

THE ROAD TO VIMINACIUM

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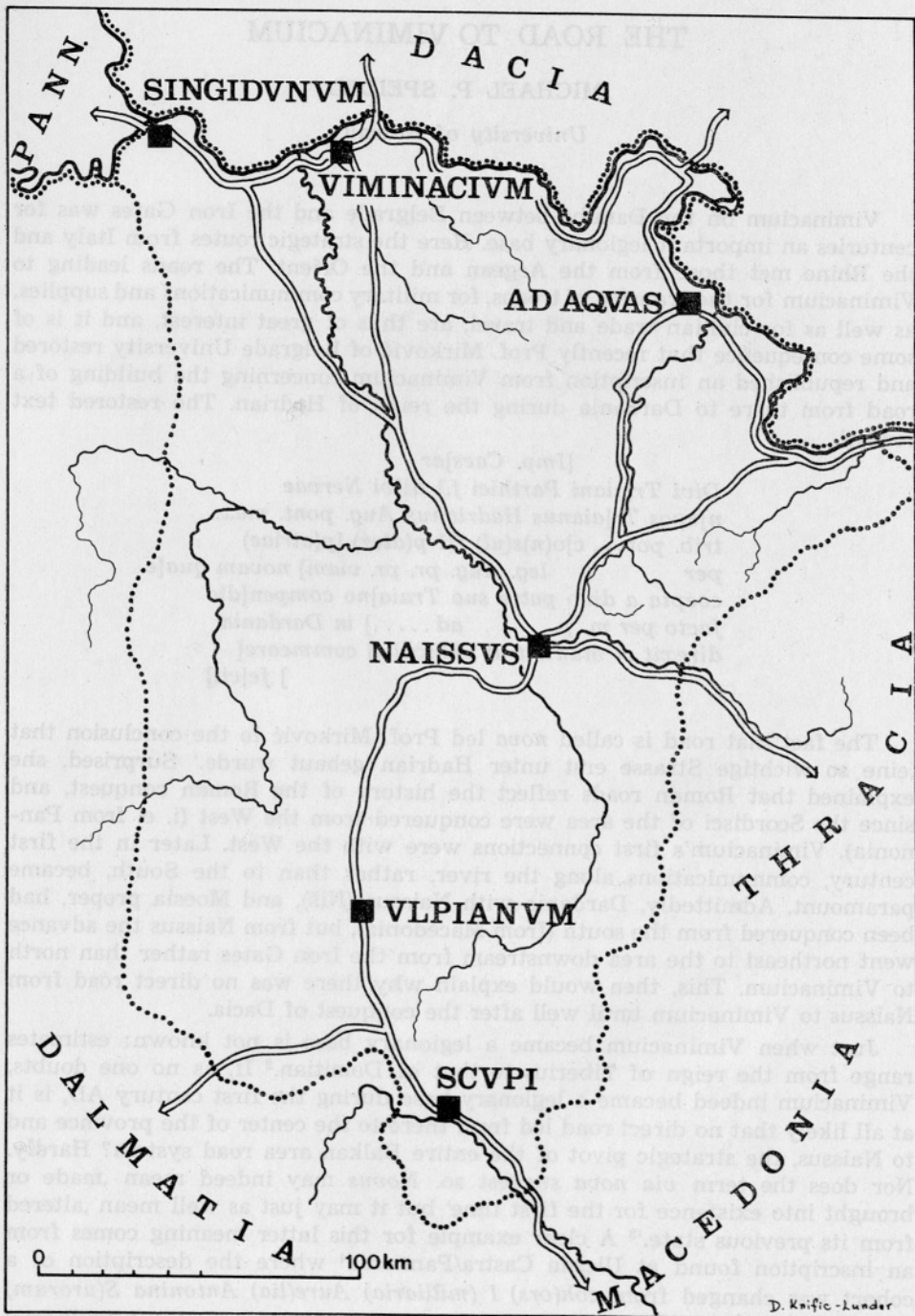
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Viminacium on the Danube between Belgrade and the Iron Gates was for centuries an important legionary base. Here the strategic routes from Italy and the Rhine met those from the Aegean and the Orient. The roads leading to Viminacium for the transfer of troops, for military communications and supplies, as well as for civilian trade and travel, are thus of great interest, and it is of some consequence that recently Prof. Mirković of Belgrade University restored and republished an inscription from Viminacium concerning the building of a road from there to Dardania during the reign of Hadrian. The restored text reads:¹

[*Imp. Caes*]ar
Divi Tr[*aiani Parthici f.*] di[*vi Nervae*
n]epos Tr[*aianus Hadrianus Aug. pont. max.*
trib. pot. . . c]o(n)s(ul) III p(ater) [p(atriae)
per leg. Aug. pr. pr. viam] novam qua[e
coepta a divo patre suo Traia]no compen[dio
facto per m. p. ad] in Dardania
direxit et munivit ut vehiculis] commeare[
] fe[*cit*]

The fact that road is called *nova* led Prof. Mirković to the conclusion that 'eine so wichtige Strasse erst unter Hadrian gebaut wurde.' Surprised, she explained that Roman roads reflect the history of the Roman conquest, and since the Scordisci of the area were conquered from the West (i. e. from Pannonia), Viminacium's first connections were with the West. Later in the first century, communications along the river, rather than to the South, became paramount. Admittedly, Dardania with Naissus (Niš), and Moesia proper, had been conquered from the south (from Macedonia), but from Naissus the advance went northeast to the area downstream from the Iron Gates rather than north to Viminacium. This, then would explain why there was no direct road from Naissus to Viminacium until well after the conquest of Dacia.

Just when Viminacium became a legionary base is not known: estimates range from the reign of Tiberius to that of Domitian.² If, as no one doubts, Viminacium indeed became a legionary base during the first century AD, is it at all likely that no direct road led from there to the center of the province and to Naissus, the strategic pivot of the entire Balkan area road system? Hardly. Nor does the term *via nova* suggest so. *Novus* may indeed mean 'made or brought into existence for the first time' but it may just as well mean 'altered from its previous state.'³ A clear example for this latter meaning comes from an inscription found at Ulcisia Castra/Pannonia⁴ where the description of a cohort was changed from *coh(ors) I (milliaria) Aure(lia) Antonina S(urorum) const(ituta) Pisone et Iul(iano) co(n)s(ulibus)* (a. 175) to *coh(ors) I (milliaria)*



Aure(lia) Antoniniana nova Se(veriana) const(ituta) Pisone et Iul(iano) co(n)s-(ulibus). Since the unit was in existence since AD 175, the Severan attribute *nova* must mean 'renewed' or 'reformed'. The same will apply to Hadrian's construction of a road from Viminacium to Dardania: he did not make a new road, he made a road new.⁵ Viminacium, one may continue to infer from general historical principles, had a direct connection with the south already during the first century AD when it became the capital of Upper Moesia, and especially at the beginning of the second century AD when it served as Trajan's headquarters during the first Dacian war.

¹ M. Mirković, Vom obermösischen Limes nach dem Süden: Via Nova von Viminacium nach Dardanien. In: *Roman Frontier Studies* 1979, ed. W. S. Hanson and L. J. F. Keppie, Part III, Oxford 1980, 745—755.

² Tiberius: Mirković, l. c.; Domitian, perhaps: A. Mócsy, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia*, A History of the Middle Danube Provinces of the Roman Empire, London, 1974, 48 and 82.

³ See e. g. the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* s. v. 1196.

⁴ RIU 840, see the discussion, *ibid.* p. 169.

⁵ Trajan's *Via Nova* in Arabia wasn't all new either. For Roman road building

in the Nabataean kingdom and antecedents to the Road from the Red Sea to Petra see e. g. B. Isaac, Trade Routes to Arabia and the Roman Army, *Roman Frontier Studies* 1979, 889—901.

For a similar ambiguity in a road construction text *a novo* see J. Wagner, *Provincia Osrhoenae* in: *Armies and Frontiers in Roman and Byzantine Anatolia*, ed. St. Mitchell, Oxford, 1983, 103—130. See especially D. French, *Roman Roads and Milestones of Asia Minor*, fasc. I, *The Pilgrim's Road*, Oxford, 1981, p. 22; 32; 86 f (nr. 55: *viam novam perfecerunt* in AD 217/218, -- with respect to the Flavian trunk road from Byzantium to Antioch).

CESTA ZA VIMINACIJ

Povzetek

V zborniku *Roman Frontier Studies* 1979, vol. 3 (1980) 745—755, je Miroslava Mirković analizirala viminacijski napis, ki spričuje, da je dal vladar Hadrijan zgraditi novo zvezo **Viminacium-Naissus**. Presenetljivo kasno povezavo s provincialno metropolo skuša razložiti z interpretacijo okupacijskih sunkov, ki naj bi do Viminacija ne prihajali z juga, ampak z zahoda paralelno z udari na Skordiske. Speidel opozarja, da oznaka *novus* ne kaže samo na novo zgraditev, marveč dopušča tudi 'dopolnitve, spremembe od prejšnjega stanja' ter opozarja na RIU 840 (z diskusijo na str. 169). V konkretnem primeru gre za 'obnovljeno, oziroma predelano in preloženo cesto'. Bilo bi namreč nerazumljivo, da bi tako važna trdnjava ob Donavi in administrativna metropola province ne bila direktno povezana že od začetka tudi na jug.

Fig. 1: The Roads of Upper Moesia.

Sl. 1: Ceste v provinci Moesia Superior.