

SOME OBSERVATIONS ON LEAD FIGURINES OF THE GODDESS VENUS IN THE AREA BETWEEN SIRMIUM AND VIMINACIUM

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Abstract. – This paper deals with the occurrence of lead figurines of the goddess Venus in the area between the two cities of Sirmium and Viminacium. A classification into five types, based on stylistic and iconographic features, has been proposed. Although these types show features in common with products of other workshops in the Danubian basin, it has been observed that such products were not exchanged among the centres in the area. This paper puts forward the hypothesis that there were two centres of worship of the goddess Venus, in Sirmium and Viminacium, where these figurines could have been manufactured.

Key words. – Lead figurines, Venus, Sirmium, Viminacium, Lower Pannonia, Upper Moesia.

In the territory of the Roman Empire, lead figurines were not a rare commodity. They were usually of rather small dimensions, simply crafted and were often manufactured using shallow two-part moulds. The figures were usually placed on pedestals, in aediculae or set into a frame imitating the front of a temple. Although the manufacturing methods varied, they show both common features and certain specific traits determined by the place of manufacturing. Examples of lead figurines known so far, originate from Britannia,¹ Gallia,² Germania,³ Italia,⁴ Noricum,⁵ Pannonia,⁶ Moesia,⁷ Dacia⁸ and Syria⁹ (Map I). Within the territory of the Empire, it is possible to distinguish the areas with the greatest number and variety of represented divinities. The characteristic feature of the figurines of divinities originating from Britannia and Gallia is the lead aedicula into which they were set. In the Danubian basin, namely in Pannonia and Lower Moesia, divinities were set into aedicula-shaped frames. The territory between Sirmium

¹ Chew 1991, 82.

² Chew 1991, 88–89; Gschaid 1994, 442, Venera (Pupilin).

³ Wagner 1991, Minerva on a pedestal (Langenheim), 265–269, Mercury on a pedestal (Heddernheim) 269–270; Lar on a pedestal (Mainz) Frenz 1988 S. 247, Abb. 40–43; Venus (Vallon sur Dompierre) Monnier 2009, 206–207.

⁴ Chew 1991, 88–89; Bolla 2004, 69–71, Fortuna and Amor on a dolphin (Verona); a tin figure of Venus (Esquilin) Bauer 1936, 19.

⁵ Bauer 1936, 1–2; Chew 1991, 88.

⁶ Siscia (Bauer 1936, 9); P. Zsidi collected 68 lead statuettes originating from Hungarian part of Pannonia (Zsidi 2000, 324–327); Parović-Pešikan 1971, published two figurines from Sirmium; Dautova-Ruševljan 2006, 345–346. Hrtkovci, Gomolava, Kukujevci.

⁷ Vinča II 1936, 154–155; Viminacium (Popović 1992, 45–46); Durostorum (Donevski 1975, 146–147; Elefterescu 2005, 221–238).

⁸ A figurine featuring Mercury and two Venus (?) figurines originate from Dacia (Benea 2007a, 119; Benea 2007, 544–545; Benea 2008, 242–243.). It is interesting to note that Benea mentions a fragmented sculpture of Mercury found at Čair (Viminacium). However, none of the pieces published by I. Popović can be identified as the fragmented statuette of Mercury.

⁹ Badre 1999, 181 ff.

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in Lower Pannonia and Viminacium in Upper Moesia is one of the areas marked by a specific repertoire of representations, where several dozen such pieces have been found so far. The most significant characteristic of the figurines from this area is a very plain and simplified image of the goddess Venus. Such a style led some authors to question the identity of the Roman goddess. The purpose of this study is to show that the aforementioned figurines do represent the goddess Venus, as well as to shed light on certain characteristics of the workshops in which they were manufactured.

A rather small number of figurines were found during excavations at Sirmium and Gomolava (six pieces), with most of them being purchased for museums. The

largest collection of finds from Viminacium is held by the National Museum in Požarevac; this collection has been partially published. The Museum of Vojvodina holds the pieces found at Gomolava, Hrtkovci and Kukujevci. The Museum of Srem in Sremska Mitrovica has a collection of figurines found at Sirmium and the surrounding area; no more than two pieces from this collection have been presented. The collections of the Museum in Šabac, The Historical Museum of Serbia, The National Museum in Belgrade and The Belgrade City Museum, which include pieces found at archaeological sites in Mačva, Obrenovac, Kosmaj, Zemun and at Viminacium, have yet to be published.¹⁰ The entire corpus of the figurines, including more than fifty pieces,

Map I. Finds of lead figurines within the Roman Empire

Карта I. Налазишта оловних фигурина у Римском Царству



either fully preserved or fragmented, can be classified into several types distinguished by the posture of the naked female body and the style of its rendering in sculpture.

Type I (Figs. 1/1–6)

The characteristics of this type have been determined on the basis of the best preserved group from Sirmium featuring Venus and Amor on a pedestal. The figure of Venus was rendered rather schematically, whereas the figurines made using a shallow one-piece mould are pronouncedly two-dimensional. The torso and legs are almost level with one another. The legs and arms are shown as two bands and the natural width of the hips and thighs is indistinguishable. The raised right hand touches the head, while the left hand rests on the hips. The breasts are shown as two nipples. The rear of the body is flattened, without any distinguishable gluteal muscles or any transition between the hips and the back. The head is round with linearly rendered nose, mouth and eyes on the face, whereas the nape is flat and coarse. The diadem is shown as a row of grains on the forehead and the parted hair is rendered using a series of lines. Bracelets can be seen on both upper and forearms. In three items belonging to this type, the figure of Venus on a pedestal is accompanied by a smaller figure of Amor. It is also rather simplified, with long arms and legs, whereas other body parts are not clearly articulated.

As far as the positions of the right hand (holding the hair) and the left hand (placed on the hips) are concerned, this representation has shared features with two types of images representing a standing figure of a nude Venus – Venus Anadyomene and Venus Pudica.¹¹ The artist was obviously unfamiliar with the characteristics of these two types of images, which were based on the story of Aphrodite rising from the foaming sea and wringing her hair and the figural pose of the modest Aphrodite covering parts of her body with her arms. Among the lead figures of Venus, the figurine from the area of Durostorum¹² is similar to this type in the position of the hands and in its simple style. The same position of the hands and the simple representation of the human body, as well as the small dimensions, are also characteristics of the bronze figurine found at Chirpan (Pizus) in south Thrace.¹³

Source sites: Kukujevci (Fig. 1/6),¹⁴ Sirmium – Sites Nos. 4 (Fig. 1/1), 26 (Fig. 1/4), Južni Bedem (Fig. 1/3),¹⁵ Salaš Noćajski,¹⁶ Hrtkovci,¹⁷ Gomolava,¹⁸ Taurunum,¹⁹ Viminacium, (Figs. 1/2, 5)²⁰ an unknown site.²¹

Type II (Figs. 2/7–9)

This type represents a rather schematised and simplified version of the famous figural pose, Venus Pudica.²² Only in the item originating from Vinča has the whole figure been preserved, whereas the other five pieces are fragmented. Depending on the position of

¹⁰ I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my colleagues Pavle Popović, Jasmina Davidović and Miroslav Jesretić, curators at the Museum of Srem, Dr. Slavica Krnić, museum counsellor at the Belgrade City Museum and Marko Vuksan, senior curator at the Historical Museum of Serbia for allowing me to publish, so far unpublished, materials. I am also grateful to Dr. Tatjana Cvjetičanin, museum counsellor at the National Museum in Belgrade, Dragana Spasić, curator of the Museum of Požarevac and Gordana Ković, curator at the National Museum of Šabac for providing me access to their collections and supplying information on the items from their collections.

¹¹ LIMC VIII, 204, 206–207.

¹² Elefterescu 2005, 223, Cat. No. 6 (IX/2).

¹³ Ogenova-Marinova 1975, 154, Cat. No. 176, Fig. 176.

¹⁴ Dautova-Rušeavljan 2006, 346, Cat. No. 9, Fig. 1/9.

¹⁵ Apart from the published lead figurine of Venus with Amor on a pedestal found at Site No. 4 (Parović-Pešikan, 1971, 37–38, T. XVII/64), the documentation of the Museum of Srem preserves the record of an additional two lead figurines of Venus on a pedestal found in Sirmium. The first of them can be found in the inventory of the archaeological excavations carried out in Sirmium in 1958 as the find from Južni Bedem (Inv. No. 123). On the basis of the drawing it may be concluded that the same group has already been published as a find from an unknown site (Parović-Pešikan, 1971, 37–38, T. XVII/64a). The other, unpublished, example was found at Site No. 26. The height of the preserved part including the pedestal is 13.7 cm. The figurine bears the field inventory number 1046.

¹⁶ A fragment of the head and torso of a lead figurine is listed in the inventory of the Museum of Srem, Nr. 2168. Height: 5.2 cm. Unpublished.

¹⁷ Dautova-Rušeavljan 2006, 345, Cat. Nos. 1, 2, 4, Fig. 1/1, 2, 4.

¹⁸ Tasić 1965, 30, T XIV/1; Dautova-Rušeavljan, Brukner 1992, 65 Cat. Nos. 33, 34, T 8/38; (Dautova-Rušeavljan 2006, 345, Cat. Nos. 3, 9, Fig. 1/3, 9.

¹⁹ Najhold 2010, 211, Figs. 122, 123.

²⁰ Popović 1992, 40, Cat. Nos. 50, 51; the Historical Museum of Serbia holds a fragment of the hips of a female figurine Inv. No. 476 (Fig.) and a fragmented Amor figurine Inv. No. 477 (Fig.) which belong to this type.

²¹ Two fragmented statuettes published by Chew belong to Type I. Both were gifted to the Musée des Antiquités nationales. One is said to originate from the Reims region (Chew 1990/1991, 81) and the author presumes that the other, published in an auction catalogue as a Celtic product from the Danubian basin, was actually found in France (Chew 1990/1991, 81, 88). Bearing in mind the circumstances under which both statuettes reached the Museum, we suggest that both were found somewhere in the Danubian basin; in the late 1980s they might have come to be owned by third persons, who subsequently gifted them to the Musée des Antiquités nationales.

²² LIMC VIII, 204, LIMC II, 52.

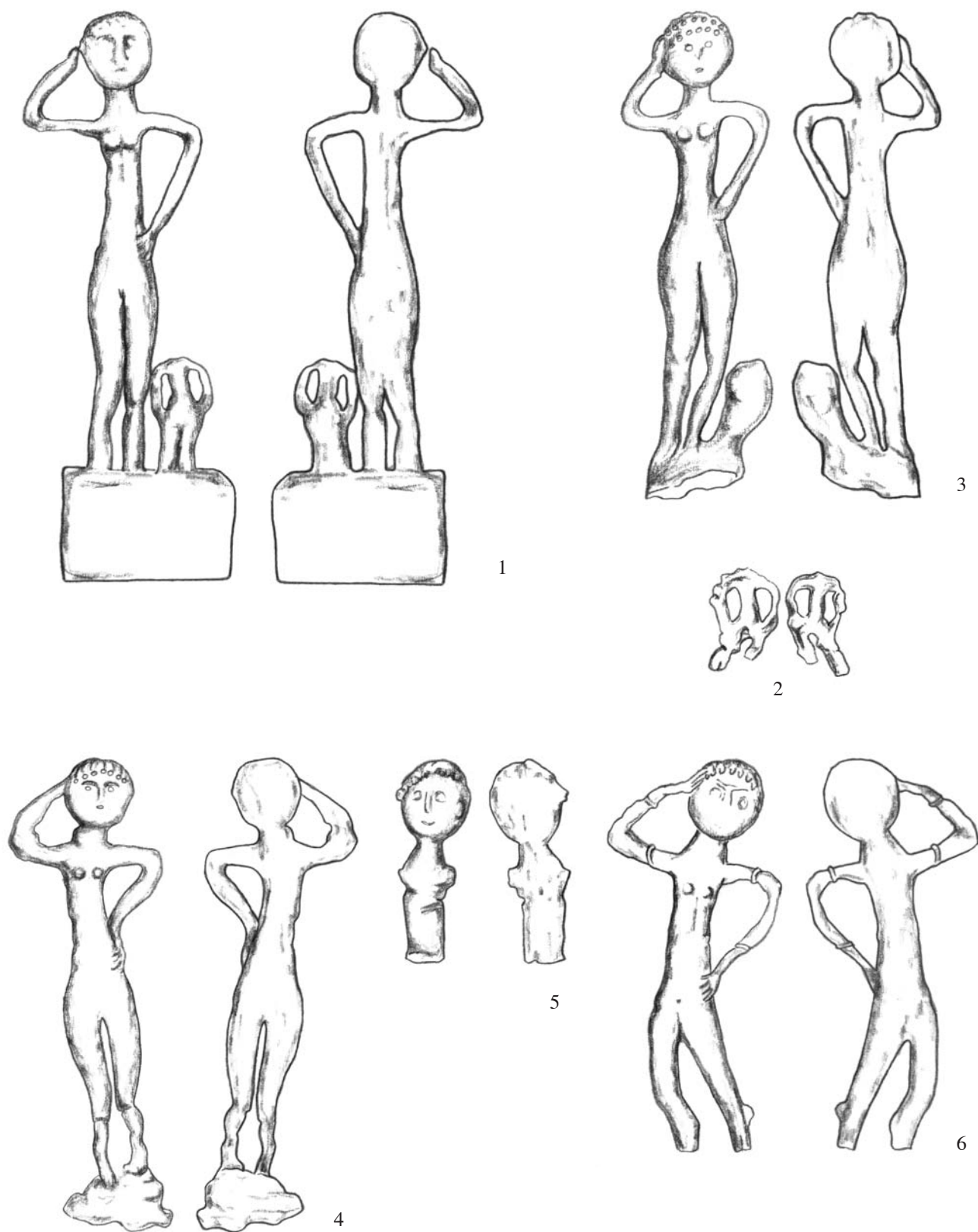


Fig. 1. Type I: 1, 3, 4) Sirmium; 2) Viminacium; 5) Salaš Noćajski; 6) Gomolava
 Сл. 1. Тип I: 1, 3, 4) Сирмијум; 2) Виминацијум; 5) Салаш Ноћајски; 6) Гомолава

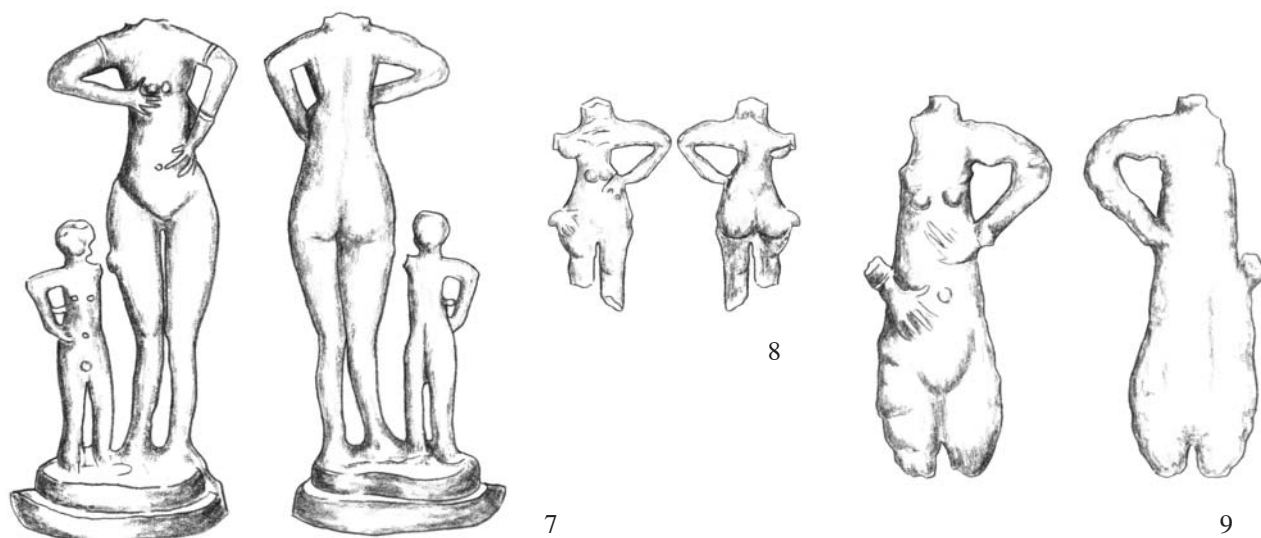


Fig. 2. Type II: 7) Vinča; 8) Viminacium; 9) Sirmium
 Сл. 2. Тип II: 7) Винча; 8) Виминацијум; 9) Сирмијум

the arms, two variants can be distinguished within this type. The first variant includes the figurines in which the right arm is bent at the elbow and rests below the breasts, whereas the left one, also bent at the elbow, rests on the belly or hips. The overall appearance of the body is somewhat more natural than in the first type, although the stiffness of the arms and the unnatural angles at which they are bent can still be observed. The curves of the body are more pronounced; the rear of the figurines is sculpturally rendered and parts of the gluteal muscles and back are distinguishable. The head is preserved only in one item from Viminacium and it differs in size from the heads typical of types I and III. Within this variant, it can be observed that two types of mould were used: the items from Viminacium and Vinča are identical, as are the pieces from Viminacium and Hrtkovci. The second variant within this type includes two figurines in which the positions of the left and right arms are interchanged: the left rests below the breasts, whilst the right is placed on the hip. Two pieces that belong to this variant have different dimensions which indicates that at least two moulds were used for the manufacturing of these figurines. Lead statuettes similar to this type cannot be found in any other areas.

Source sites: Sirmium – Site Kej²³ (Fig. 2/9), Hrtkovci,²⁴ Vinča (Fig. 2/7),²⁵ Viminacium (Fig. 2/8).²⁶

Type III – Viminacium (Figs. 3/10–13)

None of the items classified as Type III are fully preserved. It is basically a variant of the Venus Pudica type but, unlike the previous type, the body is more harmoniously shaped. Similar to Type I, the eyes, face and nose on the round head are schematically rendered. The diadem on the forehead consists of grains arranged in an arched pattern, while the hair is arranged in tufts. The right arm is tight to the body and it rests below the breasts, while the left hand is placed above the pubis. The hands are oval and, unlike the previous two types, the fingers are not outlined. A necklace is shown around the neck and bracelets around the arms. A distinguishing feature of this type is the jewellery, rendered using tiny grains, crossed on the breasts and back. A long chain wrapped around the shoulders and crossed on the back and on the breasts,

²³ The figurine was found during construction work. Museum of Srem Inv. No. 1144.

²⁴ Dautova-Ruševljan 2006, 345, 346, Cat. Nos. 5, 6, Fig. 1/5, 6.

²⁵ Reinach 1913, P. 233/5; Vinča II, 154–155, Fig. 324 a, b; Vinča III, 121–124, Fig. 557 a, b.

²⁶ Historical Museum of Serbia, Archaeological collection I.B. 475; Popović 1992, 40, Cat. No. 52; Milošanović 2008, 166, Cat. No. 13, Pl. IV. 22,23.

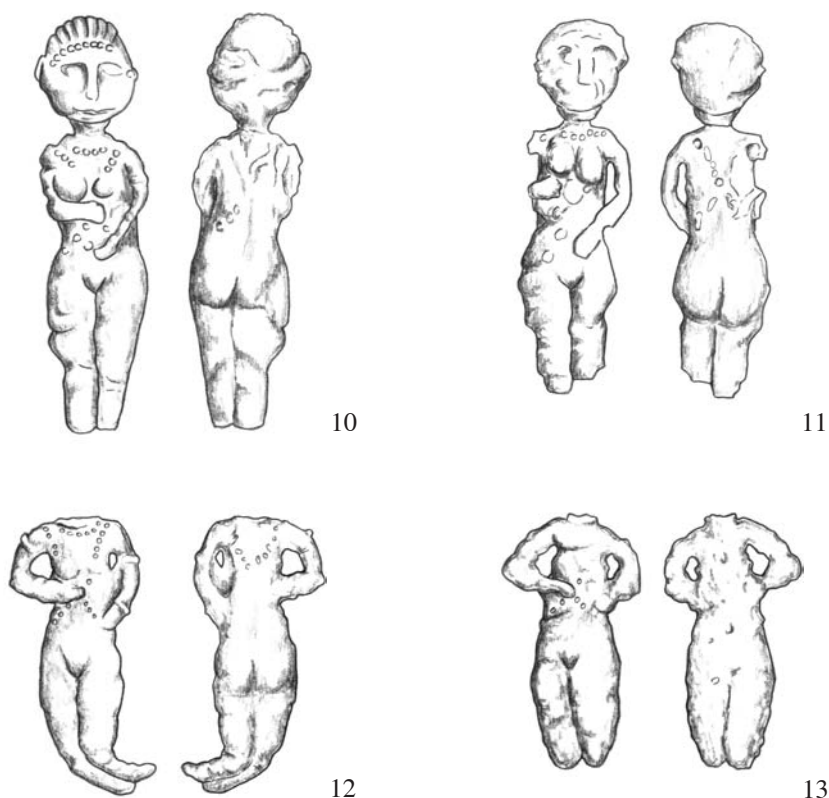


Fig. 3. Type III: 10, 11) Viminacium; 12, 13) Salaš Noćajski
 Сл. 3. Тип III: 10, 11) Виминацијум; 12, 13) Салаш Ноћајски

is fastened by a decorative clasp. Apart from this item, only a lead figurine found in Klagenfurt²⁷ features breast jewellery and as such it is, so far, a unique type. This piece shows a cloth wrapped around the hips with the crossed chain appearing to secure it.

This specific type of jewellery was characteristic of the terracotta figurines featuring the goddess Aphrodite since the late fifth century BC, the period to which the Aphrodite in a shell from Fanagoria (Taman) has been dated.²⁸ A very similar piece from Tanagra²⁹ has been dated to a somewhat later period, i.e. the early fourth century BC. A terracotta figurine with abundantly adorned legs and arms, along with the crossed jewellery across the breasts, originates from a tomb used between the sixth and third centuries BC.³⁰ The terracotta from Myrina has been dated to the first century BC.³¹ The same type of jewellery is featured on terracotta figurines from southern Italy and Jordan, but their dating has not yet been determined.³² Apart from images of Aphrodite, the crossed chain across the breasts appears on other representations of women during Hellenism.³³ Similar images were not recorded over a

long period of time, but reappeared in the territory of Dacia and Lower Moesia in the Roman period.

Several bronze figurines feature the same type of jewellery. In the village of Micia in Dacia, a bronze figurine of Venus has been found in which the motif of a crossed chain on the breasts and on the back was rendered using punctured circles.³⁴ A similar figurine, almost identical to the previous one, was unearthed in the territory of Thrace in Negovanci.³⁵ The same motif is rendered in incised crossed lines on another two bronze

²⁷ Bauer 1936, 18, 16a, b.

²⁸ Winter 1904, 203/3; LIMC II, 109, Cat. No. 1083.

²⁹ Winter 1904, 203/2; LIMC II, 109, Cat. No. 1084.

³⁰ Duyuran 1960, 11, Pl. XI.

³¹ Winter 1904, 220/5; LIMC II, 86, Cat. No. 779.

³² Southern Italy, Winter 1904, 213,3; Jordan, LIMC II, 159, Cat. No. 111.

³³ Brown 1984, 21–23.

³⁴ Teposu-Marinescu, Pop 2000, 96, Cat. No. 112., Pl. 59.

³⁵ Ogenova-Marinova 1975, 150, Cat. No. 171, Fig. 171.

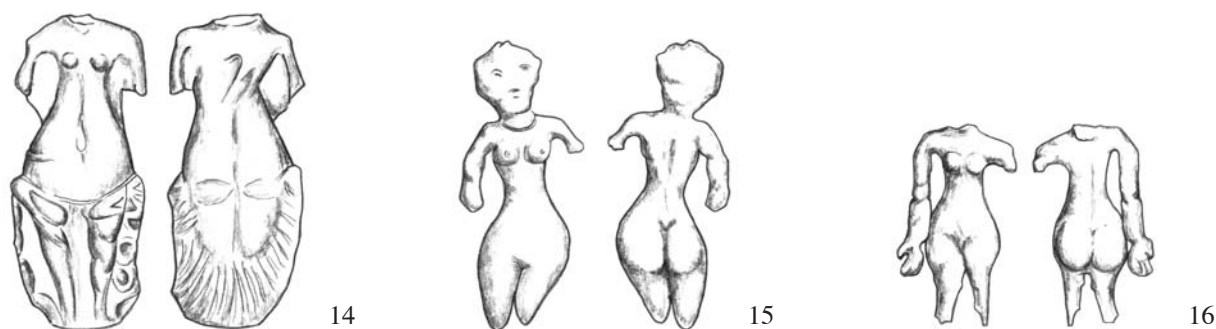


Fig. 4. Type IV: 14) *Taurunum*; Type V: 15, 16) *Viminacium*

Сл. 7. Тип IV: 14) *Таурунум*; Тип V: 15, 16) *Виминацијум*

figurines of the goddess Venus – those from Barzica and Devnja,³⁶ which are, just like the previously mentioned two pieces, very similar to one another. Our figurines found in Viminacium belong to the Venus Pudica type, the Berzica and Devnja figurines to the Venus Anadyomene type, and those found in Micia and Negovanci to the type of Venus with the outstretched arm.

Source sites: Salaš Noćajski (Figs. 3/11, 13),³⁷ Viminacium (Figs. 3/10, 12).³⁸

Type IV (Fig. 4/14)

This type has been defined on the basis of a piece found on the bank of the River Danube in Zemun. The standing nude female figurine has a mantle wrapped around the hips. The breasts are marked by two nipple-like protrusions and the navel by a shallow depression. The body is narrow at the waist, widening towards the hips. The mantle around the hips is suggested by radial folds. Since its arms are broken below the elbows and the head is missing, it is not possible to classify it as a particular type within the corpus of the Aphrodite/Venus representations. What it has in common with the previous three types is the two-dimensionality of its representation and the unskillfully rendered body posture. It has similarities to several lead figurines from the broader area of the Danubian basin. Two figurines are identical; one of them was found at Durostorum,³⁹ whereas the location where the other was found is not known.⁴⁰ With both sculptures, the mantle is wrapped only around the left leg, while the right leg is totally bare. The left hand covers the pubic area and the right arm is broken in two, therefore, its position is not known. The figurine found at Brigetio was sculpted in a different manner and it shows a mantled Venus with her left hand

on the pubic area.⁴¹ The diversity of the representations of Venus with a mantle wrapped around her hips is illustrated by two different pieces from Siscia. One of them features raised arms holding plaits,⁴² whereas the other has broken arms of indeterminable position.⁴³ The only similar items that can be found are two identical fragmented pieces from Smyrna,⁴⁴ held by the Louvre. The difference between the figurines from Smyrna and the one from Taurunum lies in the better rendering of folds in the mantle wrapped around the hips of the former pieces. As both figurines from Smyrna are broken above the hips and no other similar examples are known to have been found, it is not possible to discuss the rendering

³⁶ Ognenova-Marinova 1975, Barzica 144, Cat. No. 163, Fig. 163; Devnja 146, Cat. No. 164, Fig. 164.

³⁷ Two lead figurines were gifted to the Museum of Srem. According to the person who found them, they were discovered in a field at Salaš Noćajski. Several fragmented lead statuettes acquired for the National Museum in Belgrade in 1933 originate from the immediate vicinity of this site, at Mačvanska – Mala Mitrovica (Garašanin 1951, 164).

³⁸ Popović 1992, 40, Cat. Nos. 53, 54. Two unpublished figurines held by the Historical Museum of Serbia originate from Viminacium: Inv. No. 471, preserved height: 8.3 cm. Inv. No. 472; preserved height: 7.3 cm.

³⁹ Elefterescu 2004–2005, 222–223, Cat. No. 4, Pls. II/1, VI/1

⁴⁰ Thomas 1952, 35, Pl. VI/3.

⁴¹ Thomas 1952, 35, Pl. VI/6.

⁴² Bauer 1936, 17, Cat. No. 14, T III/14a, b.

⁴³ Bauer 1936, 17, Cat. No. 13, T III/13a, b. The third Venus figurine (Cat. No. 15) features the mantle only on the back; however, the figurine was made using two different moulds (in this case, a mould for a figure of a divinity dressed in a long chiton gathered at the waist was used; 17–18).

⁴⁴ Chew 1990/1991, 88, Cat. Nos. 41, 42, Pls. 41, 42.

of the torso and, therefore, suggest the hypothesis that the Taurunum figurine could have originated from Asia Minor. Under the present circumstances, this is the only piece that bears any resemblance to lead figurines originating from other parts of the Roman Empire.

Source site: Taurunum (Fig. 4/14).⁴⁵

Type V (Fig. 4/15, 16)

The distinctive feature of this type is a significantly different sculptural rendering of the body, which is, unlike the previous types, three-dimensional; the rendering of the head and face is also considerably different. In the figurine from Taurunum,⁴⁶ the woman holds her hair with her left hand, whilst her right arm is outstretched. The torso is unskilfully rendered and the figure is pronouncedly steatopygous. Differences are also observed in the manner in which the heads are sculpted. The eyes, nose and mouth are roughly outlined in relief, while the diadem is shaped as a triangular extension above the forehead. The two items found at Viminacium share some common features with the previously mentioned figurines. In the first one⁴⁷ the head is missing, however, judging by other features (the torso, hips, steatopygous character and arms) and its dimensions, it is possible that it was similar to the previous examples. The other figurine,⁴⁸ originating from Viminacium, is somewhat more pronouncedly three-dimensional, having fuller breast and a head sculpted differently from all other lead figurines. Within the corpus of lead figurines found in Dacia, Upper and Lower Moesia and Thrace,⁴⁹ there are a large number of pieces featuring Venus with her right arm outstretched, whilst her left hand is holding a plait. The quality of rendering of the body varies, from very successfully sculpted pieces to those similar to the crude rendering of the face and body in the Taurunum figurine. Therefore, it is possible that the items belonging to this type were made in a workshop manufacturing bronze figurines.

Source sites: Taurunum, Viminacium.

* * *

Bearing in mind the number of discovered items, the group of lead figurines found in a relatively narrow territory between Sirmium and Viminacium does not show a great variety of types. Generally speaking, the first three types could be said to have been made using no more than six moulds. This fact indicates that moulds could have been used over a shorter period of time. The fact that there are such a large number of fig-

urines belonging to various types at three equally distant locations – Sirmium, Viminacium and Hrtkovci, does not allow us to reliably distinguish the place of manufacture from the place of utilisation. Although the lead figurines from the area between Sirmium and Viminacium do not bear any direct similarities to the repertoire of representations from the Hungarian part of Pannonia and Lower Moesia, in terms of style the figurines belonging to types I and II show similarities to the pieces from Savaria, Brigetio and Durostorum.⁵⁰ They are distinguished by the very unskilful and schematic rendering of the head and body. It can also be noticed that there are several types of representations, of varying manufacturing quality, in the Upper and Lower Danubian basin. In the Serbian part of the Danubian basin, it is possible to observe differences between the first three types and the fourth group, which was made by a more skilled artisan. It seems that the existence of the fifth group can be explained by reasons different from those of the other four groups. In our opinion, its similarity to pieces made of bronze, and primarily their three dimensional appearance, indicates that it was created either within the circle of workshops manufacturing bronze objects or under their influence.

For the majority of the lead figurines from the territory between Sirmium and Viminacium there is no information about the context of the find. Therefore, it is not possible to reliably establish the time of their emergence in this region. Only one piece (Site No. 4 at Sirmium) can be more precisely dated to the second

⁴⁵ Zemun. Danube River bank. Site III Pumpa. Registered in the inventory of the Antique Collection of the Belgrade City Museum under number 4376. It is preserved up to the height of 6.4 cm. Unpublished.

⁴⁶ Najhold 2009, 109.

⁴⁷ Viminacium. Fortuitous find. Standing nude, pronouncedly steatopygous female figure. The head, left arm and legs are missing. The right arm is hanging by the body. The preserved height is 3.9 cm. It is registered in the inventory of the Archaeological Collection of the Historical Museum of Serbia under number 474. Unpublished.

⁴⁸ Viminacium. Fortuitous find. Standing female figurine. It is registered in the inventory of the Archaeological Collection of the Historical Museum of Serbia under number 473. The preserved height is 5.4 cm. Unpublished.

⁴⁹ Ogenova-Marinova 1975, Cat. Nos. 158–169, pp. 142–149; Teposu-Marinescu, Pop 2000, Cat. Nos. 98–104, pp. 89–92; Ružić 2006, Cat. Nos. 163–166, 168, pp. 137–140.

⁵⁰ Savaria, Brigetio (Tomas 1955, Pls. VI–I, VI–2); Durostorum (Elefterescu 2005, Cat. Nos. 3, 7).

half of the third century.⁵¹ Other items discovered at Sirmium can be roughly dated to this period, though the information regarding the context of the find does not allow precise dating.⁵² Unfortunately, we have the same situation at Gomolava, where metal processing areas were identified during archaeological excavations,⁵³ but there is no clear record of the archaeological horizon in which lead objects were found. Along with the vessels used for casting metal and lead slag, intermediary products and lead mirrors serve as an argument in favour of the hypothesis that, besides other lead objects, lead figurines of the goddess Venus were also manufactured there.⁵⁴ In a publication preceding the monograph on Gomolava, N. Tasić stated that a lead figurine and a Late Antique lamp with the inscription CERNO had been found in the same Late Antique burial horizon.⁵⁵ As lead figurines of the goddess Venus frequently appear in tombs,⁵⁶ it is not impossible that the items found at Gomolava originate from Late Antique graves and not from workshops manufacturing lead objects. The lead Venus found at Šašinci was discovered at a site containing a late-third-century horizon.⁵⁷ It would appear that the lead figurines from the area between Sirmium and Viminacium date from the second half of the third century.

In other parts of the Roman Empire, lead figurines of deities appeared considerably earlier. The oldest dated items (late first century AD) were found in a ship sunk together with lead ingots. The figurines were part of small models of temples (*naiskoi*), which were also made of lead.⁵⁸ Lead figurines of divinities set in *aediculae*, found during archaeological excavations in the British Isles and in Gallia, were sculpted in a different style and they have been found in horizons dated to different periods. At *Viroconium Cornoviorum*, a figurine of Venus in an aedicula was found on a dump outside the market place, together with cast and ceramic pottery dated no later than the second century. A figurine of Mercury found at Segedunum, the lead doors of an aedicula from Vindolanda and a figurine of Minerva from Dorchester⁵⁹ come from a significantly later chronological context. Two figurines of Venus in *aediculae* originate from graves in Gallia dated to the second century,⁶⁰ while an exquisitely sculpted statuette, dated to the second century, probably originates from a home shrine.⁶¹ The lead figurines from Savaria were discovered at an empty shrine of Mercury and are dated to the late second and the first half of the third century, whereas the hoard at Matrica has been estimated to date from the second to third centuries.⁶² The third

group of lead figurines from the Danubian basin, concentrated around Durostorum, has been dated to the late second and the early third centuries.⁶³ On the other hand, three representations of the goddess Diana from Durostorum were discovered in the complex of baths dated to the second half of the third century.⁶⁴

The greatest number of lead figurines set in shrines (*aediculae*) was discovered within sacral complexes and were only rarely found in graves. Assuming the proposed dating is correct, it could be presumed that between the second and fourth centuries lead figurines were primarily manufactured for shrines, where individuals dedicated them as votive gifts.⁶⁵ The same presumption

⁵¹ The statuette was found under the floor of a Late Antique structure together with the coins issued by Claudius II. Parović-Pešikan 1971, 37–38.

⁵² The item found at Site No. 26, which is actually a Late Antique necropolis discovered in the profile of the excavation, in the horizon roughly dated to the third to fourth centuries. The same could be said of the archaeological find from the south rampart area at Sirmium. The item found at the site Kej, beyond the fortified area of Sirmium, was purchased from the person who found it.

⁵³ Dautova-Rušeavljan, Brukner 1992, 60–63.

⁵⁴ A lead figurine was assigned a field inventory number. However, the published literature fails to provide precise information regarding the horizon in which it was found (Dautova-Rušeavljan, Brukner, 1992, 65; Dautova-Rušeavljan 2006, 346).

⁵⁵ N. Tasić 1965, 30; this lamp has been classified as Type XXII dated to the late third and the fourth century (Dautova-Rušeavljan, Brukner, 1992, 82–83, Cat. No. 25, Pl. 7/29).

⁵⁶ Apart from the examples mentioned further in the text, there is another lead Venus figurine from Smyrna which was found in a child's grave (Bauer 1936, 19).

⁵⁷ Horizons from the first, late third and fourth centuries have been identified at the site. The late-third-century horizon has been dated on the basis of the coins issued by emperors Tacitus and Diocletian found in the horizon (Brukner 1980, 107).

⁵⁸ Six lead *naiskoi* were discovered in a sunken ship in one of the channels of the Po River. Along with the figurines of Mercury and Amor, the *naiskoi* also contained two lead figurines of the goddess Venus. Berti 1990, 72, 205–210, Cat. Nos. 133–138, Pls. XXIII–XXVII.

⁵⁹ Segedunum, Vindolanda, Allason Jones 1984, 232; *Viroconium Cornoviorum*, Frere 1985, 285.

⁶⁰ Chew 1991, 81–82;

⁶¹ Monnier 2009, 206, 207.

⁶² Zsidi 2000, (Matrica) 326, Cat. No. 47, (Savaria) 327, Cat. No. 58. Such dating is mentioned in the catalogue of finds, whereas in the text Zsidi states that “almost all of more than sixty lead votive objects date from the period between the second half of the second century and the end of the third century”, p. 322.

⁶³ Elefterescu 2005, 227, 238.

⁶⁴ Donevski 1975, 147.

⁶⁵ Zsidi 2000, 328.



Map II. Finds of Venus statues representing the breast chain

Карта II. Налази Венериних статуа са представом накиша на њима

could be extended to lead figurines found in the Serbian part of the Lower Pannonia and Upper Moesia. However, the shrine for which these lead figurines could have been made has not yet been identified.

In order to open a discussion on the identification of the shrine, it is necessary to address the issue of the identity of the represented divinity. There are studies that question the interpretation of the lead figurines as representations of the goddess Venus, proposing that they should, rather, be identified as the Great Mother Goddess, i.e. as some undetermined female divinity,⁶⁶ or as the goddess shown on the icons of the Danubian horsemen.⁶⁷ The first hypothesis is not supported by iconographic evidence since the lead figurines of the goddess Venus are identical to representations of the same goddess in other materials. Within the corpus of lead figurines it is possible to observe differences in artisans' craftsmanship, just as they are observable in representations of Venus sculpted in stone, terracotta or bone. It is obvious that different variants can be distinguished among the lead pieces found in The Danubian basin and, within a broader repertoire of representations, these differences are also distinguishable in those made

of bronze and terracotta. However, we should not ignore the fact that on the heads of the figurines belonging to Type III, no matter how schematically shaped, artisans rendered, as far as their abilities allowed, a diadem with pearls on an unskilfully sculpted head and adorned the breasts with jewellery. This detail, which can be traced back to the late fifth century BC, had a continuity extending to the lead Venus figurines from the Danubian basin, which are, chronologically, the latest representations of Venus with this attribute (Map II). In our opinion, the huge number of lead figurines in this area suggests that it is necessary to re-examine all variants of the representations of the goddess Venus, sculpted in various materials, in a broader area, where they are found in their hundreds. It is only when this corpus is gathered in a single place and all variants of representations of the nude female figure fully analysed, that it will be possible to undertake work to define the answer

⁶⁶ Dautova-Ruševljan, Brukner 1992, 62; Dautova-Ruševljan, Vujović 2006, 82.

⁶⁷ Popović 1992, 46.

to the question as to why these representations of the goddess Venus appeared in the Danubian basin in such numbers and who were the users of so many figurines. According to current knowledge, in the territory of the Lower Pannonia and Upper Moesia, representations of Venus absolutely dominate in the corpus of lead figurines. The only cult-related images that can compare in number to the lead Venus figurines are the lead icons of the Danubian horsemen. Along with a series of problems related to the interpretation of this cult,⁶⁸ there is one that cannot be solved without physico-chemical analyses; namely the question of whether the same workshops manufactured both lead icons and lead figurines. A positive result of such analyses would not serve as clear evidence of a cult relationship between Venus in the Danube basin and the Danubian horsemen. In our opinion, it would, rather, be an indicator of the increased use of lead in the manufacturing of cult objects in a certain historical period.⁶⁹ The style of these two groups of cult objects cannot be easily linked. There are considerable differences in style among various types of lead icons of the Danubian horsemen. The items belonging to types I and II (Dalj, Divoš)⁷⁰ are products of very skilled artisans who sought to create a veracious representation of the scene. Their skill is easily observable in the rendering of the human figure in movement, in the posture of the body and the detail of the clothes of the goddess between two horsemen, etc. What should also be considered is the fact that the represented figures are not bigger than 17–18 mm. In contrast, the items belonging to Type VII (Popinci) are marked by the unskilful rendering comparable to that of Type I of the lead figurines of the goddess Venus. There is a feature which links these two types of cult objects even more strongly: which is the rendering of the goddess' face. In both cases, the head is round, the eyes are marked by two dots, the nose by a vertical and the mouth by a horizontal line. However, these shared features are not an indicator of the cult affinity but rather one of stylistic similarity. If it were possible to establish a link between the similar features in the rendering of the heads of the two goddesses, it could be assumed that they were products of the same workshop. The area in which lead icons can be found coincides with the area in which lead Venus figurines can be found. The parallels between the two groups of objects are particularly often found in the distribution area within the Danubian basin. It has long been observed that the icons of the Danubian horsemen manufactured in the territory of Pannonia and Upper Moesia appear only in this area, while the

products of Dacia and Lower Moesia appear only in the Lower Danubian basin.⁷¹ A similar pattern of distribution has been observed for the lead figurines of the goddess Venus. It is even more interesting that the unskilfully rendered faces of the goddess in lead icons and those of the lead figurines of Venus can also be observed in Dacia and Lower Moesia. Accordingly, we believe that there are neither iconographic similarities nor any cult affiliation between the lead figurines of the goddess Venus and lead icons of the Danubian horsemen, and that the only link between them is the crude craftsmanship of an artisan inexperienced in glyptics.

Bearing in mind that the lead figurines feature the goddess Venus, it is reasonable to expect that there must have been a sanctuary for which they could have been made. If we tried to offer an answer to the question of why lead figurines of the goddess Venus appear in such large numbers, assuming that there was a shrine to the goddess Venus at Site No. 4 at Sirmium,⁷² the question of the large number of figurines found at Viminacium, which is considerably distant from Sirmium,

⁶⁸ The hypothesis that the cult of the Danubian horsemen was related to the cult of Dominus and Domina has been recently put forward. Szabo 2007, 157–158; Panczel 2010, 82.

⁶⁹ On the existence of the mine Agrippi(ana) in the vicinity of Sirmium in the late third century, cf. Dušanić 2009, 114; on the exploitation of lead in the mines on Kosmaj beginning in the mid-second century, cf. Merkel 2007, 69; on the dating of lead icons of the Danubian horsemen in the second half of the third and in the fourth century, cf. Tudor 1976, 97–98.

⁷⁰ Iskra-Janošić 1966, 50, 53.

⁷¹ Popović 1988, 115.

⁷² M. Jeremić has recently thrown light on the cult character of this site (Jeremić 2006, 173–176, 199); his hypothesis is supported by the fact that two terracotta figurines of Venus were found at the same site (Pejović 1995, 44, Figs. 1 and 2; Milošević 2001, 108). Along with these, another four stone sculptures have also been discovered (Cat. Nos. 64–67); the fragment with a hand on the pubic area (Cat. No. 66, Pl. 40/2, erroneously identified as the torso of a male figure) and a fragmented torso (Cat. No. 64, Pl. 40/3) could be identified as parts of sculptures of the goddess Venus (Dautova-Ruševljan 1983, 18, Milošević 2001, 108). Another piece found nine years ago further supports the hypothesis on the existence of a Venus cult in Sirmium. In the complex of the imperial palace, within a sixth-century rubble horizon formed after the destruction of a structure built in the late third, i.e. at the very beginning of the fourth century, a marble head of the goddess Venus has been discovered in the immediate vicinity of a piscine. Although the sculpture dates from a significantly earlier period, the place where it has been found shows that it was used during the fourth century (Popović 2006, 153, Figs. 2a–d). Judging by its hairstyle – part of the hair covering the *taeniae* on the nape – the head from Sirmium shows similarities to a sculpture from Naples – Aphrodita Calypigia LIMC II, 85, Cat. No. 765.

would inevitably arise. Along with lead figurines, a significant number of fragments of stone sculptures originating from Viminacium have been known to have been found.⁷³ Unfortunately, the information on their discovery location is imprecise and there are no more than four items for which it is possible to determine the broader location of discovery. However, the data provided by excavation records of the investigations carried out more than one hundred years ago, suggest that the existence of a cult site dedicated to the goddess Venus could be assumed in part of the urban settlement at Viminacium. As an explorer of Viminacium, Miloje Vasić investigated about 1,600 square metres within the “urban settlement” in 1902. On that occasion, he found well-preserved architectural structures next to one of the main communication routes within the town. Although very general, his report reveals that the excavations were performed in one of the most urbanised parts of Viminacium. Besides several construction horizons, he has also mentioned the remains of a street along with some sewage and heating systems, etc.⁷⁴ Together with numerous movable items, other finds from this site include two stone statuettes of the goddess Venus, one of which is fragmented, a dolphin, three fragmented terracotta heads of Venus, a torso once belonging to a terracotta Venus statuette, as well as three fragmented moulds used in the manufacturing of Venus figurines.⁷⁵ More recently, this site was located in the northern section of the settlement, in the immediate vicinity of the baths, on their western side. In our opinion, such a great number and iconographic diversity of representations of the goddess Venus suggests that a Venus cult existed at this site. Unfortunately, not a single lead figurine has been discovered there.⁷⁶

Taking all previously mentioned items into account, we could sum up that all of the figurines are marked by shallow relief, a round head, a schematic rendering of the face and a disproportional nude female body. The similarly crude execution of various types of represen-

tations of the goddess Venus indicates a particular mode of use. They could have been used solely as a visual symbol of the goddess, made recognisable and familiar to those who used them through the form of a figure holding her hair, covering her breasts or holding a veil above her head. This interpretation would support the hypothesis that such figurines were made in sanctuaries. In a shrine, the pilgrim was surrounded by various representations of the goddess Venus and the object possessed by him was iconographically identical to an object of a higher quality which aroused a higher aesthetic experience and was also placed in the sanctuary. The differences in the manufacturing quality of the lead figurines from the Danubian basin indicate that they could have been made by several artisans whose skill of rendering a representation in the shallow relief of a mould varied. As the majority of figurines were made using six moulds, it seems that there were not many artisans who were manufacturing them in the Serbian part of the Danubian basin. It is also possible that they often travelled between Sirmium and Viminacium and that the lack of any clear indication of the origin of particular types may be explained by this fact. Not only that, Sirmium–Viminacium lead figurines do not appear beyond the boundaries of the Sirmium–Viminacium region but it may also be observed that lead figurines originating from other areas do not appear there in significant numbers either. Accordingly, we believe that lead objects were used within local markets and were not a means of trade among distant areas of the Roman Empire. Such a conclusion may be coupled with the presumption that they were cult objects manufactured in local workshops for local sanctuaries and that their occurrence beyond the boundaries of a local area is merely an indicator of random events resulting from the actions of an individual. All of these hypotheses can be fully confirmed only by the analysis of a greater number of items where the context of their find is reliably established.

⁷³ Tomović 1992, Cat. Nos. 65, 69, 71, 72, 76–80;

⁷⁴ Vasić 1905, 103–107.

⁷⁵ Vasić 1903, 209, 216–217.

⁷⁶ The toponym Čair mentioned in the study authored by Ivana Popović as the place where a group of lead objects were found covers a broader area of Viminacium’s castrum and settlement, Popović 1992, 29, note 1.

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Резиме:

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НЕКА ЗАПАЖАЊА О ОЛОВНИМ ФИГУРИНАМА БОГИЊЕ ВЕНЕРЕ НА ПОДРУЧЈУ ИЗМЕЂУ СИРМИЈУМА И ВИМИНАЦИЈУМА

Кључне речи. – оловне фигурине, Венера, Сирмијум, Виминацијум, Доња Панонија, Горња Мезија.

Међу фондом оловних фигурина божанстава у римском царству (Карта I), примерци из области југоисточног дела Доње Паноније и подунавског дела Горње Мезије заузимају посебно место. Издвајају се по специфичним представама богиње Венере. У оквиру групе од 40-ак што целих, што фрагментованих примерака могу се издвојити 5 типова, који се разликују према ставу наге женске фигуре као и према стилу израде. На основу тога се може закључити да је у овој области постојала производња локалних радионица чији производи нису били заступљени у другим деловима царства. Такође је уочено да у истој области нема фигурина из других радионица. Ово упућује на претпоставку да су

оловне фигурине богиње Венере рађене за потребе локалних светилишта. Могуће је да се једно такво светилиште налазило на локалитету 4 у Сремској Митровици, док је локализација другог предложена у северном делу насеобинског дела Виминацијума. Ретки стратификовани налази упућују на могућност да се производња ових фигурина у области између Сирмијума и Виминацијума датује у другу половину III века. Уочава се иста појава и код производње оловних икона подунавских коњаника. Како се три најзаступљенија типа фигурина појављују на локалитетима где су оне најбројније, предложена је могућност да се производња одвијала у самим светилиштима.