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RELIGIOUS LIFE IN COLONIA SARMIZEGETUSA

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The present thesis has as goal to approach the Roman city of *Sarmizegetusa* from a religious perspective; more precisely, we are here focusing on its religious life. This subject has not been approached before in a unifying manner. This research was based on the analysis of the archaeological and epigraphic sources available up to now.

In the last decades, the analysis of Roman religion has seen major progress, by introducing new methods, where the accent is put on interdisciplinarity. This thesis is connected to the new methodology already used in the European research¹.

What we can see in the first place is the variety of religious cults in *Sarmizegetusa*. The civilian population who and the military from the province, had a very diverse ethnic composition. All these settlers and soldiers came with their own religious beliefs and traditions, which they did not abandon in the new *Colonia*, adding them to the official religious cults, organized in the provincial towns after the pattern of Rome².

The most important deities worshipped at *Sarmizegetusa* are, of course, those of the Roman pantheon, which include Roman deities with Italic and Greek origins. There is no shortage of Celtic deities, the so-called „Oriental” deities, the deities known as Balkan-Danubian deities or henotheistic deities; to this we add the emergence of abstract personifications.

Given the variety of deities worshipped in the first town of Roman Dacia, reflected in the diversity of worship places, I have structured this thesis into five parts and each part was divided

¹ For works considered fundamental to the issue in question, see: Friesen 2005; Steimle 2007, 66-73; Steimle 2008; Andringa 2009; Castella, Krause 2009; Schowalter, Kremer 2012. For the sacred topography of a city of Pannonia see: Brelich 1938, 20-142; Paulovics 1943; Alföldy 1963, 47-69; Balla 1967, Sosztarits 1994, 233-241; Szabó 2005-2006, 57-78; 67-76. For new methods in reasarching the religious life in a Roman city, see: Szabó 2014a, 41-58.

² Macrea 2007, 305-328.

into chapters and subchapters. The extent of each part is different, depending on the available sources.

The first part will present the divinities attested in the provincial metropolis. This part will be divided into 6 chapters, which aim to analyse this aspect, based on the epigraphic, iconographic and architectural evidence³.

When we are talking about the deities worshipped in *Colonia Sarmizegetusa* it is essential to distinguish between local believers, those who represent the permanent population and the imperial officials who temporarily live in the city. The latter category, although it has a great influence, does not belong to the local population, this category is just passing by, so as the gods they worship.

Governors and procurators spent a limited period in Dacia, after which they moved to other provinces. For this reason their religious behaviour is of „personal” type, in the sense that they dedicated altars to the gods “acquired” through their lifetime. In the same category we find the military, who is just passing by, but had a religious behaviour, dedicating altars for different deities.

The permanent population included the municipal functionaries, members of *collegia*, *ordo*, or *augustales*, slaves, freedmen, pilgrims, women and former soldiers who had settled in *Colonia Sarmizegetusa* as veterans.

In **the second part**, I focus my attention on the imperial cult. S. Bulzan covered this subject in his doctoral thesis in 2005,⁴ therefore my approach is more simplistic. The information was summarized and reinforced with the new theories emerged over the past few years, and with various analogies.

In Roman Dacia, as in the other parts of the Empire, the imperial cult has created a new relationship between the Emperor and the loyal population, with regard to the ideological domination, managing to establish control among local elites.

³See: Part I: *Divinități*; Cap. I: *Divinități greco-romane*; Cap. II: *Divinități așa-zise „orientale”*; Cap. III: *Divinități celto-germanice*; Cap. IV: *Divinități africane*; Cap. V: *Divinități balcano-dunărene*; Cap. VI: *Tendențe henoteiste*.

⁴Bulzan 2005.

The celebration of the imperial cult in *Sarmizegetusa* is unique, here the *Concilium trium Daciarum* gathered, and obviously the imperial cult was officiated at the provincial assembly. For this reason, its analysis is more exciting and difficult as a distinction has to be made between the provincial level and the city level.

The third part of the thesis is devoted to the religious buildings coming from *Colonia Sarmizegetusa*. This part is divided according to the archaeological and epigraphical evidence available. Another chapter discusses the sacred topography of *Sarmizegetusa*. Each building is presented as an archaeological record, containing information on the: research carried out by now; building plan; inventory found; some comments on the report of the excavation and analogies⁵.

Regarding the construction of such buildings, we should take into consideration the following aspect: firstly, the emplacement of the temples was not chosen randomly, a ritual took place⁶. Second, the temples could be built on private or public ground (which needed approval)⁷. Following the solemn dedication of the temple, with the participation of priests (we have this very well documented in the case of Iuppiter Dolichenus' sanctuary⁸, with analogies from the Empire), and through the ceremony, the temple became a sacred place, with a certain legal status. On this occasion an *epulum* was organized (at *Sarmizegetusa* we have the evidence for an *epulum Iovis*⁹). Besides the actual construction of the building, other expenses were needed for the furniture, decoration of the sanctuary (see for example the headquarter of the augustals in *Sarmizegetusa*¹⁰) and other items: dishes, paintings, lighting (in Mithras' sanctuary, the problem of lighting was resolved by providing openings), curtains (as in the sanctuary of *Dii patri*)¹¹, votive objects, shrines, gates etc.¹².

The sanctuaries required personnel which ensured the religious service, and some costs had to be covered related to the subsequent maintenance of the building and all that it entails.

⁵See: Part III: *Edificii de cult*.

⁶ Stambaugh 1978, 557.

⁷ Stambaugh 1978, 558-559.

⁸IDR III/2, 20.

⁹IDR III/2, 242.

¹⁰IDR III/2, 7.

¹¹ IDR III/2, 18.

¹² Stambaugh 1978, 568-571.

Most of the temples were financed by benefactors. Among some of these buildings we mention the temple dedicated: to Diana, built by a certain Felix (?) Imperial libert¹³; to the gods Dominus *et* Domina by centurion C. Postumius Pansa¹⁴; to Liber Pater Augustus by L. Apuleius Marcus, decurion of the colony who restored the porch and *cubiculum*¹⁵; six *sacerdotes* of Iuppiter Dolichenus financed the construction of the temple¹⁶, just like a *sacerdos* who financed the construction of a temple near *Forum Vetus* for the gods Bel (?) Malagbel and Iarhibol¹⁷; P. Aelius Theimes financed a temple for his gods¹⁸; M. Cominius Quintus, decurion and pontifex, together with his wife Valentina Antonia, financed the construction of a building to Dea Regina for the health of his mother in law, Claudia Valentina¹⁹; an imperial slave, Nemesianus, financed the construction of a temple for Caelestis Virgo²⁰.

The *Asklepieion* has several construction phases; unfortunately we do not know the name of the benefactors who financed the work, neither if it was built from private or public money. We have only a fragmentary inscription which tells us that the *aedem* was restored by a certain T. Gr. (?)²¹.

In the case of Nemesis and Mithras, and of the buildings from *domus procuratoris* we do not know the names of those who financed the construction. In these cases, we have the buildings' plan, numerous *ex voto*-us, inscriptions, but none of the evidence discovered by chance or after excavations offer details on the benefactor, or on the finances required.

Venus was not worshipped only by *procurators*, many statues have been discovered, so we can consider her an important divinity in *Sarmizegetusa*, for the local population as well.

The **Fourth Part** will present the *sacerdotes* of *Sarmizegetusa*. Here we have the *sacerdos Arae Augusti*; this function implied the worship and celebration of the emperors, at a

¹³IDR III/2, 198.

¹⁴AÉ 2010, 1383.

¹⁵IDR III/2, 11.

¹⁶IDR III/2, 20.

¹⁷AÉ 2011, 1084.

¹⁸IDR III/2, 18.

¹⁹IDR III/2, 19.

²⁰IDR III/2, 17.

²¹IDR III/2, 329.

provincial level. At a municipal level, we have: pontifex, flamen and augur, and various priests i.e. *sacerdotes Iovis Dolicheni*²².

Not everyone could aspire to fulfil an important position, such the priest of the colony. This was a privilege of the local aristocracy, who had Roman citizenship, property, and who acted as benefactors. These positions were open to former officers who wanted to pursue a municipal career. However, not every decurion could aspire to fulfil these sacred positions. It was necessary to fulfil the above conditions. Multiple decurionate paved the way for the fulfillment of some priestly positions.

As mentioned, it was necessary to have a good financial position, in order to show goodwill to the community. In 142 p. Chr., Q. Aurelius Tertius granted 80,000 sesterces because he was chosen Flamen of the colony; T. Varenus Pudens granted 50,000 sesterces to be elected flamen; M. Procilius Niceta, flamen of the colony, sacerdos Laurentium Lavinatium took care of the building of *aedem Augustales*. Besides these, Niceta initiated public works. Obviously, no one can say that all those honoured with these positions were spending impressive amounts of money, but they acted as benefactors, even though we do not always know the outcome.

Experience was important in acquiring positions. This was obvious in the following cases: P. Aelius Fabianus was elected augur in two colonies *Napoca* and *Sarmizegetusa*; P. Aelius Strennus was first omen in *Apulum*, then in *Sarmizegetusa*; T. Varenus Pudens became flamen in two cities, at the same time (*Apulum* and *Sarmizegetusa*).

As we know, there were certain characters who occupied two positions at the same time: P. Aelius Antipater, flamen of colony *Apulum*, who later became *sacerdos Arae Augusti*; Fabianus P. Aelius, who was omen in *Napoca* and *Sarmizegetusa*, and in the latter was pontifex; P. Aelius Strennus was omen in *Apulum* and *Sarmizegetusa*, after which he probably became *sacerdos Arae Augusti*; M. Procilius Niceta and T. Varenus Sabinianus became flamen in *Colonia Sarmizegetusa* and he also received the honorary title of sacerdos Laurentium Lavinatium.

²²See in thesis: Part IV: *Corpul sacerdotul*.

Most inscriptions come from the late IInd and mid IIIrd century AD, especially from the Severan dynasty. This overlaps with the zenith of *Sarmizegetusa*, and of the entire province.

The Fifth Part of the thesis comprises a repertory of around 300 votive monuments coming from the *colonia*.

Each monument is a prayer in itself, bearing a double message: religious and social. Each prayer may include the following elements: (1) theonym, (2) worship formula (usually *sacrum*), (3) dedicator's name (with his positions), (4) dedication formula, (5) reason²³.

The theonym, the worship formula and dedication formula, were part of the religious register: they allowed a direct communication between man and divinity. The names and functions of the dedicator, the reason and the mentioning of other people, are part of the social register, indicating the political and civic side of the votive act²⁴. This was labelled, by J. Rüpke, as *secondary communication*, meaning that people claimed to speak with the gods, and ended by talking to their fellow contemporaries²⁵.

In order to easily understand the information, I have introduced the data into a table.

We present the epithets of the gods. Regarding the population of *Colonia Sarmizegetusa*, the dedicator's personal pantheon will be analysed, after which we will proceed to the analysis of their social and political hierarchy. Here, a separate chapter deals with collective dedications or religious manifestations associated with women. Often the monuments are dedicated to another person (member of the family, colleagues, or emperor), therefore, I wanted to show those links in the section „Connections“. Finally, I analysed the different types of formulas which concluded the dedications.

Let's draw attention to the city timeline, in order to better understand its importance over other cities in Roman Dacia.

²³ Nemeti 2012, 42.

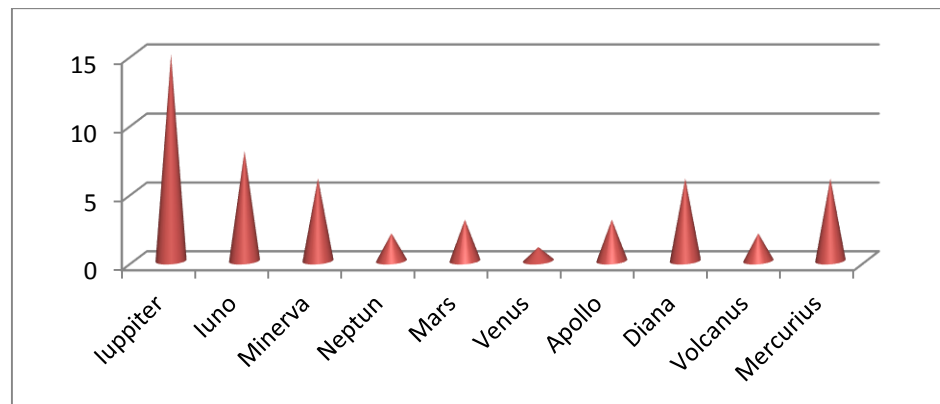
²⁴ Nemeti 2012, 42.

²⁵ Rüpke2009, 36-38.

After accomplishing the ceremonies and the fundamental acts, the *Trajanic Forum* or *Forum Vetus* was built. The founding of the colony was made by the governor of Dacia, Decimus Terentius Scaurianus, who held the position since 109 p. Chr. Initially the forum was built from wood, but soon, under Trajan, a larger one, made of stone and limestone blocks, was built, by a detachment (vexillatio) of Legio III Flavia Felix.

At the same time, or shortly after, in the northern part of the Roman precinct, the sacred buildings were built, those that are within the sacred area and that are surrounded by a *temenos*. Why do we support this theory? Because on this side of the city, the traditional Graeco-Roman temples were built, as well as the *Ara Augusti*. The so-called „Oriental” temples were built only later on²⁶. This theory is supported by stratigraphy as well: we know that under the reign of Marcus Aurelius, these temples were already built because they were touched by the Marcomanic war.

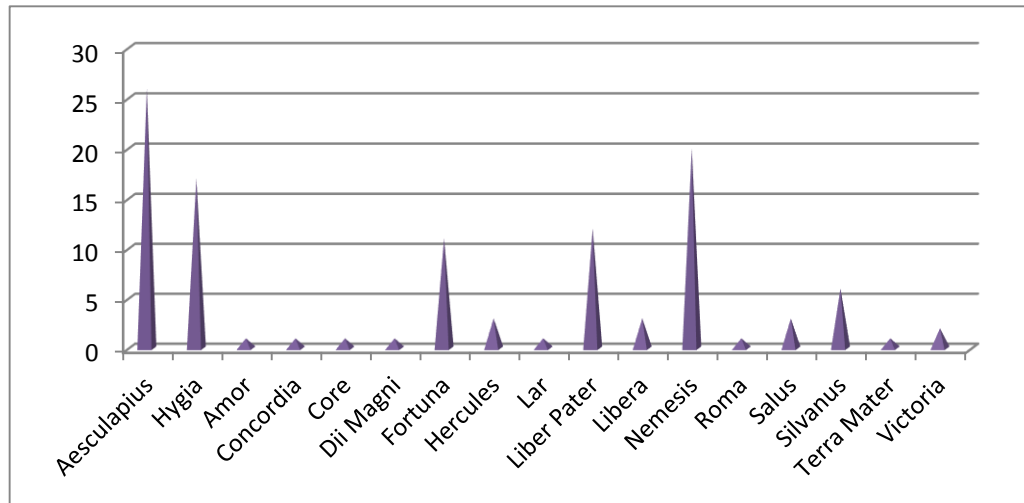
Under Antoninus Pius (138-161), the great work of reconstruction of the Trajanic forum began, replacing limestone or sandstone columns, with marble Corinthian columns. At the same time, the so-called *Forum Novum* (150 p. Chr.) was built, having the Capitol on its eastern side, and becoming a religious forum.



Dii consentes. Attested since the foundation of the city and up to the abandonment of the

²⁶The situation found in *Colonia Sarmizegetusa* corresponds with the situation of the city-headquarters in other provinces. The best analogy we have from *Lugdunum*, the center of the three Gauls, but as well from Pannonia (*Savaria*), Hispania Tarraconensis (*Tarraco*), Gallia Narbonensis (*Narbo*) Raetia (*Cambodunum*), Noricum (*Virunum*) and Britannia (*Camulodunum*). Thanks to these examples we can better understand these manifestations and we can say that they fall within those religious-political acts present in all provincial centres of the Roman Empire.

province.



Other Graeco-Roman deities. Attested since the foundation of the city and up to the abandonment of the city.

The reigns of Marcus Aurelius (161-180), Lucius Verus (161-169) and Commodus (180-193), coincide with the rebuilding of the temples of the sacred area. We cannot say for sure that the actions were limited to this area, for example we have shrines, bases of statues in the sacred area of *domus procuratoris*, in *Forum Vetus* (24 columns of the inner court of the forum were replaced with more elegant columns, carved in marble by local craftsmen), and most likely in *Forum Novum* which, besides the Capitol, is still not archaeologically researched.

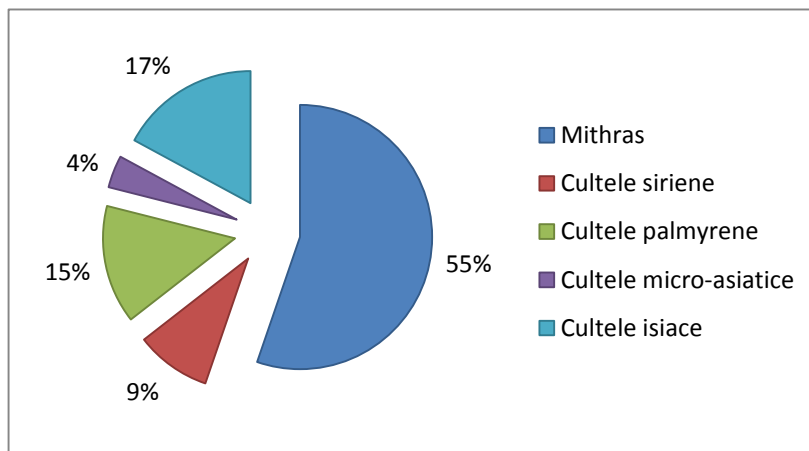
Gradually, Eastern Roman deities became part of the official Roman religion, mostly because of the emperors who supported their spread in the Empire. Moreover, based on epigraphic and topographic evidence, we mention the existence of a temple of Isis, built under the reign of Antoninus Pius.

Under the reign of Septimius Severus (193-211), on the northwestern side of the enclosure, a temple of the goddess Caelestis Virgo was built. The goddess bears the epithet *Augusta*, and the temple, according to the inscription, was dedicated by a slave August,

Nemesianus, *pecunia sua*. The temple and epithet show the fact that she was officially worshipped.

Under Caracalla (211-217), the *serapeum* was built, in the sacred area, inside domus procuratoris. The epithet of Sarapis occurs only under Caracalla.

Alexander Severus (222-235) supported, due to its origin, especially the Palmyrene cults. During this period four temples were built in *Sarmizegetusa*: the first was dedicated to the native gods of P. Aelius Theimes, the temple is located on a hill on the western side of the enclosure (the building is called *Dii patrii*). The second temple was built for the holy god Malagbel, in the northwestern part of the enclosure (Malagbel I), near the sanctuary of the goddess Caelestis. This is attested by an inscription dedicated to the health of the emperor Severus Alexander and Iulia Mamaea, by Primitivos, libert of the emperor and *tabularius*. The third temple was apparently built on the north-eastern side of the enclosure (Malagbel II). Finally, we mention the construction of a building right next to the *Forum Vetus* for Malegbel, the sun god, whose worshippers were not Palmyreni, but Roman citizens (Malegbel III). Before the reign of Alexander Severus, such building could not be built in the Roman enclosure: in this case, the cult of this Palmyrene god had an official character in *Sarmizegetusa*.



„Oriental” deities.

After the reign of Emperor Alexander Severus, between the reign of Maximus (235-238) and Aurelianus (270-275), we do not have any religious buildings which can be dated; however, there are some which were reconstructed. Altars, statues dedicated to different deities, prove the

fact that the religious life was not suppressed, but the religious building activity reached its climax when *Sarmizegetusa* received the title of *Metropolis*.

In conclusion, there is a religious complex around the *Asklepieion*, which was included in the sacred area. It is located on the northern side of the Roman enclosure, and it was surrounded by a *temenos*, where the Graeco-Roman temples were situated. The second sacred area is located in *domus procuratoris*, the deities worshipped here being of different origin.

Gradually, the Eastern Roman cults were widely spread due to the military that came from the East. The area given to these deities was on the southern, southwestern and western side of the Roman precinct. Why were they built in this area? On the northern side there were the traditional temples, and no space was available; on the northwestern and the north-eastern side were the temples of the divinities officially accepted by Rome, but they were not grouped into a sacred area. Under Trajan and Hadrian the „Oriental” temples could not have been built in the middle or near the traditional ones, near the *Ara Augusti*.

Over time, temples dedicated to the “Oriental” gods were admitted into the enclosure, being built close to the traditional temples, without however being grouped in a sacred area. Malagbel, Isis and Caelestis became widespread in the Empire, including in *Colonia Sarmizegetusa*. In *Sarmizegetusa* therefore we can trace the same religious and political events as in the *Urbs Aeterna* but not at the same time.

Through this thesis, I tried to bring a contribution to the religious life of *Sarmizegetusa* by addressing issues such as: *The sacred topography of the colony*, respectively the *Epigraphic repertoire of votive documents in Colonia Sarmizegetusa. Analysis, Comments and Statistics*, themes that were only mentioned, or that were not researched until now. At the same time, the thesis outlined the Palmyrene cult in *Sarmizegetusa*, and the importance of public religiosity in the Roman Empire. The cult of Malagbel deserves special attention because from the Roman Empire, only in *Sarmizegetusa*, in the province of Numidia, and in Rome, we may speak of an official Roman cult.

Finally the „Tutela provincia” was established, as well as those deities who are considered “passer-by gods”, and popular gods of the colony.

The thesis highlights the social groups that religiously manifested themselves in *Sarmizegetusa*, as well as the diversity of gods in the Roman pantheon worshipped here, and nonetheless the peculiarities of religious life in this settlement in comparison with other cities of the province, or of the Roman Empire.

The epigraphic and archaeological evidence points out to a large number of divinities worshipped since the foundation of the city. The building activity reaches its peak during the Severan dynasty. Over 70 gods and goddesses of different origin are attested, which leads us to think that *Sarmizegetusa* opened its gates to all the gods who were “brought” from different parts of the Empire.

Several gods appear less frequently, or they simply are not attested in other cities of the Roman Empire. This includes: Aesculapius Pergamenus, Men Cilverstianus, Mars Singilis, Fortuna Daciarum, Venus ubique (we have an analogy in *Pompeii*), and Volcanus mitis (from *Brixia*). Some rare theonymes, resulted from a Roman-Oriental syncretism, are documented as well: *Iovi Soli invicto deo genitor*, *Soli invicto Mitrae Aniceto*, *Dei Solis Ierhabolis* and *Dei Solis Malagbeli*.

The divinities from *Sarmizegetusa* had several peculiarities of great importance not only for the first Roman city in Dacia, but also for the religious life throughout the province.