

**THE ACTIVITY OF THE *NAISSUS* WORKSHOP
IN THE FOURTH CENTURY AND THE FINDS
OF THE VALUABLE OBJECTS FROM THE WESTERN
PROVINCES OF THE EMPIRE**

The activity of the *Naissus* workshop for the production of the objects made of precious metals is still best known by the famous Licinius' plates, although during the last decades there were few attempts to represent in its whole the production of the official and private silver objects made in this studio.¹ But the new discoveries, as the completed noticing and interpreting of the existing finds, enable us to observe the activity of this important thoreutic centre in new light, especially when we are talking about its complex and long lasting connections with the similar studios in the West.

The find of the golden jewelry in the crypt of the mausoleum in Šarkamen (Fig. 1) in 1996, gave us some indirect proofs of the first contacts of the workshop in *Naissus* with that one in Trier. Namely, the analysis of eleven specimens of the discovered golden jewelry has shown that it, by its typological characteristics, by the way of execution and decoration, strongly follows the local traditions, well manifested in the execution of the similar decorations during the second half of the 3rd century, and it was supposed that it has been executed in some nearby goldsmith's workshop.² Only the most luxurious piece from this set of jewelry, the composite necklace (Fig. 2), does not have its direct analogies in the older jewelry from this region, although its elements, the medallions made of blue paste in golden frames, decorated by cutting the metal and oval plaques decorated with the hammered running spiral, exist on various jewelry from the Balkan region.³ It is particularly important to mention that the oval plaques, analogous to those from Šarkamen, represent an integral part of the luxurious necklace from an unidentified site in Serbia, today in the National Museum in Belgrade.⁴ The composite necklace from the Šarkamen find has its best analogy in the jewelry around the neck of the young woman represented

¹ Baratte F., 1976, 33–41; Baratte F., 1978, 102–107; *Античко сребро / Antique Silver*, 1994, кат. 265–274; 342–349; Popović I., 1997, 134–138.

² Popović I., Tomović M., 1998, 293–312; Popović I., 2005.

³ Popović I., Tomović M., 1998, 298–305, Fig. 15–22.

⁴ Поповић И., 2001, 135–146.



Fig. 1. Golden jewelry from the mausoleum in Šarkamen

Сл. 1. Златни накит из маузолеја на Шаркамену



Fig. 2. Necklace from Šarkamen, reconstruction

Сл. 2. Огрлица са Шаркамена, реконструкција

in the fresco from the ceiling of the ceremonial hall of the Trier palace (Fig. 3). The portrayed person belonged, surely, to the Constantine's close environment, whether it is his wife Fausta or his sister Constantia. The ceiling of the palace in Trier was painted with frescoes around 320, that is in the period between 316 and 320, when the palace was destroyed.⁵ If we assume that the builder of the Šarkamen complex was the emperor Maximinus Daia (caesar since 305,

⁵ Lavin I., 1967, 99; Böhme A., 1974, 31, Abb. 6; *A l'aube de la France*, 1981, 33–36, nr. 14.



Fig. 3. Fresco from the palace in Trier

Сл. 3. Фреска из палате у Тријеру

augustus 309-313) and that in the mausoleum, with her jewelry, was buried his mother,⁶ it would mean that these decorations were made somewhat earlier than the fresco from Trier, in which the necklace analogous to that one from Šarkamen is represented. Of course, that fresco could have been made on the basis of the already existing, somewhat older portrait of the represented person. That would, for its part, show that women from the emperor's environment owned the jewelry of the typified execution, made in one or more goldsmith's centres, by the artisans who worked on the basis of the given models. According to the existing finds, the prototype of the luxurious composite necklace could have been made in some Balkan centre. As we will show that the connections of

⁶ Tomović M., 2005. The hypothesis that the jewelry belonged to the Licinius' wife and Constantine's sister Constantia (Петровић, Р., 2000, 414–415), does not seem plausible, having in mind the historical circumstances, i.e. the defeat of Licinius in the clash with Constantine and the definitive loss of the Balkan provinces in 324, when his wife begged her brother to spare his life (Zos., II,28,2; Anon. Val., 5,28; Aur. Vict., Epit., 41,7). His possible burial at Šarkamen, in the following years, does not have any historical explanation.

the workshop from Trier with that from *Naissus* existed already since 316, it is logical to assume that this contact began slightly earlier. This would mean that jewelry from Šarkamen was made in the geographically close *Naissus* workshop, whose artisans were in connection with the craftsmen from the imperial workshop in Trier. When it was necessary they used to make the valuable objects for the persons from the emperor's environment. Although there are no other data on the activity of the workshop in *Naissus* for the Maximinus Daia's court, the official activity of this centre will be very significant only few years later, during the preparations for the celebration of Licinius' jubilees.

The silver plates made in *Naissus* workshop for Licinius' *decennalia* in 316/17⁷ are, in fact, the bowls in the form of the callote, with the inscription: LICINI AVGVSTE SEMPER VINCAS, the round seal with the sign NA/ISS(us) and the laurel wreath, inside which is the acclamation SIC X/SIC XX in the centre. From six such vessels, discovered in 1900 in Vinik near Niš, two are today in the National Museum in Belgrade (Fig. 4), one is in the Museum of Fine Arts



Fig. 4. Licinius' plate from *Naissus*, National Museum in Belgrade

Сл. 4. Лицинијев тањир из Наиса, Народни музеј у Београду

⁷ The chronology of Licinius' *decennalia* is a problem that has not yet been solved. For the extensive bibliography on this cf. Popović I., 1997, note 3.

in Boston, one in the British Museum in London, one in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, while one is in the private collection in Switzerland.⁸ In the beginning of the 1980s in the Fortress of Niš few fireclay molds were discovered,⁹ some of which could have been used for molding these very vessels (Fig. 5). This fact indicates the possible location of the workshop. By the shape of the recipient these shallow callote-bowls belong to the group of the vessels which were, during the 4th century, produced on a massive scale of



Fig. 5. Fireclay mold from *Naissus*, National Museum in Niš

Сл. 5. Шамотни калуп из Наиса, Народни музеј у Нишу

glass, bronze, lead or alabaster.¹⁰ The oldest specimens made of silver originate from the end of the 3rd century, and they were discovered in *Carnuntum*,¹¹ *Lovere*¹² and *Karataš (Diana)*.¹³ Those were vessels without any inscription or some other sign, and so the first official products of this kind are the bowls from the *officina Naissus*. It is interesting that those vessels, probably just after their production, were copied by the less skilled artisans from the other workshops. So, in the place *Esztergom*, not far from the castellum *Brigetio* in Hungary, in 1901 was discovered the silver bowl with the inscription and acclamation identical to those from the *Naissus* vessels (Fig. 6), but with the extremely stylized decoration, without the seal of the workshop and with the punched name of the artisan: *ERMES VAS(cularius) F(ecit ?) S(ignavit ?)*.¹⁴ We do not know in which workshop this artisan worked, but as a model for making the vessel that celebrates *Licinius'* jubilee he used the bowls produced in *Naissus*. So, the question remains open if *Ermes* was active in some local centre, not far from *Esztergom*, being in connection with the artisans from the *Naissus* workshop and through this coming to know the vessels prepared for *Licinius'* *decennalia*, or this vessel was made not far from *Naissus*, and came to Hungary through plundering. In any case, this find shows that the official vessels, produced in *Naissus* workshop, were copied right after they have been made, and *Licinius'* defeat and the fall of the city into the *Constantine's* hands caused the hiding of the original vessels that have never been distributed to the meritorious individuals. The shallow callote-bowls continued to be produced also in the changed histori-

⁸ For the information about the existence of the sixth plate and the basic bibliography dealing with all the vessels cf. Baratte F., 1976, 34.

⁹ *Античко сребро / Antique Silver*, 1994, кат. 265–267.

¹⁰ Guggisberg M., 2003, 69–85.

¹¹ Dembski G., 1989, 51, Nr. 2.

¹² Sena Chiesa G., 1990, 274, Nr. 4e. 2d. 1.

¹³ *Античко сребро / Antique Silver*, 1994, кат. 275.

¹⁴ Kádár Z., 1960, 135, Taf. 28, 1.



Fig. 6.+ Licinius' plate from Esztergom, National Museum in Budapest
 Сл. 6. Лицинијев тањир из Естергома, Национални музеј у Будимпешти

cal conditions. Namely, a specimen from the hoard, found possibly on the Black Sea coast, today in the Mortgage Bank in Munich, emitted for the celebration of *decennalia* of Constantine II and Crispus in 321/22, carries the punched sign NAIS.¹⁵ The other vessels from the same find show that identical bowls were produced at this time also in Nicomedia and Antioch,¹⁶ and the specimens of the same type, which, together with the plate made on the occasion of Constans' *decennalia* in 342/43, belong to the new find from Kaiseraugst, bear witness that besides Nicomedia, Thessalonica became an important centre for the production of the silver callote-bowls.¹⁷ So, this type of vessels, which, for official purposes of celebrating Licinius' *decennalia*, for the first time was produced in the *Naissus* workshop, during the reign of Constantine and his successors was

¹⁵ Overbeck B., 1973, 29, Nr. 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Nr. 1–3, 5.

¹⁷ Guggisberg M., 2003, Nr. 76–81.

being made also in other eastern theoretical centres, while into the western parts of the Empire it was coming as a part of private property of the individuals who came from the Balkan region.

The finds of the silver vessels show that the workshop in *Naissus*, producing the objects for the Licinius' court, continued to work for Constantine's needs also. According to some specimens of the golden jewelry, this happened immediately after the Constantine's capture of the city. Namely, in Bela Palanka (*Remesiana*) were found two band-like golden rings, having on their rectangular heads the inscription FIDEM CONSTANTINO (Fig. 7). This jewelry belongs to the small group of the related official decorations that Constantine started to award to the meritorious persons in 315, on the occasion of the celebration of his *decennalia* and preparations for the final battle with Licinius.

The finds of such rings are concentrated in Gaul, whence ten pieces originate. The other group of such decorations consists of the rings from Pannonia, emitted after the Constantine's victory over Licinius in the battle at *Cibalae* in 316. The specimens from Bela Palanka belong to the third group, distributed after the Constantine's capture of *Naissus* and *Serdica*.¹⁸ Since Constantine's presence in *Serdica* was recorded on December 3rd and 4th 316 (Codex Theodosianus, I,1), he was in the region of *Remesiana* at the end of November of that year. The written sources do not record any battles during the Constantine's breakthrough towards *Serdica*, but this does not mean that there were not any, and that the emperor could not present the loyal military commanders with the golden rings carrying the inscription of fidelity. But, while the specimens of this jewelry from Gaul and *Pannonia* are almost identical by its shape, weight and inscription, the rings from *Remesiana* are of poor quality with the smaller letter O in the inscription. That jewelry was modeled, certainly, after the specimens produced in the Trier workshop, which Constantine was distributing among the commanders in Gaul and *Pannonia*. However, the specimens from *Remesiana* are, probably, the local product, made in the workshop



Fig. 7. Fidelity ring to Constantine from *Remesiana*, British Museum in London

Сл. 7. Прстен оданости Константину из Ремезијане, Британски музеј у Лондону

¹⁸ Popović I., 2001 a, 187–199.

in *Naissus*, the city that Constantine visited already in 319 (CTh, II,15,1; 16,2), when he could have given them as a donation to the meritorious persons.¹⁹ The issue is open if during the military campaign the court artisans escorted the emperor, or, more probably, the local craftsmen, on the commission and after the given model, made in Trier, produced the rings with the fidelity inscription to Constantine. In any case, this jewelry shows that connections, direct or indirect, between the workshops in Trier and *Naissus* existed already in the beginning of the Constantine's rule over the territory of *Moesia Prima*.

The contacts of the *Naissus* workshop with the centre in Trier, indicated



Fig. 8. Fibula from Blace, National Museum in Belgrade

Сл. 8. Фибула из Блага, Народни музеј у Београду

through the finds of the Constantine's fidelity rings, are confirmed through the discovery of one golden fibula of specific shape, in Blace near Prokuplje (Fig. 8). We are talking about the early variant of the „onion bulb“ fibula, with a round plaque on the head, the bow consisting of ridges and the decorations made of the row of large granules. Its closest analogy represent the gold-plated fibula from the necropolis St. Paulin in Trier (Fig. 9) and

the silver specimen from Cologne (Fig. 10). They were, probably, donated on the occasion of Constantine's *decennalia*, on July 25th 315, as a reward for the loyalty in the battles with Germans on the Rhine Limes in the spring of 313.²⁰ Hence it can be assumed that some of the artisans from the Trier workshop, who were producing the objects for this celebration, after the Constantine's triumph over Licinius were transferred to *Naissus*. Here, together with the local craftsmen, they were producing the objects designed for the persons meritorious for the Constantine's breakthrough towards *Serdica*. Consequently, the luxurious fibula from Blace, as the fidelity rings from *Remesiana*, form a group of valuable objects with which Constantine presented the loyal commanders during the decisive battles for domination over the Balkan provinces. These were imperial *donativa*, produced, most likely, in the *Naissus* workshop, whose artisans already worked for the court, and whom, possibly, joined also some goldsmiths from Trier.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ Popović I., 2004, 225–239.

Officina Naissus continued its activity also during the reign of Constantine's heirs. Besides the bowl, made for *decennalia* of Constantine II and Crispus, here was also made the big shallow plate, part of the great hoard of silver vessels, discovered in the camp Kaiseraugst (*Castra Raurica*) in Switzerland. This plate, with the central medallion decorated with crossed squares and floral motifs, carries the punched sign of the artisan, of the workshop and of its weight: EVTICIVS NAISI PV (Fig. 11). The new find of silver vessels from the same site, that contains also the plate made on the occasion of Constans' *decennalia* in 342/43, showed that the structure of this hoard is heterogeneous, that the vessels were collected in the period from 337 to 350, and that they belonged to one, or a group of prominent individuals from the Constans' environment, who, in the moment of danger during the clash with

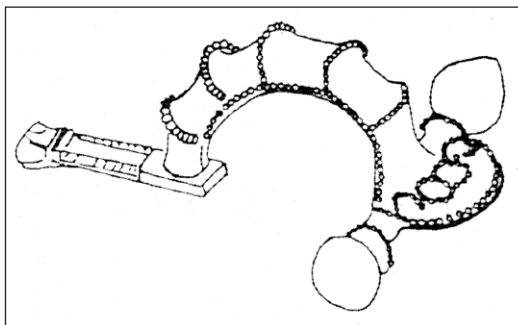


Fig. 9. Fibula from Trier
Сл. 9. Фибула из Тријера

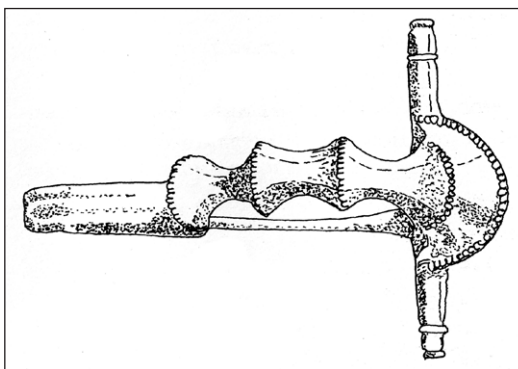


Fig. 10. Fibula from Cologne
Сл. 10. Фибула из Келна

the usurper Magnentius, probably around 351/52, have hidden them. Part of the silver vessels are imperial donations, while the others are private property obtained through sale, heritage, robbery or exchange. Monetary part of this find shows that in the period between 337 and 340 there exists a concentration of the specimens from the Balkan mints, while after 340 the coins from Gaul prevail. When we are talking about silver vessels, it was established that six specimens originate from Thessalonica, one from Nicomedia, one from *Serdica*, one from *Naissus*, while three of them were made in the western workshops, in Trier and *Mongotiacum*. For other specimens the place of their origin is not established.²¹ But, the plate of *Euty chius*, for which the inscription confirms that it was made in *Naissus*, carries in the central medallion the characteristic motif made of crossed geometric figures and floral elements. The analogous decoration have also two deep bowls from this find,²² while the motif of the bulb from the brim

²¹ Guggisberg M., 2003, 285–291.

²² Cahn H., Kaufmann-Heiniman A., 1984, Nr. 41, 52.



Fig. 11. Euty chius' plate from Kaiseraugst: a) look. b) inscription

Сл. 11. Еутихијев тањир из Кајзераугста: а) изглед. б) натпис

of the *Naissus* plate appears only on the *Ariadne's* plate from Kaiseraugst²³ and on one plate from the Traprain Law treasure in Scotland.²⁴ These decorative elements indicate that the artisan from *Naissus*, *Euty chius*, made the plate after some model, maybe from the Gaul workshops. The plate could have been a part of the imperial donation, but also a private order, and the model after which it was made could have come to the *Naissus* workshop while Constans and his court were passing through these parts. Namely, Constans and Constantine II attended, in the late summer of 343, the council in *Serdica*, so it is very possible that they have passed through *Naissus*. In any case, the decorative scheme of the *Euty chius'* plate, as also the silver plate with the hexagram in the central medallion, discovered in Niš itself (Fig. 12),²⁵ indicate the existence of the influences or direct connections between the thoreutic workshops in Gaul and the studios in *Naissus* during the fourth and fifth decade of the 4th century.

The repertoire of the thoreutic workshop from *Naissus*, which from time to time received the official orders, satisfying the needs of the emperor's court, clearly shows us that its connections with the related western centres were long lasting and complex, developing themselves in both directions during the whole first part of the 4th century. They begun, probably, already during the second decade of this century, when the jewelry from the mausoleum at Šarkamen was made, produced, in all probability, in the *Naissus* workshop. The composite necklace from this set of jewelry served as a model for the decoration represented on the neck of the woman from the Constantine's environment in the fresco from Trier. That jewelry, also, could have been made in *Naissus* during

²³ *Ibid.*, Nr. 61.

²⁴ Curle A.O., 1923, Nr. 19, Pl. XV.

²⁵ *Античко сребро / Antique Silver*, 1994, кат. 270.



Fig. 12. Silver plate from *Naissus*: a) look; b) central medallion, National Museum in Belgrade

Сл. 12. Сребрни тањир из Наиса, Народни музеј у Београду

the stay of the emperor and his court in this city in 319, or the model from this workshop was brought to Trier at that time, or few years earlier, just after the Constantine's capture of the city in 316. Namely, already at that time the contacts of these two studios became intensive. This is proved by the finds of the fidelity rings to Constantine and by the golden fibulas with the ridges on the bow. While the jewelry from Šarkamen indicates the influences from the Balkans, these objects bear witness to the influx of ideas, models, and maybe the people from Trier to *Naissus*. The tumultuous historical events during the reign of Constantine's sons caused the great mobility of the emperors and their environment, and through this the quick transmission of the cultural influences and also of the goods themselves from one end of the Empire to the other. The products of the *Naissus* workshop then reach the western provinces, but, at the same time, they obtain the inspiration for enriching their decorative repertoire.

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ДЕЛАТНОСТ НИШКЕ РАДИОНИЦЕ У IV ВЕКУ И НАЛАЗИ ДРАГОЦЕНОСТИ ИЗ ЗАПАДНИХ ПРОВИНЦИЈА ЦАРСТВА

Делатност нишке радионице предмета од племенитих метала и даље је најбоље позната по чувеним Лицинијевим тањирима, иако је последњих деценија било неколико покушаја да се производња официјелних и приватних предмета од сребра, проистеклих из овог атељеа, представи у целини. Међутим, нова открића, као и уопштено сагледавање и интерпретирање постојећих налаза, омогућују нам да активност овог значајног тореутског центра сагледамо у новом светлу, поготово када је реч о његовим сложеним и дуготрајним везама са сличним атељеима на Западу.

Отриће златног накита у крипти маузолеја на Шаркамену (сл. 1), 1996. године, пружио нам је неке, додуше индиректне доказе о првим контактима нишке радионице са оном у Тријеру. Најлуксузнији примерак из овог сета накита, композитна огрлица (сл. 2), своју најбољу аналогију налази у накиту који на врату носи млада жена, представљена на фресци са свода свечане сале палате у Тријеру (сл. 3). Судећи по постојећим налазима, прототип луксузне композитне огрлице могао је да настане у неком балканском центру. Будући да ћемо показати да су везе радионице из Тријера са оном из Наиса постојале већ од 316. године, није нелогично претпоставити да је тај контакт започео и нешто раније. То би значило да је шаркаменски накит израђен у географски блиској нишкој радионици, чији су мајстори одржавали везе са занатлијама из царске радионице у Тријеру, по потреби израђујући и драгоцености за особе из царског окружења. Мада не постоје други подаци о делатности радионице у Наису за двор Максимиана Даје, официјелна активност овог центра биће веома значајна само коју годину касније, током припрема прославе Лицинијевих јубилеја.

Сребрни тањира рађени у нишкој радионици поводом Лицинијевих деценија 316/17. године су, у ствари, калогасте зделе са натписом LICINI AVGVSTE SEMPER VINCAS, кружним печатом са ознаком NA / ISS(us) и лоровим венцем, унутар кога је урезана акламација SIC X / SIC XX, у центру (сл. 4). У нишкој Тврђави откривено је неколико шамотних калуца, од којих су неки могли да служе за ливење управо ових посуда (сл. 5), што упућује на могућу убикацију радионице. С друге стране, у месту Естергом (Esztergom), недалеко од кастела *Brigetio* у Мађарској, 1901. године откривена је сребрна здела са натписом и акламацијом идентичним онима са нишких посуда (сл.

б), али са крајње стилизованим декором, без печата радионице. Не зна се у којој је радионици овај мајстор радио, али као узор за израду посуде која слави Лицинијев јубилеј послужиле су му зделе произведене у Наису.

Налази сребрног посуђа показују да је радионица у Наису, која је израђивала предмете за Лицинијев двор, наставила да ради и за потребе Константина. Судаћи по неким примерцима златног накита, то се десило непосредно по Константиновом освајању града. Наиме, у Белој Паланци (*Remesiana*) су нађена два тракаста златна прстена, која на правоугаоној глави носе натпис FIDEM CONSTANTINO (сл. 7). Овај накит припада малој групи сродних официјелних украса које је Константин почео да додељује заслужним лицима 315. године, поводом прославе својих деценија и припрема за обрачун са Лицинијем. Налази оваквог прстења, израђеног у радионици у Тријери, концентрисани су у Галији, одакле потиче чак десет примерака. Овај накит показује да су везе, посредне или непосредне, између радионица у Тријери и Наису постојале већ на почетку Константинове власти над територијом Прве Мезије.

Контакти нишке радионице са центром у Тријери, наговештени кроз налазе прстења оданости Константину, посведочени су открићем једне златне фибуле специфичног облика, у Блацу код Прокупља (сл. 8). Реч је о раној варијанти луковичасте фибуле, са кружном плочицом на глави, луком обрађеним у виду хриди и украсима од низа крупних гранула. Њену најближу аналогију представљају позлаћена фибула са некрополе St. Paulin у Тријери (сл. 9) и сребрни примерак из Келна (сл. 10). Оне су, вероватно, дариване поводом Константинових деценија 25. јула 315. године.

Officina Naissus је своју делатност наставила и за време Константинових наследника. Поред зделе, израђене поводом деценија Константина II и Криспа, овде је настао и велики плитки тањир, део велике оставе сребрног посуђа, откривене у логору Кајзераугст у Швајцарској. Тај тањир, са централним медаљоном украшеним укрштеним квадратима и флоралним мотивима, носи пунцирану ознаку мајстора, радионице и тежине: EVTICIVS NAISI PV (сл. 11). Декоративна схема Еутихијевог тањира, као и сребрног тањира са шестокраком звездом у централном медаљону, откривеног у самом Нишу (сл. 12), индицирају на постојање утицаја или директних веза између галских тореутских радионица и атељеа у Наису током четврте и пете деценије IV века.

Бурни историјски догађаји током владавине Константинових синова условили су велику мобилност царева и њиховог окружења, а самим тим и брз пренос културних утицаја, али и самих добара с једног краја Царства у друго. Производи нишке радионице тада допиру у западне провинције, али, истовремено, из њих црпу инспирацију за богаћење свог декоративног репертоара.