

DIOCLETIAN'S VISITS TO QUARRIES AND MINES IN THE DANUBIAN PROVINCES*

Slobodan Dusanić
Belgrade

I. The well-known passage in Lactantius concerning Diocletian and Nicomedia runs: “*Huc accedebat infinita quaedam cupiditas aedificandi, non minor provinciarum exactio in exhibendis operariis et artificibus et plaustis, omnibus quaecumque sint fabricandis operibus necessaria. Hic basilicae, hic circus, hic moneta, hic armorum fabrica, hic uxori domus, hic filiae. Repente magna pars civitatis exciditur. Migrabant omnes cum coniugibus ac liberis quasi urbe ab hostibus capta. Et cum perfecta haec fuerant cum interitu provinciarum, ‘non recte facta sunt’, aiebat, ‘alio modo fiant’. Rursus dirui ac mutari necesse erat iterum fortasse casura. Ita semper dementabat Nicomediam studens urbi Romae coaequare*”¹.

No doubt, Lactantius was not free from malice. But the core of the passage must be historical, as shown i.a. by the reference (in the last-quoted phrase) to Diocletian’s resolve to build Nicomedia into another Rome. Indeed, the *imitatio Romae* was a part of Diocletian’s building program, in the case of Nicomedia and Sirmium at least. As we shall try to show, he was ready to sacrifice much to the realization of that program, including his own comfort. No other Emperor seems to have inspected quarries and mines so often as Diocletian did. This will have had something to do with a certain private fascination for quarrying/mining (mines and quarries were, for the Roman world, two similar forms of exploitation of natural resources) and, on the other hand, with his notorious mobility (*Paneg.* 3.2.3 ff.). However, politico-ideological reasons must have been central in making Diocletian visit the *fiscus’ metalla*, which had an important rôle in his plans to embellish the Tetrarchic city-capitals.

II. Several pieces of neglected or controversial evidence help us better understand Lactantius’ testimony as well as Diocletian’s policy regarding the State production of metals and stones. To begin with, the *Passio Sanctorum Quattuor Coronatorum*, the Pannonian part of which seems to be based on sources from the fourth century (chs. 1-21 ed. Delehaye), tends to sustain the assumption of Diocletian’s taking special interest in quarrying and related activities². Both the historical value of the *Passio* and the reliability of its geographical indications are disputed of course³. For the purpose of the present paper it is sufficient to note that the complex text of the *Passio* (chs. 1-21) unites historical elements with legendary; the former are important enough to dissuade us from treating the Hagiographer’s allusions to the Emperor’s interest in quarries with a facile scepticism. Such allusions ought to have contained a kernel of truth.

D. Simonyi⁴ will have been right in identifying the central prototype of the *metallum* of the *Passio* with a Roman quarry in the Geresd area (to cite its modern name), in the vicinity of the Lower Pannonian city of Sopianae and the Danubian forts Lugio and Ad Statuas. No doubt, Simonyi’s argument – which mainly though not exclusively relies upon vulnerable petrologic considerations – can be reinforced. It has been inferred from the subscriptions to two Diocletianic laws in the *Codex Iustinianus* (IX 20. 10 and 11) that Diocletian issued them at Lugio itself, on November 5, 293. The day-date indirectly supports the evidence of the *Passio*, according to which the martyrdom of the *Sancti Quattuor Coronati* took place on November 8 (ch. 20). Despite the vagaries of less relevant points in the *Passio*’s chronology, the “November 8” must be historically reliable (it is attested in several other cult texts concerning the *Coronati*⁵) and taken to reflect the same visit paid by Diocletian to the country of Geresd which

is attested through *Cod. Iust.* IX 20. 10 and 11. Let us note, the visit – dating from early November and resulting i.a. in the inspection of the quarries as well as the trial of the *Coronati* – was not a part of the Court's routine travels but a single purposive measure. Judging from the rather abundant evidence of subscriptions to his constitutions⁶, Diocletian lived in Sirmium during the longish period of September, 293, to August, 294. As far as we are informed about this episode of his reign, we may say that it was unusually static: Diocletian went to see neither cities nor major military posts⁷ in the neighborhood of the Pannonian metropolis. The only places other than Lugio known to have been visited by him between September, 293, and August, 294, were *Aurris* (!), *Agrippinae* (!) and *Trac.* (!), which all seem to have been mines (cf. *infra*, section III).

We have to conclude therefore that Diocletian was mainly occupied, while living in Sirmium (AD 293 - 294), by his plans of making the great Pannonian city another Rome (*imitatio Romae*, analogous to that pointed out by Lactantius in the case of Nicomedia). Thence his travels of the time were undertaken to quite special and scarce destinations. For the new Sirmium he needed a variety of stone sculptures and architectural elements in the first place. The Geresd quarries furnished the quasi-imperial red granite, among other kinds of material⁸. The *Passio* connects Diocletian's presence at the *metallum* with the needs of decorative and religious architecture (Aesculapius' statue, with its crucial role in the story, chs. 12 ff. That will have been ordered by the Emperor as a token of his gratitude for recovery from illness), obviously the architecture of a city which served as an imperial residence. That city must have been Sirmium, to which Diocletian returned after the trial of the *Coronati* (ch.21). The vicinity of the *statio* Ad Statuas implies that the Geresd stones were transported to Sirmium by the cheap and comparatively easy Danube-Save route, some of them already in a carved form, as the Hagiographer's text suggests. And, of course, Diocletian may have transferred or wished to transfer to Sirmium certain gifted *lapidarii*⁹ in addition to the stones and sculpture them.

An explanation along the same lines should be sought for the evidence about the then visits of Diocletian to the mines of gold, silver, lead, perhaps even copper, zinc and iron (the next section). Lead was used for many purposes, not the least for making possible the crection of several types of structures. To cite what Lactantius says à propos of Nicomedia, a new Rome must possess a mint (*Moneta*) and an *armorum fabrica* among other official buildings / institutions. The city's rank demanded them, as did practical considerations¹⁰. The mint would need precious metals (+ copper and zinc) of course – the closer the mine(s) the better –, the *fabrica* iron and lead. And we should note that the Sirmium mint seems to have been active under Gallienus; it will certainly be (re) opened by Constantine I, who made it a considerable success.

III. As we have already noted in the preceding pages, Diocletian's itineraries of 293-294 provide additional pieces of instructive evidence for our subject. He visited a place that is registered in the subscription to *Cod. Iust.* II 13.20 as *Demessi* (!); this offers a convenient starting-point for the analysis in the present section. The visit occurred on September 22, 294, if we believe the transmitted text of the *Codex* (and, despite some modern contentions to the contrary, there is no good reason to question it). A law of August 20, 294 (IX 18.2), was still issued *Sirmii*; the *locus* of slightly more recent laws, dated September 8 and 12 (IV 19.21; IX 20. 12), is Singidunum; the rest of September and the whole of October saw Diocletian's visits to many other places, also well attested, in Moesia and Thrace (Viminacium, Cuppae, Ratiaria etc.). These geographical and chronological data imply, for *Demessi* (!), a location in the Singidunum – Viminacium area, though not on the frontier itself, whose list of forts/stations is more or less complete without containing a similar name. *Demessi* (!) (obviously genitive of a toponym ending in *-ssum* or *-ssus* and beginning in *Deu-* the correction demanded by the inscription *IMS* I 46, cf. below, note 11) has long passed for unidentifiable. A series of

indications, epigraphical¹¹ and topographical alike (these latter stemming mainly from what is known of Diocletian's movements during the summer-autumn, 294), suggest however the identification of Deumessum (Deumessus) with the principal *vicus* of very important silver- and lead-mines of Kosmaj, *vicus* probably situated around Roman fort of Stojnik (modern name)¹². This is all the more so as the contents of the constitution II 13. 20 (attesting *Demessi* (!) = Deumessum/Deumessus) appear to reflect experienced advice on a specific point which the Emperor's lawyers obtained from the *legis periti* of the local mining administration.

It seems a natural conclusion to make that Diocletian's chief motive for visiting Deumessum (Deumessus) was his plan to found a mint (as well as to open an arms-factory?) in Sirmium. The city as a new Rome, was situated less than 80 Roman miles from Kosmaj and easily accessible thanks to the water routes. Analogous conclusions, based on the thesis that Diocletian's programme of Sirmium's *imitatio Romae* determined most of his itineraries in 294, are difficult to avoid for two or three more places that have remained puzzling so far. They were situated still closer to Sirmium than Deumessum (Deumessus) was, a fact to underline their relevance to our argument.

The subscription to *Cod. Iust.* VI 21. 14, of May 3, 294, cites the enigmatic *Aurris* (!) (the *A* being not quite certain) as the *locus* of the constitution, which comes shortly after those dated May 1 and labelled *Sirmii* (II 36.1; IV 22.3). By May 18, if not earlier, the Emperor was *Sirmii* again (VI 59.1). *Aurris* (!) must be sought therefore "in der näheren Umgegend von Sirmium" (Th. Mommsen, whose emendation <T>*urris* should not be retained). It is significant that the Sirmium area has nothing like *Aurris* (!) attested in the itineraries of the so-called *Savestrassen* and *Limesstrasse*. This state of affairs suggests for *Aurris* (!) a position south of Sirmium, distant from the city about one hundred Roman miles at maximum (to calculate the distance from the dates of *Cod. Iust.* II 36.1/IV 22. 3 and VI 21.14, some two or slightly more days apart), where (judging from the parallels of Lugio and Deumessum/Deumessus) quarries or mines were situated. Actually, a simple correction¹³ *Aur (a) ris* (abl. *loci* or abl. *separationis*?) would postulate gold mines. Under the name of *Aur (a) riac* (rather than *Aur (a) ria*), they are obviously to be located somewhere in the region of (modern) Jadar or that of (modern and neighboring) Mt. Cer, both of which are really auriferous¹⁴ and close enough to the site of Sirmium¹⁵. Although never explored through archaeological excavations, the Jadar and Cer regions (whose southern parts are famous for their medieval and later mining¹⁶ have furnished considerable traces of Roman life¹⁷. These may be connected with i.e. the numismatic evidence of Pannonian silver-and gold mines, rather neglected by present-day scholarship¹⁸.

The next toponym bearing upon our subject runs *Agrippinae* (!) (*Cod. Iust.* V 12. 21, passed on August 5, 294). It does not seem to be attested elsewhere (at least not in the sources concerning Pannonia, to which province the date of the law and some other circumstances point); however, the village of *Agrippinae* (!) will have been a similar case to that of *Aur (a) riac*. In other words, *Agrippinae* (!) is likely to have been a mine situated in the (not immediate) vicinity of Sirmium (the city where Diocletian promulgated the slightly earlier constitution of August 1, 294 *Cod. Iust.* V 16.22), in the southern part of Sirmium's broader area, to be exact; I am inclined to correct the transmitted form of the name into a (*Metalla*) *Agrippi (a) na*¹⁹ or (*Argentariae*) *Agrippi (a) nae* (nom. pl.). If we accept the hypothesis that the subscription to *Cod. Iust.* V 12. 21 hides the name of a mine in the Sirmium area, it is best sought among the *metalla* of the north of the Drinus valley²⁰ or the Cer region to the east. The attraction of this hypothesis lies in the fact that Marcus Agrippa exploited, in Illyricum, mines producing lead (and silver, probably); numerous lead ingots with his names have been discovered in a hoard near Ravenna²¹. Agrippa's *metalla* were thus capable of developing a settlement or settlements baptized after their first Roman owner and situated somewhere in the Hinterland of Sirmium.

Finally, the *Trac.* (!), a *hapax* attested by *Cod. Iust.* IV 58. 4 (the reading of the Parisinus and the Pistoriensis), of May 25 (or July 27?), A.D. 294. The abbreviated name will have also belonged to a place in the Sirmium area; a *varia lectio* of the subscription to IV 58.4 (according to the Veronensis) even cites Sirmium, not *Trac.*(!), as the *locus* of the law. The uncertainties affecting the text of the subscription warn us against the inclusion of the *Trac.* (!) into the central topic of the present analysis. There is, however, a possibility (little more) to explain the occurrence of the *Trac.*(!) at IV 58.4 along more or less the same lines as the occurrence of the *Aur(a)riae* and *Agrippi(a)na* in other pages of the *Codex*. When the abbreviation is expanded *T(h)rac(es)!* (or *T(h)rac(ibus)* abl. loci/abl. separat.), the name becomes appropriate to the toponymy of a mining district, recalling the *Dalmatas* of the *Aquae* region²² and the “ethnic” *castella* of the Dacian gold-mines²³. To put it explicitly, in that case IV 58.4 attests to Diocletian’s stay at a village whose inhabitants had been transferred from Thrace in order to activate the mines in their new neighborhood (i.e. the mines in the lower Drinus valley or the Mt. Cer district?). Indeed, the presence of Thracians from Thrace and/or Moesia Inferior is well documented in the mining territory of Kosmaj and may be postulated for the *ferrariae* of Železnik, not far from Singidunum²⁴. Some of those immigrants may have been traditionally associated with mining²⁵. Of course, a southern Pannonian colony of Thracians is imaginable even if it is attributed no connection with the industry of *metalla*.

IV. There is more evidence, in the *Codex*, of Diocletian’s visits to places, which can be associated with quarrying. *Atubino/Atobino* (*Cod. Iust.* IV 48.5, of Nov. 3, 285) and *Suneata* (*Vat.* 297, of Nov. 2, 285) appear to have been close to the famous marble quarries of Synnada (central Phrygia)²⁶. As such, these villages will have seen the Emperor at a moment when his plans about the embellishment of Nicomedia began to take shape. The quarries of the “Triballi” (*Cod. Iust.* VIII 48.5 Dec. 4, 291: *Triballis*), though rather distant from Sirmium, may have been still exploited to provide building materials for the *imitatio Romae* which was the task of the architects of Sirmium – and the water route Danube-Save was there to facilitate the transport of the “Triballian” stones and/or quarrymen. It is generally believed now that the *Triballis* meant nothing more than the city of Oescus – called the Triballian Oescus by Ptolemy (*Geogr.* III 10.10) – but there are good reasons to assume that the ethnic refers to the (originally peregrine) *civitas Triballorum* situated to the south and southwest of Oescus²⁷. Though the subscription to VIII 48.5 does not mention the *metalla* themselves, their existence in the “Triballian” land may be safely assumed on the strength of a remarkable inscription from the territory of the *civitas* which records the presence, and reflects the importance, of the local *lapidarii* of Graeco-Oriental origin²⁸. If its quarries, the *civitas Triballorum* not distinguish it, we are permitted to conjecture, would not have deserved the honor of Diocletian’s visit.

To conclude. If the results of the present paper are accepted, they will be of certain interest for the history, topography and onomastics of Roman mines and quarries, as well as the study of texts such as the *Passio Sanctorum Quattuor Coronatorum*, Lactantius or the subscriptions to a number of laws in the *Codex Iustinianus*. The paper may also have a purely archaeological relevance, owing to what it implies about the stone materials – their sources, their means of transport, their craftsmen – used by the builders of Sirmium and Nicomedia. But it is our knowledge of Diocletian’s personality that seems to profit the most from the evidence examined in the foregoing pages. Although a general and a reformer, the *senior Augustus* in difficult times, Diocletian was able to devote a considerable measure of his personal attention to *metalla* and the building works in the major civilian centres of his portion of the Empire. While ready to rely upon his subordinates in many other important tasks, perhaps even the task of fortification of the Danubian frontier²⁹, he obviously did not think that somebody else should replace him when it came to the inspection of quarries and mines which were to serve the

program of developing Sirmium or the Bithynian capital. His intensive wish to make Sirmium and Nicomedia the rivals of Rome – in architecture as well as in other matters – certainly explains essential aspects of his visits to both kinds of *metalla*. However, in addition to what Lactantius calls Diocletian's *cupiditas aedificandi*, there was, I think, the factor of Diocletian's special interest in the workings of mines and quarries to influence his movements. That interest, largely non-political, cannot be found in Constantine I, another great builder and Diocletian's heir in many respects.

*A developed version of the present paper, to be published elsewhere under the title "*Infinita quaedam cupiditas aedificandi. Diocletian's Visits to Quarries and Mines in the Danubian Provinces and Asia Minor*", will include i.a. the discussion of evidence on Diocletian's visits to the Anatolian *metalla*.

NOTES

1. De *mort. Pers.* 7. 8-10. "In addition, Diocletian had a limitless passion for building, which led to an equally limitless scouring of the provinces to raise workers, craftsmen, wagons, and whatever is necessary for building operations. Here he built basilicas, there a circus, a mint, an arms-factory, here he built a house for his wife, there one for his daughter. Suddenly a great part of the city" (i.e. Nicomedia) "was destroyed, and all the inhabitants started to migrate with their wives and children, as if the city had been captured by the enemy. And when these buildings had been completed – and the provinces ruined in the process – he would say 'They have not been built rightly; they must be done in another way.' They then had to be pulled down and altered – perhaps only to come down a second time. This was the way he was always raving in his eagerness to make Nicomedia the equal of the city of Rome". Transl. J. L. Creed (Oxford Early Christian Texts 1984), whose commentary (p. 89 note 9) points out both the Diocletianic program of "the building up of the new tetrarchic capitals, including Nicomedia" (the theme of *imitatio Romae* appears therein for the first time şif we focus on both extant and explicit literary sources; in 290/1 in relation to Milan: *Paneg.* 3, 2, 12) and "Lactantius' resentment at any impairment of the pre-eminence of Rome".
2. Ch. 1: "*perrexit Pannoniis ad metalla diversa sua presentia(!) de montibus abscidenda*". Cf. chs. 12 ff.
3. See also e.g. J. Guyon, *MEFRA* 87(1975) p. 505-561 with bibl.
4. *Acta Ant. Ac. Sc. Hung.* 8 (1960) p. 165-184.
5. Guyon (n. 3) p. 508 ff.
6. A general view on this subject in Th. Mommsen, "*Über die Zeitfolge der Verordnungen Diocletians und seiner Mitregenten*", Abh. Ak. Berlin 1860 Berlin 1961 p. 349-447 esp. 430-441.
7. With regard to the complete absence of them in the Emperor's itineraries of 293 (Sept.) - 294 (Aug.), the popular conjecture that he was led to Lugio by his tasks as general (see e.g. F. Fülöp, *Sopianae*, Budapest 1984 p. 274 (with bibl.): "Diocletian published two edicts in 293 A.D. in Lugio, which underlines the importance of this significant *limes* fortress, and is presumably to be connected with the construction of a fortress at this beleaguered section.") appears unattractive.
8. On the variety of stones (including the red granite) used by the Sirmium architects see M. Jeremić, in: D. Srejšović ed., *The Age of Tetrarchs*, Belgrade 1993-1995 p. 141.
9. Cf. Lact. *De mort. pers.* 7. 8: "... provinciarum exactio in exhibendis operariis et artificibus..., omnibus quaecumque sint fabricandis operibus necessaria ..."
10. P. Popović in: D. Srejšović ed., *The Age of Tetrarchs*, Belgrade 1993-1995 p. 277) remarks that "the first wave of increased şmonetary circulation in the Tetrarchic Sirmium is evidenced already in 294, and it can be associated with a comparatively long stay of Diocletian" ..in that city.
11. *IMS* I 162 (massae plumbeae): *M (etalla) D (eumessensia)*; *CIL* XV 7915 (cf. S. Dušanić, *Arheol. Vestnik* 28 Ljubljana 1977 p. 167 ff.): (*Metalla*) *Tr (icorniensia) D (eumessensia)*
12. *IMS* I p. 103 n. 50; p. 112 with n. 16.

13. It assumes the mechanical omission of an (originally supralineate?) *A* in the MS reading, paralleled by the omission of *V* in *De (u) messi* and, perhaps, of *A* in *Agrippi (a) nae* (on the latter, bellow; the mistake *Agrippinae* may have resulted, however, from the influence of the better-known name of the Rhenish Colonia Agrippina). Such omissions of letters are common in the toponyms cited in the subscriptions to the laws of the *Codex*, see Mommsen (n. 6) p. 356 ff. (e.g. VII 48.3 *Herc. et* instead of *Heracleae*; VII 60.3 *Retriae* instead of *Rctiariae*; VIII 48. 9 *Aniali* instead of *Anchiali*).
14. S. Janković et al., in: I. Popović, T. Cvjetičanin and B. Borić-Brešković eds. *Silver Workshops and Mints* (Symposium Acta 1994 National Museum Belgrade) Belgrade 1995 p. 24 f., fig. 7; cf. Spremić (n. 16 *infra*) 51 (“Zlatarica” near “Rupača”) and V. Simić, *Zbornik radova* (Rudarsko-geološko-metalurški fakultet i Institut za bakar u Boru) XVI (Bor 1974) p. 158 (“Zlatarska jaruga”).
15. See M. Vasić’s map referred to below, n. 17.
16. M. Spremić, in: *Jadar u prošlosti*, Novi Sad 1985, 41-76 (silver, and lead, gold, and iron).
17. M. Vasić, *Glasnik Srpskog arheološkog društva* 2 (Beograd 1985) p. 124-141 (mines, p. 126 and 133 n. 17; map, p. 136).
18. S. Dušanić, in: H. Temporini and W. Haase eds. *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II 6, Berlin – New York 1977 p. 57 b-e 66 f.
19. It is tempting to assume a common phenomenon of vulgar Latinity and qualify the MS *Agrippinae* (note its ending!) as a gen. loci (neutr. pl. transformed into a fem. sing.).
20. S. Dušanić, *Istorijski Glasnik*, Belgrade 1980, 1-2 p. 21 f.
21. *Ann. ép.* 1987, 397; cf. S. Dušanić, “The Valle Ponti Hoard of Lead Ingots: Notes on Roman Commercial Activities in Illyricum at the Beginning of the Principate” (forthcoming).
22. Proc. *De Aed.* IV 4 p. 23, 18. Cf. Dušanić (n. 18) 74 n. 137, and (n. 20) 32 with note 180.
23. *IDR* III/3, 388; cf. 383 and *CIL* III 1271.
24. Komaj: *IMS I* p.108, with nn. 22-26. Železnik (on its mining of iron in recent times, Simić (n. 14) 156): M. Mirković, *Starinar* n.s.39(1988) 99-104.
25. Cf. O. Davies, *Roman Mines in Europe*, Oxford 1935, 229 and 231 (of the Bessi).
26. *Atubino/Atobino* and *Suneata* are usually (and wrongly) sought in a Balkan province of the Empire. I hope to show elsewhere that they should be located in Phrygia.
27. On the *civitas* (whose exact position has not been defined previously, and whose history still presents a number of interesting problems) see F. Papazoglou, *The Central Balkan Tribes in Pre-Roman Times*, Amsterdam 1978, 66 with n. 169; B. Gerov, “*La Romanisation entre le Danube et les Balkans d’ Hadrien à Constantin le Grand*” (deuxième partie)” (in Bulgarian with a French summary), *Ann. Univ. Sofia* (Faculté des lettres) vol. 47 (1950/1 – 51/2) 83 ff.; cf. *TIR*, K 34, XII b.
28. *CIL* III 12390 = 14409 = Gerov (n. 27) vol. 48 (1952/3) 371 no. 251; cf. *CIL* III 14412,3 = Gerov 373 no. 288.
29. M. Zahariade, in: *Atti* (XI Congresso Internazionale di Epigrafia Greca e Latina, Roma 1997), Roma 1999, 558 f. The construction of forts in Pannonia, in AD 294 (*Fasti Idatiani ad ann.*), was probably managed by the provincial dignitaries also (“wohl zum stärkeren Schutz der illyrischen Kaiserresidenz Sirmium”); B. Saria, “Onagrinum”, *RE* XVIII 1939, 402), without Diocletian’s immediate control.

Explanation of the map:

Q= Quarry; M=Mine.

Q Geresd (near *Lugio*), Nov. 8, 293

Q Fruška Gora (*Mons Pinguis, Mons Igneus*), Nov. 293

M Aurris (corr. *Aur<a>ris*, nom. *Aurariae*), May 3, 294

M Agrippinae. Aug. 5, 294

M Demessi (corr. *Deumessi*, nom. *Deumessus* or *Deumessum*), Sept 22, 294.

Q Triballis (nom. *Triballi- Civitas Triballica*, near *Oescus*), Dec. 4, 291.

