

# River Crossings and Roman Auxiliary Forts: A New Evidence from the River Krka

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## ABSTRACT

*The author provides a new evidence of the Roman auxiliary fort located on the right bank of the River Krka, in the cadastral municipality of Radučić village, next to the hamlet of Ljevaje. The fort was a part of the garrison of Burnum, which controlled the main crossing over the River Krka, i.e. the crossing over the former travertine barrier of Čavlinov buk. This evidence provides a new insight of the layout of garrison of Burnum, which was organized in a very different way than previously thought. It has been established that the Roman military garrison of Burnum was formed along the River Krka, from Radučić to Ivoševci, with the objective of controlling the key crossings over the travertine barriers of Čavlinov buk, Bilušića buk, Brljan and Manojlovac. Therefore, alongside the legionary fortress, three auxiliary forts were placed in the immediate vicinity of these river crossings.*

**Key words:** Burnum, River Krka, Roman auxiliary fort, river crossings, travertine barriers, Radučić, Ljevaje, Čavlinov buk

## Introduction

Somewhere between the end of the Great War in Illyricum (AD 6-9) and the first years of the reign of Tiberius (AD 14-37), on the right bank of the River Krka, a Roman military garrison of Burnum, with a permanent legionary fortress, was established<sup>1-2</sup>. Situated on the far edge of the eastern Bukovica Plateau, it was, in broader terms, a connection between several separate geographic entirities, previously occupied by various ethnic groups of pre-Roman Illyricum. The legionary fortress was situated around the upper flow of the River Krka, which represented the main border between the Liburnian and Delmatian ethnic communities. To the north of the legionary fortress, lies Mokro Polje, where the main passage over the River Zrmanja is found, which then runs along the lower slopes of Kom (the easternmost part of Velebit Mountain), opening the pathway to upper Zrmanja and further to Lika, i.e. to the territory of the Japodes. This path represents by far the most natural and easiest connection between Dalmatia and inland Croatia.

To the west of the legionary encampment lies the very important area of Kninsko polje. Through the valley of the River Butižnica, it opens a passageway towards Strmica, which was connected by the valley of Mračaj with Bosansko Grahovo, i.e. with the territory of the Ditiones. Thro-

ugh the valley of Krčić, Kninsko polje was also connected with the valley of the River Cetina. The valley of River Butižnica opens another important path, which leads to Plavno through the valley of Radljevac. Plavno is a very specific area with an extremely rich water sources, and it could be also entered by the path which leads over Padene and Oton. On the wider territory of the legionary fortress, alongside the River Krka, there are several travertine barriers (Čavlinov buk, Bilušića buk, Brljan, Manojlovac) that formed the natural river crossings to the territory of the Delmatae. To the south of the encampment, there is another important river crossing – the one over the travertine barrier of Roški slap (Fig. 1).

## State of Research

Numerous archaeological finds and architectural remains are a testament to various constructions in the wider area of the legionary fortress, of which the ruins of an amphitheatre and aqueduct stand out<sup>3-5</sup>. The latter carried water from Plavno, through the valley of Radljevac and further over Stara Straža to the legionary fortress<sup>6</sup>. There are also visible remains of a wide Roman road net-

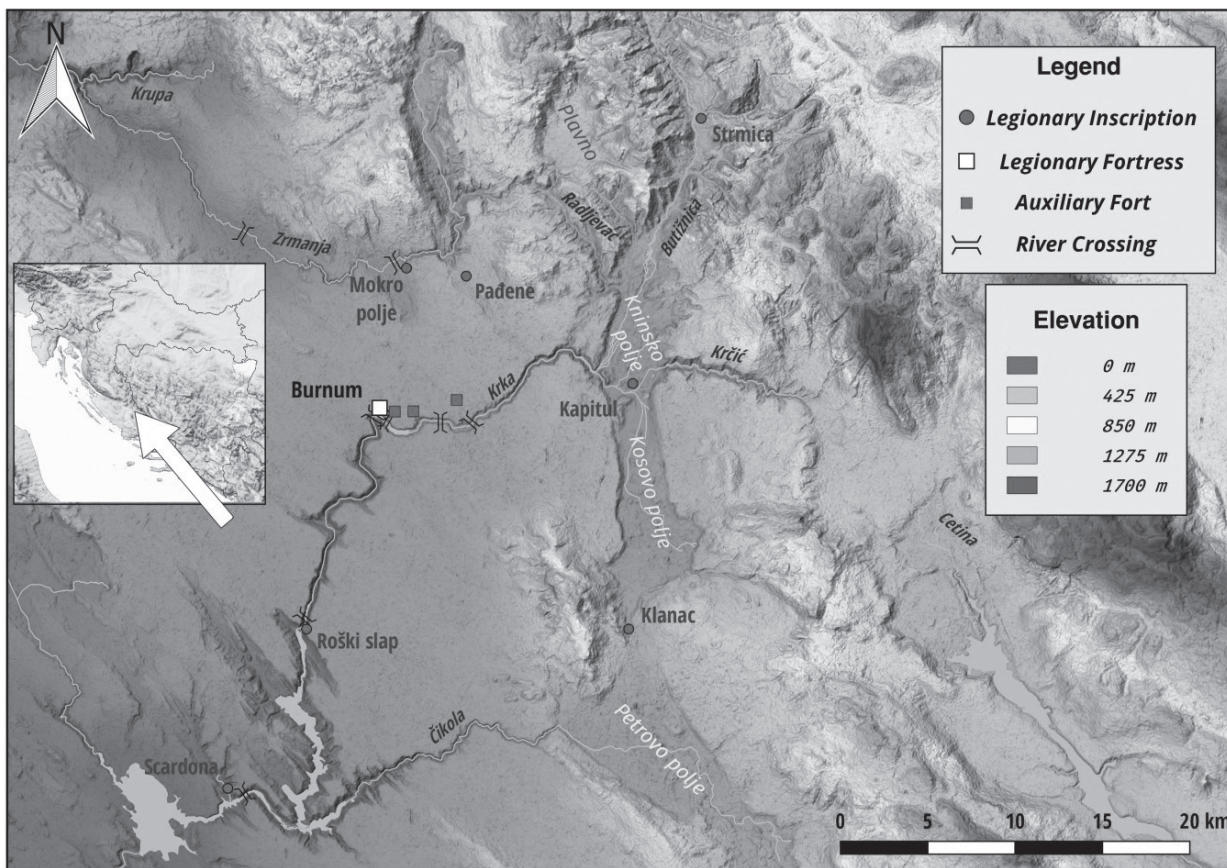


Figure 1. The Wider Area of the Garrison of Burnum (author: L. Drahotusky-Bruketa).

work that represented the means necessary for the supply of the encampment<sup>7-9</sup>. Burnum was also connected by roads with the coastal colonies of Salona and Iader and especially with the port in Liburnian Scardona<sup>10-11</sup>. What is more, in the wider area of the legionary fortress, numerous inscriptions of legionaries and auxiliaries, indicate that there was an immense military presence in the area<sup>12</sup>. The inscriptions are mostly published in large epigraphic corpora, such as *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL), works of Anna and Jaro Šašel (ILJug)<sup>13-15</sup>, or journals such as *L'Année épigraphique* (AE). They also represent an extremely important source in other aspects, since they preserved data on the troops that occupied Burnum, as well as the names of soldiers who served in them, and other social and demographic data<sup>16</sup>.

The great number of fortified hillforts found at key connecting points confirms that this frontier area had a turbulent past, even before it was occupied by the Romans<sup>17</sup>. The concentration of inscriptions of Roman soldiers on key junctions (Mokro Polje, legionaries: CIL III, 6416, 9905, ILJug 2811; Padene, legionary: CIL III, 13251; Kapitel near Knin, legionaries: CIL III, 9903, 9904, 9906, 9908, 9909, auxiliary: CIL II, 9907=14321,5; Klanac near Tepljuh, legionary: CIL III, 6419=9897, auxiliaries: CIL III, 9829, 9834, 13229; Roški slap, legionary veterans: CIL III, 2817, 2818, 9885; Strmica, legionary:

CIL III, 6417) and the presence of pre-Roman hillforts (but also later medieval fortresses) in their immediate vicinity, shows that the Romans, as pragmatic as they were, took over the pre-existing system of control of natural routes, simply adapting it to their own model.

### Archaeological Perspectives

Since the area of Bukovica is very scarcely settled and was never caught in the wave of industrialization, a unique opportunity for conducting various anthropological studies arose. Due to the sparse population, numerous archaeological sites have been preserved which can be easily perceived on aerial photographs and satellite images. A significant anthropomorphic influence on the landscape is evident; this is especially demonstrated through a great number of hillforts, burial mounds, Roman roads, and dry-stone ramparts. However, a simple study of aerial photographs discovered other important parameters that have permanently altered the cultural image of the greater eastern Bukovica area, during the Roman period. Such was, for instance, the Roman auxiliary forts.

The study of aerial photographs and satellite images, as well as direct field surveys, show that the Roman garrison on the River Krka was organized in a very different

way than previously thought. To begin with, the earlier studies assumed that the garrison of Burnum was organized in the form of a legionary fortress, and one auxiliary fort situated above the travertine barriers of Brljan and Manojlovac<sup>18</sup>. However, more recent studies showed that along the River Krka, besides the legionary fortress, there were as many as three auxiliary forts. Each of them was positioned near the key crossings over the travertine barriers of the River Krka (Fig. 2). Furthermore, all forts evidently followed the same model, not only in terms of the location (control over river crossings), but also in the terms of layout (the classical ‘playing-card’ type), total surface area, terrain levelling, wall preservation and so on. Their layout and total surface area, perfectly fit those of other known auxiliary forts in the province of Dalmatia (Gračine in Humac near Ljubuški<sup>19–22</sup>, Makljenovac near Doboj<sup>23</sup>) as well as auxiliary forts in other provinces<sup>24</sup>.

### The First Auxiliary Fort

The first auxiliary fort on the River Krka is located within the cadastral municipality of Ivoševci village, nearby the toponym Provalije. It is found only 300 metres away from the legionary fortress and it forms an elongated rectangle with rounded corners on a flat plain, enclosing an area of 2 hectares. The sides of the rectangle are actually piles of rock, with more recent

dry-stone walls on top of them. Archaeological excavations showed that this was indeed an auxiliary fort and that the piles of rock are actually the ruins of a wall. A round, north-eastern corner of the wall was discovered, as well as the roof tiles with the stamp of legio XI Claudia Pia Fidelis<sup>25</sup>. This fort, along with the legionary fortress, controlled the travertine barriers across the Brljan and Manojlovac Waterfall, where a prominent bend of the River Krka was formed, followed by two of its few natural crossings (Fig. 3).

It should be stressed that, due to the steepness of cliffs around this bend, access via Brljan (but also via Manojlovac) was very difficult in antiquity and a modern road, subsequently cut into the cliff of the canyon with the help of modern engineering, can lead us to the wrong conclusion that this was the main crossing over the Krka. Nowadays, there is a main modern crossing point over the upper Krka; but this was not the case in Roman times. The question is also whether it was a carriageway or a simple footpath? In addition to control over the crossings, the legionary fortress and the first auxiliary fort, were evidently situated there in order to control the hillfort in Puljani<sup>26</sup>, which is located opposite them, on the left bank of the River Krka.

But the most important crossings over the upper Krka during the ancient times, are located a bit more upstream, in the area of Radučić village, i.e. across the travertine barrier of ‘Bilušića buk’ and across the former travertine

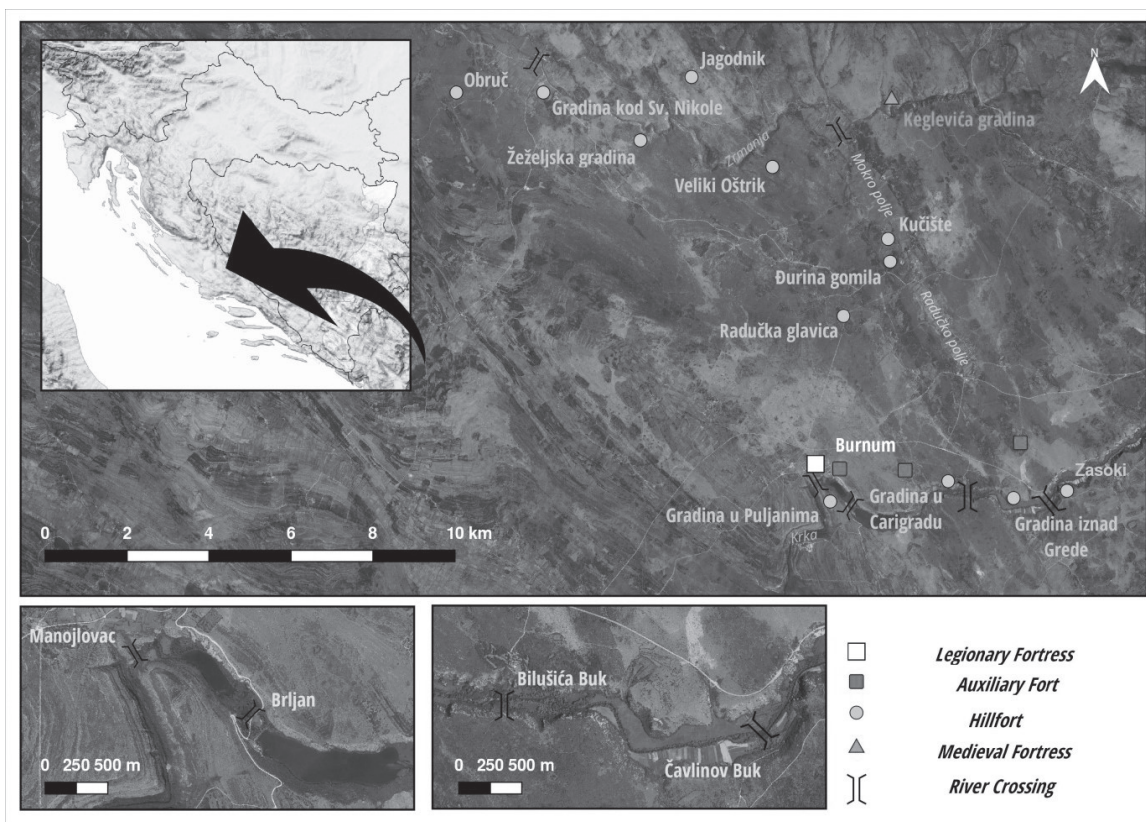


Figure 2. Disposition of the River Crossings, Auxiliary Forts, and pre-Roman Hillforts (author: L. Drahotusky-Bruketa; source: <https://geoportal.dgu.hr/>).



Figure 3. Position of the First Auxiliary Fort (author: N. Cesarik; source: <https://geoportal.dgu.hr/>).

barrier of ‘Čavlinov buk’. The second and third auxiliary forts were situated in close proximity to these travertine barriers.

### The Second Auxiliary Fort

The second fort, first spotted and identified by Šime Vrkić<sup>27</sup>, is situated in the hamlet of Donji Radići, next to the Bjelobrk household (Fig. 4). Again, it forms an elongated rectangle, somewhat bigger than the first one, with the total surface area of 2.7 hectares, located on level terrain. It is 2.2 km away from the legionary fortress. Its sides are made of piles of rock (larger than in the first fort) with more recent dry-stone walls on top, as well. The fact that these are the ruins of a wall is proven by the state of the north-eastern corner, where the pile has disintegrated. Today, Dušan Bjelobrk’s farm buildings are there, which were built on the foundations of the initial wall. Next to the fence of the farm building, there are evident remains of the fort’s wall (Fig. 5). According to the owner, several surface finds, such as pottery, emerged from the area of the fort. The fort controlled the crossing

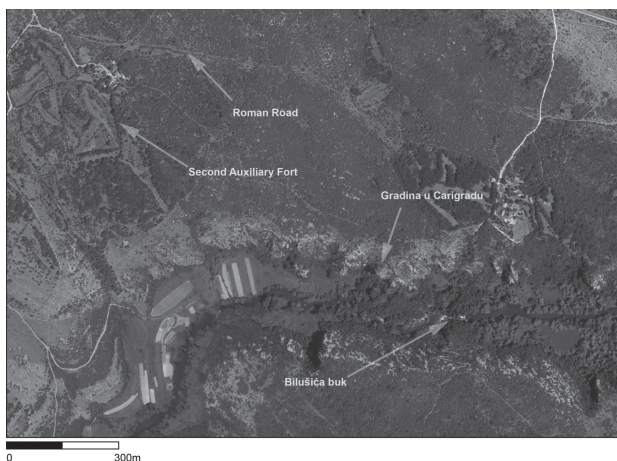


Figure 4. Position of the Second Auxiliary Fort (author: N. Cesarik; source: <https://geoportal.dgu.hr/>).



Figure 5. Remains of the Wall of the Second Auxiliary Fort (photo: N. Cesarik).

over the travertine barrier of Bilušića buk, where, according to the locals, there was once a wooden bridge, from which great pylons were visible after a considerable amount of travertine slid on Bilušića buk. That position was once controlled by the hillfort known as ‘Gradina u Carigradu’, near today’s Burze hamlet.

### A New Evidence: The Third Auxiliary Fort

The third auxiliary fort on the River Krka, which was previously unknown, is situated above the most important old crossing over the Krka, i.e. over the former travertine barrier of ‘Čavlinov buk’. The relevant literature also refers to it as ‘crossing at Bobodol’, which is correct but not specific enough. Namely, when descending down from the present-day hamlets of Puače and Ljevaje towards the River Krka, one arrives at a notch, where a particularly gentle slope towards the Krka is formed. Once, there was a lake named Bobodol, which was later drained and in front of which a travertine islet formed, whose barriers slowed down the flow of water and enabled easy connection between the two banks of the River. Today, on the surface of the drained lake ‘brine’ (i.e. meadows along the river) are found. The westward (downstream) part of the ‘brina’ is called Liver, while the part to the east (upstream) is called Bobodol. However, on topographic and Croatian base maps, only Liver can be found. Furthermore, in the area of Oprominje (i.e. Municipality of Promina), on the left side of the River Krka, south-east of Marasovine, there is a village of Bobodol, which can be very confusing for those interested in the subject matter. Technically, the path went through the notch on the right side of the River Krka, descending towards the former lake known as Bobodol (today a part of ‘brina’) and then crossed to the other side (towards Marasovine) across the travertine barrier of Čavlinov buk. Due to the ambivalence of the term ‘Bobodol’ and the fact that maps show no designation for the part of ‘brina’ called Bobodol, the most precise term to use is the ‘crossing over the Čavlinov buk’.

This important crossing was formerly controlled by two pre-Roman hillforts, one on the right bank (named by the locals of Radučić as ‘Gradina nad Gredom’) and other on the left bank of the River Krka (known as Zasoki). Approximately 1.5 km north of the described crossing, in the area of the hamlet of Ljevaje, lies the third auxiliary fort (Fig. 6). It is, again, a straight and elongated rectangle (Fig. 7) with clearly noticeable rounded corners (Fig. 8), with the total surface area of 2.7 hectares. This site is 4.6 km away from the legionary fortress and 2.3 km away from the second auxiliary fort. It is positioned on a level plain (Fig. 9) and its sides are made of piles of rock with more recent dry-stone walls on top (Fig. 10). In the south-east corner, the piles have disintegrated due to plough-fields that were created on that lot (cadastral parcels 5082 and 5083). The fact that this is actually an auxiliary fort is demonstrated – apart from the evident analogies with the first two cases – by surface finds, such as pottery and carpentry nails (Fig. 11 a-b) <sup>28-29</sup>, but also with finds that are a typical indication of the Roman military presence – such as a hobnail (Fig. 11 c) and a part of a belt fitting (Fig. 11 d). The ruins of the fort are especially well delineated on aerial photographs from the 1968 reconnaissance (Fig. 12).

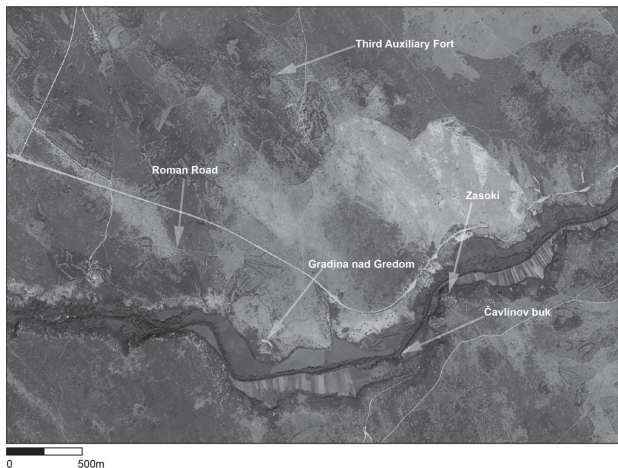


Figure 6. Position of the Third Auxiliary Fort (author: N. Cesarik; source: <https://geoportal.dgu.hr/>).



Figure 7. Layout of the Third Auxiliary Fort (source: <https://geoportal.dgu.hr/>).



Figure 8. Rounded North-eastern Corner (photo: N. Cesarik).



Figure 9. The Level Terrain of the Third Auxiliary Fort (photo: N. Cesarik).



Figure 10. Dry-stone Wall on Top of the Piles of Rock (photo: N. Cesarik).

## Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, through the analysis of aerial photographs and direct field surveys, it has been established that the Roman military garrison of Burnum, was formed along the River Krka, from Radučić to Ivoševci, with the objective of controlling the key crossings over the travertine barriers of Čavlinov buk, Bilušića buk, Brljan and Manojlovac. Therefore, alongside the legionary fortress,

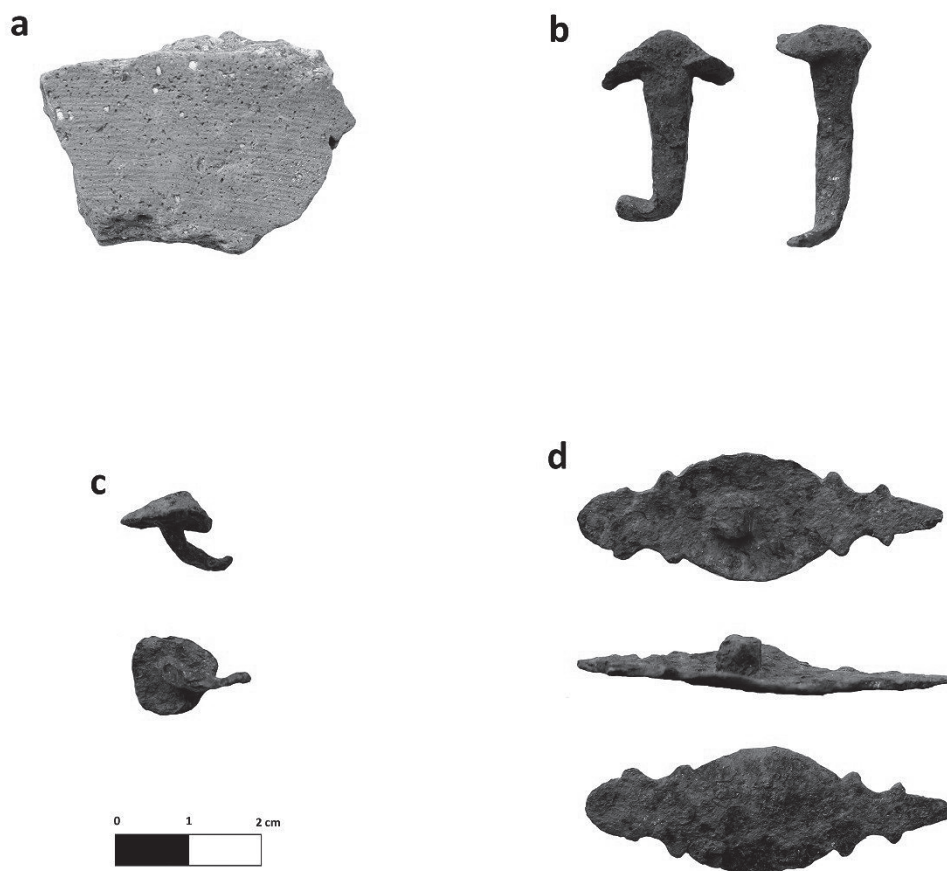


Figure 11. Surface Finds from the Third Auxiliary Fort (photo: N. Cesarik).



Figure 12. The Third Auxiliary Fort on the Aerial Photograph from 1968 (source: <https://ispu.mgipu.hr/>).

three auxiliary forts were placed in the immediate vicinity of these river crossings.

If we take into consideration the concentration of auxiliary forts on the River Krka, it is clear that previous propositions in relation to the chronology of the presence and movements of auxiliary units in Burnum, can no longer stand<sup>30</sup>. Namely, it is evident that in the area of Burnum, several auxiliary units resided at the same time, moving in considerably larger contingents than was previ-

ously thought. It is very likely that each of these forts was intended for different types of auxiliary units. One of them was probably intended for a cavalry unit (*ala*), the other one for an infantry cohort, while the third could have been intended for the regiment of archers. All these units were precisely recorded on the inscriptions from Burnum (AE 1971, 299 *ala Hispanorum*<sup>31-32</sup>; CIL III, 15003, ILJug 841 *cohors Montanorum*<sup>33-34</sup>; CIL III, 14980 *cohors I Belgarum*; ILJug 842, 2820, AE 2009, 1034 *cohors II Cyrretharum*<sup>35</sup>).

Since legionary posts were situated in the area of Kapitul near Knin and Klanac near Tepljuh, as confirmed by the inscriptions of soldiers of *legio XI Claudia Pia Fidelis*, the auxiliary units from these sites should be linked to the forts in Burnum. Klanac near Tepljuh represents the very edge of Petrovo polje, i.e. a natural passage towards Kosovo polje (which is actually a *prata legionis*, cf. CIL III, 13250; AE 1988, 923<sup>36-37</sup>), on whose northern edge lies the second important legionary outpost – Kapitul near Knin. Accordingly, the total number of three auxiliary forts on the River Krka, can easily explain the presence of auxiliary soldiers in the area of Petrovo polje (CIL III, 9834 *cohors I Lucensium*; CIL III, 9796, 9816, ILJug 756 and possibly CIL III, 9797 *ala Claudia Nova*; CIL III, 2759 *cohors III Alpinorum*; CIL III, 13229 *cohors I Belgarum*;

CIL III, 9829 cohorts I milliaria Delmatarum). Furthermore, I must emphasize the fact that, amongst all the inscriptions from Petrovo polje, only the inscriptions from Tepljuh (CIL III, 9829, 9834, 13229) were found *in situ*<sup>38</sup>. The rest were found either in a secondary context, or the micro-location data is not known.

The fact that in the area of Klanac near Tepljuh, along with the funerary inscription of a soldier of legio XI Claudia Pia Fidelis (CIL III, 6419=9897), roof tiles with the stamp of legio IIII Flavia Felix (CIL III, 15110 d-e) were also found, points clearly to the existence of a certain military architecture in that area. In addition to all of the above, I believe that there is no need to look for the presumed auxiliary fort in the area of Petrovo polje<sup>39-40</sup>, since, in my opinion, it was never located there.

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The reason for the military presence in Petrovo polje (i.e. Klanac near Tepljuh) was the same as the reason for the presence of soldiers in Kapitul near Knin, which was the control of the entrance into Kosovo polje (i.e. into the *prata legionis*).

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## **RIJEČNI PRIJELAZI I RIMSKI AUKSILIJARNI LOGORI: NOVE SPOZNAJE S RIJEKE KRKE**

### **SAŽETAK**

Autor donosi spoznaju o novootkrivenom rimskom auksilijarnom logoru smještenom na desnoj obali rijeke Krke, na području katastarske općine sela Radučić, pokraj zaseoka Ljevaje. Logor je sastavni dio nekadašnjeg rimskog vojnog uporišta u Burnumu, koji je kontrolirao glavni prijelaz preko rijeke Krke; odnosno prijelaz preko nekadašnje sedrene barijere Čavlinova buka. Ovom spoznajom dobivaju se novi uvidi u raspored vojnog uporišta u Burnumu, koje je bilo organizirano na sasvim drugačiji način no što se to prvotno smatralo. Ustanovljeno je da je rimsko vojno uporište u Burnumu bilo formirano uzduž rijeke Krke, od Ivoševaca do Radučića, s ciljem kontrole ključnih prijelaza preko sedrenih barijera Čavlinova buka, Bilušića buka, Brljana i Manojlovca. Za te su potrebe, uz legijsku utvrdu, bila postavljena i tri auksilijarna logora, smještena u neposrednoj blizini navedenih riječnih prijelaza