

**RADOVI BIOARHEOLOŠKE SEKCIJE  
SRPSKOG ARHEOLOŠKOG DRUŠTVA**

# **BIOARHEOLOGIJA NA BALKANU**

Metodološke, komparativne  
i rekonstruktivne studije života  
u prošlosti

**Urednici**

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**Selena Vitezović**

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**BIOARHEOLOGIJA NA BALKANU. METODOLOŠKE,  
KOMPARATIVNE I REKONSTRUKTIVNE STUDIJE ŽIVOTA U PROŠLOSTI.**



PAPERS OF THE BIOARCHAEOLOGICAL SECTION  
OF THE SERBIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

# **BIOARCHAEOLOGY IN THE BALKANS**

**METHODOLOGICAL,  
COMPARATIVE AND RECONSTRUCTIVE  
STUDIES OF LIVES IN THE PAST.**

**Editors:**

Nataša Miladinović-Radmilović  
Selena Vitezović

Belgrade • Sremska Mitrovica  
2016

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2016

*Izdavač / Published by*

SRPSKO ARHEOLOŠKO DRUŠTVO, Beograd, Čika Ljubina 18-20  
BLAGO SIRMIJUMA, Sremska Mitrovica, Ilariona Ruvarca bb

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*Štampa / Printed by*

DC Grafički centar, Savski nasip 7, Novi Beograd

*Tiraž / Printed in*

200

ISBN 978-86-84457-17-4

Ova je knjiga štampana sredstvima Ministarstva za prosvetu, nauku i tehnološki razvoj  
Republike Srbije.

This book is published with the financial support of the Ministry of Education, Science  
and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

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## BIOARHEOLOGIJA NA BALKANU.

Metodološke, komparativne i rekonstruktivne studije života u prošlosti.

Nataša Miladinović-Radmilović, Arheološki institut, Beograd  
Selena Vitezović, Arheološki institut, Beograd

Rekonstrukcija života u prošlosti osnovni je cilj arheologije kao nauke. Metodološki i teorijski okviri proučavanja menjaju se i unapređuju neprekidno od samog nastanka arheologije kao naučne discipline, preispituju se stare metode, nove stvaraju, preuzimaju i prilagođavaju iz drugih disciplina, i tako dalje.

Bioarheološki ostaci, koji su istovremeno i *bioarheološki* i *kulturni*, odnosno, istovremeno pripadaju sferama *prirodnog* i *kulturnog*, imaju poseban značaj za proučavanje različitih aspekata života u prošlosti, posebno onih koji se odnose na kvalitet života, način ishrane, biljni i životinjski svet sa kojim su prošle zajednice bile u interakciji, ali i na mnoge druge aspekte.

Ovaj zbornik nastavlja se na prehodni, *Bioarheologija na Balkanu: Bilans i perspektive*, i sada donosi radove koji su metodološke prirode i studije slučaja sa teritorije Balkana o rekonstrukciji života u prošlosti, od praistorije do srednjeg veka.

Radovi delom proističu iz skupova održanih u okviru Sekcije za bioarheologiju Srpskog arheološkog društva, posebno tematskih sesija *Rekonstrukcija izvora hrane i načina prehrane u praistoriji: nabavka, priprema i prezentovanje hrane u neolitu Balkana* i *Metodološke, komparativne i rekonstruktivne studije života u prošlosti*. Sekcija je nastala iz potrebe da se rezultati rada bioarheoloških istraživanja predstave široj arheološkoj javnosti, kao i da se pokrene diskusija o metodološkim i drugim problemima sa kojima se ra-

zličiti stručnjaci susreću u radu. Pored toga, cilj je bio ne samo da se predstave interdisciplinarni radovi, već da se zaista pokrenu *multidisciplinarna* istraživanja.

U ovom zborniku, prvi su radovi metodološke prirode – N. Miladinović-Radmilović nastavlja sa predlaganjem standardizovane metodologije obrade humanog osteološkog materijala, dok D. Vulović i D. Bizjak ukratko predstavljaju metode i njihovu primenu analize DNK humanog osteološkog materijala i analize hemijskih elemenata i stabilnih izotopa.

Odeljak o rekonstrukciji ishrane u prošlosti donosi različite studije sa široke balkanske teritorije, i to od neolita do srednjeg veka. Prvi je rad makedonskih arheologa E. Kanzurove i Z. Rujaka, koji su dali pregled svih do sada raspoloživih podataka o ishrani u neolitu na tlu Makedonije. C. Popova predstavlja jedinstveni nalaz *bulgura* sa ranoneolitskog lokaliteta Jablkovo u Bugarskoj, koji ukazuje na načine pripreme i čuvanja hrane među ranim zemljoradničkim zajednicama. D. Filipović i koautori daju rezultate arheobotaničkih analiza sa dva gvozdenukopska lokaliteta, Crnoklište-Gornjo Polje i Staničenje-Mađilka u jugoistočnoj Srbiji. Mada uzorak nije veliki, značajan je, jer su arheobotanički uzorci iz ove oblasti srazmerno malobrojni. Rad N. Markovića i koautora bavi se ulogom živine u srednjovekovnoj ekonomiji manastira Studenice.



Studije slučaja opet pokazuju raznovrsnost tema koje uključuju i bioarheološke podatke i na koje se sve načine različiti pristupi mogu koristiti u tumačenju prošlosti. Rad K. Đukić i M. Đurić prikazuje određivanje starosti pomoću Vilemsove metode na primeru populacija sa Ajmane. G. Jeremić i T. Čerškov bave se problemom desakralizacije grobnog prostora u kasnoj antici i uzrocima oštećenja grobova. K. Đukić i T. Pavlović razmatraju pitanje upotrebe koštanog praha u medicinske svrhe u okvirima avarske kulture, a na primeru groba sa lokaliteta Čik. Rad V. Bikić i N. Miladinović-Radmilović donosi interesantnu kombinovanu analizu arheoloških i antropoloških podataka na primeru groba vojnog sveštenika iz pred-modernog doba sa Beogradske tvrđave. Zbornik zatvara rad S. Petković i koautora, koji predstavlja rimsku koštanu oplatu sa pred-

stavom Arijadne, verovatno sa drvene kutije ili sanduka, iz Davidovca, i koji pokazuje kako kombinovana analiza same predstave, tehnike izrade, kao i konzervatorska rekonstrukcija, pružaju podatke o stanovnicima rimskog Davidovca i njihovom imovnom i socijalnom statusu, trgovini koja se odvijala i mogućim zanatskim radionicima u široj okolini.

U budućnosti će, nadamo se, interesantne studije i značajni metodološki radovi opet naći svoje mesto u okviru radova Bioarheološke sekcije. I, na kraju, ali ne najmanje važno, htele bismo da se zahvalimo svim kolegama koji su podržali naš rad, kako kolegama iz Arheološkog instituta, tako i članovima Srpskog arheološkog društva koji su nas podržali i koji su pratili naša izlaganja na skupovima.

## ROMAN BONE PLATING FROM DAVIDOVAC (SOUTHERN SERBIA): PRELIMINARY INTERPRETATION AND RECONSTRUCTION

SOFIJA PETKOVIĆ<sup>1</sup>, SELENA VITEZOVIĆ<sup>1</sup> and ŽELJKA TEMERINSKI<sup>2</sup>

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*Abstract:* During the archaeological rescue excavations at the route of the highway E75, section 10 (southern leg), in the village of Davidovac, near Vranje, a Roman settlement with necropolises (2<sup>nd</sup> – mid-5<sup>th</sup> century) were investigated at locations Crkvište (Northeast) and Gradište (Southwest). At the site of Davidovac – Gradište, a Late Roman building was discovered, built in the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, twice renewed during the 4<sup>th</sup> and destroyed in a fire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. In the *atrium*, near a circular furnace, in the layer from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, fragments of a bone plating were discovered. On the central plaque, a mythological scene of sleeping Ariadne, surrounded by Satyrs, was represented. The bone plating has been sent to the Department of conservation of the National Museum in Belgrade, for conservation and research. Also, the raw material of the plating and traces of manufacture were examined.

*Keywords:* bone plating, Roman furniture, Late Roman period, mythological representations, osseous raw material, bone manufacturing technology, reconstruction of bone plating

*Apstrakt:* Tokom zaštitnih arheoloških iskopavanja na trasi autoputa E75, koridor 10 (južni krak), u selu Davidovac kod Vranja, na lokalitetima Crkvište (severoistok) i Gradište (jugozapad), istraženi su rimsko naselje i nekropole (II – prva pol. V veka). Na lokalitetu Davidovac – Gradište otkrivena je kasnoantička građevina, podignuta krajem III – početkom IV veka, dvaput obnovljena tokom IV veka i uništena u požaru u V veku. U atrijumu, pored kružne peći, u sloju iz IV veka otkriveni su fragmenti koštane oplata. Na središnjoj pločici predstavljena je mitološka scena usnule Arijadne okružene satirima. Koštana oplata je poslata u Konzervatorsku laboratoriju Narodnog muzeja u Beogradu zarad konzervacije i daljeg proučavanja. Takođe, analizirani su sirovina od koje je oplata izrađena i tragovi izrade.

*Ključne reči:* koštana oplata, rimski nameštaj, kasnoantički period, mitološke predstave, koštane sirovine, tehnologija izrade koštanih predmeta, rekonstrukcija koštane oplata

### INTRODUCTION. THE CONTEXT OF THE FIND

The village of Davidovac is situated in southern Serbia, 9.5 km south-west from Vranje (map

1). In the vicinity of the village, archaeological remains were noted and, when the site was in jeopardy because of the construction of the highway E 75, section 10 (southern leg), archaeological rescue excavations were carried out in



Map 1. The position of the site Davidovac.  
 Mapa 1. Položaj lokaliteta Davidovac.

autumn-winter 2011. Two locations were investigated, Davidovac-Crkvište (Northeast) and Davidovac-Gradište (Southwest). Along with scarce prehistoric finds, Roman settlement and necropolises were discovered, dated into the period from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. Roman settlement was part of the province of *Dardania*, and its importance is visible from rich and diverse architectural remains and portable finds (Грујић 2012; Petković 2012a; Петковић 2012b; Petković 2015; Špehar and Stamenković 2012; Шпехар *et al.* 2013).

At the site Davidovac-Gradište, on the left side of the highway route Vranje–Bujanovac, a Late Roman building was discovered in trenches 41 and 41 a-b. Above the cultural layer in the trenches on the left side of the highway (Plan 1), a layer of river deposit, *alluvium*, consisting



Figure 1. The Late Roman building with *atrium* in trenches 41 – 41 a-b, from the south.

Slika 1. Kasnoantička građevina sa *atriumom* u sondama 41 – 41a-b, pogled sa juga.



Figure 2. The southeastern section of probe 41a (in *atrium*), from the northwest.

Slika 2. Jugoistočni deo sode 41a (u *atriumu*), pogled sa severozapada.

of yellow or yellowish-brown sand, 1,50–1,00 m thick (from NE to SW) was discovered (layers A and A1). It probably originated from successive floodings by the Južna Morava river, although just one catastrophic flood could have resulted in such a deposit of sandy clay. This layer had sealed and preserved Roman cultural layers and objects.

Beneath this river deposit, two cultural layers dated into the Roman period were discovered: layer B, brown soil with construction rubble,

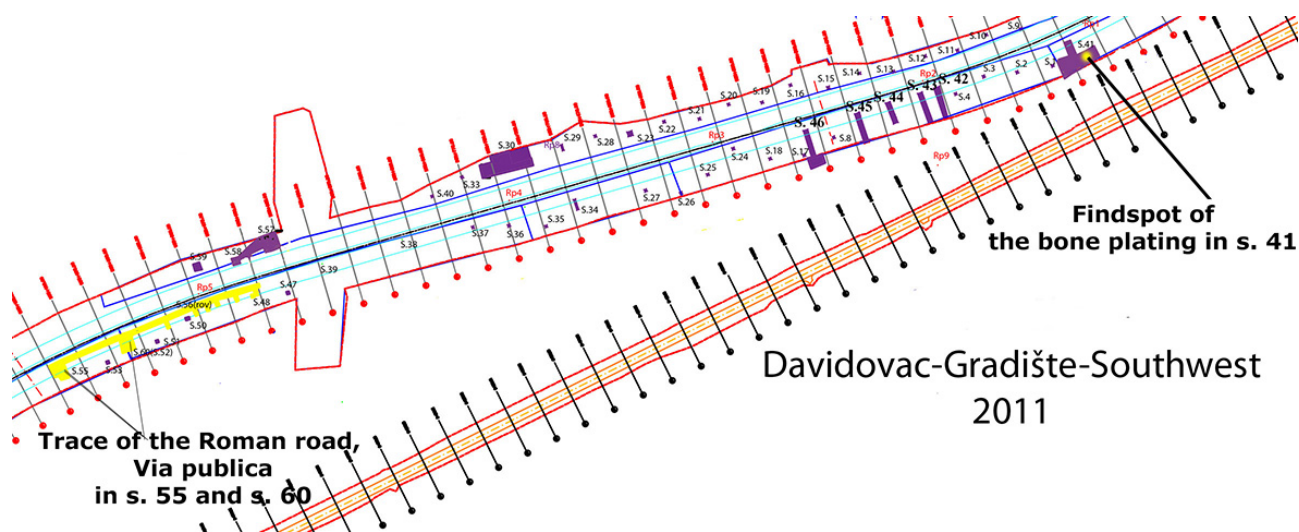


Figure 3. Excavation plan with position of trenches.  
Slika 3. Plan iskopavanja i položaj sonde.

crashed stone, lime mortar, fragments of *tegulae* and *imbrices*, and layer C, light brown soil with soot and burned soil. Layer B (average thickness 0,70 m), formed above the level of some kind of cobble (road or street) in trenches 1–4 and 8, included small finds dated in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, bronze coins, fragments of ceramic and glass vessels. Layer C (average thickness 0,50 m), included a small amount of archaeological finds, fragments of Roman and prehistoric ceramic vessels and animal bones. Graves of cremated individuals of *Mala Kopašnica* – *Sase I* type, dated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> – the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, had been dug in this layer (Petković 2012a: 88–89, sl. 3; Петковић 2015).

Trench 41 was opened to the north from trench 1, with the aim to inspect level b, some kind of pavement beneath layer B. It was oriented SE–NW (dimensions: 25 x 5 m). In the north-eastern section of trench 41 a dry-wall, made of stones without plaster, was discovered, so this trench was extended towards north-east (10 x 10 m, trench 41a) and south-west (10 x 12 m, trench 41b) (Figure 3).

In trench 41 and its' extensions 41a-b, a part of a Late Roman building, with several rooms located around a central courtyard (*atrium*),

probably *villa suburbana*, was discovered. The excavated part of the object, spreading from the north-west to the south-east, was 11 m wide and 12 m long. It consisted of two rooms with a north-western entrance through the smaller room. Walls were made from crushed stones and large river pebbles plastered with yellow clay (Figure 1).

The wall discovered was, in fact, the foundation for the upper part of the construction made of wooden beams and packed soil. On the relative depth of 1,50 m, a poorly preserved mortar floor with traces of pavement was found inside the object. The floor was once paved with *tegulae*. The building was destroyed by fire, as suggested by the fact that above the floor there was a layer of ashes, soot and burned soil, marked as layer B. Inside the building, a roof construction of *tegulae* and *imbrices* had collapsed over this layer destroyed by fire (Figure 2).

In this area, beneath the floor and the layer of yellowish-brown sand (layer C), level c was discovered, consisting of lime mortar floor, and below it a levelling layer of yellow sand covering level d (a floor of poorly preserved lime plaster and light-yellow packed soil). This level was damaged by numerous pits (pits 1–25), among them a granary-pit (pit 8), postholes for timber



**Figure 4.** Small finds. A. Fragments of a “cameo” glass cup with a relief in violet color with hunting scene. B. Ceramic lamps, a bone hair-pin and glass beads. C. bronze brooches, bronze buckles and a bronze key.

**Slika 4.** Pokrentni nalazi. A. Fragmenti “kameo” staklene čaše sa reljefom u ljubičastoj boji sa scenom lova. B. Keramičke lampe, koštana igla i staklene perle. C. Bronzane fibule, bronzana kopča i bronzani ključ.

of a roof construction or a gallery and cremated graves (pit 15 = grave 30, pit 16 = grave 31, pit 24 = grave 32). Two of these graves contained urns, and there were grave finds in them such as bronze coins, a bronze pin and fragmented glass vessels, dated in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

To the north-east of this building, a large amount of construction rubble was found as well. In addition to the two discovered rooms of the Late Roman object, a part of an inner courtyard – *atrium* was investigated in the north-eastern extension of the trench (extensions 41a and

41b). In the courtyard attached to it, several artisan furnaces were discovered (blacksmith furnace, pottery and glass kilns), as well as a large amount of small finds dated in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> – the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, among them predominantly bronze coins.

The stratigraphy of cultural layers inside the building provided evidence for two phases of restoration and three living horizons levels (b-d). At these levels, corresponding layers were established: layer D – a levelling layer above the first mortar floor, layer C – a layer of destruction caused by fire (charred wood, and beam frag-

ments from the roof, ash, soot and burned soil) above the second mortar floor, layer B of similar composition as the previous, but formed above level b (mortar floor paved with bricks) and layer A, composed of the river sediment of yellow and yellowish-red sandy clay, which covers layer B (Figure 2).

Based on archaeological findings from the building, primarily a large amount of fragmented ceramic and glass vessels, ceramic lamps and bronze coins, it can be concluded that those layers were formed during the Late Roman period, from the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> / the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Also, some luxurious items were found inside the object, among them fragments of a “cameo” glass cup with a relief in violet colour representing a hunting scene (Figure 4), grey “Macedonian” ceramics with stamped ornament (Радиновић 2012: 108–112, T. I, 3–4, 6, 8, 10; T. II, 1, 5–9; T. III, 4, 6–7; T. IV, 2, 5–6; T. VI, 1, 3), gilded cross-bow *fibulae* and silver zoomorphic brooch in the shape of an eagle, polychrome glass beads, and, finally, a bone plating of a wooden chest with a relief representation of a mythological scene.

### THE BONE PLATING

In the north-eastern courtyard, near the circular furnace made of *tegulae*, fragments of bone plating of a chest, decorated by engraving and carving, were discovered in layer C, dated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

The find consists of a part of a central medallion, with the mythological scene of sleeping Ariadne, surrounded by Dionysian *thiasus*, an elongated piece with a partial figural representation, and diverse segments of rectangular stripe-plaques with abstract decorations.

The main central medallion (Figure 5) was reconstructed out of 19 fragments, and originally had an irregular quadrilateral shape (trapezoidal), with approximate dimensions of max. length 14,7, min. length 12,2 cm, and height of 16 cm. There are visible small holes placed mainly along the sides of the plaque, probably for at-



Figure 5. Main part of the bone plating with representation of Ariadne, before conservation.

Slika 5. Glavni deo koštane oplate sa predstavom Arijadne, pre konzervacije.

taching with small bone or wooden pegs, since there are no traces of contact with metal.

### Figural representations

On the central medallion, Ariadne is represented, lying naked on the bed, surrounded by a drapery fluttering in the wind, resembling in shape to a shell (Figure 6). Her head is turned to the right, so we can see only the left profile of her face, with her eyes closed. Her hair is divided at the forehead and gathered in a bun at the nape, although we don't know exactly what her hairstyle looked like, since this part of the plaque was damaged.<sup>1</sup> Her upper part of the body, is turned to the right, but her legs are turned to the left. Her arms are stretched and bended in elbows. She

<sup>1</sup> The hairstyle most probably corresponded to the coiffure of the Empress Fausta (Brunn 1966: nos. 12, 29, 56).



**Figure 6.** Bone plating: representation of Ariadne. A. frontal surface. B. dorsal surface.  
**Slika 6.** Koštana oplata: predstava Arijadne. A. prednja strana. B. zadnja strana.

is holding the drapery with her left hand. The right arm is missing from elbow down, due to the plaque's original shape, and it was probably represented on another piece that fitted here, therefore, we do not know what Ariadne held in that hand. The end of the cloth is draped over her right arm. Her rather large, rounded belly may indicate pregnancy.<sup>2</sup>

Although naked, Ariadne has a rich set of jewellery: earrings, necklace with round medallions and three bracelets.<sup>3</sup> She has a spiral arm ring with snake protomes on the right upper arm and wide, ribbon-like arm ring on the left upper

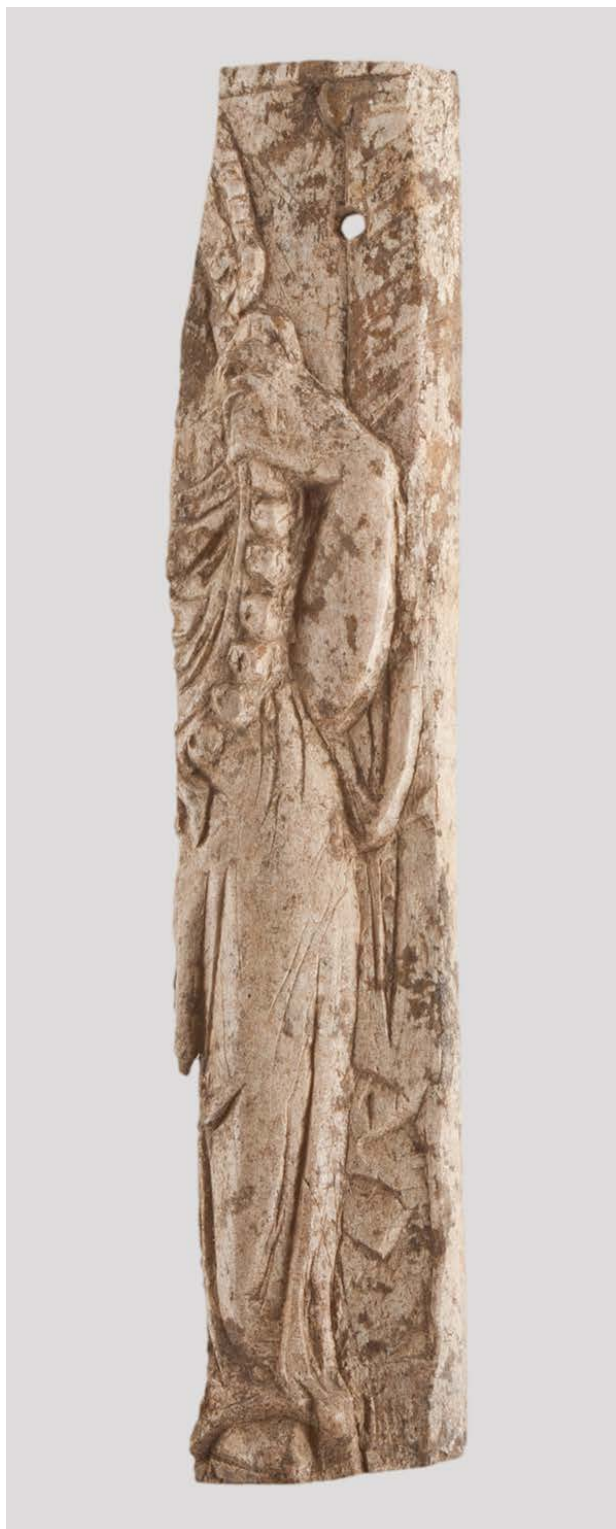
arm. Also, she has a bracelet on her left forearm. Her legs are bent in knees, the left one is hidden behind the right leg and covered with drapery. She has leopard skin beneath her feet. Above Ariadne's left hand is a large, spirally twisted snake, and a palm branch is below.

Two satyrs are offering her vine to forget the pain caused by Theseus' treason. One, with a cup in his right hand, is approaching her from the lower left corner, and the other, with a crater in his hands, from the upper right corner of the scene. Both satyrs are half-naked and have ape-like faces, wearing fur caps with animal heads, which emphasize their wild nature.

Another piece (dim. 13,4 x 2,8 cm) represented a male figure, dressed in a long robe, with long, curled hair, holding some semi-circular object (perhaps a necklace or a belt?) in his left hand. This part of plating was probably a representation of Dionysus approaching his beloved Ariadne. The placing of this piece is uncertain – probably to the right of the central representati-

2 In one version of the myth, Ariadne was already pregnant with Dionysus when Theseus abandoned her at Dia. Moreover, Dionysus appeared to Theseus in a dream threatening him because of Ariadne's abduction (Kérenyi 1978: 271).

3 This kind of jewelry is characteristic for the period of Tetrarchy and the reign of Constantine the Great, i. e. the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Popović and Borić-Brešković 2013: 171, 192 –195, Figs. 90–91, 110).



**Figure 7.** Bone plating: fragment with the representation of Dionysus.

**Slika 7.** Koštana oplata: fragment predstve Dionisa.

on, or perhaps at the corner of the chest (Figure 7).

The entire scene illustrates a well-known myth of Ariadne abandoned at the island of Dia (Naxos), waiting asleep for her new spouse, Dionysus. In some variations of this myth a pregnant Ariadne has a tragic destiny, since she dies while giving birth. In another, she reaches supreme happiness after meeting Dionysus, whom she marries (Kérenyi 1978: 270–272).

The main central plaque is made of a *scapula* of a large ungulate, most likely bovid (cf. Deschler-Erb 1998: 55–58, see also Krzyszkowska 1990).<sup>4</sup> At first glance, the raw material resembled ivory because of its' polished surface. However, careful inspection of the upper and lower surfaces of the object (i. e. ventral and dorsal sides of the bone, cf. Figure 6b), cross section, entire morphology and size of the object, revealed that it is in fact a large flat bone from a large mammal – *scapula*, most likely from a large, adult *Bos*. The shoulder blade bone is the only one that met the requirements of the artisan – it had a large flat surface of desired proportions and adequate thickness in order to make a relief without breaking.

First *spina* and *processus coracoideus* were removed, by cutting and grinding, and then *scapula* edges were cut out in order to make a rectangular blank, by sawing and by abrasion (Figure 6b).

Two side parts of the central piece are preserved almost completely, while the upper and lower parts are only partially preserved. The left side is somewhat differently worked than the right one, which has carefully executed finishing. The left edge was cut in such a manner to fit with another part of plating (plaque) where the missing part of the scene was represented.

Two fragments of the bone plating (dim. 10,6 x 2,1 cm) show a part of the drapery and a pair

4 The bones of the following large mammals were confirmed in the layers from this object: cattle, buffalo and camel, by the archaeozoological analysis conducted by Sonja Vuković, MA and Nemanja Marković, MA. We hereby thank them for allowing us to use the preliminary results of their analysis.





**Figure 8.** Bone plating: A. fragment with clothing piece and a pair of wings. B. fragment with male torso. C. fragment with an unidentified figural representation.

**Slika 8.** Koštana oplata: A. fragment sa draperijom i parom krila. B. fragment torza muške osobe. C. fragment neidentifikovane figuralne predstave.



A



C



B



D

**Figure 9.** Bone stripe-plaques: A Group 1. B. Group 2. C. Group 3. D. Group 4.

**Slika 9.** Koštane ukrasne trake: A. Grupa 1. B. Grupa 2. C. Grupa 3. D. Grupa 4.

of wings, probably belonging to the divinity of love, Eros, or the god of sleep and dreams, Hypnos, probably once located above the right arm of Ariadne. Also, a small fragment (4,7 x 3 cm)

with the representation of the naked right leg of a kneeling person, probably another satyr, belonged to the same plaque, once to the left of the central medallion (Figure 8a).

The entire scene was completed by additional bone pieces. The above mentioned male figurine, probably Dionysus, was made from a long bone segment. A part of bone plating, consisting of 5 fragments (dim. 4 x 2,3 cm), showing the torso of a third male person, probably *silenus* Maron, should be placed to the right of the central plaque (Figure 8b). Lower right corner piece is preserved, with one perforation. The polish at the edges indicated its' position on the relief.

There is also a small fragment of the end of bone stripe-plaque (dim. 7,4 x 1,9 cm) with a part of unidentified figural representations (Figure 8c).

The figural representation was first sketched and before execution it was necessary to plan carefully three dimension of the scene; it was particularly important to predetermine the depth of incisions to prevent raw material from breaking. Probably some guidelines were outlined or incised and afterwards the entire representation was carved out by a small, sharp metal chisel, by gradual removing the surplus of the material, and also by use of some fine, sharp pointed tool. More complicated details were carried out by gouges with a curved blade. Outer surface was also polished afterwards, by cloth with sand added, plant stems, etc. (cf. Bianchi 2007; Vecsey 2012). Perforations were made by drilling and they have different diameters, depending on their position on the plaque and on bone thickness and morphology at different segments. Traces of manufacture reveal an experienced craftsperson with a steady hand, since no mistakes, no traces of hesitating or stopping, changing directions etc., were noted in manufacture traces.

#### *Decorative plaques*

Approximately 60 fragments of bone stripe-plaques, roughly rectangular in shape, decorated with horizontal grooves or a “wavy spiral” motive were also discovered at the same place, in the *atrium* of the Late Roman building. They probably formed a frame for the main plaque or plaques with mythological scenes assembled together in the cycle of Dionysus – Bacchus. On some of these plaques small holes for attachment are visible (Figures 9a-d), and the entire bone plating was probably attached to a wooden surface by small bone or wooden pegs, since no traces of metal corrosion were noticed.

Four groups of these stripe-plaques can be distinguished according to the decoration on them (Figures 9a-d). The first group consists of stripes with wavy spirals (Figure 9a), while the rest of them have differently arranged horizontal incised lines, differing by the number of incisions and the ratio of flat and incised surfaces (figure 9b-d).

The stripes differ in length and width, and their edges were also cut in different manners (some straight, some oblique, with different angles), presumably to fit perfectly into the predetermined area on the object on which they were placed. For example, the smallest stripe with a wavy spiral completely preserved was 10,5 (9,8) x 2,1 cm, and it has one edge vertically cut and the other obliquely cut. This particular stripe-plaque did not have any perforations. Another stripe-plaque with the same, wavy spiral motif had preserved dimensions 11,5 x 2,7 cm. On the other hand, the smallest completely preserved stripe-plaque is 5,6 cm long, and has both lateral sides vertically cut. The maximum preserved length of a stripe-plaque is 18,6 cm (Figure 9d).

The stripe-plaques were made from large mammal ribs, most likely bovid, judging by their size – again, this was the only raw material that met the requirements in dimensions and shape. At first glance, they resembled another material – in this case antler, however, closer inspection of the objects’ surfaces (both inner and outer), especially of the bone structure, demonstrated clearly that these were segments of flat bones.

Ribs were cut into pieces, since they have natural curving and diverse width and thickness at various parts of their anatomy, so it was not possible to make one stripe from a single rib segment. Ribs are generally difficult to divide into regularly shaped pieces, especially when in fresh state (cf. Christidou 1999), so they may have been divided by direct or indirect percussion or perhaps by sawing. Also, broken rib pieces coming from kitchen (butchery) debris may have been used. However, no marks of these early stages of *débitage* were preserved. Also, later steps cannot be reconstructed with certainty, merely hypotheses can be made. Ribs were split longitudinally and then the entire spongy tissue was abraded from them, so that very thin, but completely smooth stripes were obtained.

In order to make completely flat stripes, they had to be processed further, most likely be emerged into hot liquid and then pressed into desired shape. All bones (and other osseous materials)

are generally more easily modelled if softened first, and some softening techniques, such as prolonged emerging into water, steaming, etc., make them more susceptible to shape modification, especially bending or straightening (cf. Semenov 1976: 159–160). However, used technique leaves no sign in the archaeological record, therefore, only hypotheses can be made, based on ethnographic and experimental data (for results obtained by different softening techniques cf. Osipowicz 2007).

Finally, they were thoroughly burnished and polished, with some fine-grained abrasive means, and perhaps by sand and cloth, or plant stems (cf. d'Errico and Giacobini 1985: 468–9, see also Bianchi 2007 with references).

The decorations were made by incising, i. e. by gradual scraping in order to obtain the wavy spirals in relief. This may have been done by small chisels and by gouges with curved blade. The polish was executed before incising, thus creating a more intensive difference between the two levels on the bone.

Another interesting detail was noted regarding the process of the making of wavy spiral decorations – several stripes have ends of the decorative motif cut off, suggesting that originally a longer stripe-plaque was made and then shortened in order to fit perfectly into the designated space on the box (Figure 9a).

## DISCUSSION

The entire bone plating from Davidovac used to be placed on a, presumably, wooden chest or a box used for jewellery, etc. The find is dated into the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, according to the archaeological context and analogies in art – frescoes, mosaics and reliefs.

The closest analogy comes from the Roman site of *Eleutherna* near Rethymno on Crete – a plating made of ivory, originating from the same period (the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century). In the central ivory plating on a chest a mythological scene of Amphitrite and Thetis, surrounded by marine *thiasos* is presented (Vasiliadou 2011: 68, Fig. 4). Furthermore, the bone plaque from

the Walters Art Museum has certain similarities with the representation of Dionysus and Ariadne, awoken by a winged Eros/Cupid. This plaque, dated in the 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century, comes from Egypt<sup>5</sup>. A partially preserved carving of a nude male figure that holds some fruits, most likely grapes, probably representing Dionysus, was discovered in Haluša (ancient *Elusa*) in Palestine (Goldfus and Bowes 2000).

The model for the representation of the scene of sleeping Ariadne and Dionysus with *thiasos* and winged Cupid could be found in Pompeian paintings, especially in the House of Ariadne (*Casa di Arianna*), at the western wall of an *oecus* in room 20 (Naples Archaeological Museum, Inv. No. 9278). Also, a fresco from Jamahiriya Museum in Tripoli, Libya, dated in the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century, bears a striking similarity to the scene on the Davidovac plaque<sup>6</sup>. Similar is the mythological scene represented on mosaic floor in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century *villa urbana* in *Thessalonica*, now in the Archaeological Museum in this town (Dunbabin 1999: 214–215, Fig. 226). Finally, a marble icon from the territory of *Pautalia*, found in the village of Krainci near Dupnica in Bulgaria, now in the Archaeological Museum in Sofia, bears the same scene (Венедиков 1955: 195) (Figure 10). Among the most recent finds, one relief that was discovered in 2011 in Drava river in the vicinity of Osijek, Croatia, should be mentioned<sup>7</sup>.

We should also mention the marble relief of Ariadne from the palace of Galerius, *Felix Romuliana*, which is, unfortunately, poorly reconstructed (Popović 2011: 117, Fig. 74). It is, however, a good chronological indicator, as the imperial palace was built in the first decade of the fourth century (approximately 305–311 AD) (Popović 2011: 87–96).

5 [www.art.thewalters.org/detail/40672/plaque-with-dionysos-ariadne-and-eros](http://www.art.thewalters.org/detail/40672/plaque-with-dionysos-ariadne-and-eros)

6 [www.theoi.com/Gallery/F12.3.html](http://www.theoi.com/Gallery/F12.3.html)

7 <http://www.jutarnji.hr/iz-drave-izvadili-reljef-iz-rimskog-doba--misle-da-je-rijec-o-veneri-i-dva-erota/983680/?foto=3>



**Figure 10.** Marble icon from National Archaeological Museum, Sofia, Bulgaria. (Courtesy of NAM, Sofia and thanks to Ms. Veselka Katsarova)

**Slika 10.** Mermerna ikona iz Nacionalnog arheološkog muzeja, Sofija, Bugarska. (Ljubaznošću NAM, Sofija i gđe Veselka Kacarove)

When it comes to ornate chests, a famous *Proiecta* casket, made of gilded silver, part of the so-called Esquiline Treasure from Rome, now in the British Museum, London, must be mentioned. This was a wedding chest of a bride, *Proiecta*, married to *Secundus* around 380 AD. The sides of the lid are decorated with pagan mythological themes: the goddess *Venus* on a cockleshell and the scene of a Roman bath on large sides, and *Nereids* (sea-nymphs) riding a *ketos* (a dragon-like sea monster) and a *hippocampus* (a beast that is half horse and half fish) at the narrow sides of the lid. The representation of one of the *Nereids*, to the right of *Venus*, is very similar to the iconography of our *Ariadne* from *Davidovac*, as well as of *Amphitrite* from *Eleutherna* chest. It is particularly interesting that this casket, decorated with pagan mythological scenes, was a marriage gift to a Christian woman, who lived during the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (probably died in 383 AD) (Weitzmann 1979: 330–331, No. 310, Pl. IX).

The original appearance of our representation has been only partially reconstructed. It can only be speculated on the exact position of each piece on the box. Even the stripe-plaques cannot be fitted completely into their original positions due to the fragmentation of some of them. Furthermore, it is not possible to know whether additional pieces are missing and which ones.

For the similar ivory plating from *Eleutherna*, Crete, also dated into the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, a hypothetical reconstruction was offered. Unfortunately, for the reconstruction of the box from *Davidovac* there is not enough information at this stage of research.

Pieces with wavy spirals were distributed around the main representation on the reconstruction of the *Eleutherna* piece, however, in our case, their exact position cannot be reconstructed. Since some of the pieces were obliquely cut (at different angles), it may be assumed that they were positioned on a trapezoidal segment of the box, but, as mentioned above, they can be fitted together in several possible ways; also, we do not know how many pieces are missing.

Although the Alexandrian workshops were famous for production of bone and ivory items and plating for furniture, in the Late Roman period this craft was transferred to the western artisan centres, like the newly-founded capital city of Constantinople. Also, recent discoveries of workshop debris and carved pieces from both the East and the West suggest that bone carving workshops were much more numerous than previously thought (cf. Goldfus and Bowes 2000: 186, with references).

We assume that both reliefs, the ivory plaque from *Eleutherna* and bone plating from *Davidovac*, could have been made in Thessaloniki (*Thessalonica*) or Constantinople (*Constantinopolis*) in the first decades of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Vasilidou 2011: 73–74). It should be noted that the Late Roman settlement in *Davidovac*, probably a mansion, was formed along the Roman road *Naissus – Scupi – Thessalonica – Constantinopolis* (Petković 2012b: 25–26). By this way, luxury goods, such as “Macedonian” grey ware and em-

bossed glass vessels, were imported to the interior of the Balkans (Радиновић 2012: 113–115).

#### CONCLUSION REMARKS

Bone carvings were common in the Roman Empire, used for a large spectre of purposes. Especially widespread were bone inlays applied on wooden objects – furniture pieces, boxes, lids, etc. (cf. e. g. MacGregor 1985; Schallmayer 1996; Goldfus and Bowes 2000; Bíró 2012; Vass 2012). One such bone carving plaque is the object of our paper; it stands out by its' highly artistic, carefully made representation, so far probably the best preserved and most beautifully made example originating from the central Balkans territory (cf. Petković 1995). Also, it is important that this exceptional find has a clear archaeological context and rather precise dating in the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> – first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (period of Tetrarchy and the reign of Constantine I and his sons).

The raw material choice is quite unusual. Although bones from easily available domestic animals, mainly cattle and horses, along with red deer antlers, were main raw materials in the Roman Empire (cf. Bianchi 2007; Choyke 2012), preferred skeletal elements were long bones, particularly metapodials, while flat bones were much more rarely exploited. Luxurious objects were predominantly made from antler or elephant or hippopotamus ivory (cf. Schallmayer 1996). Also, compact bone of long bones was used, since this material possesses desired physical and mechanical qualities – especially great thickness, and that allows a representation to be carved more easily and with more precision. *Scapulae* and ribs were, in fact, rarely used (Bianchi 2007: 361), and when used, it was particularly because of their specific form. While ribs may have been used for multiple purposes (see, for example, Gostenčnik 2010), *scapulae* are seldom reported (c. f. Deschler-Erb 1998; Bíró 2001).

The choice of *scapula* and ribs, on one hand, demonstrates “saving” on raw material, i. e. using locally available, cheaper materials, per-

haps coming from butchery debris, instead of more luxurious one, but also suggests artisan's extensive knowledge of raw materials, since even such “replacement” met his requirements regarding size and shape.

Craftsperson that made this object had great technological knowledge on raw materials and was very skilful, since no mistakes or hesitations were noted on it. Furthermore, the entire representation is highly artistic in every sense – in composition, figure forms, details, proportions, etc.

This opens interesting questions on the origin of this piece and its' owner. It is obvious that only very wealthy people could afford such luxurious carrying cases, which testifies to the prosperity of the Roman settlement in Davidovac in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The Late Roman settlement by the road *Naissus–Scupi* was communicating with at least three neighbouring provinces – *Dacia Mediterranea*, *Macedonia II* and *Praevelitana*. There was an intersection of roads leading to large cities of these provinces – *Naissus*, *Serdica*, *Pautalia*, *Stobi* and *Lissus*. Merchants travelling these roads brought different goods to Roman *mansio* in Davidovac, among them the luxurious wooden wedding chest decorated with the bone plating.

Although the wooden wedding casket from Davidovac with the bone plating was probably manufactured in a workshop located in a large city centre, like *Thessalonica* or Constantinople, it is also possible that it was made in one of Dardanian towns, like *Naissus*, *Scupi* or *Ulpiana*. It must be stressed that such items, usually furniture, were produced in carpenters' workshops and that same artisans were carving wood and bone artefacts (Petković 1995: 13–14.). Following this idea, it could have been possible to manufacture this chest even in Davidovac, if we presume that the partially excavated building in probe 41 was some kind of an artisan centre, with different workshops around a central courtyard (Petković 1995: 16–18; Петковић 2001: 70–73, Figure 1). This hypothesis could be investigated only by further excavations of this Late Roman object.

*This text is a result of the projects Romanization, urbanization and transformation of urban centres of civil, military and residential character in Roman provinces on the territory of Serbia, no. 177007 and Archaeology of Serbia: cultural identity, integrational factors, technological processes and the role of the central Balkans in the development of the European prehistory, no. OI 177020, funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.*

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## Rezime

**RIMSKA KOŠTANA OPLATA IZ DAVIDOVCA (JUŽNA SRBIJA):  
PRELIMINARNA INTERPRETACIJA I REKONSTRUKCIJA**

SOFIJA PETKOVIĆ, SELENA VITEZOVIĆ i ŽELJKA TEMERINSKI

Lokalitet Davidovac, smešten 9,5 km jugozapadno od Vranja, istraživan je tokom 2011. godine u okviru zaštitnih arheoloških iskopavanja na trasi Koridora 10. Osim praistorijskih nalaza, otkriveno je bogato rimsko naselje sa nekropolom, smešteno u II-V vek nove ere. Arheološki raddovi obavljani su na dve lokacije, Davidovac-Gradište i Davidovac-Crkvište.

Na lokaciji Davidovac-Gradište, među brojnim arhitektonskim ostacima, izdvaja se jedna poznorimska građevina, podignuta krajem III ili početkom IV veka, dvaput obnavjana tokom IV i uništena u požaru u V veku. U atrijumu, pored kružne peći, u sloju iz IV veka otkriveni su fragmenti koštane oplata.

Sama oplata je bila fragmentovana i poslata je u Konzervatorsku laboratoriju Narodnog muzeja zarad konzervacije i daljeg proučavanja.

Glavna predstava jeste mitološka scena usnule Arijadne okružene satirima. Osim toga, može se rekonstruisati delimično i muška figura, moguće Dionis. Tehnološki detalji čine ovu predstavu posebno zanimljivom. Glavna scena izrezbarena je na komadu veće pljosnate kosti, po svemu sudeći, skapuli krupnog sisara, veličine govečeta. Visoka ispoliranost kosti verovatno je imala za svrhu da imitira slonovaču.

Osim fragmenata glavne scene, nađeno je i oko 60 fragmenata duguljastih pravougaonih

traka, koje su najverovatnije bile raspoređene oko nje ili na bočnim stranama predmeta na kome su stajale. Tačan položaj, međutim, još uvek nije u potpunosti rekonstruisan. Ove su trake bile izrađene od segmenata rebara, takođe krupnog sisara poput govečeta, i bile su ukrašene paralelnim horizontalnim rebrima i volutama.

Sama oplata najverovatnije je bila deo drvene kutije, za nakit ili nešto slično.

Vreme nastanka ove predstave se na osnovu konteksta može sigurno datovati u sam kraj III – prvu polovinu IV veka, što je veoma značajno jer su brojne koštane mitološke predstave iz rimskog perioda ili nađene van konteksta ili su nađene u kontekstu znatno kasnijem od vremena nastanka.

Nalaz takođe otvara interesatno pitanje porekla. Mada su najpoznatiji najpoznatiji rezbari bili iz aleksandrijskih radionica, novi nalazi ukazuju da je postojao i veći broj regionalnih radionica u kasnoj antici. Takođe, postavlja se pitanje vlasnika kutije – Davidovac je očito u rimsko vreme bio prosperitetno mesto, i nalazio se u blizini važnog puta *Naissus–Scupi*, pa je moguće da su i trgovci koji su ovuda prolazili donosili i luksuznu robu iz nekog od obližnjih većih centara.

CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији  
Библиотека Матице српске, Нови Сад

572:902(497)(082)

**BIOARHEOLOGIJA na Balkanu** : metodološke, komparativne i  
rekonstruktivne studije života u prošlosti / urednici  
Nataša Miladinović-Radmilović, Selena Vitezović.  
- Beograd : Srpsko arheološko društvo ; Sremska Mitrovica : Blago Sirmijuma,  
2016 (Novi Beograd : DC Grafički centar).  
- 204 str. : ilustr. ; 29 cm.  
- (Radovi Bioarheološke sekcije Srpskog arheološkog društva = Papers of the  
Bioarchaeological Section of the Serbian Archaeological Society)

Na spor. nasl. str.: Bioarchaeology in the Balkans. - Radovi na srp. i engl. jeziku.  
- Tiraž 200. - Str. 1-2: Bioarheologija na Balkanu /  
Nataša Miladinović-Radmilović, Selena Vitezović.  
- Napomene i bibliografske reference uz tekst.  
- Rezimeji na engl. jeziku uz svaki rad. - Bibliografija uz svaki rad.

ISBN 978-86-84457-17-4

1. Миладиновић-Радмиливић, Наташа, 1973-  
а) Биоархеологија - Балкан - Зборници  
COBISS.SR-ID 304124935



