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**RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS AT THE
HUMAC SITE IN BRINJE (2018–2020)**

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The authors present the preliminary results of archaeological excavations carried out between 2018 and 2020 at the Humac site in Brinje. The impetus for organising the excavations was the accidental discovery of a marble head of Emperor Augustus, which belonged to a statue erected in honour of the first Roman emperor at the end of the 1st century BCE or the beginning of the 1st century AD. Given the known historical and documented archaeological context, the discovery of the head of Emperor Augustus became a key piece of evidence indicating the existence of a hillfort settlement at Humac, conventionally identified as the main centre of the Iapodian *Monetini* (*oppidum Monetium*). During the 2018 field survey conducted on the northeastern slopes of Veliki Humac, within dense forest below the hilltop, an area containing the remains of masonry-built Roman structures was identified. Trial excavations carried out in 2019 at the spot where the head of Augustus had been accidentally found in 1965 revealed stratified cultural deposits, whose analysis indicates continuous occupation of the site from prehistoric periods until the 4th-5th century. Further excavations in 2020, on a small plateau below the hilltop, uncovered the remains of walls belonging to a larger Roman building, the function of which can hypothetically be linked to the find of the head of Emperor Augustus. Whether this structure was a building dedicated to the worship of the Roman imperial cult (*Augusteum*) remains to be determined by future archaeological research.

Keywords: oppidum Monetium, Humac site in Brinje, archaeological excavations, head of Emperor Augustus, Roman imperial cult

Previous knowledge about the Humac site in Brinje

Humac (locally known as "Umac") is a hill located on the Brinje polje, southeast of the town centre (Fig. 1). Due to its topographic position and terrain configuration, as well as its strategic and transport significance, Humac represents an ideal location for the existence of an Iapodian hillfort during prehistory.



Fig. 1. Humac near Brinje (preglednik.arkod.hr/)

This is evidenced by the still visible terraces and their partially preserved retaining walls. Karl Patsch was the first archaeologist to provide, in 1900, a brief description of Humac and to propose that Brinje was identical to *Monetium*, the centre of the Iapodian *Monetini*.¹ The *Monetini* are mentioned in historical sources (Appian and Cassius Dio) among the "this-side" Iapodes, who surrendered to the Romans without resistance at the beginning of Octavian's campaign in Illyricum in 35 BCE. Although Patsch only recorded a general note about a hillfort where three fragments of roof tiles with stamps were found,² his hypothesis gradually became widely accepted. Consequently, archaeologists and historians have since routinely identified the prehistoric and Roman *Monetium* with Brinje – specifically, with the hill of Humac.

¹ K. PATSCH, 1900, 29.

² Š. LJUBIĆ, 1876, 35, no. 16-17.



Fig. 2. Marble head of Augustus, accidental find from 1965
(photo by M. Glavičić)

In 1965, on the southeastern side of Humac, Ivan Bičanić discovered a unique find – a marble head which, based on the characteristic features of the portrait and the arrangement of the hair locks, unmistakably depicts Octavian/Augustus (Fig. 2).

The head was originally part of a statue officially erected in honour of the first Roman emperor in the final decades of the 1st century BCE.³ The discovery of a life-sized marble head of Augustus in Brinje is both surprising and highly significant – not only for the local history but also as an important addition to the corpus of known portraits of Augustus in the Republic of Croatia (Fig. 3).

Until now, only two portraits of Augustus were known from the territory of the Roman province of Dalmatia: the first being a head from Osor, and the

³ M. GLAVIČIĆ – N. CAMBI, 2017, p.p. 1-2.

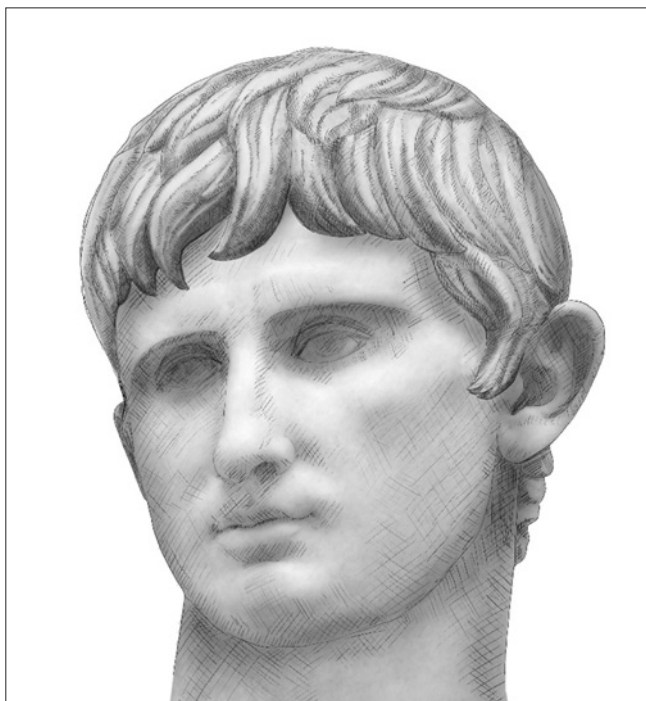


Fig. 3. Reconstruction of the head of Augustus from Brinje
(drawing by S. Olujić Tomaić)

second, a statue from Nin.⁴ The head of Augustus from Brinje belongs to the so-called *Prima Porta* type; however, it still retains certain Hellenistic traits observable in the so-called *La Alcudia* type. This feature represents a distinct peculiarity of the Brinje head, which, based on typological characteristics, should be dated shortly after 27 BCE – the year when Octavian received the title *Augustus*. Since this dating directly corresponds to the known historical context, it can be concluded that a statue of Augustus was erected on Humac as an honorary monument celebrating his military victories in Illyricum between 35 and 33 BCE. Naturally, this was a deliberately planned act, executed as part of the official worship of the imperial cult at the provincial level. Given that a marble statue of the first emperor would not have been placed arbitrarily in the landscape, it is reasonable to assume that it stood at a carefully chosen

⁴ N. CAMBI, 2000, 31-32 (Cat. no. 16, T. 6-7), 36-37 (Cat. no. 24, T. 20-21; N. CAMBI, 2002, p. 120, p.p. 125-130, Fig.172, 176.

and prominent location, likely within a representative building or public space dedicated to the worship of the Roman imperial cult (*Augusteum*). The accidental discovery of the marble head of Emperor Augustus thus became the key piece of evidence confirming the existence of an ancient settlement on Humac, conventionally identified with the Roman *Monetium*.⁵

Field survey of the Humac site in Brinje, 2018

After several prior interviews with the discoverer of the marble head of Octavian/Augustus, on 26th June and 20th October 2018, members of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Zadar conducted an archaeological reconnaissance and photogrammetric survey of the Humac site in Brinje (cadastral plot no. 5981/1, cadastral municipality of Brinje).⁶ Since no archaeological excavations had ever been carried out at Humac, the field survey aimed to locate the findspot of the marble head of Octavian/Augustus, in order to determine the potential excavation area, as well as to spatially identify visible archaeological structures and delineate the extent of the pre-Roman and Roman settlement (oppidum *Monetium*). During the survey, the southeastern slope of Veliki Humac was examined in detail. At the foot of the hill, within dense pine and beech forest, remains of terrace retaining walls, scattered heaps of roughly hewn stone, fragments of mortar, and small pieces of *tegulae* were observed, all suggesting the presence of masonry-built Roman structures. At the base of the slope, a karst doline was located, within which the imperial marble head was originally found among a stone heap. The plateau between the elevations of Veliki and Mali Humac was also inspected. Although no architectural remains were identified there, small ceramic fragments found in soil thrown up by moles indicate the presence of a cultural layer, suggesting the need for test excavations. As no prior archaeological data for the site existed, the conducted field survey conclusively confirmed the archaeological potential of Humac in Brinje and the justification for undertaking systematic archaeological excavations.

⁵ On the western slope of Humac, along the edge of the karst polje, stands the Gothic Church of St Vitus, consisting of a nave, a sanctuary and a bell tower aligned with the western façade (Fig. 11). A sacristy was once attached to the northern side of the sanctuary. Built in the 14th century, it once served as a parish church and today functions as a cemetery chapel. Z. HORVAT, 2000, 126-131.

⁶ Based on the decision of the authorised Conservation Department in Gospić (Class: UP/I-612-08/18-08/0332, Reg. No.: 532-04-02-12/5-18-01), the reconnaissance and survey of the site were carried out by Prof. Dr M. Glavičić and M. Grgurić, M.A. in archaeology, staff members of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Zadar.



Fig. 4. Humac – Brinje, 2019: Trench 1, Context SJ 1B (photo by V. Glavaš)

Archaeological excavation of the Humac site in Brinje, 2019

As mentioned in the introductory section of this paper, in 1965, an accidentally discovered damaged marble head of Octavian/Augustus was found at Humac. The sculpture was originally part of a statue officially dedicated to the first Roman emperor at the end of the 1st century BCE or the beginning of the 1st century AD. In order to verify the claim of the discoverer – who stated that the marble head had been found within a stone heap inside a karst doline at the foot of the hill on the northeastern part of the site, together with fragments of worked stone and pottery – it was decided to conduct archaeological excavations at the findspot.⁷ A test trench (Trench 1), measuring 8 × 7 metres (Fig. 4), was

⁷ Based on the decision of the authorised Conservation Department in Gospić (Class: UP/I-612-08/18-08/0318, Reg. No.: 532-04-02-12/2-19-2), archaeological excavations were conducted in October 2019 by the staff and students of the Department of Archaeology, University of Zadar. The professional team consisted of Prof. Dr Miroslav Glavičić (principal investigator), Assoc. Prof. Dr Vedrana Glavaš (deputy director of excavations), Maja Grgurić, M.A. in archaeology (site recorder), and students Fabijan Barić, Eugen Fritz Prgomet, Pio Domines Peter, Adrian Kusačić and Dino Molnar. The research was funded by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia with designated project funds (Contract No. 9-137-19).

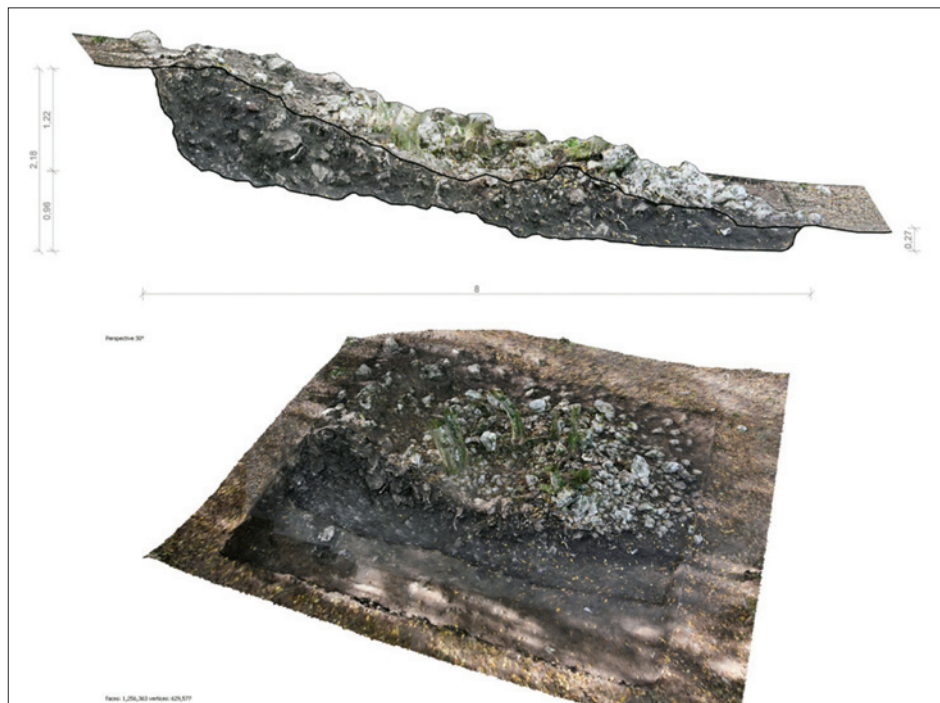


Fig. 5. Humac – Brinje, 2019: cross-section of the mound and 3D model of Trench 1 (prepared by M. Grgurić)

opened in the karst doline at the location indicated by the discoverer. The stone heap in the centre showed signs of disturbance, namely a depression about 2.5 m in diameter and up to 0.5 m deep, allegedly created by the discoverer in 1965 while searching for additional finds. Several mature hornbeam trees had since grown within the depression, and their roots were interwoven around the stones and significantly complicated the excavation process.

Trench 1 was placed within an area of the karst doline that, during the period of settlement, was not used for habitation. This is supported by the stratigraphic characteristics of the deposit, which lack evidence of settlement layers. The stratigraphy revealed no cultural horizon but rather a slope accumulation consisting of irregularly shaped stones of varying sizes and a humic layer of uniform composition and consistency from the present surface to a depth of 1.3 m (Fig. 5).

Although no remains of stone sculpture or architecture – the original motivation for the excavation – were found, the trench yielded material

culture remains, primarily ceramic finds, which provide valuable new insights into the occupation history of the site. A preliminary analysis of the artefacts revealed the presence of coarse prehistoric kitchenware as well as chronologically and typologically diverse Roman pottery. The ceramic assemblage indicates continuous occupation of the site from prehistoric periods during the 4th-5th centuries.

Consequently, the results of these initial archaeological investigations confirmed that during the Iron Age, a substantial hillfort-type settlement was established on Humac hill in Brinje, which continued to exist during the Roman period. The excavations definitively corroborate the hypothesis that the hill of Humac in Brinje should be identified with *oppidum Monetium*, the centre of the Iapodian *Monetini* mentioned in historical sources describing Octavian's military campaign in Iapodia in 35 BCE.

Excavations at the Humac hillfort in Brinje in 2020

Humac is an archaeological site where no previous excavations had been conducted, making it necessary to locate visible archaeological structures that define the extent of the pre-Roman and Roman settlement (*oppidum Monetium*) and to obtain other relevant data on the topography of this hillfort-type site. The survey was planned and carried out on the basis of previously collected information obtained through interviews with several elderly locals, who recalled once clearly visible terrace retaining walls and the remains of masonry structures on the eastern slope of the site. Historical aerial photographs were also useful for visualising the terrain, as the summit of the hill is now densely forested, while the base is overgrown with thickets that are impassable in places. During the 2018 and 2019 field surveys, a staked-out route for a firebreak forest road was observed, which in 2020 was constructed by the local forestry service along the stretch between Mali and Veliki Humac and around the hill. Since the road construction was carried out using heavy machinery, the site suffered extensive damage, particularly at the base of the lower terrace of this hillfort settlement. The road tracing and construction were carried out without the knowledge or approval of the authorised Conservation Department in Gospić.

As the northeastern slope of Veliki Humac had previously been identified as containing remains of masonry structures of Roman date, it was decided to conduct test excavations there (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Humac – Brinje, 2020: excavation location (photo by M. Glavičić)

In 2020, two trenches were opened on a small terrace below the summit of the hill, later joined into a single excavation area.⁸ The excavation revealed the remains of a large masonry structure, within which four walls were

⁸ Based on the decision of the authorised Conservation Department in Gospić (Class: UP/I-612-08/20-08/0357, Reg. No.: 532-04-02-12/2-20-2), archaeological excavations were carried out during September and October 2020 by the staff and students of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Zadar. The professional team consisted of Prof. Dr Miroslav Glavičić (excavation director), Assoc. Prof. Dr Vedrana Glavaš (deputy director), Marina Šimičić, M.A. in archaeology (site recorder), and students Pio Domines Peter, Enzo Gabriječić, Dominik Kelava, Jan Krička and Dino Molnar. The research was funded through the scientific project No. 269-2690868-0774 at the University of Zadar (project leader: Prof. Dr M. Glavičić). The Municipality of Brinje provided essential logistical support and the assistance of two workers during the excavations. We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to the representatives of the Municipality of Brinje – Mayor Zlatko Fumić, President of the Municipal Council Milan Kolak, and administrative officer Marija Vranić – for their generous support and invaluable assistance in organising the research.

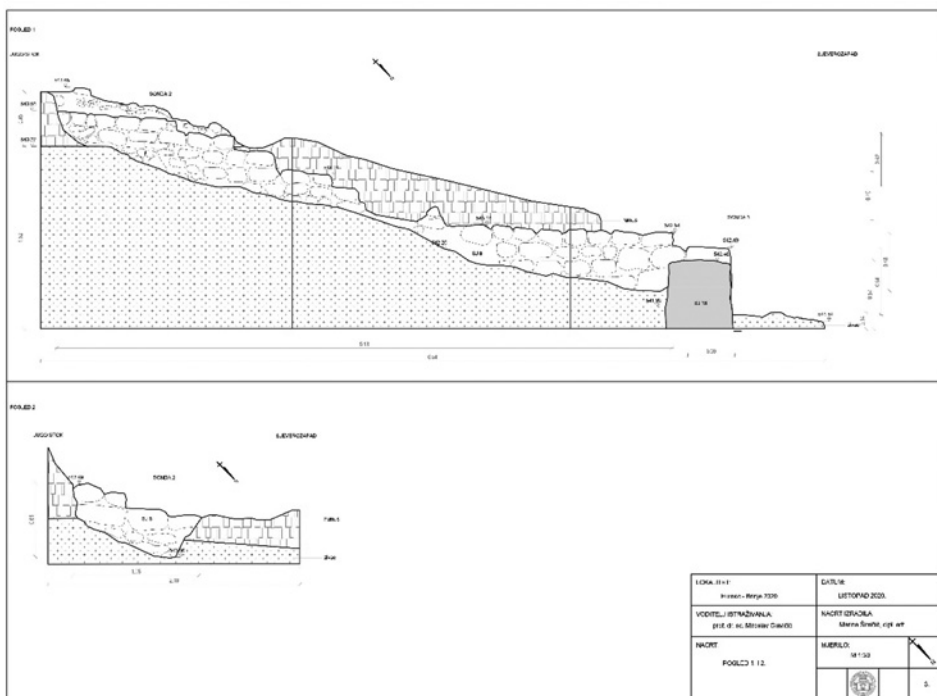


Fig. 7. Humac – Brinje, 2020: views of walls SJ 5 and SJ 6
(prepared by M. Šimičić)

documented: walls SJ12 and SJ18 functioned as retaining walls used to level the terrain that naturally slopes toward the southeast, while walls SJ5 (=SJ16) and SJ6 were constructed perpendicular to them (Figs. 7-8). The walls were explored over lengths ranging from approximately 2 to 5 metres and extend beyond the excavated area. They are preserved to heights between 25 and 70 cm and have an average width of about 45 cm. The facings were built of roughly dressed rectangular stones laid in horizontal courses, bound with white to yellowish mortar (Fig. 9).

Within the excavated area, layers of compacted and fragmented mortar (SJ13 and SJ14) were recorded, resulting from the collapse of the ceiling, overlain by a deposit containing numerous fragments of roof tiles (SJ11). One tile fragment bore a workshop stamp reading [SOL]ON[AS], whose production is dated to the first half of the 1st century AD. No clear habitation layers were observed during the excavation. The layers contained no animal bones, and domestic pottery was only present sporadically. Thus, it can be

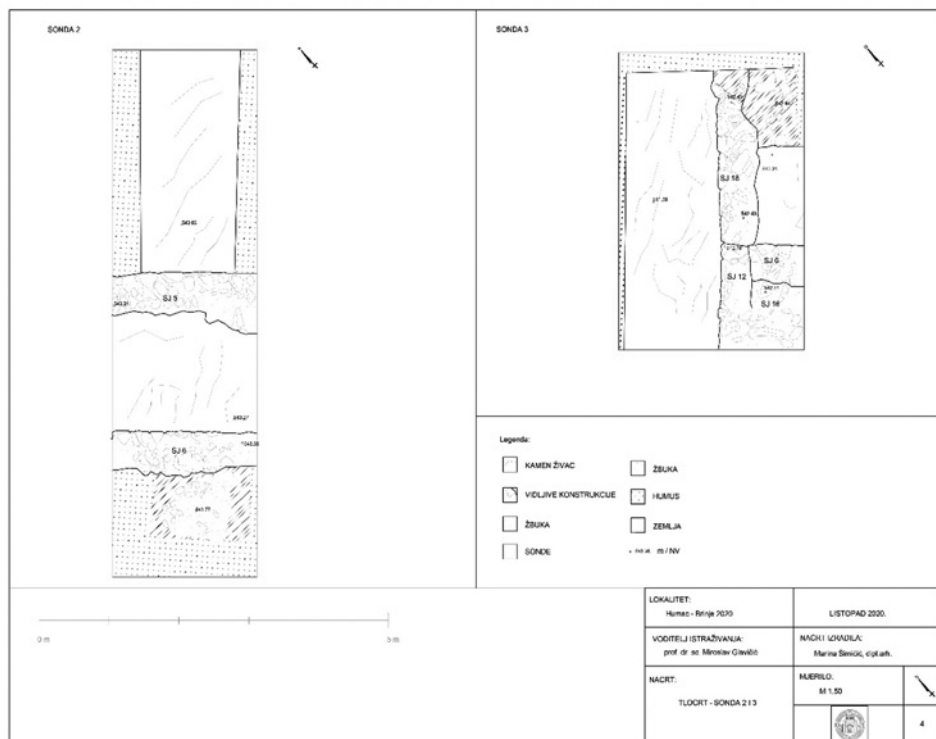


Fig. 8. Humac – Brinje, 2020: ground plans of Trenches 2 and 3
(prepared by M. Šimičić)

concluded that the building whose remains were uncovered at Humac was not used for residential purposes. The architectural remains likely belonged to a larger, representative public structure, the plan and dimensions of which must be established through future archaeological investigations (Fig. 10). At this stage – though only as a working hypothesis – the function of the documented structure at Humac may be associated with the discovery of the marble head of Emperor Augustus, which once formed part of a statue officially erected in honour of the first Roman emperor at the end of the 1st century BCE.



Fig. 9. Humac – Brinje, 2020: outer face of wall SJ16 (photo by V. Glavaš)

Results of archaeological research at the Humac site in Brinje (2018–2020)

The discovery of a marble head of Octavian/Augustus, accidentally unearthed in 1965 at the Humac site near Brinje, led to the scholarly analysis and publication of this exceptional find in 2017. The imperial head became the main piece of evidence confirming the existence of a hillfort-type settlement at Humac, conventionally identified as the principal centre of the Iapodian *Monetini* (*oppidum Monetium*), mentioned in historical sources in the context of Octavian's campaign in Illyricum between 35 and 33 BCE. This unique find, originally part of a marble statue officially erected in honour of the first Roman emperor at the end of the 1st century BCE or the beginning of the 1st century AD, provided new insights into the complex process of Romanisation among the Iapodian population. It also inspired researchers from the Department of Archaeology at the University of Zadar to direct their professional interest toward the site of the discovery – Humac on the Brinje karst polje – where archaeological investigations were conducted between 2018 and 2020.



Fig. 10. Humac – Brinje, 2020: excavated area of Trenches 2 and 3 (photo by M. Glavičić)

The 2018 field survey focused on locating the findspot of the marble head of Octavian/Augustus to determine the most suitable area for excavation, as well as identifying visible archaeological structures in order to define the extent of the pre-Roman and Roman settlement (*oppidum Monetium*). On the northeastern slope of Veliki Humac, within a dense pine and beech forest below the hilltop, several stone terrace walls, scattered piles of roughly dressed stones, fragments of mortar, and smaller pieces of *tegulae* were identified, suggesting the existence of masonry-built Roman structures.

Trial excavations conducted in 2019 within the karst doline at the northeastern base of Veliki Humac – where the marble head was found in 1965 – revealed layers of cultural deposits containing a significant quantity of pottery fragments. Preliminary analysis of the material indicated the continuous occupation of the site from prehistoric times until the 4th-5th century. These findings confirm the formation of a substantial hillfort-type settlement during the Iron Age, which persisted throughout the Roman and Late Roman periods.



Fig. 11. Gothic Church of St. Vitus (14th century) on the western slope of Veliki Humac (photo by M. Grgurić)

Since earlier surveys had identified an area with architectural remains covered by humus and vegetation on the northeastern slope of Veliki Humac, two test trenches were opened in 2020 on a small terrace below the summit. Excavations revealed the remains of walls belonging to a large Roman building. The walls were built using the standard technique of horizontally laid roughly dressed rectangular stone blocks bonded with mortar (*opus quadratum*), extending beyond the limits of the two excavated trenches. Within the excavated area, compact layers of crushed mortar were documented, likely formed by the collapse of the ceiling, overlain by a rubble layer containing numerous large and small fragments of *tegulae* from the roof. One *tegula* bore the stamp of the workshop [SOL]ON[AS], whose production is dated to the first half of the 1st century AD. No habitation layers were recorded during the excavation, leading to the assumption that the uncovered architectural remains belonged to a public building. At this stage, the function of the structure can only hypothetically be associated with the find of the marble head of Emperor

Augustus, originally part of a statue officially dedicated to the first Roman emperor at this location. Whether these remains belong to a building dedicated to the imperial cult (*Augusteum*) is a question to be resolved through future archaeological research.

In conclusion, the results of recent archaeological investigations have definitively confirmed the existence of the *oppidum Monetium* – the centre of the Iapodian *Monetini* mentioned in historical sources describing Octavian's campaign in Iapodia between 35 and 33 BCE. Given its significant archaeological potential, the site of Humac in Brinje should continue to be the subject of systematic and long-term archaeological research.

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REZULTATI ARHEOLOŠKIH ISTRAŽIVANJA NA LOKALITETU HUMAC U BRINJU 2018. – 2020. GODINE

Sažetak

Saznanje o postojanju mramorne glave Oktavijana/Augusta, koja je slučajno bila pronađena davne 1965. godine na lokalitetu Humac u Brinju, rezultirala je znanstvenom obradom i objavom ovog izvanrednog nalaza 2017. godine. Nalaz carske glave postao je glavni dokaz da je na Humcu egzistiralo gradinsko naselje koje se konvencionalno identificira kao glavno središte japodskih Monetina (*oppidum Monetium*), spomenutih u historijskim vrelima u kontekstu Oktavijanove

vojne u Iliriku 35. – 33. godine prije Krista. Jedinstveni nalaz carske glave, koja je pripadala kipu službeno postavljenom u čast prvoga rimskog cara krajem 1. st. prije Krista ili početkom 1. st. po Kristu, ukazuje na neke posve nove momente u razumijevanju složenog procesa romanizacije japodskog stanovništva u rimsko doba, potaknuo je znanstvenike Odjela za arheologiju Sveučilišta u Zadru da svoj profesionalni interes usmjere i na mjesto njezina nalaza, tj. na lokalitet Humac u Brinjskom polju, gdje su u razdoblju od 2018. do 2020. godine provedi arheološka istraživanja. Preliminarni rezultati recentnih istraživanja sažeto su navedeni u radu.

Pregledi terena 2018. godine bili su fokusirani na lociranje mjesta nalaza mramorne glave Oktavijana/Augusta, sa ciljem određivanja lokacije arheološkog iskopavanja, i prostorno lociranje vidljivih arheoloških struktura, sa ciljem definiranja areala predrimskog i rimskog naselja (*oppidum Monetium*). Na SI obronku Velikog Humca, u gustoj šumi podno glavice brijega, uočene su kamene strukture podzida terasa i raštrkane gomile grubo klesanog kamena, ulomci žbuke i manji fragmenti tegula, koje sugeriraju postojanje zidanih antičkih objekata.

Sondažnim iskopavanjem 2019. godine u vrtači lociranoj na SI strani u podnožju Velikog Humca, na mjestu gdje je 1965. godine slučajno pronađena mramorna glava Oktavijana/Augusta, dokumentirani su slojevi kulturnog depozita koji je sadržavao veću količinu keramičkih ulomaka. Preliminarna analiza materijala ukazuje na kontinuiranu naseljenost lokaliteta u vremenskom periodu od prapovijesnih razdoblja do 4./5. st. Stoga se može konstatirati da je na brijegu Humac u Brinju tijekom željeznog doba formirano povećanje naselje gradinskog tipa, koje egzistira tijekom antičkog i kasnoantičkog razdoblja.

Budući da je ranijom prospekcijom terena na SI obronku Velikog Humca lociran areal s građevinskim strukturama prekrivenih humusnim slojem i vegetacijom, na omanjem platou podno glavice brijega sondažnim istraživanjem 2020 godine dokumentirani su ostatci zidova veće antičke građevine. Zidovi su građeni uobičajenom tehnikom horizontalnog uslojavanja pačetvorinastog grubo priklesanog kamena povezanog žbukom (*opus quadratum*), čiji se duktus proteže izvan gabarita dviju postavljenih sonde. Na istraženom prostoru dokumentirani su nabijeni slojevi smrvljene žbuke, koji su nastali urušavanjem stropa, na koje je nalegao sloj šute s brojnim većim i manjim ulomcima tegula s krovišta objekta. Na jednom ulomku tegule ostao je trag pečata radionice SOLONAS, čija se produkcija datira u prvu polovicu 1. st. Tijekom iskopavanja na istraženom prostoru nije uočen nasebinski kulturni sloj. Stoga se pretpostavlja da dokumentirani arhitektonski ostatci pripadaju objektu javne namjene. Za sada se funkcija objekta hipotetski može povezati s nalazom glave cara Augusta, koja je pripadala mramornom kipu službeno podignutom u čast prvoga rimskog cara na ovom mjestu. Radi li se o ostacima objekta posvećenog štovanju carskoga kulta (*Augusteum*) treba ustanoviti budućim arheološkim istraživanjima.

Zaključno se može konstatirati da su rezultati recentnih arheoloških istraživanja definitivno potvrdili da je na brdu Humac u Brinju egzistirao *oppidum Monetium*, središte japodskih Monetina spomenutih u historijskim vrelima pri opisu Oktavijanova vojna pohoda u Japodiju 35. – 33. godine prije Krista, kojega zbog velikog arheološkog potencijala treba nastaviti kontinuirano i sustavno istraživati.

Ključne riječi: *oppidum Monetium*, Humac u Brinju, arheološka istraživanja, glava cara Augusta, carski kult