

Herausgegeben von:

Thomas Corsten
Fritz Mitthof
Bernhard Palme
Hans Taeuber

TYCHE

Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte
Papyrologie und Epigraphik

HOLZHAUSEN
DER VERLAG

Band 25, 2010



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Vertreten durch:

Thomas Corsten, Fritz Mitthof, Bernhard Palme, Hans Taeuber

Gemeinsam mit:

Franziska Beutler und Wolfgang Hameter

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e-mail: franziska.beutler@univie.ac.at

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e-mail: hans.taeuber@univie.ac.at oder bernhard.palme@univie.ac.at

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ÁGNES ALFÖLDY-GĂZDAC
SZILAMÉR PÁNCZÉL — ISTVÁN BAJUSZ
SILVIA MUSTAȚĂ — LÓRÁNT VASS

A Family Funerary Monument Erected by a *vilicus* from Porolissum in Roman Dacia*

Tafel 9–11

The Roman archaeological site Porolissum lies on the territory of the villages Moigrad, Ortelec, Brebi and Jac, in the county of Zalău, attached to the localities of Creaca and Mirșid.

The Roman settlement developed around the auxiliary fort established on the Pomot Hill, following the conclusion of the second Dacian war in AD 106. Owing to its strategic position, Porolissum became the most important military centre of the north-western part of Roman Dacia, which later became the province of *Dacia Porolissensis* (Fig. 1, p. 88). Its primal objective was to maintain a constant control over the road that linked the *Barbaricum* with the Transylvanian basin, and to coordinate the defence of the north-western limes sector known as the “Limes of the Meseș Mountains”. The considerable military presence and the establishment of an imperial customs office assured a relatively swift economic development for the town of Porolissum, acknowledged by obtaining the status of *municipium* from the emperor *Septimius Severus*. Parallel with its economic growth by the 3rd century AD, Porolissum became one of the province’s most important cultural, religious and administrative centres, and the population of the city and its *territorium* reached 20,000 inhabitants¹. Following the end of Roman rule, no consistent settlement developed in this place, making it an ideal ground for archaeological research of the Roman period. The first professional archaeological excavations were carried out by Árpád Buday in 1908², and after many interruptions systematic research has taken place since 1977. As a result of the excavations undertaken up to this point, large portions of the defensive system, the civil settlement, the road network and the cemetery were identified and explored (Fig. 2, p. 88). Along with the archaeological research, a great number of

* We are indebted to Dr. Franziska Beutler for her comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this study. Thanks go also to Dr. Adam Szabó and Dr. Carmen Ciongradi for their helpful advice.

¹ M. Bărbulescu (coord.), *Atlas Dicționar al Daciei Romane*, Cluj-Napoca 2005, 37.

² Á. Buday, *Porolissumból. Jelentés az 1908 június 10-től július 4-ig végzett ásításokról*, Erdélyi Múzeum 3 (1908) 337–148.

building remains were conserved or restored, creating an archaeological park of significant extent³.

Excavations in the Roman cemetery, which lies on Ursoieș Hill on the border of the village of Jac, took place in 1949 and 1958, and were resumed in 2006⁴. During the excavations of 2008, a number of 19 cremations were discovered in trench J (Fig. 3, Taf. 9) belonging to two burial horizons. The earlier horizon comprised nine cremations and along with them a masonry base (1.36 x 1.40 m) built out of volcanic rock (context 1810), next to which fragments of a funerary altar (context 1803a) were discovered *in situ* (Fig. 4/a–b, Taf. 9). The probability that they may have belonged to a family funerary enclosure is based on the concentration of graves around the tombstone and on the discovery of a funerary lion in a seated position and a fragment from a funerary aedicule (context 1803b) in the same trench.

This paper aims to present and analyse this funerary altar (Fig. 7, Taf. 11)⁵ which from both typological aspects and the circumstances of its discovery is unique among the funerary and epigraphic monuments in the province of Dacia.

The altar is today kept in Zalău, in the Sălaj County Museum of History and Art (*Muzeul Județean de Istorie și Artă Zalău*), SF. 196–197⁶. The monument is made of limestone. The front side containing the relief and the inscription is detached from the body of the altar. The detached layer, which is approximately 10 cm thick, is broken into three parts that correspond to the main morphologic elements of the altar: 1) the abacus together with the upper cornice, 2) the trunk, and 3) the profiled base of the altar. Along with the fragments belonging to the body of the monument, the truncated pyramid shaped coping of the altar was also found next to it.

A. The body of the altar measures 121 x 50 x 40 cm⁷, the dimensions of the mortice are 6 x 7 cm. The width of the frame is 6 cm, the epigraphic field of the base 12 x 29 cm.

³ For a synthesis of the archaeology of Porolissum see: N. Gudea, *Porolissum. Res Publica Municipii Septimii Porolissensium*, București 1986; N. Gudea, *Porolissum: Un complex arheologic daco-roman la marginea de nord a Imperiului Roman. Vol. I. Cercetări și descoperiri arheologice până în anul 1977, Zalău 1989*.

⁴ The most important financial support of the Project is the PN II ID_516 CNCSIS Grant “The phenomenology of space and funerary anthropology in the context of archaeological, geophysical and topographical prospections within the necropolis of the Roman town of Porolissum (2nd–3rd centuries AD)”.

For preliminary results see Á. Alföldy-Găzdac e.a., *Proiect „Necropolis Porolissensis“ Methods and Perspectives*, *Acta Terrae Septemcastrensis* 6/1 (2007) 9–17; N. Gudea e.a., *Moigrad-Porolissum, com. Mirșid, Jac, com. Creaca, jud. Sălaj. Punct: Pometul Moigradului și al Jacului, Ursoieș*, in: M. V. Angelescu, F. Vasilescu (ed.), *Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice din România. Campania 2007*, București 2008.

⁵ The synoptic drawing (Fig. 7, Taf. 11) was made by Adrian Florea on the basis of the instructions of the authors.

⁶ The photographs were taken and processed by Dávid Petruț, Cristian Găzdac and Lóránt Vass.

⁷ The thickness of the detached layer was added to that of the body of the altar in order to obtain the full dimensions of the monument.

B. The coping measures 70 (base and pinecone 20 cm each) x 43 x 34 cm, mortice: 8 x 7 cm.

The letters are 4 cm in the first inscribed field, 3 cm in the second, the inter-punctuation consists of small triangular incisions.

A) The body of the altar (Fig. 5/a–b, Taf. 10) consists of a monolithic structure; the upper cornice, the trunk and the base are worked from a single slab. On its top side, a rectangular mortice can be found, which was used for the attachment of the coping. The abacus, situated at the upper end of the altar, is decorated with an enclosed triangular pediment, flanked by *acroteria*. The field of the pediment is decorated with two opposing acanthus leaves and a *nodus* in the middle. The abacus is connected to the trunk by a cornice with an elaborate moulding, which consists of the following elements: cyma, cavetto and an undecorated astragal at the bottom. The body of the altar is bordered by a moulded frame consisting of a fillet on the inside, an undecorated astragal in the middle and a cavetto moulding on the outside. Inside the frame lies the inscribed field. The base of the altar is made up by a moulded cornice (consisting of a cyma and an astragal), and a wide fillet, which holds the field with the secondary inscription in a *tabula ansata*.

B) The coping (Fig. 6/a–c, Taf. 10) has a rectangular plan, as well as the body of the altar. The base of the coping is made up by a wide fillet with two *acroteria* at its ends, which are decorated with *palmette* motifs. The truncated pyramid is found above the base, and it ends with a pinecone in its upper part. The pyramid was decorated with reliefs on three sides. The front face is decorated with a rosette with six petals enclosed by a three sided frame. The frame consists of three parallel thin astragals. On the right-hand side there is a six-leafed rosette with two ivy leaves connected to its upper and lower sides springing into opposite directions. The composition is enclosed by a simple astragal frame. Because of its damaged state, the decoration of the left-hand side is unrecognizable, while the rear side of the coping is undecorated. On the bottom of the coping there is a rectangular mortice connecting it with the altar.

From a typological point of view, the funerary monument from Porolissum belongs to the category of “funerary altars with profiled framing on the body/*Profilge-rahmter Grabaltar*”. Regarding the design level owing to the elaborate mouldings of the cornices and frames, the altar set can be considered as one of the best products of the stone carving workshops from Porolissum⁸. The triangular pediment decorated with acanthus leaves and flanked by *acroteria*, found in the abacus of the altar, is one of the most common decorative elements on altars and *stelae* alike in Roman Dacia⁹. The discovery of an altar together with its coping in an archaeological context is a

⁸ For an overall view of the funerary monuments of Porolissum, see: N. Gudea, V. Lucăcel, *Inscripții și monumente sculpturale în Muzeul de Istorie și Artă Zalău*, Zalău 1975; L. Țeposu Marinescu, *Funerary Monuments from Dacia Superior and Dacia Porolissensis* (BAR I. S. 128), Oxford 1982; M. Crânguș, *Atelierul de piatrărie de la Porolissum*, in: D. Benea (ed.), *Dacia în sistemul socio-economic roman. Cu privire la atelierile meșteșugărești locale*, Timișoara 2008.

⁹ C. Ciongradi, *Grabmonument und sozialer Status in Oberdakien*, Cluj-Napoca 2007, 111–112.

unique case in the research of Roman Dacia. Although there are a relatively large number of known funerary altar copings in Dacia¹⁰, none was discovered together with the altar, which made an analysis of the connection between the monument and its coping impossible¹¹. From a typological perspective, the coping of the altar belongs to the type known as “truncated pyramid shaped coping/*pyramidale Bekrönung*”, and it was attached to the body of the monument with a single rectangular iron cramp. At the present stage of research, a total of 21 similar copings are known from Dacia, the majority of these coming from the large urban centres of *Dacia Superior: Apulum* and *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*¹². The particularity of these sculptural pieces is the fact that they have curved sides, whence, they are referred to as the variant with curved sides of the “truncated pyramid shaped copings”¹³. The variant with straight edges such as the one discovered in Porolissum is so far the only one known of this kind from the province of Dacia. The difference between the two variants is tangible from the perspective of their iconography as well. In the case of the coping from Porolissum, along with the motif of the simple rosette, we find a more elaborate composition with two ivy leaves springing from the rosette. This iconographic formula is very rare in Dacia; a similar decoration is to be found on the lateral side pediments of the altar dedicated to Iuppiter Optimus Maximus by P. Aelius Maximus found at *Napoca* (modern Cluj-Napoca)¹⁴. On the copings with curved sides from Dacia the following iconographical motifs can be distinguished: 1) wine branch springing from a *kantharos*, 2) image of a swimming dolphin, 3) *camillus* and *camilla* (separate or in pair), 4) scale motifs, 5) the full image or bust of the deceased, 6) *Attis* leaning on a *pedum*¹⁵.

According to the scholars who have studied this subject, the truncated pyramid shaped coping with curved sides has its origins in Northern Italy¹⁶. The latest researches have shown that the variant with curved sides spread from the workshops of *Aquileia*, in the 1st century A.D., to the Danubian area and appeared in Dacia in the 2nd century A.D. on account of artistic influence from *Pannonia* and *Noricum*¹⁷. The form with straight edges most likely developed in Northern Italy in the workshops of *Pola*, and later spread to *Germania superior*, *Raetia*, *Moesia inferior* and *superior* and *Dalmatia*¹⁸. Unfortunately the presence of a relatively large number of the variant with straight edges cannot, in the absence of new information regarding the spread of

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 87–93. Characteristic for the funerary altars of Dacia are the following types of copings: 1) truncated pyramid, 2) rectangular (*Rechteckige Bekrönung*) and 3) sphinx shaped.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 87.

¹² *Ibidem*. The only coping of this type discovered in *Dacia Porolissensis* comes from *Potaissa* (today Turda, Cluj County).

¹³ H. Daicoviciu, *Coronamente în formă de trunchi de piramidă arcuită pe teritoriul Daciei*, *Apulum* 7 (1968) 341–342.

¹⁴ The monument is kept in the Transilvanian National Museum of History (register no. 20265).

¹⁵ C. Ciongradi, *s. note* 9, 237–243.

¹⁶ H. Daicoviciu, *s. note* 13, 333–351.

¹⁷ C. Ciongradi, *s. note* 9, 88.

¹⁸ L. Țeposu Marinescu, *s. note* 8, 30.

the type in the neighbouring provinces, provide compelling information concerning neither the direct place of influence nor the origin of the deceased whose burial site it marked.

The epitaph of the altar was arranged in two separate inscribed fields: the main field, in a framed register on the trunk, contains information regarding the deceased, while the smaller field in the *tabula ansata* on the base of the altar offers information about the person who erected the monument. It is obvious that the texts of the two fields belong to the same inscription, and there is no reason to believe that they were carved at different times. The text of the main register is only partially readable. Approximately one third of the inscription is preserved. The upper and the lower parts are lost due to the corrosion of the stone. As a result of the fragmentation of the stone layer which contained the inscription and detached from the altar, we can only estimate that the upper part of the register contained three, maybe four lines of text (including the *D(is) M(anibus)* formula), while the bottom part could have held four lines at most, in case the letters were of identical height. The fragment containing the large inscribed field is broken at left, therefore the text situated on the left edge together with the left frame is lost.

Due to the corrosion of the surface, on first impression the inscription reveals only a small amount of information: the few parts of the text which are entirely preserved refer to the age, the relational and social status of the persons who were in some way involved in the commemorating process. The beginning of the first preserved line is illegible, the rest is filled with a single word which continues at the beginning of the next line. The first letter of the word under consideration is C, the condition of the second and third letters is very similar: a vertical bar is, at the bottom of the line, attached to a horizontal *hasta* at right. The third letter, because of an incision in the middle-part of its vertical *hasta*, can be identified with the letter E, while the previous letter can be read as L. The fourth letter is easily recognizable as O. In the line under consideration two letters in a fragmentary state are left. Of the fifth letter only a vertical bar is preserved, to the right upper end of which a horizontal *hasta* is connected. The last letter of the line is preserved in the form of an oblique bar which rises to the right. Owing to the fact that there is not enough space for the letter M, it can only be read as A. According to the traces still visible on the surface of the stone, the penultimate letter is P, therefore the word so far reads: CLEOPA. The beginning of the next line is broken off, the first letters are therefore missing, but the next two letters with which the word ends, are clearly readable as AE. Given that there is only space for not more than two letters at the beginning of the line, by completing it as [TR]AE a connection can be made with the previous line. The first result of the investigation is thus the name Cleopatra¹⁹, in the genitive or dative according to the termination of the word at the beginning of the second line. According to epigraphic tradition, the *filiatio* was mentioned exclusively on the paternal side, therefore the name can in this case

¹⁹ The name fragment in this form is not suitable for an alternative interpretation, see: A. Mócsy, *Nomenclator provinciarum Europae Latinarum et Galliae Cisalpiniae cum indice inverso* (Dissertationes Pannonicae III/1), Budapest 1983; this is so far the first attestation of the name *Cleopatra* on an inscription from Roman Dacia.

only refer to the deceased person in the dative. Following an *interpunctio*, the text continues in the same line with the indication *filia(e)*. The last two readable lines reveal the deceased person's age; according to the inscription the aforementioned girl passed away at 7 years and some months — at the end *m(enses)* can be read — of age. The beginning and the end of the large inscribed field where the text has been lost, could hypothetically have contained the name and the age of two more persons; in this case, the epitaph was originally dedicated to three persons. Owing to the fact that the dedication was set to a *filia*, we can assume that the person mentioned as the dedicator in the text of the base was the father of the deceased girl. His name was *Martinus*²⁰ and he is specified as a *verna*²¹, thus a slave born in the master's home. The second line of the small inscribed field apparently begins with the letter E or F. Closer inspection shows that the upper horizontal bar is longer than usual, therefore it can be read as a ligature of E and T. The remaining part of the line is only partly readable. The first letter of the next word is preserved only as the upper part of a slightly oblique bar. The next two letters are I and L. Because the next letter (B) is likely to be a part of the closing formula of the inscription, we can say that the second word comprised only 3 letters.

Due to the poor state of the first letter, the interpretation of the word is open to multiple solutions. Firstly the variant *fil* has to be taken into consideration, as an abbreviation for *filius*, -a (-ii, -ae in the plural). In this case we would be dealing with the very unusual formula *Martin(us) ver(na) et fil(ius, -ia?)*, which, because of the absence of the name of the son or daughter in question, is equivocal and its use in this form seems unlikely. Instead of *fil(ius)*, it seems much more probable that the word spelled *vil(icus)* in which case the inscription could refer to a servant working for the Imperial customs office of Porolissum²². At the moment, the names of several slave workers in the customs office of Porolissum are known, among them those of four *vilici*²³. The oblique *hasta* of the first letter which could have belonged to the letter V seems to support this hypothesis. Even so the formula *verna et vilicus* is not a usual one, and it can be considered a variation of the standard formula *verna vilicus* which is encountered in inscriptions from *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa* and *Ampelum* (Zlatna, Alba County)²⁴. During the uncovering of the building of the customs ser-

²⁰ The inscriptions of Dacia make reference to five other persons with this name: from *Apulum* (*Dacia superior*) the following persons are known: *Mestrius Martinus* (IDR III/5, 66); *Martinus* (IDR III/5, 53); *Flavius Martinus* (IDR III/6, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189); Orlea (*Dacia inferior*): *Marc(us) Martinus* (IDR II, 309); Slăveni (*Dacia inferior*): *Martinus* (IDR II, 547).

²¹ In Dacia a total of 17 individuals are known to have been *vernae*. The majority of them come from *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa* (IDR III/2, 192, 301, 303, 373, 395, 453) and *Ampelum* (IDR III/3, 332, 336, 349, 364, 356, 372).

²² For the customs office of Porolissum, see: N. Gudea, *Porolissum: Un complex arheologic daco-roman la marginea de nord a Imperiului Roman. Vol. II. Vama romană. Monografie arheologică. Contribuții la cunoașterea sistemului vamal din provinciile dacice*, Cluj-Napoca 1996, *passim*.

²³ N. Gudea, *s. note* 22, 77–78. In total seven persons are known to have been customs servants, among them four *vilici* and three servants with unknown positions.

²⁴ IDR III/2, 263, 301; IDR III/3, 332.

vice, two votive altars dedicated to the Genius of the *Publicum Portorium Illyrici* by *Marcion et Polio vil(ici)*, and *Felix et Luc(ius) vil(ici)* were discovered²⁵. These votive and funerary monuments erected by the customs servants of Porolissum are a proof of the economic power represented by this social group.

On the basis of this examination, the inscription can be read as follows:

 [. . .] + Cleopa-
 [tr]jae ° filia(e)
 [quae?] ° vixit
 [an]n(os) ° VII m(enses)

5 *Ma[r]tin(us) ver(na)
 et vil(icus) b(ene) [m(erenti) pos(uit)?].*

1. 6: Ligature ET

At the beginning of the article we mentioned that near the spot where the altar was discovered fragments of more elaborate funerary monuments were found (a part of the roof structure of a funerary aedicule and a sculpture of a sitting lion). The proximity of the aforementioned sculptural pieces and the fact that this type of funerary lion is typical for funeral enclosures²⁶ make it possible that the altar together with the other finds belonged to the funerary enclosure of a family.

Regarding the dating of the monument, we can rely only on information with limited accuracy. From a stylistic perspective, the relatively flat relief and the absence of traces of hand drilling are features common for monuments dated to the 2nd century AD. This hypothesis is reinforced to some extent by the archaeological situation: the monument belongs to the earlier burial phase discovered in trench J, and the excavations so far place the use of the cemetery mainly in the 2nd century AD, as also the coin finds suggest.

Romanian Academy
 Institute of Archeology and Art History
 RO-400084 Cluj-Napoca
 Romania
 cgazdac2000@yahoo.co.uk

Dávid Petruț, Cristian Găzdac,
 Ágnes Alföldy-Găzdac, Szilamér Pánczél,
 István Bajusz, Silvia Mustăță, Lóránt Vass

²⁵ N. Gudea, *s. note 22*, 277–278.

²⁶ C. Ciongradi, *s. note 9*, 104.

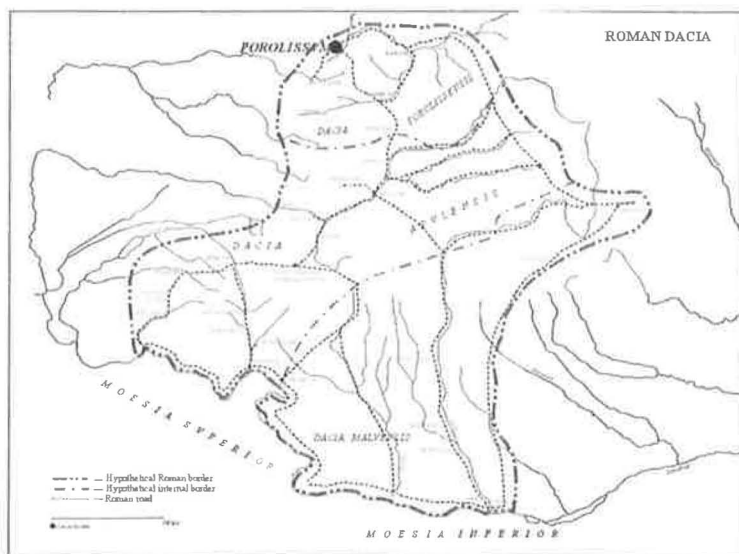


Fig. 1. The location of the site of Porolissum

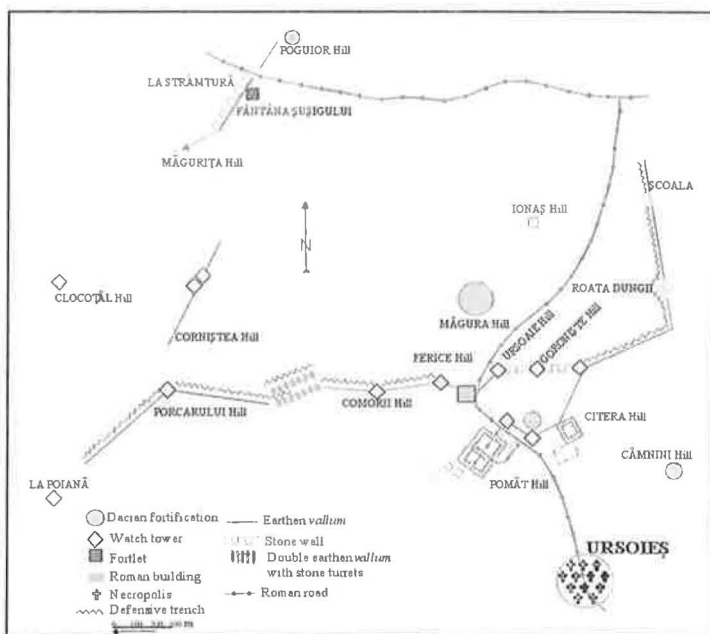


Fig. 2. The layout of the site of Porolissum with the necropolis of Ursoieș²⁷

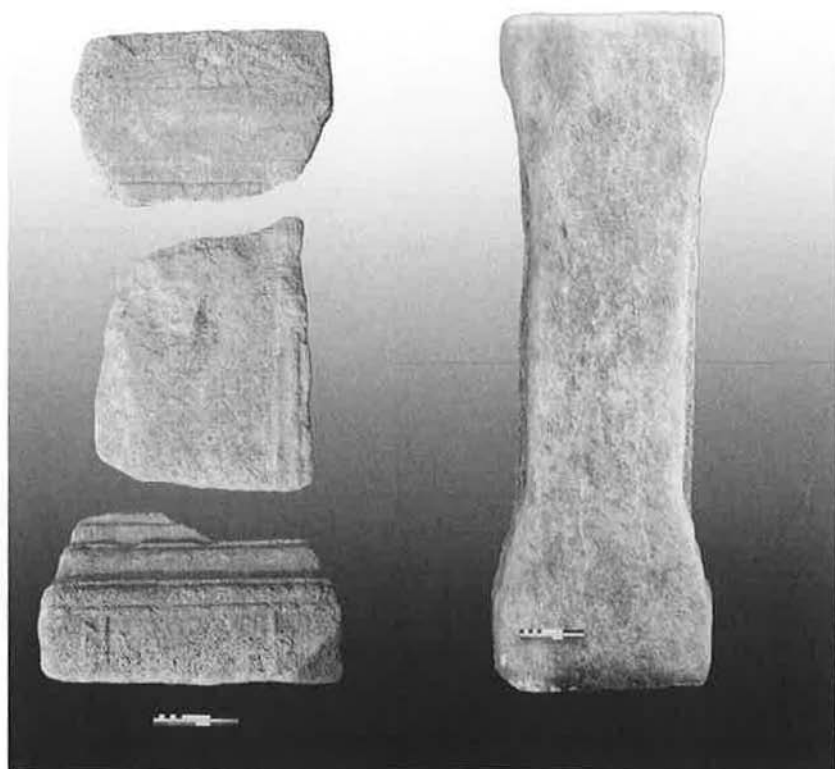
²⁷ The plan published by N. Gudea (in: N. Gudea, D. Tamba, *Porolissum: Un complex arheologic daco-roman la marginea de nord a Imperiului Roman. Vol. III. Despre templul zeului Iupiter-Dolichenus din municipium Septimum*, Zalău 2001, fig. 4) was modified by the authors according to the latest research results.



zu D. Petruț et. al., S. 82, Fig. 3: Trench J during the excavations



zu D. Petruț et. al., S. 82, Fig. 4/a–b: The monument and its components upon discovery



zu D. Petruț et. al., S. 83, Fig. 5/a–b: The body of the altar



zu D. Petruț et. al., S. 83, Fig. 6/a–c: The coping of the altar



zu D. Petruț et. al., S. 82, Fig. 7: Synoptic drawing of the altar