

THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER  
IN THE SANCTUARIES OF AESCULAPIUS.  
A STUDY REGARDING THE NORTHERN PROVINCES  
OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

ANDREA CUMURCIUC

**Zusammenfassung:** Die Beziehung zwischen dem Aesculapius-Kult und Wasser ist in den wichtigsten Heiligtümern der griechischen Welt gut nachgewiesen. Wasser hatte in diesem Kult sowohl einen praktischen als auch einen religiösen Verwendungszweck. Für alle nördlichen Provinzen des römischen Reiches ist die Präsenz des Aesculapius dokumentiert, in Pannonien und Dakien aber war seine Popularität deutlich höher. Soweit uns genügende Zeugnisse vorliegen, können wir in allen Provinzen die Verbindung zwischen Aesculapius und dem Wasserkult beobachten. Entweder gibt es eine Quelle auf dem Gelände eines Asklepieion, wie in Brigetio, Aquincum und Sarmizegetusa, oder die dem Aesculapius geweihten Monumente sind innerhalb von Quellheiligtümern errichtet, wie in Carrawburgh, Vichy, Mont-de-Sène, Germisara und Băile Herculane.

**Stichworte:** Römische Religion; nördliche Provinzen; Aesculapius; Heiligtümer; Votive Inschriften.

From the many healing cults that coexisted in the Roman Empire mostly outspread was the one of Aesculapius, healing hero and medicine God, hailing from Thessaly. His cult was officially introduced in Athens in the year 420 BC, but his main sanctuary was placed in Epidaurus, from where the cult spread across the Hellenistic and then the Roman world.

Regarding the iconography of Aesculapius, in 90% of the cases, he is represented as a noble father, with serene attitude, wearing beard, and being either seated, or leaning on his snake-entwined staff. He is associated with his daughter, Hygia, who in the iconography took the place of his wife Epione. In the rest of the cases, approximately 10%, he is represented as a new-born, or a child, as a beardless young man, or as a mature man, seated or laying<sup>1</sup>. The narrative representations are missing from the iconography of Aesculapius, only on some *ex-voto* he appears performing a libation<sup>2</sup>.

The water had an important role in all the sanctuaries of the God, both in the Greek world and outside of it. Its utility was in the first place a ritual one. At the entrance of the sanctuary the ritual hand washing took place, the act having also a hygienic purpose, considering that the place was frequented by people carrying different diseases. Before consulting the God, the visitor paid a tax, and performed an

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<sup>1</sup> LIMC I, p. 865.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

ablution in order to be purified before presenting the offers and making the sacrifice. The visit of the healing deity took place during the night, while the worshiper was sleeping in the *adyton*, a sacred process, known under the name of incubation. Inside the *adyton* the worshiper had permanent access to fresh water, thanks to an open channel that surrounded the building<sup>3</sup>. The water of the sacred fountains was also consumed as a therapy.

The relationship between water and the cult of Aesculapius is well documented in the main sanctuaries of the Greek world. At Epidaurus, Corinth, Kos and Pergame a series of hydraulic installations were identified. A representative case is the one offered by the sanctuary in Kos, situated on three terraces, the middle one being the original place of the cult. A small ionic temple was placed here, two large rooms, a group of fountains and an altar for sacrifices. The upper terrace was surrounded by a portico, having in the centre a temple, while the lower terrace contained a number of pools<sup>4</sup>, used for the healing baths prescribed by the sacred personal. In order to mark the importance of bathing, in the Roman period a bath-house was attached to the sanctuary.

The importance of water in these sanctuaries is not only practical, and it is not limited to simple purifications, which took place in all the sanctuaries of the Roman world. It has a more profound, religious meaning. Aesculapius, having as main attribute a snake, is a chthonian deity. His cult is based on the nightly appearances of the God, during which he sends codified messages to his believers, so we can also consider him an oracular deity. As a chthonian and oracular deity he can easily be associated with springs.

Considering the importance given to springs and in the lack of those to fountains, the presence of water became the condition *sine qua non* for the placement of an Asklepieion. The chosen place must be rich in springs, preferably thermal or mineral ones, must be situated outside the settlements, because of hygienic reasons, and if possible near woods, or on high platforms, where the clean air could help heal certain diseases<sup>5</sup>. But, as we will see, these theoretical prescriptions were not always respected in practice.

The cult of Aesculapius was officially introduced to Rome in 293 BC, as a consequence of a major plague. The Sibylline Books were consulted in order to see if the new deity could be brought to Rome. The sacred snake representing the God himself was brought from Epidaurus, but according to the legend he refused to take his place in the temple of Apollo, and preferred the Tiber Island, where in 291 BC a temple was dedicated to Aesculapius<sup>6</sup>. The fact that the Tiber Island was chosen as place of the first Asklepieion in the Italian peninsula has a mythological, a practical and also a religious explanation. Isolating a placement, that was going to function as a hospital, away from the inhabited area, surrounded by water, was obviously the result of a

<sup>3</sup> G. Argoud, *L'utilisation médicale de l'eau en Grèce et le plan des sanctuaires d'Asclépios*, in Actes du Colloque Archéologie et Médecine. VII<sup>ème</sup> Rencontres Internationales d'Archéologie et d'Histoire, Antibes 1986, p. 534.

<sup>4</sup> J. Riethmüller, *Asklepios. Heiligtümer und Kulte*, Heidelberg 2005, p. 365.

<sup>5</sup> Idem, op. cit., p. 360.

<sup>6</sup> C. Tiussi, *Il culto di Esculapio nell'area Nord-Adriatica*, Studi e ricerche sulla Gallia Cisalpina 10, Roma 1999, p. 15.

hygienic measure. On the other hand, the island housed another healing cult, an older one, represented by the river god Tiberinus. The inefficiency of this cult during the plague led to the introduction of a new healing deity. But, in order to preserve an old Italic cult, and not to eliminate it in favor of a foreign one, a compromise was made: to place them both in the same sanctuary.

The sanctuary on the island remained the most important center of cult in the Italian peninsula, from where it spread across the Northern provinces. The cult of Aesculapius is present in all of the studied provinces: Britannia, Gallia, Germania, Raetia, Noricum, Pannonia and Dacia, but the importance varies considerably.

In Roman Britain we have no knowledge about the existence of an Asklepieion. The few votive inscriptions and figurative representations were found in various points<sup>7</sup>. A votive altar dedicated to Aesculapius, with two inscriptions, one in Latin and one in Greek, was found at Lanchester<sup>8</sup>. The dedication was made by Titus Flavius Titianus, who calls himself a tribune. In Roman times near the modern town Lanchester an auxiliary fort and his *vicus* were placed, known under the name of *Longovicium*. Titianus is tribune of the cohort stationed here. The fact that the name of the troop is not mentioned in the inscriptions reveals that we are dealing with a private offering, and not with one made in the name of the entire unit. The altar could be placed in the fort's *valetudinarium*, but also inside another sanctuary.

Another inscription, together with a votive relief dedicated to Aesculapius was found in Binchester<sup>9</sup>, also a military region. The altar was erected by a doctor named Marcus Aurelius, who offers the monument to Aesculapius and Salus, for the health of *ala Vettonum*, troop formed from Roman citizens. The troop was stationed at Binchester, and Marcus Aurelius was a military doctor, working in the fort's *valetudinarium*, where the inscription was probably placed.

A votive altar, dedicated to Fortuna Redux, Aesculapius and Salus, was also discovered in Chester, where in Roman times was the headquarters of the II legion. The altar was raised by freedmen and slaves of Titus Pomponius Mamilianus Rufus Antistianus Funisulanus Vettonianus, son of Titus from Galeria tribe, a *legatus Augusti*<sup>10</sup>. The monument dates back to the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, and the person named was the commander of the legion, probably left in a mission, reason why the first deity mentioned is Fortuna Redux. A figurative representation of Aesculapius was also found in Chester<sup>11</sup>. Although the head of the statue and the upper part of the shoulders are missing, the male figure, dressed with a tunic can be identified with Aesculapius because of the snake-entwined staff.

The Roman fort of Overborough was the source of an altar dedicated *Deo Sancto Asclepio et Hygiae*, by Iulius Saturninus, for the health of his family and himself<sup>12</sup>. Another altar with a Greek dedication to Aesculapius, by Aulus Egnatius Pastor, was

<sup>7</sup> E. Birley, *The deities of Roman Britain*, in ANRW II, 18.1, 1982, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> RIB I 1072.

<sup>9</sup> RIB I 1028.

<sup>10</sup> CIL VII 164.

<sup>11</sup> CSIR - GB, I/6, 1.

<sup>12</sup> RIB I 609.

found at Maryport<sup>13</sup>, and at South Shields, on the territory of the Roman fort, Publius Viboleius Secundus offers an altar to the same deity<sup>14</sup>.

From the few figurative representations of Aesculapius known in Britain, one was found at Carrawburgh, a settlement attached to an auxiliary fort on Hadrian's Wall. It is a fragmentary relief in which Aesculapius is associated with Minerva<sup>15</sup>. From the figure of Aesculapius only the feet and the lower part of the cope is preserved. He is dressed with a long *himation*, and has the snake-entwined staff next to his right foot. The two deities are represented in a niche. The association of Minerva with Aesculapius can be explained by the healing character that Minerva owns in some of the cases. In Carrawburgh we know about the existence of a spring sanctuary, but we cannot associate it for sure with a healing cult. However a statue of Aesculapius could be placed in this sanctuary.

Another possible representation of Aesculapius was also found inside a spring sanctuary in Bath. It is an altar carved on three sides<sup>16</sup>. On the frontal side we can see Bacchus and on the opposite side a dog, a tree with a snake and two human figures. The dog and the snake could be references to Aesculapius, in which case the two human figures are Coronis, the mother of Aesculapius, and Apollo. However the meaning of the scene remains uncertain, because the references regarding Aesculapius are vague and the representation would be unique in the iconography of the god.

As we can see, the cult of Aesculapius was not too popular in Roman Britain. The small number of monuments and their presence almost exclusively in military regions shows the lack of interest of the local population towards this cult, the believers being soldiers coming from different parts of the Empire.

The cult is not too popular neither in Gallia or Germania. In Gallia Narbonensis, Aesculapius owns four epigraphic monuments, at Nîmes<sup>17</sup>, Grenoble<sup>18</sup>, Riez<sup>19</sup> and Aosta<sup>20</sup>, then one in Gallia Lugdunensis at Lyon<sup>21</sup>, and one in Gallia Belgica at Trier<sup>22</sup>. In none of the six inscriptions, Aesculapius is associated with another deity, but in two of them he is mentioned together with the term *Deus*. The worshipers of Aesculapius are: Valerius Symphorius and Protis, who use in the text of the inscription from Riez the Greek terms *enchiridium* and *anabolium*, which could indicate their Greek origin; Caecus, who calls himself *Isidis aedituus*; Lucius Cornelius Adgubilli, a person of Gallic origin; Marcus Pennius Apollonius; and Titus Iulius Saturninus, *procurator Augusti*. The inscription from Riez is the only one offering some information about the cult. The worshipers name the objects offered to the deity, among them a golden torques figurating two snakes.

<sup>13</sup> RIB I 808.

<sup>14</sup> RIB I 1052.

<sup>15</sup> CSIR - GB, I/6, 85.

<sup>16</sup> CSIR - GB, I/2, 3.

<sup>17</sup> CIL XII 3042.

<sup>18</sup> CIL XII 2215 = AE 1959, 198.

<sup>19</sup> CIL XII 354 = CAG IV, p. 366.

<sup>20</sup> CIL XII 2386.

<sup>21</sup> AE 1982, 712, 4.

<sup>22</sup> CIL XIII 3636.

All the representations of the god from the Gallic provinces, made of bronze, marble or limestone are realized according to the classical prototype, without local attributes or associations with indigenous deities. The figurative representations have all small dimensions, between 8.5 and 9 cm<sup>23</sup>, so we can not consider them cult statues, and we have no archaeological or epigraphic proof for the existence of an Asklepieion. In these conditions we have to ask the question, where were the few discovered votive altars and offerings placed, and in the absence of Aesculapius which deity or deities took over the healing attributes.

The spring sanctuaries with healing character were very popular sites in Roman Gaul. The deities worshiped in these sanctuaries are mostly of local origin, or they are Roman deities associated with local ones. Healing rituals took place in these sanctuaries, similar with those from an Asklepieion, and we could expect to find offerings to Aesculapius. In reality, only in Vichy and in the spring sanctuary from Mont-de-Sène we have one representation of the Roman medicine god<sup>24</sup>. The cult's lack of popularity can be explained through the population's loyalty towards the pre-Roman healing cults, in which case they did not feel the need of introducing a new deity with the same characters.

The situation is mostly similar in the Germanic provinces. In Germania Superior, Aesculapius owns three inscriptions<sup>25</sup> in Mainz<sup>25</sup>, Augst<sup>26</sup> and Obernburg<sup>27</sup>, and four other monuments were found in Germania Inferior, at Bad Godesberg<sup>28</sup>, Bonn<sup>29</sup>, Köln<sup>30</sup> and Dormagen<sup>31</sup>. In Obernburg, Aesculapius is associated with Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Apollo, Salus and Fortuna, and on the right side of the altar appears Neptune. In Bad Godesberg, Aesculapius is associated with Fortuna Salutaris and Hygia, in Bonn and Mainz - only with Hygia, and in Dormagen - with Apollo. In Augst, Aesculapius is named with the epithet *Augustus*, probably because the monument was placed on a territory controlled by the municipality, as we can see from the ending formula of the inscription: *loco dato decurionum decreto*. In Mainz, the worshiper Valerius ... addresses to the *numen* of Aesculapius. Among the worshipers we can also find: Tiberius Claudius Claudianus, a Roman citizen who does not mention any function or profession; Q. Venidius Rufus, legate of the I Minervia legion; Marius Maximus Calvinianus, legate of the province Cilicia; and Marcus Rubrius Zosimus. The last one, of Greek origin, is a doctor of the *cohors IV Aquitanorum* and offers the monument for the health of Lucius Petronius Florentinus, the prefect of the unit. The doctor mentions his residence, Ostia, fact that could explain the presence of Neptune on the right side of the altar, as the protective deity of Rome's harbor. Another Greek doctor could be the worshiper in the Greek inscription found in Köln<sup>32</sup>. Here used to

<sup>23</sup> E. Sikora, *Le culte d'Esculape en Gaule*, in A. Pelletier (éd.), *La médecine en Gaule*, Paris 1985, p. 196.

<sup>24</sup> Idem, op. cit., p. 197.

<sup>25</sup> CIL XIII 6695.

<sup>26</sup> AE 1993, 1221.

<sup>27</sup> CIL XIII 6621 = AE 1903, 382.

<sup>28</sup> CIL XIII 7994.

<sup>29</sup> AE 1963, 43.

<sup>30</sup> CIG 2591.

<sup>31</sup> AE 1977, 564 = AE 2007, 1022.

<sup>32</sup> B. H. Stolte, *Religiöse Verhältnisse in Niedergermanien*, in ANRW II, 18.1, 1986, p. 641.

be the headquarters of *classis Germanica*, where our person could work as a doctor. But unfortunately he doesn't mention any name or function.

The discoveries made in the Germanic provinces do not allow us to identify any Asklepieions, the doctor from Ostia working obviously in the unit's fort. A final interesting remark about the cult of Aesculapius in the Gallic and Germanic provinces is related to a recent study realized by G. Masson<sup>33</sup>. The researcher identifies oculist stamps in almost all the establishments where Aesculapius was worshiped. We could be dealing with a simple coincidence, but there is also the possibility of associating the cult of Aesculapius with ophthalmological problems, which needed more precise procedures, for what the doctors of Aesculapius were preferred.

In the Danubian provinces we can observe a change of attitude towards the cult of Aesculapius. In Noricum the god owns two monuments at Virunum<sup>34</sup>. The first one is an altar dedicated to Aesculapius Augustus by Caius Marius Lucanus Priscus, decurion of the *colonia* having also the function of *duumvir iure dicundo*<sup>35</sup>. He dedicates the altar in his own name and those of his children. The second inscription is a fragmentary one, so we cannot read the name of the worshiper, but in this case Aesculapius is associated with Hygia<sup>36</sup>, as a difference to the first altar where he appears alone.

A figurative representation of the god was found at Lauriacum in the pad of a Roman fountain. It is a torso of a statue<sup>37</sup>. Although the head and the lower part of the feet are missing, Aesculapius can be identified on the base of his clothing, a *himation*, the egg that he holds in his left hand and the snake-entwined staff.

The existence of an Asklepieion in Noricum is possible at Iuvavum, where a number of figurative representations were found. A statue made of local marble, with a height of 49 cm, represents Aesculapius wearing the *himation*, which covers the lower part of his body, his back and the left shoulder. The head, the neck and the right arm of the statue are missing, but we can still see the end of the staff on which he was leaning his right arm<sup>38</sup>. The god appears in a similar position in another statue from which the head, the right arm, the left hand and a part of the right foot are missing. Next to the right foot we can see the lower part of the staff with the tail of the snake<sup>39</sup>. From another Aesculapius statue only the basis is preserved, with two feet next to a tree and a tail of a snake<sup>40</sup>. The last figurative representation from Iuvavum is a double statue of Aesculapius and Hygia, from which the heads and the feet are missing<sup>41</sup>. Aesculapius is dressed with a *himation* and holds in his left hand the staff with the snake. Hygia is dressed with a *chiton* and a cloak, holds in her right hand a short

<sup>33</sup> G. Masson, *Les médecins en Gaule et dans les Germanies et les divinités Asclépios/Esclape et Hygie*, DHA 31/2, 2005, p. 120.

<sup>34</sup> H. Vettors, *Virunum*, in ANRW II/6, 1977, p. 335.

<sup>35</sup> AEA 2005, 5.

<sup>36</sup> CIL III 4772.

<sup>37</sup> CSIR - Österreich, III/2, 14.

<sup>38</sup> CSIR - Österreich, III/1, 5.

<sup>39</sup> CSIR - Österreich, III/1, 6.

<sup>40</sup> CSIR - Österreich, III/1, 7.

<sup>41</sup> CSIR - Österreich, III/1, 8.

snake and in the left one a basket with fruits. Under Hygeia's basket is still visible the right hand of Aesculapius, holding a vessel with fruits.

As an argument for the existence of an Asklepieion in Iuvavum we have to mention that all the presented statues were found in the same room, together with the head of a statue representing Serapis. In Roman times Serapis was also worshiped as a healing deity, and the rituals performed in his cult were similar with those from an Asklepieion. But so far we have no epigraphic proof for the existence of an Asklepieion in Iuvavum.

In Pannonia, the cult of Aesculapius is present in different points. In Emona, Lucius Petitiu<sup>s</sup> Technicus raised an altar to Aesculapius<sup>42</sup>. He calls himself *medicus* and according to his name he is probably a freedman. In Poetovio, Marcus Messiu<sup>s</sup> Messor dedicates a statue for *Aesculapius Augustus*<sup>43</sup>. Different fragments of statues representing Aesculapius and Hygia were found in Poetovio, which could indicate the existence of an Asklepieion, although such an establishment has not been identified<sup>44</sup>.

Two inscriptions regarding Aesculapius were found in Vindobona<sup>45</sup>. There are two altars raised by the same person: Publius Aelius Lucius, centurion in the *legio X Gemina*, stationed at Vindobona. Aesculapius is associated with Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Apollo and Sirona. Jupiter is the official deity of the state, his presence in the first line of the inscription being an act of political loyalty, needed by an officer in the Roman army. Jupiter is followed in the inscription by a series of healing deities, such as Apollo, Sirona and Aesculapius. Under the name of Apollo we can guess the Celtic Grannus, the traditional companion of Sirona. The order of the deities shows the religious preferences of the centurion. He seems to trust more the local deities than Aesculapius. Nevertheless, because the monument was placed in the fort's *vale-tudinarium*, a dedication also for Aesculapius was needed.

In Brigetio, the cult of Aesculapius is confirmed by several epigraphic monuments and figurative representations. One of the most interesting pieces is an altar raised by Quintus Ulpius Felix, an augustal of *Municipium Brigetio*, who confirms the fact that he built a temple for Apollo and Hygia from his personal funds<sup>46</sup>. The inscription dates back in the year 205 AD, when Aurelius Antoninus Augustus was consul for the second time<sup>47</sup>. After 12 years, the same person raises a new altar, that confirms the enlargement of the temple: *porticum a portis II ad fontem Salutis a solo inpendi-s suis fecit*<sup>48</sup>. The word *fontem* from the text of the inscription is a reference to one of the sanctuaries' sacred springs, which in the lack of a natural source could be replaced by an artificial one. But in the case of *Municipium Brigetio*, the public fountain also had healing characters, because the city's water supply system started from healing

<sup>42</sup> CIL III 3834.

<sup>43</sup> AE 1920, 64.

<sup>44</sup> Z. Kadar, *Der Kult der Heilgötter in Pannonien und den übrigen Donauprovinzen*, in ANRW II, 18.2, 1989, p. 1040.

<sup>45</sup> AE 1957, 114; Lupa 4783.

<sup>46</sup> CIL III 3649 = RIU III, 773.

<sup>47</sup> Z. Kadar, op. cit., p. 1048.

<sup>48</sup> AE 1944, 110 = RIU II 377.

springs situated 17 km away from the settlement in the Tata region<sup>49</sup>. It is important to mark that both altars raised by Quintus Ulpus Felix are dedicated to Apollo and Hygia. Apollo is a very popular healing deity in the former Celtic area and the association with Hygia clearly shows the healing character of the sanctuary from Brigetio. Identifying this sanctuary with an Asklepieion is justified because Hygia is a secondary deity in the cult of Aesculapius, and the medicine god also owns some epigraphic monuments in Brigetio. Aesculapius Augustus alone appears on two votive altars<sup>50</sup> and on a third one together with Hygia<sup>51</sup>. Probably in the same sanctuary were placed the two statues of Aesculapius found in Brigetio, together with a relief and a statue of Hygia<sup>52</sup>.

In Carnuntum were discovered two funerary inscriptions, confirming the existence of three doctors. They are Lucius Iulius Euthemus and his slave, Eucratus *medicus*<sup>53</sup>, and Lucius Iulius Optatus, *medicus*.<sup>54</sup> The three of them were probably military doctors working for the legion stationed at Carnuntum, and their presence cannot be considered an argument for the existence of a healing cult. On the territory of the same settlement two votive inscriptions were found, unfortunately fragmentary ones, dedicated to *Fontibus*<sup>55</sup>. They had to be placed on the territory of a sanctuary in which water had an important role. Identifying this sanctuary with an Asklepieion is not possible, because in Carnuntum there are no votive altars dedicated to Aesculapius. The only monument raised in the honor of the medicine god is a sculptural fragment, representing the head of a marble statue<sup>56</sup>.

In Pannonia Inferior, in Aquincum, the cult of springs had an important role, also visible in the name of the town. The aqueduct responsible with the city's water supply started from a group of springs, situated 1 km north of Aquincum, in a glade dedicated to the Nymphs<sup>57</sup>. In the 14 springs and around them several votive monuments were discovered, altars dedicated to healing deities. The 14 altars found inside the sacred area were dedicated to Jupiter, Aesculapius and Hygia, Apollo and Sirona, Silvanus and Mithras<sup>58</sup>, but we will only present the ones regarding Aesculapius and Hygia. The first one was found near spring number 14, and it's dedicated to Aesculapius and Hygia by Marcus Foviadius Verus<sup>59</sup>. He is decurion of the *canabae* and of *Municipium Aquincum, duumvir quinquennalis* and *flamen*. The second altar was discovered near spring number 13 and it's dedicated to Aesculapius and Hygia by Caius Gavillius Eutyclus<sup>60</sup>. The altars for Aesculapius and Hygia and the one dedicated to

<sup>49</sup> Z. Kadar, loc. cit.

<sup>50</sup> CIL III 10971; RIU II 374.

<sup>51</sup> RIU II 373.

<sup>52</sup> Z. Kadar, op. cit., p. 1049.

<sup>53</sup> AEA 2008, 19 = AE 1929, 215.

<sup>54</sup> AEA 2006, 24 = AE 2006, 1058.

<sup>55</sup> AE 1938, 166; AE 1956, 52.

<sup>56</sup> CSIR - Österreich, I/2, 20.

<sup>57</sup> K. Póczy, *Wasserver- und -entsorgung. Gebäude des Stadtzentrums*, in P. Zsidi (Hrsg.), *Forschungen in Aquincum 1969-2002. Zu Ehren von Klára Póczy / Clarae Póczy Octogenariae, Aquincum nostrum II.2*, Budapest 2003, p. 144.

<sup>58</sup> Eadem, *Szent kerületek Aquincum és Brigetio aquaeductusánál*, *AERT* 107, 1980, p. 9.

<sup>59</sup> AE 1972, 363 = *TitAq* I, 30.

<sup>60</sup> K. Póczy, op. cit., p. 3.



Apollo and Sirona were found next to a group of three springs, placed at the entrance into the sanctuary<sup>61</sup>, showing the relationship between the springs and the healing deities. As every spring sanctuary or as every Asklepieion, the one from Aquincum was frequented by sick people who spent some time there, hoping to regain their health. Obviously they needed accommodation in one of the buildings situated nearby. Such a construction was found in Aquincum, situated west from the sanctuary, a building with the dimensions of 120 × 30 m, fed with water from spring number 3<sup>62</sup>.

The cult of Aesculapius was practiced in Aquincum also inside the legionary fort. Four votive altars for Aesculapius, Hygia and Telesphorus were found in the *valetudinarium*<sup>63</sup>. Tiberius Martius Castrensis, doctor of the *legio II Adiutrix*, raises an altar for Aesculapius<sup>64</sup>. In the same place was found also the altar dedicated to Aesculapius and Hygia by another doctor, Marcius Marcellus<sup>65</sup>. Titus Venusius Aper, *optio valetudinarii*, dedicated an altar to Aesculapius and Hygia<sup>66</sup>, and Titus Flavius Priscus, veteran of the *legio IV Flavia* and *ex optione valetudinarii*, raised an altar for Telesphorus<sup>67</sup>. The large number of monuments discovered in a relatively small space indicates the existence of a sanctuary dedicated to the medicine gods, attached to the fort's *valetudinarium*.

Other worshipers of Aesculapius and Hygia from Aquincum were also active in the army. Aurelius Artemidorus was *beneficiarius* in the *legio II Adiutrix Pia Fidelis*<sup>68</sup>, and Domitius Victorinus, who raises an altar to Aesculapius and Hygia for the health of the emperor, was centurion in the *legio IV Flavia*<sup>69</sup>. Another worshiper of Aesculapius and Hygia from Aquincum, Iulius Iulianus<sup>70</sup>, doesn't mention his job or social status.

Based on the presented materials we can confirm a significant presence of Aesculapius in Pannonia, especially in Aquincum, where he owned two sanctuaries, a civilian and a military one, both having attached a hospital.

If in the western provinces the cult of Aesculapius is insignificant, and the number of monuments increases in the Danubian provinces, in Dacia we have an impressive number of 73 epigraphic monuments in the honor of Aesculapius and Hygia. 79% of the monuments were found in the two most important towns of the province, Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa and Apulum.

In the majority of the inscriptions found at Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, Aesculapius is associated with Hygia and only rarely with other deities. On an altar dedicated by Marcus Lucceius Felix Aesculapius is associated with Salus<sup>71</sup>, Quintus

<sup>61</sup> Eadem, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> Eadem, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>63</sup> P. Zsidi, *Doctoring in the border province of the Roman Empire, the relics of healing in Pannonia Inferior and its governor's seat in Aquincum*, in P. Zsidi, Gy. Németh (eds.), *Ancient Medicine and Pannonia*, Budapest 2006, p. 51.

<sup>64</sup> AE 1937, 180.

<sup>65</sup> CIL III 3413.

<sup>66</sup> AE 1937, 181.

<sup>67</sup> AE 1955, 13.

<sup>68</sup> CIL III 3412.

<sup>69</sup> TitAq I, 37.

<sup>70</sup> AE 1937, 182.

<sup>71</sup> AE 1983, 837.

Axius Aelianus associates him with Salus, Epione, Venus, Neptune, Salacia, Cupid and Fons<sup>72</sup>, and Publius Aelius Hammonius raises an altar for Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, *Dei consentes*, Salus, Fortuna Redux, Apollo, Diana, Nemesis, Mercury, Hercules, Sol, Aesculapius and Hygia<sup>73</sup>. In nine of the cases the worshipers speak to the *numen* of Aesculapius<sup>74</sup>, in one inscription he is called *Deus*<sup>75</sup>, in another text we have the expression *Pergameno*<sup>76</sup> as a reference to his main sanctuary in Pergamum, and one altar is dedicated to the Fountains of Aesculapius<sup>77</sup>. Among the worshipers we have a decurion from *collegium fabrum*, Publius Flaccinius Felix, who raises two altars for the health of his daughter Lucilla<sup>78</sup> and other two altars with unknown destination<sup>79</sup>. Among the other worshipers we can find a *flamen* of *Colonia Sarmizegetusa*<sup>80</sup>, a soldier of the VI<sup>th</sup> legion<sup>81</sup>, a *duumvir* of the *colonia*<sup>82</sup>, an augustal of the colonies Siscia and Sarmizegetusa<sup>83</sup>, and three *procuratores Augusti*<sup>84</sup>.

As we could expected it, because of the large number of monuments, in Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa was also a sanctuary of the medicine gods. Two votive inscriptions confirm the existence of an *aedes* of Aesculapius<sup>85</sup>. The establishment situated north from the city wall and east from the amphitheatre was studied between 1973 and 1976. The buildings with two phases of construction are grouped inside the sacred area with a surface of  $57 \times 41 \times 70 \times 61$  m<sup>86</sup>. In the first phase, the establishment consists of two temples, a Gallo-Roman one and a classical one<sup>87</sup>. Situated south of the second temple we have a rectangular building with an unknown destination. North of the same temple the remains of a circular fountain were found, with a diameter of 1 m and a depth of 5.5 m<sup>88</sup>. Probably this is the fountain of Aesculapius mentioned in one of the votive inscriptions. In the second phase of construction, which dates back to the reign of Marcus Aurelius, the first temple is enlarged, the second one is demolished, and in his place a new rectangular building is constructed. In the north-eastern corner of this building another rectangular fountain is dug, with a depth of 4.5 m<sup>89</sup>. The third building is also enlarged, and south of it another rectangular construction appears, with the dimensions of  $5 \times 5.9$  m<sup>90</sup>.

<sup>72</sup> AE 1998, 1101.

<sup>73</sup> IDR III/2, 246.

<sup>74</sup> AE 1911, 33; AE 1976, 569; AE 1977, 671, 678; IDR III/2, 151, 156, 159, 166, 329.

<sup>75</sup> IDR III/2, 174.

<sup>76</sup> IDR III/2, 164.

<sup>77</sup> IDR III/2, 183.

<sup>78</sup> IDR III/2, 163; AE 1977, 676.

<sup>79</sup> IDR III/2, 162; AE 1977, 675.

<sup>80</sup> IDR III/2, 164.

<sup>81</sup> IDR III/2, 167.

<sup>82</sup> IDR III/2, 153.

<sup>83</sup> IDR III/2, 165.

<sup>84</sup> IDR III/2, 246; AE 1983, 837; AE 1998, 1101.

<sup>85</sup> IDR III/2, 529; AE 1977, 671.

<sup>86</sup> D. Alicu, I. H. Crişan, *Medicina la romani*, Cluj-Napoca 2003, p. 96.

<sup>87</sup> J. Nicolaus, *Asklepionul din Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*, *Sargetia* XV, 1981, p. 51.

<sup>88</sup> A. Rusu-Pescaru, D. Alicu, *Templele romane in Dacia*, Deva 2000, p. 40.

<sup>89</sup> *Idem*, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>90</sup> *Idem*, op. cit., p. 40.

Unfortunately the archaeological excavations do not allow us to identify the exact purpose of each building. But the excavations led to the discovery of a statue and a relief of Aesculapius and of 14 votive altars, from which eight are dedicated to the medicine gods<sup>91</sup>. Regarding the rituals that took place in the sanctuary, the inscriptions offer very few clues. On one single altar, the one dedicated by Lucius Bononius Saturninus, we can find the formula *ex viso*, a reference to the ritual of *incubatio*<sup>92</sup>. Although, we have no reasons to believe that the rituals from this Asklepieion were any different than those from the rest of the Empire.

In the inscriptions found at Apulum, Aesculapius is usually associated with Hygia<sup>93</sup>, but he appears also together with Lares, Penates, Neptune, Salus, Fortuna Redux, Diana, Apollo, Hercules and Spes<sup>94</sup>, with Apollo and Diana<sup>95</sup>, with the other healing deities of the spot<sup>96</sup>, with Caelestis, the Genius of Carthage and the Genius of Dacia<sup>97</sup>, and with Jupiter, Juno and Minerva<sup>98</sup>. In five cases the worshipers speak to *Numini Aesculapii*<sup>99</sup>, on one single altar he is called *Deus*<sup>100</sup>, and on one altar the worshiper speaks directly to the ears of the deity<sup>101</sup>. Aurelius Aeternalis places his inscription for Aesculapius and Hygia<sup>102</sup> on a votive relief, on which we can see in the center Aesculapius wearing a *himation* and holding in his right hand the snake-entwined staff. He is flanked by Hygia and Epione, both holding a snake and a vessel with fruits. Between Aesculapius and Epione we can also see Telesphorus.

Among the worshipers of Aesculapius in Apulum we can find: Publius Cadius Sabinus, a tribune of the *legio XIII Gemina*<sup>103</sup>; Marcus Gallius Epictetus, an augustal of *colonia Apulum*<sup>104</sup>; C. Iulius Metrobianus, *duumvir* of *colonia Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*, priest of Aesculapius and *duumvir* of *colonia Apulum*<sup>105</sup>; Publius Aelius Genialis, *duumvir* of *colonia Apulum*<sup>106</sup>; Publius Aelius Rufinus, decurion of *municipium Apulum* and patron of the *collegium fabrum* from *colonia Apulum*<sup>107</sup>; Publius Aelius Syrus, augustal of *municipium Septimium Apulense*<sup>108</sup>; Carpion, imperial freedman, head of the tax service from Dacia Apulensis<sup>109</sup>; Tiberius Claudius

<sup>91</sup> D. Alicu, I. H. Crişan, op. cit., p. 98.

<sup>92</sup> IDR III/2, 159.

<sup>93</sup> IDR III/5, 3-11, 13, 14, 16-21.

<sup>94</sup> IDR III/5, 299.

<sup>95</sup> IDR III/5, 20.

<sup>96</sup> IDR III/5, 21.

<sup>97</sup> IDR III/5, 41.

<sup>98</sup> IDR III/5, 199.

<sup>99</sup> IDR III/5, 1, 3, 4, 8, 19.

<sup>100</sup> IDR III/5, 9.

<sup>101</sup> IDR III/5, 20.

<sup>102</sup> IDR III/5, 9.

<sup>103</sup> IDR III/5, 299.

<sup>104</sup> IDR III/5, 13.

<sup>105</sup> IDR III/5, 1.

<sup>106</sup> IDR III/5, 4.

<sup>107</sup> IDR III/5, 6.

<sup>108</sup> IDR III/5, 7.

<sup>109</sup> IDR III/5, 10.

Valerianus, centurion in the *legionis XIII Gemina* and *I Adiutrix*<sup>110</sup>; C. Pomponius Fuscus, *duumvir* of *colonia Aurelia Apulensis*<sup>111</sup>; Lucius Septimius Nigrinus, patron of the *collegium fabrum* from *colonia Aurelia Apulensis*<sup>112</sup>; Marcus Ulpius Valens, *quattuorvir* of *municipium Septimium Apulense*<sup>113</sup>; Dius, Farnax and Irenicus, *augustals* of *municipium Aurelium Apulense*<sup>114</sup>; C. Iulius Frontonianus, *beneficiarius consularis* in the *legio V Macedonica*<sup>115</sup>; Aulus Terentius Uttedianus, legate of the *legio XIII Gemina* and governor of province Raetia<sup>116</sup>; Septimius Asclepius Hermes, freedman and *augustal* of *colonia Apulum*<sup>117</sup>; Lucius Iulius Bassinus, *decurion* of *colonia Apulum*, *duumvir* of *Colonia Napoca*, *flamen* of *colonia Drobeta*, *flamen* of *municipium Dierna*, *decurion* of *municipium Apulum* and *municipium Porolissum*, and *tribune* of *legio IV Flavia*<sup>118</sup>; other persons do not mention their social status.

The inscriptions from Apulum reveal also the existence of some priests of Aesculapius: C. Iulius Metrobianus<sup>119</sup>, C. Nummius Verus<sup>120</sup> and Septimius Asclepius Hermes<sup>121</sup>. The first one owns public offices both in Sarmizegetusa and Apulum, so we do not know for sure where he was a priest. Septimius Asclepius Hermes was a freedman of the temple of Aesculapius, and probably because of his services he got the distinction called *ornamenta decurionalia*, the external signs of the magistracy, which he couldn't normally own because of his servile birth.

Other three inscriptions confirm constructions made in the name of the medicine god. Publius Aelius Syrus, together with his wife and daughter, dedicated to the god a 30 feet long portico<sup>122</sup>; Publius Aelius Rufinus built a 40 feet long portico for the health of his wife and son<sup>123</sup>; and Marcus Gallius Epictetus built a 36 feet long portico for the health of his family<sup>124</sup>. These constructions prove the existence of a sanctuary where they could be placed. Other two inscriptions dedicated to healing deities were found inside the sanctuary. C. Iulius Varianus raises an altar for Apollo Salutaris for the health of his wife and son<sup>125</sup>, and C. Iulius Frontonianus builds a bridge for Apollo, Diana, Letona and the other healing deities of the spot<sup>126</sup>. The building place was discovered on the territory of *colonia Aurelia Apulensis*, near the lake Tăușor, in the same place with the altar dedicated to Aesculapius, Hygia and the

<sup>110</sup> IDR III/5, 11.

<sup>111</sup> IDR III/5, 16.

<sup>112</sup> IDR III/5, 18.

<sup>113</sup> IDR III/5, 19.

<sup>114</sup> IDR III/5, 20.

<sup>115</sup> IDR III/5, 21.

<sup>116</sup> IDR III/5, 41.

<sup>117</sup> IDR III/5, 199.

<sup>118</sup> IDR III/5, 14.

<sup>119</sup> IDR III/5, 1.

<sup>120</sup> IDR III/5, 2.

<sup>121</sup> IDR III/5, 199; AE 2004, 1201.

<sup>122</sup> IDR III/5, 7.

<sup>123</sup> IDR III/5, 6.

<sup>124</sup> IDR III/5, 13.

<sup>125</sup> IDR III/5, 34.

<sup>126</sup> IDR III/5, 36.

other healing deities of the spot<sup>127</sup>. We can localize the sanctuary near the lake and the bridge built by C. Iulius Frontonianus, which probably permitted the access into the sacred area<sup>128</sup>.

Some inscriptions offer clues regarding the rituals that took place in the sanctuary. Marcus Gallius Epictetus built the portico as a consequence of a dream<sup>129</sup>, and C. Iulius Frontonianus raised the monument according to the directives given by the god also during a dream<sup>130</sup>. The dream is obviously a reference to the ritual of *incubatio* practiced in the sanctuary. Regarding the efficiency of the rituals, C. Iulius Frontonianus confirms the healing of an ophthalmologic disease: *redditis sibi luminibus*.

Votive inscriptions dedicated to Aesculapius were found also in other settlements of Roman Dacia. Three altars were discovered in Germisara<sup>131</sup>, where the cult of Aesculapius and Hygia is related with the healing springs protected by the Nymphs. The same relationship is visible also in the case of the altars discovered at Băile Herculane. Marcus Aurelius Veteranus, prefect of the *legio XIII Gemina*, raises an altar for *Diis magnis et bonis Aesculapio et Hygiae*<sup>132</sup>, and an altar dedicated for the health of Iunia Cyrilla confirms that the healing power of Aesculapius works through the thermal springs of the spa<sup>133</sup>.

Another interesting inscription was found at Ampelum, administrative center of the mining area in the Apuseni Mountains. Eutyches, imperial freedman, confirms that he built a temple for Aesculapius and Hygia<sup>134</sup>. The Roman settlement from Ampelum had never been archaeologically researched, and nowadays it's mostly destroyed by modern constructions, so identifying the temple will be a very hard if not an impossible task. Other two inscriptions dedicated to Aesculapius were found at Ampelum. The first one is fragmentary, and besides the name of the deity doesn't offer any other relevant information<sup>135</sup>. The second one is dedicated to Aesculapius and Hygia by Marcus Antonius Saturninus, decurion of the colony<sup>136</sup>. Considering the fact that Ampelum had never been raised to the status of a *colonia*, we do not know the decurion's place of origin.

Other three altars dedicated to Aesculapius were also found in the mining area, this time in Alburnus Maior. One of them was discovered in 2001, on the territory of a sanctuary where other deities were also worshiped: Aptus, Apollo, Fortuna, the Nymphs, Mercury, Jupiter, Terra Mater, Silvanus, Liber and Libera<sup>137</sup>. The altar for Aesculapius was raised by Marcus Ulpius Clemens and Aelius Mes...<sup>138</sup>. The second altar dedicated to Aesculapius is fragmentary and the name of the worshiper is not

<sup>127</sup> IDR III/5, 21.

<sup>128</sup> I. Piso, *Epigraphica XII*, AMN XVII, 1980, p. 86.

<sup>129</sup> IDR III/5, 13.

<sup>130</sup> IDR III/5, 21.

<sup>131</sup> IDR III/3, 230, 231, 232.

<sup>132</sup> IDR III/1, 54.

<sup>133</sup> IDR III/1, 55.

<sup>134</sup> IDR III/3, 280.

<sup>135</sup> IDR III/3, 287.

<sup>136</sup> IDR III/3, 286.

<sup>137</sup> C. Ciongradi, *Die Römischen Steindenkmäler aus Alburnus Maior*, Cluj-Napoca 2009, p. 45.

<sup>138</sup> AE 2003, 1495.

preserved<sup>139</sup>. The third altar was found in 2003 in secondary position, in the Roman cemetery; Fronto Plarentis raises the monument in the name of an unidentified *collegium*<sup>140</sup>.

Other votive inscriptions for Aesculapius were found in Dacia at Săcelu<sup>141</sup>, Galt<sup>142</sup> and Ilișua<sup>143</sup>. An altar with unknown place of discovery was raised by Veturius Marcianus, a veteran of the XIII legion, for the health of his family<sup>144</sup>. He mentions that the altar was raised for Jupiter Dolichenus from the order of Aesculapius, which was transmitted to him through a dream. We can presume that he visited one of the province's Asklepieions and participated there to the ritual of *incubatio*.

## Conclusions

Based on the presented facts we can establish the general features of the cult of Aesculapius and Hygia in the northern provinces of the Roman Empire, and the role of the water in their sanctuaries. In Roman Britain, the medicine god doesn't own any sanctuaries, the few epigraphic monuments and figurative representations were found in military regions and they were probably placed in the fort's *valetudinarium*. The only case of association between the cult of Aesculapius and a water cult was identified in Carrawburgh, where a votive relief of the god was placed on the territory of a spring sanctuary. The situation is mostly similar in the Gallic provinces; where we don't have any epigraphic or archaeological prove for the existence of an Asklepieion, although, the relationship with the water is visible through the two votive monuments placed each on the territory of a spring sanctuary, in Vichy and Mont-de-Sène. In the Germanic provinces, the seven discovered altars don't offer any clues regarding the association of the cult with a spring or a fountain, and in the lack of a sanctuary we can't make any other presumptions. In Noricum, a series of figurative representations of the god were found in the same room, allowing us to identify it with an Asklepieion, but unfortunately in lack of epigraphic and archaeological evidence we have no information about the use of water in this building.

The situation changes considerably in the Pannonian and Dacian provinces. In Brigetio, two inscriptions confirm the construction of a temple of Apollo and Hygia, one of them mentioning also the sacred fountain inside the sanctuary, probably an artificial one, but fed with the water of healing springs. The relationship between the cult of Aesculapius and that of the healing springs is clearly visible in Aquincum, where the medicine god is worshiped inside a spring sanctuary, which has also attached a building for the accommodation of visitors. A second sanctuary of the god in Aquincum was attached to the *valetudinarium* inside the legionary fort, but in this case we have no information about the existence of a fountain or spring.

<sup>139</sup> IDR III/3, 382.

<sup>140</sup> C. Ciongradi, op. cit., p. 59-60.

<sup>141</sup> IDR II, 182.

<sup>142</sup> IDR III/4, 233.

<sup>143</sup> CIL III 786.

<sup>144</sup> IDR III/5, 220.

As a difference to the other provinces, in Dacia the cult of Aesculapius is highly popular. The god owned a sanctuary in Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, on the territory of which a sacred fountain was discovered, fountain also mentioned in one of the votive inscriptions. Another sanctuary was placed in Apulum. In this case we have no information about a spring or a fountain, but the establishment was situated near the water, as one of the inscriptions reveals. The relationship between Aesculapius and the healing springs is visible both in Germisara and Băile Herculane.

As we could see, where we have enough evidence, the cult of Aesculapius is associated with a water cult, either there is a sacred spring or fountain on the territory of the Asklepieion, or the votive monuments for Aesculapius are placed inside spring sanctuaries.

**Andrea Cumurciuc**  
“Babeş-Bolyai University”, Cluj-Napoca  
cumurciuca@gmail.com