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First century BC Roman fortifications in the Eastern Alps

In the area of the Eastern Alps, an early Roman defensive system (consisting of minor fortifications and control outposts) has been presumed on the basis of a relatively small amount of archaeological data.¹ Since the excavations in the last decades brought to light some new information² it would be worth re-examining the old and new archaeological evidence for the early Roman fortifications and re-evaluating the meaning of its architecture, chronology and strategic functions.

Before the close examination of the fortifications, an outline of the Roman penetration in the Eastern Alps during the 2nd and 1st centuries BC will be presented at which special attention will be paid on the development of the communications over the Alpine passes.

Aquileia and its hinterland in the 2nd century BC

Aquileia was founded as a *colonia Latina* in 181 BC on the site of the pre-Roman emporium.³ Until the mid-first century BC this was the only Roman citizens' community in north-eastern Gallia Cisalpina. The colony had a strong influence over a large region, extending from the future Concordia to Istria and reaching deep into the Alpine valleys.⁴ Following the victory over the Histri (who occupied the territories east of Aquileia)⁵ in 178/177 BC the Roman politics were primarily defensive. Control over new territories was achieved through alliances, minor annexations and punitive expeditions. One

1 Šašel 1974a; Šašel 1974b; Zaccaria 1981; Bosio 1981; Zaccaria 1992, 75-90.

2 Review by Bigliardi 2004.

3 Zaccaria 1996, 139-140; Zaccaria 2003, 294-302; Bandelli 2003b.

4 Zaccaria 2003, 321-324.

5 Matijašić 1991.

of the main Roman goals was to secure the transalpine passes that lead to the north Italian plain.⁶

The Carni – a Celtic tribe – were settled in the hinterland of Aquileia, from the present-day Carnia to the Tergeste area⁷, as well as in the Soča river basin (the group of Idria)⁸ and in western Slovenia (the Notranjska-Kras group).⁹ The Roman alliance with at least a part of them could have started already during the war with Histri.¹⁰

The regions populated by the Norici and Taurisci extended beyond the Carni. From the first contacts onwards (presumably as early as 170 BC) the Norican kingdom was the most important Roman ally in the area.¹¹ On the other hand, the Celtic Taurisci (who inhabited the Sava river valley) were mainly hostile towards the Romans.¹²

Transport routes

Shortly after it was founded Aquileia was connected to Italy with new routes (Fig. 1). The coastal route (*via Aemilia*) was constructed in 175 BC and reconstructed in 156 or 153 BC, when it also obtained its new name *via Annia*. This route linked Padova, Altinum, Concordia and Aquileia.¹³ *Via Postumia* was built in 148 BC, and it ran close to the foothills of the Alps – from Genova to Aquileia.¹⁴ The route from Aquileia towards the east, at least to the springs of the Timavo river, was probably constructed in the early times of the colony.¹⁵

6 Pavan 1987, 17-30; Zaccaria 1992a, 75-77; Šašel Kos 1997, 21-31.

7 Vedaldi Iasbez 1994, 229-239; Vedaldi Iasbez 2000, 333-336; Bandelli 2001; Šašel Kos 2005, 413-414.

8 Guštin 1991.

9 Božič 1999, 202-203.

10 Šašel Kos 1997, 26-31.

11 Piccottini 1990; Šašel Kos 1997, 26-31.

12 Šašel Kos 1998; Šašel Kos 2005, 416.

13 Bosio 1991, 30-35, 69-81; Prenc 2000, 44-46; Vedaldi Iasbez 2005, 480-482.

14 Zaccaria 1992a, 80; Prenc 2000, 46-47; Vedaldi Iasbez 2005, 482-483; a different reconstruction of the track by Bosio 1990; Bosio 1991, 42-57.

15 Buora 1990, 43-44.



Fig. 1: The Roman routes and passes in the North Adriatic and in the south Eastern Alps.

The old routes crossing the Eastern Alps followed the river valleys and used the most suitable passes. These passes are Monte Croce Carnico (It.) / Plöckenpass (Ger.) – 1362 m a.s.l., Camporosso (Ger. Seifnitz, Slov. Žabnice) – 819 m a.s.l., Predel (Slov.) / Predil (It.) – 1156 m a.s.l. and Razdrto – 600 m a.s.l. (Fig. 1).

The Monte Croce Carnico pass was the most important link with the inner Eastern Alps that was used by the Veneti in the pre-Roman era.¹⁶ The archaeological evidence (e.g. late Greco-Italic amphorae) in Carnia indicate that transport routes towards the north were open for Roman goods already in the second half of the 2nd century BC.¹⁷ The settlement Iulium Carnicum in the valley of the But river controlled the route across Monte Croce Carnico / Plöckenpass, while the settlement in Moggio controlled the route along the Fella river.

16 Bandelli 2003a, 307-308.

17 Osoppo: Villa 1997, 53-54, tab. 1; 2; 2-4; Vitri et al. 2007, 43, fig. 2: 3; Ragogna: Villa 1997, 53, tab. 2; 1; Amaro: Vitri 2001b, 34-35; Moggio: Faleschini 1993; Vitri et al. 2007, 43, fig. 2: 4-6; Iulium Carnicum: Vitri 2001a, 54-57; Donat 2001a, 372-377, 388-389; Donat 2001b; Vitri et al. 2007, 45-47.

As indicated by the Roman military finds from Barda – Roba¹⁸ and the votive finds from the sanctuary in Kobarid in the Soča valley¹⁹ the route following the valleys of the Natisone (It.) / Nadiža (Slov.) and Soča (Slov.) / Isonzo (It.) rivers and crossing the Predel / Predil pass was used by the Romans at least from the end of the 2nd century BC.

The beginning of the extensive Roman traffic across the Razdrto pass in the middle of the 2nd century BC can be concluded from the numismatic evidence in western Slovenia²⁰, as well as from the hoard of Roman weapons from Grad near Šmihel.²¹ A Roman outpost stood on the Razdrto pass from the end of the 2nd century onwards.²²

Mid-first century BC

As a result of the military and administrative reorganisation during the Caesar's proconsulate (59–49 BC) the Roman authority consolidated in the region of the Eastern Alps.²³ The law passed in 49 BC (*lex de civitate*) provoked the foundation of new cities in Transpadana and Istria.²⁴ The towns of Concordia²⁵, Tergeste²⁶, Forum Iulii²⁷ and Iulium Carnicum²⁸ were founded in the Caesarian period or somewhat later.

Fortifications

The Caesarian period was a prologue to a long period of military activities: the Octavian's wars in Illyricum and the Augustan occupation of the Alps and

18 Tagliaferri 1986, 121–126.

19 Osmuk 1987; Osmuk 1998a; Osmuk 1998b; Maggi, Žbona Trkman 2007, 66, 70, 74, fig. 11, note 69.

20 Miškec 2003.

21 Horvat 2002.

22 Bavdek 1996; Horvat, Bavdek 2009.

23 Zaccaria 1992a, 82; Šašel Kos 2000; Vedaldi Iasbez 2000; Rossi 2003; Šašel Kos 2005, 340–342.

24 Zaccaria 1986, 65–70; Zaccaria 2003, 313–314.

25 Vedaldi Iasbez 2000, 343–345.

26 Zaccaria 1992b, 149–152; Šašel Kos 2000, 292–293; Vedaldi Iasbez 2000, 340–342.

27 Giavitto 1998, 203–206; Vedaldi Iasbez 2000, 345–350; Zaccaria 2007, 130–132; Chiabà 2007.

28 Mainardis 2008.

Pannonia. The main wars were far from the Eastern Alps, but the hinterland was probably affected by the minor actions as well as by military transports and logistics.

Aquileia was a central base for the military activities in the Eastern Alps and the Balkans.²⁹ It seems that a buffer zone existed in the Aquileian hinterland, and this extended into the Alpine valleys and into the Ljubljana basin.³⁰

In spite the fact that some military bases are known from written sources no traces were found. During the campaigns against the Histri 178 BC³¹ a legionary camp was erected in the area of the Timavo river. In the winter 59/58 BC three legions were stationed in the Aquileia region where they occasionally wintered also during the Caesar's campaigns in Gallia.³² In 51 BC, *legio XV* was sent to Aquileia, perhaps to prevent a new attack by the Iapodes.³³

Rare military activities in the Alpine area can be inferred from the archaeological evidence. A hoard of Roman weapons from Grad near Šmihel, dated between the end of the 3rd century and the first half of the 2nd century BC, probably represent the remains of a single military event.³⁴ Likewise, the Roman military finds from Barda – Roba are probably the remains of a single military campaign at the beginning of the 1st century BC.³⁵ The weapons from the sites in the Idrijca river basin (Grad nad Reko and Cerkno) are vestiges of the Roman military interventions in the 4th decade BC – probably from the beginning of the Octavian's wars in Illyricum.³⁶ The weapons, found in the Ljubljanica river, indicate that military transports took place along the river in the 1st century BC and at the beginning of the 1st century AD.³⁷

Towns in Caput Adriae

The Roman control of the routes over the Eastern Alps significantly increased with the establishment of the new administrative centres: Concordia, Iulium

29 Šašel Kos 2005.

30 Šašel 1974a; Šašel 1974b; Zaccaria 1981, 66-71; Zaccaria 1992, 75-90; Bigliardi 2004.

31 Livius, 41, 1-5; Zaccaria 1981, 70.

32 Caes., B. G. I. 10; Šašel 1974a, 174; Šašel Kos 2000, 290; Vedaldi Iasbez 2000, 337-338.

33 Caes., B. G. VIII. 24; Šašel 1974a, 174; Šašel Kos 2000, 282-283; Vedaldi Iasbez 2000, 338.

34 Horvat 2002.

35 Tagliaferri 1986, 121-126; comp. Chiabà 2007, 54.

36 Istenič 2005.

37 Istenič 2009a; Gaspari 2007, 150-153.

Carnicum, Forum Iulii and Tergeste. In the second half of the 1st century BC a number of towns in the Cisalpina and North Adriatic area were fortified with defensive walls, which was most likely linked to the new autonomous status reached after 49 BC.³⁸ The old 2nd century BC Aquileian defensive wall was reconstructed in the first century BC.³⁹ Tergeste got walls with towers in 33/32 BC⁴⁰ and Concordia in the Augustan period.⁴¹ On the other hand, Iulium Carnicum had no defensive walls at all.⁴² The first defensive walls at Forum Iulii might be from the Republican period.⁴³

Besides the manifestation of status, the town fortifications also had an important defensive function, for example, when one considers the incursion of the Japodes into the Tergeste area in 52 BC⁴⁴ or the plans of the Dalmatian and Pannonian rebellions to invade Italy in 6 AD.⁴⁵ Later on the town fortifications were neglected, which can be clearly seen in the abandoned eastern walls of Aquileia in the first century AD.⁴⁶

South of the Alpine ridge: Carnia and northern Friuli

Several fortified sites positioned outside of the urban centres are known in northern Friuli and Carnia, i.e. the region settled by the Carni. In the present study, the prehistoric fortified settlements that exhibit the presence of early Roman occupation – but have no contemporary defensive structures (or they are not archaeologically documented) – were not taken into account.⁴⁷

Castelraimondo was an indigenous hill-top settlement where the Arzino valley breaks into the plain. The defence wall that surrounded the site is dated to the mid 2nd century BC. The wall fronts were made from stones, while the interior was constructed from wooden structures and filled with earth and stones. A square tower (5.9 x 5.9 m) built from stones and mortar was added to

38 Zaccaria 1981, 68; Rosada 1990; Bonetto 1997, 217.

39 Zaccaria 1981, 66-68; Rosada 1990, 375-381.

40 Zaccaria 1992, 152.

41 Conventi 2004, 134.

42 Vitri et al. 2007; Mainardis 2008.

43 Bonetto, Villa 2003; Zaccaria 2007, 132-134: unreliable chronology.

44 Šašel Kos 2000, 291-293.

45 Šašel Kos 1986, 182.

46 Zaccaria 1981, 68, 74.

47 Comp. Bigiardi 2004, 323-324, 329-330.

the defensive wall in the Caesarian or Augustan period (Fig. 2). The settlement was populated until the late Roman period.⁴⁸

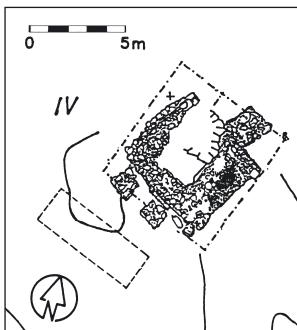


Fig. 2: Castelraimondo. Tower. After Santoro Bianchi 1992.

The indigenous settlement of Verzegnis – Colle Mazéit had a good strategic position, controlling the confluence of the rivers But and Tagliamento. The votive objects indicate the existence of a sacrificial site in the Late Iron Age.⁴⁹ The old Late Bronze Age defensive wall was reconstructed in the 2nd century BC at the latest. In the Augustan or Tiberian period, a rectangular tower was built from stones and mortar above the wall (Fig. 3: Area VII). The old wall and the tower continued to function together as a part of the settlement defence.⁵⁰

48 Santoro Bianchi 1992, 157-178, 394-395; Santoro 2003; Santoro Bianchi 2004, 437-438.

49 Donat, Righi, Vitri 2007, 96-98.

50 Vannacci Lunazzi 2001; Vannacci Lunazzi 2003; Vannacci Lunazzi 2006a; Vannacci Lunazzi 2006b; Vannacci Lunazzi 2006c.

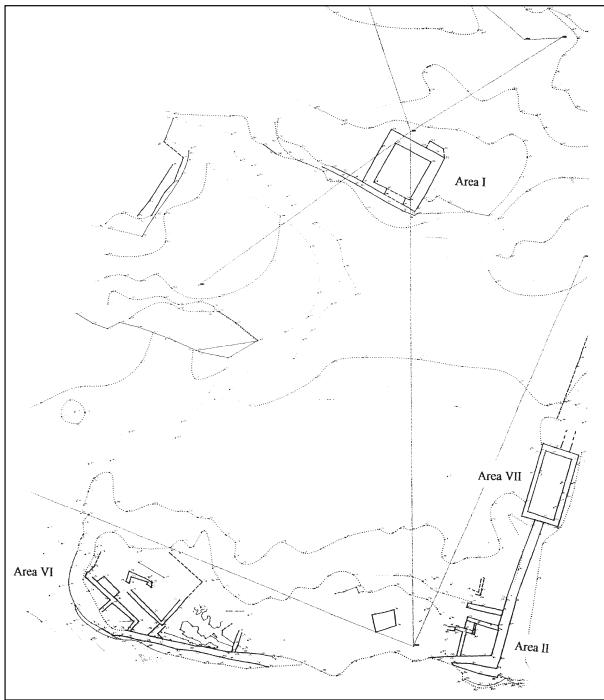


Fig. 3: Verzegnis – Colle Mazéit. Plan of the settlement. Not to scale.

After Vannacci Lunazzi 2006c, 312, fig. 1.

Raveo – Monte Sorantri, located above the Degano river valley, was populated from the 8th century BC to the Late Roman period. An important military cult was located there between the 3rd century BC and the 1st century AD.⁵¹ In the late 1st century BC a defensive wall was built around the settlement (Fig. 4). The buildings were stacked against the wall.⁵²

51 Donat, Righi, Vitri 2007, 100-116.

52 Villa 2001; Donat, Righi, Vitri 2007, 108, sl. 13.



Fig. 4: Raveo – Monte Sorantri. Plan of the settlement. Not to scale.

After Villa 2003, 679–680, fig. 1.

A defensive wall was also discovered in the settlement of Moggio – Colle di S. Spirito. This wall was dated by the small finds between the 1st century BC and the beginning of the 1st century AD.⁵³

Barda – Roba was a prehistoric settlement located on the hill close to where the Natisone valley opens into the Friuli plain. The intentionally damaged Late Iron Age (LT C1) weapons indicate the existence of a sacrificial site.⁵⁴ The lead sling shot and Roman coins, dated to the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 1st century BC, are often interpreted as the remains of Roman military activity at the site.⁵⁵ The poorly researched early Roman fortification, consisting of a tower and a defence wall, is roughly dated between the 1st century

53 Bassetti, Faleschini, Muscio 2002.

54 Donat, Righi, Vitri 2007, 94-96.

55 Tagliaferri 1986, 121-126; Rupel 2005, 73-75; Donat, Righi, Vitri 2007, 95.

BC and the 1st century AD.⁵⁶ The settlement declined after the beginning of the 1st century AD.⁵⁷

In addition to archaeological evidence written sources indicate the existence of small fortified sites in the area.

Strabo defined Tergeste as a *frourion*⁵⁸, which is a Greek translation of the Latin *castellum* – a fortified settlement. It is assumed that a fortified vanguard built to protect Aquileia existed here for a certain period between the wars with Histri and the foundation of the Roman colony in Tergeste.⁵⁹

Castellum Pucinum, mentioned by Pliny⁶⁰, was located between the Timavo river and Tergeste. It is assumed that it was situated in the present-day Duino or in the area of Prosecco, but neither location has been supported by archaeological evidence.⁶¹

Castellum Larignum was an indigenous fortified settlement, which was besieged by Roman troops during the period of the Caesar's proconsulate (59–49 BC). It has not been localized, but it was probably situated in the Fella river valley and presumably identical to the later mansio Larice.⁶²

Iulium Carnicum was, as it can be deducted from its name, a castellum or forum, before becoming vicus and colonia.⁶³ No fortifications that would indicate a castellum have been discovered.⁶⁴

All of the archaeologically examined fortifications have strategic positions located within the inner Alpine traffic connections (Verzegnis – Colle Mazéit, Raveo – Monte Sorantri, Moggio – Colle di S. Spirito) or at points where the Alpine valleys open into the Friuli plain (Barda-Roba, Castelraimondo).⁶⁵ Except for perhaps Moggio⁶⁶, all of the rest are old indigenous agglomerations, which continued to be populated during the Imperial period and in which the

56 Tagliaferri 1986, 125; Casagrande, Pessina, Righi 2003; Rupel 2005, 73-75; Donat, Righi, Vitri 2007, 95; Vitri 2007, 159-161.

57 Vitri 2007, 160-161.

58 Strabo V 1, 9, 215 C.

59 Zaccaria 1981, 71; Rossi 1996.

60 Plin., n. h. III, 18, 127.

61 Zaccaria 1981, 70-71; Vedaldi Iasbez 1994, 391-393.

62 Zaccaria 1992a, 82; Šašel 1981; Mainardis 2008, 38.

63 Mainardis 2008, 36-39.

64 Vitri et al. 2007, 43-47.

65 Comp. Santoro Bianchi 1992, 133.

66 Concina 2001, 65-66.

signs of Romanisation were very poor prior to the Augustan period.⁶⁷ Verzegnisi and Castelraimondo were fortified anew with defensive walls in the 2nd century BC. Raveo – Monte Sorantri and Moggio probably obtained defensive walls in the second half or at end of the 1st century BC. Possibly in the same time, protruding rectangular towers appeared in Castelraimondo, Verzegnisi, and Barda – Roba. These towers were constructed in the Roman building techniques – with stones and mortar. Despite the fact that the chronology of the fortifications is somewhat inaccurate, their existence in the Augustan period seems to be certain.

The previously described constructions had no clear connections with Roman military architecture. The type is similar to the fortifications of Roman towns.⁶⁸

The defensive walls and towers were neglected or abandoned during the 1st century AD, but the settlements continued to live on. Their population was prevalently indigenous.⁶⁹

Across the first Alpine ridge

Four settlements with common characteristics existed in the area north and east of the first Alpine passes, i.e. in the regions of Norici and Taurisci.

The settlement and sanctuary at Gurina, situated in the Gail valley, established good connections with the Veneti.⁷⁰ The settlement obtained a 1.7 m wide defensive wall built from stones and vertical wooden posts in the La Tène period. The construction seems to be similar to the 2nd century wall of Castelraimondo.⁷¹ Gurina's main prosperous period was in the second half of the 1st century BC and at beginning of the 1st century AD. The site demonstrates numerous Roman imports already in the middle of the 1st century BC, which could be proof that the connections with Italy were quite considerable at the time. A large Roman administrative building was constructed prior to the Augustan period. The old La Tène defensive wall was demolished and a new stone and mortar one constructed, probably in the second half of the 1st cen-

67 Vitri et al. 2007, 43.

68 Comp. Mušič, Horvat 2007, 261-262.

69 Vitri et al. 2007, 43.

70 Jablonka 2001.

71 Gamper 2004, 157-159; Gamper 2007c, 136.

tury BC. The new wall was 0.7 m wide and had foundations that measured up to 1.8 m in width. It had a protruding rectangular tower (10.5 x 7.5 m; Fig. 5) and an entrance in the form of a tower (the inner dimensions 10.2 x 6.45 m; Fig. 6). With the exception of the ambulatory type sanctuary, the settlement of Gurina declined after the 1st century AD.⁷²

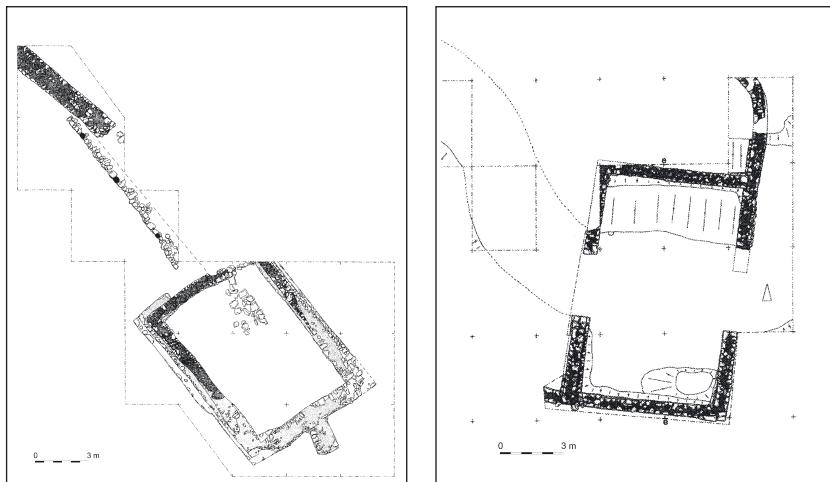


Fig. 5 (left): Gurina. The tower. After Gamper 2004, 163, fig. 45.

Fig. 6 (right): Gurina. The entrance. After Gamper 2007a, 432, fig. 9.

The most important stronghold of the Roman immigrants was at Magdalensberg.⁷³ The settlement probably started as early as the first half of the 1st century BC.⁷⁴ The early forum and the settlement of merchants and craftsmen are dated to the Late Republican and Early Augustan periods.⁷⁵ The religious centre with a temple was situated on the top of the hill⁷⁶, where a vast fortification was also built in the Mid Augustan period (second decade BC; Fig. 7). It had a double defensive wall, with a large protruding tower (10 x 12 m)

72 Gamper 2004, 159-162; Gamper 2007a; Gamper 2007b; Gamper 2007c, 138.

73 Piccottini 1991; Scherrer 2002, 13-15.

74 Chronology of the beginning: Božič 2008, 123-129.

75 Dolenz 1998, 15-35.

76 Dolenz 2007, 67-77.

in the south and an entrance in the north (in the form of a 7 x 6 m tower) which was additionally protected by a side tower (5.1 x 6 m).⁷⁷

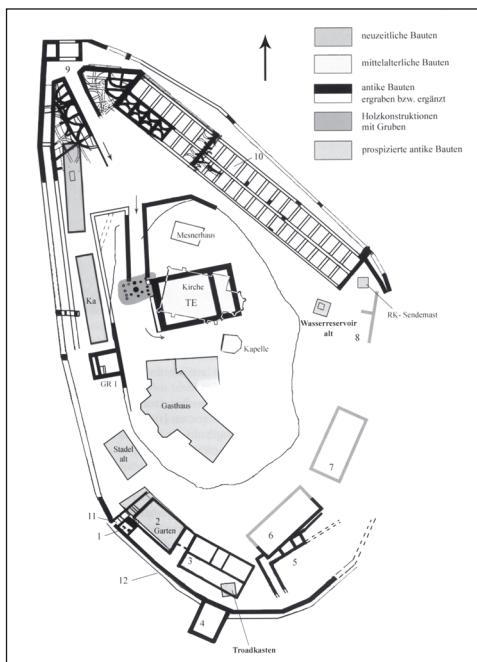


Fig. 7: Magdalensberg, fortification on top of the hill. Not to scale. After Dolenz 2007, 66, fig. 1.

The settlement of Kranj – Carnium was located on a well protected position above the confluence of the Sava and Kokra rivers, thus controlling the transport in the region north of the Emona colony. The settlement of Italian immigrants originates to the Mid Augustan period. It was fortified with stone defence walls and a rectangular, protruding tower similar to that at Magdalensberg. The Early Roman settlement was abandoned already at the beginning of the 1st century AD.⁷⁸

77 Piccottini 1977, 267-270; Piccottini 1980, 77-83, 102-109; Dolenz 2004, 123.

78 Sagadin 2003; Sagadin 2008.

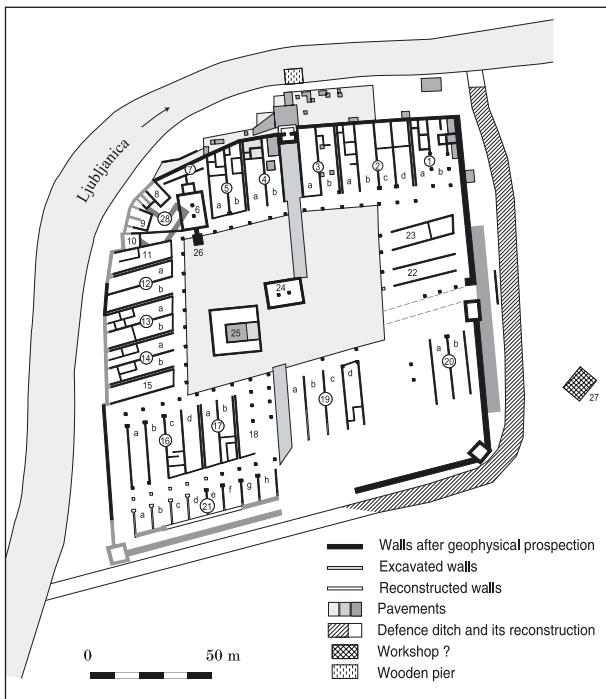


Fig. 8: Nauportus – Dolge njive. After Mušič, Horvat 2007, fig. 39 and Horvat 2008, 114, fig. 4.

Nauportus, *vicus* in the extreme eastern part of the Aquileian territory, was situated on the springs of the Ljubljanica river, at the junction between the land routes leading from north-eastern Italy and Istria and the eastwards oriented water routes running along the Ljubljanica and Sava rivers. The fortification (walls, towers, defensive ditch), which protected a large marketplace, storehouses and *tabernae*, was erected in a meander of the Ljubljanica river at the site Dolge njive (Fig. 8). The architecture was similar to the constructions found in North Italian Late Republican towns, as well as to the architecture of the ports throughout the Empire. Nauportus was thus a reloading trading post, where long distance transit transport and trade could take place. The site was probably built in the Pre-Augustan or Early Augustan period and declined during the first half of the 1st century AD.⁷⁹

79 Horvat 1990; Mušič, Horvat 2007; Horvat, Mušič 2007; Horvat 2008.

These four settlements prospered within the Eastern Alps at the same time. They were under the control of Roman immigrants, mostly merchants, from the mid-first century BC (Gurina, Magdalensberg, Nauportus) or from the Mid Augustan period (Carnium) onwards. They were very important in the long distance transport and trade, the connections with Italy being the most prominent.⁸⁰ Magdalensberg (old Virunum) was the centre of Roman administration in Noricum, from where the mining and metal processing in the Eastern Alps were controlled.⁸¹ Gurina was situated in the mining area.⁸² All four sites had naturally defended positions (on the top of a hill or protected by waters) and were fortified in a similar manner, with stone walls and protruding towers. The Nauportus fortification seems to be Pre-Augustan or Early Augustan, while the Magdalensberg and Carnium fortifications were erected in the Mid Augustan period. Despite some military finds, the settlements do not seem to be regular bases for Roman military troops.⁸³ The defensive structures have close connections with the fortification works in the Late Republican towns in Italy⁸⁴ and the above mentioned fortifications in Carnia.

At the margins of Pannonia

Jaroslav Šašel presumed that the 35/33 BC military operations led to the creation of a military occupation line across western Illyricum. This line ran from the vicinity of Salona and Narona on the Adriatic coast to Siscia and Poetovio on the Sava and Drava rivers. Following the annexation of Noricum in 16 BC this line was supposedly extended northwards to the Danube. The five legionary fortresses of Illyricum (Burnum, Tilurium, Siscia, Poetovio, and Carnuntum) and a connecting road were established on or near this line.⁸⁵

From the Octavian wars in Illyricum onwards a central military base existed in Segestica / Siscia. It was situated at the confluence of the Sava and Kupa (Cro.) / Kolpa (Slo.) rivers. Its important position on the navigation and inland routes enabled control over south Pannonia and the northern Balkans.⁸⁶

80 Piccottini 1987; Jablonka 2001, 199-204; Mušič, Horvat 2007, 265-267.

81 Piccottini 1991; Piccottini 1994.

82 Jablonka 2001, 194-199.

83 E. g. Piccottini 1994, 473; Scherrer 2002, 13; the opposite opinion: Gamper 2007a, 435.

84 Piccottini 1980, 102-109; Piccottini 1993, 201-202; Dolenz 2004, 123; Mušič, Horvat 2007, 261-267.

85 Šašel 1974b; Wilkes 1977.

86 Šašel 1974c, 731-735; Lolić 2003, 133, 140; Šašel Kos 2005, pp. 437-442.

The legionary fortress was set up in Poetovio at the latest during the Dalmatian and Pannonian rebellion in 6–9 AD.⁸⁷

An entire series of military camps dated to the Augustan period was discovered close to where the Sava river spills into the Pannonian plain, i.e. at the Brežice Gates: Sv. Urh⁸⁸, Čatež – Sredno polje⁸⁹ and Obrežje. The fort in Obrežje was constructed in two phases, which are dated to the middle and late Augustan periods. The defensive walls in both phases were built on rectangular ground plans with similar dimensions (290 x 210 m and 300 x 215 m) and were defended by a single or a double ditch.⁹⁰

A military camp existed in Emona at the end of the 1st century BC and in the first decade AD. It was positioned near the Ljubljanica river and at an important crossroads.⁹¹

The forts from Emona to Siscia were located on the inland navigation route along the Ljubljanica and Sava rivers. Its importance for trade in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC was mentioned by Strabo.⁹² It continued to function as a prominent communication route during the Roman era.⁹³ There are several indications that it was used intensively for military transports, at least from the Augustan period to the end of the 1st century AD.⁹⁴ The waterway started in Nauportus, where the fortified complex of storehouses probably represented a logistics base.⁹⁵

The structure and interpretation of the fortification system

The Eastern Alps region was obviously strongly fortified in the early Roman period. It was covered by a special system of fortifications with which it was possible to control a broad area between Aquileia and the Pannonian plain at

87 Horvat et al. 2003, 156, 173.

88 Mason 2008, 195; G. Tica, pers. comm.

89 Guštin 2002.

90 Mason 2006; Mason 2008.

91 Hvalec et al. 2009.

92 Strabo 4, 6, 10; 7, 5, 2; Šašel Kos 1990, 17–20, 143–147; the Late Iron Age archaeological finds from the Ljubljanica river: Gaspari 2007; Gaspari 2009.

93 Šašel Kos 1997, 34–36; Tassaux 2004; Istenič 2009c.

94 Istenič 2009a; Istenič 2009b; Egri 2008.

95 Mušić, Horvat 2007, 267; Egri 2008, 46.

the end of the 1st century BC.⁹⁶ Four groups of fortifications were discovered, the distribution of which probably formed four successive “layers” (Fig. 9).

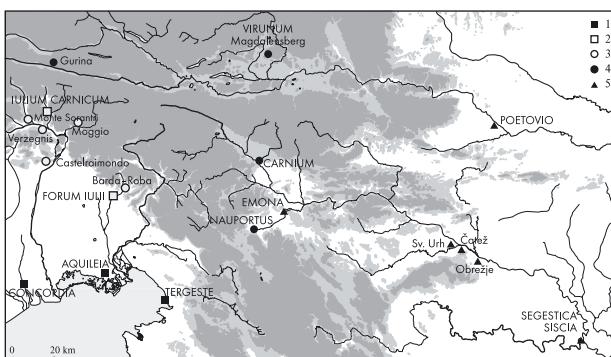


Fig. 9: The fortifications in the Eastern Alps during the Augustan period. 1 fortified Roman towns, 2 Roman towns without fortifications, 3 fortified settlements in Northern Friuli and Carnia, 4 fortified settlements of Roman immigrants, 5 military bases.

The first group, i.e. the mid 1st century BC fortifications of the towns of Aquileia, Tergeste and Concordia, represented the innermost vital part of the Italian defensive system.

The second group – the fortifications in Carnia and at the southern foothills of the Alps had important strategic positions for the inner Alpine connections and exits of Alpine routes into the north Italian plain: Castelraimondo, Verzegnisi – Colle Mazéit, Raveo – Monte Sorantri, Moggio – Colle di S. Spirito, Barda – Roba. Except for Moggio they were all located on old indigenous settlements that did not experience considerable immigration by the Roman population. The defensive walls of Verzegnisi and Castelraimondo were constructed already in the 2nd century BC and continued to be used in the 1st century BC. Walls with rectangular protruding towers seem to be typical for the second half of the 1st century BC. This type of fortifications is similar to the defensive architecture of the Roman towns in Italy.

The third group is represented by the settlements of Roman immigrants that controlled the transport routes on the other side of the Alpine passes: Nauportus, Carnium, Magdalensberg and Gurina. It seems that the fortifications

96 As already supposed by Šašel 1974a and Šašel 1974b.

on works began in the Pre-Augustan or early Augustan period (*Nauportus*) and continued into the middle Augustan period (*Magdalensberg, Carnium*). In the course of the Augustan conquest of Pannonia and Dalmatia camps for regular military troops, i.e. the fourth group of fortifications, were built along the edge of the Pannonian plain and along the navigation route *Nauportus – Emona – Siscia*: *Emona, Sv. Urh, Čatež, Obrežje, Siscia*.

In the hinterland, immediately behind the Octavian and Augustan military operations in Illyricum, the control of the communications, the protection of the Roman immigrants, and, last but not least, the protection of Italy itself, appear to be highly dependent on private interests and investments. The indigenous population of Carnia certainly played an important role in protecting Italy, however the strongholds to the north and east of the Alpine Passes were exclusively in the hands of the Roman immigrants.

A similar connection of private (mainly economic) and state interests can be observed in the leading role of the Aquileian merchant families in the exploitation of the metal resources in Noricum.⁹⁷ The combined interests also seem to be visible in *Nauportus*, where the logistics base for military actions was probably managed by the merchant families of Aquileia.⁹⁸

The political and economical stability of the 1st century AD contributed to the great changes in the settlements in the Eastern Alps, which also included the abandonment of the fortifications outside of urban centres. The early Alpine settlements of Roman immigrants lost their importance (*Gurina, Nauportus, Carnium*) or were transferred into the lowlands (*Magdalensberg – Virunum*).⁹⁹ The settlements in Carnia continued to live on, exhibiting a rural existence.

97 Scherrer 2002, 64-65.

98 Šašel Kos 1990, 21-30, 148-156; Mušić, Horvat 2007, 267.

99 E. g. Piccottini 2002; Horvat 1990.

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