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A RETIARIUS' TRIDENT FROM SISCIA?

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Among the many finds discovered in the harbour of Sisak during the dredging undertaken in the early 20th century, several pronged spears, evidently fisherman implements, were also found. One of those finds, however, shows some notable differences. The lack of barbs on the prongs and its general appearance, strongly reminiscent of tridents' depictions used by *retiarii*, could imply that this artefact was never meant to be used to catch fishes. It would rather appear that it was a gladiatorial weapon according to analogies depicted on Roman mosaics, reliefs, graffiti, pottery and glass vessels.

Key Words: Siscia, gladiatorial games, retiarius, trident / *Ključne riječi: Siscija, gladijatorske igre, recijarij, trozub*

During one of the many dredgings undertaken in Sisak before the First World War, more precisely during the dredging performed in May 1912, a socketed iron trident came to light among hundreds of other Roman artefacts. It was given the inventory number A-2378 and remained in the holdings of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb ever since. However, it has remained unpublished. The artefact is altogether 38 cm long, the prongs are 12.5 cm long, while the width of the trident's tip, i.e. the three parallel prongs is 9 cm. The prongs are approximately spaced 3 cm apart, each prong being approximately 1 cm thick (**figs 1–2**). Finding a trident in a harbour may hardly be referred to as an odd occurrence. Roman fishermen were using harpoons and tridents on a regular basis and it is no coincidence that the trident happens to be one of Neptune's attributes. Indeed, the Kupa river in Sisak has yielded several tridents (as a matter of fact, some should rather be described as pronged spears or spears with barbed points because they have more than 3 prongs) which may be determined as Roman and one may easily imagine how they were used to catch large river fishes (**fig. 3**). There are, however, some notable differences compared to our case study. Fishing tridents'



Fig. 1. Drawing of the Kupa trident find (made by M. Galić) /
Sl. 1. Crtež nalaza trozuba iz Kupe (autorica: M. Galić)



Fig. 2. Photography of the Kupa trident find (photo: I. Krajcar) / *Sl. 2. Fotografija nalaza trozuba iz Kupe (snimio I. Krajcar)*



Fig. 3. Fishing implements from the Kupa River (photo: I. Krajcar) / Sl. 3. Ribarski pribor iz rijeke Kupe (snimio I. Krajcar)

prongs are not always parallel but they are always barbed. The specimen studied in this paper is the only one found in Siscia whose prongs are not barbed. How significant is this detail? Quite a lot, I would say: when a fisherman strikes the fish with a trident, the unfortunate animal is already as good as dead. While the fish is unlikely to survive such wounds, just being pierced does not imply that it will not try to disengage itself and escape. The fisherman still needs to ensure that his prey will not break away. This is precisely the role of the barbs which will remain stuck in the soft tissues. While our trident may have been used as a functional fisherman's instrument, it would have had a genuine construction flaw. Thus, one may wonder why a knowledgeable and experienced fisherman would have bothered catching fish with an imperfect tool.

This item may, however, be interpreted in a different way. In a Roman archaeological context, an artefact such as a trident did not necessarily belong to a fisherman. Even without being an accomplished historian or archaeologist, one is easily compelled to contemplate the possibility of this favourite attribute of Neptune being used as a weapon in gladiatorial fights. The thought is appealing but can it be substantiated with credible arguments?

Let us look first at the general context. Siscia was not just a city with a harbour, it was a large and important town, one of the main Pannonian urban centres,¹ whose inhabitants could enjoy more or less all the commodities and amenities available to average Roman city dwellers. Thus, imagining gladiatorial spectacles in Siscia is not necessarily far-fetched but there is a catch to this. There are no archaeological remains which would corroborate the existence of an amphitheatre in Siscia. Nonetheless, considering the size and the importance of the city, the existence of an amphitheatre may be surmised. Several large Pannonian cities certainly had amphitheatres,² Carnuntum, Aquincum and Brigetio even had two.³ Amphitheatres existed in Scarbantia and Gorsium as well,⁴ and its existence may be assumed in Savaria.⁵ The same conclusion may be reached for Sirmium.⁶

The lack of remains does not necessarily imply that no amphitheatre ever existed. For instance, Zosimus mentions an amphitheatre outside of Mursa's walls (which appear to have been in disuse in the mid-4th century AD since Zosimus claims that it was overgrown with woods), but no such structure has ever been discovered.⁷ Such buildings may have been primarily wooden structures which leave no visible traces unless systematic archaeological excavations take place, like in the neighbouring province of Moesia Superior, where precisely such an amphitheatre has been excavated in Viminacium.⁸ As far as Siscia is concerned, the existence of an amphitheatre has actually already been presumed by M. Rostovtzeff, who believed that Siscia may have been depicted on Trajan's column, where one clearly sees Roman troops embarking on river vessels in the harbour of a large town with an amphitheatre outside of city walls.⁹ V. Vukelić and D.

¹ Mócsy 1974, 22–23, 112–114, 273; Šašel 1974, 702–741; Hoti 1992, 133–153; Koščević, Makjanić 1995, 1–14; Lolić 2003, 131–152.

² Agócs 2012, 9–15.

³ In all the cases, one amphitheatre was a civilian one while the other was an *amphitheatrum castrense*, due to the presence of legionary garrisons; Kolendo 1979, 41–54; Golvin 2012, 136–137; Scholz 2012, 14–21; Beutler 2013, 19–34; Neubauer *et al.* 2014, 173–188; Rinaldi Tufi 2018, 148–149.

⁴ Gömöri 2003, 85; Fitz 2004, 203; see also Hornum 1993, 49, 226, cat. 133.

⁵ Hornum 1993, 49, 222–225, cat. 129–132; interestingly, the altar cat. 132 dated to the second century AD was dedicated to Nemesia Augusta by a Siscian magistrate, *Lucius Valerius Valerianus, decurio coloniae Flaviae Sisciensium, duumvir iure dicundo, flamen divi Claudii, duumvir quinquennialis and sacerdos provinciae Pannoniae Superioris*.

⁶ Popović 1981, 126–128; Ožanić 2001, 156–159; Vujović 2011, 256, 266–267.

⁷ Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, II, 50.

⁸ Bogdanović, Nikolić 2017, 87–92; Bogdanović *et al.* 2018, 44–49; see also Tacitus, *Annales*, 4.62–63 and the Fidenae disaster; Chamberland 2007, 136–147; Neighbour *et al.* 2007, 125–139; Sommer 2009, 47–60; Bloier 2015, 24–28.

⁹ Rostovtzeff 1957, 236, pl. XLII, 1; Hoti 1992, 143–144.

Pernjak further elaborated that hypothesis in two recently published papers.¹⁰ They based their assumptions on some epigraphic and archaeological finds as well as some construction reports from the sixties. Finds of theatre masks and an actor's funerary stone likely confirm that theatre plays were performed in Siscia and suggest that a public building may have been devoted to that purpose.¹¹ Oil lamps with theatrical motives are hardly an evidence for theatrical displays, but the use of bone *tesserae* as entrance tickets for theatrical shows and games is not utterly unlikely.¹² Be it as it may, the existence of a theatre does not imply that it could have been used for gladiatorial spectacles as well, although it is not impossible.¹³ The authors follow the suggestion that Siscia may have been represented on Trajan's column but, interestingly, they dismiss the possibility of an amphitheatre being represented on that particular relief. They see it as a defensive tower, a rather fanciful assumption since the relief is not remindful of any known type of Roman fortification. It is clearly an amphitheatre, beyond any doubt, but I assume that the authors were unwilling to see it as such since there are no remains of an amphitheatre in the vicinity of Siscia's southern gate. In any case, we cannot claim with certainty that Siscia is actually represented on Trajan's column at all, and the whole idea has to remain in the realm of conjecture. The authors' suggestion that Siscia's amphitheatre may have been a timber structure is rather credible though and I agree with their conclusion that this "phantom" amphitheatre certainly was not *intra muros*, considering the results of over a century of archaeological research within Siscia. They proposed another location, *extra muros*, on the opposite bank of the Kupa river, where the city hospital has been built in the sixties. Their rather convincing arguments are based on terrain configuration, but also on reports of construction engineers who mention discoveries of Roman bricks and point out odd geomorphologic features, i.e. "an exceptionally regular slope in the form of a horseshoe". A very superficial archaeological survey appears to have been conducted at the time but to no avail. New research in that area may provide more conclusive evidence, but the amphitheatre location suggested by V. Vukelić is quite plausible. Despite the lack of clear evidence, it is quite certain that gladiatorial games actually took place in Siscia. As a matter of fact, even in the neighbouring municipium, Andautonia, a far smaller town than Siscia, games likely took place, at least occasionally. While there is no evidence yet for an amphitheatre in Andautonia, the Nemesis relief found there, dated to

¹⁰ Vukelić, Pernjak 2013a, 14–23; Vukelić, Pernjak 2013b, 251–257.

¹¹ See also Rnjak 1979, cat. 181, 184 (catalogue entries by V. Damevski).

¹² See also Damevski 1981, 252–257; Rnjak 1979, cat. 618–619 (catalogue entries by V. Damevski).

¹³ It was definitely common in the eastern part of the Empire, see for instance Jory 1986, 537–539; Bennett 2009, 1, 8–10; Kelly 2011, 77–79; Carlsen 2014, 441, 445, 448; Dodge 2014, 555–556.

the second half of the 2nd or early 3rd century AD at the latest, is clearly related to games because it depicts the deity with quite a few gladiatorial weapons and pieces of equipment, among them a trident as well, as a matter of fact remarkably similar to the piece discovered in Siscia (**fig. 4**).¹⁴ Notables holding offices in Siscia, especially priests of the imperial cult, would have been expected to organise games, just like everywhere else, and it is quite certain that they must have done it from time to time, if not on a regular basis.¹⁵

Taking into account all of the above, inhabitants of Siscia could likely have enjoyed watching games like many other townspeople in the provinces. Thus the trident found in the Kupa could have belonged to a gladiator. Obviously, not any gladiator, since only one *armatura*, i.e. one gladiatorial category or type of fighters was using the trident as its weapon. Those men, the *retiarii*, took their name from the most distinctive piece of their equipment, the net, i.e. *rete* in Latin.¹⁶ Besides, they were armed with a trident (usually called a *fuscina*,¹⁷ although the term *tridens*¹⁸ was also used)¹⁹ and a dagger as a backup weapon.²⁰ They were the least armoured gladiators, wearing no helmet and using no shield, relying for their protection solely on a shoulderguard (*galerus*)²¹ and often an armguard as well (*manica*).²²

The *retiarii* were a relatively new development in gladiatorial fighting since this category of fighters does not appear to have been introduced in the arena much before the beginning of the first century AD. It was definitely in existence by the reign of Caligula, although the origins of the fighting style most certainly go back for a few more decades, i.e. to the Augustan period.²³

This *armatura* started gaining widespread popularity from the second half of the first century AD on, the admiration for *retiarii* kept steadily rising among fans

¹⁴ *AIJ* 474; Selem 1980, 265–266; Hornum 1993, 61, 67, 72, 175–176, cat. 38, pl. XXVI; Knezović 2010, 193–199; Buovac 2013, 145–151; Knezović 2013, 80–88; for a general overview, see also Tataki 2009, 641–647; Pastor 2011, 83–93.

¹⁵ Oliver, Palmer 1955, 340–343; Ville 1981, 175–200, 212–213; Carter 2003, 83–87, 100–111; Chamberland 2007, 136–147; Tataki 2009, 640–646; Pastor 2011, 83–93; Rinaldi Tufi 2018, 94–97; Streinu 2018, 358–362.

¹⁶ Junkelmann 2000a, 94–95; Matyszak 2011, 96–98; Manas 2016, 704–705.

¹⁷ *TLL*, Vol. VI.1, 1651–1652, s.v. *fuscina*; *OLD*, 750–751, s.v. *fuscina*.

¹⁸ *OLD*, 1974, s.v. *tridens*.

¹⁹ Junkelmann 2000a, 94; Matyszak 2011, 98–99; Bishop 2017, 73.

²⁰ Bishop 2017, 71–72.

²¹ *TLL*, Vol. VI.2, 1678, s.v. *galerum et galerus*; Junkelmann 2000a, 81–82; Bishop 2017, 80.

²² Bishop 2017, 79–80.

²³ Suetonius, *Caligula* 30.3; Flecker 2015, 292–293, 299, L 20, L 21, L 39; Manas 2016, 705–709; Manas 2018, 1–12.



Fig. 4. Nemesis relief from Andautonia (photo: I. Krajcar) / Sl. 4. Reljef Nemeze iz Andautonije (snimio I. Krajcar)

and they remained popular till the end of gladiatorial games by the end of the 4th century AD.²⁴ The origin of this *armatura* is unknown but it appears to be the only one without a clear martial tradition, usually tracing back to some Roman enemies of the past.²⁵ Quite obviously, the fighting style seems to be inspired by the way fishermen catch fishes, by using a net to catch and entangle them and a trident to dispatch them (interestingly, fishermen normally do not use those implements at the same time, nor for the same type of pray), although one may wonder how this became a fighting style in the arena.²⁶ The *retiarius* was opposed to a heavy fighter,²⁷ at first the *murmillo* and later the *secutor*, whose helmet was smooth on purpose, in order to make it more resistant to trident's strikes and less prone to be snagged by the net.²⁸ Was the trident an efficient weapon? As a matter of fact, it was. The main offensive weapon of the *retiarius* is estimated to have been 1.6 m long on average and appears to always have had a three-pronged tip. As we will see later, according to known depictions, those prongs seem to have been rather short. This may likely be explained by the fact that basically any vital organ of the body may be reached by any 10 cm blade.²⁹ At the same time, shorter massive prongs are less likely to break after repeatedly hitting a metal surface like a thick helmet. It would also appear that, unlike fishermen's tridents, *fuscinae* used in the arena did not need barbs. This may be due to two reasons. It has already been pointed out that a fisherman wants to prevent his pray slipping off his trident and barbs are eminently suitable for that purpose. A *retiarius* would probably have wished to avoid his main weapon becoming entangled, which could easily occur if a tip with barbed prongs would get through a net. At the same time, one may say that barbed prongs would be difficult to extract from your opponent's body as well. This is to be expected but this would perhaps not have been the main concern of the *retiarius* once he impaled his adversary. It would rather have been a concern for the *lanista*³⁰ and the *editor* or *munerarius*,³¹ i.e. the owner of the gladiatorial troop and the notable who was financing the *munus* from his own pocket.

²⁴ Junkelmann 2000a, 124–127; Junkelmann 2000b, 59–61; Teyssier, Lopez 2005, 54–67; Futrell 2006, 96–98; Borriello, Rocco 2008, 28; Matyszak 2011, 96–99; Gilbert 2013a, 97–99; Bishop 2017, 91–94; Rinaldi Tufi 2018, 87–88.

²⁵ Cf. Manas 2018, 1–2, 12–14.

²⁶ Could it have been inspired by the story of the siege of Tyre, whose defenders used nets and fishermen's tridents against Alexander the Great troops? See Junkelmann 2000a, 125; Gilbert 2013b, 140–141; Bishop 2017, 93; Manas 2018, 2–12.

²⁷ Teyssier, Lopez 2005, 60–67.

²⁸ Manas 2016, 707–709; Bishop 2017, 75, 97.

²⁹ Matyszak 2011, 89–91.

³⁰ Ville 1981, 272–276; Gilbert 2013a, 12–15.

³¹ Ville 1981, 175–225, 276–277; Junkelmann 2000a, 129.

Using barbed prongs would have very likely provoked gruesome injuries. The point of the fight was not to maim your opponent, an outcome to be likely expected if hit with three barbed prongs. Obviously, a deep penetration in the throat, torso, stomach or back with a trident would in any case likely result in death. It would not have mattered much if the prongs were barbed or not. However extracting barbed prongs from a non vital part of the body, like an arm or a foot would not necessarily have been fatal but it would certainly have irretrievably damaged muscle tissues. A man wounded by blades cleanly extracted from his body could have been patched up by a decent doctor – and gladiators could rely on competent surgeons³² – but a permanently incapacitated fighter was a big financial loss, both for the *lanista* who invested a lot of money to train and sustain him and for the *editor* who had to reimburse the *lanista* for any killed or injured gladiator, a sum far higher than the lease price he paid for the troop to perform. Only a very rich game *editor* – or a very blood thirsty one looking to attract the favour of the public at any cost – would have disregarded that. As a matter of fact, weapons may occasionally even have been blunted on purpose in order to reduce fatal injuries.³³

Gladiatorial fights were certainly dangerous and deaths were not unusual but they were more exceptional than we are led to believe. Combat was strictly regulated, fighters were controlled by referees, while the *editor* and the *lanista* were looking to protect their financial interests.³⁴ The public was not looking forward to see brave and competent fighters killed, especially if they were well-liked or even adulated stars. Unless one of the gladiators was dispatched by a (un)fortunate hit, the fighters were normally just trying to overpower their opponents. Combat was usually short because it was extremely tiresome and well trained gladiators were generally not even trying to kill their adversaries with a single blow. In fact, no gladiator was ever sent to the arena without a long and thorough training and even freshmen could stand a chance since they were far from being unprepared for their first fight.³⁵

The goal was to show the public their skill and spectators were far more thrilled by a spectacular combat which would end with one of the exhausted

³² Wiedemann 1992, 117; Junkelmann 2000a, 141–142; Gilbert 2013a, 56–59, 130–135; Bishop 2017, 135.

³³ Carter 2006, 166–167, 170–172.

³⁴ Ville 1981, 318–325; Wiedemann 1992, 116–124; Kyle 1998, 84–86; Junkelmann 2000a, 134–136; Junkelmann 2000b, 67–68; Carter 2007, 98–112; Matyszak 2011, 162–165; Gilbert 2013b, 136–139, 142–146.

³⁵ Gilbert 2013a, 25–103; Carter 2018, 127–130; Bishop 2017, 117–121.

fighters asking for mercy.³⁶ Gladiators actually had a fair chance to stay alive after a fight, at least during the imperial period, especially so in the 1st and most of the 2nd century AD, according to statistics. Good fighters were spared most often than not and quite a few gladiators survived several defeats.³⁷ Sometimes, a badly injured gladiator would be given a coup de grâce, even if he fought well, because the referees and the doctors would point to the *munerarius* that there is no hope to save him. Considering all of the above, it is very likely that tridents meant to be used in the arena normally did not have barbed prongs, for purely pragmatic reasons. A find from Ephesus led some scholars to believe that a *retiarius'* trident could have had barbed prongs as well but even if it is true, this could unlikely have been the norm. It is not my intention to dispute the conclusions of forensic specialists, but some doubts should be in place here: among the remains of some of the individuals who have been identified as gladiators, two skulls appear to have suffered *antemortem* injuries inflicted by a trident while one skull clearly suffered *perimortem* wounds from the same weapon. The latter fatal wound was inflicted by a trident whose central prong was quite likely barbed.³⁸ The authors point out the fact that depictions of *retiarius'* tridents usually show the weapon with straight prongs and only seldom with barbed ones. According to them, the barbed prong may have been useful for catching and pulling back the opponent's shield. They found an analogy from Ephesus' harbour where a trident was discovered whose distance between prongs exactly matches the distance between two lesions on the skull of the men dispatched by a trident. The photograph of this trident is shown in both articles but since the implement does not seem to have been cleaned, it is hard to tell what kind of barbs it might have. Unlike most depictions of tridents used by *retiarii*, the specimen from Ephesus harbour does not have straight outer prongs. Admittedly, the suggestion that this was a genuine piece of gladiatorial equipment is not convincing enough. It could simply be a fishermen's trident and there is no particular reason why its dimensions would not match similar implements used by the *retiarii*. Another puzzling question concerns the circumstances in which the trident was used to kill that ill-fated individual. The adversaries of the *retiarii* all wore helmets and it is basically impossible that a trident, even wielded by an extremely strong individual, would have pierced a helmet worn by a *murmillio* or, even less likely, by a *secutor*. The man who was killed must have been bareheaded at the moment of his death and we may

³⁶ Auguet 1970, 49–60; Ville 1981, 408–425; Junkelmann 2000a, 136–142; Coulston 2009, 200–202; Gilbert 2013b, 146–162.

³⁷ Ville 1981, 318–325; Wiedemann 1992, 119–124; Junkelmann 2000a, 142–145; Junkelmann 2000b, 69–70; Futrell 2006, 143–145; Carlsen 2011, 86–91; Matyszak 2011, 173–178; Gilbert 2013a, 124–128.

³⁸ Kanz, Grossschmidt 2006, 209–216; Kanz, Grossschmidt 2009, 216–217.

doubt that he was actually a gladiator at all. Was he simply executed by a gladiator, i.e. a *retiarius*?³⁹ Gladiators wearing helmets were not taking them off even when they were supposed to be executed and in any case they would have been dispatched with a dagger if they were not granted *missio*.⁴⁰ The aforementioned finds from Ephesus are extremely interesting and there is no much doubt that most if not all of those mortal remains indeed belonged to gladiators. Nonetheless, the exact circumstances of the death of the individual killed by a trident as well as his background remain puzzling.

Since there are no undisputed analogies, i.e. no finds of tridents which may be attributed to *retiarii* beyond doubt, we have to rely on iconography and depictions of this weapon. Fortunately, those are quite numerous. Many mosaics all over the Empire show gladiatorial fights and *retiarii* are very often represented among all the fighters.⁴¹ Those depictions are more often than not of high quality and the equipment and weapons of the gladiators are shown with a lot of details. The famous gladiator mosaic (and huge, measuring approximately 28 meters) discovered at Torrenova on the Via Casilina, not far away from Rome, is now housed in the Galleria Borghese. The name of each gladiator shown on the mosaic – dated to the late 3rd or early 4th century AD – is inscribed next to him, and all those who did not survive the fight have next to them a Ø symbol, fairly certainly the first letter of the word θάνατος, dead... Quite a few of the gladiators depicted on the mosaic are *retiarii* with tridents. All of those tridents are shown the same way: a socketed tip with short, massive parallel prongs, none of which has barbs. The wooden shafts of most tridents appear to have iron butts (**fig. 5**).⁴² Basically identical tridents are depicted on mosaics from Augst (dated to the early 3rd century AD),⁴³ Zliten (dated approximately to the 2nd century AD, although some date it to the late 1st century AD, or the Severan period),⁴⁴ Verona (dated around 200 AD),⁴⁵ Kos (3rd century AD),⁴⁶ Bignor (late 3rd–4th century AD),⁴⁷ on the mosaic found on the Via Appia in Rome, now in the National Archaeological Museum of Spain in Madrid (dated to the 3rd century AD),⁴⁸ the mosaic from Aix-en-Provence (dated

³⁹ Wiedemann 1992, 119; Futrell 2006, 90.

⁴⁰ Junkelmann 2000b, 68; Matyszak 2011, 167–168.

⁴¹ Flecker 2015, 139–142; Rinaldi Tufi 2018, 80–82.

⁴² CIL VI 10206; Junkelmann 2000a, 144–145, figs 228–230; Borriello, Rocco 2008, 31.

⁴³ Junkelmann 2000a, 97, figs 135, 137.

⁴⁴ Parrish 1985, 153–158; Junkelmann 2000a, 102–103, figs 142, 211.

⁴⁵ Junkelmann 2000a, 106–107, figs 149, 151.

⁴⁶ Junkelmann 2000a, 38, fig. 51.

⁴⁷ Henig 1995, 90, 124; Wilmott 2007, 142–143, fig. 2; Hingley 2008, 252.

⁴⁸ Junkelmann 2000a, 136–137, fig. 216.

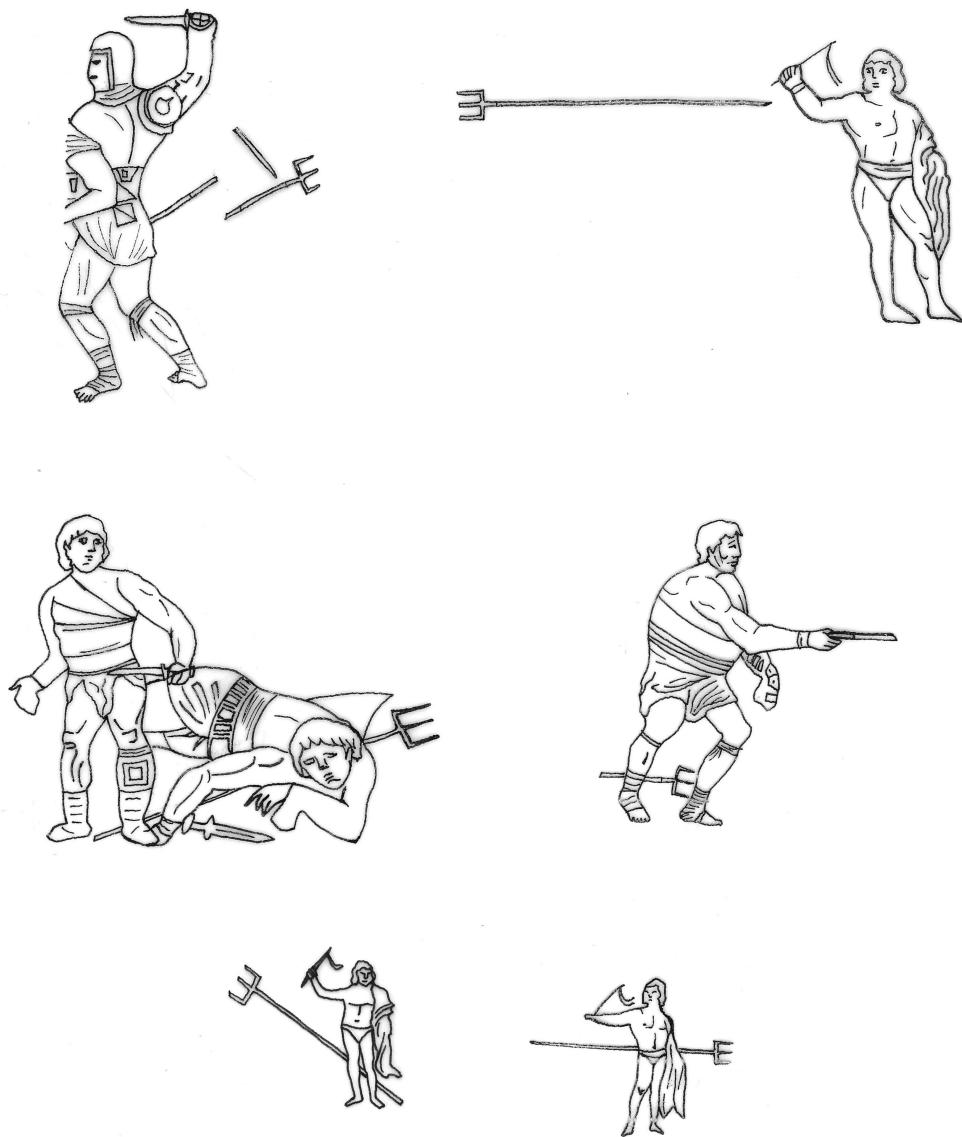


Fig. 5. Details of trident depictions on the Torrenova mosaic (made by H. Ivezić after Boriello, Rocco 2008)
/ Sl. 5. Detalji prikaza trozuba na mozaiku iz Torrenove (nacrtala H. Ivezić prema Boriello, Rocco 2008)

to the late 1st century AD),⁴⁹ or on the mosaic from Aenona (dated to the late 1st or early 2nd century AD).⁵⁰

Funerary monuments of gladiators with figural reliefs quite often show the implements used by the dead man, and *retiarii* are no exception.⁵¹ A rapid overview of the available data shows that the trident is normally depicted with a rather short, three-pronged tip, while the prongs as a rule do not appear to have been barbed. The monument of Umbricius Scaurus (or Festius Ampliatus) in Pompeii, had stucco reliefs, now lost, which depicted a *munus*, and among other things, tridents fairly reminiscent of our specimen in Siscia.⁵² Friese fragments from Rome, now housed in the Galleria Chiaramonti in the Vatican Museum and dated to the 2nd century AD, also show the same type, i.e. short tip with unbarbed prongs.⁵³ An outstanding friese fragment from Patras depicts three pairs of gladiators fighting, among them a *retiarius* hitting the top of a *secutor's* shield with his short-tipped trident.⁵⁴ Another funerary stone from Patras clearly depicts the deceased *retiarius* with a trident, again with unbarbed prongs.⁵⁵ The Capitoline Museum has a fragmentary relief from a funerary monument depicting several victories of the deceased *retiarius*. His weapon also has a short, three-pronged tip, again without barbs.⁵⁶ Another relief from Rome, dated to the 3rd century AD, also depicts a fight between a *secutor* and a *retiarius*, namely Delphinus and Narcissus, whose trident looks rather similar to what has been described above.⁵⁷ Two funerary *stelae* from Romania show reliefs of deceased *retiarii*: the *retiarius* Argutos holds a trident with three short prongs that appear unbarbed, while the depiction of the *retiarius* Skirtos shows him holding a trident with short, massive prongs clearly without barbs.⁵⁸ An interesting graffito on a brick from Apulum also depicts a *retiarius*, namely a certain Herculanius holding a short tipped trident with unbarbed prongs as well.⁵⁹ The Chester relief undeniably depicts a *retiarius* holding

⁴⁹ Lavagne 1994, 29–32.

⁵⁰ Dubolnić Glavan 2018, 46–47, fig. 6, 62, T. 1.

⁵¹ Flecker 2015, 142–147.

⁵² Junkelmann 2000a, 76–77, fig. 108; Borriello, Rocco 2008, 12–13; Flecker 2015, 242–244, A 56.

⁵³ Junkelmann 2000a, 24–25, fig. 26; Flecker 2015, 246–248, A 60 A–D (the fragments 60A clearly depicts a tip with three short parallel prongs, while fragment 60B shows a tip with external prongs slightly bending outwards).

⁵⁴ Papapostolou 1989, 388–393, fig. 32; Flecker 2015, 276–277, B 8.

⁵⁵ Papapostolou 1989, 378–380, fig. 20.

⁵⁶ *CIL* VI, 33988; Junkelmann 2000a, 16–17, fig. 16; Flecker 2015, 277–278, C1.

⁵⁷ Junkelmann 2000a, 146–147, fig. 233; Flecker 2015, 282, C4.

⁵⁸ Bondoc 2006, 34, cat. 27–28.

⁵⁹ Bondoc 2006, 29, cat. 1.

a short tipped trident with prongs evidently without barbs.⁶⁰ A funerary relief from Smyrna, now in the Ashmolean, on loan from the Museum of the City of London, depicts an almost fully equipped *retiarius* (he is only missing his net), with a trident in his right hand, again with a short, massive three-pronged tip with no discernible barbs.⁶¹ A 4th century AD sarcophagus from Rome bears a relief depicting Iulius Balerianus, the deceased *retiarius* holding a net and a trident with a particularly short three-pronged tip without barbs.⁶² There are few reliefs depicting equipment on gladiators' urns discovered in Salona, with some tridents as well, with a relatively short tip formed of three parallel prongs without barbs, rather similar to the Siscia's specimen.⁶³ A honorary monument, now in Istanbul but discovered in Vize in Thrace, bears the relief of a *retiarius* fighting a *secutor*. The tip of the trident is badly executed, one actually only sees a rectangle, but in any case the tip must have been short.⁶⁴ Depictions of *retiarum* on ceramics, i.e. vessels, lamps and decorative medallions are not uncommon and while their quality varies a lot, one may clearly see unbarbed prongs on quite a few of those representations.⁶⁵ *Retiarum* and their tridents appear on glass vessels as well, and the depictions match those on ceramics.⁶⁶

When one looks at graffiti depicting *retiarum* in combat, despite the general crudeness of those drawings, the trident is usually represented as being slightly shorter than the man holding it (occasionally also longer or more or less the same size), either used as a single- or double-handed weapon, always with three short parallel prongs or tines (only seldom are the outer prongs slightly bent inwards). Normally, the prongs do not appear to be barbed.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Jackson 1983, 87–95; Junkelmann 2000a, 94–95, fig. 132; Wilmott 2007, 141–143.

⁶¹ Junkelmann 2000a, 124–125, fig. 197; Junkelmann 2000b, 58.

⁶² Junkelmann 2000a, 30–31, fig. 39.

⁶³ Rnjak 1979, cat. 551, 561 (catalogue entries by N. Cambi, with further bibliographical references).

⁶⁴ Robert 1982, 154–156.

⁶⁵ See, for instance, the famous cup from Camulodunum (Colchester), dated to the late 2nd century AD, with a depiction of the *secutor* Memnon vanquishing the *retiarius* Valentinus, whose trident lies on the ground and has a short tip with unbarbed prongs, Junkelmann 2000a, 20–21, fig. 22; Wilmott 2007, 143–145; see also Balsan, Vernhet 1971, 87; Gassend 1978, 107, fig. 7; Junkelmann 2000a, 126, fig. 199, 134–135, fig. 213; Junkelmann 2000b, 46, fig. 30; Flecker 2015, 292–293, 299–300, L 20, L 21, L 39, L 41.

⁶⁶ Landes 1986, 345–349; Hope, Whitehouse 2003, 295–300; Foy, Fontaine 2010, 91, 103–105, cat. 135, fig. 7.

⁶⁷ Liou, B. *et al.* 1976, 255–260, figs 1–2; Deniaux, Bartaud 1979, 265–268, fig. 1; Langner 2001, 48, cat. 820, 823, 827–830, 833–837, 839–840, 850, 852, 912–915, 1015–1017; cat. 1015 from Ephesus clearly depicts a trident with barbed prongs, while cat. 911 from Albano Laziale is a rare depiction (and a very schematic one) of a trident whose prongs are not parallel; Garraffoni, Funari 2009, 189–191.

Admittedly, this is not an exhaustive list of gladiatorial tridents' depictions in the Roman world, but just an overview of analogies to be found in the easily available publications. The point was to find weapons similar to the specimen from Siscia, but also to find out how common (or uncommon) unbarbed prongs on those depictions are. Portrayals of barbed prongs are few and far between in the available documentation, suggesting that prongs without barbs must have been the norm.

In any case, the trident found in the Kupa river in the harbour of Sisak, the ancient Siscia, is remarkably similar to the depictions of the *fuscina* used by the *retiarii*. After looking at all those mosaics and reliefs, it would appear that the artefact housed nowadays in the Zagreb Archaeological Museum was not meant to be used as a fisherman's implement. However, we may wonder how it ended up in the river. As a matter of fact, it was found in a river, but also next to a large city where gladiatorial games likely took place. Thus, both fishermen and gladiators may have used it. Was it a gladiatorial weapon reused by true fishermen? It seems unlikely. Was it rather a votive gift? I am not aware of other pieces of gladiatorial equipment found in rivers which may have been interpreted as such. Accordingly, it could be a rather unlikely conjecture, maybe even fanciful. Nonetheless, before expressing the hope that the remains of Siscia's amphitheatre may be found one day, I find it more suitable to finish this paper with a suggestion. Without elaborating further, one should perhaps keep in mind that another group of well armed and trained Romans was occasionally offering their weapons as votive gifts...⁶⁸ Soldiers certainly did it from time to time, could some gladiators have done it as well, once in a while? *Affaire à suivre...*

Be it as it may, further research or a lucky find may offer more clues about gladiatorial games in Siscia, providing perhaps more arguments for the interpretation I suggested for this item.

⁶⁸ Bishop, Coulston 2006, 30–31 with further references.

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SAŽETAK

Trozub recijarija iz Siscije?

Među tisućama rimskih nalaza otkrivenih tijekom jaružanja rijeke Kupe pronađeno je, zajedno s mnoštvom ribarskog pribora, i nekoliko trozuba i četverožuba koji se nedvojbeno mogu identificirati kao ribarski alat. Ipak, jedan od tih artefakata bitno odskače izgledom. Vrhovi mu nemaju kukice tipične za ribarske trozube, a ujedno izrazito nalikuje prikazima recijarijskih trozuba na mozaicima i reljefima, kao i onima na grafitima te keramičkom i staklenom posuđu. Izostanak bitnog morfološkog detalja za ribarski alat, kao i naglašena sličnost s brojnim poznatim prikazima tog gladijatorskog oružja upućivali bi na mogućnost da je uistinu riječ o trozubu koji su mogli rabiti recijariji. Dok su kukice od iznimne koristi za ribare, odnosno za trozube koje su ribari koristili, uporaba takvog oružja od strane gladijatora vrlo bi vjerojatno, ukoliko ne bi odmah došlo do smrtonosne ozljede, uzrokovala trajne posljedice i invaliditet žrtve. Po svim raspoloživim podacima iz izvora takvo što se čini neprihvatljivim rizikom, ne samo za same gladijatore, već i za vlasnike gladijatorskih družina odnosno laniste, kao i za organizatore i financijere igara. Potonji su, naime, bili dužni obešteti lanistu ne samo u slučaju smrti gladijatora, nego i u slučaju zadobivanja ozljeda koje bi preživjelog borca trajno udaljile iz arene. Velika većina prikaza recijarijskog trozuba prikazuje to oružje bez kukica, što po svemu sudeći nije slučajnost, već pragmatična mjera opreza.

Iako u Sisciji nema pouzdanih arheoloških tragova amfiteatra, postoje ozbiljne indicije da je on mogao postojati. S obzirom na veličinu i važnost tog urbanog središta, gotovo da nema sumnje da su se tamo, makar i samo povremeno, morale odigravati gladijatorske igre. Utoliko otkriće ovog trozuba ne čudi, mada kontekst nalaza izaziva određene nedoumice. Dok se gubitak ribarskog trozuba u rijeci može smatrati očekivanom i uobičajenom pojavom, ukoliko uistinu je riječ o recijarijskom trozubu teško je pružiti nedvosmislen odgovor na pitanje kako je taj predmet mogao završiti u rijeci, pa makar to bilo u luci grada u kojem su se više nego vjerojatno organizirale gladijatorske igre. U nedostatku analogija, tvrditi da je riječ o votivnom daru u najmanju se ruku čini smjelo pretpostavkom. Ipak, možda ni tu hipotezu ne možemo apsolutno odbaciti, barem dok se ne pojave nalazi koji bi na gladijatore i gladijatorske igre u Sisciji bacili novo svjetlo.