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A FUNERARY MONUMENT FROM COLONIA AURELIA APULENSIS, RECOVERED BY AN UNEXPECTED PATH

Abstract: This study addresses the issue raised by a funerary monument accidentally discovered in the area defined by archaeologists as the “eastern necropolis” of Colonia Aurelia Apulensis, component of the Apulum conurbation, the most significant city in the imperial province of Dacia. The monument was excavated under unfortunate conditions, somewhere in the years 2002–2003, during the connection of a private household to the city’s water network. Due to the lack of specialized supervision by archaeologists, the monument was brutally removed from its original context (in situ) by an excavator, which struck and partially damaged a portion of the figurative scene depicted on the funerary monument. The current holder of the cultural property, a collector from Alba Iulia, was informed about this situation. He is the one who recovered the monument, restored it, and exhibited it within his collection at his residence. To conclude, the study also addresses the legal aspects regarding the ownership regime of such cultural goods, namely the legality of private collections of antiquities in cities that are overlapping archaeological sites, emphasizing the lack of involvement of public institutions in managing the evolution of these phenomena.

Keywords: Colonia Aurelia Apulensis, private collection, aedicula, hunting scene, Norico-Pannonian noble.

The Law 182/2000, regarding movable cultural assets, aimed from its opening to “establish the legal regime of goods belonging to the national cultural heritage, as part of the national cultural heritage, and regulates specific activities for their protection.” As an obvious as necessary goal, especially since this normative act came after a period of over 10 years during which movable cultural assets had an unhappy regime, de facto and de jure. The specialized bibliography of the last 15 years has carefully addressed the way in which, during the indicated period (1990–2000), but under its inertia, and in the early years after the issuance of Law 182/2000, a considerable number of movable cultural assets left the territory of Romania. As a result of this reality, quite well-known in certain segments of society but tacitly accepted in the absence of thorough tools to stop the phenomenon of illicit export, unique reactions have emerged, somewhat acting “against the current.” We refer here to individuals with a certain social status and financial availability who, for various reasons rooted in a patriotic, national sentiment, have become buyers of cultural heritage goods acquired and valorized by collectors and antiquities traffickers. Thus, in some cities with tradition in Transylvania, Dobrogea, Banat, and Crișana, several collections of cultural
goods have emerged, most of them of archaeological origin, illegally excavated and trafficked on a small but dynamic internal market for local antiquities.

The monument that is the subject of this study, along with others that have already been published\(^1\), became known as a result of a judicial activity, in a criminal case aimed at recovering a hoard of Kosons\(^2\), made of gold, stolen and trafficked by illegal excavators of Dacian archaeological sites in the Șureanu Mountains\(^3\). The main objective of the judicial investigation was to identify one of the Kosons within the residence of a witness\(^4\) in the criminal case, who had acquired the piece from a representative of the criminal group that trafficked the monetary treasure\(^5\).

The owner of the two searched locations demonstrated exceptional good faith throughout the entire judicial process, repeatedly stating that he had accumulated these collections primarily through direct purchases, paying "in cash," from various collectors, traffickers, and antique dealers in the city\(^6\), aiming to ensure that "the archaeological heritage remains in the country and does not go abroad." Regarding some artefacts in the collection, he specified that he personally recovered them from various locations in the city of Alba Iulia, where excavations were taking place, archaeological artifacts were appearing, and no archaeologist was present to carry out the necessary legal procedures\(^7\).

This is also the case with the present artifact. The monument was discovered somewhere in 2002–2003, in the Partoș neighborhood, which overlaps with Colonia Aurelia Apulensis, one of the most prosperous and wealthiest cities of Roman Dacia\(^8\). A simple overview of the anthropic interventions carried out in this neighborhood over the last 25 years\(^9\) can provide a clear image of the enormous proportions of the affected area within the ancient Roman city. The artifact was found in the southeast part of the Roman city, beyond what phonebooks of most collectors and traffickers who were investigated in the case.

To justify his statements, the witness provided the judicial authorities with a series of photographs taken by him in the Lower City (Municipium Septimium Severus), along the Mureș River, and in Partoș (Colonia Aurelia Apulensis). For more details about multiple unsupervised interventions within the conurbation of Apulum, see in the following: CIUTĂ 2013; CIUTĂ 2014; CIUTĂ 2022.

\(^{1}\) SZABO et alii 2016, 231–244; COCiŞ et alii 2023, 341–385.
\(^{2}\) Criminal case 172/P/2005, handled by the Prosecutor’s Office attached to the Alba Iulia Court of Appeal.
\(^{3}\) LAZĂR 2013, 49–72; CIUTĂ/CONDRUZ 2013; PURDEA 2019, 139–221; PURDEA 2022, 25–37.
\(^{4}\) The witness (or the collector!), is a person enjoying notoriety within the community of Alba Iulia municipality, both for professional achievements and for supporting culture and cultural events, never had the intention of hiding or concealing the collection of cultural goods he owns, both at his residence and at the design office. These were exhibited, before the search, in a reputable specialized publication in the field of architecture, addressing experts in the field at the national level.

\(^{5}\) If the activity carried out on March 16, 2006, seemed to be an extremely simple one, initially summarized as the identification and lifting of the gold Koson, judicial investigators found themselves facing a completely different situation, discovering the existence of two museums of smaller dimensions, at the two locations specified above. We are talking about thousands of objects, mainly of archaeological origin, of various types, sizes, epochs, and materials. Let’s just say that documenting, photographing, and inventoring cultural goods was a real challenge for the six judicial officers who executed the judicial warrant, which lasted for 16 hours.

\(^{6}\) This assertion was confirmed by the fact that his name was found in the following: CIUTĂ 2013; CIUTĂ 2014; CIUTĂ 2022.

\(^{7}\) ARDEVAN 1998.

\(^{8}\) Possibly through the successive tracking of satellite images provided by the Google Earth program since its inception, potentially compared with maps from the 20th century and the General Urban Plans (PUG) of the city.
archaeologists consider to be its limit, defined by the enclosing wall of the first phase of the city’s evolution (municipium), in an area where subsequent archaeological research has attested to the existence of a Roman necropolis.

From the collector’s explanations, confirmed by other individuals present at the scene at that time, about 60–80 meters east of the eastern boundary of the current Orthodox cemetery operating in Partoș (!), during mechanized excavations for connecting a household to the water network, the excavator bucket extracted from the ground a fragment of a monument in the form of a slab, depicting human and animal characters in bas-relief technique on one side.

The excavator’s bucket primarily touched the left part of the relief representation, affecting the depiction of the human character on the left (Fig. 4, 16), which is still visible at the present time. It is worth noting that various other fragments of limestone sarcophagi, as well as a fragment of a funerary medallion, were also extracted from the ground on the same occasion.

The monument, with dimensions of 95 cm in height, 74 cm in width, and 13 cm in thickness, having a slightly irregular rectangular shape on the edges (Fig. 4), shows ancient fractures as well as recent damages left behind by the excavator’s bucket.

The funerary monument discussed with this occasion, is a fragmented aedicula wall built from limestone. The representations carved on its surface are in a relatively good state of preservation and they are divided in two registers.

The first register depicts a hunting scene (Fig. 5), where a stag is running away from three hound dogs that are trying...
to chase it down. Two of the dogs are represented under
the stag, targeting the belly, and the third one looks like is
jumping on the stag, perhaps aiming to bite it on the neck.
In order to understand the whole depiction, we will explain
each element in part.

In the Roman world, the stag has strong and varied sym-
byclic meanings. From a religious point of view, it is associ-
ated with the hunting god Diana, (being especially related
to the legend of Acteon, that was transformed in a stag and
killed by his own dogs, only because he saw Diana in nude19)
and also with Apollo20 and Orpheus21. The legends of Sylvia
and Cyprissus reflect the close relationship and level of
affection that could have been reached between people and
deer.22 Usually, in the literary sources, the stag can also be
used as a symbol of dichotomy (for example love and hate).23
From a social perspective, the deer and the stag represents
symbols of high social status, as in some cases the nobles
kept them in private gardens as pets, being the only ones
that could afford the breeding of wild animals.24 Considering
the material and financial requirements of hunting deer and
eating venison, this activity is also considered a symbol of
social inequality.25

The dog, the animal that is perceived as the human’s best
friend, benefits of a diversity of religious and social mean-
ings. At the religious level, it is seen with guarding tasks
alongside underworld divinities, such as Hekate, Pluto
and Serapis.26 Placed in another context, accompanying
Asklepios at Epidaurus, the dog has the function of a healer,
licking the sick people that were coming to the temple27.
The ritual sacrifice of dogs is well attested. It can be done in
the honor of Hecate, Genita Mana (when the people of the house
welcomed a new baby slave amongst them28) or Enyalios or
with the occasion of some specific festivals (Robigalia – an
agricultural festival held in the name of Robigus; Lupercalia –
a pastoral festival of purification; and during augurium
canarium).29 Moreover, the consuming of dog meat is also
attested, especially puppies, with ritualic and medical pur-
poses.25 The dog is very well represented in funerary con-
texts, appearing in funerary representations, recreated as a
statue/statuette, or mentioned in epitaphs, thus, all of this
reflecting the close affection of man for his companion.26

When it comes to the social meanings and practical func-
tions, Jocelyn Toynbee identifies five categories: hound dogs
(as we can see in our case), sheep dogs, guard dogs, perform-
ing dogs and pet dogs27, each one of them benefiting of
a different raising. In the case of hound dogs, they were fed
once a day during winter and twice a day during summer and
it was indicated to take it outside at least four times during
the day, especially in spring and autumn.28

The idea that hunting represents an aristocratic activity
is taken from the Hellenistic world.29 This could have been
done in two ways: on foot, carrying nets and accompanied
by hounds or riding a horse and trying to keep up with the
hounds.30 The stag was the second most hunted animal by
the romans, after boars, the indicated weapon being the light
spear.31 Arrian describes briefly the way of hunting a stag:
‘Stags and other beasts of similar size are hunted in this way –
namely, by putting well-bred hounds onto them. But the animal
is large and runs for a great distance. Consequently, it is not safe
to run it down; there is a considerable risk of losing a good hound
for the sake of a stag. Stags are hunted, where there are rideable

![Fig. 6. Funerary frieze from Flavia Solva (Noricum). LUPA 1295 (http://lupa.at/1295).](http://lupa.at/1295)

planes, as in Mysia and among the Getae and in Scythia and in
parts of Illyria, by giving chase to them on Scythian and Illyrian
horses’.32

The representation of hunting on funerary monuments
was usually done by freedmen, veterans and peregrines
as a way of showing high social status affiliation and the
knowledge of aristocratic roman habits.33 Of course, it can-
not be denied that the defunct could have had an affective
consideration to this activity, being one of his favourites. All
of these can also be applied to our case. The scene of dogs
chasing down a stag is also represented on other funer-
ary monuments (Fig. 6–7)34, sometimes are even involved

19 GILHUS 2006, 79.
20 GILHUS 2006, 105.
21 TOYNBEE 1973, 143.
22 TOYNBEE 1973, 143.
24 GILHUS 2006, 30.
25 ALLEN 2014, 176.
26 TOYNBEE 1973, 122–123.
28 FRANCO 2019, 47.
29 LACAM 2008, 41–43.
divine characters (for example Erotes) (Fig. 8), although in this case, the hunting becomes a ritualic and sacred process, a victorious fight against death. Furthermore, it can also be encountered in domestic environment, as a mosaic scene.

There is a scarce possibility of a rider depicted in this scene, because, of the one part, the typology realized by Irina Nemeti does not register any type of rider associated with three dogs, but only with one dog38, and, of the other part, the rider cannot be represented on the left side, because there is much space preserved and there is no clue of a possible rider, and the right side is out of the question, because there is where the stag is heading to.

The second register (Fig. 9), delimited by a frame, presents in a frontal manner two women of the same height (most probably mother and daughter), both of them wearing what Jochen Garbsch called ‘Die norisch-pannonische Frauentracht’39. Therefore, the appearance of this dress on funerary monuments it can be interpreted as a way of showing cultural affiliation40. The main elements of the dress are the large tunic, which is covered by a peplos-like tunic fastened with a pair of brooches to the shoulders and held with

35 LUPA 25002 (http://lupa.at/25002): A coffin relief of erotes hunting a stag, accompanied by hound dogs.
36 PAINTER 1967, 23.
37 NEMETI 2019, 292, 295.
38 GARBSCH 1965.
a belt at the waist. Moreover, on a considerable number of monuments, the female is also wearing a bonnet and a mantle.\textsuperscript{41} The recent studies proved that, for this type of dress, it can be identified a multitude of variants\textsuperscript{42} and it can be encountered in a larger spreading area, encompassing the Rhine region, the Danubian provinces and Dalmatia\textsuperscript{43}.

The elements that can be typologically classified are the \textit{peplos}-like tunic, the bonnet and the brooches\textsuperscript{44}. In the case of our representation, the peplos-like tunic cannot be classified, because of the fact that only half of it is depicted, and a typological identification requires a full-length depiction. The bonnet might be classified as Rothe H 1.1.2., presenting a thick band of cloth at the edge, continued upwards with thinner arched layers of cloth.\textsuperscript{45} The closest analogy found in Roman Dacia is a funerary medallion coming from Apulum, depicting a family (Fig. 10), where the woman is wearing roman cloths, except for the bonnet, which is a Norico-Pannonian one.\textsuperscript{46} Other three analogies we have identified at Klagenfurt (Noricum) (Fig. 11–13)\textsuperscript{47}.

Jochen Garbsch claimed that the \textit{peplos}-like tunic is only fastened with Norico-Pannonian brooches (A 236–237; A 238)\textsuperscript{48}. The later reassessments of these kind of representations showed us that there is actually a variety of brooch types depicted on funerary monument,\textsuperscript{49} even though most of them are Norico-Pannonian brooches. Our representation belongs to the category of majority. The two pairs of brooches depicted on the shoulders of the women resemble with A 236, because it can be observed that the bow has two knobs on its surface, although they are badly preserved. This type of brooches originates in the Eastern Alpine region, especially within and around Magdalensberg.\textsuperscript{50} The appearance

\textsuperscript{41} ROCHE 2012, 178.
\textsuperscript{42} ROCHE 2012, 178–222.
\textsuperscript{43} ROCHE 2013, 37.
\textsuperscript{44} Typological classifications have been realized by Jochen Garbsch, Ursula Rothe and Csilla Sáró (see SÁRÓ 2021, for the exemplars from the North-Eastern Pannonia).
\textsuperscript{45} ROTHE 2012, 200.
\textsuperscript{46} CIONGRADI 2007, 253–254, M/A 4; BÁLTÁC et alii 2015, 202, nr. 205.
\textsuperscript{47} LUPA 874 (http://lupa.at/874); LUPA 878 (http://lupa.at/878), LUPA 881 (http://lupa.at/881).
\textsuperscript{48} GARBSCH 1965, 26.
\textsuperscript{50} DEMETZ 1999, 49; SEDLMAYER 2009, 87–88.
in Roman Dacia is usually related to the settle of the Norico-Pannonian colonists, but their ethnic character is highly questionable. In the case of Roman Dacia, they are dated in the first half of the second century, although the 236 h subtype (Cociș 11C1-C2) – the one which also appears on our monument – is recently dated later, until the end of the Marcommanic Wars. Usually, the A 236 h type is depicted with a thin bow and prominent knobs, but in our case, the bow is extending towards the head and the knobs are smaller. Therefore, the only similar representations we have succeed to identify so far were discovered at Apulum – a funerary stela or medallion depicting a family, where the representation of the woman is the most preserved. She is wearing a Norico-Pannonian bonnet and the brooches are depicted in a similar manner (Fig. 14) – and Flavia Solva (Noricum) (Fig. 15) – a funerary medallion, where the female is depicted as wearing the Norico-Pannonian dress, fastened by brooches with two knobs. It is easily observed that is the same way of displaying brooches, even though they are half covered by a mantle.

On the neck, the women wear torques, which are recognized by their spiral shape. The torque appeared in the Middle Bronze Age as an accessory of the elite, being manufactured from noble metals (silver and gold) and also from bronze. It was then adopted by the Roman army as

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51 HUSAR 1999, 179–183; Cociş 2004b, 405.
52 HUSAR 1999, 179–183; Cociş 2004b, 405.
53 COCIŞ 2004a, 73.
54 HINKER 2017, 71.
55 See, for example, the stelae belonging to Ulpia Maximilla (ȚEPOȘU-MARINESCU 1982, 118, S 64; CIONGRADI 2007, 164, S/A 19) and Lucius (ȚEPOȘU-MARINESCU 1982, 122–123, S 82; CIONGRADI 2007, 167, S/A 24).
57 LUPA 1206 (http://lupa.at/1206).
58 HARDING 2007, 33.
accessory fastened on centurion armours." Klárá Kuzmová has analysed the funerary representations of torques from North-Eastern Pannonia, classifying them in two groups. Our case can be identified as belonging to the second group, because of its thick, narrow, and tight appearance on the neck.

The dating of the monument does not rely on the representations of Norico-Pannonian brooches, but since there is no other element useful for dating, we have to give a large timeframe, between the first half of the II\textsuperscript{nd} c. A.D. and the beginning of the III\textsuperscript{rd} c. A.D., the exact timeframe of depicting the Norico-Pannonian dress in Roman Dacia.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Our analyse revealed that the monument was erected by persons originating from the Norico-Pannonian region, who tried to show their cultural affiliation by demanding the depiction of the Norico-Pannonian dress, but, at the same time, they tried to emphasise their social appurtenance to a roman provincial aristocracy by depicting a hunting scene, a beloved activity to the roman nobles.

The data provided above, combined with the information obtained during the investigations into the circumstances of the monument’s recovery, imply further discussions. In the period from 2002, in the area indicated as its provenance, located east of the cemetery that now serves the Partoș neighborhood, all plots eastward to the Mureș River embankment have entered the urban area of Alba Iulia. The current satellite image indicates that there is already a well-defined street layout, and dozens of houses have been built. According to legal provisions, all these interventions should have been carried out following preventive archaeological research. At present, there are no references in the specialized literature regarding the results of archaeological research conducted in this area. Still, we hope that such research has been conducted, and that it has led to a better understanding of the location and role played by the necropolis in the eastern zone of Colonia Aurelia Apulensis. In this context, the present study will contribute to a better interpretation of these aspects.

Another detail that needs to be addressed in the final conclusions is the legal regime of cultural heritage items held in private collections in Alba Iulia. We mention this because the collection from which the artifact under study originates is by no means an isolated case, as at least five other similar collections have been identified in the city. What is known is that, following the judicial activity carried out in the two locations of the collection, the aspects related to the circumstances of acquiring the gold Koson have been clarified, and

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61 Klárá Kuzmová 2008, 547.
62 CIONGRADI 2007, 34.
63 This dating variant is confirmed by dr. George Bounegru, from the National Museum of the Union, Alba Iulia, one of the archaeologists that carried out preventive research in the eastern necropolis of Colonia Aurelia Apulensis.
64 The timeframe for the rest of the empire comprises from the beginning of the I\textsuperscript{st} c. A.D. to the beginning of the III\textsuperscript{rd} c. A.D. See ROTHE 2012, 222.
65 "In 2015, archaeological research was conducted in the area for the installation of a water main under the Mureș River. An extensive surface affected by the project was investigated. On that occasion, traces of habitation were discovered, primarily dating back to the early Roman province period, as well as a new Roman necropolis. Subsequently, between 2018–2022, research was carried out on Gh. Sion Street, on adjacent surfaces, where it was found that the necropolis discovered east of the first Roman city (Municipium Aurelium Apulensis) continued, with predominantly incineration graves, burned at the ustrinum, and the sepulchral pits were also ritually burned. Several dozen graves were investigated and documented, with the majority of them not having been looted. All documented graves belonged to the 2nd century AD" – kind information from dr. George Bounegru.
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