

part of the introduction presents shortly the history of the research on the Danubian riders-cult, from the first articles of Franz Cumont, Buday Árpád and Hampel József till the latest works of Rudolf Ertl and the author of this book. Szabó Á. rightly points out that the older literature from the paradigmatic work of Dumitru Tudor, till the classification of the LIMC, Rudolf Ertl or Sorin Nemeti was focusing especially on the iconographic typology of these objects, trying to identify the regional distribution and evolution of these narratives, without reflecting on the functionality of these objects as tools in religious communication. This can be explained mainly by the unknown provenience of the objects, found mostly in undocumented contexts. Reflecting also on the current state of research, Szabó cites the “interesting and quintessential” lecture of Richard Gordon held in Pécs in 2016 and the new project initiated by Dilyana Boteva entitled “*The Rider monuments from the Balkan-Danubian provinces of the Roman Empire*”⁷.

The third chapter entitled “The identification of the major deities” presents his article published in 2007⁸. The study presents a unique lead plaque (82 x 100 mm) discovered by metal detectorists in Lébény-Barátföldpuszta (ancient Quadrata) in 2003. The rectangular, two registered tablet is unique due to the inscription in the upper section which names the divinity as “Domino”. Szabó argued, that although the iconographic program of the tablet shows a female central figure, the dedication was made for a Dominus, a male divinity. He tried to associate this unique plaque with the well known Dominus dedications from the Roman Empire identified in numerous provinces (Dacia⁹, Pannonia Superior¹⁰, Pannonia Inferior¹¹, Moesia Superior¹², Moesia Inferior¹³, Dalmatia¹⁴ and probably in Italia¹⁵, Africa Proconsularis¹⁶, Mauretania Caesariensis¹⁷). While most of the inscriptions with the Latin Dominus are dedicated to the Roman emperors, the others are related to divinities which are usually unnamed¹⁸, but there are also few exceptions, when the name of the divinity (Saturnus, Silvanus, Mars, Apollo, Deus Aeternus) is also revealed¹⁹. The association of Dominus alone with the well known iconography and this particular cult might be wrong, however the divine pair of Dom(i)nus and Domna seems to be indeed concentrated exclusively in the territory of the Danubian provinces. Identifying the two divinities – the female Moon Goddess

⁷ The lecture of Richard Gordon is not yet published. Invited in Pécs by the authors of these lines, Richard Gordon’s lecture interpreted for the first time the so called Danubian Rider’s cult in the frame of the Lived Ancient Religion approach.

⁸ Later an Italian version was published in 2008.

⁹ CIL III 1289, CMRED I. NR. 40-42, CIL III 7671, AE 2010, 1383, AE 2010, 1372.

¹⁰ AE 1974, 494, AE 1992, 1429, AE 1962, 213c.

¹¹ RIU 1523b, CIL III 3236.

¹² CIL III 7532, 8244.

¹³ AE 1950, 175, AE 2003, 1564, ILBulg 362, IGLNo 74.

¹⁴ ILJug 1827

¹⁵ CIL V,2, 8979.

¹⁶ AE 1940, 54. The inscription was preserved on a mosaic which came from a context with a statue of Saturnus, therefore it can be associated with the Punic Baal: Hurst 1999, 39-41.

¹⁷ CIL VIII 20969a. Similarly to the previous inscription, this one is associated also with Saturnus.

¹⁸ See also: AE 1923, 89, AE 1939, 201a.

¹⁹ AE 1900, 17, CIL II, 703, AE 1904, 139, CIL III 1079, ILNo 052, CIL III 6143, AE 2003, 1923.

and the male Sun god associated earlier by L. Zotović and I. Tóth – Á. Szabó combines the earlier theories of two researchers with the epigraphic evidence and formulate his paradigmatic thesis, that this particular cult formed in early 2nd century AD probably in Moesia Superior had as central figures a female (Domna) and a male (Domnus) divinity and not the two riders as it was thought before. The lead tablet from Quadrata seems to prove this theory: the presence of the male divinity is evoked by the linguistic religious language, the inscription, while his female counterpart by the visual religious language, the iconography.

The fourth chapter of the book entitled “the central theme of the religion” is an article published in 2017. In this article the author presents a marble relief (175 x 102 x 18,5 mm) recovered in 2007 by Hungarian authorities discovered – as the other objects too – by antiquity looting. The relief represents four scenes: the tympanon shaped upper part represents a Sun god-like male bust (Dom(i)nus?), the second scene a central female figure (Dom(i)na?) with two riders and two stars, the third scene represents a ritual banquet and two other scenes possibly related to initiation ceremonies and animal sacrifices²⁰. The last scene – which seems to be the most profane and earthly – represents objects and animals, possible tools of religious communication. Interpreting this hierarchical, visual narrative, Á. Szabó tries to reconstruct the lost mythologem in a short, half page long interpretation. Giving more analogies from other iconographic narratives from Illyricum and interpreting the visual motifs of the relief might help this hypothesis further, although Szabó is aware that such visual bricolage is created by a small group of people and transformed by local appropriation in few generations. Szabó argued, that even if the Sun god-like figure is represented on the highest register, the central figure of this cult might be the Female counterpart (Dom(i)na), who is represented at least three times on this paneled relief.

The fifth chapter has the title “Manufacturing the tablets and the spread of the cult objects” and it’s based on one of Á. Szabó’s article from 2008. Here he presents a lead tablet (categorized after Tudor’s typology: type IV aedicula with corner acroteria class B subdivision (e) or Ertl 1996 F 01 typ). In this article the author presents a hypothesis on the mass production of these small lead tablets, made in negative turning, helped also by the form of the objects itself. Based on the few analogies from south of Dacia and Moesia Superior, he argued, that these tablets were probably associated with a sanctuary as portable religious souvenirs.

While in the previous chapter Szabó just shortly mentioned the problem of the sanctuaries, in the sixth chapter he discusses the problem of cult places. Based on the analogy from Sopiana (today Pécs) where 4 different objects dedicated to the cult were discovered, Á. Szabó presumed that the cult had domestic and “public” spaces of religious communication too. One of the objects from Sopiana was a limestone relief found in an archaeologically attested context, which gives a special place for this object, as one of the few with a documented environment. Szabó identified 17 places in 8 Danubian provinces where possible sanctuaries

²⁰ On the Greek influences of the animal sacrifices in Illyricum see also: Hitch-Rutherford 2017, 21.

of Domna et Domnus could exist. Only the sanctuary from Colonia Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa was discovered and attested archaeologically²¹. He shortly mentions also the relief from Poetovio, which was identified by I. Tóth as a central cult-relief from a sanctuary of Domna et Domnus and associated with an indigenous “Sol Invictus Illyricus”²².

In the final chapter, Á. Szabó presents his major conclusions on the topic, arguing, that this new cult or religion – two notions, which are often mixed in the book – was founded in the 2nd century AD and spread rapidly in the Danubian provinces, where it was attested in various local appropriations. Sanctuaries and their possible religious providers represented local and probably, global centers of religious pilgrimage too, especially in Sirmium. He identified Domnus et Domna as propitious, universal gods, which represents one of the reasons of the rapid success of this “offer” on the religious market of the so called “second paganism” during the Principate. Whoever was or were the founder(s) of this new religion – which is not radically different from the numerous small group religions of the Principate²³ – they created a highly efficient visual language and religious narrative, an imperial bricolage which due to its syncretic, flexible nature and accessibility became a successful form of Roman religious communication in the 2nd-4th centuries AD.

This book of Ádám Szabó is an important work because of many reasons: it gives a radically new interpretation of a rich material evidence of a mysterious aspect of Roman religion(s) and tries to implement on the case studies of the Danubian provinces some of the new focus points of the current Roman religious studies. Further researches will need to read the iconographic program and visual language of these reliefs and plaques in a different way, analyzing the visual tools of the Danubian provinces combined so efficiently in this cult, as strategies of local religious appropriations.

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²¹ FIEDLER-HÖPKEN 2010.

²² lupa 8808. Without further archaeological evidence, Tóth's hypothesis remains a solitary theory.

²³ REBILLARD-RÜPKE 2015; LICHTERMANN ET AL. 2017.