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Danijel Dzino

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

*Introduction, approaches, review of sources
and secondary literature*ROME AND THE WESTERN PART
OF THE BALKAN PENINSULA

The conquest of Illyricum has been examined previously in the context of a general narrative of Roman expansion, as has initial Roman interaction with Illyricum from the perspective of Dalmatian or Pannonian provincial history, and through the analysis of primary sources.¹ This book will examine Roman political conduct in Illyricum, the development of Illyricum in Roman political discourse and the beginning of the process that would integrate Illyricum into the empire and wider networks of the Mediterranean world. It will reveal Roman political and military engagement through the ways in which Roman power was present in Illyricum across the Adriatic and from Aquileia via the Odra pass between 229 BC, when Roman involvement across the Adriatic starts, and the later Julio-Claudian era, when permanent control over the Danube is established. In addition, this book will try to explore, as much as it is possible, the different narratives of this process, apart from the Romanocentric narrative of power and Roman military conquest, which dominate the available sources, and earlier scholarly interpretation of the events.

It is highly doubtful that the Romans could organise a grand strategy, apart from the loosely defined idea of the ‘conquest of the world’. We cannot really talk about ‘foreign policy’ in the modern sense, which implies a level of intentionality and consistency of planning during long periods of time. However, the Roman strategy on a regional level appears much clearer and better defined. Written and material sources show that the Romans

¹ Republican political conduct: Zippel 1877; Badian 1952; Wilkes 1969: 29–36; Bandelli 1983; 2004; Šašel Kos 2004; Dzino 2005. General context up to AD 14: Syme 1934b; Wilkes 1965a; Gruen 1996. Provincial history: Mócsy 1962: 527–50; 1974: 31–111; Alföldy 1965a: 166–70; Wilkes 1969: 37–152; Zaninović 1976b; Šašel 1976; Šašel Kos 1997b. Primary sources: Šašel Kos 1986; 2005a; Domic-Kunić 2003; 2004.

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possessed the capabilities to think strategically, that they were able to develop and execute more complex military operations in certain regions, especially in the late Republic and later in the empire.² This regional ‘policy’, as will be shown, changed significantly; it focused on different sub-regions and went through different phases that were impacted by changing global and regional factors.

The consequences of the conquest of these lands were significant for the empire and they are visible to any modern historian who enjoys the benefit of historical hindsight. The efforts of Roman generals in the first centuries BC/AD enabled Rome to extend her influence across the Danube and to control huge areas of the Pannonian basin. This achievement created a significant buffer zone between the imperial frontier and the Italian homeland, and gave Rome the military and economic advantages of controlling the Danube. Illyricum, although from a Roman perspective an underdeveloped and relatively poor area compared with, for example, Gaul or the Eastern provinces, gave soldiers for the legions, metals for Roman workshops such as gold, silver and iron, and provided the empire with a land link, from Italy to Macedonia. Some scholars have placed perhaps too strong an emphasis on the significance of the conquest of the Adriatic hinterland for geo-strategic purposes, such as the link between the Eastern and Western provinces.³ However, even though it is tempting to assume as much, all these issues have not significantly affected the changes and modifications of Roman political practice in Illyricum. These considerations project the contemporary judgements of scholars, their assessment of the situation and interpretation of events, rather than what was influencing actual Roman Illyrian affairs. As will be discussed later, Roman ‘imperialism’ was not necessarily driven by economic or strategic motives, but rather impacted by the ethos of the elite and their perceptions of fear, insult, etc. Also, Roman political and military actions were significantly affected by their perception of geographic space, which was further influenced by inaccurate measurements, ethnological generalisations and complex imperial ideology developed in the Augustan era.

It is a curiosity that such a vast territory just across the sea from Italy remained almost untouched by Roman expansionism until the end of the first century BC. Physical geography might be one reason for the delayed conquest, as rough terrain discouraged the plans of any would-be conqueror to expand from the eastern Adriatic coast further into the continent.

² Alston 1998: 276–85, and also Ferrill 1991; Isaac 1992; Whittaker 1994; 2004: 28–49 etc.

³ Syme 1934b; Wilkes 1965a: 13–14; 1969: 46–7; 1996: 547–8.

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However, other reasons might also be assumed. A full conquest of the area required primarily a change in the Roman attitude to the understanding of space and ways of domination over space, which developed in the late Republic, reshaping the very essence of the Roman provincial system. The term ‘Illyricum’ comes from the Greek term *Illyris* (Ἰλλυρίς), used for their north-western non-Greek neighbours *Illyrioi* (Ἰλλυριοί), whom they perceived as sharing a common culture and ‘ethnicity’.⁴ However, in imperial times Illyricum was considered to be roughly all the space between the south-eastern Alps, the Danube, Thrace and the Adriatic and the Roman provinces of Dalmatia, Pannonia and Moesia. Earlier scholarship rightly recognised that this extension of understanding what Illyricum was in written sources has been related to the process of Roman conquest of the area.⁵ The Romans borrowed the term earlier invented by the Greeks and incorporated it into their political geography, applying it to the inhabitants of what they defined as Illyricum with their cognitive political understanding of space. True, the indigenous population might share some common cultural features but in no way had any sense of common identity. Thus, we can say that the Romans in a way invented Illyricum, as they did with some other regions such as Gaul, Britain, or Germany, constructing them as spatial and geographical units in order to suit their political purposes. As Chapter 5 will argue, this occurred *de iure* with the *lex Vatinia* in 60 BC that entrusted Illyricum to Caesar as an attachment to his *provincia* over Cisalpine Gaul.

For easier analysis, Roman relations with Illyricum should be divided into chronological phases. Certainly, this division, and use of abstract terms such as ‘Coastal’ or ‘Lesser’ Illyricum, should be handled with care, as every division of history into historical periods is an essentially artificial construction of the modern historian. These phases are the reflection of the ways Rome interacted with this space, under the influence of regional and global events:

- trans-Adriatic phase (229–60 BC)
- Illyricum (59 BC–68 BC)

⁴ Pliny, *HN* 3.144; Pomponius Mella, 2.3.55 *Illyrii proprie dicti* (‘properly called Illyrii’); their possible location: Alföldy 1965a: 49–50; Hammond 1966: 241. Suić and Katičić question the existence of a separate people of *Illyrii*. For them *Illyrii proprie dicti* are peoples inhabiting the southern Adriatic coast between Dyrrachium and Lissus; Katičić 1964a; 1965a; Suić 1976c; Pająkowski 1980 (between Lissus and Neretva). Papazoglu 1989: 46–7 (located close to the Macedonian border in later-day Epirus). The form ‘Illyricum’ derived from *regnum Illyricum* analogous to Noricum – *regnum Noricum*; Šašel Kos 2000: 284. See D. Rendić-Miočević 1980: 15 n. 3 for different spellings of the words Illyricum and *Illyrii* in the Latin sources.

⁵ Strabo, 7.5.1 τὰ Ἰλλυρικά; App. *Ill.* 1, 6; Pliny, *NH* 3.139 *nunc totum uno nomine Illyricum vocatur generatim* (‘now, the whole is called with one name – Illyricum’); Šašel Kos 2005a: 219–44.

and in more specific ways:

- Illyricum as part of Roman Greek and Macedonian engagement (229–168 BC)
- The late Republican period (167–60 BC)
- The construction of Illyricum (59–33 BC)
- The establishment and strengthening of ‘coastal’ Illyricum (59–44 BC)
- The pacification of the interior of part of Dalmatia (44–33 BC)
- Illyricum as a senatorial province, ‘Lesser’ Illyricum (33–11 BC)
- The imperial province ‘Greater Illyricum’ (11 BC–c. AD 10)
- The two Illyricums (c. AD 10–68).

The first period is easy to recognise, and it provides the background to Roman relations with Macedonia and North Italy; it is concerned partly with the Illyrian and the Histrian kingdoms and the issue of piracy in the Adriatic, but without a permanent military commitment across the Adriatic. 167 BC witnessed the end of the Illyrian kingdom, which used to be a focal point throughout the initial stage of Roman political involvement in the region. After that event, Rome focused its attention on the south and north Adriatic as separate zones of operations, linked with Macedonia and North Italy, but still avoiding permanent military commitment and the administrative organisation of the space. The proconsulship of Caesar is taken as the start of the transition, and it is marked by the formation and defence of a unified zone of operations on the Adriatic coast – Illyricum – the magistrate’s *provincia*, and the control of its immediate hinterland. In this period, the encouragement of Italian immigration and the formation of colonies and *municipia* on the eastern Adriatic coast show a change of attitude and the increased strategic need to include Illyricum in the Roman world. The success of Octavian’s expedition in 35–33 BC finally enabled the establishment of an administrative, senatorial province of Illyricum, limited to the coastal belt and the immediate hinterland.

A general change of political conduct and an aggressive expansion into continental Europe in the last fifteen years of the first century BC increased the military and political domination of Rome all the way to the Drava and the Danube rivers. The *Bellum Pannonicum* brought about the formation of the imperial province Illyricum in 11 BC, in order to more easily coordinate military operations in the middle Danube region. ‘Greater’ Illyricum, encompassing the lands from the Adriatic to the Danube, proved difficult to administer as a single province, and after a series of strategic errors that became evident during an indigenous uprising in AD 6–9 (the *Bellum Batonianum*) marked the final failure of later Augustan political engagement

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in Illyricum. This resulted in the division of 'Greater' Illyricum into two parts, the future provinces Dalmatia and Pannonia. This phase finishes roughly with the reigns of Claudius and Nero, when the transformation of Pannonia into a permanent imperial frontier province was completed, and Dalmatia was incorporated into the administrative system of the empire to a reasonable degree.

Is it worth examining the political conduct of Rome in Illyricum, or should we consider Illyricum as something separate from, say, the larger 'Balkan' or 'Central European' policy of Rome (as unfortunate as these modern geopolitical constructs might sound)? Modern scholarship is sceptical about any notion of an Illyrian 'policy', and regards it as at best chaotic and inconsistent.⁶ In general, there is still an uncomfortable divide in modern scholarship between the centralist, Tacitean narrative of imperial history of the core and the highly localised historical narrative of the provinces at the periphery. Not much changed after Mócsy recognised this problem: 'A daunting gap separates the study of central Roman imperial history from local, often highly developed, archaeological research. This gap may be bridged only by the use of a method which explores every aspect, period by period and in accordance with historical principles.'⁷

Certainly, it is not possible to explore Illyricum in isolation from other regions, especially when taking into account the inadequate sources we have for Illyricum. For this reason Chapter 2 will briefly deal with Roman foreign relations in general, especially the changes that occurred from the late Republic to the early Principate. True, the Romans often based their foreign relations on day-to-day changes in the situation, rather than following some previously determined policy, due to the lack of communication between commanders in the field and the central government. Still, one would be mistaken to argue that Roman foreign relations were a chaotic chain of unconnected events. These changes of political conduct did not exist isolated from the contemporary socio-political disturbances or from the fundamental change in the Roman political system and society that inaugurated the Principate. They were part of the general process of social transformation: the disappearance of the oligarchic Republic and the gradual establishment of an autocratic regime and imperial ideology.

⁶ E.g. Wilkes 1969: 27–8, 36.

⁷ Mócsy 1974: xix. The situation has improved in more recent times, depending on the region, but there are still areas, such as central Spain, which are largely neglected by all but local scholars, who rarely treat the region as a whole, Curchin 2004: 2–3.

SOURCES AND MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

It is not possible to make a complete presentation of the material or scholarship that deals with late pre-Roman and early Roman Illyricum here, as the quantity and quality of published works increase each decade. Still, the history of Illyricum remains a comparatively neglected area in Anglophone historiography, but things are improving in more recent times, especially after the detailed monograph of M. Šašel Kos on Appian's *Illyrike* and the history of pre-Roman Illyricum published in 2005.

A large corpus of Albanian and former Yugoslav scholarship remains mainly unavailable and is generally unknown to the wider community of scholars, except through the works of Alföldy, Wilkes, Hammond, and more recently Cabanes and Šašel Kos. In vain Syme complained three decades ago that his work in this field failed to attract either praise or censure, or even a bare mention. Illyricum and its ancient inhabitants are today still represented by little more than brief footnotes in general works of ancient history, although a general shift in scholarly interest in the last decades towards provincial narratives forecasts a brighter outlook for Illyricum.⁸

Ancient historians, geographers, philosophers and poets were never really interested in what they saw as a wild, rough and isolated region on the fringes of the Hellenic and Roman world. In fact, from the start, it provided an example of barbarian 'otherness' in Hellenic intellectual thought. Illyricum was contrasted with Hellenic civilisation, as one of the many barbarian negatives of Greece.⁹ Romans maintained the same attitude, the sources giving only secondary attention to the conquest of Illyricum when compared with their conquest of Gaul or Germany. Nothing substantially changed throughout imperial times. The words of Cassius Dio still convey to the modern reader the literary topoi of his times mixed with the genuine contempt, horror and desperation felt by the Mediterranean upper class intellectual from his era who was placed in, what he perceived as, the most remote and barbarian parts of the world, by the hands of cruel Fortune:

The Pannonians dwell in Dalmatia along the very bank of the Ister from Noricum to Moesia and lead the most miserable existence of all mankind. For they are not well off as regards either soil or climate; they cultivate no olives and produce no wine except to a very slight extent and a wretched quality at that, since the winter is very rigorous and occupies the greater part of their year, but drink as well as eat both

⁸ Syme 1971b: 24; Wilkes 1992: 4.

⁹ Wallace 1998, esp. 213–16. The indigenous population still represented a relevant part of an international community in Hellenistic times; D. Rendić-Miočević 1981.

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barley and millet. For all that they are considered the bravest of all men of whom we have knowledge; for they are very high-spirited and bloodthirsty, as men who possess nothing that makes an honourable life worth while. This I know not from hearsay or reading only, but I have learned it from actual experience as once their governor, for after my command in Africa and in Dalmatia (the latter position my father also held for a time) I was appointed to what is known as Upper Pannonia, and hence it is with exact knowledge of all conditions among them that I write.¹⁰

The most significant problem (post)modern scholars face is the necessity for a re-evaluation of the existing evidence, driven by an increased awareness that preserved primary sources must be read in particular ways. The sources were all written by members of the Mediterranean elite, for a specific audience in order to fulfil their expectations and to fit certain literary genres of their period. Thus, we can say that primary sources reflect the views, stereotypes, discourses and morality of their authors and their audience. Historical ‘truth’ and ‘lie’ are the categories that imply our contemporary understanding, rather than the original message of these authors, or the understanding of their audience.¹¹

The narratives of the indigenous population of Illyricum remain hidden and are only told in the language and system of the cultural values of their conquerors. It seems appropriate to quote Momigliano on this: ‘To give a good account of the origins of a war one must know something about geography and about ethnography, one must have lived with the people of the other side.’¹² Primary sources never bothered with these issues too much and modern scholarship used to recognise Roman interactions with Illyricum only through the acts and aims of Rome, told through the Roman value-system and by the Romans, or ‘Romans’ such as Greek-writing Appian of Alexandria or Cassius Dio. They show the Romans as culturally and morally superior towards the ‘barbarians’, and thus create discursive intellectual justification for the Roman conquests.¹³ Our written sources present Roman foreign relations as a Roman narrative of power. They assume war to be a natural and inevitable social phenomenon, so that any analysis of Roman conduct in Illyricum depends heavily only on knowledge of Roman military operations in the area as presented by the written sources. The sources often deal with appearance but not substance. They commemorate individual wars or campaigns, but do not always

¹⁰ Dio, 49.36.2–4, transl. E. Cary. See P. Salmon 1986 for Roman stereotyping of the peoples of Illyricum.

¹¹ Cameron 1989; Marincola 1997; Clarke 1999; Shuttleworth Kraus 1999; Potter 1999 etc.

¹² Momigliano 1960: 23. ¹³ See for example, Webster 1994; Alston 1996; Rutledge 2000.

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mention the reasons behind them, their context inside wider Roman politics, their place within the Roman system of social values nor what they understood by the terms ‘war’, ‘peace’, or ‘justice’.¹⁴

The lack of indigenous narratives can be in some degree compensated with archaeological evidence. Archaeology can tell us something about the ways in which the inhabitants of Illyricum constructed their social identities within their communities and regions, ways in which they were affected and in which they selectively accepted cultural templates from the Mediterranean and Iron Age Europe. However, archaeology is not the best methodological tool for determining their ethnicity, if we accept that they had ethnicity at all. It is apparent that individuals and communities who lived in antiquity constructed their identities in their interaction with other communities, and across a number of different social contexts that they inhabited and participated in. The search for cognitive singularities of their ‘ethnicities’ often reflects rather our own scholarly need to impose order on the confusing world of ancient identities. It does not help us to explain how they formed their identities, why they did it and how they expressed and constructed these identities.¹⁵ Also, archaeology does not provide a complete picture as it focuses only on the artefacts which are preserved, while a range of perishable artefacts, such as, for example, textile, leather, or wood, rarely survive.

As said before, primary sources are scarce. The *Illyrike* of Appian is the only surviving specialised work that deals with the history of Illyricum, focusing on Rome’s wars with the peoples of Illyricum. It begins with the first Illyrian war in 229 BC and concludes with Octavian’s expedition in 35–33 BC.¹⁶ The Illyricum topic was not attractive to classical historians such as Appian as he himself testifies. Appian admitted to having a problem in locating material for his *Illyrike*.¹⁷ He supplied many essential details about early Roman encounters with Illyricum in the third and second century BC, so that he is together with Polybius and Livy a major source for the history of Illyricum. Appian preferred a geographical and ‘ethnological’ rather than a chronological approach. He has been praised, but also criticised by modern scholars for his limitations, unevenness and omissions, especially for the period between the mid-second century BC and the campaigns of Augustus.¹⁸ Appian was

¹⁴ Momigliano 1960: 13–27. Cf. Harris 1979 esp. 54–104; Finley 1985: 70–87; Campbell 2002: 1–20, Barton 2007; Rosenstein 2007 etc.

¹⁵ Jones 1996; P. S. Wells 1999; Brather 2004.

¹⁶ It has not attracted significant attention from modern scholars. Key works are Dobiáš 1930; Marasco 1993, and the recent monumental work and a new English translation of Šašel Kos 2005a.

¹⁷ App. *Ill.* 6, 14, 29.

¹⁸ Šašel Kos 2005a: 43–51. See also Wilkes 1969: 34 n. 2; Marasco 1993: 485.

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not particularly critical in his assessment of Roman Republican foreign affairs, and, as Marasco argued, he describes every Roman interaction with Illyricum as a *bellum iustum*, regardless of the real causes and motives for these wars. Appian was probably influenced by the foreign relations of his age, which dealt with the defence of the empire; it does not appear that he understood the process of Republican expansion.¹⁹ In the section of his book dealing with the campaign of Octavian, he relied exclusively on the now lost memoirs of Augustus who was an eyewitness, but an eyewitness who had personal and political interest in putting a certain 'spin' on his narrative. The first *princeps* was apparently interested in clearing his name from accusations of cruelty and treachery during the Civil Wars. In the passages of the memoirs concerned with his expedition to Illyricum, Augustus describes only his own deeds, and leaves unmentioned the efforts of others.²⁰

The other important source is the Roman history of Cassius Dio.²¹ His work covers not only the campaigns of Octavian, but the Danubian campaigns of Crassus in 29–28 BC and the *Bellum Batonianum* in AD 6–9, all of which are treated in some detail, while the *Bellum Pannonicum* 12–9 BC is mentioned sporadically only in the context of the general history of the empire. The fragments of Dio that cover the Illyrian wars are preserved in Zonaras. Dio had the advantage of knowing the area, being governor there in the early third century AD.²² However, he is not always aware that he often applies the terminology of his own age to the first century BC/AD.²³ It is unclear which sources Dio actually used for his account of the reign of Augustus, including the conquest of Illyricum.²⁴ For Octavian's campaigns (Books 49–50), his account is generally not so far from that of Appian who follows Augustus. However, some details are obviously different from that of Appian, which suggests the possibility that Dio was using some other source(s).²⁵ His sources for the *Bellum Pannonicum* and Bato's rebellion are impossible to determine as yet, but it appears that he had good sources on the Pannonian revolt, which resulted in a rather full treatment of the

¹⁹ Marasco 1993: 487–9.

²⁰ App. *Ill.* 15; on Augustus' 'Autobiography': Charlesworth 1934: 868; Yavetz 1984: 1–8; Mellar 1999: 177–9; Šašel Kos 2005a: 393–7.

²¹ Millar 1964; Harrington 1970; Ameling 1997; Swan 1997; 2004: 3–38, and Šašel Kos 1986 – Dio's treatment of Illyricum.

²² *Legatus Augusti* in Dalmatia, 49.36.4; and Pannonia Superior 80.1.3.

²³ Dio, 49.37.6; Šašel Kos 1997a: 191–2: Dio calls Segestica Siscia, while Appian, who is not so well acquainted with the area, keeps the old name, probably following the autobiography of Augustus.

²⁴ See Millar 1964: 83 f.; Harrington 1970: 16 f.

²⁵ Reinhold 1988: 17–19, 68; Šašel Kos 1986: 142–4; Gruen 1996: 172. Šašel Kos 1986: 120 suggests Aulus Cremutius Cordus and the remains of Asinius Pollio's history as the sources in question. See Šašel Kos 1997a for a full treatment of the differences between Dio and Appian.

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events.²⁶ Dio rarely goes into details, but he can give a general idea of the order of events, especially in regard to the *Bellum Batonianum*, and of course he is a useful check on other sources. Modern scholars have criticised Dio as too general, annalistic and dry, and often making obvious geographical errors.²⁷ Dio's view of history influences his historical narrative, as he saw Roman history subordinating and dominating all other histories, and he saw its course as being an integral product of providence and secular forces, both participating in the natural order of things.²⁸

Another important source is the eyewitness account of Velleius Paterculus, who was Tiberius' *legatus Augusti* in Illyricum during the *Bellum Batonianum*. In his history he deals with the rebellion only, and he promises to deliver a more detailed account of indigenous peoples in Illyricum later,²⁹ but that work is unfortunately either lost or, more probably, was never written. Velleius is often the only source for certain events, so that it is necessary to take his account into consideration. Modern historians have questioned the credibility of his work, which is often seriously undermined by his amateurish approach, his lack of critical judgement and a lack of recognition of matters of historical importance.³⁰ However, Velleius should not be judged by contemporary standards of what is historically important or irrelevant; it is possible to see the positive qualities in Velleius' work, especially his non-Tacitean lack of cynicism and positive enthusiasm for Tiberius' personality and rule.³¹ His work shows both adulation and affection for the new political system in the principate, and should be seen as part of the new discourse on political consensus, which characterised the imperial ideology of the early principate.³²

Important additional sources are Pliny the Elder and the geographer Strabo of Amasia. Pliny preserved a description of the Roman administrative organisation of the Dalmatian province from the late first century BC, or first century AD.³³ He uses at least three different sources for his description of the administrative provincial organisation of Dalmatia. The oldest is the late Republican administrative structure described by Marcus Terentius Varro (the antiquarian), the *formula provinciae* and the inventory of three judiciary *conventus*, possibly compiled after the division of

²⁶ Millar 1964: 91; Swan 2004: 21–6. ²⁷ Reinhold and Swan 1990: 171–3.

²⁸ Swan 2004: 8–13.

²⁹ Vell. Pat. 2.111.4 (legate); 2.106.2–3 (promised work on Pannonians and Dalmatians).

³⁰ Harrington 1970: 18–21.

³¹ Woodman 1977; Craus and Woodman 1997: 82–4; Schmitzer 2000; Gowing 2007.

³² Lobur 2008: 94–127. ³³ Pliny and Illyricum: Domić-Kunić 2003; 2004; Marion 1998.