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BOOK REVIEW



Ivana Popović, Miloje Vasić, Jean Guyon et Dominic Moreau (édité par): La basilique Saint-Irénée de Sirmium et sa nécropole

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The significance of the early Christian monuments and finds of Sirmium have been recognized for a long time, but the excavations of the Synerotas cemetery north of the town in the 19th century were improperly carried out. Only a part of the numerous Christian inscriptions was edited by A. von Domaszewski in the supplement volume of the CIL III, the entire material was published by J. Brunšmid only decades later in his 'Kameni spomenici series' (Vjesnik Arheološkog muzeja u Zagrebu 1907 and 1909), and the finds of the 19th century went to the National Museum of Zagreb. The new finds that have come to light following the World War II could have remained in the local museum of Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia. The systematic French-Serbian excavations led by V. Popović and N. Duval in 1970s have had numerous promising discoveries and publications (as the Sirmium series¹) concerning the late antique imperial city, the hippodrome, the imperial palace, and the cemeteries, but Caričin Grad (Justiniana Prima) has become more important for the project from the 1980s. The results of the previous excavations of Sirmium have not published for decades with the exception of some preliminary reports. It is primarily due to the merit of one of the editors, Dominic Moreau, that after many decades of waiting, the results of the excavation of the early Christian cemetery around the burial place of Saint Irenaeus, the martyr bishop of Sirmium have finally been published. The cemetery east of the late antique metropolis became the most important early Christian place of memory. The most important results of the excavation, the ground-plan of the basilica and the funerary inscription that mentions the martyr became known already in 1970s,² but the entire material, especially the numerous Christian funerary inscriptions has not been published. The Serbian-French team prepared the full archaeological survey, the authors worked up the finds in separate chapters (brick and stone material, coins, pottery finds with the anthropological analysis) and the volume has finally been edited in 2022. Ivana Popović added the results of two recent rescue excavations from the area of this cemetery. In this paper I intend to deal with the main results of this new publication with a special regard to the epigraphic material. *volt*.

In the last two decades several monographs were published concerning the history and archaeology of the Roman town, the latest one was Miroslava Mirković's work in 2017 that also contained the entire epigraphic material, all of them used the main pieces of information of the excavations of the 1970s.³ The recent work intended to work up all results of the international digs in the eastern cemetery of Sirmium and continue the work of the 1970s. Because of this fact and the new series of the publisher (Rome and after in Central and Eastern Europe), several prefaces were added to the work. In the introductory chapter the two editors dealt with the history of Early Christianity of Sirmium and topography of the late antique metropolis (pp. 25–31). In the city several councils were held in the fourth century, beside the Orthodox Catholic Church, a very strong Arian (and a Photinian) section existed. Their main memorial places were built around the

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¹Popović (1971–1982) volumes I–III, VII–VIII, XII.

²Duval (1979) 83–84.

³Milošević (2011); Poznanović (2004); Popović (2004); Jeremić (2016); Mirković (2008); Popović et al. (2017); Mirković (2017).

burials of the martyrs of the Diocletianic persecution north (Syneros) and east (Anastasia, Demetrius és Irenaeus). The urban basilica was also revealed that was mistakenly connected to the cult of St. Demetrius. The memorial place (*cella memoriae*) can only be localized at the very end of the eastern cemetery beside St. Anastasia's chapel as it was mentioned in Demetrius second legend and where two *cella memoriae* were found (Passio sancti Demetrii II.17) as it was earlier suggested by Jacques Zeiller.⁴ On the other hand, it cannot be excluded that the relics of the martyr could not have been transferred to the urban basilica (but no written source confirms this possibility). In the next chapter the previous archaeological investigations of the eastern cemetery were studied (pp. 32–38) where the earlier finds were catalogized in topographical order (mainly based on I. Jung's letters). 53 masonry graves were found with several funerary epitaphs. As far as it was possible the authors identified the exact sites of the earlier findings. It is a striking fact that the greater part of Greek funerary inscriptions of Sirmium was found here. I must remark that the two Christian Greek lost funerary epitaphs were not mentioned (published based on Z. Gruic's letter) (CIGP Nr. 208–209⁵). Both can probably be connected to this cemetery. In the case of the Greek fragmentary epitaph Nr. 15/e the most plausible completion of the name is 'I]w£nna as I suggested decades ago (CIGP Nr. 135). In my opinion, it was not good decision to separate the Christian finds and two above-mentioned *cellae memoriae* found at the very eastern end of the same cemetery along the road leading to Singidunum.

The main part of the monograph deals with the excavations of the 1970s (1976–1977), i.e. the basilica of Irenaeus and the burials inside and outside the building and the finds (inscriptions, mensae, architectural elements, frescoes, coins) and the analysis of the anthropological material (pp. 41–188). Unfortunately, no inside floor levels of the great (24 × 15 m) building with an apse survived, but marble, mosaic, *opus sectile* and fresco fragments clearly show that it could have been a very richly decorated late building (pp. 41–50, 111–115, 171–174). These small fragments cannot make possible any architectural reconstruction, the building phases remained unknown. Only one later addition (a N–S wall added to the NE corner of the basilica) could have observed. 102 E–W graves were unearthed, 62 inside the building (pp. 51–91). About 30% of them is earlier than the chapel, several graves were cut by the walls. The burials are mainly masonry graves, some of them built of tegulae and the walls could have been painted too. Very pottery finds (a part of them is earlier and they were not part of the grave furniture) were found in them and because of the robberies they are broken (pp. 175–177). The study of the coins clearly show that the cemetery was in use from the 330s, but majority of the coins are from the second half of the fourth century (pp. 163–170). An interesting observation is the lack of the fifth century material, the latest one was minted in the year 402. This fact proves

that the cemetery was not used from the beginning of the fifth century. The analysis of the anthropological material confirms the hypothesis that the cemetery was used by the wealthy Christian layers of Sirmium, especially inside the basilica (pp. 179–188). The most important grave could have been Nr. 5 in front of the apse just beside the supposed place of the martyr grave where the inscription mentioning the basilica was found (this could have been burial place of Macedonius and his wife). Unfortunately, during the excavation the martyr grave was not observed (hardly dealt with this topic in the work). The grave can probably be localized in the axis of the building in front of the apse in rectangular area signed as '*argile vierge*' in the ground-plan. The lack of the burial can probably refer to the possibility that martyr's relics were placed in a reliquarium or sarcophagus (?) above the ground and the original grave did not survive. This possibility can be confirmed by the graves placed closely beside each other in the apse (perhaps *retro sanctos*). Irenaeus could have originally been buried in one of the empty graves inside the basilica (as for instance, Nr. 24?). The martyr relics were not placed in this building from the fifth century as it was abandoned, they can probably be localized in his much safer basilica in Mačvanska Mitrovica on the other side of the river Sava as it is attested centuries later (cf. Theophyl. Historia martyrii XV. Martyrum 54). Another interesting observation is that there were empty areas (not used for burials) in the middle and the rear side of the building, obviously reserved for the believers.

The chapter dealing with the brick and tile material is also very important (pp. 99–110). During the excavations hundreds of *tegulae*, *imbrices* and *latera* came to light, both in the building and in the graves. More 100 of them had stamped tiles. Two stamp types were found: the already known FIG SCA BAR and the new FIG SCA SAT. The expansion of the abbreviated stamps is problematical, esp. the *contractio* suggested by M. Mirković *fig(ulina) s(ub) c(ur)a* as it is not attested elsewhere. That is why a more plausible was suggested by the authors: *s(ub) c(ura) a(gentis)*. It seems obvious that the tiles were prepared in a workshop of a local (Pannonia secunda) military unit, therefore the abbreviated letters SAT and BAR must have belonged to the names of military commanders. On the other hand, BAR cannot be identified with *Barbatio magister peditum* as the supervision of provincial workshops did not belong to the tasks of the commander of the *comitatenses*.⁶ That is why Bar(—) (beside *Barbatio*, other *cognomina* cannot be excluded either as *Barbarus*, *Barbanus*, *Barbatus* etc., therefore the abbreviation cannot be expanded⁷) and Sat(—) (most probably *Saturninus* (cp. the stamp of the *legio X gemina*: CIL III 10707) could have been the unknown *duces* of the province⁸ or the commander of one of the legions garrisoning in Pannonia II. The abbreviation A could have belonged to the name of the military unit of Sirmium as it is attested in the *Notitia Dignitatum* that an *ala Sirmensis* stationed in the city in the late Roman period (Not. Dig. Occ.

⁴Zeiller (1918) 190.

⁵Reference for the corpus of the Pannonian Greek inscriptions was totally omitted (CIGP).

⁶Lórinz (1985).

⁷Solin and Salomies (1994) 300–301.

⁸The list of the Pannonian *duces* is incomplete: Fitz (1994) 1266–1275.



XXXII,55), but the formula *fig(ulina) s(ub) c(ura)* most probably rules out this possibility.⁹ An inscribed brick was also found (written on both sides) that had probably a funerary text (the letters VIVS beside the reading relative pronoun *cuius* can also be restored as *viv(u)s sibi et ... fecit or posuit*), i. e. the male person erected the funerary epitaph to himself and his relative(s). In this caste the letters + IPTO in the second line concern to a male deceased person who was already mentioned in the missing part of the text (i. e. *patri, fratri or filio*): [*suprasc*]ripto.

The numerous marble funerary mensae fragments (all together 20 pieces that belong to 14 mensae) were studied in detail (pp. 151–161). Both rectangular and the more frequent (semi)circular types (according to Duval, type 2.e with a diameter 70–115 cm in average) are used in the basilica. Some of them were inscribed (Nr. 11–13). It is misleading that Nr. 12 was re-published among the inscriptions (again as Nr. 12). On the other hand, it is also unclear why the other inscribed ones were omitted. It is also unclear why Duval's exact drawing was not used in the case of the Nr. 12 with a Greek inscription as the figure on the find published here is too small. The two Latin inscriptions were funerary inscriptions (in the former one the numeral IIII refers to the age of the deceased or date of the *depositio*). It has to be added that a fourth mensae was identified by Duval among the older finds (CIL III 10240=AÉp 1986, 602). I must remark too that in the chapters dealing with the stone monuments the older finds should have been published too, because they were found at the same time, and they should have been studied as well. N. Duval examined separately the funerary *mensae* and *piscinae* of Western Illyricum (Sirmium, Salona) and Aquileia.¹⁰ These stone monuments covered several times the graves (as the cases from Salona clearly show) (sometimes martyr relics), but they could also have been used as real *mensae* for the *refrigerium*. Sometimes the *mensae* and the *piscinae* can hardly be distinguished, esp. in the case of monuments with impressed surface. The exact localization of the *mensae* in the basilica of Irenaeus is not clear, but I. Popović observed that the rectangular ones were found in the apse (Nr. 14–15). In these cases, the cultic use cannot be ruled either (as reliquarium or altar as in the *oratoria* of Aquileia). Several times the word *piscina* was used in Salona instead of *mensa* (Salona IV, Nr. 81–83, 88, 121). It was explained by their shape and the form of the grave-pit as well (N. Cambi). Based on the case of Salona, Mirković completed the inscription Nr. 15 as *han[c piscinam]* and this is the most plausible solution, but the possibility a *han[c mensam]* cannot be excluded either (cf. ILJ 1980d=Salona IV, Nr. 47).

The most important and elaborated chapter of the monograph deal with the inscriptions (written by J. Guyon and S. Ferjančić) that contain the good quality documentation of 54 (mainly marble) Christian funerary epitaphs, almost all of them from the middle and second half of fourth century. Unfortunately, the stone monuments in most of the cases are too fragmentary to restore, but good observations and

commentaries of the authors can help the further epigraphic research (pp. 117–149). The edition of these epitaphs was a great desideratum from the 1970s, only the most important ones were published (as tablet that mentions the basilica or the exorcist's epitaph), sometimes only the photo without any commentary. Finally, M. Mirković already edited all Christian inscriptions as well (not included in Sirmium 1 in 1971) in her English monograph on Sirmium in 2017 (and in a previous Serbian paper),¹¹ but she published only the photos of these fragments (without transcription or CatNr.). It is noteworthy to mention that all fragments are in Latin, not a single Greek one has been found apart from the above-mentioned mensa published by Duval. The most plausible explanation is that the cemetery was abandoned at the beginning of the fifth century (before Pannonia secunda and Sirmium was attached to East Rome). The most important text was found in grave Nr. 5 and mentions the name of the martyr. The problem of the Semitic name of the wife was satisfactorily discussed with all possible solutions. It can also be questioned to whom the epitaph and grave (*memoria*) was made as the text mentions only two persons, Macedonius and his wife who erected the tablet. The authors therefore correctly came to the conclusion that the tombstone was erected for themselves. The authors had relatively few comments on the expression *basilica domini nostri Erenei* (as on Irenaeus' cult in the entire work). The term *dominus noster* is a little bit perplexing as in early Christian inscriptions the term concerns only Jesus Christ or the emperor (used in most of the cases for consular dating). A martyr could have been called *dominus* too (but it is not frequent) as it is attested in Sirmium as well where another martyr, Synerotas was called *dominus* (CIL III 10232) and *beatus* (CIL III 10232) too. In these cases, the word *martyr* was always added (cp. CIL III 14340² as in the cause of the most plausible restoration of the epitaph that mentions (AÉp 2013, 1251).¹² The use of the possessive pronoun *noster* is very unusual and it concerns most probably to the leading of role Irenaeus' cult in Sirmium as he was the martyr bishop of the city. Sremska Mitrovica/Szávaszentdemeter was named after St Demetrius, but his cult became more popular only centuries later.

Apart from the archaeological investigations of the basilica two new rescue excavations were published by I. Popović from the area of the eastern (partly already published in the *Starinar*). The masonry grave found in the street Mike Antića has become widely known because of its frescoes depicting Old Testament scenes (the story of Jonah) (pp. 191–199). More important is the excavation of 2016 in the Palanka street where 21 graves were revealed (pp. 201–218). Among them the most interesting one is grave Nr. 20 with frescoes depicting Old and New Testament scenes (Good shepherd, Three young men in the furnace). Around this burial later a *cella memoriae* with an apse was built. I must remark that the coin of Claudius II found in the grave can only be used as *terminus postquem* and

⁹The military unit earlier was mistakenly connected to the tile stamps AD and ADS from Sirmium: cf. Lőrincz (1978) 7.

¹⁰Duval (1984); Duval (1985).

¹¹Mirković (2016).

¹²For the correct restoration of the text ([- - - a]d beati[ssimam] marty[re(m)] Anast[asiam] see Kovács (2019).



Jovian's coin dates the grave better. In both cases the anthropological material was examined in separate chapters. For the sake of clarity, at the end of monograph written in French a longer English abstract was added (pp. 223–229).

Despite all values of the work, some minor mistakes and typos can be observed in the text, some of them I have corrected as follows:

1. The letters on other side of the tile inscription should be read as: *qu(a)e*.
2. Nr. 2. The name of the exorcist cannot surely be restored *Urs[ici]nus*, but it is the most probable possibility therefore the name should be mentioned in the exemplum with a question mark.
3. A Nr. 3. The reading of the word *tribunus* in line 2 correctly is: *tri]buni*.
4. Nr. 5. Apparently the two last lines remained, the letters in line 2 cannot be interpreted as *mens[es]* or *mens(es)* as the first damaged letter cannot be an M (an oblique hasta that was part of a V, X, or Y).
5. Nr. 6. Despite the fact that the marble tablet is fragmentary, it is sure that the epitaph contains several names. In the case of the formula *en pace* an exclamation mark should have been used as the form of the preposition *en* is a vulgar Latin phenomenon, so the correct transcription is as follows: *en (!) pace*. In my opinion, the letters NOFETO cannot be corrected to *neofito* as it cannot be explained by neither vulgar Latin forms, nor the misunderstanding of the stonemason. Alone in the word *neophytus* three vulgar forms should have been supposed that is not attested in the entire Late Roman epigraphic material: *eo>o*, *ph>F*, *I>E*. That is why one should follow the earlier interpretation that interpreted text as male cognomen ending *-tinus* in the dative (*[—]etino f(ilio)*) and an *et*. The last letter of the line was an O that can also be connected to the name of the next line ending *-piades*. On the other hand, in this case one must suppose the names in the funerary text would have been mistakenly enumerated in the dative and nominative too and only three letters would have been missing at the beginning of the line (for instance *[—]etino f(ilio) et O/lym]piades (!) et*). Besides the formula *in pace* in line 1, the name of the deceased person (in the nominative), the formula *bonae memoriae* formula or a predicate (*hic requiescit* or *pausat*) could have been mentioned. The use of the dative in the next line can rather support the formula *bonae memoriae*. The restoration *O/lym]piades* becomes possible, if the predicate was very short, for instance *pausat*. The first name *[—]etinus* can probably be restored as *[Val]e(n)tino*. At the end of line 3 an A can clearly be deciphered (the form agrees with the A of the same line (with a short hasta at the top), the damaged last letter can be the horizontal hasta of a T. Here, the transcription of the exemplum given by the authors is surely erroneous: S[—]. The letters SAT can probably belong to a Latin cognomen with the beginning SAT—, one would restore obviously the most frequent name Saturninus/a, but this does not agree with the letters E or

FTV+ in the last line. Based on this fact and the restoration of the cognomen *O/lym]piades* the name must have been shorter (as for instance the cognomina *Saturus*, *Satyrus* or *Saturnus*, each used by the Christians too). The last name begins with an V followed by a damaged letter (most probably an R). The most probably solution can be the name *Ursicinus*.

Based on this argumentation, the funerary epitaph can be restored as follows (only *exempli gratia*):

[Bonae memoria]e or [quiesci]t en (!) pace / [Val]e(n)tino f(ilio) et O/[lym]piades (!) et Sat/[uro] et Ur[sicino] -----

If the restoration of the name *Olympiades* is incorrect *[—]piades* and all following persons were the ones who erected the funerary monument:

[Bonae memoria]e or [requiesci]t en (!) pace / [Val]e(n)tino f(ilio) et O/[—]piades (!) et Sat/[urus] et Ur[sicinus] / -----

If the restoration *Olympiades* is incorrect the name of the last deceased person began with an O, and *[—]piades* and others were the ones who erected the funerary epitaph, therefore their names are in the nominative:

[Bonae memoria]e or [requiesci]t en (!) pace / [Val]e(n)tino f(ilio) et O/[—]piades (!) et Sat/[urus] et Ur[sicinus] / -----

6. Nr. 9. There is no *exemplum*, but besides the formula *hic dormit* in the last line observed by the authors, the letters of the first line can also be restored: as letter C was also pronounced as G the letters can be restored as a name *—]RGON[—*, for instance *Gorgonius* (attested already in Sirmium: CIL III 6441) (cp. the form *Corconius* in an early Christian inscription from Trier¹³).
7. Nr. 10. In my opinion, the letters + C or GEN cannot surely be restored as *argentarius*, a banker as it was mentioned in the summary, the second letter can be a G or C as well and it cannot be excluded that the letters belonged to a name. The first letter could be an R, P or B too and it cannot be excluded that it would have been part of the previous abbreviated word., The reading *argentarius* must remain one of the several uncertain possibilities.
8. Nr. 12 It was omitted that fragment belongs to the funerary mensae and it also can be found in the chapter dealing with them (cp. Nr. 12).
9. Nr. 19. The suggested interpretation of the letters SAV as *Kalendas Augustas* cannot be excluded, but it is only one of the numerous possibilities as for instance the cognomina *Savinus*, *Savonius*, or the Syrian *Sauma* (cf. CIL V 8760).
10. Nr. 33. The last letter in line can be an O or C or Q as well, therefore it should probably restored as Greek cognomen beginning with *Eu]tyc[h-* that was frequent in Pannonia: for instance, *Eutyches*, *Eutyclus* opr *Eutychanus*.
11. The latter name (earlier not attested in Sirmium) can be supposed in the fragments Nr. 34 and 40 (letters + VT and EV), but the epitaphs are too fragmentary to restore the text with high probability.

¹³Merten (2018) Nr. 6.



12. Nr. 41. The remained letters IGE were not interpreted, they could have belonged to the word *refrigerium* (or the predicate *refrigero*) or to a cognomen as well: as for instance Diligens, Primigenius.
13. The reading of the graffito mentioning the name of Jonah in the grave revealed in the street Mike Antića is correct, but in my opinion, not a Greek Ω was inserted among the Latin characters (not a bilingual text), but the entire graffito was written in Greek with a sigma lunata at the end, i. e. the correct transcription as follows: Ἰωνᾶς. The inscription belongs to the fourth century inscriptions of Sirmium (cp. CIGP 129–138, 208–209) where the use of the Classical Ω can be observed instead of the later W-shaped character.
14. As far I could check the authors cited all relevant publications (with exception of the Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum Pannonicarum), but minor mistakes can also be observed among the references (for instance, my own work dealing with sources of late Roman Pannonia was attributed to another author (Korać) (but correctly cited in the epigraphic chapter).

This volume was a great desideratum of the research of Pannonia and the authors did their job well. On the other hand, the epigraphic material confirms my earlier opinion that there would be a great need for a separate corpus of the hundreds of early Christian epitaphs of Pannonia, if I may suggest the title in the *Inscriptiones Christianae Pannonicae* (ICP) in order to study and in many cases properly re-publish these inscriptions. In any case, the present work serves as a suitable basis for this work.

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