

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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2025

SPREJETO NA SEJI PRVEGA RAZREDA ZA ZGODOVINSKE IN DRUŽBENE VEDE
SLOVENSKE AKADEMIJE ZNANOSTI IN UMETNOSTI
DNE 4. DECEMBRA 2024

IN
NA SEJI PREDSEDSTVA
SLOVENSKE AKADEMIJE ZNANOSTI IN UMETNOSTI
DNE 28. JANUARJA 2025

RAZPRAVE I. RAZREDA
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Uredniki / Editors:
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Izdajatelj in založnik / Issued and published by:
Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti

Priprava in prelom / DTP: Mateja Belak
Tisk / Printed by: Present d. o. o. Ljubljana
Naklada / Print run: 300 izvodov / copies
Ljubljana 2025; prva izdaja, prvi natis / first edition, first print

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/9789612681180>

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

94(37)(082)
94(497.4)«00/05»(082)

Omnia tempus revelat : studies on Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages = študije o antiki in zgodnjem srednjem veku : in Memory of Jaroslav Šašel = v spomin Jaroslavu Šašlu / editors Milan Lovenjak ... [et al.]. - 1. izd., 1. natis = 1st ed., 1st print. - (Razprave / Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Razred za zgodovinske in družbene vede = Dissertationes / Academia scientiarum et artium Slovenica, Classis I: Historia et sociologia ; 45)

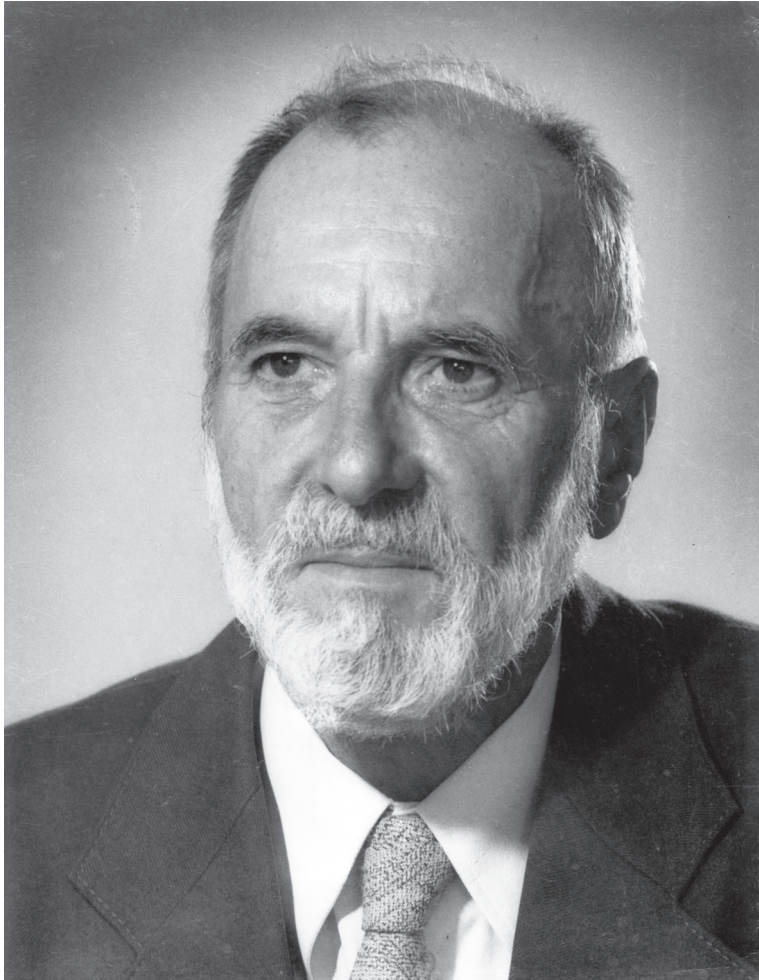
ISBN 978-961-268-118-0 (Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti)
COBISS.SI-ID 247282435

Knjiga je izšla s finančno podporo SAZU ter programov »Arheologija« (P6-0247) in »Slovenska zgodovina« (P6-0235), ki ju sofinancira Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijsko dejavnost Republike Slovenije iz državnega proračuna.
The book was published with the financial support from SAZU and the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (research core funding No. P6-0247 and P6-0235).

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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*

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

Izvilleček

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

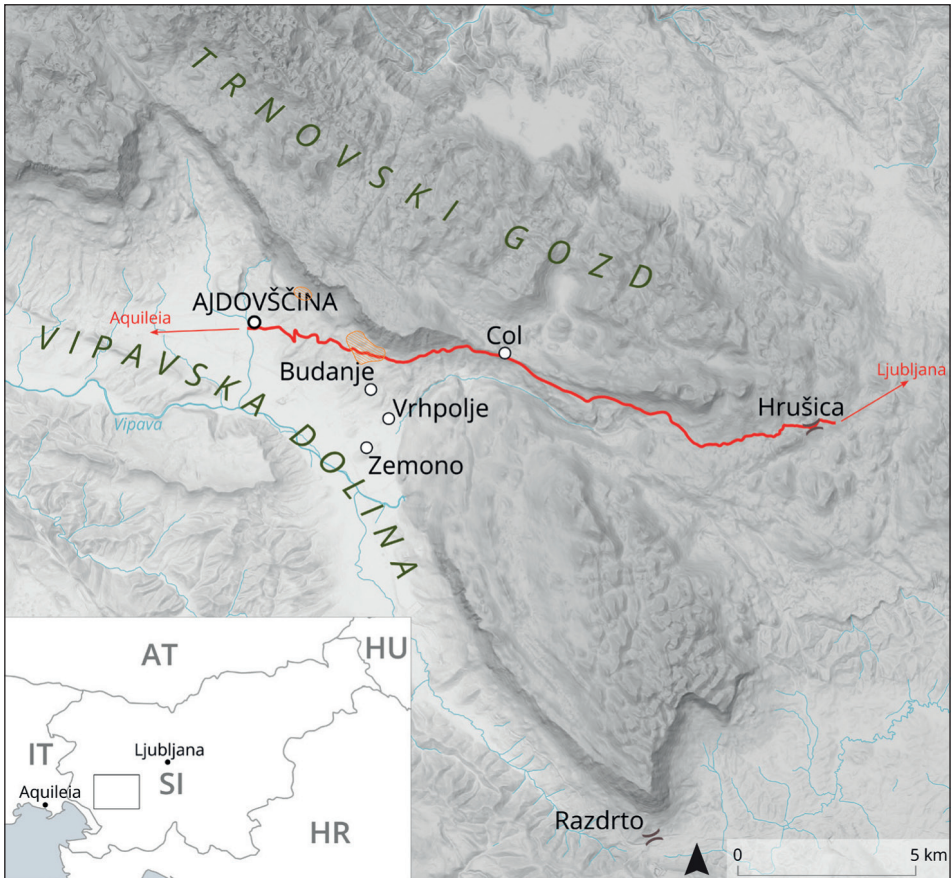


Fig. 1: The north-eastern Vipava Valley with the study area north of Budanje and northeast of Ajdovščina marked in orange, along with other sites and geographical units referenced in the text.

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>).

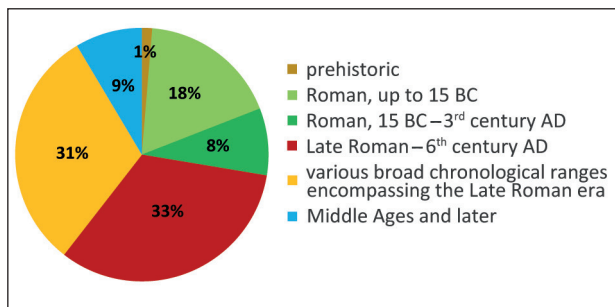


Fig. 2: Chronological incidence of the non-numismatic artefacts from the study area north of Budanje and northeast of Ajdovščina.

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).

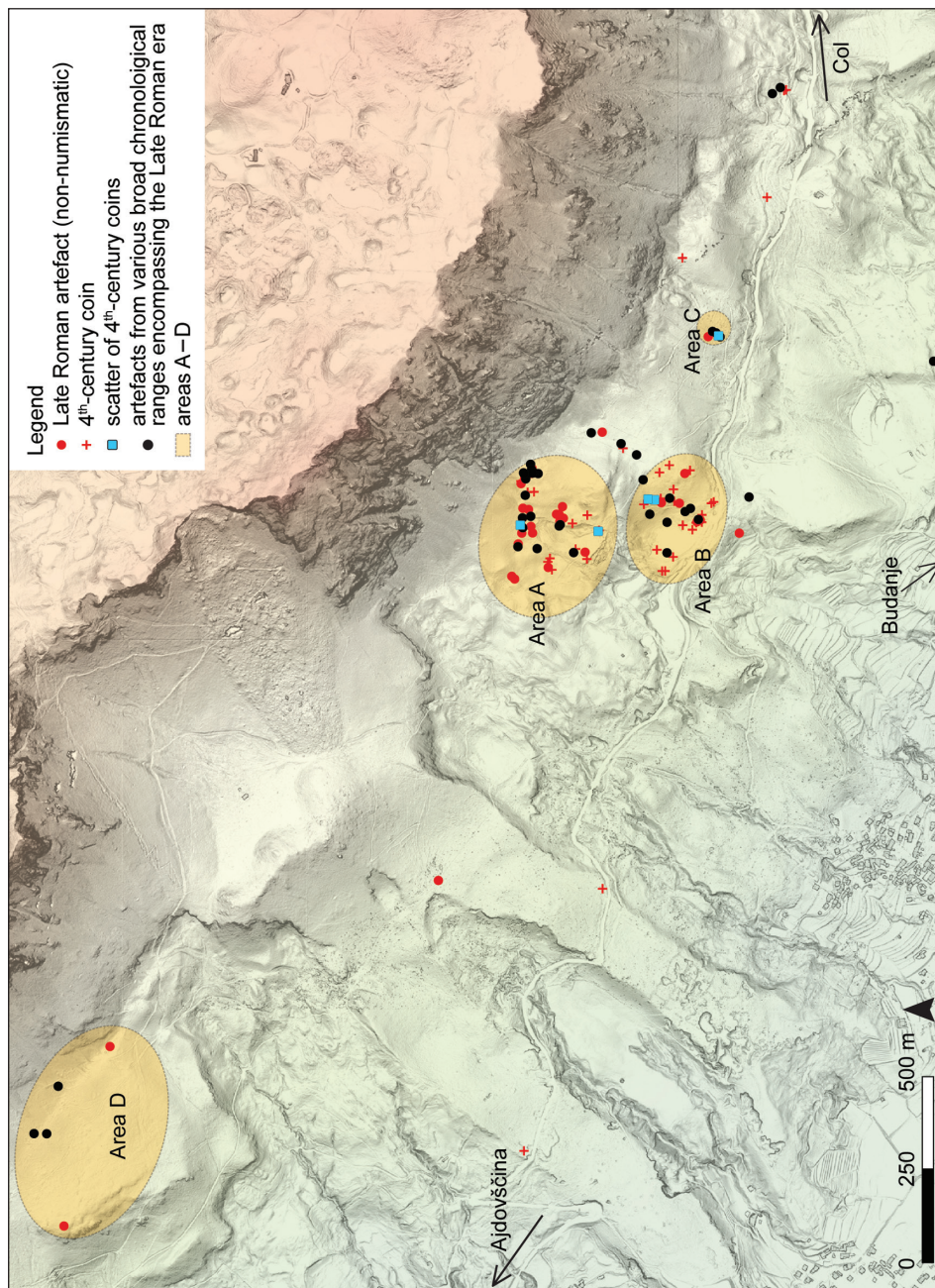


Fig. 4: Study area north of Budanje and northeast of Ajdovščina, showing the findspots of Late Roman artefacts as well as artefacts with various broader date ranges that include the Late Roman period, unearthed between 2016 and 2020 and concentrated in Areas A–D. Basemap: LiDAR © Arso, GURS.



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).

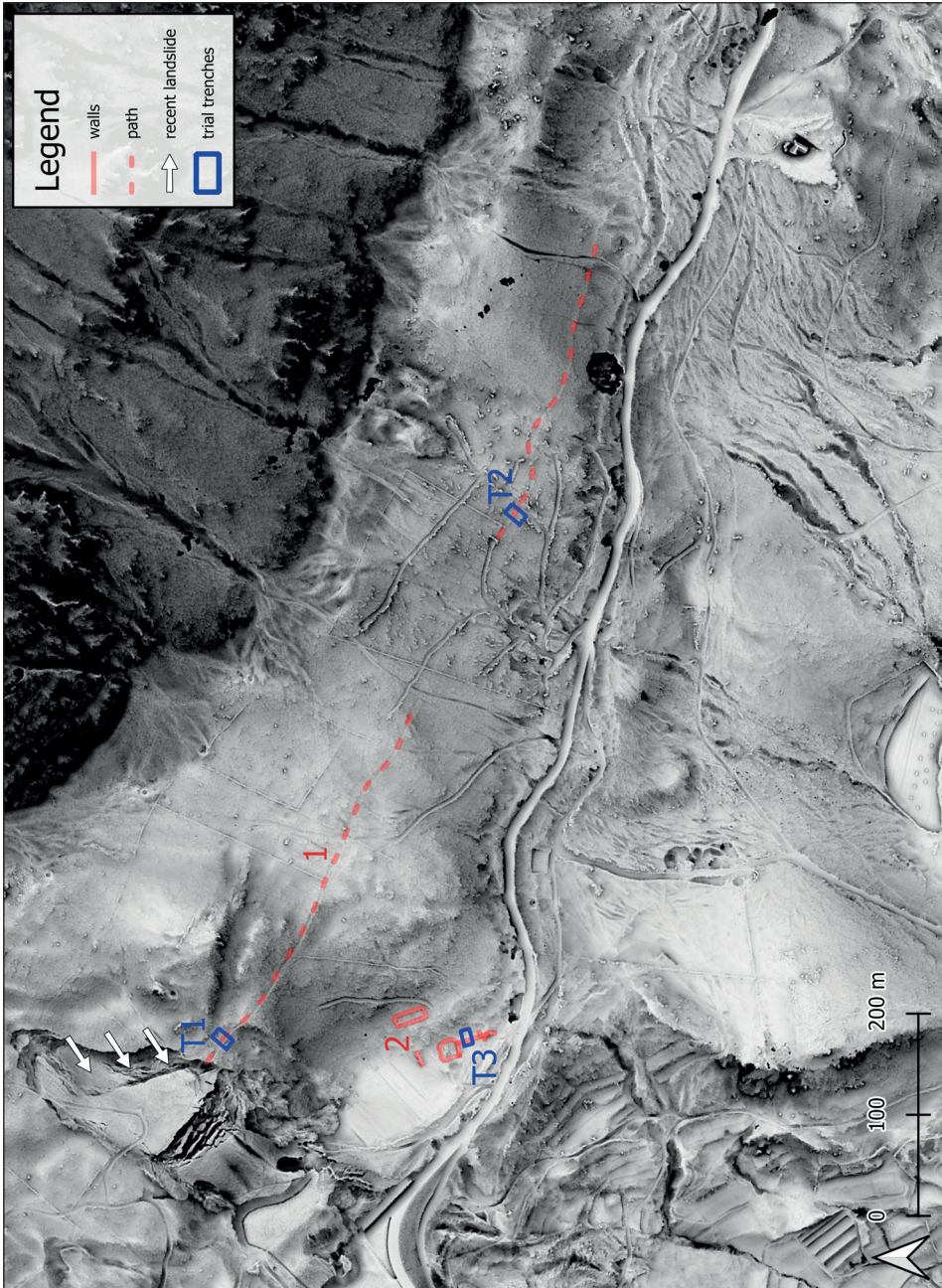


Fig. 6: Study area north of Budanje with the archaeological interpretation of the LiDAR-derived digital elevation model showing linear features indicating a path (1) and walls (2). The position of the trial trenches is marked with rectangles, the recent landslide scarp with arrows. Basemap: LiDAR ©Arso.

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).

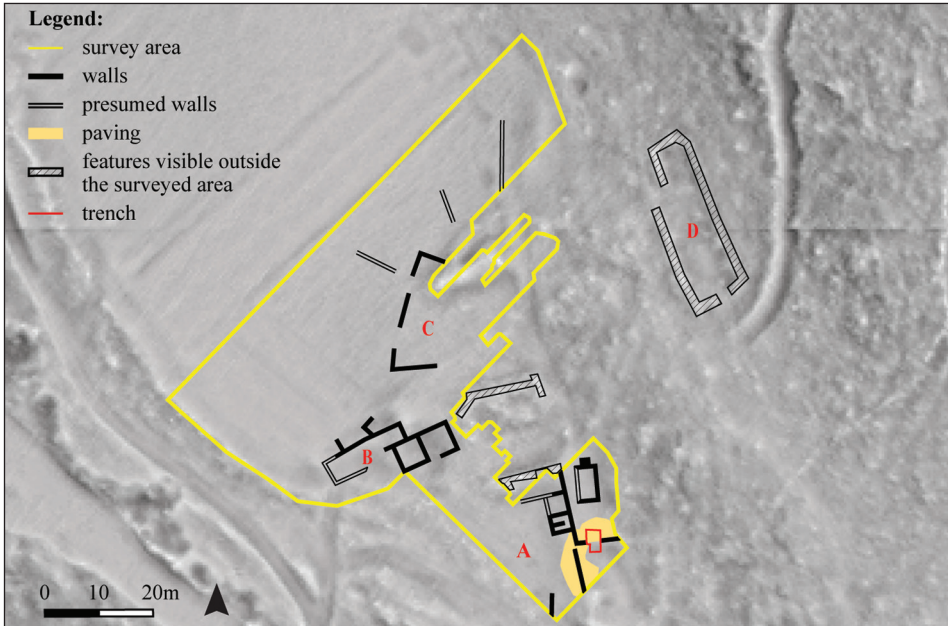


Fig. 7: Study area north of Budanje. Results of the ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey conducted in 2023: structures A, B, and C. Rectangular structure D is visible outside the surveyed area. Basemap: LiDAR ©Arso.



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 Poznan 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.

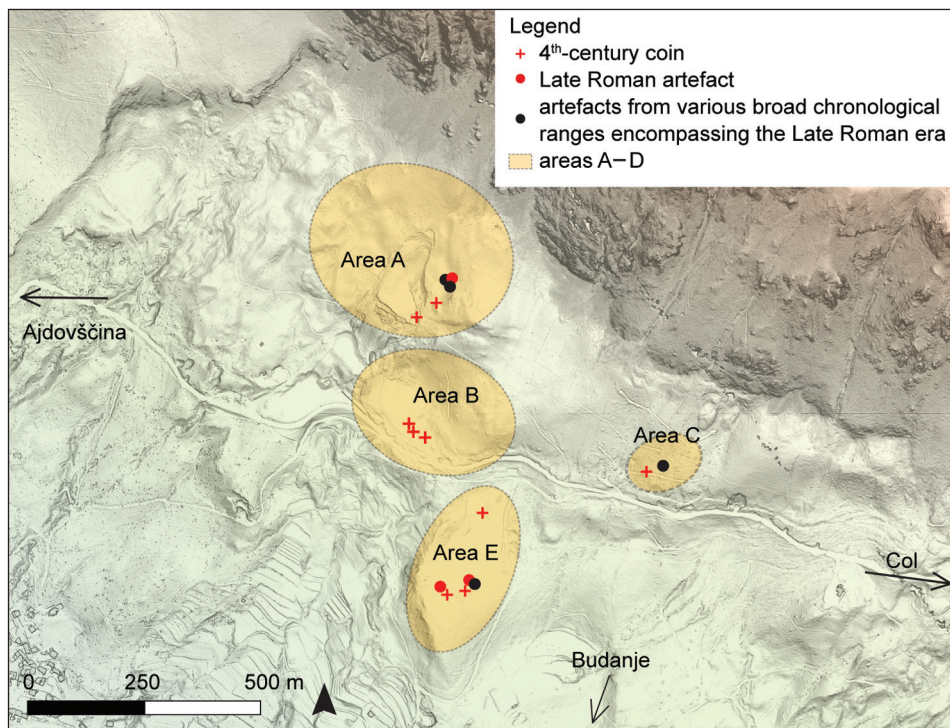


Fig. 9: Study area north of Budanje showing the findspots of Late Roman artefacts as well as artefacts from various broad chronological ranges encompassing the Late Roman era, unearthed during the 2022 field survey. Areas A, B, C and E of artefact concentrations are also indicated. Basemap: LiDAR © Arso.

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;

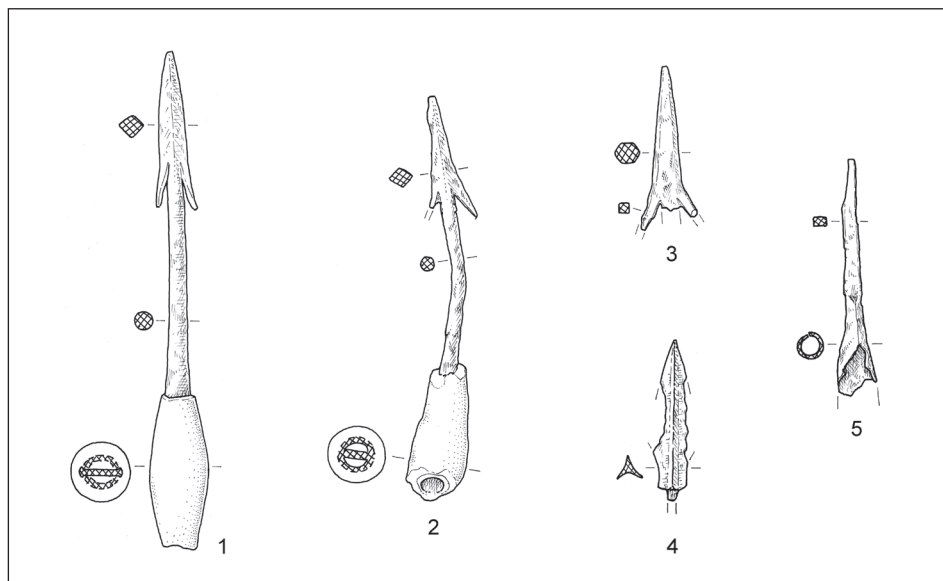


Fig. 10: Study area north of Budanje, artefacts found during the 2022 field surveys: *plumbatae* (1 – Area A; 2, 3 – Area E) and arrowheads (4 – Area C; 5 – Area E). Iron and lead (1–3), iron (4–5). Scale = 1:2.

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; Svobljak 2015; Urek, Kovačič 2020; Žerjal, Tratnik 2020.

²⁵ Šašel, Petru 1971; Kos 2012; Kos 2014; Višnjič, 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.

Acknowledgements

We thank Patricija Bratina (ZVKDS Območna enota Nova Gorica) for her invaluable cooperation, Ursula Schachinger (Department of Classics, University of Graz) for identifying the coins from the field surveys and the latest Roman coin from the Area A, the company GEARH d.o.o. for conducting the geophysical surveys, and the archaeologists from the STIK Group for their technical assistance during the fieldwork.

The authors acknowledge the financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency (as part of the P6-0283 research programme).

Illustrations: Figs. 1, 4, 9 (by Nejc Dolinar, Narodni muzej Slovenije); *Fig. 3* (by Primož Fučka); *Fig. 6* (by Matic Zupan, Narodni muzej Slovenije); *Fig. 7* (by Branko Mušič, GEARH d.o.o.); *Fig. 8* (photo: Matija Lukić, Skupina STIK); *Fig. 10* (drawings: Ida Murgelj, Narodni muzej Slovenije).

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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