

Zef Mirdita, *Religija i Kultovi Dardanaca i Dardanije u Antici*, Hrvatski Institut za Povijest, Zagreb 2007, 249 str.

Mirdita's book belongs in many ways to the traditional concept of portraying the religion of the antiquity in the Balkans, providing a conventional thematic classification of the material. It is in fact an additional contribution to author's prior knowledge of Dardania, and a research which, as it was noted in the foreword, was supported by Humboldt's scholarship and mentored by prof. Wilfried Fidler from the *Ludwigs-Maximilian Universität* in München. The book was originally published in Albanian language (*Religjioni dhe kultet e dardanëve dhe të Dardanisë në antikë*) in Zagreb 2001. In front of us now we have the rewritten and translated version which, during the process as the author states, gains more in its scientific value. The author approaches the problem of the religiosity of the territory of Dardania from a wide chronological perspective, reaching all the way to the Neolithic religious symbolism and connecting it to the later cults known in the region. He then sorts the material by distinct gods and divinity groups, in order to round up with a more historical account of the time of early Christianity. The material is presented in a somehow catalogue manner, relying mostly on archaeological evidence. Central of the author's research is the epigraphical survey of the material, with seldom reviews of the iconography of certain cults.

Mirdita's book is divided in two general parts; the first dealing with the attested pagan cults of the antiquity, and the second with the prevailing of the Christianity in the territory of Dardania. In the preceding *Introduction* the author clarifies the geographical position of Dardania, as well as the roman administrative division of the territory. He then explains the basic problems and issues of studying the religion of antiquity in general and in the region of Dardania in particular, stating the lack of written sources as the main problem. The issue of the ethnicity of the region is also elaborated, which is crucial while dealing with the material and spiritual culture of Dardania.

The first part of the book includes fifteen short chapters where the author, after introducing the known symbols on the prehistoric material from Dardania, categorizes the cults and the deities in the usual manner: *Epichoric, Egyptian, Oriental, Greek deities, Roman religion (the Capitulum Triad), Roman chthonic cults, Greek - Roman Olympian gods, Non - Olympian gods, Divinized concepts, Nature gods, House gods, Panthea Signa, the Imperial cult, and the cult of the unidentified deity*. The last chapter is devoted to *Priest orders, Temples and Ritual accessories*. The method of the authors approach to the material is unified in all the mentioned chapters so it can be integrally explained; Mirdita briefly introduces the basic significance of the deities and reviews the collected epigraphic material. He pays attention to the origins of the dedicatees (locals or Orientals), their role in the society (*liberti* or *servi*, soldiers or tradesmen) as well as to the possible ways of the acceptance of the foreign cults which came either by the emigrants or by the soldiers. The intermingling of the population in Dardania has indeed left consequences on the development of the local religion. The author often reflects on the phenomenon of syncretism as well, however, he is not much concerned with the rituality or with the precise dating of the monuments.

At the beginning of the first part of the book more attention is given to the local Epichoric deities, among which Mirdita includes the Illyrian and the Thracian ones. He considers some of the divine epithets as testimonies of separately defined deities such as *Iuppiter Ulpianensis, Iuppiter Paternus* or

Iuppiter Depulsor; also *Ezaios*, *Melcid* and *Sonketene* which are epithets for Zeus, Jupiter and Hera, and *Dominus* and *Domina* which are common epithets for several gods and goddesses. All of the above reflects a rather unusual approach of the author, which certainly arouses doubts in his method. The Egyptian and the Oriental cults were attested in the areas which were in direct contacts with the Hellenized world. The phenomenon of syncretism is here elaborated, especially the difference between the theological from the practical one. The fact that these cults were more concentrated on the borders of Dardania allows the consideration that they were brought in these parts by the soldiers. Greek divinities are epigraphically absent from the region, a notion upon which the author concluded that they were not particularly popular among the local population having in mind that the inhabitants of Dardania did not have contacts with the Greek world. Mirdita is here relying only on iconographical material as proof of their existence in Dardania. Accordingly to the abundance of evidence for the presence of the roman religious flows, Mirdita respectfully devotes most of the chapters to the roman deities and divine concepts present in the region. During the Romanization, the local gods did not cease to exist, but continued to be worshiped according to *interpretatio Romana*. Among the other, Mirdita draws out the significance of Jupiter as the most worshiped god in Dardania, having in mind all the locally known epithets. Although the majority of the cults celebrated in the region in this period were roman in nature, the conclusion of the author is that the Romanization of the local population was not very strong within the cultural sphere.

The second part of the book has a rather different conception. The author pays more consideration to the general historical background of the development of Christianity in order to portray the conditions upon which it came, spread, and evolved in the region of Dardania. His arguments are affirmative towards the reasons of the mass acceptance of the Christian theology in the apostolic times. Apart of the sporadic mentioning of bishops from Dardania in the early period, we do not have considerable knowledge of the cleric hierarchy nor of the institutionalized church until the middle of the fifth century when we learn more of the service of *Ursilius episcopus Dardaniae*, his successor and their contemporaries. Dardania was in the middle of the rivalry between Rome and Constantinople, nonetheless demonstrated significant loyalty to Latin West. Several important Christian centers flourished in Dardania – *Iustiniana Prima*, *Iustiniana Secunda* that made the history of the Christianity in the region eventful. Here the author reflects also on the intrusions of the barbarians in the region and the politics of Justinian I. Mirdita ends the second part of the book analyzing several early Christian inscriptions found on the territory of Dardania.

The work of Mirdita contributes to the general knowledge of the spiritual manifestations of Dardania, a region which is still obscure to a wider academic public. However, it must be pointed out that the author does not get deeply involved with interpretations, nor he offers analogies using a more detailed observance. The comparative material is mainly from the other regions of Upper Mesia. Although the author uses extensive literature, he is not considering contemporary bibliographical units of the proposed topics. The value of this book can be perceived above all as a collection of archaeological and epigraphical testimony of the religion in Dardania presented for future analysis.

Aleksandra Nikoloska
Evrobalkan, Skopje