

Jupiter and the other gods – duty and piety of the Roman soldiers in Dalmatia*

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A short overview of military religion is given, both the official and the unofficial cults, venerated in the Roman army in the province of Dalmatia and/or Illyricum, with special concern on the data that a certain investigated territory can provide us. Apart from the fact that Jupiter was the most prominent god, to a large extent the number of military votive inscriptions dedicated to the great Roman deities such as Minerva, Hercules, Mars, and Victoria, is very scarce, especially when compared with the number of inscriptions dedicated to Jupiter, either alone, or when he appeared together with other deities.

Key words: Roman religion, Roman military religion, the official military cults, the unofficial military cults, Jupiter, Nemesis, Silvanus

When researching military religion, there are, so far, three milestones. The first one occurred more than a century ago when Alfred Von Domaszewski wrote the first book entirely dedicated to the subject of Roman military religion: *Die Religion des römischen Heeres*, Trier, 1895. Today, it is still essential and indispensable. Knowledge of military religion expanded with the finding of the calendar from Dura Europos, and its subsequent analysis and publishing in 1940 by Robert O. Fink, Allan S. Hoey and Walter F. Snyder marked the second milestone (Fink, Hoey & Snyder 1940). The calendar, now known as *Feriale Duranum*, represented a list of feasts celebrated by the *cohors XX. Palmyrenorum*, and it dates to the time of Alexander Severus. Today there is no doubt that the aforementioned cohort was not unique in the Roman army in this regard, and that each unit of the Roman army had a similar calendar. The discovery of the calendar pointed out to some erroneous conclusions made by Domaszewski, e.g. the day of the renewal of the oath or *sacramentum*, moves on from 1st of January to the 3rd of January. *Feriale Duranum*, is by its shape the list of the feasts and celebrations, since it contains only *dies festi*. According to the calendar, the army celebrated military and public feasts, the old Roman gods, and they especially honoured the cult of the emperor and his family (Fink, Hoey & Snyder 1940: 24–29; Richmond 1962: 185–186). The publishing of the *Feriale Duranum* spurred new interest in the subject of military religion. Several articles were published and each brings a somewhat different view on a particular issue (Nock 1952; Gilliam 1956; Richmond 1962; Helgeland 1978: this article is a complete review of the calendar found in Dura, and a general overview of the Roman military religion, its official and unofficial cults).

The third milestone happened in 1978 when the first critical review of the Domaszewski's book emerged. It was the article by Eric Birley in which he indicates to certain erroneous conclusions by Domaszewski and underlines the need to create more recent study of the subject. However, even Birley emphasizes how

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little of new there is to say after Domaszewski (Birley 1978: 1506–1541). As for the province of Dalmatia, archaeologists dealt either with the army (e.g. Wilkes 1969; Zaninović 1976: 169–184) or the cults (e.g. Medini 1976: 185–205; Sanader 1999). In discussions about the cults, the military aspect of a particular cult was debated if the dedicant was a soldier. Only recently the topic of military religion or cults has been engaged (e.g. Perinić Muratović 2005; Perinić, in print).

In the Roman Empire, the army was either the initiator of social change or a tool needed in the execution of said change. In that sense, the army reflected the social trends of the moment in history. The Roman army is a living organism with the same needs and tasks but its needs and tasks were realized in different settings, depending on the province and even micro locations where the soldiers were stationed. Such adjustments to the newly conquered areas could certainly be reflected in the pantheon of each soldier. Since the end of the 1st century AD, but especially later, the entire legions were sent to the military campaigns very rarely. Then, the soldiers had the possibility to approach the local population, not only as conquerors, but also as the disseminators of the Roman imperial culture in general. On the other hand, the Roman soldiers permanently stationed in one area learned about the local culture, religion, and cults, appropriating some of their elements and including them in their private worship. Unfortunately for us, the end of the first century was also the time when Dalmatia became *provincia inermis*, the province without permanent military garrison. That is also the reason why the military votive inscriptions from neighbouring areas of what was once Illyricum were taken into the consideration here. From the province of Dalmatia 141 military votive inscriptions were taken into consideration, and the widened territorial scope included the area that in 1st century constituted Illyricum. From that territory, another 165 inscriptions were taken into consideration, which means that, in total, 306 military votive inscriptions were taken into consideration.

It is now well known that Roman army, regardless of the size of the unit, carried with them a copy of religious calendar, that is, the list of observances and festivities celebrated. When discussing Roman military religion, it is important to differentiate between (I) the official religion of the Roman state, formal celebrations/observances of the state, (II) the cults approved within certain units, such as the worship of deities from the soldier's place of origin, or territories that were constantly recruited from, (III) the local cults in different military territories that were usually accepted, and, somewhere even officially approved of, and (IV) the deities or *Genii* of certain places that proved acceptable to the soldiers. Finally, the cults brought over from the east hold a special place, i.e. they represent a separate case, whether they were followed by easterners or people who had served in the East. For all these categories, apart from, to a certain extent, the first two, it is advisable to differentiate between the worshipers based on rank – senators, Roman knights, centurions, legionary or auxiliary soldiers. In many cases it is evident that the soldiers followed their superiors in worshiping deities not prescribed by the official religion, or deities indigenous to the area where the soldiers were stationed (Birley 1978: 1509).

As for official deities, Domaszewski noted, relying on Pliny (NH. X, 16) that during the Republic there were five military deities the legionaries used as signa: eagle (Juppiter), wolf (Mars), boar (Quirin), that constituted the triad, Minotaur (Juppiter Feretrius – god of the offensive), and horse (Juppiter Stator – god of the defensive) (Domaszewski 1895: 118). Apart from the deities that they honoured as signa, the legionaries worshiped the great gods, the, so called, *dei militares* or *bellorum dei*: Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, either alone or together; as well as Victoria, Mars as Ultor, Mars Militaris, Mars Militiae Potens, and as Mars Campester (Domaszewski 1895: 52). *Campestris* was also the epithet ascribed to Nemesis, so the link between Mars and the training fields (*campus*) is clear and, in that way, attested.

Religion had multiple roles in the army. First, it was to identify the life of each soldier with the fate of Rome herself; Secondly, through it *l'esprit de corps* or “community spirit” was supposed to be held at a high level; and thirdly, it created social structure in the life of the soldiers and ensured discipline, loyalty, rewards for certain credits or penalties, as well as the explanations of traditions (Helgeland 1978: 1473). In all probability, the official religion had a role to make a soldier's life more bearable, if not more significant, and also to give it a purpose. It can be described as a system of worshiping gods prescribed for all military units, wherever they might be stationed. This system is different from the one that the soldiers brought with them and cherished for personal reasons, and that made up the unofficial system. Based on the votive inscriptions of soldiers we can determine whether the local community influenced the garrison in Dalmatia, and the adjacent territory, and if, and how much the circumstances the soldiers lived in on the said territory influenced their worship.

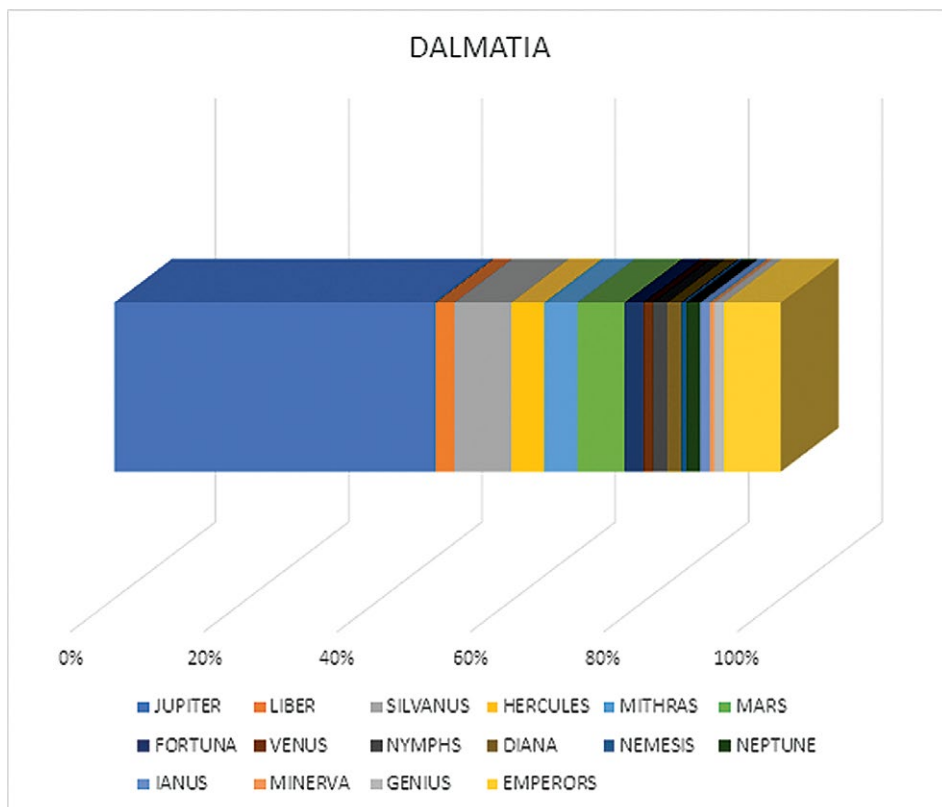


Fig. 1.

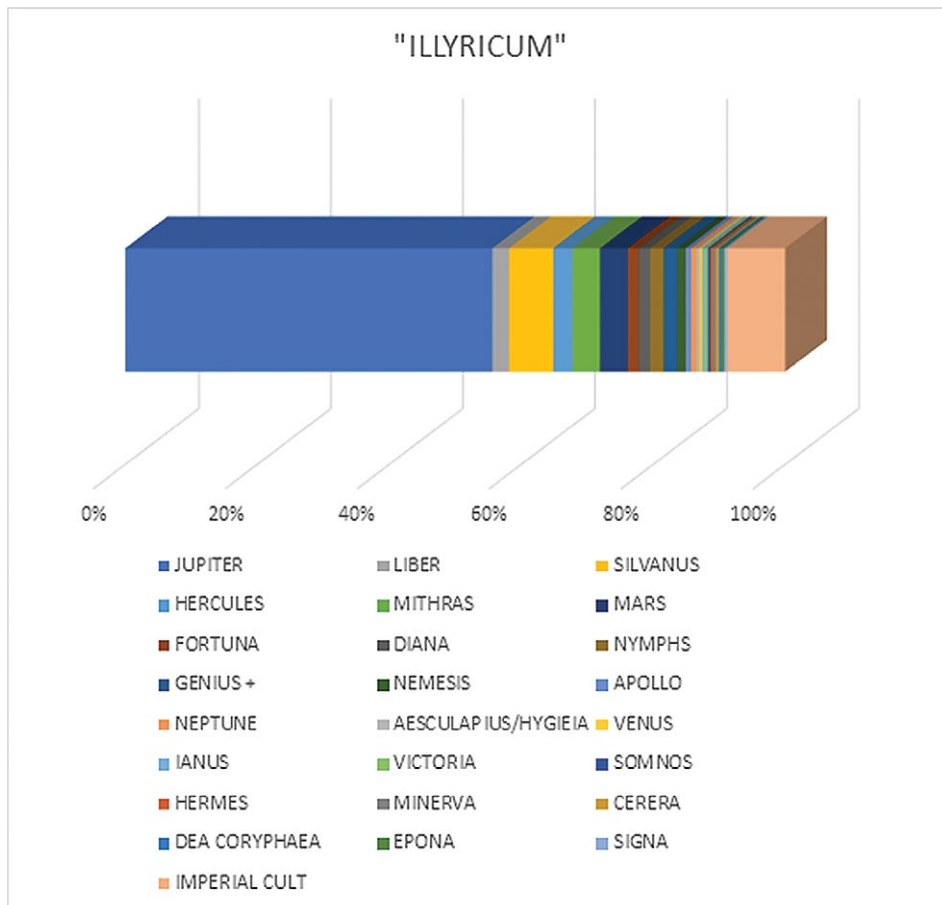


Fig. 2.

On these two figures we see the distribution of various deities, both official and unofficial. What is most striking and visually obvious is the number of inscriptions dedicated to Jupiter, either alone, or conjoined with other deities. What is also visible is, when the spatial scope was widened outside of Dalmatia, there are some inscriptions dedicated to, not unexpected, but maybe, deities which were not usually worshipped among soldiers, like for example *dea Coryphaea, sive Caelestis*, (AIJ 240) possibly Phoenician goddess Tanit (Selem 1980: 262–264) but also a Greek goddess who inhabits the summit of the mountain, an epithet of Artemis, and also of Diana. Nevertheless, it is clear that the overall distribution of gods and goddesses did not change significantly.

We can also discern how important military deities, as was Mars, were to a soldier, especially after 1st century when situation in wider area of Dalmatia, or Illyricum, was quite peaceful. Because of such overall situation one would not expect many dedications to, e.g. Mars or *Disciplina Militaris*. And it truly is as expected (Perinić, in print).

Based on the collected inscriptions (10), it seems that Mars was equally praised among the high-ranking officers (consular beneficiaries) and among common soldiers. In the case of Mars, Domaszewski's conclusion that Mars became more popular in 3rd century (Domaszewski 1985: 33–36) remains unchanged. He is invoked as *Augustus* (e.g. CIL III, 8431 from Stolac, Diluntum), and is found conjoined with Victoria (CIL III, 15180; AIJ 239, from Sisak, Siscia). The Roman god of war, whose influence spread further to include agriculture and, thereby the protection of the Roman family, ranks right behind Jupiter based on the military importance. However, in comparison to Jupiter, significantly fewer inscriptions dedicated to him have been found (10). Overall, the number of military votive inscriptions dedicated to great Roman deities such as Minerva, Hercules, Mars, and Victoria, is rather scarce, especially when compared with the number of inscriptions dedicated to Jupiter, either alone, or when he appeared together with other deities. A single inscription dedicated to Victoria, the goddess who followed the successes of the Roman army was found in Ptuj, Poetovio (ILJug 340).

Although deities of the official military pantheon were, as concluded by Alföldy, often worshiped due to the feeling of duty, rather than a true religious impulse (Alföldy 1961: passim), the 3rd century reveals a more pronounced tendency in both officers and regular soldiers to seek divine help not only from other deities prescribed by the official calendar, but also from emperors and imperial houses (Fishwick 1969: passim). One of the deities that can serve as an example of the growing feeling of personal participation (responsibility) is the already mentioned Nemesis who was not mentioned by Domaszewski at all. On the studied area, Nemesis is *Regina* (Ščitarjevo, Andautonia, CIL III, 4008. (4013); AIJ 474), *Augusta* (Daruvar, Aquae Balissae, AIJ 585), and *Sancta* (Komini, Pljevlja, ILJug 602). On the inscription where she is mentioned as *sancta*, she appears together with the *genius* of a *municipium*, unfortunately the *genius* was not named. Based on only three discovered inscriptions, it seems that Nemesis was worshiped by both high-ranking officers and common soldiers. The inscriptions are too few to generalize, but it can be concluded that the cult of Nemesis was not particularly widespread in the military. The inscriptions are dated from 150 till the end of the 3rd century.

The largest number of inscriptions are dedicated to Jupiter, 133 of them, either as *Optimus Maximus*, or with other epithets, such as *Dolichenus*, *Heliopolitanus*, *Cohortalis*, *Conservator*, *Depulsor*, *Tonitatorius*, or to Jupiter *Optimus Maximus* conjoined with other deities (67 of them), including: Juno and Minerva, Juno *Regina* and Minerva, Juno, Mars, *Sol Invictus*, Ceres, *Fortuna Redux*, and *genii* such as: *Genius loci*, the *genius* of a specific *municipium*, and conjoined with all the deities, i.e. *diis deabusque omnibus*. Jupiter is a Roman supreme deity included in the category of *dii militares* (alone or forming a triad with Juno and Minerva) that also included Victoria and Mars. Being the supreme deity of Rome, most of the military votive inscriptions from the studied area were dedicated to him.

As can be discerned from these votive inscriptions, the votaries of Jupiter were mostly high-ranking officers, most of them consular beneficiaries. The reason for this high a number of inscriptions is probably coming from the tradition or custom by which the senior officers raised the monuments dedicated to Jupiter when they were leaving current position to a new assignment (Speidel & Dimitrova-Milčeva 1978: 1553–1554; also Alföldy: 1961). This situation also reflects the official character not only of Jupiter, but of religion in the army as a whole. Jupiter accompanied with other deities is found on 67 inscriptions. Those deities are either from the category of *dii militares*, or *genii*, the attendant spirits of a place or of a person,

so it can be safely said that Jupiter covered most of aspects of military life, if not all. Most inscriptions, 49, are dedicated to Jupiter conjoined with the *genii*. Here, just like in the case of the votive inscriptions dedicated solely to Jupiter, the dedicators are mostly high-ranking military officials, either centurions or consular beneficiaries. The *genii*, as gods with a narrow circle of protection, were frequently connected to the great gods with a wide circle of protection, such as the *dii militares*. The great gods, *dii militares*, also had their own 'specialised' geniuses which is confirmed with the inscription found in Novae (Lower Moesia) dedicated to Mars and Genio Armamentarii (Speidel & Dimitrova-Milčeva 1978: 1551). Their dedicators, from the territory taken into consideration here, were specialists (e.g. *speculator*, *signifer*) and high-ranking officers. Furthermore, there is a possibility that when *Genii loci* were joined with the great gods, that they actually represented local indigenous deities (Mócsy 1974: 252).

Given that the military life was everything but easy and safe, it is surprising that only three inscriptions were found that were dedicated to the gods capable of healing. One inscription dedicated to Aesculapius and his daughter Hygia, dedicated by consular beneficiary Caius Iulius Herculanus is found in Skelani, Srebrenica (ILJug 1522). The other two dedications to the gods of healing are to Aesculapius's father, Apollo, one from Šuica (Marijanović 1985/86: 109–112), dedicated by Aurelius Iulianus, centurion, and the other is from Varaždinske Toplice, Aquae lasae (Kušan Špalj 2015: 75–76, 100), where Apollo was invoked with Diana and the Nymphs, by *speculator legionis* Lucius Aerus Florentinus. But perhaps, and possibly, what some did not find within Aesculapius, Hygia, and Apollo, the others were able to recognize in Silvanus (Kuntić-Makvić 2003: passim; Perinić 2016: 38). Military inscriptions dedicated to Silvanus are the most numerous after those of Jupiter, yet only 16 of them were found. Silvanus is mainly referred to as *Augustus*, *Domesticus*, *Silvestris* while being associated only with Silvanae (from Daruvar, Aquae Balissae, Rendić-Miočević 1980: 114–115, 123; T. 2, 1; sl. 3), and Nymphs (from Trilj, Tilurium, CIL III, 13187; ILJug 143; Rendić-Miočević 1955: 24; T. 1, 3; Perinić 2017: 345–357). Seven military votive inscriptions dedicated to Silvanus are from Topusko and due to this fact, it could be presumed that the baths in Topusko probably were specialized for the military. Silvanus' cult, like Mithra's, but unlike Jupiter's, was more popular among ordinary soldiers than among high-ranking officers. It is also conceivable that the soldiers built Silvanus' shrine in Topusko (Ad Fines) just as they built the temple of Sol Elagabalus in Brigetio (CIL III 4300, soldiers of *Legio II Adiutrix*), or like they helped restore the temple of Liber in Ljubuški, Bigeste (CIL III, 6362 (=1790); CIN I, nr. 11; Atanacković-Salčić 1981: 267, nr. 7; CIL III, 6363 (=1789); CIN I, nr. 14; Atanacković-Salčić 1981: 266–267, nr. 6).

These unofficial cults were mostly a matter of soldiers' personal choice and/or tradition, and as such they serve as a useful criterion in determination of the religious practices of the Roman army. They reveal the diversity of belief rather than some solid continuum. This is understandable when one takes into account how great a choice there was, considering the size of the Empire, and what various motifs soldiers had for choosing a particular deity/cult. It is important to note that soldiers, being either legionaries or auxiliary soldiers, had complete freedom and flexibility in the so-called *interpretatio Romana/ Celtica/ Germanica/ Dalmatica* and so on. Auxiliary troops were able and willing to worship ancestral and other deities from their own country of origin, as they were willing to worship official deities or local deities of the area they were stationed in; which for soldiers could one day be Dalmatia, and Syria the next. If we are to accept the opinion that most dedications to *dii militares*, and most of them concerning Jupiter, were made in large part out of a sense of duty and tradition or as a custom, we can also argue that most of the dedications that were made to other gods were out of pure piety. Furthermore, we can also argue that the custom of raising votive monuments to Jupiter when a soldier is being promoted or transferred somewhere else, arose from the genuine soldier's pledge to Jupiter for his successful future. It seems that the division according to provinces may show us if some god was favoured in that province, but the 'divine universe' of soldiers indicates that whenever systems depended solely on men (in terms that the worship was not prescribed through a calendar, or whatever other means of control), they are going to represent certain peculiarities. Be that as it may, those peculiarities were always in accord with the troops stationed within one camp and province. Judging by the epigraphic votive monuments, the said divine universe was exceptionally rich: accompanying military standards were many gods, more than a dozen geniuses, dozens of personifications. Equally diverse were persons dedicating the monuments, from senatorial officers, centurions, to ordinary soldiers.

Abbreviations

AIJ	Antike Inschriften aus Jugoslavien I
CIL	Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum
CIN	Corpus inscriptionum Naronitarum
ILJug	Inscriptiones Latinae quae in Yugoslavia repertae et editae sunt

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