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# The Roman Roads between Upper Moesia and Thrace: Archaeological and Epigraphic Evidence

VLADIMIR P. PETROVIĆ & DRAGANA GRBIĆ\*

The extreme south-eastern corner of Serbia that belonged to the Roman province of Thrace is archeologically almost unexplored.<sup>1</sup> Most of the information about this region in antiquity still draws on the early explorations of Konstantin Jiriček and Felix Kanitz.<sup>2</sup> The archaeological investigations in this area were never systematic, and they were very limited in scale and scope; thus, most of the extant material comes from chance findings; data are scattered throughout publications and the bulk of material is still left unpublished and almost forgotten. However, this region is very interesting: it was a contact zone between two Roman provinces: Upper Moesia and Thrace.<sup>3</sup> This was also a zone of delimitation between Greek and Latin language areas. This is observed not only by the distribution of inscriptions set up in Greek and Latin respectively, but also by the eloquent name of a road station on the “doorstep” of Upper Moesia, that was positioned somewhere between *Remesiana* and *Turres* — *statio Latina*, which is presumed to mark the beginning of Latinophone area.<sup>4</sup> Archaeological investigations have only recently been intensified by the ongoing work on the construction of a highway in the region of Pirot and Dimitrovgrad and new evidence that is currently coming to light shows that further research could reveal many interesting information (map 1).

The communication that will be in the main focus of the present paper is the less-known road that connected *Timacum Minus* (mod. Ravna, near Knjaževac),<sup>5</sup> a military camp and a significant settlement in Upper Moesia with the Roman town of *Pautalia* (Kyustendil in western Bulgaria) in the Roman province of Thrace.<sup>6</sup> This road intersected with the *Via militaris* at the foot of the fortress of Gojin Dol, to the south-east of Pirot (*Turres*) where a major Roman intersection has recently been discovered. The second part of the paper will offer some new thoughts on the location of couple of road stations on the *Via militaris*, namely, its section between *Turres* and *Meldia*.

*Timacum Minus* is fairly well explored Roman site in Beli Timok River region and obviously the most important one.<sup>7</sup> It was an early military camp and a signifi-

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<sup>2</sup> JIRIČEK 1886; KANITZ 1892.

<sup>3</sup> The border between provinces must have run on the line between *Remesiana* (Bela Palanka) and *Turres* (Pirot).

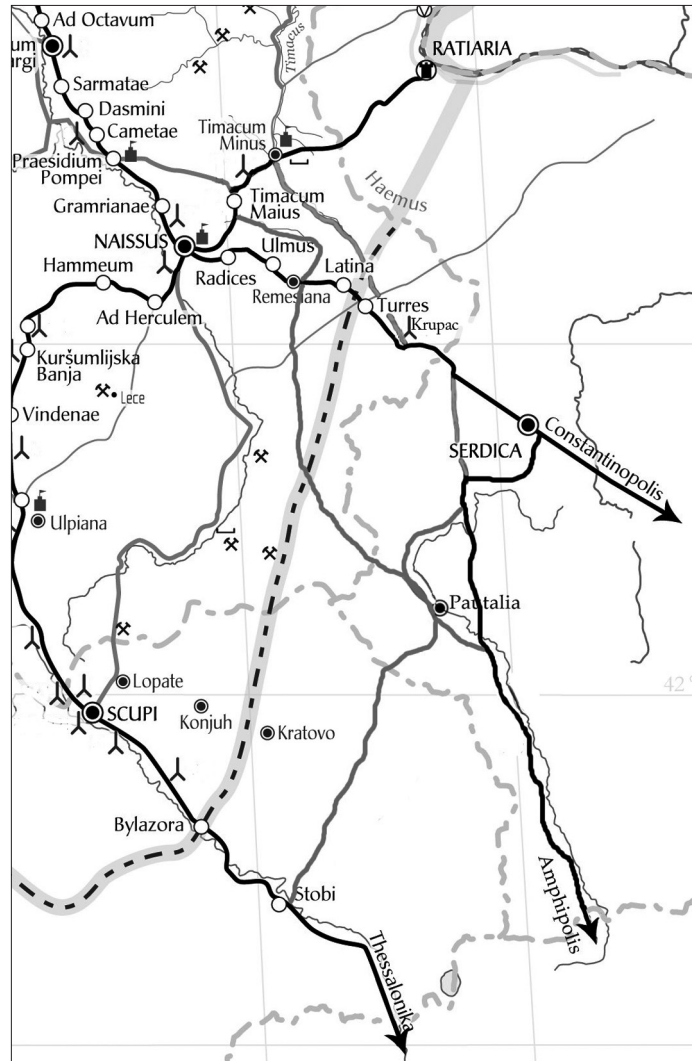
<sup>4</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 77; *IMS* IV, 25; PETROVIĆ V. 2007, 80.

<sup>5</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 125.

<sup>6</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 98.

<sup>7</sup> *IMS* III/2, 37–50.

Map 1. Roman Road Timacum Minus - Pautalia



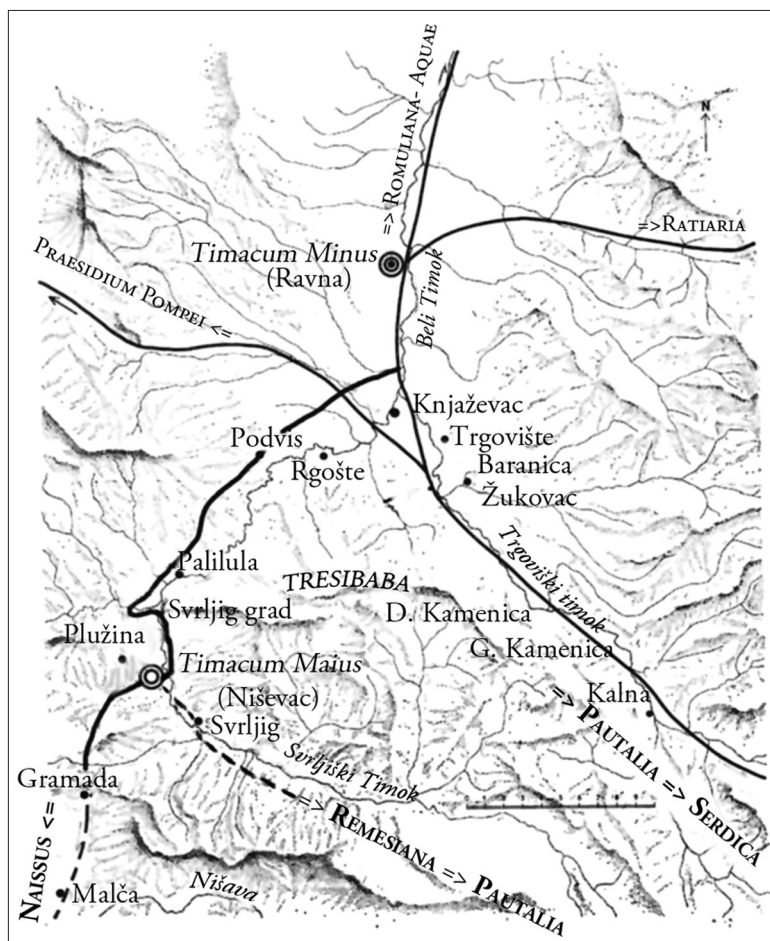
cant settlement that was also an administrative centre of the mining district of Timok, as indicated by epigraphic records. Mining was apparently the most important feature of region's economy in Roman times.<sup>8</sup> Thus, this vicinal road that linked *Timacum Minus* and *Pautalia*, actually connected two mineral-rich regions and their seats. Besides, *Timacum Minus* was also the key to the Danube region and to the north-east of Upper Moesia.

The path of the Roman road from *Timacum Minus* follows the segment of the road that is documented in the itineraries, which leads towards *Timacum Maius* (Niševac, near Svrljig) and *Naissus*, until the Knjaževac basin.<sup>9</sup> At this point it diverges towards the southeast and further leads through the Trgoviški Timok River valley. Along this road many ancient fortifications have been registered: Kalna, Donja Kamenica, Štrbac, Gradište, Žukovac and Baranica.<sup>10</sup> As a rule, these are strategically placed fortifications of a smaller scale that flank the road. They are built in *opus mixtum* with only few internal edifices. The purpose of these roadside fortifications was multi-fold: they were built to control the road and to protect the transport of pre-

<sup>8</sup> DUŠANIĆ 1977, 75 sq.; DUŠANIĆ S. 1990.

<sup>10</sup> PETROVIĆ 1995, 60–62.

<sup>9</sup> PETROVIĆ, FILIPOVIĆ & LUKA K. 2014, 97–142.



Map 2. Timok River Region Map

cious cargo; they defended the settlements and served as *refugia* in cases of peril. The fortifications were built in Roman epoch, but considerably gained on significance in Late Antiquity / early Byzantine period (map 2).

BARANICA is the most significant among these sites. It is a large fortification of irregular plan, ca. 300 x 250 m with suburbs and a necropolis. It is placed on a rocky hillock that closes the valley of Trgoviški Timok, leaving only a narrow and steep passage between the rocks for the riverbed. The ramparts (1,5 – 2,00 m thick) were built in *opus mixtum*. At certain places, the walls are preserved in 1m height, as well as the towers of square and round plan. Three Roman inscriptions have been found there.<sup>11</sup>

GRADIŠTE is a fortification of irregular, elongated plan, ca. 150 x 40 m. It is placed on a domineering, rocky hill, positioned at the meeting of three rivers: Aldinska, Deanovačka and Pričevačka. Stone rampart is preserved in 3 to 4 m height in a stretch that runs about 30 m. To the south of the fortress, about 2 km along Aldinska River, there are archaeological traces of ancient mining: beds, galleries and smelteries.<sup>12</sup>

The locality of DONJA KAMENICA has two registered fortifications. The first fortification (approximately 150 x 60 m) is of irregular, somewhat rounded plan. It is positioned on hilltop on the left bank of Trgoviški Timok River. The stone ramparts are

<sup>11</sup> *IMS* III/2, 102, 103, 104.

<sup>12</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 59.

adjusted to the configuration of the terrain. The vestiges of two round towers and of one rectangular building on the northern side of fortress are preserved. The second fortification at this site (approximately 120 x 80 m), also has an irregular plan. It rests on the hilltop on the right bank of Trgoviški Timok.

KALNA is a fortress of irregular plan, 250 x 150 m, sitting on the right bank of Trgoviški Timok. It is positioned near the modern village of Kalna, on the rock that closes the narrow valley of Trgoviški Timok. The remnants of the ramparts are preserved up to 1 m height.<sup>13</sup>

From Kalna, the Roman road followed Stajanska River up to Bigar waterfall, whence it continued through the valley of Sugrinska River towards Ragodeš (the finding spot of two Roman relief plaques: one of Mithra and the other representing the Thracian horsemen),<sup>14</sup> Temska (the site of an ancient fortification, with traces of settlement; finding spot of a Roman inscription)<sup>15</sup> and Nišor,<sup>16</sup> where the ancient necropolis has been registered. Somewhere in this area, it entered into the territory of the Roman province of Thrace. The road passed by or through Pirot (*Turres*)<sup>17</sup> and Gradašnica and it continued to Krupac,<sup>18</sup> following the right bank of Nišava River. It ran independently of *Via militaris*.

That this road, leading from Timok region to *Pautalia*, indeed passed through Krupac (near Pirot, S-E Serbia) is confirmed by Roman milestone with inscription in Greek that indicates *Pautalia* as *caput viae*. Dimensions of the milestone are 102 cm high, 101 cm in diameter; height of the inscription field: 102 cm, letters 4 – 4,5 cm. The monument still stands in the church yard in Krupac, where Nikola Vulić, and later Petar Petrović had seen it. N. VULIĆ, *JÖAI* (Beibl.) 15, 1912, 228, n° 7; *AE* 1913, 175; *ILJug* 1459. (fig. 1)

The text runs:

[Ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ.] | [ὑπὲρ ὑγείας κ<αἰ> σωτη]ρίας κ<αἰ> <αἰ>[ωνίου] διαμολνῆς τε κ<αἰ> νε[ίκτης] θ[ει]οτ[ά]του αὐτοκρατορος Ἰουλ(ίου) Φιλλίππου | Σεβ(αστοῦ) κ<αἰ> Μ[α]ρκίας Ὀτακιλίας Σευήρας Σεβ(αστῆς) ἡγεμοννεύοντος τ(ῆ)ς Θρακῶ[ν] | ἑπαρχίας Φουρνίου Πουλπιανοῦ πρεσβ(ευτοῦ) Σεβ(αστοῦ) ἀντιστρατήγου ἢ Παυταλίων πόλις τὸ μίλιον.

The milestone belongs to a group of milestones in Thrace that were erected for the health, safety and eternal endurance of the Emperor Julius Philip and Marcia Otacilia Severa by *Sextus Furnius Publianus*, the governor of Thrace. His governorship is usually dated between AD 247 and 249.<sup>19</sup> However, inscriptional evidence may suggest somewhat earlier date, as has been already proposed by Petar PETROVIĆ.<sup>20</sup> He proposed to date these inscriptions in the year 244 AD — the first year of his reign, connecting the renovations on the road network and the erection of the numerous milestones with the expected passage of the Emperor on his way from Persia to Rome via Balkans, namely through Thrace and Upper Moesia.<sup>21</sup> It has been assumed that there was a phase of significant reconstruction of the road network in this area during the reign of Philip the Arab. The same dating for Publianus' gover-

<sup>13</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 67.

<sup>14</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 105–106; N. VULIĆ, *Spomenik* LXXVII, 71, no. 7 and *idem*, *Spomenik* XCVIII 128, no. 283.

<sup>15</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 124; KANITZ *Studien*, 103; N. VULIĆ, *Spomenik* XCVIII, 1941–1948, n. 284; PETROVIĆ 1977, 183.

<sup>16</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 92; GARAŠANIN 1951, 170; PETROVIĆ 1977, 183.

<sup>17</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 128–129.

<sup>18</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 75.

<sup>19</sup> *PIR*<sup>2</sup> F 593; THOMASSON 2009, 22: 060; KÖRNER 2002, (S 15) 339, with references to the epigraphic evidence.

<sup>20</sup> PETROVIĆ 1968; *idem*, *IMS* IV 125, 126.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. LORIOT 1975, 792sqq.; HALFMANN 1986, 235.



Fig. 1. Milestone from Krupac

norship and for the milestones that he had erected in the province of Thrace has been recently proposed by Lily GROZDANOVA.<sup>22</sup>

It is important to indicate here the existence of another milestone that bares the same text as that from Krupac.<sup>23</sup> This milestone belongs to the epigraphic collection of the National Museum in Belgrade, and it is, to the best of our knowledge, unpublished. Unfortunately, the exact provenance of the object as well as its path to the collection are not known, but the internal evidence in the text strongly suggest that it must have come from a site located in the south-eastern corner of Serbia, quite probably in the environs of the Krupac / Pirot where its twin inscription was found. A possible trace may be a short note of Nikola Vulić that he published in *Spomenik of the Serbian Royal Academy* (XCVIII) of 1948.<sup>24</sup> He wrote that in the village of Vojnegovac, near Krupac, there is “a Greek inscription, found in 1924 and some other in-

<sup>22</sup> L. GROZDANOVA, *Римските императори срещу готите на Книва: политическа митология, исторически документи и възстановима събитийност* (in Bulgarian), thesis summary with bibliography <https://www.uni-sofia.bg/index.php/>

[bul/content/download/86064/667581/version/1/file/Lily+Grozdanova\\_Avtoreferat.pdf](https://www.uni-sofia.bg/index.php/).

<sup>23</sup> The inscriptions differ only in *ordinatio*.

<sup>24</sup> *Spomenik* XCVIII, 1941–1948, p. 127, no. 281.



scriptions”, but he did not publish the monuments. It could possibly be the site of the milestone’s provenance. However, we should not press the evidence too hard, especially since the distance from the destination is not noted in these inscriptions; also the information about particular find spots in the older literature can sometimes be vague, no longer relevant or hardly understandable for modern readers.<sup>25</sup> Suffice it to conclude that it most probably comes from the environs of *Turres*, certainly from the territory that belonged to the province of Thrace and finally, from the same vicinal communication leading to *Pautalia*, as the first inscription.

These two milestone inscriptions should be grouped with milestones from the same region that also indicate ἡ Παυταλίων πόλις — the city of Pautalia (Kyustendil) as *caput viae*.

The first milestone was found somewhere on the territory of / in the environs of modern Dimitrovgrad.<sup>26</sup> It was erected in the times of Severus Alexander by *L. Prusius Rufinus* (PIR<sup>2</sup> P 1014).

*IGBulg* IV 2041.

[Ἀγαθῆι τύχηι] | [ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ θειοτάτου | Αὐτοκράτορος Μ. Αὐρ(ηλίου) | Ἀντωνίνου {Σευήρου Ἀλεξάνδρου}] |<sup>5</sup> τύχης τε καὶ νεύκης καὶ | αἰωνίου διαμονῆς, ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς Θρακῶν | αἰπαρχείας Λ. Πρωσίου | Ῥουφίνου πρε<σ>β(ευτοῦ) Σεββα<sup>10</sup>στών {Σεβαστῶν} ἀντιστρατήγου, | τὸ μείλιον ἡ Παυταλεω<sup>1</sup> τῶν πόλις. | Εὐτυχῶς.

The other milestone was found in Kalotina, in Bulgaria, near Dimitrovgrad. Its text is identical with the first two mentioned inscriptions, from Krupac and from Belgrade collection. Consequently, it should also be dated in 244 AD.

V. BEŠEVLIJEV, *Epigrafski prinosi*, p. 19, n° 18. Height 189 cm, diameter 48 cm:

Ἀγα[θῆι τύχηι] | ὑπὲρ [ὑγείας κ<αί> σωτηρί[ας καὶ αἰωνίουδιαμο]νῆς [τοῦ μεγίστου καὶ θειο]<sup>5</sup>τάτου [αὐτοκράτορος] | Μ. Ἰουλ(ίου) Φιλ[ίππου Σεβ(αστοῦ)]|κα[ὶ Μαρκείας Ὠτακι]λλίας [Σευήρας Σεβ(αστῆς) ἡγε]μ[ονεύοντος τ(ῆ)ς Θρ]ακῶν ἐπαρχείας Φουρ[νίου Π[ρουπλιανοῦ πρεσβ(ευτοῦ) Σεβ(αστοῦ)] | ἀντι[στρατ]ή[γου ἡ Παυτ]αλε[ωτῶν πόλις].

π[ρεσβευ τοῦ Σεβαστου, Beševliev.

From KRUPAC, the road followed right bank of Nišava until the fortification at Gojindolsko Kale.

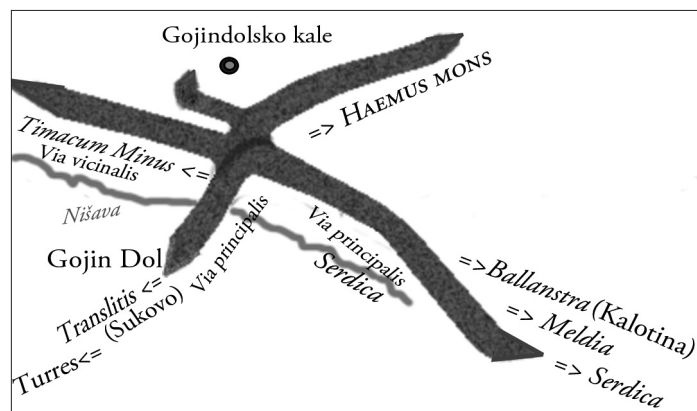
GOJINDOLSKO KALE or MALO KALE. According to the recent archaeological data, Gojindolsko Kale is a late antique and early Byzantine fortification, erected probably in the fourth century and renewed in the sixth century under the emperor Justinian. The fortification had an important rôle in controlling the Roman communications and quite probably served as a *refugium* in Late Antiquity. It is positioned on the right bank of Nišava River in the environs of the village Gojin Dol, on a hilltop that dominates the area. The latest archaeological researches conducted during the construction of the modern highway have revealed that this place was an important intersection of Roman roads.<sup>27</sup> (fig. 2)

<sup>25</sup> For example, references to private properties or references to the names of the owners of properties at the beginning / first quarter of the twentieth century.

<sup>26</sup> From the environs of Dimitrovgrad comes also one fragmentary Latin milestone, *CIL* III 13717.

<sup>27</sup> Dr MIROSLAV LAZIĆ, Gojindolsko Kale (Malo Kale), Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture – Beograd. [http://www.heritage.gov.rs/latinica/zastitna\\_arheoloska\\_iskopavanja\\_koridor\\_10\\_Gojindolske\\_kale\\_Malo\\_kale.php](http://www.heritage.gov.rs/latinica/zastitna_arheoloska_iskopavanja_koridor_10_Gojindolske_kale_Malo_kale.php)

Fig. 2. Intersection at Gojindolsko kale



Namely, at this place, the *Via militaris* or the Constantinople Road, the key trans-Balkan Roman communication that was the main artery of the traffic in the Balkans, namely its section *Turres — Serdica*, crossed paths with some smaller vicinal communication. This vicinal communication should no doubt be identified as the road between *Timacum Minus* and *Pautalia*. The course of the Constantinople Road on the territory of modern village Gojin Dol passed to the right bank of Nišava River, and after the intersection with the vicinal road, continued towards Dimitrovgrad.

The route towards *Pautalia* coincided with the path of the main road to *Serdica* until the area between Kalotina<sup>28</sup> and Dragoman,<sup>29</sup> where the already mentioned milestone that indicates *Pautalia* as *caput* has been discovered. One should not completely exclude the possibility that two paths — first of the main road leading to *Serdica*, and second of the vicinal road heading to *Pautalia* — had two separate lines on a short stretch, although this is less likely. Already in Dragoman, the Roman milestones indicate *Serdica* as *caput viae*.<sup>30</sup> There is also another fragmentary milestone indicating *Serdica* as *caput*, from the same epoch and almost the same region — Pirot district, although its precise provenance is not certain.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, somewhere between Kalotina and Dragoman, the vicinal route to *Pautalia* certainly diverged from the main communication which is documented in the Roman itineraries, and it continued towards Pernik,<sup>32</sup> joining the main road *Serdica — Pautalia*. It is possible that this vicinal road to *Pautalia* joined the communication *Timacum Maius — Remesiana — Pautalia* at Dolno and Gorno Ujno,<sup>33</sup> instead of the itinerary communication *Serdica — Pautalia*. In any case, it ended in the Roman town of *Pautalia*, Thracian settlement that was the centre of Thracian region of Dentheletica. Archaeological and epigraphic material testifies of social and cultural mobility in this area that has roots in pre-Roman times. Early contacts and communication between the land of the Dentheletae and Timok valley may be illustrated by the example of a votive inscription from *Timacum Maius* (Niševac, located in the valley of Svrljiški Timok River) dedicated to *Hera Sonketene*.<sup>34</sup> Other findings, mostly inscriptions recording cults and personal names suggest that these micro-regions were very well connected. Most importantly, as already mentioned, *Pautalia* was the centre of the large mining region. It is worth to summarize that there were at least three

<sup>28</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 20.

<sup>29</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 85.

<sup>30</sup> *AE* 1978, 722, erected also in 244, by *Sextus Furnius Publianus*.

<sup>31</sup> N. VULIĆ, *Spomenik* 75, 1933: — Μ]αρκίαν Ωτακ[ιλίαν ΙΣευ]ήραν Σεβ(αστήν) γ[υναικα

Ιτου] κυρίου ήμ[ών Φιλίππου] ή Σέρδ[ων πόλις Ι—].

<sup>32</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 100.

<sup>33</sup> PETROVIĆ & GRBIĆ 2014, 95–106.

<sup>34</sup> PETROVIĆ & FILIPOVIĆ 2014.

different possibilities to travel between the Timok region and *Pautalia* and between Upper Moesia and Thrace. At the moment, we have evidence on the existence of two vicinal roads: 1) *Timacum Maius* — *Remesiana* — *Pautalia* and 2) *Timacum Minus* — *Pautalia* and one major itinerary road, the *Via militaris*, leading, via *Serdica* to Constantinople. It is worthwhile to highlight that these roads are not chronologically identical and that they differed in character and function.

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Regarding the section between *Turres* and *Meldia*<sup>35</sup> of the main communication, the *Via militaris*, it is important to stress that only the *Itinerarium Hierosolymitanum sive Burdigalense*, which gives the most precise information, notes two intermediary stations: *mutatio Translitis*<sup>36</sup> and *mutatio Ballanstra*.<sup>37</sup> The *Tabula Peutingeriana*, as total distance between *Turres* and *Meldia*, gives 24 Roman miles; the Antonine Itinerary gives 30 miles, while the distance indicated in the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* totals 31 miles. The actual distance between Pirot (*Turres*) and Dragoman (identified as *Meldia*) is about 46 km, which conforms almost perfectly to the data indicated in the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, which is the most reliable itinerary. The record in the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* more or less corresponds to the entry in the Antonine Itinerary, while the *Tabula Peutingeriana* in this case cannot be considered as correct.

On the stretch between *Turres* and *Meldia* there were at least two *mutationes*, as it is indicated in *It. Burdigalense*. These are *mutatio Translitis* that has been identified with Dimitrovgrad and *mutatio Ballanstra*, identified with Kalotina, near Dimitrovgrad. After a closer reading of the entries in the Roman itineraries and by comparing toponymy with all available archaeological data, one comes to the conclusion that the location of the stations on this stretch should be revised. In particular, the distance between *Turres* and *mutatio Translitis* was 12 Roman miles which corresponds to the distance of ca. 18 km. The distance between Pirot (*Turres*) and Dimitrovgrad which is the presumed location of *mutatio Translitis* is 27 km. However, the real distance between these two points exceeds significantly the mileage that was indicated in the itineraries. Therefore *mutatio Translitis* should not be located in modern Dimitrovgrad, as previously thought, but must have been positioned before it, on a significant river crossing. The eloquent toponym *Translitis*, which indicates that this station was located near the spot where the road crossed from one riverbank to the other and the distance from *Turres*, instigated us to search for the station *Translitis* in the vicinity of Vojnegovac and Sukovo. The area between the villages Vojnegovac and Sukovo has yielded several ancient inscriptions both in Greek and Latin.<sup>38</sup> Also, there are remnants of the ancient fortification at Sukovo.<sup>39</sup> As we have presumed before, a milestone conserved in Belgrade may also originate from this area. Also, another, newly discovered milestone that is currently being preserved in the Museum of Pirot and that is yet to be published, was discovered at a place called Vojnegovačka bara, on the border between three villages: Vojnegovac, Sukovo and Veliko Selo by the Nišava River. The area between Vojnegovac and Sukovo is located in marshy area around the mouth of the Jerma River, which flows into the Nišava River, as suggested by the

<sup>35</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 85.

<sup>36</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 126.

<sup>37</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 20.

<sup>38</sup> *TIR*, K-34, Naissus, 122; N. VULIĆ, *JÖAI*

15,1912, Beibl. 228 s.

<sup>39</sup> PETROVIĆ 1977, 182. Cf. N. VULIĆ, *JÖAI* 15, 1912, Beibl. 228 s.

modern toponym “Vojnegovačka bara” that further supports our presumption about the location of *mutatio Translitis*. On the other hand, the fortress of Gojin Dol, where the main Roman road crossed the Nišava River, as already mentioned, is not far from the Vojnegovac — Sukovo area, ca. 3 Roman miles. The toponym *Translitis* obviously indicates the vicinity of the river crossing at Gojin Dol, which is the point where the road passes to the other bank of the Nišava River. The station *Translitis* could have been located in the plain area, on the path of the main Roman road, in Vojnegovac — Sukovo zone, on the left bank of the Nišava River. The nearest fortress of Gojin Dol, on the hilltop at the right bank of the Nišava River, could have served as control point and *refugium*.

Finally we think that the *mutatio Translitis* (Vojnegovac — Sukovo) and the fortress at Gojin Dol are two separate points that must be considered as a whole. It should be stressed that the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* with the *mutatio Translitis* chronologically corresponds to the archaeological remains of the fortress at Gojin Dol (the late antique period).

Second intermediary station between *Turres* and *Meldia*, *mutatio Ballanstra*, recorded in *Itinerarium Burdigalense* is located on the distance of 10 Roman miles or 15 km eastward of *mutatio Translitis* which corresponds to the eastern periphery of the modern settlement Kalotina in Bulgaria, as it is more or less already suggested in the scientific literature.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

- AE — *L'année épigraphique*, Paris  
 AEM — *Archaeologisch-epigraphische Mittheilungen aus Oesterreich-Ungarn*, Wien  
 ANRW — *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, Berlin–New York  
 CIL — *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin  
 JÖAI — *Jahreshefte des Österreichischen archäologischen Instituts*, Wien  
 IMS — *Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure*, Belgrade  
 Spomenik — *Spomenik Srpske kraljevske akademije*, Belgrade  
 PIR<sup>2</sup> — *Prosopographia Imperii Romani<sup>2</sup>*, Berlin  
 TIR K-34, Naissus — *Tabula Imperii Romani, Naissus — Dyrrachion — Scupi — Serdica — Thessalonice*, Ljubljana 1968

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