

ON THE FUNERAL SYMBOLISTIC OF THE MONUMENTS FROM DROBETA

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Romanization as it was proved by historical and archeological studies from the last decades was a continuous phenomenon which have began before 106 p. Ch. and goes on even after the Aurelian's abandonment of Dacia. Romanization meant Roman style of life in every level of daily life, starting with Roman institutions and Latin language and ending with Roman beliefs and customs.

If we speak about the provincial art from Drobeta, the funeral monuments are by all means a complex creation. Leaving out the inscriptions, the anepigraphic monuments give information about the beliefs, customs and ornaments. Moreover the funeral monument is the result of mixing sculpture with architecture. It takes sometimes the image from the plastic art with the religious content.

Death is the first mystery and the deceased is the first god (Bărbulescu 1984, 188). It is perfectly normal that a human person who was loved and died to be mourned. The loss of such a person give birth to pious feelings which are very close to the religious one from which is very easy to recognize the problem of survival and to admit the existence of another life beyond grave.

Further on, we try to present the symbolistic of the funeral monuments from Drobeta. The most important role of the funeral monuments was to keep alive the memory of the deceased. The funeral monument was therefore addressed to *Dis Manibus*, this way the epitaph having a votive power. On some monuments one can see gods from the underground world or only their attributes. Drobeta yielded a profile of paralelepipedic limestone on which one can see the *Mercur's* caduceus (Bărcăcilă 1932, 25). *Mercur* has a psychopomp meaning (van Genep 1998, 138) - he leads the soul to the Inferno, in front of the judges from the world beyond the *Styx*. It is, therefore, normal that *Mercur* should appear next to *Dis Pater*, *Proserpina* or *Hercules* on the funeral monuments.

On the left wall (Bărcăcilă 1932, 31) of another inscription from Drobeta one can notice *Thanatos*, the genius of the death with his head on his shoulder. His right arm leans against his shoulder. With his left hand he keeps a torch with a flame which reach till the earth; his left leg is across his right one.

On the right wall (Bărcăcilă 1932, 33) of the same inscription there is a character who has the left arm bend to his chest and keeps in it an attribute (a bird ?); the right hand is figured across his leg. In the hand he has another attribute (an animal). The character is half (lower part) dressed. He is identified with one of *Cybele's* victimarius as it can be noticed from the scene from the back wall of the inscription (Bărcăcilă 1932, 37). The scene shows a garland flanked by two lions. With this garland was decorated the forehead of a victim sent to be killed. Here the garland stands instead of a bull's or a ram's head. The bull's or ram's head appears between two lions on other three monuments from Drobeta. Lions are *Cybele's* attributes. The *Cybele'* cult appears to have been much more than a simple sacrifice of a bull or a ram. We can speak here about the "blood bath" (Tudor 1976), made for the one who brings the offering: *taurobolium*. The same the "blood bath" as a sacrifice, can be observed in the case of *Attis* cult, but the offering was a ram: *criobolium*. This funeral monument belongs probably to some believers or priests who made these sacrifices during their life-times in order to get purification of the soul as well as the happiness in their next lives (IDR II 49).

The grave is considered an eternal place of rest. Some objects which may have been used by the defunct in his next life are very often met there. The concern for the grave can be noticed in two inscriptions from Drobeta. One of them shows that the grave was made at the heir's request and in the other the heir is requested not to permit anybody to be buried there (IDR II 62). The concern for the grave and the usual sacrifices made there are also presented on a funeral will-stone from Sucidava (IDR II 187). Sacrifices are centred in Roman conceptions around the existence of body and soul beyond death. The fact that one brings there food at certain intervals of time underlines another belief which can be met in Dacia - the belief that the soul continues to live near the body in the grave and it needs food and drink in order to survive (Bărbulescu 1984, 190).

If *Dis Manibus* were the gods of the underground world they might also have been to receivers of these offerings.

The idea of an eternal world which should be instead of the liturgical life from the grave is illustrated on the grave-stone through some circles which are the symbols of sky. It can be noticed on a funeral stone of *Graia Vitalis* from Drobeta (Bărcăcilă 1932, 6). Some people said that a soul might become a star. The sidereal symbolism appears on the funeral monuments on the shape of circle, disc or rosette. Rosettes also appear on an altar (IDR II 37) and two funeral stones (IDR II 56-57) from Drobeta.

The bird is an ancient symbol of the soul. It helps the soul to reach the sky (Bărbulescu 1984, 192). Some of the birds which are often met on the funeral monuments from Drobeta are peacocks - they are the symbol of eternal soul. The peacock is *Junona's* bird (Chevalier, Geerbrant 1995, 59-60) - the image of severe manners and in the same time the symbol of immortality in the apotheosis of queens. It appears on a fragment of funeral monument of a merchant from Drobeta (Bărcăcilă 1932, 24). On an altar from limestone there are two peacocks facing each other (IDR II 37). On another altar there is a dead woman with a bird in her arm (IDR II 34).

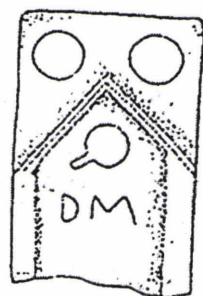
From the boat and the idea of sailing in order to arrive in the land of happiness one can reach the symbolism of dolphins and other monsters of the sea. Face to face dolphins (IDR II 35) can be seen only on one altar from Drobeta. Moreover the symbol of rosette, dolphins or bird is met also on the territory of Dacia: at Sarmizegetusa, Apulum, Mehadia, Aquae.

To resume if we speak about life beyond death there are two opposite conceptions: the grave and the sky immortality. The last appears on one hand as a primary belief showing that both body and soul are immortal, and on the other hand, in a more evolved way, recognizing only the immortality of the soul. The idea of continuous life even in the dark space of the grave leads to the existence of an underground world, a world of darkness, a classical Inferno (Minois 1998, 49-54).

The result of this believes can be seen not only in the bringing of the food or the *Charon's* coin, but also through an entire succession of representations - *Mercur's* psychopomp attributes for example. Even if the belief that the immortal soul may reach the sky was long time in existence, the funeral sculpture will continue to present the images born from the mythology of the underground Inferno.

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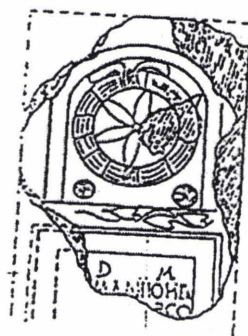
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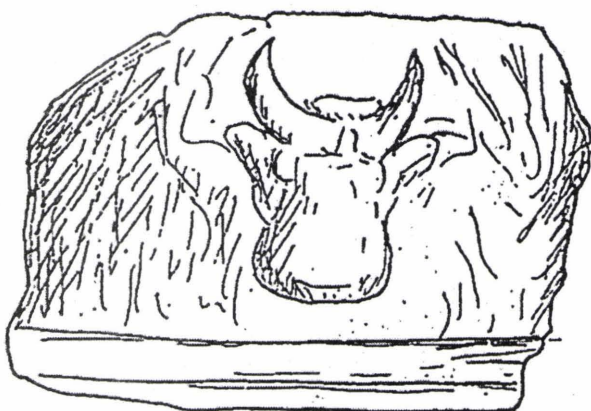
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Fig. 1. Epitaph dedicated *Dis Manibus*; Fig. 2. Mercur's *caduceus*; Fig. 3. Thanatos on a Drobeta inscription; Fig. 4-5. Garland flanked by two lions and the bull in the middle; Fig. 6. Cybele's *victimarius*.