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The votive relief from Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa

SUMMARY

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KEYWORDS: Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, votive relief, religious life, iconography, onomastics, sculpture workshops.

The present work, suggestively entitled *Votive relief from Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*, includes all the marble votive relief-type figurative monuments discovered and published so far at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa. It is not a work that includes previously unpublished material, but until now, this subject has never been treated in a unitary, monographuc way. I believ that focused work on a single type of archaeological material from a single archaeological site is necessary.

The research involved analyzing each piece in detail and then categorizing each representation within iconographic an iconographic type to identify the preffered divinities among the believers of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa and their identities. The analysis was made to the extent possible given the state of preservation in which the pieces are today.

The thesis has been structured into six chapters with related subchapters. The last chapter consists of the catalog of the pieces, which includes the technical descriptions and the image of the votive reliefs.

The first chapter is the introductory one, in which the importance of an exclusive study of votive relief is argued. Although many of the pieces have been published in specialized works, some of the deities have not been correctly identified. Over the years, some lost pieces have been found and republished, pieces that in those studies were misinterpreted, and the illustration was not qualitative.

The importance of the monuments discovered in the archaeological site of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa has been recognized since the 15th century. In the following years, efforts were made to preserve them, and archaeological excavations were conducted with scientific rigor. Archaeological research continues today at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, the first and only city founded under Trajan in Dacia, and one of the most important Roman sites in the province.

The second chapter represents the main part of the work, which includes the analysis of the images depicted on the votive reliefs and their typological framing. The deities are divided into the following categories: Greco-Roman deities, Oriental deities, Balkan-Danubian deities, and Theos Hypsistos.

Representations of Greco-Roman deities are predominant at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa. For the healing gods, Aesculapius and Hygiea, an *asklepeion* was erected to the east of the amphitheater, where the ten marble votive reliefs dedicated to them were found. The iconographic type of the images scattered at Sarmizegetusa is of Greco-Roman inspiration, and in many cases, the pair of healing gods is accompanied by Telesphorus.

Diana, goddess of the hunt, patroness of animals and pregnant women, is among the favorite deities of the faithful of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa. She is often depicted in hunting scenes with her acolytes. She also appears associated with Silvanus on one of the reliefs, due to the rural character of both deities.

Fortuna, the personification of good luck, is less present on the votive reliefs of Sarmizegetusa. She is found on only two of them; on one of the reliefs, she appears together with Liber Pater and Mercurius, which is a less common association. The second relief in which she is depicted is of a higher artistic quality; the goddess Fortuna is seated on a throne, holding in her left hand the *cornucopia* and her specific clothing. The goddess Juno is also not popular among votive relief monuments. Only two pieces have been found in which the deity has been mentioned. Jupiter is in the same situation, with only two votive reliefs dedicated to him. On one Jupiter appears with Mercurius, a rare association throughout the Empire. The god Mars has three votive reliefs dedicated to him throughout Dacia, one of which was discovered at Sarmizegetusa. To the deity Minerva is dedicated a single votive relief at Sarmizegetusa, making a total of four in Dacia.

The greatest concentration of votive reliefs with the image of the goddess Hekate is found at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa. Five pieces have been discovered on which Hekate is depicted. Hekate is depicted *tricorpora*, always accompanied by specific attributes and dressed in already-known garments.

Hercules has over 100 monuments dedicated to him in Dacia. At Sarmizegetusa, fragments of a decorative frieze belonging to a cult edifice have been discovered, on which the Herculean legend, the twelve labors of Hercules was depicted. The so-called `narrative relief`, from which seven scenes can still be deciphered today.

The cult of Liber Pater is well known among the faithful of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa. A temple was dedicated to him to the east of the amphitheater, with the structure of a true Roman sanctuary. All the votive reliefs dedicated to Liber Pater were deposited here. Most of the images from the Dacian province were iconographically classified into two types, the `Sarmizegetusa type` and `Potaissa type`.

In Dacia, the cult of Mercurius has two aspects. The first is that of the god of trade and trade-related activities, and the second is the funerary role he fulfills, *psychopompos*, being associated with Hercules or apotropaic animals. In the images on the votive reliefs of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, we never see him alone. He is accompanied by Jupiter, Liber Pater and Fortuna, Dis Pater and Proserpina. In the last mentioned case, there is a religious syncretism, the *interpretatio gallica*. To the north of the amphitheater, a temple of a couple of the infernal gods, Dis Pater and Proserpina, has been confirmed.

Nemesis is among the most worshipped deities at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa. The *nemeseum* lies to the north of the amphitheater and is the main provider of votive reliefs of the goddess. The most common iconographic model is of the Greek Hellenistic type, derived from the model of the statues at Smyrna.

Silvanus, a rural deity who protects forests, pastures, fields, and all rural life, is well-known among the religious community of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa. Votive reliefs dedicated to the god Silvanus were discovered in the western *cubiculum* of the temple of Liber Pater. Silvanus is shown in the images alone, dressed in oriental garments, with Diana or the nine female characters, the Silvane. The presence of Silvanus' nine female companions is found only at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa.

Oriental cults, as well as the Balkan-Danubian ones, are present in the life of the believers of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, spread through military channels.

In Dacia, the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus is attested in more than 50 monuments, and six votive reliefs depicting the god have been discovered at Sarmizegetusa.

The cult of Mithras is the most popular oriental cult in Dacia. At Sarmizegetusa, one of the *mithraeum* has been archaeologically confirmed, located *extra muros*, southwest of the city walls. The god Mithras has over 100 votive reliefs worshipped at Sarmizegetusa. In all the representations, the central scene is that of the tauroctony, *Mithras Tauroktonos*. Three series of local reliefs have been typologically established, which are spread throughout the province of Dacia.

From an iconographic point of view, the Danubian Riders and Thracian Rider cults are strongly influenced by the mysteries of other cults. Reliefs were the main manner of representation of these cults, no inscriptions or literary sources by ancient authors are known to us today.

The cult of anonymous god, Theos Hypsistos is present in Dacia, at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, where monuments dedicated to him have been identified. Two votive altars, probably both discovered in the sacred area of the *praetorium procuratoris* and three votive plaques depicting ear pavilions. Most probably there was a sanctuary dedicated to Theos Hypsistos where the plaques come from. The god receives and listens to the prayers of the faithful, acting as *epekoos*.

The third chapter includes the study of the onomastic on the inscriptions on the marble votive

reliefs from Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, which contribute both to their dating and to our knowledge of the population of the ancient city. To the extent of the available information that these votive plaques provide us today, the names of the dedicators were analyzed, taking into account the origin of the name and social status. It was observed that the majority of the worshippers belonged to a middle-class community. Only 10% belong to *honestiores*, *plebs urbana* are present 90%.

Chapter four turns its attention to the culpture workhops and stone quarries, in particular the marble quarry from Bucova. The Bucova marble quarry is located near the ancient city of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, 12 km away. The quarry at Bucova was the main supplier of marble from Dacia and especially from Sarmizegetusa, being the only place in the province where marble was mined in Roman times.

The sculpture workshops of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa have been confirmed based on the material discovered in considerable quantities, of the stylistic particularities and similarities present on the sculptural monuments. A provincial style of execution, schematism, and lack of organicity were noted. Only two workshops were attested and confirmed archaeologically. One in the vicinity of the eastern necropolis and the second, identified in the complex of temples dedicated to Aesculapius and Hygiea, whose functionality was most probably temporary.

Finally, after analyzing the pieces, it was observed a preference for representations of deities from Greco-Roman pantheon. However, in terms of the style of execution, the artistic influences are oriental. The garb composed of Phrygian bonnet and high-capped boots, the vegetal decoration, the typology of figurative imagery was found largely in the eastern half of the Empire and not least, the proven presence of micro-asiatic craftsmen. The artistic similarities confirm that most of the votive reliefs were produced in the culpture workshops of Ulpia Sarmizegetusa. At the same time, the area's natural resources may be a further argument that they were produced locally.

The worship of deities with an agrarian and rural character, and the lack of epithets accompanying the name of the deity on the inscriptions in many cases, show that the deposition of votive reliefs at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa was not a manifestation associated with official religion, but a manifestation of personal piety.