

## The Image of Persephone on the Upper Moesian Limes A Contribution to the Study of Ancient Cults

**Abstract:** The ways in which Persephone was depicted in the Roman province of Upper Moesia may help understand the significance the goddess had for the inhabitants of the Upper Moesian limes, notably Viminacium and Ratiaria, where the discussed archaeological material was discovered.

**Keywords:** Persephone, Ceres, Dis Pater, Viminacium, Ratiaria, Upper Moesia, limes

Depictions of Persephone or inscriptions dedicated to her do not seem to have been very frequent in Upper Moesia or in the neighbouring provinces of the Roman Empire. The known Upper Moesian representations and an inscription dedicated to Dis Pater and Persephone all come from the Danubian area of the province, with the exception of a Kore intaglio whose find-spot is unknown.<sup>1</sup>

The Upper Moesian archaeological material shows the following representations: the Abduction/Rape of Persephone, Persephone and Pluto, Kore's Return from the Underworld, and a portrait of Persephone. So far, Kore and Persephone are not known to have been depicted together. It is interesting to note that some coins minted in the Balkans usually depict Persephone together with Demeter.<sup>2</sup>

The Abduction of Persephone, the central relief on the marble stele of Marcus Valerius Speratus from Viminacium (fig. 1) dated to the second

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<sup>1</sup> Studying the cults of Persephone and Demeter, A. Jovanović, *Ogledi iz antičkog kulta i ikonografije* (Belgrade: Filozofski fakultet, 2007), 81, suggests that not only the depictions of the goddesses but also some artefacts recovered from graves should be related to their worship: wreaths of wheat ears, a ram's head, a snake, and bracelets in the form of a snake. This paper discusses only the figural representations of deities, and not individual elements of their symbolism precisely because of their complexity and their possible attribution to other members of the Greco-Roman pantheon.

<sup>2</sup> The two are shown together on coins minted at Odessus in the late second and early third century for Septimius Severus (N. Mushmov, *Antičnrite moneti na Balkanskiat poluoströv i monetite na bulgarskite tsare*, Sofia 1912), no. 1595; Elagabalus, no. 1624; Alexander, no. 1628; and Gordian III Pius, no. 1658. The abduction of Persephone was depicted on coins minted at Alexandria, in Lydia and in Phrygia (*LIMC* IV, s.v. Hades: no. 100a – Alexandria, no. 102 – Lydia, and no. 103 – Hierapolis, Phrygia).

or the early third century,<sup>3</sup> reveals a complex iconographic type. In addition to the central couple, Hades and Persephone in a horse-drawn chariot, the composition characterized by narrativeness and attention to detail also includes Hermes and Athena.

Persephone and Hades/Pluto (Dis Pater) form a badly damaged sculptural group from Viminacium (figs. 2 and 2a) dated to the late second or early third century. The two figures, whose heads are now missing, are shown seated on a double throne, Pluto in a chimation, and Persephone in a chiton and mantle, with a still recognizable animal at their feet. The backside of the throne is decorated with the letter "S". The group was first identified by Vulić as Persephone and Pluto with Cerberus lying at their feet.<sup>4</sup>

A third Upper Moesian representation occurs on a glass-paste intaglio (fig. 3) dated to the same period.<sup>5</sup> The orange intaglio in imitation of carnelian shows a standing figure of Kore/Persephone with her hair gathered up into a *nodus*, and holding a torch in each hand. Given its large size, the intaglio might have been fitted into a medallion or adorned some other object.

The last known depiction of Persephone is a gilt bronze relief decorating a mirror from Viminacium (fig. 4), also dated to the late second or early third century. Persephone, wearing a "melon" hairstyle, is shown in profile. The portrait, enclosed in a laurel wreath and facing a myrtle branch (*myrtus communis*), was identified as Persephone by D. Spasić-Djurić,<sup>6</sup> who

<sup>3</sup> J. Brunšmid, "Nadgrobní spomenik Marka Valerija Sperata iz Viminacija", *Vjesnik Hrvatskog arheološkog društva* 1 (1895), Pl. 1; *CIL* III, 12659; *RE* IV, 1901, col. 242; A. von Domaszewski, *Die Rangordnung des römischen Heeres* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1967), 34; A. Hekler, "Forschungen in Intercisa", *Jahrshefte des Österreichischen archäologischen institutes in Wien* 15 (1912), 184, fig. 123; *Actes VIIIe Congr.*, Pl. 90/4; H. Devijver, *Prosopographia militarium equestrium quae fuerunt ab Augusto ad Gallienum* II (Leuven 1977), 831, no. 38; J. M. C. Toynbee, "Greek myth in Roman stone", *Latomus* 26 (1977), 402; M. Mirković, *Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure*, vol. II *Viminacium et Margum* (Belgrade: Faculté de Philosophie, 1986), 130–131, no. 110; S. Pilipović, "Divine rape as a funerary motif: the example of the stela from Viminacium", *Balcanica* XXXII–XXXIII (2003), 61–88, and, of the same author, *Mit i ljubav* (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2007), cat. no. 1.

<sup>4</sup> The sculpture was identified as Persephone and Pluto by F. Ladek et al., "Antike Denkmaler in Serbien II", *Jahrshefte* 4 (1901), 122, no. 12; N. Vulić et al., "Antički spomenici u Srbiji", *Spomenik SKA* XXXIX (1903), 65, fig. 8; Mirković, *Inscriptions*, 137, fn. 6; uncertain identification: M. Tomović, *Roman Sculpture in Upper Moesia* (Belgrade: Archaeological Institute, 1993), 120, no. 209, Pl. 47/6–7; Lj. Zotović, "Das Paganismus in Viminacium", *Starinar* XLVII (1996), 128.

<sup>5</sup> N. Kuzmanović-Novović, "Antička gliptika na teritoriji Srbije" (PhD thesis, Belgrade University, 2005), cat. no. 167

<sup>6</sup> D. Spasić-Djurić, "Reljefna ogledala iz Viminacijuma", *Viminacium* XII (2001), 175.

studied the emergence of the myrtle motif and its connections with the goddess.

We should also mention two stone sculptures, one from Singidunum,<sup>7</sup> the other from Scupi,<sup>8</sup> which have tentatively been identified as Persephone or Demeter.<sup>9</sup> Ratiaria has yielded an inscription dedicated to Proserpine and Dis Pater by an *augustal*.<sup>10</sup>

Persephone, the Greek goddess of the underworld and nature, Demeter and Zeus' daughter and Hades' wife, was a central figure of the Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>11</sup> She reigned in her husband's kingdom, but she also managed to secure her return into the world of the living, where she spent a part of the year.<sup>12</sup> Since Hellenistic times, Hades had been associated with the inevitability of death, and Persephone with renewal. Proserpine, the Roman goddess of the underworld and the mistress of the world of the dead became assimilated to Persephone. On the advice of the Sybilline Books, Demeter, Kore and Dionysus began to be worshipped as early as 496 BC,

<sup>7</sup> Tomović, *Roman Sculpture*, cat. no. 50, suggests that it might be Ceres or Persephone, while S. Krnić, "Dve mermerne skulpture iz Singidunuma", *Godišnjak grada Beograda XLVII-XLVIII* (2003), 51–65, believes it to be a fragment of a funerary composition.

<sup>8</sup> Tomović, *Roman Sculpture*, cat. no. 52; V. Sokolovska, *Antička skulptura vo SR Makedonija* (Skopje: Muzej na Makedonija, 1988), no. 122

<sup>9</sup> To be mentioned as well are two iconographically complex votive emblems from Tekija, Serbia, which have also been variously interpreted. Drawing on Mano-Zisi, *Nalaz iz Tekije* (Belgrade: Narodni muzej, 1957), 37, and bearing in mind different interpretations of the deities depicted on them (Serapis, Dis Pater–Pluto and Heracles, Cybele, Magna Mater, Demeter etc.), A. Jovanović, "Prilog proučavanju srebrnih amblema iz Tekije", *Glasnik Srpskog arheološkog društva* 6 (1990), 29 ff, suggests that one might be Heracles in his syncretistic manifestation with Jupiter Heliopolitanus, and the other Persephone. On different interpretations of the emblems, and on the possibility that they depict Sabasius and Cybele, see S. Pilipović, *Kult Bahusa na centralnom Balkanu* (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2011), 122–124.

<sup>10</sup> *Diti Patri et Proser | pinae Regin(ae) | Q(uintus) Sab(inius) Vital(is) pr(imus) Augus | talium: CIL III, 12646; CIL III, 8081; E. Kalinka, Antike Denkmäler in Bulgarien* (Vienna: Holder, 1906), 131–132, no. 141; cf. M. Mirković, *Rimski gradovi na Dunavu u Gornjoj Meziji* (Belgrade: Arheološko društvo Jugoslavije, 1968), 137; R. Duthoy "Les Augustales", *ANRW* 16/2 (1978), 1254–1309. 1978, 1281, fn. 217.

<sup>11</sup> M. Djurić, *Istorija belenske etike* (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1976), 4 ff.

<sup>12</sup> C. G. Jung & C. Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology* (Princeton University Press, 1973), 109. A third-century-BC inscription praises a certain Erina as a new Kore, see *Anthologia Palatina* VII, 13; cf. also R. Turcan, *Messages d'outre-tombe: l'iconographie des sarcophages romains* (Paris: De Boccard, 1999), 12. For the symbolism of the abduction of Persephone, with an overview of the earlier literature, see Pilipović, *Mit i ljubav*, 28–34, 62–67.

and subsequently other cults were also introduced, such as those of the Dioscuri, Apollo, Asclepius, etc.<sup>13</sup> The exact mechanism of transcribing Greek cults into Roman cultural contexts is difficult to unravel, because of the continued presence of earlier autochthonous cults. At times, it was elements of these earlier cults that led to innovative amalgamations. For example, Ceres, the ancient Italic deity associated with the plebs and worshipped from the fifth century BC, came in the mid-third century BC in contact with another cult, known to the Romans as the “Greek cult” of Ceres.<sup>14</sup> Rituals in which women now came to play an important role began to spread from southern Italy, and groups of matrons and young girls participating in processions, singing and offering sacrifices to Ceres and Proserpine, mother and her young daughter, were mentioned for the first time.<sup>15</sup> Apart from the Vestal virgins, who were an exception to many a rule of Roman society, women had not played any significant role in Roman public worship. Proserpine retained a role in the further evolution of worship, and played it together with Dis Pater, who became the third member of a mythic triad (Proserpine/Daughter, Dis Pater/King of the Underworld, and Ceres/Mother). This in fact was a prelude to a new type of secular games. As recorded by Varro in 249, at the time of the First Punic War, Dis Pater was worshipped in Tarentum together with Proserpine (*Ludi Tarentini*). The games in honour of the two deities held in Tarentum subsequently grew into a celebration marking the end of a *saeculum* (*Ludi Saeculares*).<sup>16</sup> The cult of Dis Pater saw a revival towards the end of the pagan era.

Persephone was frequently depicted in the visual arts where, regardless of her various iconographic types, she always stood as a symbol of triumph over death and an allegory of human fate. Persephone's fate offered the hope of rebirth to the mortals facing the darkness of the grave.<sup>17</sup> She embodied a double relationship: as a daughter, with her mother, she symbolized life, and as Hades' wife, death.<sup>18</sup> Apart from this basic meaning, her figure may have had a more concrete meaning, as an allegory of women's fate.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> G. Foot Moore, *Storia delle religioni* (Bari: Laterza, 1929), 619.

<sup>14</sup> Beard et al., *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 70, fn. 225.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. fn. 227.

<sup>16</sup> According to Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* III, 18, it was a nocturnal celebration held around an altar in Tarentum.

<sup>17</sup> F. Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1942), 95–97.

<sup>18</sup> Jung & Kerényi, *Essays*, 108.

<sup>19</sup> The borders of Hades' realm could have functioned as a metaphor for the border between girlhood and womanhood. As the ruler of the world of the dead, Hades could

As we have seen above, the known Upper Moesian representations of Persephone encompass the Abduction of Persephone, Persephone and Pluto, Kore's Return from the Underworld, and a portrait. Given that the depictions are done in different media, their analogies should be looked at in a broader culturological framework. The Abduction of Persephone from the stele of Marcus Valerius Speratus has no closer analogies in Upper Moesia or even in the neighbouring provinces. Examples of the scene can be found in distant parts of the Empire: in Rome — on some sarcophagi;<sup>20</sup> in a black and white mosaic from the cemetery under the church of St Peter;<sup>21</sup> among the murals decorating the tomb of the Nasonii<sup>22</sup> — and in the paintings adorning tombs in Egypt, Lebanon and Syria.<sup>23</sup> The Viminacium scene, of a complex iconography and stylistic richness, is an exquisite work of art with its skilfully carved figures, harmony in composition and wealth of detail. Its realist rendition may perhaps be compared only with the Upper Moesian relief of Helen and Menelaus from the stele of Gaius Cornelius Rufus.<sup>24</sup> The stele itself finds analogies in the best examples of funerary art from the provinces of Noricum and Pannonia.<sup>25</sup>

Unlike the stele, the sculptural group of Persephone and Pluto from Viminacium is a piece of provincial art. Its closest artistic analogy is a relief from Ostia, now in the Vatican Museums, which also shows the two seated on a double throne with Cerberus at their feet,<sup>26</sup> but which contains two

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have been an allusion to the earthly husband, and the abduction of the bride, to death, see Turcan, *Messages*, 47; C. Sourvinou-Inwood, "The young abductor of the Locrian pinakes", *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 20 (1987), 139; E. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 131–132. For arguments in support of this interpretation found in epitaphs and the visual arts, see Cumont, *Recherches*, 102; *LIMC* IV, s. v. Pluto, no. 31; Pilipović, *Mit i ljubav*, 28–34, 62–67.

<sup>20</sup> H. Sichterman & G. Koch, *Griechische Mythen auf römischen Sarkophagen* (Tübingen: E. Wasmuth, 1975), nos. 59–61.

<sup>21</sup> *LIMC* IV, s. v. Hades, fig. 76b.

<sup>22</sup> E. Winsor Leach, "G. P. Bellori and the Sepolcro dei nasonii Writing a 'Poets' Tomb", in A. Barbet, ed. *La peinture funéraire antique* (Paris: Ed. Errances, 2001), 69.

<sup>23</sup> Western Hermopolis in Egypt, Tyre in Lebanon, and Massayif in Syria; see M.-T. Olszewski, "La langage symbolique dans la décoration à scènes mythologiques et son sens dans les tombes peintes de l'Orient romain. Nouvelle approche", in Barbet, ed. *La peinture funéraire*, Pls. 27/5, 27/6 and 28/7.

<sup>24</sup> Mirković, *Inscriptions*, no. 73.

<sup>25</sup> The complex architecture of the stele and its relief decoration find their closest analogies in the funerary art of Noricum and both Pannonias; see Pilipović, "Divine rape", 73 ff, as well as her *Mit i ljubav*, 50, 109–110, and "La scena di caccia: motive di decorazione delle stele funerarie della Moesia Superior", *Starinar* LVI (2008), 337–352.

<sup>26</sup> *LIMC* IV, s. v. Pluto, no. 54.

more figures. Geographically nearer to the Viminacium sculpture is a relief from Konstanza, Romania, now in Bucharest, with waist-length portraits of Persephone and Pluto.<sup>27</sup> The central couple used to be flanked by two figures, of which the one on the left side is damaged beyond recognition, while the other may be identified as Demeter.

The glass-paste intaglio, whose find-spot is unknown, shows the classical type, i.e. the standing figure of Kore/Persephone holding a lit torch in each hand. This iconographic type had been in use since Hellenistic times, either independently or incorporated into various compositions.<sup>28</sup>

The Viminacium mirror with the representation of Persephone and a myrtle branch may find analogies in Thrace, but especially in North Africa and Asia Minor, where many similar relief mirrors come from. Persephone was depicted on them with a laurel or olive branch, with flowers reminiscent of poppies, or with a laurel wreath and wheat ears.<sup>29</sup> Myrtle, however, was a plant dedicated to Persephone and thus associated with the world of the dead.<sup>30</sup> The question of provenance of this particular mirror cannot be easily resolved. It could have been imported from the abovementioned regions, but it could also have been crafted in some of the Viminacium workshops. The other precious-metal mirrors made using the same technique discovered at Viminacium are decorated with the reliefs of Dionysus and Ariadne, Venus and the Three Graces, Venus and Amor, and Apollo.<sup>31</sup>

The inscription from Ratiaria dedicated to Proserpine and Dis Pater is the only such discovered in the province. The epithet *Regina* conferred upon the goddess is a reminiscence of the Orphic hymn that describes Persephone as the queen of the underworld and the keeper of its gate in the depths of the earth.<sup>32</sup> In Upper Moesia, and elsewhere, this epithet was usually associated with Juno.<sup>33</sup> The cultic association of Dis Pater and Proserpine has also been attested in inscriptions from Napoca and Sarmisegetuza

<sup>27</sup> LIMC IV, s. v. Pluto, no. 1a. Cf. G. Bordenache, "Temi e motivi della plastica funeraria d'età romana nella Moesia Inferior", *Dacia* VIII (1964), 171, no. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Two Hellenistic reliefs from the National Museum of Athens show Persephone holding a torch in each hand, see G. Günther, "Persephone", in LIMC IX, cat. nos. 22 and 71.

<sup>29</sup> G. Zahlhaas, *Römische Reliefspiegel* (Kallmünz 1975), cat. nos. 5–7, 16–17.

<sup>30</sup> M. Blech, *Studien zum Kranz bei den Griechen*. Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 38 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982), 94 ff.

<sup>31</sup> Spasić-Djurić, "Reljefna ogledala", 161 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Orph., *Hymn in Proserp.*, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> IMS II, 25; IMS IV, 24; IMS IV, 25; IMS VI, 8; IMS VI, 9; IMS VI, 213; AE 1992, 1500; *ILJug* 1393; *ILJug* 1427.

in Dacia,<sup>34</sup> from Carnuntum in Upper Pannonia,<sup>35</sup> and in the province of Raetia.<sup>36</sup> As for the inscriptions dedicated to Persephone and Pluto, there is one from Raetia,<sup>37</sup> two from Lower Germania,<sup>38</sup> and two from Lower Moesia.<sup>39</sup> Mirković even suggests that the votive monument bearing the dedicatory inscription from Ratiaria might have stood in a shrine of the two deities.<sup>40</sup>

The question as to who the worshippers of Persephone on the Upper Moesian limes might have been is not easy to answer, given the scantiness and heterogeneity of the archaeological material. The most concrete information is provided by the inscription on the stele with the relief of the Abduction of Persephone. Lucia Aphrodisia set up the stele to herself and her husband, M. Valerius Speratus, during their lifetime. Marcus Valerius was a veteran of Legion VII *Claudia*. Honourably discharged from the army, he served as a decurion of the municipium of Viminacium, and then re-entered military service, and as prefect of the Cohort I *Aquetanorum*, participated in a campaign against Britain. Marcus Speratus was probably a Romanized inhabitant of Upper Moesia, possibly originally from a Celtic-inhabited area — Upper Moesia, Pannonia or Noricum.<sup>41</sup> His wife bore a non-imperial gentile name, which suggests that she probably came from a family which had moved to Upper Moesia and Viminacium from some other part of the Empire.<sup>42</sup> The sculpture of Persephone and Pluto provides no clue as to who commissioned or owned it. Likewise, little can be said about the person who owned the Kore/Persephone intaglio, probably worn as a medallion. Even though the fact that the adornment was made of glass paste in imitation of carnelian does not add to its value, its size and quality carving suggest that

<sup>34</sup> Napoca: *CIL* III, 7656; Sarmisegetuza: *IDR* 3, 2, 199, fig. 160.

<sup>35</sup> *AE* 1988, 914.

<sup>36</sup> *CIL* III, 11923.

<sup>37</sup> *CIL* III, 5796.

<sup>38</sup> *AE* 1939, p. 74 s. n. 235.

<sup>39</sup> For one, see *ILBulg* 140, Pl. 25, 140, and for the other, *ILBulg* 39; Pl. 9, 39 (B); Jovanović, *Ogledi*, 66, draws attention to the existence in the Middle Danube and Dacia of monuments showing Dis Pater, as well as to his association with Persephone in that region, and suggests that the finds in the Danube area of Lower Pannonia (at Surčin, Batajnica, Zemun and Židovar) of fibulae in the form of a double, Gallic, mallet, an attribute of Dis Pater, indicate that his worship was widespread in the region.

<sup>40</sup> Mirković, *Rimski gradovi*, 137.

<sup>41</sup> S. Ferjančić, *Naseljavanje legijskih veterana u balkanskim provincijama* (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2002), 162 ff, no. 367. Cf. Mirković, *Rimski gradovi*, 58 ff, no. 110.

<sup>42</sup> Ferjančić, *Naseljavanje*, 164.

it was not at all inexpensive, and allow us to presume that its owner was a well-to-do woman. To the same social class of Viminacium must have belonged the female owner of the relief mirror, considering the costly material and the use of the technique of casting and matrix hammering. The dedicant of the inscription from Ratiaria was an augustal.

It appears from the above that Persephone was not worshipped in association with Ceres in Upper Moesia, even though it is in the Danubian part of the province that the cults of both have been attested most convincingly. The provenance of two inscriptions dedicated to Ceres which were reused for the medieval walls of Smederevo Fortress<sup>43</sup> is still a matter of debate, and some suggest that they might have been brought from Viminacium.<sup>44</sup> There is also an inscription dedicated to Ceres from Ratiaria.<sup>45</sup> The Belgrade City Museum has in its collections a bronze statuette of Ceres from an unknown site,<sup>46</sup> and the goddess is also identifiable in three intaglios (from Guberevac, Kostolac, and an unknown site respectively).<sup>47</sup> To be mentioned again are two sculptures inconclusively identified as Persephone or Demeter, one from Singidunum, the other from Scupi.<sup>48</sup> A pseudo-cameo casting mould, discovered at Ravna, has also been tentatively identified as Domitia or Demeter.<sup>49</sup>

The Upper Moesian representations of Persephone come from the area of the Empire's Danube frontier, namely the area of the province that saw the earliest and fullest process of Romanization as a result of the fact that sections of the road through the barely passable Iron Gates Gorge had been completed as early as the 30s AD, and that permanent military camps were set up soon.<sup>50</sup> Concurrent settlement from other parts of the Empire,

<sup>43</sup> *IMS* II, 3 and *IMS* II, 4.

<sup>44</sup> In the medieval period the ruins of Viminacium served as a source of building material. E.g. many gravestones from the cemeteries of larger nearby settlements such as Viminacium, Margum and Aureus Mons were reused for the walls of medieval Smederevo, see V. Kondić, "Sepulkralni spomenici sa teritorije rimske provincije Gornje Mezije" (PhD thesis, Belgrade University, 1965), 268; Mirković, *Rimski gradovi*, 98.

<sup>45</sup> *CIL* III, 8085.

<sup>46</sup> B. Petrović, "Rimska božanstva", in *Antička bronza Singidunuma*, ed. S. Krunic (Belgrade: Muzej grada Beograda, 1997), 35, cat. no. 9.

<sup>47</sup> Kuzmanović-Novović, "Antička gliptika", cat. no. 164–166.

<sup>48</sup> Tomović, *Roman Sculpture*, cat. nos. 50 and 52.

<sup>49</sup> A. Jovanović, "Prilozi proučavanju antičkih kultura u Gornjoj Meziji", *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja Niša* 3-4 (1987), 82–84.

<sup>50</sup> During the six centuries of Roman and early Byzantine domination in the Balkans these military settlements became one of the Empire's vital lines of defence, see Mirković, *Rimski gradovi*, 21 ff; P. Petrović, "Rimski put u Djerdapu", *Starinar* XXXVII (1986), 41–55.



however, produced an ethnic mix-up,<sup>51</sup> which gave rise to various combinations of different cultural traditions, such as Roman, Hellenistic, Thracian, oriental and native. At the same time, the area of the Upper Moesian limes saw the introduction of Greek and Roman cults. More precisely, at the time the representations of Persephone and inscriptions dedicated to her appeared for the first time there, Greek and Roman religions had already been very much identified with one another, i.e. the principal deities of the Roman pantheon were equated with the Greek.<sup>52</sup> Roman monuments with themes from Greek mythology, such as the stele of Marcus Valerius Speratus, reflect the process of Romanization combined with a revival of Greek themes and stylistic models.<sup>53</sup> This particular monument was created in the tradition of the best works of funerary art of Noricum and Pannonia, which developed under the influence of Aquileia. On the other hand, influences from the eastern provinces of the Empire, well-known for their rich tradition of metalwork, are observable in the relief mirror of high workmanship.<sup>54</sup>

The contexts in which the representations of Persephone occur are heterogeneous. Persephone from the stele of Marcus Valerius Speratus expressed a clear funerary context. Here the Greek myth was placed in a new sepulchral context, acquired a specific meaning and, thus transformed, expressed new Roman ideas. A funerary aspect is present in the scene of the Return from the Underworld on the glass-paste intaglio,<sup>55</sup> an expression of intimate beliefs of the woman who probably wore the medallion,<sup>56</sup> and it is

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<sup>51</sup> Inscriptions attest to the presence of Illyrian, Thracian and Celtic names, but they also provide evidence for names of Gallic, Italic, Macedonian, Greek and Syrian origin, see A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1974), 70, 124; Mirković, *Inscriptions*, 58–59.

<sup>52</sup> For the finds of Archaic Greek products on central-Balkan sites, including the large amount of jewellery and luxury vessels discovered at Novi Pazar, see S. Babić, *Poglavlarstvo i polis* (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2004).

<sup>53</sup> R. Turcan, “Bilan et perspectives”, in Section “Mito greco nell’arte romana”, *Atti del IX Congresso della F.I.E.C.* (Pisa 1989), *Studi italiani di filologia classica* 10 (1992), 1087–1102.

<sup>54</sup> G. Karović, “Srebrno ogledalo sa reljefnom predstavom iz Viminacijuma”, in *Radionice i kovnice srebra. Silver Workshops and Mints*, eds. I. Popović et al. (Belgrade: National Museum, 1995), 223.

<sup>55</sup> The importance of Persephone’s role as a symbol of death is illustrated by a well-known anecdote from Nero’s life (Suetonius, *Nero* 46, 4): shortly before his death, Nero summoned haruspices, and on that occasion, Sporus, his favourite, presented him with a ring whose gemstone was carved with the abduction of Persephone.

<sup>56</sup> On intaglio signet-rings and amulets (*amuletum*), and on intaglios as adornments, see H. B. Walters, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems and Cameos, Greek, Etruscan and Roman, in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1926), 1 ff.

emphasized in the mirror with Persephone's portrait and a myrtle branch, a plant associated with the world of the dead. In the ancient world, the dead and their tombs were decorated with myrtle, golden myrtle wreaths were laid into graves, and the plant was also a symbol of the Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>57</sup> Persephone and Pluto enthroned in the sculpture from Viminacium were also deities of the underworld. On the other hand, Mirković puts forth another possible interpretation of the sculpture: Persephone may have played the role of an agrarian goddess, like Ceres, the Earth Mother, Liber, and Libera and Silvanus.<sup>58</sup> Mirković supports her interpretation by the fact that it was that part of the Danube frontier, notably the plains on the western side of the Danube and Ratiaria on its eastern bank, that provided propitious conditions for agriculture, and that it is there that the worship of agrarian deities has been attested.

Briefly, the entire known material comes from the area of the Upper Moesian limes, i.e. from Viminacium and Ratiaria, and is roughly dated to the late second and early third century. In that area, Persephone was associated with Hades/Pluto and Dis Pater, and not with her mother, Demeter/Ceres. The artefacts suggest that the worshippers of Persephone were members of well-to-do classes. This seems to be a reliable conclusion for the dedicants of the marble stele and the owner of the relief mirror, and possibly also for the owner of the glass-paste intaglio. The representations of Persephone from Viminacium and the inscription from Ratiaria may be seen as an expression of the belief in the afterlife and in the deities of the underworld, even though the agrarian aspect of the goddess should not be overruled either. The fact that the archaeological record contains scanty evidence of the cult of Persephone in the Balkan provinces of the Empire confers greater weight upon the representations and inscriptions discovered in the area of the Upper Moesian Danube limes.

*UDC 904-03(497.11):73.04(37)*  
*255-5 Persephone*

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<sup>57</sup> C. Eichberger et al., "Trees and shrubs on Classical Greek vases", *Boccone* 21 (2007), 121-123.

<sup>58</sup> Mirković, *Inscriptions*, 37.



Fig. 1 *Abduction of Persephone*, marble relief from the stele of Marcus Valerius Speratus, Viminacium (photo I. Stanić)

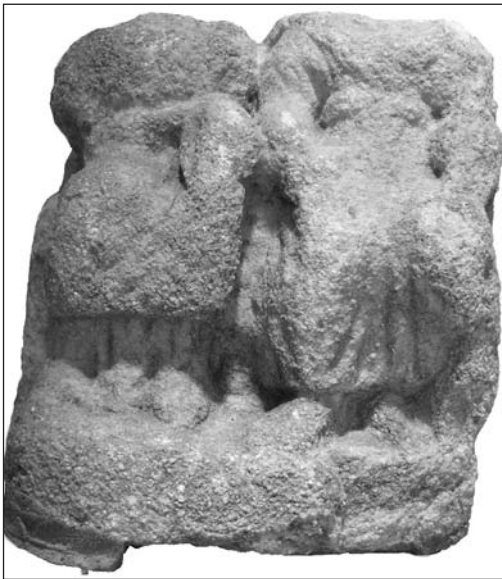


Fig. 2 *Persephone and Pluto*, marble, Viminacium (photo I. Stanić)



Fig. 2 *Persephone and Pluto*, marble, Viminacium (detail)

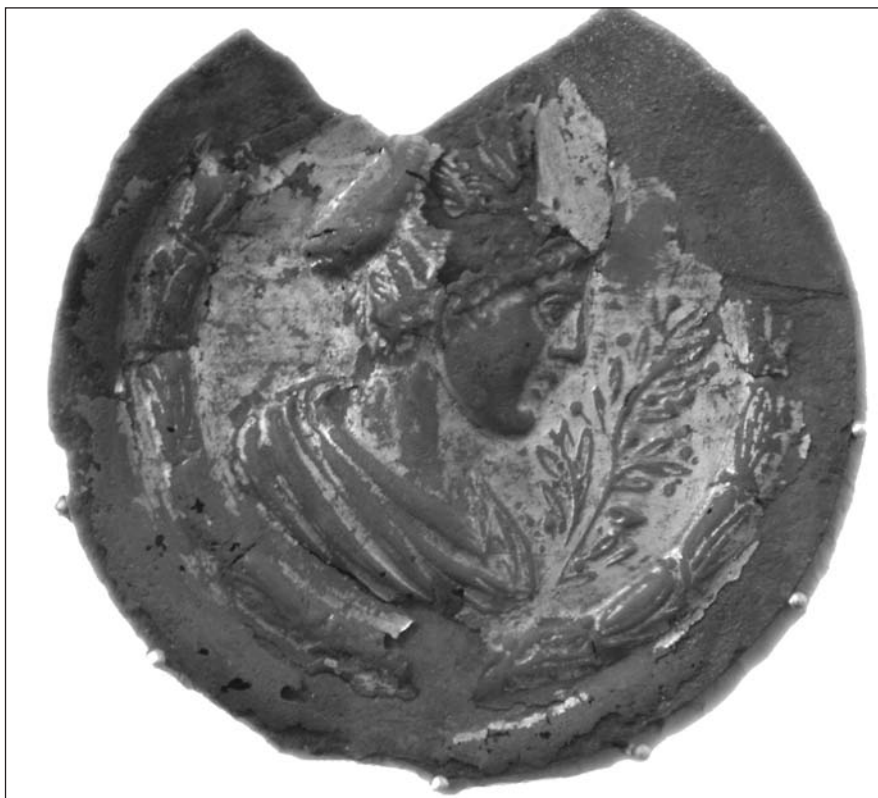


Fig. 3 *Persephone*, glass paste intaglio (photo National Museum, Belgrade)



Fig. 4 *Persephone*, relief mirror  
made from precious metals,  
Viminacium  
(photo I. Stanić)

## Abbreviations

<i>AE</i>	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i> , Paris
<i>Actes VIIIe Congr.</i>	<i>Actes du VIIIe Congrès International d'Archéologie Classique 1963</i> , 1965
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>IDR</i>	<i>Inscriptiile Daciei Romane (Dacia Superior) III/1–III/4</i> , Bucharest 1977–1988
<i>ILJug</i>	A. et J. Šašel, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae quae in Iugoslavia inter annos MCMXL et inter annos MCMLX et inter annos MCMLXX et inter annos MCMII et MCMXL repertae et editae sunt</i> , Ljubljana 1963, 1978, 1986
<i>IMS</i>	<i>Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure</i> , I, II, III/2, IV, VI, Belgrade 1976–1995
<i>ILBulg</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Latinae in Bulgaria repertae</i> , Sofia
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> , I–VIII, Zurich, Munich, Düsseldorf 1981–1997; Supplement IX, Düsseldorf 2009
<i>RE</i>	A. Pauly & G. Wissowa, <i>Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>

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