

**THE RELATION OF THE LEFT AND RIGHT PRINCIPLE
IN ROMAN ICONOGRAPHY
(SHOW-CASE OF THE DANUBIAN HORSEMAN)**

Snežana Černač – Ratković (Belgrade – Serbia)

Keywords: Left principle, right principle, Roman iconography, Danubian horseman.

Abstract. An extraordinary demonstration of uniting male and female lunar principle can be noticed at some votive plates with representations of the Danube horseman. In most of the cases, the bust of Luna is placed on the left side of the monument, thus marking the female principle. Still, on some examples, the bust with the Moon is placed on the right, male side, thus representing Lunus, Luna's pair. The cult of Lunus (Men) from Asia Minor was especially popular during the reign of the Severian dynasty and it is most likely that pictures with such an iconographical constitution can be dated into the first third of the 3rd cent. It seems that the understanding of dual nature of the Moon survived for a long time in this region.

The interest for monuments of this type dates from the end of the 19th century, when T. Antonescu wrote the first corpus of the plates known by that time. The important works of Nowotny, Hampel, Hoffiler¹ and Budy follow.² They were the guiding literature for Tudor³, who made a more detailed classification of these monuments and gave an attempt to understand their content. Scientists from former Yugoslavia who dealt with this problem were M Abramic⁴, who published many of such monuments from Dalmatia, but also the work of I. Iskra-Janošić⁵, who attempted to classify the plates without dealing with their content.

The plates containing scenes from the cult of the Danubian horseman can be found in all the Danubian provinces of the Roman Empire, especially in Pannonia, Dacia and Lower Moesia, but much less in Noricum, Dalmatia, Upper Moesia and Thrace. Although the greatest number of plates was found in Pannonia, Tudor thinks that this cult came to being in Dacia. According to him, the greatest number of plates showing one horseman and dating into the 2nd cent. comes from this territory, while the plates showing two horsemen date into the period from the 2nd to the 4th cent.

¹ Hoffiler, V., *Novi tračko-mitrički votivni reljefi*, VHAD n.s. sv. XVI, Zagreb 1935, 61-66.

² Authors that studied materials from our territory include Iskra-Janešić I., *Rimske votivne pločice od olova u Jugoslaviji*, *Opuscula Archaeologica* VI, Zagreb 1966, 49-68; Zotović, Lj., *Tri olovne ikone iz zbirke Muzeja grada Beograda*, *Starinar* XXIV-XXV, 1975, 33 ff.; Idem, *The Cult of Lunar Goddess or the Cult of Danubian Horsemen*, *Starinar* XLIX, 1998, 63 ff.; Ochsenschlager, E. L., *Lead plaques of the Danubian horsemen type at Sirmium*, *Sirmium* II, 1971, 55 ff.; Bojović, D., *Mitrine ikone i ikone podunavskog i tračkog konjanika iz Singidunuma*, *Starinar* XXVIII-XXIX, 1979, 135 ff.; Idem, *Prilog proučavanju kulta podunavskih konjanika*, *Starinar* XXXII, 79 ff.; Popović, I., *Spomenici kulta podunavskih konjanika iz Narodnog muzeja u Beogradu*, *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja* XI-1, 1983, 53 ff.; Idem, *Jedan donjopodunavski centar za izradu olovnih ikona podunavskih konjanika*, *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja* XII-1, 1986, 113 ff.; Idem, *Nove olovne ikone kulta dunavskih konjanika iz Sirmijuma i Singidunuma*, *Godišnjak grada Beograda* XXXVII, 1990, 57 ff.; Idem, *Radionica olovnih predmeta ili svetište kulta dunavskih konjanika u Viminacijumu*, *Viminacium* 7, 1992, 29 ff.; Krnić, S., *Neobjavljene ikone podunavskih konjanika iz zbirke Muzeja grada Beograda*, *Starinar* XLV-XLVI, 1995, 163 ff.

³ Tudor, D., *Corpus Monumentorum Religionis Egvitum Danuviorum* (CMRED) I, *The Monuments*, Leiden 1969; Tudor, D., *Corpus Monumentorum Religionis Egvitum Danuviorum* (CMRED) II, *The Analysis and Interpretation of the Monuments*, Leiden 1976.

⁴ Abramic, M., *Serta Hoffilleriana*, *Hoffilerov Zbornik*, Zagreb 1940, 297-307, T. XIX-XXI.

⁵ Iskra-Janošić, I., *Rimske votivne pločice od olova u Jugoslaviji*, *Opuscula Archaeologica* VI, Zagreb 1966, 49-68.

Beside one or two horsemen, there is always a female figure shown on these plates, i.e. a goddess, who is superior to the horsemen. She is actually the main person of the cult. According to Lj. Zotović, she is the solar goddess Luna, to whom this cult was dedicated. The iconography of this cult developed under strong influences of the Mithraic cult. It is the fact that both cults show identical images: the busts of Sol and Luna or just Sol with a quadriga, the followers of the horsemen, further on a lion, a bird and several other elements. The cult of the Danubian horseman is syncretistic and in its iconography, there are elements overtaken from many other cults like Cabyra, Dioscures, Thracian horseman etc.

The main difference between the plates showing the Danubian horseman and those showing the Thracian horseman or Dioscures is that on the first group, the horses step onto a human figure or a fish, symbolizing the victory of Good over the Evil. Fish and ram are always shown on the plates of the Danubian horseman, which is not the case with other riding deities. Obviously, each of these cult possesses its specific and independent character.

The mystic content of the cult is shown in horizontal zones: on the lead plates there are mostly four or three zones. Only very rarely, the pictures are divided into two zones. On some round plates, pictures overlap and they are not easy to define. At marble plates, the iconographical content is also given in two or three zones, which is also the case with examples made of terra cotta. The upper zone symbolizes the sky, the second illustrates the mystic content of the cult, while the third presents the mystic ritual. In the fourth zone, typical cult symbols are shown. The sky is symbolically shown with Sol in a quadriga in the middle, with the busts of Sol and Luna or with the pictures of snakes. Sol is depicted as the creator and the lord of the world, with a crown on his head (*corona radiata*), holding a sphere in his left hand. The sky is sometimes represented only with busts of Sol and Luna or with a symbolical picture of a heavenly Triade in the shape of an amphora and two heraldically placed snakes.

Such monuments offer an opportunity to know a part of life of the population of our regions from the 2nd to the 4th century.⁶ Since the biggest concentration of finds of such plates can be located at the territory of the Danubian Limes, it indicates that the carriers of this cult were Roman soldiers. Under their influence, local population also accepted this cult.

If we accept Tudor's opinion that all the monuments dedicated to the cult of the Danubian horseman originate from the stone monuments showing one horseman and coming from Dacia, it would mean that the lead plates, typical for Dacia and Lower Moesia represent an early phase of producing lead plates of this cult, considering that they were copying those made in stone. The most numerous type of plates from Pannonia, those of rectangular shape, offer the most precise elements for dating, since the central female figure, the goddess, was depicted with lots of details and a hair-style typical for the empresses of the Severian dynasty (Iulia Domna, Iulia Moesa, Iulia Mammea)⁷.

According to geographical area in which rectangular plates with a relief picture inside the aedicula are found, but also according to the great number of analogical examples, a conclusion can be drawn that the basic territory in which such monuments were spread was Lower Pannonia. They must have been produced in a single workshop, probably in Sirmium, in which several moulds were used simultaneously. There is also a possibility that there were several workshops within a single producing centre. A hypothesis that in Sirmium only moulds were produced, but the plates themselves were produced by travelling craftsmen is less likely. The existence of such craftsmen is documented within and outside the Empire, but only during the 5th to the 7th century, when they produced jewelry and other objects for the barbarians. Lead icons of the Danubian horseman can be dated before settling of the barbarians within the Empire.

⁶ Popović, I., *Spomenici kulta podunavskih konjanika iz Narodnog muzeja u Beogradu*, Zbornik Narodnog muzeja XI-1, Beograd 1983, 66.

⁷ Popović, Iv., *Nove olovne ikone kulta dunavskih konjanika iz Sirmijuma*, *Starinar* n.s. XXXIX, Beograd 1988, 115.

There are no inscriptions that would make it possible to date them precisely, but according to the hair style of the central female figure, that is typical for the first third of the 3rd century, they can with great certainty be connected to this period. It was the time when oriental cults and religious syncretism were at their peak in the whole Empire.

The icons of such type, genetically connected to the icons of the first type, were found in Pannonia exclusively and they were most likely produced in Sirmium. The unpublished icons from the Sirmium excavations are not new to the science, because they belong to the well known type of such monuments. The finds of lead icons of the Danubian horseman are common along the whole Danubian Limes, which indicates that the main carrier of such a cult was the Roman army. Still, a great concentration of such plates in the Lower Pannonia, as well as the great number of identical examples, speak for the fact that Lower Pannonia was their producing centre. It is most likely that in Sirmium there were workshops for the production of moulds, but also icons themselves⁸.

Although one can claim that rectangular icons with a relief divided into four zones inside the aedicula, dated into the first half of the 3rd century, were produced in Sirmium, somewhat younger icons with acroteria were equally found in Lower Pannonia and in the Moesian Danube valley. It is still a question whether, beside Sirmium, there were producing centres in Singidunum or Viminacium, or that there were travelling craftsmen, who produced and sold such plates to the great number of the cult followers in big military and urban centres. The cult of the Danubian horseman was certainly widely spread among the soldiers, which is indicated by finds of lead icons in the military camps in Singidunum, Porolisum, Drobeta, in Hognizu in Romania or Visegrad in Hungary. It is possible that this fact explains the iconographical similarity of the finds from Lower Pannonia and Moesian Danube valley, as well as for the great number of icons from this territory produced in the same moulds. It is known that already at the end of the fourth decade of the 3rd century, Marinus, Decius and maybe Aemilianus united the military command over Pannonia and Moesia. The military unification of these two provinces was at its peak around 260, when two usurpers of the Gallienus's throne, Ingenuus and after him Regalianus, were claimed emperors in Sirmium by Moesian troops. In the middle of the 3rd century, Lower Pannonia and Upper Moesia were one from the military point of view. Moesian legions VII Claudia and IV Flavia were in Pannonia and in its capital on several occasions. The mobility of military troops made tribute to spreading of finds of identical and iconographically common lead icons of the Danubian horseman at the territories of the Upper Moesia and Lower Pannonia⁹. Here, one can identify seven types of plates.

The main characteristics of the first type (type Dalj) (Pl. 1) is a rectangular shape with a semi-circular aedicula carried by two columns and the main topic divided into four fields. This type can be divided into four variants, that differ from each other in column types (smooth or twisted) and quality. The second type (type Divoš) (Pl. 2) is also of rectangular shape, with the upper part ending in three horn-shaped parts. The main picture is divided into three zones, that are strictly separated from each other. The third type (type Čalma) (PL. 3) is rectangular with a frame, ending on its upper part with a triangle and acroteria. The picture is divided into three zones that are thematically separated. The fourth type (type Mačvanska Mitrovica) (Pl. 4) is divided into two variants. One of them is similar to the Čalma type, although it possesses a circular medallion within the rectangular frame, containing the picture divided into three zones.

⁸ Popović, Iv., *Jedan donjopanonski centar za izradu olovnih ikona Podunavskih konjanika*, Zbornik Narodnog muzeja XII-1, Beograd 1986, 121.

⁹ Popović, Iv., *Nove olovne ikone kulta Dunavskih konjanika iz Sirmijuma i Singidunuma*, Godišnjak grada Beograda, Beograd 1990, 60.

The second variant is of circular shape and much like the medallions of the former type. The fifth type (type "Beograd 1") (Pl. 5) possesses a triangle within the rectangular frame, although the picture is divided into two zones. The sixth type (type Popinci) (Pl. 6) is of circular shape with the picture divided into two zones, the zones being hard to separate from each other. The seventh type (type "Beograd 2") (Pl. 7) is rectangular, with the picture divided into three zones.

From the literature so far it is well known that lead votive plates appear in the middle and lower Danube valley and its confluences, i.e. at the territories of former Dacia, Moesia and Thrace. Their great concentration can be observed in Srem, i.e. at the Sava - Danube confluence and in eastern Slavonia. Almost all of the plates represent accidental finds, except for one plate from Sirmium and a round plate from the unknown site, that was found in a grave. The quantity of plates is also of great importance: 20 pieces of the Dalj type, three pieces of the Divoš type, two Čalma pieces, eight of Mačvanska Mitorvica, one of each of the "Beograd 1" and "Beograd 2" type and three of the Popinci type. Lead plates were also found in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

The finds from Hungary and Romania confirm that the greatest concentration of finds can be observed along the Danubian Limes. It speaks for the fact that one is here dealing with a cult whose carriers were Roman soldiers. Tudor for instance studied stone monuments of the same art together with the here mentioned lead plates and he recognized strong oriental influences. It is not possible to speak about the influences of one single cult on these plates, but about a combination of several cults like Mithra, Cabyre or the Dioscures, Hera, Demeter or Nemesis.

There is no satisfactory explanation so far of a single cult represented on such plates. The spreading area of the finds along the Limes speaks for the fact that the army was the main carrier and the main element in spreading this cult. Oriental influence is easy to explain by the fact that many legions were transferred from one spot to the other (during the reign of Nero, the legion VIII Augusta was transferred to Moesia, in 71., the legion XV Apollinaris comes to Pannonia from the east etc.). Since great transfers were during the 2nd and the 3rd century, these plates can probably also be dated in this period. Under the influences of the army, local population could have also accepted this cult and as a logical consequence, many local workshops producing such plates developed. Since in our region most of the plates belong to the Dalj type, it could be presumed that the plates of this type were produced somewhere in the vicinity. It is difficult to determine the workshops for other plate types, especially since data are missing for Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

Votive plates made of lead offer a possibility to study one part of the spiritual life of the Roman population in our region. This picture in Pannonia in the 2nd and the 3rd century is rather complex. This problem is very interesting and it deserves further research.

No direct analogies have been found for any of the mentioned icons. All the pictures on icons are rather stylized. The picture of the lion and the radial crown of Luna are identical with similar pictures on coins from the last quarter of the 3rd century, which indicates that our icons can also be dated into this period.

Interesting examples on coins are shown on some emissions of the Olbya mint. On one series, there is Sol on the averse, and two horsemen on the reverse. These examples basically support the idea by D. Tudor about the origin of the cultic image of the Danubian horseman, that, according to him, originates from the lower Danube valley. He also points to Rostovcev's idea about certain influences from the Northern coast of the Black sea¹⁰.

While writing about the plates of the Danubian horseman, one can see an irregularity that needs explanation. Sol and Lunas busts mostly do not possess a permanent and unchangeable position. The most usual is the picture of Sol placed on the right side and Luna placed on the left

¹⁰ Huge bibliography of Rostovcev was given in Tudor D., CMERD II, 29-30.

side of the picture.¹¹ Still, on some examples, especially from the territory of Lower Pannonia and Upper Moesia, there is a reverse picture: the bust within the moon-sickle is right and Sol is on the left picture side. One can suppose that this position is not accidental, at least by the majority of the examples, but that it is the consequence of rationalisation that bases on the affirmation of Men or Lunis, i.e. the lunar principle.

Numismatic material from the republican period is consequent in this matter: the solar symbol is on the right side and the lunar on the left. On the coins from the mints of Asia Minor from the Imperial period interesting changes occur, connected to various approaches of certain emperors to cultic politics. During late antiquity, there are also some irregularities on the mintings, probably because of certain philosophical and theological teachings of the time. On the coins of the mint A. Malius (Sergianus) from the years 118-107, there is Roma depicted on the obverse and Sol riding a quadriga on the reverse. Above Sol, there is an astrological-solar symbol of the moon sickle on the left side and two stars (Dioscures) on the right side¹². From this period there are also coins of Cn. Cornelius Sisenus with Roma on the obverse and Jupiter in a quadriga on the reverse. Above the quadriga is the bust of Sol on the right side and a lunar symbol on the left side¹³. On the coin of Aspendus (Lycia) from Imperial times there is a race shown on the obverse, with the solar symbol depicted on the right side and the lunar symbol on the left side¹⁴. On one series from Aphrodisias in Caria, also from the Imperial period, there is the head of young Demos on the obverse and a cultic statue of Aphrodytes on the reverse. On her right side, there is a solar symbol and on her left side a lunar one¹⁵. On the coins of Andeda in Pisidia from the time of Maximinus the Thracian there is a temple with the cultic statue of Artemis of Perga. Right from her head is a solar symbol and a lunar one on her left side¹⁶. On the obverse of the coins of Maximinus the Thracian, Gordianus III, Tranquilina, Philipp, Otatilia Severa, Salonina, Aurelianus etc. there is always a temple with the cultic statue of Artemis of Perga and a solar symbol on her right and lunar symbol on her left side¹⁷.

This situation repeats on the coins of the Severian dynasty¹⁸, but also on various coins from Cyprus, where on the obverse there are busts of Septimius Severus, Iulia Domna and Caracalla. On the reverse, there is a picture of the temple of Aphrodyte of Paphia and above her head there is a solar symbol on the right side and a lunar one on the left side¹⁹. As shown on the mints from Cyprus and Perga, during the Severian dynasty the position of cosmic symbols changes and Luna becomes the dominant one.

Ever since the Parmenides study that denies the Egyptian theory of the priority of the left side, it is a custom that the solar viril principle is on the right side and the lunar, the chthonic feminine one on the left side²⁰. This quite stable iconographical order was kept until late antiquity. Only during the Severian period and because of very strong influences of Iulia Domna, oriental and especially Asian and Syrian cults overtake the dominant, imperial position²¹.

Jovanovic thinks that during the Severian dynasty, Men was identified with Sol through the viril principle and that during this period of sacral competition, their places on various

¹¹ Tudor, D., CMERD II, 181 ff.

¹² Crawford M.H., *Roman Republican Coinage*, Cambridge 1974, 318, No. 309/1.

¹³ Idem, 318-319, no. 310.

¹⁴ SNG Cop., Lycia – Pamphylia, 264-5.

¹⁵ SNG Cop., Caria I, 107-108.

¹⁶ SNG Cop., Pisidia, 7.

¹⁷ SNG Cop., Lycia – Pamphylia, 338-340, 342-4, 361, 366-7.

¹⁸ SNG Cop., Lycia – Pamphylia, 330, 335, 337.

¹⁹ SNG Cop., Cyprus – Capadocia, 89, 90, 92.

²⁰ Loyd, G.E.R., *Right and Left in Greek Philosophy*, JHS 82, 1962, 56 ff; Kember, O., *Right and Left in the Sexual Theories of Parmenides*, JHS 91, 1971, 70 ff.

²¹ Aureus with the picture of the royal family from 209. offers interesting data. Iulia Domna is on the right side and Septimius Severus on the left. After RIC IV, 312. Picture in Muenzkatalog Tkelec AG 1998, No. 205.

monuments changed. Therefore he concludes that monuments dedicated to the Danubian horsemen and containing this inverse picture of the astral symbols can be dated into the Severian period. Such an example are plates from Čalma²², but also from Zlatara in Ruma. This example was found in a Roman villa, together with a „T“-shaped fibula that dates into the 3rd cent²³. Lj. Zotović dates the Čalma type of plates into the 3rd century because of one interesting iconographical detail: the cock above the rams head reflects the theme of an eagle above the bovides head from the Turmasdgd cult that also dates into the 3rd century²⁴. A contribution to this lower chronology of the Čalma type plates are pictures of fish between two stars in a tympanone, which indicates a cultic meal. It should be considered that other monuments also contained such inversions. On the monuments of the Popinci type, the Luna is on the right side and Sol is on the left side of the goddess depicted in the middle²⁵. Circular examples described as the Popinci type are very poorly made with lots of technical weak-points, maybe even with iconographical irregularities. Maybe this inversion could be interpreted as mistake of the carver or accidental copying of the Čalma type plates, although this could be very difficult to understand. Maybe these are some religious tendencies of the first decades of the 4th century. On coins, especially aurei minted in Antiochia during the Diarchy of Constantine I and Licinius, there is a figure of Iuppiter Conservator flanked with the lunar symbol on the right and the solar symbol on the left side²⁶.

²² Iskra-Janošić, I., *op. cit.*, 54-55.

²³ Brukner, O., *Rimska naselja i vile rustike, Arheološka istraživanja duž auto-puta kroz Srem*, Novi Sad 1995, 138, T. VI/63; XX/1.

²⁴ Zotović, Lj., *Tri olovne ikone iz zbirke Muzeja grada Beograda*, Starinar XXIV-XXV, Beograd 1975, 35.

²⁵ Iskra-Janošić, I., *op. cit.*, 57-58.

²⁶ Jovanović, A., *Numizmatičke beleške uz kult Podunavskih konjanika*, Numizmatičar 21/1998, Beograd 2000, 11-28.

Bibliography

- Abramić M., *Serta Hoffilleriana*, Hofilerov Zbornik, Zagreb 1940, 297-307, Vjesnik hrvatskoga arheološkoga društva, nove serije, sveske XVIII, XIX, XX, XXI, 1937-1940.
- Bojović D., *Mitrine ikone i ikone podunavskog i tračkog konjanika iz Singidunuma*, Starinar n.s. XXVIII/XXIX/ 1977-1978, Beograd 1979, 135-142.
- Bojović D., *Prilog proučavanju kulta podunavskih konjanika*, Starinar XXXII/1981, Beograd 1982, 79-82.
- Hoffiler V., *Novi tračko-mitrički votivni reljefi*, VHAD n.s. sv. XVI, Zagreb 1935, 61-66.
- Iskra-Janošić I., *Rimske votivne pločice od olova u Jugoslaviji*, Opuscula Archaeologica VI, Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Zagreb 1966, 49-68.
- Jovanović A., *Numizmatičke beleške uz kult Podunavskih konjanika*, Numizmatičar 21/1998, Beograd 2000, 11-28.
- Popović I., *Spomenici kulta podunavskih konjanika iz Narodnog muzeja u Beogradu*, Zbornik Narodnog muzeja XI-1, Beograd 1983, 53-68.
- Popović I., *Jedan donjopanonski centar za izradu olovnih ikona Podunavskih konjanika*, Zbornik Narodnog muzeja XII-1, Beograd 1986, 113-122.
- Popović I., *Nove olovne ikone kulta dunavskih konjanika iz Sirmijuma*, Starinar n.s. XXXIX, Beograd 1988, 105-116.
- Popović I., *Nove olovne ikone kulta Dunavskih konjanika iz Sirmijuma i Singidunuma*, Godišnjak grada Beograda, Beograd 1990, 57-62.
- Popović I., *Radionica olovnih predmeta ili svetište kulta dunavskih konjanika u Viminacijumu*, Viminacium 7, Požarevac 1992, 29-57.
- Tudor D., *Corpus Monumentorum Religionis Equitum Danviorum* (CMRED) I, The Monuments, Leiden 1969.
- Tudor D., *Corpus Monumentorum Religionis Equitum Danviorum* (CMRED) II, *The Analysis and Interpretation of the Monuments*, Leiden 1976.



Fig. 1 - Plate type Dalj (after Iskra-Janošić I., 1966, T. I, 1)



Fig. 2 - Plate type Divoš (after Iskra-Janošić I., 1966, p. 53)



Fig. 3 - Plate type Čalma (after Iskra-Janošić I., 1966, T. IV, 1) Grobalja necropolis



Fig. 4 - Plate type Mačvanska Mitrovica (after Iskra-Janošić I., 1966, T. VI, 1, 2 and 4)



Fig. 5 - Plate type Beograd 1 (after Iskra-Janošić I., 1966, T. VI, 3)



Fig. 6 - Plate type Popinci (after Iskra-Janošić I., 1966, T. VI, 5)



Fig. 7 - Plate type Beograd 2 (after Iskra-Janošić I., 1966, T. IV, 2)