

# VIVERE MILITARE EST

FROM POPULUS TO EMPERORS - LIVING ON THE FRONTIER  
VOLUME I

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BELGRADE 2018

INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY  
MONOGRAPHS  
No. 68/1

**VIVERE MILITARE EST**  
FROM POPULUS TO EMPERORS - LIVING ON THE FRONTIER

VOLUME I

Belgrade 2018

**PUBLISHER**

**Institute of Archaeology**

Kneza Mihaila 35/IV

11000 Belgrade

<http://www.ai.ac.rs>

[institut@ai.ac.rs](mailto:institut@ai.ac.rs)

Tel. +381 11 2637-191

**MONOGRAPHS 68/1**

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**PRINTED IN**

500 copies

**COVER PAGE**

Tabula Traiana, Iron Gate

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ISBN 978-86-6439-035-4

ISBN 978-86-6439-036-1

## ROMAN RELIGION AND CULTS ON THE DANUBE LIMES IN SERBIA\*

NADEŽDA M. GAVRILOVIĆ VITAS, *Institute of Archaeology Belgrade*  
E-mail: N.Gavrilovic@ai.ac.rs

### ABSTRACT

*Among different spheres of daily life led by Roman soldiers in the forts along the Danube Limes, one of the important ones was the sphere of spiritual culture, beliefs and religion. Although with the process of Romanisation, the official pantheon of Roman deities was introduced to the indigenous population, with the building and development of the defence frontier system on the Danube and Roman legions and auxiliary units who were stationed there, came soldiers of different origin and provenience, who brought with them their own religious beliefs and deities. Epigraphic and archaeological monuments found in the Danube Limes localities testify to the degree of acceptance or resistance of the autochthonous inhabitants towards different Roman, Hellenised and Oriental cults and show some very interesting examples of syncretism of the mentioned cults with unknown, indigenous gods and goddesses.*

**KEY WORDS: DANUBE LIMES, SERBIA, ROMAN CULTS, ARMY, FORTIFICATIONS, IMPERIAL CULT**

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\* This article is a result of the work within the project *Romanization, urbanization and transformation of urban centres of civilian and military character in the Roman provinces in the territory of Serbia* (No. 177007), financed by Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Republic of Serbia.

It is presumed that the first permanent camps of Moesian legions on the Danube Limes in the territory of the province of Moesia were in larger centres like *Singidunum*, *Margum*, *Viminacium*, *Ratiaria*, and *Oescus*, while from the period of the division of the province of Moesia into Moesia Superior and Moesia Inferior, two permanently stationed legions, *legio III Flavia* and *legio VII Claudia*, were present in Moesia Superior on the Danube limes until the end of Antiquity. However, the majority of forts on the Danube Limes in today's Serbia belonged to the type of medium auxiliary forts, with auxiliary units, who formed the backbone of the provincial army. They occupied much smaller forts than legions did - medium auxiliary forts comprised a surface area which varied from 1 to 2.5 hectares and could accommodate around 500 soldiers.<sup>2</sup> Those auxiliary units, as legions, were comprised of soldiers of different origins who came from various parts of the Roman Empire, and brought with them their own customs and religious beliefs. As part of the Roman Imperial Army, they accepted Roman religion, the official Roman pantheon and ritual practices, but nevertheless, many of them stayed faithful to their local, indigenous gods and goddesses and, since the Roman state never applied any pressure in the sphere of religious beliefs, epigraphic and archaeological material confirms numerous deities of different origin.<sup>3</sup> Also, near every fort, a civilian settlement catering for the soldiers' needs was formed, consisting of indigenous Romanised inhabitants, but also traders, artisans, veterans, slaves and freedmen, who came from different parts of the Roman empire, bringing with them their own customs and religions.<sup>4</sup> Through roads within the Iron Gorge, Roman soldiers were in permanent contact with the traders, administration, veterans, slaves and freedmen for the communication, supply and transport<sup>5</sup>, which streamed between the

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<sup>2</sup> Like in localities *Čezava*, *Taliata*, *Diana*, *Pontes*, *Drobeta* etc. Ibid, 18. Small fortifications of the type *burgus-quadriburgia*, existed in localities Mihajlovac and Ljubičevac, while watchtowers were confirmed in localities Lepenski Vir and Zidinac, Ibid, 57.

<sup>3</sup> The same can be applied for the persons who constituted the military administration, since they were also of different origin.

<sup>4</sup> For more about the topic of the spread of different religions throughout the Roman world, see Price 2012, 1-19.

<sup>5</sup> It is well known that Moesia was an important mining area for the Roman empire, rich with ores like gold, silver, copper, iron and lead, but also with very fertile land for agriculture and mountainous areas with woods. Local workshops for ceramic wares, glass vessels, tools and weapons are confirmed in centres like *Sirmium*, *Singidunum* and *Viminacium*, from where the products were transported to fortifications and settlements along Danube Limes.

fortifications and settlements along the Limes, but also between the fortifications along the Limes and almost all parts of the Roman empire, creating a vibrant social network which had an important role in the exchange of religious and spiritual beliefs, and religious theologies as well. Of course, the local context of indigenous cults and religion was an important factor too, determining the degree of acceptance or resistance towards the newly introduced cults and religions.<sup>6</sup>

Epigraphic monuments, the remains of different types of sanctuaries and different kinds of archaeological material with a clear cultic function, were found in localities of the Danube Limes in Serbia (Fig. 1), testifying to the importance and about the need for religious practices and rituals in the lives of the soldiers and civilians who lived there, but also bringing important knowledge about various theologies, their diffusion, different deities and many ways of their worshipping and participating in their cults, in the aforementioned area.

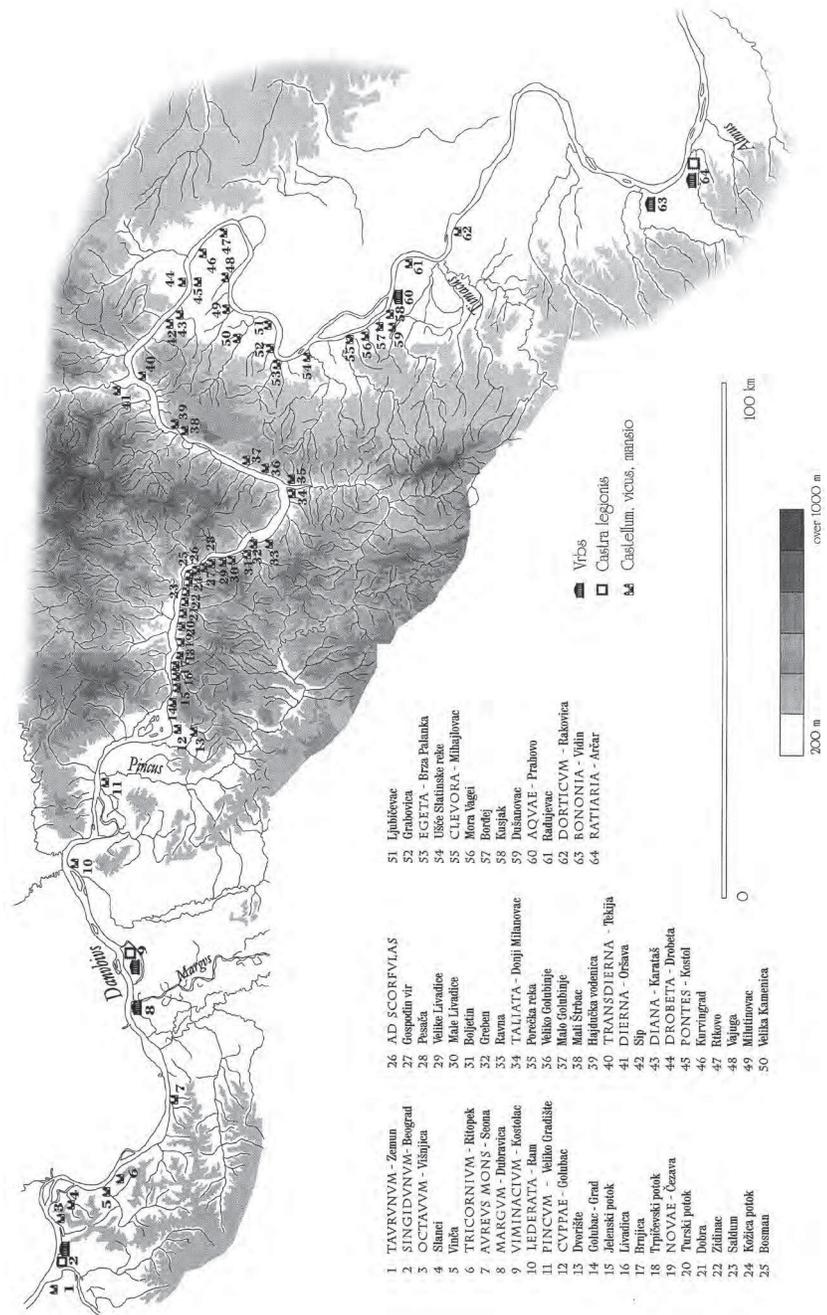
As he was the supreme god in the Roman pantheon, Jupiter was also the most popular deity on the Danube Limes. The god of victory, he was associated with the greatest power and triumph and, as the power of Roman Empire grew, so his importance did as well. Epigraphic dedications to *Jupiter Optimus Maximus* (Jupiter the Best and the Greatest) are the most numerous, mostly made on votive altars, for the health of the emperor or the well-being of the dedicant's family.<sup>7</sup> From the territory of Singidunum, a total number of 36 votive dedications to *Jupiter Optimus Maximus* have been confirmed, which is not at all surprising considering that Singidunum was one of the most important centres in *Moesia Superior*, where *legio IV Flavia* was stationed from the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century until Late Antiq-

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6 Along with the process of Romanisation, the deities of the Roman pantheon were introduced to the territories of the Central Balkan provinces and the middle Danube region. Through the Roman period, until the final victory of Christianity, religions and cults of different provenance were present in the mentioned territories, having more or less success in the autochthonous population, which was mirrored the popularity or absence of certain cults or assimilation of certain cults with the cults of indigenous deities.

7 Epigraphic dedications to the most powerful and the greatest of all Roman deities, underline his supremacy, will and power, which were highly respected among Roman soldiers and the civilian population. Epigraphic dedications to *Jupiter Optimus Maximus* made for the health of the emperor include, for example, monuments from Singidunum published in *IMS I*, 3; *IMS I*, 4; *IMS I*, 101; Kostolac (*Viminacium*) *IMS II*, 22; *IMS II*, 25; Votive monuments dedicated to *Jupiter Optimus Maximus* for the health of the dedicant are known from Singidunum, *IMS I*, 11 and Ritopek *IMS I*, 79.

Fig. 1 Map of the localities on the Danube Limes in Serbia (Roman Limes on the Middle and Lower Danube, Belgrade 1996)



uity.<sup>8</sup> The strategic position of Singidunum contributed to the fact that it became a very important crossroad with a fort and settlement and soon developed into a *municipium* (in the period of the reign of Emperor Hadrian) and later, during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, it became a colony. Marble fragmented sculptures representing the god Jupiter are not numerous and, for most of those kept in the National museum in Belgrade, the place of finding is, unfortunately, unknown.<sup>9</sup> They present either a standing figure of the god with an eagle or Jupiter seated on a throne.

As the capital of the Roman province of *Moesia Superior*, *Viminacium* was not only a very important military centre, but also a strategically and economically significant city, located in a favourable geographic position, being a crossroad for road and river transportation.<sup>10</sup> The cult of the god Jupiter has been confirmed in *Viminacium* with seven votive monuments and a fragmented marble sculpture of Jupiter with an eagle.<sup>11</sup> Since *Viminacium* was a centre settled with inhabitants of different origins through the period of the Roman rule, the majority of pagan cults known during antiquity existed there and different deities were venerated by citizens of diverse social and economic status. Beside the cult of *Jupiter Maximus Optimus*, dedications and cult sculptures connected to the gods *Jupiter Dolichenus*, *Jupiter Turmasgades* and *Jupiter Paternus* have been discovered in *Viminacium*.<sup>12</sup>

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8 Votive monuments dedicated to *Jupiter Optimus Maximus*, from the territory of Singidunum are published in: *IMS I* (n. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 79, 80, 86, 87, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, ), *AE 1727*, *AE 1997*, n. 1301, *IL Jug 1986*, n. 502, Petković 2002, 219-224.

9 Fragmented marble sculptures identified as representations of the god Jupiter mostly present a bearded head of a mature man, a standing god with an eagle beside him or a god seated on a throne. There are also three dubious fragmented sculptures which represent either the god Jupiter or the god Asclepius. Fragmented marble sculptures of Jupiter kept in the National Museum in Belgrade, whose place of find is unknown, are: fragmented sculpture of a half-naked Jupiter (inv. n. 2954/III), dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Bošković Robert 2006, n. S.1; head of a bearded mature man (inv. n. 2953/III), dated to 3- 4<sup>th</sup> century, *Ibid*, S. 3.

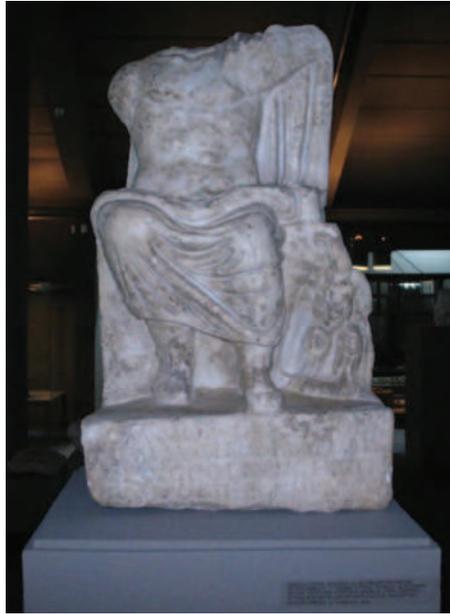
10 From the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century until the end of Antiquity, *Legio VII Claudia* was stationed in *Viminacium*, as was the river fleet *Classis Flavia Histrica*, Korać et al. 2014, 65-66.

11 For votive monuments from *Viminacium* dedicated to Jupiter see *IMS II*, n. 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24 and 25. Besides a fragmented sculpture of Jupiter with an eagle, of which only the figure of the eagle is preserved, two marble torsos of Jupiter/Asclepius of the iconographic type were also found in *Viminacium*, Tomović 1992, n. 187, fig. 38.7, Bošković Robert 2006, 134, S.12, Pl. 46/2.

12 For the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus in *Viminacium* and generally in central Balkan Roman provinces, see Gavrilović 2010, 173 etc. For the cult of Jupiter Turmasgades, *Ibid*, 178-181. For votive dedication to Jupiter Paternus, *IMS II*, 102.



Fig. 2 Marble sculpture of Jupiter, Kostol (Pontes), (<http://virtuelnimuzejdunava.rs/pocetna/rimski-bog-jupiter.i-97.125.html>)



At Kostol (*Pontes*) a unique dedication to *Jupiter Optimus Maximus Montanus*, inscribed on the front side of the base of a statue of a god seated on a throne with an eagle with spread wings beside his left leg, was discovered (Fig. 2).<sup>13</sup> This iconographic type of Jupiter sculpture belongs to the type of presentations copied from the famous cult statue of Capitoline Jupiter<sup>14</sup> and is analogous to the marble statue from Tekija (*Transdierna*). Since the epithet *Montanus* is not confirmed anywhere else in the territory of the Central Balkan Roman provinces, it could be presumed that its meaning implied a god who inhabited higher spheres

(mountains?).<sup>15</sup> An iconographically similar marble statue of Jupiter seated on a throne was discovered in the Limes locality of Tekija (*Transdierna*), and by virtue of its stylistic similarities to the statue from Kostol, it can be presumed that it was modelled in the same workshop (perhaps in a centre like Ratiaria or *Viminacium*?).<sup>16</sup> Above the north-western tower of the Ram fort (tower 5) from the middle ages, a votive monument (used as *spolia*) dedicated to *Jupiter Optimus Maximus* by *vexillatio legionis VII Claudiae* was found, dating to the period of Trajan's wars in

13 A fragmented statue of white marble was found in 1979 during the archaeological excavations in the locality of Kostol (*Pontes*), in a pit situated in the passage of a *porta principalis sinistra*. The statue of the god is naked, with emphasised body musculature and a himation over his left shoulder. The ex-voto was dedicated to *Jupiter Montanus* by *Marcus Lucius Romanus Marini* (-us, -ninus, -anus?), Augustal of Colonia Drobeta. The monument was discovered in the area of the presumed agricultural estate and it is dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Гарашанин, Васић, Марјановић-Вујовић 1984, 48-50.

14 The cult statue of Jupiter Capitoline was made after the fire of the Capitoline shrine in 69 AD, for the temple of Jupiter in Capitoline Hill, Stamper 2005, 14.

15 Гарашанин, Васић, Марјановић-Вујовић 1984, 49.

16 The fragmented marble statue of the god Jupiter on a throne from Tekija, represents only the lower part of the god's naked body with a himation on it and a figure of an eagle with semi-spread wings. On the sides of the throne, analogous to the throne of a statue of Zeus at Olympia, a series of animal figures (sheep, bulls) in shallow relief are presented. The statue is dated to the first decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Tomović 1992, 107, n. 138, fig. 45.1-4.

*Dacia*.<sup>17</sup> An ex-voto offer in the shape of a votive plaque, found in a hoard also in the locality of Tekija, with an image of a Zeus/Jupiter bust presented in *aedicula*, flanked with the attributes of a thunderbolt and sceptre, is dated to the second half of the 1st century.<sup>18</sup> A fragmented marble sculpture of Jupiter was also found in the locality of Karataš (*Diana*), representing a local work of art, dated to the second half (the end?) of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> As for the bronze statuettes of Jupiter, they were almost exclusively found in different localities in the Limes area which is, in the context of the god's symbolism for soldiers and considering the ease with which it could be transported (due to the small size and weight of the statuettes, which was, of course, the case with all cult objects of smaller size and lighter weight)<sup>20</sup> and probable existence of small *lararia* or *sacella* in forts and settlements beside forts on the Danube Limes, not surprising.<sup>21</sup> The majority of the statuettes represent the god as a nude, bearded, mature man in a standing position, with a thunderbolt in one hand and a sceptre in the other hand and, judging by their stylistic characteristics, they were products of local workshops, dated into the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> Among them, a completely nude bronze statuette of Jupiter from the locality of

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17 Симић, Симић 1984, 33, fig. 3; IMS II, 293; Mirković 2015, 71-72.

18 Six silver votive plaques with images of different deities (Jupiter, Sabazius, Magna Mater, Fortuna-Tyche, Luna, Mercury), were found in an bronze vessel in the locality of Tekija (*Transdierna*), belonging probably to a soldier of a Roman cohort or legion. For more about the plaque with the image of the god Zeus/Jupiter see Mano-Zisi 1957, 39-40, fig. XXV. A small number of votive plaques with the image of *Zeus Zbelsourdos* are also known from the locality of Pautalia (?), Вулић 1941-48, 306, n. 72.

19 The fragmented marble statue of Jupiter found in the locality of Karataš (*Diana*) represents a muscular nude torso of the god, with a himation falling down over his left shoulder and covering the lower part of his body. Iconographically, it is very close to the statues of Zeus and Asclepius from the second part of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B. C. However, stylistically, the statue from Karataš, judging by its simplicity and unskilful modelling, represents the work of a local artisan, dated to the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Срејовић, Кузмановић-Цермановић 1987, 90, n. 36, fig. 36; Tomović 1992, 105, n. 134, fig. 36.3.

20 Price 2012, 8.

21 Bronze statuettes of a nude standing Jupiter, with a thunderbolt and sceptre as attributes in his hands were found in the localities of: Kostol (*Pontes*), Veličković 1972, n. 5; an unknown locality in the Limes area, Ibid, n. 3; Ram (*Lederata*), Bošković Robert 2006, 117, n. 4; two statuettes found in the locality of Tekija (*Transdierna*), Cermanović-Kuzmanović 1971, f. 1-4 and f. 5-8; two statuettes from Arčar (*Ratiaria*), Najdenova 1994, 301. A bronze statuette of Jupiter with a patera (instead of a thunderbolt) and a sceptre, was found in the locality of Kostol (*Pontes*), dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Veličković 1972, n. 4.

22 The iconography of bronze statuettes of Jupiter, mostly found in the Limes region imply copying of the classic and Hellenistic sculptures, namely in the shape of *Zeus Brontaios*, modelled on a Greek prototype of Leochares (370-360. B. C.)



Fig. 3 Bronze statuette of Jupiter, Tekija (Transdierna), (<http://virtuelnimuzejdunava.rs/pocetna/bronzana-skulptura-boga-jupitera.i-106.125.html>)

Tekija (Transdierna) could be connected to the *cohort V Gallica* (and be of Gallic provenance) and, in that context, have a military sacral meaning (Fig. 3).<sup>23</sup> Besides the concentration of epigraphic and archaeological monuments dedicated to Jupiter in the Limes area, the other centres where the god (venerated alone or with other deities like Iuno, Liber and Libera, Draco and Dracena, Minerva, Hercules, Nemesis, Ceres, Asclepius, Telesphoros and Hygieia, Nemesis, Lares and anonymous deities)<sup>24</sup> was very popular were mostly important economic and mining centres, like for example *Ratiaria*. Very closely tied to the mightiest Roman god Jupiter, was the cult of the emperor, the imperial cult, which was very dominant in the army. Emperor worship was not only usual in all the units of the Roman army, it was even obligatory for ensuring victory over the enemies of the Roman State.

As the most important female Roman divinity, representing women and female principles of life, the goddess Juno was also associated with childbirth, marriage, the protection of women in peril, but also as a saviour of the Roman State. Concerning the region of the Danube Limes in Lower Pannonia and Moesia Superior, the goddess' cult is epigraphically confirmed in votive monuments found in the locality of *Viminacium*.<sup>25</sup> She is mentioned on votive monuments as *Iuno Regina* in the context of a political deity, the goddess of heaven who protects and brings wellbeing to the Roman emperor, but also as the one who ensures the preservation of the Roman State in a political and military context. Enjoying popularity not only among women, but also soldiers, it was not unexpected that a marble statue of the goddess was found in the locality of Tekija (*Transdierna*) in the Limes region. The marble statue of Juno from Tekija represents a female figure standing on a plinth, dressed in a *chiton* with a *himation* over it, with, probably, a sceptre in her right hand (now missing) and an inscription carved on the front of the plinth.<sup>26</sup> N. Vulić thinks that the location of the statue's find was a Roman

<sup>23</sup> Цермановић-Кузмановић 1974, 159-161.

<sup>24</sup> With Juno *IMS* II, 25; with Liber, Libera and Terra Mater, *IMS* I, n. 16; with Hercules, Minerva and Nemesis, *Il Iug*, 1439; with Ceres, *CIL* 3, 8085; with Draco and Dracena, *IMS* VI, n. 10; with Asclepius, Telesphorus and Hygieia, *Il Iug*, 1438; with Nemesis, Вулић 1941-48, n. 223; with Lares, *IMS* II, 24; with anonymous deities, *IMS* IV, n. 62, n. 101, *Il Iug*, 1414, *AE* 1972, n. 514 and n. 515.

<sup>25</sup> *IMS* II, n. 25.

<sup>26</sup> The inscription carved on the front of the plinth is dedicated to *Iunoni Reginae* by the Decurion Ulpus Antonius Quintus, who was from the municipium of Drobeta. The statue of Juno was modelled in the Classicist style, copying draped female statues from the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B. C., but

fortress in Tekija and dates the statue to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> The fragmented marble statue of Juno from Radujevac, dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, represents a female dressed in a long *chiton* with a *himation*, similar to the statues of a veiled *matronae*.<sup>28</sup>

The goddess Minerva represented the third deity in the Capitoline triad, the goddess who mostly presided over handicrafts, inventions, arts and sciences. A powerful protectress, Minerva was also an averter of all the spirits of evil, danger and disease. For Romans, she was, however, also a goddess of war, a guarantee of victory, whose feast days included gladiatorial games while, on the other hand, as the protectress of women, she usually watched over women's weaving and spinning.<sup>29</sup> Votive monuments dedicated to Minerva were found in the localities of *Singidunum*<sup>30</sup> and *Viminacium*.<sup>31</sup> In both monuments found in the Limes area, the goddess is venerated along with Jupiter and Juno and, thus, the dedications are made to the Capitoline triad. Besides the mentioned monuments, votive monuments on which the Capitoline triad is honoured have also been found in southern parts of the Roman province of Moesia Superior and were dedicated by soldiers, *beneficiarii consularis* and traders, who expressed their gratitude and loyalty to the Roman State with their dedications. Judging by the small bronze finds of Minerva, the deity enjoyed some popularity in the Danube Limes, since two statues have been found in the territory of *Singidunum*, and three statuettes were discovered in the region of the Limes (Fig. 4).<sup>32</sup> Analogous to numerous statuettes of Minerva in other Roman provinces, these

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with a lack of skill in presenting the fullness of the figure, which stylistically implies the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century as the period of its modelling, Tomović 1992, 97, n. 108, fig. 28.4.

27 Вулић 1941-48, 259; Tomović 1992, 97.

28 Срејовић, Цермановић-Кузмановић 1987, 86, n. 34, fig. 33; Tomović 1992, 93, n. 92, fig. 29.4.

29 In time, the goddess Minerva became associated with war and the Roman army, which is confirmed not only by Pompey's dedication of a temple to Minerva for his success in the east, but also by Domitian choosing a goddess for his special protectress and his companion. This close association could be seen not only in coinage and sculpture, but also in the goddess' temples built on the *Campus Martius* and in Domitian's *Forum Transitorium*, as in the great equestrian statue of Domitian which stood in The Forum, with an image of Minerva in his left hand, Hekster 2015, 252-256.

30 IMS I, n. 15.

31 IMS II, n. 25.

32 One bronze statuette of Minerva was found in the Lower town in Kalemegdan, in Singidunum, while three statuettes from the Limes area are unfortunately of unknown provenance, Античка бронза Сингидунума 1997, n. 1; An appliqué in the shape of Minerva's bust found in Obrenovac, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> century, should also be mentioned, Античка бронза Сингидунума 1997, 69, n. 47.



Fig. 4 Bronze statuette of Minerva, unknown locality, Limes area (Veličković 1972, n. 14)

finds represent the goddess standing, wearing a *chiton* with a *himation* and a helmet on her head, and with an *aegis* with Medusa's head and a patera in one hand while leaning on a spear in the other hand. While all the statuettes of Minerva represent solid provincial works modelled on the Greek prototype of *Athena Lemnia*, one statuette discovered in the Limes area distinguishes by excellent skilfulness in the details (the goddess' hair, the egida with Medusa's image on the goddess' chest) and may represent an import dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>33</sup>

Epigraphic and archaeological monuments dedicated to Hercules have been found in abundance in the Danube Limes area in Serbia, confirming the god's popularity as a powerful god of success and victory among soldiers, but also within the autochthonous population. Votive monuments dedicated to Hercules alone<sup>34</sup> or with other deities (like Jupiter or Jupiter, Minerva and Neptune)<sup>35</sup> are mostly known from the Danube Limes region and represent dedications from soldiers. Votive monuments dedicated to Hercules discovered in locations in the Danube Limes area are three votive altars from Viminacium dedicated to *Hercules Conservator*, *Hercules Sanctus* and *Hercules Victor* and a votive monument from Arčar (*Ratiaria*) dedicated to *Hercules*, almost all dedicated by soldiers.<sup>36</sup> The popularity of the Hercules cult in the Limes region can also be perceived in the name of the locality *Ad Herculem* (Čortanovci).

A similar situation repeats regarding the concentration of marble statues of Hercules - the majority of whole and fragmented sculptures and sculptural compositions was found in the Limes region, in the localities of *Ratiaria*, *Singidunum*, *Viminacium*, *Margum*, Prahovo and Karataš.<sup>37</sup> Most of them represent solid provincial works of art, copies of the famous sculptures *Torso Belvedere* and *Farnese Hercules* by Lysippos. The particularly exquisite sculptures of Hercules with Telephos from

33 Veličković 1972, 20, n. 12.

34 In votive monuments from Moesia Superior, Hercules is usually mentioned with the epithets *augustus*, *conservator*, *sanctus*, *invictus* and *victor*. While the epithet *augustus* implies the official character of the cult (the first monuments dedicated to *Hercules Augustus* are dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century), epithets *invictus* and *victor* are the earliest known epithets given to Hercules and they imply that under them, the deity was venerated as the god of strength, invincibility and victory, for more Gavrilović 2014, 17-23.

35 *IMS* I, n. 103; Gavrilović 2014, n. 15.

36 Gavrilović 2014, 17-22.

37 *Ibid*, 29-34.

*Singidunum* (Fig. 5) and *Viminacium*, dated to around 320, are more analogous to the original statue of Lysippos than the copies from Rome and Naples.<sup>38</sup> Bronze statuettes of Hercules were discovered in the territory of the Central Balkan Roman provinces, but only a statuette from the locality of *Ratiaria* is important for the connection with the Limes area and represents an iconographic type of god, unlike the marble sculptures which are associated with only two iconographic types of Hercules statues, as we have already seen.<sup>39</sup> Since almost all dedicants of Hercules votive monuments are soldiers and since the majority of marble statues and bronze statuettes of the god was found in localities in the Danube limes in Serbia, it is quite clear that the official cult of Hercules found his most numerous worshipers among the soldiers who were situated in forts and auxiliary camps in the Limes area, particularly in larger centres like *Singidunum* and *Viminacium*. Since Hercules was (among other functions) the god of invincibility and strength, military men mostly dedicated votive monuments to him, in hope of heroism, endurance and glory. As has already been mentioned, the cult of Hercules with the epithets *augustus*, *conservator*, *invictus* and *victor*, belonged to the official cults of the Roman State and, depending on the political situation and the ideology of the emperor in question, was more or less popular. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of the votive monuments, marble sculptures and bronze statuettes (parts of the sanctuaries and *lararia*) found in the Limes area, are dated to the period of the reign of emperors such as Commodus, Septimius Severus and Alexander Severus. Remains of Hercules' sanctuary were also discovered in the locality Ravna (*Campsia*).<sup>40</sup>

The Roman deity Mars, the god of war, at first an agricultural deity and protector of the crops, evolved later into a protector of the Roman nation and its army.



Fig. 5 Marble sculpture of Hercules with Telephos, *Singidunum* (National Museum Belgrade)

38 The marble statue of Hercules from *Ratiaria* represents a very high quality copy of the Greek prototype represented by the Roman copy of *Torso Belvedere*. However, the sculptures from *Singidunum*, *Viminacium* and *Margum* represent copies of a famous sculpture from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century of Glykon, *Farnese Hercules*, which shows a naked and bearded, mature god caught in a rare moment of repose, leant on his club over which the pelt of a Nemean Lion is thrown, while holding the apples of Hesperides behind his back, Bieber 1955, 36-37; Pollitt 1986, 50-51. For the sculpture of Hercules with Telephos from *Viminacium* see Gavrilović 2014, 31, cat. 24, fig. 24.

39 Three bronze statuettes of Hercules were found in *Ratiaria*, belonging to the iconographic type of *Herakles Albertini* (a standing, naked, bearded, mature god with a club and the pelt of a lion, and a diadem on his head) and *Herakles Lenbach* (a standing, naked, bearded, mature god with the pelt of a lion, and a *rython* in his hand)., for further reading with literature see Ibid, 37-38, cat. 47, fig. 47.

40 Ibid, 54, 58.



Fig. 6 Bronze statuette of Mars, *Viminacium* (Veličković 1972, n. 10)

As a dignified ancestor of Romans, he symbolised not only the raw strength and courage in war, but also invincibility and victory over the enemies of the Roman Empire. He enjoyed particular popularity among the soldiers of the Roman army and was invoked before any impending danger, because of his warrior nature, to give help and bring success in battles. In the territory of today's Serbia, the cult of Mars has been confirmed with six votive monuments, on which the god is mentioned either alone or with the epithets *Sacrum* (votive monument from *Viminacium*), *Campester* and *Equitum*.<sup>41</sup> Of the so far known six bronze statuettes of Mars, three were found in the localities of the Limes area (localities of *Viminacium* and an unknown site in the Limes region), presenting a well known iconographic type of *Mars Ultor* (Fig. 6).<sup>42</sup> Knowing the high degree of Mars' popularity within the Roman army, his primarily military function on the Danube Limes in Serbia, where numerous legions were stationed, is completely expected.

An eternal traveller and protector of roads and voyagers, seamen, traders and their transactions, but also a patron of the arts, the youth and dead souls, Mercury and his popularity among soldiers situated in the Limes region are confirmed with one votive inscription and two marble statues from *Viminacium* and numerous bronze statuettes from different localities.<sup>43</sup> Since the votive inscription dedicated to Mercury, *Liber* and *Libera* doesn't give any information about the dedicant's social or professional status, the reason for the dedication or the function in which deities were respected, we will turn to more than a dozen bronze statuettes

41 The cult of Mars has been epigraphically confirmed in the territory of today's Serbia with five votive monuments from the locality of *Timacum Minus*, near Knjaževac (which represents the oldest fortification in the area of Timok, dated from the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, garrisoned by *Cohors I Thracum Syriaca*, which was replaced from the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century by *Cohors II Aurelia Dardanorum*, which was, in the last decades of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, replaced by *pseudocomitatenses Timacenses auxilarii*). One votive monument dedicated to *Mars Sacrum* comes from locality of Kalište, *Viminacium*, where traces of a *castellum* have been confirmed, for more see Gavrilović 2010a, 266-278.

42 The iconographic type of *Mars Ultor* presents the god as a mature, bearded man in full armour with a helmet on his head, holding a spear and a shield. Emperor Augustus was the promoter of the cult of *Mars Ultor*, Mars the Avenger and his temple was dedicated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B. C., in the Forum of Augustus.

43 *IMS* II, n. 28; Gavrilović 2014, 63-81, cat. 97-166. Similar votive inscriptions dedicated to the deities Mercury, *Liber* and *Libera* are known from *Apulum*, *Carnuntum* and *Rome*. Two marble sculptures of Mercury, from *Viminacium*, presenting a head of a young man and a torso of young deity belong to the Classicistic style of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B. C. (the head of a deity) and copies of Praxiteles' sculptures (the torso of a deity). Among numerous bronze statuettes of Mercury, there are also nine figurines of the iconographic type of Hermes-Thoth.

found in localities like *Ratiaria*, *Singidunum*, Tekija, Karataš and Male Livadice,<sup>44</sup> in search of the answer of Mercury's popularity among soldiers in the Limes. The majority of the statuettes belong to the iconographic type of *Hermes Kerdos* and represent solid provincial work dated to the period of the 2<sup>nd</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> century. However, two statuettes from the localities of Tekija (*Transdierna*) and Karataš (*Diana*) represent exquisite imported works of art, where the god is shown naked, with a winged *petasos* on his head and winged sandals on his feet, holding a tortoise in his hand (statuette from Tekija, Fig. 7), or a marsupium and caduceus (missing) in the case of a statuette from Karataš.<sup>45</sup> As the god of commerce and travel, patron of traders and guardian of merchants, artisans and travellers, Mercury was certainly a very popular deity among soldiers, veterans, free men and slaves who travelled or inhabited the settlements beside the forts and auxiliary camps on the Limes. Judging by the number of bronze figurines found in the localities in the Danube region, it can be presumed that many houses in settlements and forts had a small statuette of Mercury in their *lararia*.

The cult of the goddess Diana, protectress of nature, forests, hunting, mines, but also women and childbirth, deity of wild and remote spaces and invincible huntress concerned with the chase, enjoyed enviable popularity in the Limes area, partly because of her association with Mars and partly because of her responsibility for the outer frontiers and the protection of lives and the welfare of soldiers who were stationed on the frontiers. The toponym *Diana*, which refers to the fort in Karataš (*Statio Cataractarum*), was maybe given because of Diana's sanctuary that existed there (Fig. 8).<sup>46</sup> Votive monuments dedicated to Diana alone (with the epithets *Augusta*, *Sacra*, *Regina*) or with other deities (Apollo or Silvanus), were



Fig. 7 Bronze statuette of Mercury, *Diana* (Karataš) (<http://virtuelnimuzejdunava.rs/pocetna/rimski-bog-merkur.i-87.125.html>)

<sup>44</sup> Летица 1984, 183-184, fig. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Among other animals, the tortoise is commonly seen animal in Mercury's iconography and the statuette from Tekija (*Transdierna*) can be dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The statuette from Karataš (*Diana*) represents a high quality imported statuette of Mercury with the image similar to the images of the emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, mostly to the image of the emperor Caligula. The statuette is dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Gavrilović 2014, 72-73, cat. 122.

<sup>46</sup> The locality of Diana was located between Dierna (*Zerna*) and Kostol (*Pontes*) and is mentioned as the locality Zanes among the forts which were reconstructed by Justinian. Since the name of the Roman goddess Diana is encompassed in the name of the locality and since, in the early Roman strata of the fort in the locality, a marble votive relief with the representation of the goddess Diana hunting and a small marble head of the goddess were found, it can be presumed that there was a sanctuary dedicated to the goddess in the very locality of *Diana* / Karataš, Ранков-Кондић 2009, 371.





Fig. 8 Goddess Diana, locality *Diana* (Karataš) (<http://virtuelnimuzejdunava.rs/pocetna/glava-rimske-boginje-diane.i-89.125.html>)

found in several localities in the territory of *Moesia Superior*, like Arčar (*Ratiaria*) and *Viminacium*.<sup>47</sup> As for the fragmented marble sculptures of Diana presenting the deity in the hunt, they were found in *Viminacium* and iconographically belong to the type of Praxiteles' *Artemis Brauronia* and Leochares' *Artemis Agrotera* with a deer.<sup>48</sup> Fragmented marble votive reliefs with a representation of Diana hunting were also found in *Viminacium*.<sup>49</sup>

The cults of *Liber* and *Libera*, that is of the god *Dionysus* (*Bachus*) and his thiasos, celebrated the deities as patrons of agriculture, fertility, wine, vine growing, joviality, good spirits and feast, but also as protectors of mines and miners, iatric and chthonian deities. The cults of *Liber* and *Libera* have been confirmed with votive monuments, sculptures and statuettes found in *Singidunum*, *Viminacium* and *Kostol (Pontes)*. The votive monuments are dedicated to either *Liber* alone (with the epithets *Pater*, *Sacrum*, *Augustus*, *Sanctus*)<sup>50</sup>, with *Libera* or with some other deity/deities, like *Jupiter* and *Mercury*, or the goddesses *Juno* and *Terra Mater*. Iconographically, *Dionysus (Bachus, Liber)* was most frequently represented in relief, sculpture and small statues as a young naked standing man, with a *nebris* over his shoulder and attributes such as a *thyrsus*, *cantharus*, grapes, *pedum* or a *cultellus*. Fragmented marble sculptures from *Singidunum* and *Viminacium* depict exactly that iconographical type of the god's statues.<sup>51</sup> A marble votive relief with an inscription, from the locality of *Kostol (Pontes)*, represents one of the most interesting finds dedicated to *Liber* and *Libera*, presenting two deities with a *putto* and *Maenad* in the main scene, while in the lower register there is a scene depicting "The death of *Pentheus*" (Fig. 9).<sup>52</sup> The relief from *Kostol (Pontes)* is

<sup>47</sup> CdO 2016-2017; *IMS* II, 63, n. 5, n. 297.

<sup>48</sup> Both fragmented statuettes were dressed in a short, belted chiton and while the first statuette where the goddess is represented pulling an arrow from a quiver is dated to the last decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the second statuette is dated to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or the first decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Tomović 1992, 92-93, fig. 30.6, 18.3.

<sup>49</sup> Томовић 1990, 104-105, 130; *IMS* II, n. 35.

<sup>50</sup> *IMS* I, n. 16, 17; *IMS* II, n. 27, 28; *AE* 1938, 93.

<sup>51</sup> Tomović 1992, 109, n. 150, fig. 38.1; 110, n. 151, fig. 47.3; 111, n. 157, fig. 41.3.

<sup>52</sup> The votive relief with the inscription dedicated to the divine pair of *Liber* and *Libera* by *Aurelius Siro* presents, in the main scene, the gods in a standing position, with a small *putto* with an object and playing the *kettledrum* beside *Liber* and a *Maenad* holding an unidentified object beside the goddess *Libera*. The god *Liber* is nude, with a *nebris* over his right shoulder and a *thyrsus* in his left hand, and feeding a panther from a *cantharus* in his right hand. The goddess *Libera* is holding a *thyrsus*.

dated to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> – the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and it is presumed that its owner was a very educated and learned person who was well acquainted with the cult of Dionysus.

Although primarily the goddess of love, pleasure, beauty, fertility and prosperity, Venus, with the epithet *Victrix*, was believed to ensure victory over enemies. No votive monuments dedicated to Venus are known from the Danube Limes area, but there are marble fragmented sculptures and statuettes of the goddess found in localities of *Singidunum*, *Viminacium* and Karataš (*Diana*).<sup>53</sup> The goddess was mostly presented as an iconographical type of *Venus pudica*, as a naked standing female figure covering her *pudenda* with one hand, as is the case with a bronze statuette found in the locality of Rtkovo-Glamija I (Fig. 10).<sup>54</sup> However, there are more iconographical differences between the lead statuettes of Venus known from the localities between *Sirmium* and *Viminacium*.<sup>55</sup> They represent the products of local workshops, which probably existed in *Sirmium* and *Viminacium* and were producing this type of statuette for local shrines (*aediculae*), dating from the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

Although not as popular as the previously mentioned deities, the cult of the goddess Nemesis should be mentioned, since votive monuments and marble sculptures of the goddess have been found in the Limes area and the interior of *Moesia Superior*, in the localities of *Singidunum* and *Viminacium*.<sup>56</sup> The goddess was honoured as the protectress of soldiers and, generally, as the goddess of military success and victory. The epithets that are attributed to the goddess (*Augusta*, *Sancta*,

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*sus* in her right hand while. In a lower register from the main scene, two Maenads can be seen with Agave, who is holding a dagger in her right raised hand, and the decapitated head of a naked man in her raised left hand. To the right of Agave, Cadmus is holding an altar or rock in his right hand and a bag in his left hand. There is also a nude Satyr playing a wind instrument, Васић, Јовановић 1987, 127-134, fig. 1.

53 Tomović 1992, 87-89, n. 65-81.

54 Gabričević 1986, 74, fig. 1.

55 S. Pop Lazić distinguishes five types of lead statuettes of Venus: the first type is represented by the figural composition of Venus with Amor on a pedestal, the second type depicts a schematised type of *Venus Pudica*, the third type presents the type *Venus Pudica* but more harmoniously, the fourth type shows a nude Venus with a mantle wrapped around her left leg, while the fifth type presents a three-dimensional Venus with her right hand outstretched, while in her left hand she is holding a plate, Pop Lazić 2012, 151-164.

56 Gavrilović 2011, 191-203.



Fig. 9 Votive icon of Liber and Libera, Kostol (*Pontes*) (Васић, Јовановић 1987)

Fig. 10 Bronze statuette of *Venus Pudica*, Rtkovo-Glamija I (Gabričević 1986)





Fig. 11 Votive monument dedicated to Nemesis, *Viminacium* (Gavrilović 2011)

*Regina*) imply a connection between the goddess and the official cult, beginning with the emperor Claudius and following the imperial coin propaganda, and it can be concluded that it served to promote this connection.<sup>57</sup> One marble monument particularly emphasises the role of Nemesis as the goddess who is the destroyer of the enemies of the Roman State and who brings victory and peace to the Romans, a fragmented marble sculpture of Nemesis trampling on a prostrate figure with an inscription dedicated to Nemesis on its base, from *Viminacium* (Fig. 11).<sup>58</sup> From the thus far known epigraphic and archaeological material, it can be presumed that the goddess had sanctuaries at *Singidunum* and *Viminacium* and that her cult was also connected to the amphitheatre in *Viminacium* and gladiatorial games.<sup>59</sup>

The cults of the iatric deities, Asclepius and Hygieia, judging by thus far known epigraphic and archaeological monuments, were not so popular in the Danube Limes area, since epigraphically, their cults have only been confirmed in the locality of Arčar (*Ratiaria*), near the Danube.<sup>60</sup>

The cult of the Thracian Horseman or Thracian Hero, known in the territories of the Roman provinces of Thrace, *Moesia Superior* and *Moesia Inferior*, related to an indigenous Thracian god, of complex theology, who enjoyed considerable popularity among Roman soldiers and veterans. Epigraphic monuments dedicated to *Deo Heroni*, *Deo Taton* and *Deo Mundryto*, are known from the localities of *Singidunum* and *Viminacium*.<sup>61</sup> In the context of the Thracian horseman cult, a particularly interesting example is represented by the votive monument found in the locality of Karataš (*Diana*), dedicated to *Deo Toto*. Although V. Kondić presumed that, by the name *Deo Toto*, the Egyptian god Toth was considered, after new epigraphic analyses, it is more probable that the monument was dedicated to *Deus Totovitio* who is analogous to the inscription discovered at *Svilengrad*, dedi-

57 Hornum 1993, 13-19.

58 A fragmented marble monument of Nemesis trampling on a prostrate figure, from *Viminacium*, presents the goddess with her left foot on the back of a female figure. The dedicant of the monument is Aelius Pompeianus, who was maybe of oriental origin and the monument is dated into the period of the reign of the dynasty of Severi, Vasic 1979, 31-35; Gavrilović 2011, 194-199.

59 Ibid, 201.

60 *AE* 1902, 42. For more about the cults and porphyry and marble sculptures of Asclepius and Hygieia, see Vasić et al. 2016, 83-87; Gavrilović 2010b; Bošković-Robert 2006, 457-468.

61 *IMS* I, 2; *IMS* II, n. 16, 21, 309; Cermanović-Kuzmanović 1962, 38, n. 52.

cated to the Thracian Hero referred to as *Heroni Totoivhiano*,<sup>62</sup> actually erected in honour of the Thracian Hero. The dedicant of the monument was a Roman soldier, probably of Thracian origin, who served in legio IV Flavia, on the Danube frontier.

A votive altar dedicated to *Genius Daciarum* was found near the supposed settlement in the locality of Tekija (*Transdierna*), which was contemporary with the fort in Tekija from the 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>63</sup>

Among different deities of Asia Minor and Syrian origin whose cults have been confirmed in the territories of the Central Balkan Roman provinces,<sup>64</sup> the cult of the god Jupiter Dolichenus, along with the Persian cult of the god Mithras, were the most popular in the Danube Limes area. This fact is not surprising, considering the symbolism they had for soldiers as invincible, victorious and saviour gods, although the theologies (and, logically, ritual practices) of those two cults differed.<sup>65</sup> The cult of Jupiter Dolichenus is confirmed with numerous epigraphic monuments, marble sculptures, two bronze triangular votive plates, one tabula ansata, one bronze statuette and one terracotta.<sup>66</sup> The epigraphic monuments of

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62 The votive monument dedicated to *Heroni Totoivhiano*, from Svilengrad, is now situated in the City Museum of Veliko Trnovo (inv. no. 1859). It is suggested that the epithet *Totovitio* is a toponymic modifier, which means "a hero from Totoithia", Grbić 2013, 14-16.

63 The votive altar found in the locality of Tekija (*Transdierna*) was dedicated to *Genius Sanctus Paternus Daciarum* by a centurion named Antonius Maximus, who belonged to one of the cohorts (*cohort V Gallorum* and *cohort IX Gemina Voluntariorum*) that were situated at the fort in Tekija during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Цермановић-Кузмановић 1984, 341-342.

64 The epigraphic and archaeological monuments confirm the presence of the cults of Magna Mater and her consorts Attis, Sabazius, Jupiter Dolichenus, Jupiter Turmasgades, Jupiter Melanus, Jupiter Cidiessus, Zeus Okkonenos, Zeus Ezzaios, Zeus Synenos, Mên, Artemis of Ephesus, Sol Invictus and Dea Syria, Gavrilović 2010.

65 Here, primarily referring to the fact that the religion of Jupiter Dolichenus probably didn't belong to mystery religions, as Mithraism did and that, as such, Mithraism required initiation rites and excluded women, unlike the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus. However, both gods comprised a strong military component - Jupiter Dolichenus was presented dressed in Roman military dress, while Mithras, as a warrior against evil and a carrier of the light, represented an ideal for soldiers in the Roman army in pursuit of success and victory over the enemies of the Roman State.

66 More than dozen epigraphic monuments dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus alone or with some other deity/deities, have been confirmed in the following localities in the Limes area: Arčar (*Ratiaria*), Košava (Vidin), Jasen, Veliko Gradište (*Pincum*), Čezava (*Castrum Novae*), Kličevac (*Viminacium*), Karataš (*Diana*) and Brza Palanka (Egeta) Gavrilović 2010, 293-302. Marble statues of Jupiter Dolichenus sometimes presented with his paredra Junona Dolichena were found in the localities of Vidin (*Bononia*), *Viminacium*, Čezava (*Castrum Novae*) and Brza Palanka (*Egeta*). One gilded bronze votive triangular plate was found in the locality of Brza Palanka (*Egeta*), one bronze votive

the god, found in localities in the Limes area, are mostly dedicated *pro salute* of the Roman emperor/emperors, by inhabitants of indigenous, Greek or Oriental origin and are connected to the period of the reign of the emperors from the dynasty of Severi (dating from 193. to 235.), when the cult of the god flourished and reached the peak of its popularity. In almost half of the monuments, dedicants are military persons - a governor of *Moesia Superior*, soldiers, the cohort or the priests of the cult (who were also in the army), which further supports the presumption regarding the popularity of Jupiter Dolichenus as one of the most prominent gods among *dii militares*.<sup>67</sup> Of particular interest is a votive monument found in the locality of Glamija (village Rtkovo), dedicated by a priest of Jupiter Dolichenus and Dea Syria.<sup>68</sup> The only confirmed sanctuary that is, in our opinion, a *sacrarium* of the god Jupiter Dolichenus was discovered in the locality of Brza Palanka (*Egeta*, Fig. 12, 13), although it can be presumed that other sanctuaries of the god existed in the localities of Karataš (*Diana*), Arčar (*Ratiaria*), *Viminacium* and perhaps Čezava and Glamija, near Kostol (*Pontes*).<sup>69</sup> The appearance and rapid diffusion of the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus in the areas near to the Danube Limes are certainly connected with the soldiers, merchants, administrative officials and slaves of eastern

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triangular plate (unfortunately lost) was discovered in Vidin (Bononia). A fragmented terracotta presenting the deity was found in the necropolis "Više grobalja" in Viminacium, *Ibid*, 302-310.

67 A votive monument from Karataš (Diana) dedicated by L. Marius Perpetuus, future governor of the province Moesia Superior, *Ibid*, 298, n. 93; votive monuments from Arčar (Ratiaria), Veliko Gradište (Pincum) and Čezava, dedicated by soldiers, *Ibid*, 295, 297, n. 87, 91 and 92; tabula ansata with the dedication of *Cohors I Cretum*, from Brza Palanka (*Egeta*), *Ibid*, 298-299, n. 94; votive monuments dedicated by the priests of the Dolichenian cult, from the localities of Arčar (*Ratiaria*), Jasen (Vidin), Kličevac (*Viminacium*) and Glamija (village Rtkovo), *Ibid*, 294-295, 296, 302, n. 86, 89, 100; Габричевић 1987, 144-146.

68 Габричевић 1987, 144-146. The votive monument was found during archaeological excavations in the locality of Glamija I (village Rtkovo), in the south-western corner of a Late Antique fort's wall, as *spolia*. The dedicant is Julius Apollinaris, a priest of Jupiter Dolichenus and Dea Syria, and the formula *in memoriam* could imply his foreign origin. The fact that Julius Apollinaris was a priest in both the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus and Dea Syria, is not surprising, knowing from historical sources that the two deities had a mutual sanctuary in Hierapolis, where their statues stood. It can be also presumed that Julius Apollinaris was probably in some way connected to some of the military units or held some military position in some locality in the Danube Limes area, since it was not uncommon for soldiers to function as a priest in the army as well.

69 A detailed analysis and the argument for the existence of several *dolichena* that probably existed in other localities in the Danube Limes area, are given in an article by the author N. Gavrilović Vitas "Dolicheneum and Dolichenus' cult objects from the locality Brza Palanka - Egeta. Contribution to the study of the cult of Iuppiter Dolichenus", which is currently in print.

origin who were present in the aforementioned territory and who venerated the deity because of his military and invincible character, who brought needed victory, glory and further power to the Roman State. However, systematic plundering and destruction of Jupiter Dolichenus' temples along the Rhine and the Danube Limes during the reign of Maximus Thrax (235.-238.), rapidly contributed to the disappearance of the cult of this very popular military deity.<sup>70</sup>

In connection with the previously mentioned, a second important oriental cult was the cult of the Persian god Mithras, even more popular in the Danube Limes localities than any other oriental deity. An Iranian god of light, a solar deity whose cult was the last to penetrate western parts of the Roman Empire from the Hellenized East, Mithras gained many followers in the short time of his existence, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. As a creator and warrior against Evil, Mithra was an excellent *exemplum* to follow for soldiers and military officials, offering the hope of salvation and rebirth in his theology. The votive monuments dedicated to Mithras have been found in Danube Limes area localities such as Arčar (*Ratiaria*), Smederevo (originally from *Viminacium*), *Singidunum*, *Viminacium* and Prahovo (*Aquae*),<sup>71</sup> while votive relief icons have been found in numerous localities not only in the Limes region, but also in the interior of the Central Balkan Roman provinces territory. In most of the votive monuments, Mithras is mentioned by the epithet *Invictus*, as the deity under whose protection the dedicant and his family put themselves. Numerous votive icons with a main scene of *tauroctony* in the middle register were discovered in Danube Limes localities, among which the most interesting are a votive icon found in the *sacrarium* in the locality of Brza Palanka (*Egeta*), discovered along with other epigraphic and archaeological finds connected to the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus (allowing the hypothesis that a *mithraeum* existed in the vicinity of the *dolicheneum* presumed to be situated in the locality of *Egeta*),<sup>72</sup> and a marble votive relief icon depicting the act of *tauroctony*,



Fig. 12 Jupiter Dolichenus and Juno Dolichena, Brza Palanka (*Egeta*) (Museum of Krajina, Negotin: N. Borić, S. Kostić)

Fig. 13 Triangle votive plate of Jupiter Dolichenus, Brza Palanka (*Egeta*) (photo: Historical Museum of Serbia)



70 The most probable cause for the destruction of Jupiter Dolichenus' temples by Maximinus Thrax was the richness of the sanctuaries - cult objects made of silver and bronze (gilded too), coin hoards and gold objects and jewels decorated with precious stones (for example the *dolichena* by Saalburg and Pfünz), for more see Tóth 1973, 112-114.

71 AE 1966, 344; IMS II, n. 29, 30, 31, 32, 34, 308; *IlJug* 7; *IlJug* 483; IMS I, 104. We should mention a votive altar found in the locality of Karataš (*Diana*) with two letters D and M, which could be read as *Deo Mitrae*, Mirković 2015, 93, n. 40.

72 The currently known localities where sanctuaries of the gods Jupiter Dolichenus and Mithras

with different scenes from the theology of the cult in the upper register, found in the locality of Tekija (*Transdierna*, Fig. 14), which represents one of the finest works of local origin, dated to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>73</sup> However, unlike the cult of the god *Sol Invictus*, another important solar deity whose cult was adopted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and particularly emphasised from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and who was a part of the official imperial ideology and propaganda of different emperors,<sup>74</sup> the cult of Mithras, was never included into the official cults of the Roman State. As with the majority of oriental cults, the cult of the god Mithras lasted until the 4<sup>th</sup> century when, as a powerful opponent to the rising Christianity it was, with all the other pagan cults, destroyed and forgotten.

The possibility of the existence of magic practices in some of the localities in the Danube Limes should also be mentioned. A discovery of an icosahedron of quartz crystal in the western semicircular tower of the southern gate of the locality of Čezava (*Castrum Novae*), probably dated to 3<sup>rd</sup> century, leads to the hypothesis that it was maybe used as a status symbol related to a certain cult or magic ritual.<sup>75</sup> Analysing the teachings of leading philosophical schools of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century neopythagorean and neoplatonical school, M. Vasić thinks that the icosahedron from the locality of Čezava was used as a mystical-magical object, probably by

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have been confirmed, relatively close one to the other, are: Doliche and Dura-Europos in Syria, Rome (Aventine), Porolissum in Dacia, Carnuntum and Brigetio in Pannonia Superior, Stockstadt and Saalburg in Germania Superior and probably Virinum in Noricum (two *mithraea* are mentioned on the inscriptions from votive monuments), Schwarzer 2012, 172

73 This type of relief is well known not only in the Roman province of Moesia Superior, but also in Moesia Inferior and the Dacia territory. As A. Cermanović-Kuzmanović points out, since the upper part of Mithras' votive icon was used as *spolia* in the walls of the fort from the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> century, the icon itself can be dated to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Цермановић-Кузмановић 1972, 147-151; Campbell 1968, 1-2.

74 Here we are referring to the introduction of the Syrian god *Sol Invictus*, who was introduced to Rome in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and worshipped (starting from the emperor Hadrian to Commodus, Septimius and Alexander Severus, but mostly Elagabalus), not the older indigenous Roman god of the sun, whose cult existed for many centuries, Halsberghe 1972, 46-47; Hoey 1939, 456-481.

75 M. Vasić does not exclude the possibility that the icosahedron found in the locality of Čezava could be dated to an earlier time, perhaps the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, since it was found in a layer dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, but it could have been used earlier, Vasić 1994, 167. Analogies to the icosahedron from *Castrum Novae* are known from Germany, Britain, France, Italy and Turkey, but only the icosahedron from Italy (found near the locality of Arezzo, an icosahedron found in a female grave, dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century) and the icosahedron from Turkey (now in the Istanbul Art Museum) are completely similar to our find, since they are not inscribed with Latin letters and Roman numerals on their sides, for more see Kostov 2014, 25-26.



Fig. 14 Marble votive icon of the god Mithras, Tekija (*Transdierna*) (<http://virtuelnimuzejdunava.rs/pocetna/reljef-boga-mitre.i-107.125.html>)

some higher officer of the cohorts stationed in *Castrum Novae*, educated to understand all the possibilities contained in the icosahedron's symbolism.<sup>76</sup>

After a summarised review of the most important cults epigraphically and archaeologically confirmed in the localities in the Danube frontier during the period of Roman reign, we should turn to the question of the ritual practices that were part of the soldiers' lives in the forts along the Danube border. Due to the lack of literary sources concerning the religious ceremonies of the Roman army, we are bound to mainly turn to epigraphical evidence and archaeological sources. However, a religious calendar preserved on a papyrus found in *Dura Europos* about the cult ceremonies held by the Roman army throughout the course of the year, known as *Feriale Duranum*, offers us some insight into the festivals and ceremonies practised by the Roman soldiers.

It is generally accepted that *Feriale Duranum* represented a copy of a document which was in the possession of every military unit in the Roman State, but

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<sup>76</sup> Vasić 1994, 175-176.



it is more important that, judging by its content, the cults of Capitoline Triad, the gods Mars, Victoria and other deities who belonged to the circle of the so-called *dii militares*, were honoured with more ceremonies than the other gods and goddesses of the Roman pantheon. However, with the evidence in the shape of numerous votive and archaeological monuments dedicated to, for example, oriental gods like Jupiter Dolichenus and Mithras, it is clear that their cults were very popular among soldiers, although they did not belong to the official pantheon of the Roman State but, nevertheless, soldiers had the freedom to worship them openly. Whatever deity was in question or whether the honouring of certain emperor was in question, the official ceremonies were performed either on the parade ground or in the headquarters of the unit, the *principia*.<sup>77</sup>

The calendar of *Feriale Duranum* introduces us to ritual practices, rites and sacrifices (for example, of an ox in honour of Jupiter, a cow in honour of the goddesses Juno, Minerva and Victory or a bull in honour of Mars), performed in the cult acts for the particular festival or anniversary of a certain emperor or empress. Roman soldiers were united in different cult practices, by a calendar with festivals and ceremonies, in which prescribed sacrifices were part of ritual rites, thus forming social unity and a consciousness of the importance of participating and being a part of religious practices and cult acts performed in honour of their favourite god, goddess or Roman emperor/empress. Different religious practices and ceremonies were certainly a part of daily life in the Roman forts on the Danube frontier too, about which religious beliefs and rites together with numerous epigraphic and archaeological finds discovered in the Limes area represent a strong and lasting testimony.

*Translated by Nadežda Gavrilović Vitas*

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<sup>77</sup> Dziurdzik 2016, 381.

## ABBREVIATIONS

*AE* *L'Année Epigraphique*, Paris

*CdO* *Chronique d'Orient 2016-2019*

*CIL* *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin

*Il Jug* A. and J. Sasel „*Inscriptiones Latinae quae in Iugoslavia inter annos MCMXL et*

*MCMLX et inter annos MCMLX et MCMLXX et inter annos MCMII et MCMXL repertae et editae sunt*, Ljubljana 1963, 1978 and 1986

*IMS* *Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure*, Belgrade

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CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији  
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

94(398)(082)  
904”652”(497.11)(082)

VIVERE militare est : from populus to emperors - living on the  
frontier. Vol. 1 / [editorsin Snežana Golubović, Nemanja Mrđić].  
- Belgrade : Institute of Archaeology, 2018 (Belgrade : Digital Art).  
- 364 str. : ilustr. ; 24 cm. - (Monographs / Institute of Archaeology,  
Belgrade ; no. 68/1)

Tiraž 500. - Str. 7-8: Preface / Miomir Korać. - Napomene i bibliografske  
reference uz tekst. - Bibliografija uz svaki rad.

ISBN 978-86-6439-036-1  
ISBN 978-86-6439-035-4 (niz)

a) Римска држава - Лимес - Србија - Зборници b) Археолошки налази,  
римски - Србија - Зборници

COBISS.SR-ID 267209740



