

# Ex Asia et Syria

Oriental Religions  
in the Roman Central Balkans

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Front cover: The statuette of Magna Mater or her priestess from unknown locality, kept in the National Museum in Belgrade (photo-documentation: National Museum Belgrade)

Back cover: Back cover image: The head of a statue of Jupiter Dolichenus from Karataš (Diana), kept in National Museum Belgrade, The Archaeological Museum of Đerdap collection (photo: Popović, Borić Brešković 2013: 309, num. 70)

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The religions and cults of Asia Minor, Syrian, Persian and Egyptian origin, which were present in the territory of the Central Balkan provinces during the period of the Roman reign, with all their characteristics and peculiarities, have been a focus of my scientific research for a long time, since my doctoral thesis, particularly because they represent such an inexhaustible subject. Although there are only several archaeological and epigraphic monuments confirming the Egyptian cults of Serapis and Isis in the Central Balkans' territory, they drew the attention of scientists, as the monuments of the god Mithras, while Asia Minor and Syrian cults were somewhat marginalised in the eyes and minds of researchers, without any reason whatsoever.

This book was written out of my wish to, relying on epigraphic, archaeological and historical sources, gather, document, analyse and interpret all so-far known testimonies from the Roman Central Balkans' territory, which represent evidence of the presence of the Asia Minor and Syrian religions that spread and flourished in the new territory, incorporated in their own way into a local context and existed until the end of the Antiquity. In an attempt to encompass and comprehend every possible aspect of the religions for their more accurate interpretation, it was necessary to revise known monuments, to include new finds and to make valid hypothesis in those cases where epigraphic, archaeological and historical evidence was not present.

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**'Corpus habet cineres, animam sacer abstulit aer'**

(the inscription on a funerary monument found in Salona,  
CIL III, 6384, with images of *Attis tristis* on the lateral sides)





# Introduction

'The spiritual culture of Antiquity on our territory represents a special field of research, the study of the cults based on the written material with new epigraphic finds, but it will never be completed unless it blends with the research of cult objects. The research of the monuments of Oriental cults is a valuable contribution to this problem'.

These words were spoken by one of the most important classical scholars in the subject of the ancient Balkans' history, Prof. Fanula Papazoglu, at the round table where the state of the research of Antiquity in eastern parts of the former Yugoslavia was discussed.<sup>1</sup> Now, more than 40 years later, previously written words are unfortunately still true, since from then only a few studies and books dealing with a particular Graeco-Roman cult have been published. Even in those monographs, 'Oriental' religions and cults, although at first glance interesting to the researchers, remained out of focus. The reasons for such an occurrence are many – unsystematically led archaeological excavations in bigger Roman centres, unpublished documentation from previous archaeological research and the frequent discontinuity in the publishing of new excavation results or of a particular kind of material from a certain locality or area have left us with short archaeological reports, a few unpublished master's and doctoral theses and catalogues of museum collections dealing with different archaeological monuments and objects, among which cult objects like sculptures, statues, reliefs etc., are presented in catalogue form. Specific problems were also tackled sporadically in the context of an individual monument or object like, for example, the problem of the typology and iconography of votive and/or funerary monuments, where inscriptions (if present) confirm the Oriental origin of a deity and where the dedicant's name or presented iconography imply the dedicant's Oriental origin. In the context of cult monuments and objects, rare recent articles tend to take as given already existing scientific opinions from earlier literature, without entering deeper into the core of the problematics of numerous important elements like literary, epigraphic and numismatic sources, the revision of material, and the analysis of iconography and of the local context (the topography, residents, institutions, economy, social relationships, spiritual life etc. in a particular locality or area). In different Roman Central Balkan localities, sacralised spaces are

sometimes presumed in earlier literature, but there are no efforts to analyse and interpret published or unpublished archaeological documentation or to conduct an eventual reconstruction of the space in question.<sup>2</sup> Similar to neighbouring provinces like Dacia,<sup>3</sup> Roman provincial religion in the Central Balkan territory was understood as one of many sides of the Roman culture, without really comprehending that it mirrored the core of one's life and beliefs, with all the wealth and complexity of ritual practices, sacrifices, prayers etc., which encompassed one's religious knowledge about a particular deity or religion, but primarily one's most intimate thoughts and feelings.

Since none of the above mentioned problems (like many others associated with the identity of the indigenous population in a particular part of the Central Balkans' territory, the existing degree of reception or resistance to the particular cult or religion in question, the existing level of syncretism between unknown indigenous deities and a particular foreign deity, etc.) were not explored more deeply in earlier literature related to the cults and religions from Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt and Persia in the Roman Central Balkans, it is clear that any serious research must take into account not only previously mentioned, but also the effort to encompass all the complexity of a particular territory and its residents in question, to be able to get as clear and accurate a picture as possible. All characteristics and specifics of the Central Balkans' area must be reckoned with, bearing in mind the complex situation in the pre-Roman period, when various indigenous tribes inhabited the territory and the fact that the northern and southern parts of the Central Balkans were under different cultural and, thus, religious influences before the Roman conquest. Into this quite complicated structure, the Roman army, administration and culture were introduced by the Roman state, bringing people *ex toto orbe Romano*.

<sup>2</sup> In localities where it is possible, like Viminacium for example, new field methods like geophysics methods (geomagnetic, geoelectric, geo-radar), GIS, LIDAR, multidisciplinary approach which includes researchers from other sciences like geomorphologists, petrologists, archaeobotanists, archaeozoologists etc.), 3D models etc. are applied, but unfortunately not in many other Roman localities in Central Balkans.

<sup>3</sup> Szabó 2018: 8. As C. Szabó explains studying Roman religion of Dacia in Romania was for a long time but a single chapter of the 'cultural life' of the province and presented as a consequence of the 'deep Romanisation', Szabó 2018: 8.

<sup>1</sup> Papazoglu 1978: 155-164.

The focus of this book will be the cults and religions of Asia Minor and Syria, by which I refer to all currently known theologies and deities attested epigraphically and archaeologically in the territory of the Central Balkan Roman provinces, like the Metroac religion, the cults of the gods Sabazius, Jupiter Dolichenus, Jupiter Turmagades, Jupiter Melanus and other Asia Minor local Jupiters, Mên and the goddess Artemis Ephesia. Syrian cults are presented by through monuments of the deities Sol Invictus and Dea Syria (Atargatis). Since we dispose of only one, but very intriguing monument dedicated to the god Theos Hypsistos, I included it into the corpus of monuments, as part of the discussion about Palmyrene funerary sculptures of priests and private religious associations attested in the Central Balkan. However intriguing and very important religion in Roman Central Balkan' territory, attested with numerous monuments and sanctuaries in the antiquity, Mithraism will be the subject of a separate publication by this author.<sup>4</sup>

Judging by the number of confirmed Asia Minor and Syrian deities, it is very clear that they were favoured in the Roman provinces of the Central Balkan, which is supported by the fact that in parallel with the Roman invasion and their conquest of the territory during the 1st century, the first traces of religions from Asia Minor can be followed, brought by the Roman army, merchants and other social groups. Since I am aware of the complexity and the breadth of the subject of this book, it is necessary, after specifying the geographical and time frame, to carefully follow the paths of penetration of each religion and cult in question, the form that each religion and cult had in the moment

of its diffusion into the Central Balkan territory and the different methods of their integration, adaptation and transformation within a local context. Equally important are the iconography and syncretism of different imageries, the religious aspects of each deity, the significance of official imperial ideology, the role of dedicants belonging to different professions and social strata, as the main carriers of a particular cult, the presence or absence of current philosophical teachings, the cult organisation and hierarchy, the sanctuaries and sacralised spaces and, finally, the co-existence of the budding Christianity and the demise of pagan cults in general.

However, the focus will be to present all the existing epigraphic and archaeological evidence connected to the Asia Minor and Syrian religions and cults attested in the Roman Central Balkan. In those cases where a certain Asia Minor or Syrian cult (or for that matter, the influence of a certain cult) is presumably present but cannot be sufficiently argued, it will be highlighted but not included into the corpus of monuments.

Along with the revision and presentation of new analysis and the interpretation of different problems in the context of Asia Minor and Syrian religions and cults during the Roman reign in the Central Balkans, it should be possible to determine and understand the role, influence and importance of these religions and cults in the lives of Romanised and indigenous population and to comprehend in what way and to what degree they were incorporated into the religious system and beliefs of Central Balkan residents during Antiquity.

<sup>4</sup> The Corpus of Mithraic monuments from Central Balkans' territory, followed by their analysis and interpretation, is in the preparation to be published.

# Geographical Frame and Pre-Roman History of the Central Balkan Roman Provinces

The term 'Central Balkan' is not precisely defined in scholarly literature, but it is necessary to somehow determine the territory which constituted a particular geographical part in the Roman Empire. The central position of this territory between the Greeks in the south, the Illyrians in the west and the Thracians in the east made it not only a link between the Hellenized and Roman world, but also a very transitional area for different cultures and a very attractive space for settling, because of its abundant forests, mountains and river valleys that offered fertile land, but also because of other natural resources, like rich mines and thermal springs.<sup>5</sup> Guided by the natural frontiers of the Balkan Peninsula, the definition of famous geographer Jovan Cvijić, the Central Balkan area would comprise a small part of today's eastern Bosnia, the whole of Serbia with Kosovo, part of northern Montenegro and part of the Republic of North Macedonia (a little below the area of today's Skopje). In Antiquity, it would encompass the eastern part of the province of Dalmatia and the whole of Moesia Superior, that is, in Late Antiquity, parts of the Roman provinces of Dalmatia, Moesia Prima, Praevalitana, Dardania, Dacia Ripensis and Dacia Mediterranea.<sup>6</sup> As S. Ferjančić explains, there are considerable differences between the Roman Balkan provinces, in the context of their formation and military organisation, but the mutual factor is that they were all urbanised and Romanised in a similar period, in the last decades of the Republic.<sup>7</sup> Before the formation of the Roman provinces, the Central Balkan territory was inhabited by different tribes known to the ancient writers as the Tribali, Autariatae, Dardani, Scordisci and Moesi (Figure 1).<sup>8</sup> Each of them inhabited a particular part of the territory and had its own history of confrontation and pacification with the Roman state. Although they were settled in the same geographical area, they were not similar in an ethnic, political or language context.<sup>9</sup> As F. Papazoglu points out, the Tribali were closer to the Thracian people, the Dardanians had a strong Thracian streak, while the Scordisci were of Celtic origin. The first population mentioned by ancient writers in the 5th century BC

were the Triballi, while the Autariatae are known from the end of the 4th century, followed by the Dardanians and the Scordisci, who appear in historical sources at the beginning of the 3rd century BC. The Moesi are not mentioned until the beginning of the 1st century. These tribes had their own particular political history, social organisation and structure, economy and religious practices. Nevertheless, while the Tribali, Autariatae and Moesi remained at a semi-nomadic level, hunting and practicing primitive agriculture without permanent settlements, the Dardanians and Scordisci reached a higher degree of civilisation and cultural progress. Beside farming and cattle-breeding, their material culture shows knowledge of different kinds of crafts, trades and exploitation of mines. They built their settlements on hilltops with earthen walls around them and had a road network defined by the natural features of the terrain. Some of them, like the Celtic Scordisci, even had their own monetary economy and mints.<sup>10</sup> Without entering further into the history and development of these paleo-Balkan tribes, this ethnic diversity was present at the moment of the Roman conquest, at the beginning of the 1st century.

The first contact between the Romans and the indigenous Central Balkan tribes happened in 200 BC, when Publius Sulpicius Galba reached Illyricum as a result of the attack on Macedonia. The Dardanians were the tribe that is mentioned as the one tribe that offered help to the Romans.<sup>11</sup> From that period on, until the final conquest of the whole territory, there were constant wars between the Romans and paleo-Balkan tribes, with the turning point in the Roman attempts to conquer the indigenous population between Macedonia and the Danube and to reach the Danube River to establish a secure boundary against the barbarian tribes (later known as the *limes*) being Marcus Licinius Crassus' expedition in 29-28 BC. He succeeded to conquer the north-eastern parts of the Central Balkan territory, with the river Timok being the western frontier of his conquest.<sup>12</sup> It is likely that at that time, the Dardanians lost their independence and later, in Pliny's *Natural History*, they are named as a peregrine community in the province of Moesia.<sup>13</sup> In 10

<sup>5</sup> Papazoglu 1969: 5.

<sup>6</sup> Cvijić 1987: 25-30.

<sup>7</sup> The Balkan provinces of Roman Empire were Pannonia, Dalmatia, Moesia, Macedonia, Thrace and Achaia and S. Ferjančić distinguishes Macedonia and Achaia from all other mentioned provinces by their early forming during the 2nd century BC, Ferjančić 2002: 9.

<sup>8</sup> Papazoglu 1969.

<sup>9</sup> In the context of paleo-Balkan languages, Thracian, Illyrian, Celtic and Dacian languages existed.

<sup>10</sup> Popović 1987, with further bibliography about Scordisci's issuing of coins imitations of Greek coinage.

<sup>11</sup> Livy XXXI, 28, 1-3.

<sup>12</sup> Dio Cassius doesn't mention Crassus' advancing west from the river Timok, therefore it can be presumed that it was the boundary he reached, Dio Cass. LI 23-27; Mirković 1968: 21.

<sup>13</sup> Mirković 1968: 22; Plin. *Natural History* III 149.



Map of indigenous tribes in central Balkans (Droysen 1886: 16)

BC, the Romans, led by General Marcus Vinicius, fought off a Dacian attack across the Danube, while another Roman general, Lentulus, was in charge of securing the border on the Danube against the Dacians in the area of the Iron Gates.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, Dio Cassius writes that Delmatae in Dalmatia, who came under the supervision of Augustus one year prior, refused to pay tributes and Tiberius had to quash their rebellion, which continued through the next year, after which Augustus divided the territory of Illyricum into two provinces: Dalmatia (*Illyricum superius*) and Pannonia (*Illyricum inferius*).<sup>15</sup> Therefore, between 13 and 9 BC, the Romans succeeded in subduing Illyricum and pacifying Thrace, while opening the doors to the foundation of a new province known as Moesia. Dalmatia retained its status of an imperial province until 297, when it

was encompassed by Diocletian's reforms and when its south-eastern parts were transformed into the province of Praevalitana. As for the central part of the Central Balkan Roman provinces, which in the period of the early Empire coincided with the territory of the province of Moesia Superior, the area is first mentioned by Dio Cassius under the name Moesia, in his writings about the first consular legate of the province of Moesia, Aulus Caecina Severus.<sup>16</sup> Different authors have discussed the probable period when the province of Moesia was established, opting between 27 BC and 14 or 15, with the prevailing opinion that it was probably founded in the 14th or 15th year.<sup>17</sup> However, several

<sup>14</sup> For different opinions of authors see Syme 1934: 113-137. R. Syme thinks that the military situation and the literary evidence point towards the hypothesis that Lentulus' military actions took place in the period from 6 BC to 4 BC, *ibid.*: 122, 130; Mócsy 1974: 36.

<sup>15</sup> Šašel Kos 2011: 108; Wilkes 1996: 565.

<sup>16</sup> Romans moved their legions from Macedonia to Moesia probably in the last decade of the 1st century BC, with presumably Niš (Naissus) as the centre of the military command. One of the consular legates who commanded Moesian troops was Aulus Caecina Severus. The exact year when Roman legions were transferred from Macedonia to Moesia is not known - most authors suggest that it was between 11 BC and 6 BC, Mirković 1968: 23ff; Wilkes 1996: 567.

<sup>17</sup> Appianus writes that already in the second decade of the 1st century, Moesia is paying taxes, while Tacitus gives the information about Poppaeus Sabinus who was Moesian governor in that period,

more decades had to pass before, in 86, Domitian divided Moesia into two provinces: Moesia Superior and Moesia Inferior.<sup>18</sup>

The territory of the Roman province of Moesia Superior encompassed most of today's Serbia with Kosovo, bordering parts of eastern Bosnia and Hercegovina and north-eastern Montenegro, the north-western part of Bulgaria along the Danube and the northern part of the Republic of Northern Macedonia. The northern frontier of Moesia Superior went along the Danube to the confluence with the River Sava up to the River Cibrica in Bulgaria (which was also the boundary between Moesia Superior and Moesia Inferior).<sup>19</sup> Moesia Superior was formed in 86 and existed until 272, with a particular military, administrative and cultural history, because of its characteristics such as geographic position, natural resources and the ethnicities that populated the territory in the pre-Roman period.<sup>20</sup> S. Dušanić states that Moesia Superior was divided into four major units named after the tribes that lived on the territory: Tricornenses (for the Tricornienses), Pincenses (for the Pincenses living by the River Pek), Moesia (for the Moesi living around the River Timok) and Dardania (for the Dardani who lived in the south).<sup>21</sup> However, Pliny the Elder and Ptolemy give different accounts about the tribes in the territory of the Central Balkans. Pliny the Elder writes about the tribes of Dardanians, Celegeri, Triballi, Timachi and Moesi in Moesia and that was probably the situation at the moment of the formation

of the province of Moesia and for several decades after. The Celegeri probably inhabited north-western parts of the province and belonged to the Celtic Scordisci, while the Timachi were inhabitants of the Timacus (Timok) valley.<sup>22</sup> Contrary to that, four *civitates* that are believed to have inhabited Moesia Superior upon its formation are mentioned by Ptolemy at the beginning of the 2nd century AD, who introduces two new communities, *Tricornienses* and *Pincenses* (named after the sites of *Tricornium* (Ritopek) and *Pincum* (Golubac)).<sup>23</sup> Ptolemy's account does not coincide with the earlier accounts about the Balkan tribes of the Dardani, Tribali and Moesi.<sup>24</sup> Without elaborating further, it is important to note that the ethnic and linguistic diversity continued to exist among Central Balkan indigenous residents upon the Roman conquest, confirming Illyrian, Thracian, Dacian and Celtic ethnicities and cultures.<sup>25</sup>

The Roman province of Moesia Superior had an important geographically strategic position that connected Rome and the western provinces with the eastern provinces via numerous roads and rivers like the Danube, Sava, Morava, Vardar, Nišava, Timok and Ibar. The earliest contact between the Romans and inhabitants of the Central Balkans happened through the Roman province of Macedonia, along the rivers Vardar and Južna Morava, when the Romans reached the lower Danube to conquer the Thracians. Aware of the need to connect their camps in Moesia with their bases on the lower Danube, the Romans began building an inland road along the later Moesia Superior's frontier.<sup>26</sup> Archaeological excavations conducted for decades in the Iron Gate area, have shown the complexity and strategic importance of Moesia Superior's Danube Limes frontier which was, due to the geomorphological features of the terrain and the Danube, already functioning from the end of the 1st and the beginning of the 2nd century (Figure 2).<sup>27</sup> The natural resources

App. III 30, 86; Tacitus, *Annales*, I. 80.

<sup>18</sup> Mirković 1968: 22; Mladenović 2012: 5. In the period between the forming of province Moesia and its division in two provinces Moesia Superior and Moesia Inferior, several important changes happened in the territory of the newly formed province, primarily in the military context: before 16 year BC, no Roman legions were situated in the province, while after the first decade of the 1st century, first Roman *castra* were founded on the Danube limes, precisely on the Lower Danube between Isker and Almus, Mirković 1996: 35. Tacitus mentions two legions situated on the Moesian part of the river Danube, which was attested by the inscription from 33-34, carved in the cliff in locality Gospođin vir (*CIL* III, 1698). Those two legions were IV Scythica and V Macedonica, Tacitus, *Annales* IV 5. Also, during and after the war in 69, the Roman army in Moesia was enlarged and until the Dacian wars in 85, there were five legions present in the province: I Italica, IV Scythica, V Alaudae, IV Flavia and VII Claudia (legions IV Flavia and VII Claudia stayed in Moesia Superior until the end of the antiquity – the first legion stayed in Viminacium and the second legion in Singidunum), Mirković 1968: 23-26; Mócsy 1974: 91.

<sup>19</sup> The frontiers of Moesia Superior could further be followed along river Arčar up to the valley of White Timok river, towards Knjaževac between Bela Palanka and Pirot, *IMS* IV: 18; The southern frontier went across Bosiljgrad, Stracin up to the area of Tatomir and then towards Gradište and Crni vrh to the site Sopot, *IMS* VI.

<sup>20</sup> M. Mirković suggests that the early defence system in province Moesia, before its division, included beside the Danube area also the passages towards the Timok valley and Naissus. However, crucial years for the Danubian border were the years of Roman civil war, 68-69., when the defence of the Roman limes on the Danube was handed to the Sarmatian tribe of Yazigi. After the civil war in Rome, changes in the context of the legions stationed on Danube Limes, were made and four already mentioned legions were transferred to Moesia, Mirković 1981: 75.

<sup>21</sup> During the 1st century, Tribali assimilated with Dardanians and Scordisci, Papazoglu 1969: 45, 84, 97, 264-265; Dušanić 2000: 344.

<sup>22</sup> Wilkes 1996: 579.

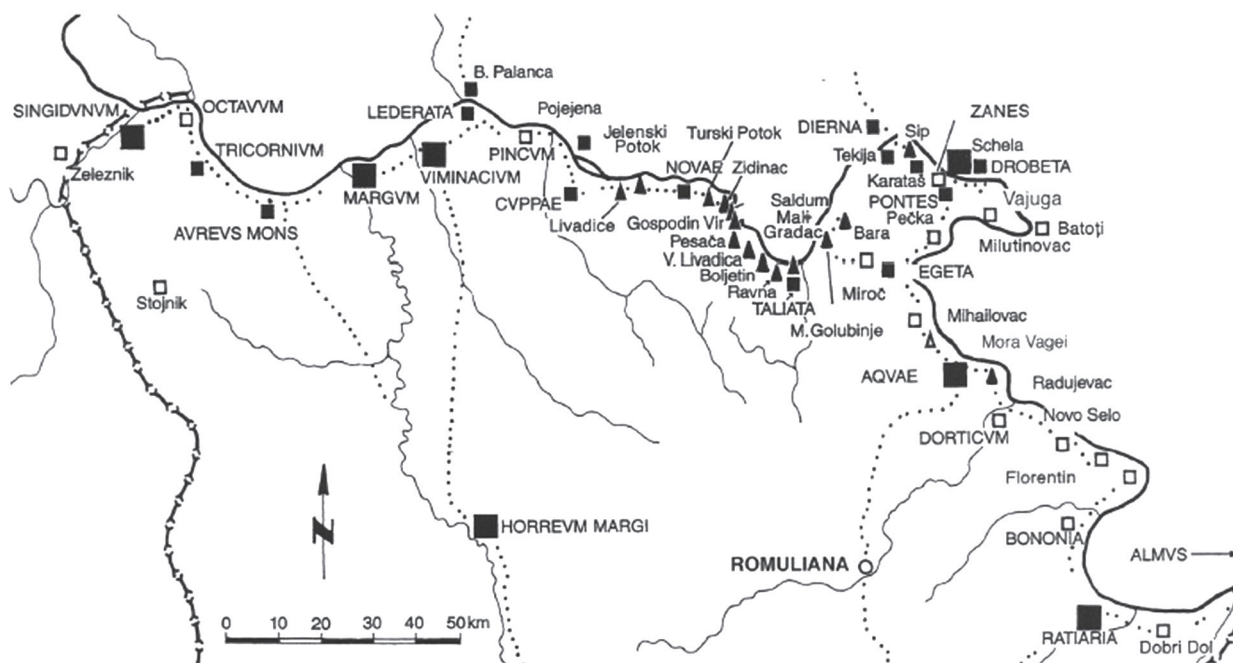
<sup>23</sup> Ptol. III 9.2.

<sup>24</sup> Plin. *Natural History*, III 149; Mócsy 1974: 66-68; It is believed that Tricornenses of Tricornium replaced the Celegeri and the Picensi of Pincum replaced the Timachi, Wilkes 1996: 580.

<sup>25</sup> As A. Mócsy noticed, the Illyrian element was strong among the Dardanians, but also in the western parts of the province, like for example in the territory of Municipium S (presumably Splonum?) around the modern town of Pljevlja (today north-eastern part of Montenegro), where several native communities of the Delmatae from the coastal interior of province Dalmatia were transferred in the 2nd century because Romans needed working force for mines and agriculture. Celtic component attributed to Scordisci is noticed in the northern parts of Moesia Superior, while the Thracian element was visible in the whole province, Mócsy 1974: 65-66.

<sup>26</sup> As P. Petrović and M. Vasić point out, the construction of the inland road along the Moesia Superior's frontier was one of the most demanding and difficult projects for the Romans ever, because they needed to not only build the roads, but also to improve the conditions for shipping, by making some roads which would go through the gorge of the Iron Gate as near to the banks where steep cliffs were almost vertical. In the efforts to do that, Romans had to use various construction techniques to be able to cut the roads in the rock slopes, Petrović, Vasić 1996: 18-19.

<sup>27</sup> Systematic archaeological excavations showed that the first phase



Localities on Danube Limes, Moesia Superior (Mirković 2007)

of the land, like the fertile valleys, forests, mines and thermal springs, helped the province to prosper after the Dacian wars, which was mirrored in its economic growth and the founding of *municipii* and colonies in the 1st century. As in other Roman provinces, the Roman state relied on the indigenous elite to establish an efficient Roman administration.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, at the end of the 2nd century, attacks by barbarian tribes began and military, economic and social crises marked the larger part of the 3rd century, lasting until the beginning of Diocletian’s reign. The period of his reign is remembered not only for the numerous reforms, but also for the renewed importance of the Central Balkan area to the Roman Empire.<sup>29</sup> Although Diocletian’s

heirs, particularly Constantine the Great with his successors, continued to dedicate attention to the further development and defence of the newly formed provinces of the Central Balkans; at the end of the 4th century, the Goths and other barbarian tribes invaded and raided the mentioned territory. The particularly forceful attacks of the Huns destroyed *castra* and settlements in the Limes and the interior of the former Moesia Superior in the middle of the 5th century. Although during Justinian’s reign, the fortifications in the Danube Limes and the large Central Balkan cities were restored, the fall of the whole territory to the Avars in the middle of the 6th century was inevitable.

of Danube Limes fortifications, legionary fortresses and auxiliary camps formation in Moesia Superior, dates from the first half of the 1st century since the destruction of the first construction horizons dates to the period 68-69 and is related to the Dacian attacks on the forts situated on Danube’s right bank, Petrović, Vasić 1996: 20. Although Dacian attacks in 85 brought numerous Roman army troops to Moesia, the fortification system in Danube Limes was further developed by Trajan and his successors, Dušanić 1996: 41 etc. P. Petrović and M. Vasić differentiate six construction phases of Moesia Superior’s Danube Limes, with the sixth phase dating between 367 and 370 (related to the building activity of Valentinian I and Valens) and the seventh phase when fortifications were restored during the reign of Theodosius I, Petrović, Vasić 1996: 20-23.

<sup>28</sup> J. Šašel estimates that only after a period of three human generations, the process of Romanisation was successfully applied in the territory of the provinces Moesia Superior and Moesia Inferior, Ilić 2011: 41.

<sup>29</sup> Diocletian finished the process of the division of Roman provinces into smaller units and in the territory of the eastern part of Moesia Superior and western Moesia Inferior new provinces Dacia Ripensis and Dacia Mediterranea were formed. On the south of Moesia Superior, the new province Dardania with the capital Niš was founded, while on the north province Moesia Prima was created. In the south of the province Dalmatia, a new province Praevalitana was

formed. All these new provinces constituted Diocese of Moesiae (later Dacia), Mirković 1981: 92.

# The History of the Research of Asia Minor and Syrian Religions and Cults in the Territory of the Central Balkans

The history of the research of Asia Minor and Syrian religions and cults attested in the Roman Central Balkans begins in the last decades of the 19th century, burdened by the complicated political situation in the region.<sup>30</sup> Several foreign travellers, impressed with the antique ruins and monuments they saw during their travels through the Balkans, wrote about them, described and drew them. Thanks to Arthur Evans, who gave his invaluable impressions about the archaeological monuments and topography of Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro<sup>31</sup> and Felix Kanitz who travelled all over the Balkans and left us his precious writings and drawings,<sup>32</sup> we have knowledge about the antique structures and monuments that are today nonexistent. Due to the initiative of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, archaeological material already discovered in different Roman localities (like Acuminum – Stari Slankamen, Taurunum – Zemun, Sremska Mitrovica – Sirmium etc.) was gathered.<sup>33</sup> The effort of individuals was also important, since amateurs like Ignjat Jung, who was a teacher from Sremska Mitrovica<sup>34</sup> or Feliks Milleker from Vršac, saved in their reports many epigraphic and archaeological monuments and objects, which are now lost or destroyed. From the last decade of the 19th century, one of the first great classicists, Nikola Vulić, sometimes with his colleagues Anton von Premerstein and Friedrich Ladek and sometimes alone,<sup>35</sup> every year published Roman epigraphic and archaeological monuments, including those in relation with Asia Minor and Syrian deities, providing details about their finding, which made the information invaluable. At the same time, Mihailo Valtrović collected archaeological evidence from different historical periods and started the first archaeological excavations with Miloje Vasić in Viminacium. The papers of Carl Patsch about Roman monuments from the province of Dalmatia were, from the last decade of the 19th century, published almost yearly in the journal *Wissenschaftliche Mitteilungen*

aus Bosnien und der Herzegowina. They are still of great importance, especially in the context of the funerary monuments with the figure of *Attis tristis*, which are today considered destroyed or lost.

The period between the First and Second World Wars was a time with few archaeological excavations. Still, archaeologists and amateurs continued to gather Roman monuments and objects (mainly found by chance) and some of them started systematic excavations in localities such as Mediana, Brzi brod and the necropolis of Jagodin Mala in Niš (Naissus), where important monuments like the torso of Magna Mater statue were found. Nikola Vulić continued with his work in Macedonia, collecting Roman monuments and inscriptions, but he also started excavations of the Antique theatre in Skoplje (Scupi).<sup>36</sup> Rastislav Marić's publication from 1933, about Antique cults in the territory of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, represented the first serious study about Greek, Roman and indigenous, but also Oriental, cults in the larger part of the Roman Central Balkans territory.<sup>37</sup>

The situation regarding the progress of not only the new archaeological excavations, but also published works, became considerably better after World War II. First systematic and planned archaeological research began, in parallel with the publishing of articles with the topic of Asia Minor and Syrian religions and / or cults. In his publication from 1957, about the hoard from Tekija, Đorđe Mano-Zisi describes, analyses and interprets two silver plates with representations of Magna Mater and Sabazius.<sup>38</sup> The first short studies that paid more attention to the Asia Minor cults began to appear in the early 1960s – Sofija Kojić gathered and discussed funerary monuments with figures of *Attis tristis*,<sup>39</sup> the cults of Magna Mater and Jupiter Dolichenus were analysed in the PhD thesis of Ljubica Zotović from 1964 (published by Brill in 1966)<sup>40</sup> and two years later, Dušanka Vučković-Todorović submitted a report about the archaeological excavations she led in the locality of Brza Palanka (Egeta), where a *sacrum* of Jupiter Dolichenus was discovered.<sup>41</sup> Sofija Kojić tackled the question of Theos Hypsistos' cult in her

<sup>30</sup> In this concise review of the so-far existing bibliography about the Asia Minor and Syrian religions and cults in Roman Central Balkans, I will omit individual articles or catalogue entries in which archaeological monuments reflecting mentioned religions or cults have been quoted, but not analysed or discussed.

<sup>31</sup> Evans 1883.

<sup>32</sup> Kanitz 1861; 1868; 1882; 1892; 1904.

<sup>33</sup> Much of the gathered material ended up in the museums of Zagreb, Temišvar and Budapest, Garašanin 1978: 166.

<sup>34</sup> Miladinović-Radmilović, Radmilović 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Вулић Н. 1909, 109-191; Вулић Н. 1931, 4-259; Вулић Н. 1933, 3-89; Вулић Н. 1934, 29-84; Вулић Н. 1941-48, 1-335; Вулић Н., Премерштајн А. ф. 1900, 15-58; Вулић Н., Ладек Ф., Премерштајн А. ф. 1903, 43-88. For the full bibliography of N. Vulić see Marić 1959: XV – 1.

<sup>36</sup> Garašanin 1978: 167.

<sup>37</sup> Marić 1933.

<sup>38</sup> Mano-Zisi: 1957.

<sup>39</sup> Kojić 1961: 1-47.

<sup>40</sup> Zotović: 1964; Zotović 1966.

<sup>41</sup> Вучковић-Тодоровић 1965: 173-181

article about a votive monument from Pirot,<sup>42</sup> while Ljubica Zotović published two articles dealing with the penetration, diffusion and disappearance of Oriental cults in the territory of Yugoslavia and representations of young men identified as *Attis tristis* and the winged genii of death.<sup>43</sup> Radmila Ajdić published a gold ring with a syncretistic representation of the god Sabazius from a Late Antique grave in Niš,<sup>44</sup> while Ljubica Zotović again turned to the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus.<sup>45</sup> Two important studies appear in 1977 concerning Asia Minor and Syria in the area of northern Macedonia by Siegrid Düll and Bosnia and Hercegovina by Enver Imamović.<sup>46</sup> In the same year, Ljubica Zotović's article about the cult of Jupiter Turmasgades in Viminacium also appeared.<sup>47</sup> In Aleksandar Jovanović's article, a syncretistic representation of the god Sabazius from a gold ring discovered in Niš is revised, while the subject of Michael Speidel's paper is a votive monument dedicated to Asclepius and the genius of Jupiter Dolichenus.<sup>48</sup> In 1980, Petar Selem and Julijan Medini presented archaeological monuments from the provinces of Pannonia and Dalmatia, relating them to analogous monuments from the Roman provinces of the Central Balkans, while in the unfortunately never published doctoral thesis of Julijan Medini, the religions and cults of Asia Minor attested in the province of Dalmatia are thoughtfully and thoroughly analysed and interpreted.<sup>49</sup> In her publication about Oriental cults in Moesia Inferior and Thrace, Margarita Tatcheva-Hitova also analyses Asia Minor and Syrian cults, while Julijan Medini dedicates a new article solely to the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus.<sup>50</sup> In the works of Dragoljub Bojović about Roman gems and cameos, representations of the gods Attis and Sol were presented, and Julijan Medini turns to the research of the Asia Minor deity Men and its traces in the province of Dalmatia.<sup>51</sup> The iconography of the goddess Magna Mater in the territory of Macedonia was the theme of Viktorija Sokolovska's paper, while the authors V. Velkov and V. Gerasimova-Tomova discuss Asia Minor and Syrian cults in Thrace and Moesia Inferior, with analogies from the Central Balkan Roman provinces.<sup>52</sup> Studying the iconography of silver plates from the Tekija hoard, Aleksandar Jovanović offers a new interpretation of the images of Magna Mater and Sabazius, while Maja Parović-Pešikan publishes a most interesting article about the cult of Jupiter Melanus in Ulpiana.<sup>53</sup> The

question of Palmyrene funerary monuments from Singidunum is debated by I. Popović, while Tatjana Cvjetičanin writes about Amphipolis' terracottas of the god Attis, from the National Museum in Belgrade.<sup>54</sup> In Miodrag Tomović's publication about Roman sculpture in Moesia Superior, the author analyses and interprets the statues of Magna Mater, Jupiter Dolichenus and Sabazius, while the cult of the god Mēn from Macedonian territory is, among other cults, the subject of the doctoral thesis of Nade Proeva.<sup>55</sup> Among different kinds of objects from antler and bone, Sofija Petković also mentions needles with their head in the shape of Sabazius' votive hands, while Marijana Ricl deals with the concept of sin and confession inscriptions from Asia Minor in her publication.<sup>56</sup> A new interpretation of funerary monuments in the shape of *cippi* with the figures of *Attis tristis* appeared in the publication of Radmila Zotović in 1995, while Aleksandar Jovanović writes about the cult of Theos Hypsistos in the territory of the Central Balkans.<sup>57</sup> The subject of stone lion statues found in different localities of western Serbia, Belgrade (Singidunum) and Viminacium (Požarevac), which could have been connected to the Metroac cult (or perhaps the cult of the god Mithras?), has been the focus in several articles by Radmila Zotović and Stefan Pop-Lazić.<sup>58</sup> In her synthesis about attested cults in Viminacium in Antiquity, Lj. Zotović touches the question of Magna Mater's cult, while in the catalogue of the exhibition 'Античка бронза Сингидунума (Antique bronze of Singidunum)', several statuettes of Asia Minor and Syrian deities are presented.<sup>59</sup> In an article about Oriental cults in Dardania, Zef Mirdita discusses Asia Minor and Syrian cults as well, while the doctoral thesis of Anemari Bugarski-Mesdijan offers the author's views on Oriental deities in the territory of the Roman province of Dalmatia.<sup>60</sup> Some interesting evidence about the priest of Jupiter Dolichenus from the Viminacium area was published in 2004.<sup>61</sup> Never before published gems and cameos with representations of Graeco-Roman and Oriental gods and goddesses, including Magna Mater, Sabazius, Artemis of Ephesus, Dea Syria and Sol, are the subject of the unpublished doctoral thesis of Ivana Novović-Kuzmanović, while in her publication about the cult of the god Jupiter in Moesia Superior, Aleksandra Bošković-Robert presents a corpus of god monuments and its interpretation, including the monuments of Asia Minor local deities identified with the Roman god Jupiter.<sup>62</sup> In his article about funerary praxis in Moesia Superior from the

<sup>42</sup> Којић 1963: 223-230.

<sup>43</sup> Зотовић 1969: 431-440.

<sup>44</sup> Ајдић 1971: 33-45.

<sup>45</sup> Зотовић 1971: 59-65.

<sup>46</sup> Düll 1977; Imamović 1977.

<sup>47</sup> Зотовић 1977: 33-40.

<sup>48</sup> Јовановић 1977: 87-90; Speidel 1980: 182-186.

<sup>49</sup> Selem 1980; Medini 1980: 67-88; Medini 1981.

<sup>50</sup> Тачева-Хитова 1982; Medini 1982: 53-90.

<sup>51</sup> Бојовић 1984-1985, 139-152; Medini 1987: 175-187.

<sup>52</sup> Соколовска 1988: 113-126; Velkov, Gerassimova-Tomova 1989: 1318-1361.

<sup>53</sup> Јовановић 1990: 29-36; Parović-Pešikan 1990: 607-616.

<sup>54</sup> Поповић 1993: 71-76; Цвјетићанин 1992: 349-358.

<sup>55</sup> Томовић 1993; Proeva 1992.

<sup>56</sup> Petković 1995; Ricl 1995.

<sup>57</sup> Зотовић 1995; Jovanović 1996: 128-134.

<sup>58</sup> Зотовић 1994: 123-131; Зотовић 2004: 21-29; Зотовић 2003: 87-96; Pop-Lazić 2002: 7-100; Гојгић, Вујадиновић 2019: 7-24.

<sup>59</sup> Zotović 1996: 127-137; Античка бронза Сингидунума 1997.

<sup>60</sup> Mirdita 2001: 37-54; Bugarski-Mesdijan 2003.

<sup>61</sup> Petrović 2004: 217-224.

<sup>62</sup> Нововић-Кузмановић 2005; Bošković-Robert 2006.



1st to the 3rd century, Aleksandar Jovanović also encompasses the cult of Jupiter Melanus.<sup>63</sup> The doctoral thesis of Aleksandra Nikoloska regarding the cults of Cybele / Magna Mater and Attis in Croatia, deals with the iconography and aspects of deities, while the unpublished doctoral thesis of P. Karković Takalić analyses mystery religions in the province of Dalmatia.<sup>64</sup> A significant publication of Lj. Mandić appeared in 2015, encompassing the territory of south-western Serbia in the context of attested antique necropolises, discussing the topography and iconography of funerary monuments.<sup>65</sup>

Over the years, in different articles and publications, the author of this book has tried to shed some clearer

light on the iconography, different aspects of veneration, ritual practices, dedicants and sanctuaries of Asia Minor and Syrian deities in different Central Balkan localities.<sup>66</sup> This book was written out of a sincere wish and effort to gather all evidence about Asia Minor and Syrian religions and cults from the Roman Central Balkans into one place and, through their documenting, analysis and interpretation, offer a more accurate view on the local context in which these religions and cults appeared, flourished and, in the end, vanished, on the mentioned territory in Antiquity.

<sup>63</sup> Jovanović 2006: 23-44.

<sup>64</sup> Nikoloska 2007; Karković-Takalić 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Мандић 2015.

<sup>66</sup> Gavrilović 2015a; Petković, Gavrilović Vitas, Miladinović-Radmilović, Ilijić 2016.

## Cultural Influences and Romanisation

As in other parts of the Roman Empire, the conquest of the Central Balkan territory by the Romans led to the inevitable Romanisation of the indigenous population, which covered not only the larger centres that later attained a municipal or colonial status, but also, to a certain extent, smaller rural areas. In earlier literature, the prevailing opinion was that the process of Romanisation was introduced by Roman soldiers, veterans, administrators, merchants and artisans to the indigenous population, which was to be educated and civilised from scratch. However, archaeological evidence shows that Hellenised proto-urban centres in Dardania, like the locality of Krševica, were formed and developed under strong Greek influences, as were several other important centres where a prior practice existed regardless of the process of Roman urbanisation.<sup>67</sup> Although some urban centres of the Central Balkan provinces were founded by Roman veterans and did not have a direct connection to the older settlements, like Ratiaria for example, they still had traces of the previously settled indigenous population at the site or in its vicinity. As the main goal of the Roman conquerors was to place the overtaken population into a specific administrative and legal framework and to include them in further development, although complex, the organisation of Moesia Superior's residents was similar to the urbanisation of the neighbouring provinces.<sup>68</sup> However, the development of the province and the degree to which urbanisation was achieved, were another matter. The territory of Moesia Superior, as has already been mentioned, was divided into four administrative units; the indigenous population inhabited quite large territories, the boundaries of which did not coincide with the borders that existed between tribal communities in the pre-Roman period. However, the new organisation into *civitates* resulted in further internal divisions into: *pagi*, *vici*, etc. and the provincial governor had to rely on the distinguished members of the indigenous population, to whom a number of benefits were given for them to deal with and control

<sup>67</sup> Mladenović 2012: 22. The locality Kale Krševica is situated in the South Morava river valley near the village Krševica (south-eastern Serbia) and represents the settlement from the 4th and first decades of the 3rd century BC. The settlement itself was built under strong Greek influence and while it existed, it maintained close contact with Macedonia and Greece, Popović 2009: 141-153; Popović 2012: 11-51.

<sup>68</sup> D. Mladenović and C. Szabó observe rightly that in the context of the wider state policy of the urbanisation of the Middle and Lower Danube by the Roman state, romanisation of the province Moesia was not much different than in neighbouring provinces, Mladenović 2012: 23-24; Szabó 2018: 11-12.

certain tasks that would allow undisturbed everyday life in the province. The administrative institutions in future *coloniae* and *municipia* were the *duumviri*, *aediles*, *quaestores* and *decuriones*, which all belonged to the *magistratus minores ordinarii*, however, no inscriptions or ancient sources provide information regarding their rights and obligations in Moesia Superior.<sup>69</sup> The earliest towns, like Scupi or Ratiaria, were founded by imperial decree at the sites of legionary camps, while other cities attained their municipal or colonial status as their urban development progressed.<sup>70</sup> Beside these two earliest founded cities, in contrast to other Roman provinces, it is possible to distinguish only two major phases of the development of Moesia Superior's cities: the first phase is dated to the 2nd century, when municipal status was given to the civilian settlements formed close to military camps. Cities like Singidunum, Viminacium and Remesiana became *municipii* under the reign of the emperors Traian or Hadrian, while Margum, Ulpiana, Horreum Margi and Naissus were given municipal status under Marcus Aurelius. It is presumed that Municipium DD (DD probably stands for Dardanorum) near Sočanica, was granted the status of municipium during the reign of the Severi dynasty.<sup>71</sup> Only two cities in Moesia Superior, Viminacium and Singidunum, became colonies in time, most probably

<sup>69</sup> Two senior magistrates, *duumviri*, were equivalent to the Roman consuls and were in charge of the autonomy of the colonies for the period of one year and held administrative and judicial power, but also organized the work of the city council, various priestly colleges etc. The *quinquennales* had similar duties as censors in Rome – they were elected every five years, dealt with financial priorities of the municipality etc. The *aediles* were similar to the praetors in Rome and their duties encompassed the public policy, supervision of markets, roads, buildings, baths, the provision of supplies, organization of public games etc. The *quaestor* cared for the proper distribution and for preventing any losses and fraud in finances, for maintaining of the urban infrastructure (streets, walls, roads) and cared for public initiatives, like for example the erecting of statues of persons who contributed to the city. The *decuriones* acted as advisory persons, who monitored how the public property was cared for, but also in some cases had judicial functions, Iliev 2011: 42-43.

<sup>70</sup> Scupi was founded by imperial decree during the Flavian dynasty, *IMS* VI, num. 15, 42, 46, 66; Ratiaria became a colony under the reign of emperor Trajan, most probably in 106, *CIL* III, 14217, 14499; Mócsy 1974: 115-116. The inscriptions dedicated by the veterans of Scupi showed that in the moment of the colony's founding, beside the veterans from legion VII Claudia, legion V Alaudae and legion V Macedonica, veterans from legion IV Macedonica were also present, Ferjančić 2002: 76. Ratiaria was located near the village of Arčar, in Vidin area and was founded after the end of the 2nd Dacian war, in the period between 106 and 112. It is thought that veterans of legions IV Flavia and VII Claudia participated in the founding of *colonia Ratiaria*, but S. Ferjančić suggests that only a small number of veterans from the two above mentioned legions was present, *Ibid*: 79-80.

<sup>71</sup> Mirković 1968; Mirković 1981; Mócsy 1974: 213 etc.

during the reign of Emperor Gordian in 239.<sup>72</sup> All the mentioned cities did not have large areas within the walls (from around 20 ha to 60 ha), some of them were fortified and it is presumed, from the so-far known topography of excavated localities, that they were built using a regular architectural plan, with all the public and private buildings that an average Roman centre would have.<sup>73</sup> The Roman army was behind all major works, particularly waterworks, at least until the late 2nd and the first half of the 3rd century, when euergetism became prominent in Moesia Superior, which coincides with the visits of emperors through these parts and with the exploitation of the mines.<sup>74</sup> Together with the development of the cities, agrarian and rural mining settlements also thrived in their own way – positioned mostly in river valleys, near main roads or in mining areas. The majority of the population worked in the fields, with cattle, with pottery or in mines and one section of them was also employed in the imperial or private domains and villas in the suburbs of the cities.<sup>75</sup> Most of the *villae rusticae* date from the 3rd and the 4th century, with the earliest ones built near bigger centres or in the mining areas, probably belonging to the local procurators of the mines, persons of high status and economic means, of whom some were, in S. Dušanić's opinion, in Septimius Severus' period, at least in Municipium DD (Sočanica), knights.<sup>76</sup> The second phase of the development of major urban centres belongs to the period of Late Antiquity. Centres like Naissus began to be intensively built and rebuilt and then became the capital of the new province of Dardania, at which time the city became a more important centre of influence for the Roman state. Alas, Naissus was later also an infamous example of a Roman city, which was completely destroyed by the Huns in 447, described in detail by Priscus. Naissus is mentioned as one of 70 cities (including Serdica, Marcianopolis, etc.) that were completely devastated.<sup>77</sup> Before later attacks of Avars, at the end of the 6th century, most urban centres in Moesia Superior were abandoned, with the population

mostly living outside of the cities, which, in time, transformed into smaller fortress-towns.<sup>78</sup>

The importance of roads and inland waterways through which cultural and religious influences could come from one part of the Empire to the other is very significant in the context of the penetration and diffusion of Asia Minor and Syrian cults in the territory of the Central Balkans. As M. Mirković rightly observes, there were several important roads in the territory that connected it with the western parts as well as with the eastern parts of the Roman Empire. Italy was connected to the East through Pannonia, reaching the Danube at Belgrade (Singidunum). The second important road point was the capital of the province, Viminacium, from which roads radiated in different directions: in an eastern direction from the camp, one road led along the Danube, while a southern road from Viminacium led towards Niš (Naissus).<sup>79</sup> The so-called *via militaris* built in 33, led from Singidunum, Viminacium, along the Morava Valley, through Naissus and further to Serdica, Philippopolis, and Adrianopolis to Constantinopolis. As much as inland roads were important, they were of secondary importance for connecting Roman provinces with the Central Balkan territory – fluvial routes were more important and cheaper.<sup>80</sup> Whenever it was possible, all transportation was done by waterways – beside the Danube, other important rivers were the Morava, Ibar, Mlava, Nišava, Timok, etc. The most important ports were in Viminacium and Singidunum, while smaller ports have been archaeologically attested in Tekija (Transdierna), Čezava (Novae), Karataš (Statio Cataractarum Dianae), Brze Palanke (Egeta), Prahovo (Aquae), Sapaja and Hajdučka vodenica.<sup>81</sup>

I have already mentioned the importance and wealth of the Central Balkan mines and quarries and their significance for the Roman state. The exploitation of mine ores probably started in the last decades of the 1st century and there were two mining districts: Dardanian (*metalli Dardanici*) and a northern district (which was probably known as *metalli Ulpiani*, later *metalli Aureliani*).<sup>82</sup> Epigraphic monuments and *itineraria* show that the settlements in the Dardanian territory were founded along the main roads and in mining districts. As S. Dušanić emphasises, Roman mining in

<sup>72</sup> Mirković 1981: 81.

<sup>73</sup> Most of the mentioned centres lie under modern cities and therefore the archaeological excavations are not only scarce but also quite complex to perform. Cities like for example Niš (Naissus) lied on the territory around 20 ha, Petrović 1976, while Viminacium presented the largest centre, encompassing around 51 ha within the walls. All these centres had forum, temples, monumental public buildings (*horrea*, public and private *thermae* etc.) with hypocaust heating and were decorated with mosaics and sculptures, theatre (only in Scupi from the period of Hadrian's reign) and amphitheatre (discovered in Viminacium, Bogdanović: 2019), Mladenović 2012: 24-26.

<sup>74</sup> For more details see Mladenović 2011: 173-193; Dušanić 2010.

<sup>75</sup> Here, I am not only referring to the imperial domains from late antiquity such as Felix Romuliana (Gamzigrad near Zaječar) or Mediana (Niš), where different buildings of economic nature (*horrea*, workshops for pottery/ tools/ weapons, *thermae* etc.) existed and provided the administrators who worked in the estates and the army stationed nearby.

<sup>76</sup> Dušanić 2010: 662-663.

<sup>77</sup> Петровић 1976: 41-43.

<sup>78</sup> Mladenović 2012: 50.

<sup>79</sup> M. Mirković summarizes important communications in Moesia Superior in six points: along the Danube (inland and fluvial way), crossing the Danube – the roads in plain of Banat, the road from Viminacium to Dardania, south of Naissus along the Južna Morava valley, southwest of Naissus – connection Lissus – Scupi and Scupi – Stobi and finally, road east from Naissus – towards Bela Palanka (Remesiana), Mirković 2019: 237-251.

<sup>80</sup> Mócsy 1974: 45.

<sup>81</sup> The ports in Viminacium, Novae and Aquae were separated from the fortifications, while ports in other localities were built near the military camps, Петровић 1991: 209.

<sup>82</sup> *Metalli Ulpiani* (later *metalla Aureliana*) encompassed mines in Kosmaj, Avala, Rudnik, Pek and Timok, Dušanić 2010: 473-532.

the Danubian provinces was quite a complex and well organised system by the Roman state, which was well maintained and which effected the organisation of *portorium* and the process of the Romanisation of the indigenous population. The presence of immigrants from Asia Minor and Syria in the mining districts of the Central Balkans resulted in inevitable interactions between the indigenous residents and the population of Oriental origin, who left their traces in known epigraphic and archaeological evidence.

As in every Roman province, the indigenous and Romanised population was differentiated by their social and economic status. In the beginning, the Romans presented urban aristocracy, while during the 2nd and 3rd century, the Romanised indigenous population (mostly gaining their citizenship under the reigns

of the emperors Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius), also becomes very prominent in the military and administrative positions in the Central Balkans' larger urban centres.<sup>83</sup> Because of the understanding of how Asia Minor and Syrian religions and cults were accepted and existed in the territory, it is important to remember that the Central Balkans was a very transitional area, where people of different origin and provenience came to, lived or passed through, leaving behind them traces of their cultures. However, until the end of Antiquity, the indigenous residents mostly lived in the villages or smaller places, being ignorant of Latin and staying faithful to their own spiritual culture, which is attested by characteristic syncretism between unknown indigenous deities and deities from other cultures, like for example the god Attis and the gods Silvanus, Dionysus/Liber or Mithras.

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<sup>83</sup> Mirković 1981: 83.