

The Inscription of Medicus of the XIth Legion from Burnum

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ABSTRACT

The archaeological site at Burnum is the subject of scientific research conducted since 2003 in the area of the ancient agglomeration by the members of the Chair of Ancient Archaeology of the Department of Archaeology of the University of Zadar, accompanied by partners – Krka National Park, City Museum of Drniš and Laboratory of Archaeological and Topographic Survey of the Department of Archaeology of the University of Bologna. Epigraphic and onomastic analysis of known inscriptions has one of the main roles within the interdisciplinary studies and, in a matter of study of a mere site, is in the scientific focus since the 19th century. Since Burnum becomes a military stronghold at the beginning of the 1st century AD on which legionary and auxiliary forts have been built, it is not surprising that the majority of the inscriptions are mentioning soldiers of units that have been placed at Burnum. Majority of the inscriptions mention the soldiers of the XIth legion – a unit which was stationed at Burnum from 10 to 69 AD. This article deals with another piece of epigraphic evidence of the military personnel of the XIth legion in the province of Dalmatia, where a military physician (medicus legionis XI) has been confirmed for the first time. It is very important to mention that we are dealing with the oldest known physician who held his medical service on the territory of the Roman province of Dalmatia.

Key words: roman army physician, legio XI, Burnum, latin epigraphy, funerary stele

Introduction

Roman legionary fortress of Burnum was built shortly after the end of the bloody Batonian uprising (*bellum Batonianum*) at an extremely favorable strategic point which was previously controlled by the Liburnian *Burnistae*. Their center was located at the *oppidum* on the Gradina near Puljani – a place which allowed for the control of very important river crossings over the river Krka. Since Krka (*Titius flumen*) represented a natural border between ethnic communities of Liburnians and the *Delmatae*, natural crossings were crucial points in cultural and economic fluctuation between these communities. The location of the fortress was very well chosen taking in consideration macro and micro characteristics of the landscape, but also political and strategic circumstances of the time, because the fortress was built on the territory of the loyal Liburnians, from where Romans could penetrate into the territory of rebellious *Delmatae*¹.

Burnum: Present State of Research

From the archaeological point of view, Burnum represents a wide agglomeration which consists of a legionary

fortress and its accompanied buildings (amphitheater, campus), auxiliary camp, civilian *canabae* scattered around the military objects and a hill-fort near Puljani where local *Burnistae* were settled (Figure 1). The first archaeological excavation of Burnum was undertaken at the beginning of the 20th century by the Archaeological Institute of Wien in 1912/1913². The same Institute initiated a revision of the previous excavations of the fortress in 1973/1974³ and at same time the Archaeological Museum Zadar started the research of the legionary aqueduct Plavno polje – Burnum, with B. Ilakovac at the head⁴. Systematic archaeological research of Burnum started in 2003 with the cooperation of the Chair of Ancient Archaeology of the Department of Archaeology of the University of Zadar, together with Krka National Park, City Museum of Drniš and Laboratory of Archaeological and Topographic Survey of the Department of Archaeology of the University of Bologna. Until today, the most well known discovery to the public was the excavation and the presentation of Burnum's amphitheater, which gave excellent results and eliminated all doubts

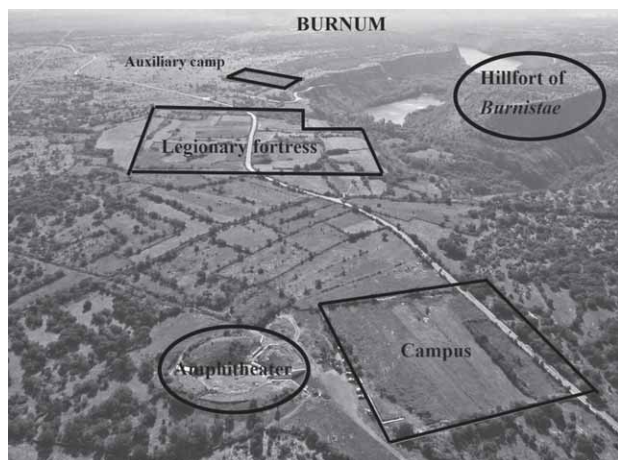


Fig. 1. The agglomeration Burnum.

whether Burnum had an amphitheater or not⁵. In the recent few years a considerable number of papers have been published on the subject of the archaeological site of Burnum. This improved our knowledge of the territory of Burnum, its main components⁶, geographical and strategic advantages⁷, building activity⁸, small archaeological finds and routes which supplied the whole agglomeration^{9–11}. In addition, it is important to stress out that some part of the agglomeration was conducted to geophysical survey, using non-invasive methods^{12,13}. With that kind of survey the whole project was upgraded to a level which follows the most contemporary archaeological trends.

The epigraphic sources

However, as much as the new data improves our knowledge about the whole site, the main source for understanding the historical contents and the general development of the agglomeration itself, are definitely epigraphic monuments¹⁴. Their analysis and classification were subjects of debate since the 19th century and so far, the wider area of Burnum has yielded over a hundred such monuments. Most of them were published in the third part of the capital work *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (standard abbreviation is *CIL* III) initiated by great Theodor Mommsen, but also in the works of Anna and Jaro Šašel *Inscriptiones latinae quae in Iugoslavia...* (standard abbreviation is *ILJug*)^{15–19}. Through them we are able to gather information about the movements of military units (legionary and auxiliary), building activities inside the agglomeration, conformation of historical events (e.g. a famous conspiracy of Scribonianus in AD 42), but also the information of civil population which settled the *canabae* around the fortress – due to commercial and likewise reasons – forming with soldiers one of the most populated centers in Roman Dalmatia in the 1st century AD. Since Burnum was one of the two main military strongholds in Dalmatia (the other was Tilverium on the river Cetina²⁰), it is logical that the most of the inscriptions mention the individuals of military profession,

most of whom belonged to the members of the XIth legion – the unit which stationed at Burnum for by far the longest period of time (since 10 to 69 AD) and whose members originally built the permanent fortress and satellite fortlets.

The Inscriptions of the XIth Legion

Typologically, all the inscriptions of the members of the XIth legion from Burnum are funerary in character, and in epigraphically point of view, they are very simple and typical with content that generally does not disrupt the usual pattern. An individual inscription usually mentions the nomination of the deceased, his origins and rank, as well as the number of years lived and served in the army. The nomenclature of the Burnum inscriptions is a typical reflection of the period of the early Principate in the province of Dalmatia. The naming of the deceased soldiers is, in general, consisted of *praenomen*, *nomen*, filiation, and *cognomen* – which infrequently occur on the monuments dated before AD 42. On the issue of military ranks, most of the inscriptions mention ordinary soldiers (*milites gregarii*), which represented the majority of the Roman legion. Several non-commissioned officers (*principales*) have also been confirmed, along with some commissioned officers (*centuriones*) and a couple of senior officers (one prefect of the camp, as well as two *primipilares*). In addition, four of the soldiers gained the status of veterans, after completing their regular military service^{21–23}. The majority of the inscriptions have been found in the close proximity of the fortress. However, the presence of the soldiers of the XIth legion has also been confirmed in Mokro Polje, Pađeni, Strimica, Kapitul near Knin, Mratovo and Roški slap. Due to the dispersion of the inscriptions, as well as the geomorphological characteristic of the wider Burnum area, we are able to define the boundaries of the legionary territory in detail.

New evidence

This contribution brings evidence of yet another inscription mentioning a member of the XIth legion from Burnum, which by all means represents an undocumented function of the military personnel of the XIth legion in the province of Dalmatia. The monument has been seen and sketched by a Croatian Franciscan Lujo Marun in 1908 (Figure 2) but it has not been viewed by the public until the Museum of Croatian Archaeological Monuments published Marun's Antiquarian's Journals²⁴. The revision of D. Marsić revealed that the monument is located in the Ancient Department of the Archeological Museum Zadar (inv. no. A27656), and has for the first time presented a photographic record of the monument²⁵. However, the content of the inscription remained unsolved.

The monument we are dealing with (Figure 3) is an upper right remnant of a funerary stele of an architectural composition (height: 96 cm; width: 46 cm; thickness: 21 cm). What remained of the inscription are seven



Fig. 2. L. Marun's sketch of the monument from Burnum.



Fig. 3. Funerary stele from Burnum.

lines carved with regular capital. By comparing Marun's sketch and the current state of the monument the following content can be seen:

ARIUS
RISTO
DICUS
XI
E
US
T

Discussion

Some minor damage have occurred to the epitaph since Marun's discovery: the letter D in the third line of the inscription is barely seen today (the only thing left is the part of the curve of the letter), whereas it is clearly visible on the Marun's sketch; the letter E below the fourth line – undoubtedly a part of the funerary formulation *h(ic) s(itus) e(st)* – is completely missing today. Considering the graphemes XI in the fourth line as well as the context of the location where the inscription was found (the legionary fortress in Burnum which was garrisoned by the XIth legion) it is clear that we are dealing with a monument dedicated to a member of the XIth legion. What is interesting is that the content of the third line (letters DICUS) suggests that the epitaph is addressed to a legionary physician (*medicus legionis*). Bearing that in mind, it is pure luck that a part of a central pedimental relief has been preserved (the left lock of Gorgon's hair and a part of her left cheek) which enabled the calculation of the original width of the epitaph (40 cm). Even by putting this information aside, two facts

advocate that the content of the third line refers to a military function (both of which are related to the clearly structured pattern of Burnum inscriptions):

1. If the content of the second line refers to a *cognomen* – e.g. [A]risto (or some of the *cognomina* with a prefix *Aristo*, e.g. *Aristonus* etc.²⁶ if the name is adjacent in the following line) – than the content of the third line cannot depict an *origo*, because it is clear that the noun is in the nominative case. Accordingly, the only solution possible is that we are dealing with a military function.

2. If the content of the second line refers to an *origo* (it is possible that the noun is in ablative case) the third line cannot imply a *cognomen* due to the fact that the order of elements in epitaphs is clearly uniformed: *origo* is stated after the filiation and *tribus* in a *dua nomina* (*praenomen + nomen*) form; or after the *cognomen* in a *tria nomina* form (the *cognomen* is always stated prior to the *origo*). Therefore, the only option is, again, an allegation of a military function.

Moreover, the availability of the calculation of the original width combined with the state of the fourth line of the epitaph leaves no doubt in relation to the matter in question: it is obvious that originally only the letters LEG could be situated in the fourth line which conclusively means that the military function could not be stated in it. Hence, the content of the third line definitively depicts a military function. Considering that no other function except *medicus* ends with the suffix –DICUS (or even –ICUS), this monument undoubtedly addresses a physician of the XIth legion. Having in mind the width of the epitaph, the *cognomen* of the deceased could not continue in the line below which makes it clear that the name of the deceased was *Aristo*. His name is ev-

idently of the Greek descent which fits in perfectly with the conclusion that the deceased was a *medicus* – because many of the known military *medici* are in fact of oriental origins²⁷.

At the beginning of the first line a serif of a letter whose right part is placed at an angle (such as the letters K, V, Y and X) is visible and is undoubtedly a part of the letter V, which is a part of a nomen *Varius*, noted, *inter alia*, among the soldiers of the XIth (*ILJug* 2098 – *Lucius Varius*) as well as the VIIth legion (*ILJug* 1921 – *Titus Varius*) in Dalmatia. *Praenomen* »*Lucius*« has only been assumed in the reconstruction (Figure 4) because it commonly follows the *nomen* »*Varius*« in the inscriptions of the province of Dalmatia²⁸. However, this cannot be known for certain, especially because the inscription of the member of the VIIth legion denotes a *Titus Varius*. There could not have been enough space in the second line for expressing the *tribus* which means that at the beginning of this line only a filiation was noted – which is not uncommon among the first century monuments in Roman Dalmatia (e.g. two soldiers from the VIIth legion: *CIL* III, 8764 – *C. Vatinius Sef. f. Capito*; *CIL* III, 9712 – *L. Vegnonius L. f.*)²⁹. On the other hand, the *tribus* is not stated on inscriptions without the filiation. The letters which are preserved at the end of the last two lines of the conserved part of the epitaph surely belonged to the names of one or two of the commemorators, which is a practice well documented on inscriptions from Burnum, but due to the excessive fragmentation of the lines nothing can be said about these men. It is most likely they (if there were two of them) were also members of the XIth legion, although such a matter is definitely confirmed only in one case (*ILJug* 836).

The restitution of the inscription is as follows:

[L(ucius?) V]arius / [L(uci?) f(ilius)]
A]risto / [me]dicus / [leg(ionis)] XI / [h(ic) s(itus)]
e(st) / [—]us / [—]t / [&

Roman Military Physicians

This inscription mentions the only directly confirmed physician of any military unit in the province of Dalmatia, as well as the oldest known doctor who served his medical practice in that area. Up to this date, a monument of *Rufus*, a soldier of the *legio XI Claudia pia fidelis*, whose funerary stele depicted an *etui* with surgical instruments, was known^{30–32}. However, that fact did not specify him as a *medicus* for the inscription clearly states he was an ordinary soldier (*miles legionis*). Undoubtedly, *Rufus* was a member of Burnum's *valetudinarium*, but was not the same rank as a *medicus* was. He clearly served in the ranks, and was for some time attached to the medical staff and hierarchically positioned below the post of a *medicus*. In that view, the expressions *medicus ordinarius* and *miles medicus* are very interesting. It is probable that these expressions represented a distinction between members of medical staff who served in the ranks (*in ordine militat*) as opposed to those who came to



Fig. 4. Ideal reconstruction of the funerary stele of Varius Aristo, medicus of the XIth legion from Burnum (drawing made by Valeria Medić).

their posts of physicians directly from civilian life. *Rufus* was probably just a medical orderly because his inscription clearly states he was an ordinary *miles*, but according to the fact that he was attached to medical staff leaves a possibility that *Rufus* was one of the soldiers who were exempt from the physical work (*immunes*). Although some sources state differently (Justinian's *Digest* 50.6.7 states that the military *medici* belonged to the group of *immunes*) it is most probable that the military *medici* were a part of the *principales*, and were on a double pay (*duplicarii*) in comparison to ordinary *militēs*³³. The epigraphic sources refer to different expressions and titles for the staff of the legionary *valetudinarium*. However, the term *medicus legionis* is by far the most frequent one^{34,35}.

Dating of the Monument

Considering the fact that on this monument the honorary title *Claudia pia fidelis* was omitted, it would be logical to conclude that it was erected prior to the year 42 AD (when Emperor Claudius rewarded the Dalmatian legions with an honorary title, due to their fidelity during the conspiracy of Scribonianus)³⁶. However, the lack of honorary titles does not necessarily mean that an inscription dates before the year 42 AD, since on several boundary inscriptions³⁷, erected during the rule of Nero and the government of Aulus Ducenius Geminus (63–67 AD), the name of the XIth legion is stated without the honorary titles. This nicely indicates that only the presence of honorary titles *Claudia pia fidelis* can be used as a *terminus post quem* when dating the inscriptions of the soldiers of the VIIth and XIth legion, whereas their ab-

sence can only be used as a guideline of an earlier dating of a monument and not as an excluding fact.

Conclusion

This article brought yet another evidence of a member of the XIth legion, which was stationed in the area of the Roman province of Dalmatia, in the military fortress of Burnum, approximately 2000 years ago. An exceptionally interesting fact is the acknowledgment that the inscription mentions a physician of the stated legion – *Varius Aristo*. Judging by the nomenclature of the deceased, it is evident that he was of oriental origin which fits the conclusion of him being a military *medicus* – because the majority of Roman military physicians had typical Greek names. Although the monument of *Rufus*, a soldier of the XIth legion from Burnum, was brought to our knowledge earlier and whose lower part depicted an *etui* with surgical instruments which indicates that *Rufus* was attached to the *valetudinarium* of Burnum, *Varius Aristo* is the only epigraphically confirmed physi-

cian of any military unit in the area of the Roman province of Dalmatia. As opposed to *Rufus*, who was an ordinary soldier (*miles*) and served in the ranks, *Aristo* was a »*medicus*« in the proper sense of the word and probably a member of the *principales* of the XIth legion on a double pay. It is important to note that *Varius Aristo* is currently the oldest known physician who practiced his medical service in the province of Dalmatia nearly 2000 years ago.

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NATPIS LIJEČNIKA XI. LEGIJE IZ BURNUMA

SAŽETAK

Arheološki lokalitet Burnum predmet je znanstvenih istraživanja koja od godine 2003. na prostoru antičke aglomeracije provode djelatnici Katedre za antičku arheologiju Odjela za arheologiju Sveučilišta u Zadru u suradnji s Nacionalnim parkom Krka, Gradskim muzejom u Drnišu i Laboratorijem za istraživanje arheoloških struktura Odjela za arheologiju Sveučilišta u Bolonji. U sklopu kompleksnih istraživanja jednu od najvažnijih uloga ima epigrafska i onomastička analiza poznate natpisne građe, koja je u pogledu samoga lokaliteta u znanstvenom fokusu još od 19. stoljeća. Budući da Burnum, početkom 1. stoljeća, postaje rimsko vojno uporište na čijem su prostoru izgrađeni legijski i auxilijarni logor, logično je da natpisna građa najvećim dijelom spominje vojnike onih postrojbi koje su boravile u njima. Brojnošću svakako prednjače spomenici vojnika XI. legije – postrojbe koja je najduže boravila u Burnumu (od oko 10. do 69. godine). Ovaj rad donosi još jednu epigrafsku spoznaju o vojnom kadru XI. legije u provinciji Dalmaciji, gdje je po prvi puta dokumentiran vojni liječnik (*medicus legionis XI*). Samim time, vrlo je važno i spomenuti da se radi o najstarijem poznatom liječniku koji je svoju medicinsku službu obavljao na prostoru koji je nekada obuhvaćao rimsku provinciju Dalmaciju.