

## Introduction

This volume springs from the symposium ‘Africa and the Danubian Provinces of the Roman Empire’ (July 29-30, 2018), which took place in Timișoara and was organized by the National Museum of Banat, the Center for Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Studies (Babeș-Bolyai University) Cluj-Napoca, and the West University Timișoara. The symposium was attended by well-known specialists along with early career researchers from Romania (Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca, Iași, Bucharest, Zalău, Sibiu), France (Toulouse), Bulgaria (Sofia), Austria (Vienna), Italy (Macerata). We had the pleasure to have as keynote speakers Prof. Dr Laurent Bricault (University of Toulouse II Jean Jaurès), Prof. Dr Alexandru Diaconescu (Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj Napoca, Center for Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Studies), Prof. Dr Ioan Piso (Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca), Prof. Dr Doina Benea (West University Timișoara), and Dr Florian Matei-Popescu (Vasile Pârvan Institute of Archeology, Romanian Academy, Bucharest). We regret that Prof. Dr Mustafa El Rhaiti (Meknès, Morocco) could not attend the symposium, despite his efforts. His contribution would have given the symposium a different perspective on the common and different elements among the two regions of the Roman Empire and on the population dynamics of the Empire in the 2nd-3rd centuries AD.

The symposium would not have existed without the contribution of the Center for Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Studies (Babeș-Bolyai University) Cluj-Napoca. We had the pleasure to have as keynote speaker the director of this institution, Prof. Dr Alexandru Diaconescu. Unfortunately, he passed away much too soon, during the volume editing process, and this volume is dedicated to his memory. A large number of those present at this symposium, whether or not they contributed to this volume, knew him, either personally or through his work. To some he was professor and to others a colleague or friend. Those who knew him were impressed by his special oratorical talent, by his charismatic personality and by his extensive knowledge of Roman art and architecture, of the Ancient Orient, of the religions of Oriental origin of the Roman Empire, and epigraphy. What gave an even greater depth to the research of Prof. Dr Alexandru Diaconescu, was the fact that he was also an excellent archaeologist. This allowed him to work not only with written sources and discoveries made by other archaeologists, but also to make his own discoveries and interpret the reality in the field, especially in terms of major statuary, minor art, and the architectural structure of a Roman city. He and his teams made important discoveries in many cities of Dacia, including Apulum, Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa and Napoca. His most important work is *Statuaria majoră*

*în Dacia romană* (Monumental Statuary in Roman Dacia), an extremely valuable work for all those who study high Roman art or other related fields.

During the symposium in Timișoara he presented the paper ‘Public life in Roman colonies. A parallel between Thamugadi in Numidia and Sarmizegetusa in Dacia’. In this presentation he made an extensive and refined parallel between the municipal organization of these two Roman cities located in such different areas of the empire, emphasizing both the similarities and the differences. The presentation, based mainly on archaeological evidence, was perfectly matched with the theme of the symposium and emphasized once again what the organizers wanted to assert: without ignoring the differences induced by local heritage, the Roman Empire applied the same principles to all its provinces, regardless of the organization of the army, politics, cities or religions (especially of civic religion).

The intention of the symposium was to illustrate the Egyptian and African military and civilian presence in the Danubian provinces, the Egyptian and African influences manifested at the level of material culture, religion and magic, as well as the presence of the inhabitants of the Danubian provinces in the North African region of the Roman Empire, and Egypt through case studies. It is well-known through the study of brick stamps, military diplomas, funerary epitaphs, and other archaeological remains that soldiers from Egypt and North Africa were stationed in Dacia and vice versa. The scholars whose articles are included in this volume have examined literary, historical, epigraphic, archaeological and art historical evidence in order to discuss the cross-pollination of culture and organization within these two regions of the Roman Empire. In the past decade, scholarship has begun to address a broader array of questions pertaining to issues such as the Roman economy, politics and religions, from a more atypical perspective. Topics such as social and individual identity, fear, hope, desire, and how the archaeological evidence can embody them are increasingly discussed. We are dealing with what we can define in a new term as *the archaeology of the imponderable*. This term refers to archaeological evidence that provides us the opportunity to capture, through an unconventional query, very personal aspects of people’s lives in antiquity, aspects difficult to measure otherwise.

The symposium was a complex event that included the opening of the exhibition *From Pagan Gods to Christianity*, which was attended by all the specialists involved in the symposium. The exhibition was organized by Dr Ștefana Cristea (Center for Middle Eastern and

Mediterranean Studies, Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca and the National Museum of Banat Timișoara) and Dr Călin Timoc (National Museum of Banat Timișoara) and included artefacts belonging to the National Museum of Banat Timișoara, the Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilization Deva, the Museum of the Iron Gates Region Drobeta Turnu Severin, the Buzău County Museum, the Zalău County Art Museum (Vasile Lucăcel History Section), and the Museum of Montane Banat Reșița. The exhibition aimed to expose ideas, rituals, and symbols that Christianity adopted from older cults and religions, such as those from Egypt or the Near East (e.g., resurrection, the soul, a happy eternal afterlife for the ones who deserved it, the snake as symbol of chaos), and from the Roman Empire (e.g., displaying the protective deities in specially arranged spaces inside the houses). At the same time, the exhibition aimed to express the materiality of these abstract notions.

During the symposium, the papers were grouped according to general themes, which are followed in this volume: Roman Army. Exchanges of military units between the Danubian provinces, Egypt and North Africa; Public life, romanization, population; The African and Egyptian influence in the religious life of the Danubian provinces.

The first theme concerns the military connection and the mobility of Roman troops between the two geographical areas of the Roman Empire. This topic was approached by considering both the ancient literary sources, as well as the archaeological record, as in the articles of Florian Matei Popescu and Lucrețiu Mihăilescu-Bîrliba. In the contribution of Dr Florian Matei-Popescu, 'Auxiliary Units from European Provinces in the Moorish War of Antoninus Pius', the author reevaluates the information regarding the participation of the Roman army in the Moorish war, during the reign of the Emperor Antoninus Pius. The current state of research, updated through epigraphic, numismatic, and papyrological discoveries allows a much more accurate view of those involved and the events. The study of military diplomas has greatly enriched our knowledge of the size and composition of combat vexillations that crossed the Mediterranean Sea. The new information brought by Dr Matei-Popescu's work complements that of Prof. Dr Doina Benea, also a participant at the symposium ('Some observations on Maurorum Numerus from the province of Dacia', published in *Sargetia*, IX / 2018, 61-85). Prof. Dr Benea's article focused upon the military relations between the provinces of Dacia and Mauretania (2nd-3rd centuries AD), seen through the perspective of Moors recruited to defend the Roman Danubian limes.

Lucrețiu Mihăilescu-Bîrliba, in his article *Militaires de Mesie Inferieure dans les Mauretanies*, suggests that the conditions in Africa evolved better from the point of view of Romanization, compared to the image of Africa painted by authors such as Marcus Annaeus Lucanus. The inscriptions recall periodic demobilizations of the troops of Lower Moesia who were sent to the African

limes, especially in the areas of Mauretania Caesariensis and Tingitana. The conflict between the Romans and the African tribes, which lasted more than 10 years, involved the transfer of military units from the European part of the Roman Empire to the African one. The settling of veterans in the African provinces, where they married local women, might seem a little less common. One explanation could be the political stability of the area, compared to other provinces, and the possibility of owning an extensive piece of land, which would offer prosperous economic prospects for their future descendants.

The social mobility between the Danubian and African provinces of the Roman Empire as well as Egypt's trade relations with the Greek colonies in the Pontic area and Thrace are well demonstrated in the article by Ligia Ruscu: 'Epigraphic Sources on the Movements of People between Egypt and the Provinces of Lower Moesia and Thrace (1st - 3rd century AD)'. Africa's riches attracted merchants who sought the patronage of the Ptolemies to protect their success in business. These relations changed when Rome interfered militarily and administratively in the eastern Mediterranean. In the Roman imperial era, population transfers between Pontus Euxinus and Egypt intensified and became more diverse. Like Lucrețiu Mihăilescu-Bîrliba, Ligia Ruscu noticed that mixed marriages occurred after a long period of not being allowed or not performed, because of cultural traditions. Marriage facilitated the acquisition of Roman citizenship, permitting some African noble families to ascend to the new provincial aristocracy, accumulating wealth and prestige.

The most common theme among the contributions in this volume relates to the religious life of Egypt, the Danubian and African provinces. Most papers address the deities of Egyptian origin Isis, Serapis, Harpocrates, and Osiris, as well as the Sibylline Oracles and the cult of Aesculapius and Hygia.

Jasmin Hangartner offers a comparative study on how the cult of Asclepius was represented in provinces such as Africa Proconsularis, Numidia, Mauretania Caesariensis, Mauretania Tingitana, and Roman Dacia ('The Cult of Asclepius in the Roman Empire: A Comparative Analysis of North Africa and Dacia'). Both the mapping of the places of worship of the god and his competence are taken into account. Based on the existing archaeological evidence, the author concludes that for some of the places of worship attributed to this god there is not enough evidence to support such a claim. Although there are similarities between the way the cult of Asclepius/Aesculapius was perceived in the provinces of North Africa and Dacia (in cities such as Apulum, Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa), there were still many elements characteristic only of the African regions: the association of the god with Punic and Numidian deities and "unlike in North Africa, in Dacia there is no site where the cult is almost exclusively documented through members of the military even though the urban centres of the province are very much influenced by it". Nevertheless, an inscription dedicated by an officer

in Roman Dacia (CIL III, 993) mentions the goddess Caelestis together with Asclepius, as well as two *genio*, one African and one Dacian: *Genio Carthaginiis* and *Genio Daciarum*. This inscription highlights the idea according to which the provinces of the entire Roman Empire, regardless of the distance between them, were guided towards a military, political, and spiritual uniformity in order to ensure a common language throughout its space. The inhabitants of the empire of course had religious preferences that reflected their uniqueness and helped overcome the fear of death, but recognized the importance of all local gods. They tried to win their goodwill, whether the god was a protective spirit of Carthage or Dacia.

New evidence of the existence of Isiac cults in Thrace (Serdica) is presented by Dr Vessela Atanassova in the article 'Isis and Serapis in Serdica'. The author recalls the stages in which the deities of Egyptian origin arrived in Thrace and groups the material researched by the main deities: Isis and Serapis. The two deities are mentioned in epigraphic material and coins, but also emerge in various representations, including very personal items such as a hair pin and lamps that are present either in temples or tombs. The author concludes that in the 3rd century AD dedications or embodiments of the gods of Egyptian origin came not only from the official environment, but also from the domestic or personal one, inside or outside the cities.

Another Danubian province that benefits from a study discussed in this volume is Illyricum. The focus of this article by Csabo Szabó is on the meaning that the notion of Egyptianism(s) may have had at the general level of the Roman Empire. Another point of interest of the article is the mobility of Egyptian objects inside the empire. The author focuses upon the Western part of the *Publicum Portorium Illyrici* with several case studies (e.g., Savaria, Salona). The methodology and the terms used pertain to the latest approaches in the study of ancient religions and are clearly influenced by the school created by Jörg Rüpke in Erfurt (Lived Ancient Religion). Szabó's study brings into question a problem less discussed in the scientific literature: to what extent can "Africanism" be linked to Roman Egypt, geographically and culturally. To answer this question the author turns to the ancient literary sources. He concludes: "Studying Roman religion today means focusing on individual agency, facets or religious communication, strategies in space sacralization and less prominently, the role of materiality of religion in communication and ritualization. Other important topics however, such as belief, divine agency, and polis religion seem to be marginalized." Even if we agree with him to a large extent, the studies carried out in the last decade show a growing awareness of studying the importance of the ancient human element in all its complexity, being created in this regard new terms and more daring approaches.

Laurent Bricault, Dan Deac, and Ioan Piso discuss the dissemination of the goddess Isis and the other deities associated with her in the Roman Empire, a phenomenon closely related to the local social context. The particular case

they discuss is that of *colonia* Sarmizegetusa. The article summarizes the currently available information related to the adoption of Egyptian deities in the province of Dacia and presents the data in a new light. All the epigraphic and anepigraphic sources available at this moment for *colonia* Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa are analyzed in detail, making this article an invaluable tool for those interested in the subject. The inscriptions are grouped according to the area in which they were discovered, thus, helping to create a more complete picture of the evolution of certain constructions (e.g. the *Serapeum* built in *praetorium procuratoris*, dated by the authors to 213 and continuing to exist during the 3rd century AD) or areas of the *colonia*. A point of great interest is the reading of what the authors consider to be two or three marble plates, extremely fragmented and representing a very important text used in the initiation rituals to the Isiac cult. The text reminds us of the one described by Apuleius, Isis was called here *una quae est omnia*.

Also focusing upon a city in Roman Dacia, the article by Ștefana Cristea and Călin Timoc paints a picture of the proliferation of the Isiac cult in Dierna (Orșova, Mehedinți County). The location of Dierna on the banks of the Danube and the importance of this location in its history are described, based on epigraphic, historiographical and archaeological sources. The first part of the article emphasizes methodology and the use of specific terminology. The authors defend the use of certain terms, while offering their definition. Ancient literary, epigraphic, and archaeological sources are considered in the discourse of the article. Moreover, it includes a catalog of artifacts discovered in Dierna and related to the worship of the deities of Egyptian origin. Some of the items are published here for the first time. The authors attempt, as far as possible, an investigation into the social dimension of the motivation for choosing these gods by the inhabitants of the city. Cristea and Timoc have also built a model of the ways in which these deities were introduced into Dierna. Unfortunately, the Roman city is now under the waters of the Danube river, and any further archaeological excavations are limited to the areas adjacent to the ancient city.

We are very happy to have had the chance to collaborate with such an extraordinary group of specialists as those who have chosen to publish in this volume, and we hope that our collaboration does not stop here. We are also grateful for the support of all the institutions involved in the organization of the symposium and the publication of the volume, as well as the publishing house.

The Editors