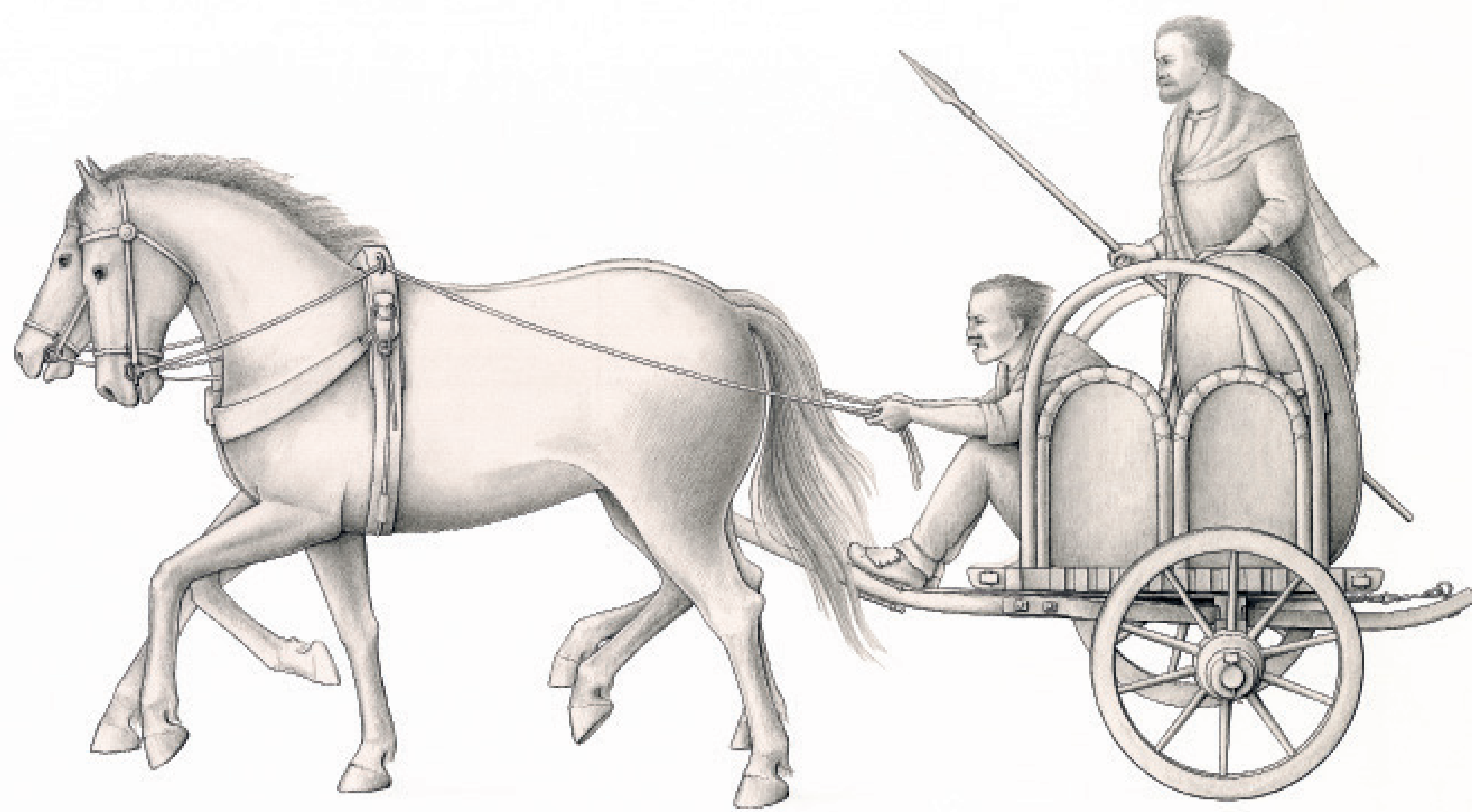


A Brief History of the Principal Roads in Dolenjska

by Uroš Bavac



A depiction of a two-wheeled Celtic war chariot based on the findings at the archaeological site Mestno jedro – Sejmišče pri Brežicah (1)

Prehistoric Times

The importance of land routes for human travel and the transport of goods changed dramatically over time. In the region of Dolenjska, the existence of the earliest roads is only attested to by indirect archaeological evidence, such as the depiction of a four-wheeled wagon on an Early Iron Age (5th–4th century BC) situla found at the site of Kapiteljska njiva in Novo mesto.

The oldest remnants of old dirt roads, discovered at the site of Glavni trg (Main Square) in Novo mesto and the archaeological site of Požarnice near the village of Družinska vas, can be dated to the Late Iron Age (3rd–1st century BC). At the site of Sejmišče in the town of Brežice in the region of Posavje, archaeologists unearthed three Celtic warrior graves containing remnants of a two-wheeled war chariot.

Antiquity

Prehistoric dirt roads generally followed the contours of river valleys (the rivers Sava, Krka, Temenica ...). After the Italic merchants, they were used by the Roman legions who occupied the territory of present-day Slovenia. The Romans adapted numerous already existent routes to their needs and shortened travel times by building new roads. Such was the design of the military road (*via*



A depiction of a four-wheeled wagon on an Early Iron Age situla found at the site of Kapiteljska njiva in Novo mesto (2)

militaris) which led from Ljubljana (*Emona*) to Sisak (*Siscia*) and further towards the east. The road was plotted either during the campaigns of emperor Tiberius against the border tribes in the province of Illyricum (*Illyricum*) between the years 12 and 9 BC or during the Pannonian–Dalmatian uprising (*Bellum Batonianum*) between the years 6 and 9.



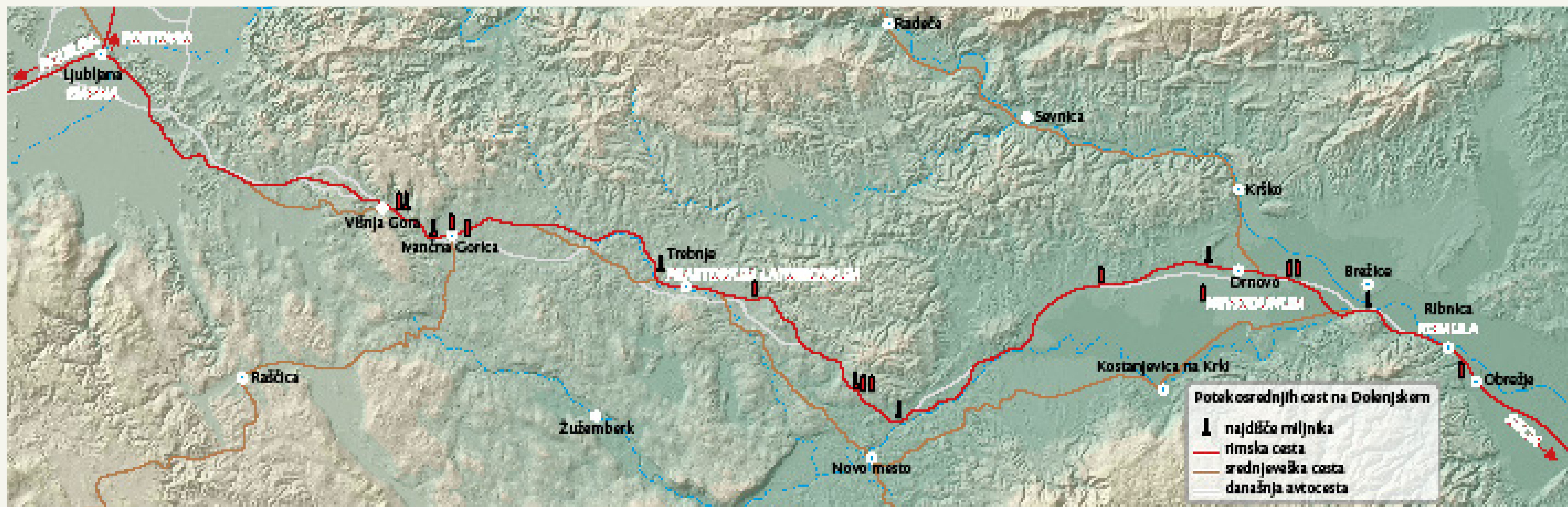
A drawing of a lead plate inscribed with the word *Romula*, found in Ribnica (1)

The new road linked northern Italy with the northern Balkans, crossing the province of Illyricum to reach as far as Thrace and Macedonia and further to the provinces of Asia Minor. With the establishment of civil administration and the building of way stations (primarily for postal service), it gradually acquired the status of a public (state) road (*via publica*). The emperor was regarded as its chief builder, while local governments were generally responsible for the upkeep of roads.

Crossing the easternmost region of Italy at Ivančna Gorica (*Acervo*) and passing through the border station of the *beneficarii* in Trebnje (*Praetorium Latobiorum*), the road reached the riverside municipal centre in present-day Drnovo (*Nevidunum*) near the town of Krško. It exited the Slovene territory after passing through the last narrow corridor before the open plains of the Pannonian basin at the way station in Ribnica (*Romula*) near the town of Brežice, which oversaw land and river traffic.



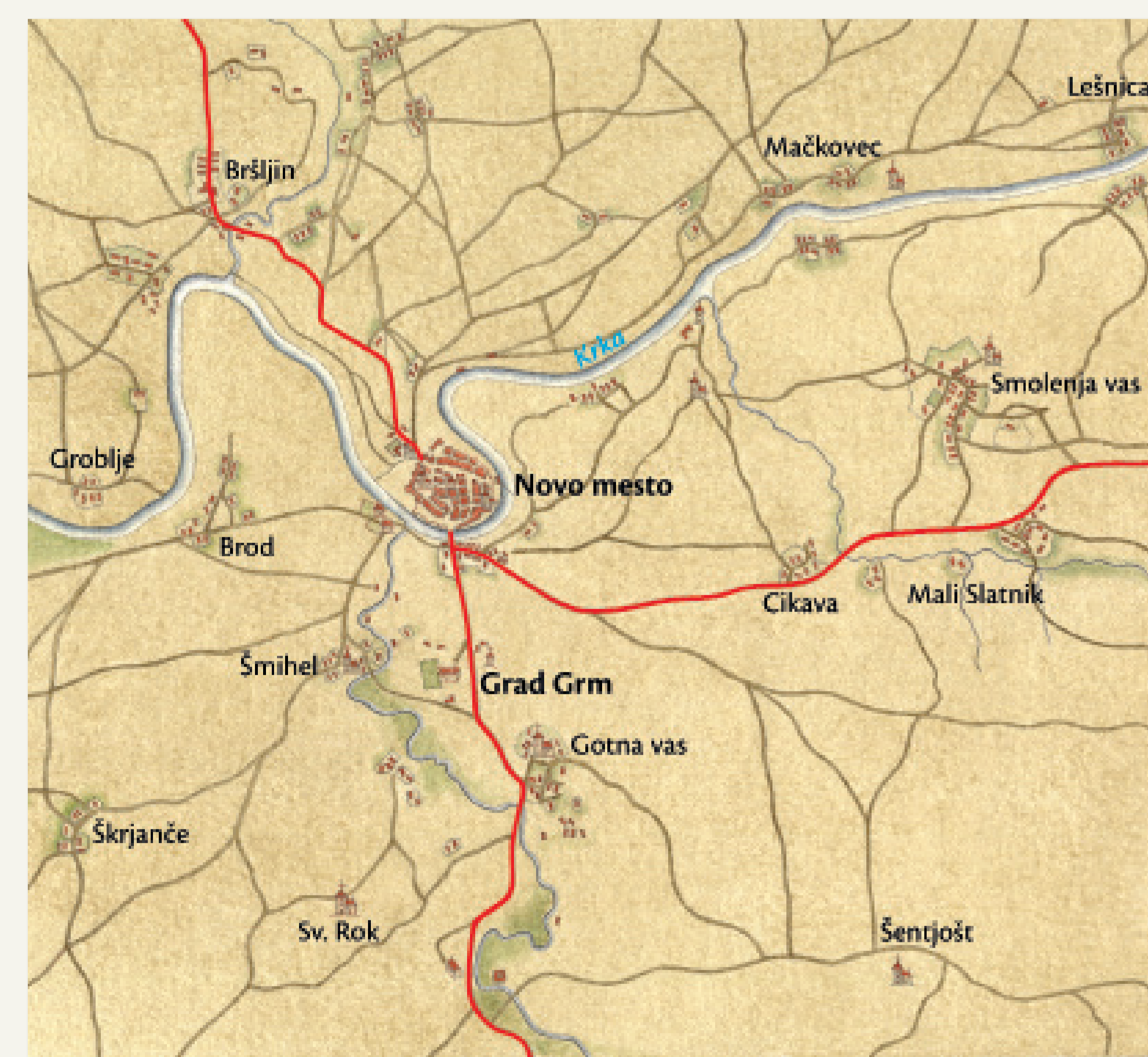
Slovenia and its wider surrounding area on the Tabula Peutingeriana – a redrawing of an ancient Roman road map (3)



Rudolf IV, Duke of Austria (1339–1365), (4)

The Middle Ages

In the centuries after the decline of the ancient world, the significance of the principal Roman road in the region of Dolenjska diminished. In the second half of the 14th century, due to strong trade connections between Carniola and Croatia, it was replaced by a road through Novo mesto, which the town's founder, the Habsburg Duke Rudolf IV, mandated as obligatory (decreeing that *the road from Hungary to Carniola and on towards the sea should pass through this town*). The road led from Trebnje, down the Mirnopaška dolina valley, over the Marof hill and reached the town centre at the river bend. After crossing the river Krka and passing the toll station, the road split in two directions; one going towards Kostanjevica na Krki and the other past Grm Castle, over the Vahta pass in the Gorjanci hills, through Metlika and on towards Karlovac (Croatia).



A map of the road through Novo mesto at the end of the Middle Ages (1)



Opening ceremony for the new road in Glavni trg in Novo mesto (2)

After the Second World War

The original Roman route regained its importance after the Second World War. The section of the Brotherhood and Unity Highway, built to connect Ljubljana and Zagreb (Croatia), followed the Roman route for the most part.

At the beginning of the current millennium, the newly constructed section of the motorway in Dolenjska, in line with the then-new methods of rescue archaeology, avoided the location of the Roman road wherever possible. The course of the Roman road is well documented in certain locations (the archaeological sites at Podsmreka near Višnja Gora, Ivančna Gorica, Požarnice near Družinska vas, Čateški grič, Ribnica na Dolenjskem, Jesenice na Dolenjskem and Obrežje).



A road near Čatež in 1959. Photo: Edi Šelhaus (5)