

ROMANIZED EGYPTIAN GODS IN *POROLISSUM*¹

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The number of the findings from Porolissum which betray an Egyptian influence in the area are very scarce, to be more precise three bronze statuettes, a cameo and a possible „lucerna”. Because of the fact that they were discovered in an archaeological context (which is very rare with the aegyptiaca artifacts in Dacia Porolissensis) and because of the recent reinterpretations of some depictions which were linked with the Nilotic civilization this paper aims to create a new image of how these Egyptian-origin elements reached Porolissum, this Roman settlement on the fringes of the Empire.

The Romanized cults of the Egyptian gods Isis and Sarapis² from Roman Dacia triggered the attention of scholars worldwide beginning the 19th century³. In the 1970`s (cat. No. 3 and 5) and 1980`s (cat. No. 2 and cat. No. 4 but initially considered to be a representation of Isis, as the original author of the publication of the statuette, Alexandru Matei, concluded at that time)⁴ up to very recent years (2001, cat. No. 1), the systematic archaeological excavations have made scholars integrate *Porolissum* on the map of the *aegyptiaca* finds⁵. All of these artifacts that we know of come from the area of the *vicus militaris*⁶, namely from the area of the temple of the god Bel and from the

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² For this new concept which differs from the cumonian „oriental cults” see Alvar 2008, *passim*.

³ Neigebaur 1851, *passim*; Drexler 1890, *passim*; Popescu 1927, 159-209; Jones 1929, 245-305; Floca 1935, 204-249; *SIRIS* 680-699; Vidman 1970, *passim*; Petolescu 1971, 643-658; Sanie 1975, 529-537; Berciu-Petolescu 1976, 5-7, 30-34; Mărghită-Petolescu 1978, 718-731; Popa 1979, *passim*; Popa 1983, 71-80; Malaise 1984, 1677-1679; Vidman 1989, 1001-1004. Piso 1998, 253-271; Bricault 2001, 28-29 (map), 34-35 for Dacia; Budischovsky 2004, 175-176; Sanie 2004, 61-82; *RICIS* 616/ 0101, 616/ 0102 (Dacia Porolissensis); Nemeti I. 2005, 349-355; Budischovsky 2007, 267-288; Dunand 2008, 260-269; Carbó Garcia 2010, 369-432.

⁴ Deac 2012a, for the particular study of this statuette.

⁵ I rule out of the repertoire two fragments of statuettes: 1. The bronze statuette representing a bull which was considered to be an Apis bull by the original publisher Al. Matei (Matei 1977, 147-152 fig. 1-2) and which recent studies indicate the Dolichean bull (Deac 2012b) and 2. a head of an animal made out of stone and preserved fragmentary which the same scholar Al. Matei considered it to be a depiction of the god Anubis (Matei 1982, 79, pl. XII-XIII). In reality we deal with a fragmentary statue of a gryphon of which only the head is still preserved. Both artifacts are housed by the History and Arts Museum of Zalău, inv. no. C.C. 6/1973(the bull) and inv. no. C.C. 295/1958 (gryphon).

⁶ About the area of the *vicus* see Tamba 2008, *passim* and Tamba 2012, 52-53 in the later suggesting the fact that the area of the *vicus* had an urban status when Septimius Severus granted to the settlers of

building conventionally named LM3 (except the cameo and the *lucerna* which are considered to be stray finds).

The archaeological contexts suggest that at *Porolissum* we deal with evidence of private manifestations of the Egyptian-origin cults as is the case found in the LM 3 building. Conventionally named LM 3⁷, the most impressive building serving as a housing facility of the *vicus* was a *striphouse* (ger. *Streifenhaus*) which had a manufacturing area where glass beads were produced. The monetary circulations point out the fact that the climax of the activity in the house was during the reign of Septimius Severus⁸. On the entire surface of the house and of the extensions, under-floor heating installations (*hypocaust*) were excavated. The approximately 11.5 cm. high bust of Sarapis was found in the area of the C room on the ancient „stepping level” of the stone phase of the building, right under the level of the debris of the collapsed stone walls. In this room it can be suggested the fact that a small personal shrine (*lararium*) to the syncretistic Jupiter-Sarapis existed, making it the first case of the kind archaeologically identified in Dacia Porolissensis. The segment of time in which this archaeological situation can be framed is between the reign of Septimius Severus and the abandonment of the Roman authority of the province. Unfortunately we cannot consider too reliable the cameo with the representation of Sarapis (cat. no. 3, the second depiction of Sarapis at *Porolissum*)⁹, because of the nature of the artifact, namely a very mobile one and because of the lack of information concerning the archaeological context in which it was found.

In the area of the temple of Bel two other *aegyptiaca* were discovered. One represents an erotic scene in which an Egyptian *Sem* priest has intercourse with a female (unfortunately the priest with his macro-phallus was lost probably from the ancient times)¹⁰. The statuette already damaged in the ancient times (only the female is preserved nowadays from the entire bronze statuary assembly) was thrown in one of the

Porolissum an area in which they could build the *municipium*. The same author (D. Tamba) considers the fact that the Romans, quoting and translating: „[...] there were no clear distinctions between the case of the urban or rural settlements only in regards of surface, economic potential and number of inhabitants” (p. 53). Without insisting on the matter, I consider the fact that the *municipium* was positioned somewhere to the south-east of the auxiliary fort on the Pomăt hill while the *vicus* was a totally different entity (including from the judicial point of view) which as the archaeological researches show was a simple village positioned on the sides of the road that came from the building of the custom and went south in the direction of *Napoca*, passing to the south and south-west the fort. Also the archaeological evidence concludes that the *vicus* was built right after the Roman conquest and continued in parallel with the *municipium* (which was founded according to a ritual, its surface and rectangular shaped limits were drawn etc.) until the abandonment of the Roman authority of the area (see Tamba 2008 for details of every building).

⁷ Tamba 2008, 247-295, Tamba 2012, *passim*.

⁸ Tamba 2008, 259.

⁹ Tăpescu-David Lakó 1973, p. 4 pl. I/3; Popa 1979, p. 12-13, nr. 8. Also I question the fact that the fragment of the *lucerna* representing Isis *lactans* (meaning suckling his son Harpocrates) as coming from *Porolissum*.

¹⁰ It was originally published as an Isis representation in an unique iconographic state, mourning his husband's death (Osiris), by Osiris' brother, Seth. The same opinion is shared by M. Popescu (Popescu 2004, 155). Petculescu *et al.* 2003, p. 155, no. 248, wrongly interpret the statuette as being a negro and as a functionality they consider it to be a lid of a bronze vessel although the same authors remark the fact that it has no elements of binding mechanism which should be analog with other vessels of the kind. Recently this new iconography was put to doubt and the new interpretation was proposed (Deac 2012a). It is worth mentioning the fact that these depictions of *Sem* priests acting in erotic scene are very rare as it can be seen in the new interpretation.

pits acting as waste disposals pits of the different offerings to the god Bel (*favissa* G.1.) to the north-east of the place where the altar stood. The dating of the offering of the statuette to the god (and later on thrown in the *favissa*) was at the turn of the 2nd century and beginning of the 3rd century A.D., judging by the coins in the pit.

In the area of the temple of Bel¹¹, situated on the „terrace of sanctuaries” i.e., approximately 6 meters north of the Roman road coming from the Roman custom and heading to auxiliary fort on the Pomăt hill, somewhere between the outer and the inner wall of the building a statuette of Harpocrates was discovered in a chronologically „late” layer of the Roman dominance in the area, dating the artifact surely in the 3rd century A. D.¹². The depiction of Harpocrates must have been associated with the god Bel and served as a private cult statuette.

In conclusion it seems that at *Porolissum* in the area of the *vicus militaris* traces of private cultic places dedicated to the Egyptian gods of Sarapis or Harpocrates can be identified. Particularly, the case of Sarapis is very challenging because for the first time scholars can identify an area of private worship (small shrine, *lararium* with the bust of Jupiter Sarapis in the room C of the LM3 building) in an intimate place like a typical household of the Roman *vicus*. Judging by the archaeological context the dating in the time frame of the reigns early Severian emperors, makes me dare to think if the owner of the bust perceived Sarapis not as a Jupiter-Sarapis (as the iconography of the god points out) or more likely as a Sarapis - healing god, as was Sarapis perceived during this era of the early Severs. Furthermore offerings to the god Bel were made that consisted among other things of imported bronze statuettes originating in Egypt itself.

Nevertheless we cannot consider a model of core-periphery for the material culture originating in Egypt in the case of *Porolissum*¹³. The fact that the diffusion of the Egyptian-origin divinities such as Sarapis or Harpocrates ended up at the „periphery” (in this case *Porolissum*) is impossible to digest simply because these contexts in which *aegyptiaca* were found prove the fact that these artifacts were personal and mobile which makes me assume the hypothesis according to which we do not confront ourselves with a diffusion of the cults at an official and public level, but

¹¹ „the temple of the paternal god Bel of the Palmyrenian *numerus* from Porolissum” would be according to Diaconescu 2011, 139 the correct nomination.

¹² The building was remade somewhere between A. D. 215-217, according to the following inscription: *Pro salute [I]mp(eratoris) M(arci) Aur[eli(i)] / Antonini Aug(usti) Pii Fel(icis), deo / patrio Belo n(umerus) Pal(mirenorum) sagit(tariorum) tem/plum vi ignis consumptum/ pecunia sua restituer(unt) dedi/cant[e] C] I[ul(io) Sept(imio)Casti] no / co(n)s(ularis) III Dac(iar(um) et M. Ul]pio Victore / proc(uratore) Aug(usti) provi(nc(ia)e) Po]rol(issensis), cura agen/te T. Flavio Saturn(ino) (centurione) le] g(inonis) V Mac(edonicae) p(iae) c(constantis).* (see: Gudea, Lucăcel 1975, Gudea 1989, p. 762, no. 10; Piso 1993, p. 179, no. 10. 11-12, no. 7; Diaconescu 2011, 141) dating the Harpocrates statuette somewhere *post-quem*.

¹³ Cf. Versluys 2010, 17 „Most studies dealing with the meaning of Roman *Aegyptiaca* have always been (implicitly) reasoning from the concept of *diffusion*; a kind of core-periphery model in which the original meaning at the Nile was brought overseas in successive ‘waves’.³¹ Although this certainly is true to a certain extent, one of the main problems with this model, so it seems, is the question of agency. Understanding the popularity of Egypt and the Egyptian gods in the Mediterranean as a uniform (chronological) development of diffusion – from core (and original meaning) to periphery (and possible misunderstanding) – provides little room for processes of selection and appropriation. The former Isis conference (Leiden 2005) already had tried to deconstruct this somewhat monolithic image and the second part of its proceedings – called *Understanding the cults of Isis in their local context* – clearly shows that indeed ‘Isis’ or ‘Egypt’ meant very different things in different contexts. Here I would like to even go one step further, as for the Hellenistic-Roman tradition in particular it is possible to set the established framework upside-down”.

rather we can talk about traces of private acts of piety manifested towards these divinities by individuals who carried these statuettes as their own personal belongings. Finally, there is one more aspect that needs some discussions to be carried out. All *aegyptiaca* from *Porolissum* are coming from dated 3rd century contexts. Their dating confirms a phenomenon in which the gods from the Orient such as Jupiter-Dolichenus, Bel, Dea Syria¹⁴ correlated with the increase of population (because of the creating of *municipium Septimium Porolissensis*) and the flow of money after the civil wars 193-197 A. D.¹⁵ virtually bombard the settlement of *Porolissum* establishing due to the Palmyreans living there a window of „orientalization”. As we can see, other oriental Romanized gods, such as Harpocrates are linked with the officially established cults of Bel. Sarapis on the other hand, seems to be privately adored in a household of the *vicus* of *Porolissum*, being nothing else but another divinity in the afflux of the ones originating in the Orient and later on Romanized from the above mentioned settlement.

Catalogue:

1. Sarapis, bronze bust statuette. Conservation state: good. (Pl. 4).

Dimensions: height=11.5 cm.

Description: Hollow cast bronze statuette with the divinity portrayed as a mature man with long hair, temperate look, bushy beard, cut short and with nice curls. The face has nice features depicted, big eyes, prominent nose, and the mouth slightly opened. The god has a *kalathos* on his head decorated with a line in a zig-zag shape and wears a *chiton*, of which the folds can be easily observed. On the lower part of the bust an *aquila* can be seen with its head turned to the left and with the wings wide opened which suggests that we deal with a iconographic depiction of Jupiter Sarapis.

Place of discovery: *Vicus militaris*, LM 3 building in 2001 in the south-western part of the house.


Place of custody: History and Art County Museum of Zalău, without an inventory number.

Dating: Severian age due to the hairstyle which is significantly close to the one Septimius Severus used to portray himself as the god Sarapis.

Bibliography: Tamba 2008, p. 251, 276, Pl. VI.5.16.

2. Harpocrates, bronze statuette solid cast. Conservation state: good.

Dimensions: height of the body=5 cm, height of the pedestal=1.8 cm, diameter=2 cm; parallelepiped post 3.8x3.2x1.5 cm. (Pl. 3a)

Description: Harpocrates is depicted as a young boy, nude, sitting on a cylinder pedestal. His hair is portrayed as being pulled backwards and on the sides of his head and with a tuft on his forehead. The features of the face are very well distinguishable, with big eyes, short nose and slightly opened mouth. The god is holding a goose in his left hand closely to the chest and the goose's beak with his right arm in a position that suggests the mystery cult of Isis and Harpocrates represented by the goose. This unique iconography is a change of the typical iconographic depiction of Harpocrate with his finger hold on his mouth in an effort of depicting the act of making silence specific to the mystery cult of Isis, his mythological mother. Actually the hieroglyphic depiction of the word „son”, namely „sa” is the hieroglyph  (a goose) (Gardiner G38)¹⁶.

¹⁴ Gudea 2003, 217-242 with the older bibliography. Also more recently Diaconescu 2011, 135-192.

¹⁵ Birley 2002, 89-128.

¹⁶ Gardiner 1957, 471.

Place of discovery: in the area of the temple of *Bel*, between the inner and the outer wall at a depth of approximately 30 cm, in a secondary position.

Place of custody: History and Art County Museum of Zalău, inv. no. CC 272/1977.

Dating: Severian Age.

Bibliography: Matei 1982, p.76, no. 2, pl. II-III; M. Popescu, 2004, p. 155, mentions it as being *Horuz*. Irina Nemeti is also preparing a study of Harpocrates in Roman Dacia that is forthcoming.

3. Sarapis, red jaspis cameo (Pl. 5 a).

Dimensions: 1.3x 1 cm.

Description: Oval shaped red jaspis cameo with a slightly curved surface. The image of the god is representing a draped bust of Sarapis, seen in profile, with the face turned to the left. He is depicted as a strong, mature man and on his head he has a nicely decorated *kalathos*. His hair is very rich and is folding on his back. His beard is bushy and cut short. His face is very expressive, with his slightly opened mouth and it depicts a prominent nose. His left eye and eyebrow are very good outlined.

Place of discovery: uncertain, somewhere in *Porolissum*.

Place of custody: History and Art County Museum of Zalău, inv. no. 408/ 1966.

Dating: second-third century A.D.

Bibliografie: Țeposu-David Lakó 1973, p. 4 pl. I/3; Popa 1979, p. 12-13, nr. 8. About the cameos from *Porolissum* see: Gudea 1989, 750-751, pl. CCLXIII.

4. Female consort of an Egyptian *Sem* priest, bronze statuette. Fragmentary statuary ensemble. (Pl. 3 b).

Dimensions: height of statuette=5.5 cm, diameter pedestal=6.7 cm.

Description: The statuette represents a woman adopting a dwarfish position on top of a mould. The bronze statuette depicts a female adopting a dwarfish position on a small mound and surrounded by reptiles in what want to be an environment similar to the one of the banks of the river Nile (the entire pedestal has 6.7 cm in diameter). It is portrayed with a draped cloth, tightened with a belt (*cingulum*) and covering only the inferior part of the body with the exception of the feet. The head is supported by the knees while being slightly turned aside and covered with some sort of a wig. The face is remarkably portrayed with the eyes, nose and mouth perfectly distinguishable. The left arm is not depicted while the right one is with the palm of the hand turned inwards touching the knee and the chin supporting itself on the exterior part of the palm. A peculiar aspect that should be mentioned is the orifice between the legs in the genital area (0.6x0.4cm.) which A. Matei considers to be an exaggerated representation of the female sex, an aspect which is well remarked by the author.

The same author considered the artifact as a depiction of Isis in a hypostasis of the myth of Isis and Osiris, more precisely the episode when Isis mourns his husband who was killed by his brother Seth. In reality this iconographic depiction of Isis in inexistent a fact that makes us turn our attention to another iconographic hypostasis. To be more precise, we deal with a representation of an Egyptian woman, a consort of an Egyptian *Sem* priest in an erotic scene generically name in the literature as *symplegma*, with the woman having sexual intercourse with the priest. The priest is depicted with a *macro-phallus*, semi-nude and chanting at a tambourine all the elements of the priest being now-a-days lost since ancient times most probably.

Place of discovery: a *favissa* of the temple of Bel, conventionally named by the archaeologists as G. 1 pit.

Place of custody: History and Art County Museum of Zalău, inv. no. CC 751/1980.

Dating: the archaeological context suggests a dating in the Severan period.

Bibliography: Matei 1982, p.77-78, no. 3, pl. IV-VIII; Petculescu *et al.* 2003, p. 155, no. 248 (the authors of this volume wrongly interpret the statuette as being a negro and as a functionality they consider it to be a lid of a bronze vessel although the same authors remark the fact that it has no elements of binding mechanism which should be analog with other vessels of the kind); M. Popescu, 2004, p. 155 (considers the statuette as being Isis after the original statement of A. Matei); Deac 2012a.

5. Isis *lactans* și Harpocrate, lucerna, orange clay. Conservation state: fragmentary.

Dimensions: Length=6.9 cm. (Pl. 5 b)

Description: Isis is portrayed in the hypostasis *lactans* with her son Horuz. The head of the goddess is missing. It seems that the artifact is a handle of *lucerna* representing Isis staying and suckling Horuz both surrounded by Egyptian made stalks. When it was discovered it already had an inventory number (290) which shades a great amount of doubt regarding the belonging of this artifact to the repertoire of *Porolissum* and of the testimony of the owner, A. Hetco due to which it was found at *Porolissum* and making the unworthy. As the authors show in the original publication of this artifact it seems that we deal with an import coming from Alexandria.

Place of discovery: unknown.

Place of custody: private collection.

Dating: second-third century A. D.

Bibliography: Culcer-Winkler 1970, p. 547, Pl. 35, Matei 1982, p. 79, Pl. IX, Gudea 1989, 512-513, pl. CVIII, no. 2-3.

Abbreviations

AMN	– <i>Acta Musei Napocensis</i> , Cluj-Napoca
AMP	– <i>Acta Musei Porolissensis</i> , Zalău, 1977-
ANRW	– <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms in Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> (ed. H. Temporini și W. Haase), Berlin-New York, 1970-
Apulum	– <i>Acta Mysei Apulensis</i> , București, 1942-
EDR	– <i>Ephemeris Daco-Romana. Annuario della Scuola Romana di Roma</i> , Rome, 1923-
EPRO	– <i>Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain</i> , serie editată de M. J. Vermaseren. 113 vol., Leiden, 1961-1990
RGRW	– <i>Religions in the Greco-Roman World</i> , editat de H.S. Versnel, R. Van den Broek et al., numărate de la ultima serie <i>EPRO</i> 114 (1992), Leiden, 1992-
RGVV	– <i>Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten</i> , 1 (1903) - 27(1939); 28 (1969) Berlin
RICIS	– L. Bricault, <i>Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques (RICIS)</i> , Paris, 2005

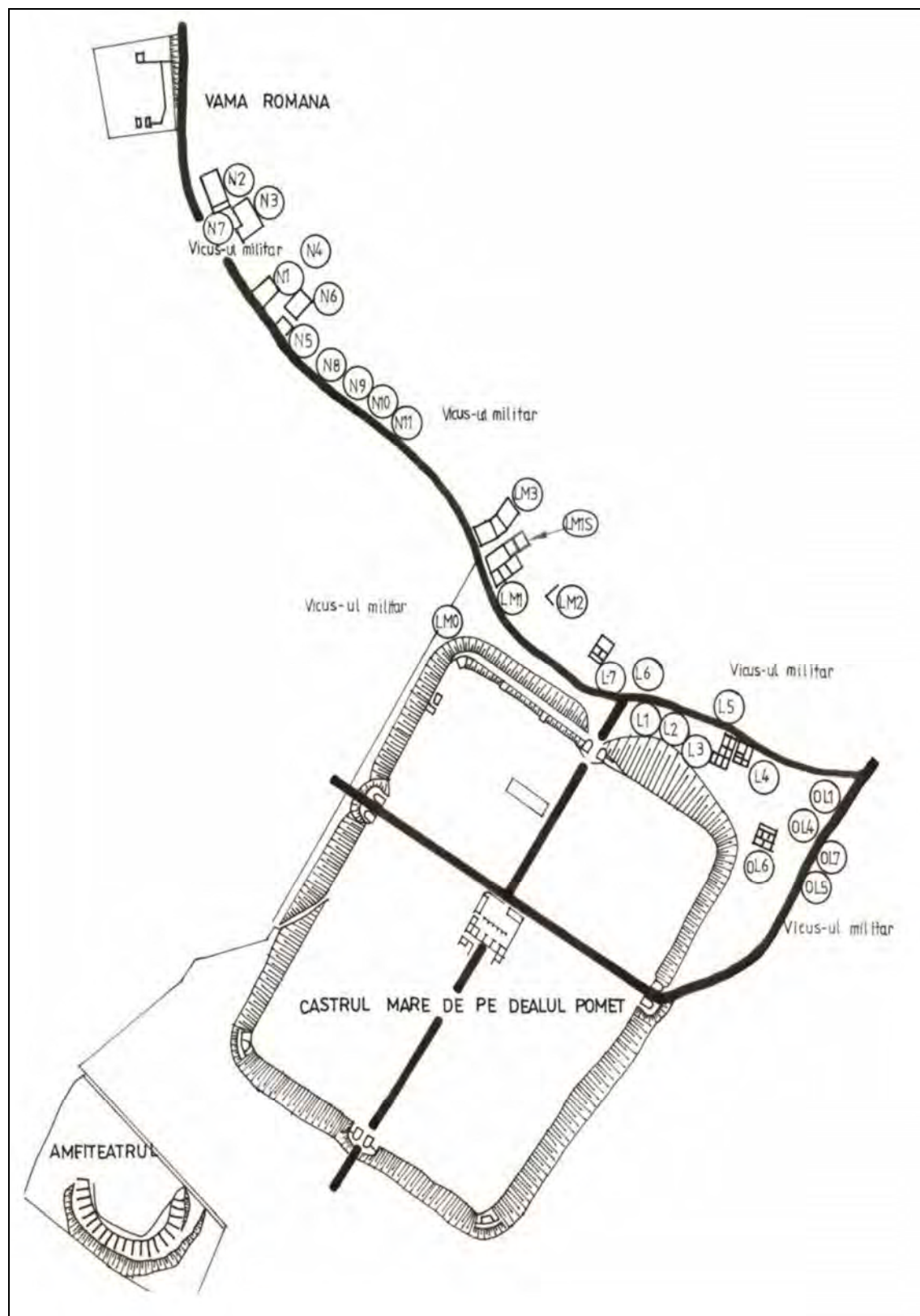
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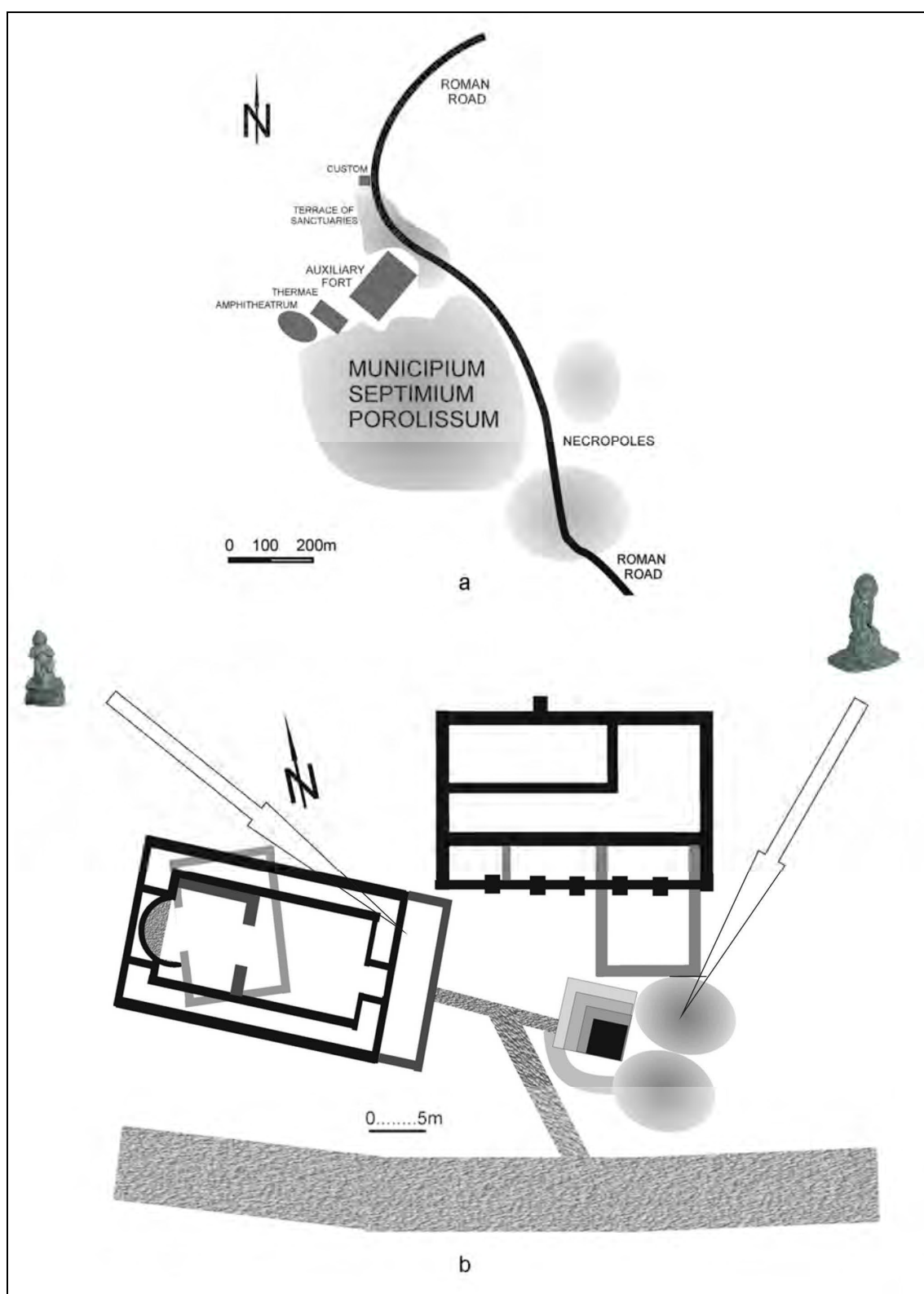
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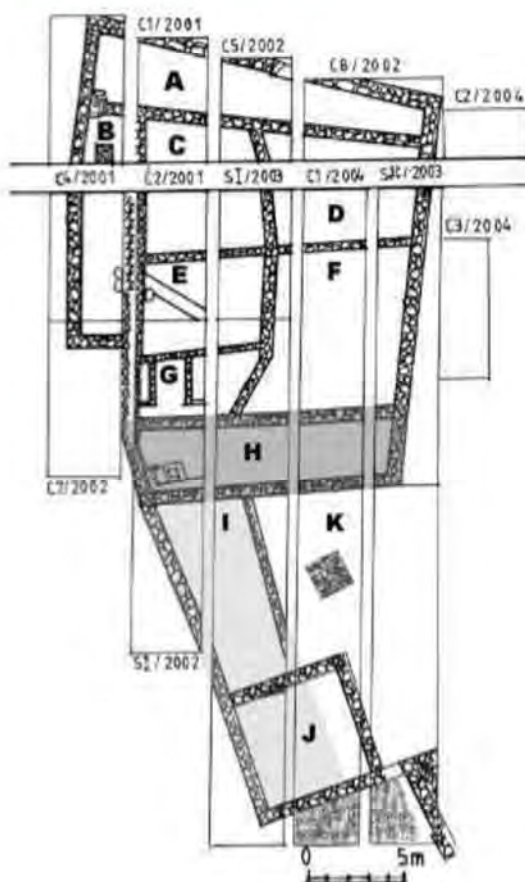
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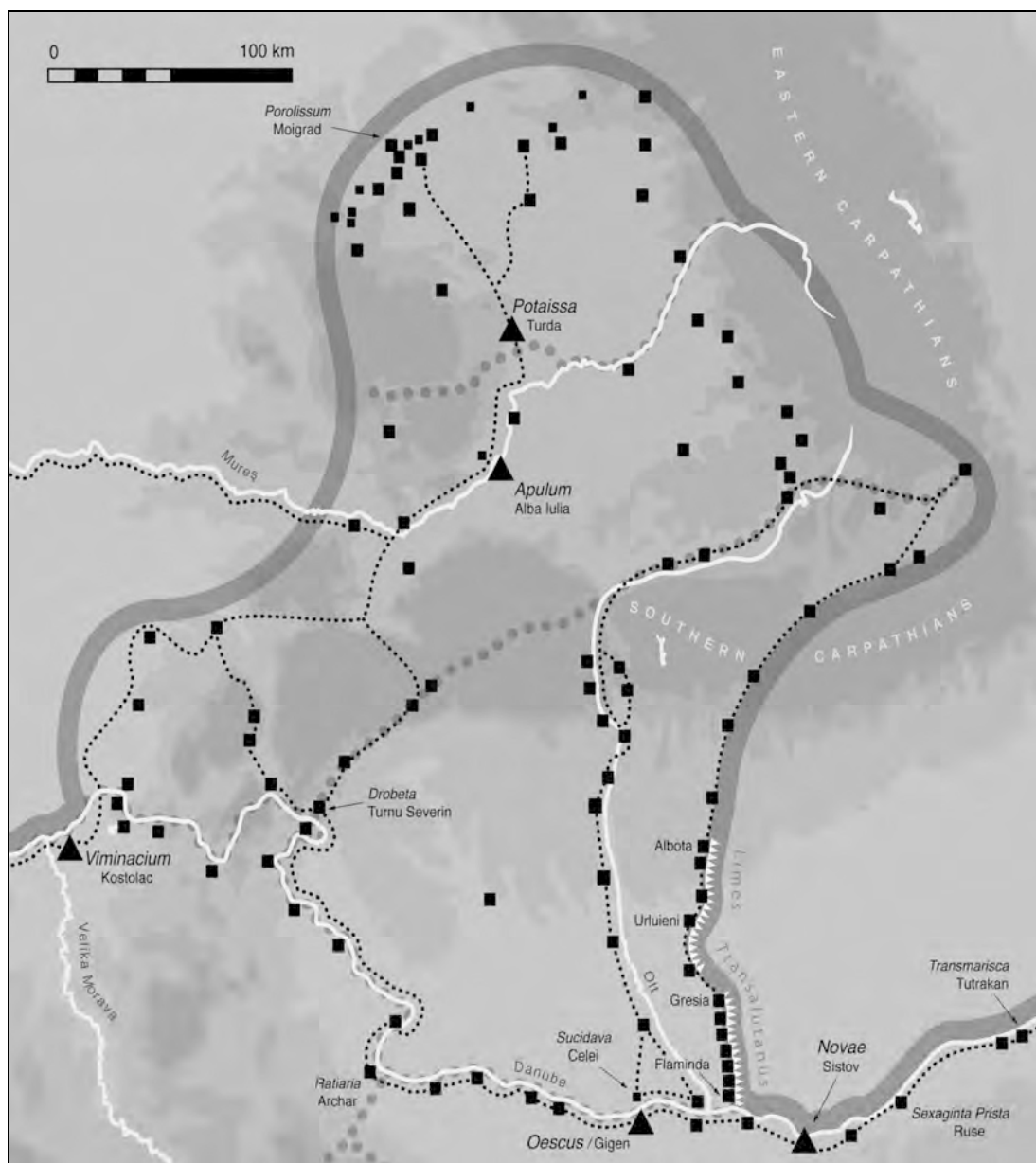
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Divinități egiptene romanizate la *Porolissum*

Rezumat

Numărul redus al descoperirilor de la *Porolissum* care trădează o oarecare influență egipteană în zona amintită mai sus sunt foarte rare, mai precis este vorba de trei statuete de bronz, o camee și o posibilă lucernă. Din cauza faptului că aceste artefacte au fost găsite în contexte arheologice clare (un lucru destul de rar în provincia *Dacia Porolissensis*) dar și datorită noilor reinterpretări ale unor reprezentări care erau considerate a fi în strânsă legătură cu civilizația de pe malurile Nilului, scopul acestui studio este de a crea o imagine nouă asupra modului în care aceste elemente cu influență egipteană ajung să fie distribuite chiar și în zone atât de îndepărtate cum este așezarea de la *Porolissum*.

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