

Cristian-Aurel Roman

ANTEFIXA FROM SARMIZEGETUSA

During the archaeological campaigns of 1995-1997 that took place in the public center of the *Colonia Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacica Sarmizegetusa* (today Sarmizegetusa, department of Hunedoara), numerous pieces of ceramic were discovered, among which three fragments of *antefixa*¹ of burned clay, representing human faces.

They are the center of our attention in the following.

1) Fragment, MS, inv. 31527, pl. II/1

Only the upper part of the head has been preserved: part of the left eye and from the eyebrows up: the character seems to have worn some sort of cap on the head. We doubt that the missing part could be only the hair of the individual here represented, considering the graphic rendering of this portion. The relatively semispherical cap, slightly tapered off at the upper part, has its bottom margin marked by a bold kerb uniting four radial incisions that start from the top; the incisions come in pairs on the laterals of the bold kerb placed at median position on the cap. The eyebrows were fashioned by sticking a soft clay paste and pressing it into a bold strip, which was then incised with narrow lines parallel to the face's axle for a better visualization of what was intended as an imitation of hairs. The eyes are marked by incised lines following the eye and pupil contours. The brick-orange fabric is rough, with sand and pebbles, typical of the pieces of construction or pottery made by the Sarmizegetusa craftsmen.

Height_{preserved} = 9,5 cm; width = 12 cm; thick = 6,2 cm.

Discovered - *Interfora*, trench A, layer 11, 1995.

2.) Fragment, MS, inv. 32894, pl. II/2

The piece includes only the lower part of a human face; the eyes, the forehead and the rest of the upper part of the head are missing. The nose, only partially preserved, has on either side two fully contoured cheeks; the lips, made with soft paste laid over, form a half open mouth which is small compared to the size of the face, a mouth with a strongly marked chin, drawn to the exterior. Some parallel combed incised lines are marked, resembling the beard on the character depicted.

The fabric is similar to that of the piece above.

Height_{preserved} = 9,5 cm; width = 12,5 cm.

Discovered - *Forum novum*, 1996.

3.) *Antefixa*, MS, inv. 33530, pl. III/3 a, b, c

The piece is almost entirely preserved; the chin has a part missing, the calotte lost its top, small parts of the ear pavilions are missing, and the nose is crushed. Despite these minor deficiencies the face represented here could be considered complete, especially when compared to the other *antefixa* already presented. We can thus notice that the three pieces are similar. Moreover, they can be said to render the same figurative type.

¹ A. Andrén, *Antefissa*, EAA 1960, 404-40; C. Thierry, *Antefixa*, DA II, 1881, 285- 287.

The personage here represented has a massive face with prominent cheek-bones and cheeks, with a strongly marked chin, incised with a comb. It is possible that the reason for emphasizing this part of the face could have been that of lending the character a strong touch of virility. On the other hand, it could simply be a way representing the volume of his beard. Curiously enough, the incisions do not cover the cheeks and do not appear above the lips to mark a moustache, as expected for a bearded personage. The mouth was created similarly to piece no. 2, by sticking some "wands" of clay on the face, curved afterwards to render the shape of half opened lips. The eyes with the pupils are marked by simple incisions in the soft paste, with little attention paid to their shape and size. The eyebrows, as noted at piece no. 1, are emphasized by perpendicular incisions on the axle of the face. The ears did not get special attention from the craftsmen, being created simply by pressing the clay in the corresponding anatomical area. Similarly to piece no. 1, we notice that the personage is wearing the same tapered "bonnet" on his head, marked with incised lines. In the rear part the piece still preserves a piece of the tile to which it had belonged and we can notice the craftsman fingermarks left when sticking the tile to the posterior part of the *antefixa*.

The fabric is similar with that of the other pieces.

Height_{preserved} = 9,5 cm; width = 12,5 cm.

Discovered - *Forum novum*, 1997.

If we study the pieces no. 1-3, we notice that these have many elements in common. Thus, besides the fact that they have the same fabric characteristics, the faces rendered are also similar. At pieces no. 1 and 3 we notice the same cap on the personages' heads, the same way of reproducing the eyebrows and the eyes, while at pieces no. 2 and 3 we notice the strong resemblance in the form of the face, the full cheeks, the nose, the lips and especially the chin with incised lines. Thus, we can notice that the pieces discussed render the same human face, with a big, strong face, probably a short beard, wearing a "bonnet" on the head. All these elements allow us to consider that they were made by the same craftsman. The fabric of the fragments is also typical for the ordinary pottery in *Colonia Sarmizegetusa*.

The stratigraphical conditions are clear only for piece no. 1, discovered in *Interfora* in layer 11, the others lacking a viable framing from this point of view. The only stratigraphical condition that we have does not allow us, unfortunately, to strictly delineate the chronological context of the piece discovered at that level. We know that the context in which our piece was found is connected with the *tegulae* marked with the stamp of the IVth Legion *Flavia Felix* (LEG IIII FF)². This would date it at the beginning of the *Colonia* (the first two decades)³, with its production dated by the the *antefixa* used in this period. As shown above, the three pieces presented have similar features concerning the fabric, the modeling, the features of the rendered human face, which leads to the only possible conclusion, that they were created by a single craftsman (we are not talking about potters, who frequently proved their highly artistic skills, but about a producer of construction materials - brick, tiles - a "brickmaker") relatively contemporary.

Taking the comparison further, to the other two *antefixa* discovered in *Sarmizegetusa* (pl. III/1, 2)⁴ in the same area (one in the "Palace of *Augustales*", in tank

²I hereby would like to thank Mr. Al. Diaconescu for the solicitude shown in explaining some of the aspects concerning the stratigraphic situation in the *Colonia Sarmizegetusa*.

³I. Piso, *Les estampilles téglaires de Sarmizegetusa*, EN 6, 1996, 194-196.

⁴D. Alicu, *Materialul ceramic de la Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*, Sargetia 11-12, 1974-1975, 43-49, fig. 1-1a, 2-2a.

no. 2", and the other, "probably in the "Palace of *Augustales*")⁵ we will observe the differences. The later pieces, both made, as it seems, by the same craftsman, render a human face but present it differently. The head is more schematic; the anatomical "rules" are replaced here by a slightly forced framing of the human face into an almost square space. Both sides of the face present incisions representing the personage's hair. We do not observe the existence of a "bonnet", the hair is rendered here by many rows of small incisions above the forehead, and the personage has a beard that covers the entire chin, completed by a moustache rendered by a strip of small incisions.

The *antefixa* from Sarmizegetusa, discovered in the old excavation in the area of *forum vetus*, were included by C. L. Băluță in the B1 category – grotesque masks, *persona tragica*⁶. The new pieces discovered in that area do not stand out, have no major differences and they could be classified in the same category of representation; these pieces are relatively similar also from the artistical point of view, in that they are mediocre.

The two types of personages represented in the *antefixa* from Sarmizegetusa, could hardly be identified as representing a certain character from the repertory of images circulating in the Roman world at the time. For these pieces no analogies were noted among the *antefixa* from Dacia⁷, limited in number as they are; this fact could be due both to the effective absence of the piece, as well as to the insufficient processing and publishing of the ceramic material existing in museums.

Since in Dacia Superior moulds of *antefixa*⁸ (*ectypa*⁹) have not been discovered until now, there are some questions about these rather roughly processed pieces presumably in a local brickyard.

D. Alicu commented upon the two pieces from the old excavations that they are "probably produced by the same craftsman, but not with the same mould, there being both similarities and disimilarities in detail between the two pieces". Indeed, the pieces are made in similar moulds and the further retouching emphasizes only the hair and the beard of the personages. There are elements in our pieces which make us inquire into the way in which they were made. Thus, although they render the same human face, the three pieces are different in size.

It is hard to believe that they came from three different moulds, three "generations" of moulds, some created after the others (considering the sizes and features of the pieces), and it is equally difficult to believe the hypothesis of the existence of three different moulds in which the *antefixa* analyzed were made. The absence of some moulds and the very small number of this sort of *antefixa* can only consolidate any doubts we have formulated here.

The whole repertory of modification and the further retouching that we have ascertained here would plead in favour of another technique - the handmade modeling of the piece by a local craftsman. The face has suffered multiple transformations: the "bonnet" was endowed with four radial incision, the eyes and pupils outline was

⁵ The "Palace of *Augustales*", and "the tanks" are known today as *forum vetus* and *aeraria*, cf. R. Étienne, I. Piso, Al. Diaconescu, *Les deux forums de la Colonia Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacica Sarmizegetusa*, R&EA 92, 1990, 3-4, 273-296; R. Étienne, I. Piso, Al. Diaconescu, *Les propylées du forum de Sarmizegetusa (Roumanie)*, CRAI 1990, 91-109.

⁶ C. L. Băluță, *Antefixe romane din Dacia Superior*, Sargetia 15, 1981, 37.

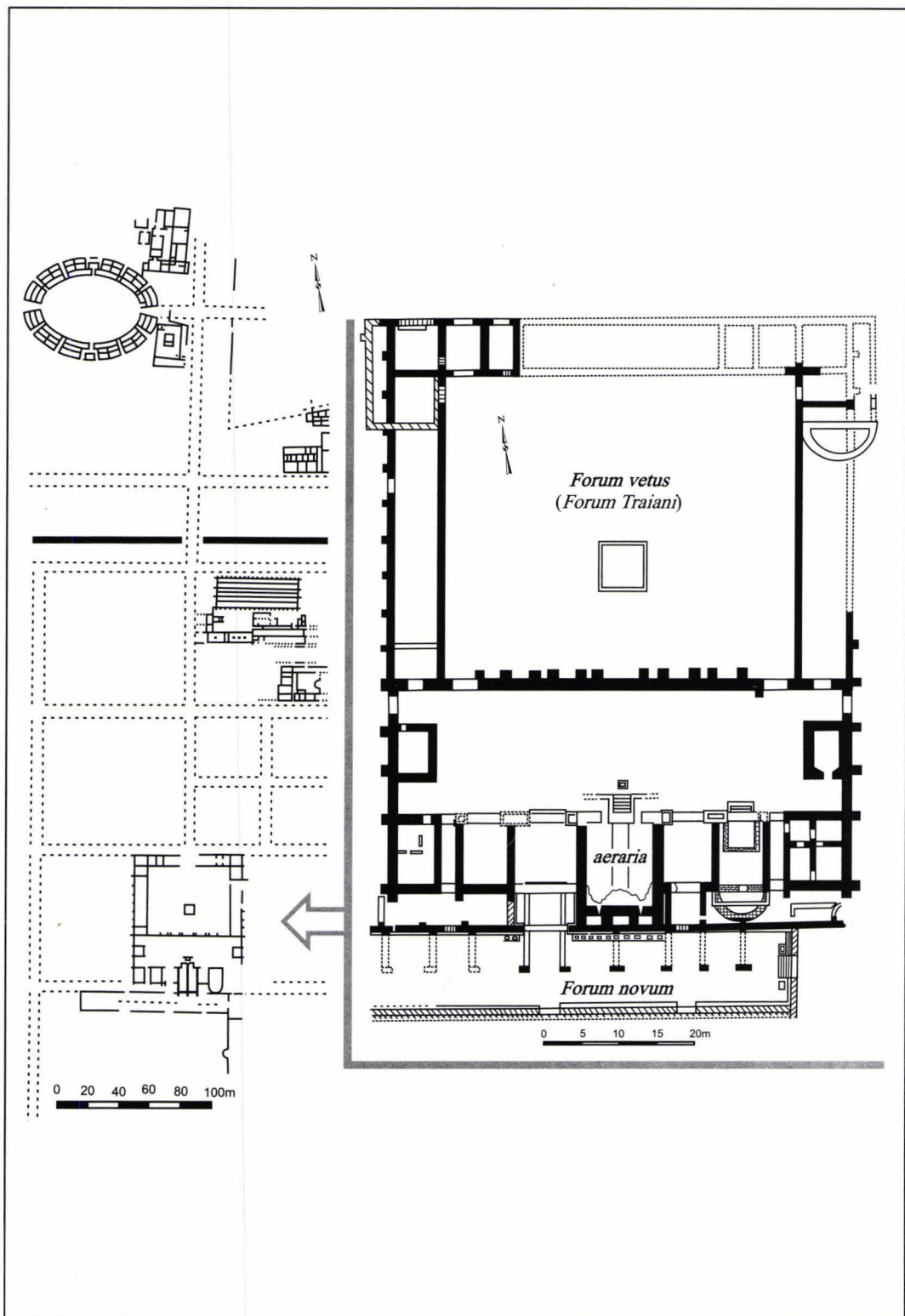
⁷ We mention here the two centers where the number of *antefixa* is larger than in Sarmizegetusa: Potaissa (Ana Căţinaş, *Les antefixes découverts dans le camp de la Legio V Macédonica*, in RCRF, Acta 35, Abingdon 1997, 233-238) and Apulum (C. L. Băluță, I. Berciu, *Antefixe romane de la Apulum*, Apulum 19, 1981, 83-95).

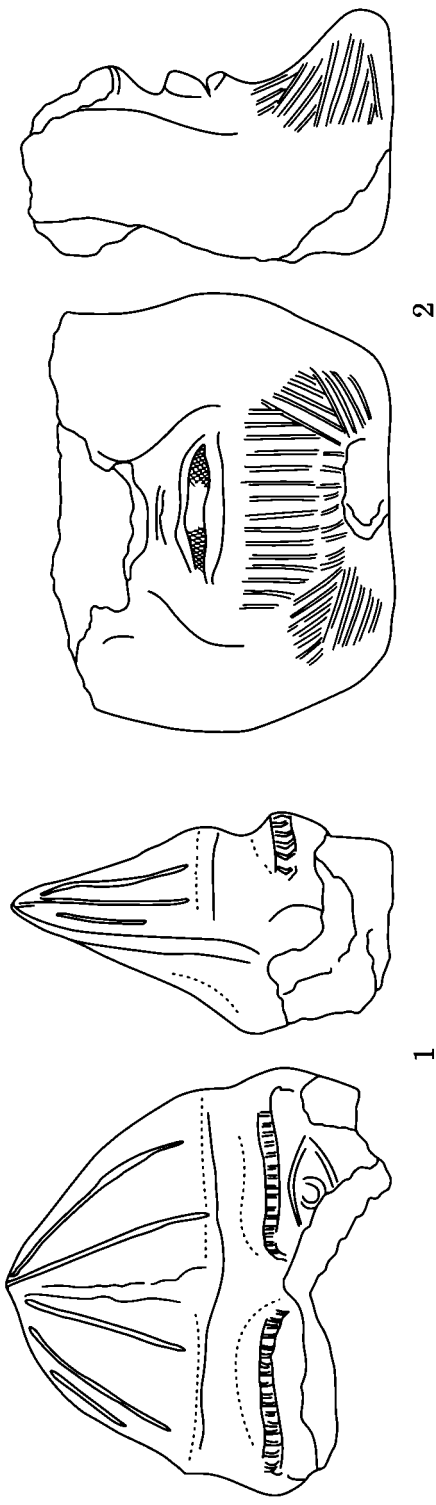
⁸ C. L. Băluță (n. 6), 39.

⁹ C. Thierry (n. 1), 286.

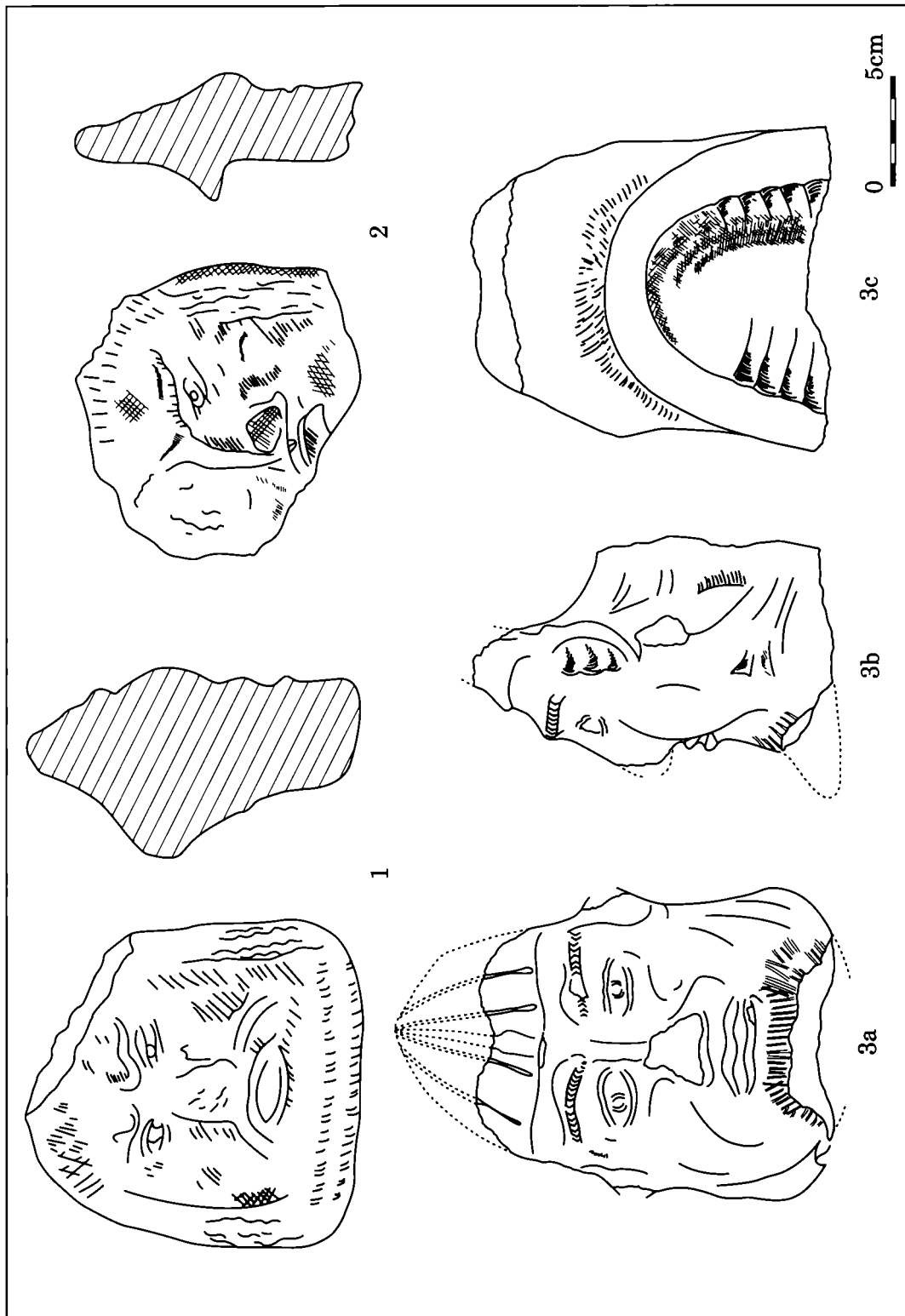
marked by incisions in the soft paste, the eyebrows were emphasized by small incisions parallel with the face axle and probably made by sticking and modeling a piece of clay in the corresponding anatomical place, the lips were created by sticking small rolls of soft clay curved so as to render a half-open mouth, and the beard was marked in the soft paste by incisions with a “comb”.

Considering that the rendered personages are not in the “classical” motif repertory of *antefixa*, that their execution is relatively rough compared to other *antefixa* from Dacia, that there are dimension differences that hardly allow for a hypothesis of a “generation of moulds”, that we are dealing with multiple processing before the drying and the burning of the pieces, we would incline in favour of a handmade modeling of these artefacts in a local brickyard. This option does not exclude the possible making of the pieces in a pattern, which were then retouched and finished by hand. The artistic quality of the pieces does not indicate a craftsman used to the iconographical representations of that epoch, but a brickmaker that had reached a certain skill in rendering this sort of ceramic pieces.





Pl. II. *Antefixa* from Sarmizegetusa



Pl. III. *Antefixa* from Sarmizegetusa