

## NEW MONUMENTS DISPLAYING FUNERAL BANQUET SCENES DISCOVERED AT GHERLA

Amongst Roman monuments discovered in Dacia Porolissensis, the ones displaying funeral banquet scenes occupy a very important place<sup>1</sup>. Four new such monuments, which were identified in Gherla, will be discussed in detail within the present paper.<sup>2</sup> They are housed within two institutions: *aedicula* hind walls (fig. 2, 3, 4) are located in the Roman Lapidary of the National History Museum of Transylvania, while the fourth piece (fig. 1) is located in the Roman Lapidary of the History Museum of Gherla<sup>3</sup>.

### 1. Stela fragment (fig. 1 a-b)

The monument is housed in the History Museum of Gherla, inventory number 3739, size: 65 × 45 × 21 cm. It is made of volcanic tuff coming from Dej. The item is poorly preserved. The find spot is uncertain, yet it probably originates in the fort of Gherla<sup>4</sup>.

Only one fragment of the funerary stela left part was preserved, having the relief field divided into two registers. The relief field was framed by two columns with spiraled barrel, comprising a leaves' capital supporting an archivolt. The 9 cm wide upper part of the left column and the leaves' capital, schematically represented, were preserved. The column framed both the inscription register and its lower part of the register containing the banquet scene, which is presented in the upper register. The scene depicts a headless woman seated on the *kathedra*. The woman is equipped with *tunica* girdled beneath the breast and coming to the ankles; she probably carried a *palla*, however it cannot be clearly distinguished. Since the item is poorly preserved, the object that the woman holds in her right hand, probably a cup or a *rhylon*, cannot be precisely identified. The inscription in the lower register is missing, except for the upper part of the letter "C".

### 2. Hind wall of *aedicula* (fig. 2)

The monument is housed in the National History Museum of Transylvania, no inventory number, size: 58 × 61 × 18. The item is made of volcanic tuff coming from Dej; the discovered fragment is fortunately well preserved. It was uncovered in 1983 inside the fort of Gherla during industrial works<sup>5</sup>.

The fragment belongs to the scene top portion depicting a banquet. The scene displays a man laying on the *kliné*, from which the back board survived. The man carries a *tunica manicata*, while the *sagum* is realistically portrayed. The physiognomic features are well rendered; the hairstyle and beard are noticeable. The left hand is folded in right

<sup>1</sup> L. Bianchi, *Rilievi funerari con banchetto della Dacia Romana*, *Apulum* 12, 1974, p. 169, confirms that Dacia Porolissensis is the area where large part of monuments exhibiting funeral banquet scenes come from.

<sup>2</sup> We wish to thank Ms. Carmen Ciongradi for the suggestions in support of drafting the present paper.

<sup>3</sup> D. Isac and Al. Diaconescu, *Aspecte ale artei provinciale romane la Gilău*, AMN 17, 1980, p. 125, M. Gramatopol, *Dacia antiqua*, Bucureşti, 1982, p. 165 made reference to the mystical veils' representation on piece number 3, yet no further observations or descriptions have been published.

<sup>4</sup> The piece was made available for publishing by courtesy of Mr. Mihai Meşter, director of the local museum, to whom we address our thanks.

<sup>5</sup> The piece was identified and recovered by Prof. Radu Ardevan, to whom we express our gratitude for making the piece available for publishing.



fig. 1



fig. 2

angle, laying on the *kliné* mattress and holding a cup, while the right hand stretched out holding probably a wreath. This monument is similar to *Iulius Crescens* stela from Cășei. Behind the man on the *kliné*, we could partially observe two mystical veils, sketchily represented. The item dimensions suggest that three mystical veils must have had been depicted within the banquet scene.

### 3. Hind wall of *aedicula* (fig. 3)

The monument is housed located in the National History Museum of Transylvania, inventory number 1590, size: 54 × 90 × 18 cm; made of volcanic tuff coming from Dej. It is fairly well preserved. The find spot is unknown, but it most likely comes from Gherla – Dej – Ilișua since the manufacturing material is the volcanic tuff. Dan Isac and Alexandru Diaconescu<sup>6</sup>, and also Mihai Gramatopol<sup>7</sup> made reference to the above mentioned item. Unfortunately, only the banquet scene upper part survived; it introduces two characters, rendered realistically. The two figures hold in their hands two mystical veils that form deep folds. Noticeably, the characters hold the veils in an elegant manner. The heads are turned in semi profile, glancing a little to the left, respectively to the right. On the left, the upper part of a female head, seated on the *kathedra* can be distinguished, while the head contour of the character seated on the *kliné* is vaguely distinctive in the image center, since this part is broken.

### 4. Fragment (fig. 4)

The monument is located in the History Museum of Transylvania, inventory number S856, size: 21 × 31 × 8 cm. The finding place is uncertain; it probably comes from the collections housed with the History Museum of Dej. Unfortunately all its borders are broken. Only representations of the *mensa tripes* curved feet were preserved, however the lower part is missing. The item lacks the upper part as well, thus we could not identify what lays on the *mensa*. A *panarium* is depicted under the *mensa*, to the left, with the upper part of an arched lid clearly defined.

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Monument number 1 can be relevantly paralleled with another monument coming from Gherla. The latter displays a fragmentary banquet scene<sup>8</sup> as well (fig. 5). The two monuments are produced based on a similar prototype: the spiral columns and the leaves' capital are almost identical. The archivolt frames both registers and is rendered in the same manner. We must remark that the first editor of the monument states the inscription is illegible<sup>9</sup>, while Lucia Țeposu-Marinescu erroneously assigns. The monument an inscription<sup>10</sup> that actually pertains to another item. The same author ascribes the item under discussion to the type of funeral monuments depicting a single individual<sup>11</sup>. Adrian Husar<sup>12</sup> also mistakenly attributes both the inscription and the banquet scene type to the same monument. Conversely, the piece is fragmentary and the representation of the woman seated on *kathedra* was not preserved. Analogously, monument number 1 can be paralleled with the funerary stela discovered at Cășei<sup>13</sup>: the similar spiral column type, with a leaves' capital and the same *kathedra* prototype. The

<sup>6</sup> See note 2.

<sup>7</sup> See note 2.

<sup>8</sup> L. Țeposu Marinescu, *Funerary Monuments in Dacia Superior and Dacia Porolissensis* (BAR International Series 128), Oxford, 1982, p. 117, no. 61.

<sup>9</sup> J. Ornstein, *Ausgrabungen bei Szamosújvar*, JÖAI 6, 1903, Beiblatt 118, no. 3, fig. 39.

<sup>10</sup> L. Țeposu Marinescu, op. cit., p. 117, no. 61. This inscription pertains to the piece with the National History Museum of Transylvania, inv. No. B 890; see J. Ornstein, op. cit., Beiblatt 116-117, no. 2, fig. 38.

<sup>11</sup> L. Țeposu-Marinescu, op. cit. (n. 8), p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> A. Husar, *Norico-pannonii*, in M. Bărbulescu (ed.), *Funeraria Dacoromana*. Arheologia funerara a Daciei romane, Cluj-Napoca 2003, p. 369, 378.

<sup>13</sup> L. Țeposu Marinescu, op. cit. (n. 8), p. 127, no. 101.



fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5



fig. 6



fig. 7

presence of almost identical monuments upon style, composition and manufacturing material (the volcanic tuff of Dej) in the Gherla – Cășei – Ilișua area favorably accounts for the existence of a workshop in this area.

The style the veils are sketchily represented on monument number 2 is similar to that of the three mystical veils depicted on the monument of *Iulius Crescens* discovered in Cășei, but in our case the figures holding the veils are not represented. Moreover, on both monuments, a man head seated on the *kliné* is carved in the lower veils part.

The realistic style in exhibiting the veils and the individuals holding them is noticeable on the monument number 3. The representation manner in rendering the characters is very similar to that of the stela fragment located in the National History Museum of Cluj-Napoca<sup>14</sup>, which comes from Napoca or Dej, and the monument originating in Gilău (fig. 7).<sup>15</sup> On the latter, the individual with long hair is most likely a female and she holds the veil in the same elegant way. The item is dated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

The representation of the *panarium* on monument number 4 can also be found on other four monuments discovered in Dacia Porolissensis. The location of the *panarium* under the curved feet of *mensa tripes* can be observed on the monuments coming from Șaula<sup>16</sup> and Ilișua<sup>17</sup>, and is accompanied in all these cases by an *urceus*. The *panarium* is located in front of the *mensa tripes* accompanied by two *urcei* on a monument coming from Potaissa<sup>18</sup>, and a *panarium* with arched lid, located between two characters, is displayed on a monument coming from Napoca<sup>19</sup>.

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The monuments of Dacia Porolissensis exhibiting mystical veils are: the stela of *Iulius Crescens* from Cășei<sup>20</sup> (fig. 6); the monument of the National History Museum of Transylvania<sup>21</sup> (fig. 7); the monument of the church of Gilău<sup>22</sup> (fig. 8); monument number 2 (figure 2 a-b) and of the monument number 3 (fig. 3 a-b) herein discussed.

There are three representation styles for the mystical veils:

- a) The sketchy representation of veils. The style is characteristic to the monument number 2 herein discussed (fig. 2 a-b) and the *Iulius Crescens* stela (fig. 6).
- b) The elegant representation of the veils and of the position of the hands, the realistic representation of the characters. The style is observed for the monument number 3 in our paper (fig. 3 a-b) and on the monument housed by the National History Museum of Transylvania of Cluj-Napoca (figure 7).
- c) The plain representation of the veil, without rendering the folds volume, hold by only one character. The style is observed for the monument coming from Gilău (fig. 8).

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Dating the monuments under discussion represents an essential aspect. We believe that the resemblance with other monuments which depict funeral veils is indicative for well dated items. The first representation style of veils is the earliest, as *Iulius Crescens* stela was dated in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>23</sup> We believe monument 2 in our

<sup>14</sup> L. Țeposu Marinescu, op. cit. (n. 8), p. 150, no. 204.

<sup>15</sup> D. Isac, Al. Diaconescu, loc. cit. (n. 3).

<sup>16</sup> Al. Diaconescu, *Un fragment de stelă cu reprezentarea banchetului funebru*, AMN 16, 1979, p. 545-549.

<sup>17</sup> D. Protase, *Noi monumente sculpturale romane din nordul Daciei*, Apulum 4, 1961, p. 127-129.

<sup>18</sup> I. Mitrofan, L. Țeposu, *O aedicula funerară de la Potaissa*, AMN 7, 1970, p. 533-534, fig. 3.

<sup>19</sup> L. Țeposu-Marinescu, op. cit. (n. 8), p. 205, no. 31, pl. XXXVII.

<sup>20</sup> See note 6.

<sup>21</sup> See note 10.

<sup>22</sup> L. Țeposu Marinescu, op. cit. (n. 8), p. 128, nr. 107.

<sup>23</sup> L. Țeposu Marinescu, op. cit. (n. 8), p. 127, no. 101.



fig. 8



paper belongs to this period as well. The monument in the National History Museum of Transylvania, which belongs to the second representation style, was dated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD alike monument number 3 in our study. Regarding the third representation style the dating criteria are ambiguous, therefore, based on evident similarities between the character holding the veil and the individual depicted on the monument in the National History Museum of Transylvania, we suggest that the item belongs to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD as well.

Monument number 1 in our paper, upon form similarities with the monument of Gherla dated above in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half century AD<sup>24</sup> can be assigned to the same period. No accurate dating could be established for monument number 4, because of its fragmentary state.

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Scholars expressed various opinions regarding the significance of the mystical veils depicted on funeral monuments. Luca Bianchi argued that the representation of the veils constitutes an extremely rare symbolic theme on monuments with the funeral banquet of the Roman period and that the characters who sustain these veils are *genii*<sup>25</sup>. The author asserts that the representation of such characters who sustain draperies is justified by *horror vacui*.

Regarding the monuments with the funeral banquet scene discovered in Dacia Porolissensis, the representation of the mystical veils is mentioned by Dan Isac and Alexandru Diaconescu on a number of four monuments<sup>26</sup>. Mihai Gramatopol, after mentioning the presence of the veils on three monuments with the banquet scene, states that they are dionysiaques mystical veils supported by the god's acolytes; the author also mentions that such veils appear on the relief of the tomb of *Haterii* from Rome, during the first century AD, and on certain sarcophagi of the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD<sup>27</sup>. These mentions of the veils presence are singular. It is necessary to make further reference to the veils representation on the marble relief of the *Haterii* family tomb from Rome, dating from the end of the first century and which are in the collections of the Lateran Museum<sup>28</sup>, two veils hanging behind the character which lays on a *kliné* are depicted.

There are ancient literary reports mentioning the veils' presence in funerary context. Cassius Dio records that, when Agrippa died, Augustus delivered the funeral speech and a veil was interposed between the emperor's and the deceased, exposed in the Forum.<sup>29</sup> The author finds no reason for that fact. In another circumstance, when the emperor's sister Octavia died, Augustus hung between him and the body a veil<sup>30</sup>, yet again the ancient author is surprised about such a practice. Seneca, speaking of Tiberius who delivers the funeral speech when his son Drusus died, states that the veils are

<sup>24</sup> L. Teposu Marinescu, op. cit. (n. 8), p. 117, no. 61.

<sup>25</sup> L. Bianchi, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 166.

<sup>26</sup> D Isac, Al. Diaconescu, loc. cit. (n. 3).

<sup>27</sup> M. Gramatopol, loc. cit. (n. 2).

<sup>28</sup> J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World*, New York 1971, p. 44, fig. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Cassius Dio, LIV 28: *πυθόμενος δὲ τοῦτο ὁ Αὐγουστος (ἔτυχε δὲ ἐν τοῖς Παναθηναίοις ὁπλομαχίας ἀγῶνας τῷ τῶν παίδων ὀνόματι τιθείς) ἐξαορμήθη, καὶ καταλαβὼν αὐτὸν τεθνηκότα ἔς τε τὸ ἄστυ τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ ἐσεκόμισε καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ προέθηκε, τὸν τε λόγον τὸν ἐπ' αὐτοῦ εἶπε, παραπέτασμα τι πρὸ τοῦ νεκροῦ παρατείνας.*

<sup>30</sup> LIV 35: *καὶ τοῦτο μὲν, εἴ γέ τω πιστόν, οὕτω παραδέδοται· ἐν δὲ τῷ ἔτει ἐκείνῳ τὴν τε Ἰουλίαν τῷ Τιβερίῳ συνώκισε, καὶ τὴν Ὀκταουίαν τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἀποθανούσαν προέθετο ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἰουλείου ἡρώου, παραπέτασματι καὶ τότε ἐπὶ τοῦ νεκροῦ χρησάμενος.*



interposed between the emperor and the deceased because the gaze of the *pontifex* cannot become impure at the sight of a body<sup>31</sup>.

A definite interpretation for the significance of the veils representation on funeral monuments is difficult to offer. The religious significance of the veils remains an open question.

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<sup>31</sup> Seneca, *De consolatione ad Marciam*, 15, 3: *Ipse pro rostris laudavit filium stetisque in conspectus posito corpore interiecto tantummodo velamento, quod pontificis oculos a funere arceret...*