

Votive stone carvings from Tibiscum. Local production and import

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Abstract. Tibiscum is an important military and civilian settlement from south-western part of Dacia Superior. In the fort several units were garrisoned, mainly from oriental provinces of the Empire and beside the fortification the civil settlement quickly flourished and in the beginning of the IIIrd century AD the settlement here become a *municipium* or at least some part of it. The votive stone carvings discovered in the fort, the *vicus* or the *municipium* represent, in general, Greco-Roman divinities regardless of the fact that the main troops forming the garrison here were of oriental origin. Were discovered representations of Jupiter, Diana, Mercury, Silvanus, Liber Pater, Venus, Hercules etc.; along them several representation of Danubian Riders and two Epona representations. Some votive carvings were made in stone workshops from Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, others were made somewhere in the South of the Danube line and some others are made locally. The ones produced locally are easy traceable because they are of small size and very schematized.

Keywords: Votive reliefs, stone-workshops, local productions, Greek-Roman deities

Rezumat. Sculpturi votive de la Tibiscum. Producție locală și importuri. Tibiscum este o importantă așezare militară și civilă din Dacia Superior. Castrul era garnizoana mai multor unități, în special din provinciile orientale ale Imperiului și pe lângă fortificație a înflorit o așezare civilă care, în secolul al III-lea p. Chr., a devenit *municipium*, sau cel puțin o parte a acesteia. Reliefurile în piatră descoperite în castru, *vicus* sau *municipium*, înfățișează în general divinități greco-romane, în ciuda faptului că unitățile principale care formau garnizoana erau de origine orientală. Au fost descoperite statui și reliefuli care înfățișează pe Iupiter, Diana, Mercurius, Silvanus, Liber

Pater, Venus, Hercules etc., și, pe lângă acestea, câteva reprezentări ale Cavalerilor Danubieni și două reliefuri ale zeiței Epona. Unele au fost realizate în atelierul de la Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, altele provin din ateliere de la sud de Dunăre și unele au fost produse în atelierul local. Produsele locale sunt ușor de recunoscut pentru că sunt de dimensiuni mici și foarte schematizate.

Cuvinte cheie : Reliefuri votive, ateliere de pietrărie, producție locală, divinități greco-romane

Tibiscum is an important military, civil and commercial centre in Roman Dacia on the banks of Timiș river. The name – Tibiscum is supposed to derive from Thraco-Dacian language and means a marshy place literally translating «place of the marsh»¹. Tibiscum is a military center right from Trajan conquest and soon after a permanent stone military fort was built here, along the fort a civil settlement appeared quickly (military *vicus*) and another roman settlement was founded on the other bank of the river almost in the same time.

In the reign of Antoninus Pius some reorganizational works have been done by the Romans and a new stone fort (larger) and a new civil settlement appeared on the banks of Timiș River. At this time three military units were stationed here (*cohors I Sagittariorum* replaced at some time at the end of the 2nd century AD by *cohors I Vindelicorum equitata c. R. pia fidelis, numerus Palmyrenorum* and *numerus Maurorum*).

In the North-Eastern part of the fort, nearby it, the civil settlement – the military *vicus* expanded also in the time of Antoninus Pius. This settlement grew larger and in the time of Caracalla the civil settlement will become *municipium Tibiscense*. In fact the Severus dynasty reign was for Tibiscum the «golden age» period, for instance the dedications for imperial family is quite abounded in this time, also economic growth is observed through archaeological means. Here pottery workshops existed along tile and brick ones², glass³, blacksmith and jewelry shops⁴. Just presumed but not actually found a stone workshop had been present here. This concentration of workshops

¹ Benea/Bona 1994, 7.

² Benea/Bona 1994, 92-96.

³ Benea/Bona 1994, 101-102.

⁴ Benea/Bona 1994, 96-100.

along trading businesses (also attested here) makes Tibiscum quite unique in Roman Dacia⁵.

Stone monuments from Tibiscum were never subjected to paleographic and scientific examination⁶ and the stone was identified just by looking at it. Limestone was the most used type of stone at Tibiscum, especially cristallin one but we have encountered also fosilier one. Sandstone was also used especially for funerary monuments.

Marble was used at Tibiscum especially of epigraphic monuments and votive reliefs. Due to these particularities we assert that a stone workshop existed at *Tibiscum* only for the needs of the inhabitants and not concentrated on export.

At Tibiscum are known now many votive stone monuments (statues, statuettes, plaques and reliefs) making easy to define religious beliefs here both in the military and civilian life. The main concern of this study are votive reliefs, usually we have encountered here divinities from Roman pantheon such as Jupiter, Diana, Mercury, Liber Pater, Venus, and also Epona and Danubian Riders.

Jupiter is present at Tibiscum with two reliefs, in one he is alone and in the other he is represented along Diana. The first relief is actually a bas-relief and the depiction of Jupiter is quite typical to Roman art. Jupiter is nude and is holding the scepter in his left hand and in the right hand holding the bunch of lightning or the *patera*⁷ (Pl. I/1). His image is completed by the eagle with the open wings. The depiction is more schematic than natural especially the musculature is heavily schematized. The relief was discovered in the North-Western part of the Roman fort alongside to an altar dedicated to Juppiter Conservator.

The second relief shows both Jupiter and Diana (Pl. I/2), Jupiter on the right and Diana on the left; the god has a similar depiction as before holding the scepter in the left hand, with the crinkle of his clothes along the waist and on the left shoulder⁸. The image of Diana is fragmented; we can only see her right hand which is used to take an arrow from her back quiver, an extremely common depiction of this goddess. The artistic touch is more carefully than the first one especially to the left hand of Jupiter and his coat crinkles.

⁵ Benea/Bona 1994, 27.

⁶ Wollmann 1973, 120, no. 84.

⁷ Moga/Benea 1979, 131.

⁸ Benea 1997, 233-234, no. 1.

Jupiter is shown on relief carvings with other deities too, in our case alongside Diana into a manner of depiction very similar with that from Bukovo⁹ from South-Eastern part of today Serbia were is depicted alongside Dionysus and Hercules. Jupiter is shown in both carving reliefs holding in his left hand his scepter, and the manner of holding this scepter and the position of the fingers on the scepter are similar in both depictions also the position of the left arm is similar at Tibiscum and Bukovo. The manner of execution of the carving is different though the relief from Serbia has a higher artistic quality so we assert that these similarities are consistent with the use of templates in both cases.

Diana hunting has been represented alone in one limestone relief from *Tibiscum* (Pl. I/3). We can see the goddess in frontal view, clothed in a Doric chiton covering her to her knees; over chiton she wears a *hymation*¹⁰. Unusually, she is not represented along another deity and also without a dog or a buck deer. A similar piece in representation of the deity was uncovered at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa¹¹.

Mercury is shown at Tibiscum on a single marble relief (Pl. I/4), depicted with cloak over bear shoulders, his musculature is quite anatomically correct executed and also we can observe the intention of the artisan to show Mercury as a calm and distinguished young man, but artistically this relief is a modest achievement¹². Mercury is wearing a *chlamys* and *petasus*. The wings are depicted schematically.

Liber Pater is shown at *Tibiscum* on two reliefs (actually both fragmented and high reliefs). In both cases we can see the foot of Liber Pater and Pan¹³ (Pl. I/5). The margins of reliefs are fluted and the fact that the details are well depicted. Due to the fine details D. Benea assert, and we agree, that both reliefs are likely to be made at Ulpia Traiana were analogies exist.

Venus is depicted on one relief at Tibiscum¹⁴. This one is made out of marble, has rectangular shape with a slightly vaulted part and shows Venus in *Venus Pudica* typical depiction (Pl. II/1). The technique is truly provincial, awkward and sometime sloppy in details, even the specific elements are poorly detailed. The body is shown well-

⁹ Pilipović 2009, 65.

¹⁰ Benea 1997, 235, no. 2.

¹¹ Alicu/Pop 1979, 71, fig. 19.

¹² Benea 1997, 235, no. 3.

¹³ Benea 1997, 235-236, no. 4, 5.

¹⁴ Isac/Stratan 1973, 123-124.

proportioned but hair curls and clothes crinkles are not depicted. The work is fragmentary and on marble stone.

An interesting high relief is the one depicting the works of Hercules¹⁵ (Pl. II/2). Here two unique scenes for Dacia are shown: the seventh one The Cretan Bull and the eleventh one The Apples of the Hesperides. Due to the fact that another narrative relief, with many common elements with this one, was discovered at Ulpia Traiana we consider that the place of origin of this high relief is also Ulpia Traiana¹⁶.

Two fragmentary marble reliefs dedicated to the Celtic goddess Epona were discovered at Tibiscum (Pl. II/3-5). In the first one, just a fragment survived, the goddess feeds the horses, a very common iconographical stance but due to the fact the left part was destroyed we can only guess the actual iconography¹⁷.

The second relief broken in four pieces shows again Epona feeding the horses and we can actually see the goddess¹⁸. The presence of a tree in the background was considered by C. Timoc¹⁹ to be unprecedented but some similar depictions were discovered into an altar in Bordeaux²⁰. One of the depictions has a vaulted top part and the other is rectangular in shape. The depiction of Epona from Tibiscum makes Dacia to have seven mentions of this goddess alongside Italy, being the Danubian Province with the most attested mention of this particular deity.

Analyzing the manner of work and observing the schematic depiction we can assert that these reliefs were made in a provincial environment, maybe at Tibiscum.

Votive representation of Epona from Roman Dacia, make us to assert that the cult of this deity is larger than usual and that alongside Italy, Dacia is the second province outside the traditional Celtic space with a large cult dedicated to this Celtic goddess before Britannia or Hispania²¹. Analyzing the manner of depiction of animals and of the deity we can observe a pattern of schematization, a pattern used before at Tibiscum probably a characteristic of this artistic centre, because the

¹⁵ Bărbulescu 1981, 455-457;

¹⁶ Bărbulescu 1981, 455-457.

¹⁷ Isac/Stratan 1973, 122-123; Timoc 1997, 115-116.

¹⁸ Isac/Stratan 1973, 120-121; Timoc 1997, 115.

¹⁹ Timoc 1997, 116.

²⁰ Magnen 1953, nr. 224, pl. 46.

²¹ Magnen 1953; a statistic of monuments depicting Epona on the whole Empire numbers 246 items, most of them in Celtic space (Belgium and Germany).

main focus is attended to the central element of the composition and the details are more schematized than usual.

At Tibiscum 14 reliefs were dedicated to Danubian Riders²². Most of them are the type with one rider (pl. III/2-3, 5), three are with two riders (Pl. III/1). The shape is almost always rectangular, with profiled border and three registers (type B2a after Nemeti's catalogue²³). Most of them heavily fragmented only six of them can be shown due to their size being understandable. Artistically they are heavily elaborated and common in all Dacia, typologically similar with all other depiction known in province. Three of them could be locally produced or produced in the same workshop due to the lower register in which the main personage is shown seated and holding a long rod (?) or a fishing pole (?) pointed at the ritual feasting table and due to the similar depiction of the head of the ram on the table (Pl. III/3-5)²⁴. Other carvings could be imports as similar with the latest relief uncovered in the civil settlement that has an analogy in another piece discovered at Castelu, another roman settlement but from Moesia Inferior²⁵.

Conclusions

Twenty-four votive reliefs were discovered at Tibiscum, most of them without well specified place of finding due to the time of their uncovering. Marble is the predominant stone, followed by limestone. The characteristics that support our assertion of the artistic centre from Tibiscum are more or less tied to the fact that all carvings are of rectangular shape, rarely with a vaulted top, most of them low relief, mainly with small dimensions (10 to 16 cm wide), the anatomical details of the deity is well depicted the rest (clothes, hair) are more schematized; usually a carving relief is dedicated to one deity, with few exceptions especially the Danubian Riders but also here predominant is the type with one rider, also some depictions are unique to Dacia (Hercules, Epona) and finally simplicity is the first characteristic that we can say about all depictions, most of them respects the patterns but the

²² Moga 1976, 39-51; Tudor 1939, 70-73.

²³ Nemeti 2005, 210.

²⁴ Tudor 1969, 14, nr. 25, pl. XII; 9-10, no. 201, pl. III; Moga 1972, 6, no. 4; Vasinca 2009, no. 33.

²⁵ Nemeti/Ardeţ 2013, 215.

background is simply depicted the main focus is centred on deity/deities.

Assuming that the place of origin for the most of them is local could be correct, some of them are still imported probably from Ulpia Traiana from where we have strong analogies in high reliefs depicting Liber Pater and Hercules and not so strong ties regarding the relief of Jupiter and Diana. The artisans from Ulpia Traiana carved the reliefs of Liber, of Hercules (all three of them made in high relief technique a technique not used before or after in the stonemasonry workshop from Tibiscum) and probably one depiction of Jupiter and one of Diana. Probably locally produced are the reliefs depicting Danubian Riders with the same lower register and rest of them probably imports, most plausible place of origin being Moesia Superior and Moesia Inferior.

Illustration

- Pl.I/1. Relief of Jupiter (foto Călin Timoc).
- Pl. I/2. Relief of Jupiter and Diana (foto Călin Timoc).
- Pl. I/3. Relief of Diana (foto Călin Timoc).
- Pl. I/4. Relief of Mercur (after Benea 1997).
- Pl. I/5. Reliefs of Liber Pater (after Benea 1997).
- Pl. II/1. Relief of Venus (foto Răzvan Pinca).
- Pl. II/2. Relief of Hercule (foto Călin Timoc).
- Pl. II/3-5. Reliefs of Epona (foto Răzvan Pinca; after Timoc 1997).
- Pl. III/1-5. Reliefs of Danubian Riders (foto Maria Vasinca).

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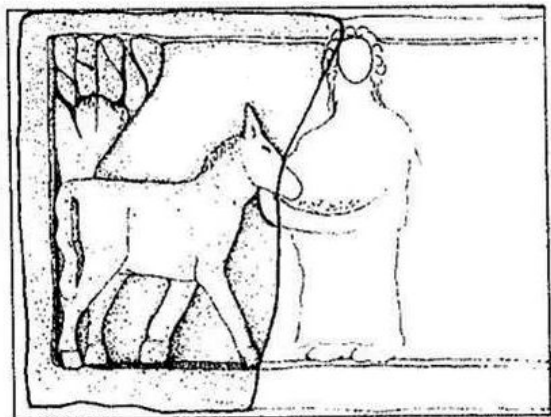


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Pl. II



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Pl. III