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THE CULT OF THE GOD MARS ON THE TERRITORY OF SERBIA

Abstract: On the Serbian territory, a total of 11 votive monuments dedicated to the god Mars have been noted to date. Of these, seven monuments belong to the independent cult of the god Mars. In contrast, the remaining four belong to this cult's symbioses with imperial or other deities' cults. Two votive monuments have been preserved at the Ravna location. It is there that the god Mars is presented in a cult symbiosis with the imperial cult in two votive monuments - one with Jupiter, and the other with the Capitoline triad, Fortuna, and other gods and goddesses. There are a total of five monuments dedicated to Mars in Central Serbia and six in Vojvodina. The six monuments in Vojvodina originate from the area of Sremska Mitrovica. As for Central Serbia, four monuments originate from the Ravna location, and one from the Kaliste (Viminacium) location. A monument dated within the period 208-211 A.D., and originating from Ravna, confirms that a temple dedicated to the god Mars was located in this area. Other monuments may be dated within a broader historical period, from the second half of the 2nd century to the beginning of the 3rd century.

Keywords: Serbia, Central Serbia, Vojvodina, Mars, Fortuna.

On the Serbian territory, a total of 11 votive monuments dedicated to the god Mars have been noted to date. Of these, seven monuments belong to the independent cult of the god Mars. In contrast, the remaining four belong to this cult's symbioses with imperial or other deities' cults. There are a total five monuments dedicated to Mars in Central Serbia and six in Vojvodina (map I). All six monuments in Vojvodina originate from the area of Sremska Mitrovica. As for Central Serbia, four monuments originate from the Ravna location, and one from Kaliste (Viminacium) location (map II).

Besides Jupiter, the god Mars is the most significant Italic and Roman deity, having praised him from ancient times. The ancient Etruscans, Oscs, and Sabinians, also honoured the god Mars. It was a supreme Italic deity first, but Jupiter, the former god of the heavens and weather conditions, later became the supreme god, while Mars was primarily celebrated as the god of war and warfare.

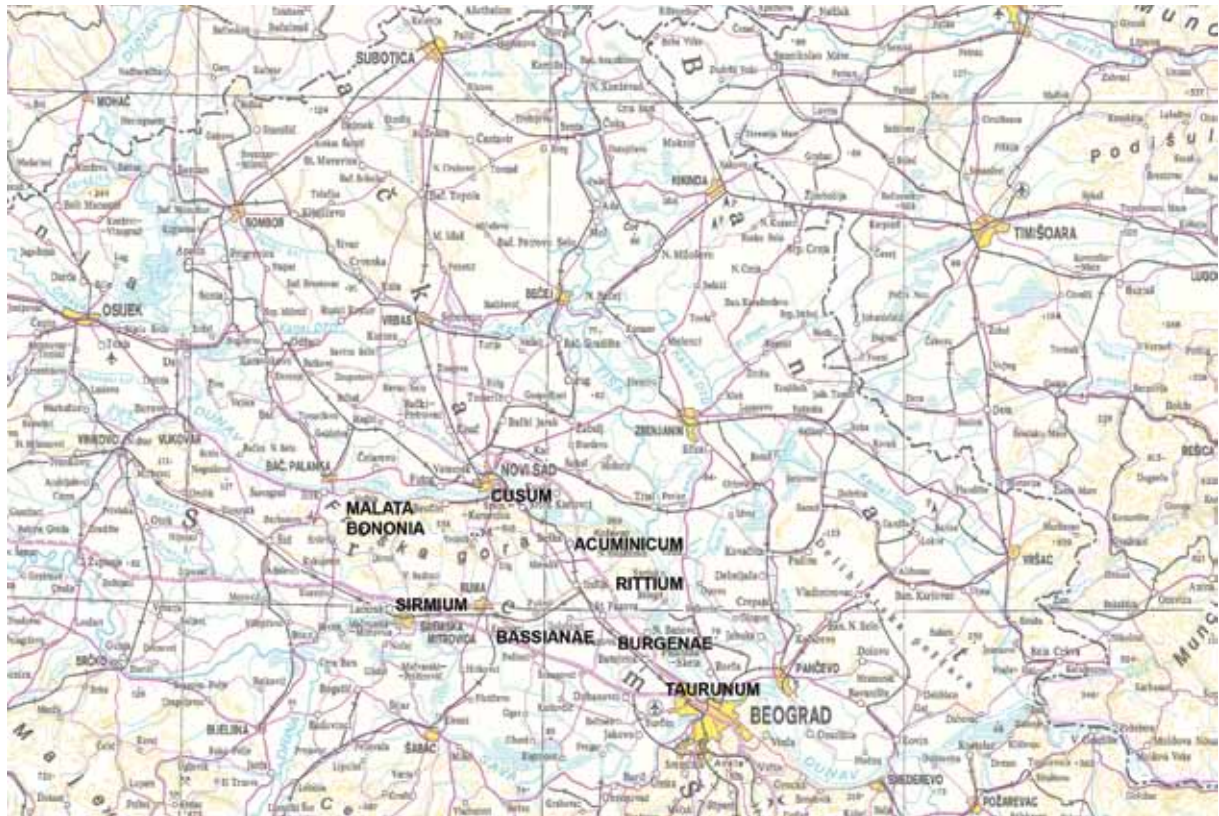
However, the rural population considered him the god of livestock and agriculture. They honoured Mars and believed he was the protector of

cattle and crops, as these could have been compromised or destroyed in warfare. Being the god of cattle and fields, the rural population addressed prayers to him to protect their land from enemies and to grant progress with their livestock and agriculture. The Romans considered Mars the god protector of the nation and state (Замуровић 1936; Срејовић, Цермановић Кузмановић 1979).

It is also likely that the aforementioned quality connected Mars to Jupiter, who was the patron deity of the entire nation and the state. In this form, a cult symbiosis, Mars is presented on a monument on the territory of Vojvodina. On the same memorial, Jupiter is designated as Jupiter, the Capitoline. It is little wonder that this monument intensified the concept of *praefectus*.

A much more interesting monument is the votive monument dedicated to the Capitoline Triad, Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, as well as Fortuna and other deities.

Mars was connected to the Capitoline Triad not only because of Jupiter but also because of Juno. People believed that Mars was the son of



Map 1. Vojvodina

Juno (and therefore Minerva's brother). He was conceived when Juno received a flower gift from Flora. This beautiful myth points to the potential connection of Mars with many other gods and goddesses, especially those referring to bushes, woods, pastures, and meadows. In this reference, the god Silvan was believed to have evolved into an independent deity from the attributes of the god Mars (Mars Silvicolo). In addition, connections among other deities with either Jupiter or Juno are persistent, according to finds on the territory of Central Serbia. This territory is featured by the formula "other deities" (*dis deabusque*); Western provinces are featured by the formula "all deities" (*omnes*).

In particular, the connection with Fortuna focused on prayers addressed to both the Capitoline Triad and the god Mars to grant good fortune, something that was both essential and unpredictable during times of war. Fortuna was referred to as the first daughter of Jupiter. This is the origin of the link between Mars and Fortuna, which was mediated by the god Jupiter. At the same time, this monument especially presents Mars and Fortuna to highlight Mars' significance in the Roman

Pantheon. Designated as *Campestri*, Mars represents the protector of fields and plains. At the same time, the monument reflects the respect for the god Mars. Such respect is shown in the Field of Mars in Rome, where a temple dedicated to Mars was built. People highly respected Mars in connection with Minerva and these two deities were celebrated on a joint holiday on the 19th of March each year (*Quinquatrus maiores*), one of the oldest Roman holidays. At first, this was a holiday dedicated to the god Mars, but later it also included the goddess Minerva, with celebrations lasting for five days. Minerva had initially been praised and honoured as the goddess-protectress of crafts, craftsmen, and students. Craftsmen respecting Minerva included physicians, pipers, and trumpet players, as these were important for the army and military action. Juno had initially been recognised as the goddess-protectress of marriage and married women, the Moon, and childbirth. This deity later evolved into the goddess-protectress of the Roman family, Rome, and the entire Roman state. Each provincial town had a temple built in honour of the Capitoline Triad, similar to that built in Rome. Sirmium likely had a temple dedicated to Jupiter,

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Juno, and Minerva. It is another question as to whether Sirmium had a separate temple dedicated to the god Mars, or if the dedications were made in the temple dedicated to the Capitoline Triad, as was the case in the sanctuary of the benefactor consuls.

On the territory of Central Serbia, the cult symbioses of the god Mars are shown on two monuments at the Ravna location. Mars is here related to the imperial cult. Both monuments connect him with the Severi and Antonini dynasties. Both monuments designate Mars by the attribute *equitum* – equestrian, as the protector of equestrians. One of these is particularly significant, as it serves as proof that a temple dedicated to the god Mars

the Ravna location, with one of them lacking the given feature. However, the other one is particularly interesting as it contains attributes to Mars. Mars is designated here by the attribute *campestris*, which can have multiple meanings. This attribute can refer to Mars as the god coming from fields for training the army, especially during wars. A more important meaning of this attribute refers to Mars as a god originating from the Field of Mars or a god standing on the Field of Mars (Bogdanovic 1931: 53). The dedicator's name has not been preserved, but it is known that he belonged to the *equity cohort II Aureliae Dardanorum*. The aforementioned shows the multiple meaning of this attribute and Rome as its origin.



Map 2. Central Serbia

existed at the Ravna location (*Marti equitum templum*). As this monument can also be dated within the period 208-211 A.D., it means that a temple dedicated to the god Mars existed on the territory of Ravna at the beginning of the 3rd century.

Three monuments of the individual cult of the god Mars also originate from the territory of Central Serbia. One of them is situated at the border between the Viminacium and Horreum Margi location, where the attribute *sacrum* – saint designates Mars. Two other monuments were found at

On the territory of Vojvodina, four monuments dedicated to the individual cult of the god Mars have been found to date.

On two of these monuments, Mars is designated with no attributes involved; in the other two, Mars was referred to by the features “imperial” and “saint” (*Augusto* and *sacrum*). The designations lacking attributes are likely to include the overall significance and meaning of the god Mars. Simultaneously, the titles with details “imperial” and “saint” refer to the state’s patron and protector.

As for the monuments' tectonic appearance, each of them represents the front of a temple. It is surprising to see *pulvinus* as an ornament on the monument's capital. For the four monuments, some descriptions have not been lost. Of these four monuments, three include *pulvinus* as a decorative element of the capital. In this sense, one can see the influence of the western provinces on the territory of the Roman Vojvodina, as *pulvinus* is almost never present anywhere else (with minor exceptions) on the territory of Central Serbia. The capital of these monuments is most often ornamented with rosettes positioned directly on the *pulvinus*, or on the triangular gable in the middle. There is only a single case with a spiral ornament positioned on the *pulvino*. This ornament is rare; it is found only on the side of a votive monument in Cajetina (Zotović 2011). The decorative spiral element is considered to originate from the pre-historical tradition lasting until the ancient period, which saw it as rare, but distinct and acceptable. The rosette is a common decorative element on both the territory of Vojvodina and Central Serbia. The triangular gable and palmettes' presence re-confirms that the votive monument is a temple "miniature", with the capital imitating the temple roof.

It is interesting to review the votive monuments' dedicators. Four of them were found in the Jupiter sanctuary, erected and dedicated to Jupiter by the *beneficiarius consularis*. The benefactor consuls also had all the four monuments erected and dedicated to the god Mars. The fact that votive monuments dedicated to Mars were found in the sanctuary dedicated to the god Jupiter indicates a close relationship between Jupiter and Mars.

Personal names are not very helpful when dating monuments. Only the monument dedicated to Jupiter and Mars might be dated to Marcus Aurelius' reign. Following the information given on the monuments where consul pairs have been preserved, we can date the other monuments found in the Jupiter sanctuary into a broader chronological period, from the second half of the 2nd century to the beginning of the 3rd century.

Catalogue

Mars

1. Ara, limestone, dimensions: 0.58 x 0.44 x 0.38 m. Capital accented with three-fold, and postament with two-fold proliferation. Acroteria in the capital corners, a triangle containing a rosette with palmettes in the middle.

Location.: probably the border between the Viminacium and Horreum Margi

Mart(i)/ sac(rum)/ T. F(lavius) Sapi (/) ex viso(!).

Literature: Н. Вулић 1909, 143 – 144, n. 66; IMS II, 197, n. 299.

2. Ara, sandstone, dimensions: 0.82 x 0.42 x 0.36 m. A large libation opening on top.

Location.: Ravna

Marti

Literature: Н. Вулић, 1931, 82, n. 191; IMS III/2, 65 – 66, n. 6

3. Ara, sandstone, preserved in a fragmented condition.

Location: Ravna

Tekst:

Vulić:

[Marti] Campestr[i] coh(ors) II Aur(elia)/ Dard(anorum)] equit(ata) pro [salute]/ [---

Petrović (IMS III/2):

maybe: *[Marti] camperstr[i] et] equit(um)*; or *[Dis] Campestr[ibus et]/ [Marti] equitum?*

Literature: Н. Вулић 1941 – 48, 81, n. 171; IMS III/2, 66, n. 7.

4. Ara.

Location.: Sremska Mitrovica

Marti

Literature: M. Mirković 1971, 66 – 67, n. 22.

5. Ara, limestone, dimensions: 0.85 x 0.39 x 0.38 m. Capital carved with spirally ornamented *pulvini*, triangular gable in between, with two rosettes in the middle.

Location: Sremska Mitrovica

Marti/ Aug(usto) sacr(um)/ Ti. Claud(ius)/ Fortis beneficiarius/ co(n)s(ularis)/ v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).

Literature: M. Mirković 1994, 382, n. 40. (fig. 1)

6. Ara, limestone, dimensions: 0.88 x 0.45 x 0.39 m. Capital carved with spirally ornamented *pulvini*, triangular gable in between, with a rosette in the middle.

Location: Sremska Mitrovica

Marti/ Ti. Cl(audius)/ Postuminus/ b(ene)



Fig. 1. Ara, Mars, Sremska Mitrovica

f(iciarius) co(n)s(ularis)/ v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).

Literature: M. Mirković 1994, 383, n. 43. (fig. 2).

7. Ara, limestone, dimensions: 0.99 x 0.43 x 0.39 m. Capital with carved acroteria.

Location: Sremska Mitrovica

Marti/ Aug(usto) sac(rum)/ C. Iul(ius) Valens/ b(ene)f(iciarius) co(n)s(ularis)/ v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).

Literature: M. Mirković 1994, 390, n. 56.

Mars – Imperial Cult

1. Ara, sandstone, dimensions: 0.98 x 0.48 x 0.32 m.

Location: Ravna

Mart(i) eq(uitum)/ pro salute do/minor(um) NN[N] Se/veri et Antonini/ IMPP G. Atrius Deco/rat(us) trib(unus) coh(ortis) II Aurel(iae)/ Dard(anorum) Antonini/anae (milliariae) eq(uitae) l(ibens) p(osuit).

Literature: IMS III/2, 66 – 67, n. 8.

Dated: AD 208 – 211



Fig. 2. Ara, Mars, Sremska Mitrovica

2 .

Ara, marble, dimensions: 0.59 x 0.52 x 0.10 m.

Location: Ravna

[Mart]i equitum te[mplum/ pro s]alut(e) domino[rum n(ostrorum duorum)/ Seve]ri et Antonin[i imp(eratorum duorum)/ ---] Atrium Deco[rat(um) trib(unum)/ coh(ortis)]/ II Aure(eliae) Dard(anorum An[toni/ni]a]nae (milliariae) eq(uitatae) AE[---].

Literature: Н. Вулић 1941 – 48, 81, n. 172; IMS III/2, 67 – 68, n. 9.

Dated: AD 208 – 211

Jupiter – Mars

1. Ara. Lost.

Location: Sremska Mitrovica

I(ovi) o(ptimo) m(aximo)/ et Marti/ custodi/ Helvius/ Pertinax/ praef(ectus).

Literature: CIL III 3232; M. Mirković 1971, 66, n. 20.

Dated.: most likely from the period of Marcus Aurelius.



Fig. 3. Ara, Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Fortuna, Mars and diis deabusque, Sremska Mitrovica

Jupiter – Juno – Minerva – Fortuna - gods and goddesses - Mars

1. Ara, sandstone, dimensions: 0.85 x 0.40 x 0.36 m. Capital with carved pulvini, with a rosette in the middle and embossed decoration of acanthus and palmette.

Location: Sremska Mitrovica

I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo)/ Iunoni Reg(inae)/ Min(ervae) Fort(unae) Mart(i)/ Cam(pestri) dis dea<bus>/que sacr(um) T./ Fl(avius) Aulus b(eneficiarius) co(n)s(ularis)/ ex n(umero) fr(umentariorum)/ v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).

Literature: M. Mirković 1994, 385, n. 47. (fig. 3).

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