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AGRICULTURE IN THE ROMAN PROVINCE OF DALMATIA IN THE LATE ANCIENT TIMES

During the Late Ancient times the main industry in the province of Dalmatia was agriculture. The key reasons for dealing with this branch of economy were favorable climatic conditions and fertile soil, especially in the plains. The intensity of farming was not equally represented in all regions of the province of Dalmatia, as well as in the period before and after the fall of the Western Roman Empire. The general crisis of the Empire had a negative impact on farmers who, due to increasing insecurity, were massively leaving their estates and going to other, safer parts of the province of Dalmatia. That is why the imperial authorities were forced to introduce new legal norms to prevent them or at least somewhat mitigate their departure. Such circumstances led to the growing decline of the rustic villas and the creation of large landholdings owned by individuals. Starting from the second half of the 4th and during the 5th century, the decline of agriculture intensified.

Keywords: agriculture; farming; Roman Empire; province of Dalmatia; rustic villas

INTRODUCTION

The Roman conquest of Illyricum and formation of the province of Dalmatia greatly enhanced agricultural activity, thanks to new methods in this industry. The Romans apply more advanced methods such as a two-field (farmland) soil cultivation system, land reclamation, deforestation and the use of metal tools. However, due to the lack of written sources, it is difficult to create a complete picture of the beginnings of Roman agriculture in the province of Dalmatia. We know that agricultural operators were slaves, freedmen (*libertinus*), free peasants, colonists, immigrants and veterans. The latter constituted a privileged section of the population who were enjoying possession of the property, and usually slaves or farmhands worked on their property. Veterans' migration was most intense during the 1st century. Beside the veterans, the villa owners could have been other colonists. Epigraphic monuments testify to this. Based on them, it can be generally concluded that the owners of the rustic villas differed in ethnic and class origin, of which the Italics were most dominant, and there were Greeks (Bojanovski 1969: 15-16; Čremošnik 1965: 199). Also, the native, romanized population could have their own villas too.

In addition to crops: wheat, oats, millet, vegetables are also grown: beans, peas, lentils, turnips, radicchio, carrots and cabbage, grape vine and olives (Omerčević 2010: 130). On the one hand, the cultivation of these products depended on the climatic factors and the quality of the land of certain regions of the province of Dalmatia, while on the other hand, the rustic villas occupied the first place in the marketing of these products, and thus contributed to the development of the entire agriculture. In the agricultural business, cattle were also used, mostly bulls and mules. In addition to livestock, larger rustic villas could also have their own craft workshops (Pašalić 1960: 64-5; Čremošnik 1955: 131; isti 1965: 169). About Roman agriculture, information was provided by Cato the Elder, Varro and Columella. In the whole set of regulations, what should be and what should be contained in the agricultural estate, as well as the methods of work that will be applied to it, through the archaeological findings found, we can see that in the province of Dalmatia, these principles were also in use. For example, if olive oil production is represented on an agricultural property, such property should also have presses (Cato 1934: I-LII)¹ and an adequate temperature for storing oil and wine (Columella 1941: I. 74).² Presses were found in some villas on the soil of the province of Dalmatia, and certainly many of them were

¹ Cato, 1, 3, 18 (<https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cato/cato.agri.html>)

² Columella, I. 6, VII. 2, 4 (<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/columella.html>)

built according to the principle envisaged by the mentioned classics (Cato, 1934: I-LII; Varro, 1934: I)

AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY OF 3RD AND 4TH CENTURIES

Basically, the coastal zone and hinterland of the province of Dalmatia, that is, the regions of present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as western Serbia, were quite suitable for agricultural production, which was maintained throughout all periods of Roman rule. The area of western Serbia, unlike the rest of Dalmatia, is much less archaeologically explored, while there are almost no written sources for the area between Sava, Danube, Kosmaj and Rudnik. However, the agriculture at that time, although it was the only salvation for the population of that period, cannot in any way be measured by its intensity of development in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. This is evidenced by epigraphic monuments from the first half of the 3rd century, built by veterans who were assigned the land after their military service (Ferjančić 2002; Demicheli 2011: 75-76). In the first half of the 3rd century, the province of Dalmatia, unlike other parts of the Empire, enjoyed a high degree of well-being (Omerčević 2010: 125-230).

The population of the province of Dalmatia was fully integrated into the economic and legal system of the Empire. This is most clearly seen by the emergence of colonists and the establishment of a new social order of colonies. For the land lease, the colonists had to give one third of the wheat and barley harvest, one quarter of the peas yield, one third of the olive harvest, a certain amount of honey from each hive, while for the livestock they were paying in cash (Basić 2012: 21-22; Hobson 2012: 74, 149). A similar example was found in the Illyrian population. Livestock farming, as the main occupation of the native population, took place mainly in the remote parts of the interior of the province of Dalmatia. There has been no change in livestock production in the livestock itself. The novelty was the tax liability, which included a livestock fund, as well as the supply of the surrounding army with livestock and products thereof (Imamović 1987: 38). Of the domestic animals, cattle, sheep, goats and horses are most commonly represented (Busuladžić 2011: 87).

In the first half of the 2nd century, a small number of colonists were present in the province of Dalmatia. Later, in the first half of the 3rd century, there were many more. They were the most numerous on agricultural holdings, and especially on those cultivated with grape vines.

The deterioration of the situation occurred in the second half of the 3rd century, although Dalmatia was still a fairly stable province. Towards the end of the 3rd century, in the coastal cities of southeastern Dalmatia (Duklja *Doklea* and Budva *Buthua*), an economic crisis occurred that would cause the population to abandon their estates (Cermanović Kuzmanović 2009: 58-59; Gazivoda 2010: 178), and their departure to some other places. The economic weakening of these cities was due to their isolation, i. e. the distance from the main roads between East and West, on the one hand, and because of the high demand for precious metals and iron, on the other. Such circumstances have pushed aside the production of various types of agricultural crops, most notably grape vines and olives. Difficulties faced by the population of the narrow coastal zone also came from changing the direction of the Salona-Skodra road. Namely, a new route on this road bypassed Narona. Stretching out on the left coast of Trebižat, it entered deeper into the hinterland of the Adriatic coast [Bojanovski 1969 (1970): 143-144]. Unlike the northern cities, which were rich in economic resources, this part of the province of Dalmatia did not have such benefits. Hence it was sparsely populated. The departure of the population from the coastal regions is evidenced by a hoard of money from the beginning of the 4th century, when this area was already part of the Prevalitane province, which was found on the site of a rustic villa, in the Zeta River valley. The money found was minted in the period from 294th to 313th year respectively, during the reign of Emperors Diocletian and Constantine (Vučinić 2014: 163-165).

The great danger of barbarians, which, at the end of 3rd and 4th centuries, Dalmatia was faced with, reflected in the loss of labor. The massive fleeing of workers first hit the mines. After some time, in leaving the job, the miners were joined by workers who were especially needed at that time: farmers, cattlemen and artisans. They left their former jobs, seeking salvation in safer places. To prevent the miners from leaving, the emperors Valens, Grace, and Valentine I are between 369th and 378th year (Cth 1.32.5, 6; 10.19.5, 10.19.7; Imamović, 2016: 41) adopted many acts, trying to prevent the loss of labor legally. Emperor Valentine I, in 371st year passed a law concerning farmers. Under this law, *colonists* and *inquilins* (landowners' workforce) in Illyricum and the surrounding regions are bound by the land in which they reside and cannot have the freedom to vacate the land on the basis of their origin or their arrival.

Obviously, the general crisis has affected the increased uptake of farm properties - the rustic villas where much more has been produced. This is confirmed by the growth of rustic villas in present-day western Serbia (Valjevo), belonging to the III

and IV centuries. Agricultural products were partly marketed to soldiers in the Danube limes, and the rest went to the neighboring provinces of Pannonia and Upper Moesia, whose lands were destroyed earlier and crops were destroyed. Rustic villas in the Valjevo area are mostly raised on the hills. They were, in the architectural sense, much more modest than in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. No urban agglomeration was found in the Valjevo area, which indicates that there was no administrative headquarters here either. When it comes to the Valjevo region, until now no archaeological finds have been found to indicate barbarian invasions. The only thing found was a Roman fortification building, which according to Ž. Jež could be built in the 3rd or 4th century. Judging from this information, it is quite possible that the mine there was quite threatened.

So far, written sources about the Valjevo region do not provide us with any relevant information. During 2014 part of a rustic villa in Anine (Ćelije, Valjevo) near Ibar Highway was explored. It is a large agricultural complex, within which was a residential building. The complex was spread over an area of about 30 acres. It was built at the beginning of the 4th century and demolished in 380th year by Goths and has never been renewed (Arsić 2008: 57; isti 2011: 204). This villa is one of the largest in western Serbia and was used to supply legions in Sirmium and the Danube. Research on this villa is still ongoing. Judging from the available source material, in the early Byzantine times the state government functioned well here. The reason for this was the proximity of the road to Domavia and the Rudnik Mountain. It is obvious that the new authorities have endeavored to secure and safeguard this road communication.

In Western Serbia, several localities were found where traces of rustic villas were found. Among the most important are the localities in the area of Čačak, where several objects were found that had the character of villas. Among others, these are the villa in Gornja Gorevnica, from the 4th century, villa in Prijedor, which existed from the second half of the 4th century to the beginning of the 5th century, and villa in Beljina, which is believed to have been existed the longest, from the half of the 2nd to the first decades of the 5th century (Ilić 2012: 106-109). In addition, the remains of the villa were also found at the site of Crkvine-Bare (Skobalj) (Ropkić Đorđević 2013: 171-177), which existed from the end of the 3rd to the end of the 4th century. A rather luxurious villa was discovered on the Dabinovac site west of Zobljak (Kolubara) (Arsić 2011: 202). Also, near Bajina Bašta, the remains of a rustic villa, which existed during the 2nd and 3rd centuries, were registered at the Višesava site (Thomas 1964: 360). Judging by archaeological findings, several sites of rustic villas have been established

in the area of Šabac. Among others, these are Noćaji (Vasiljević 1972: 158-159), Mrdenovac, Miokus, Nakučani, Drenovac, Metković, Ševarice, Mačvanski Pričinović. It is not known at present when they were built, but it is known that they existed until the 4th century (Ilić 2012: 121-123).

While the areas of present-day Bosnia and western Serbia were of great importance to the Roman Empire, primarily due to the exploitation of silver ore and the export of pure silver, but also to the cultivation of cereals and crops, coastal areas such as Liburnia and Naronia were important for the cultivation of agricultural crops, among which a special place belonged to the cultivation of olives and the production of olive oil. The Dalmatian locality of Muline, in the Liburnia area, is known for its modern and perfect torcular (antic oil and grape press press), used to produce olive oil (Ilakovac 1998: 1-26). In the Mogorjelo area two more torculars were found to produce wine and olive oil. It is estimated that up to 4000 liters of olive oil could have been produced in about 400 years (Bojanovski 1969: 27-54). Immediately after the cultivation of the olive tree is followed by the cultivation of grape vines, followed by cereals that were intended for the local market. Due to barbaric invasions and war devastation, agricultural crops also suffered. The people of Pannonia sought their salvation from starvation in the neighboring province of Dalmatia, which at that time was quite calm and stable. As one fled and left Pannonia forever, others came to get food and return to where they left off.

The rustic villas, whose traces were established on the Dalmatian islands, were largely built during the Republic in the 1st century, that is, before the definitive conquest of the Illyrians by the Romans. One of them was found on the island of Rab (Lopar). It is a larger villa that had a residential building. It has, among other things, supplied the surrounding markets with its ceramic products (Lipovac Vrkljan, Šiljeg 2012: 20, 28). In addition, traces of several rustic villas on the islands of Pag, and Krk were discovered (Suić 1976: 223), as well as one special villa in Soline bay near Hvar, which also had its own salt pans and harbor [Begović, Schrunck, Ugarović 2012 (2013): 143-166]. Judging from the archaeological material, it can be concluded that there was no island or bay without agricultural property, with residential buildings almost regularly. In the early imperial era there were several luxury villas, which were called *martimnaville*. With their architecture and wealth, they were completely separated from the agricultural estates and largely belonged to the imperial estate (Begović Dvoržak, Dvoržak Schrunck 2004: 65-90). The islands of Cres and Lošinj, as well as the cities of Zadar and Trogir, are known for their numerous villa findings (Begović, Schrunck 2002: 119–120; Imamović, Omerčević 2017: 181). The develop-

ment of agriculture in the coastal zone of Dalmatia is also evidenced by the fact that there are 205 registered rustic villas and in the interior about 160 (Imamović, Omerčević 2017: 181)

In addition to the rustic villas, many remains have been found in the province of Dalmatia that relate to other, independent buildings, unrelated to the rustic villas. Almost all of them stopped functioning sometime in the second half of the 4th century. One such object relates to an iron blacksmith discovered at the site of Jaričište (Mali Borak) (Blagojević 2013: 165).

The existence of rustic villas, traces of which were discovered in the territory of present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina, ended, most probably, at the end of the 4th and in the first decades of the 5th century. The latest numismatic findings from the villa in Višići (Čremošnik 1965: 199-200), date from 383rd year, while the villa in Mogorjelo was turned into a castrum in the 4th century. The last specimens of money found at this site belong to the 5th century (Pašalić 1960: 64). Both villas were built in the 1st century. The villa in Panik near Bileća belongs to the 3rd century. It existed until the second half of the 4th century (Čremošnik 1974: 118), as did two smaller villas in the Višegrad area (Čremošnik 1970: 48-50). Three rustic villas with residential buildings were discovered in Lisičići near Konjic and were built in the 3rd century (Čremošnik 1955: 114; isti 1957: 148). Almost at the same time, a villa in Stup near Sarajevo was built (Čremošnik 1930: 214-222). Remains of rustic villas in Rankovići near Travnik, Založje near Bihać, in the Deliminium area, near Banja Luka, Bosanska Krupa, and Bijeljina and elsewhere were discovered in the wider area of present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The problems brought about by the 4th century influenced the creation of a large number of large landowners who were favored by the decay of villas. They could lease their land to the conductors (*conductores*) for a fixed period or permanently, and there were those landowners who managed their land through intermediaries. The escaping of the population from the country contributed to the strengthening of the colonates that tied the workers to the land, which was especially related to Illyria (Omerčević 2017: 201). The lack of original material does not allow saying more about the cultivation of agricultural crops. The cultivation tools found indicate that the grain (corn) was grown in the area around Sava River and in parts of central Bosnia. There are differences in tools, in the plains and hills. While in the plains, plough and plow were used, in the hills, mattocks and two-pronged hoes were used.

At the end of 4th and almost the entire 5th century, the prosperity and stability of the province of Dalmatia disappeared in a whirlwind of new turmoil, misunderstand-

ings, disagreements, and even conflicts. The devastated cities and their economy had a negative impact on society and social relations, standard and quality of life, government and construction. This situation was caused by constant barbaric attacks. The empire was put in a very difficult financial situation. The imperial authorities tried to overcome the way out of this situation by returning to the original economy, which was dominant in the royal era. It is agriculture, which has remained the primary occupation of the Roman population.

REFLECTIONS OF THE FALL OF THE WESTERN ROMAN EMPIRE ON AGRICULTURE IN THE PROVINCE OF DALMATIA

According to some researchers, one of the key causes of the collapse of the Western Roman Empire lies in the system of economy and commerce. In this regard, D. Montgomery, an American geomorphologist, says: “The erosion of fertile land by over-exploitation was a major cause of the downfall of the Roman Empire, as well as a number of other ancient civilizations“ (Montgomery 2007: 5). Similar to this statement is the statement of the American historian and anthropologist J. Tainter, who says that one of the most significant reasons for the collapse of the Western Roman Empire was the emergence of small landowners and the exhaustion of fertile land (Tainter 1990: 88-91, 217). It is estimated that the late Empire agriculture provided up to 90% of government revenue (Tainter 1990: 206).

Generally speaking, the Roman Empire was complex, but land depletion as the main reason cannot be taken. A good but opposite example for such claims is the province of Dalmatia. Its land cannot be said to have been depleted in the years immediately before the fall of the Empire and even earlier. Only the province of Dalmatia was exploited in those years and even later. This is confirmed by King Odoakar’s endowment of 18th of March 489th year in which along Syracuse in Sicily, the *comes domesticorum* by Pierius in Mljetis also mentioned, whose imperial estate brings 200 solidi a year.³ Then a late antique villa was built on the site of Polače, certainly intended for Pierius himself. It was of a monumental type with preserved walls up to 20 meters high. It could have been built or upgraded at the site of an early empire villa (Fisković 1999: 61-82).

³ These 200 solidi, respectively, were in the name of the debt of 690 gold solidi that Odoakar owed to Pierius (Zaninović 1990: 728).

From this Odoakar endowment, one can see the importance of the sea, though it was not crucial. Syracuse, located by the sea, provided as much agricultural products (olive oil, wine, salt, and fish) as Mljet, Brač, Hvar, Vis, Korčula and other islands and settlements along the Adriatic, such as Naron, Epidaur, etc. In the 5th century, only one estate in the Polače (Mljet) site yielded 500 solids per year. If this data is compared with the yields during the reign of Odoakar, then it can be concluded that the yields in agriculture were more than half lower. However, this fact cannot be compared to other settlements, such as Trogir, which still retained the importance of an important agricultural and commercial center, despite being exposed to frequent attacks by Avars and Slavs.⁴ It is very important to emphasize here that the agricultural activity did not die down and that depending on the area on which it took place it functioned with reduced intensity. A good example is the Istrian colonies that had a much more agrarian population than the Dalmatian colonies. Namely, in the area of Istria, there was often a replacement of certain industries with some more profitable ones (Suić 1976: 167).

Here, too, the geographical location has significantly influenced the economic flows. For the Istrian coast and certain islands, writer Kasiodor (from the first half of the 6th century) says: “As the villas on them shine far and wide, arranged as pearls on a necklace“ (Kasiodor 12, 22: 3-5). From this view of Kasiodor it can be concluded that there were still beautifully decorated villas, which survived both the 4th and 5th centuries, and were very active during this period.

However, activities on agricultural estates declined significantly in the 4th century. Rare were those agricultural settlements that survived and welcomed the 5th century. Such are the villas in Prijevor and Beljine near Čačak, then Mogorjelo, which primarily played the role of castrum, though the production of food items was carried out within it. There was also a villa in Hvar until the 6th century, as well as a villa in Mljet. Villa in Soline bay reveals late antique architecture and construction materials. Based on these details, it can be concluded that it was converted into castrum (Begović, Schrunk, Ugarković 2012: 159). The same thing was done with the villa from the first century on the island of Lastovo, which was transformed into a castrum in the 5th century (Begović, Schrunk 2002: 122). The same thing happened with villas in other areas. Thus, for example, the rustic villa at Brioni in the mid-5th century (452.) was turned into castrum (Begović, Schrunk 2010: 263). The fact that in the 3rd century there was a significant decrease in the slave labor force and the escaping of the free population from estates, which resulted in a significant decrease in agricultural prod-

⁴ Apart from the port, Trogir was an important granary, with craft workshops (Regan, Nadilo 2008: 255).

ucts, should not be forgotten here. The crisis was especially significant during the 4th and 5th centuries due to the increasing number of people fleeing the country, which made the colonate system particularly prominent (Clausing 1965).

In his endowment, King Odoakar mentions the imperial estate, meaning that there were still state estates (*ager publicus*), which along with private estates (*ager privatus*), meadows, pastures and forests (*ager compass cuuset silvae*) had existed since the early imperial age (Suić 1976: 95). With his endowment, Odoakar further confirmed compliance with Roman norms and laws.

Salona, as a large business center, as an *ager publicus*, covered the area from Trogir to Omiš, along with the nearby islands (Zaninović 1977: 781). Agricultural products from estates that were part of the province of Dalmatia were sold in cities that had jurisdiction in a particular area. These cities lived on yields from these lands. In addition to Salona, such cities were Aqua S..., Domavia (Suić 1976: 95-101) as well as many other municipalities. In addition to agricultural resources, a number of other economic potentials have been exploited as well, such as various metal ores, stone, pastures, forests, water, salt, etc.

In this time, some of the villas (urban or rustic ones) have undergone certain transformation (Matijašić 2000: 467; Begović, Schrunk 2002: 113-130). While some villas were transformed into castrum fortresses, others were still active in performing their function and some others were completely abandoned due to devastation or other disasters. The fertile land, until the definitive suppression of the achievements of ancient times, was the main and sole source of life. Rare were the rustic villas that worked at full capacity. However, even if they worked, they would in no way be able to meet all the needs of the market. Therefore, the rural economy had a primacy in providing food for the urban population. In addition, many villas have been converted into sacred Christian objects.

When it comes to the causes of the collapse of the Roman Empire, there can be no single reason, as exclusive, because the Empire, as well as the states before and after it, had both advantages and disadvantages over the whole system, which should be viewed through the administration, the army, economy, social relations and other phenomena that are an integral part of every state. No elementary disasters, when it comes to the consistency of the Roman State, can be taken as a crucial factor. One of the main causes of the collapse of the Western Roman Empire lies in the decades-long wars against barbarians who have exploited all available economic resources.

CONCLUSION

Thanks to the successful functioning of both the economic and the legal system, the Roman authorities were able to substantially promote agricultural activity in the province of Dalmatia and thus significantly improve the standard of living of the then population. However, agricultural development was not of equal intensity during the Principate and at the time of Dominate. The military anarchy that ensued in the 3rd century caused a crisis, which continued throughout almost the entire 4th century. The Roman Empire was burdened with imperial and usurper conflicts and the increasing invasions of barbarians. Such situation had the effect of further exhausting the Empire. From the second half of the 4th century, the importance of the province of Dalmatia increased significantly. Specifically, the state of the Empire required the cultivation of agricultural crops in the province of Dalmatia, including olives and grapes, followed by various types of cereals intended for the local market. In addition to supplying the local market, during the crisis, food was also exported to the Danube limes and to the neighboring province of Pannonia.

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POLJOPRIVREDNA DJELATNOST U RIMSKOJ PROVINCIJI DALMACIJI U DOBA KASNE ANTIKE

Sažetak:

U poljoprivrednoj djelatnosti, vile rustike su bile proizvodni centri, a njima su upravljali veterani ili drugi kolonisti koji su se na tlo provincije Dalmacije počeli doseljavati početkom I stoljeća. Radnu snagu činili su robovi, oslobođenici, slobodni seljaci i koloni. Poljoprivredna proizvodnja u provinciji Dalmaciji (primorski pojas, današnja Bosna i Hercegovina i zapadna Srbija) održala se kroz cijelo razdoblje rimske vladavine. Primorski krajevi provincije Dalmacije bili su pogodni za vinovu lozu i maslinu, dok su u unutrašnjosti uzgajane razne vrste žitarica i povrća. Opća kriza III i IV stoljeća utjecala je na pojačano podizanje vila rustika, što je vidljivo kroz broj vila u današnjoj zapadnoj Srbiji. Također, vlasti su preduzele potrebne mjere kako bi spriječile bježanje radnika sa posjeda. Pad Zapadnog rimskog carstva, u čijem sastavu je bila provincija Dalmacija, odrazio se i na njenu poljoprivrednu djelatnost. Međutim, njena plodna zemlja je predstavljala glavni i jedini izvor života do kraja antičkog razdoblja. Seoska privreda preuzela je glavnu ulogu u snabdijevanju stanovništva jer rijetke vile rustike, koje su se održale, nisu mogle osigurati dovoljnu količinu žitarica i drugih artikala.

Ključne riječi: poljoprivreda; zemljoradnja; Rimsko carstvo; provincija Dalmacija; vile rustike

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