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Votive Inscriptions in Mitrovica and Its Surroundings

The study of votive epigraphic monuments is significant in archaeology, providing valuable insights into a particular period or region's social structure. During the Roman era, monuments like ceramics and coins were crucial communication markers between cultures. The votive inscriptions found in Kosovo's territory offer evidence on the worship of local, Roman, Greek, and Eastern deities. Mitrovica, a region with a rich history of cultural exchange, flourished as a center of civilization even during the Roman period. The abundance of votive epigraphic monuments in Mitrovica sheds light on the revered deities. It offers valuable glimpses into the region's Roman-era history, including insights into the specific deities venerated during that time.

Keywords: votive inscriptions, Mitrovica, Roman period, legions, Kosovo

Mitrovica and archaeological artifacts during centuries

People have inhabited the territory of Mitrovica for centuries, with evidence of settlements dating back to prehistoric times. The discovery of various archaeological sites spanning up to the Middle Ages underscores the historical significance of this region. The abundant minerals and the existence of the Ibër River alongside Mitrovica made it an ideal location for human habitation and settling. These factors underscore the lasting presence of diverse cultures in the area, as evidenced by various archaeological artifacts.

Evidence suggests that human habitation around Mitrovica predates the city's founding and even the Roman exploitation of mineral resources. Extensive research conducted in and around Mitrovica indicates that the settlements in the area date back more than seven thousand years. Notably, the settlement of Zhitkovc, located on the banks of the Ibër River, is recognized as one of the oldest known settlements in the region.¹

The Roman era significantly influenced the significance of this region, primarily due to the abundance of ore from mining and the advancements made in agriculture and livestock. Throughout the centuries, traditional cattle herding routes from Vermion, through Sharr mountains, Kopaonik, and Homole, to the Carpathians, have crossed Mitrovica's hilly and mountainous terrain.²

The Roman province of Moesia contains 4976 inscriptions.³ Dardania, a region within Moesia, encompasses the city of Mitrovica. According to the Epigraphic Database Heidelberg (EDH), 100 epigraphic monuments have been documented near Mitrovica. The existence of these monuments and settlements provides a reliable source, offering a fundamental understanding of the lifestyle and events during this historical period.⁴

During the Roman period, the people built a well-constructed road network that enabled easier access, the exploitation of ores, and the utilization of the region's goods. Within the network of Roman roads in Kosovo, two routes stood out: the northeast-southwest route, connecting Naissus (Nish) to Lissus (Lezhë), and the northwest-southeast route, linking Central Bosnia through Vicianum to Scup (Skopje).⁵ The second

¹ TASIQ (1979: 25).

² TASIQ (1979: 25).

³ BELTRÁN-LLORENS (2015: 138).

⁴ ÇERŠKOV (1973: 26).

⁵ TASIQ (1979: 42).

Roman road, that ran close to Mitrovica, was of particular importance as it connected the provinces around Novi Pazar with the central parts of Kosovo and Macedonia.⁶

One of the prominent settlements was Municipium DD, which underwent two distinct construction phases, each characterized by its unique features. The first period is associated with the reign of Hadrian and involves the construction of temples. In contrast, the second period, during the reign of Diocletian, focused on the city's infrastructure and layout.⁷

Furthermore, during the Roman era, various cults dedicated to local deities were observed in the interior of the Balkan Peninsula, showcasing the ancient world's adaptation to the customs and traditions of the Illyrian population.⁸

Mitrovica and its surrounding areas also provide evidence of epigraphic monuments, which refer to the area and the *beneficial stations* that played a significant role in the development of roadways.

Votive epigraphic monuments in Mitrovica and its surroundings

Mitrovica's region and surroundings are home to many epigraphic monuments, which have been thoroughly documented in academic papers, online sources, catalogs, and other publications. The artifacts have sparked interest among researchers from Kosovo and other regions. The Epigraphic Database Heidelberg (EDH), Clauss Slaby, CIL, and ILJug provide valuable online research resources. Certain artifacts have survived, while others have been lost over time. Most artifacts are

⁶ TASIĆ (1979: 42).

⁷ TASIĆ (1979: 46).

⁸ ÇEŞNEKOV (1973: 69).

crafted from limestone, although examples are made from marble and dacite. All aspects of life underwent significant and dynamic changes during the early imperial era. An epigraphic ‘explosion’ from the late 1st century BC was quantitative and qualitative since many inscriptions and monument types were developed or adopted.⁹

These inscriptions included a variety of Roman and Greek deities, with mentions of Roman gods such as Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, and Neptune, as well as the Greek deity Nemesis.

Epigraphic monuments dedicated to the Roman god Jupiter and the Capitoline triad

One inscription in Mitrovica mentions the Capitoline Triad (see Fig. 1). It is made of limestone and dates from the late 2nd century. It measures 88 x 34 x 32 cm.



*I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / Iun(oni) Reg(inae) / Min-
er(vae) s(acrum) Au[r(elius)] / Sa[e]vin(us) / Procul(us)
/ b(ene)f(iciarius) co(n)s(ularis) / v(otum) l(ibens) p(o-
suit).*¹⁰

Interpretation:

This monument was as an offering to Jupiter, the Best and Greatest, Juno Regina, and the sacred Minerva, by Aurelius Saevinus Proculus, *beneficiarius consularis*, who willingly set up this offering.

Fig. 1. Epigraphic monument dedicated to Jupiter and Minerva (E.Dobruna 2005:1191)

⁹ WITSCHER (2014: 105).

¹⁰ DOBRUNA-SALIHU (2005: 827); FERAUDI-GRUÉNAIS: EDH, <https://edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/edh/inschrift/HD033641>. 2024.05.30.

Another inscription dedicated to Jupiter, also discovered in Mitrovica (see Fig. 2), is made of limestone, with dimensions 84 x 27 x 30 cm, and dates from the early 3rd century.

*Iovi / Op(t)imo / sacr(um) / ex viso / M(arcus) Ulp(i-
us) / Viator / b(ene)f(iciarius) co(n)s(ularis) / ex fru-
mentario).*¹¹

Interpretation:

Monument was an offering to sacred Jupiter by M. Ulpus Viator, *beneficiarius consularis*, and a corn-merchant.¹²

Jupiter was attributed to various epithets, one of which was Propulsator, discovered in Banjska in Vushtrri (see Fig. 3). This marble monument, with unknown dimensions, is estimated to originate from the 2nd to 3rd century.

*I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / propulsatori / et ceter-
is(qve) dis / deabusque / C. Varius / Martialiss / c(la-
rissimo) v(ir).*¹³

Interpretation:

The monument is dedicated to Jupiter, the Best and Greatest, with *propulsator* (to ward off, to remove, to avert)¹⁴ local epithet. It was dedicat-



Fig. 2 Epigraphic monument dedicated to Jupiter (E.Dobruna 2005:1191)



Fig. 3 Epigraphic monument dedicated to Jupiter (N.Ferri 2013:106)

¹¹ FERAUDI-GRUÉNAIS: EDH, <https://edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/edh/inschrift/HD033640>. 2024.05.30.

¹² GOODWIN (1874: 97).

¹³ FERRI (2013: 100); MEHMETAJ (2011: 380).

¹⁴ GOODWIN (1874: 187).



Fig.4 Epigraphic monument dedicated to Jupiter (N.Ferri 2013:106)

ed to other gods and goddesses, and the entire dedication was carried out by C. Varius Martialis, the most notable man.

An inscription dedicated to Jupiter (see Fig. 4) was discovered in the Valli—Shala of Bajgora. It measures 64 x 44 x 40 and dates to the 2nd–3rd century.

*I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) Coh(ortali) Avrel(ius)
v(e)n(erabilis) c v(otum) l(ibens).*¹⁵

Interpretation:

The monument, dedicated to Jupiter, the Best and Greatest, was built by Aurelius with the epithet Cohortali. The dedication of the monument was carried out with venerable and willingly.

A monument dedicated to Jupiter was found in Kostërc of Skënderaj but was unfortunately lost. The monument's dimensions are unknown, but according to its inscription, it was dedicated to Jupiter.

*I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo). C. (=Capitolino) or (Cohortali) / T. Ael(ius) Avitus (?) / dec(urio) m(unicipii) Ulp(ianae) v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).*¹⁶

Interpretation:

Monument dedicated to Jupiter, the Best and Greatest, Capitoline or Cohortali. It was dedicated by T. Aelius Avitus, decurion of Ulpiana Municipium, who willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow.

¹⁵ FERRI (2012: 105).

¹⁶ MIRDITA (1981: 267).

Epigraphic monument dedicated to Minerva

Minerva was one of the goddesses to whom an altar was found in Laushë, dating back to the 1st century; regrettably, the monument lacks any mention of its dimensions.

*Minerva Auc (=Augusta?).*¹⁷

Interpretation:

Monument dedicated to Minerva.



Fig. 5 Epigraphic monument dedicated to gods and goddesses (E.Dobruna-Salihi 2005:1195)

Epigraphic monument dedicated to gods and goddesses

The monument dedicated to all gods and goddesses (see Fig.5) was found in Vushtrri. It is crafted from white marble and dates to the 3rd century (year 230). It is 101 x 33 x 22 cm in dimensions.

*D(is) d(eabusque) / M(arcus) Aurelius / Marcianus / b(ene)f(iciarius) co(n)s(ularis) leg(ionis) / VII Cl(audiae) / [[Sever(ianae)]] / [[Alexan(drianae)]] v(otum) l(ibens) p(ersolvit) / Agricola et Clement(ino) / co(n)s(ulibus).*¹⁸

Interpretation:

This monument was dedicated to the gods and goddesses by M.Aurelius Marianus, *beneficiarius consularis*, of VII Claudia legion; he willingly paid the vow during the consulship of Agricola and Clement.

¹⁷ KALAJA-HAJDARI (2017: 373).

¹⁸ FERAUDI-GRUÉNAIS: EDH, <https://edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/edh/inschrift/HD033652>. 2024.05.30.

Epigraphic monuments dedicated to Nemesis



Fig. 6 Epigraphic monument dedicated to Nemesis (E.Dobruna-Salihi 2005:1190)

Greek deities were also present in Kosovo. In Mitrovica, inscriptions in the Greek language mention deities such as Nemesis, the goddess of divine justice.¹⁹

A monument dedicated to Nemesis (see Fig. 6) was discovered in Mitrovica. It is made from limestone and dates back to the end of the 2nd century. It measures 80 x 33 x 31 cm.

Nemesi reg(inae) / sac(rum) pro/salute(!) / dominor(um) nn(ostrorum) Augg(ustorum) / C(aius) Val(erius) Valens / b(ene)f(iciarius) co(n)s(ularis) leg(ionis) IIII Fl(aviae) / v(otum) l(ibens) l(aetus) me[r]ito] po[s]uit)²⁰.

Interpretation:

Monument dedicated to holy Nemesis queen for the welfare of our lord Augustinians, C. Valerius Valens, *beneficiarius consularis* of IV Flavia legion, willingly, gladly, deservedly made the vow.

Another limestone monument dedicated to Nemesis was discovered in Mitrovica. It is 88 x 32 x 28 cm and dates from the end of the 2nd century.

Nemesi Reg(inae) / sac(rum) / Martia/lis b(ene)f(iciarius) co(n)s(ularis) / leg(ionis) IIII Fl(aviae) / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).²¹

¹⁹ PAYMENT (2006: 42).

²⁰ FERAUDI-GRUÉNAIS: EDH <https://edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/edh/inschrift/HD033642>, 2024.06.10; EDCs, <http://www.manfredclaus.de/>, 2024.06.10.

²¹ KALAJA-HAJDARI (2017: 375).

Interpretation:

Monument dedicated to holy Nemesis queen, by Martialis *beneficiarius consularis* of IV Flavia Legion, willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow.

One of the monuments that mention the genii of the stations, Jupiter and Nemesis, was discovered in the region of Mitrovica, specifically in Sočanica. According to this inscription, a Roman settlement was found in Sočanica, which could be called Municipium Dardanorum. The inscription dimensions are 36 x 39 cm and dates back to the 3rd century.

*I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) et Nemesi / Reg(inae), Genio / stat(ionis) M()
Dard(anorum) / Sept(imius) Vitalis / b(ene)f(iciarius) co(n)s(ularis) leg(io-
nis) / VII Cl(audiae) v(otum) l(ibens) s(olvit).*²²

Interpretation:

Monument dedicated to Jupiter, the Best and Greatest, and Nemesis Queen, Genius of Dardania station, by Septimius Vitalis *beneficiarius consularis* of VII Claudia Legion, willingly fulfilled his vow.

IV Flavia and VII Claudia Legions

The Roman legions had a dominant role all over where Rome took control. Cassius Dio mentioned the VII Claudia and IV Flavia legions as part of Upper Moesia.²³ The VII Claudia was a Dalmatian legion; its honor was reflected in the emperor's name through the title 'Claudia,' known as the VII Claudia Pia Fidelis, which means 'Claudius' Loyal and Patriotic.' This title was given to honor their loyalty during the re-

²² MIRDITA (1981: 270).

²³ CARY trans. (1917: 457).

volt of Scribonianus.²⁴ Legion VII remained at the same camp until it was relocated to Moesia, likely in 58 AD (but no later than 62 AD).²⁵ Their emblem was a bull.²⁶

After Civilis's revolt, the four German legions that had either surrendered or lost their *aquilae* were cashiered, and consequently, I *Germanica*, IV *Macedonia*, XV *Primigenia*, and XVI disappeared.²⁷

In the summer of 70, Vespasian recruited two new legions, IV *Flavia Felix* and XVI *Flavia Firma*, to replace them.²⁸

Vespasian gave the unit his family name, Flavia, and the emblem of a lion, a symbol associated with Vespasian's favorite deity, Hercules.²⁹ The title 'Felix,' symbolizing imperial favor, was also granted by emperors to various military colonies established by them.³⁰ By 85 AD, the legion had been relocated to Moesia.³¹

Roman military preparations intensified throughout 100 A.D.; weapons and ammunition were produced and stockpiled in Moesia, where the resident I *Italica*, IV *Flavia*, V *Macedonia*, and VII *Claudia* legions would have been training crossing rivers.³²

Importance of votive inscription in Mitrovica and its surroundings

The votive inscriptions found in the region provide detailed information. Compared with other cities in Kosovo, Mitrovica has a higher

²⁴ PARKER (1971: 176).

²⁵ PARKER (1971: 176).

²⁶ DANDO-COLLINS (2010: 143).

²⁷ PARKER (1971: 107).

²⁸ PARKER (1971: 107).

²⁹ DANDO-COLLINS (2010: 130).

³⁰ DANDO-COLLINS (2010: 130).

³¹ DANDO-COLLINS (2010: 130).

³² DANDO-COLLINS (2010: 379).

number of inscriptions that mention *beneficiarii*. This suggests that in the territory of Mitrovica, the votive inscriptions dating back to the 1st–3rd centuries indicate the existence of *beneficiarii*, who typically held authority over roads and other economic and strategic locations during their active duty in the Roman provinces where they were assigned as beneficiaries. The military, especially beneficiaries appointed by the governor on seconded duty throughout this mining sector, maintained control over exploiting the region's natural resources and the personnel engaged in this work, among whom could be found prisoners or *damnati ad metalla*.³³ This fact demonstrates the importance of this territory during the Roman period and its connections with other provinces. However, there are a couple of inscriptions dedicated to the god Nemesis, dedicated by beneficiary consuls of the IV Flavia Legion dating back to the 2nd century, also two others, one of which is a monument dedicated to Jupiter, the Greek god Nemesis, the genius of a station in Dardani and another dedicated to the goddesses. Two of the inscriptions were dedicated by beneficiary consuls and members of the VII Claudia Legion from the 3rd century. When examining these monuments, we observe the movement of Roman legions such as the VII Claudia, believed to have been stationed in Moesia until the 4th century, and that of IV Flavia believed to have been stationed until the early 5th century. The evolving circumstances, ranging from the migration of diverse populations, including economic and social crises, forced these beneficiaries to cross rivers, travel across the Danube, or gradually fade away. This pertains to the period from the 4th century onwards, also known as late antiquity.

³³NELIS-CLÉMENT (2000: 260).

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