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## ***THE RING FROM TEKIĆ AND THE SEAL FROM VELIKA: THE LATEST EPIGRAPHIC FINDS BEARING THE NAME OF INCERUM***

### **Abstract**

In the 2021 issue of the Požeški pučki kalendar (PPK), archaeologists Nikola Cesarik and Vjekoslav Kramberger published two previously unknown epigraphic inscriptions mentioning the Roman settlement of Incerum (Inicerum).<sup>1</sup> These consist of a silver ring inscribed VOTSILVINCERIVS, found on the surface of the Treštanovačka Gradina site near Tekić<sup>2</sup>, and a seal impression inscribed INCERI from the vicinity of Velika. The authors interpret part of the first inscription as INCERIUS.

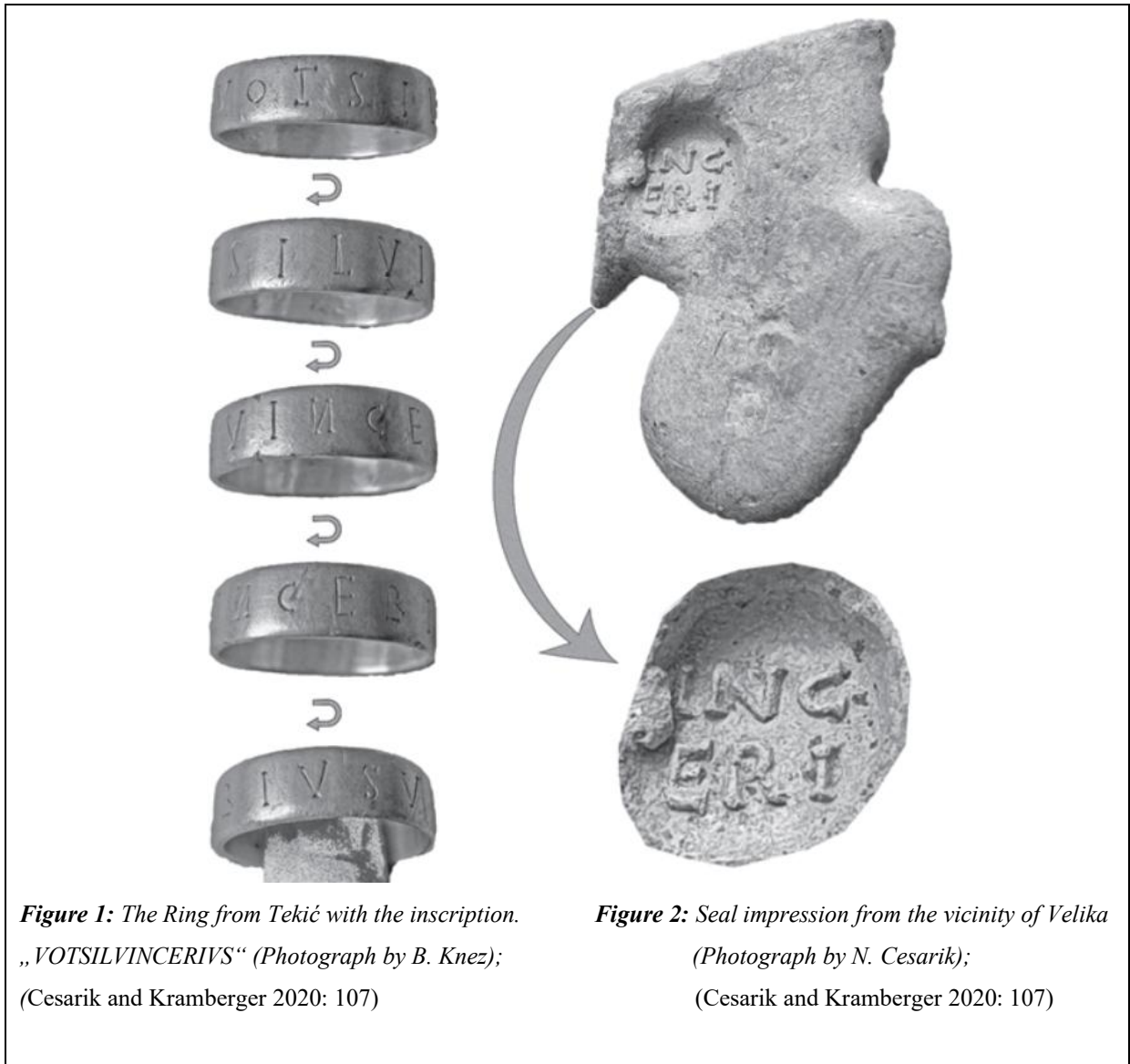
In the present study, these inscriptions are analysed from a philological perspective, in the hope that they may shed further light on the otherwise sparsely attested Incerum—provided, of course, that the finds prove to be archaeologically authentic, since they have not yet undergone professional examination.

**Keywords:** Ring from Tekić, Seal from Velika, epigraphy, Incerum

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<sup>1</sup> Cesarik and Kramberger 2020. On the history of research into Incerum, see also Kramberger 2009; Langhamer 1972; and Bilić 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Most of the publications on the Tekić – Treštanovačka Gradina site (several dozen in total) were written by Dubravka Sokač Štimac; however, these works address various phases of research, and she has never produced a comprehensive synthesis. The number of publications (approximately fifty) is too large to be listed here and is, in fact, not directly relevant to the present study. A useful overview of research at the site, including the essential bibliography, is provided by Bilić 2012.



### 1. Incerum: A Roman Site in the Požega Basin

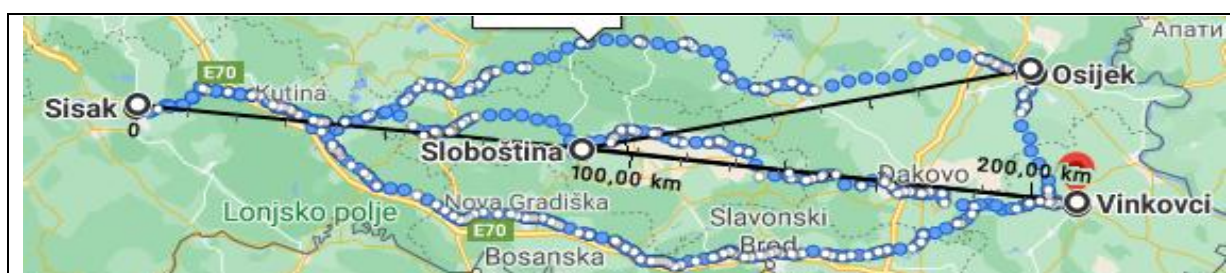
Both Tekić and Velika are cited in the literature as possible locations of the ancient road station Incerum, which appears twice in the Antonine Itinerary (A.I.)<sup>3</sup>, the only undisputed source concerning Incerum. The toponym *Incer-* or *Inicer-* does not appear anywhere else in

<sup>3</sup> There are several editions of the A.I. Here we have used Wesselingio 1735, which is still reliable and also contains a more extensive note on Incerum/Inicerum. The most recent edition is Löhberg 2006, who places Incerum in Vetovo, on the basis of long outdated information concerning an otherwise lost funerary stele from Vetovo.

the Roman Empire<sup>4</sup> apart from here in the Požega Valley, and its origin may therefore not be Latin.<sup>5</sup>

Even a cursory glance at a map of the area between Sisak (Siscia) and eastern Slavonia (Osijek/Mursa and Vinkovci/Cibalae) suggests that this site must have been situated somewhere in the Požega Valley, in the central part of this section of Pannonia; although other solutions are theoretically conceivable (each of which, however, raises even more questions and problems).<sup>6</sup>

The ideal route of a pedestrian road from Siscia towards Cibalae and Mursa appears as shown on Map 1 (solid lines).



**Map 1.** The spatial triangle Siscia—Cibalae—Mursa. The shortest route from Siscia to Cibalae and Mursa runs through the middle of the Požega Valley, which lies at the centre of this area. The dotted lines indicate present-day roads (Google Maps).

According to the A.I., both roads converge at Incerum; however, the point at which they diverged is unknown, since the road heading eastwards (both towards Mursa and towards Cibalae) may for a time have followed the same route. The westernmost point of divergence must have been Incerum (in the western part of the Požega Valley), and the easternmost somewhere in the eastern part of the Valley or anywhere between these two points.

The Roman road most probably ran exactly through the middle of the Valley, a few kilometres south of the present-day Velika–Kutjevo road, approximately along the line indicated by our straight line on Map 1. There can be no doubt as to the direction of the road: as early as 1898, the Kutjevo landowner, Baron Milan Turković, discovered remains of Roman

<sup>4</sup> Wesselingio 1735 (Wesseling) lists various spelling variants of the name of this place and concludes: “Omnes hoc loco Inceru, at infra Inicero, quo fit, ut, quaenam verio fit lectio, in ambiguo maneat” / “All (give) this place as Inceru, and below as Inicero, whereby it remains uncertain which reading is the more correct.” (Wesselingio 1735:260).

<sup>5</sup> In the symposium presentation *Sed mansio Augusti in praetorio est* (Rašić 2014a), alongside various Latin etymologies, I also proposed a Germanic one (*imker* ‘beekeeper’), in which case Incerum would denote something like Pčelić or Pčelarevo—Croatian toponyms derived from *pčela* (‘bee’)—and the like. Germans were at that time present throughout Pannonia. Yet which etymology is closer to reality we shall never know.

<sup>6</sup> Klaić 1899 places it in that part of the Valley.

roads precisely there at six locations in the centre of the Valley (see below in the text, Chapter 18; Turković 1898:242–243).

The data in the A.I. concerning the Siscia–Mursa route are certainly not accurate, as the stated distance is too short to be realistic (most probably one section of the road and a station have been omitted), and therefore this road will not be discussed further in the present text. It requires a separate and complex explanation.

## 2. The Significance and Circumstances of the New Finds in Tekić and Velika

The finds presented by Cesarik and Kramberger have until now been unknown and unpublished (as far as I am aware). They therefore constitute important discoveries which could contribute to clarifying various questions concerning ancient Incerum, whose story remains an unwritten book, for the time being filled only with numerous question marks. The sources relating to Incerum are thus increasing. In this paper we seek to make the fullest possible use of the information concerning the most recent finds and to examine to what extent they may assist us in gaining new insights into Incerum

These two most recent inscriptions, discovered in the Požega region, would constitute the only *local* confirmation of the existence of Incerum (if verification establishes that the finds are reliable). Prior to this, we know of only a single monument mentioning the name Inicerum: an epitaph on the tombstone of a Roman officer (*praefectus allae*), which states that the deceased originated from Inicerum (sic!, not Incerum).<sup>7</sup> The prefect's tombstone was discovered not far from the Valley, at the site of Bedemgrad, near the settlement of Našički Gradac; therefore in very close proximity to the Valley; but it subsequently disappeared without trace and was thus not included in Mommsen's epigraphic corpus (CIL III).

Regarding the provenance of the finds, the authors state: "Both objects ... were discovered by Tomislav Đurak of Požega, who also donated the ring from Tekić to the City Museum of Požega." The donation dates from 2013. From the article it is not entirely clear where the seal is currently located (perhaps it is not in the museum) or why the finds were not previously studied (although they are in fact sensational).

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<sup>7</sup> The prefect's tombstone was indeed found near Našice, but it could equally have been located anywhere in the Empire. I have already written on this (Rašić 2020), on the basis of Pinterović 1975, Domić Kunić 1988, and Migotti–Šašelj Kos 2018.

We therefore do not know much about the circumstances and the precise locations of the discoveries. This will probably follow in the promised more comprehensive scholarly study by Cesarik and Kramberger (the publication PPK is of a popular and regional character). We cannot pass further judgement on these discoveries until the circumstances have been clarified and the artefacts examined. For the time being, they must be treated with the necessary degree of caution. Nevertheless, we may allow ourselves certain philological reflections on the toponym Inicerum / Incerum.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Incerum: Doubts Concerning the Name

Until recently, it was held that the A.I. was the only ancient source in which this station (or perhaps also a settlement?) is mentioned on the routes from Siscia towards Cibalae and from Siscia towards Mursa. In all cases known so far, we have only the name of the station, which appears exclusively in the ablative: *Incerō* or *Inicero* (depending on the transcription of the A.I., of which there are some twenty). Theoretically, this could also be a dative, though that is functionally less to be expected. It is therefore difficult to determine what the original name was and to which declension the noun belonged. It is thus possible to reconstruct: *Incerus*, *Incerum*, *Incer*, or *Incerō*. For linguistic reasons, the variants with nominative *Incer* and *Incerō* are less probable, since they would not produce the ablative form found in the A.I.

We have seen that even the root of the word is not certain, since in some variants of the A.I. forms with *-i-* occur: *Inicero* (as, for example, on the prefect's tombstone). This, of course, has implications for the possible etymology of the name, which cannot be established before the exact original form of the root—*Incer-* or *Inicer-*—has been definitively determined.

These two most recent finds bring something new: the root form is *Incer*, yet on the ring we have something more than the mere name. On the lead seal we again have only the name, but this time in the genitive. This is the first occurrence of another case form, which might contribute to resolving the question of declensional affiliation and limit the possible forms of the name to *Incerus* or *Incerum*. The gender still cannot be determined, since we do not know the nominative and have no example accompanied by an adjective. However, place-names

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<sup>8</sup> At the time when the writing of this paper had already been completed, a whole controversy broke out in certain media outlets concerning the discovery and subsequent fate of the ring. See <https://www.034portal.hr/javnosti-na-znanje-nadleznima-na-ravnanje-223>. There is also a video statement by the finder on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRVPZ5NJdE>.

most commonly ended in -um, so it is likely that we are dealing with a second-declension neuter.

In both new inscriptions we have a form without -i- in the root, which would suggest that the original form may have been *Incer-* (pronounced: /ɪŋker/), that is, *Incerus* or *Incerum* (proceeding from the genitive on the seal). *Inicer-* may have been an older form from which *Incer-* later developed through the loss of the vowel.<sup>9</sup> This would imply that the ring and the seal are of later date (fourth century?), when the form without *i* had become customary. The A.I. was probably compiled in the third century and shows vacillation regarding this name.

The text on the seal is entirely straightforward and does not require special philological analysis. The text on the ring, however, is philologically and epigraphically interesting and not altogether easy to interpret.

Since it is a dedication to the Roman god Silvanus, let us first say something about him and the material evidence associated with him, and in particular about Silvanian votive rings characteristic of Pannonia. Several such rings have been found in Hungary and Slovakia; this is the first example in our country (Croatia) and indeed in southern Pannonia as a whole.

#### 4. The Cult of Roman God Silvanus in Pannonia

In Pannonia, votive offerings to the locally popular deity Silvanus<sup>10</sup>, the Italic god of forests, are frequent finds. Many authors agree that the importance of the cult of Silvanus in Pannonia may be measured against that of Jupiter. Silvanus there appears almost as the equal of the supreme god of the Roman Pantheon, as though his Pannonian counterpart, although he was not a member of the canonical group of twelve gods. The cult of Silvanus was strictly private and was worshipped chiefly by estate owners. Most commonly he was honoured with roadside stelae (*stellae*) or ritual altars (*arae*) on estates, that is, stone monuments.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For drawing my attention to this possible line of development I am grateful to the Latinist Prof. Dr Bojan Marotti (private communication by email, 19 April 2022).

<sup>10</sup> On the cult of Silvanus see the standard monograph Dorcey 1992. Other important studies include Domaszewski 1902, Dézspa 2001, Kossatz-Deissmann 1994, and Clauss 1994, as well as various works on Roman religion and cults, for example Aust 1899: 137–138 and 139 on Faunus. In Croatia, Ljubica Perinić has written an excellent book on the subject in English (2016), which developed out of her doctoral dissertation on Silvanus defended in Croatian (Muratović 2008). For further studies see the bibliography at the end of this paper and the references cited therein, especially in Perinić 2008 and Muratović 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Some literature on Silvanian sacred objects in this region includes: Bekavac 2011; Bojanovski 1977–1978; Cambi 1968, 2000, 2013a and 2013b; Džino 2012 and 2018; Filipović and Kusik 2017; Matijašić–Tassaux 2000; Migotti 2017; Nečas Hraste and Vuković 2011 (in an interesting Indo-European mythological context); Prusac 2010; Rendić-Miočević 1951–1952, 1955, 1974, 1979–1980, 1982, 1989a and 1989b, 2003 and 2007;

Silvanian votive rings are rarer and appear to be an exclusively Pannonian phenomenon, whose origin might be explained by certain local indigenous beliefs (for example among the Germans, specifically the Goths, among whom the ring symbolised the sun-god, that is, the god Gaut and later Óðinn-Gautr).<sup>12</sup> The ring, as a closed circle, in itself symbolises a perfect and indissoluble bond, like a fetter. It retains this function even today in engagements and marriages, and within the Church (episcopal and papal rings). A vow to Silvanus might also have been made by spouses or lovers.

It may, however, be that this was an entirely local custom and an expression of the regional identity of Pannonia, where Silvanus was the most popular god. Nor should we overlook the fact that, among the Romans, rings represented an item of jewellery with a special status. In the early period, not everyone was permitted to wear rings.

“At Rome particular importance was attached to the ring as a symbol of dignity, as manifested in a special law (*ius anuli aurei*) concerning the wearing of the gold ring (*anulus aureus*), which was at first worn only by the nobility (that is, men of patrician families and those who possessed land worth at least 400,000 sesterces), then from 216 BC also by the equestrian order, and from 150 BC by military tribunes. In the imperial period the circle of ring-bearers expanded, so that from Augustus gold rings were also worn by physicians, from Hadrian by freedmen, from Claudius by all persons in contact with the emperor, and from Septimius Severus by all soldiers” (Đurđević 2013a:15).<sup>13</sup>

In post-Severan Pannonia, the wearing of a ring could thus have been a sign of freedom and greater acceptance within Roman society, and since Silvanus was, so to speak, a Pannonian god, one would then expect rings dedicated to him. It is unlikely that any commoner would have dared to wear a ring dedicated to Jupiter, a god directly associated with the emperor and the imperial order. Silvanus, by contrast, was the democratic god of the Pannonian people.

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Schejbal 2004; Vasiljević 2018; Veledar 2018; and Zotović 1994; and in Bosnia and Dalmatia: Džino 2012; Lulić 2014; and Maršić 1998 (in Dalmatia). All the works listed under Perinić / Muratović in the bibliography are of particular importance, as she takes into account the majority of earlier scholarship.

<sup>12</sup> Nordgren 2000.

<sup>13</sup> See also Fourlas 1971, Rothenhöfer 2019, and Popović 1992. On rings in Pannonia with sacred dedications, see Szabó András 2014. For the Limes region, see Pfahl 2006.

## 5. Silvanus, the God of Wild and Untamed Nature

Silvanus was originally an Italic god of forests and of wild, untamed nature. He was responsible for many things, but most commonly he appears as the protector of the rural estate and as a *genius loci*, the “guardian of the place”, and is depicted as an old, bearded man of distinctly rustic appearance. In his hand he carries a cypress tree torn from the ground with its roots, connected with a mythological tradition according to which Silvanus was in love with the youth *Cyparissus* (*Cupressus*), whose stag he accidentally killed, whereupon *Cyparissus* died of grief. The uprooted cypress probably symbolises Silvanus’ rootedness in the earth and his bond with vegetation.

Silvanus is known as a protector of crops and livestock, which he guards against wolves; in this respect he corresponds to the Slavic *Veles/Volos*, with whom he also shares certain demonic traits: for example, he frightens pregnant women, while *Volos* is depicted as a beast, serpent, dragon, or bear; yet in that very capacity he also protects fields and livestock from wolves, so that farmers and herdsman both fear and venerate him. In Christianity, the role of guardian of crops and fertility is assigned to *St George* (*Zeleni Jura* [Green George]), who in turn represents an *interpretatio christiana* of *Jarylo*, the young god, son of the Slavic supreme god *Perun*.<sup>14</sup> A similar role as protector of livestock is also attributed to *St Nicholas*.

In *Dubrovnik*, the patron saint of cattle is *St. Blaise* (cro. sv. *Vlaho*), and in the Orthodox it is *St. Vlasius* (cro. sv. *Vasilije*) (*Bishop Sebastius*). The vocal correspondence of the names of these saints with the name of the god *Veles-Volos* is striking. Tradition says that *St. Vlasi* was guarded by wild beasts that behaved as tame and that he saved cattle from wolves.

We thus see how various mythologies converged into one, and underlying them all may in fact be the Roman cult of *Silvanus*. Not far from *Tekić*, in the village of *Vetovo*, ethnologists have recorded a cult of cattle veneration which certainly has deep historical roots (*Lechner* 1977). *Vetovo* is one of the few villages in the *Požega Valley* bearing a Latin name.

*Silvanus* was particularly venerated by peasants, hunters, and shepherds, as he protected the boundaries and limits of estates. In this role he was also honoured by land surveyors (*agrimensores*, *gromatici*), who ritually invoked him before conducting measurements,

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<sup>14</sup> In Croatia, much has been published on this subject over the past twenty years by *Radoslav Katičić*, in five books in which an in-depth philological analysis brings to light the deepest layers of Proto-Slavic and Proto-Indo-European spirituality.

addressing him as *domesticus* (protector of the house and hearth), *agrestis* (guardian of flocks and shepherds), and *orientalis* (god of boundaries, borders, and boundary markers).<sup>15</sup>

When all this is taken into account, it is hardly surprising that Silvanus was an important deity in the agrarian province of Pannonia.<sup>16</sup> According to local belief, he sits close beside the heavenly supreme god Jupiter, and we are therefore not surprised by the discovery of an object dedicated to him in Tekić.

## 6. Silvanian Votive Rings in Pannonia

Silvanian votive rings are rare and appear to constitute an exclusively Pannonian phenomenon. Around ten have been found in the Hungarian part of Roman Pannonia, and some also in the Danubian region of Slovakia.<sup>17</sup> If I am correctly informed, this would be the thirteenth find of such a ring in Roman Pannonia<sup>18</sup>, and the first discovery in our part of Pannonia, which makes it exceptionally important.

The discovery of the ring in Tekić corresponds with several other finds of rings dedicated to Silvanus from the territory of Roman Pannonia, preserved in the Savaria Museum in Szombathely, Roman Savaria on the ancient Amber Road and along the routes leading towards the Danube (Carnuntum, Vindobona, etc.). Roman Savaria (*Colonia Claudia Savariensum*) was founded in AD 45 and is the oldest town in Hungary.<sup>19</sup> The prefect from Bedemgrad, who originated from Inicerum, belonged to the Claudian tribe, as did many inhabitants of Savaria. This may constitute a modest indication that the settlement of Inicerum was founded at a very early date, already after the first Roman campaigns towards the Požega region.

<sup>15</sup> On Roman land surveyors (*agrimensores*, *gromatici*) and their cults, see Behrends–Capogrossi 1992; Campbell 2000; De Nardis 1994; Dilke 1971; Libertini 2018; Tákacs 2012 and 2015; and Thulin 2013.

<sup>16</sup> On Silvanus in Pannonia, one of the earliest studies is Nagy–Szabó 1976, while one of the most comprehensive is Dézspa 2012 (see also Dézspa 2001). See also Devescovi 2004; Kandler 1985 and 2005; Mócsy 1955; Mráv 2002; Szöke 1971; Ţentea 2016; Tóth 1967; and Weber/Hiden 2011. For Roman religion in Pannonia more generally, see Fitz 1998 and Szabó Csaba 2022.

<sup>17</sup> On Roman rings in Slovakia, see Daňová 2016; v. i Krupa 2016 te Bazovský, Igor – Daňová 2010; Miške 2018; Mykovinová 2003; Jílek et al. 2021; Kozáková 2016; Kraskovská 1974 i Schmidtová 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Szabó András 2014 provides a detailed list and description of twelve rings with Silvanian votive inscriptions in Hungarian Pannonia. See also Szabó András 2009, 2011, and 2014, as well as Szabó Géza 1996. Images of the rings are published in Sosztarits 2013 (pp. 119–120). On Roman rings in the National Museum in Belgrade, see Popović 1992. For a general typology of rings, see Guiraud 1989 (with examples from Gaul) and Henkel 1913 (the Rhineland).

<sup>19</sup> Vas County, that is, Željezno; the Croatian name is Sambotel or Subotiče. In Slavonia there are several places bearing the name Subocka, whose Hungarian designation was Szombathely or Szambathely. Kukuljević 1878 uses the form Subotica.



**Figure 3:** *Inscription on a Silvanian votive ring from Savaria (Sosztarits 2013: 119)*

One Silvanian votive ring was found in Savaria itself (*Figure 2*).<sup>20</sup> The archaeologist Blanka Horváth maintains that this is not an ordinary ring but an object of magical purpose, symbolising the close bond between a human being and the deity. This may also apply to the ring from Tekić, however one reads it (the dedication to Silvanus is indisputable). The text on the Savaria ring is brief but complete and clear: *Votum Silvano* — “A vow to Silvanus (I made, I fulfilled).” Here too the word order is accusative + dative, as on the Tekić ring.

The second ring was found in *Civitas Iovia (Alsóheténypuszta)*.<sup>21</sup> It bears a dedication to Silvanus Viator, engraved in letters with inlaid ornamental interspaces; the text reads: SILVANO VIATO(RI), that is, “To Silvanus the Traveller” (*Figure 5*).<sup>22</sup> Linguistically speaking, this consists of two successive datives, that is, indirect objects. This is perfectly good Latin.



**Figure 4:** *Ring from Savaria with the inscription “Votum Silvano” (Sosztarits 2013: 119)*



**Figure 5:** *Ring from Iovia with the inscription “Silvano Viato(ri)” (Sosztarits 2013: 120)*

<sup>20</sup> It is preserved in the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum / MNM 18/1909). See Tóth 1979:166, no. 12, and *Romains de Hongrie*.

<sup>21</sup> In southern Hungary, 35 km north of Pécs. In 1715 a group of Chakavian Croats from Lika settled there (in the villages of Magoč and Bikal, near Dombóvár), today largely Magyarised. A straight line runs towards our Donji Miholjac; it is therefore not far from the Požega Valley — approximately 140 km.

<sup>22</sup> It is preserved in the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum / MNM RR 84.11.1.).

In the catalogue of the Savaria exhibition<sup>23</sup>, which provides images and data for both rings, it is noted that such rings are found only in Pannonia and that they were probably funerary objects, since they are striking luxury items (one was found in a grave). Here Silvanus appears as a guide of souls to the other world.

It is possible that the Tekić ring served the same purpose (especially if it was found near a necropolis — 125 graves have been excavated in Tekić), though the precise location of the find is unknown. If we knew that it had been discovered within the area of the necropolis, this would provide an additional argument for reading the *V* in the inscription as an abbreviation of *Viator*: in that case, a sepulchral function would be far more probable. *Viatores* are associated with cemeteries and graves.

The Hungarian archaeologist András Szabó — who in one of his studies lists a total of twelve Silvanian votive rings (all of gold and silver) — also considers this to be an exclusively Pannonian phenomenon<sup>24</sup>, explaining the popularity of Silvanus in Pannonia by arguing that his protective functions corresponded to those of various indigenous deities. This claim, however, is not supported by specific examples.

Danijel Džino disagrees with this interpretation, regarding the cult as an innovation and offering a more nuanced explanation. Džino also demonstrates that the veneration of Silvanus was particularly widespread in Dinaric Dalmatia (and Bosnia), not only in Pannonia.

“Silvanus’ cult attracted worshippers who were not at the top of the social hierarchy: freedmen, slaves, soldiers, and above all people of indigenous origin who did not belong to the elites of their communities. New generations required symbols that would enable them actively to express and construct social and cultural differences, traditions, and a specific visual aesthetic. The veneration of Silvanus provided a convenient framework through which local cultural traditions could be made recognisable within the ‘global’ imperial context. In this way, Silvanus’ worshippers could feel themselves part of the Empire, while at the same time satisfying their need actively to express and shape local belonging and identity. The difference between the visual representation of Silvanus as Pan and as the ‘Younger’ Silvanus, as well as the clothing of his companions (‘Diana’, ‘nymphs’) in specific local dress, demonstrates the active localisation and gender

<sup>23</sup> Biró 2013: 120, Figure 8.71. See also Tóth 1979: 166, No. 12 and Romaines de Hongrie (2001): 116, No. 232.

<sup>24</sup> Szabó 2014, p. 158: “Exclusively known from the territory of Pannonia so far.”

redefinition of the visual aspects of the cult by different communities and provincial subcultures.” (Džino 2012:279)

Votive rings appear (as far as we currently know) to be an exclusively Pannonian phenomenon. Chronologically, these rings are dated to the late third and fourth centuries AD. Szabó also considers them primarily funerary objects, although their precise function cannot always be reliably determined from the inscriptions, since only two rings are known from a “closed context”, that is, with clear archaeological circumstances (they were found in graves). Votive rings of other religions have also been discovered (for example a Jewish ring with a menorah; Berger 2005).

Szabó also provides numerous examples of votive rings dedicated to other Roman deities, which are interesting as supplementary evidence but fall outside the scope of the present study. Here we shall list only the Latin texts of the inscriptions and their reconstructions (details are given in Szabó’s study), following the author’s numbering:

1. SILVANI VOTI RIESI
2. SILVANO VIATORI
3. V(oco)SILVANVM VIATOREM
4. S(ilvano) S(acrum) VRSINI(us) V(otum) L(ibens) M(erito) S(olvit)
5. VOTVM SILVANO
6. S(anc)TE SILVANE
7. SILVANO [v]OTVM
8. SILVANO VIATORI
9. SILVANO VIATO(ri)
10. [Si]LVA[n(o)] SILV(estris)
11. VOTV(m) SILVANO V(?) M(?) VI[atori?]
12. [Silva]NI[---?]

The twelfth dedication cannot be identified with certainty as Silvanian; therefore only eleven examples may be regarded as certain.

Of the remaining eleven rings, four or five are dedicated to Silvanus Viator, and may therefore have had a sacred or “magical” function, as Horváth suggests: the owner prays to Silvanus for an easy passage to a better world. This is thus the most frequent invocation. On two rings he is addressed as “holy Silvanus” (sacrum, sanctum), while on nos. 1, 4, and 7 a

vow is made to him without further specification (*voti, votum*), which we also find on ring no. 11 dedicated to *Silvanus Viator*. No. 3 stands out from the average, where *V-* is expanded as *voco* (“I invoke, I call”), which may be correct, since after this transitive verb an object follows in the accusative with full case endings.

In nine instances *Silvanus*’ name appears in the dative, meaning that he is ritually addressed as a god. The only genitive occurs on ring no. 1, and the only vocative (form of direct address) on no. 6. On nine or ten rings the name appears in its full form with case endings (here inscription no. 10, which is damaged, must be taken into account). In Szabó there is only one abbreviation (in no. 4), and that of a single letter, *S*. In this respect the Tekić ring somewhat stands out with its *SILV* or *SIL*; yet such inscriptions are also known elsewhere in the Empire. Steiner (1862) lists thirteen inscriptions bearing the full dative form *SILVANO*; on three we have the abbreviation *SILV*, and on two only *S*.

### 7. Curiosum: The Ring of *Silvianus* Which Is Not *Silvanian*

The so-called *Ring of Senicianus*, discovered in 1785 in Britain (Silchester, Hampshire), appears to have inspired Tolkien’s story “The Lord of the Rings” (*The Middle-earth Ring*). This ring was not dedicated to the god *Silvanus*; rather, it belonged to a certain *Silvianus*, a Roman soldier in *Glevum* (*Colonia Nervia Glevensium*, or sometimes *Glouvia*; today Gloucester).<sup>25</sup>



**Figure 6:** *The Ring of *Silvianus* from Glevum*, ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ring\\_of\\_Silvianus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ring_of_Silvianus)).



**Figure 7:** *The Ring of *Senicianus* from Glevum* ([www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/719789](http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/719789))

<sup>25</sup> For more details see: <https://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/719789> and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ring\\_of\\_Silvianus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ring_of_Silvianus).

It appears that Silvianus' ring was stolen while he slept by a certain Senicianus (perhaps a man from Senia?), upon whom Silvianus then laid a curse that he should never enjoy good health. This curse was discovered on a lead tablet. The ring is held in a private collection and was exhibited in 2013 at a National Trust Property.<sup>26</sup> Its surface is polished into ten facets; on one appears the abbreviation VE (Venus) together with the image of the goddess Venus.

One facet is inscribed with *Seniciane vivas iin de*, where there is clearly an erroneous engraving. The text should read *Seniciane vivas in deo* — “Senicianus (man of Senia?), live in God.” In its multi-faceted workmanship it is somewhat similar to the ring from Savaria shown in Figure 4.

This ring, therefore, should not be associated with any vow to Silvanus: the soldier Silvianus clearly venerated Venus, while the religious affiliation of the possible thief Senicianus remains unclear. Some have suggested that he was a Christian (the invocation *Vivas in deo* being characteristic of early Christianity).



**Figure 8:** The ring from Tekić is exceptionally large (photograph from the author's archive).

Silvianus' gold ring is larger than ordinary rings and may not have served as jewellery (its diameter is 25 mm), or else it was worn over a glove. In its excessive size it resembles the Tekić ring from the Požega museum: its diameter is approximately 2.8 cm and its width 3 mm (Figure 7). It is not, however, clear how this fact should be interpreted.<sup>27</sup>

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Now that some contextual information has been provided, we may proceed to the analysis of the Tekić ring and the seal.

<sup>26</sup> For more details see: <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/719789>.

<sup>27</sup> I had the opportunity to examine and measure it, and to try it on, thanks to the kindness of Mirela Pavličić Hein, archaeologist at the City Museum of Požega, to whom I express my gratitude.

## 8. The Type of Lettering on the Tekić Ring and the Velika Seal

The first feature that strikes one in these two inscriptions is the different type of Roman lettering employed on each of them. The Tekić ring displays a typical Roman capital script, whereas the word *Inceri* on the Velika seal exhibits characteristics of cursive writing. The type of lettering can often assist in dating an inscription: the classical capital began to be used towards the end of antiquity and at the beginning of the imperial period, acquiring at that time its recognisable shaded letter forms. Cursive script came into use from the third century and certainly after the fourth century.

The seal, therefore, may be of later date; and since the cursive on it has not yet reached full stylisation, nor are the letters markedly inclined, it may belong to the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century. Unfortunately, this assessment cannot be more precise, as epigraphic monuments warn us of numerous exceptions, which may depend on the scribe and various other factors. It is unlikely, however, that it dates from before the third century.

In general, inscriptions in capital script belong to the imperial period; they are rarely earlier than the turn of the era, though the practice of writing in capitals continued even later, when other styles of writing were already predominant.

In capital script the letters are upright, whereas in cursive they incline to the right, probably under the influence of writing on softer materials such as papyrus or leather. Lead and wax are also soft materials, and the seal is cast in lead.

Capital script is characteristic of stone monuments and clearly bears the traces of carving tools, of the chisel. Silver too is a soft metal, easy to work; yet the incisions on the ring are somewhat unskilful and the letters irregular, although they attempt to imitate the style of lapidary inscriptions — for example, the ends of the letters resemble chisel marks. The trace of the tool is clearly visible at the base of the letter *T*, where the stroke is so executed that the horizontal bar is entirely detached from the vertical stem. Something similar occurs at the ends of the letter *C*, which is more open than is usual in capitals; it is written in a manner resembling Etruscan inscriptions, and the *C* on the seal is the same.

The size of the letters is uneven — for example in the case of the letter *O*, which is smaller than the others. The letter *E*, on the other hand, is larger than the rest, which may again indicate the inexperience of the engraver. The form of the letter *R* is also noteworthy: its curved part is not fully closed and does not touch the vertical stroke. The letter *P* was written in a similar

manner up to the imperial period (reflecting its gradual development from the Greek prototype *Π* through the western Greek form *Γ*).

Most striking of all is the mirror writing of the letter *N* (as *Π*). The same phenomenon appears on a ring from Iovia, a Roman site in Hungary (Figure 5).<sup>28</sup> In short, with all its minor imperfections, the inscription appears to be a Roman engraving, probably executed by a somewhat poorly literate craftsman.

## 9. Philological and Epigraphic Analysis of the Text on the Ring of Tekić

Let us now turn our attention to the more important and more eloquent of the two finds: the silver ring bearing the inscription *VOTSILVINCERIVS*, discovered on the surface of the site of Treštanovačka gradina, where many scholars locate the ancient settlement of Incerum mentioned in the Antonine Itinerary, though without more convincing arguments or firm evidence. The distances given in the A.I. do not correspond, and it appears that they have not been seriously measured.

Cesarik and Kramberger analyse the inscription on the circumference of the ring as *VOT·SILV·INCERIVS* and, expanding the abbreviations, reconstruct the full text as *Vot(um) Silv(ano) Incerius*. This appears perfectly reasonable, though longer readings are also possible, as will be discussed below.

The Tekić ring inscription is epigraphically interesting because the word order is not the most usual. One would expect *Silvano votum* rather than *Votum Silvano*. The normal word order in Latin is *indirect object + direct object*, that is, dative followed by accusative. In a great many dedications, the name of the god Silvanus appears first (*Silvano votum ... etc.*), entirely in keeping with Latin usage. Yet there are also inscriptions in which *votum* stands at the beginning of the sentence. This may either enhance expressiveness (emphasising the vow rather than the god Silvanus) or reflect a weaker command of classical Latin, that is, a shift in

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<sup>28</sup> On this question I sought the opinion of the epigraphic specialist Prof. Dr Anamarija Kurilić of the University of Zadar. In an email of 16 September 2022, she replied as follows: "This form of writing the grapheme N is not rare, though neither is it particularly frequent; in other words, it is not something unusual on monuments, especially those produced by craftsmen of lesser quality (and literacy). The same applies to the mirror writing of the letters D and S. ... Since there is as yet no analysis dealing in detail with the question of the mirror writing of graphemes, it is difficult to state with certainty whether there are any regional or chronological preferences, but the impression (on the basis of the inscriptions with which I am familiar) is that it occurs more frequently on inscriptions from the second century onwards, and equally in all parts of the Roman Empire, and is generally attributed to the lesser skill of the stonecutter. Today I would even venture to suggest that it might be a sign of dyslexia, especially if the stonecutter had received a correctly written model but nevertheless mirrored the letter on the stone."

linguistic usage. A common formula on stone monuments is *Deo Silvano* (“To the god Silvanus”, both words in the dative), or else certain attributes of Silvanus are specified, such as *deus rusticorum*, the deity of peasants and protector of agricultural estates (e.g. *domesticus*, *arator*, *sator*).<sup>29</sup>

In this type of inscription abbreviations are most frequently employed, and these are generally standard. One often encounters the abbreviation S.V.S.L.M. for the votive formula *Silvano votum solvit libens merito* (literally: “To Silvanus I fulfilled the vow willingly and deservedly”, that is, “I gladly and properly fulfilled my vow to Silvanus”). Abbreviation is connected with lack of space, the nature of the material, and economy of time and effort in engraving the inscription; on a ring, in any case, space is limited. “*Votum*” is often abbreviated to a single letter “V” or to VOT. Sometimes the entire word is written with its case ending (*votum*, *voti*, etc.). The name of Silvanus is also abbreviated, minimally to S or to SIL, more rarely with additional letters (if space permits), so that we also find SILV... and similar forms. Where possible, the full name is written with case ending (*Silvanus*, *Silvano*, etc.).

Since the votive purpose here is clear, the cases are predictable: the dative *Silvano* (“to Silvanus”) followed by *votum* in the accusative. Owing to linguistic redundancy, this is understood even when the full words with case endings are not written. So it is on the Tekić ring: the dative and accusative are implied. The Romans evidently did not trouble themselves excessively with redundancy of information. It is as though they wished to vex future epigraphists, who must reconstruct even what is not written, that is, the full intended text of the inscription. The dedicators, however, did not doubt that the gods would be able to decipher the text.

Epigraphists, in their non-divine imperfection, must by sheer necessity contrive to penetrate the original inscription. They contend not only with abbreviations (which is the relatively easier part of the task), but also with numerous damages to monuments that impede legibility: on fragmented finds, words are preserved only partially, or the continuation of the text is missing. A further difficulty is that the Romans did not separate words on monuments but wrote *in continuo*, so that it is sometimes unclear where one word ends and another begins; various possible readings of the text may arise from this.

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<sup>29</sup> See the numerous dedications to Silvanus in Steiner 1862. Many examples are also found in Perinić 2008 and 2016.

Every Roman inscription is therefore a new challenge, and any reading proposed is always merely a suggestion offered to the collegial community of epigraphists, practitioners of this demanding and fascinating archaeological discipline. Only after publication and textual criticism is the majority of inscriptions finally established in their most probable form and interpretation; not infrequently, however, various uncertainties remain, since certain fragments cannot in fact be read unambiguously. The same future awaits this text, now offered for scholarly discussion.

### **10. Possible Alternative Readings of the Name on the Tekić Ring**

We have said that other readings are possible besides the one proposed by Cesarik and Kramberger. These depend on whether the abbreviation of the name of Silvanus was SIL or SILV. This is, of course, not insignificant: if the abbreviation was only SIL (which is quite common in Roman inscriptions, as is the use of a single S), then the remaining letters should be read not as *INCERIUS* but as *VINCERIUS*, which is an attested Roman name (especially in Late Antiquity; for example, one Spanish blessed bore this name), from which derive the Croatian name Vinko (“victor”) and the place-name Vinkovci. In that case the dedicator would have been called *Vincerius*, not *Incerius*. The name would thus not refer to Incerum at all — even if the ring had been found there. Of course, we do not actually know the true name of the dedicator.

This would also yield another possible reading of the dedication: “*A vow (was made) to Silvanus by Vincerius.*” The coincidence of this name with a large part of the phonetic form of the place-name Incer(um) might therefore be merely accidental. All the more so since the reading *INCERIUS* is not something that can easily be anticipated — it is unexpected or less probable, as such a name is not recorded anywhere in the vast corpus of Latin inscriptions.

It is, of course, tempting that the inscription was found at a possible location of Incerum, so that the name seems almost to suggest itself; yet therein may lie a trap: what if Incerum was not in Tekić, as some historians and archaeologists claim (without firm grounds)?

Our understanding is more secure if we remain aware that this is only *one* possible reading, though not necessarily an incorrect one. The vow could thus have been made by either *Incerius* or *Vincerius*, with the form *Vincerius* having a certain advantage, since it is an attested personal name, whereas *Incerius* would represent an onomastic exotum.

### 11. Incerius: an Individual or a Community?

Cesarik and Kramberger also examine the possibility that the vow was made by the community of a place called *Incerius*, but immediately dismiss this possibility “in view of the fact that the inscription appears on a personal object (a ring), since it would be difficult to expect that an entire community would dedicate such a small personal object to a deity in fulfilment of a vow (in such a scenario one would rather expect a larger stone monument to be dedicated)” (p. 107).

On this point I fully agree with the authors, and would add an important philological argument: if the place-name had been *Incerius*, the ablative form of the name in the sources would have been *Incerione*, and certainly not *Incerio* or *Inicero*, which are the only attested forms (in all variants of the Antonine Itinerary and on the prefect’s tombstone). It is therefore entirely excluded that the place could have been called *Incerius*.

However, as noted above, one should not hastily assume that there existed a personal name derived from the place-name (although this is possible), but should also consider the entirely plausible option that the personal name was *Vincerius*. In that case any further discussion becomes unnecessary. At the same time, it is clear that the first interpretation is indeed more exciting and interesting (though it remains uncertain what exactly it would tell us).

### 12. Silvanus Viator. Silvanus the Traveller, Protector of Travellers and Guide of Souls

There is also a third possible reading: VOT- SIL- V- INCERIUS. In that case the name *Incerius* would remain, while the element -V- could be interpreted as an abbreviation for one of the attributes of Silvanus: *viator*, that is, *Silvanus Viator*, “Silvanus the protector of travellers” (a counterpart to Mercury, the divine messenger). Along Roman roads we often find votive stelae (roadside monuments) dedicated to Silvanus Viator. In a figurative sense, *Silvanus Viator* is also a “guide to the world beyond”, that is, a companion on the final journey.

The Hungarian archaeologist Blanka Horváth writes of this attribute of Silvanus:

“In western Pannonia, and especially along the Amber Road, the role of protecting travellers appears in a particularly prominent way. His authority over journeys on land is confirmed by votive objects and inscriptions in which he appears together with deities of roads and crossroads. Although the term “viator” carries the meaning “protector of

travellers”, his function was not limited to providing protection during earthly journeys. Certain Silvanian rings discovered in graves indicate the role of this deity in accompanying the souls of the deceased into the afterlife. Besides Silvanus, this attribute “traveller” is also used for Mercury.”<sup>30</sup>

### **13. Incerius: a Personal Name or an Ethnic (or Ktetic) Form?**

If the reading of this *-V-* as an abbreviation for *Viator* were to prove correct, the remainder of the text could again be read as *Incerius*. As noted above, this form is less probable as a personal name, but it is possible as an ethnic or a ktetic (i.e. “*a man from Incerum*”, “*an Incerian*”, “*of Incerum*”). Of course, it may also represent a personal name, that is, a nickname or cognomen. It is not uncommon for ethnics to become names, nicknames, or elements within naming formulae (e.g. *Romulus*, *Diocletianus*, *Postumius*). In such formations the suffix *-ius* is often used as a derivational element (though others also occur, depending on the type and form of the root word). In Latin one might perhaps expect the form *Incerianus*, as in *Diocletianus* (possibly derived from *Dioclea*); forms ending in *-ius* developed in a later phase of the Latin language, possibly under the influence of the Greek *-ios*.

*Incerius* would then be a proper name (an anthroponym) derived from the place-name *Incerum* or *Incerus* (that is, *Incer/o/*). The dedicator would therefore be *Incerius*. In form it resembles other Latin names ending in *-ius*: *Iulius*, *Claudius*, *Antonius*, and the like, which are often derived from personal names (usually those of a father or ancestor).

Personal names derived from toponyms are rare (more often the reverse occurs: a place receives its name from a person, those are the so-called eponyms), but such cases do exist, although it is often unclear whether this was a true given name or merely a nickname, as happens even today (for example, when a person from Rama is called Ramljak): most often this becomes an additional name or surname. The suffix *-ius* generally serves to form possessive adjectives: *Postumius* meaning “a man of Postojna”, “a native of Postojna”, “one belonging to Postojna”. This roughly corresponds to Croatian suffixes such as *-anin* (Požežanin) or *-ac* (Vukovarac), and similar forms. Thus, from a philological point of view as well, the most probable interpretation of the word would be as an ethnic designation: “*a man*

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<sup>30</sup> Blanka Horváth: [https://savariamuseum.blog.hu/2020/06/11/silvanus\\_feliratos\\_gyuruk](https://savariamuseum.blog.hu/2020/06/11/silvanus_feliratos_gyuruk)

from *Incerum*". In that case the dedication to Silvanus would have been made by a male inhabitant of *Incerum*.

#### 14. Philological Analysis of the Text on the Seal from Velika

That the name originally had the root *incer-* (and not *inicer-* or *inceri-*) is also confirmed by the second find, a lead seal on which we have, in two lines: INC/ERI. This is undoubtedly a genitive functioning as a possessive adjective, whose nominative would have been *Incerum*, *Incerus*, or perhaps *Incer*, with the ablative *Incerō*, as also found in the Antonine Itinerary. Here is the exact quotation from the article:

"This is a lead seal used to secure a shipment, on which the letters INC/ERI appear in two lines. Its content can simply be read as *Inceri* (translated as 'from *Incerō*', meaning that the shipment was sent from *Incerō*). Of course, if this had by chance been a find from Tekić, there would have been no doubt that *Incerō* was located there, but our seal was discovered in the vicinity of present-day Velika, where, according to some authors, the station *Incerō* was in fact situated. Unlike the ring from Tekić, where the most probable interpretation is that a person is mentioned whose name was derived from the name of his place of origin (*Incerius*), the Velika seal undoubtedly records the place *Incerō* mentioned in the Antonine Itinerary. The type of object — a seal — is also significant, since it attests to a postal route where, just as today, the place from which the shipment was sent was indicated." (Cesarik–Kramberger 2021:107)

If the place-name had been *Incerius*, the genitive would have been *Incerii-*. Everything therefore again falls into place: there could not have been a place called *Incerius*; that would designate an inhabitant of the place *Incerum*. I am not entirely certain that the best translation of the genitive *Inceri* is "from *Incerō*". In that case the ablative *Incerō* would have been used in Latin, which expresses precisely that meaning: "(originating) from *Incerum*, coming from *Incerum*". The ablative also has other functions, for example in the Antonine Itinerary: *Iter a Siscia Mursa, Incerō etc.*, which we translate with a construction consisting of a preposition + genitive ("from *Sisak*"), while the second part — depending on the preposition used — is rendered by a genitive, an accusative of direction, or a dative: "from *Siscia* to *Mursa*"; "from *Siscia* towards *Mursa*".

The authors also state that the ablative corresponds to our locative, which is true only in certain cases: the preposition *in* with a noun in the accusative indicates direction, whereas in

combination with the ablative it indicates location (thus functioning as a locative) or origin, the starting point of movement. “In Incerum” may therefore mean “in Incerum”, which is indeed locative in sense; but without the preposition in the form is ablative (or dative, though that does not apply here).

In the context of the Antonine Itinerary it is always an ablative — a case that does not exist in Croatian and is translated by the construction *preposition + genitive*: “from Incerum”. The genitive *Inceri* (“of Incerum”), however, functions in Latin more as a possessive than as Croatian genitive: “Incerian, belonging to Incerum, pertaining to Incerum.” Sometimes the ablative is translated in Croatian by the instrumental: *domo Inicero* literally “by house from Inicerum”, that is, “by origin from Inicerum”. In the case of this seal this is not unimportant, because “Inceri” does not mean “in Incerum”, but rather “of Incerum”, “belonging to Incerum”, “relating to Incerum” — in other words, “Incerian”, which is the closest possible translation.

This in turn implies that the first word determined by this genitive is missing. For example: *portorium Inceri* (the customs of Incerum, incerum customs), *praefectus Inceri* (the prefect of Incerum), *praetorium Inceri*, or something similar. When we examine the image of the seal, it indeed appears to be a fragment missing its left side, where this first word may once have stood. Otherwise it is difficult to explain this isolated genitive, which by itself has no clear meaning except as a linguistic indication — though one that is nevertheless significant for establishing the correct name. Beyond that, nothing more can be said about this single word.

## 15. Are We Now Closer to Ancient Incerum?

In conclusion, the authors ask whether these two new epigraphic discoveries — sensational in themselves — can contribute to the identification of the toponym Incerum. Their answer is negative: the objects may have been brought to those locations, but it is equally possible that they were found precisely at the place whose name they mention (at least in the case of one of them).

In the case of the shipment bearing the seal, transport is a perfectly plausible assumption (although it may also have been an unsent shipment, as the authors themselves note). With the ring, however, it is possible that its owner, originally from Incerum, no longer lived there and bore the nickname *Incerius*; thus its discovery at Tekić could even argue against the assumption that Incerum was located at Treštanovačka gradina. If that site had indeed been Incerum, all its inhabitants could have been called Incerius, which would make little sense. It is also possible

that the votive ring was made away from the dedicator's native place, to which he later returned, or that he sent his ring to Incerum. The same applies to the seal from Velika: Incerum may have been located in the area of Velika, but it may also have been elsewhere in the Valley, or even outside it (for example, A. Mócsy places it in Suhopolje in Podravina, while Pavao Ritter Vitezović places it in Cernik, and then in Požega).

The authors conclude:

“Be that as it may, the name *Incerius* has so far not been recorded anywhere in the entire Roman world and can therefore only be connected with the place mentioned in the Antonine Itinerary as *Incerum*. Since the ring was discovered at a site which most authors consider to represent the remains of Incerum, it might at first glance appear certain that the present-day archaeological site near Tekić is in fact the ancient *Incerum*.” (Cesarik–Kramberger 2021:107).

## 16. Where Was Incerum Actually Located?

The answer only *appears* obvious. The only thing that is certain is that this “majority of authors” has never examined or critically questioned the identification of Incerum with Tekić. The only archaeologist who has raised doubts about this is Tomislav Bilić, who has described and analysed in detail all investigations conducted at the site of Treštanovačka gradina at Tekić.<sup>31</sup> All other authors simply repeat what their predecessors claimed and cited, without any analysis. Yet Bilić is not cited by anyone (not even by our two authors), although his work represents the most recent scholarly assessment of this site.

The certainty of these claims is further weakened by the doubts and reservations expressed by Cesarik and Kramberger themselves, and above all by what generally accompanies most attempts to locate Incerum: the disregard of the otherwise precise and easily verifiable data contained in the primary source, the Antonine Itinerary. Let us list some of the characteristic shortcomings:

### a) Distances between the ancient sites (according to the A.I.)

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<sup>31</sup> Bilić 2012: 16.

The distance of Tekić from Siscia and Variana (Sisak and Kutina) does not correspond to the distances given in the Antonine Itinerary. Tekić lies as much as twenty kilometres too far east of the location where, according to the data in the A.I., we would expect Incerum — that is, approximately 114 km from Sisak.

The positions of the neighbouring stations *Menneianae*, *Aquae Balissae* and *Leukon* have not been conclusively established (there are only weakly supported conjectures), but distances can be measured from confirmed Roman locations such as *Siscia*, *Certissa*, *Cibalae* and *Sirmium*. This can easily be checked with simple measurements using Google Maps or similar tools.<sup>32</sup>

Within the Valley — according to the distances given in the A.I. — the next station on the road towards Sirmium, *Picentino*, should be located about 37.5 kilometres from Incerum. The entire valley is barely more than 40 km long, so the only logical interpretation is that Incerum lay at the extreme western end of the Požega Valley (closer to Psunj and Papuk, somewhere around the villages of Soboština or Rudina, where Roman finds have been recorded), while *Picentino* lay at its eastern end, on the slopes of Dilj Gora, where Roman roads have been confirmed (Klisa, Sapna and Kneževac) and where a Roman building has been discovered near Vukojevica (1 km south of Klisa), which could have functioned as a *mansio*.

All researchers nevertheless agree that *Picentino* must have been located in the eastern part of the Valley, in the area around Čaglin (Latinovac and Ruševo have been proposed, although no Roman finds are known there). If *Picentino* is located there — quite correctly — then Incerum cannot lie 15 km to the west, where Tekić is situated, but rather about 37 km from Čaglin, which places it in the western part of the Valley, around Orljavac or Soboština.

The middle of the Valley cannot be considered as the location of Incerum: this is geographically and topographically impossible and contradicts the distances given in the A.I.. Tekić simply cannot have been the ancient Incerum of the Antonine Itinerary. That possibility must be excluded.

### ***b) Neglect of Picentino***

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<sup>32</sup> Preliminary results of my own measurements and topographical investigations were presented in Rašić 2014a, 2014b (abstracts of the presentations in Đurđević 2014b) and in Rašić 2016a. Incerum is placed in the area around Soboština.

Picentino is consistently neglected in the literature, unfairly and without good reason, while all attention is directed towards Incerum, even though there is no valid reason to suppose that this station was less important than Incerum or that a larger settlement existed beside Incerum than beside Picentino. Incerum seems to have become something of an obsession for the archaeologists of Požega, while Picentino has become its orphan!

One of the few archaeologists who devoted attention to Picentino (and came quite close to identifying it!) is the Požega-born Goran Đurđević, until recently professor of archaeology in Beijing.<sup>33</sup> However, since Đurđević, in searching for the location of Picentino, starts from the “standard” assumption that Inicerum was located at Tekić, this leads him about twenty kilometres too far east. Thus he was unable to solve the problem, even though his method was fundamentally sound. Đurđević is also one of the few scholars to search for the location of the praetorium and the imperial mansio<sup>34</sup> — features that most researchers have neglected, although they are clearly the most important structures along the entire route. In his work, Đurđević approaches the Roman period in the Požega region systematically and asks the right questions.

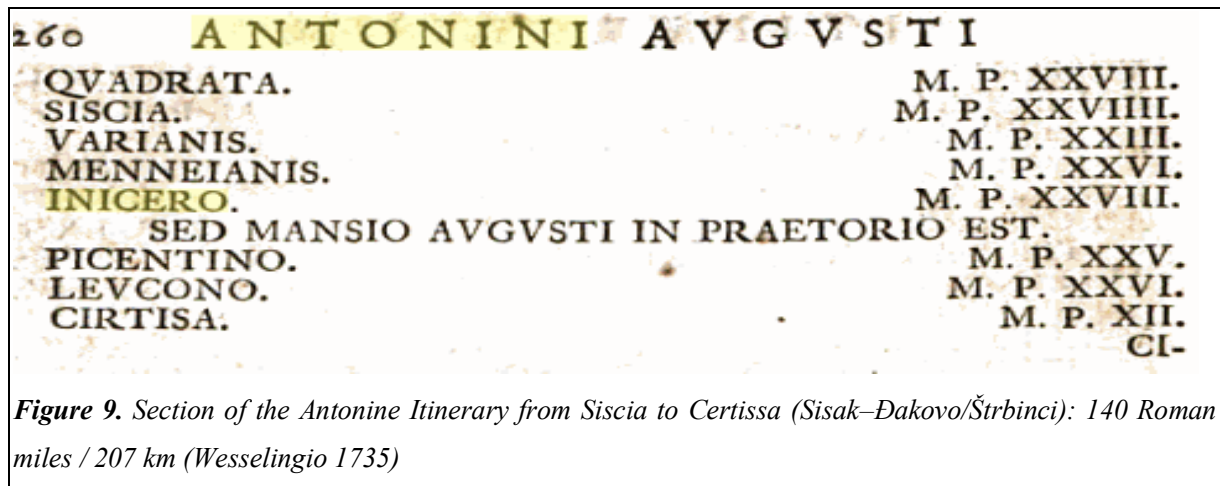
### c) *Forgetting the sentence: Sed mansio augusti in praetorio est*

It is difficult to understand how the most important statement in the relevant section of the Antonine Itinerary has been overlooked: between the stations Incero and Picentino appears the sentence *Sed mansio Augusti in praetorio est* — “But the emperor’s residence is in the praetorium.” Đurđević’s work prompted me, as a philologist, to examine this issue myself, with the intention of interpreting this Latin sentence. Both Incerum and Picentino should be located in the Požega Valley. The praetorium and the palace within it were neither in Incerum nor in Picentino, as indicated by the *but (sed)* in the Latin sentence.

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<sup>33</sup> See his contribution on Picentino in the book of abstracts of the symposium mentioned in note 3, and “Did the Roman Emperor Bathe in the Pools of Velika?”, on the portal [pozeski.hr](http://pozeski.hr/je-li-se-rimski-car-kupao-u-velickim-bazenima/) (<http://pozeski.hr/je-li-se-rimski-car-kupao-u-velickim-bazenima/>), published 17 March 2014; reprinted in: Požeški pučki kalendar 2015.

<sup>34</sup> See “Did the Roman Emperor Bathe in the Pools of Velika?”, on the portal [pozeski.hr](http://pozeski.hr/je-li-se-rimski-car-kupao-u-velickim-bazenima/) (<http://pozeski.hr/je-li-se-rimski-car-kupao-u-velickim-bazenima/>), published 17 March 2014; reprinted in: Požeški pučki kalendar 2015.



These undoubtedly important structures — the praetorium and the mansio — which should have attracted the primary attention of archaeologists, have rarely been sought, and the possibility was not considered even when a Roman settlement was excavated at Tekić, which was too readily and uncritically proclaimed to be Incerum.

Among other things, a luxurious building with a heated bath was discovered at Tekić (along with two adjacent buildings), so it would be worth examining whether this could have been the praetorium with the imperial mansio within it. Only two Roman buildings have been excavated in the Požega Valley (Sloboština and Tekić), and Sloboština is too small to accommodate both a praetorium and an imperial mansio. This leaves only Tekić, but it should be borne in mind that most of the Roman settlements at Velika and Tekić have not been excavated at all; therefore the question of the location of the imperial mansio and the praetorium must remain open.

*d) Fixation on the “city” of Incerum*

The road stations Incerum and Picentino should therefore be sought elsewhere, bearing in mind that they are exactly what the Antonine Itinerary describes them to be: *road stations!* — not necessarily settlements. Future archaeologists might find themselves in a similar difficulty if they were to excavate the remains of a motorway rest area near Novska and claim that they had discovered the town of Novska itself, which actually lies some ten kilometres away from the station. Roman settlements in the Požega region should first be excavated before firm conclusions are drawn about them. For now, we have only indications that settlements may have existed (Velika, Tekić, and perhaps the area around Imrijevci).

## 17. Turković's Discovery of Roman Roads in the Požega Valley

Finally, there is another major oversight: archaeologists working in the Požega Valley appear to have forgotten the earliest discoveries of Roman roads, made by the Kutjevo landowner Milan Turković, who reported them to the Croatian Archaeological Society in 1898. His discoveries not only fit perfectly with later research, but also explain it and ultimately support my own thesis concerning the location of Incerum in the western part of the Valley, around Soboština or Rudina.

Turković discovered remains of Roman roads along the following line (from west to east): *Golobrdci – Treštanovci (Tekić) – Tominovac – Ferovac – Klisa (near Gradište) – Sapna*.<sup>35</sup> All these places lie along the middle of the Valley on a perfectly straight line (as Roman roads typically ran across flat terrain!), stretching from Klisa through Tekić to Golobrdci.



At a distance of about 37 kilometres westward from Klisa, the road reaches the area around Soboština, where significant Roman finds have been recorded that may correspond to architectural structures associated with Roman public roads and their logistical system (*Cursus publicus*). In the vicinity of Soboština there are thirteen sites with Roman finds.

Somewhere around Klisa (near the village of Vukojevica) Picentino may have been located (the distance from Soboština corresponds to the Antonine Itinerary, and Roman finds are also known at that site). On the route towards Mursa in the Antonine Itinerary one station seems to be missing (this section of the route is unclear, as the A.I. gives an impossibly short distance from Siscia to Mursa), whereas on the road towards Cibalae Picentino is explicitly mentioned. It is possible that the omitted station on the route to Mursa was in fact the same Picentino,

<sup>35</sup> Turković 1898: 242–243.

where the roads diverged towards Mursa and Certissa (Đakovo / Štrbinci). Even today the roads diverge near Klisa.

It is equally possible that the road branched already at Tekić, or at least somewhere east of it; in that case there must have been another station or *mutatio* (a relay station for horses, mules and oxen).

Finds of the remains of a Roman building at Grabarje and of a Roman road at Knežci indicate the existence of a Roman road leading towards Marsonia. This road probably connected with the route between the station of Urbate (Srbac/Davor?) and Marsonia towards Certissa, meeting it somewhere on the southern slopes of Dilj. In that case Picentino would have been located in the south-eastern part of the Valley, while another settlement of unknown name would have stood near Klisa/Vukojevica. However, in that case the distances to Leukon, Certissa and Cibalae would not correspond: Picentino therefore could not have been located near Ruševo or Djedina Rika. It is also possible that the road to Mursa followed the same route as the road to Cibalae from Incerum to Klisa/Vukojevica, branching only there towards Mursa and Certissa.

This would answer the question of where the ancient stations of Incerum (most probably in the area of Soboština and Orljavac, or the nearby Rudina) and Picentino (near Vukojevica, though with the reservations noted above) were located. Such a solution is fully consistent with the data given in the Antonine Itinerary.

The problem of locating Picentino is further complicated by the fact that relatively few Roman finds have been discovered in the eastern part of the Valley. Nevertheless, the most significant among them must be taken into account — the one near the village of Imrijevcı, where a Roman iron foundry once existed. A road leading towards Marsonia may have passed through the sites of Grabarje and Knežci to reach this area. Since there is no iron ore in the Valley (or in its immediate surroundings), a road connection with Bosnia must be assumed (probably via Marsonia and Urbate). However, because of the excessive distance to the east, Imrijevcı certainly cannot have been Picentino.

## **18. Open Questions for Future Research**

These are, of course, my own reflections on the matter (which I will soon publish in a more fully argued form). They depart from everything found in the traditional literature on Incerum; yet they appear reasonable to me because they address many questions that have remained

unresolved so far, unlike other interpretations that lack a firm foundation in several of the points of argument already mentioned.

In short, there is still no consensus on the matter. In this context the two most recent finds relating to Incerum have appeared, and they inevitably become entangled with the question of its location. Perhaps these finds may indeed help us in that respect, but first they must be examined within the professional community and according to the established rules of scholarly practice.

As a non-archaeologist, I would be interested to know why the Požega Museum, where the objects are kept, did not respond more adequately to these discoveries from 2013. There must undoubtedly be professional protocols governing such matters. Under what circumstances were the ring and the seal discovered, and at which precise locations? What was their archaeological context in relation to other finds at the same sites? What do we know about the honest finder and generous donor of these artefacts? Was he a specialist, or were these chance finds (since we are dealing with two artefacts discovered at two relatively distant locations)? Why was the Silvanian ring not included in the excellent study of jewellery from Tekić, which Goran Đurđević examined in his undergraduate thesis<sup>36</sup> in archaeology?

Only when such questions have been answered will these finds be able to enter definitively into the corpus of reliable knowledge about Incerum, which for the time being remains rather limited in scope.

In short, these interesting artefacts may yet tell us important stories and perhaps change our understanding of Incerum. I hope that these philological reflections may have contributed something to that process. Even if the objects should ultimately prove not to be authentic, the philological analysis of the names Incerum and Inicerum will still remain worthwhile.

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<sup>36</sup> For the moment, this remains the only study of small artefacts discovered at Tekić.

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Pregledni rad

UDK: 904:930.85(497.5 Tekić, Velika)

<https://doi.org/10.32903/p.8.1.5>

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***PRSTEN IZ TEKIĆA I PEČAT IZ VELIKE: NAJNOVIJI EPIGRAFSKI  
NALAZI S IMENOM INCERUMA***

**Abstract**

U Požeškom pučkom kalendaru (PPK) za 2021. godinu arheolozi Nikola Cesarik i Vjekoslav Kramberger objavili su dva do sada nepoznata epigrafska zapisa sa spomenom rimskoga Inceruma (Iniceruma). Radi se o srebrnom prstenu s natpisom VOTSILVINCERIVS nađenom na površini lokaliteta Treštanovačka gradina kod Tekića i pečatnoj plombi s natpisom INCERI iz okolice Velike. Dio prvoga natpisa autori tumače kao INCERIUS.

U ovom radu analiziramo te natpise s filološkoga gledišta u nadi da nam oni mogu otkriti nešto više o inače skromno zasvjedočenom Incerumu. (Naravno, ako se ispostavi da su nalazi arheološki autentični, jer za sada još nisu bili stručno obrađeni).

**Keywords:** Prsten iz Tekića, Pečat iz Velike, epigrafija, Incerum