
ROMAN AUXILIARY FORTS IN DALMATIA: THE CASE OF TILURIUM

Abstract: The legionary fortress of Tilurium (village of Gardun near Trilj in Croatia) has been the subject of archaeological excavations from 1997; and until now, four monographs have been published dealing with the material found in the campaigns from 1997 to 2010. One of the main achievements of these excavations is definitely the confirmation that the stone objects inside the fortress were not built prior to the reign of Claudius; which is something that has also been noted in the case of Burnum, the second legionary fortress in Dalmatia. However, previously there was no knowledge of the auxiliary forts near the fortress of Tilurium, which, of course, should have been expected, especially considering the case of the fortress of Burnum, for which we know was strengthened with four auxiliary forts, built probably during the reign of Claudius. In this paper, the author reveals the remains of the Roman auxiliary fort located on a karstic plateau above the river Cetina, approx. 550 meters south of the legionary fortress of Tilurium. It is highly evident that the fort controlled the crossing over the river Cetina, situated below the pre-Roman hillfort of Svalinova Gradina in Čaporice. According to the information from the ancient itineraries, it is most likely that the road station of Pons Tiluri should be located around that river crossing.

Keywords: *Tilurium; Roman auxiliary fort; river Cetina; river crossing; Pons Tiluri.*

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INTRODUCTION

Although the subject of Roman auxiliary units in Dalmatia has a long history of research, the topic was almost exclusively studied from the epigraphic point of view.¹ Archaeology, at the same time, had nothing or very little to offer; and, until 2000s, the only known auxiliary forts in Dalmatia were those at Makljenovac near Dobož,² built in the second half of 2nd century AD;³ and Gračine in Humac near Ljubuški, which was, until recently, even questioned to be the auxiliary fort.⁴ However, with the public access to various aerial photographs and satellite images, the knowledge of dispersion of Roman auxiliary forts in Dalmatia has considerably increased in the last couple of years. That can especially be said for the garrison of Burnum, which we now know was organised as a chain of forts located on the upper flow of the river Krka, consisting of one legionary fortress and four auxiliary forts.⁵

With the knowledge of the disposition of auxiliary forts in Burnum,

¹ Cf. ALFÖLDY 1962; ALFÖLDY 1987, 239-297.

² ČREMOŠNIK 1984.

³ In the 2nd half of 2nd century AD, the fort at Makljenovac was occupied by *cohors I milliaria Delmatarum*, cf. CESARIK/GLAVAŠ 2017, 213.

⁴ For the most recent study, see MILETIĆ 2017, with earlier bibliography.

⁵ CESARIK 2017; CESARIK 2018, 13-20.

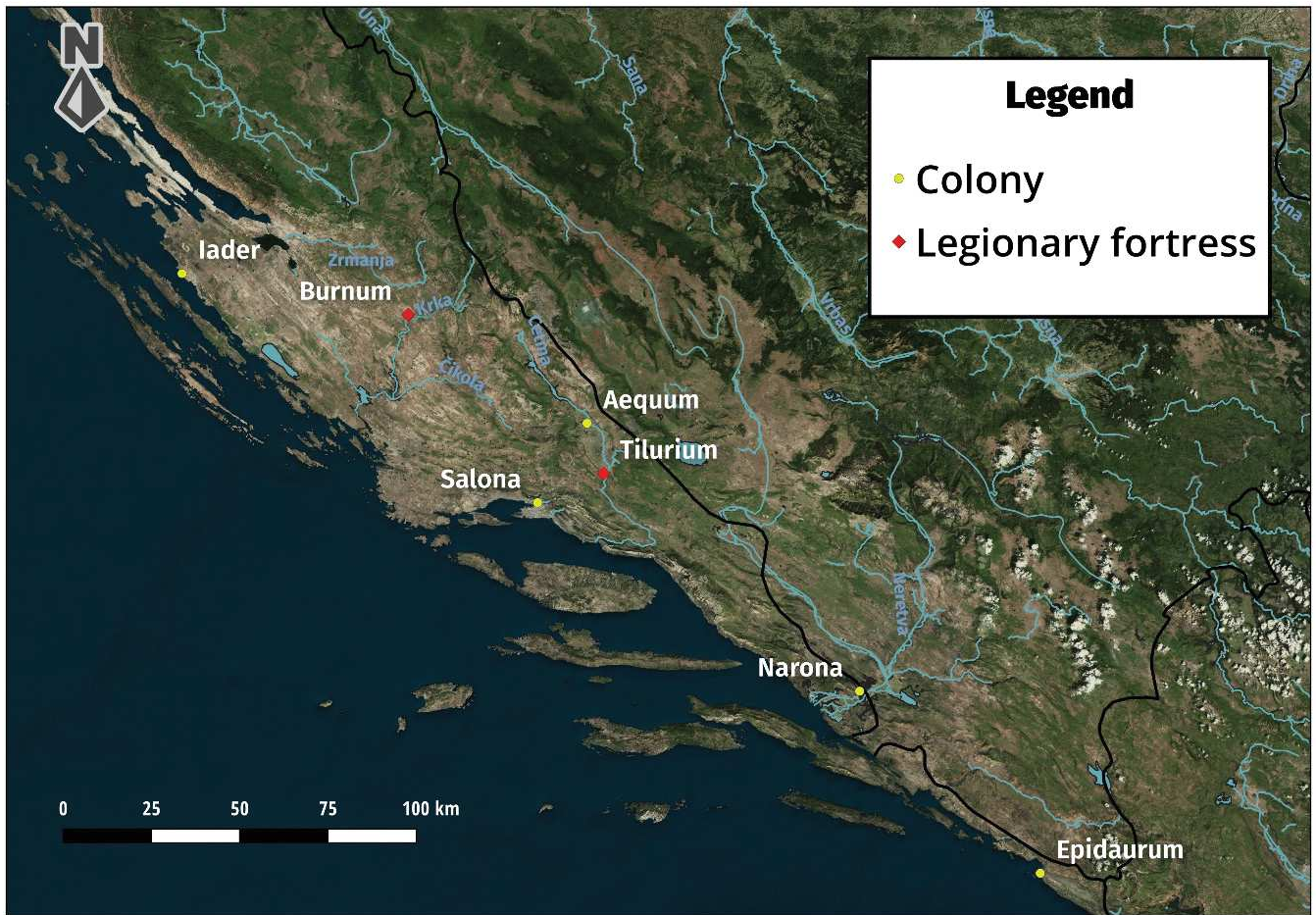


Fig. 1. Roman colonies and legionary fortresses in Dalmatia (made by L. Drahotusky-Bruketa).

I started to look for the similar forts in the hinterland of Salona, namely in the area of Tilverium, which was – after Burnum – the second legionary garrison in Dalmatia (Fig. 1). It was not just the finds of inscriptions of Roman auxiliary units at Tilverium that caught my attention;⁶ actually, it was the fact that Burnum and Tilverium definitely shared a similar process of formation, which is not only perceivable through the epigraphic testimonies,⁷ but through the archaeological material as well.⁸

The legionary fortress of Tilverium (village of Gardun near Trilj) has been the subject of archaeological excavations from 1997; and until now, four monographs have been published dealing with the material found in the campaigns from 1997 to 2010.⁹ One of the main achievements of these excavations is definitely the confirmation that the stone objects inside the fortress were not built prior to the reign of Claudius;¹⁰ which is something that has been noted in

⁶ For the inscriptions with the record of auxiliary units from Tilverium, see SANADER/TONČINIĆ 2010, 34-37.

⁷ The best epigraphic connection between these garrisons is seen through the title *Claudia Pia Fidelis*, which was given to *legio VII* (which occupied Tilverium) and *legio XI* (which occupied Burnum), after the suppression of the revolt of Scribonianus in AD 42 (cf. Cass. Dio 60.15.4). For *legio VII* in Dalmatia, see TONČINIĆ 2011; for *legio XI*, see BETZ 1939, 67-70.

⁸ See, for instance, the analysis of stamped pottery: ŠIMIĆ-KANAET 2003 (Tilverium); BORZIĆ 2013 (Burnum).

⁹ SANADER 2003; ŠIMIĆ-KANAET 2010; SANADER *et alii* 2014; SANADER *et alii* 2017.

¹⁰ ŠIMIĆ-KANAET/TONČINIĆ/RADOVIĆ 2005, 110-111; SANADER *et alii* 2014, 79-80.

the case of Burnum as well.¹¹ However, previously there was no knowledge of the auxiliary forts near the fortress of Tilverium, which, of course, should have been expected, especially considering the case of the fortress of Burnum, for which we know was strengthened with four auxiliary forts (Fig. 2), built probably during the reign of Claudius.¹²

TILURIUM: A MAJOR CROSSROAD OF CENTRAL DALMATIA

The first thing I would like to emphasize in presenting the recent discoveries on the organisation of the garrison of Tilverium, is the fact that Tilverium is marked as an important junction in *Tabula Peutingeriana*, as well as the *Antonine Itinerary* and *Ravenna Cosmography*.¹³ In *Tabula Peutingeriana*, Tilverium is indicated as a place where two major roads from Salona intersect (*Tab. Peut.* segm. 5). The first road leads to the colony of Narona, one of the most important cities in the province;¹⁴ while the second leads to Central Bosnia, and further to *Argentaria*, an especially important mining district.¹⁵ Since Tilverium is situated on a favourable position which enabled the crossings over the river Cetina, it is clear that both of these roads had to cross that river in order to reach their destinations.

That is especially potentiated in the *Ravenna*

¹¹ ZABEHLICKY-SCHEFFENEGGER/KANDLER 1979, 9-15.

¹² CESARIK 2018, 13-20.

¹³ Cf. SANADER/TONČINIĆ 2010, 38.

¹⁴ For that road, see BOJANOVSKI 1977.

¹⁵ For that road, see BOJANOVSKI 1974, 133-191.

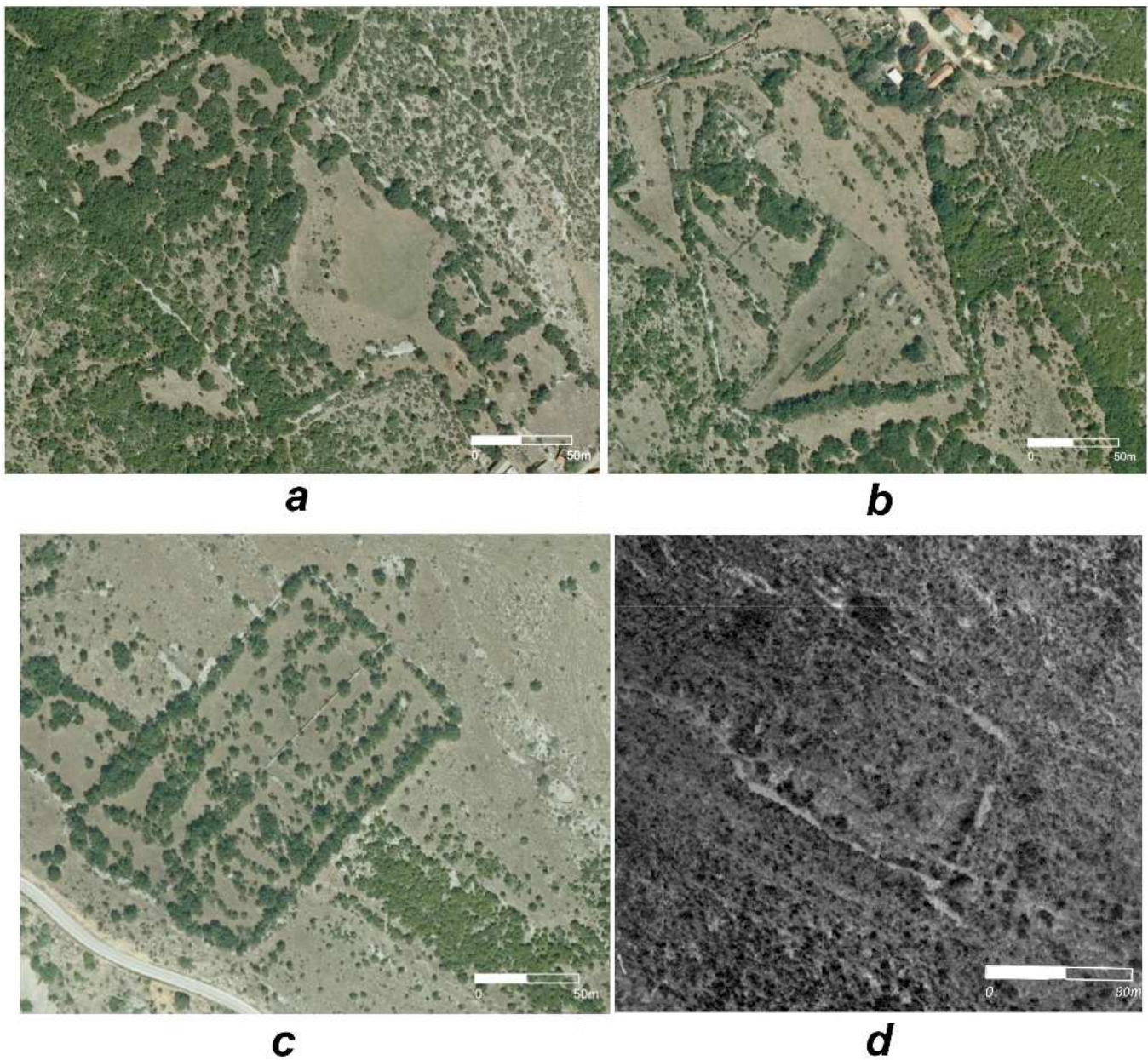


Fig. 2. Roman auxiliary forts on the river Krka. a. Dračevica (Ljavaje, Radučić); b. Bjelobrci (Donji Radići, Radučić); c. Jurine ograde (Ivoševci); d. Čučevo. Source: a-c (geoportal.dgu.hr); d (ispu.mgipu.hr).

Cosmography, in which, along with Tilurium (*Tilurion*), there is a record of another road station – Ponteluri (*Rav. Cosm.* 4.16 = 210.13); which is stated as Pons Tiluri in the Antonine Itinerary (*It. Ant.* 337.4). On both itineraries, the station is pinpointed on the road that leads to Narona. Even today, the city of Trilj, which is situated below the village of Gardun, has the same function as Tilurium once had. For instance, if one wants to go from Split to Central Bosnia, it is necessary to cross the river Cetina at Trilj, in order to go to the Kamensko border crossing, which further leads to Duvanjsko polje in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Similarly, to go to the valley of river Neretva, either from the area of Split or Sinj: it is necessary to cross the river at Trilj to go to Čaporice, and further to the area of Imotsko polje.

Thus, the crossing over the Cetina in Trilj was, until recently, the only option of connecting the area of Split with Duvanjsko and Imotsko polje. However, after the construction of A1 motorway, there is a faster alternative,

since there is an option of crossing river Cetina over the modern arch bridge of St. Michael, which is the part of a motorway approach road from Bisko to Čaporice (Fig. 3).

Since Tilurium is located on a karstic plateau above the city of Trilj, it would be illogical if one would need to go directly to the crossing at Trilj, in order to go from Salona to Narona. Such a crossing would be logical if one were to go to Narona from the colony of Aequum, which approximately corresponds with today's role of the city of Sinj; but in the case of the route from Split, one would make an unnecessary detour, since he would need to go north-east in the direction of Trilj, and after crossing the Cetina, he would turn south to reach Čaporice and continue south-east to Imotsko polje. Therefore, having in mind that the itineraries mention a station of Pons Tiluri on the route from Salona to Narona,¹⁶

¹⁶ The station of Pons Tiluri is mentioned on the road from Salona to Narona on the Antonine Itinerary (*It. Ant.* 337.5); while on the Ravenna Cosmography, Ponteluri is recorded on the road from Narona to Aequum: *Narron – Bigeste*



Fig. 3. Modern day roads in the area of Trilj (source: geoportal.dgu.hr).

it is most probable that such a station would be located south of the legionary fortress of Tilurium, at a place that provided a natural crossing over the river Cetina, and which opened a natural path (without unnecessary detours) to the area of Imotsko polje and further to the valley of river Neretva.

Having in mind the disposition of auxiliary forts on the river Krka, all of which are located near the crossings over the travertine barriers of its upper flow,¹⁷ it would be logical to assume that a similar thing happened on the river Cetina. Therefore, I thought that the Roman bridge on a route from Salona to Narona should be located somewhere near Čaporice and that such a bridge would have a similar role as today's bridge of St. Michael near Grabovina in Čaporice. Of course, the location of that bridge should not come into consideration since it crosses the steep canyon of the river Cetina in the form of an arch. In my opinion, the old bridge should be expected on a place which enables easy access to both sides of the river, as well as an easy connection of the river banks.

TRIAL AND ERROR: THE LOCATION OF OGRADE IN THE HAMLET OF ŽIVALJIĆI IN GARDUN

When I started the survey of the wider area of the *Aufustianis - Novas - Iulianum - Tilurion - Ponteluri - Aequon* (Rav. Cosm. 4.16 = 210.13). For the analysis of that part of Ravenna Cosmography, see ČAČE 1995, 41-43.

¹⁷ CESARIK 2018, 13-20.

legionary fortress at Tilurium, I noted a rectangular structure called 'Ograde' (meaning 'the fences', or 'enclosure'), located at the hamlet of Živaljići in Gardun (Fig. 4). Its shape immediately drew the attention since it is similar to the shape of the auxiliary forts in Burnum; and what is more, it encloses an area of 1.9 ha, which is almost the same surface area of the auxiliary fort at Jurine ograde, situated 270 m east of the legionary fortress of Burnum.¹⁸ Although there are many modern enclosures that could be connected with Ograde in Živaljići, it was a few other facts that made me think that this could actually be the location of the auxiliary fort, as well as the station of Pons Tiluri known from the itineraries.

Firstly, it is located near the place with the most natural access towards the Cetina, from both sides of the river; and what is more, that place naturally links the area of Vojnić and Gardun with the area of Čaporice, thus connecting the road from Salona with the natural route towards the Imotsko polje. Secondly, right across Ograde, on the left bank of the river, there is a pre-Roman hillfort of Svalinova Gradina, located exactly above the mentioned access to the banks of the Cetina (Fig. 5). Thirdly, in the immediate proximity of Ograde, there is a medieval fortress of Nutjak (Fig. 6); and finally, right beneath the Svalinova

¹⁸ CESARIK 2017, 365-366. For the trial excavation of that fort, see MILETIĆ 2011, 267-268.



0 50m
Fig. 4. Ograde in the hamlet of Živaljci in Gardun (source: geoportal.dgu.hr).



Fig. 5. The view of Svalinova Gradina from the right bank of the river Cetina (photo: N. Cesarik).



Fig. 6. River Cetina and the medieval fortress of Nutjak (photo: N. Cesarik).

Gradina, there is a place name called 'Mostina', which is an augmentative of a Croatian word 'most', meaning 'the bridge'. All of these were clear indicators that the location of Ograde could potentially be the Roman auxiliary fort located at the crossing over the river Cetina, which was previously controlled by the pre-Roman hillfort of Svalinova Gradina, and later, during the Middle Ages, by the fortress of Nutjak. All that was needed in order to confirm or confute such a hypothesis was to make a direct field survey.

THE HAZARDS OF WISFUL THINKING

I have managed to visit the site of Ograde two times; and even if I published a study in which I am proposing an option that this is the Roman auxiliary fort,¹⁹ I was never sure for that to be true. There were two main doubts which got me into denial. Firstly, I never found any piece of pottery on the site; and secondly, the enclosure was located beneath the karstic plateau, which I thought would be a logical surrounding for the positioning of a fort (Fig. 7). The latter fact was more emphasized when comparing the positions of auxiliary forts on the river Krka, all of which were built on a karstic plateau which secured the natural control of the river crossing. Therefore, it would be strange if the auxiliary fort at Tilurium was placed beneath the plateau which had the strategic position for controlling the area around it (Fig. 8).

With all said, I became further sceptical when I saw the layout of the lots on the Cadastral map of Habsburg Empire from 1831, in which there is no assumed north-eastern wall at Ograde (Fig. 9). However, I was always under the influence of thought that the natural access towards

¹⁹ CESARIK 2018a, 55-57.

the river Cetina, but also the location of pre-Roman hillfort and medieval fortress, as well as the place name 'Mostina', would be more than a coincidence if that location was never guarded by any kind of Roman fortification. Especially if we know of the existence of a legionary fortress 1.5 km to the north, including the record of a station of Pons Tiluri in the itineraries.

FAILURE IS THE MOTHER OF SUCCESS: THE AUXILIARY FORT AT TILURIUM

In order to find further evidence for confirming or rejecting my original hypothesis, I started another survey of satellite images and aerial photographs of the wider area around the legionary fortress of Tilurium. It did not take long before I spotted what I was searching for: The Roman auxiliary fort located on a karstic plateau near the hamlet of Golinjevo in Gardun (Fig. 10), placed above the enclosure of Ograde in Živaljići, some 550 meters south of the legionary fortress of Tilurium.

Even a simple look on the aerial photographs left me no doubt this site is actually the Roman auxiliary fort (Fig. 11), but I knew that I need to visit the site in Golinjevo, in order to provide the real archaeological evidence. I visited the site at the beginning of 2019 and found what I was looking for: there are surface finds of Roman pottery all around the site (especially the fragments of amphorae; Fig. 12), and there are clearly visible remains of foundations of the stone walls (Fig. 13-14).

The fort has a rectangular layout with rounded corners; however, following the terrain features, the north-eastern corner had to be cut off (Fig. 15), since there



Fig. 7. The karstic plateau above Ograde (photo: N. Cesarik).



Fig. 8. The plateau of Gardun, opposite of Svalinova Gradina (photo N. Cesarik).

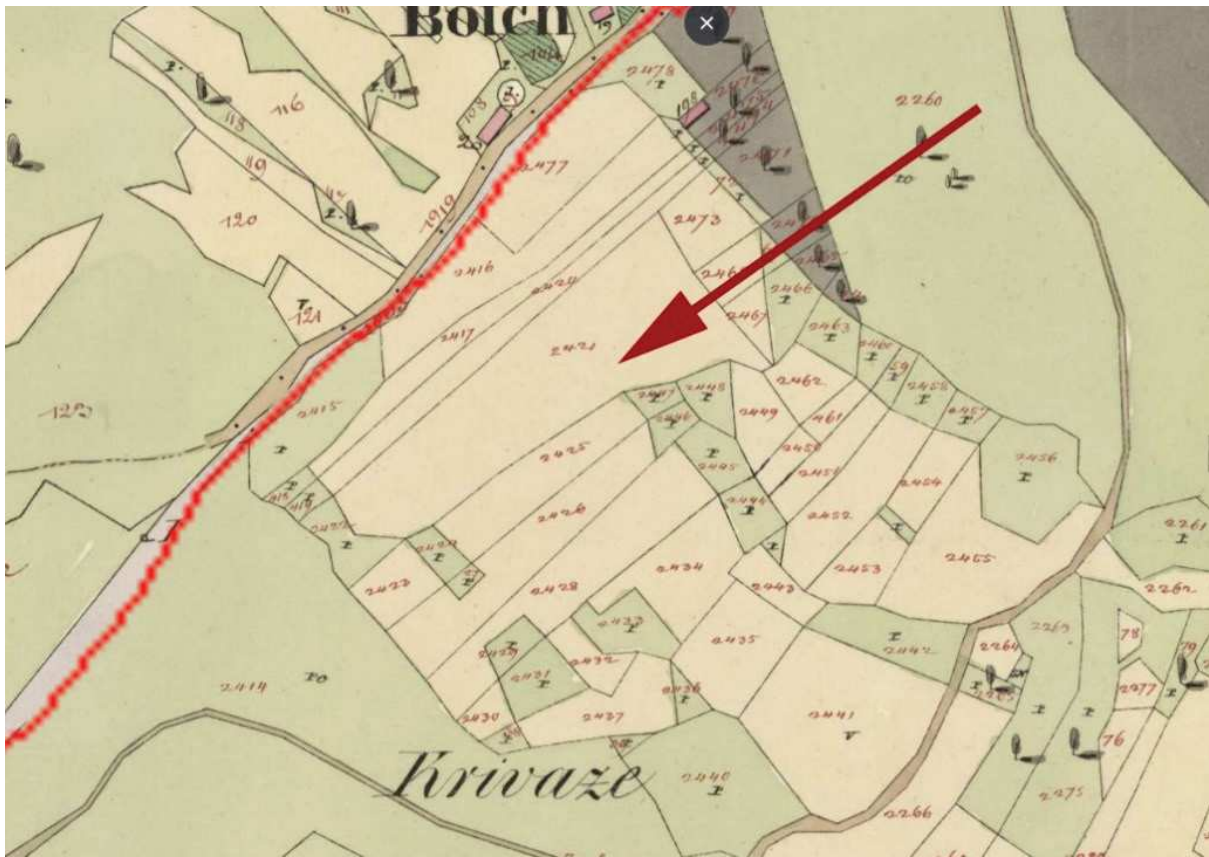


Fig. 9. Ograde on the cadastral map of the Habsburg Empire from 1831 (source: mapire.eu).



Fig. 10. Roman auxiliary fort near the hamlet of Golinjevo in Gardun (source: geoportal.dgu.hr)



Fig. 11. Auxiliary fort near Golinjevo on the aerial photograph from 1968 (source: ispu.mgipu.hr).



Fig. 12. Surface finds of pottery from the auxiliary fort (photo: N. Cesarik).



Fig. 13. Remains of the south-eastern rounded corner (photo: N. Cesarik).



Fig. 14. Remain of the northern wall (photo: N. Cesarik).



Fig. 15. The outline of the auxiliary fort near Golinjevo in Gardun (source: Google Earth).



Fig. 16. Remains of north-eastern corner, which has been cut off because of ravine (St. Peter's church in Gardun above; photo: N. Cesarik).



Fig. 17. The view of Svalinova Gradina from the auxiliary fort near Golinjevo in Gardun (photo: N. Cesarik).

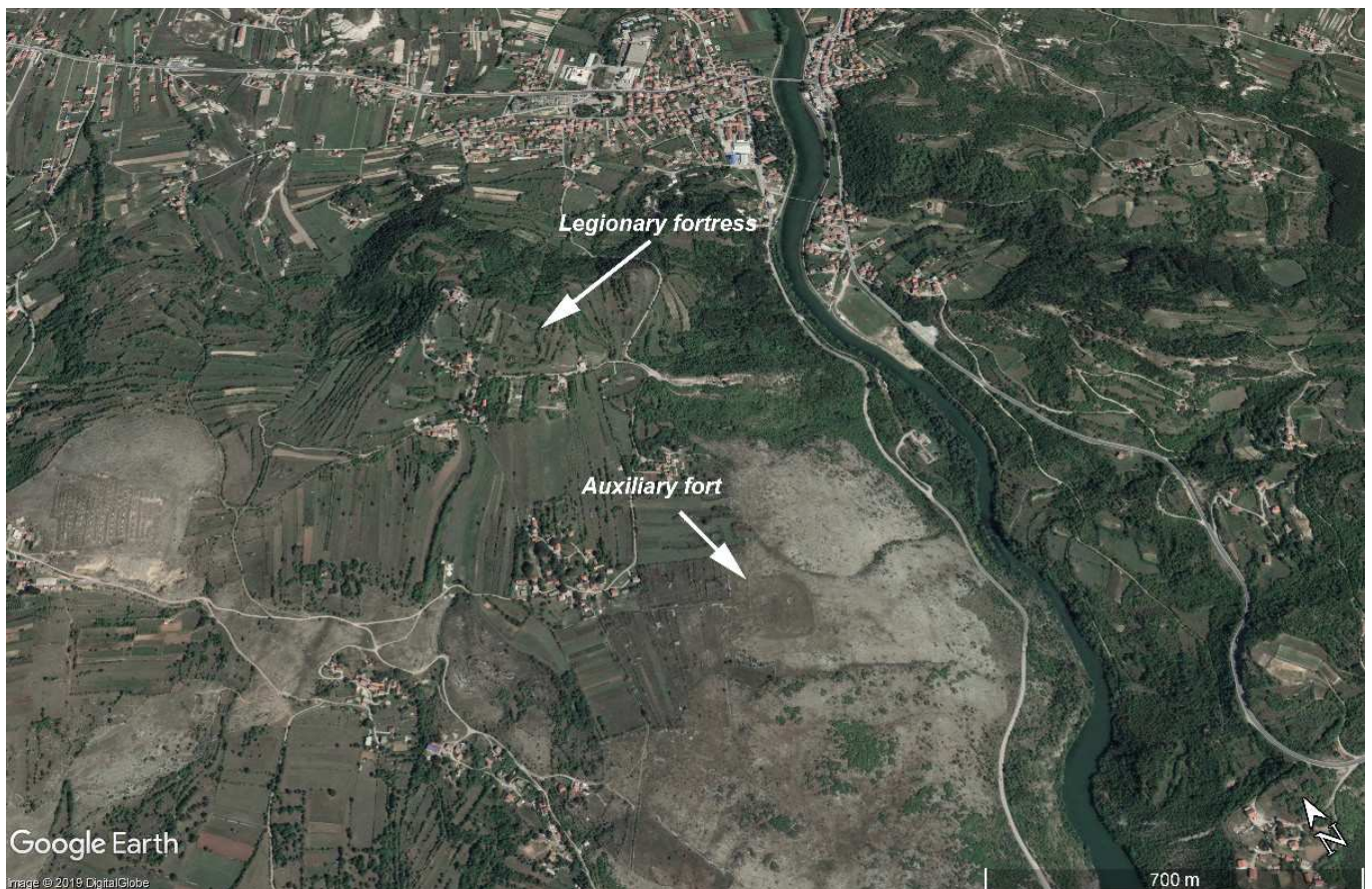


Fig. 18. Correlation between legionary fortress and auxiliary fort (source: Google Earth).



Fig. 19. Disposition of pre-Roman hillfort, Roman auxiliary fort, medieval fortress, and modern period drystone wall enclosure (source: Google Earth).

is a ravine which crushes into the river Cetina (Fig. 16). According to the measurement tools on Geoportal DGU, the total surface of enclosed area is approximately 1.6 ha, which places this fort in the most common group of Roman auxiliary forts in the means of an enclosed area.²⁰ The fort is located on a favourable position, providing excellent control of the area around it (Fig. 17), and it is situated only 550 meters south of the legionary fortress of Tilurium (Fig. 18).

After the discovery of the auxiliary fort near Golinjevo, which is placed on the plateau above the enclosure of Ograde in Živaljići (Fig. 19), it became clear that the hypothesis of Ograde being the Roman auxiliary fort should be rejected. It is most likely that Ograde is actually a drystone wall enclosure from the modern period, and there is no need for connecting it with the Roman era. However, I must stress that this is the typical case of trial and error, and if I had not spotted the enclosure of Ograde, I may have never realised that near it, there is a real auxiliary fort which controlled the crossing over the river Cetina. I can only say that failure is the mother of all success.

PONS TILURI

With all said, I must present another interesting fact considering the crossing over the Cetina below Svalinova Gradina. It is logical to assume that the Romans would place the bridge on a location with easy access towards the river; but knowing the comparanda from the river Krka, it

²⁰ JOHNSON 1983, 31.

is also likely that they would use a favourable position for connecting the banks of the river. Of course, in the cases of karst rivers, such places are usually found at travertine barriers; and having in mind that the river Cetina was regulated several times during the 20th century, it would not come as a surprise that once, below Svalinova Gradina, there was a travertine barrier which provided the easy connection between the river banks. On today's aerial photographs and satellite images, there are no visible remains of such formation. However, on the aerial photograph from 1968, there is a clear sight on the former travertine barrier at that place (Fig. 20),²¹ which is another indication that the road which connected Salona and Naron, once crossed the river Cetina below Svalinova Gradina. Considering the presence of a Roman auxiliary fort above the crossing, it seems logical to assume that the station of Pons Tiluri should be located around that place (Fig. 21).

However, more detailed information about the crossing over the river Cetina, as well as the auxiliary fort at Golinjevo in Gardun, can only be provided by means of further geophysical prospection and archaeological excavations. Since the fort at Golinjevo is in whole placed on a state lot – with no recent constructions whatsoever – the site provides an excellent opportunity for conducting thorough archaeological excavations. At this point, it would

²¹ The water-level has probably grown because of construction of the Dale Hydroelectric Power Plant, which is located approx. 3 km downstream of Svalinova Gradina.



Fig. 20. Remains of travertine barrier on the river Cetina below Svalinova Gradina. On the left: 2011 aerial photograph; on the right: 1968 aerial photograph (source: ispu.mgipu.hr).

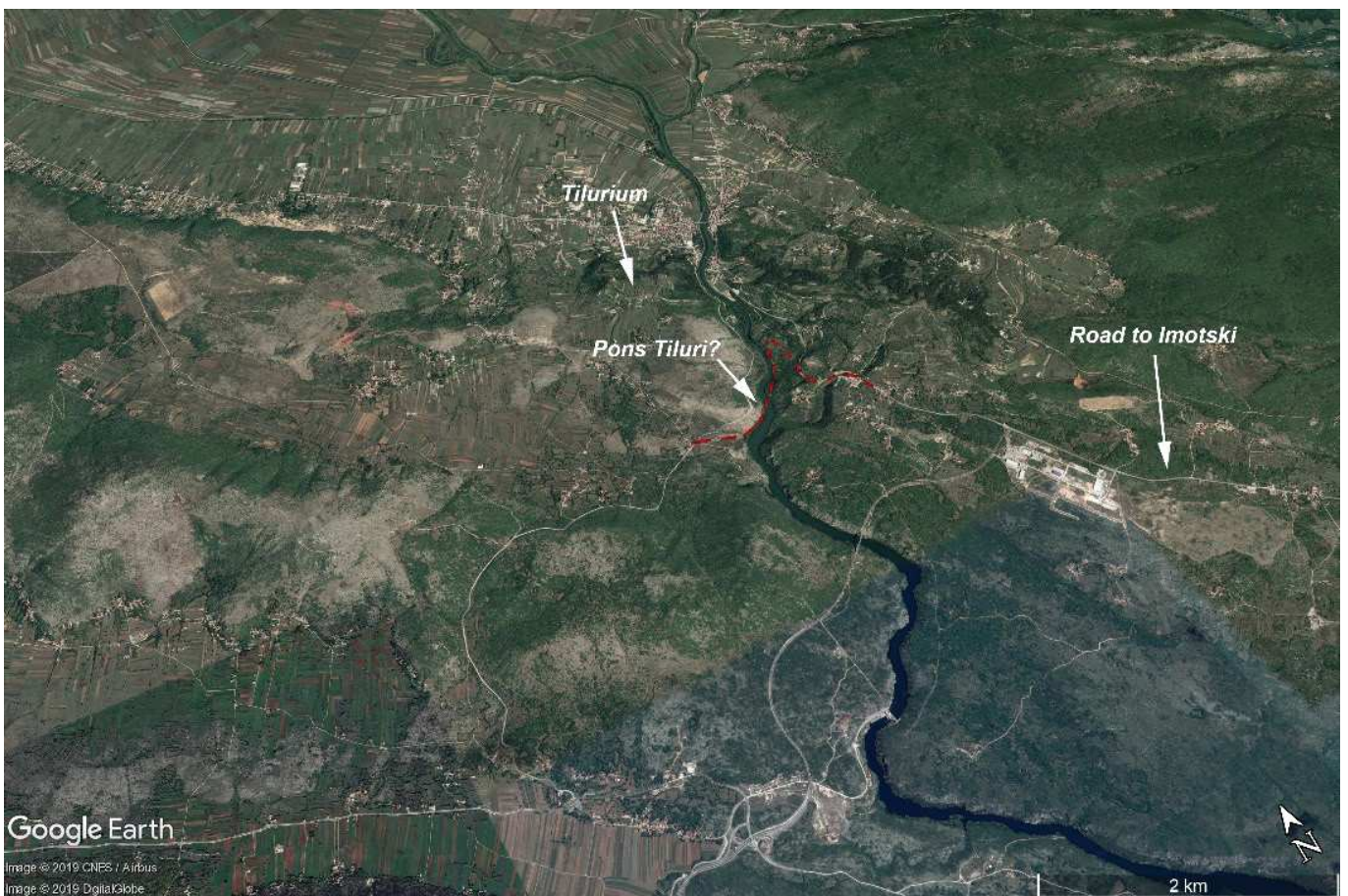


Fig. 21. The possible location of Roman bridge over the river Cetina and the location of a road station Pons Tiluri (source: Google Earth).

be fruitless to assume when the fort was constructed, as well as for how long it was occupied, but I am hoping that the answers to these questions will emerge in the near future.

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