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## THE ANCIENT ROAD TRANUPARA (KONJUH) - PAUTALIA (KYUSTENDIL)

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**Abstract:** *Presentation of the results of the research of the ancient road from the ancient city of Golemo Gradishte locality, Konjuh village (Tranupara) along Kriva Reka, and the ancient fortifications that controlled and protected the road: Kralitsa village of Shopsko Rudari, Vidim, Kuklitsa village. Gradište village of Trnovac, Gradište village of Opila, Gradište village of Konopnica.*

**Key words:** fortifications, ancient road of Kriva Reka, Tranupara, Shopsko Rudari, Trnovac, Opila, Konopnica.

Among the many archaeological topics and problems from the ancient period, in the territory of northeastern Macedonia, the road routes and localities along them attract attention. Kriva Reka and its right tributary Pčinja have flowed through this territory since ancient times, into which several smaller creeks and streams flow. The Kriva Reka valley is bounded to the north by the Bilino massif, and to the south by the Osogovo mountains. Along Kriva Reka and Pčinja, an ancient main road existed from ancient times, which connected the Skopje-Kumanovo regions with the areas of Slavishte and Kriva Palanka. The area through which this road led in early antiquity, a road that connected the settlements and cities of the Agrianes people, we can with great certainty name it - the Agrianian Road.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Agrianes were the northernmost part of the Paionian nation. For the basic elements of their territory, see: Соколовска В., 1987-1989, 9-34; Lilchikj Adams V. & Lilchikj S., 2017, 49-60; Лилчиќ Адамс В., 2019, with the literature cited.

In the area east of Skopje, two important roads joined this road. One is the eastern section, which separated from the Vardar Road (Via Axia), in the Skopje Basin, and led to the north, through the area of Preševo, towards the Morava Valley. The second road connected: the valley of Bregalnica, the plateau of Ovchepole (the area of the ancient city near the village of Knežje (with unknown name), with the valley of Kriva Reka. This road connected the most important ancient cities: Astibus (Shtip), the cities near the villages of Knežje and Nemanjtsi, with the city of Tranupara which was located on the site of the Golem Gradište village of Konjuh. Judging by the observed cultural horizons, at the sites investigated so far, this road route was used intensively throughout antiquity. The thesis of identification of this road with the so-called Diagonal road from Peutinger's Map (Tabula Peutingeriana) was presented in the literature.<sup>2</sup> The Peutinger map contains the following stations and distances, in the space between the ancient cities of Stobi and Pautalia (Kyustendil): Stopis - XXX - Tranupara - XX - Astibo - L - Pautalia. The researchers noticed that the first major station along the road, and after Stobi, were the remains of a large ancient city near the present-day city of Shtip. The distance from Stobi to Shtip, along the main road that ran along the valley of the Bregalnica River, is 36 km, or 24.32 km, which exceeds the distance of 30 Roman miles (44.39 km) represented on the Poitinger map. Therefore, the researchers hypothesized that the compiler of the Poitinger map mistakenly replaced the two stations. The first stop after Stobi should be Astibus (Shtip), and the second stop, 20 miles from Shtip, was Tranupara. In the following, some researchers put forward a hypothesis that the diagonal road from Shtip continued through the valley of Bregalnica to the area of the municipality of Delchevo, where it crossed the south-eastern mountain branch of the Osogovo mountain, and led north to Kyustendil (Pautalia). Without going into a deeper analysis of this idea in this text, at this point we will only state that several important ancient cities existed along Bregalnica. On the left bank of Bregalnica were the towns: Bargala, the village of Gorni Kozjak, Gradishte, Zrnovci and Vinichko Kale, Vinica (Armonia or Kelenidin). On the right bank of Bregalnica were the towns: Kale village of Krupište (the ancient town of Zapara ?), the town of Kalata, Dulica (Armonia or Kelenidin). Therefore, if the Diagonal road led along Bregalnica in the direction of Delchevo, there is no chance that at least one of these towns was not listed on the Poitinger map.

The road route from the ancient city near Shtip, to the north, led along the eastern edge of Ovche Pole. On that line, on the road itself, there are the remains of the more significant small towns in the following localities: Kula village Sudikj, Gradishte village Mechkuevski, Gradishte village Nemanjica, Gradishte village Dolno Gjudjanci. By the way, we will also mention the town of Gradishte near the village of Knezhje, which is located about 14 km west of the mentioned road route. However, one should keep in mind the time in which

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<sup>2</sup> Лилчиќ (Адамс) В., 1994, 33-47

the protogenes version of the Poitinger map was written, which is the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Our research has observed cultural horizons in the above-mentioned towns, near Sudikj, Mechkuevski and Dolno Gjulganci, while not in Gradishte, Nemanjica village.

In the north, the road reached the hilly Kampur pass, which was controlled by the castle on the hill of Golema Vukasia, village of Pezovo. From the Kampur mountain pass the road split. One section led to the northwest in the valley of the river Luka, towards Kumanovo. The second section, the one on the assumed Diagonal Road, led in a north, northeast direction, to the town of Golemo Gradishte near the village of Konjuh, on the left bank of Kriva Reka.

The ancient city near Konjuh was unknown for a long time, until I. Mikulčić visited, researched and documented in 1973 and 1975.<sup>3</sup> The results have been published several times from 1973-2002.<sup>4</sup>

Subsequent research in the city near Konjuh was organized by Professor Dr. Carolyn Sue Snively. From 1998 to 2022, she carried out archaeological excavations of the city's acropolis and the urban part of the city, where she discovered the city's basilica with a residential episcopal complex.<sup>5</sup>

The ancient city near Konjuh developed thanks to two moments. Because of the crossroads, that is, the junction of the road coming from Ovchepole plane with the road from Scupi to Pautalia. As well as because of its location at the border between three late antique provinces: Macedonia Secunda, Dacia Mediterranea and Dardania.

Recently, another hypothesis was put forward, about the possible location of the late antique city of Zapara, on the remains of the city near Konjuh.<sup>6</sup> The suffix -para in Tranu-para and Za-para clearly indicates places in the zone of the late antique province of Mediterranean Dacia, inhabited by Thracian ethnic groups. In our case, it is known that the Thracian Maidoi settled in the valley of the river Strymon, in the period after the death of Alexander the Great, migrated to the zones inhabited by the Paeonians and probably the Agrianes.

From the ancient city near Konjuh, the road to Pautalia continued along the relatively open left bank of Kriva Reka. At a distance of about 4 kilometers from the eastern city gate, the river reaches the southern foot of the Kralitsa hill, the village of Shopsko Rudari. Due to the control of the road, a small guard

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<sup>3</sup> Students Roza Topuzova (Kareska) (3<sup>rd</sup> year archeology studies) and Viktor Lilchikj Adams (2<sup>nd</sup> year archeology studies) participated in the research in September 1975.

<sup>4</sup> Микулчиќ И., 1973, 177-182; Микулчиќ И., 1974, 347-368; Mikulčić I., 191-212; Микулчиќ И., 1975, 115-121; Микулчиќ И., 1996, 223-226; Микулчиќ И., 1999, 358-361; Mikulčić I., 2002, 128-133.

<sup>5</sup> Snively C. S., 2002, 297-306; Snively C. S., 2006, 229-244; Snively C. S., 2008, 335-351; Snively C. S., 2010, 375-389; Snively C. S., 2011, 187-201; Sanev G, Snively C. S., Stojanoski M, 2012, 347-364; Snively C. S. & Sanev G., 2013, 157-172; Snively C. S., 2013, 403-44.

<sup>6</sup> Sokolovska V., About the location of Armonia and Zapara, MANU, scientific symposium in honorem acad. Blaga Alexova: From Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages, Archaeological Views in Macedonia, December 5-6, 2022 (in preparation for printing).

fort was built on the last projecting hill in early antiquity. The site has been misinterpreted in the literature as a sanctuary.<sup>7</sup>

After the guard castle of Kralitsa, the road entered the area of today's village of Kuklitsa. High above the right bank of Kriva Reka are two fortifications, Vidim and Straža. Vidim hill (825 m) is more dominant. On this site/hill in late antiquity, a strong castle was built with the function of observation and transmission of alarm signals, primarily to the city of Tranupara on the site Golemo Gradishte, Konjuh village. And further towards the mountainous background to the east, towards the castle of the Zdravchi Kamen locality, the village of Shlegovo, which dates back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>8</sup>

Straža peak (777 m) rises about 790 meters north of Vidim. On this peak are the remains of a small castle consisting of a small acropolis (53x30 m) and two residential terraces on the northwestern slope. With research in 2022, we discovered two small bronze coins of the Roman emperors Arcadius and Theodosius II.

It seems that the ancient road after Kralitsa crossed from the left to the right bank of the Kriva Reka and led for about 8.5 km to the southwestern foot of the Gradishte hill near the village of Trnovac in Kratovo area. Gradishte, Trnovac was researched and documented by V. Lilchikj in 1989.<sup>9</sup> And his results were published by I. Mikulchic.<sup>10</sup> V. Lilchikj Adams recorded on the plateau of the hill an elongated and strongly fortified fortification (large 168x97 m, on an area of 0.8 ha; a strong perimeter defense wall opus incertum technique 1.2 m wide, registered parts of roof tiles (tegulae) Laconian type, contours of two rooms cut in rocks), with cultural horizons from the Iron Age / Archaic period and from Late Antiquity mainly 4-6 centuries AD. The castle most directly controlled the ancient road that led around its southwestern and southeastern foothills and along the right bank of Kriva Reka.

From the castle of Gradishte, Trnovac, the road continued along Kriva Reka, and in about 4 kilometers it reached the entrance to the gorge between the hills of Mulin Rid and Koriya, which leads to the village of Opila. It is unclear whether this small gorge, less than 2 kilometers long, was protected by a small castle or tower. The positions of the first two hills at the very entrance to the gorge would be significant and most suitable: the western hill - elevation 514 m on Koria Hill and elevation 530 m on the elongated southwestern branch of Mulin Hill.

Leaving the gorge at the mouth of the Vetunichka River, the road continues through the widened valley around the village of Opila for about 1.7 km and reaches the southern foot of the ancient castle on the hill Gradishte Babunci, village of Opila. On this hill there is a fortified acropolis, large 120x60

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<sup>7</sup> Станковски Ј., 2003, 229-231, сл 1-6, plan attachment 1.

<sup>8</sup> Лилчиќ (Адамс) В., 2009, 41-53.

<sup>9</sup> Лилчиќ (Адамс) В., 1994, 37, plan p. 41 fig. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Mikulčić I., 2002, 240-241.

m, while the entire castel together with the wide southwestern suburb measures 180x120 m.<sup>11</sup>

It seems that the road near Gradište Babunci, Opila shifted to the left bank of the Kriva Reka, where it diverged from the bed, following a relatively flat line along the northern foothills through the fields of the villages of Opila and Odreno. Near Odreno, a locality called Gradište has been noted, which no one has visited or investigated. In our search for the unspecified description of C. Krstevski: 23. *Odreno, Gradishte, Gradishte from late antiquity. On a high hill with a flattened plateau, bounded on the east by Buin Dol ...*,<sup>12</sup> we suppose it to be on the hill above Churina Maala. This hill has the characteristics of a fortification to control the road that led to its southern foot. In the context of Gradište, Odreno, we point out the wrong identification with Gradishte 1, Psacha, by I. Mikulchic.<sup>13</sup>

From the area of the village of Odreno, the road continued to the atar of the village of Psacha, where it approached the river bed, to enter a small gorge (about 3 km long) at the mouth of the Rashka Reka in the Kriva Reka. On the south-southwest side is the locality Gradishte 2, Psacha, while on the north side is Dolno Gradishte 3, Petralica.<sup>14</sup> The site was investigated by V. Lilchikj Adams in 2008. He registered on the top of the hill a fortified, elongated narrow plateau, with a north-south orientation and a southwest suburb. Fragments of pottery from early antiquity as well as from late antiquity have been recorded. Parts of laconian type roof tiles (*tegulae*), a piece of house glue, as well as parts of pithos and several ceramic loom weights were observed in the ruins of an ancient house intersected by the railway that passes through a tunnel cut through the hill in a line below the acropolis.

Coming out of the gorge, the road moved along the left bank of Kriva Reka, through the areas of today's villages of Mozhdivnjak and Konopnica. Near Mozhdivnjak, two fortifications Gradishte 1 (elevation 848 m) and Gradishte 2 (with an unknown location somewhere in the source area of the Moshtanitsa river) have been noted. The researches of V. Lilchikj Adams at Gradishte 1, Mozhdivnjak pointed to a small fortified mountain position about 2.6/2.7 km away from the bed of the Kriva Reka and the road, so we believe that it could not have played a role in controlling the road.

We emphasize the idea that the road may have moved away from the bed of the Kriva Reka immediately after bypassing the Kula elevation, a hill in the gorge itself, located just opposite the confluence of the Rashka Reka in Kriva Reka. It is a local road route that is still used today. The same, avoiding the

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<sup>11</sup> Mikulčić I., 2002, 244-246.

<sup>12</sup> Крстевски Ц., 1996, 44.

<sup>13</sup> Mikulčić I., 2002, 243-244, no 136.

<sup>14</sup> Крстевски Ц., 1996, 47: 27. *Petralitsa, Gradište III, a gradishte from the Late Antiquity. At the mouth of Petralička in Kriva Reka, on a small ridge with a dominant location, traces of a rampart can be seen, and fragments of ceramic vessels, pithos and building material can be found on the surface.*

curves of the gorge, leads to the southeast, along a relatively flat terrain through the elevation of Strazhin (682 m) to the village of Mozhdivnjak and then takes a northeast direction again approaching the left bank of Kriva Reka, near the Diamadzaci neighborhood of the village of Konopnica.

Above Diamadzatsi, on the low hill Gradishte Garazdanci – Janin Kale (elevation about 703.08 m), there are remains of a significant roadside fortification. It is mentioned by I. Mikulčić, even presented metrically,<sup>15</sup> but completely inaccurate because the author never visited the site and derived the measurements completely arbitrarily, probably taking them from a topographical map. The site was investigated by V. Lilchikj Adams on June 16, 2007. According to him, it is a strongly fortified plateau with an approximately elliptical shape measuring 120x95 meters. He registered building / floor bricks 4 cm thick. The defensive wall was formed in mortar technique with rare thin plaster. He noticed outlines of more rectangular spaces on the northeast side of the fortress from the inside of the defensive wall, as well as an approach - entrance to the fortress from the same side. He also documented a 55-meter-long front wall that was built on the southern side of the fort, facing the wide mountain saddle in front of it.

In the continuation of the valley of the Kriva Reka, the road moved along its bed, passing the area of the present-day city of Kriva Palanka, where the remains of Kale Kriva Palanka are located, which was stated in the literature to date from late antiquity.<sup>16</sup> We use this opportunity to inform you that Kale in Kriva Palanka dates back to the Ottoman period, which was probably seen by I. Mikulčić during the years after 1976 so that he did not include it in his study of late antique fortifications in Macedonia.<sup>17</sup>

From Kriva Palanka the road moved to the northeast along the bed of Kriva Reka, where it entered the narrow Zhidilovska Klisura. This gorge is about 8 kilometers long and has not yet been archaeologically explored. On its western part, Kiselicka River flows into Kriva Reka. While in the area of its expansion in the eastern part near the villages of Uzem and Kostur, there are two localities named Gradishte. No visible cultural remains have been observed on the Gradishte Uzem hill. While in Gradište Varoshka Maala, Kostur village there is a small early Byzantine castle from the 6th century. Perhaps its function was to protect the road that ascended from here in a northeasterly direction to the Deve Bair pass.

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<sup>15</sup> Mikulčić I., 2002, 243, no 134.

<sup>16</sup> Mikulčić I., 1976, Kale, Kriva Palanka. TIR, Ljubljana 1976, Kriva Palanka.

<sup>17</sup> Mikulčić I., 2002.

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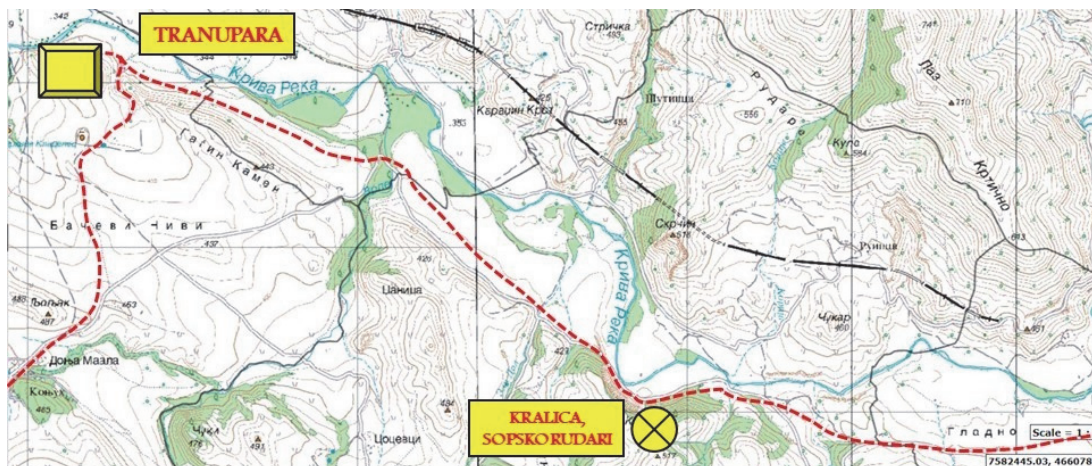
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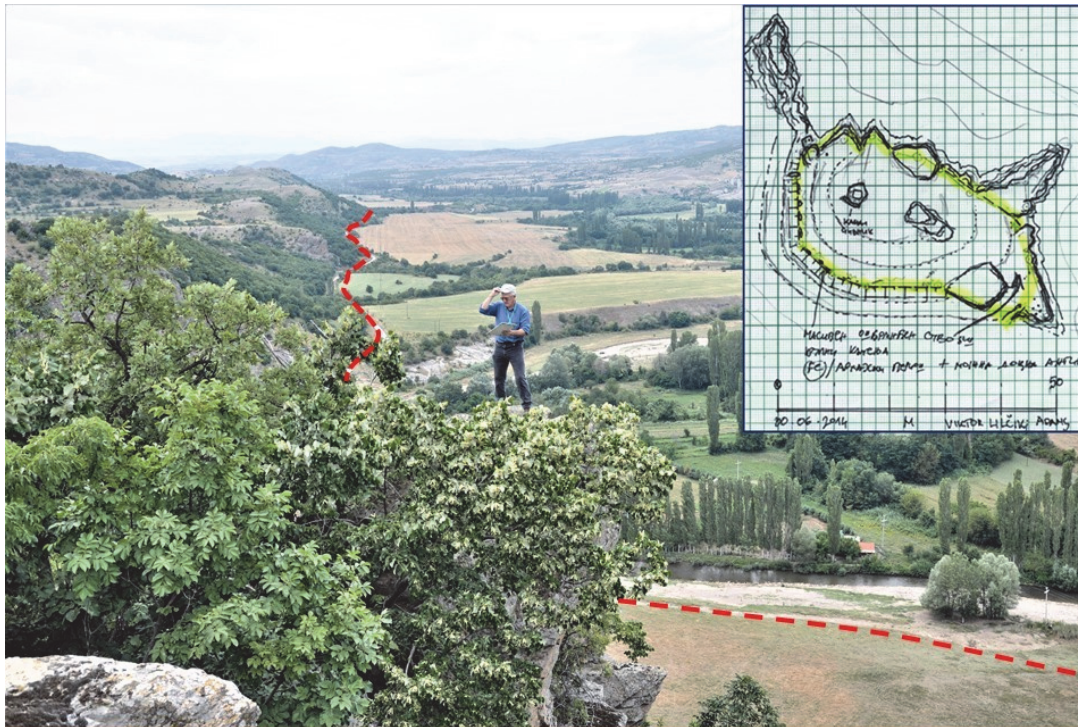
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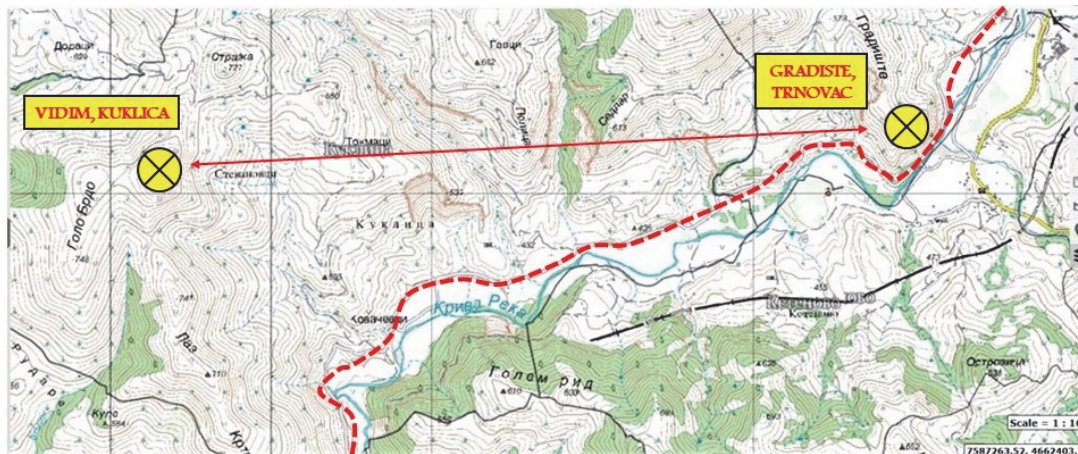
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Подлога: Google Earth



ПАТНА ТРАСА ОД ГРАДИШТЕ, КОЊУХ ДО  
КРАЛИЦА, ШОПСКО РУДАРИ,



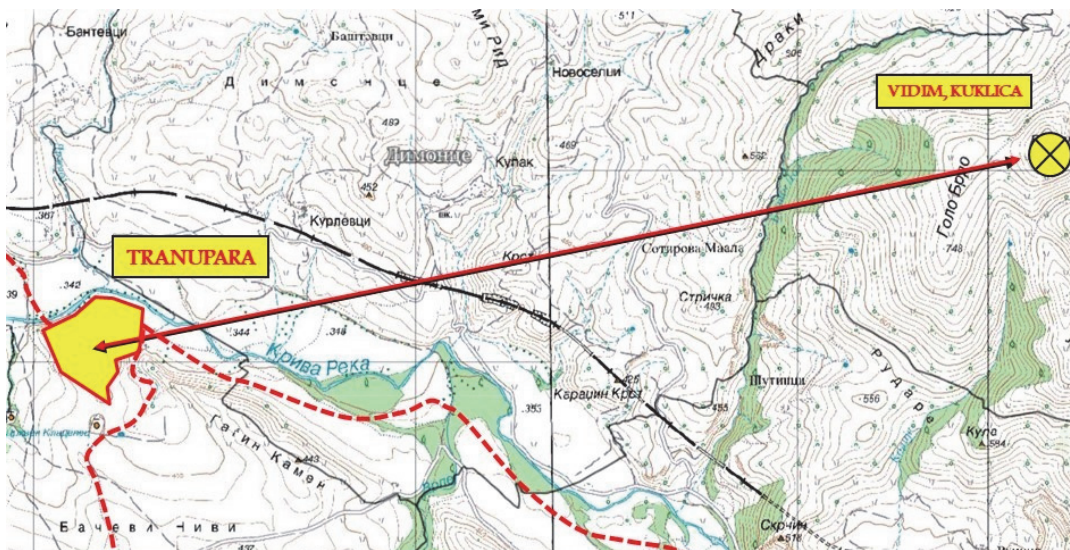
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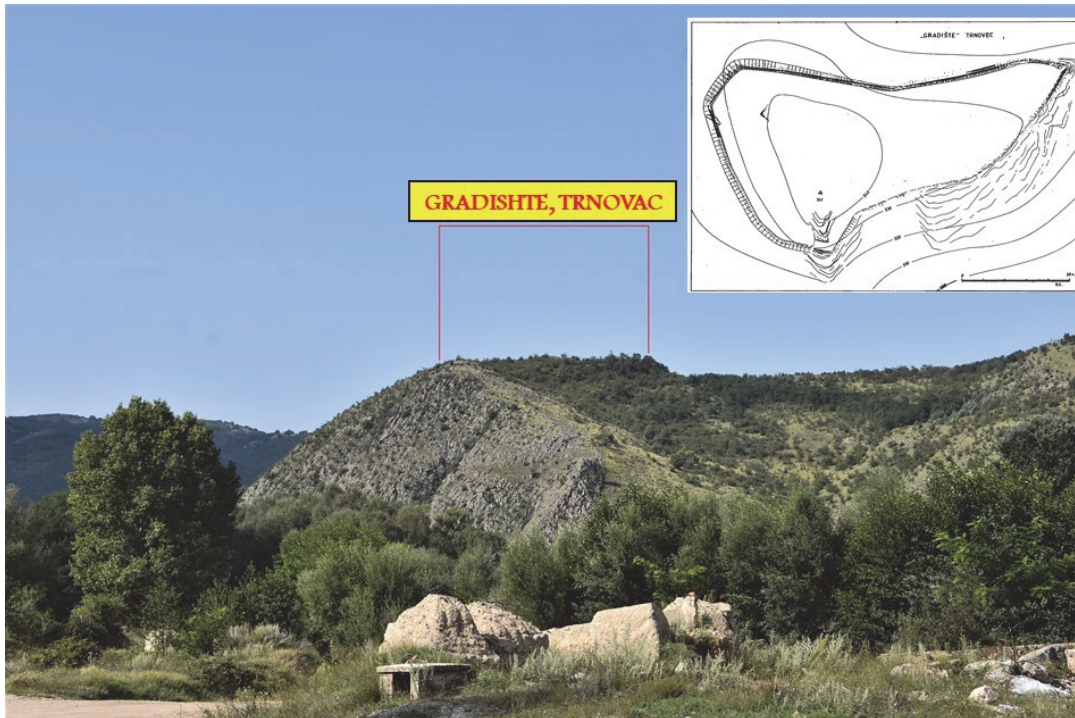
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ВИДИМ, КУКЛИЦА, КАСТЕЛ СПЕКУЛА  
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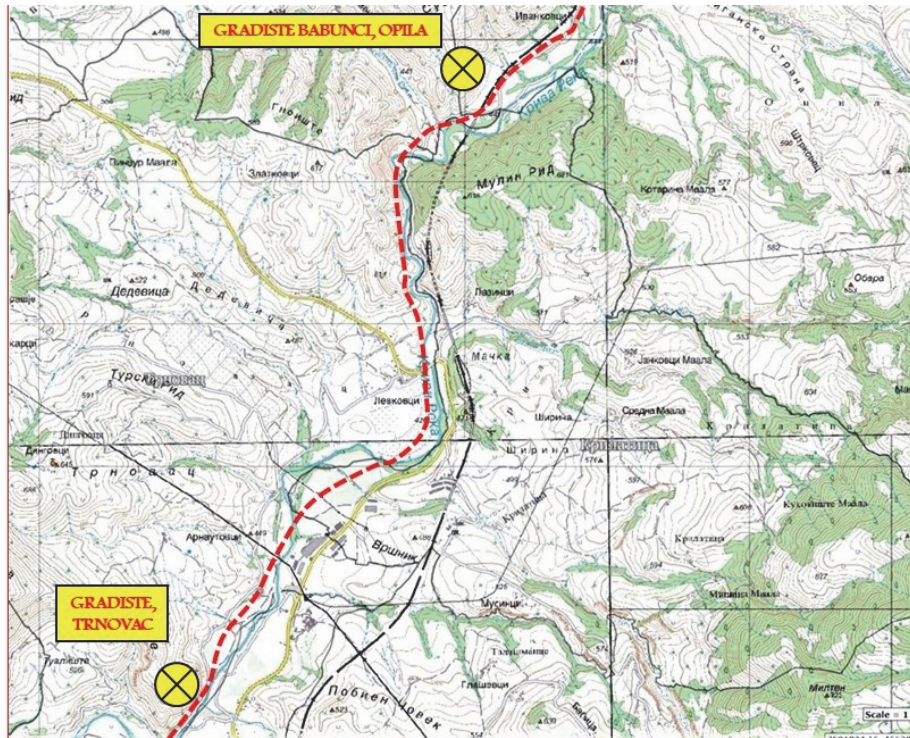
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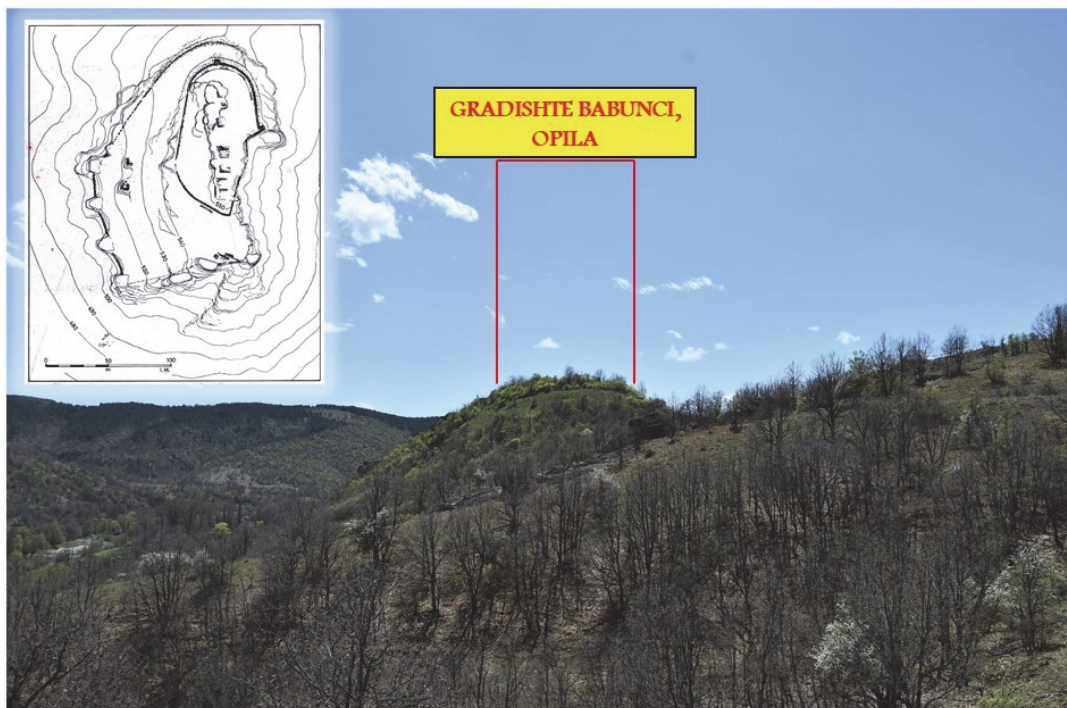
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ВИЗУЕЛНА КОМУНИКАЦИЈА ВО ДОЦНАТА АНТИКА И ВО  
РАНОВИЗАНТИСКИОТ ПЕРИОД  
4-6 ВЕК Н.Е.**



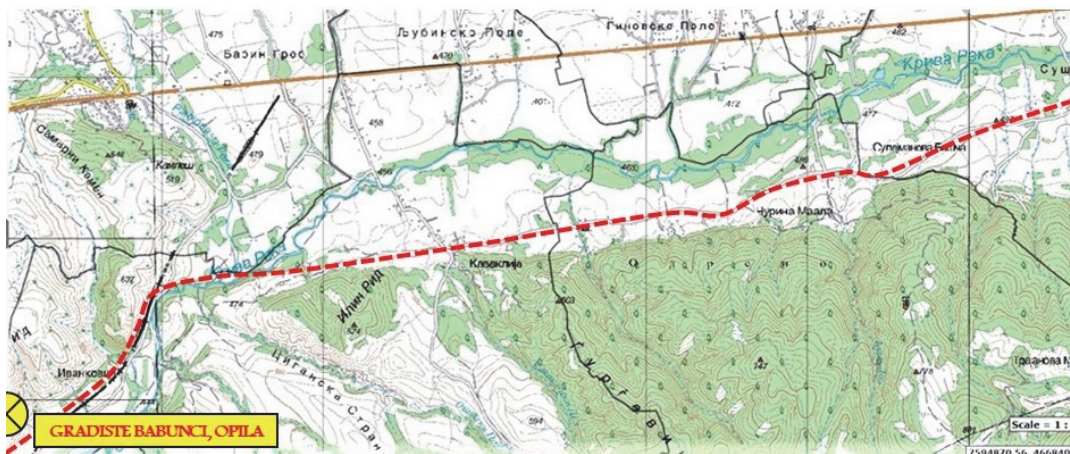
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АНТИЧКИ КАСТЕЛ-СТРАЖА, АРХАЈСКИ ПЕРИОД / ДОЦНА АНТИКА 4 ВЕК Н.Е.**



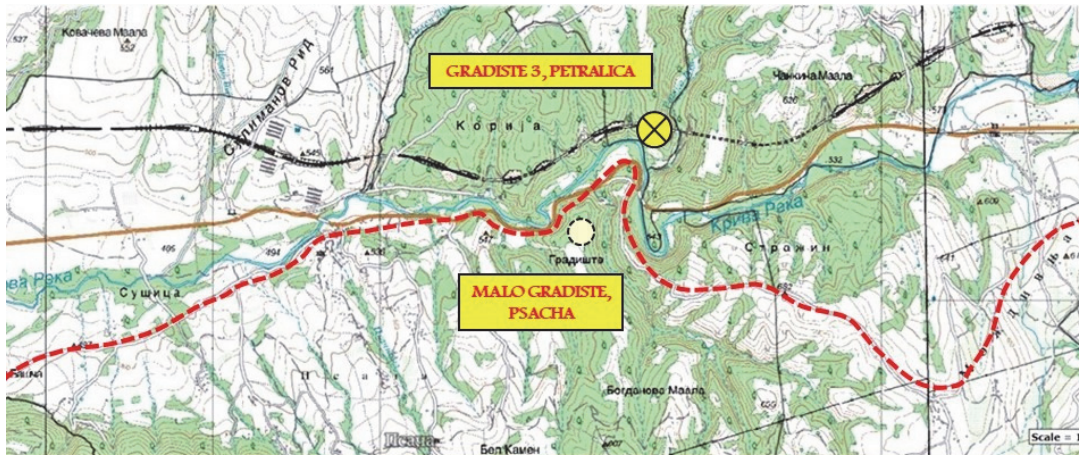
**ГРАДИШТЕ, ТРНОВАЦ – ГРАДИШТЕ БАБУНЦИ, ОПИЛА**



**ГРАДИШТЕ БАБУНЦИ, ОПИЛА, ОД СЕВЕРОИСТОК**



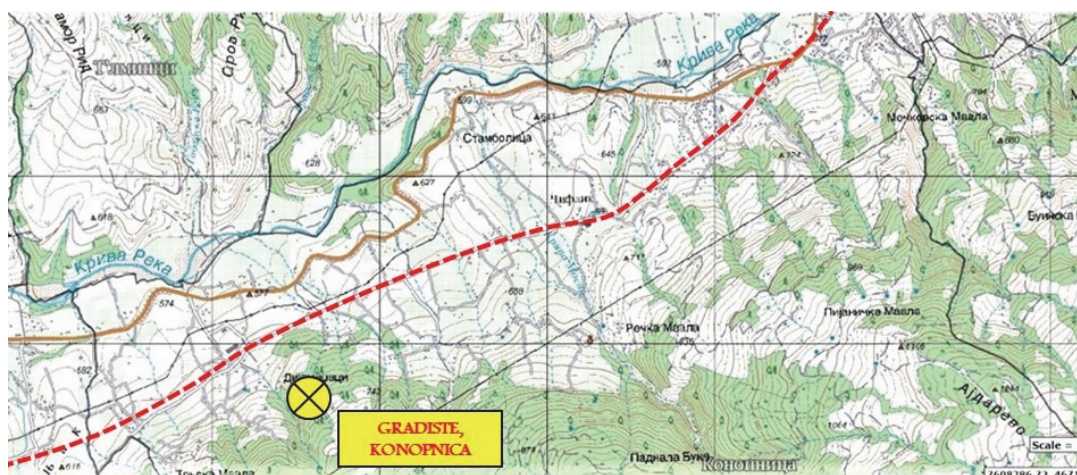
**ТРАСАТА НА ПАТОТ, ОД ГРАДИШТЕ БАБУНЦИ, ОПИЛА  
КОН МАЛО ГРАДИШТЕ, ПСАЧА,  
ВОДЕЛА ДОЛЖ ЛЕВИОТ / ЈУЖНИОТ БРЕГ НА КРИВА РЕКА**



**ТРАСА НА ПАТОТ НИЗ АТАРОТ НА СЕЛО ПСАЧА  
 КОНТРОЛА НА ПАТОТ ОД МАЛО ГРАДИШТЕ, ПСАЧА  
 ОТСПРОТИВА Е ГРАДИШТЕ 3, ПЕТРАЛИЦА, КОНТРОЛА НА ПАТОТ ШТО  
 ДОАЃАЛ ОД СЕВЕР ДОЛЖ БАШТЕВСКА РЕКА**



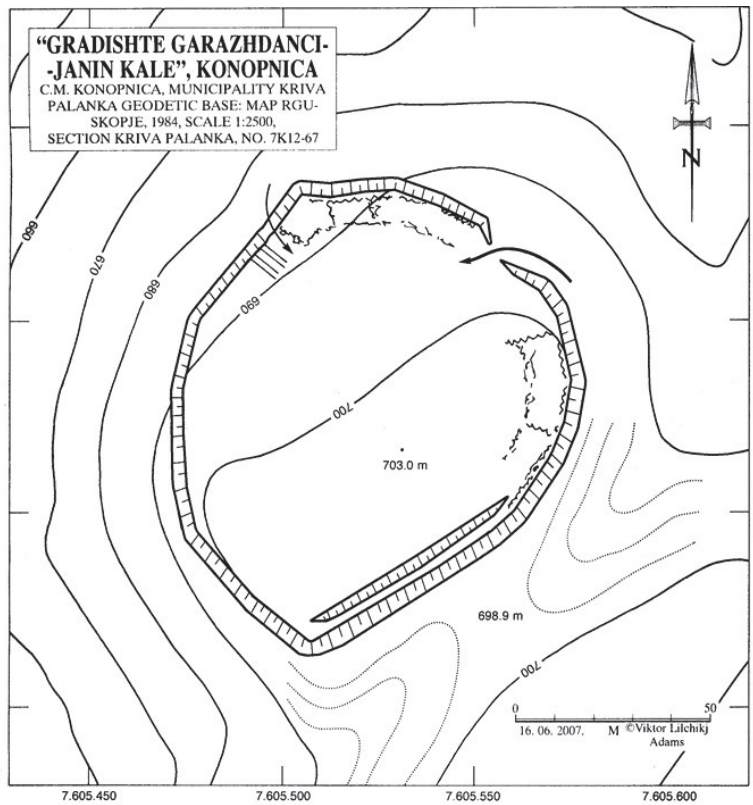
**ГРАДИШТЕ 3, ПЕТРАЛИЦА, ОД ЈУГОЗАПАД, ОД ПАТОТ КОН КРИВА ПАЛАНКА**



**ТРАСА НА ПАТОТ НИЗ АТАРОТ НА СЕЛО КОНОПНИЦА  
КОНТРОЛА НА ПАТОТ ОД ГРАДИШТЕ ГАРАЖДАНЦИ – ЈАНИН КАЛЕ,  
КОНОПНИЦА, КРАЈПАТЕН АНТИЧКИ КАСТЕЛ СТРАЖА  
¼ - 6 ВЕК Н.Е.**



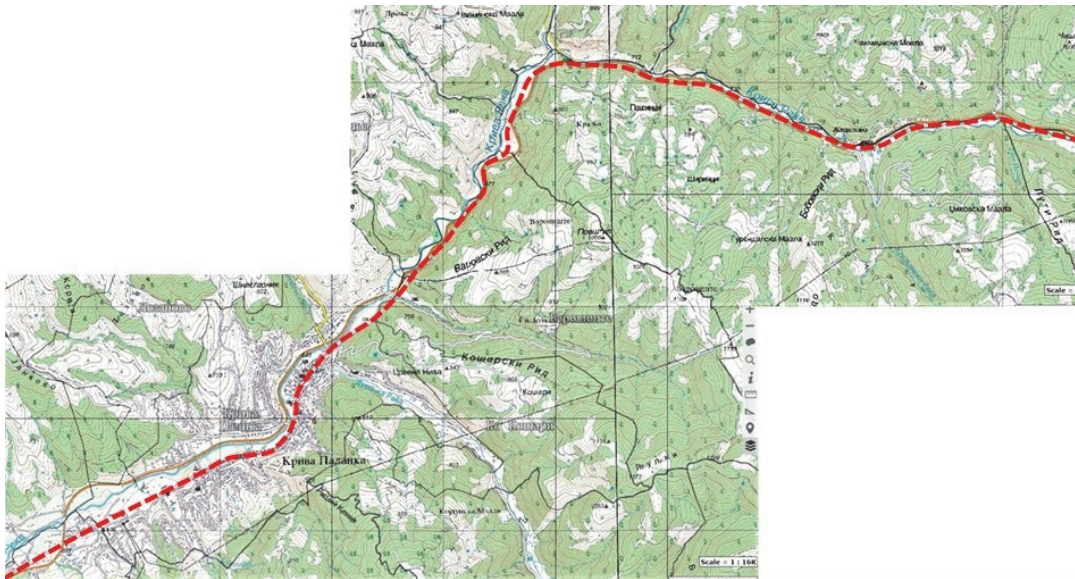
**ГРАДИШТЕ ГАРАЖДАНЦИ – ЈАНИН КАЛЕ, КОНОПНИЦА**



**ГРАДИШТЕ  
 ГАРАЖДАНЦИ  
 – ЈАНИН КАЛЕ,  
 КОНОПНИЦА**

**КРАЈПАТЕН  
 АНТИЧКИ КАСТЕЛ  
 СТРАЖА**

**¾ - 6 ВЕК Н.Е.**



**ПАТНА ТРАСА ДОЛЖ КРИВА РЕКА, НИЗ ПРОСТОРТ НА ГРАДОТ КРИВА  
 ПАЛАНКА И НИЗ ЖИДИЛОВСКА КЛИСУРА**

**ВО КЛИСУРАТА НЕ СЕ ЗАБЕЛЕЖЕНИ КАСТЕЛИ**



**ВО ГОРНИОТ ЈУГОИСТОЧЕН АГОЛ НА ЖИДИЛОВСКА КЛИСУРА, ПАТОТ СЕ  
ИСКАЧУВА КОН ПЛАНИНСКИОТ ПРЕВОЈ  
ЈУЖНО ВО ГОРНИОТ ДЕЛ НА ДОЛИНКАТА НА КРИВА РЕКА СЕ НАОЃААТ  
КАСТЕЛИТЕ: ГРАДИШТЕ ВАРОВШКА МААЛА, КОСТУР (6 ВЕК Н.Е.)  
ГОРНО ГРАДИШТЕ, КОСТУР (НЕ Е ПОСЕТЕН)**