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and the Roman Rural Economy**

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Roman Rural Settlements in the Provinces of *Pannonia Inferior* and *Moesia Superior*

Olivera Ilić

The Pannonian area and the northern parts of modern Serbia belong to a wider geographical area that can be designated as the Middle and Lower Danube Valley. Over centuries, the Danube and the Sava rivers have connected this region with Central Europe and Italy to the west, and the eastern parts of the Balkans and the Black Sea to the east. The valleys of the Morava and Vardar rivers offered a connecting channel with the Mediterranean world.

After the conquest of this territory in the process of Roman expansion in the 1st century AD and the establishment of Roman administration in the newly-created provinces, organised urbanisation emerged, alongside autochthonous rural settlements, which continued to exist for some time.

According to investigations conducted so far, this process developed more intensively in the Pannonia region than was the case in the barely accessible mountainous and hilly areas of the Central Balkans (fig. 1). The new organisation of the Roman state resulted in the establishment of new types of rural settlements: the *vici* (table 1). Such settlements, which to a great extent resulted from the settlement of veterans, were important production units. These played a part in supplying the urban centres before the establishment of agricultural estates of the *villa rustica* type.

Investigations in the Srem region (the south-eastern portion of *Pannonia Inferior*) have revealed that early Roman settlements dating to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD were situated in the same areas where building complexes classified as ‘villas’ later were constructed, or in their immediate vicinity. The sites of Beocin-Dumbovo, Hrtkovci, and Sasinci are examples of this evolution.

A boundary marker uncovered in the area of the village of Beocin-Dumbovo bears an inscription about the assignment of land of the *Iosista* village to a Titus Claudius Priscus, the prefect of the *ala I civium Romanorum* in the second half of the 1st century AD. This evidence suggests an early Romanisation of the area.¹ The inhabitants in this settlement lived in elliptical pit houses that had rectangular open hearths (fig. 2). In addition to traditional local pottery (consisting of rough handmade pots), fragments of *terra sigillata* and Italic glass were also found. Ceramic spindle whorls and flint tools indicate that an indigenous economic system continued to exist.

Typological and stratigraphic analyses of the housing structures and the finds, particularly of pottery, point to the parallel existence of the indigenous population, with their protohistoric socio-economic structure, and the Italic Roman soldiers.² In this still inadequately documented symbiosis, we can assume that two opposite socio-economic categories were the fundamental components in the formation of the *vicus* at Dumbovo-Beocin.

SITE	LOCATION	PROVINCE	CENTURY
Dumbovo, Beocin, Srem	Roman <i>limes</i> . Later, a villa was built near the <i>vicus</i>	<i>Pannonia Inferior</i>	1 st –2 nd century
Kudos, Sasinci; Srem	Main road between <i>Sirmium</i> and <i>Singidunum</i> . Later, a villa was built near the <i>vicus</i>	<i>Pannonia Inferior</i>	1 st –2 nd century
Kuzmine, Srem	Main road between <i>Sirmium</i> and <i>Singidunum</i>	<i>Pannonia Inferior</i>	1 st –2 nd century
Malo Kuvalovo, Krnjesevci; Srem	Main road between <i>Sirmium</i> and <i>Singidunum</i>	<i>Pannonia Inferior</i>	1 st century
Vranj, Hrtkovci, Srem	Left bank of the Sava. Later, a villa was near the <i>vicus</i>	<i>Pannonia Inferior</i>	1 st –2 nd century
Prhovo, Srem	Main road between <i>Sirmium</i> and <i>Singidunum</i>	<i>Pannonia Inferior</i>	1 st –2 nd century
Bube, near Belgrade	Vicinity of <i>Singidunum</i>	<i>Moesia Superior</i>	1 st –2 nd century

Table 1: Roman *vici* in the provinces of *Pannonia Inferior* and *Moesia Superior*.

Usually, the main economic activity of the inhabitants of a *vicus* was agriculture and animal farming; the latter is confirmed by faunal remains of domestic and wild animal species recovered at the site of Dumbovo-Beocin. The animal bones studied (634 bone finds), belonged to both phases, with the older horizon represented by the *vicus*, and the later settlement embodied by the *villa rustica*.³ For both chronological periods the bones of domestic animals represent the majority when compared to those of wild animals. Faunal taxa included: domestic cattle (*Bos taurus*), sheep (*Ovis aries*), goats (*Capra hircus*), pigs (*Sus domesticus*), horses (*Equus caballus*), dogs (*Canis familiaris*), and chicken (*Gallus gallus*). The wild animal bones consisted of remains of red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) and greylag goose (*Anser anser*). Fish such as carp, pike, and catfish were also represented.

Analysis of bone material from this site shows that domestic ox was the most common species (34.3%), followed by pig (24.8%) and sheep/goat (18.9%). Wild animals make up only 1.4% of the total. These numbers clearly represent the way

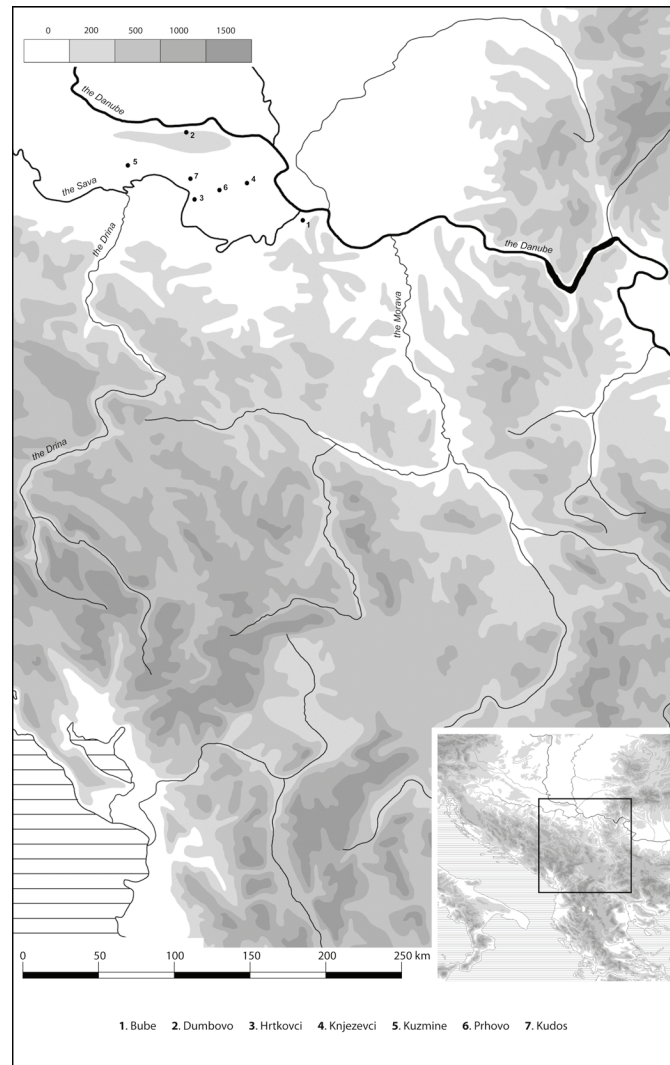


Fig. 1: Roman *vici* in the provinces of *Pannonia Inferior* and *Moesia Superior*.

of life of the inhabitants in the Roman rural settlement, which was primarily based on domestic animal breeding rather than on hunting. Most of the animals were used for food, except for the horse, that served as work animal, and the dog, whose function was as guardian or pet.

Besides farming and cattle breeding, forest exploitation and various kinds of handicrafts (e.g. pottery, leather and wool processing, crafts associated with wood-working) also contributed to the economic activity of the *vici* in Dumbovo. We suppose that the processing of raw materials was, at first, limited only to satisfying the needs of the inhabitants and their immediate neighbours. However, at a later point they reached more distant areas via trade routes, thus becoming a segment

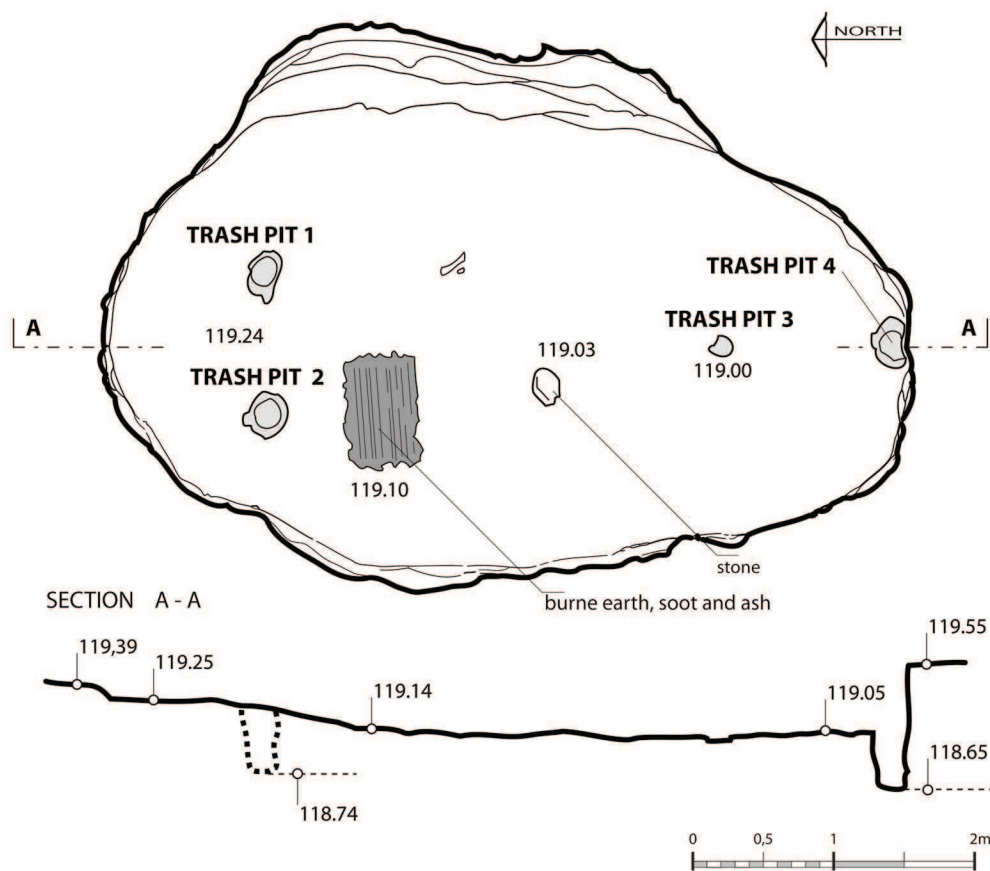


Fig. 2: Beocin, Dumbovo: plan and cross-section of Hut 2.

of the economic life of the province. This was the time of the reorganisation of the frontier defensive system and when auxiliary troops were deployed on the Danube banks. Archaeological investigations have revealed that after the abandonment of the pit houses and the disappearance of that type of settlement, a rather small country estate – a villa rustica with watchtower – was established in the valley in the 4th century AD.

Although villas are recorded in relatively large numbers, they have not been systematically investigated so far in the provinces of Lower Pannonia and Upper Moesia. We can speak of the typology of those structures only on the basis of examples from the neighbouring regions, primarily Pannonia. This is thanks to the great expert on the architecture of Roman villas, Edith Thomas, who made an overview of villas in Roman Pannonia, including the territory of present-day Vojvodina.⁴ Unfortunately, given that most of the villas in the Central Balkans are insufficiently investigated, a typological classification of those structures, as well as their size, could not be precisely established.

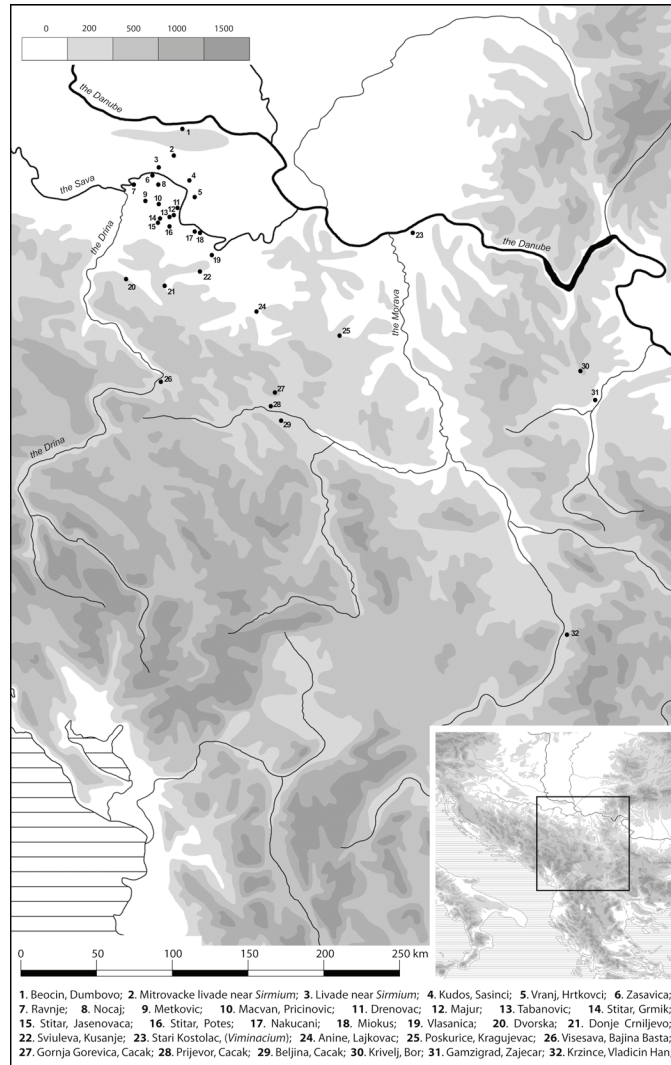


Fig. 3: Roman *villae rusticae* in the provinces of *Pannonia Inferior* and *Moesia Superior*.

Region of *Sirmium* and *Bassianae*

A significant number of villas have been recorded or partially investigated in the course of field surveys and rescue excavations within the wider urban territory of the ancient cities of *Sirmium* and *Bassianae* (fig. 3). The wider territories of both these cities are characterised by typical Pannonian plains, which are interrupted partially by the southern slopes of the Fruska Gora Mountain (*Alma Mons*). This area is traversed by the Sava and Danube and is rich in smaller waterways. It was especially convenient for establishing small rural settlements: *vici* as well as agricultural estates, the *villae rusticae*. A certain number of these villas were built in the territory or immediate vicinity of the

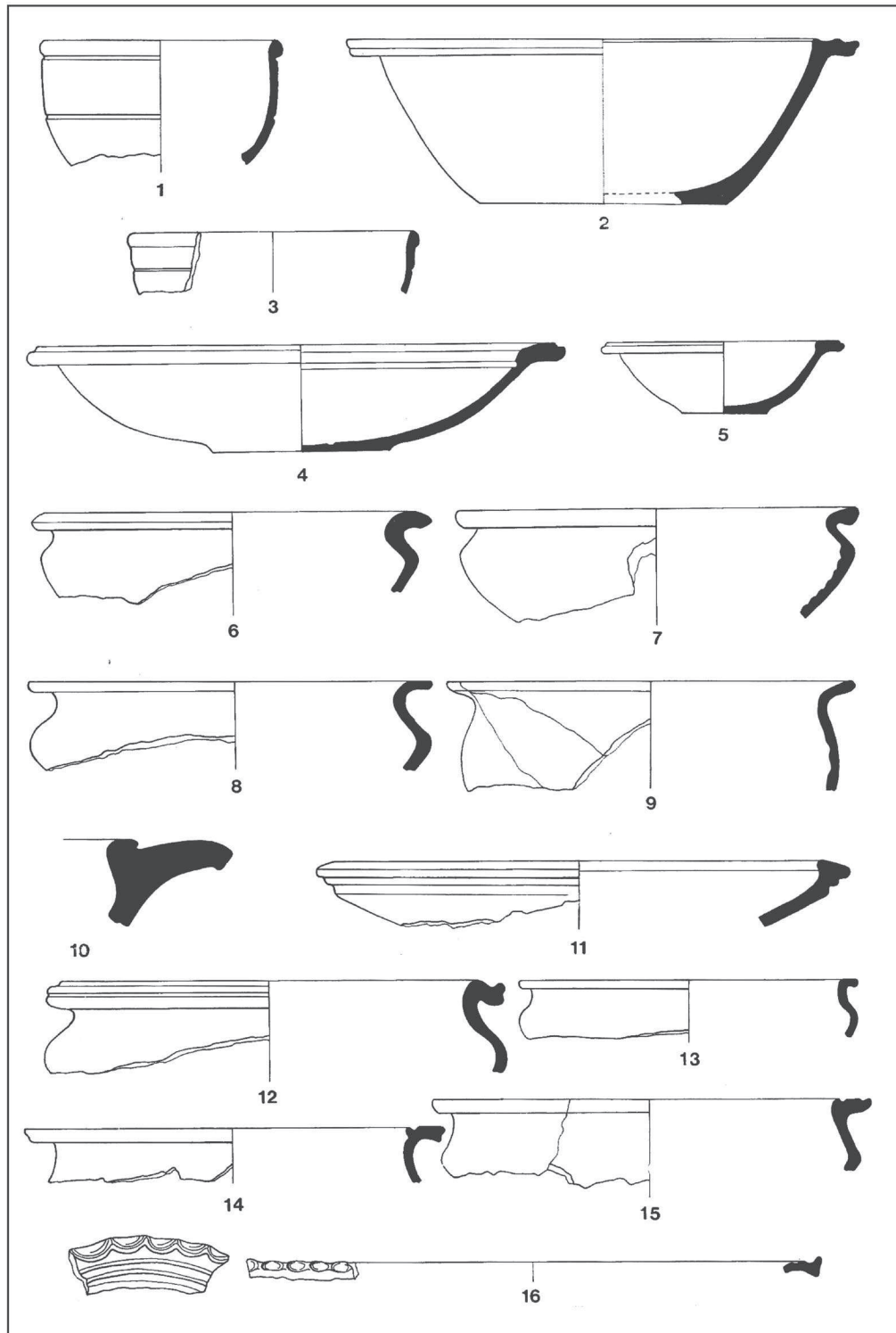


Fig. 4: Beocin, Dumbovo: Roman provincial terracotta bowls.

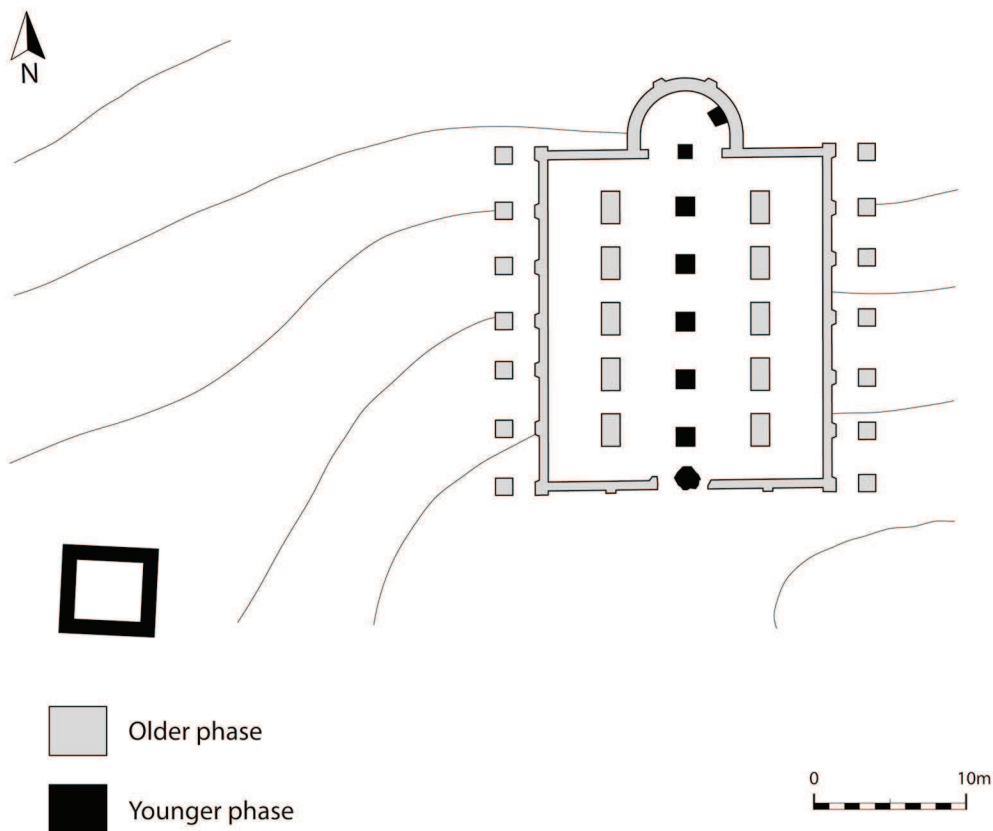


Fig. 5: Kudos, Sasinci: Basilica and watchtower of the *villa rustica* complex.

early Roman settlements starting in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. The villa at Beocin-Dumbovo was built in the 4th century in the valley along the stream, while a watchtower stood on the slope of the hill. The villa had three building units devoted to residential and production functions. The rectangular shaped *speculum* or watchtower protected the residents of the villa and prevented the enemy from passing through the valley into the interior of the province. Archaeological finds, especially Roman provincial pottery forms typical of the 4th century, were found in large numbers (fig. 4). We could say that the villa in Beocin-Dumbovo was not simply a private economic unit that satisfied the needs of the owner and the inhabitants of the estate. Erected in the close vicinity of the *castra* of *Bonnonia* and *Cusum*, its agricultural activities and crafts ensured the development of economy and trade. This was of great importance for the supply of the military and the frontier population, and thus contributed to the security of the border.

Archaeological material and coins from the site of Sasinci suggest two phases of habitation: a rural village (a *vicus*) from the time of the Flavians, and a *villa rustica* dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries (fig. 5). In the area of the Hrtkovci village, besides the partially explored villa of Vranj (fig. 6), five more villas have been recorded on the basis of surface finds that consist of building rubble and other archaeological material.⁵

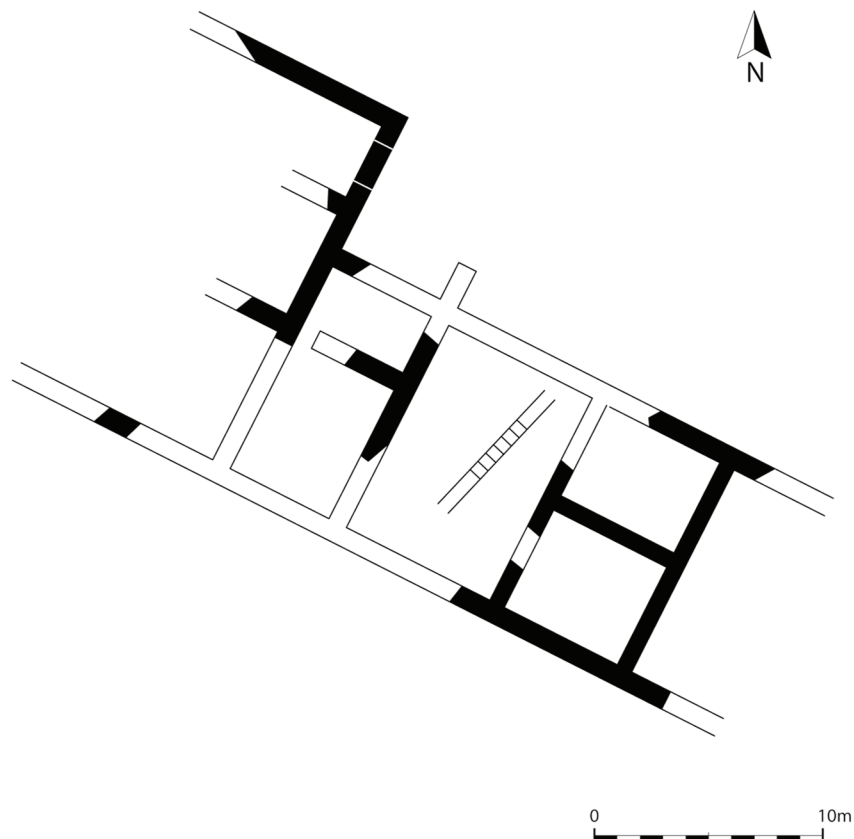


Fig. 6: Vranj, Hrtkovci: Plan of the partially investigated walls of the *villa rustica*.

Remains of a brick-built hypocaust indicate that the Vranj villa had an under-floor heating system. A rather large quantity of fresco fragments, comprising vegetal and geometric motifs, was found in one of the rooms of the villa. The structures of these villas were positioned on the foundations of earlier buildings of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, a characteristic of most of the villas of Pannonia so far investigated.

The Region of Macva and the Drina Valley

The region of modern northwestern Serbia is of exceptional importance for studying Roman villas in the area of the Central Balkans. Thanks to the partial archaeological excavations conducted during the last decades, new light has been shed on the ancient topography of the region. This is the area where three Roman provinces bordered each other: *Pannonia Inferior*, *Dalmatia* and *Moesia Superior*. Much of the mountainous region of the Drina valley owed its development to mining and forest exploitation, whereas Macva developed as a result of being a region suitable to intensive agricultural

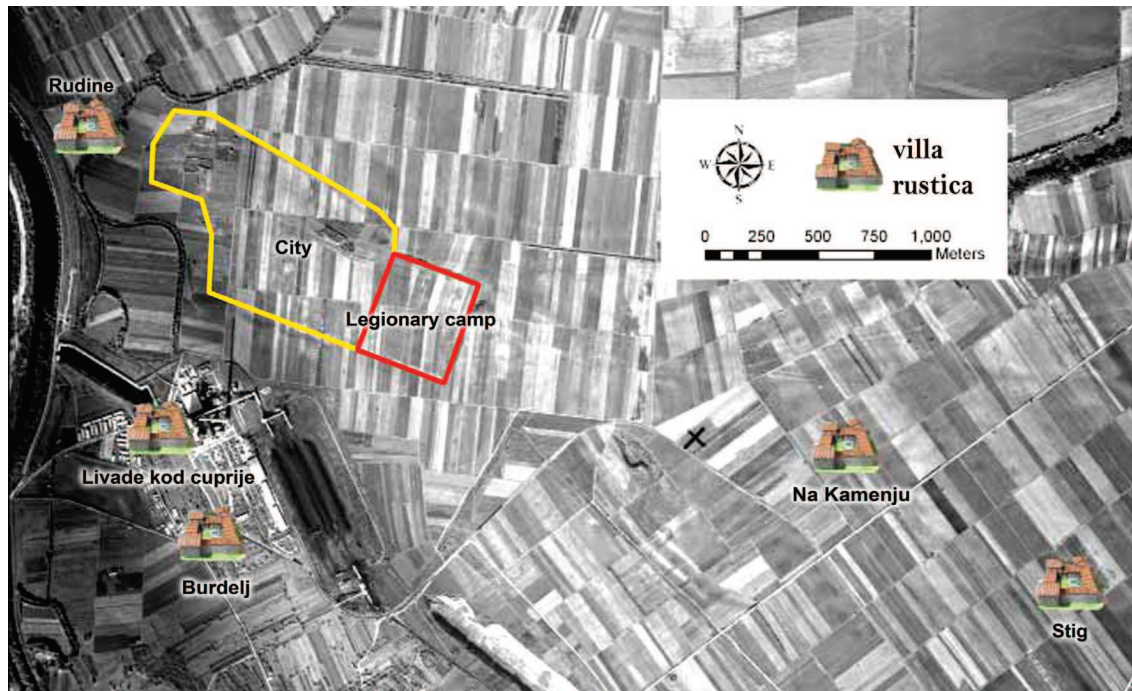


Fig. 7: Stari Kostolac (*Viminacium*): Roman villas in the vicinity of the city.

exploitation. This entire area abounded in agricultural estates. The region towards the Sava River was particularly densely populated; such population concentration is understandable considering the fertility of the land, together with the fact that the area gravitated towards the great urban centre of *Sirmium*. In general, considering the distribution of villas and settlements, the impression is that they were mostly located in immediate proximity to rivers; to the left and right of the rivers were open areas for cultivation. Undoubtedly, certain communication routes also had a significant impact on the location of the villas. Currently, this region is the most thoroughly investigated area in the territory of *Moesia Superior* as far as Roman villas are concerned. Here, it is most probable that a seasonal labour force was employed. Such a conclusion is also suggested by an archaeological survey of the sites in Stitar, where, in addition to the main residential building for the owner, there are smaller structures or huts. Hired workers may have resided in these. Such a system of hired labour is also suggested by the well-known large monetary hoard from Svileuva, in the vicinity of a villa at Kusanje.⁶ The hoard contained coins from the period of Gordian III to Carinus. We can assume, judging by the large amount of money in the Kusanje hoard, that this was an agricultural estate of considerable size.

We attempted to establish the chronology of the villas based on the surface finds (e. g. pottery, coins) and the coin hoards. We hypothesise that the development of agriculture started in these areas in the middle of the 1st century AD, and was followed in the 2nd



Fig. 8: Stari Kostolac (*Viminacium*): Roman villa at Nad Klepeckom.

and 3rd centuries by a larger degree of immigration and development of agriculture, primarily farming. In this context we should mention the villa at Bela Crkva, which contained the remains of ancient structures and a hoard consisting of silver jewellery, vessels, and coins.⁷ Coins from that hoard span the period from Nero to Commodus, so we could classify the villa as one of the earliest, with its date of construction assumed to be in the mid-2nd century AD.⁸ Most of the other villas recorded in the region of Macva date from the middle of the 3rd to the end of the 4th century.⁹ It can be safely assumed that all these villas were connected by a road network.

***Viminacium* and its Surroundings**

Very little is known about villas in the vicinity of *Viminacium*, the capital of *Moesia Superior*, particularly taking into account the importance and position of this city in the Roman Empire. In the course of decade-long investigations at *Viminacium*, villas have not been adequately studied and presented to the academic audience, despite being very important for the study of the economy of the provincial capital. When the city had the status of *municipium* (117 AD), its territory encompassed a larger part of the plain in the lower course of the Mlava River (mod. Stig plain). After acquiring the status of *colonia* (239 AD), *Viminacium* expanded to include the entire Stig plain and *Pincum* (mod. Veliko

Gradište). The remains of five villas have been discovered at various locations within the city's ager in the course of archaeological investigations at *Viminacium* (fig. 7).

A large villa complex was discovered in 2013 at the site of Nad Klepeckom, several kilometres to the east of *Viminacium*. The research at this villa site has not been completed yet. Currently, the area investigated measures 80 × 31.5 m and features at least 24 rooms, making it the largest villa complex known so far in the surroundings of *Viminacium*. The villa had a central courtyard; the west side housed the service quarters while the residential part was on the east side. Here, remains of the floors and wall heating system have been discovered (fig. 8).

Conclusion

The territories of the Roman provinces of *Pannonia Inferior* and *Moesia Superior* stood out during the entire ancient period as agrarian areas with low levels of urbanization. A few areas could be distinguished for their intensive agriculture, which certainly was the result of favourable natural factors: topography, soil composition, and hydrological and climatic characteristics. One of these primarily agricultural areas is the territory of present-day Srem and Macva, in Pannonia. On the basis of the distribution and location of the recorded sites, Roman settlements appear to have been established in the vicinity of main roads and at locations that made possible the exploitation of natural raw materials as well as the employment of labour from the neighbouring native settlements. According to the archaeological investigations carried out so far, in this region we can see that villas complexes were mostly constructed on the same spot of previous, early-imperial settlements of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, or in their immediate vicinity (table 2).

Notes

¹ Mirković 1971, 81–82 no. 79, pl. 12,1.

² Brukner 1976, 22.

³ Bökönyi 1976, 49–50.

⁴ Thomas' study (Thomas 1964) is still current, even though it was written more than half a century ago.

⁵ Dautova Ruševljan 2005, 239–240.

⁶ The hoard was discovered in 1916. 11,000 pieces of Roman coins are stored in the National Museum in Belgrade.

⁷ The richness of the finds and the Illyrian character of some jewelry pieces confirm the hypothesis that in the 2nd and 3rd centuries there were fewer landowners.

⁸ Petrović 1941, 11–23.

⁹ Vasić 1985, 128.

SITE	TYPE	PROVINCE	CENTURY
Dumbovo, Beocin	Pannonian villa with a central corridor and watchtower	<i>(Pannonia Secunda)</i>	4 th century
Mitrovacke Livade, Sirmium	Partially investigated villa complex. It was built in the vicinity of a Roman rural settlement of the 1 st /2 nd century. Later, a watchtower was built	<i>Pannonia Inferior (Pannonia Secunda)</i>	3 rd -4 th century
Livade, Sirmium	Pannonian villa with a central corridor	<i>Pannonia Inferior (Pannonia Secunda)</i>	3 rd -4 th century
Kudos, Sasinci	The villa complex consisted of a basilical building with apse and a few smaller utilitarian structures. The villa complex included a watchtower	<i>Pannonia Inferior (Pannonia Secunda)</i>	3 rd -4 th century
Vranj, Hrtkovci	Some rooms of the villa have been partially investigated. The complex was built in the vicinity of a Roman rural settlement of the 1 st /2 nd century	<i>Pannonia Inferior (Pannonia Secunda)</i>	3 rd -4 th century
Zasavica in Macva	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Pannonia Inferior (Pannonia Secunda)</i>	
Ravnje, Macva	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Pannonia Inferior (Pannonia Secunda)</i>	
Nocaj, Macva	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Pannonia Inferior (Pannonia Secunda)</i>	
Metkovic, Macva	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Pannonia Inferior (Pannonia Secunda)</i>	
Macvan, Pricinovic, Macva	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Pannonia Inferior (Pannonia Secunda)</i>	
Drenovac, Macva	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Pannonia Inferior (Pannonia Secunda)</i>	

Table 2: Roman *villae rusticae* in the provinces of *Pannonia Inferior* and *Moesia Superior*.

SITE	TYPE	PROVINCE	CENTURY
Majur, Macva	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Pannonia Inferior</i> (<i>Pannonia Secunda</i>)	3 rd century
Tabanovic, Macva	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Pannonia Inferior</i> (<i>Pannonia Secunda</i>)	
Stitar, Grmik, Macva	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Pannonia Inferior</i> (<i>Pannonia Secunda</i>)	
Stitar, Jasenovica, Macva	Villa with projecting towers at the corners (Eckrisalit)	<i>Pannonia Inferior</i> (<i>Pannonia Secunda</i>)	4 th century
Stitar, Potes, Macva	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Pannonia Inferior</i> (<i>Pannonia Secunda</i>)	
Nakucani, Macva	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Pannonia Inferior</i> (<i>Pannonia Secunda</i>)	4 th century
Miokus, Macva	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Pannonia Inferior</i> (<i>Pannonia Secunda</i>)	
Vlasanica, Macva	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Pannonia Inferior</i> (<i>Pannonia Secunda</i>)	
Dvorska	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Dalmatia</i>	3 rd century
Donje Crniljevo	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Dalmatia</i>	3 rd century
Kusanje, Sviuleva	A villa was partially investigated	<i>Moesia Superior</i> (<i>Moesia Prima</i>)	3 rd century
Viminacium, Nad Klepeckom	Villa with central courtyard and 24 rooms	<i>Moesia Superior</i> (<i>Moesia Prima</i>)	3 rd century
Viminacium, Livade near Cuprija	Pannonian villa with a rectangular ground plan and central corridor	<i>Moesia Superior</i> (<i>Moesia Prima</i>)	4 th century

Table 2 (continued)

SITE	TYPE	PROVINCE	CENTURY
Anine, Lajkovac	Six rooms of the villa have been partially explored. It is one of the largest villas known in Serbia.	<i>Moesia Superior</i> (<i>Moesia Prima</i>)	4 th century
Poskurice, Kragujevac	The villa complex is partially investigated.	<i>Moesia Superior</i> (<i>Moesia Prima</i>)	3 rd century
Višesava, Bajina Bašta	Villa with portico?	<i>Dalmatia</i>	2 nd –3 rd century
Gornja Gorevnica, Cacak	A building with an apse has only been partially explored ?	<i>Moesia Superior</i> (<i>Moesia Prima</i>)	4 th century
Prijedor, Cacak	Rectangular residential building with five rooms. The villa complex was only partially investigated	<i>Moesia Superior</i> (<i>Moesia Prima</i>)	4 th –5 th century
Beljina, Cacak	Some rooms of the villa have been partially explored. It is a rather small agricultural estate	<i>Moesia Superior</i> (<i>Moesia Prima</i>)	1 st phase: 2 nd /3 rd century; 2 nd phase: end of 4 th – 1 st half of 5 th century
Krivelj, Bor	Pannonian villa with a corridor	<i>Moesia Superior</i> (<i>Dacia Ripensis</i>)	The end of 3 rd to the end of 4 th century
Gamzigrad, Zajecar	In the SE section of the imperial palace complex, a villa was partially explored: it has two longitudinal rooms and a portico to the east	<i>Moesia Superior</i> (<i>Dacia Ripensis</i>)	3 rd century
Krzince, Vladicin Han	A complex villa, only partially explored. A passage between the rooms is linked in with a portico	<i>Dacia Mediterranea</i>	4 th century

Table 2 (continued)

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Fig. 1: by author. – Fig. 2: after Brukner 1976, pl. 4, with modifications. – Fig. 3: by author. – Fig. 4: after Brukner 1976, T.X., with modifications. – Fig. 5: after O. Brukner, native settlements, in: Z. Vaja, *Arheološka istraživanja duž autoputa kroz Srem* (Novi Sad 1995), pl. 2, with modifications. – Fig. 6: after Dautova Ruševljan 2005, fig. 2. – Fig. 7: Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology SASA, Belgrade. – Fig. 8: Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology SASA, Belgrade. – Table 1–2: by author.

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