

A VOTIVE ALTAR DISCOVERED IN THE LEGIONARY CAMP OF APULUM

Abstract: This paper presents the latest epigraphic discovery in the camp of XIIIth Legion Gemina, represented by a votive altar dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, the protective Genius of the centuria, by a non-commissioned officer with the rank of optio named M(arcus) Atti(us) Valens. It was identified in situ, next to the entrance in contubernium, more precisely next to one of the rooms used to deposit the weapons (*arma*). This room was closely to the apartment of the centurion. Considering the chiselling manner of the letters, which are not carefully executed, and the context of the discovery, which is the last level of Roman habitation, the votive monument is chronologically dated during a period of the military anarchy as more precise data is forthcoming. This is the second monument discovered in Apulum dedicated to a protector Genius of the centuria. This military deity is mentioned in Potaissa by the texts of two votive altars¹. Our character is attested for the first time expanding the list of options associated with this Legion.

Keywords: *divinity, votive altar, legionary camp, legion XIII Gemina.*

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The rescue¹ archaeological research was made due to the restoration of the local War Enrolment Office² (**Plate 1**), built during the Habsburg domination, as well as for the construction of a new conference hall in the area, these allowing us to investigate more of the geographical area of the third terrace of Mureş River, Alba-Iulia County, Romania, investigation which revealed traces of habitation starting with La Tène period as far as the 18th century³.

The examination brought to light the inner sides of two barracks situated one in front of each other, which unveiled a part of the surface from the apartments inhabited by *centurions* (**Plate 2/2, 3/1**). These architectural structures will be preserved and will be the theme of a new museal circuit in the near future.

The subject approached by this paper, is an important epigraphic discovery attributed to the Roman period, illustrated by a votive altar (**Plate 3/2, 3; 4/1-6**) made of calcareous stone (CaCO₃), identified near the entrance in one of the rooms belonging to a *contubernium*, where the weapons were deposited (*arma*).

The roman military camp (*castrum*) from Apulum, was constructed as quarters for the XIIIth Legion Gemina (*Legio tertia decima Gemina*). It has a

¹ CĂȚINAȘ, BĂRBULESCU 1978, 17-20, Fig. 1a-b; BĂRBULESCU 2004, 375-376, Fig. 1a-b, 2a-b.

² It is an "U" shaped building from the 18th century constructed according to the plans by architect Giovanni Morando Visconti, who also designed the plans for the Habsburg fortification. See: FLEȘER 2006, 94. On a design belonging to Lt. Col. Konrad von Weiss, from 1736, the building of the War Enrolment Office is marked with the letter O. On another design belonging to the same author dating from 1736 and 1738, the Habsburg building is noted with the letter I. See: ANGHEL 1986, 252, Fig. 2; ANGHEL 1994, 289, Fig. 3.

³ The archaeological information related to this research is the theme of a future monography.

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rectangular shape, with the sides measuring 470/480 m (N-S) - 440 (E-V) m. The material used consists mostly of stone blocks using *opus quadratum* as assembly technique. The hypothesis of a previous stage, during Emperor Trajan, cannot be excluded and presumptively, that it would have been a hillfort surrounded by a wooden palisade⁴. Additionally, the excavation that took part in 2011 uncovered a certain area belonging to the operational headquarters, on which, efforts are being made to be published⁵.

The last archaeological investigations in the western precinct of the fortification brought new information related to the intervention from the late Roman period, between the 3rd century and the beginning of the 4th century, when the fortification wall was reconstructed⁶.

Carrying on our topic, the altar was discovered in *praetentura dextra*, one of the areas where the barracks of the soldiers were placed. In the greater context of the entire roman settlement, the two barracks are placed face to face (**Plate 3/1**), being perpendicular on *uia principalis*⁷. The votive altar (h-56 cm; base dimensions: 45.5 X 40 cm) (**Plate 3/2, 3**) was identified *in situ*, placed on a calcareous plinth (h-13 cm, L-57.5 cm, l-55.5 cm) having a quadrilateral shape, identified at a depth of 2.40 m (**Plate 2/1; 4/1-6**), near the apartment of the centurion, next to the entrance in one of the rooms pertaining as a deposit for the weapons (*arma*) near-by a *contubernium*. The superior part of the monument, the canopy, is damaged, although the text is approximately 90% preserved. The epigraphic piece remains unfinished, perhaps because the beneficiary considered that the back side was not necessary to be carved by the lapidary. The traces of demarcation are provided by the linear ditches chiselled on the stone forming a facade known as *dice*⁸.

The epigraphic field consists of five rows preserved with the dimensions of h-34.5 cm, l-32.5 cm. The height of the letters varies significantly from one row to another: r. 1: h-5 cm; r. 2: h-5.5-6 cm; r. 3: h-5 cm; r. 4: h-5 cm; r.5: h-4 cm. Several specific elements are present as we may see: in the first row *interpunctio* is present between letters I (h-2.5 cm) and O (h-3.5 cm), which are being partially preserved; letter I from the third row is also partially preserved (h-3.5 cm); on the fourth row, the letter S is decreased. The distinctive sign belonging to the *centuria* from the second row is roughly visible.

The epigraphy can be read as following:

I(oui)*O(ptimo)*[M(aximo)]/Gen(io) (centuriae)/M(arcus) Atti(us)/Valens/Optio, translated as: "To Iupiter the best and the greatest (and) to the protector Genius of the *centuria*, M(arcus) Atti(us) Valens *optio*".

⁴ ANGHEL 1975, 268, Fig. 7-9; RUSU 1979, 53; HEITEL 1985, 215-231; MOGA 1998, 46-47.

⁵ GUDEA *et alii* 2015, 233-241.

⁶ OTA, FLORESCU 2016, 205-234.

⁷ As planimetry, the barracks are similar to the ones researched in several roman military camps on the British and Rhaetian-Danubian limes, also to those in Numidia: Inchtuthil, Caerleon, Noviomagus, Novaesium, Aquincum, Potaissa, Lambaesis. See: WEBSTER 1985, 186-188, fig. 33-34, 35a-b; BĂRBULESCU 1997, 33-35, Abb. 5; BAATZ 2000, 150-153, fig. 12.4a-b, 12.5a-c; NÉMETH 2003, 88, Abb. 3. We meet furthermore similarities in the auxiliary camp from Drobeta, Dacia Superior. See: MARCU 2009, 135-138, Fig. 29-30.

⁸ This must have been 30 cm thick, although, for some reasons it has 36 cm, which leads us on the opinion that the piece is unfinished and used as such.

The method of writing is not carefully executed, indicating a possible period of military distress.

It is the second monument of this type from Apulum that stands as a proof for the existence of a protector Genius of the *centuria*. The first altar discovered in the same area, dedicated to a similar deity, nowadays deposited to Hofbibliothek in Wien, is devoted by Tib(erius) Claudius Mansuetus ranked as *optio*⁹. Both individuals have the same military rank possessing *tria nomina* of italic origins.

Iupiter is one of the military deities (*dii militares*), who protects the Roman army as well as the Empire¹⁰. Most of the devotions regarding this divinity, from the entire military context of the province, are present in Apulum, and most of the times it is authenticated with the epithet of Optimus or Maximus¹¹.

The *genii* were idols which had an apotropaic role. They had protective attributes, thus everyone received a genius at his birth. Also, every institution – religious or professional, province, town, military camp and any other human activity had its own genius¹². Today, we are referring to 56 inscriptions dedicated to all kind of *genii* in the province of Dacia, 18 of them appertain to the rural area¹³.

The present discovery is a military genius, *Genius centuriae*. It's cult starts at Rome, at the beginning of the 2nd century within the troops of *uigiles* under Emperor Commodus. It is adopted latterly by the Praetorian guards as well by the legions, therefore each *centuria* arrays a chapel within the barracks¹⁴. The cult dissemination of our Genius was wider compared to any other military *genii*, a fact demonstrated by over 50 inscriptions discovered in circa 40 *castra*. As a matter of fact, we mention that in Carnuntum and Mogontiacum are present more than a half of the votive monuments dedicated to this deity¹⁵. In Carnuntum, almost as in Apulum, four votive altars were placed in the yard between the two barracks, in the proximity of the apartments belonging to centurions¹⁶.

This Genius of the *centuriae* associated to *Iupiter* has both epithets - Optimus and Maximus, both being military deities and protectors of the *centuriae*. This reminds of the esprit de corps of the soldiers¹⁷, with the role of defending all the members of the *centuria*¹⁸, and the building (*centuria*) they lived in¹⁹. The reverence of the cult of the *Genii* by a soldier illustrates, in the opinion of O. Alexandrov, a powerful romanisation²⁰. Similar divinities of the *centuria* are also adored in the camp of Potaissa, through the existence of two votive altars ordered by a centurion, Aurelius Muca and a certain man called Aurelius Asclepiades²¹. Farther

⁹ MOGA 1985, 136; IDR III/5, 79; ȘTEFĂNESCU-ONIȚIU 2009, 83; CUPCEA 2014, 31, nr. 102.

¹⁰ FERRARI 2003, 469.

¹¹ ȘTEFĂNESCU-ONIȚIU 2009, 75, 77.

¹² HILD 1896, 1488, 1496; SPIEDEL, DIMITROVA-MILČEVA 1978, 1542-1544; ROMEO 1988, 599; KERNBACH 1989, 202; GRIMAL 2001, 202; FERRARI 2003, 384.

¹³ DUDĂU 2013, 211.

¹⁴ SCHMIDT HEIDENREICH 2013, 118.

¹⁵ SCHMIDT HEIDENREICH 2013, 119.

¹⁶ SCHMIDT HEIDENREICH 2013, 119.

¹⁷ ȘTEFĂNESCU-ONIȚIU 2009, 108.

¹⁸ SPIEDEL, DIMITROVA-MILČEVA 1978, 1546.

¹⁹ SCHMIDT HEIDENREICH 2013, 118.

²⁰ ALEXANDROV 2012, 276.

²¹ CĂȚINAȘ, BĂRBULESCU 1978, 17-20, Fig. 1a-b; BĂRBULESCU 2004,

evidence can be found in Superior Germany at the camp of Saalburg²², in Moesia Inferior - Gura Ialomiței²³, in Britannia - Chester²⁴ and in Numidia - Lambaesis²⁵. Alternatively forms of adoration are represented by minor art, like the bronze statue from Bad Homburg, Superior Germany²⁶.

The man who dedicated the inscription to Iupiter Optimus Maximus (*Genius Centuriae*) is named M(arcus) Atti(us) Valens, possessing a *tria nomina* of italic origins, a non-commissioned officer with the rank of *optio* in The XIIIth Legion Gemina. It is the first attestation of this devotee and the discovery expands the list of *optiones* regarding this Legion. An *optio* seconds at the command of the *centuria* after the centurion. During the battle, his role was to lead the *centuria* in case the centurion died²⁷. He wore a hash mark (*insignia*), the rod (*hastile*), being responsible for upkeeping the fighting line and the disposal of the soldiers. He also had administrative duties like taking care of the optimal supply of the troops²⁸.

To conclude, the votive altar dedicated to Iupiter Optimus Maximus and to the protector Genius of the *centuria* was discovered *in situ*, near the entrance to one of the rooms of a *contubernium*, being placed in proximity of centurion's residence. Its inscription is approximately 90% preserved and attests another non-commissioned officer with the rank of *optio* of the Legion, a character with *tria nomina* of italic origins, M(arcus) Atti(us) Valens, although this do not necessarily show the same origins of the individual. The archaeological context and the writing manner show, due to the lack of other elements for a more exact chronology, a period of military disorders.

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375-376, Fig. 1a-b, 2a-b.

²² CIL XIII 2, 7494.

²³ ISM V, 127.

²⁴ GOLDSWORTHY 2008, 69.

²⁵ SPIEDEL, DIMITROVA-MILČEVA 1978, 1546.

²⁶ ROMEO 1988, 602.

²⁷ WEBSTER 1985, 116-117.

²⁸ CUPCEA 2014, 22-23.

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Plate 1. 1. The researched area in the plan dating from 1711 designed by Giovanni Morando Visconti; 2. Identification of the researched area in the project-plan of the bastion fortification from 1736, designed by Lt. Col. von Weis; 3. Satellite photo of the areal framing of the project; 4. Plan with the research units.

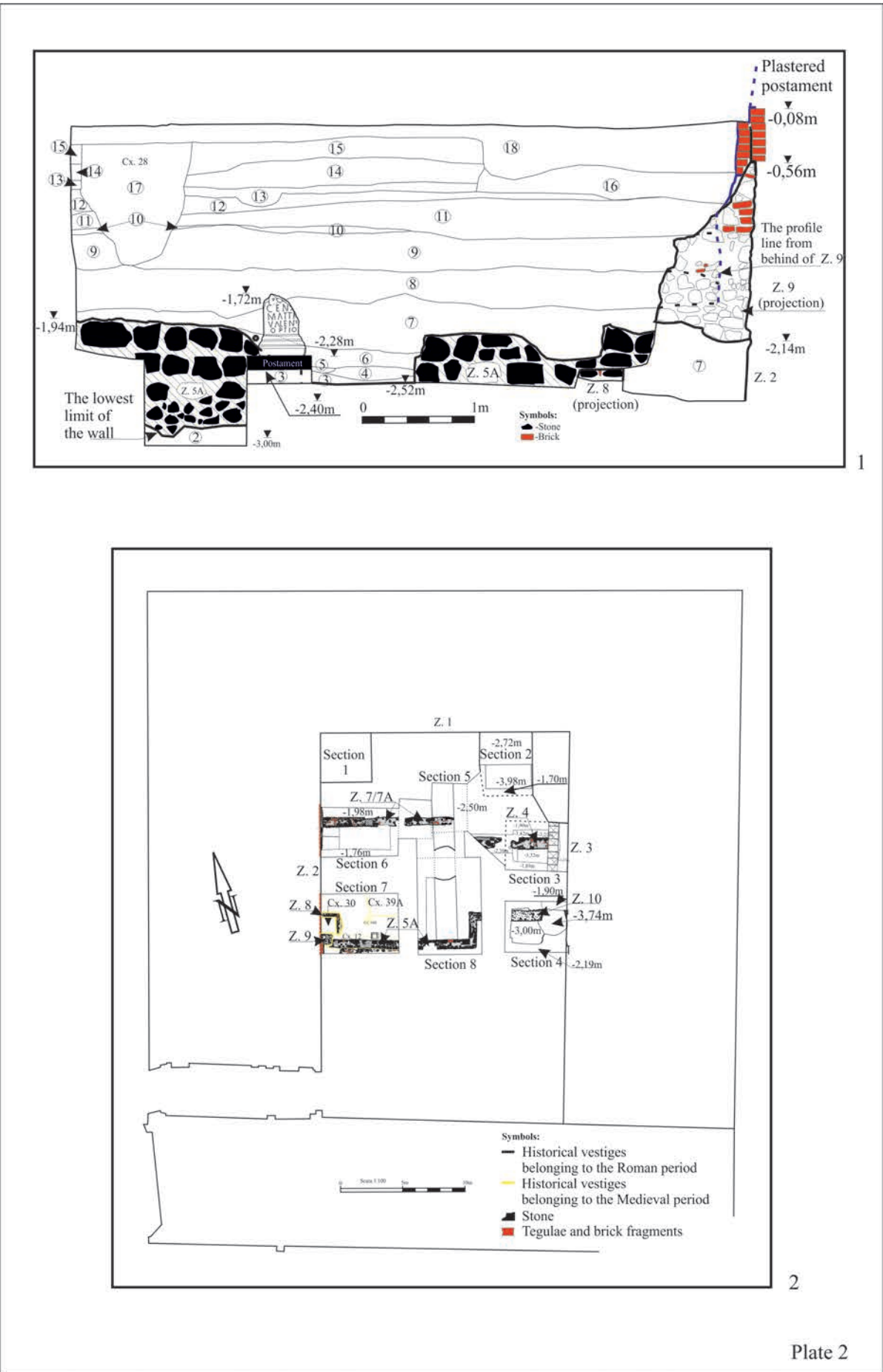


Plate 2. 1. The stratigraphic context of the discovery. Section 7, south profile; **2.** General plan of the identified archaeological vestiges.

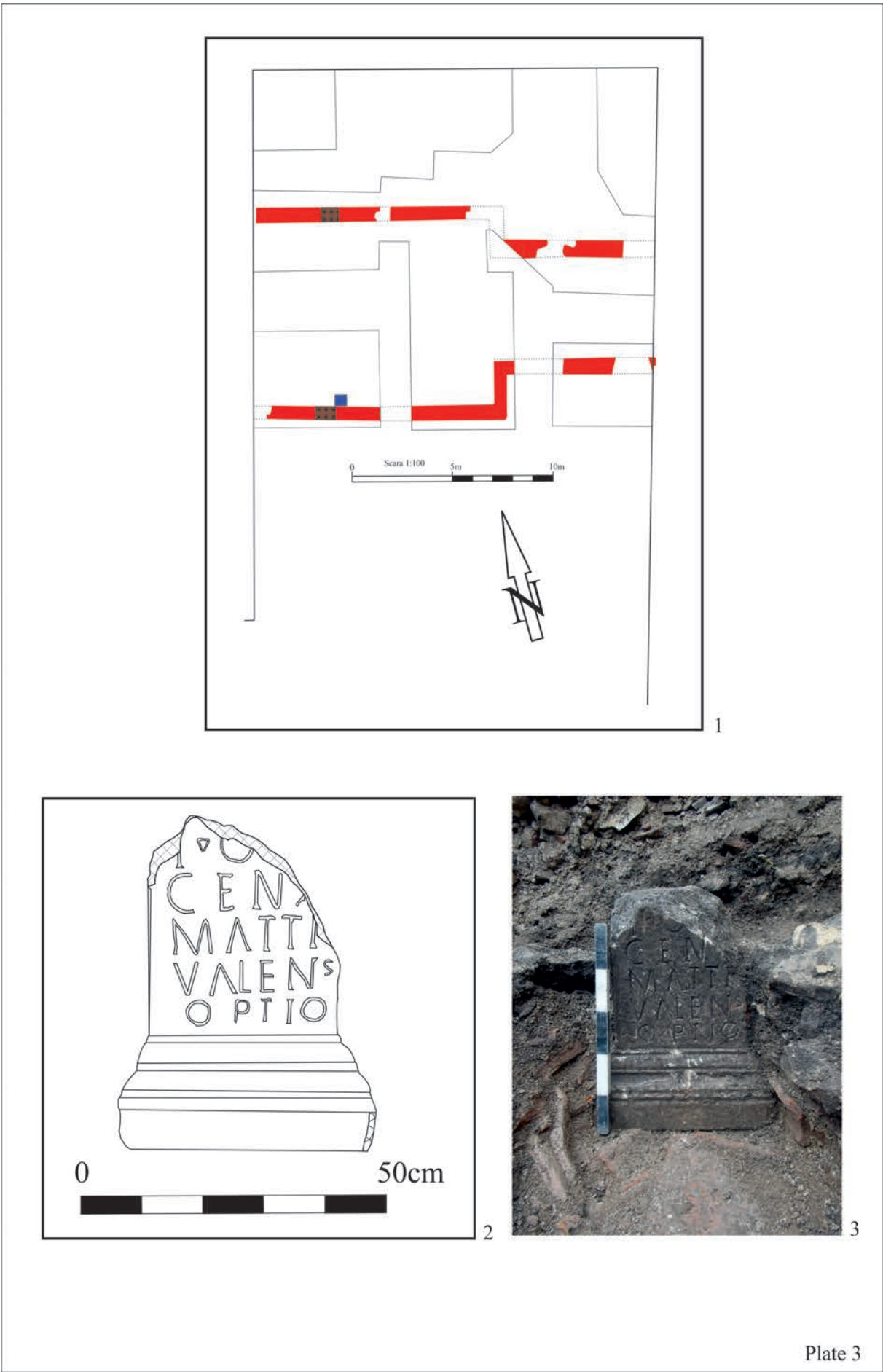


Plate 3. 1. Graphic reconstruction of the routes of the perimeter walls of the barracks; 2. Votive altar; 3. *In situ* votive altar.



Plate 4

Plate 4. Depiction of the votive altar *in situ*.