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Petru Ureche

SHRINES OF THE *DOMUS* IN THE QUARTER OF ST. THEODORE IN PULA

Abstract: In the quarter of St. Theodore in Pula, next to the public *thermae* and Hercules' sanctuary, in 2005, most part of the luxurious *domus* was excavated. The *domus* was inhabited from the third quarter of the 1st century BC to the 5th century AD, with one major restoration after the fire in the beginning of the 2nd century AD. Architectonic cult indicators are a threshold mosaic with Dionysian motifs of kantharos and wine, niches in the walls and elements of marble architectural decoration of cult spaces, a capital and an architrave. A total of six niches were discovered, one with a white and black mosaic depicting a shell, an altar and containing a dedication to the goddess of Salus. Small finds are represented by various objects used in rituals or objects symbolizing the divine presence. Fragments of the censer with letter-shaped openings, fragments of a large calcite alabaster crater, a clay vessel fragment with a theatrical mask in relief, clay lamps with figures of Minerva and Medusa were found in the *triclinium*. The finds of Corinthian drinking cups decorated with Dionysian scenes come from other rooms, and from the drainage channel comes a bronze medallion with the Medusa head probably belonging to a carriage. The findings from the *domus* confirm the presence of cults in every aspect of everyday life. A peculiar niche dedicated to Salus is associated with the neighbouring public *thermae* and the sanctuary of Hercules built at the sacred spring.

Keywords: *Dionysius, domus shrine, niche, Pula, Salus.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

A luxurious *domus* in the quarter of St. Theodore in Pula (*Pola*) was built in the third quarter of the 1st century BC, at the same time as the public *thermae* and the sanctuary of Hercules in the same quarter¹ (Fig. 1). The *domus* was completely renovated after a fire in the early 2nd century AD and continuously inhabited until the 5th century AD.² The excavated part occupies 600 square meters, classifying it among large or very large houses.³ Two types of archaeological finds indicate cult activities within the *domus*: architectural and small finds. Architectural indicators are specially designed elements or places of cult purpose incorporated into the walls or floors, while small finds are represented by objects used in sacral rituals or objects symbolizing the divine presence.

¹ STARAC 2009, 273.

² STARAC 2009, 288.

³ FOSS 1997, 209; BRANDT 2010, 68.

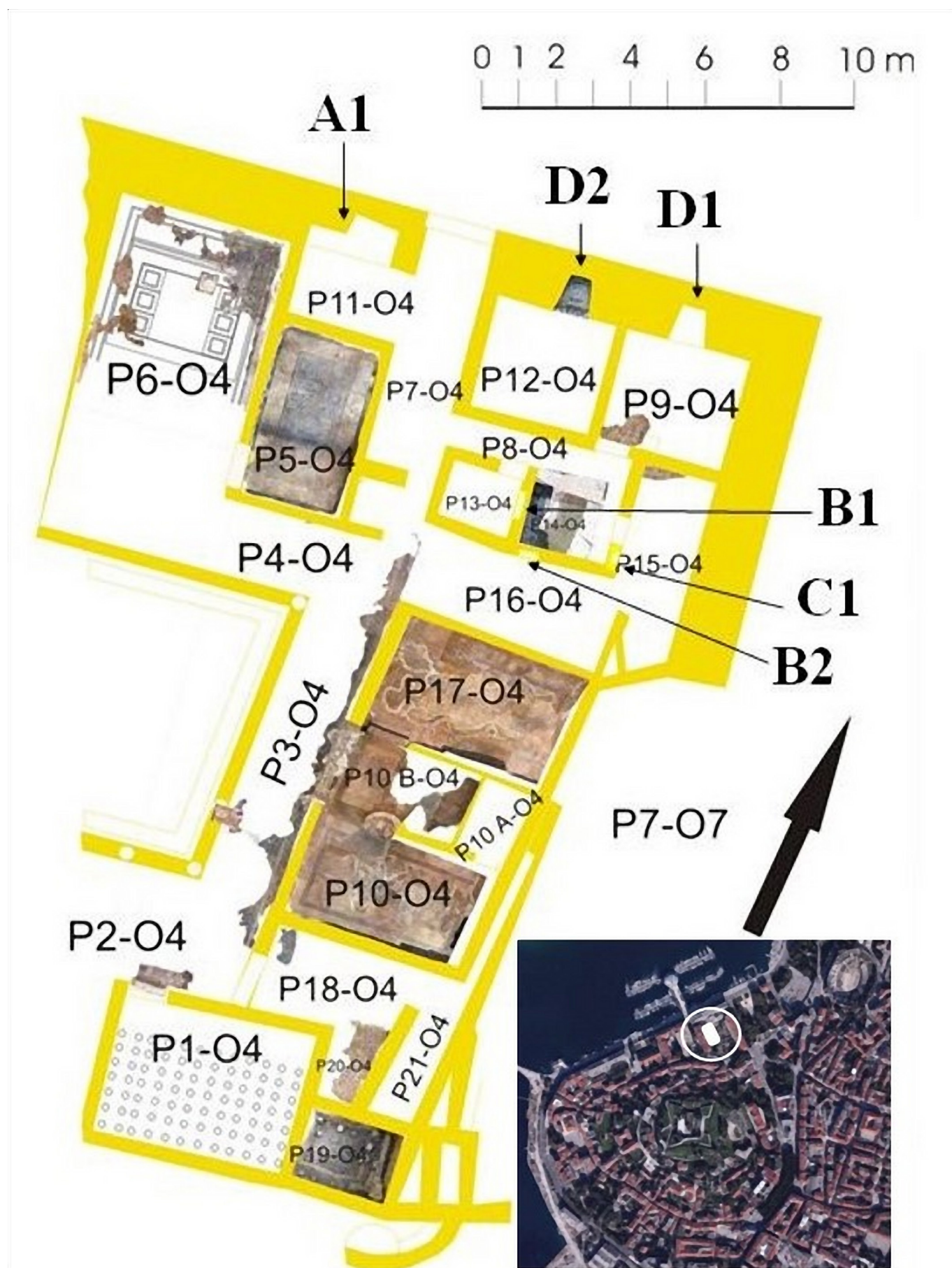


Fig. 1. Niches in the domus in the quarter of St. Theodore, Pula (©Google maps. Elaborated by: A. Starac).

II. ARCHITECTURAL TESTIMONIES OF THE CULT

II.1.1. NICHES

The walls of the *domus* are preserved on average a meter above the floor, and six niches of various sizes and shapes are partially preserved.⁴ Niches can be divided into four groups, depending on the shape:

- A. Two-part niche reaching the floor
- B. Rectangular niches
- C. Semicircular vaulted niche
- D. Trapezoidal niches.

All niches were made during the construction of the *domus* immediately after the foundation of the Roman colony of Pola in BC 46-45, except for niche B1 in the auxiliary kitchen, created during the renovation. The niche B1 is the only one that possibly had no cultic but utilitarian purpose for storing groceries and vessels, according to the numerous pottery finds in the room. Semicircular vaulted niche C1 is the only one preserved in full height, but the plaster in the interior is not preserved. Two better preserved niches, A1 and D2, show traces of a wooden door for closing. No movable finds such as figurines or lamps were found in any of niches. The archaeological context provides exact informations on the cult character only for the niche D2 with a mosaic inscription dedicated to the goddess of health Salus. All niches are located in a group of adjacent rooms in the northeastern part of the *domus* near the entrance. Except for a niche A1 in the vestibule, all niches are placed within the rooms lined up around a small inner courtyard P14-O4 with a square rainwater collection basin (*impluvium*). The purpose of these rooms is related to practical, unrepresentative daily activities performed by family slaves, such as cooking, washing, storing and storing groceries.

A large rectangular two-part niche A1 in the entrance hall P11-O4 (*vestibulum*) is the only one reaching the floor (Fig. 2). The niche 282 cm wide, preserved in the height of 140 cm, is placed in the north front wall of the house 200 cm thick. The niche consists of two vertical sections, the shallower rectangular west section, and the deeper, trapezoidal east section. The rectangular part of the niche is 110 cm wide, 70 cm long. The trapezoidal part is 150 cm wide in the rear and 163 cm in the front, 140 cm long. The niche, plastered with two white layers, occupies 2.86 square meters. The first, older white layer on the eastern wall bears a horizontal red line 3 cm wide 42-45 cm above the floor, and below it a vertical red line 2 cm wide. Red lines divide the eastern wall into three white fields. It is not known whether the red lines were repeated on a second white layer, severely damaged. A vertical groove 3 cm wide for closing the niche with a sliding door goes along the entire preserved height of the first plaster layer on the west wall of the niche. The groove is located exactly in the front plane of the wall containing the niche. On the opposite side of the niche the plaster is damaged, but there seems to be no room for a vertical groove. The niche was closed after the demolition of the *domus* in the 5th century AD by the wall containing

among other wedge-shaped elements of masonry peristyle columns.

The rectangular, white painted niche B1, 90 cm wide and 20 cm long, is placed in the room P13-O4, bottom 63 cm above the floor (Fig. 3). The niche is preserved in the lower part, 56 cm high. A thick layer of burning and organic waste with pottery indicate that the room P13-O4 was used as an auxiliary kitchen. The niche was created during the renovation of the *domus*, in the early 2nd century AD or later in the early imperial period. In the first construction phase, the east wall of the room was open by a window towards a small inner courtyard with the *impluvium* P14-O4. During the renovation, the window was outside walled up to half the length, so that a niche was left inside the room P13-O4.

The rectangular, white painted niche B2 66 cm wide and 29 cm long is placed in the warehouse and kitchen room P16-O4, bottom 85 cm above the floor (Fig. 4). It is preserved in the lower part, 18 cm high. The niche was closed by a wall in the Late Antiquity.

Semi-circular vaulted niche C1 45 cm high, 40 cm wide and 25 cm long, is located in the kitchen P15-O4, next to the door toward a small inner courtyard P14-O4 (Fig. 5). The bottom of the niche is only 30 cm above the floor. Only the remains of white plaster are preserved inside the niche, without traces of painting. In the northern part of the white painted kitchen P15-O4 was a basin or water tank with a spout into the drainage channel, in the southern part a fireplace with pots.

Trapezoidal niche D1 in the toilet P9-O4 (*latrina*), bottom 109 cm above the floor, is preserved only in the lower part 83 cm high (Fig. 6). The front width is 121 cm, back width 73 cm, length 122 cm. White plaster is preserved only partially on the side walls, the bottom surface is not preserved. The room is simply white painted in two phases, the floor is tiled in the *opus spicatum* technique. The lower part of the east and north walls was left intentionally unplastered in a height of 80 cm above the floor, indicating the existence of a toilet bench along the east wall and above the drainage channel. The elevated stone threshold has no door slots, meaning the room has never been closed by a door. The niche was closed by the wall after the demolition of the *domus* in the 5th century AD.

A trapezoidal white painted niche D2, with mosaic on the bottom 97 cm above the floor, is placed in the room P12-O4⁵ (Fig. 7). It is preserved in the lower part 69 cm high, the front width is 120 cm, rear width 70 cm, length 128 cm. In the first construction stage, the room was painted white with red lines in the corners and around the niche. In the second stage, the room was decorated by frescoes with black panels in the lower part, and red panels with vegetable motifs in the middle field. A vertical groove in the plaster on each side in front indicates the niche was closed by a wooden door. The trapezoidal bottom is decorated with a mosaic of black and white cubes side 0.8 cm. The mosaic is bordered by a narrow black border. A rear frame with alternating black and white rectangular fields and crosses contains in the middle a black altar. The spacious central white field brings a

⁴ STARAC 2009, 277, fig. 6.

⁵ STARAC 2009, 273-288, figs. 6, 8.

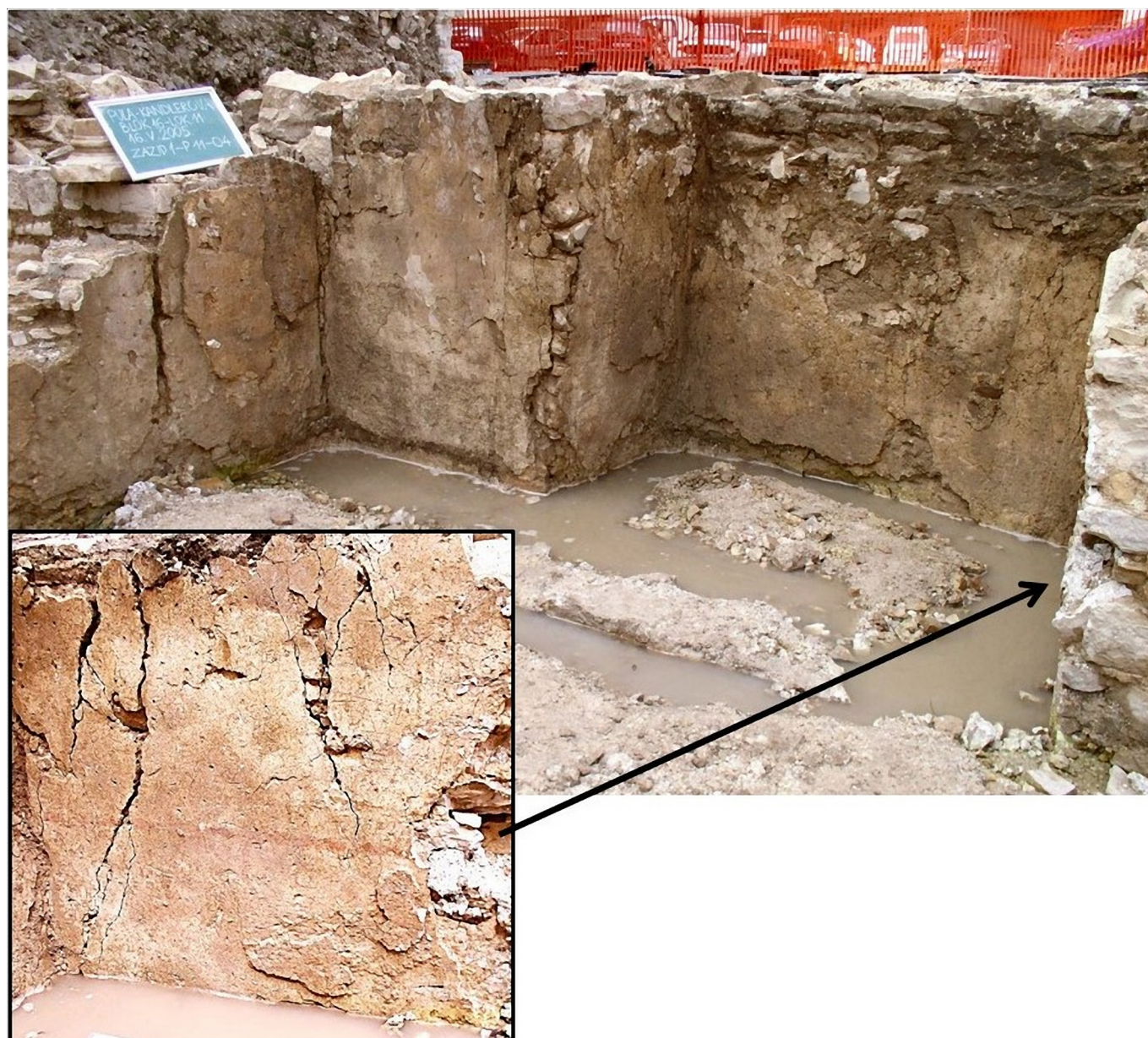


Fig. 2. Niche A1 (Author: A. Starac).

black linear representation of a shell, or a shell-shaped vase. In the rear below the altar there is the inscription: *Salus*, in a rectangular frame decorated inside with a triangular motif, with trapezoidal side handles (*tabula ansata*). The ribbons are placed to the left and right of the inscription frame, and two rows of crosses are below. The damaged inscription: *[P?.....C]R*, possibly the consecration *[sac]r(um)* is beneath the shell. Nearly twenty droplet traces formed by dripping rust from iron nails are scattered in the upper half of the mosaic. The mosaic was made during the construction of the house, in the third quarter of the 1st century BC. It remained undamaged until the 5th century AD, and later was walled up together with other openings in the same wall.

II.1.2. LARARIA AND SACRARIA

The term *lararium* denotes a cult room, aedicule, niche, group of figurines or frescoes of religious content in private houses, workshops and shops. In written sources,

this expression appears in the 3rd century AD. In earlier centuries, expressions used in the description of the shrines of Lares, Penates, and the Genius of the father of the family were *Lares*, *aedicula Larum*, *sacellum* or *delubra Larum*.⁶ The term *sacraria* was used for other home cult places, like a niche dedicated to *Salus*. The *lararium* was usually in the shape of a small temple with a gable and columns, and could be masonry, made of stone or bronze. There were also wooden *lararia* or cabinets used as *lararia* and for storing sacrificial vessels.⁷ *Lararia* could be painted with figural ritual scenes and religious symbols. Bronze, marble, or clay figurines of deities, sacrificers and small altars were placed inside. The figurines of other deities beside *Lares* and *Genius* could be placed in the *lararium*, not only from the Greco-Roman pantheon.⁸

⁶ BASSANI 2003a, 154; BASSANI 2003b, 402-403.

⁷ PESANDO 2011, 21.

⁸ BOYCE 1937, 64, no. 264B, VII 3, 11.



Fig. 3. Niche B1 (Author: A. Starac)



Fig. 4. Niche B2 (Author: A. Starac).



Fig. 5. Niche C1 (Author: A. Starac).

In the absence of inscription and figurative contents in most niches, we must rely on better preserved finds from other localities in attempts to interpret their purpose. Cult niches in Roman private houses in northern Italy are preserved only in a small number.⁹ The best documented home shrines in Pompeii and Herculaneum show that the wall niche was the most common choice, most often semi-circular and then rectangular in shape. In Herculaneum, a semi-circular vaulted and simply white painted niche similar to the niche C1 convincingly prevails.¹⁰ Semi-circular vaulted niches are the most common choice also in workshops and shops in Pompeii.¹¹ A *lararium* could be found first in the kitchen, then in the atrium, peristyle, home garden, near the front door, vestibule, and usually was equipped with a wooden cabinet or chest for storage of ritual vessels and utensils.¹² Since Lares were originally the guardian gods of the hearth, the logical and most frequently chosen place for the *lararium* was the kitchen, but other deities were also

worshiped in the kitchen.¹³ Lares were the guardians of hearth and custodians of the place, household, whole family, all the family fortune and property.¹⁴ To some extent, Lares also had the dimension of heroic ancestors.¹⁵ The atrium was the main place for the sanctuary of the Genius of the father of the family and Lares as the *protectores* of the house together with the Penates.¹⁶ The wealthier houses like the *domus* in the district of St. Theodore in Pula had multiple *lararia*, some of which placed in the modest rooms of the slave compartment, allowing access to the sanctuary for each family member at any time.¹⁷

Simple white colour in niches A1, B2, C1 and D2 is equally suitable for a functional niche used as a cabinet and for a *lararium*. Red colour appears in niches A1 and D2. Similar, white-plastered niches with a red strip outside were recorded in Pompeii, although relatively rare.¹⁸ The

⁹ BASSANI 2011, 110; 2012, 121, Brescia. BASSANI 2011, 113, fig. 10; 2012, 128, Luni.

¹⁰ MARCHETTI 2016, 411.

¹¹ SANTORO/MASTROBATTISTA/PETIT 2011, 187, fig. 3.

¹² FOSS 1997, 202; DE CAROLIS 2007, 246, T. XXVIII; GIACOBELLO 2008, 64; BRANDT 2010, 69, T. 1; VAN ANDRINGA 2011, 91; GHEDINI 2012, 280, 282, fig. 189, Ariminum 9; FUCHS 2016, 99, 104-106, figs. 12-13, 15-16.

¹³ GIACOBELLO 2008, 64; VAN ANDRINGA 2011, 91-93; MARCHETTI 2016, 413-414.

¹⁴ GIACOBELLO 2008, 38, 41; FLOWER 2017, 33-34, 46-52.

¹⁵ TORELLI 2011, 42; FLOWER 2017, 8.

¹⁶ DUBOURDIEU 1989, 65-75; VAN ANDRINGA 2011, 93.

¹⁷ FOSS 1997, 216; GIACOBELLO 2008, 60; BRANDT 2010, 61, 65; VAN ANDRINGA 2011, 92-96; MARCHETTI 2016, 413; FLOWER 2017, 4.

¹⁸ BOYCE 1937, 26, no. 41B, I 7, 11; 26, no. 43, I 7, 19; 27, no. 47, I 10, 3; 34, nos. 86-87, V 2, 4; 36, no. 106, V 2 h; GIACOBELLO 2008, 232, I 8, 17; TRENTIN 2014, 307, fig. 3.52, I 17, 4.



Fig. 6. Niche D1 (Author: A. Starac).

red in Roman symbolism represented supreme power and happiness, signified the clothes of the upper classes and the clothes of children protecting them from misfortune, it belonged to Jupiter and to the triumphator.¹⁹

Rituals were performed in front of the *lararium* at every event important for the family, such as the birth, the first wearing of a man's toga, the wedding, going on a trip and returning, death and anniversaries.²⁰ The Genius of the father of the family represented basically the ability of the father of the family to produce offspring and prolong the lineage, and he was offered a sacrifice of wine pours.²¹ A cup of salt (*salinum*), usually made of silver, was offered to the Penates for the protection of food from spoilage.²² Other obligatory utensils in religious house rituals were the jug (*urceus*) and *patera* for offering a sacrifice, a vessel for storing an aromatic mixture burned in the sacrifice (*acerra*) and an incense burner (*turibulum*). Everyone, a Roman citizen or a slave, could individually promise and make a sacrifice to

any deity.²³ Each member of the family had his own Genius, the protector spirit who did not leave him from the moment of his birth until death, which he celebrated in the home sanctuary.²⁴ Prominent Roman citizens kept the ancestor wax mask (*imago*) in the *atrium* on display for clients, friends and future generations.²⁵ The masks could be kept in a cabinet near the *lararium* and exposed during public and private festivities celebrating the Genius of the father of the family and the ancestral spirits.²⁶

Taking into account the known data on *lararia*, we will examine the purpose of the niches of the *domus* in the quarter of St. Theodore. The trapezoidal niches D1 and D2 go beyond the original accommodation and function of the *lararium*. Their special purpose is accentuated by the trapezoidal shape. The niche D2 dedicated to the goddess of health Salus should be observed in the broader urban context, as the *domus* was placed next to the sanctuary of Hercules at the source and next to the public *thermae*. The shell shown on the mosaic is originally associated with Venus born of sea

¹⁹ GALLIAZZO 1979, 81; OVID. *Trist.* IV, 10, 35; IV, 10, 28-29; PLIN. *NH* XXXIII, 7, 29; XXXIII, 36, 111.

²⁰ GIACOBELLO 2008, 43-44; LAFORGE 2009, 127, 153-162; FLOWER 2017, 34, 40-45, 55-58.

²¹ PÉREZ RUIZ 2007-2008, 204-205; FLOWER 2017, 6.

²² DUBOURDIEU 1989, 87; LAFORGE 2009, 128.

²³ LAFORGE 2009, 163-173.

²⁴ CENSOR. 3; LAFORGE 2009, 19.

²⁵ FLOWER 1996, 185-222., 272.; POLLINI 2012, 14-16; FLOWER 2017, 11.

²⁶ LAHUSEN 1985, 282-285; FLOWER 1996, 7-9, 185-222; POLLINI 2012, 25-26.



Fig. 7. Niche D2 (Author: A. Starac).

foam, and sometimes appears in the decoration of private cult niches.²⁷ Traces of iron rust on the Salus mosaic testify to the existence of iron nails, probably placed in the upper part of the niche for hanging oil lamps and flower wreaths. Nail holes suitable for hanging flower wreaths and ribbons around a *lararium* niche were found in several houses in Pompeii.²⁸ The cult of Salus, heiress of the Greek Hygieia, was worshiped throughout the Roman Empire along with the healing god Aesculapius, but also independently near the spring.²⁹ In the turbulent changes of the Roman state during the 1st century BC, the Salus cult changed. The health of the state was equated with the health of the emperor, entering into regular votive practice. Figural depictions and votive inscriptions are characteristic of the house shrines from the Augustus' period onwards.³⁰ So the Salus niche testifies to the beginning of a change in the concept of house shrines.

The trapezoidal niche D1 in shape and size corresponds to a niche D2 and can be attribute to a cult purpose also, despite the fact that it is located in the latrine, a room that does not belong to the standard choice of rooms equipped with a shrine.³¹ Sacraria placed in the latrine appear in Pompeii in Casa degli Epigrammi greci (V 1, 18),³² and in the Suburban Baths (VII 16 a),³³ both depicting Isis-Fortuna. There are in Pompeii several other houses with cult paintings of Isis-Fortuna in the vicinity of latrine, but not just inside it.³⁴ The image of Isis-Fortuna was placed in the toilet because she was regarded as the protectress of health, sanitation and hygiene, like Hygieia/Salus, and her image had to protect from the illness-causing demons.³⁵ Isis-Fortuna is therefore the most likely divinity to whom the niche in the toilet was dedicated.

The trapezoidal shape appears also in the large niche A1 which, due to its size, could serve as a cabinet. Due to the prominent location in the vestibule, we can assume that it contained the main house *lararium* for the worship of the Genius of the father of the family and Lares as protectors of the entrance and the whole house. The front door played a major role in rituals related to the celebration of household holidays, birthdays, weddings, and other events significant to the family.³⁶ The absence of any traces of shelf supports or shelves supports the assumption on the cult character of the niche. The owners of the *domus* in the quarter of St. Theodore are not known, but given the rich equipment, certainly they were members of the highest social class in the colony and there is a theoretical possibility that near the entrance were kept exposed wax masks of deserving fathers of the family.

²⁷ DELIVORRIAS/BERGER-DOER/KOSSATZ-DEISSMANN 1984, II, 1, 4; MARCHETTI 2016, 411, fig. 3-4, *Herculaneum*, Insula Or. II, 9.

²⁸ BOYCE 1937, 55, no. 213, VI 15, 6; 75, no. 349, VIII 2, 39; LAFORGE 2009, 123, IX 13, 1-3.

²⁹ MARWOOD 1988; WINKLER 1995; ŠAŠEL KOS 1999, 109; ROTH-CONGÈS 1997, 190, *Glanum*.

³⁰ HAUG/KREUZ 2021, 30.

³¹ BRANDT 2010, 70, T. 1; MOORMANN 2011, 58.

³² BOYCE 1937, 32, no. 77, reporting the figure as Vesta; BRANDT 2010, 100, no. 83; KAISA KOPONEN 2021, 203, n. 95.

³³ KAISA KOPONEN 2021, 203, n. 95.

³⁴ KAISA KOPONEN 2021, 203, II 4, 2-12; 195-196, figs. 16-17, IX 7, 21-22; 193, figs. 12-13, V 4, 9; 194-195, figs. 14-15, VIII 5, 39.

³⁵ MOORMANN 2011, 58; KAISA KOPONEN 2021, 202-203.

³⁶ MAC MAHON 2003, 68.

The rectangular *lararium* niche that reaches the floor is documented in Pompeii, but as an exception and not a rule.³⁷ In Pompeii, *lararia* and *sacraria* were located in the entrance areas and corridors of only a few houses, and the entrance areas were actually the last choice for their accommodation.³⁸ Except in the masonry *lararium*, a divine image can appear in the entrance area in a fresco representation.³⁹ Besides the Lares, the usual divine gatekeepers were Mercury and Hercules.⁴⁰ Although the entrance to the house was dedicated to Janus, the omniscient deity of the beginning and the end, Janus never appear on the front door and entrance halls. The two-part shape of the niche A1 suggests the complex cult character, dedicated to various divine family protectors.

Semi-circular vaulted niche C1 next to the kitchen hearth is a classic place of the worship of Lares, the guardians of the hearth, who could be joined by the Genius of the father of the family and Penates. Rectangular niche B2 in the kitchen near the fireplace seems like a perfect place for the home shrine of Penates, the divine protectors of food in the pantry (*penus*).⁴¹ The niche B1 made during the renovation possibly had practical storing purpose, but as it was placed in an auxiliary kitchen, it could be dedicated to the Penates also.

II.2.1. OTHER ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CULT

A black and white mosaic threshold with a cantharus and vines is placed at the entrance to the ala P10 B-O4, open towards the east peristyle porch P3-O4 (Fig. 8).⁴² A black cantharus 22 cm high and vines emerging from it are placed on a white background in the black rectangular frame 30 cm high and 200 cm wide, preserved in the width of 180 cm. The mosaic threshold was created during the renovation of the *domus*, after the fire in the early 2nd century AD.⁴³ In some cases the figural motifs of the threshold mosaic can define the cult purpose of the room.⁴⁴ The mosaic was placed in a passage room from the peristyle porch to two larger rooms, of which the southern one was identified as a winter *triclinium* (P10-O4). The *triclinium* is a room for family joint evening meals (*cena*), during which short rituals were regularly held. The architectural decoration of the *triclinium* was adapted to the purpose and symbolically divided into three zones. The ceiling represented the celestial sphere, in the middle level in which people moved the table represented the altar, and the floor represented the zone of contact with the underground World of the Dead. The religious ritual in the *triclinium* was held before the meal by the father of the family, and consisted of prayer, invocation of divine grace and thanksgiving with the offering of sacrifice in the form

³⁷ BOYCE 1937, 38, no. 112, V 3, 7; SANTORO/MASTROBATTISTA/PETIT 2011, 189, fig. 7.

³⁸ BOYCE 1937, 22, no. 9, I 2, 17; 27, no. 47, I 10, 3; 12, 33, no. 81, V 1, 28; 36, no. 106, V 2 h; 55, no. 216, VI 15, 9; MAC MAHON 2003, 67, VI 12, 2; GIACOBELLO 2008, 230, I 15, 1; VAN ANDRINGA 2011, 91.

³⁹ MAC MAHON 2003, 67, VI 9, 2; I 9, 1; I 3, 24; VI 14, 43; VI 15, 1.

⁴⁰ ANNIBOLETTI 2011, 70-72.

⁴¹ DUBOURDIEU 1989, 13-33; TORELLI 2011, 41.

⁴² STARAC 2009, 286, figs. 6, 20-22.

⁴³ STARAC 2009, 286.

⁴⁴ BASSANI 2003a, 170.



Fig. 8. Mosaic threshold depicting a cantharus and vines (Author: A. Starac).

of food.⁴⁵ Food that accidentally fell to the floor was not allowed to be eaten or cleaned by blowing, but was dedicated to Lares by returning to the table and then burning in their honor.⁴⁶ The Dionysian motif of the cantharus with vines is logically placed on the floor, in a zone of symbolic contact between earthly life and the World of the Dead in which the mediation of Dionysus played an important role.⁴⁷ The cantharus with vines symbolically represents the dining room, the sacrificial ritual with which the meal ended, and the Dionysian mystery of the eternal renewal of life.

A fresco fragment collapsed in the toilet depicts a temple⁴⁸ (Fig. 9). Pseudo-Corinthian capitals with S-shaped



Fig. 9. Fresco fragment depicting a temple (Author: A. Starac).

⁴⁵ DOSI/SCHNELL 1992, 48; LAFORGE 2009, 141; BASSANI 2011, 107, fig. 4, Oderzo; GHEDINI 2012, 280, Opitergium 4.

⁴⁶ PLIN. NH XXVIII, 5, 27-28; FLOWER 2017, 13-14.

⁴⁷ VERSNEL 1990, 152.

⁴⁸ STARAC 2009, 280, fig. 15; STARAC 2012, 248, 425, fig. 38.

volute⁴⁹ bear an architrave with frieze showing blue-green motifs on a burgundy background. Figural motifs are not clearly recognizable, but because of their blue-green colour and compared to the friezes of the painted temples in *triclinium* and *oecus* of Villa Oplontis A,⁵⁰ they can be interpreted as a marine *thiasos* with Tritons and sea monsters. A procession of sea gods, monsters and creatures developed in Greek art under the influence of Dionysus' triumphant return from India and his marriage to Ariadne.⁵¹ A marine *thiasos* followed Neptune, Amphitrite and other deities connected to the sea, such as Venus.⁵² Sacral motifs related to water have a special value in the domus built next to the public *thermae* and the sanctuary of Hercules at the water source.

Elements of precious marble decoration, an architrave, and a semi-capital, indicate special architectural solutions in the *domus*, probably of a cult purpose. Profiled gray marble architrave, broken left and right, is 24 cm high, 75 cm wide and 15 cm long (Fig. 10). On the upper and lower edge there are the same profiles, a flat lath 2.5 cm high outside and a *cyma reversa* 2.5 cm high inside. The architrave was found in a room with the Salus niche D2. Certainly, the architrave did not belong to the nearby front door of the *domus*, shaped by an arch resting on pilasters. It could be built above the Salus niche, bearing a gable.⁵³ The architrave could also be located above the door of a particularly significant room or a part of the house, possibly just above the entrance to a room with the Salus niche.

Corinthian semi-capital with a row of acanthus leaves and a pair of rosettes, 22.4 cm high, 7.5 cm wide, 9 cm long, bottom diameter 15 cm, collapsed in the winter *triclinium* P10-O4 (Fig. 11). It is made of burgundy marble with white veins (rosso antico; *marmor Taenarium*).⁵⁴ The abacus is 3.9 cm high. One quarter of the semi-capital is

⁴⁹ PENSABENE 1973, 155-158, cat. nos. 638-649; 212, 220-221; T. LXI, nos. 645-649.

⁵⁰ SCOGNAMIGLIO 2019, para. 1087-1093, figs. 12.19-12.33.

⁵¹ ICARD-GIANOLIO/SZABADOS 1992, VI, 1, 821.

⁵² SIMON/BAUCHHENS 1994, VII, 1, 497; ICARD-GIANOLIO 1997, VIII, 1, 85.

⁵³ SANTORO/MASTROBATTISTA/PETIT 2011, 189, fig. 7, V 3, 7; PESANDO 2011, 23, fig. 12, VI 12, 2/5.

⁵⁴ PENSABENE/BRUNO 1998, 6, nos. 19-20.

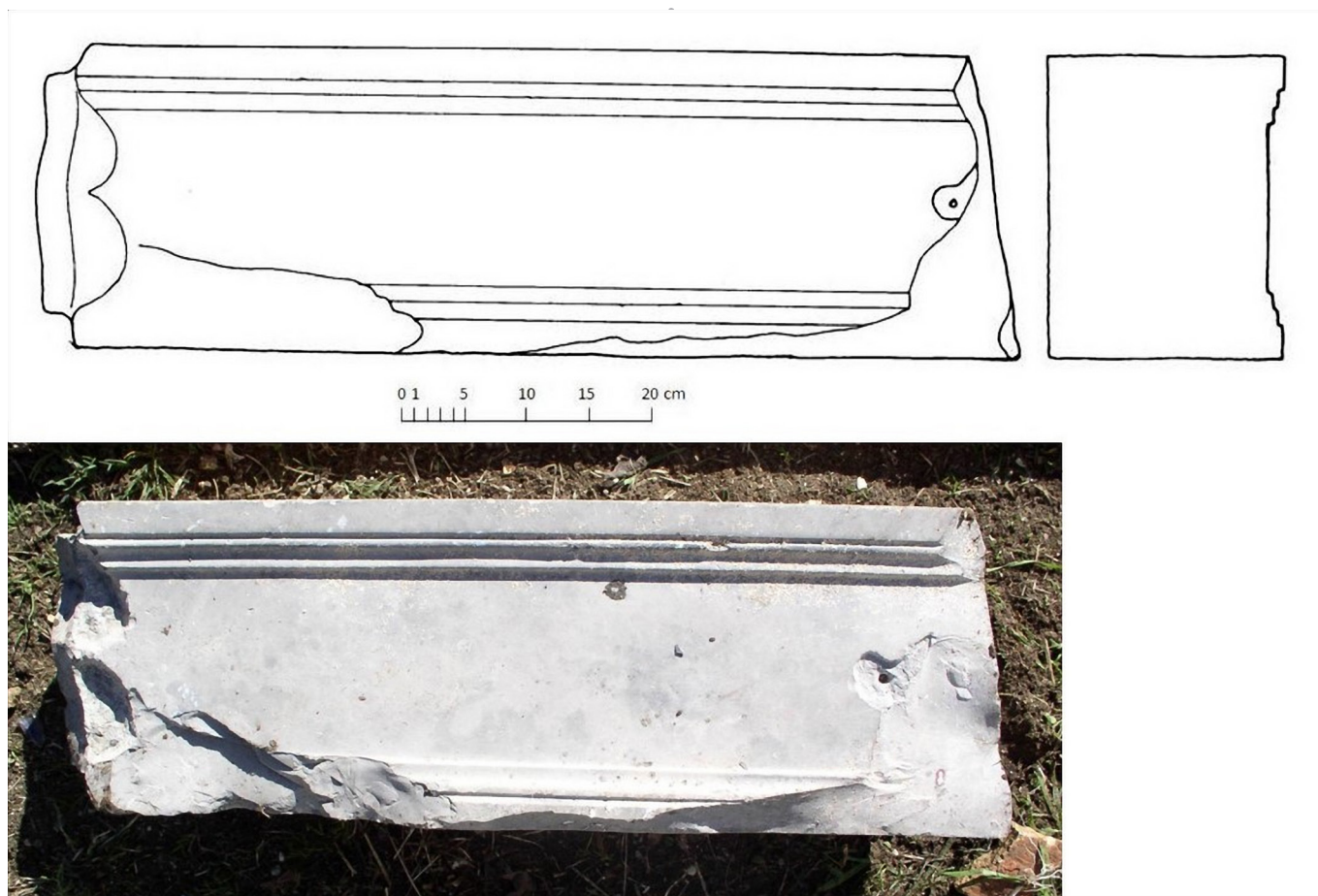


Fig. 10. Grey marble architrave inv.no. AMI-A-46573 (Author: A. Starac).

preserved. Acanthus leaves with slightly bent rounded tops resemble palmettes, following the late Hellenistic tradition as one of the oldest acanthus forms in Roman architectural decoration.⁵⁵ Flowers with curved stems under abacus were introduced in BC 40-20.⁵⁶ Very quickly, during the early and middle ages of Augustus, flowers on the capitals spread throughout northern Italy and Transalpine provinces.⁵⁷ The capital height corresponds to the standard interior semi-column.⁵⁸ The height of the Corinthian semi-columns with the semi-capital could range between 194.13 and 238.93 cm (VITRUV. III, 3, 10-11). The height of the architrave should be added in order to obtain the height of the room. The grey marble architrave corresponds to the bottom diameter of the semi-capital and calculated height of the semi-column (VITRUV. III, 5, 9). The height of a room with a Corinthian semi-column could range between 218 and 263 cm. Columns and pilasters in the *domus* without constructive role in the porch can be interpreted as indicators of special rooms or their parts with a cult purpose.⁵⁹ A pair of columns, semi-columns or pilasters could be located in front of the entrance to the room with the shrine, in front of the cult apse or near the altar. Expensive red and white Greek marble from



Fig. 11. Marble semi-capital inv.no. AMI-A-47043 (Author: A. Starac).

Laconia is an indicator of the special significance of the room. Its calculated Augustan price was 11.4-14.28 sesterces for one cubic foot of untreated marble, or 4-5 times more than the price of white Thassos marble.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ ROTH-CONGÈS 1983, 105, fig. 1.a.

⁵⁶ VISCOGLIOSI 1996, 120-122, temple of the Divine Julius, 29 BC; BAUER 1969, 184-189, fig. 4, T. 61, no. 1, T. 62-63; HEILMEYER 1970, 37, T. 6, no. 1, Palatine, temple of Apollo, BC 28.

⁵⁷ CAVALIERI MANASSE 1978, 59; NIBBI 2000, 185.

⁵⁸ PENSABENE 1973, 138, T. LIII, nos. 552-562.

⁵⁹ BASSANI 2003a, 162.

⁶⁰ KROPFF 2016, *Edictum Diocletiani De pretiis* XXXIII, 1, 2-3; DUNCAN



Fig. 12. *Thymiaterion* inv.no. AMI-A-42294 (Author: A. Starac).

III. SMALL FINDS

Various objects associated with the cult were found in the winter *triclinium* P10-O4. A fragmented hollow conical clay stand was decorated with cornices and letter-shaped perforations (Fig. 12). In the lowest field, three S-shaped perforations 2.4 cm wide, preserved in the height of 9.5 cm, are visible in a row, occupying one quarter of the circumference. The shape of a letter S is repeated with an incision. In the upper field, 8.4 cm high, the perforated letter D is recognizable, 7.5 cm high and 5 cm wide. The uppermost field also had perforations. The clay is red, with an ochre engobe, rough, 3.3-1.5 cm thick, full of sand and quartz grains. Bottom diameter is 38 cm, uppermost cornice diameter 28 cm. The total height was more than 45 cm. Parts of the stand were found scattered from the *triclinium* (P10-O4) through the kitchen (P18-O4) to the bathroom sauna (P19-O4). The mobile incense burner-altar on a high stand, *thymiaterion*, could have its justifiable place in the *triclinium*. It was a stand for sacral purposes, on top of which was a vessel for ritual burning of fragrant plants during the sacrifice (*thymiaterion*, *turibulum*). The burning of aromatic plants in the censer represented a symbolic purification

in the sacrificial ritual. It could be used for libations, or for the offering of sacrificial gifts in the form of food. The stand shape corresponds to the cylindrical stands for incense burners from Pompeii.⁶¹ The rhythmically repeated, prefabricated perforated letter S could mean consecration (*sacrum*), and D a deity or more (*deo / deae / deis*). Some incense burner stands with an inscription made before firing are documented in Italy and provinces.⁶² It can be stated that the clay incense burner from Pula had a daily practical role in the *triclinium* next to the hearth in rituals in honor of the gods and guardian spirits of the house.

Four joined fragments 0.7-1.4 cm thick of the upper part of the yellow-white calcite alabaster crater (Fig. 13), opening diameter 37 cm and preserved height 14.5 cm, were found in the winter *triclinium* P10-O4 and in a small pantry P10 A-O4 (*cella penaria*) next to it. The calcite alabaster crater, large enough to be used as a fountain, could adorn the peristyle or a representative room. The cult character of the vessel is associated with the sanctity of water, springs, and life in general. Perhaps a fragment of yellow-white calcite alabaster found about thirty meters south of the *domus*, in the post-late Roman layer (S.U. 5(24)-P14-O1) in the temple *temenos*, belonged to the same crater. The fragment, measuring 13 x 13 x 3 cm, shows a flat surface with a shallow flat circular recess of 20 cm in diameter, 1.2 cm deep and bordered by a shallowly indented strip 1.8 cm wide. The other side is flat and smooth. The fragment could have belonged to a profiled crater stand (*hypokrateridion*) that regularly had a full bottom, flat underside. Marble crater with an elaborated pedestal from Ascoli Satriano⁶³ and so-called Medici vase⁶⁴ illustrate what approximately the Pula crater on the stand could look like. The alabaster stand fragment reached its finding position only after 7th century AD. Therefore, if it belonged to the same crater as the alabaster fragments found in the ruin of the *domus* inhabited till the 5th century AD, the original site of the crater should be searched in the *domus* and not in the *temenos* of the sanctuary. Marble craters served as fountains or decorations for gardens, houses and public spaces, and could be located also indoors, in a room or porch.⁶⁵ They began to be made in the Hellenistic period, and their golden age dates to the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD.⁶⁶ Originally, the Greek crater was a large clay vase for mixing wine with water at a feast, it was placed in the center of the room, and connected with the Dionysian cult.⁶⁷ The Dionysian symbolism of the crater was retained throughout the Roman period in decorative marble craters that lost their original purpose in serving wine.

A fragment with a relief theatrical mask with the upside-down palmette under the chin, 5.5 cm high, 5.4 cm wide and 0.3-1 cm thick, made of coarse brown clay without

⁶¹ D'AMBROSIO/BORRIELLO 2001, 37-44; COTTICA *et alii* 2010, 170, fig. 3, group 7; MARCHETTI 2016, 416.

⁶² VAN ANDRINGA 2010, 165, fig. 53, Pompeii, Karden, Chartres, Dalheim, Carrawburgh.

⁶³ BOTTINI/SETARI 2009, 8, fig. 1.

⁶⁴ GRASSINGER 1991, 163-168, no. 8, T. XXXVIII-XLVII.

⁶⁵ BERGMANN 2002, 92, 114, fig. 2, Pl. 1; HARTSWICK 2004, 111; CADARIO 2005, 17.

⁶⁶ GRASSINGER 1991, 35.

⁶⁷ LISSARAGUE/SZEGDY-MASZAK 1990, 19.

JONES 1982, 66, 366; WASSINK 1991, 465.

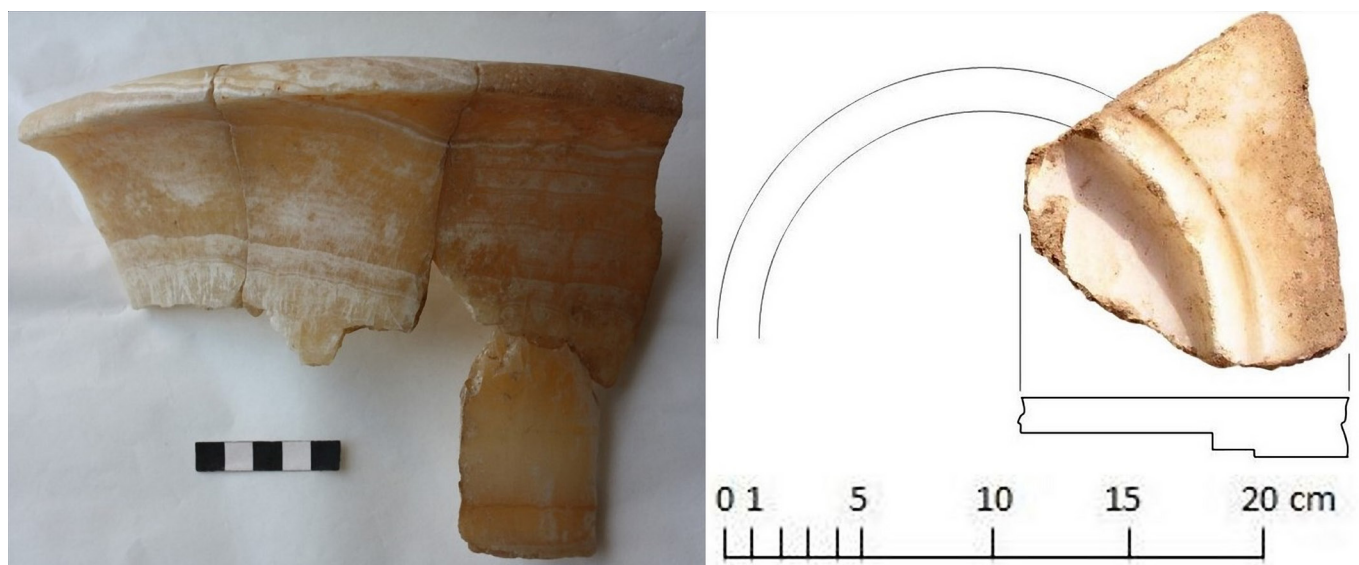


Fig. 13. Alabaster crater inv.no. AMI-A-42291 and alabaster stand fragments (Author: A. Starac).

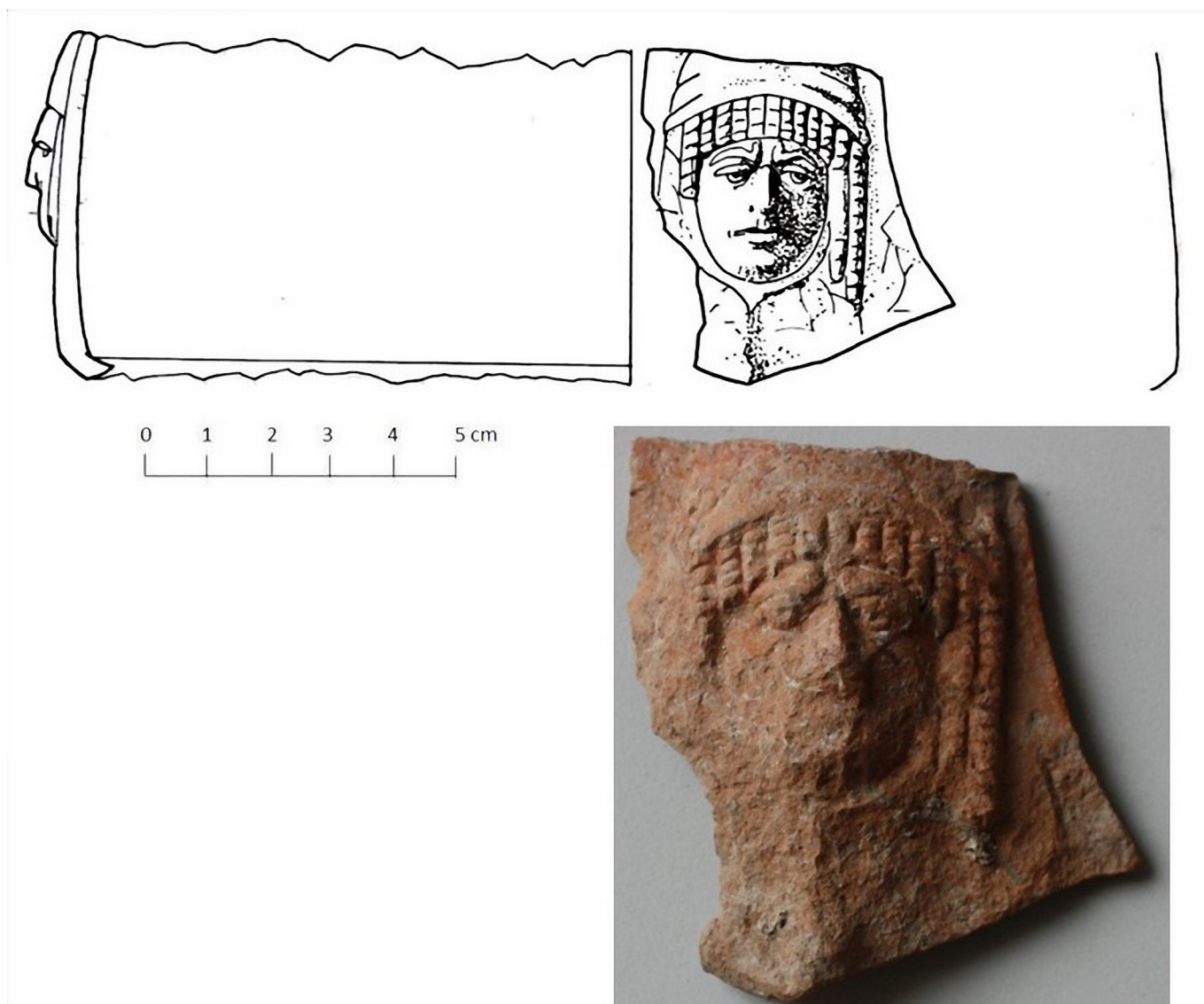


Fig. 14. Fragment of a vase with mask inv.no. AMI-A-45922 (Author: A. Starac).

slip, belonged to a biconical crater 18 cm in diameter (Fig. 14). The mask fragment was found in the winter *triclinium* P10-O4, in the same layer with fragments of the clay *thymiaterion* and alabaster crater allowing dating from



Fig. 15. Corinthian cup inv.no. AMI-A-42193 (Author: A. Starac).

the 2nd to the 5th century AD. Cult craters of coarse clay were often decorated with relief snakes and masks.⁶⁸ The symbolism of the mask is associated with Dionysian rituals and stage performances during religious festivals.⁶⁹ It appears on objects of everyday use, and it is especially related to necropolises and the cult of the dead. Exactly the same type of mask with a head covering is a characteristic element of a bronze lamp handle Loeschcke XX type. The mask is mainly found on the Loeschcke XX variant with rounded nozzles from the 1st and 2nd century AD, but remained in use until the 4th century AD, especially in the Danube provinces.⁷⁰ Complete clay variants of the same lamp type with a mask on the handle have not been preserved, but in the limes and Danube region clay applications of a tragic mask with a mitra and a palmette are documented.⁷¹ Unlike the mask from Pula, the clay masks from the Danube region are not attached to the background surface. The discovery of a clay mould testifies to the making of this type of masks in Carnuntum.⁷² A mask made using a clay mould could adorn different types of vessels, especially wine cups.⁷³ The mask on the lamp was interpreted as a tragic mask, a mask of a

pantomime artist or Dionysus himself.⁷⁴ Depending on the specimen, different opinions are expressed as to whether the mask is male or female, whether it wears mitra or onkos. Lamps from Pompeii do not have a head covering or have a mitra with unwrapped ends, and from the 2nd century AD the mitra occurs regularly with curved ends.⁷⁵ A fragment from Pula shows an onkos or a mitra of unwrapped ends. The palmette under the mask is standard on the handle of the Loeschcke XX bronze lamps. It is also present on the clay cult crater from the Augusteum in Narona,⁷⁶ the closest parallel to the mask fragment from Pula.

Dionysian motifs often adorned the wine cups, especially Corinthian cups. The Dionysian scenes are displayed on Corinthian cups Form 1 found in the cookery and other rooms of the *domus* and dated to the second half of the 2nd and 3rd century AD⁷⁷ (Fig. 15). A fragment of the Cnidian oinophoros Hausmann III type in the shape of pelike, decorated in relief with vine and grapes, dates to the 2nd-3rd century AD⁷⁸ (Fig. 16).

The lamp Loeschcke VIII with a handle shows a bust of Minerva in profile on the left with a helmet on her head, created after the Phidias statue of Athena Promachos (Fig. 17), very common on lamps of Attic, Corinthian and African

⁶⁸ TOPIĆ 2004a, 219, 231, no. 66; BRULET/VILVORDER 2004, 11; CVJETIČANIN 2008, 160.

⁶⁹ BURKERT 1985, 160-165.

⁷⁰ LOESCHCKE 1919, 135, T. II, Type XX; DI FILIPPO BALESTRAZZI 1990, coll. 241-251, figs. 7-9; BAILEY 1996, 39-44, Q 3669 - Q 3686, Pl. 47-54; SEDLMAYER 2001, 308, map 1; 308; HUMER/KREMER 2011, 413-414, cat. 931-935; GREEN 2012, 24; BUORA 2015, 717, fig. 2.

⁷¹ MENZEL 1954, 28-29, cat. nos. 100-101, fig. 26, nos. 9-10; ALICU 1994, 136-137, fig. 9, no. 1036; HUMER/KREMER 2011, 414-415, cat. 938.

⁷² HUMER/KREMER 2011, 414, cat. 937.

⁷³ SCHINDLER-KAUDELKA 1980, 51-53, T. 48, nos. 36-37; MIKL CURK 1991, 108, fig. 1; GASSNER 1991, 158, fig. 4.

⁷⁴ GREEN 2012, 32; BUORA 2015, 717.

⁷⁵ GREEN 2012, 46, cat. 35-36; BUORA 2015, 717.

⁷⁶ TOPIĆ 2004a, 219, 231, no. 66; TOPIĆ 2004b, 315-318.

⁷⁷ Inv. nos. AMI-A-42192, AMI-A-42194, AMI-A-42318. AMI-A-47021. MALFITANA 2007, 114-117, cat. nos. 177-198. The cup AMI-A-42193 resembles a cup from Rome: MALFITANA 2007, Form 1, type 4, cat. III.1.5, 177, T. XIII-XIV.

⁷⁸ HAUSMANN 1955, T. 43, nos. 1-2; T. 44, nos. 1-4; T. 45, nos. 1-2; HAUSMANN 1956, T. 64; TORTORICI 1981, 234, T. CXX, 1; BAILEY 1979, 262, D1, Pl. IV.



Fig. 16. Cnidian oinophoros, fragment inv.no. AMI-A-46454 (Author: A. Starac).

production from the 2nd to the 4th century AD.⁷⁹ Another lamp depicts the head of Medusa (Fig. 18), which has become one of the most powerful symbols of protective, apotropaic power in Roman official art since the time of Augustus.⁸⁰ It was also very widespread in the private context, especially in the funerary sphere. The depiction on the lamp belongs to the type of beautiful Medusa with snakes tied in a knot under the chin, developed since the 5th century BC.⁸¹ Analogies could be found among the lamps of Eastern Mediterranean,

⁷⁹ CANCIANI 1984, II, 1, 1078, no. 36; II, 2, 787, no. 36; BRONEER 1930, 190-191, no. 582, T. XII, 582; 246, nos. 1102-1108, figs. 174-175; PERLZWEIG 1961, 111-112, nos. 649-668, Pl. 15, nos. 649, 653, 659, 660, 668; BAILEY 1988, 7, 405, Pl. 117, Q 3258-3259, 3261; BONIFAY 2004, 313-315, fig. 175a-175b.

⁸⁰ GIULIANO 1960, 982-985; CASARI 2004, 27.

⁸¹ KRAUSKOPF/DAHLINGER 1988, IV, 1, 296-297, 327-330; IV, 2, 171-172, nos. 108b-118; PAOLETTI 1988.



Fig. 17. Oil lamp inv.no. AMI-A-45910 (Author: A. Starac).



Fig. 18. Oil lamp inv.no. AMI-A-45938 (Author: A. Starac).

Moesian and African production from the second third of the 2nd to the end of the 4th century AD.⁸² A lamp had its

⁸² PERLZWEIG 1961, 17-22, 118, no. 771, Pl. 17, no. 771; MARDEŠIĆ 2002, 357, cat. 17; BONIFAY 2004, 320-322, cat. no. 22, fig. 179, no. 22;

practical application inside or in front of a home *lararium*.⁸³ Lamps with the image of Minerva and Medusa could be used in home rituals and in the lighting of the rooms. Through them, the protection of higher forces from the evil lurking in the darkness was symbolically invoked.

A cast circular bronze medallion from the drainage channel in the vestibule carries the rough-hewn Medusa head (*gorgoneion*), representing apotropaic protection from evil (Fig. 19). It is 1.5 cm high, diameter 4.6 cm, 0.1 cm thick, rear recess and broken thorn. Relief medallions of these dimensions are usually called phaleras and associated with military equipment, although a military medal phalera was twice as big.⁸⁴ Medallions with *gorgoneion* could be found on a wooden base, chest or door as an applied decoration of the house inventory.⁸⁵ Similar bronze fittings with a pair of medallions were placed on a yoke on a chariot where they fastened nooses through which the heads of horses passed. A wide thorn on the back of the medallion indicates that it is more likely a chariot element than a home furniture decoration. The wide flat border classifies the medallion in the chariot fittings group of the 2nd-3rd century AD.⁸⁶



Fig. 19. Bronze medallion inv.no. AMI-A-46063 (Author: A. Starac).

IV. CONCLUSION

The large *domus* in the quarter of St. Theodore provided the most comprehensive information so far on house shrines in Istria. Five out of six niches in the explored part of the *domus*, all of cult purpose, were made during its

construction and all remained open until the *domus* was abandoned. Only one niche was made in a later renovation phase, by walling up a window. Niches are located mainly in the northern part of the house near the entrance and in the servile area. The largest niche, the only one open to the floor, is adjacent to the entrance in the vestibule and five smaller niches are arranged in functional rooms around *impluvium*. The presence of a niche in the kitchen, pantry, toilet and the Salus niche in a room whose purpose is not clearly defined testify that the sacred moment was present in literally all aspects of everyday life. Various sacral spheres are expressed by different sizes and shapes of niches. The largest, two-part niche open to the floor was the most significant, main house *lararium*. The two-part shape suggests that a various divine protectors were worshiped in the niche. The kitchen with fireplace and pantry are equipped with their own *lararia*. Trapezoidal, white painted niches of Salus and in the adjoining toilet represent atypical house shrines conditioned by the local cult tradition, the proximity of the sacred spring and the public *thermae*. The Salus niche was red bordered, and probably contained a gray marble architrave. Another trapezoidal niche in the toilet could be dedicated to Isis Fortuna, the only divinity attested in toilets. The Salus niche equipped with figural depictions and inscriptions testifies to the beginning of a change in the concept of house shrines that will come to full expression during the Augustus' rule.

The mosaic threshold with a cantharus and vines in front of the *triclinium* symbolizes the Dionysian mystery of eternal renewal of life, present in the daily religious ritual with which the family meal began. A mosaic threshold was added during the renovation in early 2nd century AD, and remains unknown whether it was preceded by a similar motif in the first building stage. The frescoes depicting a temple frieze resemble a sea *thiasos*. The polychrome marble semi-capital belonged to a lost prominent part of the *domus*, possibly a house shrine aedicule.

Beside the niches in entrance and servile areas, cults took place in the dining room through the use of *thymiaterion*. The clay crater with a theatrical mask and calcite alabaster crater represented Dionysus, given the role of the crater in drinking wine and its symbolism of the vase of life. An additional presence of religious beliefs in everyday life is shown by lamps and table pottery with divine and religious representations, used from the 2nd until the late 4th century AD.

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325, cat. no. 8, fig. 183, no. 8; 331-332, cat. no. 1, fig. 186, no. 1; OPAITȚ/TSARAVOPOULOS 2010, 28, fig. 12; TOPOLEANU 2016, 68-69, cat. no. 9, Pl. I, 9.

⁸³ BOYCE 1937, 37, no. 108, V 2 h; 62-63, no. 253, VII 2, 20; 64, no. 264B, VII 3, 11; LAFORGE 2009, 123.

⁸⁴ FEUGÈRE 1993, 63-65; STUPPNER 2002, 25, fig. 4, 14; 232, IV a 20; HUMER/KREMER 2011, 404, cat. 838-850.

⁸⁵ SEITZ 1994, 395; BOLLA 2008, col. 35, fig. 3.

⁸⁶ STARAC 2021, 26-28, 42, cat. no. 2, fig. 2.

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