

Roman campaigns in the Lower Danube region.
The olive oil supplies, from Augustus to Trajan

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- abstract -

This paper will discuss some archaeological evidence concerning a problem that generated consistent debates - the mechanisms of military supply. Almost all previous studies are taking into consideration mostly the epigraphic evidence, but it is also worth analysing the information provided by particular artefacts, for example olive oil amphorae.

Olive oil was, and still is, an important part of the Mediterranean diet. As a consequence, it was always considered by specialists as one of the major purchases of the Roman army. However, it is important to observe that there was a significant difference between the logistics required by an army in campaign and that of a cantoned army in a fully established province. Therefore, the mechanisms of supply used in the first case may not be similar with those concerning a settled army in a rather peaceful period.

During the period between the conquest of Illyricum (35-33 BC) and Trajan's Dacian campaigns (AD 101-102 and 105-106), Istrian Peninsula was the major source of olive oil for the Lower Danube region. The archaeological evidence is showing a wide distribution of Dressel 6B amphorae in Pannonia, while in Moesia they are known only from military sites along the Danube. However, taking into consideration their chronological distribution, it was observed that Dressel 6B amphorae are mirroring phases of the military control in the region, first in southern Pannonia and along the Amber Route, later up to the Danube. Moreover, the size of some amphora assemblages seems to be associated with the presence of legions in particular sites and with the use of operational bases for certain campaigns. Four situations deserve particular attention in this respect. Chronologically the first is *Nauportus*, looking to be Octavian's supplying base for his Illyrian campaign. The second is *Poetovio*, whereas the third one is Devin, very probably used by Tiberius for his expedition across the Danube in AD 6. The fourth situation is represented by an array of rather small sites from the Iron Gates region, which were used by Trajan for the Dacian campaigns.

Consequently, during the Roman offensive period between Octavian and Trajan, the supplying system of an army in campaign continued to be based merely on the late Republican one, which was much flexible and able to adapt to the conditions on a new territory. At the same time, the mechanisms of provisioning that were specific for such armies may have played a consistent role in determining the characteristics of olive oil consumption in the Danube region during the discussed period. Not least, such mechanisms were influenced by the incipient development stage of the Roman administrative structures, as well as by the inter-dependence between the military, political and economic factors that marked the advance of the Roman state towards the Danube during the last decades of the Republic and first century of the Principate.