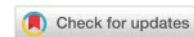


# A CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF THE POPULATION FROM THE SOUTH OF THE PROVINCE OF DALMATIA (EXAMPLES FROM THE TREBIŠNJICA VALLEY AND ITS SURROUNDINGS)

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**Abstract:** By analyzing narrative sources, epigraphic monuments, and various archaeological finds from the south of the Roman province of Dalmatia (the Trebišnjica River valley / eastern Herzegovina), the paper attempts to examine and determine the ethnicity of the population of classical antiquity. The conquest of Illyricum (during the wars fought from the 3rd century BC until the beginning of the 1st century AD) and the education of the population in the province of Dalmatia (believed to have started in AD 7/8 until the end of AD 9), lead to territorial and ethnic changes. Roman citizens (*cives Romani*) settled in the valley of the Trebišnjica River and lived there along with the local population (*peregrini*). The Italic peoples mostly contributed to the penetration of the Roman culture, civilization, and Roman way of life in this region. They brought the remains of the Roman civilization with them, which influenced the local population in different ways. Epigraphic monuments and diverse archaeological finds reveal these processes in the south of the province of Dalmatia. The analysis will attempt to reconstruct the ethnic image of the population living in the south of the province of Dalmatia. The analysis of epigraphic monuments will reveal whether foreigners or locals were the dominant factor in this region. Moreover, the analysis of material facts will suggest when the process of Romanization in this region began and how long it lasted. The Romanization process in the south of the Roman province of Dalmatia implied granting citizen rights under certain emperors. Members of higher social strata of a community (*civitas*) were granted civil rights. Today we can trace the Romanization process only indirectly through onomastics of the local population using epigraphic monuments. The results obtained through the analysis of epigraphic monuments and different archaeological finds will show which areas in the south of the province of Dalmatia maintained their local ethnic characteristics during the Roman period, and which succumbed to Romanization, which was best recorded again by onomastics.

**Keywords:** population of classical antiquity, epigraphic monuments, province of Dalmatia, the Trebišnjica River valley, eastern Herzegovina.

**Field:** Social sciences

## 1. INTRODUCTION

We have already mentioned in our papers (historical and geographical framework) that the south of the province of Dalmatia (the Trebišnjica valley / eastern Herzegovina) was part of the Illyrian Kingdom in the pre-Roman period. The Romans conquered this region of the Balkan Peninsula during the wars waged from the 3rd century BC to the beginning of the 1st century AD. Epigraphic monuments suggest that Roman citizens (*cives Romani*), either immigrants or locals who acquired Roman civil rights under the emperors of the 2nd and the first half of the 3rd century, lived in the territory of modern eastern Herzegovina in the Roman period. Moreover, locals without Roman civil rights (*peregrini*) lived in the Roman period in this region in larger settlements, working in agriculture and paying taxes. Judging by the Illyrian names on epigraphic monuments, we can assume that the indigenous community consisted of a pre-Roman population: larger or smaller ethnic groups or tribes which Roman authors called the Illyrians. Narrative sources do not have direct data on the population of Illyricum in the hinterland of the eastern coast of the Adriatic, while the archaeological research of the pre-Roman layer has been small-scale and limited to the research of tumuli with a typical burial method until the 4th century BC. Nevertheless, the population that lived in inhabited places left visible traces in the material of the necropolis and the onomastics of epigraphic monuments. We can thus conclude that the results remain in the sphere of more or less probable hypotheses. Thus, the basic source data on which our research of the structure of the population of the Roman provinces is based is almost exclusively based on the testimony of epigraphic texts (Zippel, 1877, p. 189, 194; Vulić, 1926, p. 54–72; Betz, 1938, p. 5; Alföldy, 1965, p. 168; Wilkes, 1969, p. 223–252; Bojanovski, 1988, p. 36–64, 355–359; Rendić-Miočević, 1989, p. 135–144, 145–154, 181–189; Čače, 2003, p. 29–48; Mesihović, 2010, p. 94–97; Mesihović, 2011, p. 33–421; Samardžić, 2015, p. 143–146; Mesihović, 2021, p. 7; Šaćić / Mesihović / Veletovac, 2021, p. 9 and further; Mesihović,

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2023, p. 5 and further; Šačić, 2023, 33–55; Mesihović, 2023, p. 5–39).

## 2. ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM OF EPIGRAPHIC MATERIALS

A modest number of epigraphic monuments testify to the population of eastern Herzegovina during the Roman period. Namely, several epigraphic monuments discovered in this region testify to the settlement of the Italic people in the valley of the Trebišnjica river (eastern Herzegovina) during the Roman period. Fragments of tombstone stela with partially preserved inscriptions were found at the site of Prlo. Fragment dimensions are the following: height 0.57 m, width 0.24 m, and depth 0.46. It is believed that one line of letters has probably been lost at the beginning and the end of the inscription (Bojanovski, 1977, p. 70, no. 2; Šačić, 2011, p. 169). The possible text reconstruction is the following: ] /Vil[- - - ? Au] / reli[ae Marce?]/lae p[iae ?] / et pia[e - - - ?] / Mini[ae - - - pi]/entis[simae coni]/ug[i - - - ? an]/nor[um- - - ?] / vam[- - - ?] / - - - (ILJug 651b). It is believed that Vilius, if this genus is attested in the first preserved line of the inscription, belonged to the class of Roman citizens who arrived from Italy, probably via Narona, Salona, Epidaurum, or Risinium (OPEL IV 170) as merchants, artisans, landowners, or veterans during the Early Empire. Moreover, it is assumed that the inscription contains the names (Vilius, Aurelia, Marcela, Flamina) of persons of Italic origin settled in Panik, the location of a villa rustica, and that this estate was inhabited by a large number of the Italics. The inscription can be dated to the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd century AD (Bojanovski, 1977, p. 70, no. 2; Šačić, 2011, p. 169). This fragment of cippus with an incomplete inscription, which indicates the presence of Italic families in eastern Herzegovina and, indirectly, the Romanization of this area, is preserved in the Heritage Museum in Trebinje (asset number 160) (Samardžić, 2015, p. 283–284).

A boundary stone inscription from Kosijerevo is particularly important for eastern Herzegovina. It was carved into the living rock on the left bank of the Trebišnjica river, at the site of Zagulj. This terrain is now submerged, and the inscription was cut and transferred to the museum in Nikšić (Sergejevski, 1964, p. 93–95; Bojanovski, 1973, p. 92, image 11; Imamović, 1980, p. 33–34, no. 3; Šačić, 2011, p. 164–166). Its text is the following: L. Funisulanus Vet/onianus leg(atus) pr(o) pr[ae]t(ore)] / [po]ntem et terminos / [re]novari ius(s)it per / T. Cas(s)ium Frontonem / o(ptionem) leg(ionis) IIII F(laviae) f(elicis) in / [fun]do Vesii (!) C( ) / S( ) C( ) D( ) L( ) V( ) (ILJug 647). The inscription can be dated to the period when Lucius Funisulan Vetonian was the governor in Dalmatia (from AD 80 to 83), i.e., the period of the Flavian dynasty, which is rare in the territory of Eastern Herzegovina. The inscription from Zagulj is important for several reasons. First of all, it corroborates the existence of large estates in Panik (fundus Vesius), then it testifies to the repair of the bridge on the Trebišnjica river as well as to the restoration of the boundary on its left bank, the works that were undertaken by order of the provincial governor (pontem et terminos renovari ius sit). G. Alföldy believes that Vesii is an Italic family known in the province of Dalmatia since the Early Empire (OPEL IV 161; Alföldy, 1969, p. 135; Samardžić, 2015, p. 283–284). The construction of the bridge and restoration of the boundary was supervised by Titus Cassius Fronto, assistant to the centurion of IV Flavia legion. In modern historiography, it is considered that this unit was brought to Dalmatia when it was founded (in AD 70), and in AD 86 it was transferred to Upper Moesia (Ritterling, 1924, p. 1541; Betz, 1938, p. 47; Alföldy, 1964, p. 167–179; Wilkes, 1969, p. 97; Ferjančić, 2002, p. 176). As previously noted, the inscription from Zagulj provides important data regarding the bridge restoration which carried an important road Narona–Leusinium–Salluntum–Scodra (Sergejevski, 1962a, p. 111–113; Sergejevski, 1962b, p. 73–104; Bojanovski, 1962, p. 11–12; Bojanovski, 1977, p. 91–94). From the contents of the inscription, we can conclude that the bridge was already worn out, which indicates that the road was built well before AD 80 (Alföldy, 1969, p. 135; Bojanovski, 1977, p. 91–94; Samardžić, 2015, p. 284).

A tombstone in the shape of a stela, unearthed in 1925 during fieldwork on the plot of M. Kiste, at the site Trebimlja (Popovo polje, Trebinje), is also significant for the study of the population of eastern Herzegovina in the Roman period. Remains of a settlement, which have not been investigated, were also found here. The remains such as building foundations, brick tombs, ceramics, and other building materials are spread over a site measuring 500 x 400 m. The Heritage Museum in Trebinje conducted a minor protective excavation in 1964, but the report with the results was not published. Due to the shallowly carved letters, the inscription on the tombstone is quite difficult to read, and its text reads: D(is) m(anibus) s(acrum) / P. Aplio Pl[as] / so patri pientis / [s]imo dec(urioni) m(unicipii) Dil(unti) / et M[ ] C[ ] / infelicissi / ma(e) def(unctae) an(norum) VIII(?) / P. Aplius Anni / us v(ivus) sibi et / suis fecit (ILJug 1740. Up. Bojanovski, 1973, p. 151; Bojanovski, 1977, p. 84, no. 7; Šačić, 2011, p. 177–178; Samardžić, 2022, p. 159–169). Based on the fine craftsmanship, we can conclude that this is a monument dedicated to members of the upper class. The text shows that Publius Aplius Plasus, decurion of the Diluntum municipium, belonged to the class of the local aristocracy. Cognomina Plasus and Annius are Illyrian, as

well as the gentilicium Aplius, carried by father and son. The onomastic formula is Roman (tria nomina). I. Bojanovski assumed, according to praenomen Publius that this family was granted Roman civil rights based on the decision of Emperor Hadrian (117–138), who had this praenomen (Bojanovski, 1977, p. 82–86). However, there are views that this decurion Publius Aplius Plassus (Alföldy, 1969, p. 267), who kept his Illyrian nomen gentilicium, did not have the status of a Roman citizen (Šačić, 2011, p. 179–181; Samardžić, 2022, p. 159–169).

In support of this, the mentioned girl (his daughter) does not have a Latin praenomen in the inscription, and the onomastic structure of her name is purely Illyrian. Such a thing was not common for this period, especially if the two previous generations (father and grandfather) had Roman civil rights (Šačić, 2011, p. 179–181). When it comes to the previously stated view, we are cautious to some degree because the daughter's name has not been preserved in full, so the assumption is difficult to accept. The dating of the monument to the second half of the 2nd century is suggested by tria nomina with the praenomen and the extended consecratory formula Dis Manibus sacrum (Alföldy, 1969, p. 267; Bojanovski, 1977, p. 81–82), but there are views that the monument should be dated to the first half of the 2nd century (Šačić, 2011, str. 179–181). The importance of this inscription lies in the fact that it is one of the few monuments in eastern Herzegovina mentioning the municipium Diluntum. The inscription was discovered on the remains of a smaller Roman settlement (in Trebimlja), which belonged to the administrative area of Diluntum, and where the decurion Publius Aplius Plassus had an estate (villa). His family, of local origin, participated in the municipal administration (Bojanovski, 1977, p. 81–82; Šačić, 2011, p. 179–181; Samardžić, 2022, p. 159–169).

A damaged tombstone with an incomplete inscription in a double frame was discovered by Stevan Kijac, the museum conservation technician in Trebinje, at the site of Veličana (Popovo polje). The dimensions of this inscription are the following: height 0.685 m, width 0.36 m, and depth 0.16 m. The inscription is located in the Heritage Museum in Trebinje (asset number 167). The preserved text is the following: D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) / [- - -] Mascelloni / [- - -]simo ser(vo) / [- - -]mano Surio / [- - -]rimano [- - -] / [- - -]renti o[- - -] / [G]ermano R[- - -] / M[- - -]H[- - -] (AE 1977, 611. Up. Bojanovski, 1977, p. 74–76; Samardžić, 2020, p. 287–288). In terms of content, the inscription introduces several names, but due to damage, it is difficult to read. It is believed that Mascellio is nomen gentilicium, suggesting a person without civil rights (Bojanovski, 1977, p. 77), and a name of Italic or Celtic origin (OPEL III 62; Alföldy, 1969, p. 240). I. Bojanovski and A. noted that the names Surio and perhaps Plarens appear on this inscription (as a funerary inscription to Zirej and his son Zanatis, born at the site of Ukšići in Ljubomir) (ILJug 106), so they believe that it is an indicator of mixing local Illyrian population with the immigrants (Bojanovski, 1977, p. 77; Šačić, 2011, p. 184–185). When it comes to dating the inscription, the formula D(is) M(anibus) S(acrum) offers terminus post quem and that is the first half of the 2nd century (Šačić, 2011, p. 185; Samardžić, 2015, p. 287–288).

Personal names on epigraphic monuments are important source material that allows us to conclude the ethnic composition, kinship relationships, and origin of the population (Katičić, 1962, p. 95–120; Bojanovski, 1977, p. 7–98; Rendić-Miočević, 1989, p. 623–690). Thus, several Illyrian names are attested in the families that lived in the area of the Trebišnjica valley. Apart from the mentioned inscription of Publius Aplius Plassus, the decurion of Diluntum, Illyrian names are attested on some other epigraphic monuments of eastern Herzegovina (Samardžić, 2015, p. 295–296).

At the site of Dobričevo, Bileća, a tombstone was discovered with the following dimensions: height 0.48 m, width 0.385 m, and depth 0.215 m. It was built into Dobričevo monastery and moved to the National Museum in Sarajevo in 1898. The text reads: Aelia Zo/rada h(ic) s(ita) / an(norum) LX / Zanatis / et Tatta m(atri) / b(ene) m(erenti) f(ecerunt) (CIL III 14620. Up. Bojanovski, 1977, p. 78–80, image 5; Šačić, 2011, p. 173). Three Illyrian female names are mentioned on the inscription: Zorada (Alföldy, 1969, p. 332), Zanatis (Alföldy, 1969, p. 331–332), and Tatta (Alföldy, 1969, p. 305). The fact that Zorada has imperial nomen gentilicium Aelia means that these are the members of a family which was granted Roman civil rights by Emperor Publius Aelius Hadrianus (117–138) or Antoninus Pius (138–161). Zorada may represent the first and her daughters the second generation of new Roman citizens (or the second and third generations). The monument can be dated to the second half of the 2nd century AD, while the inscription suggests that indigenous traditions, which are reflected in the use of Epichoric names, remained in the Trebišnjica valley for quite a long time, but at the same time, it points out to the process of Romanization of the Illyrian population in the hinterland of the eastern coast of the Adriatic (Bojanovski, 1962, p. 11–12; Bojanovski, 1977, p. 78–80; Samardžić, 2015, p. 295–296).

At the site of Ukšići (Ljubomir), during the First World War, a damaged tombstone with an incomplete inscription was found. Its dimensions are: height 0.33 m, width 0.58 m, and depth 0.28 m. The letters are irregular and shallowly carved, and it is assumed that the first two lines of the inscription are missing.

The supplemented text is the following: [D(is) m(anibus) Ziraeo Plarentis f(ilio) defuncto anno(rum) - - -] / [L- - - et Z]anati / [Zira]ei f(ilio) defuncto / annor(um)XXX / Annaia Zanat(i) f(ilia) vi[ro et f(ilio)] / et Plarens Zira[ei f(ilius)] / patri et fratri (ILJug 106. Up. Bojanovski, 1977, p. 80, image 6; Šačić 2011, 177–178). All the names in the inscription are Illyrian, while the naming formula of peregrini, characteristic of the local population, is composed of personal names and patronymics in the genitive case. The content of the inscription shows that the monument was erected in honor of two men – Zirej (Alföldy, 1969, p. 332) and his son Zanatis (Alföldy, 1969, p. 331), who died at the age of thirty. The monument was erected by Zirej's wife Anaja (Alföldy, 1969, p. 150) and their son Plarens (Alföldy, 1969, p. 267; Bojanovski, 1977, p. 81–82). In their family, the name Zanatis was passed down among women. One of Zirej's and Anaja's sons bears the name after his maternal grandfather, while the other son, Plarens, follows his father's onomastic inheritance and bears the same name as his paternal grandfather. The inscription can be dated to the period from the end of the 1st century to the end of the 2nd century AD, because the names were adapted to the Roman formula, and the family did not yet have the civil rights that were granted to all free inhabitants of the empire in AD 212 (Constitutio Antoniniana) (Bojanovski, 1977, p. 81–82; Samardžić, 2015, p. 296–297).

Next to the main road Bileća–Stolac in the settlement of Fatnica, to the south of the road, on the edge of the Fatnica field, another significant inscription was found, whose text reads: D(is) M(anibus) / Tattaris Veneti / filius et Temus An/naei filia Batoni / filio annorum / XX et Anna<e>ae / fil(i)ae annorum XXV / fil(i)is pientissimis / vivi fecerunt / sibi / et suis. (CIL III 12800+p. 2258. Up. Bojanovski, 1976, p. 36; Bojanovski, 1977, p. 97; Šačić, 2011, p. 171–172). In terms of its onomastic formula, this inscription is similar to the inscription from Ukšić (Ljubomir). All the names are Illyrian (Tattaris (Alföldy, 1969, p. 306), Venetus (Alföldy, 1969, p. 323), Temus (Alföldy, 1969, p. 306–307), Annaeus (Alföldy, 1969, p. 150), Bato (Alföldy, 1969, p. 163–164), and the naming formula is characteristic of the local population, indicating that in this area the Romanization process took place relatively slowly compared to other parts of Dalmatia (Up. Katičić, 1962, p. 112; Bojanovski, 1988, p. 110–111). The inscription can be dated to the 2nd century (Bojanovski, 1977, p. 82; Samardžić, 2015, p. 296–297).

### 3. CONCLUSION

The ethnic image of the population in the south of the province of Dalmatia (eastern Herzegovina) can be reconstructed based on epigraphic monuments, graves and grave goods. The most important information about Italic immigrants is provided by epigraphic monuments and nomina gentilicia attested on them. Based on the lack of imperial gentilicia from the 1st century, it is considered that Romanization in this area began under Hadrian (117–138) and Antoninus Pius (138–161). The Italic community was important (sites: Prlo, Kosijerevo, Trebimlja, Veličani) which contributed the most to the penetration of Roman culture and civilization as well as the Roman way of life. They brought with them all the vestiges of the Roman civilization, which penetrated the local population in various ways.

Epigraphic monuments from the Trebišnjica valley testify that foreigners were not a dominant factor here, while there were significantly more of them in the Bregava valley and the upper course of the Neretva river. As their number was not negligible, it is clear that the role of the Italics in the Romanization process in this area was very significant. Although the aforementioned inscriptions from the area of eastern Herzegovina provide relatively modest results about the structure of the population, the image formed based on individual nomina gentilicia changes with each new find.

The epigraphic material suggests that the areas in the interior of eastern Herzegovina during the Roman period preserved their Epichoric ethnic characteristics for a long time, which is best shown in the example of the onomastics from Dobićevo, Ljubomir, and Fatnica. Some of the typical names found on the epigraphic monuments from this region are Zorada, Zanatis, Tattaris, Temus etc. Epichoric onomastics shows that traditional forms of life were maintained for a long time even in the Roman period. However, although native Illyrian names are still found on these inscriptions, they have been adapted to a certain extent to the Roman onomastic system (single-name onomastic formula with patronymic and filiation). If common people from the aforementioned smaller settlements adapted their names to the Roman way, then this is a sign of a strong Roman influence on the life of this population in general. We can reasonably assume that a certain number of locals in the territory of eastern Herzegovina lived without Roman civil law in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. These could include those with single-name onomastic formulas such as Zanatis and Tatta from the Dobićevo inscription, or those with a name to which a patronymic is added, such as, for example, Tattaris Veneti.

The Romanization of the local population in the south of Dalmatia is also reflected in the process of granting civil rights, and citizenship was primarily granted to members of the higher social class of

a certain community (civitas). Today, the Romanization process can only be traced indirectly, and only through the onomastics of the local population displayed on epigraphic monuments. The local population that did not have civil rights usually bore only a personal name (Dobrićevo – Tatta) or a personal name with the addition of the father's name in the genitive case without the expression filius/filia (Fatnica – Tattaris Veneti) or with the addition of filius (Ljubomir – Zanatis Ziraeifilius, Plarens Ziraeifilius). In the area of Dalmatia, we noticed on the epigraphic monuments the Illyrians had two names. The two-name formula consists of a first and last name with the addition of a patronymic without the expression filius/filia (Mali Kablič – Plator Carvius Batonis), and with the addition of the expression filius/filia (Komić – Sestus Platurius Tritifilius). Real Roman citizens had a three-part onomastic formula (tria nomina), type P(ublius) Aelius Victor, in which the first part – personal name (praenomen) and gentile name or nomen gentilicium (nomen gentile) – were given by the emperor who granted them citizenship, and then followed by the cognomen, which was often the former Illyrian name of the new citizen.

The native population of eastern Herzegovina gradually received Roman civil rights. Judging by the nomen gentilicium Aelius, attested on the majority of tombstones found in the valley of the Trebišnjica river, the local population most often received their civil rights from the emperor Publius Aelius Hadrian (117–138) or Antoninus Pius (138–161). Unlike these partial distributions of civil rights, Constitutio Antoniniana from AD 212 ended the process of introducing the local population into the ranks of Roman citizens.

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