THE LAST LEGION ON THE *LIMES DELMATICUS* – VIII *AUGUSTA*

Željko Miletić
Sveučilište u Zadru
Obala kralja Petra Krešimira IV./2
zmiletic@unizd.hr

Silvia Bekavac
Sveučilište u Zadru
Obala kralja Petra Krešimira IV./2
sbekavac@unizd.hr

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Recent archaeological research has provided arguments supporting the thesis that Legio VIII Augusta, or one of its vexillations, was stationed at the military centre of Burnum on the Limes Delmaticus after Legio IIII Flavia Felix left Dalmatia during Domitian's Dacian War. In the layers belonging to the first construction phase of the military training ground (campus), dated to the reign of Claudius, tegulae stamped LEG XI CPF have been found, while those from the second phase bear the stamp LEG VIII AVG. Such tiles also occur at other sites along the Delmataean limes. The intensive production of bricks and the associated construction activity of the VIII Legion suggest that the unit's primary role at Burnum may have been the logistical preparation of Trajan's expeditionary army on its way through the province of Dalmatia towards the theatre of the Second Dacian War. During Trajan's reign, a water-supply system was constructed at Jader with funds from the imperial fisc. At the same time, a military building was erected in the municipium of Asseria, the roof of which was covered with tiles bearing the stamp of the VIII Legion. The military training ground at Burnum was also repaired at that time. Burnum is the setting of one of the few scenes on Trajan's Column depicting a journey through Dalmatia. The scene shows officials and guests welcoming Emperor Trajan as he arrives from the direction of the municipium of Asseria. The two soldiers depicted in the stylised fortress, interpreted here as the castra legionis, may be identified as legionaries of Legio VIII Augusta. Immediately after the end of the Second Dacian War and the departure of the VIII Legion, Dalmatia became a provincia inermis.

Key words:
Burnum; Legio VIII *Augusta*; *Limes Delmaticus*; Trajan's Column; Roman military logistics

The legionary camp of Burnum, part of the so-called Delmataean *limes*, was created as a reaction to the Pannonian-Delmataean War, the uprising of the two Batos, which took place in AD 6–9, which Suetonius described with the notorious claim that it was "*gravissimum omnium externorum bellorum post Punica* – of all external, non-civil wars, second only to the Punic Wars in gravity".[1] Recent stratigraphic excavations and non-destructive surveys have supplemented the topography of Burnum with new data. An auxiliary camp was discovered about 500 m east of the *castra legionis*, a military amphitheatre was excavated, roads with crossings over the River Titius (today's Krka) were identified, and, for the topic of this article, the excavation of the *campus*, the military training ground, is particularly important (Figure 1).[2]

The idea of building a limes apparently came from Emperor Augustus, which in Burnum is confirmed by the discovery of numerous *tegulae* with PANSIANA stamps in the area of the *castra legionis*.[3] The stratigraphy of the layers in the *principia* of the legionary camp at Burnum, excavated by the Austrian Archaeological Institute even before World War I,[4] and again in AD 1973–1974,[5] shows that troops were permanently stationed at Burnum at least from the early years of Tiberius's reign.[6] Such a chronological determination is confirmed by the statement of Tacitus – *"Nec multo post Drusus in Illyricum missus est ut suesceret militiae studiaque exercitus pararet; simul iuvenem urbano luxu lascivientem melius in castris haberi Tiberius seque tutiorem rebatur utroque filio legionis obtinente"* – that Drusus was sent to Illyricum to accustom him to military ser-

1 Suet. *Tib.* 16.

2 Cambi *et al.* 2006; Miletić 2010, 126–137; Glavaš, Miletić 2013.

3 Miletić 2011, 264–266.

4 Reisch 1913.

5 Zabehlicky-Scheffenegger, Kandler 1979.

6 Zaninović 1968, 122; Ilakovac 1982, 104; Miletić 2010, 123–124.

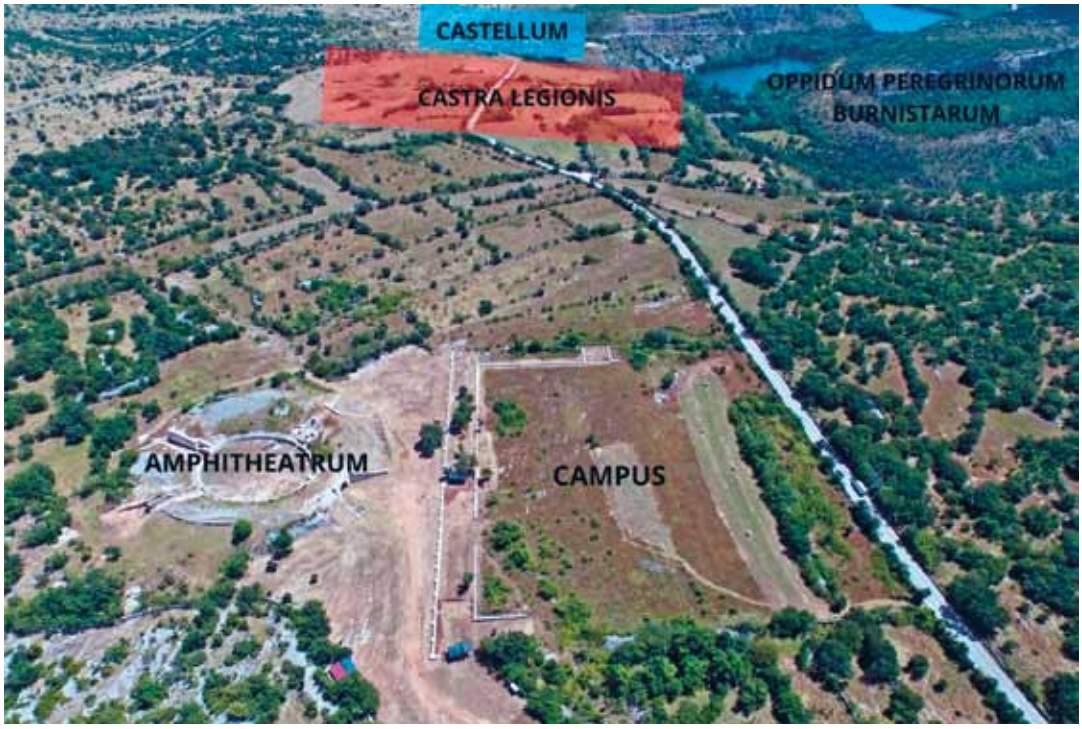


FIGURE 1. Aerial view of the archaeological site of Burnum with marked positions of the *castellum*, *castra legionis*, *amphitheatrum* and *campus* (military training ground) (photo by Ž. Miletić).

vice and to prepare the army. In addition, Tiberius believed that the young man, indulging in the luxuries of the city, would be better kept in the camps and that he himself would be safer if both his sons commanded the legions.[7] Drusus' three-year stay (AD 17–20) was briefly interrupted when he travelled to Rome for the funeral of Germanicus.[8] Illyricum, with a strong military presence, lay opposite Italy on the other shore of the Adriatic, which further increased the strategic importance of the region; therefore, the choice of this province for his training in military skills is understandable.

The camp was first occupied by the XI Legion, as confirmed by dozens of monuments. The original roofs, covered with tiles from Augustus's state workshop PANSIANA, and delivered from northern Italy, lasted for several decades. Military tile workshops were established in Burnum after AD 42 and produced tegulae bearing the newly acquired honorary name of the Eleventh Legion, *Claudia Pia Fidelis*. The unit earned this title, together with the VII Legion in Tilurium, for the loyalty shown to the emperor Claudius during the failed conspiracy organised by a clique in Rome in conjunction with the governor of Dalmatia, Lucius Aruntius Camillus Scribonianus.[9] After this event, the area of the *principia* was significantly expanded, so the neighbouring buildings in the camp had to be demolished and rebuilt, and new tegulae bearing the stamp of the XI Legion *Claudia Pia Fidelis* were placed on their roofs.[10]



FIGURE 2. Fragment of a *tegula* with stamp LEG VIII AVG from Burnum (photo by Ž. Miletić).

7 Tac. *Ann.* 2. 44.

8 Tac. *Ann.* 3. 2–7; Levick 1999, 116.

9 Tac. *Hist.* 5. 75; Suet. *Cl.* 13.2, 35; Cass. Dio, 55. 15; Cambi 2009, 69.

10 Miletić 2011, 265–268.



FIGURE 3. Water channel in the courtyard of the military training ground (campus) at Burnum, paved with tegulae stamped LEG VIII AVG (photo by Ž. Miletić).

Recent excavations have clearly shown that the emperor's package of reward measures included a general urban renewal of Burnum.[11] The military amphitheatre was also constructed at that time and was later upgraded during the reign of Vespasian, as evidenced by the monumental imperial inscription, as well as by the discovery of a stamp of the IIII Legion *Flavia Felix*, whose first station was Burnum.[12] The site had previously been abandoned by the XI Legion *Claudia Pia Fidelis*, which had gone to Italy to take part in the civil war and ultimately sided with Vespasian.[13]

In reconstructing the sequence of the legion's stay in Burnum, the newly-discovered campus, the military training ground, plays an important role. The floor plan shows that this was an exercise building (*campus*, *palaestra*), consisting of a central open courtyard surrounded by long halls (*exedrae*). The hall that runs along the entire northern side of the courtyard is 10.20 m in width and 143 m in length (internal dimensions). Before the construction of the campus and the amphitheatre began, the extremely karstic terrain had to be levelled, so cavities and sinkholes were filled with material from a cultural layer. When Emperor Claudius decided to construct the amphitheatre and the campus, soil from another area, perhaps from an earlier temporary camp that had been converted into a training ground after the construction of the permanent *castra*, was used to fill and level the ground beneath the future structures. Thousands of broken artefacts from the military milieu were recovered from this filling, ranging from parts of equipment and weapons to ceramics and, in particular, coins, which date to the decades preceding the reign of Claudius, at the latest to the first years of his rule.[14]

Tegulae bearing the stamps of the XI Legion *Claudia Pia Fidelis* fell from the roofs into a layer of roof collapse and building debris, indicating that, as part of a joint construction project with the amphitheatre, the campus was constructed by the legionaries. In recent research, these two buildings have been shown to be typical companions of legionary camps of that period.[15] In the same shallow layer of collapse, stratigraphically completely disturbed due to agricultural cultivation and the dismantling of walls for the construction of the nearby railway, a large number of tegulae stamped with the mark of the VIII Legion *Augusta* was found (Figure 2). This may be the result of repairs to the old roof structure and the replacement of damaged sections with new tiles. Wilkes proposed two possible periods of the stay of the VIII Legion in Dalmatia: the first in AD 68–69 during the civil war, and the second after the end of the Flavian dynasty.[16]

Tacitus, however, clearly states that the Illyrian army took Vespasian's side, and later in the text he mentions that the Third Legion served as an example for the other Moesian legions, VIII and VII *Claudia*.[17] It seems unlikely that the VIII Legion, or its vexillations, on their way from Novae in Moesia during the civil war, would have gone to Burnum, where they would have established large-scale tile production and associated building operations. In the province of Dalmatia, tegulae of Legio VIII

11 Sedlmayer 2024, 158.

12 AE 2021, 1039; Cambi *et al.* 2006, 11–13.

13 Glavičić, Miletić 2009, 75–78; Miletić 2010, 137, 139; 2011, 268–269.

14 Miletić 2011, 272; Glavičić, Miletić 2013, 160, 163–166; Vrkić 2017, 210–212, Figs. 13–14; Borzić 2020, 25–161.

15 Trumm 2013, 58–60, Fig. 14.

16 Wilkes 1969, 115–116.

17 Tac. *Hist.* 2.74 and 2.85; Wellesley 1960, 276–279.



FIGURE 4. Detail of a tegula with the stamp LEG VIII AVG, found at the bottom of a drainage channel in the campus yard (photo by Ž. Miletić).



FIGURE 6. To left of centre, the tegula with the seal shown here in the photograph in Fig. 5; to right, a third tegula with a barely noticeable seal LEG VIII AVG (photo by Ž. Miletić).



FIGURE 5. Detail of the second tegula with the stamp LEG VIII AVG, found at the bottom of the drainage channel in the campus yard (photo by Ž. Miletić).

Augusta have also been found in Asseria, Tilurium, Bigeste and Tomislavgrad.[18] During the Year of the Four Emperors, the VIII Legion probably did not even pass through Burnum, but left Moesia by a shorter and easier route via Siscia in Pannonia on its way to northern Italy. We therefore reject the first date proposed by Wilkes.[19]

Excavations in the area of the training ground did not yield a single fragment stamped with the mark of the IIII Legion *Flavia Felix*. That unit, reorganised from the IIII Macedonian Legion, occupied the camp at Burnum immediately after its foundation and permanently left Dalmatia around AD 86 on its way to Domitian's Dacian War.[20] The abandoned site was subsequently occupied for some time by Legio VIII *Augusta*, or at least by one of its vexillations. Several observations support this interpretation.

A drainage channel constructed beneath the floor of the northern hall of the campus (training ground), immediately after passing through the wall into the courtyard, filled a pit lined with clay (Figure 3). The section inside the courtyard, of a different form from that in the hall, has a bottom paved with tegulae bearing the stamps of Legio VIII *Augusta* (Figures 4, 5 and 6). A recently published paper states that only one tegula with the seal of the 8th legion is visible in this channel.[21] Through direct observation by the authors of this paper, during archaeological research at the site, two more tegulae with seals of this unit have been reliably identified. They are badly worn, probably due to erosion by water, which is why the seal is not visible on the remaining tegulae in the canal, although the location of the seal's impression can be inferred on several of them. We interpret these differences of two channel segments as evidence of a reconstruction in the courtyard at the end of the first or the very beginning of the second century AD, at the same time that the half-century-old roofs of the campus, originally built by the XI Legion *Claudia Pia Fidelis*, were repaired and the tegulae bearing the stamps of that unit were replaced with those of Legio VIII *Augusta*. About thirty of the latter have been identified on the campus.[22]

The presence of Legio VIII *Augusta* in Burnum is further confirmed by the discovery of a tombstone (Figure 7).[23] More recently, Cesarik recognised that another inscription from Burnum also mentions a member of the VIII Legion (Figure 8).[24] This monument had previously been wrongly attributed to the VII Legion, which was stationed in Dalmatia at the camp of Tilurium until around AD 56. The palaeography of the letters differs from that on the earlier stelae of the XI Legion from Burnum and the VII Legion from Tilurium, and it clearly belongs to a different period. We therefore conclude that the VIII Legion was stationed in Burnum during the reign of Emperor Trajan. If the VIII Legion

18 Tončinić 2009, 1451–1453.

19 Miletić 2011, 270.

20 Ritterling 1925, 1542; Cesarik 2022, 179–181, 183–185.

21 Jadrić-Kučan, Zaninović 2025, 124.

22 Borzić 2021, 594–595.

23 ILJug III, 2818.

24 CIL III 14992; Cesarik 2016, 268–269.



FIGURE 7. Funerary inscription mentioning a soldier of *Legio VIII Augusta*, Burnum (Archaeological Museum Zadar; photo by O. Harl, June 2014).



FIGURE 8. Tombstone of Sextus Valerius Lucinus, soldier of *Legio VIII Augusta*, Burnum (Archaeological Museum Zadar; photo by O. Harl, June 2014).

was represented at Burnum only by a vexillation, the remainder of the unit must have remained in the permanent camp at Argentorate, to which it had been transferred from the earlier base at Mirebellum around AD 90, that is, after Domitian's campaign against the Chatti in AD 84 and the rebellion of the legate Saturninus in AD 89.[25]

Nenad Cambi is the principal proponent of the thesis that certain episodes depicted on Trajan's Column take place in Dalmatian cities.[26] On his way to the Second Dacian War in AD 105, in a carefully organised military expedition that included pre-arranged infrastructure along the route, Emperor Trajan sailed across the Adriatic, passed through Dalmatia and Moesia, crossed the River Danube and advanced into Dacia. Although the scenes on the Column can be interpreted as *topoi*, that is, conventional narrative motifs illustrating the power of the Roman army and Trajan's leadership,[27] the accuracy of the monument's scenography is beyond doubt. Evidently, artists accompanied the expedition and recorded important episodes, and the court architect, Apollodorus of Damascus, himself played a key role. Between the two Dacian wars he designed the monumental Trajan's Bridge over the Danube, which is also depicted on the Column.[28]

The emperor, accompanied by the Praetorians, departed for the war on 4 June AD 105, setting sail at night from the port of Ancona, as indicated by the lantern at the stern of the ship shown on the Column.[29] The Arch of Trajan (Ancona), completed around AD 114–115, was probably prefigured in the representation on the Column, which was finished on 12 May AD 113.[30] This is not surprising, since the plans for both monuments were most likely prepared by Apollodorus; therefore, this circumstance cannot be regarded as a disqualifying factor in identifying Ancona as the place of departure. Trajan had the entire port of Ancona expanded, as indicated by the inscription on the arch.[31] It is not known whether these works were initiated as part of the logistical preparations for the Dacian wars or undertaken afterwards, once the strategic and economic importance of this central-Adriatic port on the Italian coast had become evident. The inscription states that Trajan enlarged the harbour "…because it returned to sailors the safest entrance to Italy, having also enlarged this port at his own expense".[32]

25 Fron., *Str.* 4. 3. 13; Reddé 1995, 376–379; 2000, 122–123; Miletić 2010, 127–129; 2011, 270–272; Béraud, Pichot 2020, 186–187.

26 Cambi 2001, 148–156; 2010, 147–149.

27 Bennett 1997, 92.

28 Procop. *Aed.* 4. 6. 13; Plin. *Ep.* 8.4; Cass. Dio 68. 13. 1–6.

29 Cichorius 1900, 79.

30 Bennett 1997, 92.

31 CIL 9, 5894.

32 Turcan-Deleani 1958, 155–156; Sebastiani 1983, 290; Ugolini 2020, 11–12, 34–35.



FIGURE 9. Relief from Trajan's Column depicting the reception of Emperor Trajan during his journey through Dalmatia (Cichorius 1900, tf. 060).

The extent of the military preparations for the campaign is evidenced by numerous scenes on Trajan's Column, and they certainly influenced the Roman colonia of Jader on the Dalmatian coast, where Emperor Trajan landed after sailing across the Adriatic. The depiction of the monumental forum, separated from the capitolium by the *decumanus*, is strikingly similar to the actual situation (Figure 9). Additional support for the claim about the emperor's passing through is provided by a very fragmentary inscription from AD 116 referring to Trajan's re-financing of something connected with the Jader *aquaeductus*.[33] This may relate either to construction interventions along the forty-kilometre-long main aqueduct, to another shorter aqueduct that may have been built at the time, or perhaps to the construction of a branch (*ramus*) of the main aqueduct required to improve the water supply of the port.[34] In any case, the inner harbour of Jader was of considerable size and suitable for the rapid transit of people and goods, which is further confirmed by the inscription on the arch of Melia Anniana, where an *emporium* is mentioned.[35] The arch once stood on the *decumanus*, which led to the port.

The emperor's overland journey continued along the state road that led to Burnum via Asseria. From the inscription mentioning Trajan, it is clear that in AD 113 the city gates of Asseria, a small but wealthy *municipium*, received a monumental architectural frame in the form of a triumphal arch erected by Lucius Laelius Proculus, probably as an evocation of the emperor's transit.[36] It should also be noted that tiles stamped *Legionis VIII Augustae* were found in Asseria, probably originating from a building connected with the emperor's transit.[37]

The scene on Trajan's Column refers to the reception of the emperor in the nearby military centre of Burnum (Figure 10).[38] The eyes of all the dignitaries are fixed on the Praetorians and on Trajan depicted in the previous scene. On the right side of the scene is a stylised military fort. Within it two soldiers equipped with *lorica segmentata* hold a *vexillum*, graphically representing a legionary vexillation. Only Legio VIII *Augusta* can be considered here, as the other legionary and auxiliary units had left Burnum at least two decades earlier.[39] It is likely that a vexillation was stationed in Dalmatia because it was responsible for preparing food and water and for providing accommodation for the Praetorian cohorts and other units, as well as for the draft animals of Trajan's expeditionary army as it passed through the province on its way to Dacia.

The transit of Emperor Trajan through Dalmatia has been further confirmed by the recent incidental discovery of the remains of an arch in the village of Dicmo (the name of which derives from *Ad Decimum Lapidem* – at the tenth milestone from Salona), located at the intersection of two roads: Aquileia–Dyrrachium and Salona–Aequum, the hinterland of the province.

33 CIL 3, 2909 = CIL 3, 9983; Horster 2001, 397.

34 Miletić 2017, 49–50.

35 CIL 3, 2922 = CIL 3, 9987.

36 CIL 3, 15021.

37 CIL 3, 13339,1; CIL 3, 10181,2.

38 Cambi 2001, 148–156; 2010, 147–149.

39 Miletić 2010, 127–129; 2011, 270–272.



FIGURE 10. Relief from Trajan's Column depicting the imperial *adventus* scene interpreted as taking place at Burnum (Cichorius 1900, tf. 062).

After epigraphic, architectural and decorative analysis, Cesarik, Maršić and Kokan preliminarily dated fragments of a monumental inscription discovered there to the reign of Trajan.[40] Field investigations that have only recently begun will eventually confirm this assumption.

After the victory in the Second Dacian War, the task of securing the transport of a vast quantity of slaves, gold and silver was entrusted to a network of *beneficiarii consularis* in Dalmatia (one of their stations being established at Burnum) and to the equestrian officer Quintus Marcius Turbo, who became *praefectus vehiculorum* around AD 106. This office, as a regular and permanent service, resulted from Trajan's reform of imperial administration, whereby freedmen in state offices were replaced by equestrians.[41] After the departure of Legio VIII *Augusta* from Burnum, Dalmatia thus became a *provincia inermis*, and Burnum was constituted as a *municipium* no later than AD 118, during the reign of Hadrian.[42]

40 Slobodna Dalmacija 2023; Cesarik, Maršić, Kokan 2024, 47–60.

41 Miletić, Bijađija 2014, 316–318.

42 CIL III 9890; CIL III 9891; CIL III 14321; Zaninović 1968, 124.

SAŽETAK

POSLJEDNJA LEGIJA NA DELMATSKOM LIMESU — VIII *AUGUSTA*

Nedavna arheološka istraživanja pružila su argumente u prilog tezi da je Legio VIII *Augusta*, odnosno jedna od njezinih veksilacija, bila stacionirana u vojnom središtu Burnumu na *Limes Delmaticus* nakon što je *Legio* IIII *Flavia Felix* napustila Dalmaciju tijekom Domicijanova Dačkog rata. U slojevima koji pripadaju prvoj građevinskoj fazi vojnog vježbališta (*campus*), datiranoj u Klaudijevu vladavinu, pronađene su *tegulae* s pečatom LEG XI CPF, dok one iz druge faze nose pečat LEG VIII AVG. Takve se opeke pojavljuju i na drugim lokalitetima duž delmatskoga *limesa*. Intenzivna proizvodnja opeke i s njom povezana građevinska aktivnost VIII. legije upućuju na to da je primarna uloga postrojbe u Burnumu možda bila logistička priprema Trajanove ekspedicijske vojske na njezinu putu kroz provinciju Dalmaciju prema bojištu Drugoga dačkog rata. Tijekom Trajanove vladavine u Jaderu je izgrađen sustav vodoopskrbe sredstvima iz carske riznice (*fiscus*). Istodobno je u municipiju Asseriji podignuta vojna građevina čiji je krov bio pokriven crijepom s pečatom VIII. legije. U to je vrijeme popravljeno i vojno vježbalište u Burnumu. Burnum je poprište jedne od malobrojnih scena na Trajanovu stupu koje prikazuju putovanje kroz Dalmaciju. Na sceni su prikazani službenici i gosti koji dočekuju cara Trajana dok stiže iz smjera municipija Asserije. Dvojica vojnika prikazanih u stiliziranoj utvrdi, ovdje protumačenoj kao *castra legionis*, mogu se identificirati kao legionari *Legio* VIII *Augusta*. Neposredno nakon završetka Drugoga dačkog rata i odlaska VIII. legije, Dalmacija je postala *provincia inermis*.

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