

ROMAN GILDED HELMETS OF THE MUSEUM OF VOJVODINA





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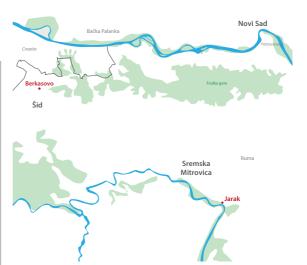
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ROMAN GILDED HELMETS OF THE MUSEUM OF VOJVODINA



ROMAN GILDED HELMETS OF THE MUSEUM OF VOJVODINA



he permanent exhibition of the Museum of Vojvodina is adorned with three remarkable Roman objects - three gilded helmets. They were found in Srem, in the village of Berkasovo near Šid and in the village of Jarak near Ruma. They date from the first half of the $4^{\rm th}$ century and are considered to be the most valuable and beautiful exhibits kept in the Museum.

THE HELMETS FROM BERKASOVO

Two gilded helmets from Berkasovo got to the Museum of Vojvodina in 1955, when a woman from this village near Šid took them out of the ground.

fter first seeing them appearing from the arable land, without knowing what kind of objects they were, in fear, Angelina Vrkatić had not cultivated that part of the field for several years. According to her, she found the helmets in the Ašman area, about a kilometer northwest of Berkasovo, on a gentle slope between the two roads. One lies in the valley and leads to the village of Bapska in presentday territory of Croatia, and the other to the monastery and the church of St. Petka, erected in the second half of the 20th century. It was post-war time and Angelina was afraid of bombs, and there were plenty of unexploded ones at that time in the fields of Srem. When she took courage to dig up the objects, she deliberately swung a hoe, damaging one of the helmets. After trying to sell the helmets and receiving information from a Novi Sad jeweler that it was only a thin gilding and that these items were

worth more if they were in a museum, the curators of the then Vojvodina Museum learned about the discovery. At that time, two curatorsarchaeologists, Mirjana Marijanski Manojlović and Šandor Nađ, worked at the Vojvodina Museum, among others. When they determined that the helmets were sensational findings, they conducted a systematic archaeological excavation to discover the context in which the helmets were found. They found buried pieces of horse equipment - two pairs of horse bits, silver decorations for a soldier's belt. one tube of silver sheet metal and one belt buckle. These items were probably not in the original position because the owner of the field had dug through them, but it was clear that it was a hoard. It was assumed that someone, probably in Roman times, buried these artifacts along with the helmets.





A less lavish helmet from Berkasovo, known in the literature as helmet no. 2, bears the inscription VICIT [LIC]INIANA, which helped archaeologists date it to the beginning of the 4th century, at a time when the future emperor Constantine the Great and his opponent Licinius were fighting over the Roman throne. Since 308, when Licinius became Augustus, the two emperors had ruled together only to begin battling for the throne soon after, which ended with Licinius's defeat and execution.



According to one interpretation, helmets could have been buried during the retreat of Licinius's troops towards Sirmium, that is, after the battle of Cibalae (present-day territory of Vinkovci), which took place on October 8, 314 AD or 316 AD. Licinius's army of 35,000 men and Constantine's 20.000 soldiers clashed between the Sava and Danube rivers. The battle was bloody and lasted all day, and ended when Constantine I led the cavalry and struck hard on Licinius's troops from the right wing.







According to another interpretation, based on the existence of a later added inscription in Greek, the helmet could have been used for a long time and subsequently buried at any point in the turbulent 4th century in the Roman province of Pannonia Secunda, where our sites Berkasovo and Jarak were.

Helmet number 1 from Berkasovo is the most beautiful and magnificent specimen among the known specimens of Late Roman helmets. Of exceptional splendor, decorated with glass inlays that mimic emerald gemstones and semi-precious onyx and chalcedony stones, it has delighted the scientific and general public for half a century. Such lavish decoration reflects the barbaric taste, which is not surprising, since it was the time of the barbarization of the Roman army, and the Romans often selected officers for their army among the leaders and important figures of the people from conquered regions. The helmet consists of a calotte made of four parts, a crest, a front ring, nasal, cheek-pieces and a neck guard. The base is made of wrought iron. It is three millimeters thick and coated with a thin layer of silver gilded metal sheet of two milimeters. The silver gilded sheet is decorated with embossing techniques, and the motifs are geometric, such as a four-pointed star, an inverted letter S, a plastic circle with a dot in the middle, a crescent, etc. The crest, calotte, nose and neck guards are all decorated with silver balls. At the time of use, the helmet had a leather pad to give it a better and more comfortable fit on the head, but the leather was not preserved during the thousand years of standing in the ground.













THE HELMET FROM JARAK

he third Roman gilded helmet from the 4th century was discovered at the very border between the villages of Hrtkovci and Jarak, 17 km southeast of Sremska Mitrovica - formerly Sirmium. It was found on the left bank of the Jarčina canal, which flows into the Sava and is a remnant of the ancient system by which the fertile fields of Srem were drained and goods were transported between the Sava and Roman settlements inland.

During deep plowing in the summer of 2006, a resident of Hrtkovci village, Živko Rajaković, dug a small gray ceramic jug. According to him, there was a silver gilded coating wrapped in a scroll, a large number of studs and decorative round rivets, as well as two silver buckles.

Before coming to the Museum of Vojvodina, he straightened and glued the pieces of silver gilded metal onto the cardboard surface, not knowing their function and purpose.





At the end of 2006, archaeologists Velika Dautova Ruševljan, PhD, a museum advisor and Miroslav Vujović, PhD, an assistant professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, examined the objects and were delighted to find that this was another sensational Berkasovo helmet. Parts of the coating were decorated in much the same way as on Berkasovo helmets, but their condition was rather poor - the silver sheet darkened and cracked. It was covered with a sulfide patina, and the calotte deformed due to straightening and gluing to the cardboard. This find was bought out, and the curators knew that they were facing the painstaking and time-consuming job of restoring the item to its original appearance.







Roman Gilded Helmets of the Museum of Vojvodina





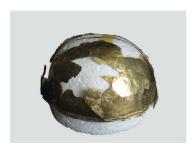


Experts from the National Museum in Belgrade - Milan Čolović, a senior conservator-technician, and Slobodan Savić, a restorer-adviser - have been engaged in a major undertaking of conservation and reconstruction, enthusiastically embracing this work and facing a serious challenge. Prior to any conservation procedure, it was necessary to separate the glued parts of the helmet coating from the cardboard pad onto which the discoverer had glued them. The parts were then immersed in distilled water, and after a while they were separated from the cardboard, as were the parts of the calotte. They proceeded with the removal of the sulfide patina and the flushing of the soluble salts, followed by a number of other conservation procedures.





As the metal *remembers*, the original shape was restored to helmet coating with agate tools. These parts were then joined, and then a model was made to which they were glued and fitted with the reconstructed helmet parts. The reconstruction lasted almost a year, but it was possible to put this complex puzzle together because a large percentage, as much as 85% of the helmet coating, was actually preserved. The less luxurious helmet no. 2 from Berkasovo served as an example for reconstruction.







However, it is even more difficult today to reconstruct an event from the past that caused the destruction of such a magnificent helmet. The helmet was made by an unknown master of the 4th century by placing a gilding on a silver sheet, decorating it and nailing it on an iron base, and then backing it with leather. It was probably worn by some important Roman officer, who was taken by fate in an unknown direction. The helmet ended up in the hands of someone who, probably back in ancient times, removed the gilded coating from it, loosening rivets and studs, putting the resulting pieces in a jug and storing them in the ground as a treasure.

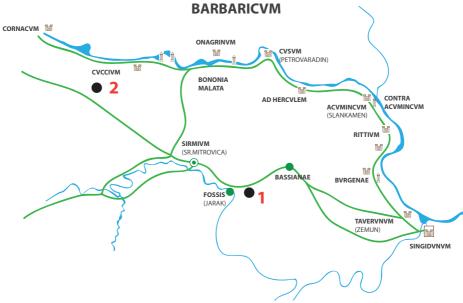








The rich history of the village of Jarak, in the vicinity of which the helmet was found, indicates the possible location of the ancient station of Fossis within the territory of Sirmium, which was the capital of the Roman province of Lower Pannonia and one of the four capitals of the Roman Empire in the 3rd century AD. This station was probably located on the route of the Roman road to Bassianae, another significant city of the Province, the remains of which are located near the present-day territory of Donji Petrovci near Ruma. The richness and variety of archeological material from the area of Jarak and the surrounding villages testify that in the 1st century BC, Celtic and Pannonian tribes lived in this place as a population in contact with the Roman Empire, and a Roman settlement was also there in later periods.



² Berkasovo

HANDIWORK AND INSCRIPTIONS ON LATE ROMAN HELMETS

In late Roman times, specially trained craftsmen (*barbaricarii*) were employed in imperial workshops, which operated under the control of high statesmen, to make richly decorated and expensive weapons, and their names can also be found on Berkasovo helmets. According to some historical sources, the emperors specially cared about this, as these items were obviously important in acknowledging their dignity, generosity and court ceremonies.

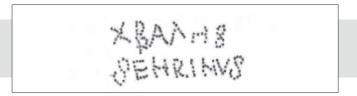
The inscriptions on the helmet coating included the insignia of the workshop, the name of the craftsman or castor, who affirmed the value and quality of silver, magic words and apotropaic formulas that protected the owners of the objects and protected the believers from evil forces, insignia related to the owner or the military unit in which he served.

WHO COULD HAVE WORN SUCH HELMETS?

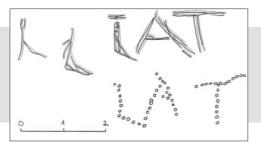
he inscription on helmet 1 from Berkasovo is in Greek and reads: *Dizon, wear it in health – Work of Avitus*, on the basis of which we know that Dizon was the owner of this helmet and Avitus was the master who made it. We also assume that the owner was a high-ranking officer of Greek or Thracian origin (judging by the origin of his name), for whom the emperor commissioned the creation of a magnificent helmet for his special military merit.

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In addition to the engraved text relating to Licinius, there is a Greek inscription on the neck guard of the Berkasovo helmet no. 2, which is also assumed to be related to the name of the owner or master.



Similarly, the Jarak helmet has traces of a Latin inscription that is engraved and punctured after gilding. Hardly readable and unskillfully done, it could have represented some workshop sign or dedication text at the time of the helmet award, but it seems more likely that the owner himself wanted to mark his property.





The owners of the Jarak and Berkasovo helmets were soldiers, probably of high rank, and members of the cavalry with which the lavish 4th century helmets are brought into connection. An evidence of this could be the finding of horse equipment in Berkasovo - horse bits, and an inscription from one of the helmets of this type from the Netherlands, whose owner served in one of Constantine's elite cavalry units. It is quite certain that such helmets could only be owned by high-ranking persons, and judging by one of Constantine's coin portraits, probably by the emperors themselves as well. They are thought to have been specially commissioned by emperors and given as a pledge of allegiance to the commanders of their units or as a reward for exceptional merits.

OTHER BERKASOVO HELMET SPECIMENS IN THE WORLD

he Roman army was very uniform and today it is easy to identify the weapons of the Roman soldier and determine the exact time of their origin. Based on historical and archeological data, it is known that the Roman army underwent certain changes in organization during the 3rd and 4th centuries. That is when the helmets that had a different construction than those used earlier, during the 1st and 2nd centuries, appeared. They had calottes that were made of multiple parts and thus more complex to make. The magnificent helmets of the 3rd and 4th centuries were named exactly according to Berkasovo findings – Berkasovo helmets, and so far about fifteen of them have been found across the European continent, including those preserved only in small parts – four have been found in Serbia (Berkasovo, Jarak, Belgrade), three in Germany (Augsburg, Pfersee, Koblenz), two in Hungary (Budapest, Hetény), and one in Croatia (Vinkovci), the Netherlands (Deurne), Romania (Concesti) and Italy (San Giorgio di Nogara).

GUEST APPEARANCES AND EXHIBITIONS

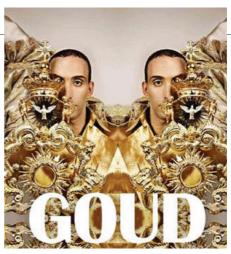
he Berkasovo helmets have been displayed in numerous domestic and European exhibitions, dedicated to the Late Roman Empire, most notably the time of Constantine the Great. In the last thirteen years they have been exhibited in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Serbia.

In 2006, they were presented in Trier (Germany) at an exhibition dedicated to Constantine the Great, while in Udine (Italy) helmets served as an illustration of the strength and power of the Roman emperors as part of the 2008 exhibition on the St. Chromatius of Aquileia, a bishop of Aquileia from the $4^{\rm th}$ century.

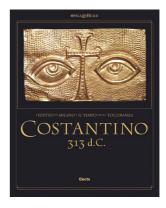


Don Sandro Piussi, an archeologist and a director of the Udine Diocesan Archive, has exhibited more than 150 exhibits from numerous museums in Italy, Vatican, Austria, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Slovenia and Spain, in the magnificent building of the Diocesan Museum and Galleries of Tiepolo. The exhibition was visited by about 10,000 people.

A spectacular and unusual exhibition by Dutch designer and performance artist Aziz Bekkaoui was organized at the Catharijneconvent Museum in Utrecht (Netherlands). The theme of the exhibition was gold, viewed through aspects of protection, adornment, power, immortality, value and worship. The Museum of Vojvodina has loaned a copy of a gilded helmet from Jarak.



The year 2013 was the year of commemoration of the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan, so the Diocesan Museum of Milan organized a rich exhibition called *Constantine 313 - The Edict of Milan and the Time of Tolerance*. The Palazzo Reale, where it was staged, is located on the Piazza del Duomo, near the famous Milan Cathedral and is one of the most representative exhibition spaces in Milan. This city did not become the center of celebration of the said anniversary by chance.







Mediolanum (Milan) was one of the capitals of the Roman Empire in 313 when Licinius Augustus and Constantine Augustus brought the edict on religious tolerance to light. It guaranteed freedom

of religion and put an end to the long and terrible persecution of Christians. The exhibition space was divided into 11 rooms where historical, artistic, political and religious topics were presented with the help of more than 200 valuable archeological and art objects from numerous European and world museums. The exhibition was seen by about 110,000 visitors.

After great success in Milan, the exhibition on Constantine and the Edict of Milan was moved to the Roman Colosseum in April 2013. Compared to the Milan setting, the Roman exhibition was realized in a slightly smaller scale and in a different form. This is certainly conditioned by the appearance of the exhibition space in the Colosseum itself, but also by the need to devote an entire thematic section to the relationship between Constantine and the city of Rome itself.





The same historic event was the occasion for the 2013/14 exhibition of the National Museum in Belgrade on Constantine the Great realized under the name *Constantine the Great and the Edict of Milan 313: The Birth of Christianity in the Roman Provinces on the Soil of Serbia.* Visitors of the Philip Morris Gallery in Niš, the Viminacium Archeological Park and the

National Museum in Belgrade had the opportunity to see the most valuable objects from the time of Emperor Constantine, discovered on the territory of Serbia.



The exhibition *Treasures and Emperors - the splendor of Roman Serbia* organized by the National Museum in Belgrade and the Aquileia Foundation was staged at the Meizlik Palace in Aquileia (Italy) during 2018 and was extremely well-promoted in the Italian media. At the Aquileia exhibition, among the most beautiful objects of Roman times from the territory of the Republic of Serbia were the most valuable objects of the Museum of Vojvodina - three gilded helmets from Berkasovo and Jarak, which were seen by over 12,000 people.





In 2018, replicas of the helmets from Berkasovo and Jarak were presented at the SANU Gallery in Belgrade as part of the exhibition *Roman Limes and Cities in Serbia* made by the Archeological Institute.



oday, the Museum of Vojvodina is the only museum in the world that has three Berkasovo helmets. The extraordinary beauty of these objects has delighted visitors in all the places they have been exhibited so far. They symbolize the power of the Roman Empire and the dignity of the Roman emperor, which was strongly felt in his provinces as well. They show a clear differentiation of the Roman army and barbaric influences during Late Antiquity, and speak of the skill of the masters entrusted with the task of making them, as well as their aesthetic sense. Buried as treasure in ancient times, the helmets from Berkasovo and Jarak have been preserved and discovered thanks to a lucky series of circumstances, and today, after approximately two thousand years, they adorn the Permanent Exhibition of the Museum of Vojvodina and testify to the importance of the cultural heritage of the Republic of Serbia and its rich past.

