

# A ROMAN SCULPTURAL MONUMENT DISCOVERED IN BARBARICUM AT COȘEIU (SĂLAJ COUNTY)

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**REZUMAT:** În primavara anului 2012 în urma unor cercetări de teren în localitatea Coșeiu (comuna Coșeiu, jud. Sălaj) a fost identificat un fragment de mari dimensiuni al unui monument sculptural roman. Monumentul este un fragment sculptural ce trebuie să provină de la o construcție funerară. Pe latura principală prezintă un decor funerar obișnuit, o reprezentare a zeului Attis în ipostaza Attis tristis. Se remarcă reprezentarea divinității pe un altar, portretizat arareori în Dacia în această ipostază. Piesa este lucrată într-o manieră naivă și rudimentară, însă meșterul încearcă să respecte anumite proporții anatomice, alterările ulterioare afectând vizibil calitatea reprezentării. Monumentul de la Coșeiu ridică o serie de întrebări și în ceea ce privește locul lui cert de proveniență. Datorită condițiilor de descoperire, din punct de vedere tehnic monumentul este atribuit atelierului de sculptură de la Porolissum.

**CUVINTE-CHEIE:** monument funerar roman, Attis, barbaricum, Coșeiu.

**ABSTRACT:** In the spring of 2012, as a result of a field research, in the village Coșeiu (Coșeiu commune, Sălaj county) a large fragment of a Roman sculptural monument was identified. The monument is a sculptural fragment that should come from a funerary building. On the primary side it has an ordinary funerary scene, a representation of the god Attis in the Attis tristis position. It notes the divinity representation on an altar, rarely depicted in this manner in Roman Dacia. The piece is worked in a naive and rudimentary way, but the craftsman attempts to respect certain anatomical proportionality, the subsequent alterations affecting visibly the representation's quality. The monument from Coșeiu raises a number of questions regarding its place of origin. Given the circumstance in which the monument was found, the most probable place of its origin is the Roman sculptural workshop of Porolissum.

**KEYWORDS:** Roman funerary monument, Attis, Barbaricum, Coșeiu.

In the spring of 2012 in the village Coșeiu (hungarian Kusály, Coșeiu commune, Sălaj county) was discovered a large fragment of a Roman sculptural monument<sup>1</sup>. Located in the north of Sălaj county, Coșeiu is about 18 km from Zalău (Pl. I, Fig. 1). The relatively good condition of the monument and the explanations of the person who signaled the discovery<sup>2</sup>, led to the conclusion that the relief was reused, with the

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<sup>1</sup> The result of a field research, conducted by the archaeologist Dan Culic from the Zalău County Museum of History and Art, the sculpture was discovered in the courtyard of an abandoned household on Morii street, in a place called în *Pomi* near the ruins of the foundation of a demolished house, made from stones bound with clay).

<sup>2</sup> The initiative of the field research was taken following the notification of the discovery, by the villager Nicu Bogdan, whom we wish to thank. According to him, at the end of the '50s or early '60s of 20th century, during the digging of a well, on the adjoining field, was found „a brick box with two skeletons“. He also reported that the place was visited by an archaeologist who researched the double tomb, „mother and child“ in what appears to have been a cist. He uncovered the grave „from waist up“, leaving it to „future generations of researchers to dig, when the techniques will improve“, as Mr. Nicu Bogdan from Coșeiu remembers, that the enigmatic archaeologist had said. Unfortunately the archaeologist's identity and the resulting documents have not been found. Around that well, today almost clogged, were stones and brick fragments, one of which drew attention as certainly from Roman period. The same person drew our attention to the existence of another relief in the foundation of a house nearby, unfortunately impossible to see.

carved side down, in the last row of the porch foundation of the house missing at present. In the parcel adjacent to the south, around the fountain<sup>3</sup>, were stones and bricks, most likely derived from the foundation of another house. One of these bricks attracted attention with its square shape, similar to those found in Roman hypocaust facilities (Pl. I, Fig. 3 a-c). The brick has traces of mortar on both sides. In the gardens of these former households one can see outlines of stone foundations and many fragmentary stones and mortar. Also, in the neighboring gardens were found fragments of ceramic tableware, unfortunately far too small to give even a partial profile and thus difficult to date with certainty. Later the monument was transported to the Zalău County Museum of History and Art, where it was included in the museum's lapidarium and it will be inventoried.

The village, today an ordinary commune of the Sălaj county, has a special reputation among historians leaning toward the Middle Ages, since it was much more important then, as an important trade fair, in the former county of Middle Szolnok<sup>4</sup>, which produced a great family of medieval nobles, the family Jakcs of Coșeu (*Kwsali Jakch*)<sup>5</sup>. This family has facilitated in the early fifteenth century the settlement at Coșeu of a monastery of minorite monks<sup>6</sup> and possibly the construction of a fortress on the hill *Hegyes* or *Várhegy*, *Pogányvár* as the hill is called on historical maps<sup>7</sup>, watching the village on the north-west, and whose ruins were visible in the early twentieth century. Also there are listed as discovered bits and an iron mace<sup>8</sup>. Unfortunately the field walks made on site have not yielded positive results, especially since the hill was altered by trenches and heavily bombed in one of the two World Wars.

In 2007 the need for a restoration project of the Reformed Church offered the chance for archaeological surveys around the Gothic monument. The exceptional discoveries around the former minorite monastery church, currently a Reformed parish church, are partly unpublished<sup>9</sup>. In one of the archaeological sections was discovered a brick similar to that described above. Initially it was thought to be from an early phase of the religious building, being discovered in the first layers of the survey, but the discoveries of *Pomi* urge us to review these opinions. At the actual location of the Reformed Church were discovered Iron Age pottery fragments.

Around the village there are traces at: Chilioara, where was found a hoard consisting of 132 Roman Republican denarii and Greek coins issued in Valentia, Hypponium or Calabria<sup>10</sup>, the rest are prehistoric discoveries from the settlements Gurăslău<sup>11</sup> (Hereclean commune), Valea Pomilor<sup>12</sup> (Șamșud commune), Șamșud<sup>13</sup>. Geographically, the closest point with a Roman discovery is the border of Deleni village (Dobrin commune), from where a silver spoon inscribed *ALSE*<sup>14</sup> originates. The first significant Roman settlement nearby is at Hereclean, from where important discoveries, including a Roman water pipeline, originate<sup>15</sup>.

Interesting research carried out in a neighboring area by the late Alexandru V. Matei at Supuru identified the existence of fortification elements, which raise a series of interesting questions about the placement of the Roman *limes* north of Porolissum<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Note 1

<sup>4</sup> Mór 1901–1904, III, 735–744.

<sup>5</sup> Mór 1901–1904, IV, 660–663.

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting that in the early 16th century the documents mention a monastery of nuns (Rusu *et alii* 2000, 119–120).

<sup>7</sup> [mapire.eu/en/map/hkf\\_75e/?zoom=14&lat=47.32874&lon=23.00106](http://mapire.eu/en/map/hkf_75e/?zoom=14&lat=47.32874&lon=23.00106); [http://mapire.eu/en/map/hkf\\_25e/?zoom=14&lat=47.32913&lon=22.99649](http://mapire.eu/en/map/hkf_25e/?zoom=14&lat=47.32913&lon=22.99649).

<sup>8</sup> Mór 1901–1904, II, 82.

<sup>9</sup> CCA 2007, 116–123.

<sup>10</sup> CCA 2007, 56, nr.58–2.

<sup>11</sup> CCA 2007, 86, nr. 1 a,b.

<sup>12</sup> CCA 2007, 200, nr. 1 a,b.

<sup>13</sup> CCA 2007, 173, nr. 1 c.

<sup>14</sup> CIL. III 1639; Gudea, Ghiurco 1988, 160.

<sup>15</sup> Băeșteanu 2007, 131.

<sup>16</sup> Matei 2004, 251–259; Matei, Gindele 2004, 283–307.

The appearance of a Roman monument in this area is somehow surprising. We would have rather expected metal parts, not a funerary sculptural monument of this size. From what the discoverer of the monument says, it can be linked to certain excavations conducted in the area in the '60's by an archaeologist whose identity still remains vague, who might have had unveiled a grave in a brick cist, which was subsequently covered<sup>17</sup>.

The monument is a fragment of a large sculptural block that should come from a funerary building (Pl. II, Fig. 1 a-b). Its dimensions are as follows: 120 × 68 × 20 cm. On the primary side it has an ordinary funerary scene, a representation of the god Attis in the *Attis tristis* position. Its dimensions are 40 × 32 cm. It appears in its specific position of mourning, with the legs crossed, an elbow held on a cane and a hand supporting the head. The field of the relief was bordered by a moulding embossing with a deepened *kyma* and a *listel*, where it is preserved, the right side of the monument being sectioned transversely at the time of its reuse. The outer frame, about 10 cm wide, shows traces of spade hits. The field of relief has the dimensions: 112 × 46 cm. At the bottom, immediately after the *listel* is a clearance of about 7 cm, after which the base on an altar begins to emerge, extremely damaged, quadrilateral, on which the feet of the god rest. This altar, 17 cm high and 18 cm wide, was extremely affected by the subsequent reuse of the monument, deep traces of spade destroyed this area of the relief. It is interesting that in the area where the altar and the moulding meet was made a hole with a diameter of 4 cm and quite deep, about 10 cm. This could have been made when the piece was reused or at a subsequent transportation. The legs of the divinity are shown schematically, possibly wearing long pants (*bracae*), it is impossible to see if it wears any shoes, the knees are crudely carved, it stands on the left leg, the right being flexed and shown crossing behind the other. The character is clothed with a double flared, oriental-type tunic, down to the knees, the contour of the rather rigid folds is hardly distinguishable. The tunic is tightened at the chest and under the waist. Above it seems to wear a robe, *sagum*, fastened on the right shoulder with a fibula which can no longer be observed, and which should hang on his back to the calves. The left hand, bent at the elbow over the abdomen, holds the end of the *pedum*, while the right arm, bent at the elbow and raised, supports the slightly inclined head. The hands are extremely damaged, it is barely distinguishable that he was wearing a long-sleeved tunic. The *pedum* too, the specific curvature of the middle part is scarcely distinguishable. The features of the face are illegible, the monument was badly damaged in that area. It has a Phrygian bonnet on his head, beneath which his hair hangs to his shoulders. Bent slightly to the left and with the head gently lowered, it mimics an attitude of sadness. The back is not processed. The piece is worked in a naive and rudimentary way, but the craftsman attempts to respect certain anatomical proportionality, the subsequent alterations affecting visibly the representation's quality. The bottom part shows on the back side traces of carving, made to thin the wall's thickness in order to attach it to an opening or as a lid or slab, used in a construction.

An interesting point raised by the monument is its functionality. The block of stone must have been part of an important funerary ensemble. It could be a segment from the base of a funerary monument, as we have an analogy that comes from Apulum (Pl. II, fig. 2). Or it could be the side of a funerary altar, as we have such a monument of the family of *Silius Victor Helvetius* in Rottenburg<sup>18</sup>. The bibliography on the cult of Attis in Dacia mentions about 64 monuments decorated with the image of this deity<sup>19</sup>, of which at least three present analogies with our monument.

The known representations of the divinity presents an altar on which it is seated, rarely. In Dacia we have similar representations at Turda<sup>20</sup>. Perhaps the closest analogy, both as dimensions and typological classification, is the monument found in the area of the ancient Potaissa, later identified in Gligorești<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See note 1.

<sup>18</sup> Haugt, Sixt 1900, 96, nr. 128.

<sup>19</sup> Chiș 2007, 168–176.

<sup>20</sup> Wollmann 1978, 43, nr. 9 și 51–52, nr. 23, fig. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Neugebauer 1851, 208, nr. 54; Bajusz 2005, II, 319, fig. 30/54 h; Chiș 2007, 173, nr. 56.

(Pl. II, fig. 3). It is a depiction of *Attis* holding both hands on the *pedum*, sitting on a base shaped like a votive altar. It was drawn by Neugebauer in 1847 in the home of Anton Csiki in Turda. It is probably identical to that drawn a year later by Ackner. Téglás describes a monument approximately identical at Gligorești, probably one and the same piece. He mentions that the bas-relief came off together with the top layer from a monument and it broke. The dimensions were 186 × 63 cm. The character has a height of 114 cm. It sits on an altar with a damaged inscription, holding in the right hand a bow, actually the *pedum*, the left elbow is resting on his right arm, the hand is raised to the face; Téglás considered he may have held a glass, actually the end of the *pedum*. He was wearing a *tunica* with folds, which reaches down to the knees, having the legs crossed. There are identical representations at Apulum, on the side of the base of a funerary construction<sup>22</sup>, as mentioned previously. Also it appears on a number of monuments, decorating the sideways, such as that of *Marcus Mociuncius Valentinus*<sup>23</sup>, *librarius* in the XIII Gemina Legion (Pl. II, fig. 4), or on an altar from *Sarmizegetusa*<sup>24</sup> or on a basis of a funerary construction from Pătrânjeni<sup>25</sup>. Another similar representation is on a pillar-wall at *Sarmizegetusa*<sup>26</sup>, probably from the Antonine period. The same way of depicting *Attis*, appears on inscription slabs also from *Sarmizegetusa*<sup>27</sup>, where they frame the epigraphic field of the monument. Based on the inscription and the representation, the monument was dated early 3rd century AD.

The representations of *Attis* on funerary monuments in a position identical to the monument from Coșeiu appear in large numbers in northern Italy. One such representation occurs on an architectural block that comes from a funerary building in Ticinum<sup>28</sup>, dated at the middle of the 1st century AD. Similar representations are at Aquileia<sup>29</sup> (Pl. III, Fig. 1), where on the sides of the funerary altars, are beautiful representation of the god *Attis*, located above an altar of which only the top was reproduced. The model is extremely popular in this Northern-Italian center, as seems to confirm a number of other fragments of funerary altars<sup>30</sup>. This type of representation then propagates in the Noric region, appearing on monuments dated to the middle of the 2nd century AD, an example being a monument of Gemeinlebarn<sup>31</sup>. One of the earliest depictions of this instance of *Attis* in the Danube area is a monument of Sirmium (Pl. III, Fig. 2 a-b), where on the sides of it, are carved two *Attis*, one holding a *pedum*, and the other a *syrix*, raised in honor of a legion centurion, who remarked himself in the Dacian wars<sup>32</sup>. In the Hadrianic era is dated a block with inscription originating from a funerary building, which has on the right side a representation of *Attis* on an altar, very similar to those from Dacia, found at *Požarevac*<sup>33</sup> in Serbia (Pl. III, fig. 3). A representation of the god *Attis* appears on a fragment of a funerary building in Intercisa<sup>34</sup> (Dunaújváros, Pl. III, fig. 4), the altar on which the god stands is of notable size. Also from here originates a monument<sup>35</sup> with a presumably identical representation, but which is fragmentarily preserved. Another representation on the altar is on a fragment from Gorsium<sup>36</sup> (Tác, Hungary). A depiction of *Attis* on a neat carved altar is at Matrica<sup>37</sup> (Százhalombatta, Pl. III, fig. 5). The altar is decorated with garlands, being the side of the base of a funerary construction, presenting an epigraphic field that mentions a *libertus* dedicating the monument to a veteran

<sup>22</sup> Ciongradi 2007, 230, Sc/A 3 (Taf. 90).

<sup>23</sup> Ciongradi 2007, 231, Sc/A 6 (Taf. 87 a-c).

<sup>24</sup> Ciongradi 2007, 227, Sc/S 3 (Taf. 88).

<sup>25</sup> IDR III/3, 341.

<sup>26</sup> Ciongradi 2007, 238, Py/S A4 (Taf. 96 a-b).

<sup>27</sup> Ciongradi 2007, 270, T/S 16 (Taf. 126).

<sup>28</sup> Gorrino, Robino 2010, 264, fig. 7.

<sup>29</sup> Scrinari 1972, 384–386.

<sup>30</sup> Scrinari 1972, 384.

<sup>31</sup> CSIR Aelium Cetium, 53.

<sup>32</sup> CIL III 10224.

<sup>33</sup> Spasic-Djuric 2002, 121, Abb. 101.

<sup>34</sup> Erdélyi 1974, Nr. 92.

<sup>35</sup> Barkóczi *et alii* 1954, Nr. 149.

<sup>36</sup> Ubi erat lupa nr. 10447.

<sup>37</sup> RIU 6, nr. 1453.



of *Cohors I Alpinorum*, *Publius Comatius*. The monument was dated to the first half of the 2nd century AD. Another analogy comes from Solva<sup>38</sup> (Esztergom, Hungary, Pl. III. Fig. 5), being a pillar wall having in the central area in a niche with an arched roof, a representation of the god above a large altar. Also above an altar appears the god on a block that comes from a funerary building at Aquincum<sup>39</sup> (Budapest). Also at Aquincum<sup>40</sup> is the same representation on a fragmentarily preserved pillar wall.

All these representations belong to the typology established by Vermaseren, that of *Attis tristis*<sup>41</sup>. The divinity is represented in an attitude of mourning, with the legs crossed, one elbow supported on the *pedum* and one hand holding the head, it seems to be observed meditating at his fate. His image on the funerary monuments could signify rebirth, the paradise promised to the followers of Cybele's cult, but it could also be a vague symbol of sadness in the face of death. L. Marinescu considers his image on the funerary monuments as a symbol of the idea of paradise, but also of sadness and depression<sup>42</sup>. Its representations in the provinces close to Dacia are uniform: Moesia Superior, Pannonia, Noricum and even northern Italy<sup>43</sup>: Attis wearing the Phrygian cap, tunic and cloak, has his left hand on his forehead and the elbow on his right fist, the legs crossed. As noted by S. Nemeti, it is useless to try a direct connection between these representations on funerary monuments and the one linked to the initiation into the Pessinuntine mysteries<sup>44</sup>. These are actually models adopted by the provincial artisans in the Danubian provinces under the major influence of the sculptural center of Aquileia, which becomes extremely popular in the 2nd century AD., especially in important urban centers. There are no characters initiated in the mysterious cults, only but craftsmen and customers who are familiar with the sotierologic manifestations of the Phrygian cult. For Dacia, the analysis of O. Chiș remains up-to-date. The representations of Attis on an altar, however, are extremely rare. Such an image appears on a well preserved relief from Ostia<sup>45</sup>, where a priest (archigallus) related to the Mithraic cult, holds two torches in front of an altar on which is Attis and the sacred pine-tree. It is possible that these representations that appear in the Danubian provinces on the funerary monuments are reminiscences of the cult of Cybele and Attis, so popular in the Mediterranean area of the Empire, which was „adopted” by local craftsmen. The quality of the representations is mediocre, so we can not make remarks on the physiognomy of the divinity, but most times the face of the god is chubby, extremely similar to the various Eros representations, appearing on fronts and canopies of funerary *stelae*. Very likely, the altar upon which he is placed symbolizes the altar on which he sacrificed his genitals. The chronological framing of the pieces can be made with certainty only in case of those presenting an epigraphic field. In the two major centers where this type of representation of Attis appears, Apulum and *Sarmizegetusa*, the monuments were dated to the Antonine and early Severian period.

The monument from Coșeiu raises a number of questions regarding its place of origin. Given the uncertain and ambiguous information on how the monument was found, the most probable place of its origin is the Roman sculptural workshop of Porolissum: There are no funerary monuments depicting Attis in Porolissum. But there are similarities with monuments from the Pannonian area, which does not exclude the influence of craftsmen reaching Porolissum from the Pannonian provinces. Its appearance in an area devoid of substantial archaeological discoveries from the Roman era, makes us guess that it's a migratory sculptural piece from the area of the Porolissum sculptural centre. For Dacia we know extremely few sculptural monuments with certain discovery context in the barbaric area. It seems that the only monument with

<sup>38</sup> Kiss 1987, Taf. 101,2.

<sup>39</sup> CSIR Ungarn 9, 2010, nr. 8.

<sup>40</sup> CSIR Ungarn 9, 2010, nr. 36.

<sup>41</sup> Vermaseren 1966, 40.

<sup>42</sup> Țeposu-Marinescu 1982, 45.

<sup>43</sup> Țeposu-Marinescu 1982, *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> Nemeti 2008, 181.

<sup>45</sup> M. De Boer, s.v. Attis, LIMC III/1, Zurich – München 1986, 98.

a similar story, is a fragment of funerary stela, discovered in Arad area<sup>46</sup>, in the village Vladimirescu, about 8 km east of Arad. The monument was discovered in 1940, during the construction of the railway embankment between Golovăț-Aradul Nou, which was recovered and brought to the Arad Museal Complex in 1971<sup>47</sup>. It is a funerary stela fragment with representations of the deceased in a rectangular niche, attributed to the existence in the area of a Roman military *burgus*<sup>48</sup>. The latest research in the area exclude the existence here of a certain sector of the Roman *Limes*<sup>49</sup>. Also a similar discovery is reported in Lipova<sup>50</sup>, but without the certainty that the monument mentioned here was discovered *in situ*.

A first impulse was to catalog the relief as a spoil brought from Porolissum in the Middle Ages or even later, maybe from a collection of one of the two contemporary monasteries, the Franciscan one or the Beguines<sup>51</sup>. However, the account of the local man about the discovery of a grave in a cist, although the Middle Ages were no stranger to this practice, the discovery of Roman bricks, traces of masonry with mortar and even ceramics, or the possibility of another funerary piece embedded in a foundation, completes the hypothesis of a Roman settlement north of the *Limes*. The lack of solid arguments leaves this theory at the level of presumption. The amount of information available at this time does not permit any relevant conclusions for the site as a whole. A Roman settlement north of the *limes* in the Meseș area, a monastery built with spoils brought from Porolissum, a *curia* of the Jakcs nobles family? These are questions whose answers can come only after investigations of archaeological nature. Geophysical investigations and perhaps even small archaeological surveys could offer more clues to this issue.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

CCA	Cronica cercetărilor arheologice din România, campania 2007.
CIL	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinorum, Berlin.
CSIR	Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani.
IDR	Inscriptiones Daciae Romanae, București (vol. III/5 – Paris).
LIMC	Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, I–VIII, Zürich–München, 1981–1997.
RIU	Die Römischen Inschriften Ungarns.

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<sup>46</sup> Pădureanu 2007, 148–159.

<sup>47</sup> Pădureanu 2007, *passim*.

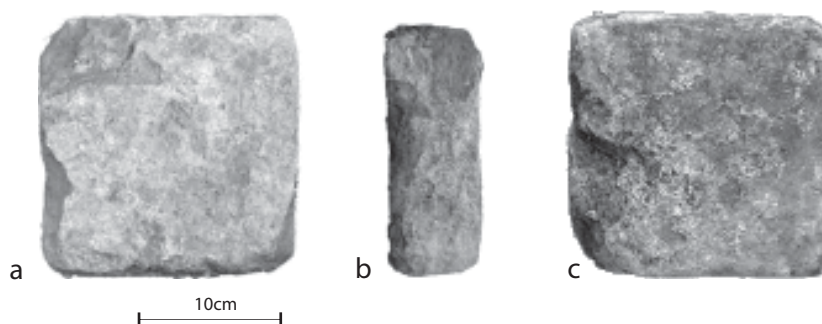
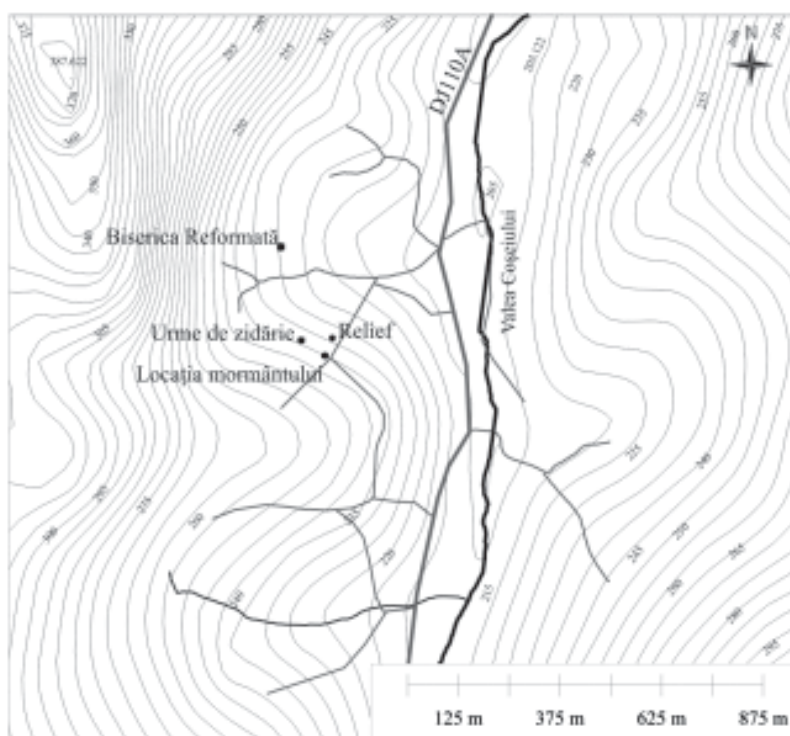
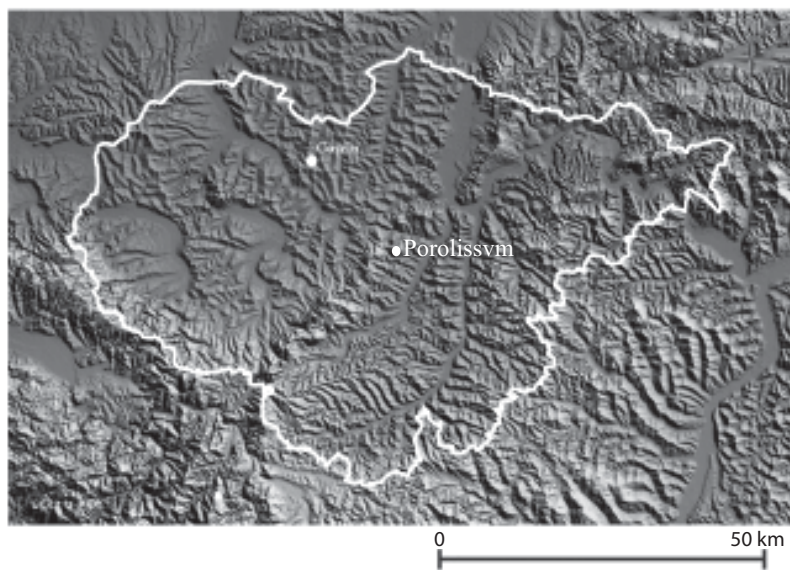
<sup>48</sup> Pădureanu 2007, 152.

<sup>49</sup> Németh et alii 2011, 87.

<sup>50</sup> Crișan et alii 1999, 79.

<sup>51</sup> See note 5.

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Pl. I. Location map of Coșeu village in Sălaj county (1); Map of discoveries from Coșeu (2); Roman brick (?) (3).



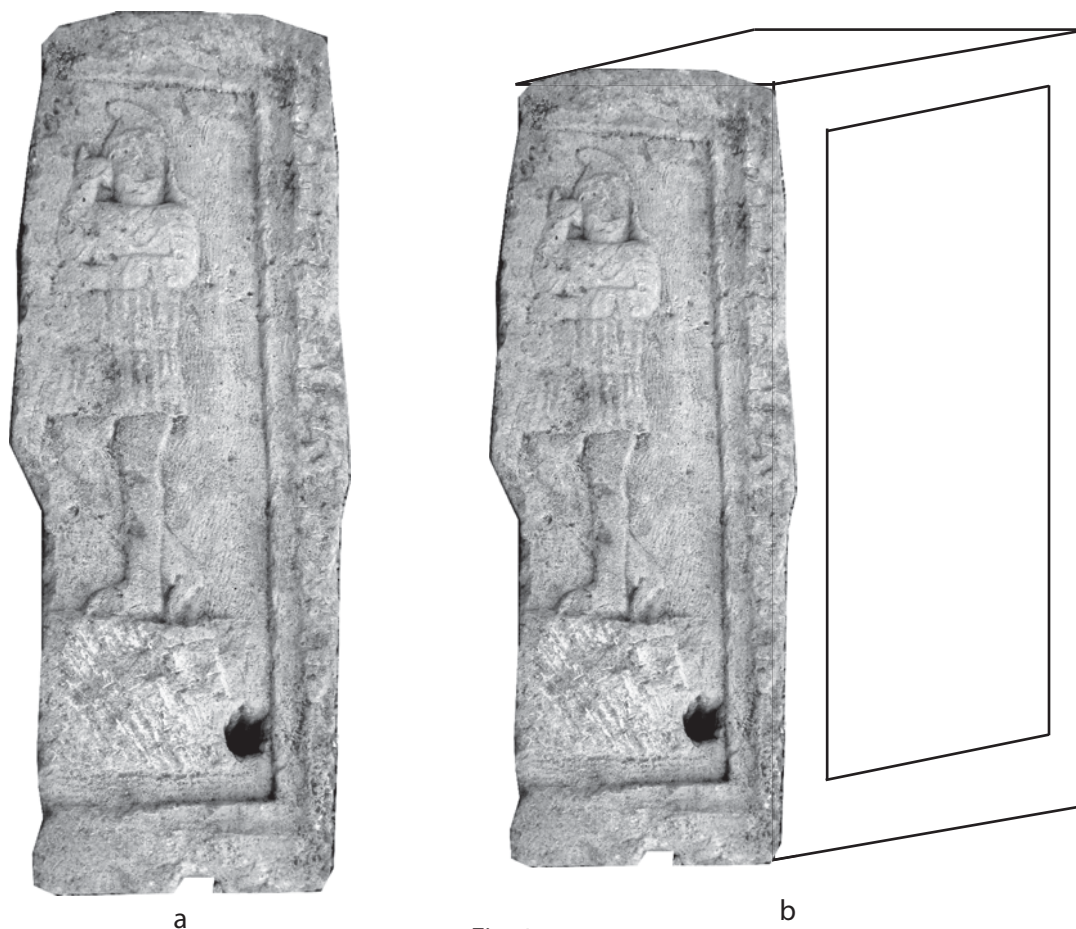


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Pl. II. The roman funerary monument from Coșeiu(1); possible reconstruction(2); Analogies: Apulum (2); Potaissa (3); Apulum (4).





Fig. 1



a



b

Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Pl. III. Analogies: Aquielia (1); Sirmium (1); Požarevac(2); Dunaújváros(3); Matrica(4); Solva(5).