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## NOTES ON THE CULT OF THE GODDESS *DEA DARDANICA* IN THE SOUTH OF UPPER MOESIA (*A few examples from Kosovo and Metohija*)

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**ABSTRACT.** The paper presents the data on the cult of the goddess of Dardania (*Dea Dardanica*) in Kosovo and Metohija. The existence of the cult was authenticated in Kosovo and Metohija by votive arae found in the Smira village near Kosovska Vitina and in the ancient settlement *Vendenis (Vindenae)* near the Glavnik village in the municipality of Podujevo. A certain number of epigraph records shows the prevailing respect for the *Dea Dardanica* cult in this area.

**KEYWORDS:** cult; *Dea Dardanica*; Dardania; Kosovo and Metohija; Upper Moesia.

The knowledge about religion and cults of a certain ethnic group provides us with spiritual, ethnic, political, and social picture of the society on a certain territory; in this particular case, the territory of Kosovo and Metohija in the Roman period. Therefore, the presence of epichoric cultural remains and traces of local cults together with

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the ancient tradition intertwined with the new religion show the results of the romanisation on this territory. However, in the inland of the Balkan Peninsula, a significant number of local cults, epichoric deities was persevered, which was one form of ancient world adjusting, but also the indicator of how much the locals were entrenched. This resulted in the integration of its kind of the Roman culture and local tradition; the spiritual syncretism, however, can be found with religion and cults (Kudrjavcev, 1957, p. 161; Čerškov, 1969, p. 64).

Regardless of the fact how much has been done in attempts to elucidate these questions, it can be said that we are still assuming, at least, about some aspects of spiritual life and the ways used for the representation of religious phenomena. This is highly typical of a Neolithic man, especially in the central area of the Balkan Peninsula, even though, we do have significant papers on that (Garašanin, 1968, pp. 211–233). The same goes for the Iron Age, i.e. the Illyrians—oral sources do not offer any data on religion and cults of the Illyrians from pre-Roman and Roman periods. Even though we do have certain ancient authors who spoke about their religion, the information on cults is marginally mentioned (Gisinger, 1927, pp. 661–687; Čerškov, 1969, pp. 64–69; Љубомировић, 2014, pp. 733–745; Mirdita, 2015, pp. 404–405). Due to the lack of written sources, the only way to learn about the religious life and cults is to study original archaeological materials, epigraph and iconographic records, (Čerškov, 1969, pp. 64–69; Mirdita, 2007, pp. 13–21; Поповић, 2008, pp. 31–43; Dobruna-Salihu, 2012, pp. 217–225; Љубомировић, 2014, pp. 123–134; Mirdita, 2015, pp. 404–405; Љубомировић, 2016, pp. 221–242; Mihajlović, 2016, pp. 679–710).

Epigraph records from Kosovo and Metohija emphasize the fact that in the Dardanian part of Upper Moesia romanisation spread and affected the spiritual life of the locals, whose lifestyle during the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries was very complex. This was seen best on the statues dedicated to different deities belonging to the Roman state religion, Hellenic and eastern, or, even, religious traditions of the ancient Balkan peoples.

This paper deals with the epigraph records on the *Dea Dardanica* cult in the south of Upper Moesia: it is about two votive arae which prove the existence of this cult in Kosovo and Metohija. One votive ara with an inscription was found in the Smir village near Kosovska Vitina and the second one in the ancient settlement *Vendenis* (*Vindenaë*) near the Glavnik village in the Podujevo municipality (Shukriu, 1989, p. 16 fot. 1; Mirdita, 2007, pp. 31–33; Поповић, 2008,

pp. 38–39; Dobruna-Salihu, 2012, pp. 217–225; Mihajlović, 2016, pp. 690–691).

The inscription on the votive ara from the Smir village near Kosovska Vitina says: *Deae Dard(aniae) / Artor(ius) / Heracli(tus) spec(ulator) leg(ionis) IIII Fl(aviae) / v(otum) s(olvit) m(erito) / Gentiano et Basso / co(n)s(ulibus)* (Shukriu, 1989, p. 16 fot. 1; Mirdita, 2007, p. 32; Shukriu, 2011, pp. 571–575; Mihajlović, 2016, p. 691). This inscription can easily be dated due to the mention of the consul. The fact is that *Gentianus* and *Bassus* were consuls in 211; therefore, the construction period of this statue can be precisely determined. This votive ara was dedicated to a speculator of Legio IV Flavio whose Roman name was *Artorius* and Greek *Heraclitus*. Judging by the Greek name (*Heraclitus*), it is about the person of an oriental descent (presumably from some Hellenic provinces of the Roman Empire).

As mentioned before, the votive ara dedicated to the Dardanian goddess *Dea Dardanica* was found in the ancient village *Vendenis* (*Vindenaë*) near the Glavnik village in the Podujevo municipality in 2003. It is dedicated to a consular beneficiary from IV *Flaviae M. Aurelius Valerianus* legion and the inscription says: *Deae Dard(anicae) / M. Aur(elius) Vale(r)ianus / b(ene)ff(iciarius) c(on)s(ularis) / leg(ionis) IIII Fl[aviae] / [V(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)]* (Dobruna-Salihu, 2012, pp. 217–225; Mihajlović, 2016, p. 691; EDCS-64100134<sup>2</sup>). All the onomastic elements related to the person are purely Roman. *Marcus* is one of the most common Roman names. The nomen gentilicium is *Aurelius*, which means that his ancestors became the Roman citizens during the rule of the last Antoninus or even thanks to the Edict of Caracala in 212. The cognomen *Valerianus* is also highly common in inscriptions from the Principate. Given the fact that most of the inscriptions dedicated to the beneficiaries from Legio IV Flavio found in Kosovo and Metohija are from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, it is justified to place this statue in that period. The beneficiary's name does not reveal anything about his origin, but the fact that the statue was built to honour the local deity could indicate the possibility of him being the romanised local citizen. It is believed that Legio IV Flavio secured the transport on the roads leading to the inland of the province (*Lissus-Naissus*) (Самарџић, 2019, pp. 119–128).

<sup>2</sup> The label refers to the number under which the statues were registered in on-line epigraphic database (Epigraphic database Clauss/Slaby – EDCS [http://db.e dcs.eu/epigr/epi\\_en.php](http://db.e dcs.eu/epigr/epi_en.php), accessed in June 2019).

The inscriptions indicate that they were mostly dedicated to the military officials. Therefore, both epigraph records with *Dea Dardanica* inscriptions were built by the soldiers from Legio IV Flavia. The first inscription was dedicated to the speculator and the second to the beneficiary consul. It is important to state that the beneficiary consuls and speculators were integral part of the province envoy's staff and they could have different roles (a messenger, an intelligence officer, a law clerk, as well as a handsman in the case of the speculators, etc.) and be involved in the activities related to the road and customs stops (Austin & Rankov, 1995, pp. 151–154; Cupcea, 2008, pp. 263–279). While taking up their new duties in the stations, they built votive statues and left inscriptions to express the gratitude to gods.

In the case of the aforementioned epigraph records from Kosovo and Metohija, the first inscription stated the year when the person the statue was dedicated to took up their duties (by stating the consular couple) and the second one did not state anything (Dise, 1997, p. 285; Mihajlović, 2016, pp. 692–693). It is assumed that the statues were dedicated to Heraclius and Valerian who built the statues when they took up their new duties. The location of the statue from the Smir village near Kosovska Vitina is near the *Ulpiana-Scupi* road, while the second one was found in the ancient settlement *Vendenis (Vindenae)* near the Glavnik village in the Podujevo municipality (the *Lissus-Naissus* road). Judging from the inscriptions on the statues, it can be assumed that *Dea Dardanica* was the deity suitable for showing gratitude when taking up the duties related to administration of Dardania (Dobruna-Salih, 2012, pp. 220–221; Mihajlović, 2016, pp. 692–693). Besides, the appearance of the statue dedicated to this deity in other provinces (Dacia) leads to the conclusion that the immigrants from Daradania were the ones whom the inscriptions were dedicated to (Поповић, 2008, pp. 31–43; Mihajlović, 2016, pp. 679–710).

The researchers who studied or discussed the *Dea Dardanica* cult in the Balkan provinces of the Empire emphasized the goddess in their analyses and presented it in ways that the Romans interpreted the act of honouring the tribal goddess or the phenomenon which is related to the Roman imperial context (Shukriu, 1989, pp. 15–21; Mirdita, 2007, pp. 31–33; Поповић, 2008, pp. 31–43; Dobruna-Salih, 2012, pp. 217–225; Mihajlović, 2016, pp. 679–710). Some of them presumed that the epigraph and iconographic records (Podujevo, Vitina, Kuršumlija Spa, Gornji Milanovac, Niš, Romania)

dedicated to *Dea Dardanica* could represent the personification of the province of Dardania due to the factors which were interpreted as symbols of natural and economic characteristics of Dardania (a money bag and *labris* – mining, the bovine – livestock farming, a boar – hunting) (Jovanović, 1980, pp. 53–60; Shukriu, 1989, pp. 15–21; Ferri, 2003, pp. 453; Mirdita, 2007, pp. 31–33; Dobruna-Salihu, 2012, pp. 217–225). However, I. Popović adds that figurative compositions and epigraphic representations of deities of Dardania are from the period when the province under that name did not exist and therefore this goddess should not be perceived as the personification of the province of Dardania, but broadly, as the deity of Dardania, the home country (Поповић, 2008, p. 40). V. Mihajlović, in recent studies, argues that this conclusion cannot be regarded as certain because it is based on general assumptions. The final thought that Dardania is iconographically represented as the region rich in ores, livestock, and wild animals is based on scattered data from different oral sources which were joined together using the logic of ethnic determinism. According to Mihajlović, the creation of concept and image of *Dea Dardanica* was most likely influenced by the possible personification of Dardania as the mining domain, the so-called mining money. He thinks that the Dardanians did not exist as the solid ethnic group in the pre-Roman period and it is not even certain if they had anything resembling the tribal goddess. Therefore, *Dea Dardanica* should be perceived as the indirect result of the processes that were happening in the context of the Roman Empire. The goddess of Dardania is at the same time the occurrence which is unequivocally and strongly connected with the context of the Roman imperial structure (Mihajlović, 2016, p. 697).

Putting aside all the aforementioned possibilities and assumptions on the identification and its functions, *Dea Dardanica* still remains the characteristic deity for the Dardanians and their territory. Due to epigraph records dedicated to the *Dea Dardanica* cult and iconographic records from Kosovo and Metohija (Podujevo, Vitina) (Shukriu, 1989, pp. 15–21; Mirdita, 2007, pp. 31–33; Dobruna-Salihu, 2012, pp. 217–225; Mihajlović, 2016, pp. 690–691), which were most likely dedicated to the immigrants from Dardania (Romania) (EDCS-11200904; EDCS-11200905; Bărbulescu, 1997, p. 553; Поповић, 2008, p. 39), but also from other regions of Upper Moesia (Kuršumplija Spa, Gornji Milanovac, Niš) (IMS IV 118–119, nr. 104; EDCS-13900438; Вулић, 1941/1948, p. 101; Dušanić, 1976,

pp. 156–157, nr. 167), as well as other regions, it can be concluded that this goddess should not be perceived as merely the personification of Dardania, but, broadly as the deity of Dardania, the home country.

**CONCLUSION** A certain number of epigraph statues that testify to the existence of the *Dea Dardanica* cult in the ancient period in Kosovo and Metohija (Upper Moesia) was preserved. These statues are mostly found at the locations of old road stations and are often the result of coincidental findings at the location that is not associated with the cult ritual. The *Dea Dardanica* cult in Kosovo and Metohija (the south of Upper Moesia) was authenticated by the votive arae which were found in the Smir village near Kosovska Vitina and in the ancient settlement *Vendenis (Vindenae)* near the Glavink village in the Podujevo municipality. A small number of these epigraph records from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century shows the respect for the *Dea Dardanica* cult on this territory. Both epigraph records from Kosovo and Metohija were built by the soldiers from Legio IV Flavia, the first inscription by the speculator and the second one by the consular beneficiary.

It can be said that *Dea Dardanica*, in the way we know about it from epigraph and iconographic records from Kosovo and Metohija and other regions of Upper Moesia (Kuršumljija Spa, Gornji Milanovac, Niš), was some kind of official deity in the realms of local government of Dardania, i.e. Upper Moesia and consequently respected among the people from this territory. There are not grounds for conclusions that the goddess of Dardania was some kind of exclusive cult that attracted selected individuals from local or regional upper social classes nor for the argument that it was an overall popular deity of all the citizens of Dardania. Due to the epigraph and iconographic representations of *Dea Dardanica* found so far, it cannot be even characterized as the deity which was largely respected among the Dardanians. In the end, this goddess should not be perceived as primarily the personification of the province of Dardania, but broadly as the deity of the home country of the Dardanians.

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ГЛИГОР М. САМАРЦИЋ

УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У ПРИШТИНИ СА ПРИВРЕМЕНИМ СЕДИШТЕМ  
У КОСОВСКОЈ МИТРОВИЦИ, ФИЛОЗОФСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ  
КАТЕДРА ЗА ИСТОРИЈУ

РЕЗИМЕ

БИЉЕШКЕ О КУЛТУ БОГИЊЕ DEA DARDANICA НА ЈУГУ ГОРЊЕ МЕЗИЈЕ  
(НЕКОЛИКА ПРИМЈЕРА СА КОСОВА И МЕТОХИЈЕ)

У раду се презентују подаци о култу *Dea Dardanica* на југу провинције Горње Мезије. Сачуван је скроман број епиграфских споменика који свједоче о постојању овог култа у римско доба на подручју Косова и Метохије (Горња Мезија). Ти споменици потичу углавном са локалитета некадашњих путних станица и најчешће су резултат случајних налаза са локалитета који нису везани уз култни ритуал. Култ *Dea Dardanica* на Косову и Метохији (југ Горње Мезије) посвједочен је на вотивној ари која је нађена у



села Смира код Косовске Витине и у античком насељу *Vendenis* (*Vindenaë*) код села Главник у општини Подујево. Ође се датују у III вијек. Оба епиграфска свједочанства подигли су војници легије IV Флавија, при чему се у првом натпису ради о спекулатору док је у другом ријеч о бенефицијарном конзулару.

Може се рећи да је *Dea Dardanica*, у облику какав познајемо на основу епиграфских свједочанстава и иконографског материјала са Косова и Метохије и других подручја Горње Мезије (Куршумлијска Бања, Горњи Милановац, Ниш), била нека врста значајног божанства у оквирима локалног управног уређења Дарданије, односно Горње Мезије и стога је поштована међу људима са овог подручја. Нема основа за закључке да је богиња Дарданије била нека врста ексклузивног култа који је окупљао одабране појединце из локалних или регионалних повлашћених слојева, али ни за мишљење да се ради о општепопуларном божанству свих становника Дарданије. Такође, на основу до сада пронађених епиграфских свједочанстава и иконографске грађе *Dea Dardanica* се не може окарактерисати ни као божанство које је масовно поштовано код Дарданаца. Отуда ову богињу и не треба схватати само као персонификацију провинције Дарданије већ као божанство домовине Дарданаца.

Кључне речи: култ; *Dea Dardanica*; Дарданија; Косово и Метохија; Горња Мезија.



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