

# Reviews

## ABOUT THE CEMETERIES OF APULUM, WITH SPECIAL REGARD TO THAT NORTHERN. READING NOTES (X)

George Valentin Bounegru, *The Northern Necropolis of Apulum. "Ambulance Station" 1981-1985*, Mega Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2017,

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The urban centre of *Apulum*<sup>1</sup> played a significant role in the history of the province of *Dacia*, while its research has unquestionably nuanced available information regarding the reconstruction of various fields of the economic, social, military life, etc., either through the results of the (more) recent investigations, or, as we shall see below, the enhanced use of certain "earlier" research, mentioned here and there in "excavation reports", yet without being published systematically, as they most definitely required and deserved, obviously with the exception of some classes of artifacts<sup>2</sup>. A place no less distinct amongst is held by funerary finds<sup>3</sup>, distributed within the two large cemeteries known as early as the second half of the last century: cemetery I from site *Dealul Furcilor-Podei*<sup>4</sup> developed for *Municipium Aurelia Apulensis* (the largest cemetery identified in the province of *Dacia*) and cemetery II, marked between the sites at *Stația de Salvare*<sup>5</sup> / *Stadion*<sup>6</sup> / *Profi*<sup>7</sup> / *OMV*<sup>8</sup>, evolving for the *canabae* and the Roman fortress, and later for *Municipium Septimium Apulensis*, respectively a few isolate finds – funerary monuments in the riverbed of the Mureș and in the south-eastern sector of *Colonia Aurelia Apulensis*<sup>9</sup>.

In this state, the Roman (funerary) archaeological literature was enriched last year by the issue of a first volume dedicated to the northern cemetery of *Apulum*, drafted by fellow townsman George Valentin Bounegru, who has definitively joined the scholars performing their activities in the prestigious National Museum of the Union based in Alba Iulia – and the

<sup>1</sup> DIACONESCU/PISO 1993, 67-82.

<sup>2</sup> The exception is represented by coins finds (more recently, GĂZDAC/SUCIU/ALFÖLDY-GĂZDAC 2009, *passim*; INEL 2011, 465-474; OARGĂ/BOLOG 2013, 207-240.), sculptural elements (BĂLUȚĂ 1974, 117-133; BERCIU/BĂLUȚĂ 1974, 583-587; MOGA 1974, 591-599; BĂLUȚĂ 1989, 251-268, but also PISO 2001, *passim*), lamps (BĂLUȚĂ 1965, 277-297; BĂLUȚĂ 2003, *passim*), brooches (MOGA/CIUGUDEAN/COCIȘ/RODEANU 1997, 535-558; COCIȘ/CIUGUDEAN/DELEANU 2004, 279-286), "bulla"-type pendants (BOLOG/BOUNEGRU 2012, 225-231; BOUNEGRU/BOLOG 2011, 135-145), earrings (HAMAT/BOUNEGRU 2016, 135-155), pieces of military equipment (INEL 2011b, *passim*).

<sup>3</sup> A general view in BOUNEGRU 2011, 135-145.

<sup>4</sup> bMACREA/PROTASE 1959, 433-452; PROTASE 1960, 397-405; PROTASE 1961, 407-410; PROTASE 1974, 134-159; CIOBANU 2004, 25-26; GLIGOR/MAZĂRE/BREAZU 2005, 251-261; OȚA 2009, 23-47; MOGA/OȚA/BOUNEGRU 2007, 34-35; MOGA/BOUNEGRU/LASCU/GHEORGHIU/FRUNZĂ 2008, 29-31; GLIGOR/BOGDAN/MAZĂRE/LIPOT/BALTEȘ 2010, 117-139.

<sup>5</sup> BLĂJAN/POPA 1983, 375-381.

<sup>6</sup> INEL *et alii* 2002, 142-146.

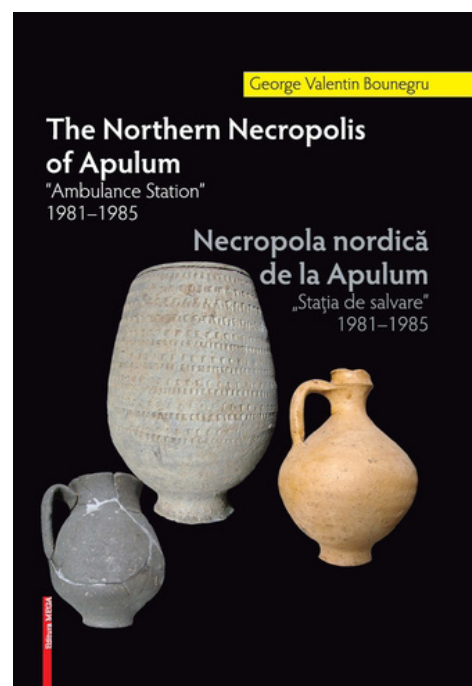
<sup>7</sup> DRAGOTĂ *et alii* 2003, 30-41.

<sup>8</sup> INEL *et alii* 2002a, 35-35.

<sup>9</sup> DRĂMBĂREAN 1999, 241-249.

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book we shall reference hereinafter surely supports such statement, being part of the researcher's doctoral thesis. It must be argued from the very beginning – and the author mentions this whenever the opportunity presents itself – that the members of the excavation teams made it possible for him to use their research results, conceding their scientific rights for the discovered materials; even more, Dumitru Protase, the one to initiate the archaeological excavations in the funerary sites related to ancient *Apulum* (1957)<sup>10</sup>, has dignified him with preserving site documentations, the faith of the Bistrița Năsăud-based academician being justified and thus rewarded also by the editorial endeavour presented here.

The book, published in excellent graphic conditions (in fact complying with quality standards with which the Mega Publishing House has accustomed its readers), partially decodes its content from the first cover: the results of the archaeological investigations conducted in the northern cemetery of *Apulum*, site “Stația de Salvare”, namely the 1981-1985 campaigns. The author's choice (of the translator's? or editor's?) to insert the Romanian version of the title on the cover somewhat misguides the reader, convinced at this point, that the book is a bilingual version, English-Romanian. This might have been the original intent, at least this explains the term “cuprins” (p. 5), which was not translated, or, possibly, the Romanian version of the title alludes to the generous abstract from the final pages. Evidently, regardless the intent, it does not impair at all, as we shall see, the quality of the historiographic act. Still without repercussions on the “final product” is the inconsistency in using the terms “necropolis” respectively “cemetery” (in definitive synonymous) or the translation (or not) of the site's location, namely “Ambulance Station” versus “Stația de Salvare”, most likely due to the choice of each of the translators: Gabriela Balica and Valentin Cedică.

Noteworthy within this context is also the fact that the author joins under the mentioned toponym the finds yielded by the same “northern” cemetery, yet which in the course of the investigations and/or publications has been awarded in the historiography on the matter other names, owed to certain contemporary neighbouring sites („Spitalul veterinar”, „Stadion”, „Canton CFR”, „OMV” etc.). Possibly, the cardinal landmark generally related to the archaeological site of *Apulum* or especially the fortress of *XIII Gemina* would have been sufficient enough to differentiate it from the other large cemetery (*Dealul Furcilor-Podei*), identified westward the mentioned sites.

The volume is divided according to the “classical”, scholarly standards. A short *Foreword* (pp. 7-8), owed to the distinguished Professor emeritus Doina Benea – coordinator of the doctoral thesis, is followed by an *Argument* (pp. 9-10) in which the author, inspired in his approach by the words of Adalbert Cserni (who remained in the memory of the posterity, among other, as the first archaeologist to discover and research a palace of a Roman governor – in this case, the governor of the three provinces of Dacia in *Apulum*) makes his intentions known and thanks those who, in one way or another, supported his efforts.

The proper approach is anticipated by a few

“introductory notes” grouped in four chapters, as follows: “I. *Funerary Rites and Rituals in the Roman World*” (pp. 11-15), “II. *Apulum. Geographical Setting*” (pp. 17-18), “III. *Early Beginnings of urban life at Apulum*” (pp. 19-25), “IV. *History of Research in the northern Cemetery*” (pp. 27-31). In the latter, we wish to underline, early at this point, on one hand, the association within the chapter of all archaeologists, involved, in the course of time, in revealing the remains of the northern cemetery from *Apulum* (Gheorghe Anghel, Ioan Alexandru Aldea, Cloșca L. Băluță, Radu Ciobanu, Horia Ciugudean, Vasile Moga, Alexandru Popa, Ioan Șerban) and, on the other, the dissociation of research results in two subchapters: “IV.1. *The 1981-1985 excavation results*” respectively “IV.2. *Recent research in the northern cemetery*”. Even though the insertion there of a brief excursus concerning the results of the research past the chronological timeframe mentioned in the title might seem eccentric to the approach, we believe that in fact, it completes it in a most fortunate manner, providing an overall view on the topic, already delimiting, for instance, the cemetery's boundaries, the current state of research etc. yet, what we believe is most important, – and which was also the intent –, the integration of the archaeological campaigns of 1981-1985 in the general context. This type of approach is not isolate, as the reader would delightedly find throughout the work, references to *post* or *ante* 1981-1985 instances being numerous, while parallels, when considering the discovered artifacts, firstly reference, the funerary milieu of *Apulum*.

There follow three chapters which are the proper object of the historiographic approach, namely “V. *Funerary rites*” (pp. 33-38), “VI. *Grave goods*” (pp. 39-84), “Monuments” (pp. 85-88). The author processes the information provided by the 161 Roman graves identified during the campaigns of 1981-1985. Amongst, 89 (= 56%) are cremations and 72 (= 44%) inhumations. Nonetheless, although this is apparently a generous sample, compared to the known sizes of the cemetery (at the time when the work was drafted, 1035 funerary features were known) it remains modest, which is one of determining reasons why the academic who presents the volume appreciates the published graves as “the beginning of study on *Apulum*”, and the author to already announce his intent to make full use in the future of also the results of the 1979-1980 research. Past the presentation of the two great funerary rites with their commonly known variations<sup>11</sup> and a potential statistical approach, whose interpreting would prove highly important in the conclusive chapter, the most expected are the “goods” part of grave furnishings, therefore grouped in the most extended chapter and evidently, the most interesting. We are thus dealing, successively, with Coins, Food offerings, Pottery (divided in the class of pots for pouring liquids, “semi-liquids” and “solid” food, respectively ritual vessels; it is noteworthy that the large number of artifacts – obviously, the most numerous elements of the grave goods –, imposed here the insertion of their own conclusive sub-chapter: “*Conclusions on pottery grave goods*”), Lamps, Terracotta figurines, Jewellery and dress accessories (hairpins, brooches, beads, pendants, amulets, bracelets, rings, earrings), Military equipment pieces, Metal pieces (keys, knives), Glass objects (the few

<sup>10</sup> PROTASE 1959, 397-407.

<sup>11</sup> See to this effect the contribution of INEL too 2011a, 145-160.

specimens identified is rather surprising, respectively the typological scarcity; in fact, these are only recipients of type *unguentarium* and *guttus*). As regards the last subchapter, related to the monuments, it evidently refers to the sarcophagi, respectively the sculptural elements. The first class is represented by a single *sarcophagum* identified during the campaigns discussed in the book, yet the fragments reported within medieval graves suggest they were slightly more numerous, however unfortunately destroyed<sup>12</sup>. Possibly ironically, from *Apulum* comes the single inscription that mentions such a monument (*IDR*, III, 5/2, 596), thus immortalizing T. Varenius Sabinianus's sarcophagus, who, held, among other offices, that of *decurio* of *colonia Apulum*; in fact, still to remain within this frame, we mention that such a special funerary set up had considerably supplemented information in the field<sup>13</sup>. As general note for this chapter we would note the fact that the author succeeds to avoid the trap to take on a typology for each class of more numerous pieces, remaining reserved in this regard and contending himself to mention certain parallels, as noted above, chiefly from the funerary environment of *Apulum*, and not only. Nevertheless, the few paragraphs that "sketch" most part of piece classes, introduce the less familiar reader to the "Roman funerary world". In addition, past any technical nuances that may be extracted based on the analysis of these complex grave goods – which, despite the restricted image provided by the few campaigns of archaeological excavations presented here –, we note its variety and richness, which mirrors as eloquently as possible the life standard pulsating at *Apulum*, reality which allured individuals from "ex toto orbe Romano", like the case of veteran *Bonio*, recorded by a military diploma issued in AD 99<sup>14</sup>.

Naturally, lastly follow the inherent "VIII. Conclusions regarding the funerary rites and rituals in the northern cemetery at *Apulum*" (pp. 89-97). The entire framework of the work is judiciously supported by four appendixes: "Appendix 1. Catalogue of graves" (pp. 99-121), "Appendix 2. Late Roman Artifacts found in the stratum or in late contexts" (pp. 123-125), "Appendix 3. Catalogue of the Monuments found in the 1981-1985 campaigns" (pp. 127-129), "Appendix 4. Identified coins" (pp. 131-132).

The critical apparatus is cleared in *Abbreviations* (pp. 133-134) and *Bibliography* (pp. 135-145), followed by *Index* (pp. 147-151) and *Abstract* (pp. 153-157), further expression of the excursus seriousness. Lastly, the descriptive part is doubled by the *Explanation of plates* (p. 159) and *Plates* (pp. 163-207), the latter, leaving aside the "old age photos" – although themselves "legible", are of best quality, documenting both features and pieces.

Summing up all the above, which we hope are exclusively arguments for reading the book, we believe that by the editorial issue presented here, the scientific community has won not only a "working tool" – to use only a generalised phrase in our historiography, but also an important and serious starting point for future research directions of the

Roman funerary archaeology<sup>15</sup> and, last but not least, further publishing of the archaeological resources of *Apulum*. The few noted imperfections (possibly other too), inherent to such work load, do not eclipse by any means preceding statements. Even more, the graphic quality, exemplary publishing methodology of the features accompanied by complete description and suggestive related illustration, the general-European linguistic support, already impose a quality standard for future volumes, which we are certain – the path being opened by the presented contribution – they would not retard in using historiographically an ensemble of exceptional archaeological sites, at least for the area of the province of *Dacia*.

Appreciating also the somewhat reparatory avatars of this editorial issue which we interpret as successful from all points, we can only congratulate the author (but also all involved, in one way or another, in this approach), wishing him to continue in the same working manner towards a possible and expected synthesis on the second cemetery of *Apulum*.

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- <sup>12</sup> For a general view of this type of find from *Apulum* see OȚA 2008, 209-918; for other "monuments" emerged in the cemetery area see BLĂJAN/PISO 1990, 227-239.
- <sup>13</sup> BERCIU/WOLSKI 1971, 375-433; BERCIU/WOLSKI 1971a, 919-965.
- <sup>14</sup> RUSSU 1974, 103-110.
- <sup>15</sup> The importance of this approach is even greater as it "unlocks" information "frozen" for more than three decades. See OȚA 2008, 209: "as regards the Roman graves discovered at the «Ambulance Station» site, there are poor chances they would ever be published", view also expressed based on the fact that of the 149 graves reported in this cemetery area until 2008 there had been published ... one! See CIUGUDEAN/CIUGDEAN 2000, 341-345; CIUGUDEAN/CIUGDEAN 2000a, 203-217.



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