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Imperial Power and Provincial Religion in Roman Dacia. A Short Regard

The modalities by which the roman emperor was positioned through religious means in the provincial communities are a much more complex phenomenon than to address simply a cult to the prince. Augustus, for example, did not recommend to the Roman citizens to recognize the living emperor as a god and they were rather advice to worship Divus Iulius¹. As was already observed the Greeks didn't have a word for "cult". They used the term "time" and the Romans used that of "honores". The same word was used for gods' sacrifices but also in relationship with people. In Latin sources, the only distinction was an adjectival term, honores divinis, celestes honores³.

Important for the religious aspect of the phenomenon called by the modern scholars "imperial cult" is the fact that in Dacia, the cult of gods on behalf of the emperor is the most prevalent form of making the connection with imperial power. The fact that the Roman citizens and non-roman communities and individuals used the cult of traditional gods, or divine entities, to honor the living emperors and also the cult of the divi, as recognized state gods, showed that the rituals addressed to the emperor were part of the provincial roman religion in Dacia (fig. 1).

It is plausible that the most important mean by which the provincial religious landscape give place to the representation of imperial power is the normative public behavior imposed all over the Roman Empire at a scale depending on the communities' status. A second aspect that can derive from the social positioning is the provincial aristocracies' needs of self-representation. In this way in Dacia the communities' expectations of honoring such a high position like that of the emperor were satisfied by rendering in charge of imperial priesthood the most prominent members of local aristocracy. In some cases those who wear the flaminal toga had accepted only this honor without being interested in pursuing a municipal career⁵. Some individuals with this social behavior will become imperial priests at provincial level. The gradually evolution of local aristocracy can be the explanation for the paucity of evidences for the "imperial cult" and gods' cult for the living emperor in the first decades of the existence of the province.

¹ BEARD, NORTH, PRICE 1998, 310.

² FISHWICK 1987-1991, 21.

³ PRICE 1984, 15, see also GRADEL 2002, 7.

⁴ This modern notion covers for many scholars the cult of the *divi* emperors, *genius* and *numen Augusti*.

⁵ Or honorific magistrate *q(uin)q(uenalis) primus pro Imperatore* of *Q. Ianuarius Rufus* at Sarmizegetusa (*CIL* III, 1503; *IDR* III/2, 112) an example, after I. Piso's concludent discussion (see PISO 1998a, 103sq), of an earlier trajanic period flamen. An other example is Q. Aurelius Tertius (CIL III, 1448;IDR III/2, 72; CIL III, 7981; IDR III/2,388) and perhaps those mentioned in a fragmentary monument from Germisara (IDR III/3, 245, was just aedilicius) and P. Aelius Marius also conductor pascui et salinarum (AE 1930, 10; AE 1957, 273) all from Sarmizegetusa and dated in the 2nd century.

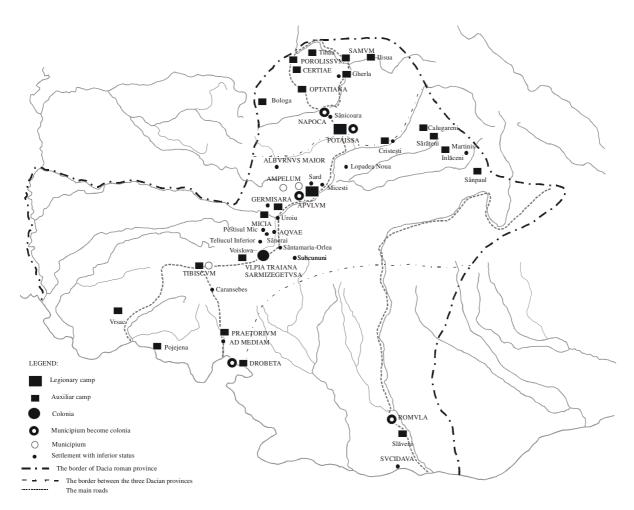


Fig. 1 - The places with imperial cult evidences in Dacia Roman Province.

The imperial cult and the cult of gods for the living emperors can be methodologically approached from two different perspectives: first, sociological, essentially political, and secondly religious. The first perspective had the aim to examine the relations of the provincial society with the imperial power and the second offer a look to the official calendar of the roman religion and the deities involved in the imperial rituals.

In the Dacian colonies and *municipia*, only Napoca can offer examples of community representation through sacrifices for *lupiter Optimus Maximus*. One is made by the supreme magistrates collegially joined⁶ and other to I.O.M on behalf of the health of the living emperors by a *praefectus iure dicundo*⁷. The frequency of the dedications for the emperor in the municipal medium is a clue that the base of roman power in Dacia is represented by the communities of citizens and colonists. Individual dedications like evergesies, private dedications or, in three cases, *ob honorem flamonii*⁸, are proves that the elites were interested in self-representation through relation with the imperial power. The *flamines* received the most important municipal honors from the Dacian towns: the supreme magistratures, even those honorific for the emperor at *Ulpia*, the

⁶ [I.O.M.] / Cons(ervatori) Mu/nic(ipii) Aeli / Hadr(iani) Napoc(ensis) / cura Ilvir(um) qq. / C. Numeri Dec/iani et Iuli Ingenui / v. s. l. m., CIL III, 14465.

⁷ I.O.M. / Iunoni Reginae / Minervae / pro salute d(omini) n(ostri) / M(arci) Ant(onini) Gordiani / p(ii) f(elici) Aug(usti) et Sabiniae / Tranquillinae / Augustae CIL III, 858. According to Lex Ursoniensis the religious attributions are assumed by duumviri, CIL II 2, 5, 1022.
⁸ AE 1979, 520; CIL III, 1448; IDR III/2, 72; CIL III, 1134.

flaminate in several towns, followed sometimes by the imperial provincial *sacerdotium* or prestigious Italian titles like *sacerdos Laurentium Lavinatium*. Only three evidences belong to municipal *sacerdotes* ⁹.

There are only six monuments dedicated by *Augustales* to divine entities in relation with the imperial cult in the entire province. The most important is a monument from Napoca for *Numen Augusti* erected by the two *magg(istri) Augustalis* (sic!) / *col(oniae) Nap(ocensis)* from which we understand that their sacrifice is made in the name of their *ordo*¹⁰. At Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, one of the few towns with epigraphically and archaeological attestation of an *aedes Augustalium*, the building was erected by M. Procilius Niceta, *flamen coloniae*¹¹.

The guilds had their own cult, private in its essence because they were not financed from public sources. At Sarmizegetusa, the only corporate structure with this kind of dedications is that of the *collegium fabrum*, but at Apulum the picture is much differentiated. The monuments are raised to their own tutelary deity and for the emperor. *Coll(egium) centonarior(um)* built a *scholam cum aetoma* from *pecunia sua pro salute Augg[g(ustorum)]* - Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Geta¹². The sacrifices were made by the *magistri*, at Ulpia, but also at Apulum. A magister of *collegium fabrum* and *Augustalis* of the colony *Aurelia Apulensis* erected an altar dedicated *Pro salute Auggg(ustorum)*, *Genio fabrum*¹³. It was set, most probably, in front of *schola* or *aedes fabrum*, because the approval of *ordo decurionum* was needed. In these locals, dedications for the emperors along with imperial busts might have existed¹⁴. At Sarmizegetusa, the same M. Procilius Niceta financed the building of a cult place for an unknown *collegium*¹⁵. The interior of this place had a gallery of imperial statues of *divi*. At Ulpia many of the dedications made by the members of *collegium fabrum* are addressed to *Nemesis Augusta*, and at Apulum the most of the dedications are for Jupiter. The difference is probably due to the relations with the legion stated at Apulum.

The organization and evolution of the cult of the *divi* and of the gods for the emperor at the provincial level is not that clear due to the lack of archaeological systematic researches of the cult ensemble near Sarmizegetusa. Still, from the monuments erected by the provincial *concilium* and by the provincial *sacerdotes*, results that those honorific in nature co-exist with the religious ones, in which the gods were invocated for the health of the emperors. In the title of the imperial priests, the cult object is mentioned only in a generic manner, *sacerdos arae Augusti*. Through Augusti the majority of the scholars saw the living emperors¹⁶. Taking into account the fact that, at this level, dedications for the emperor are only given to the gods for the health of the emperor, the conclusion may be that the cult object at the provincial altar was focused on the roman gods, on behalf of the living emperor. *Divi* could not be excluded and the existence of a temple along with the altar it is possible. This is implicitly suggested trough the term *metropolis*¹⁷.

In the provincial army the most part of dedications are collective. So called "esprit de corp" means sacrifices and processions at corporate level and pronounced by the commanders who have in charge also the religious attributions. The most interesting dedication to *lupiter Optimus Maximus* for the health of Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Getae, comes from Micia¹⁹. The supposed building dedicated by many auxiliary units is the basilica. Another *I.O.M. / et ceteris diis / deabusque im/ortalibus et Da/ciae* dedication

¹¹ The cult local identified probably in an absidate room was opening to the foral *basilica*, and the well known building plate was completed by I. Piso *aedem Augustalibus* / *pecunia sua faciend(am) instituit*, see recently ETIENNE, PISO, DIACONESCU 2004, 149–151, pl. LVI, LVII; PISO 2006, 107.

 $^{^{9}}$ CIL III, 1207; IDR III/5, 483; IDR III/3, 37; PETOLESCU 2007.

¹⁰ CIL III, 862.

¹² CIL III, 1174; IDR III/5, 425. The presence of the consul *L. Pomponius Liberalis* shows his involvement in the construction. It is the only place in Dacia where we find attestation of a high rang statesman for a *collegium*.

¹³ CIL III, 1006; IDR III/5, 80;

¹⁴ It is known that the construction of a building was associated also with erecting statues for the emperors FISHWICK 1987-1991, 497sq; DIACONESCU 1998, 335 sq.

¹⁵ *IDR* III/2, 119; *AE* 1927, 54; *IDR* III/2, 118. ETIENNE, PISO, DIACONESCU 2004, 120–126, pl. XL-XLII, Ep. 25, 26, n. 110, 111; DIACONESCU. BOTA 2004, 490.

¹⁶ See in special Коплемалл 1901, 115,134; FISHWICK 1978, 1233sq; FISHWICK 1987-1991, 301 sqq; FISHWICK 2004, II, 255–265.

 $^{^{\}rm 17}$ SZABO 1999, p. 135, for the signification of the term see BOATWRIGHT 2000, 104 sq, 136.

¹⁸ Veyne 1976, 612; Helgeland 1978, 1473.

¹⁹ CIL III, 1343; AE 1978, 705; IDR III/3, 77. PETOLESCU 1977, 370

for the health of Caracalla on his birthday originates from Apulum²⁰. The military deities like Mars and also Minerva are also well represented. An important question is the amount in which the military environment influenced the civil one, like it was at Apulum, Potaissa where the two legions from Dacia were camped, or at the settlements near the auxiliary camps.

According to the attributions, the place, and the purposes, cultic acts made by roman imperial officials can be separated several types of dedications to the emperors. First of all, the dedications of he roman imperial officials were those in the *praetoria*, investigated archaeologically at Apulum²¹ (the siege of the Dacia Superior and later of the tree dacian provinces' governors) and at Sarmizegetusa²², where the financial procurator of Dacia Apulensis was in charged. In the both edifices monuments in connection with the cult places for the emperors were found. Also, at Ampelum, in the siege of *procuratores aurariarum*, several monuments were erected clearly following the official calendar²³. The second is the dedications in the sanctuaries of the colonies and *municipia*. The third category is represented by the governors' dedications in their quality of military commanders. The last are the monuments related with the imperial activity.

The imperial administration influence can be seen especially at Apulum, near the provincial governor headquarters²⁴. The relationship of power in the sanctuaries with the imperial local deities, also topic ones, like at Germisara and Ad Mediam, is realised mostly by the imperial officials and in the second place by the slaves of custom office of Illyricum.

Beyond the hierarchic social dimension of the imperial cult and the cult of the gods for the emperor, very important are the religious aspects of the phenomenon, the worship modalities connected to the living emperor, the cult of the gods and that of the divined emperors.

It is obvious the scarcely diffusion of the dedications for divine entities who were considered to be the most relevant for the imperial cult.

The evidences for *divi*'s cult are less numerous but those which prevailed show the important role in the public, and private (corporative) religious life. So is the gallery of the *divi* at Sarmizegetusa²⁵, and the others supposed from the same town, those from Apulum²⁶ and eventually, a building plate from Drobeta²⁷. The role played by municipal *flamines* in this cult cannot also be neglected; taking into account the fact that the *divi* cult is the only recognized according to the roman notion of religion. They should belong, like in Rome, to a *divus*²⁸.

The cult for *Numen Augusti* and of the imperial genius is scarcely represented in the province. The genius is in Dacia only a recipient for worship of the governors and a *legatus* of the legion *XIII Gemina*²⁹. Thus, the old thesis regarding the universality of their cult must be abandoned. Only five dedications are known in Dacia for the imperial *numen*. It appears in different forms: *Numini Aug(usti)*, *Numinib(us) A[ugg(ustorum)]*, *Numini Domini n(ostri)*, or together with the roman gods or the imperial virtues [*Di]s immortalib(us)* et *Numini sanctissimor(um)* / *Augustorum*, *Numini et Pro/videntiae Im[p(eratorum)*³⁰. This covers almost the entire types of epigraphic formulas known in the empire. Related to imperial *numen* are

²⁰ CIL III, 1063; ILS 3922; IDR III/5, 184.

²¹ CSERNI 1902. For the interpretation of "big baths" found by Albert Cserni with *praetorium* see, DIACONESCU, PISO 1993, 72sq.

²² DAICOVICIU *ET ALII* 1980, 278–2811986; PISO 1983; PISO 1998, 253–255; RUSU-PESCARU, ALICU 2000, 90, 112–114.

²³ An altar was consecrated to IOM, Iuno Regina and Minerva *pro salute et incolumitate Marci Aureli Antonin[i] Pii felicis Augusti et Iuliae Aug(ustae) matris eius et castorum et patriae* by the procurator *Aelius Sostratus*, IDR III/3, 318. Another monument for Ceres Augusta was erected in 3rd of January 215 by a *dispensator* and dedicated by the procurator, see recently the revised text at PISO 2004.

²⁴ Where there is a priest instituted by Pertinax, the future emperor, paralle with the existence of imperial *sacerdotes* along with the *flamines*.

²⁵ ETIENNE, PISO, DIACONESCU 2004, 119–120.

²⁶ DIACONESCU 1998, 444–448, cat. 32, 34, 35, 36; 2005, vol. II, 53–58.

²⁷ IDR II, 3.

²⁸ See BEARD, NORTH, PRICE 1998, 252 sq.

²⁹ BULZAN 2005.

³⁰ CIL III, 862; CIL, III 1127= IDR III/5, 427; IDR III/ 3, 37; IDR III/2, 225; CIL, III 1439 = IDR III/2, 328.

also the 20 dedications in *d.n.m.e.* formula, honorific in nature and in vogue between the reigns of Caracalla to Gallienus.

With the 76 counted evidences spread at all social levels, the Augustan gods are one of specific category used in the imperial liturgy context. They are of most different nature, from the so-called dynastic gods to the topic or oriental deities. The connection is simply by attaching the epithet Augustus to the gods, and that means the fact that so is defined a sphere of powers. In Dacia most of them were roman deities: Diana in 15 cases, Minerva, Mercurius and Hercules in 6, Mars in 4, Apollo and Liber Pater in three times. In many situations, it is clear that the Augustan gods were called for personal purposes as is shown by the use of the expressions: *ex viso*, or *pro salute sua et suorum*. Aesculapius, for example, had 8 monuments. It is of notice both, roman and the urban connotations of the dedications for Augustal gods discovered in towns like Ulpia Traiana, Apulum, Drobeta, Ampelum and in their rural territory or in the civilian settlements near the military camps³¹. These are lacking until now in the south, and in a big proportion, in the east and north of Dacia. For example, in Dacia Porolissensis, only one dedication is known at Tihau, and none in the Inferior Dacia.

Re-defined as independent deities, there are only 22 situations in Dacia from which it clearly results that a cult was dedicated to imperial virtues and blessings³². From this point of view, the situation is similar with that of germanic and gallic provinces³³. With Victoria and Fortuna being an exception, Concordia and Providentia are rarely mentioned. They are present mostly in the official environment, in army and administration. It is surprising that in spite of the military importance of the province, the most dedications don't belong to Victoria Augusta, as is the case for example in Hispania and in Africa, but to Fortuna. The great number of dedications for the goddess of luck and wealth is probably due to sociological and religious factors as shows the erection of monuments, especially in the towns, and in military medium. The identification of Fortuna with the genii of the communities and guilds can also explain the spreading of her monuments.

Through the 7 evidences, *Domus Divina* seem to be mainly an import in the north danubian province. The formula has a double significance, religious for the gods and honorific for the emperor. The proof that this formula does not refer to imperial divine entity is the association in Dacia with *pro salute Imperatoris* formula. The most important monuments are the two Nymphaea discovered on *decumanus maximus* at Sarmizegetusa³⁴. The use of the expression *In honorem Domus Divinae* in the inscription is a proof that monuments are dedicated to Neptunus with a Nymphae and to Apollo and the Muses, although in their figures the features of Septimius Severus may be recognized³⁵.

Truly characteristic to Dacia are the sacrifices for the gods on behalf of the emperor's health. Their underestimation in relationship with the imperial cult isn't justified³⁶. Their dedication at the annual wows to the emperors, or at the imperial festivals, in relation with the sacrifices, offers them a central role in the honoring of the emperor in relation with the divinity. The cult of the gods was the near at hand pattern for the representation of power that give birth to a religious phenomenon with constitutive impact³⁷. A fundamental role in the redefinition of the "imperial cult" is attributed to the ritual, especially to the sacrifice for the gods on behalf of the emperor³⁸. In the Greek east, a cult of the gods was offered for the health of the emperor. The

³¹ Often, the monuments were dedicated to the local sanctuary deities like the Nymphs at thermal baths from Germisara.

³² See different opinions at BĂRBULESCU 1977, 284 and to FEARS 1978, 830–833.

 $^{^{33}}$ LIERTZ 1998, 146 sq.

³⁴ ETIENNE, PISO, DIACONESCU 2004, 120–126, pl. XL-XLII, Ep. 25, 26, n. 110,111; DIACONESCU, BOTA 2004, 490.

³⁵ DIACONESCU 1998, 381sq; 2005, 275. R. Turcan identifies several phenomena beginning with Commodus, like the iconographic juxtaposition, the godlike portretisation by two ways: the imperial physiognomy, as new Alexander and then by divine attributes. The last stage is the iconographic assimilation. In the Severan age is known their multiplication for the common mortals who afforded somtuously decorated sarcofages on which they were heroized (TURCAN 1978, 1025–1046). For Dacia, this phenomenon was signalized by the multiplication of Hercule (see BĂRBULESCU, NEMEŞ 1974-1975) or by attributes, eventually the imperial physiognomy (see BULZAN 1998, 2008).

 $^{^{36}}$ Taeger 1960, 232 sqq, 237; Turcan 1978, 997, 1057 sqq.

³⁷ PRICE 1984, 1–115.

³⁸ PRICE 1980-1981, 28-41.

S. Price examples for this part of the empire clearly show that most of the sacrifices were made to the ancestral gods for "the health, and the safety of the emperors but also, for eternal standing of the Roman Empire". The formula is very close with that from *Feriale Duranum*, which is an example for the official roman sacrifices calendar: *ob salutem* of *Severus Alexander et ob aeternitatem imperii P. R.* ³⁹.

According to D. Fishwick, the gods and the imperial abstractions may have been the receptors for sacrifices on behalf of the emperors' health, but he was not interested to offer a coherent theory for the rituals mentioned in the western sources⁴⁰. AFA has a central place at I. Gradel, because the sacrifices were often dedicated to the gods⁴¹. I've reached the same conclusion and the fact that in the centre of the religious honors for the emperor were the gods, was a strong argument. To conclude, the cult of the gods on behalf of the emperor was the most frequent way of positioning the prince in the society. Although they appear also in the Greek east, these types of sacrifices in Dacia are typical for the Romans.

96 of dedications use this formula in Dacia of course only for living emperors. By comparing with others provinces, the number is high, considering also the shorter existence of Dacia. The formula represents an important part from the building dedications, even when there was no finance or help from the imperial administration. This was, not by chance, the first manifestations of honors in relationship with the divinity from the province, and also, are the last to disappear.

Those who erected this kind of monuments are, most of the times, officials and military. In other provinces, the situation is almost identical⁴². Tibiscum overuns Drobeta, with 6 monuments against 3. In Dacia Porolissensis, Napoca is overuned by Porolissum with his scarcely evidences. The biggest difference is between Apulum and Sarmizegetusa. At Ulpia Traiana, together with dedication from the provincial *concilium*, only 14 monuments were erected with this formula, but double, 28, at Apulum.

It was the most used modality to draw near the universal destiny of the empire the oriental deities, often sovereign gods. The sovereign divinities best represented are IOM Dolichenus or IOM Aeternus. The same is IOM Sabasios, who appears in this formula only in Dacia.

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³⁹ FINK 1971, no. 117, 423.

⁴⁰ FISHWICK 1987-1991, 517 sqq.

⁴¹ GRADEL 2002, 18–22.

⁴² LIERTZ 1998, 158 sq.

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