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IMAGES OF FEMALE DIVINITY AND SILVANUS FROM OPAČIĆ: INSIGHTS INTO LOCAL RELIGION IN ROMAN DALMATIA

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Abstract. – Two stone panels with images of Silvanus and a female deity – usually recognised as an indigenous interpretation of Diana – were discovered by chance in what seems to be an original context, together with a pot, an inscription and two coins. Unfortunately, some parts of the original assemblage, such as the inscription and one of the coins, did not make it to the museum in Sarajevo and are forever lost for scholarship. Earlier scholarship focused exclusively on the typology of the images and their place in the cult of the Dalmatian Silvanus. However, this discovery in a clear indigenous context still provides a unique opportunity to get an insight into some theoretical aspects of indigenous spiritual life in early Roman Dalmatia, which will be explored in this paper. This, in particular, refers to the issues of ritual, indigenous literacy and knowledge of Latin, the adaptation of Mediterranean and Roman imperial religious templates, the function and meaning of artifacts and assemblages in religious worship, etc.

Key words. – Dalmatia, Roman religion, Roman provinces, Silvanus, Diana.

In 1926, one Atko Musić from the village of Opačić, near Glamoč, in the county (*oblast*) of Travnik, in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croatians, and Slovenes (present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina) was wandering around in a gorge close to his house. Under the rocks, he found three panels made of local limestone. The first panel shows a theriomorphic image of an ithyphallic and horned male with goat's legs, holding a sickle (*falx*) or a curved staff (*pedum*). Next to him are shown pan pipes (*syrinx*). He is accompanied by a female figure in a knee-length skirt, with a covered head – probably with a scarf – holding a tree branch in each hand. The second panel shows an image of the same female figure holding branches, standing on a feature that looks like an altar, flanked by two slightly smaller

and similarly represented females, with covered heads, below her. These two women have partially stretched hands with open palms. In the upper left corner of the panel, there is a two-handled vessel for storing liquid, with a narrow neck, which does not fit the Graeco-Roman wine-drinking vessel typology. All the figures have similar smiling expressions on their faces and slightly oversized heads. The third panel has an inscription. Musić also discovered one pot, two coins and an iron nail at the same place. Unfortunately, the inscription, the pot and one of the coins were lost before reaching the Zemaljski Museum in Sarajevo, and the destiny of the nail was not reported. So, all we have at our disposal are these two panels, which seem complete, rather than fragments of a bigger panel(s). One of the coins that did make it to the Museum was identified by Sergejevski as a denarius of Emperor Vespasian.[1] Unfortunately, no coins of Vespasian are mentioned in the later overview of coinage from the Glamoč area, so this coin probably remained unlabelled or in Sergejevski's possession.[2]

The images from these two panels were addressed in many scholarly analyses of art in Roman Dalmatia, as well as in discussions on the cults of Silvanus or Diana in Dalmatia. Most scholars, including the present author, did not pay sufficient attention to this assemblage and its context, but instead focused on the imagery of Silvanus and his female companion.[3] However, knowing what was accidentally discovered by Atko Musić in 1926, even if we are missing some parts of this assemblage, it, nevertheless, provides us with a unique opportunity to gain insight into some aspects of indigenous spiritual life in early Roman Dalmatia. In particular: the issues of ritual, its participants, and the wider context of the local religion during the Roman period in the deeper hinterland of the eastern Adriatic. This paper will reinterpret already-known finds from Opačić, offering a new view of the appropriation of the Silvanus cult in Roman Dalmatia, based on comparative material from the surrounding areas and recent studies on this cult.

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[1] Sergejevski 1929, 98–99 with T. 9–10; id. 1943, 168 with Fig. 3. The panels are kept in the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo). Pictures of the panels, their dimensions and the location of the finding site are available at https://lupa.at/30004 and https://lupa.at/30005 (last access 30.08.2024).

[2] Kraljević 1981.

[3] Sergejevski 1965, 129; Imamović 1977, 65–67, 88–91, 324, 336; Medini 1983–84, 19–20; D. Rendić-Miočević 1989, 489–491, 549; A. Rendić-Miočević 2003, 416–417; Prusac 2010, 4–5; Cambi 2005, 41; id. 2013, 79; Dészpa 2011, 208; Dzino 2012, 267–268; Perinić 2016, 26, 91 (no. III.76); Lulić 2021, 114.

Iconography, ritual, finding place, dating

Let us first review the evidence. The male figure from the first panel is, on account of his attributes (horns, goat legs, curved staff or sickle, and pan-pipes), with good reason, interpreted as the Dalmatian Silvanus. Originally an Italic divinity of nature – specifically of forests and boundaries – Silvanus was represented in Roman Dalmatia with different imagery and a unique set of attributes that made him look more like the Greek god Pan. An overwhelming majority of inscriptions and reliefs dedicated to this divinity were discovered in areas attributed by the scholarship to the Iron Age Central Dalmatian (Gorica) culture, which is in most parts (but not completely) identified with the area where we find the indigenous Delmataean alliance from the last centuries BC. The Dalmatian Silvanus is frequently shown alongside female companions – Diana the Huntress and/or a group of dancing women, usually depicted in local non-Roman clothing, who are referred to as "Nymphs" on account of their similarity with the Greek Nymphs dancing to music played by Pan or Silenus. The Dalmatian Silvanus rarely had small shrines and was mostly worshipped in open spaces. The dedicants usually came from lower classes – freedmen and slaves – with the largest group represented by people with indigenous names who were not members of the indigenous elites of the imperial era.[4]

Initially, the Dalmatian Silvanus was seen as originally being a local divinity syncretised with the Italian Silvanus and the Greek Pan, and this opinion (implying a three-way cultural agency) was strongly supported by local scholars such as Duje Rendić-Miočević. Some Hungarian and Anglophone scholars (e.g. Mócsy, Nagy, Dorcey) rejected the indigenous component of the Dalmatian Silvanus, seeing him as a provincial expression of an Italic divinity, but this interpretation was never widely accepted. Most recent discussions usually focus on different aspects of the Dalmatian Silvanus' indigenous-Greco-Roman hybridity and whether the origins of the cult should be located post the Roman conquest, with isolated attempts to defend his purely indigenous nature.[5] The worship of Silvanus seems to be very popular in the wider region of Glamoč, where quite a few images or inscriptions dedicated to this divinity were discovered – especially in the neighbouring settlements of Kamen and Podgradina.[6] Silvanus, as depicted in Glamoč, appears with the aforementioned female companions ("Nymphs") and Diana the Huntress, as well as, on one occasion, with the "Nymphs" *and* Hercules.[7]

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[4] See most comprehensively on the Dalmatian Silvanus in Perinić 2016.

[5] For older literature see Perinić 2016, 7–9; Dzino 2018, 109–110. Most recently: Dészpa 2011, 183–227, 257–258; Perinić 2016; Dzino 2018; Periša 2021; Lulić 2021, 112–113, 115; Kurilić 2021, 153–157; Perinić, Vasiljević 2021; Zotović 2023.

[6] Perinić 2016, 70, 72 (No. III.1.23–24; III.3.11–12) – inscriptions; 82–83 (No. III.38–43) – images. See also Dészpa 2011, 206–210.

[7] Perinić 2016, 89–91, 93 (no. III.67–68, 74–75, 84).

The female image from the Opačić panels is much more difficult to interpret. Most older scholars saw it as an "indigenous Diana", while Cambi argued that this is a "Nymph". Both identifications are problematic. Diana is, in Dalmatia, represented canonically as Diana the Huntress, with a bow, often with one hand reaching for an arrow, and accompanied by a dog or a stag. Her head is rarely covered, usually displaying the characteristic *krobylos* hair knot or crescent-moon hair pendant. Scholars trying to circumvent this issue usually recognise two broad visual templates for the representation of Diana in Dalmatia: a "global Mediterranean Artemis-Diana", and a syncretism with an indigenous female divinity connected with the Dalmatian Silvanus.[8] The female figure from Opačić is not associated with a bow, arrows or any other characteristic attribute of Artemis-Diana. On both panels, she holds pieces of vegetation; one looking like a branch of a deciduous tree, and another – a branch of conifer or palm. It does not seem to be a "Nymph" either, as these female companions of Silvanus are never shown alone with Silvanus in Dalmatia, but always in a group, usually dancing and with much longer robes than the knee-length skirt from the Opačić panel. They also rarely wear a headcover; though two reliefs from the Glamoč area may show them with headcovers, the state of the reliefs does not allow for a definite conclusion.[9] In the second panel from Opačić, two female attendants are wearing identical clothing, which might be reminiscent of the "Nymphs" portrayals. However, they are not shown dancing, and are represented differently from other "Nymphs" in Dalmatia. The female holding branches in her hands has a dominant position, standing on (most likely) an altar. She is represented slightly bigger than the other two women, who hold partially stretched hands with open palms, in what looks like a visual depiction of a ritual. Therefore, the female divinity from Opačić shown on these panels is neither Diana nor a "Nymph". Her attendants in the second panel are also not "Nymphs" and can be best interpreted as mortal worshippers.

A recent macroscopic petrographic analysis of two Roman funerary monuments from the Glamoč area confirms what Sergejevski initially said about the origins of the stone of our panels: they were made from local stone.[10] The images on both panels were undoubtedly products of the same workshop, showing no similarities with other Roman stone sculptures from this area. The only potentially similar image from the Glamoč area is a fragment containing the head of Silvanus and a *syrinx* discovered in Podgradi-

[8] E.g. Imamović 1977, 64–73, 84–91; Medini 1983–84; A. Rendić-Miočević 2006; Miličević Bradač 2008; Ead. 2009; Cambi 2013, 76–79, 84–85; Lulić 2021, 113–114, etc.

[9] Perinić 2016, 89, 93 (No. III.68, III.84). Dészpa (2011, 208–209, 226) argues that Silvanus and the Nymphs from Kamensko-Podgradina (III.68) all have Phrygian caps, which is difficult to deduce from the state of the relief. On the "Nymphs" in Dalmatia see e.g. D. Rendić-Miočević 1989, 479–488; Cambi 2013, 77–81; Perinić 2016, 22–24.

[10] Lozić 2021, 21–22, 35 with Fig. 9.

na, where Silvanus is shown with similarly large eyes and a smiling expression.[11] This all being said, one does need to be careful when attributing sculpture to particular workshops in the Dalmatian hinterland during the Roman period, as exemplified by the workshop of master Maximinus from the Imotski area, which produced sculptures in different styles, adjusting to the taste of its customers.[12]

Another interesting feature is the presence of the (now lost) pot in this assemblage and the image on one of the panels of a two-handled vessel for storing liquid. This implies that libation was a part of the ritual, with the shape of the two-handled vessel possibly even indicating the drinking of intoxicants during the ritual. A relief of Silvanus and "Nymphs" from Kamensko-Podgradina, also in the Glamoč area, shows the "Nymphs" with one-handled bowls, probably also used for ritual libation However, whether this is part of a similar local ritual pattern or (more likely) an influence from Dacia and Pannonia, where images of nymphs with bowls are more frequent, as suggested by Dészpa, remains unclear.[13] Finally, the nail found with the assemblage may indicate the presence of a protective wooden box in which these sacred artefacts were placed before and after the ritual in question.

A few words should be said about the location of the find. The village of Opačić is located on the edge of the Glamoč plains, with several gorges nearby. There is no known Roman-era settlement in the plains around Opačić, the closest recorded Roman buildings are some 1.5 km northwest, in Hasanbegovci.[14] The closest Iron Age hillfort is located approximately one kilometre southeast, above today's village of Rajićke, elevation point 993, overlooking a large gorge covered with vegetation. This hillfort was excavated in the early 1930s by Mihovil Mandić, who noticed the presence of a wall with traces of mortar, which is good evidence that the hillfort was also used in Roman times. A later survey of Benac showed that this was one of the more significant hillforts in the area, with a longer habitation period stretching to the first millennium BC. Mandić located the hillfort in "Mladeškovci near Opačić"; Mladeškovci is a village some two kilometres south of Rajićke. All three settlements (Opačić, Rajićke, Mladeškovci) are shown on his hand-drawn map, with a hillfort correctly located above Rajićke.[15] The boundaries of these settlements were taken loosely at the time – a detailed Austro-Hungarian military map of the Travnik area printed in

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[11] Perinić 2016, 82 (No. III.38).

[12] Dzino 2017.

[13] Perinić 2016, 89 (No. III.68); Dészpa 2011, 208–209, 226.

[14] Čović 1988, 3.236 (No. 22.30).

[15] Mandić 1930, 105 with a map on 102; Benac 1985, 158–160. In *Arheološki leksikon BiH* (Čović 1988, 3.240 No. 22.89) the use of mortar on the Rajićka hillfort is dated to Late Antiquity, which makes no sense as only prehistoric pottery was found at the site. There were no traces of late antique pottery.

1896 marks only Opačić and Mladeškovci, with the Rajićka hillfort (elevation point 993) located in Opačić.[16] Therefore, it is very likely that Atko Musić discovered these finds in the gorge located below this hillfort. Even if this assumption is wrong and the panels were found in some other neighbouring gorge, the finding place of these panels must relate to the indigenous settlement on the Rajićka hillfort, which was inhabited in the early Roman period.

A gorge as the finding place of the Opačić assemblage does fit well into the pattern of typically open-spaced sacral places connected with Silvanus, such as caves and niches inside cliffs.[17] However, it also fits natural environments where Milićević Bradač's "Diana outside the walls" might have been worshipped in Dalmatia. A good example is the small stone panel with the image of Diana, dedicated by one Titus Aelius Messor and signed by master Maximinus, dated towards the mid-2nd century AD. It was accidentally found in a pile of stones overlooking the small canyon formed by the Suvaja Creek near modern Donji Proložac, close to Imotski. The finding place seems to be the original location of Diana's sanctuary, but unfortunately, no other artifacts associated with the stele have been found.[18]

The Opačić panels are usually dated to the 3rd century following a later publication by Sergejevski, which placed them in the category of autochthonous sculptures from the 3rd century. The exception regarding dating is Cambi, who rightly warns that it is difficult to date these panels precisely.[19] As noted, Sergejevski reported that Atko Musić found a denarius of Vespasianus (69–79 AD) together with the panels, another now-lost coin, a pot, and a nail. Yet, on the next page, he doubts the provenance of the coin and deems it useless for dating. In the German publication of the finds, he mentions only the preserved panels with images.[20] This makes little sense, and the denarius of Vespasian should be considered for dating this assemblage.

That all being said, unfortunately, a single coin is not sufficient for precise dating. Roman silver denarii were used until the ca. mid-3rd century AD, when they were taken out of circulation. Sergejevski did not reproduce the Vespasianic coin, but, most likely, it was not significantly worn out. The reason for such an assumption is that it is hard to believe that an old, worn-out, coin would be placed as a votive gift. Working with this in mind, it looks more likely that the coin was added to the assemblage relatively early in its circulation, in the later 1st century AD. Another set of problems arises from the fact that this coin could have been added to an

[16] http://lazarus.elte.hu/hun/digkonyv/topo/200e/35-44.jpg, accessed 10.5.2024
[17] Perinić 2016, 40–44.
[18] Milićević Bradač 2008; CIL 3.8509; Alačević 1883, 65–66; Bulić 1898, 153.
[19] Sergejevski 1965, 126–132; Cambi 2005, 39, Figs. 47–48.
[20] Sergejevski 1929, 98–99; id. 1943, 168.

existing assemblage, and the panels could have pre-dated the rule of Vespasian. Therefore, whilst we do not have much to hold onto regarding dating if the earlier assumption that the coin was added in the later 1st century is correct, the panels and lost inscription from Opačić would pre-date the earliest dateable inscriptions from a wider area of Glamoč, which are dated from the rule of Hadrian (AD 117–138) onwards.[21]

Discussion

The evidence supplied by this assemblage from Opačić enables us to rethink existing views on the indigenous religion in the Dalmatian hinterland in the early Roman period. In the late Iron Age, the inhabitants of the region of Glamoč were most likely part of the Delmataean alliance. This was an indigenous political formation mentioned in Graeco-Roman written sources describing Roman military actions in this region between early/mid-2nd century BC and the final conquest following the Roman victory in the Bellum Batonianum in AD 6–9. We cannot say whether the local population shared the same ethnicity, which was to some degree not impossible in the last centuries BC. Still, they shared some common cultural features in the hinterland, especially in the plains around modern Sinj, Livno, Tomislavgrad, Imotski and Glamoč. Apart from belonging to a wider Central Dalmatian (Gorica) archaeological culture in the Iron Age, these cultural features would have also included placing importance upon the warrior image of the elite, a lack of Mediterranean imports and wine-drinking rituals in the proto-historical period, and a fondness for the worship of Silvanus in the Roman period.[22] Unfortunately, we know almost nothing about the pre-Roman spiritual life of the inhabitants and other members of the Delmataean alliance, except for a few instances of the sacralization of space. The best example is the remains of a small Iron Age temple-like structure with drywall walls in Gorica, near Imotski, where the deposition of many votive gifts – mostly weapons and personal adornments like fibulae – were discovered. According to these discovered artifacts, this site was used between ca. 700 BC and the 1st century AD.[23] The habit of depositing artifacts – usually weapons, defensive equipment and tools – is confirmed by the presence of a few hoards in the region, which have no associated built structures. This includes the deposition of metal artifacts – especially weapons – in the river Cetina. Finally, some uninhabited hillforts might have played the role of open space sacred places, judging by the quantity of broken pottery found on a few sites that might also have

[21] Bojanovski 1988, 240–241.

[22] Čović 1987 (Iron Age archaeological culture); Dzino 2009 (lack of Mediterranean imports); Šašel Kos 2005; Dzino 2010 (Roman conquest of the area).

[23] Čović 1976, 252–255; id. 1987, 473–474.

been (mostly unexplored) built structures.[24] There are also two interesting finds of imported female bronze figurines with elongated bodies – one from Studenci, near Ljubuški, and another from Sovići, near Imotski. There is no context for the one from Sovići, and the figurine from Studenci was found in an unexcavated Roman building. Their dating seems pre-Roman, but whether the figurines were used for sacral purposes is unclear.[25] If these are sacred figures, they would be further evidence that the female aspects of the supernatural were not imagined in the guise of Diana the Huntress or the "Nymphs" in the pre-Roman period.

Saying this, it is difficult to believe that the Iron Age communities in this area had an organised religious system and accompanying pantheon, as suggested by some authorities.[26] The Iron Age Delmataean communities lacked the central political organisation and literacy that would enable the canonisation of religious beliefs and the establishment of cults that could transcend locally based beliefs and rituals. Understandings of the supernatural, especially elements of cult and ritual, could have been transmitted only orally, which gave local communities significant space to interpret them differently. Even literate and urbanised ancient societies, such as those of Iron Age Greece, had very localised religious systems rather than a single unified one, negotiating the pan-Hellenic identity construct established by the literary works of Homer and Hesiod with specific features of local beliefs and local cults.[27] Therefore, we should see the pre-Roman religion in the Dalmatian hinterland as a network of very localised beliefs, which shared some general views related to the supernatural and the human relationship with the supernatural.

Back to Opačić. The first important piece of information this assemblage reveals is related to the aspect of the ritual, and we know close to nothing about the rituals taking place in this period in the Dalmatian hinterland, including the cult of the Dalmatian Silvanus. As mentioned above, there are strong arguments for libation and/or the drinking of intoxicating liquid being part of the ritual in Opačić. Another point suggested by the images of the female divinity and her female worshippers is that this was a women's cult or that women had a significant place in it. Finally, the possible presence of a wooden box where the sacred artifacts were placed after the ritual would imply that they were not displayed all the time, but only during the ritual.

Second, our assemblage suggests this was a localised sacral space, falling into the category of "meso-spaces", defined by Szabó as: places whe-

[24] E.g. Milošević 1986; Škegro 1992 (hoards) Milošević 2018, 49 with Fig. 61, 51, 207–210, 214–215 (the finds from the Cetina riverbed); Benac 2012, 43–46 (hillforts).

[25] Vego 1954 (Studenci); Čović 1976, 265–266 with Fig. 152–153.

[26] Cambi 2013, 85; Periša 2021, 76–77. Cf. Lulić 2016 for a clear rebuke of the idea of an "Illyrian religion".

[27] E.g. Larson 2016.

re fewer than 100 individuals (usually 10–30) with a strong social coherence participated in the rituals. These places were "serving as a dynamic physical, visual and imaginary agent (third space) in religious hierarchies and new social structure".[28] As noted, all the women shown on the Opačić panels – mortal and supernatural – have heads covered with what looks like a scarf, which is characteristic of the local fashion in the Roman period, as evidenced by tombstones and votive reliefs where, in some instances, Diana the Huntress is shown with a covered head.[29]

Still, I am not convinced that we should see the Opačići assemblage as simply the continuity of a pre-Roman belief system, although it is likely that the same gorge was a sacralised place in pre-Roman times. The first hint towards this view is the use of a stone relief and an inscription in a sacral context – hitherto unknown from the territory of the Delmatae in the pre-Roman period. There is only one known example of pre-Roman stone reliefs in the funerary rather than the sacral context, from Borčani, near Tomislavgrad. The dating of these reliefs on typological grounds is in the 3rd–2nd century BC (although I see no reason to exclude the 1st century BC from the dating range), which implies a very recent custom.[30] The second hint towards this view that the Opačić assemblage does not relate to a pre-Roman religion is the lack of certain deposited artifacts – especially weapons and tools – which characterise the known pre-Roman sacral places noted above. The Opačić assemblage is utilitarian, consisting of panels with human and human-like images, an inscription, and a pot used in the ritual – only two coins look like potentially deposited votive gifts. Neither of these elements feature in pre-Roman sacral sites in the region.

As noted in the introduction, much ink has been spilled on the origins of the Dalmatian Silvanus. The start of the process leading to the Dalmatian Silvanus should be traced to contacts between the Greek colonies and the indigenous coastal communities, where the image of Pan was used to visualise existing orally transmitted and locally imagined indigenous understanding of the supernatural. The Roman influence, which started sometime before the conquest, adds Silvanus to the mix, resulting in a new indigenous-Greek-Roman cultural interface that I will return to below. Before this, though, it is important to see when the images of a horned deity with goat legs appear in Delmataean areas. The catalogue of Perinić shows that an overwhelming number of inscriptions and images

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[28] Szabó 2022, 19.

[29] Bojanovski 1978, 118–125; id. 1982, 27 with T. 3–4 (tombstones); Perinić 2016, 89, 92–93 (votive reliefs). Head-covering of women might have been a long-lived tradition of female costume in a wider area of the Iron Age Balkans – Teržan 2021.

[30] Cambi 2013a, 406–410 with Figs. 11–14; id. 2013b, 19–20, 33 (Croatian) 82–83, 98 (English) with Figs. 10–15. Cambi 2013b lacks dating in the English version of the text and the dating of these monuments in the tables at the end of the text in both languages is the 4th–3rd c. BC, which is probably an error (pp. 33, 98).

are either undated or dated to the 2nd and/or 3rd century AD, except for one inscription from Kaštel Kamberovac (ca. AD 50–150) and one image from Peruča-Klis, dated in the 1st century.[31] It is necessary to point out that most of the evidence is known from secondary contexts, so there is no way to date them precisely, and a 1st-century AD dating for at least some of them can, therefore, not be excluded. Two rock carvings near Klis, for instance, might have been of an earlier date, but this is only an assumption – they are both otherwise dated to the 2nd–3rd century AD.[32]

Therefore, there is no proof of images of the Dalmatian Silvanus depicted as the Greek Pan in the Dalmatian hinterland before the Roman conquest, i.e. early 1st century AD; although it is hypothetically possible (but not yet proven) that on the sites closer to the coast, this date could be moved somewhat earlier. Dészpa has argued that the Dalmatian Silvanus was the focus of a new cult, an artificial product. While I agree with his assessment, and the argument to abandon syncretism as an explanation of the appearance of the Dalmatian Silvanus, I am not convinced that the origins of the cult and the new presentation of the god should be solely ascribed to Italian migrants and perhaps Greek colonists on the eastern Adriatic coast, with the local population credited with only 'enriching' it. Finally, Dészpa's dating of the origins of the cult in early 2nd century AD Salona and its surroundings is demonstrably wrong, considering the evidence from Opačić.[33] An indigenous population and their perceptions of the supernatural, as well as their contact with the Greek settlers from the 4th century BC, most certainly played a significant role in the development of the theriomorphic image which will be subsequently attached to Silvanus. The development of the cult of the Dalmatian Silvanus, as we know it, seems to be fast. It is worthy to recall in this context Szabó's comprehensive study of the religious transformation in the Danubian lands after the Roman conquest. He shows that while spatial or functional continuities could be observed in many places, the human and divine agencies or material tools used in the maintenance of existing pre-Roman sacralised spaces changed in just a few decades. This transformation was the consequence of increased mobility and may be seen as a strategy for reinventing and even saving existing traditions through the transformation of sacralised spaces and visual narratives by newly emerging elites and religious entrepreneurs.[34]

In the case of the Dalmatian Silvanus, it is possible that the transformation started somewhat earlier in the contacts with the Greek colonies at the central Adriatic coast and the islands from the 4th century BC,

[31] Perinić 2016, 69 (No. III.1.3), 78 (No. III.21).
[32] Perinić 2016, 79 (No. III.23–24).
[33] Dészpa 2011, 227, 257–258.
[34] Szabó 2022, esp. 44–76, 200–201.

which enabled more efficient communication of symbols between the descendants of the indigenous population and the settlers. One of these symbols may have been the Greek Pan, whom the indigenous population used to anthropomorphise and visualise their existing beliefs, although it is important to underline, again, that we do not have concrete evidence from this early period.

I see Silvanus as representing the next stage in this process of negotiation, this time within the framework of imperial networks established through the settlement of Italians and other immigrants in new provincial centres, such as Salona. On a local level, the descendants of the indigenous population reconceptualised and reinvented the existing sacred places, such as Vodna jama on the island of Brač, which became a sacred place dedicated to the "Nymphs" and Silvanus. This was not a linear process, going from indigenous beliefs to Pan, and then to Silvanus, or a simple syncretism, but rather an active engagement of all three component communities: indigenous, Greek, and Roman.[35] This process of emergence provided fertile grounds for local and personal religious choices leading later to the hybridization of the Dalmatian Silvanus with other divinities. The thus-formed cult of Silvanus also provided the potential for the adoption of the cult by foreigners, as visible on the dedicatory relief of soldier Aelius Antoninianus Bucinator from Trilj (Tilurium), where the Dalmatian Silvanus is shown together with the dancing "Nymphs" wearing indigenous clothing. However, Silvanus carries a sickle (*falx*), which is more suited to the Italian Silvanus, who would probably be more familiar to Antoninianus.[36]

The cult of Silvanus in Dalmatia, naturally, did not have the same meaning to all his worshippers. The experience of the Roman conquest was not the same for all the communities in this wider area, such as the migrants, the local communities along the coast and the islands, and the local communities in the hinterland. For instance, the Delmataean society in the eastern Adriatic hinterland experienced the trauma of the Roman conquest, accompanied by increased violence, especially during the *Bellum Batonianum* in AD 6–9. Also, a post-conquest settlement reshuffle shifted power on a local level so that regional power was moved from rebellious Iron Age core centres in the plains around Sinj, Imotski, Glamoč, Livno and Tomislavgrad to the peripheral area of Rider near Šibenik, which became the centre of new Roman peregrine *civitas Delmatae* in the first century AD.[37] The rise of the cult of Silvanus in the hinterland should, thus, be primarily interpreted as the consequence of this social restructuring, and the disappearance of the old Iron Age warrior elites in the early Ro-

[35] Dzino 2018.
[36] Perinić 2015 (syncretism); Ead. 2016, 88 (No. III.64); Ead. 2017 (relief from Trilj).
[37] Dzino 2014.

man period. As the warrior image was impossible to preserve in the new circumstances, the indigenous communities began to emphasize other aspects of their relationship with the supernatural. This might have led to the spread of the cult of the Dalmatian Silvanus in the hinterland as a symbol of belonging to a wider cultural area, perhaps initially as a strategy of quiet resistance, or a new regional identity construct developed by the local population. While initially brutal and violent, the Roman conquest gave, in the long run, the local population opportunities to engage in and profit from increased connectivity. These opportunities were brought about very fast by the building of Roman roads during the governorship of P. Cornelius Dolabella (AD 14–20). Thanks to these roads, all the previously isolated areas from the hinterland became connected with the Dalmatian capital of Salona, the interior of the province, and further up to the Pannonian-Carpathian plains. The Glamoč area was not an exception to this rule – it was included early in the road network, and one *statio beneficiarii consulares* is attested between AD 42 and 70. The religious ideas and symbols would have circulated much faster, reaching new audiences and interacting with other interpretations.[38] As elsewhere in the Empire, connectivity could have, thus, enabled local communities to participate in the creation of common images and symbols as a means of communicating with the developing imperial culture, in turn contributing towards the development of a new language of symbols for communication.[39]

However, it is also important to remember that the regional cult of the Dalmatian Silvanus was not monolithic, reflecting the remains of earlier pre-Roman cultural and religious fragmentation and localization. Silvanus is merged with local female representations of the supernatural in some places, as we see in Opačić, or Suhača near Livno, which could be a good comparative example to Opačić. Periša recently convincingly established the provenance of a bronze figurine of Pan, Silenus, or Satyr, and a relief of Diana the Huntress and Silvanus, to this site in Suhača, near Livno. To these should be added one more relief of Diana the Huntress, Silvanus, and the "Nymphs", which was already connected to this site in earlier literature. Periša's dating of the figurine to before the 2nd century AD is also reasonable, although there are limitations to dating an ancient metal sculpture on typological grounds only. Certainly, there is the question of when the figurine came to Suhača, which might not necessarily correspond with the production date. However, I am not convinced that this figurine and the reliefs could be dated to a pre-Roman period, as cautiously suggested in the article.[40]

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[38] Bojanovski 1974 (Roman roads in Dalmatia); Dzino 2017a (impact of connectivity in Dalmatia); Nikić 1983, 241–246 (early Roman roads in Glamoč); CIL 3.13231=9862 (*statio beneficiarii consulares*).

[39] Hölscher 2004.

[40] Periša 2021; Perinić 2016, 86 (No. III.54), 92 (No. III.78), 93 (No. III.93).

The site of Crkvina in Suhača, where one of these reliefs (Silvanus, Diana, and the "Nymphs") and the figurine were found in a secondary context was not excavated, but it does not have any reported Iron Age stray finds, including deposited tools, jewellery, or weapons. Only finds from the Roman period and Late Antiquity have been found. Another relief (Silvanus and Diana) was discovered some 300 metres southeast, close to a small spring, which seems to be the original location of the find and the probable original provenance of the figurine and the relief with Silvanus, Diana, and the Nymphs.[41] This site has a strong connection with three neighbouring hillforts located within one kilometre as the crow flies from each other. One is located above the western part of Suhača, close to the discovery spots of the earlier mentioned reliefs and the figurine, and two are above the neighbouring village of Mali Kablić, in the northwest. All three hillforts were inhabited in prehistory, and a bigger hillfort in Mali Kablić in Late Antiquity as well. However, in the Roman period it seems that the population abandoned these hillforts and moved below to the plains.[42]

The relief of Silvanus and Diana from Suhača is very damaged, so it is difficult to establish whether all these reliefs were made by the same workshop. However, as images of Silvanus show minor differences (horns, proportion ratio of head and body), they were likely made by different workshops, noting the earlier issues with locating workshops based on styles. Both reliefs look complete, except for the small part with the heads of two "Nymphs", which is missing in one. However, there are some noticeable similarities in both representations of Diana, especially in the oversized covering over her head, with similar but not identical decorations on the two reliefs. The way she holds the bow in the left hand, the position of the left hand, and the stag below her legs also show the same schematic arrangement. Also, in the relief with Silvanus and the "Nymphs", Diana is clearly distinguished from the "Nymphs" with a head covering and different clothing. While we do not have more specific details as in Opačić, it seems clear that this was a similar sacralised indigenous site in the pre-Roman period, where differently imagined local female aspects of the supernatural were originally worshipped. Both sacralised sites are also connected with neighbouring Iron Age hillforts, whose inhabitants used them. Still, there are visible differences – the sacralised site in Opačić is placed in a gorge, and Suhača is near a small spring at the very edge of the plains. Diana from Suhača and the female from Opačić have different attributes, with one of the Suhača reliefs also including dancing "Nymphs". The only connection between the two is Silvanus, who, in both reliefs from Suhača, plays the pipes, while in Opačić holds a *pedum* or *falx*. The-

[41] Čović 1988, 3.249 (No. 22.262), cf. Periša 2021, 67–68, 75.
[42] Benac 1985, 111–114.

refore, it looks like Suhača and Opačić present local versions of the same process, reflecting social and religious changes occurring in the period following the Roman conquest. From what has been said, I would date the reliefs from Suhača and Opačić to roughly the same period of the 1st century AD – probably its second half.

It is also interesting in this context to notice that Diana and the "Nymphs" are mentioned nine times before Silvanus in preserved dedicatory inscriptions in Dalmatia, and only on one occasion is Silvanus mentioned before Diana.[43] This shows the primacy of Diana and the "Nymphs" over Silvanus, and it implies that these local sacralised places were traditionally dedicated to these female representations of the supernatural, rather than Silvanus or Iron Age male representations of the supernatural. This assumption would explain the important role of women in the panels from the Opačić assemblage. It certainly does not mean that there were no places dedicated only to male representations of the supernatural identified with the Dalmatian Silvanus, as there are many more occasions where Silvanus is represented or mentioned alone in dedicatory inscriptions.

Finally, there is one more unanswered question – why would the worshipping community abandon sacred artifacts in the gorge near Opačić? All possible answers would fall into the speculative ground, but to complete the present discussion it would be good to offer at least a few. As this was a very localised cult related to a particular community inhabiting a neighbouring hillfort, it is possible to assume that the community was wiped out by extraordinary demographic events, such as disease. Another possibility would be that the hillfort was simply abandoned and that the community relocated from the higher ground settlements to those of the plains over time, as happened in the neighbouring village of Isakovci, where the Iron Age hillfort seems to have been abandoned whilst a Roman settlement developed contemporaneously in the plains below.[44] This potential depopulation of the original community would have likely impacted the popularity of the cult and caused changes in ritual habits.

Conclusion

As we can see from this discussion, the Opačić assemblage gives us an important window into some less-known aspects of the indigenous cults in the Dalmatian hinterland in the Roman period. Apart from the important information concerning the concept of the ritual and the potential for dating, it provides information about the spread of the cult of the Dal-

[43] Perinić 2016, 72–73 (No. III.5.1–2, 6); 86 (No. III.56), 88–90 (No. III. 64–65, 68, 73), 92 (No. III.80). The only exception is the inscription from Busija near Glamoč, pp. 90–91 (No. III. 74), where the name of Silvanus Silvestris came before Diana.

[44] Čović 1988, 3.236, 3.239 (No. 22.31, 22.75).

matian Silvanus in the hinterland in the early Roman period. Perhaps the most significant revelation following this discussion is that Silvanus was not always a central figure of the cult, and female figures were not always just his companions. Female figures, like those from Opačić and different representations of Diana the Huntress "outside the walls", and the "Nymphs", were equally, if not even more important to local communities. Instead, Silvanus could be interpreted as a shared symbol amongst these communities, which legitimized local cults in a wider context, not unlike male Olympian gods coupled with local female divinities in Greece. However, these female representations of the supernatural in some places were actual mistresses of sacralised places, and it is they who were primarily worshipped, as we can see from Opačić or Suhača, for example.

With this evidence presented, it looks like the cult of the Dalmatian Silvanus formed on the coast around the time of the Roman conquest, expanding into the hinterland after the conquest, which is not necessarily an original conclusion, although contemporary interpretations differ in detail.[45] Let me be clear, as I do not want to be misunderstood again,[46] 'new cult' does not mean that the cult of the Italic Silvanus was simply imported into these areas. The cult of Silvanus in Dalmatia was differently perceived and interpreted by different worshippers and worshipping communities, depending on upbringing, personal experiences, choices, and so on. In indigenous contexts, like those from the Dalmatian hinterland discussed here, the Dalmatian Silvanus and his companions are predominantly reimagined based on existing traditional indigenous perceptions of the supernatural, and, in most cases, worshipped in previously existing open space sacred places. However, a combination of the theriomorphic image of divinity, the name "Silvanus", and elements of ritual for which, at least, in Opačić we have some evidence, show this was a new religious phenomenon created from several existing templates, which localised the Greek Pan and the Italian Silvanus. In some contexts, such as the one investigated here, the cult of the Dalmatian Silvanus utilized earlier indigenous beliefs, becoming a regional symbol for local communities, and sharing a common disposition towards the ecological and social environment of the worshippers.[47]

This was part of a wider process of social transformation following the Roman conquest, which erased the social dominance of the old Iron Age warrior elites in the Dalmatian hinterland, and made the indigenous communities seek new symbols. However, Silvanus was not a monolithic entity, but rather a very flexible symbol, accommodated at already-existing sacralised sites, as we could see, for example, in the differences be-

[45] Dészpa 2011, 227, 257–258; Dzino 2012; id. 2018; Lulić 2014.
[46] E.g. Periša 2021, 76 with n. 44.
[47] Cf. Dészpa 2011, 287.

tween Opačić and Suhača. In this process of religious adjustment to social changes, the female aspects of the supernatural (likely original mistresses of these sacral spaces) were not forgotten, and they were also reimagined in the shape of Diana the Huntress, the "Nymphs" and whatever aspect of the supernatural the female image from Opačić represented.

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