

A GOD OF CONVALESCENCE. TELESPHORUS/ GENIUS CUCULLATUS IN ROMAN DACIA

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Abstract: This study presents in light of the discovered material, the figured and epigraphic representations regarding the cult of Telesphorus / Genius Cucullatus in the province of Dacia. The aim of this study is to clarify the god's identity and the local aspects of the cult, emphasizing the small figurative material, the most numerous part of the cult. The studied material showed that this was rather a personal than official cult, the extremely rare epigraphic evidence being edificatory to this effect. The find contexts, the items' functionality as well as the association with the triad Aesculapius, Hygeia and Epione provide precious clues on the god's competence field. Thus, it was noted that this was a deity with healing values, a childhood protector and also important in fecundity and fertility.

Keywords: Telesphorus; Genius Cucullatus; convalescence; fecundity-fertility; childhood.

Rezumat: Studiul de față prezintă prin prisma materialului descoperit reprezentările figurate și epigrafice privind cultul lui Telesphorus / Genius Cucullatus în provincia Dacia. Scopul studiului este de a clarifica identitatea divinității și aspectele locale ale cultului, punându-se accent pe materialul figurativ mărunț, partea cea mai numeroasă din cult. Din materialul studiat s-a putut observa că este vorba mai mult de un cult personal decât unul oficial, mărturiile epigrafice rarissime fiind edificatoare în acest sens. Contextele de descoperire, funcționalitatea pieselor, precum și asocierea cu triada Aesculapius, Hygia și Epione oferă indicii prețioase legate de domeniul de competență al divinității. Astfel s-a putut observa că este vorba de o divinitate cu valențe vindecătoare, protectoare a copilăriei și totodată cu un rol important în fecunditate și fertilitate.

Cuvinte cheie: Telesphorus; Genius Cucullatus; convalescență; fecunditate-fertilitate; copilărie.

Genius Cucullatus is a minor god, whose name does not designate a special character, but rather a garment peculiarity, *cucullus*, the hooded cape, *paenula cucullata*, which the god is usually rendered with. In general, the character wearing the *cucullus* is hebetate and often holds a round object in his hand, as offering, which may be a fruit or *patera*. The sleeves hooded cloak is a garment frequently used for the newborns or toddlers. Risus is also depicted with this type of clothing (Fig. 1)¹.

Head covering in the Roman world is related to death, those near death frequently covering their heads. The cape has many connotations, being used in cult ceremonies in order to get closer to the gods, in various "rites of the passing", as well as in the passing to the world of the dead, marriage or other esoteric celebrations. Furthermore, demons and all nocturnal spirits are described as wearing such garments. The *cucullus* is also used as a disappearing or camouflage trick. Iuvenalis mentions even *cucullus*

¹ LIMC, Suppl. I, 2009, s.v. *Telesphoros*, 870-878 (Cherici); DA I, 2, 1887, s.v. *Cucullus*, 1577-1579 (Reinach).

nocturnus. Therefore, these characters have firstly funerary attributes, being related to infant burials, likely also playing an apothropaic role².



Fig. 1. Asclepius and Telesphorus marble statue: a. Museo Borghese, Rome; b. Musée du Louvre, Paris; Galerie Chenel, Paris.

The origin of this character does not seem Roman, being noticeable from the early beginning a strong Celtic influence, of a deity of vegetation and wealth with healing values which via *interpretatio Romana* receives the name of Cucullatus³. It is noteworthy that the name Cucullatus is recorded only by two inscriptions, both from Noricum, discovered in a Celtic influence sanctuary⁴. The character also appears in the Etruscan environment, likely assumed from the Celtic tribes in northern Italy. Moreover, via the Celtic tribe of the Galatii Cucullatus becomes popular in Asia Minor, while the Greek and later Roman priests mention him as Telesphorus, being associated with Asclepius and Hygeia⁵.

The cult diffuses within the Empire through the areas with a strong Celtic substratum, eastwards included, via the military troops and also the traders. Finds of the type cluster in the provinces where there is an underlying Celtic influence like Gallia, Germania, Britannia, Noricum and Pannonia⁶. Dacia is an exception to this effect, as there was no Celtic sublayer previous to its conquest by the Romans, nevertheless where such finds exist. Seldom directly, from Gaul, and frequently from other provinces, such items enter the provinces without Celtic substratum, beside *terra sigillata*, decorated lamps or figured terracotta.

The competence field of the character seems to be that of Asclepius's assistant, even the deity's son, being associated with Telesphorus. He is the one "leading to full development" or "completion". Telesphorus's name, of Greek origin, is composed of τέλος, the purpose, goal, and of φόρος, the one who brings, bears, the meaning being that of the one who fulfils. The name etymology sets the deity's action area, the convalescence, fostering the healing from illness, fulfilling thus a therapeutic function. To

² Deona 1955, 43-74; Toynbee 1957, 456-469; D'Ambrosio 1993, 179-237; Vertet, Zeyer 1982, 63-65.

³ Egger 1932, 31.

⁴ Kenner 1976, 147.

⁵ Kenner 1976, 148.

⁶ Domínguez 2015, 106.

this effect, the character is rendered holding occasionally a roll, which bears inscribed the medical prescriptions⁷.

The funerary values of the character are recorded by clay statue finds placed in infant graves, like those at Ostia, Aquileia, Sassari, Dijon, Köln or Trier⁸. In addition, *Telesphorus* is regularly mentioned in funerary inscriptions, most often those erected for infants.

The connection with the characters wearing *cucullus* and a fertility cult is evidenced by their association with the mother goddess, like the case of the votive relief at Cirencester, exhibiting three *Cucullati* and a sitting goddess, who seems to hold a baby⁹. On a small marble stela, he appears associated with *Mater Malene*, a local goddess of farming fertility, whose origins seems to be in Phrygia¹⁰. On an inscription from Kassel, a mother thanks him for painless birth and the birth of healthy babies¹¹. Moreover, he may be identified within the Egyptian triad *Serapis - Isis - Harpocrates*, the idea of fecundity and fertility being underlined also by the association by deities like *Demeter* or *Aphrodites*¹².

The healing skills of the character wearing *cucullus* are obvious by the association with *Asclepius*, whereby it seems that *Telesphorus* played an active role in the *incubation* process. In the case of the *Asclepeion* at Pergamum, *incubatio* occurred precisely in the *Telesphoreion*. *Dio Cassius*¹³ reports that *Caracalla* fell ill during the march against the Germans, his recovery being related to the *Asclepeion* at Pergamum, which resulted in a series of coin issues with *Telesphorus*¹⁴.

The presence of the characters using the *cucullus* in Dacia is infrequent. Despite the association with *Aesculapius* and *Hygeia*, *Telesphorus* is mentioned by only an inscription of the 85 inscriptions mentioning the two deities, on a votive plate coming from Turda (Pl. I/3)¹⁵. One inscription on a votive relief from Sarmizegetusa, fragmentarily preserved, mentions *Aesculapius* and *Hygeia*, however there was not enough space for *Telesphorus*'s name¹⁶. It is fully rendered on the above relief. Among analogies count the reliefs in the sanctuaries at Glava Panega, *Dionysopolis* or *Nicopolis ad Istrum* in *Moesia Inferior*¹⁷.

Seldom, *Telesphorus* is rendered on stone figured monuments. Two representations of the type come from Sarmizegetusa, where *Telesphorus* appears in the company of *Hygeia* (Pl. I/1 a-b, 2)¹⁸. Analogies for these items are few within the Empire, where *Telesphorus* appears especially beside *Aesculapius* lone or beside both *Aesculapius* and *Hygeia* and rarely only beside *Hygeia*.

⁷ Bonanome 2014, 12.

⁸ La Fragola 2015, 57-61.

⁹ Green 2003, 185.

¹⁰ Guarducci 1973, 365-370.

¹¹ Bonanome 2014, 12.

¹² Aparaschivei 2012, 158.

¹³ DIO C., LXXVII 15, 27.

¹⁴ Deona 1955, 54-55.

¹⁵ Cumont 1894, 16, Fig. 1.

¹⁶ Daicoviciu 1924, 224-263, no. 8, Fig. 16.

¹⁷ Aparaschivei 2012, 165.

¹⁸ CIL III 7896; IDR III/2, 152; Alicu, Pop, Wollmann 1979, 68, no. 7; Diaconescu, Bota 2004, 190, Pl. XVII/I 4.

On a relief at Alba Iulia, beside Hygeia, Aesculapius and Telesphorus also appears Epione. The inscription however mentions only the first two (Pl. I/5)¹⁹. A good analogy for this item is given still by a relief in Moesia Inferior²⁰.

On a relief from Transylvania, beside the common depictions of Aesculapius, Hygeia and Telesphorus, also appears a small Hypnos / Thanatos with crossed legs (Pl. I/6)²¹. Representations of the sort are extremely rare within the Empire.

These depictions express the devotion to the god of medicine, the healing process also involving Telesphorus. It is difficult to establish the functionality of placing terracotta statuettes of characters wearing the *cucullus*, since in any case the accurate find context is missing. These items are briefly mentioned in the specialty bibliography, sometimes confused with Attis or certain *Genii cucullati*, the connection with Telesphorus.

Three fragmentary statuettes of the type come from Alba Iulia (Pl. II/3 a-b, 4, 5)²², a head being found in the *villa rustica* at Chinteni (Pl. II/7 a-b), in the same context with a clay small wheel²³, a terracotta head (Pl. II/6 a-c)²⁴ comes from a pottery kiln at Zlatna, from Moigrad come other two terracotta heads²⁵, while in the sanctuary of Liber Pater at Alba Iulia were also identified several fragments. In the same sanctuary, beside the Cucullati statuettes, were also identified statuettes depicting Venus, toys, among which also small wheels, as well as statuettes with Risi²⁶ representations. Given the initiation nature of the sanctuary, the offerings might have been related to the Liberalia festival occurring on the 17th of March and which coincided with the festivities by which the teenagers donned *toga virilis* or *toga libera*, thus marking the moment when the young men entered public life. Thus, beside toys (among which also small wheels), the infants also dedicate Risi statuettes, which seem to mark the passage from the baby state to that of toddler, or Cucullati statuettes, which mark the passage from the state of child to that of teenager. In Pannonia, such a case is that of the round sanctuary of Celtic influence at Aquincum, where several toys figures and Venus, Risus, Cucullatus²⁷ statuettes were discovered in the same context.

Noticeably, statuettes of the type are missing from funerary contexts. Very likely, such items are part of personal *lararia* or are *ex voto* depositions within sanctuaries, playing an apothropaic role. They might have been used to protect children, for instance against evil eyes, believed the main reason why illness occurred. Furthermore, they might have been invoked against infertility, for wealth and abundance. The offerings in the sanctuary of Liber Pater are likely connected to its initiation nature, the items being placed by the young in occasion of specific celebrations.

Another category of items depicting characters wearing *cucullus* is that of toys. Statuettes with Genius Cucullatus of *tintinnabulum* type, with mobile arms and legs,

¹⁹ Igna 1935, 1; CIL III 979; IDR III/5, 9.

²⁰ Bonanome 2014, 8.

²¹ Lenghel 1928, 69-96; Igna 1935, 64, no. 3, Fig. 25.

²² Anghel et alii 2011, 55-56, nos. 56, 58.

²³ Alicu et alii 1995, 623, no. 62, Fig. 5/5.

²⁴ Ungurean 2008, 239, no. 468.

²⁵ Gudea 1989, 514, no. 15, Pl. CIX/15.

²⁶ Diaconescu, Haynes, Schäfer 2005, 38-45; Schäfer 2014, 42-43.

²⁷ Kuzsinszki 1934, 17; Póczy 1963, 241-242.

paenula appearing as a bell, inside with grains were identified mainly in Hispania. They were used as baby rattles, however also casting out evil spirits²⁸.

Another toy type, which appears in Dacia as well, with the depiction of Cucullati, is that where the character is rendered on horseback, which instead of legs has four wheels. The character wears the classical hooded cape, *paenula cucullata*, sometimes bare-headed, the hood on the back. In some cases, hands are visible, holding a spear, likely of wood or metal, which no longer preserves, in the right hand and a shield in the left hand, where an *umbo* may be seen. The rider's body is one and the same with that of the horse, legs being no longer modelled. The wheels are made separately, being attached to the horse by a small axle for mobility. The horse nose is pierced so that a string would be inserted in order to pull the toy (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Cucullatus rider: a. Private Collection Gerhard Hirsch; b. Bavay, Musée Archéologique de Bavay; c. Cologne, Römisch Germanisches Museum.

Such a complete item comes from Celei (Pl. III/1)²⁹, another restorable item comes from Alba Iulia (Pl. III/3)³⁰. Four fragmentary *cucullus* riders were discovered at Alba Iulia (Pl. III/2, 6, 8)³¹, other two come from Turda (Pl. II/2)³², and other three are from Zlatna (Pl. III/7)³³ and Cristești (Pl. III/5)³⁴. A slightly different rider which appears in a common representation of the genius, is that of Cicău (Pl. II/1)³⁵. It wears the hood on the head and has no visible hands, the back side of the cloak preserving the prints of attachment to the horse.

Other statuettes depicting horses with wheels and prints of rider attachment on the horseback come from Turda (Pl. III/4 a-b)³⁶ and Romula³⁷. Terracotta horse

²⁸ Domínguez 2015, 111–114.

²⁹ Comănescu 1965, 797–802, Fig. 2; Gudea 1996, 186, Fig. 46 a; Ungurean 2008, 161, no. 78; Ene 2014, 264, no. 408.

³⁰ Anghel 2010, 533; Anghel et alii 2011, 81, no. 109, 110.

³¹ Pop, Dănilă 1971, 140, no. 4, Fig. 4; Anghel et alii 2011, 58, 82, 83, nos. 64, 112, 113.

³² Miclea, Florescu 1980, no. 297; Bajusz 2005, 656, Fig. 51/60.

³³ Anghel 2010, 533; Anghel et alii 2011, 82, no. 111.

³⁴ Man 2010, 104, no. 4, Pl. 1/6; Man 2011, 193, no. 4, Pl. CXL/4.

³⁵ Winkler, Takács, Păiuș 1979, 160.

³⁶ Rusu 1956, 687–713; Miclea, Florescu 1980, no. 297; Ungurean 2008, 232, no. 423.

³⁷ Bondoc, Dincă 2005, 61, no. 30; Popilian 2006, 418, no. 43, Pl. IX/43 a-c; Ungurean 2008, 207, no. 290.

fragments were found at Alba Iulia, Turda, Sarmizegetusa, Romula and Jupa³⁸. Terracotta wheels were identified at Alba Iulia, Turda, Sarmizegetusa, Moigrad, Romula, Cristești, Gilău, Valea Chintăului or Miercurea Sibiului³⁹. It is though worthy of note that such horse and wheel fragments might also come from other toy types.

Similar items come from Germania, Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium (Fig. 2 c)⁴⁰, Gallia (Fig. 2 b) or Moesia, from within funerary furniture (Slokošcița, Suhindol)⁴¹. In addition, in Athens or Myrna such items come still from infants' graves⁴². A good analogy for the item at Cicău (Pl. II/1), where Telesphorus has his head covered, comes from a private collection in Germany (Fig. 2 a). A character wearing *cucullus* is rendered on a votive relief at Brigetio⁴³, flanked by two riders, a similar depiction with a figurine in Asia Minor⁴⁴.

The association of such a character with toys is not novel, the skill field of Telesphorus being easily related to childhood. Thus, the toy might have also had protective, saving values, its protection extending also in the world beyond, as evidenced by the items found in graves⁴⁵.



Fig. 3. Plastic lamps: a. Musée Rolin, Autun (after Bolla 2010); b. National Museum Athens (after Robinson 1959); c. Arheološki Muzej, Zadar (after Bolla 2010).

Another category of items with Cucullati representations are the ithyphallic lamps (Fig. 3). Since it is a fecundity and fertility deity, it is often depicted with phallic attributes, present in various places of the empire⁴⁶.

Such lamps were discovered at Zlatna (Pl. II/8 a-b, 9 a-b)⁴⁷, in a pottery kiln. The character wear the *paenula cucullata*, one shorter down to the belt area, from under which exits an exaggerate *phalus* as *rostrum*, the place where the wick was

³⁸ Ene 2014, 247-250, nos. 355-364.

³⁹ Ene 2014, 270-274, nos. 427-444.

⁴⁰ Rouvier-Jeanlin 1995, 77-84, Fig. 1/1.

⁴¹ Filov 1911, 226-227, 286, Fig. 21.

⁴² Pottier, Reinach 1887, 458.

⁴³ Barkóczy 1944, Pl. 51/2.

⁴⁴ Ehling 2005, 162, Figs. 1, 2.

⁴⁵ Ehling 2005, 161; Domínguez 2015, 114.

⁴⁶ Eveillard 1995, 144-145.

⁴⁷ Lipovan 1992, 63-65, Fig. 1, 2/1 a-b; Anghel et alii 2011, 59-60, nos. 66, 67.

inserted. On the back side, the head area was provided with an orifice where the oil was poured. The character sits on a round pedestal and has a wine leaf vegetal motif on the back.

Terracotta lamps with such representations are rather few within the empire, like the Roman period item discovered in the Athens agora (Fig. 3 b)⁴⁸. Most often such lamps are bronze-made, features being better rendered. Only in these cases appears instead of a younger beardless character a middle-aged character, wearing a beard and mobile hood, in certain cases. Such items are often in funerary inventories of Gallia, Dalmatia (Fig. 3 a, b), Germania, Graecia and Italia⁴⁹.

Very likely, these lamps were used on a daily basis, lighting for instance, a small domestic altar or a grave. Due to the phallic symbol and the vine leaf motif, they may be most definitely related to a fertility and wealth cult. The items may also be related to the healing process by *incubatio*, playing the role of guard in the healing process occurring at night or in dark places. For instance, Telesphorus is accompanied by a shining light in Aelius Aristides's healing dream⁵⁰. Thus, they provided protection in sleep, being also the sleep carrier. In some cases, reference to the eternal sleep is made, recovery from illnesses or the promise of afterlife.

The characters wearing *cucullus*, either *Genii cucullati* in the real meaning or Telesphorus appearances, had their importance in the Roman world. Based on the nature of the discovered material and the discrepancy between the figurate and epigraphic material, it may be concluded that this was a personal cult, for the own welfare, rather than an official cult. This is a deity playing an active role in the healing process beside Aesculapius and Hygeia, childhood guardian, playing a somewhat role in fecundity and fertility as well. Thus, behind the terracotta, stone or bronze items lies the Romans' wish for the guardianship and benevolence of chthonian forces, in both the daily and after lives.

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⁴⁸ Robinson 1959, 52-53, Pl. 47.

⁴⁹ Bolla 2010, 51-69.

⁵⁰ Robinson 1959, 52-53.

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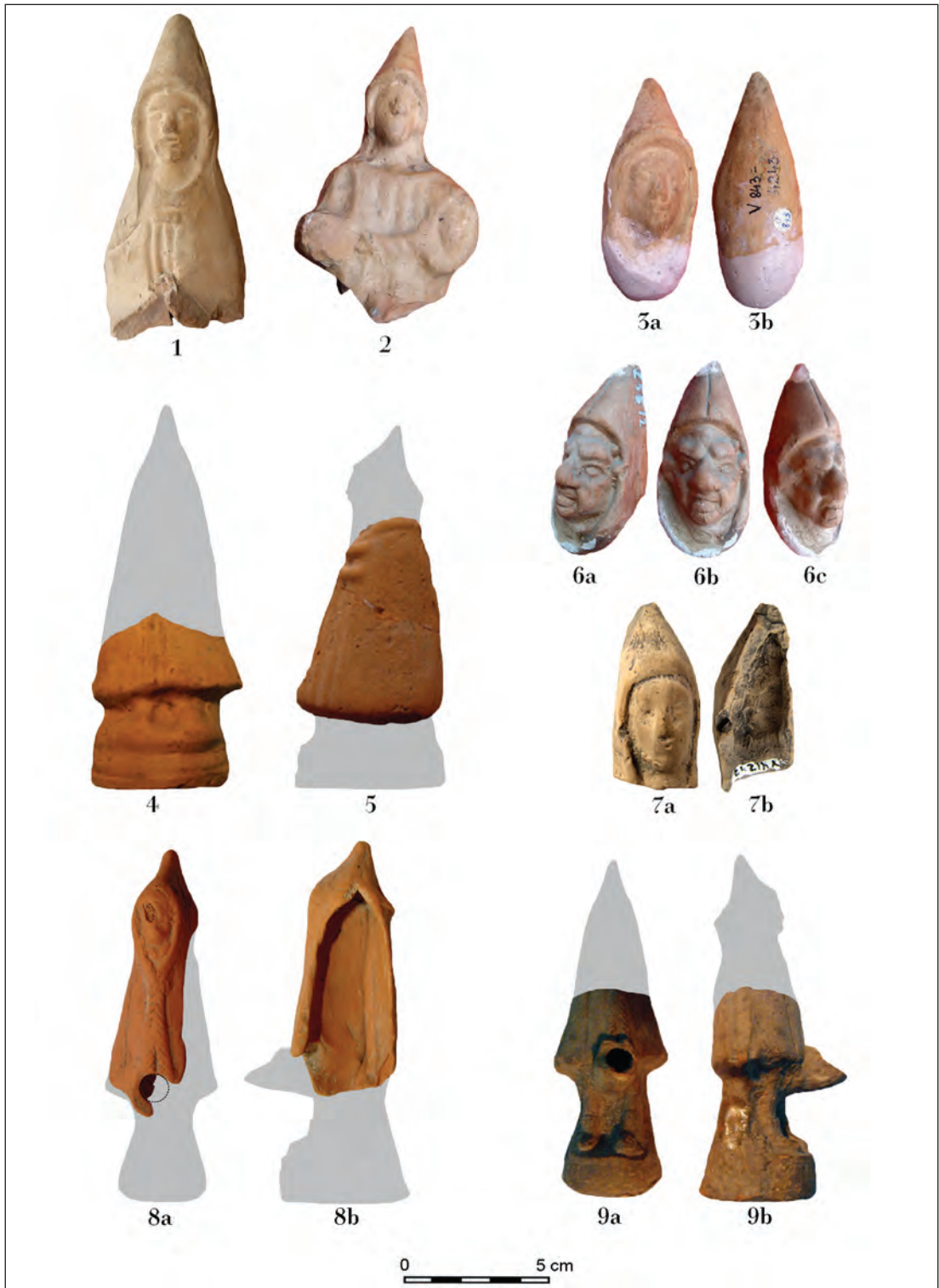
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Pl. I. Stone statues and reliefs: 1 a-b. Sarmizegetusa (after O. Harl); 2. Sarmizegetusa (after O. Harl); 3. Turda (after Igna 1935); 4. Sarmizegetusa (after Daicoviciu 1924); 5. Alba Iulia (after O. Harl); 6. Unknown (photo S. Odenie, MNIT photo archive).



Pl. II. Terracotta statues and plastic lamps. 1. Cicău (after P. Scrobotă); 2. Turda (photo S. Odenie, MNIT photo archive); 3 a-b. Alba Iulia (photo S. Odenie, MNIT photo archive); 4. Alba Iulia (after Anghel et alii 2011); 5. Alba Iulia (after Anghel et alii 2011); 6 a-c. Zlatna (photo S. Odenie, MNIT photo archive); 7 a-b. Chinteni (photo S. Odenie, MNIT photo archive); 8 a-b. Zlatna (after Anghel et alii 2011); 9 a-b. Zlatna (after Anghel et alii 2011).



Pl. III. Terracotta statues. 1. Celei (after Ene 2014); 2. Alba Iulia (photo S. Odenie, MNIT photo archive); 3. Alba Iulia (after Anghel et alii 2011); 4. Turda (photo S. Odenie, MNIT photo archive); 5. Cristești (after Man 2010); 6. Alba Iulia (after Anghel et alii 2011); 7. Zlatna (after Anghel et alii 2011); 8. Alba Iulia (after Anghel et alii 2011).