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## **THE REMAINS OF THE LIBURNIAN CEMETERY BY THE WEST WALL OF ASSERIA**

### *Summary*

The systematic archaeological excavations being carried out from 1998 at the Liburnian-Roman settlement of Asseria not far from Podgrađa near Benkovac in a certain manner represent a continuation of the research begun as early as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Excavation has been performed in the last several years around the Church of the Holy Spirit in the area of the forum and on both sides of part of the rampart on the northeastern side, while the most extensive excavations have taken place along the exterior face of the rampart in the northwestern and western sections. This is where the main entrances to the settlement were located, the ending point of roads that connected Asseria to the neighboring Nedinum and Alveria, towards the sea to Blandona and the harbor in present-day Pakoštane, and also to more distant Iader, Scardona, and Burnum. Excavation has shown that intensive construction activities took place here in the Roman period. The monumental city walls were built in the period of early Antiquity, and at that point regulation of the areas in front of one or two gates into the settlement would certainly have occurred. The roads that led to these entrances had a cemetery or cemeteries formed alongside them, recognizable today from the numerous devastated graves whose robbing has continued for over two hundred years. The graves and grave plots along accessible routes are marked by funerary monuments, especially cippi, stelae, but also large aediculae. In the second century, a monumental triumphal arch was erected in honor of the emperor Trajan, which was interpolated into part of the city walls. Considerable construction occurred in the late Roman period, recognizable for the massive buttresses to the old walls, burials in ordinary grave pits covered with tiles, as well as in larger graves, including one vaulted grave chamber. The youngest structure, from the period of the Byzantine-Gothic Wars or somewhat later, was a broad embankment bounded by a wall made of Roman spoliae that paralleled the earlier Roman rampart.

Our attention was directed to the section of the pre-Roman cemetery, several graves of which were found during recent archaeological campaigns. Six graves were discovered in 1999, with another grave in 2002 (grave 27). The graves are from the period of

the Liburnian Culture. The four that were published earlier were located along the western part of the city walls. These graves were placed directly on the bedrock, and in places had been dug into it, so that the later Roman leveling of the terrain meant mainly the lower parts of the grave pit had been preserved, with remains of the bones and grave goods of the deceased. This can particularly be seen in grave 6, which a block of the early Roman rampart literally covered, and it is evident that parts of the earlier cemetery were negated by the construction of this monumental structure.

Grave 27, excavated in 2002, was located on the northern side of the early Roman rampart in a stratum that was not subject to the later leveling, and the stone lining of the grave was preserved, while the covering slab had collapsed and was found fragmented in the grave (Fig. 2-4). The grave was composed of four slabs in the shape of a coffin that formed the grave pit (155 x 95 cm), covered by a fifth slab. The remains of the deceased individual (s) are poorly preserved, and the number of burials cannot be determined, while the dimensions of the grave and the position of the preserved leg bones indicates a burial in a contracted position. Seven bronze fibulae were found in the grave, six of them belonging to the well-known and common fibulae of Certosa type variants with a bent leaf-shaped foot, and one Certosa-like fibula (Fig. 6-9). Both fibula types were represented in the mentioned graves found some fifty meters west (graves 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6), which were previously published by N. Klarin, where twenty some examples of bronze Certosa type fibulae with bent-back leaf-shaped feet were found, along with one example of a Certosa type fibula similar to the example from grave 27.

It has been noted that the greatest number of fibulae from grave 27 but also from earlier published graves were Certosa type fibulae with a bent leaf-shaped foot. Z. Vinski called these fibulae the “Baška type”, while later Š. Batović further defined them, calling them “early La Tène-oid fibulae”, while noting their evolution and citing their Liburnian origin. These fibulae should today perhaps be termed “Liburnian fibulae with a leaf-shaped foot”, as they are most evident both in number and variety in the Liburnian region. The period of origin of these fibulae is considered to be the period from the last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the establishment of Roman dominion in these areas. Such a dating is confirmed by the finds in graves at Dragišić near Šibenik and Vičja Luka on the island of Brač, where Attic skyphoi with a black slip produced between 425 and 275 BC were found along with such Liburnian fibulae with a bent leaf-shaped foot. Although these fibulae even occasionally appear in large Hellenistic grave vaults from the second and first centuries BC, which often contained imported relief and smooth-surfaced gray pottery, they continued much longer, as was the case in the village of Danilo Gornje near Šibenik, where certain variants of these fibulae continued in use even in the first century AD.

I would particularly like to draw attention here to a phenomenon that is evident at Asseria, as well as at several other Liburnian settlements. The expansion of the city during the first century BC and the construction of the early Roman rampart led at Asseria to the negation of the earlier Liburnian cemetery. The remains of grave structures or sections of fortifications from the earlier pre-Roman period preserved within later Roman settlements have further been discovered at Varvaria, Aenona, and Iader, and this phenomenon indicates both the extent and tempo of the expansion of individual settlements.

Archaeological excavations carried out in the past decade southwest of the forum of Roman Iader have brought to light parts of three grave pits from the Liburnian period preserved below Roman urban structures or within an area that the architecture of the later settlement did not encompass. The graves with remains of the deceased and grave goods are partially preserved, so that in addition to elements of the grave structure and the remains of the deceased in a contracted position, we can also find grave goods. Spiral spectacle fibulae are common, which can be dated to the period between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, which corresponds to the time of utilization of cemeteries in this area.

Among the Liburnians, as well as among other ethnic groups throughout the first millennium BC, the area utilized for dwelling, or the defensive-residential area was separated from the area used for burial. Settlements on heights (hillforts) or by the sea, on peninsulas or islets, were usually enclosed by a bank of broken stone, or in the later period by a masonry wall with clay or lime mortar. Burial of the dead took place in special areas – cemeteries, which in prehistory, as well as later in antiquity, were formed outside the fortified/residential area, usually along the road leading from the settlement. On the basis of this, it can be concluded that the area presently occupied by the remains of the forum of Roman Iader was once, in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, the site of a Liburnian cemetery, which also extended several hundred meters further east, where two Liburnian burials had earlier been noted. Hence it can be seen that the Liburnian settlement, or rather fortified area enclosed by a dry-stone wall, as was usual in that period, was located towards the peak of the peninsula (or island). The sections of dry-stone walls discovered during excavation of the Roman temple area in 1964 could be attributed to the remains of prehistoric fortifications of the Liburnian settlement. It is difficult today to establish the surface area occupied by the Liburnian Iader from the Iron Age. It can be hypothesized that it was surrounded by a dry-stone rampart, and it certainly must have had a different configuration considering the sea level, which has risen three meters since then, and the numerous levellings of the terrain that occurred throughout history. It appears that in this early period of existence, the settlement of Liburnian Iader did not utilize merely the area of the present-day peninsula, but some of the elements, probably the harbour, of this already fully

developed Liburnian center had been removed between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC to the base of the bay formed by the peninsula and the mainland on the northeastern side.

Liburnian and Roman Aenona, and later early Croatian Nin, developed on a peninsula located in an extensive bay. The settlement, however, judging by the finds of graves, did not encompass the entire surface of the peninsula in the Iron Age. On the northeastern side of the present day island, Liburnian burials have been found that probably belonged to one of the cemeteries of Liburnian Aenona.

Excavations at Varvaria have also shown the existence of an earlier phase of construction of city walls, today partially preserved within the city nucleus. At the beginning of the 1980s, sections of a wall of massive masonry blocks with abundant Iron Age pottery were discovered not far from the eastern entrance to the complex of Roman architecture, below the floor of an atrium.

The cited examples of sections of cemeteries or fortification remnants preserved within the individual urban core of settlements can serve as guidelines in future excavations at Asseria, where hopefully it will be possible to identify individual burial, fortification, or other elements with whose aid it will be possible to better evaluate the development of the settlement from the Iron Age Liburnian hillfort to the Liburnian-Roman city of Asseria.