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## **MENTIONS OF THE DANUBE IN THE POETRY OF CLAUDIUS CLAUDIANUS**

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**Abstract:** Claudian (Claudius Claudianus fl. 395 CE–404 CE) was a late antique poet from the Hellenised East, who rose to fame as the court poet for the western Roman emperor Honorius (393–423). He came to Rome around 395 CE, and there he began using his talent as a classically trained poet to write panegyrics for wealthy and influential aristocrats and politicians. Claudian is considered one of the best authors of late Roman literature, even though he directed his talents toward propaganda primarily celebrating the well-known military commander Stilicho and writing invectives against Stilicho's enemies at the court of the eastern Roman emperor Arcadius (395–408). Claudian's poetry is one of the most valuable sources for the history of this period. In his rich poetic images, he mentions many toponyms, oronyms, and hydronyms, and his knowledge of Balkan geography seems truly enviable. One of the most frequently mentioned hydronyms in Claudian's poetry are those referring to the river Danube, which he mentions thirty-eight times. In this paper the authors cite and analyse Claudian's references to the Danube as a river that was a very important natural, political, and cultural border for the ancient world.

**Keywords:** Claudian, *Claudius Claudianus*, Danube, *Ister*, *Danuvius*

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## 1. Introduction and methodological remarks

The late antique poet Claudian (Claudius Claudianus, fl. 395–404),<sup>1</sup> from the old Greco-Roman cultural centre, Alexandria in Egypt, rose to fame as the court poet of the western Roman emperor Honorius (393–423), and more specifically as a propagandist for the de facto ruler of the West, Flavius Stilicho (d. 22 August 408).<sup>2</sup> In Rome, Claudian chose to write in Latin, despite Greek being his native language. Nevertheless, this innate blend of Hellenic and Roman culture that Claudian possessed, gave him a literary breadth worthy of the classics of ancient literature.<sup>3</sup> In his poetics, Claudian merged the literary form of the panegyric with that of the classical Roman epic.<sup>4</sup> Thus it is hardly surprising that Claudian’s poetry reflected a broad familiarity not just with the physical geography of what was then the known world, but also with the mythological geography, which was almost a muse for ancient poetry, always ready to add a particularly intimate coloration to classical poetry. In Claudian’s rich poetic images one finds a myriad of toponyms, oronyms and hydronyms, and his knowledge of Balkan geography seems truly enviable.<sup>5</sup> The body of water most frequently mentioned in his poetry, after the Nile of his youth, was the Danube. He mentions it thirty-eight times.<sup>6</sup>

In Claudian’s native language, the name for what is today the Danube had a completely different form, Ἰστρος, which is believed to be of Thracian origin because the Greeks first encountered this river via the Thracians who had settled along its lower right bank.<sup>7</sup> In Latin, the language Claudian learned during his education and chose for his poetry, the terms *Ister* or *Hister* were used, especially by the poets under the influence of Greek. However, these names only referred to the Danube’s lower course, because until the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, the ancient Greeks and Romans believed the upper and lower courses of the Danube to be two separate rivers. It was not until the time of the Roman conquest of Illyrian lands that they learned that these were, in fact, the same river.<sup>8</sup> In the West, Roman conquests introduced them to a river known among the Celtic tribes as *Dīnuvius*, which in

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<sup>1</sup> There is only indirect or fragmentary information about the dates of Claudian’s birth and death. The first date related to his life that is known for certain is the recital in Rome of the panegyric in honour Western Roman consuls Probinus and Olybrius in 395 (Martindale 1980: 299). Since there is no mention in Claudian’s works of historical events occurring after 404, and in particular Stilicho’s victory over the Gothic leader Radagaisus at Florence in 405, it is assumed that by this point he had already died (Cameron 1970: 390–418; Coombe 2018: 6–9).

<sup>2</sup> Cameron 1970: 1–2; Kenney, Clausen 1982: 705–707, for propagandistic poetry specifically, see Vukadinović 2020.

<sup>3</sup> For Claudian’s life and works, see Kenney, Clausen 1982: 705–712; Martindale 1980: 299–300; Cameron 1970: 1–30, 390–418; Claudian 1963: vii–xxvi.

<sup>4</sup> Although he seems to have written in a variety of genres—panegyrics, invectives, epics, and epithalamia—all were inferior to his panegyric style. See Coombe 2018: viii; cf. Ware 2012: 1–16; 44–47.

<sup>5</sup> Vukadinović 2013: 14–28; Id. 2012: 49–66; Id. 2010: 175–177.

<sup>6</sup> As *Danuuius*, see Claud. (Claudian 1963) 5.27; 8.52, 623; 17.235; 20.583; 21.126; 26.331, 523; 28.228; *Carm. min.* 25.70; as *Hister*, 1.135; 3.184, 308; 7.26, 150; 8.636; 10.277; 15.312; 20.165, 203; 21.215; 22.199, 367; 24.13; 26.81, 170, 337, 489, 569, 603; 28.220, 413, 648; *Carm. min.* 25.127; 50.7.

<sup>7</sup> There was another name for this river, Ματώας, which originated from the Scythian, but it did not survive in European languages. For the various names for the Danube in antiquity, see *RE* 4.2 under *Danuuius*.

<sup>8</sup> For references to the Danube by other ancient writers, see Boškov 2006; Obradović 2008; Šašel Kos 2010; Obradović 2015; Mihajlović 2018.

Latin became *Danuvius*.<sup>9</sup> By Claudian's time, two names had been established: *Danuvius* (*Danubius* in Late Latin) for the upper course and *Ister* for the lower course between the Iron Gate, downriver from Singidunum, and the Black Sea. Over time, the former became the predominant name. Claudian made no distinction between the two names historically or geographically, instead subordinating the geographical framework to the needs of his poetry and often using both names for the same stretch of river within a single verse.<sup>10</sup>

When analysing Claudian's references to the river, it is necessary to refer to some theoretical and methodological principles that we will follow here. First is the view that physical geography and human geography have different ways of defining space:<sup>11</sup> the former deals with physical space as a constitutive element of every object in nature, while the latter defines space conceptually, in the sense that space exists because of the objects within it and depends on their interrelations. From the standpoint of humanistic geography, a particular river is understood first and foremost as a historically—and therefore culturally and politically—dependent term that is dynamic due to the relationship that humans define in connection to a particular space at a particular time.<sup>12</sup> For someone from the ancient world, the Danube was not only a water barrier or a waterway, but also a cultural and political border whose definition varied depending on the historical period in question.<sup>13</sup> So when the ancient Greeks were first becoming aware of the contours of this gigantic European waterway, the Ἰστρος delineated the boundary between the known world and the mythological (as in Hes. *Theog.* 339). Perhaps the Hellenic etiological myth of the origins of the Illyrians, as preserved by Appian (*App. Ill.* 1.2), best portrays the Greco-Illyrian perception of ethnographic and geographic factors in the western Balkans that originated from the social relations among the peoples living in this area. According to this myth, the Illyrians speak of being the descendants of Illyrius, a son of the cyclops Polyphemus and his wife Galatea, who also had two other sons, Celtus and Galas. Illyrius had six sons, Encheleus, Autarieus, Dardanus, Maedus, Taulas, and Perraebus, and three daughters, Partho, Daortho, and Dassaro, from whom the tribes of the Enchelees, Autariatae, Dardani, Partheni, Dassaretii, Pannonians, Paeonians, Scordisci, and Triballi descended. This Hellenic myth provides both an ethnographic image of the pre-Roman Balkans and a geographical description, which includes names such as Pannonia that have survived up until today. Therefore, in our analysis of Claudian's use of the Danube, we will also consider the imagological aspect of the river in the Roman perception of it at this particular moment in history.

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<sup>9</sup> The name Danube in contemporary etymology is connected to the PIE root *dā*, meaning *to flow*, according to Pokorny 1959: 175 (= Revised Dictionary 536). The Slavic form *Dunaj* is found in Old Church Slavonic, Slovak, Polish, and Russian, and is a substitute for the Latin group *vi* (as in Ptuj < *Poetovia*), which is preserved in Balkan languages as *Dunav*, according to Skok 1971 *s.v.*

<sup>10</sup> Claud. (Claudian 1963) 8. 623, 636; 20.203. In all three places he is referring to the Lower Danube, but even in the same verse he uses both *Ister* and *Danuvius*.

<sup>11</sup> Cox 2021; *cf.* Massey 1999.

<sup>12</sup> For the definition of space in human geography, see Gregory, Urry, 1985; Massey 2005.

<sup>13</sup> V. Mihajlović also pointed out this valuable approach to examining issues of historical geography when he outlined the starting points for his research into perceptions of and the relationship between the notions of *Danube* and *Scordisci* in ancient thought and practice (Mihajlović 2018). Claudian is often overlooked in the analyses of ancient writers who mention the Danube, and mentions of the Danube are mostly studied in prose writers, and rarely poets. See Boškov 2006: 73–74.

## 2. Claudian's historical and mythical Danube

By Claudian's time, the Danube had emerged from mythos and solidified its significance in the sphere of Roman political interests as a *limes*,<sup>14</sup> but in literary circles, it still serves the concept of establishing the supremacy that Greco-Roman civilisation wielded over all the spatial beyond it in the realm known as *Barbaricum*. As classically trained poet, Claudian knew well the stylistic value of a powerful waterway as an *ornamenta patriae*<sup>15</sup> when making use of his scholarly talents to write panegyrics for wealthy and influential Roman aristocrats and politicians in the new Christian Rome.

After just a few months in Rome, Claudian had become a friend, and perhaps also a client,<sup>16</sup> of the Anicii, one of the wealthiest and most prominent landowning families in Italy, and also one of the rare senatorial families that had accepted Christianity. Claudian's decision to place himself in the service of a wealthy senatorial (and also Christian) family was clearly a wise one.<sup>17</sup> Theodosius I (379–395) did everything he could to peacefully coax wealthy landowners, most of them followers of the old Roman religion, to become Christians.<sup>18</sup> He appointed two Anicii brothers of the same age as Claudian, Probinus and Olybrius, as consuls for the year 395.<sup>19</sup> Because of their youth, they were hardly possessed of any great virtues or valour, but what had obviously set them apart was that their family had embraced the new faith. As their client and *sodalis* (companion),<sup>20</sup> Claudian was given the honour of writing and publicly delivering a panegyric commemorating their consulship. This would be his first public appearance during which he recited his verses in Latin. The panegyric tone and rhetorical elements of Claudian's poetry won over the hearts of the Roman aristocracy.

Claudian was able to place the mythical apparatus of classical poetry in the service of propaganda.<sup>21</sup> This panegyric shows he was very familiar with the geographic space at the frontier of the Roman Empire. This is illustrated in his account of the emperor Theodosius's victory over the usurper Eugenius, he creates a conversation between the emperor and the goddess Roma, the late antique personification of Rome.<sup>22</sup> In Claudian's metaphor, Theodosius vows to Roma that he will defend the borders of the Empire, and therefore mentions the Danube.

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<sup>14</sup> Visy 2012: 323–329.

<sup>15</sup> An allusion to the ridicule of Roman ceremonies and rituals and idols as *ornamenta patriae* by the Christian poet Prudentius in his speech against Symmachus (*Prudent. C. Symm.* 1.503–505).

<sup>16</sup> This can be deduced from a humble tone in the poems addressed to the Anicii brothers, Probinus and Olybrius. See *Carm. min.* 40.10 (*Epistula ad Olybrium*); 41.7 (*Ad Probinum*).

<sup>17</sup> There is no scholarly consensus regarding Claudian's religious convictions. However, the prevailing opinion is that he was not a Christian. See Ch. 8 in Cameron 1970; Gnilka 1973: 144–160; Vanderspoel 1986: 244; Vukadinović, Smirnov-Brkić 2014: 59; Vukadinović 2011: 8.

<sup>18</sup> Grünwald 1992: 462–487; Jordán-Montés 1991: 185.

<sup>19</sup> These were the sons of Petronius Probus (c. 328–c. 388), one of the most prominent Roman aristocrats of the time. See Jones, Martindale, Morris 1971: 734–740.

<sup>20</sup> *Claud. Carm. min.* 40.1. Cf. Bloch 1963: 211–212.

<sup>21</sup> For Claudian's poetic imagery, see Nolan 1973; Christiansen 1969.

<sup>22</sup> Papadopoulos 2018: 29–33.

Pro te [Roma] quascumque per oras  
ibimus et nulla sub tempestate timentes  
solstitio Meroen, bruma temptabimus Histrum,

(*Panegyricus dictus Probino  
et Olybrius consulibus* 133–135)

For you [Roma], across any land  
we will go fearing no season,  
in the heat of summer Meroë we will reach,<sup>23</sup>  
at the peak of winter the Danube.<sup>24</sup>

In several places Claudian uses certain geographical contrasts to express boundaries or efforts,<sup>25</sup> such as *Meroen – Histrum*, which is immediately followed by *solstitio – bruma*, which guides the listener through a contrast between the inhospitable north and the tame south, the foreign and the Mediterranean world.

The success of this panegyric for the Anicii must certainly have helped bring him closer to the emperor Theodosius. Most likely, Probinus and Olybrius recommended him to someone from the imperial court, and perhaps to Stilicho himself,<sup>26</sup> but Theodosius died suddenly on 17 January 395. He left the Eastern Roman Empire to his older son, Arcadius, and the Western to the still-underage Honorius and his guardian, Stilicho, the supreme military commander of both empires. As Honorius's regent, Stilicho was essentially the lord of the Western Empire from 395 to 408, and he would come to dominate Claudian's poetry almost as the primary motif of all his propagandistic works.

The Praetorian prefect in the East, Rufinus (*Flavius Rufinus*, d. 395), quickly responded to the hasty decision that had given Stilicho authority over both parts of the Empire and declared himself Arcadius's regent. Rufinus thus became a leading figure in the East, with the emperor Arcadius little more than his puppet.<sup>27</sup> Rufinus is described in the sources as being a man of bad character, and which had earned him numerous enemies. Among those in the East was Eutropius, a high-ranking court official, and among his more serious rivals in the West was Stilicho. Claudian's first foray into adding invectives to his propaganda was directed at Rufinus (in two books, 395–397<sup>28</sup>) and exalted Stilicho's moral and military superiority in defence of the Empire against recent attacks by Alaric's forces in Thessaly.<sup>29</sup> In the invective against Rufinus, he also mentions the Danube, but in two different ways. Being a classically trained poet, in the first reference, he reaches for a mythological landscape to make a symbolic reference to Rufinus's insatiability and relentless desire for gold (*In Ruf.* I 183–187).<sup>30</sup> In this allegory, the old Nereus drinks water from the largest streams to maintain a measure of balance for the world's waters. Here

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<sup>23</sup> An island and ancient city on the Nile.

<sup>24</sup> We have used our own translations from Latin rather than those published by classical scholars. Our translations, which are more literal than literary, better serve the purpose of this paper. Our literary translations adhering to Latin prosody will be published in Serbian in a forthcoming publication.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Claud. (Claudian 1963) 3.183–185.

<sup>26</sup> For Stilicho's rise in the West, see *Flavius Stilicho* V. Bury 1923: 106; *SAN* 13: 110–117; Jones, Martindale, Morris 1971: 853–858.

<sup>27</sup> Cameron 1970: 63; Nolan 1973: 21; Dilke 1969: 3–5.

<sup>28</sup> The chronology of Claudian's works is according to Coombe 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Dilke 1969: 5.

<sup>30</sup> Claud. (Claudian 1963) 3.183–187.

Claudian compares the Danube and the Nile and draws parallels between the swollen waters of former with the sevenfold mouth of the latter (*undantem Histrum – septeno gurgite Nilum*), again alluding to frontiers, in this case both moral and geographical.

ac velut innumeros amnes accedere Nereus  
nescit et undantem quamvis hinc hauriat Histrum,  
hinc bibat aestivum septeno gurgite Nilum,  
par semper similisque manet. sic fluctibus auri  
expleri calor ille nequit.

(*In Rufinum I 183-187*)

Though Nereus cannot stop countless rivers  
draining there the swollen Danube,  
drinking here the summer Nile with its sevenfold mouth,  
yet he always remains the same. But all the rivers of gold  
the thirst of this one [Rufinus] cannot quench.

Claudian liked to compare these rivers, the Nile and the Danube, and the following antithesis appears in the panegyric to Manlius Theodorus (399):<sup>31</sup>

lene fluit Nilus, sed cunctis amnibus extat  
utilior nullo confessus murmure vires;  
acrior ac rapidus tacitas praetermeat ingens  
Danuvius ripas.

(*Panegyricus Mallii Theodori 232-235*)<sup>32</sup>

Lazily flows the Nile, seemingly of all the rivers  
the most benign, for not a single sound reveals its strength;  
Swiftly and more speedily along its peaceful banks  
flows the giant Danube.

In another context within the same work written against Rufinus, Claudian touches on historical facts related to the great uprising of the Goths in Thrace under Alaric I, when Rufinus, despite being able to surround and destroy them, allowed them to venture into the Western Empire and ravage Stilicho's lands. At the end of that same year, he was killed during a mutiny in which some historians believe Eutropius was involved.<sup>33</sup>

Sic avidus praedo iam non per singula saevit.  
sed sceptris inferre minas omnique perempto  
milite Romanas ardet prosternere vires,  
iamque Getas Histrumque movet Scythiamque receptat  
auxilio traditque suas hostilibus armis  
reliquias.

(*In Rufinum I 305-310*)

And like a greedy robber, he does not rage alone,  
instead he hurls his threats against the sceptre, in every way  
depriving the army and burning the Roman forces,

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<sup>31</sup> Jones, Martindale, Morris 1971: 900-902.

<sup>32</sup> Most editions record the name in the title as *Manlii*, but Jones, Martindale, Morris 1971: 901 use *Mallius Theodorus*.

<sup>33</sup> Cameron 1970: 63; Nolan 1973: 21.

he pushes the Getae to the Danube, recovers Scythia  
and sends in aid to enemy army  
his remnants.

In another place, again, in an invective against Rufinus, Claudian uses a technique that combines mythical and historical landscapes. He mentions the Danube and the consequences of the barbarians moving against Rome when, as Claudian describes, Aeolus released the storm winds and freed nations, clearing the way for war, so that some of the barbarians then stormed across the frozen Danube. This was a depiction of real historical events—long known to the Romans—related to how the barbarians crossed the Danube.<sup>34</sup>

Haec fatus, ventis veluti si frena resolvat  
Aeolus, abrupto gentes sic obice fudit  
laxavitque viam bellis et, nequa maneret  
inmunis regio, cladem divisit in orbem  
disposuitque nefas. Alii per terga ferocis  
Danuvii solidata ruunt expertaque remos  
frangunt stagna rotis;

(*In Rufinum II* 22–28)

As it were, when Aeolus released the stormy winds,  
freeing the savages by unshackling them,  
and the gates of war were opened, leaving no  
safe ground, but world divided by the spreading evil.  
Some stormed over the frozen back of the wild  
Danube rending by wheels  
what should have been rent by oars.

After the invective against Rufinus, in 399 Claudian wrote verses criticising Eutropium (*In Eutropium*), a former dignitary of the emperor Theodosius I in Constantinople, who had fallen from grace as a result of his intrigues against the throne, became a significant political rival.<sup>35</sup> Claudian mentions the Danube three times in this work. Here, he uses oronyms and hydronyms as metaphors for the court's political climate and Eutropius's military blunder that caused damage to the Empire.

Responsat Athos Haemusque remugit;  
ingeminat raucum Rhodope concussa fragorem.  
cornua cana gelu mirantibus extulit undis  
Hebrus et exanguem glacie timor adligat Histrum.

(*In Eutropium II* 162–165)

Athos answers, and the Balkan Mountains echo;  
Again the trembling Rhodopes create a loud uproar.  
The Maritza, the marvellous water, raises horns of ice,  
fear chains the Danube.

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<sup>34</sup> Claud. (Claudian 1963) 5.27. Cf. 20.583, where there is also an allusion to the barbarians crossing the Danube.

<sup>35</sup> Claudian's works are one of the most important historical sources of information about the life of Eutropius (Martindale 1980: 440–444; Long 1996: 15).

Me nimium timido, nimium iunxere remisso  
fata viro, totum qui degener exuit Histrum,  
qui refugit patriae ritus, quem detinet aequi  
gloria concessoque cupit vixisse colonus  
quam dominus raptō.

(In *Eutropium II* 204–202)

Fate has again tied me to an overly timid, overly unworthy man,  
the degenerate that stripped the entire Danube,  
who abandoned the rites of the fatherland, whom the glory prevents  
to live as a retired farmer, but as a lord through plunder.

In the short historical epic, *De bello Gildonico* (398), Claudian sings of Gildo,<sup>36</sup> a Berber general from the province of Mauritania. Gildo had revolted against the emperor Honorius and the Western Roman Empire. In one place, Claudian mentions the Danube, around which the belligerent barbarian tribes were concentrated. Here, the poet wonders:

debueras etiam fraternis obvius ire  
hostibus, ille tuis. quae gens, quis Rhenus et Hister  
vos opibus iunctos conspirantesque tulisset?

(*De bello Gildonico* 311–313)

You ought to meet with your brotherly foes,  
and they with you, and which nation or the combined forces of the Rhine and the Danube  
could stand in alliance against you?

In these examples it becomes clear that Claudian primarily mentions the Danube in poems with political themes written to openly praise or reproach the historical figures of his time, as is evident in those written in honour of the consuls Probinus and Olybrius (consuls in 395) or the Roman politician Malius Theodorus (399), and especially in the invectives against Rufinus and Eutropius. The river Danube is not an object of Claudian's inspiration, contrary to the Nile of his youth, to which he dedicated a shorter poem.<sup>37</sup> The Danube in Claudian is rather a hydronym he frequently uses to complete a geostrategic and geopolitical image of the late Roman Empire. This becomes even more apparent in verses explicitly glorifying the deeds and persona of his patron, Stilicho.

### 3. Claudian's 'political' Danube

Claudian primarily mentions the Danube in his works of political propaganda (*Panegyricus dictus Probino et Olybrius consulibus*, *Panegyricus Mallii Theodori*, *In Rufinum*, *In Eutropium*, *De bello Gildonico*, *De bello Gothico*, *Panegyricus de tertio consulatu Honorii Augusti*, *Panegyricus de quarto consulatu Honorii Augusti*, *Panegyricus de sexto consulatu Honorii Augusti*, *De consulatu Stilichonis*, *Epithalamium de nuptiis Honorii Augusti*). Of these, the frequent use of the Danube hydronym appears in an epithalamium for the wedding of the emperor Honorius (398), panegyrics honouring the emperor Honorius's consulships (third

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<sup>36</sup> Jones, Martindale, Morris 1971: 396.

<sup>37</sup> Claud. *Carm. min.* 28 (47).

consulate, 396; fourth consulate, 398; sixth consulate, 404),<sup>38</sup> panegyrics in honour of Stilicho's consulate (400),<sup>39</sup> and most frequently in his historical epic *De bello Gothico*.<sup>40</sup> In all of these works, Claudian's primary motif is the glorification of Stilicho, which takes on epic proportions and often crosses into the realm of the divine with a selection of allusions to the Roman past and Roman values. Accordingly, he makes use of archaisms—classical vocabulary and syntax, mythical and historical landscapes—which were most certainly characteristic of late Roman panegyrics.<sup>41</sup> In Claudian's works, historical facts are always subordinated to poetic motifs such as, for example, the intentional omission of Stilicho's origins. This was because his “semi-barbaric”<sup>42</sup> protector and the true leader of not just the army but also the Empire needed to legitimise his social status among the western Roman aristocracy through Claudian's poetry.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, in Late Antiquity, when the barbarisation and Christianisation of Roman society was already well underway, the idea of Rome and what Rome represented (often identified in the current literature with the word *Romanitas*, coined by Tertullian<sup>44</sup>) was a universally inherited good, available to all who were willing to accept the laws and institutions that were *fundamenta libertatis* (Amm. 14.6.5). Thus, in Claudian, the known world under Roman leadership became *gens una* (*De Consulatu Stilichonis* III 160). The earlier formulation of Hellenic and Roman identities and self-image required more demanding cultural imperatives such as linguistic and religious factors.<sup>45</sup> Claudian's *dea Roma*, who personifies the Romans' view of themselves in relation to the “Others,” is a benevolent goddess who accepts conquered peoples as a mother (*mater*) rather than a mistress (*domina*) and protects the *humanum genus*.<sup>46</sup>

In an epithalamium sung in honour of the emperor Honorius's wedding to Stilicho's daughter Maria, Claudian glorifies the future empress in bravura verse, which Roberts refers to as an elevated “jeweled style”<sup>47</sup> by listing the rivers that will bow to her (the Rhine, Elbe, and Danube), again alluding to the Roman Empire's idealised geopolitical space:<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Claud. (Claudian 1963) 7.25, 150; 8.52, 623, 636; 28.220, 228, 413, 648.

<sup>39</sup> Claud. (Claudian 1963) 21.126, 215; 22.199, 367; *De consulatu Stilichonis* is in three books, and a shorter poem, *Ad Stilichonem*, is dedicated to Stilicho.

<sup>40</sup> Claud. (Claudian 1963) 26.81, 170, 331, 337, 489, 523, 569, 603.

<sup>41</sup> Nathan 2015: 11–13; cf. Barnes 2005: 543; Nixon, Rodgers 1994: 11.

<sup>42</sup> The epithet *semibarbarus* appears in Jerome's writings (*Jer. Ep.* 123:17). Stilicho was most likely the son of a Vandal military commander in service to Rome and a Roman woman (Jones, Martindale, Morris 1971: 853).

<sup>43</sup> By the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the presence of foreigners in the emperor's service had become commonplace in the West, and particularly in Italy, but the senatorial aristocracy held out the longest in resisting barbarization. See Schlinkert 1996; for the importance of self-representation among the Late Roman senatorial class, see Niquet 2000: 111–226.

<sup>44</sup> *De Pallio* 4.1. For the definition of the term *Romanitas*, see Papadopoulos 2018: 19–21.

<sup>45</sup> Papadopoulos claims that Christianisation contributed to the deconstruction of the traditional perception of *Romanitas* and that the example of Symmachus and the struggle with the court for the altar of Victoria was indicative of this transition (Papadopoulos 2018: 110–137).

<sup>46</sup> haec est in gremium victos quae sola receipt  
humanumque genus communi nomine fovit  
matris, non dominae ritu, civesque vocavit  
quos domuit nexuque pio longinqua revinxit  
(*De Cons. Style* III. 151–155 [Claudian 1963: 24.151–155]).

<sup>47</sup> Roberts 1989: 30.

<sup>48</sup> Claud. (Claudian 1963) 10.277.

iam te venerabitur Hister;  
nomen adorabunt populi; iam Rhenus et Albis  
serviet; in medios ibis regina Sygambros.  
quid numerem gentes Atlanteosque recessus  
Oceani? toto pariter donabere mundo.'

(*Epithalamium de nuptiis Honorii Augusti* 277–281)

The Danube will kneel before you;  
all peoples will adore your name.  
Now the Rhine and the Elbe shall protect you;  
you will be queen among the Sygambri.  
Why should I count the peoples and the far-off shores of the Atlantic?  
All of the world will be your dowry.

In a panegyric dedicated to Honorius for his third consulship, Claudian vividly describes Honorius's, or rather Stilicho's, successes over the Getae, and does not forget the river:<sup>49</sup>

Odrysium pariter Getico foedavimus Hebrum  
sanguine, Sarmaticas pariter prostravimus alas  
Riphaeaeque simul fessos porreximus artus  
in glacie stantemque rota sulcavimus Histrum:

(*Panegyricus de tertio consulatu  
Honorii Augusti* 146–154)

Together with Getic blood we stained the Thracian Maritza,  
together we broke the Sarmatian wings,  
on the snow-covered slopes of Mount Rhiphaeus we rested our weary limbs  
and scarred the frozen Danube with our chariots' wheels.

Claudian describes these turbulent events of the war in a panegyric addressed to Honorius on the occasion of his fourth consulship (398). Here the Danube becomes the grave of many peoples:

ausi Danuvium quondam transnare Gruthungi  
in lintres fregere nemus; ter mille ruebant  
per fluvium plenae cuneis inmanibus alni.  
...  
tibi debeat orbis  
fata Gruthungorum debellatumque tyrannum;  
Hister sanguineos egit te consule fluctus;  
Alpinos genitor rupit te consule montes.

(*Panegyricus de quarto consulatu  
Honorii Augusti* 623–625; 634–637)

When the Gruthungi<sup>50</sup> dared to cross the Danube  
they felled trees for boats; three thousand vessels  
overloaded with crews made their way across  
...

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Claud. (Claudian 1963) 8.52.

<sup>50</sup> This refers to an area occupied by the Gothic Gruthungi, a tribe that inhabited the Pontian steppes and started crossing the lower Danube in 376. Elsewhere, Claudian describes events that took place around 400, when they and the Ostrogoths were in service to Rome in Phrygia and took part in the uprisings. See Claud. (Claudian 1963) 20.203.

All the world owes you  
for destroying the tyranny of the Gruthungi;  
You were consul when the Danube ran red with blood,  
and you were consul when your father crossed the Alps to victory.

In a panegyric dedicated to Stilicho to honour his receiving a consulship, Claudian extols Stilicho's important role in preserving the border of the Western Roman Empire around 400. The Danube limes is mentioned five times as the ultimate geostrategic line, but the following verse is particularly telling:<sup>51</sup>

Omne, quod Oceanum fontesque interiacet Histri,  
unius incursu tremuit; sine caede subactus  
servitio Boreas exarmatique Triones. (De consulatu Stilichonis I 215–217)  
And all that lies between the Ocean and the Danube  
trembled before the assault of one man; hunted down without blood  
Boreas was enslaved and the Great Bear disarmed.

Also in the same poem, he tells of Stilicho's renewal of these desolate lands ravaged by war. Since one of these is Illyricum, he mentions the Danube and refers to Stilicho as *pacator Histri* (*De consulatu Stilichonis III 367*):<sup>52</sup>

Exsectis inculta dabant quas saecula, silvis  
restituit terras et opacum vitibus Histrum  
conserit et patrium vectigal solvere gaudet,  
immunis qui clade fuit. (De consulatu Stilichonis II 198–201)

By removing the uncultivated fields left by generations,  
he restores the land overgrown and plants vineyards on the Danube's banks  
and rejoices to pay taxes to his fatherland,  
for in war there were none.

Thus, when praising Stilicho, the Danube is more than just the border of a country; it is also a symbol of political stability. Behind this line of water lay a wild, non-Roman world.

#### 4. Claudian's "wild" Danube

All the previous illustrations demonstrate that Claudian was describing not only a political border but also something of a cultural one, which becomes explicit in the descriptions of battle scenes sung in the panegyric in honour of Honorius's sixth consulship (404) (*Panegyricus de sexto consulatu Honorii Augusti 220*<sup>53</sup>). Rome then celebrated its victory over Alaric, the leader of the barbarian tribes along the Danube, which Claudian denotes with the syntagm *saevus Hister*, practically identifying the Danube with all that is wild and barbarous. Moreover, by referring to the Danube and the Rhine, Claudian is

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<sup>51</sup> Claud. (Claudian 1963) 21.126, 215; 22.199, 367; 24.13.

<sup>52</sup> Claud. (Claudian 1963) 22.367.

<sup>53</sup> Claud. (Claudian 1963) 28.220.

repeatedly alluding to the tribes that, at the time, presented a serious threat to the Empire. He identifies the Danube with the enemy without any closer explanations: *et sextas Getica praevelans fronde secures colla triumphati proculcat Honorius Histri*.<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting that Claudian's barbarians were created according to what was then a commonly held view of the enemy, which was often a generalisation without any basis in historical fact. Additionally, Claudian's representations of that which should be feared beyond the borders, including the Danube, show us the Roman perceptions of the "Self" and the "Other."

As was shown earlier in one of Claudian's poetic scenes, when the divine Aeolus unleashes powerful winds along with the barbarian peoples and clears the way for war, some of the barbarians "stormed across the frozen waters of the wild Danube" (*alii per terga ferocis Danuvii solidata ruunt*).<sup>55</sup> Here Claudian uses the epithet *wild* (lat. *ferox*), thus making use of the concept of the non-Roman world beyond its borders.

In accordance with this theme, Claudian most often mentions the Danube in connection with the war against the Goths. His work *De bello Gothico* gives a description of Stilicho's campaign against Alaric in 401, in which he mentions the Danube eight times,<sup>56</sup> mostly as a natural boundary the barbarian hordes crossed before pillaging Roman lands. Particularly noteworthy is his image of a conversation between a Gothic elder and Alaric, in which he warns him of the danger ahead if he were to set off toward Rome:

"Si numero non fallor" ait "tricesima currit  
bruma fere, rapidum postquam transavimus Histrum, (De bello Gothico 488–489)

"If I am not mistaken," he said, "almost thirty  
winters have passed since we swam across the swift Danube."

Alaric, however, is offended by this disrespect for his military achievements and victories over the Romans, and he responds to the elder by again referring to the Danube, which has borne witness to his successes:

"Si non mentis inops fraudataque sensibus aetas  
praeberet veniam, numquam haec opprobria linguae  
turpia Danuvius me sospite ferret inultus. (De bello Gothico 521–523)

If your witless age had not deprived you of sense and reason,  
I would never have allowed such crude insults  
Be heard by the Danube and go unavenged in my presence.

Here in *De bello Gothico*, Claudian once again attributes almost divine properties to the Danube and the Rhine as well as the fate of guarding the borders of the Empire (*utraque Romuleo praetendens flumina regno*).<sup>57</sup>

With this work Claudian's propagandistic writing ceases, and since he does not

<sup>54</sup> Claud. (Claudian 1963) 28.220, 443, 648.

<sup>55</sup> Claud. (Claudian 1963) 5.27. Cf. 20.583, where there is also an allusion to the barbarians crossing the Danube.

<sup>56</sup> Claud. (Claudian 1963) 26.81, 170, 331, 337, 489, 523, 569, 603.

<sup>57</sup> *De bello Gothico* 331.

mention any other important events in Stilicho's life, such as the burning of the *Sibylline Books* and the victory of 405 over the Gothic leader Radagaisus, who led the barbarians right across the Danube to Italy, it is widely held that, by this point, Claudian had already died. In the end, this learned poet, who joined together "the mind of Virgil and Homer's muse"<sup>58</sup> in an idealised Roman interpretation, spoke not only of the Danube as a great (*ingens*) and distant river at the edge of the Roman world. He also used the Danube as a conceptual ethnicon of a cruel (*ferox*) and uncivilised (*saevus*) enemy of Rome, and from a geopolitical perspective, an essential key to Roman power.

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<sup>58</sup> This is part of the inscription on a statue erected in Rome in Claudian's honour. In the original Greek: *Εἰν ἐνὶ Βιργιλίῳ νόον / καὶ μοῦσαν Ὀμήρου / Κλαυδιανὸν Ρώμῃ καὶ / βασιλῆς ἔθεσαν* (CIL 6.1710). See Ware 2012: 2–3; Kenney, Clausen 1982: 708–712.

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## СНЕЖАНА ВУКАДИНОВИЋ

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## АЛЕКСАНДРА СМІРНОВ-БРКИЋ

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### ПОМЕНИ ДУНАВА У ПОЕТИЦИ КЛАУДИЈА КЛАУДИЈАНА

#### Резиме

Позноримски песник Клаудијан (*Claudius Claudianus fl. 395 – s. 404*) са хеленизованог Истока, стекао је славу као дворски песник западноримског цара Хонорија (393–423). Клаудијан се сматра једним од најбољих писаца касне римске књижевности, иако је свој таленат усмерио у пропагандне сврхе, за писање панегирика богатим и утицајним аристократама и политичарима, славећи пре свега чувеног војсковођу Стилихона и пишући инвективе на рачун његових непријатеља на двору источног римског цара Аркадија (395–408). У богатим песничким сликама Клаудијан помиње многе топониме, орониме и хидрониме. После Клаудијановог родног Нила, најчесталији хидроним у његовом песништву је река Дунав. Песник је помиње чак тридесет и осам пута као *Ister*, *Hister* или *Danuvius*. Аутори рада навели су и анализирали Клаудијанове песничке исказе о Дунаву као реци, узимајући у обзир имаголошки концепт који је ова река имала у римској перцепцији тог времена које Клаудијанова поезија рефлектује користећи Дунав као митску, историјску, политичку и надасве културну границу. Река Дунав није објекат Клаудијанове инспирације, за разлику од његовог родног Нила, већ фреквентни хидроним којим песник употпуњава геостратешку и геополитичку слику позног Римског царства. Клаудијан помиње Дунав првенствено у својим политичким и пропагандним делима (*Panegyricus dictus Probinuso et Olybrius consulibus*, *Panegyricus Mallii Theodori*, *In Rufinum*, *In Eutropium*, *De bello Gildonico*, *De bello Gothico*, *Panegyricus de tertio consulatu Honorii Augusti*, *Panegyricus de quarto consulatu Honorii Augusti*, *Panegyricus de sexto consulatu Honorii Augusti*, *De consulatu Stilichonis*, *Epithalamium de nuptiis Honorii Augusti*), а нарочито у стиховима са експлицитним величањем личности и дела свога патрона Стилихона које поприма епске размере и често залази у сферу божанског, уз одабране алузије на римску прошлост и римске вредности, па у складу са тим уз употребу архаичних термина – класични вокабулар и синтакса, митски и историјски пејзажи, што је свакако била карактеристика позноримских панегирика. Примењујући технику мешања митског и историјског пејзажа, Клаудијан историјске чињенице подређује захтевима песничког мотива. Нарочито у стиховима који величају и славе слику и дела Стилихона, који је пореклом био *semi-barbarus*, видимо да се у позноантичкој перцепцији *Romanitas* граница између Римљана и „других” померила од класичних норми диктираних вером и језиком ка новом концепту *una gens humana*, како Клаудијан каже, који је уједињен класичним римским наслеђем, симболично персонификованим код позноантичких писаца у *dea Roma*. Штавише, Клаудијан више пута под реком Дунав или Рајном подразумева племена која у то време представљају горући проблем Царства и не користи никава ближа објашњења, већ Дунав идентификује са непријатељем. На више места показало се да Клаудијан користи одређене географске контрасте да исказе границе или напоре, наводећи слушаоца на супротности негостољубивог севера и питомиог југа, страног и медитеранског света. У оквиру овог концепта, Клаудијан је говорио о Дунаву не само као о

далекој великој (*ingens*) реци на граници римског света, већ је створио и концептуални етник суровог (*ferox*) и нецивилизованог (*saevus*) римског непријатеља, а у геополитичком смислу есенцијалан кључ римске политичке моћи.

**Кључне речи:** Клаудијан, *Claudius Claudianus*, Дунав, *Ister*, *Danuvius*.

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