi in relation to Pannonia are mentioned in Cassiodorus Senator's *Variae* as well if one opts to accept a different interpretation of the relevant passage. A letter presumably from the autumn of AD 536 records the incursions in Venetia of the Suebi who are usually identified with the Alamanni, especially since another letter dated to the autumn of AD 537 mentions the recent raids into Italy of the Alamanni (Cassiod. *Var.* 12.7.1; 12.28.4).⁵ Nevertheless, there is an opinion that since Cassiodorus usually refers to the Alamanni by their name those Suebi might be the Bavarians or the Germanic inhabitants of Savia, or most likely the Suebi settled in Pannonia and referred to by Prokopios of Caesarea.⁶ Be that as it may, the first indubitable placement of the Suebi in Pannonia comes from two Eastern Roman authors writing in the mid-sixth century. Prokopios

³ Ammianus Marcellinus tells later in his text about Constantius II's campaigns against the Sarmatians and Quadi, who raided Pannonia and Moesia Prima, but without any reference to the Suebi (Amm Marc. 17.12.1–21).

⁴ Cf. Hummer 1998, 13. The Suebi are also mentioned amongst a number of barbarians who were lead as captives during Aurelian's triumph, and recorded between the Franks and Vandals which would be more in accordance with an assumption that the western Suebi are actually meant (*Hist. Aug. Div. Aurel.* 33.4).

⁵ The date of both letters: Krautschik 1983, 106. For the identification of these Suebi with the Alamanni: Stein 2023, 349, with note 1; with Marcone 2015, 253, note ad VII.5.

⁶ Heuberger 1937, 92–93.

of Caesarea's *History of Wars* mentions the Suebi who dwell in the interior beyond Dalmatia, Liburnia, Histria and Venetia, and stresses that they are not those subject to the Franks (Prokopios knows of the Suebi and the Alamanni who live beyond the Thuringians), and distinguishes between those Suebi, Siscians, and Pannonians said to reside near the Danube to the east of the Siscians and Suebi and to hold the city of Sirmium.⁷ Prokopios also speaks of places around Suavia (Σουαβία) from where the Gothic commanders recruited the unnamed barbarians before advancing toward Salona (Proc. Caes. *Bella* 5.12.11; 5.15.25–27; 5.16.9, 12).⁸ Jordanes' *Gothic History* offers more details about the Suebi in and close to Pannonia. Jordanes first mentions the *gens Suavorum* in connection with what seems to be the Pannonian Plain when he briefly says that the Gothic king Hunimund successfully fought them but without specifying the time and place (Jord. *Get.* 250). Next the Suebi appear as participants in the battle at the Pannonian river Nedao (Jord. *Get.* 261), which is the first clear indication of their connection to Pannonia. A little later in his text, Jordanes narrates the raid carried out by Hunimund, the *Suavorum dux*, against Dalmatia that is said to be close to Suavia and not far from the regions of Pannonia, especially the place where the Goths lived at that time (Jord. *Get.* 273). On the way back from plundering Dalmatia the Suebi are intercepted near Lake Balaton and defeated by Goths, who captured Hunimund, now called *rex*, and his remaining army, but sent them all back to Suavia (Jord. *Get.* 274), which indicates the location of Hunimund's Suavia north of Lake Balaton. Since Jordanes also says that the *gens* of Scirians resided above the Danube at the time when they were incited by Hunimund to join him against the Goths (Jord. *Get.* 275) that places Hunimund's Suavia near the Danube as well. Jordanes additionally strengthens the impression of the Suebi residing close to Pannonia with the story about the great coalition of various groups (the Suebi, Sarmatians, Scirians, Gepids and Rugians) who fought the Goths in the battle at the river Bolia in Pannonia (Jord. *Get.* 277). Only a few paragraphs below, however, Jordanes locates Suavia rather away from Pannonia. The *regio Suavorum*, which for the first time Jordanes clearly situates north of the Danube by remarking that the Goths led by their King Thiudimir crossed the reportedly frozen Danube to appear in the rear of the Suebi, is placed between the Bavarians in the east, the Franks in the west, the Burgundians in the south and the Thuringians in the north (Jord. *Get.* 280). The Suebi are then brought directly into connection with the Alamanni, as Jordanes says that the latter were joined by and allied themselves with the Suebi, and that both groups were attacked by Goths who then returned to their own land of Pannonia after winning a victory, though not a sweeping one (Jord. *Get.* 281). It is obvious that Jordanes has confused the political geography of his own time and the region known in the sixth century both as Alamannia and Suavia with the situation in the second half of the fifth century and the

⁷ In conjunction with the Pannonians, Prokopios mentions the Dacians, i.e. the inhabitants of the Diocese of Dacia, who are said to hold Singidunum (Proc. Caes. *Bella* 5.15.27).

⁸ These barbarians are usually identified with the Germani settled in Savia (cf. Lotter 2003, 29).

Suebic land which he himself places in or close to Pannonia.⁹ Jordanes is likely to have had before his eyes the same geographical arrangement as Prokopios of Caesarea, who describes the Franks as residing in Gaul, beyond them to the east are the Thuringians, not far to the south are the Burgundians, and the Suebi and Alamanni live beyond the Thuringians (Proc. Caes. *Bella* 5.12.8–11). Jordanes also mentions Suavia in his *Roman History*, where it is identified with the province of Savia (Jord. *Rom.* 218), when he gives a list of the provinces of the Late Roman Illyricum, which he took over from Rufius Festus' fourth century *Breviarium rerum gestarum populi Romani* (Ruf. Fest. *Brev.* 8.3). Finally, another testimony, albeit rather late, about the Suebi in or close to Pannonia is provided by Paul the Deacon's *History of the Longobards*. Paul has the Longobard King Wacho subjugating the Suebi (*Suavi*) after he expelled from the kingdom his predecessor's son, who fled to the Gepids (Paul. Diac. *HL* 1.21). Given the location of the Gepids, that would place the Longobards in the vicinity of Pannonia, all the more so as they are said to have been soon led by Audoin into Pannonia (Paul. Diac. *HL* 1.22).¹⁰ Consequently, the Suebi that are meant must have been the ones close to Pannonia as well. The Suebi are also indicated as one of the groups (next to the Gepids, Bulgars, Sarmatians, Pannonians and Noricans) brought from Pannonia to Italy by the Longobard King Alboin (Paul. Diac. *HL* 2.26), which makes it clear that those Suebi are thought to have previously resided in Pannonia with the Longobards. It seems that the Byzantine general Drocton or Droctulf(t) was recruited from those Suebi as he is called *Suavus* and said to have first lived with the Longobards (Paul. Diac. *HL* 3.19). On the other hand, Paul also knows of other Suebi located more to the west, as he relates how the Frankish kings settled the *Suavi* in places which the Saxons left after they joined the Longobards (Paul. Diac. *HL* 2.6), and the same *Suavi* were later attacked by Saxons (Paul. Diac. *HL* 3.7). Furthermore, Paul defines the region called Suavia as the land of the Alamanni (*Alamannorum patria*) and places it north of the provinces of Raetia Prima and Raetia Secunda (Paul. Diac. *HL* 2.15). The same Suavia is described as bordering from the west the province of the Noricans where the Bavarians reside, which has Pannonia on the east, Italy on the south, and the Danube on the north (Paul. Diac. *HL* 3.30). Paul also mentions the Suebi in connection with the late antique Middle Danube area in his *Roman History* when listing the *gentes* that were under Attila's rule, among which he records the *Marcomanni Suevi Quadi* (Paul. Diac. *HR* 14.2).

Notwithstanding the confusion of the late antique and early medieval authors about the Suebi in relation to the Upper and Middle Danube regions it seems fairly evident

⁹ *Alamannia* was already mentioned by the anonymous author of the panegyric to Constantius Caesar in the late third century (*Incert. Paneg. Constant. Caes.* 8(5).10.4), then by Quintus Aurelius Symmachus (*Sym. or.* 2.6, 16) and Ammianus Marcellinus (*Amm. Marc.* 20.4.1) in the late fourth century, and again by Ennodius in the early sixth century (*Ennod. Paneg.* 15.72). For a somewhat different take on the relevant Jordanes' passages, cf. Hummer 1998, 21–22.

¹⁰ For example, Seyer 1978, 590, counts with the possibility that the Suebi conquered by Wacho resided in present-day Slovakia. On the other hand, Jarnut 1982, 21, and Christie 1998, 32, place them in northern Pannonia.

from their combined narratives that they refer to three lands of the Suebi in Late Antiquity: one along the Upper Danube north of Raetia, which is identified with Alamannia, the other along the Middle Danube north of Pannonia, and the third within the confines of Pannonia, in its southwestern part. The Suebi residing in or close to Pannonia in the fifth century are usually interpreted as identical with the Marcomanni and Quadi who are believed to have preserved and revived the tradition of the Suebic name, as argued by Lotter.¹¹ The identification of the Marcomanni and Quadi, and the Longobards as well, with the Suebi has a long tradition thanks to Tacitus' *Germania*, composed at the turn of the second century.¹² Furthermore, Lotter also claims that the appearance of the Suebi in southwestern Pannonia might be due to their partial advance into the region in the 430s.¹³ Finally, the number of the Suebi in Savia is thought to have been strengthened thanks to the settlement of a group of the Suebic Alamanni mentioned in Cassiodorus Senator's *Variae epistolae* (Cassiod. Var. 3.50.1–3) as passing through Noricum and in Ennodius' *Panegyricus to the King Theoderic* (Ennod. Paneg. 15.72) as being accepted within the confines of Italy, a proposal put forward by Lotter as well.¹⁴

Suavia as an official name of Savia in Gothic times?

The assumptions laid out above have provided a cornerstone for an explanation of how the province of Savia came to be known in the sixth-century written sources as Suavia. The hypothesis of Savia as a Suebic land, which was officially acknowledged by the Gothic rulers by renaming the Roman province in accordance with the supposed ethnic situation, has been additionally worked out by Castritius. In his 1995 paper he argues that the usual emendation in the critical editions of Cassiodorus Senator's *Variae epistolae* of the name of the South Pannonian province from Suavia to Savia has been erroneous, as the existing manuscripts are consistent in rendering the name as Suavia or Su(a)evia, and to this effect he adduced more examples of the same name form in the early medieval manuscripts of other late antique works in relation to the province or the river after which the province was originally named.¹⁵ To be sure, the way in which the names are recorded in manuscripts can depend on who created the manuscripts and where they were created. Castritius provides ample examples of how a local perspective may have influenced the recording of names. Rufius Festus' *Breviarium rerum gestarum populi Romani*, contained in the seventh-century manu-

¹¹ Lotter 1968, 279–283; with Lotter 2003, 99–100; Castritius 1995, 82; Hummer 1998, 16–17.

¹² Cf. Seyer 1978, 50–51.

¹³ Lotter 1968, 284; Lotter 2003, 102. Cf. also Hauptmann 1929, 331–333, who was the first to make such proposal. *Contra* Pohl 1980, 275, who believes the conjunction of the Suebi and Savia to be a result of two confusions: between Suavia and Savia where Theoderic the Great settled the Suebic Alamanni; and between the “Suebic” settlement area of the Alamanni and the Suebi of Hunimund.

¹⁴ Lotter 1968, 278–279; with Lotter 2003, 125–128.

¹⁵ Castritius 1995, 73–75.

script from the El Escorial monastery in Spain (*El Escorial R.II.18*), has the name of the province Savia as Suaevia, much the same as the ninth-century manuscript from Vienna (*Vindobonensis* 89), which descends from a lost archetype associated with the known Spanish manuscript, where the form Suavia is used.¹⁶ Castritius rightly observes that the scribe who created the El Escorial manuscript might have had before his eyes the land of the Suebi in northwestern Spain when he recorded the name Savia as Suaevia.¹⁷ This is further substantiated by the fact that another class of manuscripts descending from a different manuscript tradition, of which the earliest known is the ninth-century manuscript from Bamberg (*Bambergensis E.III.2*), has the form Savia.¹⁸

Unfortunately, the earliest manuscripts of the *Variae epistolae* date from the eleventh century (the *fragmentum Halense* and the *fragmentum Koppmannianum*), even though an attempt has recently been made to detect traces of the letters' use in the ninth-century Carolingian context.¹⁹ That means that the current state of knowledge does not allow for a decisive claim that the archetype(s) of the *Variae epistolae* contained the form Suavia or Sua(e)via for Savia since such spellings may have all been later scribal conjectures, subsequently continuously copied. Prokopios of Caesarea associates the Suebi with the Siscians, i.e. the inhabitants of the city of Siscia, which was the provincial capital of Savia, and places at least one Suavia, i.e. the land of the Suebi, close to Dalmatia, and he does that more clearly than Jordanes who seems to be rather perplexed with the matter, even though Jordanes directly refers to the province of Savia as Suavia in his *Roman History*.²⁰ In any case, all these instances are most likely to have been the late antique authors' own deductions, and not based on some official record. Ultimately, it would be odd if the Ostrogothic authorities had intentionally adopted, with Cassiodorus' full consent, a provincial name that testified to a regional primacy within their own domain of another barbarian group. All things considered Castritius' claim that Suavia became the official name of Savia does not seem to hold up against scrutiny, even though it may well be that the province was indeed regarded by Goths as having something to do with the Suebi, notwithstanding the fact they are never actually mentioned in the *Variae epistolae* in connection with Savia. To add to this, the Anonymous Cosmographer of Ravenna, who is thought to have based his own work on writings of, among others, the sixth-century Gothic geographers, does not mention either Savia nor Suavia but only the region called *Valeria, que et Media Provincia*, which he distinguishes from Pannonia saying that it is located close to Pannonia and that it lies between the Upper and Lower Pannonia, and

¹⁶ Castritius 1995, 73–74; with Eadie 1967, 21–23, 52, ad 7; Arnaud-Lindet 1994, xxx–xxxii, 13, ad 3.

¹⁷ Castritius 1995, 74.

¹⁸ Eadie 1967, 23, 52, ad 7; Arnaud-Lindet 1994, xxvi–xxvii, 13, ad 3.

¹⁹ Cristini 2022. For an overview of the manuscripts containing the *Variae epistolae*: Mommsen 1894, lxxviii–cx, clxxxiv, esp. c–ci (the *fragmentum Halense*); Fridh 1973, xxxvii–xliii, esp. xxxviii for both the *fragmentum Halense* and the *fragmentum Koppmannianum*.

²⁰ Drawing from Rufius Festus (*Ruf. Fest. Brev.* 8.3), Jordanes apparently changed the name from Savia to Suavia.

in which he places the *civitates* that belonged to the Late Roman provinces of Savia, Valeria, Pannonia Secunda, and Noricum Mediterraneum (Anon. Rav. *Cosmogr.* 4.20).

What and where is Pannonia in the fifth and sixth centuries?

It has recently been suggested that the joining of the province of Savia with Dalmatia in Ostrogothic times may have caused the term Pannonia to come to be used exclusively for the province of Pannonia Secunda, with a remark that such designation seems to have already appeared in the Western section of the *Notitia Dignitatum* as the province of the *consularis* of Pannonia Secunda is indicated only as Pannonia (*Not. Dign. Occ.* 1.51).²¹ However, the province of the *corrector* of Savia is equally indicated as Pannonia as opposed to the province of Pannonia Prima which is listed under Illyricum (*Not. Dign. Occ.* 1.82, 87),²² which would rather suggest that the process of identification of Pannonia Secunda with the term Pannonia indeed belongs to later times.

It is likely that this occurred due to the political-administrative separation of the Pannonian provinces in the 430s after those in the north were surrendered by the Western Roman government to the Huns, whereas those in the south were ceded to the Eastern Roman Empire, with Savia being effectively cut off after the Huns conquered Sirmium and the rest of Pannonia Secunda in 441, which prevented the Eastern Romans from ever gaining their grip on the entire region.²³ Polemius Silvius' list of provinces, created in AD 448/449, shows the provincial structure of the Prefecture of Illyricum that is believed to correspond to the time before AD 395.²⁴ However, its western perspective provides some interesting additions that perhaps reflect changing knowledge about the Middle Danube region. The list seems to arrange the provinces in four groups, here listed in the order of mention: 1. Dalmatia, Pannonia Prima, Pannonia Secunda, Valeria, Praevalis, Moesia Superior (i.e. Prima), Epirus Vetus, and Epirus Nova; 2. Noricum Ripense, Noricum Mediterraneum, and Savia; 3. Dardania, Haemimontus, Dacia (by the end of the fourth century there were two Daciae, Ripensis and Mediterranea), and Scythia (the province was actually in the Diocese of Thrace); 4. Creta insula, Achaia, Macedonia (by the end of the fourth century there were two Macedoniae, Prima and Salutaris or Secunda), and Thessalia (Pol. Silv. *Later.* II.5). If this proposed grouping is on the right track it would suggest that Savia was not perceived as part of the Pannonian group of provinces, but was instead attached to the westernmost section with both provinces of Noricum. Some of the provinces are additionally described: Dalmatia is *supra mare*, Pannonia Prima is the one *in qua est Sirmium*, and Noricum Ripense is *super Danuvium*. The mistake about the location of Sirmium may signify that by the

²¹ Cf. Gračanin, Škrgulja 2014, 183–184; Gračanin 2016, 226.

²² The Pannonian province of Valeria is missing from the list as it was mistakenly struck out instead of the short-lived Italian province of Valeria (cf. Mann 1991, 217).

²³ Cf. Gračanin 2006, 49–61.

²⁴ Wesch-Klein 2002, esp. 64–66, 83.

mid-fifth century the term Pannonia had superseded the geographical difference between the two provinces. Another provincial list offering a decidedly Eastern Roman outlook, that of Hierokles from AD 527/535, records the following provinces within the Eastern Prefecture of Illyricum, which can be divided into two groups, the southern and northern: 1. Macedonia I, Macedonia II, Thessalia, Hellas (i.e. Achaia), Creta, Old Epirus (i.e. Epirus Vetus), and New Epirus (i.e. Epirus Nova); 2. Landlocked Dacia (i.e. Dacia Mediterranea), Riverside Dacia (i.e. Dacia Ripensis), Dardania, Praevalis, Moesia I, and Pannonia (Hier. *Syneke*. 638, 1a–b; 641, 1; 642, 1; 643, 6; 649, 3; 651, 3; 652, 8; 654, 2; 655, 1; 655, 7; 656, 3; 657, 1; 657, 7). Referring to the province where the cities of Sirmium and Bassiana are said to be located (Hier. *Syneke*. 657, 8–9) only as Pannonia is a clear sign that by that time the term Pannonia covered from the perspective of the Eastern Roman government solely the province of Pannonia Secunda. This is further confirmed by other examples from the official usage: Justinian's *Novel* 11 from 14th April 535 speaks of Pannonia Secunda which is in the city of Bacis (i.e. Bassiana), whereas the *Novel* 131 from 18th March 545 names only Pannonia (*Just. Nov.* 11; 131.3). This change of perspective in regard to the Pannonian provinces seems to have been in effect by the later fifth century. Priskos of Panion in his fragmentary preserved *History* mentions the land of the Pannonians close to the River Sava which was handed over to Attila and from where came Orestes, the secretary of the Hunnic king, and also the Pannonians near the Danube, which in both cases is consistent with the geographical position of Pannonia Secunda (Prisc. *Hist. exc.* 7.1–2). This *toto pro parte* approach is even more evident when Priskos defines Sirmium as a city among the Pannonians, and he also knows that Poetovio was a city in Noricum (Prisc. *Hist. exc.* 8.76–77). Priskos remarks that one of Attila's notables, Onegesios, had the stone for his bath brought from the land of Pannonians as there was no stone or timber in the area where the Huns lived, and then adds that the builder of the baths was a prisoner from Sirmium (Prisc. *Hist. exc.* 8.85–86). Finally, one Constantiolus, a Roman in Attila's service, is said to have been from the land of Pannonians that is subject to the Hunnic king (Prisc. *Hist. exc.* 135). On the other hand, Eugippius knows in the early sixth century of Pannonia Inferior as a place where the Goths dwelt, and from where they could pose a threat to the Rugians in Noricum (Eugip. *Vita Sev.* 5.1). Eugippius also speaks of two Pannoniae which, along with other areas bordering the Danube, fell into disarray following Attila's death, and of the border area between Noricum Ripense and the Pannoniae (Eugip. *Vita Sev.* 1.1). A somewhat different perception of Pannonia is offered in the letter of King Theudebert of Austrasia to Emperor Justinian I, in which the king describes the extent of his rule (*Ep. Austras.* 20).²⁵ The letter mentions among the regions purportedly under Theudebert I's control the northern part of Italy and Pannonia with the Saxons, and claims that his dominion extended over the Danube and the border of Pannonia.

Cassiodorus Senator's *Variae epistolae* provide testimony that only one Pannonian

²⁵ For the context and interpretation of Theudebert I's letters to Justinian I, cf. Gillet 2019, esp. 182–183, 186.

province was in Ostrogothic time referred to as such – Pannonia Sirmiensis, defined as a former seat of the Goths, and also known simply as Pannonia (Cassiod. *Var.* 3.23; 3.24; 4.13). Similarly, Prokopios of Caesarea distinguishes the Pannonians, associated with the Dacians, from the inhabitants of Siscia who are seen as a distinct group (Proc. Caes. *Bella* 5.15.26–27). Prokopios also mentions Pannonia as a region the Goths occupied after they crossed the Danube, and in connection with strongholds that were surrendered to the Lombards along with the Pólis Norikón (Proc. Caes. *Bella* 3.2.39; 7.33.10). Jordanes, on the other hand, uses the term Pannonia in different meanings which both reflect the sources from which he draws his information and the definition of the region in his own time. In his *Gothic History*, Jordanes defines Pannonia, which is said to have been given to the Goths by Romans, as a region bordered on by Moesia Superior on the east, Dalmatia on the south, Noricum on the west and the Danube on the north, with many cities of which the first is Sirmium and the furthest is Vindobona (Jord. *Get.* 264), and where the Goths dwelt in three distinctive groups (Jord. *Get.* 268). Pannonia is the area from which the Huns were reportedly expelled by Romans and Goths, and – along with Dacia – where Attila's Huns resided with their subject *nationes* (Jord. *Get.* 166, 226), as well as the scene of two battles, the first at the river Nedao and the second at the River Bolia (Jord. *Get.* 260, 277). The interior of Pannonia is the territory said to have been occupied by Sadages, and Pannonia is also where the city of Bassiana is located (Jord. *Get.* 272). Jordanes also remarks that the Pannonian regions, especially those where the Goths resides, are not far from Dalmatia, calls Pannonia the seat of the Gothic King Thiudimir, and says that Theoderic came to the vicinity of Pannonia through Sirmium (Jord. *Get.* 273, 281, 292). The last remark is especially interesting, since it could be construed as indicating that Jordanes does not see Sirmium as part of Pannonia. If we exclude the very likely possibility that the formulation is just a figure of speech or simply an inconsistency or unintentional inaccuracy, it might perhaps be explained as a hint to the fact that at the time when Jordanes was composing his work the city was not under Roman control and thus could be regarded as not belonging to (the Roman) Pannonia. Furthermore, when describing the extent of Scythia, Jordanes defines as its western border towards Germania the River Vistula in the north and the point where the River Hister (the lower course of the Danube) springs, and to which the Morsian/Mursian lake (apparently the wide floodplain stretching both north and south of Mursa/Osijek, including present-day Kopački Rit and the ancient Volcaean marshes) extends (Jord. *Get.* 30, 31). This seems to indicate that Jordanes understands Scythia as bordering Pannonia as well, especially since he never clearly defines Pannonia's eastern border except for remarking that it has Moesia Superior on the east, which would be consistent with the impression that he primarily has Pannonia Secunda in mind. In Scythia Jordanes places the Gepids (Jord. *Get.* 33), who are said to be closed off on the north by the River Tisza, and consequently he includes in Scythia the ancient Dacia, which he refers to as Gothia as well as Gepidia of his time, and which once bordered – Jordanes uses the past tense – the Jazyges in the east (Jord. *Get.* 74), who are known to have lived along both sides of the Tisza. This geographical arrangement suggests that Jordanes may have

believed Pannonia extended across the Danube towards the Tisza, although he is never explicit.²⁶ Jordanes also refers to Pannonia in connection with earlier events, once in the plural form as both *Pannoniae* (Jord. *Get.* 161) and thrice in the typical singular form (Jord. *Get.* 115, 140, 147). In his *Roman History*, Jordanes employs the usual singular form for a fifth-century event (Jord. *Rom.* 347), and the plural form when he refers to matters from more distant past (Jord. *Rom.* 216, 218, 287), except when stating that Emperor Marcus Aurelius died in Pannonia (Jord. *Rom.* 272) or remarking that Emperor Decius was born in Pannonia Inferior (Jord. *Rom.* 284). Additionally, Jordanes mentions the Pannonians on three separate occasions: the first time in referral to the defeat of the king of the Pannonians (Jord. *Rom.* 216), the second time in connection with their geographical position between the rivers Drava and Sava (Jord. *Rom.* 243), which is sort of an equivalent for the identical remark about where the Amantini live (Jord. *Rom.* 216), and the third time as an indication of the provincial origins of the emperors Valentinian and Valens, who are said to have been from Cibalae (Jord. *Rom.* 307).

All these examples show that by the second half of the fifth century Pannonia was more commonly seen as a single geographical administrative unit and primarily identified with the province of Pannonia Secunda, which in the early sixth century covered both (the Ostrogothic) Pannonia Sirmiensiensis with Sirmium as the long-established regional hub and (the Eastern Roman) Pannonia Secunda based on the city of Bassiana. To be sure, the term Pannonia could be also used to signify the northern Pannonia, which is understandable since the writers appear to have been aware of the existence of the province of Pannonia Prima. Furthermore, if we assume that the locations of the rivers Bolia and Nedao lie somewhere outside what the Roman Pannonia was then, it may be that Pannonia could also denote a larger area, much like Dacia, and could stand for the territory of the Gepids. What is however more important is that the term Pannonia seems to have completely ceased to be employed for the province of Savia, which apparently was associated instead with Noricum and Dalmatia.

Can archaeology help find the Suebi in southern Pannonia?

The search for the Great Migration period groups in the material record is sort of a holy grail for many a Late Antiquity/early Middle Ages archaeologist. Some time ago the matter seemed rather straightforward, as the culture-historical approach was the concept of the day, neatly arranging peoples and societies of the past into specific ethnic and cultural groups. However, the notion that an ethnicity could be recognized and identified solely on the basis of the typology of archaeological artefacts, no matter how elaborately and systematically worked out, has quite rightly been criticized and declared obsolete. In their attempts to define and sharply demarcate the material traces believed to represent movements and settlement of various distinctive groups, many archaeolo-

²⁶ For a full discussion, cf. Gračanin 2008, 19–22.

gists have often fallen into a fallacy of circular argumentation by first relying on the written evidence to specify the settlement area that is thought to have belonged to a given group of people, and then by using the artefacts unearthed in that area and seen as indicating that group of people to establish their presence in the same or any other area.

The material culture that is thought to indicate the fourth- and early fifth-century Suebic groups is traditionally located in Moravia, the Upper Danube part of Lower Austria, and western and central Slovakia.²⁷ It is believed that by the first decade of the fifth century a major shift in settlement structure occurred as a result of the mass relocation of population indicated by a significant drop in active settlements, even though some are said to have continued to exist until the first third of the fifth century.²⁸ In the second half of the fifth century, the Suebi are thought to have primarily resided in what is now western Slovakia before their polity was crushed by the Goths in the late 460s, after which they are assumed to have moved west and crossed the Danube, with a possibility that some Suebi remained in the old territory.²⁹ What may be deduced from what archaeology can tell about the Suebi is that after they are no longer tangible in the region where they are believed to have been more or less compactly settled, they cannot be traced among other so-called Germanic groups. Furthermore, it could be argued that what seems to have been a defeat against the Ostrogoths, even though Jordanes does not paint the Gothic victory as a smashing success, caused a serious blow to the inner cohesion of the Suebi, as they are never again directly referred to in the written sources narrating the events in the Middle Danube region. Therefore, it is likely that whatever of their group was left must have not amounted to much.³⁰

Considering all that has been said it is extremely unlikely that any material evidence that could be linked to the Suebi might ever be detected in southern Pannonia. True, it has been remarked that some “Germanic” groups left very rare traces of their presence in the Western Balkans, among which the Vandals, Visigoths and Suebi have been named, but the inclusion of the Suebi in that list is rather tentative.³¹ Thus it is no wonder that there has never been any attempt at finding the Suebi in the Great Migration period material record in southern Pannonia, as is exemplified in the latest overview of the finds of barbarian provenance, with only a small number of the fifth- and sixth century finds attributed generally to the “Germanic cultural circle” having been thus far uncovered, even though the author supports the strong presence of the Suebi,

²⁷ Stoklas 2022, 378.

²⁸ Stoklas 2022, 383–384.

²⁹ Ruttkay 2009, 277–278, 289. Steinhübel 2021, 17–18, describes a more elaborate extent of the territory of Hunimund's Suebi.

³⁰ Steinhübel 2021, 21, believes that after their defeat at the hands of the Ostrogoths, the majority of the Suebi fled to the Alamanni, giving them their name, while the remaining Suebi eventually moved into Pannonia after it was vacated by Ostrogoths.

³¹ Vinski 1971, 47. Cf. also Sokol 1998, 1134.

who are even said to have controlled Savia.³² To be sure, certain finds – tree-trunk burials and remains of metal pouches discovered in the cemetery at the Bošnjića Voće site south of Rakovčani near Prijedor in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina (the border area between Savia and Dalmatia), which has been dated to the period from AD 500 to sometime after 550 – have been ascribed to the Alamanni and interpreted as indicating the presence of a small Alamannic group in the region as a result of the Ostrogothic policy of settlement implied in Cassiodorus Senator's *Variae epistolae*.³³ However, not only is such an interpretation firmly embedded in the culture-historical approach, it also does not do much to help establish the presence of the Suebi in Savia, as is usually claimed.³⁴ One might be inclined to try to explain the absence of the archaeological evidence as a consequence of a far-reaching acculturation of the Suebi among other local populations, "Germanic" and Roman alike, but in that case one might equally pose a question why the Suebic identity would continue to exist, and in such a manner that the entire region eventually adopted the Suebic name.

Overall, it seems evident enough that in view of negligible quantity of material evidence that could be connected with various "Germanic" groups in the fifth- and sixth-century Savia, any attempt at identifying some of the archaeological finds as "Suebic" – notwithstanding the potential methodological pitfalls of such efforts – are not likely to bear fruit. Consequently, to answer the question asked in the title of this section: No, archaeology cannot help find the Suebi in southern Pannonia, at least not at the present level of knowledge.

The *antiqui barbari*, or a barbarian identity in flux

The enigmatic expression in Cassiodorus Senator's *Variae epistolae* about the *antiqui barbari* has attracted a fair amount of scholarly attention. The paragraph in which they are mentioned deals with a fiscal matter: the *antiqui barbari* are said to have married Roman women and obtained estates but failed to start paying the taxes due (Cassiod. *Var.* 5.14.6). They seem to have been soldiers who used to be exempt from taxation because of their military service, but by having acquired land they were now counted among the class of *possessores* and became eligible for taxation.³⁵ There is some confusion in the scholarship as to the meaning of the word *antiqui*. Šašel understood it to mean "old",

³² Rapan Papeša 2012, esp. 417, with 426–428 for the fifth- to sixth-century objects unearthed in southern Pannonia and ascribed to the Germanic cultural circle.

³³ Vinski 1971, 54; with Sokol 1998, 1134. *Contra* Miletić 1978, 102, who believes the objects to have been in use by Goths.

³⁴ Wolfram 1990, 301, 317; Castritius 1995, 82; Lotter 2003, 125. This has recently been fully accepted by Bratož 2017, 225. Gračanin, Škrgulja 2014, 185, and Gračanin 2016, 265, mention that as a possibility. The settlement of the Suebi in southern Pannonia was fully accepted in older Yugoslav historiography: Grafenauer 1952, 417; Kovačević 1960, 33.

³⁵ Gračanin 2016, 251, 259; with Castritius 1995, 83–84.

which is followed by Castritius, Lotter and the author of this paper.³⁶ However, Amory has thought that the word refers to their former status, i.e. they are “former barbarians”, which has also been adopted by Bjornlie in the recent complete English translation of the *Variae epistolae*.³⁷ The Italian translation, on the other hand, has *gli antichi barbari*.³⁸ It seems to be clear enough that those who were being referred to did not cease to be barbarians from the perspective of the Ostrogothic government, but only that they were now obliged to pay land tax, the same as all other *possessores*.

As for the identity of the *antiqui barbari*, there are so to speak two schools of thought. The first may be tentatively called Šašel's. As already mentioned, he believed them to be a group of barbarians who were not Goths and were older than other barbarians referred to in the *Variae epistolae* in connection with southern Pannonia (Cassiod. *Var.* 3.24; 8.21), and identified them as various Germanic-Hunnic ethnic splinters stemming from Attila's *Völkerbund*. He also accounted for the possibility that some of the groups mentioned by Martin of Braga could belong among the *antiqui barbari*, possibly, it seems, even the Alamanni and Suebi.³⁹ The other opinion has been expressed by Castritius who, though very much appreciating Šašel's efforts at the reconstruction of the ethnic picture in the fifth- and sixth-century Pannonia and approving Šašel's placement in Pannonia Prima and Savia of the Suebi (associated with the Marcomanni), identifies the *antiqui barbari* as the Middle Danubian Suebi, i.e. the Marcomannic Suebi who for their orthodoxy and good service were awarded by the Western Roman government the right to settle in the Roman provinces and the *ius conubium* at the time following the collapse of Attila's polity.⁴⁰ Castritius also associates the *antiqui barbari* with the category of *capillati*, mentioned in the *Variae epistolae* in connection with Siscia and Savia (Cassiod. *Var.* 4.49), which he defines as a leading socio-political class.⁴¹

However, the dominant impression is that the *antiqui barbari* was a cover term for various “Germanic” groups residing in the region from before the Ostrogothic rule and not only the Suebi, though they are also thought to perhaps have been meant.⁴² I myself have opted tentatively for the identification of the *antiqui barbari* with the Suebi.⁴³ To be sure, there have been other opinions but they are either too general or appear to be erroneous.⁴⁴ From the perspectives of both Prokopios of Caesarea and Jordanes there is no doubt that Savia was inhabited by barbarians, and specifically the Suebi, as Proko-

³⁶ Šašel 1979, 135, 137; Castritius 1995, 77–78; Lotter 2003, 37; Gračanin 2016, 251, 264.

³⁷ Amory 2003, 53, note 31, 93, note 34; Bjornlie 2019, 215.

³⁸ Giardina, Cecconi, Tantillo 2014, 153.

³⁹ Šašel 1979, 135, 137.

⁴⁰ Castritius 1995, 84–85.

⁴¹ Castritius 1995, 78. For a possible identity of the *capillati*, cf. Gračanin 2016, 234–235.

⁴² Lotter 2003, 123, 125; Lo Cascio 2014, 423, note ad XIV.27.

⁴³ Gračanin, Škrgulja 2014, 184; Gračanin 2016, 264, 265.

⁴⁴ Thus Moorhead 1997, 85, only says that they were not Goths, whereas Lafferty 2013, 226, believes them to be precisely that – the Goths. For an overview of scholarly opinions, cf. Gračanin 2016, 264–265, note 175.

prios clearly places them there and Jordanes also seems convinced that the province of Savia was at that time called Suavia, i.e. the Suebic land. Of course, they could have been simply wrong, that is to say, mistaken or ill-informed about the true provenance of the name of the province of Savia, especially as it resembles the Suebic name.⁴⁵ Having all that in mind, it seems prudent only to conclude that the *antiqui barbari* were indeed a distinct group of barbarians in the Ostrogothic kingdom, who were obviously thought to have lived in the province of Savia long before the Goths controlled the area. They were clearly not the Goths as the Goths are never referred to as barbarians in the *Variae epistolae* and other Ostrogothic official documents, but seem to have performed military duties. Although they married Roman woman their Romanness was not acknowledged by the Ostrogothic authorities. They may have included members of various “Germanic” groups as is generally maintained or, if we are to believe the sixth-century authors, primarily the Suebi, but the latter is at the current state of knowledge far from certain.

Concluding remarks

In retrospect, Jaroslav Šašel is definitely to be credited for his attempt at elucidating, especially through the visual aids of maps, the complex ethnic picture of the fifth- and sixth-century Pannonia, principally its southern parts. He provided what may be termed as the first consistent historiographic narrative about the presence of various barbarian, primarily “Germanic”, groups in the area, which offered food for thought and instigated new research. That is his lasting contribution even though some of his assumptions and propositions have not withstood the test of time, while others are still debated.

The present examination has also shown that the identification of the *antiqui barbari* with the Suebi is rather speculative, and that the assumption of Savia becoming Suavia, that is a land of the Suebi, because the Suebi actually settled there is on shaky grounds since the identification of Savia with Suavia may have merely been an invention of the sixth-century authors stemming from sort of a misunderstanding and then appeared in the early medieval manuscripts of various Late Antiquity works as an educated guess based on the contemporary knowledge in local contexts. It is equally telling that the archaeological research, especially in works of scholarship that are heavily influenced by the culture-historical approach, has never detected the Suebic material culture in southern Pannonia, nor even attempted to do that, regardless of the fact that there is not much material evidence to work with. Thus it seems more likely that the Suebi never resided in Savia, at least not as the Suebi who would hold onto their identity name. Otherwise it would be quite odd that the Ostrogothic authorities, which are supposed to have introduced a new official name for Savia knowing that it was so full of the Suebi, never actually referred to them in the context of

⁴⁵ Sokol 1998, 1133, has suggested that the phonemic similarity between Savia and Suevi/Suevia might have confused the ancient writers.

southern Pannonia, but rather chose to hide them behind a somewhat enigmatic label of *antiqui barbari* when at the same time they had no problem with designating other barbarian groups by their names.

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Hrvoje Gračanin
Sveučilište u Zagrebu
Filozofski fakultet
Ulica Ivana Lučića 3
HR-10000 Zagreb
hgracani@m.ffzg.hr
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5018-6083>

Carneola? The Settlement Pattern of Western and Central Slovenia in the 6th Century

Zvezdana MODRIJAN

Abstract

The *Cosmography* of the Anonymous Geographer of Ravenna constitutes one of the rare Late Antique sources referencing the territory of present-day Slovenia. The work includes a mention of the region of Carneola, located between Italy and Illyricum. Within this context, the geographer enumerates 25 settlements, of which only Carnium – modern-day Kranj – can be identified with certainty. The section, dealing with Carneola was most likely composed in the first half of the 6th century at the Ostrogothic court in Ravenna.

The Late Antique settlement pattern of central and western Slovenia displays marked regional variation. Gorenjska and the Soča Valley appear to have retained relatively high population densities, whereas the Ljubljana Basin and Notranjska underwent significant demographic decline. The persistence of dense habitation in Gorenjska may be attributable to its strategic geopolitical location, while in the Soča Valley, certain settlements likely endured due to their remote geographic position. The abandonment of settlements in the Ljubljana Basin is generally interpreted as a consequence of their exposed position. In Notranjska, depopulation is thought to have resulted from the declining strategic relevance of the region and the cessation of state-sponsored supply.

Keywords: *Cosmography*; Anonymous of Ravenna; Carneola; Carnium; fortified hilltop settlements; settlement; Late Antiquity

Izvleček

Karneola? Poselitvena slika zahodne in osrednje Slovenije v 6. stoletju

Delo Kozmografija Anonimnega geografa iz Ravene je eno redkih poznoantičnih virov za območje današnje Slovenije. V njem avtor na prostoru med Italijo in Ilirikom omenja deželo, imenovano *Carneola*, v njej pa našteva 25 naselij, od katerih je zanesljivo identificiran samo *Carnium* kot današnji Kranj. Del, ki obravnava Karneolo, je verjetno nastal v prvi polovici 6. st. na vzhodnogotškem dvoru v Raveni.

Poznoantična poselitev osrednje in zahodne Slovenije se na različnih delih kaže različno. Medtem ko sta Gorenjska in Posočje še relativno gosto poseljena, kažeta Ljubljanska kotlina in Notranjska precejšno depopulacijo. Gosta poselitev Gorenjske je verjetno povezana z njenim geopolitičnim položajem, medtem ko v Posočju nekatere naselbine preživijo tudi zaradi odmaknjene lege. Propad večine naselbin v Ljubljanski kotlini razlagamo z njihovo izpostavljenostjo, na Notranjskem pa z upadom strateškega pomena ozemlja in prenehanjem državne oskrbe večine postojank.

Ključne besede: Kozmografija; Anonimni geograf iz Ravene; Carneola; Carnium; višinske utrjene naselbine; poselitev; pozna antika

Among the many topics explored by Jaroslav Šašel was the geographical position and administrative status of Carneola, as conveyed in the *Cosmography* of the anonymous geographer of Ravenna.¹ This work was compiled on the basis of earlier sources, among which are those from the Early Roman, Ostrogothic, and Early Medieval periods. There is no complete consensus as to when these sources were integrated into the *Cosmography*, with scholarly opinions ranging from the early 8th to the early 9th century.² The amalgamation of sources of varying origin and age led to numerous errors within the text; nevertheless, the work remains an important source of information for a period otherwise characterised by a marked scarcity of written records.³

The aim of this article is to compare the data presented in the *Cosmography* concerning the region between Italy and Illyricum in the 6th century, with the results of archaeological research. In recent decades our understanding of settlement patterns in the south-eastern Alpine region during Late Antiquity has advanced considerably and the archaeological data available for the entire area under discussion are today significantly more extensive than what was accessible to Jaroslav Šašel.

Carneola and the *Cosmography*

The section of the *Cosmography* that discusses Carneola is based on a list of settlements attributed to the Gothic scholar Marcomirus (*Marcomirus Gothorum philosophus*), and ranks among the most original parts of the *Cosmography*.⁴ The list was likely compiled in the first half of the 6th century at the Ostrogothic court in Ravenna, although some scholars allow for the possibility that it was created as late as the end of the 6th century.⁵

Carneola, consistently referred to by the geographer as *patria*, lies between Venetia and Histria, the land of the Corontani, Liburnia Tarsaticensis, Pannonia, and Valeria. It is said to have formerly been called *Alpes Iuliana*, and the geographer also uses the terms *Carnech/Carnich* and *patria Carnium* in reference to it. Within this territory, he lists 25 settlements (*civitates*).⁶

The name Carneola is thought to derive from the Carni, a Celtic tribe mentioned as late as the 6th century by Procopius.⁷ The settlement names are likewise believed to be of Celtic origin.⁸ Jaroslav Šašel proposed that the location of Carneola corresponded to the area of present-day western Slovenia, more precisely the regions of Gorenjska

¹ *Cosmographia*; Šašel 1970; Šašel 1970–1971.

² Staab 1976, 31; Staab 1998, 104; Bratož 2014, 387.

³ Bratož 2014, 395; Kovács 2020; Szántó 2021, 112.

⁴ Bratož 2014, 389.

⁵ Staab 1998, 104.

⁶ *Cosmographia* 4.21.

⁷ Bratož 2014, 388.

⁸ Bratož 2014, 388.

and large parts of Notranjska. The core area is believed to have comprised the plain between Kranj and Ljubljana and a large part of Notranjska, with the term “valley” possibly referring to the Upper Sava Valley. Most scholars agree with this broader location in western Slovenia or within the region of the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*, although opinions vary somewhat regarding its precise extent and function.⁹

The list of 25 settlements in Carneola is divided into two parts. The first begins with Carnium, followed by six other settlements. After an ambiguous spatial designation, rendered as “in the valley of this land” or, according to more recent readings, “in the other part of this land,”¹⁰ the list continues with 18 additional settlements. It concludes with a mention of an unnamed alpine lake and several rivers, one of which is identified by name: *Corcac*. This has been identified as the Kokra, a river which flows through a deep canyon past Kranj and joins the Sava River just south of the town.¹¹

As the settlements are not recorded in any earlier or contemporary sources, and since the criteria for their inclusion remain unknown, their identification is nearly impossible. The only exception is the first settlement mentioned, Carnium, which has been identified as present-day Kranj.¹²

In comparison with the neighbouring units of Valeria and Liburnia Tarsaticensis, the number of settlements mentioned in Carneola is notably high. In Valeria, seven settlements are listed between Siscia and Emona, all of which have been identified,¹³ while Liburnia includes 19 settlements.¹⁴

The archaeological picture of the region

As it is not possible to define the exact boundaries of the land of Carneola, I will attempt in what follows to analyse the Late Antique settlement pattern of north-western and central Slovenia on the basis of the current state of archaeological research.¹⁵ The area under consideration will be bounded to the north by the Karavanke massif, which forms a prominent natural border. Although several routes likely continued to lead northwards across the range even in Late Antiquity (notably via the Jezerski vrh / Seebergsettel, Ljubelj / Loiblpass, and Korensko sedlo / Wurzenpass passes), there

⁹ Wolff 2000, 103–105; Bratož 2014, 383–391.

¹⁰ *Cosmographia* 4,21: *Item in ali<part>eiusdem patrie*.

¹¹ Šašel 1970, 588; Wolff 2000, 104, Note 31.

¹² Šašel 1970–1971, 35.

¹³ *Cosmographia* 4,20. For the problem of Valeria, see most recently Kovács 2020; for the position of Emona in Valeria, see also Bratož 2014, 392, Note 78.

¹⁴ *Cosmographia* 4,22.

¹⁵ Archaeological data were extracted from databases Zbiva: <https://zbiva4.zrc-sazu.si/>) and Arkas: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/9bcce19f3dbb4c88ac718b02174d7d3e>

is – unlike in the Julian Alps – very little evidence of high-altitude land use in the Karavanke during this period.¹⁶

To the east, the natural demarcation is less clearly defined; however, it is probable that Carneola did not extend beyond the former boundary between Italy and Noricum at Atrans. The Roman settlements along the main road from Emona to Celeia and Poetovio largely fell into decline before the mid-fifth century,¹⁷ and with their abandonment, the maintenance of the road itself ceased. Following the disuse of the route across Trojane (Atrans), one of the eastern routes likely shifted to the Tuhinjska dolina Valley. To the south, the analysis will include the area of the former Alpine barriers (*Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*) in Notranjska, while to the west it will encompass not only the Julian Alps and the pre-Alpine hills, but also the Soča Valley.

Carnium, mentioned first among the settlements in Carneola, has long been identified with present-day Kranj – primarily on the basis of name similarity and the large cemetery below it.¹⁸ In recent decades, substantial settlement finds have confirmed the existence of a large, walled settlement on the rocky promontory above the confluence of the Sava and Kokra rivers, with a large Early Christian church in the heart of the settlement.¹⁹ The finds further suggest that this was an ethnically diverse community which, uniquely within the territory of present-day inland Slovenia, may still be regarded as a town even in the Late Antique period.²⁰

The absence of the settlements mentioned in the *Cosmography* in earlier written sources is, in fact, not surprising, given the near-total discontinuity observed between Late Roman and Late Antique settlement patterns in the south-eastern Alps. The settlement landscape began to change in the final third of the third century,²¹ with the emergence of the first temporary refuges on fortified hilltop sites, followed by the fortification of the region through the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* defensive system.²² In the first half of the fourth century, archaeological evidence reveals the final flourishing of Roman towns and rural settlements, while some hilltop outposts also became permanently inhabited for the first time. Thus, the area was in the Late Roman period home to numerous settlements of various types (*Fig. 1*).

The period of settlement prosperity was short-lived; by the mid-5th century, there is no longer archaeological evidence of continuous urban habitation. Likewise, most rural settlements had collapsed, with the exception of some coastal towns and sites in Istria.

¹⁶ Horvat 2020, Tab. 5, 6.

¹⁷ Collected at Ciglenečki 2023, 32–36.

¹⁸ Stare 1980; Vinski 1980.

¹⁹ Sagadin 1991; Sagadin 2008; Pflaum, Sagadin 2016; Sagadin 2017; Urankar 2021.

²⁰ Ciglenečki 2023, 111–112.

²¹ This time is also thought to mark the boundary between Roman and late Roman periods. An overview of chronologies and terminologies in Ciglenečki 2023, 11–13.

²² Šašel, Petru 1971, 11–15; Kos 2012; Kos 2014; Kusetič et al. 2014; Ciglenečki 2015; Ciglenečki 2016.

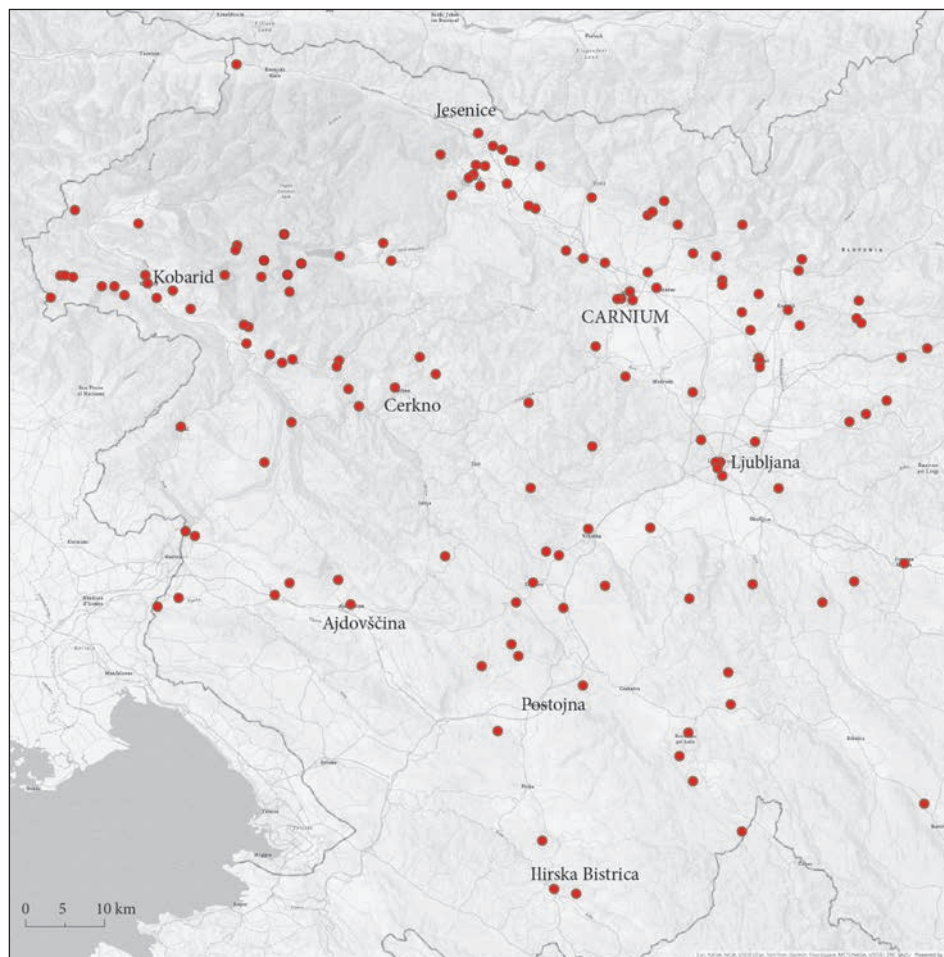


Fig 1: Settlement of the area in question between the middle of the 4th and the end of the 6th centuries. Source: <https://zbiva4.zrc-sazu.si/>; <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12102/Arkas>

During the Ostrogothic rule – and even more markedly in the second half of the 6th century – the territory of inland western Slovenia featured only Carnium and a number of fortified hilltop settlements of varying forms and functions, alongside modest rural lowland habitation. Among these elevated fortified sites, we may search for the settlements listed in the *Cosmography*. Yet, with the exception of Carnium, all of these sites disappeared with the end of Late Antiquity or following the Slavic settlement of the region, preventing their names from being transmitted into the medieval period.

According to the current state of research, there are about 30 known sites in the

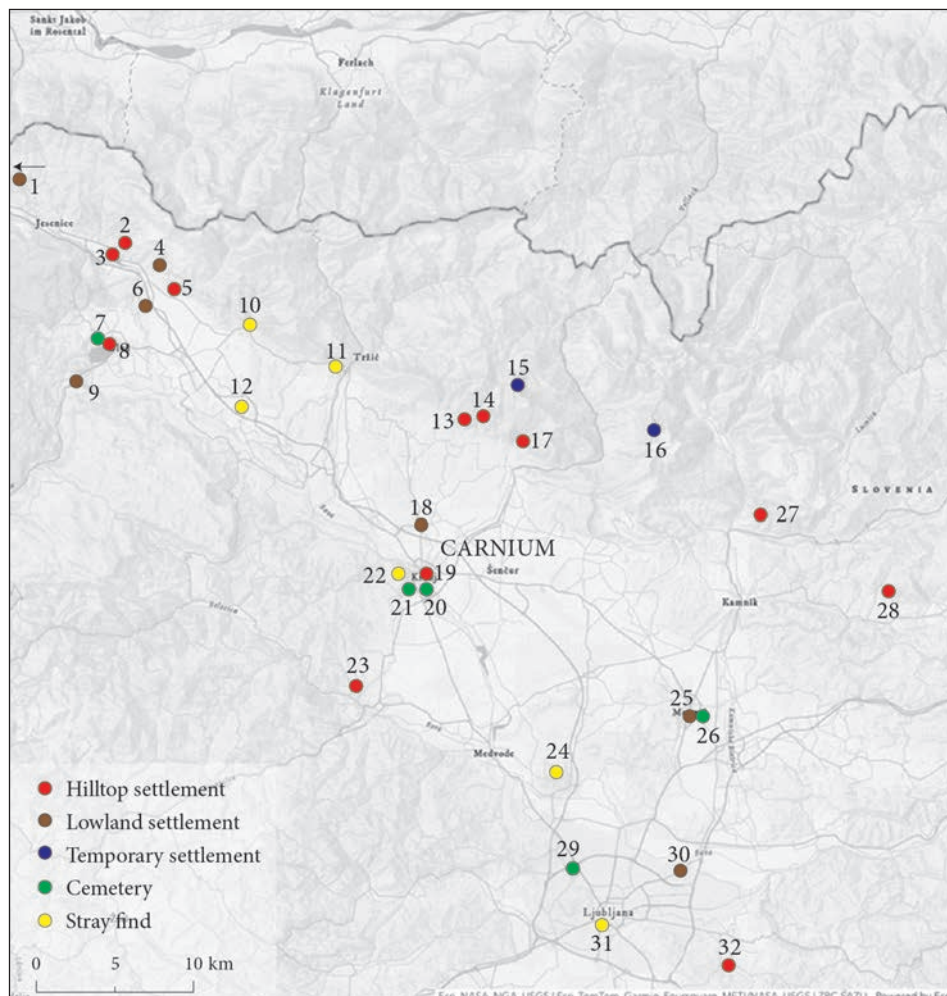


Fig. 2: Archaeological sites in Gorenjska and the Ljubljana Basin, mid-5th to late 6th century. Source: <https://zbiva4.zrc-sazu.si/>

1 – Žale (Rateče); 2 – Ajdna; 3 – Gradišče (Soteska); 4 – Žirovnica; 5 – Sv. Lovrenc (Zabreznica); 6 – Sv. Radegunda (Breg); 7 – Grad (Bled); 8 – Pristava (Bled); 9 – Sv. Marjeta (Bohinjska Bela); 10 – Previs pod Jamarskim vrhom (Begunje na Gorenjskem); 11 – Bistrica pri Trziču; 12 – Mošnje; 13 – Sv. Lovrenc (Bašelj); 14 – Gradišče (Bašelj); 15 – Kališče (Bašelj); 16 – Dolga njiva (Kokra); 17. Sv. Jakob (Potoče); 18 – Sv. Tomaž (Britof); 19 – Kranj / Carnium; 20 – Lajh; 21 – Sv. Martin (Križišče Iskra); 22 – Šmarjetna gora; 23 – Puštal (Trnje); 24 – Šmarna gora; 25 – Mengeš; 26 – Zavrti (Mengeš); 27 – Sv. Primož (Črna pri Kamniku); 28 – Sv. Miklavž (Gradišče v Tuhinju); 29 – Dravlje; 30 – Dragomelj; 31 – Ljubljana; 32 – Molnik.

area of present-day Gorenjska and the Ljubljana basin,²³ where finds confirm their use between the middle of the 5th and the end of the 6th century. These include a few stray finds (primarily coins), several cemeteries, and 18 settlements (Fig. 2).

The settlement is particularly dense in the vicinity of Kranj, where several fortified hilltop settlements have been identified, and some scholars have attempted to associate the first six settlements listed after Carnium in the *Cosmography* with them. Andrej Valič hypothesized one such settlement on the hill of Sv. Jakob above Potoče.²⁴ Timotej Knific expanded the list to include Gradišče above Bašelj, Sv. Lovrenc above Bašelj, Šmarjetna Gora above Kranj, Puštal above Trnje, and Šmarna gora. The settlement on Šmarjetna gora has not yet been archaeologically confirmed, and is inferred based on a cemetery below it, while Šmarna gora is included due to its strategic location and stray finds.²⁵ Puštal controlled access to the Selška dolina Valley and the route towards the Soča region, with finds indicating a strong presence at the end of the 5th and into the 6th century.²⁶ A similar function may be ascribed to the fortified site on Sv. Jakob, which controlled the entrance to the Kokra Valley and, via Jezersko / Seeberg, access to Noricum.²⁷ Although Gradišče is more remote and less strategically placed, it may have been linked to minor mountain passes towards Carinthia,²⁸ as suggested by one of the rare high-altitude sites in the Karavanke at Kališče.²⁹ Sv. Lovrenc, given current findings, appears to have had a more refugial character.³⁰

While it is currently difficult to confirm whether all the aforementioned sites are among those listed in the *Cosmography*, both Puštal and Sv. Jakob exhibit several features – such as strategic positioning and indications of the presence of foreign ethnic groups – that support this possibility.

The Upper Sava Valley is thought to correspond to the “valley”, mentioned in *Cosmography*, where most of the remaining settlements should be sought. Although ten sites in the Upper Sava Valley show evidence of settlement or use during the 6th century, few appear to correspond to geographer’s *civitates*. The only substantial settlements in the area were Ajdna above Potoki and Bled Castle.

The settlement at Bled Castle (Blejski grad) lay somewhat removed from the main routes in use during the 6th century. Its structure and function remain largely unknown, though its extent seems significant, covering the western peak, the saddle, and

²³ Due to differences in settlement patterns, the text distinguishes between Gorenjska (roughly north of the confluence of the Sava and Sora rivers) and the Ljubljana Basin (Ljubljana and its wider surroundings), although geographically the Ljubljana Basin also covers a large part of Gorenjska.

²⁴ Valič 1990.

²⁵ Knific, Lux 2015.

²⁶ FMRSI III, 71/16; Ciglencečki 2006; Ciglencečki 2015, 419; Knific, Lux 2015, 36–37.

²⁷ Valič 1990; Valič 1999.

²⁸ Knific 1999; Valič 1999; Karo, Mlekuž 2015.

²⁹ Horvat 2020, 23, Tab. 4.

³⁰ Knific, Lux 2015, 39–39; Karo, Mlekuž 2015, 35–36.

the eastern peak.³¹ It is dated to the 6th and early 7th centuries, primarily on the basis of an associated cemetery at Pristava,³² which reveals a strong indigenous component and few connections with Gothic or Lombard newcomers. This dating is corroborated by two Byzantine coins found at the presumed settlement site – one of Justinian and the other of Heraclius.³³

The site at Ajdna, in contrast, is smaller and perched on a naturally well-defended hill high above the Sava Valley.³⁴ It likely controlled, together with a smaller outpost at Gradišče above Soteska, a key communication route running northwest from Carnium along the Sava River.

In addition to the mentioned fortified hilltop settlements, there are a few modest remains of lowland habitation at Breg pri Žirovnici,³⁵ Bohinjska Bela,³⁶ and Rateče.³⁷ The absence of sites from this period in the Bohinj basin is surprising, as this is where the old prehistoric connections with the Posočje region run, which were still in use at least in the late Roman period.³⁸ While these routes were probably not entirely abandoned later, they no longer required state (i.e., military) control or provisioning, and thus leave only faint traces in the archaeological record.

Two finds of Byzantine coins – from Mošnje and Bistrica pri Trziču³⁹ – lack broader archaeological context, with no other finds from this period known in the vicinity. These coins may relate to the route along the Sava River (in the case of Mošnje) and the road that branched off towards the Ljubelj Pass (in the case of Bistrica pri Trziču).

The area east of Carnium is the most easily traversable, being largely flat. It is therefore striking to find evidence of 6th-century lowland habitation in Mengeš, where the remains of pit-houses – resembling those found in Kranj – have been discovered.⁴⁰ A few contemporaneous graves were also uncovered nearby.⁴¹ In the more remote hilly landscape below Velika planina, traces of Late Antique settlement are known from Sv. Primož above Črna pri Kamniku,⁴² and in the Tuhinjska dolina Valley from Sv. Miklavž above Gradišče.⁴³

The area south of Carnium is not thought to be part of Carneola, as Emona (present-day Ljubljana) is listed in the *Cosmography* (under the name Atamine) as a town

³¹ Knific 2004, 102; Knific 2008; Pleterski 2008, 159–161; Jerala, Orehek 2017; Gaspari et al. 2019.

³² Knific 2004, 102; Pleterski 2008, 159–161.

³³ FMRSI IV, 51/9; FMRSI V, 46.

³⁴ Leben, Valič 1978; Sagadin 1987; Vidrih Perko, Sagadin 2004, 219–221; Sagadin 2006a.

³⁵ Sagadin 1996; Sagadin 1998; Sagadin 2000, 151–152.

³⁶ Leben, Lux 2007.

³⁷ Sagadin 1993, 140; Sagadin 1998, 719.

³⁸ Ciglencečki 2011a.

³⁹ Mošnje: Jamnik 1995, 180–181; Bistrica pri Trziču: FMRSI III, 72.

⁴⁰ Sagadin 1995; Sagadin 2020.

⁴¹ Rozman, Podobnik 2024.

⁴² Cevc 1997.

⁴³ Sagadin 2006b.

in Valeria.⁴⁴ However, this classification is likely derived from a source dating to the early Imperial period and does not reflect the actual situation in the mid-6th century. The Geographer probably copied the list of stations between Siscia and Emona, but did not take into account the border crossing between Savia and Venetia and Histria east of Višnja Gora.⁴⁵ This section does not reflect the actual situation in the mid-6th century, when the boundary between Carneola and Valeria likely ran south of Emona.⁴⁶ By this time, Roman Emona had already been abandoned, with only sporadic finds reported from the area. A small cemetery from the late 5th and early 6th centuries in Dravljje, attributed to the Ostrogoths,⁴⁷ may suggest that the road from Emona to Carnium was still under surveillance (Fig. 2).

According to the alternate name for Carneola, as recorded in the *Cosmography – Alpīs Iulīae* – most researchers assume that it also encompassed the territory of the Late Roman fortifications known as the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*. However, a marked decline in settlement is evident in the area of present-day Notranjska after the end of the 4th century (Figs. 1, 3). At that time, the defensive barriers lost their military function and were subsequently abandoned. Some settlements in the hinterland (e.g., Šmarata, Rodik, Štanjel, Povir) appear to have remained inhabited until the mid-5th century,⁴⁸ yet by the 6th century, only two settlement sites are known in the entire region of present-day Notranjska: a hilltop settlement on Križna gora⁴⁹ and a cave settlement at Predjama.⁵⁰

The remains of an early Christian church with an apse were also discovered beneath the current Church of St Martin at Šilentabor.⁵¹ The associated settlement was probably located on the nearby site of Gradišče at Šilentabor, from which a shield-shaped belt buckle pin was recovered as a stray find.⁵² A solidus of Emperor Zeno is said to have originated from Ulaka near Stari Trg pri Ložu, though the location is not reliable.⁵³ That the area was not completely deserted is further suggested by the discovery of solidi of Emperor Justinian at Trnovo near Ilirska Bistrica, likely part of a hoard.⁵⁴ In addition, a number of inhumation burials without grave goods, radiocarbon-dated to Late Antiquity, were found at the nearby Gradišče above Trnovo.⁵⁵

The described depopulation of the area in Late Antiquity indicates a loss of its stra-

⁴⁴ *Cosmographia* 4,20.

⁴⁵ Bratož 2014, 392.

⁴⁶ Bratož 2014, 392; Wolff 2000, 99, 103.

⁴⁷ Slabe 1975.

⁴⁸ Vidrih Perko, Župančič 2005; Modrijan 2023.

⁴⁹ Urleb 1968; Modrijan 2023.

⁵⁰ Korošec 1956.

⁵¹ Božič, Ciglencečki 1995, 256–257.

⁵² Laharnar 2022, 89.

⁵³ Božič, Ciglencečki 1995, 262; FMRSI IV, 42, 132; Laharnar 2022, 225.

⁵⁴ FMRSI I, 77/2.

⁵⁵ Bavdek, Tecco Hvala 2025, 146–148. Although there were 20 inhumation burials within the prehistoric cremation burial site, only three have been radiocarbon dated.

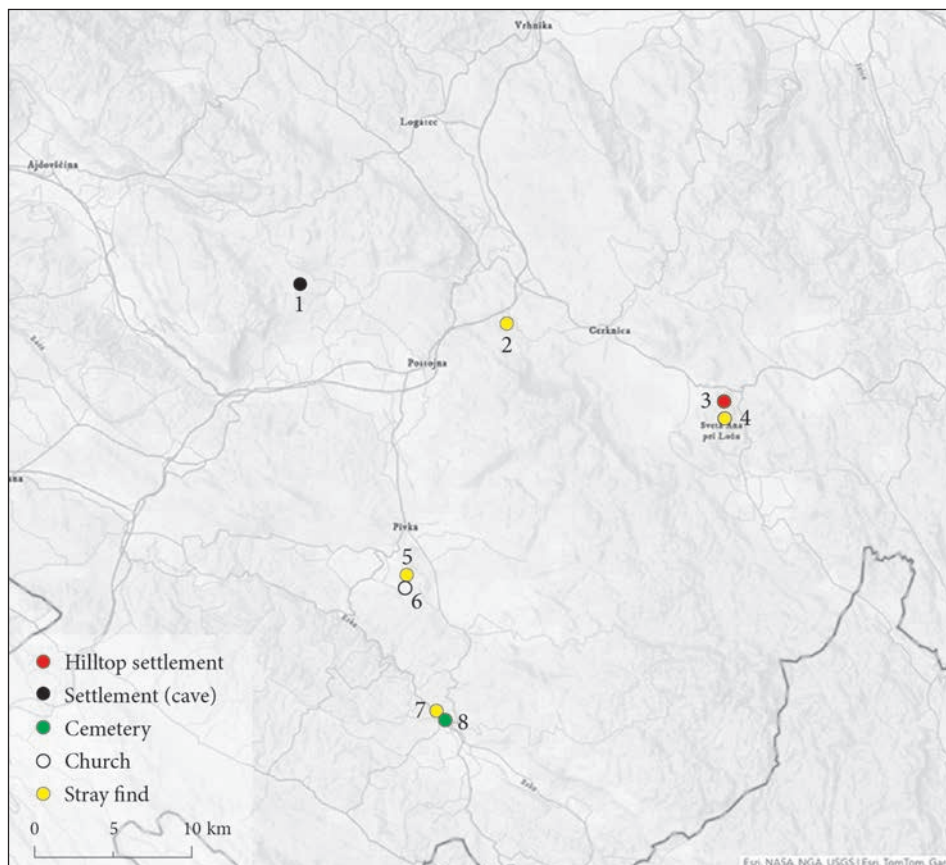


Fig. 3: Archaeological sites in Notranjska, mid-5th to late 6th century. Source: <https://zbiva4.zrc-sazu.si/>
 1 – Jama pod Jamskim gradom; 2 – Sv. Kancijan (Rakov Škocjan) 3 – Križna gora; 4 – Ulaka; 5 – Gradišče (Šilentabor); 6 – Sv. Martin (Šilentabor); 7 – Trnovo (Ilirska Bistrica); 8 – Gradišče (Ilirska Bistrica).

tegic significance following the end of the Late Roman period, a conclusion further supported by the absence of any significant role for this territory in the Byzantine-Gothic War, according to available sources.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, a few settlements endured in this largely deserted landscape, presumably overseeing routes to the east and south. Their integration into the state system of Late Antique territorial control is evidenced by finds of Mediterranean transport amphorae⁵⁷ and Byzantine coinage.

It appears unlikely that one could identify 25 settlements in Gorenjska and Notranjska worthy of inclusion on such a list. Is it therefore feasible to extend the search west-

⁵⁶ Bratož 2014, 391.

⁵⁷ Vidrih Perko, Župančič 2005; Modrijan 2023.

wards? The reading of the *Cosmography* passage as “in the valley of this land” has traditionally limited a significant portion of Carneola to the Upper Sava Valley. However, interpreting it as “in the other part of this land” opens the possibility of considering regions beyond the Alps and the Idrija-Cerkno Hills, up to the Soča Valley (Fig. 4). Important communication routes from Gorenjska to this region existed as early as prehistory. These routes ran along the Sava Bohinjka River and over Alpine passes, through the valleys of Selška dolina and Poljanska dolina,⁵⁸ all converging along the River Soča and continuing towards Friuli. These routes lost some of their importance with the establishment of several new roads during the Early Roman period,⁵⁹ leading to a general decline in the strategic relevance of the region. It is not known whether the region belonged to the urban area of Forum Iulii or Emona in the Roman period.⁶⁰

The importance of the ancient connections between the Soča Valley and central Slovenia – routes that, unlike those of the Roman period, followed naturally advantageous terrain and thus required less maintenance – was revived in the Late Roman period. Their course is confirmed by the northern section of the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* system,⁶¹ several other outposts established in strategic locations, and stray finds from this era.⁶²

The decline in settlement during the latter half of the 5th and into the 6th century in the Soča Valley was not as pronounced as, for instance, in Notranjska. During this period, a considerable number of settlements – both hilltop and lowland – existed on both banks of the River Soča. Burial grounds, stray finds, and even seasonal dwellings in the highlands (Fig. 4) are known from this area.

The central settlement of the Upper Soča Valley during Late Antiquity was located at Tonovcov grad above Kobarid. In the 6th century, it fulfilled the administrative, ecclesiastical, and defensive functions of the wider region.⁶³ It oversaw the road along the River Soča via the Predel / Predil Pass, and also controlled an important Late Antique route towards Cividale (Forum Iulii). Smaller settlements or refuges were also situated at Veliki Gradec near Drežnica⁶⁴ and at Gradec near Logje⁶⁵ in the Breginj area. In this remoted region, life from the Late Roman period continued at the unfortified site of Na mlakah near Homec, and it is possible that the inhabitants occasionally sought refuge in the nearby hilltop settlement of Gradec near Sedlo.⁶⁶ Stray finds

⁵⁸ Ciglencečki 2011a, 260–268, Fig. 5.1.

⁵⁹ In particular, the new connection between Friuli and Noricum via the Fella Valley (Faleschini 2018, 227).

⁶⁰ Zaccaria 2007, 138–139; Bratož 2014, 390.

⁶¹ Kusetič et al. 2014, 101–102.

⁶² Ciglencečki 2011a, 259–271.

⁶³ Ciglencečki, Modrijan, Milavec 2011; Modrijan, Milavec 2011.

⁶⁴ Osmuk 1985a; Ciglencečki 2011b, 45.

⁶⁵ Osmuk 1985b; Ciglencečki 2011b, 45.

⁶⁶ Osmuk 1997; Mlinar, Gebec, Laharnar 2014, 18.

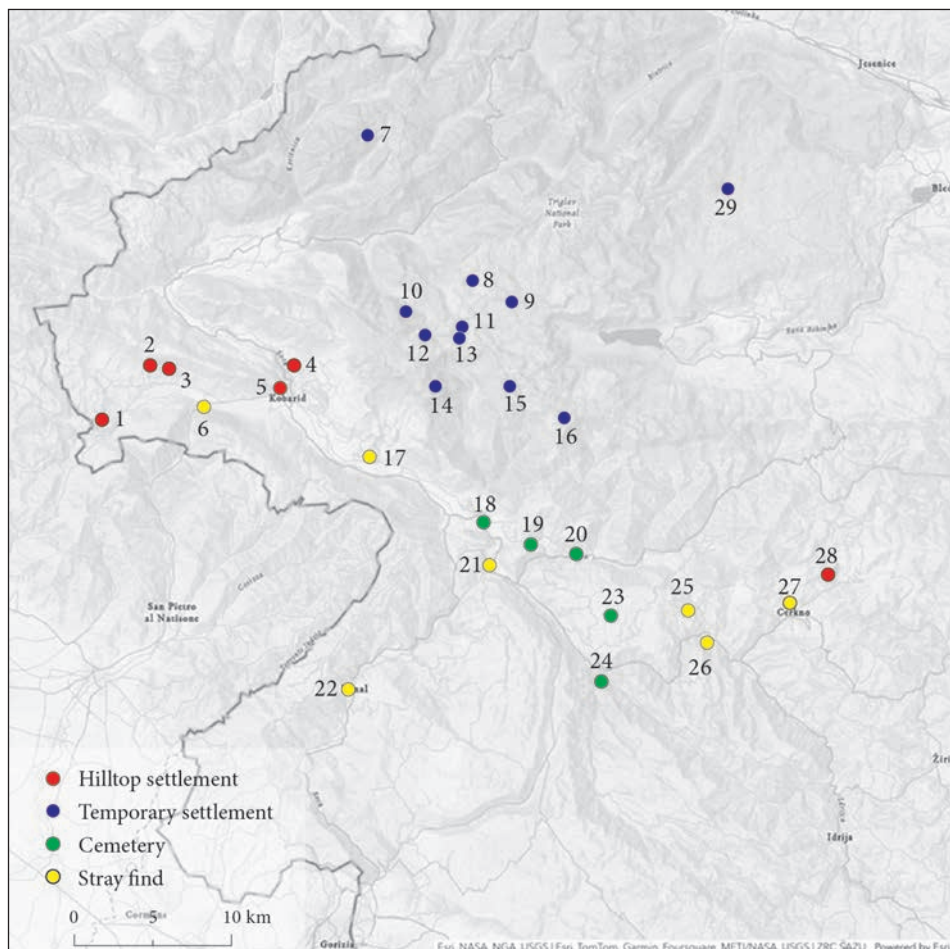


Fig. 4: Archaeological sites in Upper Soča valley and the Julian Alps, mid-5th to late 6th century. Source: <https://zbiva4.zrc-sazu.si/>

1 – Gradec (Logje); 2 – Gradec (Sedlo); 3 – Na mlakah (Homec); 4 – Veliki Gradec (Drežnica); 5 – Tonovcov grad; 6 – Sv. Volar; 7 – Lašte pod Bedinjim vrhom; 8 – Za bajto pod Čistim vrhom; 9 – Gorenja predolina; 10 – Goričica; 11 – Pod Veliko Monturo; 12 – Doliči; 13 – Mali Lepoč; 14 – Palec; 15 – Pod zelenim vrhom; 16 – Krnica pod Voglom; 17 – Selce; 18 – Rodne (Poljubinj); 19 – Na mirih (Ljubinj); 20 – Bukovčevo brdo (Podmelec); 21 – Most na Soči; 22 – Kanal; 23 – Kaplanije (Pečine); 24 – Prvejk (Dolenja Trebuša); 25 – Prhurnik (Police); 26 – Divje Babe (Reka); 27 – Gradišče (Cerkno); 28 – Mali Njivč (Dolenji Novaki); 29 – Klek.

also point to Late Antique activity at the strategically exceptional site of Sv. Volar above the Nadiža River.⁶⁷

During Late Antiquity, increasing importance was attributed to a route diverging from the River Soča near Tolmin, passing across Hum and descending via Kneža to the Bača Valley, from where it proceeded towards central area of Carneola. This route is primarily evidenced by burial sites. At its beginning near Tolmin, an older find of a Germanic grave at Rodne⁶⁸ is known, while a smaller burial ground dating from the second half of the 6th and the early 7th century was excavated at Na mirih near Ljubinj.⁶⁹ Another cemetery from the late 6th century was found on Bukovčevo brdo above Podmelec, where a nearby settlement is also presumed.⁷⁰ Yet another burial site from this period was located on the plateau of Šentviška planota at Kaplanija near Pečine.⁷¹

In the highlands of the Julian Alps, a different category of archaeological site stands out: high-mountain settlements situated at elevations between 1,400 and 2,000 metres above sea level.⁷² These were mostly seasonal dwellings, though some stray finds likely indicate the existence of routes or passes through the mountainous terrain. The habitation of high-altitude areas also indirectly confirms the presence of settlements in the lowlands.

Conclusion

From the overview presented above, it is clear that in the 6th century a relatively dense settlement network existed in Gorenjska and Posočje. Both regions exhibit a similar pattern of settlement, characterized by fortified hilltop sites, while more remote areas also reveal sparse traces of lowland habitation. Communication between these regions is evidenced by outposts at strategic locations on both sides, along with graves and stray finds.

That the central area of ancient Carneola lay in present-day Gorenjska is confirmed by the size and multi-ethnic structure of the town of Carnium and the network of surrounding settlements. These served both to house the autochthonous Romanized population and to control the territory. The same is likely true for the site of Ajdna, while Bled Castle (Blejski grad), for instance, appears more as a refuge removed from the main communication routes. None of the strategically located settlements can be interpreted solely as military outposts, and all represent a blend of civilian and military functions.

⁶⁷ Mlinar, Gerbec, Laharnar 2014, 13.

⁶⁸ Ciglencečki 2011b, 49–50.

⁶⁹ Knific 2010.

⁷⁰ Šribar 1967.

⁷¹ Knific, Svoljšak 1979.

⁷² Horvat 2020, 21–22.

In contrast to Gorenjska and the Soča Valley, the Ljubljana Basin and Notranjska in Late Antiquity experienced significant depopulation in comparison to the Late Roman period. In the Ljubljana Basin, this is undoubtedly linked to its vulnerable position on the transit route to Italy. Notranjska, however, presents a different picture: in the Late Roman period, it formed a core area of *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*, with a hinterland populated by numerous settlements of evidently mixed civilian and military use, integrated into a state-supported supply network.⁷³ The relatively large number of hoards and stray finds of Late Roman tools⁷⁴ indicate, on the one hand, a developed agricultural and artisanal economy, and on the other, confirm the instability of the period. When the territory lost its strategic significance in the early 5th century, state provisioning ceased, and most settlements were abandoned. Nevertheless, some strategically located sites – such as Križna gora, which controlled one of the alternative routes from Dolenjska towards the west⁷⁵ – persisted and, even in the 6th century received goods from the Mediterranean as part of an organized state system.

Although the data from the *Cosmography* leave many open and often unresolvable questions, the work nonetheless provides extremely rich topographical information for the territory of present-day Slovenia, which is corroborated by the archaeological record. This evidence indicates that, by the end of the 5th and into the 6th century, the region was densely populated with fortified hilltop settlements. These offered refuge to the indigenous population while allowing the authorities of the time to station small military units. Though insufficient for large-scale conflicts, these units were adequate for maintaining territorial control and securing communication routes. The boundaries of the regions in question may not have represented clear demarcations, and instead in Notranjska and the Soča Valley one may speak of a kind of transitional zone connecting with Liburnia and Venetia and Histria.

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⁷³ Vidrih Perko, Župančič 2005; Modrijan 2023.

⁷⁴ Laharnar 2022, 155, Note 153; 143, Fig. 3: 68; 147, Note 323–324; 185, Note 406–408; 317–319.

⁷⁵ Ciglencečki 1985.

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Zvezdana Modrijan
Znanstvenoraziskovalni center SAZU
Inštitut za arheologijo
Novi trg 2
SI-1000 Ljubljana
zvezdana.modrijan@zrc-sazu.si
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5097-5522>

***Virtutum signis meritorum et laude tuorum:* Martin of Braga as a Source for the History of the Slavs in Pannonia in the 6th Century**

Aljaž SEKNE

Abstract

The paper examines the dedicatory poem *In basilica*, attributed to Martin of Braga († 579), analysing its role as a historical source for early Slavic history. Since the poem contains a catalogue of peoples in which Slavs are mentioned among various *gentes*, *In basilica* is often cited as evidence of Slavic presence in Pannonia and/or Central Europe in the early 6th century, an argument also espoused by Jaroslav Šašel. The paper therefore re-evaluates Martin's poem *In basilica*, while seeking to contextualize his knowledge of the Slavs. It concludes that the catalogue of peoples in the poem primarily serves a rhetorical function, severely limiting its significance for early Slavic history.

Keywords: Slavs; Pannonia; 6th century; Gallaecia

Izvleček

Virtutum signis meritorum et laude tuorum: Martin iz Brage kot vir za zgodovino Slovanov v Panoniji v 6. stoletju

Prispevek obravnava posvetilno pesem *In basilica*, pripisano Martinu iz Brage († 579), in analizira njen pomen zgodovinskega vira za zgodnjo zgodovino Slovanov. Ker pesem vsebuje katalog ljudstev, v katerem so med različnimi skupnostmi omenjeni tudi Slovani, se *In basilica* pogosto navaja kot dokaz za prisotnost Slovanov v Panoniji in/ali srednji Evropi v zgodnjem 6. stoletju, na kar je opozoril tudi Jaroslav Šašel. Prispevek zato preizprašuje to Martinovo pesem in skuša kontekstualizirati njegovo poznavanje Slovanov. Avtor ugotavlja, da ima katalog ljudstev v pesmi predvsem retorično funkcijo, kar močno omejuje njeno sporočilnost za zgodnjo zgodovino Slovanov.

Ključne besede: Slovani; Panonija; 6. stoletje; Galicija

Without a doubt, for any modern researcher of the Late Antique and Early Medieval history of the Eastern Alpine region, it is impossible to overlook the work of Jaroslav Šašel, whose versatile oeuvre has made a significant contribution to today's understanding of ancient history.¹ His broad erudition and systematic mastery of nearly the entire span of antiquity enabled him to explore diverse topics and raise research questions that, in many ways, remain relevant to this day. The Pannonian Martin of Braga and the poem attributed to him, *In basilica*, in which Šašel saw the potential for shedding further light on the ethno-political situation in the early 6th century eastern Alpine area, were no exception.²

According to Šašel, Martin of Braga was born between 510 and 520 in southern Pannonia and left the region around 536 when the Gepids took possession of Sirmium (modern Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia). He then embarked on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land before settling in Gallaecia around 550, where he played a key role in converting the Arian Suebi to Catholicism. Initially the Bishop of Dumium and later the Metropolitan of Bracara Augusta (both in modern Braga, Portugal), he remained influential in the ecclesiastical politics of the Gallaecian Suebi until his death in 579. Martin is also said to have been the author of the poem *In basilica*, which served as a dedicatory inscription for the newly built basilica in Dumium. Interestingly, the poem contains a list of various peoples who are said to have converted to Christianity under the influence of St Martin of Tours († 397). In this catalogue of peoples, which also includes a mention of the Slavs, Šašel identified the ethnic configuration of early 6th-century Pannonia, leading him to propose his influential hypothesis that Martin relied on memories of his youth in Pannonia when listing the ethnonyms in the poem. According to Šašel, the Slavs must therefore have already been present in Pannonia in the first quarter of the 6th century.

Šašel's assessment of *In basilica*, which soon solidified into an academic axiom, is even more relevant today, as the last few decades have seen a significant increase in arguments, particularly in archaeological circles, favouring the presence of Slavs in Central Europe and/or the Western Balkans even before the arrival of the Avars in Pannonia (567/568). In this (predominantly archaeological) academic discourse, Martin of Braga is frequently regarded as a convenient and independent written source that complements the ambiguous reports of Procopius of Caesarea, while at

¹ Abbreviations of Latin authors follow van Leijenhorst, Krömer 1990, whereas abbreviations of Greek authors are based on Trapp 2018, with minor adaptations for clarity and alignment with current scholarly usage (since Trapp cites references by volume of the edition, Procopius's works are here cited with indication of the specific title; Malal. refers specifically to Thurn's edition; Greg. Tur. *Hist.* reflects Gregory of Tours's original title *Decem libri historiarum*, following modern historiographical convention).

² Šašel 1976; Šašel 1978. Notably, the first surprisingly critical analysis of *In basilica* in the Slovene language was already presented in the late 19th century by J. Smrekar (Smrekar 1890; subsequently acknowledged by Šašel 1977). The source, however, only gained wider recognition in European historiography through Łowmiański 1963, 313–314, a work which Šašel was undoubtedly familiar with. The potential of the source had also been addressed independently of Łowmiański by Stauber 1956/1957, 236–237; Fritze 1964, 318–319.

the same time corroborating recent archaeological discoveries that scholars firmly, albeit speculatively, associate with the Slavs.³ But is this really the case? Without going into more recent archaeological interpretations, which deserve a separate discussion in the future, this contribution will instead focus on evaluating Martin's poem independently of other sources and critically examining it within its own historical context. On this basis, the contribution will seek to once again question the poem *In basilica* and assess its significance for the history of the Slavs in the first half of the 6th century, a reflection that has been, among others, inspired by the recent thought-provoking interpretations of F. Curta, who argued not only that Martin most likely did not originate from Pannonia, but also questioned his authorship of poem altogether. According to Curta, the poem *In basilica* was instead written by an unknown Frankish author in the 9th century, and therefore it should not be interpreted as a reliable source for the early history of the Slavs.⁴

Martin of Braga

But before analysing *In basilica*, it is worth briefly addressing the biography of the Apostle of the Suebi. Indeed, a modern scholar attempting to reconstruct Martin's biographical profile before the mid-6th century will quickly come up against significant obstacles, since the fragmentary and often contradictory testimony of the written sources makes it practically impossible to draw reliable conclusions about his birthplace, education and theological development. His motives for coming to Gallaecia and the route he took westwards also remain unclear. The only thing that is certain is

³ Archaeology: e.g. Zeman 1966, 165–166; Váňa 1970, 60; Szydłowski 1980, 235; Klanica, Tržešćik 1991, 18–19; Fusek 1994, 118–119, 308; Chropovský 2000, 58–59; Fusek 2004, 163–164; Fusek, Zábojník 2005, 551; Godłowski 2005, 115, 141; Fusek 2008, 646; Fusek 2015, 153–154; Kazanskij 2023, 85–86. See also Kara 2022, 89. Historiography: besides Łowmiański, especially Avenarius 1986, 22; Avenarius 1992, 10–11; Tržešćik 1996, 258–259; Tržešćik 1997, 28–30; Lotter 2003, 139 (n. 513); Bystrický 2008, 147–148; Mesiarkin 2017, 69 (n. 51); Budak 2018, 75; Mesiarkin 2019, 36 (n. 3). A more problematic approach is taken by Gračanin 2008, 23; Gračanin 2011, 128–129; Gračanin, Škrkulja 2016, 18–19, 22–23. One of the few who did not rely on Martin of Braga as a source for Slavic history under the influence of Łowmiański or Šašel is Waldmüller 1976, 316–317, relying on Fritze 1964. In Slovenian scholarship, the credibility of the source is widely accepted from Šašel onwards: Pleterski 1990, 49; Bratož 2002, 89–90; Bratož 2003, 479; Bratož 2006, 278–279; Bratož 2011, 602; Pleterski 2015, 242–244; Knific, Nabergoj 2017, 59; Pavlovič 2017, 383, 386; Pavlovič 2020, 187; Pavlovič, Vojaković, Toškan 2021, 176, 177; Bratož 2021, 305, 550–551, 667, 672–673; Pavlovič 2022, 128–129; Pleterski 2024, 116–117. However, cf. Štih 2018, 468. Scepticism regarding the relevance of the poem for Slavic history was expressed by Ivanov 1989; Ivanov 1991; Curta 2001, 46; Curta 2008, 663–665; Curta 2019, 42–43 (n. 9); Curta 2021, 56–58; Curta 2022; Mühle 2023, 47 (n. 63). Cf. also Pohl 2018, 152. It is worth noting that many of the modern authors listed here place Martin's Slavs in very different geographical contexts, ranging from Central Europe to the Western Balkans.

⁴ Curta 2021, 56–58; Curta 2022.

that Martin arrived in Gallaecia around the middle of the 6th century, where he then played a leading role in the reform and reorganisation of the Catholic Church in the Kingdom of the Suebi.⁵

Today, there is a broad scholarly consensus that Martin was born between 510 and 520,⁶ most likely in Pannonia, a claim based primarily on the testimony of Venantius Fortunatus, Gregory of Tours, and the epitaph that Martin is said to have written for himself.⁷ Although I still consider Martin's Pannonian origins very likely despite recent criticisms, it is true that these claims are not as definitive as they once seemed.⁸ Venantius Fortunatus's statement that Martin "came, as they say, from Roman Pannonia" is particularly ambiguous. The phrase *ut perhibent* clearly indicates that Fortunatus was not fully convinced of Martin's Pannonian origin, contrary to the firm assertions found in modern historiography.⁹ Gregory of Tours, who mentions Martin of Braga in *De virtutibus sancti Martini* and later in *Decem libri historiarum*, also gives contradictory information.¹⁰ Likewise, Martin's epitaph, long regarded as a self-declaration of his origins, has also been met with scepticism in recent decades, as P. F. Alberto's important study subjected it to rigorous philological criticism. Alberto

⁵ The main edition of Martin's works was published by Barlow 1950. For more on Martin of Braga and his life, see Caspari 1883, i–xxi; Manitius 1911, 109–111; Barlow 1950, 1–10; Schäferdiek 1967, 120–124; Ivanov 1989; Ivanov 1991; Violante Branco 1999; Fontaine 2005, 405–408; Dietz 2005, 162–167; Andrés Sanz 2010; Ferreira 2012. Cf. also the discussion in Curta 2022. For the Suebi and their kingdom in Gallaecia, see especially Díaz 2011.

⁶ Caspari 1883, ii.

⁷ Ven. Fort. *car.* 5, 1–2; Greg. Tur. *Hist.* 5, 37; Mart. Brac. *epitaph.* 1.

⁸ The discussion of Martin's origins (especially in the light of F. Curta's recent interpretations), his time spent in the East, the possible route he took westwards, and his possible motives for coming to Gallaecia is left out here due to space constraints and will be discussed elsewhere.

⁹ Ven. Fort. *car.* 5, 2, 21 (*Pannoniae, ut perhibent, veniens e parte Quiritis*). Curta interpreted the phrase *ut perhibent* ("as they say") in connection with Martin's Pannonian origin as Fortunatus's attempt at poetic embellishment and an allusion to the Pannonian origin of Martin of Tours: "Pannonia, in other words, is mentioned here in reference to Martin of Tours, and not to Martin of Braga", Curta 2021, 57 (citation); Curta 2022, 122–123, following Espírito Santo 2007, 268, who also suggested that *ut perhibent* in the account of Venantius Fortunatus should be understood "*em sentido poético*". López Pereira 2014, 550–556, is also very sceptical. See also Violante Branco 1999, 80 (n. 66). It should be stressed that the phrase *ut perhibent* refers primarily to hearsay or a secondary, probably oral, source that Fortunatus simply did not have the opportunity to independently verify. This, of course, does not *a priori* invalidate his testimony, though Curta is certainly correct in observing that Fortunatus's statements should be approached with extreme caution, as the author was clearly attempting to draw as many parallels as possible between his honouree, Martin of Braga, and the patron saint of Gaul, Martin of Tours. To what extent Fortunatus allowed poetic stylisation to influence his information is practically impossible to determine.

¹⁰ In *De virtutibus sancti Martini*, we only learn that Martin came from a "distant region" (*de regione longinqua*), which was also his "homeland" (*patria*), Greg. Tur. *Mart.* 1, 11. Only later, in the *Decem libri historiarum*, do we learn that Martin came from Pannonia (*Pannoniae ortus fuit*), Greg. Tur. *Hist.* 5, 37, a detail that Gregory seems to have learned later. Cf. Ivanov 1989, 11; Curta 2022, 127–128.

highlighted significant differences in versification technique between the epitaph and other poems attributed to Martin, such as *In basilica* and *In refectorio*, as well as discrepancies when compared with other epitaphs from 6th- and 7th-century Hispania. Although *Epitaphium eiusdem* clearly refers to Martin of Braga and can be used as an independent source for his biography, Alberto's conclusion that the poem was probably written by another author is both convincing and highly probable, thereby calling for caution when using it.¹¹ Uncertainty thus burdens the question of Martin's origins. Recent critiques have indeed presented compelling arguments for scepticism regarding the Pannonian hypothesis, particularly highlighting contradictions and the poetic nature of the sources. However, while these arguments are thought-provoking, they remain speculative in many respects. Thus, despite the inherent limitations of the written sources, the Pannonian hypothesis still appears to me the most convincing one, though it is unlikely ever to be definitively proven or refuted. Given the complexity of the evidence, caution is certainly warranted.

Be that as it may, it is generally agreed that Martin left Pannonia around 535/536, when the Gepids, taking advantage of the political instability in the Balkans caused by the start of Justinian's Gothic War, seized the city of Sirmium and the surrounding region.¹² However, the written sources provide no firm chronological anchor to determine exactly when Martin could have left Pannonia for the Holy Land, nor how long he might have remained there.¹³ All that is certain is that Martin arrived in Gallaecia around 550. The sources, with the exception of Gregory of Tours, who mentions that Martin received some form of education in the East, do not provide specific details about his time there.¹⁴

When and why Martin decided to head west, which route he took and what motivated his decision remain open questions. In fact, it is unclear whether he intended to travel to Gallaecia from the outset or whether he made this decision later. In my view, the latter is more plausible, as Martin almost certainly spent some time in Gaul, as evidenced by his later close links with the region (and his knowledge of Sidonius Apollinaris, to which I will return later). These ties would have been difficult to establish after his arrival in Gallaecia, suggesting that Gaul may have been his first destination before eventually moving on to the Kingdom of the Suebi. Tours, a major pilgrimage centre and the site of his patron and idol, St Martin of Tours, would certainly be an ideal destination for the continuation of Martin's journey.¹⁵

Nevertheless, what we can say with certainty is that Martin eventually arrived in

¹¹ Alberto 1994, 218–219, 222–223. See also Violante Branco 1999, 80 (n. 66); López Pereira 2014, 550–551; Curta 2021, 57; Curta 2022, 129. On Martin's style cf. Alberto 1991, and in the context of the poem *In refectorio* especially Lobato 2012/2013.

¹² Argued particularly by Šašel 1976, 154 (535); Šašel 1978, 253 (536); Šašel 1979, 135 (c. 536).

¹³ Cf. Bratož 2002, 89, who places Martin's presumed missionary activity in Pannonia only after 536. Martin probably travelled to the East via Constantinople, Šašel 1979, 135.

¹⁴ Greg. Tur. *Hist.* 5, 37.

¹⁵ Cf. Greg. Tur. *Mart.* 2, 53. That Martin travelled west through Gaul is also assumed by, for example, Dietz 2005, 166; Ferreiro 2020, 258; see also Lobato 2012/2013, 83. Cf. López Pereira 2014, 554.

Gallaecia. His motives for coming to the Iberian Peninsula, however, have been widely debated.¹⁶ Whatever brought him there, the political dimension of his later activities in Gallaecia is unmistakable. This is evidenced by his rapid rise within the church hierarchy and the unconventional consecration of Martin's monastery in Dumium as an episcopal see in 556, making him both abbot and bishop, which was undoubtedly intended to integrate Martin as quickly and effectively as possible into the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Kingdom of the Suebi – a strategy that ultimately proved successful, given Martin's achievements in reforming the church in Gallaecia and his lasting influence, both during his lifetime and after his death in 579.¹⁷

In basilica as a Historical Source

However, Martin's activities on the Iberian Peninsula were not limited to ecclesiastical politics. He is also associated with several literary works, with particular attention here given to the poem *In basilica*, which reads as follows:¹⁸

*Post evangelicum bissemi dogma senatus,
Quod regnum Christi toto iam personat orbe,
Postque sacrum Pauli stilum, quo curia mundi
Victa suos tandem stupuit siluisse sophistas,
Arctous, Martine, tibi in extrema recessus
Panditur inque via fidei patet invia tellus.
Virtutum signis meritorum et laude tuorum
Excitat affectum Christi Germania frigans,
Flagrat, et accenso Divini Spiritus igne
Solvit ab infenso obstrictas Aquilone pruinas.*

¹⁶ The epitaph attributes Martin's arrival in Gallaecia to divine intervention (*divinus nutibus actus*), Mart. Brac. *epitaph.* 2. Similarly, Greg. Tur. *Mart.* 1, 11 (*commonitus a Deo*). Cf. Šašel 1976, 152, and especially Šašel 1978, 249–251, who linked Martin's arrival on the Iberian Peninsula with the military and religious plans of Emperor Justinian in Hispania. Cf. Ferreiro 1980, 248–250; Ivanov 1989, 5, 10–11. Caspari 1883, iv–v, suggested that Martin's decision to travel to Gallaecia may have simply been encouraged by Gallaecian pilgrims present in the Holy Land at the time. Similarly, Barlow 1950, 2. Cf. also Ferreiro 1980, 247.

¹⁷ See the discussion in Díaz 2023, 302–305. That Martin enjoyed royal support very early on can also be inferred from his work *De trina mersione*, likely composed between 556 and 561. It contains an interesting reference to a Suebic delegation that had recently returned from Constantinople (Mart. Brac. *trin. mers.* 3, 31–33), which intriguingly points not only to the Suebic diplomatic connection at the time, but also to Martin's early access to such guarded information at the Suebic court in Braga, Mülke 2020, 341 (n. 25).

¹⁸ Mart. Brac. *in bas.* For (partial) translations, see Šašel 1976, 151 (Slovene); Ivanov 1989, 6; Ivanov 1991, 358 (Russian); Curta 2021, 56; Curta 2022, 118 (English). See also Caspari 1883, li, for a summary of the poem's content in German.

*Immanes variasque pio sub foedere Christi
Adsciscis gentes. Alamannus, Saxo, Toringus
Pannonius, Rugus, Sclavus, Nara, Sarmata, Datus,
Ostrogothus, Francus, Burgundio, Dacus, Alanus,
Te duce, nosse Deum gaudent. Tua signa Suevus
Admirans didicit fidei quo tramite pergat,
Devotusque tuis meritis haec atria claro
Culmine sustollens, Christi venerabile templum
Constituit, quo clara vicens, Martine, tuorum
Gratia signorum votis te adesse fatetur
Electum, propriumque tenet te Gallia gaudens
Pastorem, teneat Gallicia tota patronum.*

A stylistically refined poem, written in dactylic hexameters and structured as a dialogue between the author and Martin of Tours, as indicated by the vocative form *Martine*, begins by portraying Martin of Tours as a successor to the apostolic tradition and praising him as a pioneer who supposedly spread the teachings of Christ to the northern regions of Europe. This is followed by a list of peoples who, thanks to Martin's miracles and renown, were converted to Christianity. The list programmatically concludes with the Suebi, who, in admiration of his miracles, dedicated a church in his honour. The poem concludes with an exclamation expressing the wish that Martin of Tours, the shepherd of Gaul, should also be regarded as the patron saint of Gallaecia.

According to the traditional interpretation, the poem is a *titulus* for the church of St Martin of Tours, most likely the basilica in Dumiou, which was consecrated in 558,¹⁹ and is generally identified with the *versiculi* that Gregory of Tours attributes to Martin of Braga.²⁰ However, this interpretation has recently been challenged by F. Curta, who has rightly pointed out that both *In basilica* and *In refectorio* draw heavily on the poetry of Sidonius Apollinaris (5th century). Since Sidonius's works were virtually unknown on the Iberian Peninsula in the 6th and 7th centuries, this casts doubt on Martin's authorship of these poems. Based on comparisons with other early medieval Latin catalogues of peoples that use the singular form of the noun *Sclavus*, Curta proposed that *In basilica* was not written by Martin of Braga in the 6th century, but rather by an unknown author from Carolingian Francia in the 9th century.²¹

Indeed, Curta has raised several valuable points, among them the fact that *In basilica* is preserved in three manuscripts dating to the 9th or 10th century, with two of these originating from southern France.²² However, while his interpretation is cer-

¹⁹ Barlow 1950, 276.

²⁰ Greg. Tur. *Hist.* 5, 37. See also n. 36, below.

²¹ Curta 2021, 56–58; Curta 2022.

²² It is worth noting, however, that the manuscripts containing *In basilica* are all written in Visigothic script (Barlow 1950, 277–279). While two of these manuscripts (Barlow's P and A) originate from southern France, the third (Barlow's E) is of Iberian origin. Furthermore, the folios of

tainly possible within the framework of Carolingian literary culture, the content of the poem itself argues more convincingly for a 6th-century Gallaecian origin. First, the Suebi are clearly portrayed as active historical agents, as evidenced by the second part of the poem: they marvel at Martin's miracles, build a church in his honour, and actively engage in religious devotion. In fact, the entire catalogue of peoples appears to have been included primarily to highlight the Suebi by positioning them at the end.²³ This portrayal differs from how later Frankish sources reference the Gallaecian Suebi, who typically appear as a phenomenon of the past. Given that their kingdom was destroyed by the Visigoths in 585 and their identity slowly faded, it is difficult to understand why a 9th-century Frankish author would write about them in such a present and active role. The poem also states that the Suebi dedicated a church to St Martin of Tours,²⁴ with particular emphasis on the author's formulation that the Suebi built "these halls" (*haec atria*).²⁵ The use of the demonstrative pronoun *hic* clearly implies geographical proximity and suggests the author's eyewitness perspective. Furthermore, the use of present participles (*admirans*, *sustollens*, *vigens*) reinforces the impression that these events were contemporary to the author. Additionally, the poem's connection to the historical context of the Gallaecian Suebi in the 6th century is suggested by its allusion to several miracles (*signa*) performed by St Martin, possibly referencing the miraculous healing of King Hararic's son from leprosy through Martin's relics, as reported by Gregory of Tours.²⁶ Taken together, these elements strongly support the possibility that the poem was composed in the 6th century by someone living within the Kingdom of the Suebi in Gallaecia.²⁷

Martin's authorship of the poem is therefore, in my view, entirely plausible. However, as has long been recognized, the author of the poem clearly relied heavily on the works of the Gallic writer Sidonius Apollinaris (5th century).²⁸ This reliance is particularly evident in the list of ethnonyms in the poem, where 12 of the 15 ethnic names mentioned can be found in Sidonius's works, many of them in identical form (e.g. *Burgundio*, *Sarmata*, *Toringus*).²⁹ In fact, the only original names in Martin's poem seem to be *Sclavus*,

manuscript A that contain Martin's poems were likely written by Spanish scribes (Barlow 1950, 278). Therefore, despite two manuscripts originating in southern France, one could still argue for a strong Iberian connection in the transmission of the poems.

²³ Ivanov 1989, 7.

²⁴ Cf. also Greg. Tur. *Mart.* 1, 11; 4, 7.

²⁵ Mart. Brac. *in bas.* 17.

²⁶ Greg. Tur. *Mart.* 1, 11. It is no coincidence that Gregory of Tours mentions Martin of Braga for the first time within this narrative.

²⁷ That is, unless the poem was a bookish pastiche by an unknown later author, as Curta suggests, in which case the poem's temporal and geographical presence, on which I build here, could also be explained as a chronotope, a literary construct rather than a reflection of historical reality. I owe this observation to F. Curta. While I find this unlikely, it is not impossible, given the intellectual ambitions and creative literary endeavours of writers during the Carolingian Renaissance.

²⁸ This was already noted, among others, by Manitius 1911, 110. See also Barlow 1950, 276.

²⁹ Mart. Brac. *in bas.* 12–15; Sidon. *carm.* 5, 474–477 (*Suebus*, *Pannonius*, *Dacus*, *Halanus*,

Datus and *Nara*. Even more extensive borrowing from Sidonius can be seen in the poem *In refectorio*, also attributed to Martin, where seven out of 10 lines are almost verbatim copies of one of Sidonius's poems.³⁰ Whoever composed these verses was undoubtedly an admirer of Sidonius Apollinaris. However, as has been pointed out several times, the works of Sidonius were virtually unknown in contemporary Hispania, and local writers – apart from Martin – almost never referred to him. This has led to scepticism about Martin's authorship of these poems.³¹ Therefore, if Martin of Braga, who worked in Gallaecia, was indeed the author, the question arises: how did he gain access to Sidonius's works? While it is true that Sidonius's poetry was virtually unknown in 6th-century Gallaecia, this does not apply to Gaul, where his works were well known. Both Venantius Fortunatus, an acquaintance of Martin, and Gregory of Tours drew upon Sidonius.³² As discussed above, we have very little information about Martin of Braga's life before his arrival in Gallaecia, leaving room for several possibilities. Given that Martin maintained connections with Gaul and almost certainly spent some time there – if he was not originally from there, as some have suggested – his familiarity with Sidonius's poetry is entirely conceivable.³³ He might have visited Tours, the city of his spiritual patron, where Sidonius's works were indeed known at least from the second half of the 6th century, as evidenced by Gregory of Tours.³⁴ In this context, it is worth noting that Sidonius himself composed an *epigramma* in honour of St Martin for the basilica in Tours – a work

Rugus, Burgundio, Ostrogothus, Sarmata); 7, 321–325 (*Rugum, Burgundio, Toringus, Francus*); 7, 389–390 (*Alamanne, Saxonis*). He may also have been familiar with Dracontius (5th century), *Drac. Romul.* 5, 34–35 (*Suevus, Sarmata, Gothus, Alamannus, Francus, Alanus*).

³⁰ Mart. Brac. *refect.*; Sidon. *carm.* 17. For a philological analysis of *In refectorio*, see Lobato 2012/2013.

³¹ Curta 2022, 136–137. See also Alberto 1994, 220; López Pereira 2014, 556. For the manuscript tradition of Sidonius's works, see Dolveck 2020.

³² Mathisen 2020, 633–635; Lobato 2020, 665–666. See also Furbetta 2013, 41–65.

³³ Lobato 2012/2013, 87.

³⁴ See the literature cited in n. 15. Cf. also Mathisen 2020, 633–635. It is worth pointing out that we lack concrete evidence for the presence of Sidonius's works in Tours before Gregory of Tours became bishop in 573, which would be nearly two decades after the hypothesized visit of the city by Martin. Moreover, Gregory, who clearly used Sidonius's letters, was apparently a native of Clermont (*lumen ab Arvernīs veniens feliciter arvis*, Ven. Fort. *carm.* 8, 15, 3), where Sidonius had served as bishop after 469, and it is entirely possible that Gregory encountered his works there rather than in Tours. True, later manuscript evidence suggests that the region of Aquitaine played a role in the transmission of Sidonius's texts (Dolveck 2020), though this tells us little about the situation in the mid-6th century. Nevertheless, Sidonius's works appear to have circulated fairly widely in Gaul. This is suggested not only by Venantius Fortunatus, who clearly drew on Sidonius, but also, for instance, by Gregory of Tours (*Greg. Tur. Hist.* 6, 7), who reports that in the 580s Bishop Ferreolus of Uzès, in southern Gaul, composed *libros aliquos epistularum, quasi Sidonium secutus*. Therefore, while direct evidence of access to Sidonius in Tours prior to Gregory's time is lacking, the broader picture of transmission makes such a possibility entirely plausible – especially given that Sidonius's poems and letters, which were self-published, were already actively circulating in his own time (Mathisen 2020, 631).

that may well have inspired the future Apostle of the Suebi, had he encountered it.³⁵ It is therefore not far-fetched to conjecture that Martin might have gained access to Sidonius's works somewhere in Gaul, most likely in Tours.

In any case, although everything concerning Martin's whereabouts prior to his arrival in Gallaecia – and his possible exposure to Sidonius's poetry – must remain strictly hypothetical, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and the references to the famous Gallic poet in *In basilica* (and in *In refectorio*) do not necessarily exclude Martin's authorship. On the contrary, given Gregory of Tours's explicit testimony, that verses written for the basilica of St Martin, most likely located in Dumium,³⁶ were composed by Martin of Braga – a valuable contemporary witness to his poetic activity – it remains very likely that the poem in question is indeed *In basilica*, as has long been argued, and that Martin was indeed its author.

Be that as it may, it is worth stressing that the question of the authorship of *In basilica* is of secondary relevance in this context, as its primary significance lies not in who wrote it, but in the implications often ascribed to it for early Slavic history, given the mention of the Slavs in its catalogue of peoples. But do these implications hold up under scrutiny? The following section will therefore focus specifically on the nature of *In basilica*, which is a *sine qua non* for any further discussion of its usefulness as a historical source.

The primary purpose of *In basilica* was undoubtedly to glorify Martin of Tours, and it was his miracles and fame that were said to have inspired the *immanes variasque gentes*, including the Slavs, to accept the teachings of Christ under his "guidance" (*te duce*). Some have misinterpreted this phrase to mean that Martin of Tours, who lived in the fourth century, personally preached among these peoples.³⁷ Others have seen in the catalogue of peoples a reference to the communities among whom Martin of Braga himself, under the spiritual guidance of Martin of Tours, is said to have carried out missionary work in Pannonia in the second quarter of the 6th century.³⁸ In reality, the poem merely seeks to convince the reader that all these peoples accepted Christianity through the influence of St Martin (*virtutum signis meritorum et laude tuorum*).³⁹ In other words, it

³⁵ Sidon. *epist.* 4, 18, 4–5. See also Ven. Fort. *carm.* 10, 6.

³⁶ These *versiculi* were apparently located *super ostium [...] a parte meridiana in basilica Sancti Martini*, Greg. Tur. *Hist.* 5, 37. Many earlier scholars believed that the basilica in question was located in Tours (e.g. Stauber 1956/1957, 237). However, the possibility that Gregory was referring to a basilica in Braga was already suggested by Caspari 1883, li, and especially by Barlow 1950, 276; see also Ivanov 1991, 357. For a more sceptical view of this identification, see Curta 2022, 128 (and n. 65), 138.

³⁷ Chropovský 2000, 58–59.

³⁸ Especially Bratož 2002, 89; Bratož 2003, 479; Bratož 2006, 279; Bratož 2011, 602; Bratož 2021, 305, 550–551, 667, 672–673, who interprets the references in *In basilica* as evidence for the beginning of the Christianisation of the Slavs in Pannonia before the mid-6th century. This view is accepted by Lotter 2003, 139 (n. 513); Rübekeil, Scharf, Castritius 2005, 210; Budak 2018, 75. Cf. Štíh 2018, 468.

³⁹ Mart. Brac. *in bas.* 7.

is a purely hagiographic narrative, in which the conversion of the peoples is attributed to the posthumous activity of the saint himself. The author was most likely referring to the already mentioned story of the miraculous healing of King Hararic's son from leprosy by the relics of St Martin, which, according to Gregory of Tours, ultimately led to the conversion of the Suebi to Catholicism.⁴⁰ The verses, with their hagiographical tone, therefore suggest that the relics and posthumous miracles of St Martin were still believed to inspire peoples to embrace Christianity in the author's time,⁴¹ with particular reference to the Suebi's acceptance of the "true faith". As such, the poem does not serve as evidence of Christianisation in Pannonia in the 6th century, and certainly does not refer to the youthful missionary efforts of Martin of Braga, whose activities are entirely absent from text. Alongside the Suebi, the *spiritus agens* here is Martin of Tours.

Considering the scepticism mentioned above, it is worth devoting some attention to *In basilica*'s famous catalogue of peoples, which has traditionally attracted the most interest, especially since Šašel's influential hypothesis that Martin of Braga relied on memories from his youth in Pannonia when compiling the catalogue. Šašel considered the ethnonyms, which he also linked to the *antiqui barbari* mentioned by Cassiodorus,⁴² to be an excellent source for the ethnography of early 6th-century Pannonia. But is this really the case?

In basilica lists the following peoples: *Alamannus, Saxo, Toringus, Pannonius, Rugus, Sclavus, Nara, Sarmata, Datus, Ostrogothus, Francus, Burgundio, Dacus, Alanus* and, of course, *Suevus*, who are also directly addressed in the text and are not strictly speaking part of the catalogue of peoples.⁴³ Apart from the fact that *In basilica* geographically locates all these peoples in "cold Germania" (*Germania frigens*) and the north in general, it is immediately noticeable that the catalogue includes communities that had little or no longer had any connection with Pannonia in the first half of the 6th century, such as the Saxons, Thuringians, Rugii, Burgundians and Alans. The mentions of the other groups are also anything but unambiguous. The Franks did not expand to the borders of Pannonia until the second quarter of the 6th century, as evidenced by a letter from the Frankish King Theudebert I to Justinian around 545.⁴⁴ The Sarmatians, after being defeated by the young Theoderic in 471 and losing Singidunum, are rarely mentioned,⁴⁵ and when they do appear, it is mainly as an ethnographic category in classicizing Greek and Roman sources. The same ethnographic context almost certainly applies to the Pannonians and Dacians, who are otherwise referred to as "peoples" (ἔθνη) by Procopius, describing them as subjects of the Os-

⁴⁰ Greg. Tur. *Mart.* 1, 11.

⁴¹ Cf. Fritze 1964, 318–319; Waldmüller 1976, 316; Ivanov 1989, 6–7; Ivanov 1991, 357; Curta 2001, 46.

⁴² Cassiod. *var.* 5, 14. Šašel 1976, 155; Šašel 1979. See also the contribution by H. Gračanin, in this volume.

⁴³ *Mart. Brac. in bas.* 12–15.

⁴⁴ *Epist. Austras.* 20, 2.

⁴⁵ Iord. *Get.* 282.

trogoths before the outbreak of the Gothic War (535).⁴⁶ The mention of the Slavs is also ambiguous, as their presence in the Eastern Alpine region only becomes tangible towards the end of the 6th century.⁴⁷ The only groups in the catalogue that could plausibly be linked to contemporary Pannonia are the Ostrogoths, and, with some reservations, the Alamanni⁴⁸ and Suebi⁴⁹ – although it is evident that the author of *In basilica* had exclusively the Gallaecian Suebi in mind. In this context, it is also striking that the catalogue omits the main political actors of the Middle Danube region in the first half of the 6th century, the Gepids, the Lombards and the Heruli, whom Martin, if he was indeed the author, would certainly have known about and mentioned if he had intended to provide precise ethnographic information. The poem therefore does not reflect the ethnographic conditions of Pannonia in the first half of the 6th century.⁵⁰

Šašel's suggestion that Martin based his list of ethnonyms on memories of his youth in Pannonia therefore appears less plausible. Instead, the author evidently made use of a written source, namely the aforementioned poems of Sidonius Apollinaris, particularly his two panegyrics addressed to the Western Roman emperors Avitus and Majorian. As previously noted, *In basilica* contains only three genuinely original ethnonyms: *Sclavus*, *Datus* and *Nara*, the latter two likely being distorted forms of *Danus* and perhaps *Neurus*.⁵¹

According to many modern scholars, however, this does not necessarily invalidate

⁴⁶ Procop. *Bell.* 5, 15, 27. Cf. Mart. Brac. *epitaph.* 1 (*Pannoniis genitus*).

⁴⁷ It is worth noting that among the peoples mentioned in Procopius's ethnographic digression on the Western Balkans and the Eastern Adriatic before the outbreak of the Gothic War in 535 (Procop. *Bell.* 5, 15, 24–30), the Slavs do not receive a mention. This omission is telling, given that Procopius – evidently familiar with the Slavs, as he also provides the first extant ethnographic profile of them (Procop. *Bell.* 7, 14, 22–30) – clearly had some rather precise data at his disposal, as is evident from his rigorous distinction between the different groups of Suebi, describing those in Pannonia as οὐχ ὀφράγγων κατήκοοι, ἀλλὰ παρὰ τούτοις ἕτεροι (Procop. *Bell.* 5, 15, 26). Otherwise, the presence of Slavs in Central Europe before the arrival of the Avars in Pannonia (567/568) has traditionally been argued based on Procopius's references to Slavs in the context of the migration of the Heruli to the island of Thule and in relation to the events surrounding the Lombard pretender Hildegis (Procop. *Bell.* 6, 15, 2; 7, 35, 16–22), which are anything but unproblematic and which I will discuss in detail in my doctoral thesis.

⁴⁸ Cassiod. *var.* 3, 50.

⁴⁹ Procop. *Bell.* 5, 15, 26; 5, 16, 9.

⁵⁰ Ivanov 1989, 7; Avenarius 1992, 10–11. Some have attempted to forcibly “correct” the ethnonyms in the poem and align them with other 6th-century sources, particularly the accounts of Procopius. This is exemplified by D. Třeštík, who interpreted the Rugii as Lombards, the Dacians as Gepids, and the Nari as Noricans (Klanica, Tržeštík 1991, 18–19; Třeštík 1996, 258–259; Třeštík 1997, 30). See also Łowmiański 1963, 314. Cf. Gračanin, Škrgulja 2016, 23.

⁵¹ In one of the manuscripts (Barlow's P), *Danus* appears instead of *Datus*, which was likely the original form. *Danus* is also mentioned by Ven. Fort. *carm.* 9, 1, 73. The argument that *Nara* most likely refers to the Neuri is supported by the fact that *Neurus* appears in both of Sidonius's catalogues, which the author of *In basilica* evidently drew upon (Sidon. *carm.* 5, 475; 7, 323). Cf. Curta 2021, 58, who concludes that both names are “nothing but ‘padding’, made-up names invented to complete the syllabic quantity required for a perfect meter”.

the ethnographic significance of *In basilica's* catalogue. It has been argued that Martin of Braga, to whom the poem is traditionally attributed, updated his list to reflect the circumstances of his own time (*Sclavus*, *Datus* and *Nara*), while structuring the enumeration of peoples according to a geographical principle.⁵² *Nara* could thus refer to the Noricans, which would imply that the Slavs, mentioned immediately after the Rugii, could be geographically located in the broader Eastern Alpine region. While the catalogue undoubtedly contains new ethnonyms – an issue I will address below – the argument that the list follows a strict geographical principle does not stand up to scrutiny. Although some traces of a geographical logic can be discerned, the author largely jumps back and forth in his enumeration, without following a coherent sequence. The catalogue begins roughly in the Central Alpine region, where the Alamanni are typically located (*Alamannus*), then moves northeast (*Saxo*, *Toringus*), before shifting southeast (*Pannonius*, *Rugus*, *Sarmatus*). If *Datus* refers to the Danes, the direction then turns north again, before moving south once more (*Ostrogothus*), then west (*Francus*, *Burgundio*), and finally back east (*Dacus*, *Alanus*). The ethnonyms, therefore, were not listed according to geographical principles but instead seem to have been arranged to fit the poem's metrical structure.⁵³ Any attempt to use this sequence as a basis for reliably locating *Sclavus* (or *Nara*) on the map of early 6th-century barbarian Europe is clearly futile – especially given the previously noted fact that many of the peoples mentioned belong more to the ethnographic context of the 5th rather than the 6th century. The poem's metre, rather than historical or ethnographic accuracy, was thus the author's primary concern in composing the catalogue. This is further evident from the poem's attempt to convince the reader that all the peoples listed had supposedly already embraced the teachings of Christ by the 6th century (*nosse Deum gaudent*), something that is, of course, not the case.⁵⁴

The author's excessive reliance on Sidonius Apollinaris therefore clearly excludes the possibility that *In basilica* represents an ethnographic catalogue based on his own first-hand observations, given that, as I argue, he was writing in the 6th century. However, despite this heavy dependence on earlier literary precedents, *In basilica* nevertheless includes *Sclavus*, *Datus*, and *Nara*. How can this combination of old and new, original ethnonyms be explained, and why would the author even use ethnic names that did not necessarily correspond to the ethnic landscape of his own time? In this respect, S. Ivanov's observation is well-founded: just like the lists of peoples in Sidonius Apollinaris, the catalogue of peoples in *In basilica* is clearly rhetorical and firmly embedded in the classical literary tradition.⁵⁵ As R. Mathisen has convincingly demonstrated, the tendency to create various catalogues of peoples was a pervasive phenomenon in the

⁵² For example, Gračanin, Škrkulja 2016, 22–23. Cf. Bystrický 2008, 147–148.

⁵³ As already pointed out by Váňa 1970, 61. See also Szydłowski 1980, 235; Ivanov 1991, 359 (n. 6); Curta 2008, 664; Curta 2021, 58.

⁵⁴ Mart. Brac. *in bas.* 15.

⁵⁵ Ivanov 1989, 7; Ivanov 1991, 359 (n. 6). See also, for example, Třeštík 1997, 28; Curta 2001, 46; Mühle 2023, 47 (n. 63).

ancient Roman literary tradition. Roman writers, from the Classical period through Late Antiquity, frequently employed this technique to glorify the military achievements of various emperors, often listing long sequences of defeated peoples.⁵⁶ Sidonius Apollinaris, whose panegyrics to Avitus and Majorian the author of *In basilica* undoubtedly drew upon, serves as an excellent example of this literary tradition. In his panegyric to Avitus, for instance, the catalogue of peoples clearly served to underscore the terrifying might of the Huns – a rhetorical emphasis that would echo in later representations of imperial triumph over barbarian foes.⁵⁷ Such “simple lists”, as Mathisen calls them, were therefore common, since no real distinction was made between one people and another, they were merely a sequence of ethnonyms, much like in *In basilica*. And that was precisely the point. In Mathisen’s words, “the catalogues achieve(d) their force not from the peoples’ individuality but from their multiplicity”.⁵⁸ Writers sought to incorporate as many ethnonyms into verse as possible, thereby creating a cumulative effect.⁵⁹ These catalogues thus had a rhetorical function, with their primary aim being the glorification of Roman emperors’ achievements, rather than a rigorous ethnographic examination. In Late Antiquity, the tradition of catalogues was gradually adopted by Christian writers. However, whereas earlier lists of peoples had primarily served to exalt imperial military successes, Christian authors repurposed them into a rhetorical device to glorify the universal expansion of Christianity. This is exactly what the author sought to emphasize in *In basilica*: through the rhetorical enumeration of various peoples – chosen primarily to align with the poem’s metrical structure – he sought to underscore the universal spread of the “true faith”, which, thanks to the supposed miracles and merits of St Martin of Tours, had reached many peoples, including the Gallaecian Suebi. The function of the catalogue of peoples in *In basilica* was therefore entirely rhetorical and should in no way be used as source for the ethnography of Pannonia (or any other region) in the early 6th century.⁶⁰

Sclavus in In basilica

Does this make *In basilica* completely useless for early Slavic history? Not entirely. The rhetorical function of the catalogues, however, does not necessarily imply that authors poetically employed only “outdated” collective names that no longer had any

⁵⁶ Mathisen 2011, especially 19–27.

⁵⁷ Sidon. *carm.* 7, 319–325; see also Meier 2025, 216. For the peoples listed in Sidonius’s panegyric on Majorian, see Steinacher 2017, 102.

⁵⁸ Mathisen 2011, 23 (citation).

⁵⁹ Mathisen 2011. See also Gračanin, Škrkulja 2016, 22; Curta 2022, 131–134; Liccardo 2024, 34, 241–242.

⁶⁰ A similar conclusion was also reached by Ivanov 1989, 12; Curta 2001, 46; Curta 2008, 664–665; Curta 2021, 58; Curta 2022, albeit with varying emphases and interpretive frameworks. See also Mühle 2023, 47 (n. 63).

foothold in ethnic reality. It is certainly true that, at the expense of their own observations, authors often preferred to rely on ethnonyms rooted in the ethnographic tradition and the so-called “barbarian canon” (such as Scythians, Germani, and later Huns, for instance), which allowed the writers to demonstrate their encyclopaedic knowledge, but at the same time they often also sought to include at least some peoples relevant to their own time.⁶¹ The inclusion of *Sclavus* in the catalogue could certainly be explained in this way.

Given that the main focus of this paper lies in evaluating the poem’s character and content – a prerequisite for any further discussion of its historical value – the question of its authorship has largely remained secondary. However, if we aim to contextualize the term *Sclavus* within the poem, briefly revisiting this issue may still prove useful. While the matter remains open to debate, the traditional view that places *In basilica* in the 6th century and attributes it to Martin of Braga, as argued above, remains the most plausible in my view. This interpretation can be further supported by the Latin form *Sclavus* used in the poem, which reflects a Greek linguistic context – it is a Latin adaptation of the Greek Σκλάβος, itself a Greek rendering of the Slavic self-designation (Slověne) – and, in fact, aligns well with Martin’s background, as he had spent time in the Byzantine East.⁶²

Moreover, proposing Martin of Braga as the author would indeed fit well within the broader historical framework of the early spread of the Slavic ethnonym. Even beyond the case of *In basilica*, it is evident that virtually all the early references to the Slavs in Western Latin sources at the turn of the 6th to the 7th century are in some way connected to Constantinople. John of Biclaro, Bishop of Girona in Hispania, who mentions them

⁶¹ Heather 1998, 95–96; Mathisen 2011, 23.

⁶² Greek-speaking Byzantine observers, who first encountered the Slavs along the Lower Danube frontier in the 6th century, had difficulty pronouncing the consonant cluster σλ- and thus inserted an epenthetic consonant κ or, more rarely, θ. As a result, Greek sources use the forms Σκλάβοι, Σκλαβῆνοι, or Σκλαυηνοί, and more rarely Σθλάβοι, instead of Σλάβοι. This phenomenon has long been recognized, see, for example, Roesler 1873, 89–90 (n. 1); Niederle 1923, 36; Schelesniker 1973, 7; Reisinger, Sowa 1990, 10; Anfert’ev 1991, 127 (n. 102); Koder 2002, 336; Darden 2004, 139. That *Sclavus*, as mentioned in *In basilica*, reflects a Greek linguistic context has been noted by Klanica, Tržestik 1991, 18–19; Tržestik 1996, 258; Tržestik 1997, 30; Curta 2001, 46; Curta 2008, 664; Curta 2021, 58; Curta 2022, 136. It may not be coincidental that one of the manuscripts (Barlow’s A), in which *In basilica* is preserved, renders *Sclavus* as *sclabus*. Cf. Curta 2021, 58; Curta 2022, 136, who argues that the “generic” use of the Latin singular form *Sclavus*, as found in *In basilica*, is a phenomenon of the 9th century. While *Sclavus* was indeed commonly used in a generic sense in early medieval Western Latin sources (Graus 1980, 29–30), this does not mean that every reference to *Sclavus* had to always be restricted to such a broad semantic scope. The meaning of ethnonyms varied depending on the temporal and geographical contexts of individual authors. Therefore, if *In basilica* was composed in the 6th century and its author encountered the term in Constantinople, as I argue, then the Latin form *Sclavus* would obviously have aligned with late antique/Byzantine semantics and thus referring specifically to the Byzantine enemies north of the Lower Danube. Notably, the singular form of the Slavic ethnonym with this specific meaning appears in late antique Greek sources, as seen in Agathias (Agath. 4, 20, 4: Σκλάβος ἀνὴρ).

in his chronicle at the end of the 6th century, had spent time in Constantinople between 566 and 582, where he studied both Latin and Greek.⁶³ A Byzantine context is also evident in Pope Gregory the Great, whose letters contain the earliest known reference to the Slavs in the northern Adriatic region at the turn of the 6th to the 7th century.⁶⁴ On the initiative of Pope Pelagius II, Gregory resided in Constantinople between approximately 579/580 and 586, where he served as papal *apocrisarius*.⁶⁵ Incidentally, it is worth noting, with regard to his first mention of the Slavs, that Gregory, who had previously spoken only superficially of “barbarians”,⁶⁶ explicitly thanked the Byzantine exarch in Italy, Callinicus, for the news of his victory over the Slavs. That reports about the Slavs from the Byzantine East steadily reached as far as the Iberian Peninsula at this time is attested not only by Martin of Braga and John of Biclaro, but also by Isidore of Seville, who, in the first quarter of the 7th century, records that “the Slavs took Greece from the Romans”.⁶⁷ The Latin ethnonym *Sclavi/Sclaveni*, which gradually appears in Western sources from the second half of the 6th century onwards, is therefore of Greek origin and undoubtedly entered the West via Constantinople or through other connections with the Byzantine East.⁶⁸ *In basilica* was no exception in this regard.⁶⁹ Thus, if we accept the traditional view that Martin of Braga authored the poem, it follows that he almost certainly did not hear of the Slavs during his youth in Pannonia, but instead encountered the term in Constantinople or elsewhere in the East.

But if so, can Martin’s acquaintance with the Slavs be specified in greater detail? As mentioned above, before arriving in Gallaecia around 550, Martin had apparently spent time in the Greek East, having presumably travelled there from Pannonia at some point. If this is the case, he would almost certainly have passed through Constantinople, which was an important pilgrimage centre. While we cannot determine with certainty when Martin left Pannonia, it is entirely possible that he travelled east via Constantinople in the 540s. This would place him in the region at the height of Slavic pressure on the Balkans: between 545 and 551/552, the Slavs launched at least six devastating incursions into the Eastern Roman Balkan provinces, causing considerable difficulties for Justinian, whose military forces were already engaged in conflicts with the Ostrogoths and, to some extent, the Persians.⁷⁰ Martin could therefore have first

⁶³ Schreiner 2018, 830–831.

⁶⁴ Greg. *M. epist.* 9, 155; 10, 15.

⁶⁵ Dal Santo 2013, 59.

⁶⁶ For example, Greg. *M. epist.* 1, 26; 1, 43. Interestingly, Gregory makes no mention of the Avars in his letters.

⁶⁷ *Sclavi Graeciam Romanis tulerunt*: Isid. *chron.* 414 a (s.a. 5827). It is worth noting, however, that Isidore, like *In basilica* before him, uses the form *Sclavi*, whereas John of Biclaro refers to *Sclavini*, Ioh. Biclaro *chron.* s.a. 576, 581.

⁶⁸ Koder 2002, 339; Pohl 2018, 152–153; Mühle 2023, 37.

⁶⁹ *Contra Štih* 2018, 468.

⁷⁰ Slavic raids: Procop. *Bell.* 7, 13, 24–25 (545); 7, 29, 1–3 (548); 7, 38 (549/550); 7, 40, 1–8 (550); 7, 40, 31–45 (550/551); 8, 25, 1–5 (551); 8, 25, 10 (552).

heard of the Slavs either during his journey along the Danube⁷¹ or, more likely, while staying in Constantinople.⁷² By the late 540s, just before Martin's supposed departure westward, the Slavs had become a major political concern due to their bold raids. It is thus hardly coincidental that they first appear in written sources around 551/552, when they are mentioned by Jordanes and Procopius, followed shortly thereafter by Pseudo-Kaisarios.⁷³ Given the considerable interest the Slavs were generating in the East at the time, it would not be surprising if Martin of Braga had also encountered reports about them there – where, like other contemporaries, they may have made such an impression on him that he later recalled them when composing *In basilica*.

If the above interpretations are correct, then Martin's reference to *Sclavus* in *In basilica*, which is presumed to have been composed around 558, would represent the first mention of the Slavs in the Latin West and the second mention in Latin sources after Jordanes. It is worth noting, however, that while Jordanes, Procopius, and Pseudo-Kaisarios refer exclusively to *Sclaveni*, Martin uses the form *Sclavi*, albeit in the singular. This shorter form does not appear in Greek sources until the 560s, first in John Malalas, and later in Agathias (580s),⁷⁴ whereas in Western Latin sources, *Sclavi* in the plural is first attested in the letters of Pope Gregory the Great at the end of the 6th century.⁷⁵ According to this interpretation, Martin of Braga would thus be the first known source to use the shorter form for the Slavs, preceding even its attestation in Greek sources.⁷⁶ In the end, however, whether Martin became acquainted with the Slavs during his stay in the East, as argued above, or whether he learned of them only later through an unknown Greek source⁷⁷ – or even through some combination of both – cannot be determined with any degree of certainty.

Be that as it may, the conclusion should be apparent: despite the fact that *In basilica*'s catalogue of peoples is primarily rhetorical rather than ethnographic in nature, as discussed above, it is clear that even if we accept Martin's authorship in the 6th century and assume he had specific Slavs in mind – thus granting the catalogue a limited ethnographic value – these were certainly not located in Pannonia or Central Europe but rather along the Lower Danube frontier, from where they were raiding the Balkan

⁷¹ This possibility was already considered by Smrekar 1890, 153–154 (n. 10).

⁷² Ivanov 1989, 12; Curta 2001, 46; Pohl 2018, 152; Mühle 2023, 47 (n. 63). Cf. however, Curta 2022, 136.

⁷³ Iord. *Get.* 34–35; Procop. *Bell.* 7, 14, 22–30; PsKais. 109.

⁷⁴ Malal. 18, 129; Agath. 4, 20, 4.

⁷⁵ Greg. M. *epist.* 9, 155.

⁷⁶ Cf. Curta 2008, 664–665. Caution is warranted, however, as it is by no means certain that *In basilica* was composed as early as 558, upon the consecration of the church of St Martin, as is commonly assumed. A later date should not be ruled out, *terminus ante quem* being 579, the year of Martin's death.

⁷⁷ Smrekar 1890, 153 (n. 10). Diplomatic contacts between Constantinople and Gallaecia certainly existed (see n. 17, above). Cf. Klanica, Tržestik 1991, 18–19; Tržestik 1996, 258; Tržestik 1997, 30, who attempted to explain Martin's use of the Latinized Greek form *Sclavus* by suggesting his reliance on an unknown Byzantine source.

provinces of the Empire. This is suggested by the Latinized Greek form *Sclavus*, which Martin most likely encountered in the Byzantine East, and which therefore conformed to contemporary Byzantine semantics. Consequently, *In basilica* cannot be used to localize the Slavs in Pannonia and/or Central Europe in the early 6th century. This does not render *In basilica* insignificant, however. On the contrary, it provides a valuable insight into the spread of the Slavic ethnonym across the Mediterranean in the 6th century.

Conclusion

The poem *In basilica*, traditionally attributed to Martin of Braga, is often cited as evidence for the presence of the Slavs in Pannonia and/or Central Europe before the arrival of the Avars (567/568), not least due to thought-provoking interpretations of Jaroslav Šašel, who suggested that Martin drew upon his youthful memories of Pannonia when composing the catalogue in *In basilica*. However, as this study has demonstrated, despite the ingenuity of Šašel's deduction, his interpretation raises several issues, as the catalogue of peoples in *In basilica* was never intended as a historical or ethnographic account. Rather, it primarily served as a rhetorical device, designed to emphasize the universal spread of the "true faith", which, thanks to the supposed miracles and merits of St Martin of Tours, had reached numerous *gentes*, including the Gallaecian Suebi. Given its rhetorical nature, it is hardly surprising that the author borrowed most of the ethnonyms from the panegyrics of Sidonius Apollinaris. The function of the catalogue of peoples in *In basilica* was therefore primarily rhetorical and should in no way be used as an independent source for the ethnography of Pannonia (or any other region) in the early 6th century.

In basilica's *Sclavus* does not fare much better. While different interpretations exist regarding the poem's authorship, the traditional view that situates *In basilica* in the 6th century and attributes it to Martin of Braga remains the most convincing and, indeed, provides a strong contextual basis, as his time in the Byzantine East dovetails nicely with the Latinized Greek form *Sclavus* mentioned in the poem, which reflects a Greek linguistic background. This suggests that Martin likely encountered the ethnonym not in Pannonia, but in the Greek East. In the end, however, regardless of whether we accept or reject Martin's authorship of the poem, the mention of *Sclavus* in *In basilica* holds little historical significance for early Slavic history and can in no way be used as evidence of pre-Avar Slavic presence in Pannonia or Central Europe. Nonetheless, as the potentially first known mention of the Slavs in the Latin West, its primary value lies in the study of the discourse surrounding the spread of the Slavic ethnonym in written sources.

The debate on *In basilica* and Martin of Braga has certainly advanced since Šašel's time. However, one cannot overlook the fact that his interpretations were undoubtedly groundbreaking – and in many ways, they still are – as they continue to inspire reflection even half a century later. From an academic perspective, one could hardly ask for a more enduring contribution, and for that, we can only be grateful to him.

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Aljaž Sekne

Univerza v Ljubljani

Filozofska fakulteta

Oddelek za zgodovino

Aškerčeva 2

SI-1000 Ljubljana

aljaz.sekne@ff.uni-lj.si

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0938-4799>

Defence of the Eastern Border of Northern Italy in the Early Middle Ages

Tina MILAVEC

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to discuss the role the territory of present-day western Slovenia played in the defence of northern Italy in the Early Middle Ages. In Slovenian early medieval archaeology, we are focused mainly on local and regional topics, but in this paper the author suggests we observe the turbulent political and historical context of the northeastern Italy in the 9th and 10th centuries. The western part of the now Slovenian territory in particular represented a significant transit area which retained an important strategic position until the southeastern border of the Holy Roman Empire moved further towards Pannonia and the Krka River Valley. In the light of the active control and defence of transport and communications by the representatives of the state, we could perhaps understand the renewed use of hilltop sites in this period.

Keywords: Slovenia; Friuli; Early Middle Ages; hilltop fortifications

Izvleček

Obramba vzhodne meje severne Italije v zgodnjem srednjem veku

Prispevek se osredotoča na vlogo obrambe severovzhodnih dostopov v Italijo, ki jo je prostor današnje zahodne Slovenije ohranil verjetno še globoko v zgodnji srednji vek, vsaj dokler se konec 10. stoletja meja cesarstva ni preselila dlje proti Panoniji. Zgodnjesrednjeveška arheologija v Sloveniji se osredotoča predvsem na notranje teme, v tem prispevku pa avtorica poskuša na današnji slovenski prostor pogledati v kontekstu politično-zgodovinskega dogajanja v severovzhodni Italiji predvsem v 9. in 10. stoletju. Obe stoletji sta Furlanijo in Benečijo zaznamovali s pestrim notranje- in zunanjepolitičnim dogajanjem, pri katerem so bile pogosto ključne povezave preko Alp. Poleg drugih prometnic so tudi tiste, ki so vodile preko današnjega slovenskega prostora, zahtevale nadzor in obrambo, saj so še vedno nudile lahek dostop do severne Italije. V luči tega dogajanja morda lahko razumemo tudi ponovno uporabo višinskih točk, ki so lahko služile najvišjim oblastem pri nadzoru prometa v dolinah.

Ključne besede: Slovenija; Furlanija; zgodnji srednji vek; višinske utrdbe

One of the many research interests of Jaroslav Šašel was the question of the defence of the north-eastern border of Italy.¹ He was mainly concerned with the Late Roman period and the phase of the Ostrogothic Kingdom in Italy, but his work also extended into the Early Middle Ages. In this contribution I would like to return to this topic and discuss why the importance of present-day western Slovenia as a frontier zone may have continued into the 9th and 10th centuries, and how this could shift our perception of a certain type of archaeological site.

Early medieval archaeologies are prone to serving as national archaeologies, and have the potential to significantly influence our mental maps.² The historically reported Slavic settlement around AD 600 might have actually had a greater impact on our perception of the period than on the people living in the region at the time. If Slovenian Late Antique archaeology is still almost as fully incorporated into research on the Mediterranean as it is that on the Roman period, then after the 6th and 7th centuries the focus shrinks within today's national borders, with the notable exception of Carantania and Bavaria. There is no getting away from the fact that the 7th and 8th centuries brought about some irreversible changes in the region, and a discontinuity in settlement patterns. But the lack of information from written sources and the general air of danger and darkness from the Slavic regions in the perception of our non-Slavic and Christian neighbours continues to foster a localized and at best regionalized view of early medieval Slovenia.

Maps of early medieval sites in Slovenia show concentrations especially in the north-west, in Gorenjska, and since the 2000s also in the north-east, in Štajerska and Prekmurje.³ These regions are historically and interpretatively linked to other Slavic lands, Bavaria and Pannonia, and have attracted the most interest among Slovenian scholars working on this period. Only recently has research in the south-east, and specifically Dolenjska, record many cemeteries and settlements, while Notranjska still remains relatively empty,⁴ and as yet both areas more or less evade inclusion into a broader historical or archaeological narrative. Istria and western Slovenia stand slightly apart in this context, with a certain amount of historical and archaeological data existing, albeit rarely linked to the main, Slavic or any other narrative.⁵ The barrier of the Slavic frontier seems to be just as impermeable when approached from the side of Italian scholarship, which very rarely attempts to cross the present-day state border. While not trying to deny the impact of the post-600 population and economic changes further to the east, I intend to argue that the mountainous eastern hinterland of Friuli, especially the Soča River Valley, was not affected by the same transformation as elsewhere on the land of today's Slovenia, and retained the political identity and transitory and defensive roles from the

¹ Šašel 1975; Šašel 1988.

² Barbiera 2010; Glaser 2015; Betti, Borri, Gasparri 2024.

³ Cf. Božič, Dular 1999, 375, Guštin 2007, fig. 1; Knific, Nabergoj 2016, 64; Mason 2018, fig. 4.

⁴ Mason 2018; Pavlovič, Vojakovič, Toškan 2021.

⁵ Among exceptions: Svoljšak 1970–1971; Svoljšak, Knific 1976; Cunja 1996; Štih 1999a; Štih 2005; Štih 2010; Boltin Tome 2024.



Fig. 1: Map of the discussed region with the main roads and sites mentioned in text. Shaded areas represent approximate extension of territorial units.

previous period. Seen from this angle, the early medieval reuse of hilltop sites can be explained by the continued need to control the access routes from the east.

In the paper I will first take a look at the road network, and make a brief historical summary of the historical and political aspects of the early medieval centuries in Friuli in order to emphasize the need for control here. I will then take a look at how early medieval finds at hilltop sites are viewed in Italian, Austrian and German research, and then present the relevant sites in present-day Slovenia and try to integrate them into the overall context.

Frontiers and roads (Fig. 1)

The territory of the Alpine passes (in the Roman sense) and the Soča River Valley represented a border territory between 'Italy proper' and the 'hinterland' for a very long time, certainly in a more pronounced way since the late 3rd century, when the *Claustra* fortification system began to be constructed. Even if in certain periods, for example during that of Ostrogothic rule, the frontier function was less in the foreground, the transitional character of the territory remained just as important. The Lombard Kingdom again bordered on the Avars and Slavs in the same area, while

the Carolingian conquests blurred the political borders for a while within the large March of Friuli.⁶ But after the system of large Carolingian political units and partly independent Slavic polities on its borders fell apart in the 9th century, the territory was again (on) the north-eastern border of an Italian kingdom. The sources do not reveal the exact administrative organization of the region, but according to most authors either the Soča River Valley or the Alpine passes represented the frontier of Italy,⁷ although some authors push it as far east as the Upper Sava River Valley.⁸

The main roads across the Central Alps ran along the Reschen, Brenner and Tauern Passes (and others in western Alps).⁹ In the eastern Alps the Monte Croce Carnico Pass road was the main link between the sea and central Europe in the Roman period, but it needed regular maintenance as it runs at an elevation of 1,357 m.a.s.l. Several authors stress the rising importance of once secondary roads between northeastern Italy and Styria, Carinthia and Carniola in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, such as the Val Canale/Valle del Ferro road with the Camporosso Pass (816 m.a.s.l.) and the Predel Pass road (1156 m.a.s.l., passing the Upper Soča Valley and Cividale) with the fork across the Škofja Loka–Cerkno hills (Škofjeloško hribovje, Cerkljansko hribovje) towards the Upper Sava Valley and Kranj. These were commercial links, providing Friuli with northern goods and allowing Mediterranean goods to continue travelling north, as they had since Strabo's time. Historical sources also mention travellers, pilgrims and military conflicts along these routes.¹⁰ For Friuli and Cividale these roads – and the road through Vipavska dolina – were crucial, as were the eastern Alpine passes. It is also important to remember that these roads continued towards the coast and the recovering Aquileia, temporary Comacchio and rising Venice, thriving on (maritime and) river transport, and the long-distance trade across the Alps. In this context it is important to stress that late 10th century toll stations were situated in Cividale (and Aquileia), indicating the preference of the Predel road over the one along Val Canale and Valle del Ferro. In the early 11th century the opening of iron mines in Carinthia prompted the reconstruction of and renewed preference for the Val Canale/Ferro road.¹¹

On the present-day Slovenian side along the above-mentioned corridors between Friuli and Carniola, we find early medieval (hilltop) sites, unfortunately most often evidenced by metal detector finds with little or no context. These sites are difficult to integrate into the standard narratives focused on the local and regional situation in Slovenia, a fact reflected in the many different interpretations offered.¹² This in order

⁶ Štih 1999b.

⁷ E.g. Štih 1999b, 121; Dolinar et al. 2011; Cavada 2016, fig. 1; Nabergoj 2017.

⁸ E.g. Barbiera 2010, 189.

⁹ Heitmeier 2013, fig. 1.

¹⁰ Kosi 1998, 245–247; Magrini, Kruh 2007, 184–485; Faleschini 2013; Oitzl 2018, 89; Minguzzi 2023, 31.

¹¹ Minguzzi 2023.

¹² Macháček, Pavlovič 2018; contributions in Diesenberger, Eichert, Winckler 2020 with further bibliography.

to develop my argumentation, I need to mention very briefly the political situation in northern Italy in the 9th and 10th centuries.

Friuli after the early Carolingians

After the death of Louis II in 875, the Italian throne was empty. The candidates for a new king were the great-grandchildren and even great-great-grandchildren of Carolingians along the female lines. Among the most ambitious was Berengar I, the second son of Eberhard, Margrave of Friuli, from a powerful Frankish family on his father's side and son of Charlemagne's grand-daughter. Even though also the Margrave of Friuli, his ambition took him to establish a more permanent base in Verona from where he managed several internal and external conflicts, with the Dukes of Spoleto, Kings of Burgundy and Provence and with his distant relatives, the Emperor Charles the Fat and Arnulf of Carinthia, even with the Moravians. Until his death in 925 he maintained numerous relations that reached across the Alps. Most of the crossings to sustain these connections, at least the ones we can assess from the locations of his allies and opponents, or actual mentions of movements in written sources, took place in the central and western Alps. The eastern Alpine area was most relevant around 900 on account of his contracts with the Hungarians who crossed between Pannonia and Carantania and northern Italy a number of times. In particular, the secondary roads in western Slovenia may have been used in their excursions from the direction of Carantania.¹³

While the battles for the Italian throne were underway more to the west, another power rose rapidly in Friuli – the Patriarch of Aquileia. Besides being a religious authority, the patriarch began to receive lands and donations from local rulers, and from a historical point of view more or less single-handedly ruled in Friuli in the late 9th and 10th centuries in the virtual or actual absence of the margrave.¹⁴

The patriarchs had been residing in Cividale from the early 8th century on. According to preserved written sources they only acquired land on the left bank of the River Soča and the area around Gorizia after 1000, but they may have had a significant political influence or even been active in governing the territory before that, as the Ottonian donations are often perceived as confirming their already existing status. Minguzzi¹⁵ even speculates that the absence of 10th century donations to the patriarch in Carnia simply means the region was already firmly under his control at the time, because of the importance of transalpine communications and the important economic role of forests and pastures. Both arguments could actually be used for our region, too.

The Upper Soča Valley lay directly behind the back of the seat of the patriarch in

¹³ Krahwinkler 1992; Štih 1983.

¹⁴ Piuzei 2000; Gasparri 2001.

¹⁵ Minguzzi 2023.

Cividale. It was particularly exposed to the outlet of the road along the Natisone Valley from the direction of Kobarid. The Vipava River Valley, most often cited as the main entrance to Italy and main incursion route, runs into the plain only about 20 km towards the south. While this admittedly remains in the field of speculation, I find it very hard to imagine that these roads were left completely unattended, unsupervised or unprotected in the centuries of severe internal and external conflict for northern Italy and Friuli.

However, in a research context this issue does not seem to be approached from this perspective in northeastern Italy, and there is a gap between two research foci, that on the Late Antique castra of the 6th century and that on the ‘incastellamento’ with firmly attestable architectural remains of the first castles not earlier than the 12th and 13th centuries. For the centuries in-between, continuity is assumed more on the basis of the repeated use of the same locations and roads than firm archaeological evidence at individual sites. At certain locations of later castles, 9th to 11th century finds or mentions in written sources exist, and these are interpreted as early fortifications made of perishable materials with wooden palisades or similar, which were mainly destroyed by later construction activities.¹⁶ In the sources there are a few mentions of private fortifications in the time of Berengar I, who allowed a certain Pietrus to fortify Motta del Savorgnano in 922. Most texts testify to repeated donations of properties from Berengar I and the Ottonians to the patriarch in the 10th century, but the archaeological investigations of the sites in question do not exist or are only partially published.¹⁷ Rare cases demonstrating an early medieval phase are Colle Maz  t, along the road to Monte Croce Carnico / Pl  ckenpass, Motta di Savorgnano overlooking the River Torre, and 7th and 8th century finds from destroyed contexts under the Ahrensperg Castle in the Natisone Valley. On the other hand, research has until now concentrated mostly on the castle sites in the valley and foothills of this area, and the uplands or mountain valleys have received much less attention. Importantly, Italian researchers also emphasize the role of castles for controlling the waterways, and not only roads, between the Alps and the lagoon.¹⁸

Along the transalpine roads but on the other side of the Alps, in Austrian Carinthia, Bavaria and other regions of present-day Austria and Germany, historical and archaeological evidence for fortification and (re)use of earlier Roman castella and hilltops sites from the late 8th to 10th centuries is more abundant. Individual site dating and interpretations vary, the earlier cases are usually linked to either Carantanian or late Carolingian consolidation (in Bavaria after the submission of Tassilo III), or to internal political strife and power negotiations in the second half of the 9th century.

¹⁶ Baccichet et al. 2018, 944–946; Minguzzi 2019.

¹⁷ Piu  zzi 2000; Francescutto 2012, 63–64, 73.

¹⁸ Minguzzi 2023.

Sites associated with the first half of the 10th century are usually explained by the need to defend against Hungarian invasions.¹⁹

Early medieval fortifications between Friuli and the East?

In present-day Slovenia (and elsewhere in Europe) there are several cases of the early medieval reuse of prehistoric or Late Antique hilltop sites which are almost always difficult to interpret, as most of the early medieval finds had been discovered by metal detectorists. The topic has already been dealt with by several authors²⁰ and various explanations were offered, ranging from settlements, Carolingian fortifications, forts of local Slavic elites, refuges or votive/sacred sites. And most certainly, one explanation will not fit all sites. My attempt at interpretation includes four of these sites in the hinterland of Friuli, namely Tonovcov grad near Kobarid, Gradec near Drežnica, Gradišče above Trebenče and perhaps Sv. Pavel near Vrtovin (*Fig. 1*).

Tonovcov grad above Kobarid is a well-researched and published site with well-documented Late Roman and Late Antique settlement phases. After the end of the Late Antique settlement, a phase of reoccupation or perhaps several short-term phases of reuse were established. Small early medieval finds (fittings, a knife, knife-sheath fragments, a segmented bead, arrowheads), pottery and hearths were discovered in the not fully collapsed remains of a Late Antique house, in an already empty water cistern and in one of the three churches. Several graves were also found, radiocarbon dated to the 8th to 10th centuries, positioned close to the Late Antique churches and buildings with the uppermost destruction layer covering them.²¹

Gradec near Drežnica is located in the Upper Soča Valley, a narrow rocky ledge protected by sheer slopes above the Kozjek stream on one side and a rampart on the other. Ciglencečki reported finding Late Antique pottery at the site, and interpreted it as a possible refugium in the sixth century.²² At that time Tonovcov grad represented the central settlement of the region, positioned just across the River Soča with good visual connection to Gradec. After a number of early medieval metal finds (militaria, but also tools, keys and accessories) had been discovered, Gradec was excavated to a small degree and yielded further early medieval material, including pottery and animal bones. The results of excavations are not yet fully published, but the early medieval phase was dated to the 9th and 10th centuries.²³

Tonovcov grad and Gradec above Drežnica form a pair on both sides of River Soča, with one having a more pronounced settlement and burial function while the other

¹⁹ Gleirscher 2000; Gleirscher 2012; Eichert 2012; Ettel 2014; Kühtreiber, Obenaus 2017; Later 2020.

²⁰ Ciglencečki 1992; Osti 2009; Maurina, Postinger 2012; Diesenberger, Eichert, Winckler 2020.

²¹ Ciglencečki, Modrijan, Milavec 2011; Milavec 2020; Milavec 2024.

²² Ciglencečki 2011, 43–44, figs. 1.26–1.27.

²³ Knific et al. 2021, 41–45; Karo, Knific 2020, 196, Pl. 12.

has more of a refuge/control natural predisposition and finds. Together they could supervise and close the Soča Valley at the point where it narrows significantly at Kobarid. Gradec near Drežnica also overlooks the natural pass towards Drežnica plateau below the Krn mountain range which probably offered relatively favourable settlement conditions and the transition towards summer mountain pastures, which may have represented an important part of the economy in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.

Gradišče above Trebenče lies in the Cerkno hills, the mountainous region between Soča River Valley and Carniola. A large number of metal detector finds have been discovered here, including horse and rider's equipment, weapons, tools, keys, accessories and pottery. The dating of the finds covers a large span between Late Antiquity and the Late Middle Ages, with a strong emphasis on the second half of the 9th to early 11th centuries.²⁴ Gradišče above Trebenče is located at a communications hub roughly at the watershed of Soča and Sava rivers, along the shortest route between the Bača Gorge and the Poljanska Sora Valley with its continuation towards Carniola. This area played an important part in road control in crucial parts of regional history, in the Augustan conquests and the organization of Late Roman *Claustra* (e.g. the nearby site of Mali Njivč near Novaki).²⁵ Perhaps it was even a part of the *no man's land* between Friuli and Carniola? This could be indicated by the western border of the Carniolan land Emperor Otto II gave to the bishop of Freising in 973, which lies only a few kilometres to the east from Trebenče.²⁶ Similarly, the medieval border between the patriarch's and the Freising territory was at Kladje, located ca 12 km to the south-east from Trebenče as the crow flies. Kladje represents the highest section of the Carniola-Friuli road running from Škofja Loka to Cerkno, Zakriž, and on to Kojca and the Bača Gorge, thus passing Trebenče.²⁷ It is not impossible that Trebenče was already on the patriarch's territory. As these are only speculations, the map in *Fig. 1* retains the more conservative limits of early medieval Carniola and Friuli.

The small finds of all three sites are roughly similar in that *militaria* (arrowheads, large knives and knife sheaths, belt set parts, horse tack, spurs, stirrups etc.) is found at all of them, but in various quantities. There are also agricultural and woodworking tools and miscellaneous household equipment (keys, needles, hinges, pottery). It is precisely these categories of finds that – despite the lack of remains of any permanent buildings on the surface – indicate that some sort of buildings in perishable materials existed at these hilltops, even if they seem extremely difficult to detect. They also seem to indicate at least periods of everyday life at the sites.

The more datable finds at all three sites span between two to four centuries, from the late 8th to 11th centuries with an emphasis on the second half of the 9th and the 10th.

²⁴ Karo, *Knific* 2020, 194; Bitenc, *Knific* 2021.

²⁵ Istenič 2015, 373–374.

²⁶ Bitenc, *Knific* 2021, 202.

²⁷ Kosi 1998, 248.

In my opinion this shows a prolonged, probably periodical use of these locations, and not only in Carolingian period. It is vital to note that material dating to significantly earlier and later periods is also found at some sites, such as Late Antique and late medieval finds from Gradišče above Trebenče,²⁸ which shows just how precarious interpretations of partially published sites can be.

Sv. Pavel above Vrtovin is located in the lower Vipava River Valley, on a prominent rocky plateau that is easily visible from afar and with an excellent view of the valley. Small-scale excavations and recent surveys have revealed the remains of a large settlement with defence walls, terraces with buildings and at least two or three churches. Dating is sketchy, a 6th century main settlement phase seems confirmed,²⁹ while the later use is documented by at least one grave (Grave 4)³⁰ and a part of a glass goblet which can most probably be dated to the 9th century and was found in an early medieval context.³¹ Individual early medieval finds without context may not be enough evidence for a more intensive or prolonged use in the period under discussion, but they deserve a mention. Horse and rider's equipment, arrowheads, keys and coins, specifically dirhams from late 8th and 9th centuries, have been discovered.³² These add an element of status and perhaps trade to the site, both of which are not surprising given its location on the wide threshold to (and out of) Italy. The mere strategic location on the main road raises the probability that we are once again looking at a post, perhaps even a settlement, which functioned in the early medieval period with a rather definite goal of control, and perhaps also a temporary refuge for the lowland population, some of which is attested under the hilltop (Gojače).

Discussion

The archaeological evidence for the Upper Soča Valley and the mountains to the east of it does not show a dense settlement pattern. Even more, the presented sites are more or less the only early medieval sites apart from individual finds and later graves around churches which appear from the 10th century on.³³ The early medieval settlement density is slightly higher in the Vipava Valley, but not significantly.

In my opinion the sites described above could fit into a system of early medieval defence of Friuli against external threats from the north-east and east, but also control of the roads for civil purposes. A late 10th century source indicates the Predel Pass

²⁸ Bitenc, Knific 2021.

²⁹ Svoljšak 1985; Ciglencečki 2021; Ciglencečki 2024.

³⁰ Svoljšak 1985; Milavec 2024.

³¹ Milavec 2018.

³² Bitenc, Knific 2015.

³³ Knific, Mlinar 2014.

road was also a commercial link between Carinthia and Friuli,³⁴ and the potential civil and logistic function of this route must not be forgotten.

These need not have been permanently manned forts. The cavalry attested at these locations could have been dispatched in times of danger, periodically, not continuously, over centuries, perhaps until the border zone moved further towards the east.³⁵ After the Hungarian incursions ended under Otto I and the administrative situation began to change considerably, the stabilization allowed for lowland settlement (so far mainly evidenced by 10th- and 11th-century graves around churches) and reduced the need for hilltop control. It is important to bear in mind that not even all the metal detector finds have been published so far, so the picture necessarily remains incomplete and the total time-span of the use of individual sites unknown. As already discussed by Špela Karo, the period of Hungarian invasions was decidedly one when Europe took protective measures against the attackers.³⁶ In the archaeology of the lands on the other side of the Alps, authors are not afraid to make the connection when faced with similar sites and finds as we are discussing here. The different geography allows for different fortification systems, mainly earthen ramparts and wooden palisades. Some forts are even mentioned in written sources.³⁷

The naturally and sometimes artificially fortified sites existed in the region discussed here, some partly in ruins, but still in strategic positions in relation to the road system. In the case of Tonovcov grad and Gradec near Drežnica we can perhaps even observe the changed function of sites, the settlement perhaps retaining a periodical settlement and burial use and the previous refuge turning into an observation post. In the Škofja Loka–Cerkno hills perhaps the run of the road changed slightly over time, and thus military control moved from the Late Roman Mali Njivč to Trebenče over the centuries. And in the wide Vipava Valley Sv. Pavel offers an unparalleled position to oversee the valley and the road, and so offer protection to a large number of people if necessary.

After the reorganization on the empire's eastern frontiers in the early 9th century this region was hardly politically independent, and its role as the hinterland of the Friulian plain and transitional region between Pannonia and Italy remained (or returned), albeit now within a different political organization.

Another factor, seemingly half-forgotten in Slovenian early medieval research, is long-distance trade and the famous Amber Road, this despite the fact that foreign authors see our region as crossed by several important commercial routes, a view supported by Carolingian, Byzantine and Arabic coins, centres such as Ptuj with the bridge across the River Drava, and even early medieval finds from the River Ljubljaniča.³⁸ In the period of the rise of Venice we must not forget how close this city lay

³⁴ Kosi 1998, 245.

³⁵ Nabergoj 2017.

³⁶ Karo 2021.

³⁷ Pollak 2007; Ettel 2014.

³⁸ McCormick 2001, 369–376; Cirelli 2021, fig. 9.4.

to Slovenia even in the Early Middle Ages, and how far its influence radiated. Admittedly, when working mainly with early medieval cemeteries many questions are difficult to address, but with this contribution I wish to at least bring attention to a neighbourhood which may have influenced the region of present-day Slovenia in the Early Middle Ages, and more strongly than is currently maintained.

It would be possible to focus on the Pannonian part of Slovenia in a similar manner. The sites with the largest amount of early medieval militaria seem to be located approximately along the main corridors of previous Roman roads (for example Ljubična above Zbelovska gora), and may – in a very sketchy way – indicate an attempt to control these communications, perhaps also for logistic purposes. We tend to brush aside trade and travel along these roads and focus on local situations. But the exquisite militaria found at such sites could also have ended up on these hilltops due to a functioning trade network. The deposition pattern, sometimes interpreted as votive hoards, could just as well be the result of storing goods, for example sets of rider's equipment on the way from production centres to the consumers.

Conclusion

Early medieval reuse of hilltops in western Slovenia does not make much sense when viewed only from the Carantanian and Carniolan angle. However, by bringing into focus the political events in northern Italy and the persisting frontier/transitional function of western Slovenia, I have tried to incorporate the sites in the Soča Valley, Škofja Loka–Cerkno hills and Vipava Valley into the defence strategies of Friuli as organized by the main force at the time, the patriarch. That said, any conclusions must remain preliminary as we really know very little about some sites, and the existing information can be used to support several different interpretations.

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Tina Milavec
Univerza v Ljubljani
Filozofska fakulteta
Oddelek za arheologijo
Aškerčeva 2
SI-1000 Ljubljana
Tina.Milavec@ff.uni-lj.si
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6916-0382>