

# SECRET TREASURE OF COLENTUM

## A TOURIST MAP OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE COLENTUM

### Dear reader!

This map will take you to a distant past, when old Liburnians traded on the sea around Gradina, Romans decorated their villas with mosaics, and pirates attacked the rich port of Colentum. The map shows the archaeological whole of Gradina peninsula, where once stood the Liburnian city of Colentum, the city from the antiquity. The markings on the map refer only to the researched or partly-researched sites, while the rest of Gradina still awaits future research. The description of marked sites will give you all relevant information, however, do not hesitate to visit this site and examine for yourself what else is hidden there. For the curious ones, there is Geocaching, find out what it is and how to find it!

**!** You will notice that the map also contains three visualizations which show what the LIBURNIAN CITY of Colentum used to look like; the ROMAN STREET and the antiquity port with a ROMAN VILLA. These visualizations were created by studying the existing writings and papers by experts who did research work on this site. However, they are first and foremost artistic interpretations; its purpose is to help the visitor imagine more easily what the ancient Colentum looked like. To take best from these visualizations, you'll need to go to the positions marked with the letters A, B and C. There you'll find the area with actual archaeological remains of the urban architecture shown in the visualizations.

**ATTENTION!** The trails marked in this map are passable, but they are still in early stages of development. It is said that if one wants to find the best lookout, one should look for places where the first inhabitants dwelled, so bring appropriate footwear and walk to Gradina! Go to the lookout, where you will be awed by the gorgeous archipelago of the Murter islands, the view of Kornati, the olive groves of Modrava, Murter, Betina and Tisno; you will even see the faraway mountain of Velebit. Walking around Gradina hill, you will find the remains of the Liburnian ceramics and dry stone walls, but please leave them on the site; should you come across more important findings, report it to the Argonauta Association! And now, go back to the past using this map, the forgotten city of Colentum awaits you.



## About Colentum

The island of Murter was inhabited as far back as the prehistoric and Illyrian times. The Liburnians and the Romans, who lived on the island, left clear signs of their presence. The architectural remains of the Roman structures, port facilities and mosaics speak of the island's importance during antiquity. Near the present-day settlement of Murter there used to be the ancient city of Colentum; its remains, already greatly covered by the sea, are scattered around the peninsula of Gradina, on the northern side of Hramina cove. Colentum was founded by the Liburnians in the 11th century BC. Along with lader (present-day Zadar), it was the most important port of southern Liburnia, while it was a transformed Roman small town in 1st century BC. The expression "pólis kóllenton" by Ptolemy and the found coins belonging to Roman emperors of Nero (37-68 AD) and Vespasian (9-79 AD) clearly show that the remains of ancient architecture on the peninsula of Gradina belong to a Roman town-like settlement dating from the younger period of the Roman Empire. The town had the typical antique architecture, multi storey houses, water cisterns, baths and narrow streets paved by stone slabs, very similar to today's streets in the old parts of Dalmatian cities, even in the old part of Murter. The archaeologists discovered luxury buildings, built in a terrace-like order down the slope of Gradina, with sea-facing façades, as well as the remains of other urban architecture. Wherever the archaeologists dug, they found remains of mosaics; as a result some of them named Colentum city of mosaics.



### A THE ROMAN STREET (Page 2)

An important finding for Colentum urbanism is a city street south of the old cemetery fence next to the Church of the Lady of Gradina because it tells us that the city communication adapted to the hilly terrain and, just like in other similar cities (e.g. Pula), some streets ran from summit to base, as this one did, while others were concentric and followed the isohypse lines. Approximately 18 m of this street were examined and during the examinations splintered remains of arches were found in two places. Such arches were used, for instance, to fix the façades of multi storey houses (visible even today in many of our coastal towns and villages).



### B THE MARITIME ROMAN VILLA COMPLEX (Page 2)

Research on the remains of the seaside walls on Gradina hill has shown a so called maritime Roman villa existed in this area during the Roman times. It was determined to have been a large structure built in several stages; used from antiquity (1st century) until the 5th and 6th centuries, but possibly even during the Middle Ages. The bigger part of the villa is subterranean and submerged in the sea. The visible remains point to potential length of at least 100 metres and width of 50 metres. Some of the rooms of this villa had mosaics, while many ceramic fragments and roof bricks were found.



### C LIBURNIAN TOWN (Page 2)

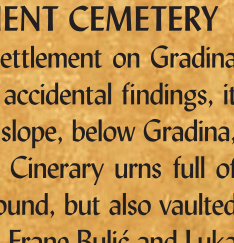
#### I ACROPOLIS AND LOOKOUT

Dinko Zavorović, a late 16th century writer from Šibenik, describes the walls on the top of Gradina, and according to him, city walls (muraglie) or at least of fortifications existed. Even today, remains of Roman and Liburnian walls, mortar and roof bricks are visible on the very top of Gradina hill. Although not researched, all these findings, as well as researchers' citations indicate the existence of an acropolis in this place. It is possible today to reach the top of Gradina via a quite well-developed narrow path. There is a cross at the very top. This point offers a splendid view to the northeast toward Modrava, the largest olive grove of the people of Murter and Betina, to the east toward Betina and Tisno, to the south toward Murter and to the west toward the islets of Mali and Veli Vinik (Large and Small Vinik), Zminjak, Mala and Velika Jarta (Large and Small Jarta) and others.



#### 2 NECROPOLIS – THE UNRESEARCHED ANCIENT CEMETERY

Archaeologist Šime Batović believes that next to the settlement on Gradina existed a flat necropolis and graves under tumuli. According to accidental findings, it can be inferred that the necropolis was located on the southern slope, below Gradina, i.e. it comprised the area between Hramina and Zdrače coves. Cinerary urns full of ashes, inhumations next to which unguentaria and coins were found, but also vaulted tombs with inhumations are mentioned as early as 16th century. Frane Bulić and Luka Jelić as well mention findings from this area corresponding to necropoleis (rings, coins, white stone urns with lids...), and more recently in that area a grave was examined in an amphora with a glass olla and a ceramic oil lamp, dated from 1st century AD.



- ROMAN BUILDINGS
- ACROPOLIS AND LOOKOUT
- CEMETERY AND THE CHURCH
- PREHISTORIC GRAVES
- KARREN ON "RAT" CAPE
- ANCIENT CEMETERY
- POSITION OF THE ANCIENT HARBOUR
- REMAINS OF THE URBAN ARCHITECTURE
- LIBURNIAN DRY STONE WALL BULWARKS
- TRAILS
- ROUGH PATHS
- ALEPPO PINE FOREST
- LIMESTONE ROCKS
- ROAD
- MODERN SETTLEMENT

#### 3 THE SUNKEN CITY AND THE ANCIENT PORT

The Roman settlement of Colentum was also a port, given the remains of port facilities, but also the fact that the Murter maritime zone was of great importance for the maritime traffic. The port of the ancient Colentum stretched to the northwest of the peninsula of Gradina, right past the present-day church. It was situated in a bay, closed on one side by the peninsula of Gradina and the islets of Mali and Veli Vinik and Tegina on the other. In that area archaeologists found ballast stones, amphorae, remains of a wooden pier and urban architecture, etc. It is believed that during the period around the 1st century BC traffic was most abundant.



#### 4 ROMAN CISTERN - THE DUNGEON

The so-called Dungeon was an above ground-type ancient cistern which was filled with rain water from the elevated roof of the architectural structure belonging to it. The dwellers named the cistern Dungeon after its appearance. Behind the Dungeon there is another, smaller and less-preserved water receptacle paved with simple mosaic tiles. Close by are ruins of an apse-shaped wall - it is believed that the receptacles were parts of a complex of smaller, perhaps private, baths.



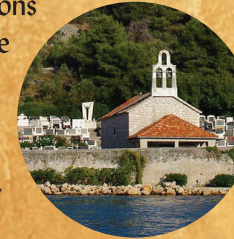
#### 5 ALEPPO PINE GROVE THAT ROCKS

Small aleppo pine forest is situated on the north cape of the peninsula Gradina, so-called "Rat". That area is marked by distinctly karst terrain with unusual sharp rocks that are full of karrens, cracks caused by water, often found in coastal rocks. If you like unusual rock formations, hidden coast and the smell of pine trees, this part of the peninsula Gradina you'll particularly like.



#### 6 THE CHURCH OF THE LADY OF GRADINA AND CEMETERY

The Church of Our Lady of Gradina was built in the second half of the 14th century on the foundations of an Early Christian church. Until the 17th century this church was the parish church of Murter and Betina. After this period, the Church of St. Michael became the parish church. Although it is a baroque building, with an additional extended apse, Gothic features are also evident on the church exterior, for example, a Gothic arch can be seen above the side portal. Church has elements of earlier periods as well. Next to the Church is a cemetery of Murter and Betina. Early Croatian graves were found as well. During examinations in 1974, two graves found on a level 150 cm below the present-day cemetery level were examined. The island of Murter, along with the island of Prvić, is the only island where early Croatian jewellery was found. A single-beaded silver earrings and a small iron knife, part of the early Croatian culture, were found in the two examined graves.



## The Liburnians

were people that lived in the early Iron Age (10th - 11th centuries BC), while their maritime dominance in the Adriatic lasted from 9th to 5th centuries BC. As maritime people, they were part of merchandise-money trade flows, accepting the Italic coins. They developed many fortified settlements on the coast and the dominating hills; those settlements later became Roman municipia. Their power gradually declined with the Greeks, while the Romans conquered them. They were organized matrilineally; that made them significantly different from the neighbouring patriarchal peoples. The Liburnians adhered to the Roman government and tax obligations without fighting. They grew corn, went fishing and shell seeking. They had vineyards and olive groves, bred sheep and goats and their main occupation was piracy. The so-called "sea people" left plenty of ship-building skills, in use today as well. During antiquity, a war ship with oars was named "liburna" after the Liburnians. Their material culture is well known from examined settlements and necropoleis in Nin, Zadar, Vrsi etc. Colentum was one of the larger ports of the Liburnians.



## The Romans

conquered the Eastern coast of Adriatic sea. The Roman influence spread thanks to stationed military units, organizing judiciary and state administration. It is particularly noticeable in town planning and the resulting cities – Pola, Parentium, Iadera, Salona, Narona and numerous others, still exist today along the former Roman roads and waterways. Waterworks, sewerage, curiae and basilicas for public works, baths, theatres and amphitheatres were built in them. The level of the Roman organisation is proved equally by both numerous ville rusticae and rural settlements, the most representative being that in Verige cove in the Brijuni archipelago. The vast legacy of the Roman Empire is seen even today in Western institutions, law, architecture and many other areas of life.



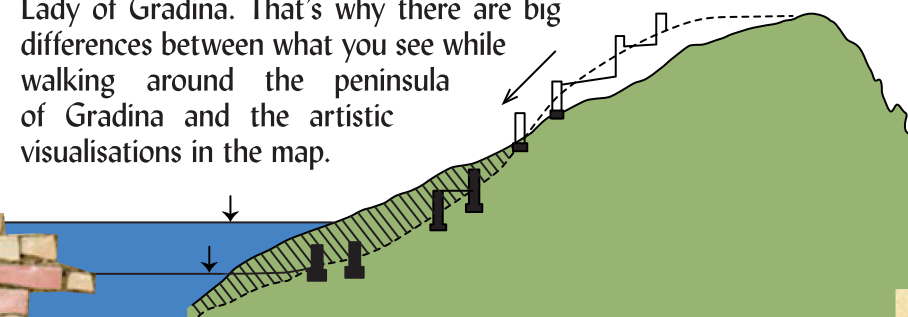
**Pirates** The unforgiving karst of the Mediterranean coast was not enough to feed a large number of people, therefore, in small seaside villages skilful mariners mainly occupied themselves with fishing. The majority of trade was done on the sea along the well-known routes of the Mediterranean Sea. When the fish became insufficient for survival, the locals who knew the coast and the merchants' routes resorted to piracy. The majority of the pirate trade included slaves. Since Roman owners had huge plantations that needed workers, Roman merchants were their main customers. Considered the "enemy of mankind", they engaged in kidnappings and even though during Cesar's reign some pirates were defeated, they still ravaged the Mediterranean. Still the Murter pirate tradition originates not from the antique, but the early new age i.e. the 17th century, when the Murter robbers, sometimes hiding their identity under the name uskoc (according to Lučić), "operated" on the waters surrounding the island itself. It was the rugged coastline and approximately two hundred smaller islands around Murter that made the pirates extremely successful in both ages.





## What happened to Colentum?

Based on the archaeological research during the past few decades, many findings were discovered, such as mosaics and frescoes that make the modern archaeologists conclude that Colentum was a rich small town. Based on that, we created visualizations which present an artistic vision of what this small town looked like long ago. Comparing visualizations and the current field conditions, a question arises: What happened to Colentum and where did the shrine disappeared? There are many theories about the fate of Colentum, from being destroyed by pillaging and pirates' vandalism to being destroyed during a powerful earthquake. What is certain, however, is that the passage of time and human activity throughout history played an active part in the destruction of Colentum. It is known that the upper part of the city was destroyed by torrential flooding and agriculture works while the inshore part was flooded by sea and battered down by waves (see outline). It must be noted that due to immersion of soil in the early new millennium the sea level was two metres lower. The archaeologist Veljko Paškvalin wrote that the villagers of Murter were saying that the Jews and the Greeks sought and took away the treasure of Colentum, while Alberto Fortis, in his work "In Dalmazia" in 1774, noted down some statements by the locals about the remains of the walls being taken away from the hilltop to build the Church of the Lady of Gradina. That's why there are big differences between what you see while walking around the peninsula of Gradina and the artistic visualisations in the map.



## Geocaching

Geocaching could be described as a game of "treasure hide and seek". The treasure in this case does not mean gold coins, diamonds or jewellery, but hidden boxes – so-called caches, which can be found by every person using GPS. You can find instructions for the game on Geocaching website, [www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com). It also includes comments of people who have joined this game and are exploring the locations of Geocaching all over the world. *The ancient Colentum also hides treasure interesting to every geocacher!* If you decide to embark on the Geocaching adventure and look for our hidden treasure, leave a comment in the logbook of the found geocache on the Geocaching website, leave new treasure for the new geocachers and return the cache exactly the way you found it. We guarantee you'll have great fun and spend pleasant time in gorgeous nature on this site with mysterious past!

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Find out more about the archaeological site Colentum and activities related to its further valorisation on website [Colentum.info](http://Colentum.info)



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## THE ROMAN STREET

This visualization shows one of the city streets of the Roman Colentum south of the cemetery fence next to the Church of the Lady of Gradina. In her paper "The island of Murter from the prehistoric times to antiquity", Anamarija Kurilić writes about findings during the examination of the Roman street from 1966 to 1973. She writes that the entrance to the Structure XV was south of the street and the entrance to the Structure XIII was to the north. The entrance to these was through the courtyard enclosed by a high wall on the street side, while rooms for living or economy purposes surrounded the courtyard from the other three sides. There were a number of other rooms away from the street. Apart from ground floor rooms, these structures had rooms on the first floor too. Fragments of frescoes were found in both structures. Some are particularly interesting. For instance, the figure of a sitting woman or that of a young man with an oar and blue and red fish. They are interesting because they are evidence of a more demanding aesthetic taste of the owner. The only better-preserved mosaics were found in the neighbouring two rooms of the northern structure. The floor in one is adorned with a black and white mosaic with a triangle motive, while a rosette motive and bordered braid are on the other. It is believed that these mosaics date to earlier centuries and are probably a product of the same school, centred in Salona. Based on dating of the found ceramic dishes – mostly early Empire imports – it was inferred that the structure came into existence as early as the period of Augustus and existed continuously up to the first half of the 2nd century, however, in the early 2nd century major changes occurred. Houses were destroyed and a reconstruction of the settlement followed, above all of the inshore part. The higher parts of Gradina were probably neglected and only re-settled in late antiquity and during the Middle Ages. The archaeologist Aleksandra Faber believes the structures were destroyed in an earthquake and evidences it with destroyed arches over the street and objects found directly on the floor of one of the rooms of the northern structure.

## Old writers on Colentum

Colentum was mentioned in the writings of Roman period researchers – in the works of Pliny the Elder, Ptolemy and a writer from Ravenna. Pliny the Elder spoke about Colentum as the only island city of the southern half of Liburnia. He also specified that this city was 30 miles from Zadar/lader (approximately 48 km) and 18 from the mouth of Titius/Krka (approximately 28 km). A fairly accurate guess, isn't it?



From 1907 to 1911, the archaeologist Luka Jelić researched the area from Murter to Krka. Among his findings, he writes that „von the summit of Colentum a gilded angel, 15 cm tall, was found". Every trace of the finding was lost, however this indicates that Colentum really was a rich settlement since so many years after Colentum this finding, obviously precious, was found...

In the time of Juraj Šižgorić (1487), the Colentum site was still somewhat preserved. Šižgorić says „there are precious stones with



signs and coins with Roman faces". in Murter, on the site of the former old town. We believe that some coins are still well hidden among the remains of Colentum. If you get lucky and find something interesting, please report the finding online or come to the office of the Argonauta Association!

In 1666, Ivan Lučić visited Colentum. For sailors, Colentum is the same as Murter. Lučić writes that Colentum is abundant in wine and corn and has many liqueurs. Today there are mostly cultivated olives around the archaeological site of Colentum. Have you already tried our home-made olive oil?

The famous writer Alberto Fortis is also one of those who stopped in Colentum. It was in 1774. He researched the area, the culture of living and got to know the inhabitants who told him that the stone from Colentum was used to build the Church of the Lady of Gradina. As proof of the existence of the ancient settlement, he found fragments of vases, chiselled stone and old tiles. He also wrote that there were frequent findings of ancient coins and inscriptions. Part of the findings from Colentum is exhibited on the Argonauta Association premises... visit the exhibition and see for yourself the findings that prove the existence of Colentum, just like Fortis did too!



## THE ROMAN VILLA

During excavations in the zone of the so-called maritime Roman villa, numerous remains were found. They can show us how the Roman villas looked like many years ago. One of the more significant excavations, led by the archaeologist Aleksandra Faber, was done from 1966 to 1973. The villa with the apse, as the archaeologist calls it, was 50 m long. The outer coastal portico connected about ten coastal rooms which could probably be reached from the inner, courtyard side, across the corridor or the portico that surrounded the courtyard with the cistern. In its second phase of existence, the villa probably had small house baths adapted within the already existing southwestern wing which was separated from the living complex by an apsidal area. These small house baths were heated by hypocaust – fragments of suspensurae and tubulae were found in the far southwestern rooms, as well as an air vent on the wall. Since in this place pink marble tiles were found, it is believed that the walls of these baths were decorated with them. Also, black and white mosaics were found here. A number of discovered fragments of wall mortar with traces of frescoes gives us an idea on how the walls were decorated. At the bottom of the rooms, the walls were painted dark (socle), while the wall surface was bordered with red and black belts, i.e. strips on a white base. This pattern was distributed vertically and by the ceiling, imitating a ceiling cornice. Traces of garlands made from light green and yellow wreaths and yellow dots in simple patterns were found. Single colour fragments in white and ochre have large surfaces, some are adorned with faux marble, dark red on an ochre base. This fresco description pertains only to the group of rooms with adapted baths, while decoration of the walls in living rooms along the long portico is unknown to us, because the traces of those were destroyed by the sea. According to the scattered remains, the only thing inferred was that those rooms were paved in black and white mosaics.

## THE LIBURNIAN CITY

The topographic image of Gradina as well as its aerial photo provide a typical layout of the prehistoric sites of Gradina, such as those we follow in our inshore area as well as in the hinterland of Dalmatia and the North Littoral. The ellipsoid-like outline of the bulwarks follows the isohypse on the upper third of Gradina hill (elevation 46 m), the traces of the living structures are situated on a sheltered slope within the bulwark. The surface findings of ceramic objects indicate the early Bronze Age and Iron Age. Later findings from early antiquity and the Middle Ages confirm the continuous inhabitation until the Turks came or until today, with a slight shift of the location of the town nucleus to the ground around Hramina port.

The prehistoric settlement on Gradina was shaped like an ellipsoid and enclosed with bulwarks which were around 150 x 200 m (the surface area within the defender area is estimated to as much as 10 ha). That's why this settlement is considered one of the largest cities of southern Liburnia. More accurately, it is believed that during the late Liburnian period, along with lader, Colentum was one of the two major maritime centres of the southern Liburnian littoral. According to the dating of the findings from the graves on Mali Vinik, the settlement on Gradina must also have existed in as early as 11th century BC. The dry stone wall bulwarks of the prehistoric settlement in Gradina were massive, in some parts four-five metres wide, while surface fragments of prehistoric ceramics from the early Bronze Age and the Iron Age were noticed on the encircling plateau. The house bases can be traced in the remains of tiny quadrangular structures cut into rock near the very top of Gradina and on her western and southern slopes (which are more comfortable to live on).

