

A RELIEF FROM TIBISCUM DEPICTING THE DANUBIAN RIDERS

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A series of small reliefs made of stone, lead, or bronze, dedicated to the gods conventionally called the Danubian Riders, can be found in the Danubian provinces of the Roman Empire¹. Easily identified through their typical iconography, these artifacts are mainly distributed in the provinces around the middle and lower Danube, in the Moesias, Dacia, the Pannonias, and fewer examples in Thracia, Noricum, and Dalmatia. The presence of these reliefs that illustrate a local religious iconography can be interpreted as an artistic and religious expression of indigenous, autochthonous beliefs from the areas bordering the Danube during the peak period of the Roman Empire, i.e. the second-third centuries A.D.²

A small fragmentary relief depicting the Danubian triad was recently discovered in the civilian settlement in Tibiscum³ (Jupa, Caraş-Severin County). It was once included in the central part of a rectangular marble relief with the iconographic scene depicted in a single row. The preserved fragment measures 13 × 6 × 0.85 cm. The item was discovered in 2012 during systematic archaeological research performed in the northern area of the civilian settlement, inside building XIV, in a leveling layer identified at the depth of – 0.30 m. The item is preserved in the collection of the County Museum of Ethnography and of the Border Regiment Caransebeş, inv. no. 51787 (Pl. I.1 a-b).

The fragment belongs to a rectangular relief that contained the depiction of the Danubian triad according to the heraldic type, with the riders turned towards the goddess placed in the middle. One part of the central area of the relief is preserved, depicting the goddess behind a three-legged table that supports a fish placed to the right. The relief is coarse and schematic, with the details of costume hardly sketched. The goddess is depicted in front view, with her hands extended towards the muzzles of the horses that approach her from both right and left. She wears a long chiton, tied at the waist. Her face lacks anatomical details, except for the eyes that are barely sketched. Her face is framed by a rich coiffure (with the hair tied at the back or wearing a *velum*). The preserved fragment also includes the head, chest, and forelegs of the horse on the left. The lines suggesting the animal's head and neck are rendered anatomically correct. The horse, with pointy ears and a rich, well defined mane, is depicted at a walk, with the left foreleg raised. Only the tip of the right hand, placed on the horse's neck, is visible of the rider on the left side. Nothing is left from the rider and his horse that were on the right side of the relief.

¹ PN-II-RU-TE-2011-3-0131.

² Antonescu 1889; Rostovtseff 1923, p. 385–415; Tudor 1937, p. 189–356; Tudor 1969; Tudor 1976; Popović 1992, p. 1078–1081; Ertl 1996; Tatcheva 2000, p. 231–245; Nemeti 2005, p. 200–216.

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Typologically, the relief can be included in the type of simple rectangular stelae with a single row. According to D. Tudor's general classification, the relief belongs to class B, i.e. reliefs with two riders and one goddess placed in the center. According to E. Will, the relief belongs to category A, the variant with two riders, a category in which the author includes three items from Moesia Inferior, one from Durostorum (Silistra), and two from Tomis (Constanța).⁴ According to a typology that takes into consideration the material and shape of the reliefs and the distribution of the scenes and symbols into rows, the relief from Tibiscum belongs to category A1 (simple, rectangular, stone-made stelae with a single row), the variant with two riders.⁵ Publishing a similar item discovered in Porolissum (Moigrad), N. Gudea included it in type I ("rechteckige Form, mit einem einzigen Register und zweiten Rittern.")⁶ This type of simple rectangular stelae includes two iconographical variants: with a single rider, one goddess and various acolytes, and with two riders, one goddess, and secondary figures.

Therefore, the relief from Tibiscum belongs to a category of simple reliefs, with an iconography restricted to the essential elements (the goddess with the tripod and fish, the two riders leading their horses at a walk, and the two characters fallen under the hoofs). On some of the reliefs in this category one can also find the depictions of two Victories, flying, placing crowns on the riders' heads.⁷ Reliefs in this category do not include the numerous symbols associated to the iconography of the Danubian Riders (tripod with ram head, fish, *lucernae*, the astral divinities Sol and Luna, initiation and ritual.)⁸

The closest stylistic and iconographic analogy is a relief discovered in Moesia Inferior, in Castelu (Constanța County) (Pl. I 2).⁹ The preserved iconographical details are identical: *mensa tripens* with the side legs curved towards the outside, the fish depicted in a similar manner (but turned to the left), the goddess' chiton draped in the same fashion and her hair dress rendered similarly. The height of the relief from Castelu is of 13 cm, just like the one of the relief from Tibiscum. Through a graphical proportional reconstruction of the depicted figures one can estimate that the length of the relief from Tibiscum is close to that measuring 19.5 cm of the relief from Castelu. Measuring ca. 20 × 13 × 0.10 cm the two marble plaques depicting the Danubian Riders are small *ex-votos* dedicated to these anonymous gods in consecrated places.

Other reliefs part of this variant with two riders were found in Apulum,¹⁰ Porolissum,¹¹ Tomis,¹² and Carnuntum¹³ (Pl. II). The variant of rectangular relief with a single rider includes discoveries from Apulum¹⁴ and Sarmizegetusa¹⁵ in Dacia and Biala Čerkova¹⁶ and Zaldapa¹⁷ in Moesia Inferior. Reliefs of this type, with a single rider and a single iconographic row, are iconographically close to reliefs depicting the Thracian Rider (typically rendered on stelae with arched upper part). Furthermore, the Moesian reliefs contain iconographic details (tree with a snake

⁴ Will 1955, p. 312: CMRED 89 (Durostorum), 93, 94 (Tomis).

⁵ Nemeti 2005, p. 209–210.

⁶ Gudea 2005, p. 216.

⁷ CMRED 97 (Castelu), 149 (Carnuntum); Gudea 2005, 215–220, no. 2, fig. 5.

⁸ On the inventory of the various scenes and symbols depicted on plaques decorated with the images of the Danubian Riders – Tudor 1976, p. 181–276.

⁹ CMRED 97.

¹⁰ CMRED 6, 7.

¹¹ CMRED 8; Gudea 2005, 215–220, no. 2, fig. 5.

¹² CMRED 94.

¹³ CMRED 149.

¹⁴ CMRED 2.

¹⁵ CMRED 17.

¹⁶ CMRED 79.

¹⁷ CMRED 90.

coiled on its branches in Zaldapa and arched upper edge in Biala Čerkova) that bring the reliefs of the Danubian Rider closer to those, much more popular in the area, of the Thracian Rider.¹⁸

In conclusion, the fragmentary relief recently discovered in Tibiscum belongs to a category of reliefs that only enjoyed a restricted distribution (in Dacia and Moesia Inferior) and is typical through its simplified iconography and the absence of an abundant Danubian symbolism.

The new relief discovered in Tibiscum raises two issues that are significant to understanding the distribution and circulation of reliefs depicting the Danubian Riders: the circulation of iconographic motifs in the artisan environment of the province and the function of these reliefs according to their places of discovery.

Eight further reliefs with the depiction of these local gods have been found in Tibiscum (Pl. III). Three have been known for a longer period and are preserved in the collection of the Museum of History, Ethnography and Art in Lugoj,¹⁹ while the other five were discovered during archaeological research in the fort and in the civilian settlement and are preserved in the collection of the Museum of Timișoara and in a private collection.²⁰ One must note that all eight reliefs belong to a distinct type, that of rectangular reliefs with the field divided in three rows, a type characteristic to the workshops in Dacia.²¹ According to the iconographic content, the reliefs with three rows have been divided in four variants.²² Variant I is typical through the depiction of a single rider in the central row, the symbolic triad in the upper row, and the “fisherman” in the lower row. In the case of variant III, the central row depicts two riders facing each other and a goddess, the upper row depicts five busts (the anthropomorphic triad and the astral divinities), while Nemesis, the *occultatio* – *ostentatio*, and various symbols are depicted in the lower row.²³

The eight reliefs can be included in two variants: variant I – reliefs CMRED 201, 202, and 203 and variant III – reliefs CMRED 22, 23, 24, and 204. One of the items, CMRED 200, is of a hybrid type, combining rows that belong to variants I and III (middle row with one rider, variant I, upper row with five busts, lower row with the *occultatio* – *ostentatio* scene, variant III). Therefore, reliefs with three rows are the most numerous type in Tibiscum, produced in a local workshop that only employed two models of the two iconographic variants, with one rider (variant I) and with two riders (variant III).

As for the place of discovery, it has been mentioned that the relief was found in the northern area of the civilian settlement, inside building XIV (Pl. IV). The place of discovery of reliefs CMRED 22, 23, 24, 202, and 203 is unknown. The hybrid relief CMRED 200 was found inside the fort, in building B. Two other reliefs were nevertheless found in the civilian settlement: relief CMRED 201 was discovered “in the civilian district, between a building with an apse and a temple,” while relief CMRED 204 was found in “the civilian settlement, inside the building with an apse.” It is relevant that four of the reliefs from Tibiscum from known contexts were found in the civilian environment, in the settlement, and just one was used in a building from the fort, in the military environment.

In the context of Tibiscum, the newly discovered marble relief seems to be an imported item, as indicated by the very similar object discovered in Castelu, in Moesia Inferior, and by the

¹⁸ Oppermann 2006, p. 299–300.

¹⁹ Tudor 1965, p. 12–14, no. 22–24.

²⁰ Moga 1972, p. 39–51.

²¹ Will 1955, p. 312–331; Nemeti 2005, 212–213; Nemeti 2006, p. 56–58.

²² Nemeti 2005 a, p. 359–360.

²³ On the name of the scenes and symbols (the symbolic triad, the anthropomorphic triad, the *occultatio* – *ostentatio* scene, “the fisherman”) – Tudor 1976.

exceptional distribution of local reliefs with three rows. From an iconographical perspective, the rectangular relief with a single row is significantly different from the rich pseudo-narrative reliefs that contain numerous mythical scenes, rituals, and symbols in the three rows. The absence of multiple scenes and complex symbolism seems to indicate an earlier dating of the relief with a single row, sometime in the beginning of the cult's iconographic development.

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UN RELIEF AL CAVALERILOR DANIBIENI DE LA TIBISCUM

(Rezumat)

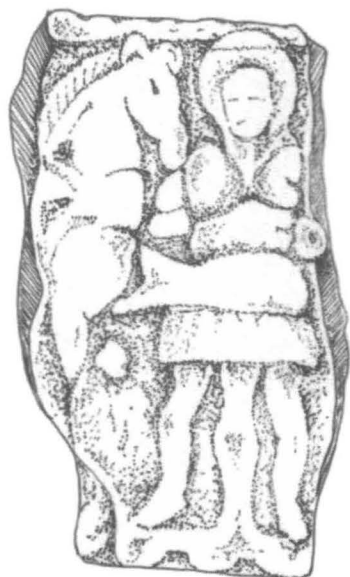
Un mic relief fragmentar cu imaginea triadei danubiene a fost recent descoperit în așezarea civilă de la Tibiscum (Jupa, jud. Caraș-Severin). Fragmentul provine dintr-o placă de formă dreptunghiulară care conținea reprezentarea triadei danubiene în schema heraldică, cu călăreții îndreptându-se spre zeița situată în poziție centrală. Se mai păstrează o bucată din partea centrală a reliefului unde se vede zeița în spatele unei mese cu trei picioare pe care se află un pește orientat spre dreapta.

Acesta aparține unei categorii de reliefuri cu distribuție restrânsă (Dacia, Moesia Inferior) caracterizate prin iconografie simplificată și absența simbolisticii abundente danubiene. Cea mai apropiată analogie din punct de vedere stilistic și al conținutului iconografic o găsim în Moesia Inferior, la Castelu (jud. Constanța) (Pl. I 2).

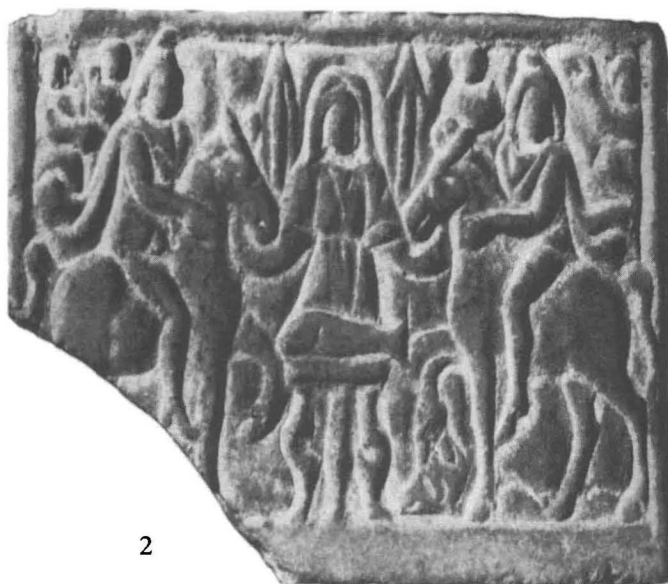
Noul relief descoperit la Tibiscum ridică două chestiuni importante pentru înțelegerea distribuției și circulației reliefulor cu reprezentarea Cavalerilor Danubieni: cea a circulației modelelor iconografice în mediul artizanal provincial și cea a destinației acestor reliefuri din perspectiva locurilor de descoperire.



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1b



2

Plate I. 1 a-b. The relief from Tibiscum (photo, drawing). 2. The relief from Castelu (CMRED 97, Tudor 1969).



1



2



3

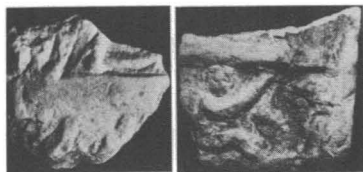
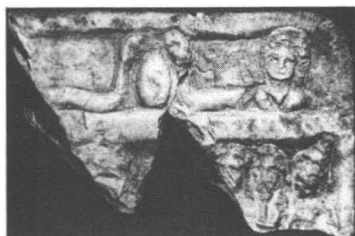


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Plate II. Rectangular reliefs depicting two riders. 1. Apulum (CMRED 6). 2. Carnuntum (CMRED 49). 3. Porolissum (CMRED 8). 4. Tomis (CMRED 94) (Tudor 1969).



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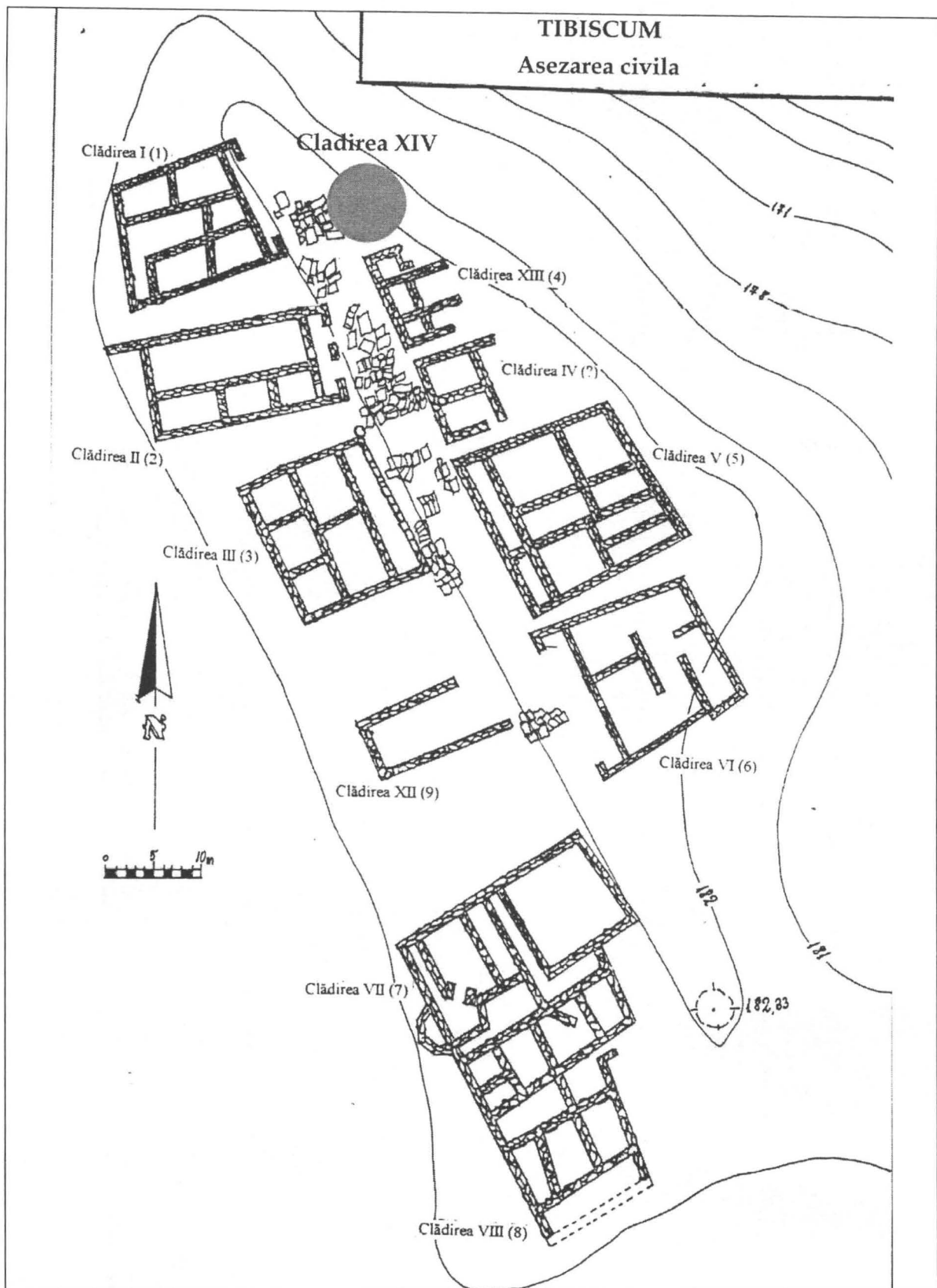


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8

Plate III. Reliefs from Tibiscum. 1-3. CMRED 201-203; 4. CMRED 200; 5-7. CMRED 22-24; 8. CMRED 204.



Pl. IV. Ground plan of the civilian settlement.