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DOCTORAL THESIS

**ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASPECTS CONCERNING THE
BELIEFS IN THE OTHER WORLD AND THE FUNERARY
RITE IN ROMAN DACIA**

Abstract

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During the age of the Roman ruling in Dacia (2nd – 3rd c.), the religiosity of the provincial Roman society is of a great diversity, both in terms of the origin of various deities and their worshipers and its forms of public expression. Among its various aspects, the author was interested in the funerary imagery, respectively the religious representations connected with the perception of death and of the Other World, as reflected in the funerary art, as well as the relations of the funerary art with the funerary rituals. To a large extent, these representations originated in the religious sensitivity of the Hellenistic world, to which joined many influences from the pre-Roman barbarian environment from Europe. By an approach of the funerary imagery from the perspective of the archaeological discoveries are exploited information provided both by the study of the architecture, of the decoration and of the epigraphy of the funerary monuments and by the research of some funerary inventories and of the funerary rite and ritual. Striving for the most close and real historical reconstruction, I did not neglect the different implications for the funerary imagery of some aspects related to the social structures and representations of This World, although my attention is focused, mainly, on the examination of the religious representations.

Chapter 1

The socio-political and cultural context of the Hellenistic and Roman religious beliefs related to the Other World and to the funerary cult

In relation to the structures of the imagery there is analyzed the socio-political and cultural context of the Hellenistic and Roman religious beliefs related to the funerary cult and to the Other World, as a theoretical basis for the discussion of the funerary imagery, how this is revealed by the study of the representations and the inscriptions of Roman Dacia, in a period which coincides with a number of interesting phenomena of varying amplitude and intensity, which can be observed in the whole Empire and which lead to the reshaping of the religiosity, preparing and promoting the spread of the Christianity, in the context of the changes which the Jewish religiosity suffered during the Hellenistic period. The Roman religious sensitivity is oriented towards the personalization and the interiorization of the faith, so in a way that departs from the official religion, which was unsupported by any doctrine, which did not provide any certainty of the salvation and which, aiming to organize the attachment towards the Roman state and the imperial house, was practiced with a legitimist formalism and especially by the military and bureaucratic representatives. The different treatment applied by the authorities not only to the recognized gods (*dii consenti*) in relation to the banned religions (*religiones illicitae*) and to the "native", i.e. Roman gods (*dii indigetes*) compared with the "new-come" gods (*dii novensides*), but also to the folk religions (which did not enjoy an official support) had important consequences. The disadvantaged social classes prefer, instead, certain religions, of Italian-provincial origin or mysteries (some of which were even persecuted) and certain deities, whose cult was closely related to their occupations. In most mystery cults, which were considered as private cults, were admitted also people who were excluded from the affirmation in the public life through access to magistracies and to some priestly dignities because of their social and legal status (foreigners, slaves, women). This situation generates a new, religious based solidarity between the members of the community, by the overcoming of the barriers of social inequality

for a while and the active participation of the women has as effect the rising of new, specific forms of religious sensitivity.

In the context of an ever increasing interest for the problem of the afterlife and of the salvation in This World and in the Other World, the changes in the Jewish religiosity reflect somewhat comparable developments, consisting in the coexistence of formal attitudes, linked with the official worship with a priestly purist reaction generating millennial and messianic expectations and with a speculative, esoteric one. The political disillusionment caused by the failure to remove the Roman domination, the inferior status of the converts and the purist attitude toward the religiosity of the Diaspora Jews, the fewer opportunities for the affirmation of the women in the community life led to dissident movements that had as a final result the separation between Judaism and Christianity, whose attractive force increased in this way, due to its different attitude towards the gentiles, especially to those from the disadvantaged social classes.

With the deepening of the crisis of the Roman state, the millenarian and messianic manifestations, oriented both to the needs of the terrestrial and to the Next life are increasing. They were fed by the zurvanism and by other oriental doctrines of the world's ages, which spoke about an eternal creation, damage, destruction and recreation, into an "improving of the beginnings" and which offered to those who proclaimed and waited for "the end of the world" and "the Last Judgement" an utopian hope in the regeneration of the world and in the restoring of the collective happiness. To this contributed also the spreading, under different influences, of a new attitude towards the issue of the slavery. The dissatisfaction with the Roman "order" and the millenarian hopes were, in fact, some of the factors which favored the spread of the Christianity, which, by the doctrine concerning the flock with one shepherd, vulgarizes the social utopia of the Stoics, the Universal City, to which since the Late Antiquity corresponds as an ideal model the City of God and on the Earth the utopia of a *Respublica Christiana*.

In the provincial Roman society of the 2nd – 3rd c., the religious sensitivity range between henotheistic tendencies and an opportunist mysticism, open to the most different religious experiences and to a continue crowding of the pantheon with provincial deities, deified abstractions and other secondary deities. At a time when the extent of the Empire, the relations between the provinces and the movement of people led to an intensification of the theocrasies and the religious syncretism, to the preservation of its unity by organizing the loialism ant the patriotism of the subjects from different backgrounds, to that contributed especially the cult of Rome and of Augustus, which was organized according to the model of that of the Hellenistic monarchs, which thus acquires a soteriological function linked to the life in This World, although it is obviously a formal, official religiosity and the ritual of the apotheosis is imitated and even ridiculed by private people. Strongly linked to the imperial cult, but also to the henotheistic trends and the solarization of different deities, is the cult of Sol Invictus, by which (due to the fact that all the peoples of the Roman Empire worshiped a principle of light) it was attempted to consolidate and to keep the unity of the state. Despite the known opposition of the Christians towards the imperial cult, the rendering of the divine triumph and glory assumed the models previously used to glorify the triumphantly emperor, but probably under the influence of some new-testamentarian passages reflecting the millenarian hopes which the Jews put in Jesus Christ. Both the faith in destiny, to which lacked an organized cult and the popularity that the soteriological mysteries enjoyed in the 3rd c. were the expression of the existential fears caused by the crisis of the Roman state and in the border provinces, where large military forces were stationed, by the increased barbarian attacks and the military anarchy that marked this era,

characterized by the strong Syrian influence over Rome, to which, on a religious level corresponds the solar henotheism and politically the more obvious despotic trends which, despite the hostility of the senatorial and military indiscipline, will culminate in the inauguration of the Dominate, a somewhat like Hellenistic monarchy. From a zurvanist perspective, it marks the end of an epicycle of the historical existence, which was speculated by the preachers of the millenarian beliefs.

An expression of the various religious currents which were manifested in the provincial Roman society during the 2nd – 3rd c. and, therefore, of the crisis of conscience in this age were the various forms of the occult and the rich demonology and angelology of oriental origin, which accompanied it as well as the attempts to systematize the philosophical ideas and magical-religious beliefs by various theosophical doctrines, because the philosophy (which became a surrogate of the religion, a secular competitor of the mystery religions and whose vulgarized ideas spread in various ways, including through wide diffused maxims and epitaphs, but whose systems were known only to an educated elite, which was contemptuous of the masses) could not fill this spiritual crisis only a little. In the environment of the Roman elites occurs often a skeptical attitude towards the religion, the gods, the survival of the soul, the resurrection and the Other World or even atheistic views. Their enlightening speech had only a limited, practically null impact on the masses whose lives followed the cultural patterns of the traditional Roman society or of different civilizations of the Empire and which had no or only little access to the written culture, but were constantly exposed to the official religious propaganda and to the very active one of the mystery religions.

Very common, especially in the European provinces, is the heroization of the deceased, whose manifestation forms are not always the ones which are specific for the Greek environment and which, due to the insufficient knowledge of the funerary imagery of the various barbarian populations, are more difficult to interpret. In the traditional cultures in different regions of the world, the cult of the real or symbolic ancestors fulfilled the same social function which in the Greek world has the cult of the heroes, which are often the founders of the city, so the symbolic ancestors of the civic community. One of the beliefs on overcoming *post mortem* the human condition was apparently that according to which those who had distinguished themselves by virtue and faith come to be after their death a kind of "court" (*comitatus*) of various gods and escape thus to return to another earthly existence, which was destined only to the unworthy and uninitiated ones. It represented the transfer into the funerary imagery of an institution of This World, namely the male warrior societies, which were subjected unconditionally, by oath, to a chieftain and were common both to different Indo-European barbarian populations and to some migrating Turanian populations. In the Thracian-Getic world the religious representation corresponding to an institution of this kind seemed to be one of the rites of immortalization, among them are considered sometimes also the periodic human sacrifices, the slaughter of the wife with the occasion of her husband's funerals and possibly the ascetic practices of the priests. The belief in immortality and the clergy who taught it had an important role in the strengthening of the Dacian kingdom, which explained also the violent disappearance of the shrines and priests serving them together with the state structures, through the Roman conquest of the kingdom of Decebalus, which seemed to have been a despotic, military - theocratic state. Whether its official religion was that proclaimed by Zalmoxis or another one, related maybe to an Uranian god of war, it did not survive the Roman conquest, unlike the traditional agricultural and pastoral rites and those related to the life of the community, of the family or of the person, which previously

were held in parallel with the official ones and which, being related with various magical practices, seem to have been countered by the priests of the official Dacian cult, which was neither sublimely spiritualized nor monotheistic, as some Romanian historians of national-Christian orientation have argued.

According to written sources, the Thracians had different opinions about what happens to the souls after death, and some had even a skeptical attitude towards the problem of the immortality, obviously linked to their dissatisfaction about the living difficulties of This World. The knowledge of the religious representations of the indigenous peoples in Dacia, in particular those related to the funerary imagery, especially during the age preceding the Roman conquest, like those of the age of the Roman ruling in the province north of the Danube was, moreover, hampered not only by the poverty and the ambiguity of the written sources, but also by the small known number of graves of the age of the "classical" Geto-Dacian civilization. But unlike the Celtic world and Pannonia, in Dacia the funerary monuments with representations related to the funerary beliefs and rituals of the Dacians are missing, like such monuments and generally the monuments of stone with representations related to the Dacian religion are missing also in other provinces of the Empire. In the current state of research, the knowledge about the funerary imagery of the free Dacians was also few. In pre-Roman Dacia, the military-theocratic despotic state seems to have succeeded, by the official cult, to impose certain religious representations about the afterlife, which were reflected by the situation of the funerary finds, but the said religious beliefs haven't been virtually unknown yet.

The problem of the survival of some representations related to the pagan eschatological beliefs and funerary rituals on the territory of Roman Dacia, whose research is still marked by an ethnocentric and/or Christian view, requires a modern approach, based on a proper application of the structuralist and comparative methods.

Chapter 2

The history of the research on sculptural and epigraphic funerary monuments of Roman Dacia

Despite of some significant achievements in the publication of new discoveries, in valorizing the museum collections and towards the modernization of the research methodology, the study of the provincial Roman funerary art Dacia remained behind the state of research in other provinces. To the difficulties linked with the diffusion of the specialized literature joined the lacking of a coherent and sustained research policy for the valorization of the collections, the strong ideological pressure exerted over time on the historical research, but also the one which encountered the circulation of ideas and people.

The historiographical context marked by the obsessive problem of proving the autochthony and the continuity of the Romanian people in the Carpatho-Danubian-Pontic area proved often to be counterproductive to the knowledge of the specific elements of the provincial Roman funerary art of Dacia: the problem of the influence of the non-Greek artistic traditions on the provincial Roman art, its relationship with the artisanal production of the various peoples of the Roman Empire that was approached from a wrong perspective and the research of the pre-Roman

traditions was confused with that of the continuity of the Dacian tradition, whose traces, in what concerns the funerary art, can hardly and uncertainly be noted in the symbolic of the figured renderings. This strongly ideologized context has affected also the study of the cultural influences exerted on the Dacian provinces through the overuse of the importance of the Italian influence (and even of the Gaulish or Rhenish one) and minimizing the influences of Balkan-Danubian provinces, especially of the Norico-Pannonian and Dalmatian ones or from the Orient, as well as the different cultural orientation which was found in the intracarpahic Dacia and in Dacia Inferior. Even more rarely was discussed about the link between the renderings which appear on monuments and the various religious beliefs which are alien to the Greco-Roman world, taken in various ways from the East or from different peoples of Europe and North Africa. Because of the authority of the traditional historiographical views in the second half of the 19th c. and the first half of the 20th c., which outbid the importance of the military factor in the Romanization of the provinces and in the development of the provincial Roman art, was risen only after the mid- '60s, but shyly, the question of the role of the civilian settlers, especially as the costume and the jewelery of the various ethnocultural groups settled in Dacia were little known and sometimes being confused with those of the native population. Although the issue of the research and the reconstruction of some monumental funerary ensembles or just of some less impressive monuments preoccupied since a long time the Romanian archaeologists, this issue occupied, however, only a secondary position in the study of the funerary architecture of Roman Dacia. This situation, related also to the scarcity of the financial resources allocated to the conservation and the restoration of the historical monuments and their orientation mainly to the projects likely to be politically exploited by manipulative political and ideological activities, given that the Romanian officials promoted a virulent political and historiographical autochthonist discourse and the native population of the Dacian provinces was not noticed by representative funerary monuments, explains why in Dacia there were no reconstructions of impressive monumental complexes, as for example, in Noricum, Pannonia and Moesia. Many funerary monuments have been still unpublished or were published incidentally, along with other archaeological materials or at the research of the archaeological complexes where they were found in their original context or in a secondary position, often with a briefly description and minimum attempts of interpretation. Although now it came that the most epigraphic and sculptural monuments discovered over time in Roman Dacia were published and that the new discoveries have been relatively quickly known to the experts, the compiling of a *corpus* of all sculptural monuments of Roman Dacia, as part of the CSIR, is still a desideratum. For these reasons, the funerary monuments of Dacia are still insufficiently known abroad. Although the gaps and the weaknesses which still exist in the research of the funerary art of Roman Dacia, I believe that in this region of the Empire it is possible to speak about a specific "will to art" (*Kunstwillen*), because of the fulfilling of its definitory criteria: the existence of workshops and of local craftsmen, of specific products by which it was expressed, an ideology, respectively an own program and a specific way to express them. In the light of these defining factors, the degree of knowledge of the specificity of the Roman funerary art is, in the current stage of research, uneven. A large research field offers especially the study of the iconography of the monuments and of the semiotics of the renderings which occur on them.

Chapter 3

Considerations on the funerary imagery as reflected by the epigraphic texts and sculptural monuments of Roman Dacia

3.1. General remarks on the Greco-Roman funerary imagery and its relationship with the funerary imageries of some Oriental and European civilizations.

Throughout the human history, the speculations about soul had an important role in the spiritual life, although it was assumed that initially the religious attitude towards the body was not driven by the belief in the soul, but consisted only and ultimately in transforming the body into an object "while physical and metaphysical", whose supernatural properties could be used by necromancers and magicians. The belief in an immaterial soul, distinct from the body, which leaves it after death to live often an existence which is independent of its former shelter occurred due to the concrete circumstances of the social and individual life, the low knowledge about the human anatomy, physiology and pathology and the disturbing experience of seeing again the passed ones while dreaming. The fear of the deads, which arose from the oldest religious representations which over time become superstitions, together with some prophylactic considerations, confusing linked with the sighting of the effects of the putrefaction of the bodies led to the emergence of various methods to hide the look of the human body's biodegradation process, so that the treatment of the body become the primary operation of the funerary rite, according to an ideology developed by the afterlife beliefs of the given community, but also a way to particularize the deceased, according to his social status, expressed by sex, age, membership in a particular social group, often according also to the circumstances in which the death occurred, which may give him a certain religious status, i.e. a degree of positive or negative sacredness.

The anthropological studies have shown that, at various populations in different regions of the world and in various historical periods, there was the belief that the man had several types of souls, which "died" according to different criteria and after different periods. The belief that the deceased would continue to live in the tomb was considered the oldest representation concerning the Other World. It was overlapped by another, on an underground kingdom of the deads, which, socially and politically, was an utopian project of the Greek cities with monarchic regime, but which communicates with This World through various natural openings and where the deads, which can be temporarily invigorated by offerings, had a blank, semi-lethargic existence. Very early, in relation to the geography of the Other World, appeared a travel literature, that of the katabasises, which takes elements of the traditional funerary imagery, partially of popular origine, but also of the one created by writers or inspired by the pneumatological speculations of various philosophical schools and subsequently influenced by the development of the cosmology and of the astronomy, and in Roman times, more strongly, by the influence of the eschatological and soteriological doctrines of the mystery religions. The belief in a subterranean Hell, which was expressed mainly in the funerary poetry and less in the funerary art, disappeared in the environment of the literate elite, but was still occurring among the masses and reappears in the Late Antiquity, in specific social and cultural conditions.

It was not until the Hellenistic period when appeared the hope in an individual immortality, for the initiates in the mystery cults, but also then was manifested a skeptical attitude towards

immortality, due to the different philosophical schools. The philosophical and religious conceptions of the Roman period were largely acquisitions and developments of the Hellenistic era. In the Late Antiquity, as a consequence of the crisis of the intellectual model, that of the philosopher, this was replaced in the collective imagination by a new model, that of the "deified man", the "saint", the Christian or the pagan one.

The representations about the Afterlife related essentially to representations about what happened with the soul after the death, which could remain bound to the body or, conversely, was independent and must be "liberated", the procedures used since the Prehistory for this purpose and which are one of the main components of the funerary rites being the deposition or the exposure to excarnation and the incineration. Over time, they have experienced various forms, differing from one region to another and from one culture to another, which were reflected not only in the funerary ritual, but also in the funerary art, as it came to the use of specific symbols that generally referred to the place where (in case that it did not disappear into nothingness or it did not merge with the Universal Soul) the soul of the deceased remained or towards which it led: on the Earth (either in the environment it left or elsewhere), in the grave or rather far from the remains, in an underground or underwater Hell or in terrestrial or celestial paradises. Thus, the four basic elements of the Universe, namely fire, air, earth and water, generated specific postexistential environments and funerary rites, i.e. the incineration, the exposure, the inhumation and the aquatic funerary rite (the sinking), that each of the mentioned elements may become a postexistential environment, as far as according to the view on world and life of the given community it has a planetary or cosmic expansion, could destroy the bodies and has the quality to inspire the fertilization, the regeneration and the multiplication of the germs of life. The location of the Other World was not necessarily congruent with the environment to which a certain destructive element, respectively a certain funerary rite corresponded, and thus though in the funerary imagery there was a relationship between representations about the Afterlife and the funerary rite, a specific location of the Other World can not be binding to a particular view about the Afterlife, as otherwise was demonstrated even by the funerary rites of some Roman dead whose religion was either witnessed by their funerary inscriptions or sure because of other considerations. But the most common representation in various cultures and in different historical periods was that the Other World is similar (including as social organization) to This World, but it is more pleasant than this, even if each deceased would have the same social status as in This World. Clearly, such a view was generated by the frustrations of This World and by the frustrations and the anxieties about leaving it, but also by the anxieties and the expectations of the Other World, that was imagined according to the model of This World or even as an antimodel of it. The Roman funerary art of Dacia, which confirmed the appropriation of the specific Roman belief in the deification of the souls of the dead, reflects motifs inspired by the travels of these souls through different environments, to the Other World. The Roman funerary monument was intended to ensure the earthly dimension of the survival of the deceased, while the sacrifices and the offerings were related to the existence of the Other World, but it is also the evidence of the appreciation which the deceased enjoyed in life and continues to enjoy also after his death from the survivors. For the Roman funerary monuments, which were trying in different ways, sometimes in the most original ones, to attract the attention, more important than the realistic rendering was, however, the transmission of the selfimage which the deceased desired. Although the individualization of the deceased was provided usually by the epitaph, in all traditional societies which were characterized by a low level of literacy, the

image played the main role as a message sender and in such societies the social status of the rendered character was often shown by a code of rules and constraints concerning the use of the symbols which indicated it. Therefore, it could be said that the figurative reliefs on the funerary monuments were meant not only to convey information about the deceased, by the rendering of his appearance and of some meaningful images from his daily activities, but also a deeper meaning, symbolic and/or religious, which reflects the values promoted by that society or, like the funerary rites, the beliefs concerning the immortality, which most commonly is conceived as a continuation of the earthly life in the Other World. Consequently, the funerary relief is often a "narrative" relief, which shows the essential elements of the "story" of the concluded life as well as of these of the eternal life, to which the deceased passed through death, just as the religious relief is the one which aiming to make known the sacred "story" of the deity's facts to the faithfuls, turns to this way of artistic expression, which contributes through artistic renderings to the shaping of the religious representations. This phenomenon is specific particularly to the mystery cults or which have an obvious relation to the representations related with the heroization of the deceased. Even for the modern man, due to the double character (narrative and initiatic as well) of the renderings in the art of the archaic societies, the symbolic code which is associated to them and is sometimes accessible only for a certain group of recipients, is not always easy to decrypt.

Although it was claimed that the mythological renderings on the funerary monuments were forms of expression of the high art, which were accessible to a limited number of initiates in the philosophical interpretations, the author believes that this was true only for some of their symbolic meanings, while the immediate message, of universal destination, of the mythological renderings was recognizable to any representative of the culture to which they belonged. For the modern man not only some of the esoteric meanings of the ancient mythological renderings remained difficult to be understood, but also many symbolic meanings of the apparently exclusively profane renderings, or those which could be explained not only through the classical mythological renderings, but also by those related to the popular beliefs, these were often overcoming the geographical, social and cultural limits of the renderings that were related to the official cults and the culture of the elites and which, by doing so, were among those whose message was the most easily understood by an illiterate man, but with minimal religious education, in a certain province or even from any part of the Empire, regardless of the ethnic origin he would have been.

The funerary monuments expressly dedicated to the eternal memory of the deceased had no connection with the belief in an afterlife of the soul in other worlds. They reflected, in fact, a crisis of the religious values, which was not necessarily the expression of an atheistic, materialist view, but also did not exclude the existence of such views.

As the doctrine of various mystery cults and, in a more elaborate form, the pagan thinkers of the Late Antiquity state, but also the Christianity, the full beatitude in the Other World, but which was impossible to be achieved by the uninitiated ones and which presumed the achieving of a full purification, was the perfect fusion with the divine, i. e. the dissolution of the individual soul into the Universal Spirit (*νοῦς*) or, in terms of the Hindu theosophy, of *Atman* in *Brāhman*. It excluded, therefore, the idea of a material afterlife and therefore the possibility of locating the Paradise. According to the views of Saloustios and thus of Iulianus Apostata there was no other life after death than the return of the souls to God and this was the real triumph over the death.

3.2. Astral, vegetal and animal symbols related to the funerary imagery.

The astral, vegetal and animal symbols in the ornamentation of the provincial Roman funerary art of ornamentation, which as independent or integrated elements with a secondary role in different scenes had a well defined sense, related to the funerary imagery, became sometimes almost opaque to the modern man or (especially as disparate symbols). They were desemnificated and reduced to a simple ornamental function or to that of structural components of a narrative without symbolic significance, related entirely or mainly to the everyday life in This World. Compared to other parts of the Roman Empire, the repertoire of the symbolic renderings of the stars on the sepulchral stele of Dacia, where there was a preference for the motifs of Greek or Oriental origin, as well as for those specific to the oriental cults of salvation, of initiatory and esoteric nature, which for this reason remained partially unknown, was however very limited, despite the popularity of the mystery cults which have provided some of the funerary symbols.

The coded message which these symbols tried to communicate could be deciphered by studying how they were associated to each other or their sense in the scenes where they occurred or their place in the architectural structure of the funerary monument. Often, some of these symbols had the value of significant archetypal images, whose meaning was universal. Some of these symbols were found, however, in the imagery of the Geto-Dacians, either in the traditional one or as a result of their contacts with the neighboring civilizations, others, such as, for example, the exotic animals, the dolphins and the various monsters were barely known or especially after the Roman conquest, while others had been taken in the Christian imagery, resemnificated or not. Thereupon, a whole pseudo-anthropological literature of national-Christian inspiration with a strong impact on the general public claimed and manipulated some of these symbols, lancing frequently unsubstantiated assumptions, but which sometimes were considered as "truths of faith". In an attempt to analyze the meaning of these symbols in the funerary imagery of the provincial Roman society of Dacia, based on the comparison with the situation in other provinces, primarily in the Balkan-Danubian ones and especially in Pannonia and Moesia Inferior, the author succeeded in some cases to comprise the social and ethnocultural environment in which certain symbols were spread and even the time and the circumstances in which some of them enter in the repertoire of the funerary art of the Dacian provinces, being possible that a deeper research in this direction or an extending from the funerary field to other areas of the imagery would bring data on these still little researched aspects of the spirituality of the inhabitants of these lands.

3.3. Themes and motifs in the sepulchral art and funerary epigraphy of Roman Dacia.

An ancient representation of the death or, more precisely, of the disappearance from This World is the rapture of a mortal and his displacement in the World of the Gods (*seductio divina*), where he enjoys, of course, the immortality that they can give to certain mortals, whom they loved or who are the fruit of the love between the given deity and a human. It was an attitude that sometimes was an attempt of self-consolation before the destiny's choice, which destroyed, paradoxically and unjust, what was good and valuable and allowed the existence of the evil, but as an exception, there were also cases when the purpose of such abductions was to move in Hades these mortals who must be punished. A special category of epitaphs was distinguished by a vision of death as a journey into the eternity, after a rapture due to the harsh climate or to the

ruthless time and caused by the selfishness of the local deities, especially when the deceased was originally from another region. Some epitaphs express the idea that the death stopped the fulfilling of the life's course of some children or young people and that, therefore, the destiny opposed to the achievement of the hopes placed in them by their parents, who thus remained without support in old age. These premature deaths were very feared, due to the possibility that the spirits of the dead, devoid of the happiness of the eternal life and convicted to wander without rest on the earth till to the end of the days they were given to live, would act harmfully, tormenting the survivors through terrifying appearances and by disease. The theme of the rapture by the fate was a representation related to the cult of the destiny's force, which is considered an expression of the secularization of the religion.

In the funerary epigraphy of Roman Dacia, there where the **fashionable philosophical theories** (especially the neostoicism and the hedonism, but also some Oriental pneumatological speculations) had a limited spread, the meditations on existential anxieties about the meaning of life and death and, in connection therewith, on the question of the soul were rare. There was the belief (widespread in various peoples) that the human survives by recalling his deeds, as well as the speculation about the components of the human nature (the body and the soul), the possibility of the existence of several components of the soul and the astral immortality. Also related to the influence of the philosophical ideas were the perceptions of the death, as an escape from the capricious power of the goddesses Spes and Fortuna, i. e. from the terror of the changing and unknown fate and that the death put an end to the joys of This World. Other monuments, by scenes which allude to the abusive and violent behavior of the gods, to their envy, showed a skeptical attitude towards the mystical obscurantism, which neither can provide to the human a better fate in This World nor a true immortality and also expressed the belief that by his death the human could overcome the hostility of the gods. There is also a special case, when the premature death was deplored by the parents who blamed the death of a child who was left unattended.

A previously less discussed aspect is **the perception of the death as a devouring beast**, a motif which was related to the archetypal representation of an intestinal Hell, whose traces were found in various myths and rituals of different peoples. It was also linked to the problem of the immortality of those who were devoured by the animals of the sea, of the land or of the air, without enjoying a burial according to the normal ritual. Embodied by various animals, either fabulous (aggressive aquatic monsters, sphinxes, griffins) or real (mostly the lions), the death was thus "domesticated" and the devouring beast became often a guardian of the tomb, how it was shown by various components now without any connection (*member disiecta*), belonging to funerary monuments composed of several segments (toppings, pedestals) or decorative parts of some funerary buildings or enclosures (column-bearing lions, free standing funerary lions).

Frequent were also the **renderings of the benevolent aquatic monsters**, whose task was to transport or to accompany the deceased to the Isle of the Blessed and to proclaim their arrival at its shores. Despite their frequency, in Dacia often these representations were taken from decorative repertoire of the local workshops, mainly for their ornamental role, so with a diminished symbolic significance.

In the funerary imagery, Lupa Capitolina with the twins Romulus and Remus (*signum originis*) had not only the value of a symbol of the family's unity and of the mother's love, whose power surpasses that of the death, but also an apotropaic role, especially and mainly in the provinces which were exposed to the barbarian attacks. Under the influence of the official mystics of the

eternity of Rome and of the Roman Empire, it becomes a symbol of the immortality. Therefore, it was one of the motifs which had a meaning both in This World and in the Other World.

Various competitions were part of the cult of the heroized deceased, and some researchers believed that the showing of costly performances in honor of the deceased would have meant to cheer up the deads expected in the Other World. It is possible that the **scenes with gladiators and certamina Graeca** represent not only an allusion to such performances in honor of the dead, but also the desire of some *munerarii* for representation or even the attempt of other persons in order to imitate the way of life and the forms of social representation of the representatives of the provincial elites who had such a quality. I believe that the gladiatorial fights, as well as the fights against the amazones, the Greek or the Romanian soldiers fighting against the barbarians could symbolise a *mors in victoria*. Like the gladiatorial fights, *certamina Graeca* were related to the belief that the life was a struggle, but also a contest, an experience which generated anxiety, in which each was trying to win, but was eventually defeated, though the one who fought well could expect that to acquire a reward after its end: the crown of the immortality.

The banquet scene was the most frequent iconographic theme of the funerary monuments of Roman Dacia. Its origin was found in the Oriental art, where it could be related to both the worship of the gods and to the funerary cult and, therefore, it could have referred both to the religious rituals and to the aristocratic lifestyle. In the social and anthropogeographical imagery of the Greek world, the food and comensality code was an indicator of the social status, but also of the ethnic and cultural identity, as defined by the opposition between the Greeks and the barbarians, whose elite imitated, in a ridiculous way, the forms of sociability involved by the adoption of this specific Greek institution. Moreover, in the Balkan-Danubian provinces, the Greek-Oriental environment had an important role in spreading the funerary monuments with banquet scenes. In the provincial Roman funerary art, these scenes had a symbolic meaning, as renderings of the eternal banquet in the Other World, which the heroization of the deceased involves, but also one related to the representative intentions of the purchaser by documenting the comensality rituals, the servants and the precious dishes, for which, despite the realistic representation of the banquet, the banquet scenes cannot be regarded as realistic representations themselves. In the Roman funerary cult, the banquet was a separation ritual, but could also have an expiatory sense and, by its regular repeating, it became an aggregation ritual, by which the survivors tried to maintain a mutually beneficial communion between themselves and the disappeared ones. The study of the banquet scenes in the provincial Roman funerary art of Dacia occasioned for me some comments on the different opinions about the iconography, the typology and the interpretation of the scene. I believe that the hypothesis that these scenes could represent ritual banquets of some mystery cults is not sufficiently substantiated yet. The combination of these scenes with other themes of the provincial Roman funerary art (hunting scenes, scenes with horses and riders, scenes with ships) shaped better their symbolic meaning, and their association with images of deities seemed to indicate some relationship with the funerary imagery of some religions, such as the isiac and the metroacist one, as well as that of the Thracian Horseman. The funerary banquet was attested also by archaeological finds from some burial complexes, confirming that it should not be considered as a tradition taken over from the pre-Roman Dacian environment.

In the Roman funerary art of Dacia **the renderings of the funerary rituals** of separation were missing, although it was supposed that because of the competition for prestige the social elite appealed (at least in times of prosperity) in this part of the Roman Empire also, as in other

provinces or Italy, to the most spectacular forms of these rites, which sometimes could be known through the study of the funerary complexes and through a deeper analysis of the funerary monuments. On these there was however a plenty of renderings related to the funerary imagery of the separation rites (the divine rapture, the scenes with horsemen, the hunting scenes, the aquatic or the aerial travel of the soul). In fact, in these scenes the deceased was rendered in at least two ways: one in which, symbolically, he left This World and the other one, when he arrived in the Other World, but it was not totally excluded that some of these scenes would contain also allusions to the way of life that awaited him there (contests, fights, hunting), so to the success of his aggregation to the World of the Deads. Much more important than the rites of separation, but occurring only few and far in the Roman funerary art of Dacia, were the threshold rites, of a length and complexity which gave them some autonomy. The threshold period, which for the living ones was the mourning (that could coincide or not with the required threshold period, necessary for the aggregation of the deceased to World of the Deads), was highlighted in the funerary rites by the rituals related to the treatment, the exposure and the keeping of the body. In Dacia there were some renderings which could be interpreted as postliminary rituals, of expiatory character (bloody sacrifices and commemorative distributions of food). As in other provinces, there were also renderings of servants which were more difficult to interpret, because their attributes (vessels and various other objects, even flowers) were used both daily, to meet their masters and their needs, for the body care, for serving at the table or for preparing the wine to be served, during the moments of respite and in various funerary rituals, both during the preparation of the body and the vigil and the rituals of separation and purification, and during the commemorative ones too. These objects could have also a symbolic meaning, related to some preliminary rituals, for the preparation of the deceased for the Great Journey and, in the Baccho-Dionysian imagery, to his hospitable welcome to the Other World. In the provincial Roman funerary art they can relate to the fact that the death did not lead to the disappearance of the relations between the slaves and their masters, but by the heroization rather to their strengthening, that the favorite slaves (who were rendered as performing their daily duties in This World) could enjoy themselves after their death a "servile heroization", as acolytes of their heroized masters.

The scenes with horsemen and/or *calo* (in whose case is necessary, in my opinion, to distinguish them from a smaller group of renderings of hunters on horseback) gave me the occasion to make some critical remarks about the old assumptions concerning their relation with the cavalry troops, with the social imagery of the pre-Roman elites, with the motif of the "Wild Hunt" and with the traditions of the "male societies", with the equestrian heroization, with the cults of the Dioscuri, of the Thracian Horseman, of the Danubian Horseman and of other riding gods, but also about their relations and their association with other themes and motifs of the provincial Roman funerary art, especially with the journey to the Other World and with the banquet scene. The issue of the relationship of these representations with the Greco-Thracian world was also discussed in the work.

Many of the renderings of horsemen and/or *calo*, occurring in Roman Age mainly in the Rhenish-Danubian provinces could not, however, be related to a particular ethnic background. Some of them had also a secular meaning, linked to social status in This World and to its corresponding lifestyle (which imitates that of the pre-Roman elites), while others' one was strictly related to the funerary imagery (in which these scenes were connected with a journey on horseback to the Other World). In Dacia, the renderings of the horseman who piercing the enemy with his spear or

marching must be considered also as an allusion to the military career of the deceased and not necessarily to the deceased who was heroized in the similitude of the Thracian Horseman, because there were obvious deviations from the iconography of this deity, although some relationship with it (which itself is derived from that of the Greek heroes) could not be denied. The most renderings of horsemen in the provincial Roman funerary art of Dacia had no connection with the iconography of the Thracian Horseman, but most likely they suggested the motif of the funerary cavalcade (*exercitus feralis*). The closest analogies for the horsemen renderings without specific elements of the Thracian Horseman's iconography from the provincial Roman funerary art of Dacia were in the Celtic provinces. It is mainly the scene with the enemy who fell under the horse's feet, which was rare in the iconography of the Thracian Horseman, but known in the renderings of the Danubian Horsemen, whose cult was linked with that of the Dioscuri. The scenes with horseman and squire (*calo*), whose origin could be found in the official Hellenistic art, might be related also to the theme of the journey to the Other World. The renderings of *calo* in the provincial Roman funerary art can be explained by the fact that he was the constant companion of the deceased, his faithful servant, corresponding in the environment of the cavalry troops to *camillus* and *camilla* on the civilian funerary monuments and, as an acolyte of the deceased, he enjoys also a "servile heroization".

The hunting was regarded as a virtuous and also sacred exercise, which ensured the heavenly immortality. According to the mystical and philosophical eschatology and soteriology of the Romans, in the life in This World it symbolized the fight against the death, which hardly can be overcome, as well as the dangers and the blows of the fate. **The hunting scenes** showing several animals of different species were intended to present the hunting only as an pursuit of the social elite and only sometimes as an virtuous exercise, when emphasizing the courage to face a dangerous animal (in Dacia, the boar). The predator, which, like game and hunter, was the exemplary model of the warrior, was also the best symbol to suggest through his killing by the hunter, the victory over the death. In a hedonistic vision of the Afterlife, the hunting, which along with the war and the parties were the main pursuits of the aristocracy, was the symbol of the continuance in the Other World of a life without the worries but full of the pleasures of This World. In Roman Dacia the hunting scenes and especially the fight scenes between animals were scarce. The presence of the hunting scenes and in the heroic cult and even in the Mithraic one explained why to this scene from the daily life of a particular social class could be assigned a symbolic meaning linked to the exemplary model that the horseman god represents for a believer who would be heroized after his death. In the Roman funerary art, the main meaning of the rendering of the deceased as a hunter on horseback was to emphasize his affiliation to the social elite. Therefore, it was waived sometimes to render the hunting as such, emphasizing only the status of an aristocratic hunter, by representing the deceased on horseback, accompanied by dog and sometimes by other characters too, without any connection with the hunting, but only with the traditional forms of expression of the allegiance to the provincial elites. It seemed that the monuments with hunting scenes could be attributed especially to some freedmen, eager of selfrepresentation, to the veterans and to the representatives of the peregrine aristocracy, whose lifestyle the rich freedmen and sometimes even the veterans seek to emulate.

In the specialised literature, the interpretation of the scenes with cars and waggons remained controversial, even if the attempts to decipher their symbolic meaning did not miss, either by referring to the mythological traditions, or to the burials with carts or by a combination of the narrative sources with the archaeological ones. The idea of the journey by car to the Other World

(known in the apothotic rituals and confirmed also by the existence of the tombs with cars or car parts) is inspired, of course, by the use of this vehicle in This World, either for travel or for the transport of the body. **The scenes with cars and waggons** can be related to the need for representation of the provincial elites who (given the discontinuity in the tradition of the burials with car or with car parts) resort to imitate the models transmitted by myths and possibly the rituals of the imperial apotheosis. Allegorical scenes with journeys by heavenly cars on some provincial Roman funerary monuments indicate doubtless that there was a belief according to which the souls of the deceased were accompanying the Sun on its way on the sky. Not all renderings of journeys in cars and waggons from the Balkan-Danubian provinces could be related to the journey to the Other World, but rather with the occupations of the deceased, in some cases veterans: they were merchants or teamsters or more rather municipal magistrates (represented as organizers of public games) and maybe landowners and sometimes car drivers. In Dacia, the rendering of the deceased in a horse-drawn wagon was taken from the decorative repertoire of the funerary monuments from Pannonia, where in such scenes were represented sometimes also women, a situation which sometimes was interpreted as a hint to a wedding travel (possibly to the death, seen as a wedding).

The marine topics with gentle or ferocious, real or imaginary inhabitants of the sea depths might have originated in the belief that the sea was the origin and the last abode of the life. They could allude to a submarine location of the Other World, or to one beyond the river Okeanos, but due to some contaminations maybe also to aquatic travels through the Underworld or, conversely, by the heavenly ocean. If not associated with such characters, **the navigation scenes** were considered mere as realistic renderings, related to the desire for representation of a deceased who wanted to make known the source of his wealth. Not always, however, the relationship between the funerary monument with the rendering of a ship and the occupation of the deceased was evident and, moreover, this did not esclude the possibility that such a rendering had also a secondary meaning, of symbolic nature. In this regard called also the relative scarcity of these renderings in the regions where the navigation played an important role and the frequency of the aquatic bestiary in the funerary iconography in regions where the shipping plays a lower one or in which it can not be practiced at all.

Irrespective of the scenes with carts, the images of the military, of the gladiators, as well as of the household slaves (which appeared rarely and far on various categories of monuments, especially in the banquet scenes), **the rendering of other occupations of the deceased** was rare in Dacia, where unlike to other Balkan-Danubian provinces were even **the "heraldic" rendering of tools**, as symbols of the handicraft (*σύμβολα τῆς τέχνης*) or occupation of the deceased were scarce. They were inspired by the "heraldic" renderings of weapons, which initially played an apotropaic and decorative role and sometimes (but how it seems, rarely) they were considered even as allusions to the heroization of the deceased, without indicating necessarily his connection with the military. The dynamic and varied scenes with renderings of the daily life, so common in the western provinces (except those which were heavily influenced by the Greek civilization and were conquered since the time of the Republic) were scarce both in Dacia and in Moesia Inferior, where (due to the repertoire of models of Greek tradition, less varied) they are represented only by the very many funerary monuments with banquet scenes or horsemen. In terms of the documentation of the *collegia*, Dacia was comparable with the Western and Central European provinces, with Dalmatia and Northern Italy, where the "profesional" *collegia* were predominant. Therefore, I believe that this phenomenon could find

its explanation both in the economic and social specificities of these areas and in the social imaginary (i. e., the anti-banaisic attitude of the Greek aristocracy), as well as in some ideas concerning the Afterlife, as far as the latter referred to the continuation in the Other World of the way of life from This World, namely the preservation of the social status they had in This World. Consequently, the "heraldic" renderings of tools as symbols of trade, which were comparable in my opinion to that of other attributes of the social status (weapons, insignia of some magistracy, for instance), indicate a change of the traditional attitudes under the influence of the intensification of the social mobility in the provincial Roman society in the age of the Principate, as well as of the new opportunities for the *homines novi*, which manifested their need for social representation in specific forms.

The funerary monuments with "heraldic" renderings of tools belonged, I think, to some entrepreneurs, owners of workshops or enriched freedmen who managed such enterprises on behalf of their masters, not to mere craftsmen, slaves or employees. It seemed possible to me that some monuments, with renderings of measurement tools, allude to the measure which the human, being responsible for his actions, must keep in his behavior to avoid the excesses which attract both suffering in This World and the divine wrath. In Dacia were known also some renderings of adze (*ascia*), a versatile tool, but whose meaning may be also a symbolic one, unrelated to the occupation of the deceased. Moreover, there was the possibility that some of the monuments on which it was believed to be rendered this tool may render, in fact, other tools: a miner hammer and a specific type of ax, which was the attribute of an administrator of a forest area (*saltuarius*).

The **rendering of the plowing scene**, rare in the Roman funerary art, could have both a secular explanation, linked to traditional Roman way of life in which, as in Mazdaism, the farming was the expression of the virtue, but at the same time it may have a symbolic meaning, related to the funerary imagery of the agricultural populations through the belief in rebirth, due to the assimilation of the agricultural labor with the generating act and, thus, of the woman with the furrow. According to some views of neopythagoreic nature, the plowing scene (frequent in Asia Minor, on the sepulchral steles of Philadelphia), is an allusion to the hard work (*πόνος*) which awaits its reward in the Afterlife. Apparently, necessarily there is no a link between the frequency of the plowing scenes in Asia Minor and the origin of those for which, in the Balkan-Danubian provinces, were raised monuments with such scenes, which were allusions to the source of wealth of the deads, to their social status, most likely also to the moral value of the agricultural occupations in the traditional Roman mentality and generally in the archaic societies, in which, of course, they determine a particular religious sensibility.

As mainly the tombs with barrel-shaped *cupae* (occurring, it seemed, only in the south of Portugal, which certainly could not be linked with any wine trade practice by all the deceased), but maybe also other categories of funerary discoveries would suggest, it seemed very likely that this changes which the do it undergoes in underground dark cellars (*cellae vinariae*) to become wine, the drink of the immortality, may have been accompanied by certain rituals, to which, in the Baccho-Dionysian mysteries, were related perhaps to some immortality beliefs. It must be kept, in my opinion, a certain reluctance to consider as Baccho-Dionysian mysts the characters which are rendered on funerary monuments in **scenes with viticultural activities or related with the transport of wine** by means of vehicles towed by horses or the oxen, which were discovered both in the western provinces of the Roman Empire and in the Balkan-Danubian ones, on which were represented scenes or activities related with the wine transport. I believe

also that in the current stage of research, the hypotheses concerning the involvement of the Treveri in the trade in Roman Dacia (particularly, with wine and textiles), their role in the diffusion of certain transporter organizational forms, but also in the spreading of the funerary pillars in this part of the Roman Empire, requires a stronger argumentation, no matter how appealing they seem to be.

Among the deceased of Dacia who preferred symbols which alluded to their jobs or to be rendered in the exercise of these occupations were to be distinguished **the military**, to whom were assigned the renderings of horsemen and *calones*, as well as, even without enough reason, the scenes with *biga*, which seemed to have rather a symbolic meaning, but which could indicate by their provenance and by comparison with the monuments with renderings of cars discovered in other provinces some relations of the deads with the military environment, perhaps as owners of *villae rusticae*, as suppliers of the army or as merchants, who imitate the traditional, pre-Roman way of representation of the aristocracy from different European provinces of the Empire. It was surprising, however, that despite the military importance of Dacia, the number of the renderings of soldiers in the Roman funerary art, primarily these of the footmen, was extremely low. An explanation could be that they preferred another way of representation, which could be linked to the fact that the horsemen renderings, to the extent that they were attributable to the soldiers, belonged to a specific funeral imagery of the auxiliary troops, but which was inspired by the traditional aristocratic pattern of various populations from Europe and Asia, which in turn could not be assumed also by the footmen of the auxiliary troops. Moreover, in Dacia the veterans preferred to be rendered as civilians on their funerary monuments. As generally in the Balkan-Danubian provinces, in the case of the soldiers who were not represented as horsemen, their concern to express their attitude towards life and death and their representations on the Other World were less obvious than the desire of self-representation, to make known the status they had in This World. Therefore, it can be supposed that these monuments belonged to individuals originating from disadvantaged social classes, concerned about their rise and for whom the social affirmation equates itself with an overcome of their existential condition, which other mortals obtain only after their death, by heroization. The upward social mobility, an equivalent of the heroization in This World, was seen as an expression of the divine choice, a success due to a special relationship with the gods or, simply, to a favorable destiny.

Often the gods and the heroes, as exemplary models, but sometimes also sacred elements of their history were also represented on the funerary monuments of Dacia, as an expression of the aspiration of the believer that his actions should be a repeat of theirs and that his life become an imitation of the sacred history, because of his desire to be identified with his divine models, under whose protection he put himself and who were thus a guarantee of salvation. However, the intention to render certain **mythological characters** may have a different, more limited meaning: to justify an immanente state of affairs or to ensure protection for the deceased by the magical power of the presence of an image, as a formal semblance of an idea, of a supernatural reality. The deities which were rendered in the funerary art of Dacia (Mercury Psychopompos, Liber Pater, Hercules, Attis, Jupiter Ammon, Parcae, Thanatos, Gorgona Medusa) were related to the mythology which inspired the pagan funerary beliefs, although sometimes there were some accents borrowed from the philosophical thinking. The study of the renderings and of their join allowed some observations and assumptions about the funerary angelology and demonology, the soteriology of certain deities, some aspects of the belief in destiny, the issue of the theocrasies

and of the religious syncretism and some less common hypostases of some deities, which are relevant to the funerary imagery. The soteriology of the deities which were rendered in the funerary art in Dacia operated with representations belonging essentially to the fecundity and fertility cults, which were centered on the eternal cycle of becoming, of birth, death and rebirth.

Conclusions

The themes and the motifs revealed by the study of the funerary art and epigraphy of Roman Dacia reflected the existence of a certain relation between the provincial Roman funerary art and the popular religiosity, which juxtaposes elements of the classical Greek and Roman mythology, of the Oriental religions, as well as specific ideas from the provincial environment, in a close relation both with the general developments in the Roman world in the 2nd – 3rd c., but also with the quiddity of the cultural area to which the Dacian provinces belonged and/or from which originated not only certain themes and motifs of the funerary iconography, but also the artists and the payers, that could suggest certain elements, which probably reflected the result of some individual reflections and choices, as an expression of some particular forms of the religious sensitivity. These relations made possible to tint the traditional perception of the provincial Roman religiosity of Dacia. The payers of the funerary monuments from the Dacian provinces belong to some relatively wealthy social classes, were economically and socially active, with expectations and anxieties deeply related to their daily concerns, wanting to act publicly in the competition for representation, but always within the limits of the social and cultural setting specific for the provincial Roman society in those parts of the Empire. This indicates both the organizational and coercive power of the social norms in this peripheral region of the Empire, with a population characterized by a great diversity of its origin (both in ethno-cultural and geographically terms), but also by a stressed preference for integration into the provincial Roman society.

The preference for certain themes and motifs, more frequent in certain provinces, especially in the Balkan-Danubian ones, was due to the integration capacity of the population from the Dacian provinces in the Roman life of this cultural space, well particularized in comparison to other regions of the Roman Empire. It provided also some clues about the circulation of people and ideas, the dissemination of a particular way of life, certain forms of social representations, certain views and beliefs and reflected, once more, the intensity of Dacia's romanization, but also its geopolitical importance and its cultural location, on the most exposed European frontier of the Empire and also on the threshold between East and West.