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DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HISTORY, CIVILIZATION, CULTURE

*The Roman necropolis in Apulum, Dealul Furcilor – “Podei”  
(2008-2012 campaigns)*

## **DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY**

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**Keywords:** Roman period, Apulum, Roman necropolis, incineration tombs, funerary place, inhumation tombs, centuries II-III AD.

## **Introduction**

This doctoral thesis presents the results of the archaeological research carried out at the Roman necropolis in Apulum, Dealul Furcilor – “Podei” between 2008 and 2012, research that the undersigned took part in, first as a student and later, after becoming an employee within the archaeological department of the National Museum of Unification in Alba Iulia, as a member of the research team.

The necropolis is the city of the dead, and the tomb, the eternal home (*domus aeterna*) is the construction that serves as a place where human remains are put to rest. In the imperial period, the tomb was composed of the *sepulchrum* – the tomb that housed the ashes or earthly remains of the deceased and the *monumentum* – the actual funerary monument.

The necropolis was always situated outside of the civil space; this fact was established by the 10<sup>th</sup> law of the 12 Tables Law. Since it was outside the city, the necropolis could be divided into lots so that every family or ancestry gained property of a certain area.

### ***1.1. Roman Dacia necropolises***

After the Roman-Dacian wars ended, resulting in the victory of the Romans, the territory of Dacia was integrated in the Roman organization system and it led to an accentuation of the Romanization process. This process brought on major changes within the political, economic, social and religious plans; funerary arrangements were given attention as well. This explains the diversity of funerary rituals that emerged in the context of religious tolerance policy shown towards the people that were conquered by the Romans. The origin of the colonists is diverse. A statistic realized with the help of inscriptions shows that from almost 3000 known names approximately 74% are Roman, 14% Greek, and the rest are of other origins: Celtic, Thracian-Dacian, Egyptian, North-African.

From Roman Dacia, we have published information about 53 necropolises and funerary places, resulted from systematic or partial research with more or less information offered.

### **1.1.1 Incineration ritual**

Incineration involves the transformation of the body from decomposition into calcined bones. The subchapter presents several types of classifications regarding this kind of burial, proposed by Romanian researchers through time. For example: Octavian Floca considers that the tombs from the necropolises on Dealul Boteş and on Dealul Poduri, from Zlatna Mountains, are incineration tombs, in a grave that was arranged and not burned. Over the sepulchral ground, there was a tumulus surrounded by a ring made of stones. The author finds similar burial systems at the necropolis in Caşolţ. For the tombs in Cinciş, he uses the following description: a) sarcophagi made of stone with plastic inscriptions and ornamentations; b) sarcophagi made of stone, with no inscriptions or ornamentations; c) tombs made of bricks and shingles; d) metal tombs; e) monumental funerary constructions.

### **1.1.2 Inhumation ritual**

Tombs can be divided according to the type of burial (directly into the ground, in a wooden coffin, in a sarcophagus made of stone or brick, with a wood, stone or brick lid), to the position of the body and maybe according to direction.

Inhumation tombs can be level (examples: Locusteni, Obreja, *Romula* – Level necropolis in the north) or tumular (the one at *Romula* – Southern necropolis).

## **1.2 Geographic environment**

Alba Iulia municipality is situated in the perimeter formed by Ampoi River, Sebeş River, the tops of the Apuseni Mountains and the Transylvanian Plateau. The city is standing on the first terrace of the Mureş River, which forms an 8-10km long and 2-4km wide plateau toward the east. The western side of the city is delimited by the wooded heights of the Metaliferi Mountains with their Mamut Peak (630m). Toward the east, over the Mureş River, one can see the Transylvanian plateau with its reddish hills of clay soil, eroded by the rivers Mureş, Sebeş and Secaş, forming a line of escarpments with interesting shapes and rare vegetation. Toward the south side, the tops of the Sebeş Mountains (Şureanu Peak – 2245m, Pătru Peak – 2130m) can be seen. The city is located in the middle of the Transylvanian plateau, at 46°05' north and 23°34' east, at an altitude of 330m.

### 1.3 Archaeological environment

The beginning of the Roman city of Apulum coincides with the battles carried by the emperor Traian against the Dacian people and with the conquering of its territory. After realizing the region's strategic and economic importance (close to ancient Marisos, today's Mureş River, and relatively close to the auriferous area of the Apuseni Mountains and on the imperial road that linked the province's capital to the other cities inside the Carpathian arc) he built the castrum of Legio XIII Gemina, in Apulum. Two different urban centres will rise and evolve becoming cities: 1. A *vicus*, Municipium Aurelium Apulense, named Aurelia Apulensis during the time of Commodus; 2. Another civil settlement was formed around the castrum and it was signalled by a few local inscriptions having the name *canabae legionis XIII Geminae*; it was declared municipium during the time of Septimus Severus and received the name Municipium Septimium Apulense; an inscription from the year 250, dedicated to Emperor Traianus Decius, reminds of a colony that could be municipium Septimium, receiving the higher rank name Colonia Nova Apulensis.

The archaeological research in this area was begun at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by the pioneer of apulense archaeology Adalbert Cserni, around the area of the Roman castrum, of the governors' pretorium, but also in a few spots of the municipality situated in present day Partoş neighbourhood. The interwar period coincided with the research led by I. Berciu in the area where the Dacian governors had their headquarters. The years 1960-1970 generated research about two of the city's necropolises: the northern one, known from the research led at the ambulance station, the veterinary hospital and, recently, OMV and Profi, and the southern one at Dealul Furcilor – "Podei". Two new necropolises were discovered in 2013-2014, in the neighbourhood called Partoş, where 42 incineration and inhumation tombs were analyzed. The cemeteries in Apulum, as well as other urban cemeteries from different Roman provinces, the diversity of rituals, customs and sepulchral form undoubtedly indicates – besides social and economic differences – an ethnic diversity of the deceased, perpetuating their burial system and funerary traditions that they had in their country of origin. The legion castrum was thoroughly researched as well; the north side until 2007 (Apor Palace area) and the south side, where *porta principalis dextra* was uncovered. In the last few years, the area occupied by the *principia*, as well as other roads and buildings inside it, was researched. Systematic research was carried out on the territory of Aurelia Colony. Within the eastern intramural area, the enclosing wall, a series of buildings delimited by the *cardines*, as well as a public building with an *opus quadratum*

wall, not far from the forum of Apulum I urban centre, were brought into focus. In the area of Tăușor Lake, a place of worship attributed to Liber Pater was identified. Another important scientific moment was the one begun in 2003, when the Recea-Monolit neighbourhood was built, uncovering elements from the Bronze Age to the post-Roman age. It is obvious that the urban development and evolution of the city of Alba Iulia, especially in the last decade, led to a rise in the number of preventive archaeological research and implicitly to the enrichment of archaeological knowledge on what the archaeological environment of old Apulum means.

### **1.5 Research history of the Roman necropolis in Apulum, Dealul Furcilor “Podei”**

A first mention regarding the problem of the necropolis is signalled following Adalbert Cserni's research, who speaks of several stone sarcophagi discovered at the “Podei” necropolis after some archaeological research conducted in 1899; two of them had inscriptions and one had a palm tree leaf ornament.

**In 1956:** The campaign was led by M. Macrea, group responsible, D. Protase, I. Mitrofan, Al. Popa and Gh. Anghel. 42 tombs were identified.

**In 1957:** Approximately the same group as the year before, except for I. Mitrofan, continued the research at the necropolis and discovered only 5 tombs.

**In 1958:** The research by M. Macrea, D. Protase and Gh. Arion led to the discovery of 10 tombs within a week.

**In 1970-1971:** The research in the biggest necropolis in Apulum was resumed, supported by several institutions: The Institute of History and Archaeology in Cluj, The Regional Museum in Alba Iulia and the anthropological research Center in Bucharest (group: D. Protase, Dardu Nicolăescu-Plopșor, Wanda Wolski, Cl. Băluță, I. Hica, Elena Kiss, M. Blăjan). The total number of tombs rose to 77.

**In 1995:** Nicolae Rodean and Radu Ciobanu performed archaeological digging and identified two Roman incineration tombs.

**In 2003:** Researcher Radu Ciobanu identified eight tombs from the Roman period.

**In 2005:** A group from the university in Alba Iulia, composed of Marius Breazu, Mihai Gligor, Paula Mazăre, Tudor Borșan and Ionuț Maican, discovered an inhumation tomb from the Roman period, in a brick sarcophagus.



**In 2006:** After the archaeological discharge following sewerage works on Izvorului street, the group composed of dr. Vasile Moga, dr. Radu Ota and dr. George Bounegru identified and analyzed 27 tombs from the Roman period.

**In 2007** we have several research series: A) in February 2007 a group from MNUAI (National Museum of Unification in Alba Iulia), composed of Constantin Inel and Ovidiu Oargă, discovered an inhumation tomb from the Roman period; B) in May, a group from MNUAI, composed of dr. Vasile Moga – in charge of the group, dr. George Bounegru, dr. Ilie Lascu, Raluca Gheorghiu, Tiberiu Frunză, discovered five tombs; C) Constantin Inel and Ovidiu Oargă discovered two inhumation tombs in May as well; D) in August, dr. Vasile Moga, dr. Ilie Lascu and dr. George Bounegru conducted a research that led to the following result: 29 tombs – 27 from the Roman period and two from the Middle Ages; E) in October 2007 and in the spring of the following year, dr. Radu Ota conducted a research on a land and it led to the discovery of 48 Roman tombs.

To conclude with, until the moment of the research that represents the object of this paper, 296 tombs from the Roman period were discovered and analyzed: 127 incineration tombs and 169 inhumation tombs.

## **2. CATALOGUE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL STRUCTURES**

This is the biggest chapter of the thesis and it contains the description of all the structures that were discovered (tombs, graves, funerary places, ditches) and the entire archaeological material attached to them. Their presentation is made in the chronological order in which the research took place, for every owner, with the following mentions: A) The structures will keep the name assigned to them at the digging site – “M” for tombs, “G” for grave robbery, “Gr” for graves without inventory, “S” for ditches, and “C” for the rest of the structures; B) The description will be made starting with the incineration and inhumation tombs, empty graves and then the rest of the structures; C) Regarding the incineration tombs and the empty graves, the orientation was made following the axes NS and EW.

## **3. FUNERARY INVENTORY**

The funerary inventory was divided into several categories, according to the material used: A) **Pieces made of burnt clay** (1. clay pots, with analogies and an

endeavour to obtain a classification of the main types; 2. Oil lamps; 3. Terracotta pieces); **B) Pieces made of glass** (1. *Unguentaria*; 2. Beads); **C) Pieces that are sculpted in stone** (this subchapter presents the following: 1. Funerary lion; 2. Funerary medallions; 3. Medical instruments); **D) Pieces made of bone** (the pieces that were described were introduced within the following categories: 1. Pins and needles; 2. Game pieces; 3. Awls; 4. Medical instruments; 5.) Pendants; 6. Rings); **E) Pieces made of metal** (the following subchapters: 1. Tools for handcrafting – distaff, punch, chisel, nails and bolts; 2. Medical instruments; 3. Coins; 4. Weapons; 5. Adornments and clothing accessories – pins, earrings, pendants, rings, bracelets, fibulae, buckles, *cingulum* pieces, footwear spikes, sponges, mirrors, bells, keys; 6. Harness pieces – iron links, horseshoes; 7. Bronze statuette; 8. Other pieces – *stylus*, wax seals, scales handle, pot handle, furniture handles); **F) Pieces made of amber** (subchapter: rings).

This chapter dealt with dating the main pieces, along with presenting analogies on the territory of Dacia as well as the rest of the vast Roman Empire.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Roman necropolis in Apulum, Dealul Furcilor – “Podei” is a level one, with two rituals, where inhumation and incineration tombs were identified. We must mention that the necropolis was not fully researched, but the process will continue due to the urban development of the area. Nonetheless, a few pertinent conclusions may be drawn.

An exact chronology is not possible because of the lack of inventory for some of the structures (especially the robbed ones), but most of them are dated over the course of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD (more precisely, 679 were presented in this thesis, so the total number of tombs from this periods goes up to 975); it can be stated with certainty that four belong to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD (Sp. 4 – M1; Sp. 6 – M23, M89, M115) and only one belongs to the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD (Sp. 4 – M28, dated with a globular button/pendant?, made of two pieces that are connected on a vertical plane; it is empty on the inside, 11<sup>th</sup> Giesler shape. The piece was identified in an inhumation tomb, along with a ring fragment and a part of an earring. Analogies: “Dealul Pemilor” – Orăștie, “În vii” – Blandiana. “Dealul Șumuleu” – Biharia, “Cioreni” – Timișoara, “Dâmbul morii” – Galoșpetreu, Bihor County, “Strada Brândușei” – Alba Iulia. There are six tombs from that period, from the entire area called Dealul Furcilor).

From a stratigraphic point of view, the first structures that appear are the incineration tombs (they are right below the vegetal layer and some of them are disturbed by modern agricultural activities); there were cases where incineration tombs were partially covering inhumation tombs. There was no case where the situation was reverse; there was just one case where three inhumation tombs were placed one on top of the other.

Unfortunately, the field did not indicate any cemetery system; the graves seem to be distributed randomly on the field and the orientation looks random as well. There were no roads or alleys that could have been used to visit the deceased. The big number of structures in the N-NW leads us to believe that they started occupying the necropolis area from that side.

Without results from the osteological remains (they are being processed at a laboratory abroad), from incineration or inhumation, we cannot draw too many conclusions, except for the obvious ones from the inhumation tombs – infantile deaths were very frequent. A problem that may find its solution after the test results are finished and after the entire necropolis has been analyzed is represented by the ethnic classification of the population buried here (a particular group clearly stands out – the people were tied around their ankles or they were in a cramped position).

So far, we could not identify the area where the incineration was made, be it individual or communal funeral piles.

Regarding the number of soldiers buried here, the inventory indicates ten such cases.

The effort concentrated in these four years of research led to the identification and study of:

**A) Incineration tombs**, 359 structures, representing 52,87% of the tombs and we can classify them as such:

1. According to the burning site:

- *ustrinum*, 326 = 90,8% of the total. This refers to those burial graves where calcined bones, wood or charcoal fragments and even ash can be found and these can be simple graves or graves whose walls and/or bottom were burnt in a ritual.

- *bustum*, 33 = 9,2%. These were considered those graves that presented the following characteristics: sizable reddish crust on the walls, but a large quantity of ash, charcoal and calcined bones as well. These were bigger, rectangular graves; they were deeper and sometimes had a step in the middle.

2. According to their orientation – for a better systematization, NS and EW axes were used as main axes resulting in the following positioning, on the axis:

- NE-SW, 127 tombs = 35,4%;
- NS, 85 = 23,6%;
- NW-SE, 75 = 20,9%;
- E-W, 72 = 20,1%.

3. According to the shape of the tomb, on the contour:

- oval, 214 = 59,6%;
- rectangular with rounded corners, 122 = 34%;
- round, 23 = 6,4%.

4. According to the arrangements:

- directly in the grave, 355 = 98,91%;
- in a brick/shingle casket, 3 = 0,89%;
- in a limestone casket, 1 = 0,2%.

5. According to the discovery: - with funerary inventory, 245 = 68,2%;

- Type of pieces:

- ceramic, 206 = 84,08%;
- iron, 93 = 37,95%;
- bronze, 50 = 20,4%;
- oil lamps, 32 = 13,06%;
- glass, 19 = 7,75%;
- bone, 10 = 4,08%;
- without funerary inventory, 114 = 31,8%.

**B) Inhumation tombs** – 320 structures = 47,13%, divided as such:

1. According to the deceased's age: - adults, 194 = 61%;
- children, 126 = 39%.
2. According to the orientation: - NE-SW, 76 = 23,7%;
- N-S, 68 = 21,2%;
- E-W, 57 = 17,8%;
- NW-SE, 52 = 16,2%;
- W-E, 33 = 10,3%;
- SW-NE, 14 = 4,3%;
- S-N, 12 = 3,7%;
- SE-NW, 8 = 2,8%.

3. According to the arrangement of the grave:

- **simple grave, 271 = 84,68%**. These people were enshrouded or put in a wooden casket (which did not exist anymore, but the iron nails were found). The graves had rectangular shapes with rounded corners and straight walls and, as we mentioned before, the orientation was random. The main position in which the skeletons were discovered was on their back, with their arms along their body or over their pelvis/chest, and their legs stretched out (with a few exceptions: eight cases in which the legs were crossed at the ankles – M120/Sp.1, M15-M22, in Sp.5, then M79, M98, M138, M170 in Sp.6 and M3/Sp.7; and then there were other six cases where the deceased was placed in a cramped or partially cramped position: M57 and M153 in Sp.1; M89 and M182 in Sp.6; M8 and M12 in Sp.7).

- **brick/shingles casket, 48 = 14,7%**. Construction material and methods were different: the roof (the part that is very rarely found because of thievery) could have been made of wood (in which case only the nails remain) or a big limestone slab or bricks (placed horizontally, leaning on the walls; placed diagonally, similar to the houses' styles nowadays; placed in the shape of an arch). The walls were formed from several rows of bricks, placed one on top of the other, with nothing in between or bound with earth or mortar. There was only one case in M43/Sp.15 where, between the brick walls, there was a fragment of recycled limestone with traces of shaping. Concerning the bottom, it was sometimes paved with bricks or the bottom layer could be missing, in which case the deceased was placed directly on the ground.

- children, 26 = 54,1%;

- adults, 22 = 45,9%.

- **limestone casket, 1 = 0,3%**;

- children, 1 = 100%.

- **under a fragment of amphora, 1 = 0,3% (M115/Sp.6)**

- children, 1 = 100%.

4. According to the discovery: - with funerary inventory, 158 = 49,3%;

- type of pieces:

- ceramic, 93 = 58,8%;

- iron, 77 = 48,7%;

- bronze, 29 = 18,3%;

- glass, 27 = 17%;

- lime, 11 = 6,9%;

- oil lamp, 10 = 6,3%;

- bone, 8 = 5%;

**C) Graves without inventory** (101 in number) – archaeological structures, in a sterile layer, similar in all respects with inhumation tombs, without any kind of archaeological material.

**D) Grave robbery** – there were two cases found at the sectioning of two of the inhumation graves.

**E) Funerary places** – two were analyzed entirely (in both cases, they were very fragmented because they were situated not far below the surface and they were seriously affected by modern agricultural works done in the area; incineration tombs were found inside) and in three others only some of the sides were examined.

**F) Drain excavation**, 11, in different sizes and only partially observed; they contained no archaeological material and their profile was in the shape of the letter “V”.

**G) Other types of structures**, 36, are larger structures, found in the sterile layer and, most of the times, just partially, being continued outside property limits; they have irregular shapes and the deeper they go the smaller they are. There were cases where incineration and inhumation tombs were found inside of them. Taking into account the inventory found inside, they were most likely related to funerary banquets.

Considering the discoveries at the Roman necropolis in Apulum – Dealul Furcilor – “Podei”, we propose the following classification:

1. Incineration tombs, with the following subcategories:

a) with a funeral pyre at the *ustrinum*:

I. in a simple grave:

1. with the remains scattered all over the surface of the grave

2. with the remains in one place (probably put in a bag made

of organic material).

II. in a burnt grave, as part of a ritual:

1. with the remains scattered all over the surface of the grave

2. with the remains in one place (probably put in a bag made

of organic material).

III. in a brick/limestone casket.

b) *bustum*

I. in a simple grave;

II. in a grave with one step.

2. Inhumation tombs, with the following subcategories:

- a) in a simple grave;
- b) in a brick/shingles casket;
- c) in a limestone casket.

## **APPENDIX**

This part contains: a list of illustrations and boards (maps, tables and boards), a list of the abbreviations used to describe the structures and the pieces and a list of bibliographical abbreviations.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

They were written in alphabetical and chronological order and I chose to divide the titles used in the bibliography into the following categories:

1. Books and catalogues;
2. Studies and articles;
3. Reports;
4. Sources;
5. Webliography.

## **ILLUSTRATION**

It includes 181 maps, tables and boards, representing the structures and the inventory discovered at the necropolis.