

ON NORTH AFRICAN CULTS IN ROMAN DACIA

SOBRE LOS CULTOS NORAFRICANOS
EN LA DACIA ROMANA

Sorin Nemeti

Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca

sorin.nemeti@ubbcluj.ro – <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9330-5812>

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RESUMEN

El contacto entre la civilización greco-romana y la cartaginesa provocó la superposición de politeísmos africanos y clásicos, disolviendo antiguas divinidades en el sistema romano. Las teonomías bárbaras y púnicas conservadas son pocas: Saturnus *Balcaranensis*, Aulisua, Iocolon, Bacax, Bonchor, Varsutina. La “*Africitas*” se percibe en monumentos votivos, rituales y en la preferencia por Saturnus como dios pantheos, que contradice el politeísmo romano. Nombres latinos como Saturnus, Caelestis, Aesculapius o Mercurius designan dioses púnico-bárbaros: Baal Hammon, Tanit, Eshmoun, Shadrappa, entre otros. La investigación moderna ofrece lecturas diversas: se enfatiza la romanización o la africanización, minimizando uno de los componentes según la tesis. Estas visiones generalizadoras son abusivas, pues el grado de sincretismo varía según fieles, contextos y épocas. Así, africanos en Dacia replican prácticas de su tierra natal. Para P. Raecius Primus, Baal Hammon y Tanit se convierten en Saturnus y Latona, una pareja inédita en el panteón clásico. Olus Terentius Pudens Uttedianus honra a Celestis junto a dioses locales de *Leptis Magna* (Eshmoun, Astarté) y al Genio de los dacios. M. Herennius Faustus, erudito romano, relaciona epítetos raros con Baal Hammon, transformado en Saturnus *Securus*. Soldados de *Micia*, ya romanizados, no usan teonomías bárbaras: el prefecto Rufus venera a Silvanus, Liber *Pater* y Plutón. En el norte de África, la herencia local y la aportación romana no se vieron como opuestas: estas divinidades híbridas muestran el camino de la interpretación, conciliación y sincretismo.

PALABRAS CLAVE

África del Norte; Cultos; Dacia; *Dii patrii*; Identidad; Soldados.

ABSTRACT

The contact between Greco-Roman and Carthaginian civilizations led to the overlap of African and classical polytheisms, dissolving older deities into the Roman system. Few Barbarian and Punic theonyms survive: Saturnus *Balcaranensis*, Aulisua, Iocolon, Bacax, Bonchor, Varsutina. “*Africitas*” appears in votive monuments, rituals, and a marked preference for Saturnus as pantheos god, contradicting Roman polytheistic variety. Latin names like Saturnus, Caelestis, Aesculapius or Mercurius served to designate Punic-Berber gods: Ba’al Hammon, Tanit, Eshmoun, Shadrappa, and others. Modern scholarship offers different interpretations: it emphasizes either Romanization or Africanization, downplaying one component to support its thesis. Such categorical readings are reductive, as the degree of syncretism varied with worshippers, social contexts, and historical times. Africans in Dacia replicated practices from home. For P. Raecius Primus, Ba’al Hammon and Tanit became Saturnus and Latona, a pair absent from the classical pantheon. Olus Terentius Pudens Uttedianus honored Caelestis, a Roman-African quasi-official deity, alongside local gods of *Leptis Magna* (Eshmoun, Astarté) and the *Genius* of the Dacians. M. Herennius Faustus classicized by linking rare epithets to Ba’al Hammon transformed into Saturnus *securus*. Soldiers in *Micia* were Romanized enough to avoid any barbarian theonym: the prefect Rufus worshipped Silvanus, Liber *Pater*, and Pluto. In Roman North Africa, local heritage and Roman contributions were not seen as irreconcilable opposites: these hybrid deities of African essence and Roman form reflect their worshippers’ search for interpretation, conciliation, and syncretism.

KEYWORDS

Cults; Dacia; *Dii patrii*; Identity; North Africa; Soldiers.

THE ANCIENTS' EXPERIENCE OF THE SACRED can only be understood through their systems of theoretical, conceptual, ritual and symbolic expression.¹ The archaeological remains of temples, the written texts preserved since Antiquity, and the epigraphic and sculptural ex-votos are part of the human languages that translate this experience of the religion lived by ancient people. The great number of ex-votos (altars, statues, *donaria*) made of non-perishable materials discovered on the territory of the former Roman Empire which exemplify the so-called "materiality of religion" (defined by the *lived ancient religion* interpretative paradigm)² is essential in describing ancient religiosity. The votive practice is in fact the core of polytheist religiosity and a privileged insight into the meaning of religious practice in the Roman Empire for modern authors.³

In later works on religious life in the Roman Empire, religion is understood as a profoundly social phenomenon, a network of meanings, a system of symbols, the immanence of which is fuelled by performing rituals, that tries to explain the world through images, narrations, written texts or refined dogmas.⁴ Ancient Mediterranean religion is seen as a "highly unstable phenomenon" (Jörg Rüpke), constantly negotiated among individuals, social groups, political entities, etc. Thus, the only important things are the means through which groups organize, maintain, and

1. Meslin, 1993, pp. 8-9.

2. Rüpke, 2011, p. 194; Rüpke, 2016, pp. 8-41.

3. *ThesCRA* I, 2004, s.v. "Weihgeschenke", pp. 379-450.

4. Rüpke & Woolf, 2021b, p. 14: "(religion...) is understood as a spectrum of experiences, actions, and beliefs and communications hinging on human communication with super-human or even transcendent agent(s), for the ancient Mediterranean usually conceptualized as 'gods'. Material symbols, elaborate forms of representation, and ritualization are called upon for the success of communication with these addressees".

communicate about religion (within the group or in relation to other groups or entities). The variety of religious practices during Antiquity could be explained as interaction, communication, networking, propagation and institutionalization. The religious development is placed under the mark of religious communications and social practices that indicate competition among groups/patrons who built temples, offered sacrifices and gifts (*ex-votos*) to the gods, and organized private or public banquets.⁵ In our opinion, the abuse of media and communication in contemporary society structures the religiosity of ancient Rome. In this simplified version of Roman religion,⁶ the gods seem to be topics of communication rather than subjects of the subjective positioning of individuals or groups in relation to transcendence. Individual or collective religiosity is delegated to the background, while these strategies of human meta-communication about the gods occupy the foreground.

Starting from the sociological reductionist methodology, one can observe that religious data is used in order to express various identities, individual and collective. In Roman Dacia, there were soldiers and various officials (governors, officers, imperial slaves) of African origin.⁷ Although no indigenous African theonyms appear in Dacia,⁸ the religion of the people originating from Roman North Africa is a separate domain and its manifestations in a remote Latin-speaking province can be grasped and defined.⁹ We can analyze the religious preferences of the people brought to Dacia from the North African provinces by separating them into two sectors: 1) the corporate identity of an occupational community (*i.e.*, the soldiers from the *numeri Maurorum*, especially those from *Micia/Vețel*, Hunedoara County) and 2) the various discrepant identities of the individuals of North African origin.¹⁰

5. Rüpke, 2018, pp. 1-23. Cf. Nemeti, 2019b.

6. A comprehensive overview of Roman religions in Scheid, 2016 and 2023.

7. Sanie, 1981-1982.

8. For *interpretatio* in ancient polytheism, the use of Greek and Roman theonyms to designate foreign gods, see: Wissowa, 1916-1919; Webster, 1995; Ando 2006; Nemeti 2019a, pp. 47-72.

9. Bărbulescu, 1994; Nemeti, 2019a, pp. 109-139.

10. For defining socio-cultural dynamics, see Cenati, 2023, pp. 23-30.

1. THE SOLDIERS AND THEIR CORPORATE IDENTITY

1.1. TEMPLE OF THE *MAURI MICIENSES*

Various military diplomas from the middle of the 2nd century CE attest an irregular unit called *Vexillarii Africae et Mauretaniae Caesariensis et Mauri gentiles*.¹¹ In Constantin C. Petolescu's opinion, these *vexillarii* are soldiers taken from the units of the Danubian provinces for the wars of Antoninus Pius in Africa, who returned home.¹² The formula *vexillarii Africae et Mauretaniae Caesariensis* should be better understood if we interpret it as an irregular unit formed by soldiers detached from various auxiliary units from Africa *Proconsularis* and Mauretania *Caesariensis* (Michael P. Speidel), a sort of *numerus electorum*.¹³ These soldiers returned in Dacia together with a group of *Mauri gentiles*, incorporated in the Roman army from Dacia.

The main information related to the religious life of the Mauri from ancient *Micia* (Vețel, Hunedoara County) is offered by the temple excavated there and by several inscriptions from the same settlement, which could be connected with the African unit. The temple was excavated in 1934, has a rectangular layout, measuring about 19 x 12 m. The researchers identified two building phases here, but there is a possibility that the temple had three *cellae* from the beginning.¹⁴ The temple is mentioned in the inscription *IDR* III.3, 47¹⁵ dated in 205 CE. The epigraphic text mentions that the *Mauri Micienses* and their *praefectus* Iulius Evangelianus rebuilt the temple of the ancestral gods (*templum deorum patriorum*) that had been destroyed by the passage of time (*vetustate conlapsum*). Modern authors from Constantin Daicoviciu¹⁶ to Marcel Bénabou¹⁷ have identified in the formula *dii patrui* those ancestral gods of the Mauri that are called *dii Mauri* in Africa. As we have shown previously, in Roman North Africa the formula *dii Mauri* applies to some local gods seen by the

11. *IDR* I 16, 29; *AE* 2007, 1763 and 2014, 1639.

12. Petolescu, 2023, pp. 263-264.

13. Speidel, 1984, pp. 123-124.

14. Daicoviciu, 1941, pp. 117-125; Rusu-Pescaru & Alicu, 2000, pp. 92-94; Diaconescu, 2011, pp. 158-162.

15. *Pro salute dd(ominorum) nn(ostorum) in/victissimor(um) imp(eratoris) Severi / et Antonini et Getae caes(aris) [a] ug(ustorum) / (trium) et Iuliae et Plautillae aug(ustarum) (duarum) et / Plautiani, c(larissimi) v(iri), praefecti pr(aetorio), patris / augustae, sub Pomponio / Liberale, co(n)s(ularis), Mauri Mic(ienses) / et Iul(ius) Evangelianus praefectus) / templum deorum patrio(rum) vetustate conlapsum / sua p(ecunia) et opera restituer(unt) / Cilone (iterum) et Libone co(n)s(ulibus).*

16. Daicoviciu, 1941, p. 124.

17. Bénabou, 1976, p. 318.

Romans as *dii hospites*.¹⁸ In the case of *Micia*, the soldiers of the *numerus Maurorum* built a temple for their ancestral gods viewed as *dii patrii*, which may or may not be identical to those called *dii Mauri* in Africa.¹⁹

1.2. SILVANUS, PLUTO, LIBER *PATER* AND DIANA. ROMAN NAMES FOR THE *DII PATRII* OF THE *MAURI MICIENSES*?

Starting from the inscriptions discovered in the ruins of the temple, an altar for Silvanus²⁰ and one for Pluto,²¹ we have previously analyzed the lot of the Latin votive inscriptions from *Micia* in light of the data known about African religious preferences.²² Two individuals, Aurelius Ianuarius and Aurelius Secundus, associated the gods Silvanus *Domesticus* and Mercurius in their dedications, which is a very common practice in North Africa, where the two divinities are associated in order to express a local divine identity.²³ In southern Tunisia, at Tozeur, there is a dedication to *Silvanus Mercurius*,²⁴ at *Thiges* there is a stone inscription to *Mercurius Silvanus*,²⁵ at *Aradi* a *flamen* of Neptune dedicates an inscription to *Mercurius Silvanus*,²⁶ while at *Lambaesis*, a fragmentary inscription mentions a *sigillum Mercuri Silvani*.²⁷ At *Castellum Mastarense*, Silvanus is represented with the attributes of African Mercury: the scorpion, the turtle and the ram,²⁸ while at *Thugga*, in the temple of Mercury, a dedication to *Mercurius Silvius* has been found.²⁹ At Bou Jelida, southeast of Carthage, an altar dedicated to *deus Silvanus* by two people of Italic origin, in the temple of an indigenous tribe (*Bacchuiana gens*), presents the attributes of the god on the sides: the ram and the rooster, attributes of Mercury.³⁰ This African god, Mercurius Silvanus,

18. Camps, 1954; Fentress, 1978; Camps, 1990.

19. Nemeti, 2019a, pp. 123-137.

20. *IDR* III.3, 118: *Silvan(o) / Rufus / praefectus / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*.

21. *IDR* III.3, 116: *Pluton(i) / Rufus / praefectus / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*.

22. Nemeti, 2019a, pp. 132-137.

23. *IDR* III.3, 134: *Silvan(o) / Domest(ico) et / Mercu(rio) / sac(rum) / (A)elius / Ianu/arius / p(osuit)*; *IDR* III.3, 135: *Silva/no Dom(estico) / et Mer(curio) / sac(rum) / Aur(elius) Sec/undus*. Cf. Bărbulescu, 1994, pp. 1334-1337.

24. *CIL* VIII 11227.

25. *CIL* VIII 87.

26. *AE* 1928, 34.

27. *CIL* VIII 2646.

28. *CIL* VIII 6355.

29. Leglay, 1971, pp. 128-132; Bénabou, 1976, pp. 341-346.

30. Beschaouch, 1985, pp. 967-973.

in spite of his compound name, is seen by the Berbero-Romans as a distinct god,³¹ as indicated by a dedication from *Lambaesis*: *Deo Mercurio Silvano*.³² He is an indigenous god surprised in a process of *interpretatio*. The series of African reliefs of Mercury with the scorpion as an attribute, discovered at *Mastar*, *Mascula*, *Sitiffs*, *Rapidum* and *Renier*, make it possible to outline a divine figure specific to North Africa, an important Punic god associated with the cult of Tanit/Caelestis and Baal Hammon/Saturnus.³³ According to Marcel Léglay, the meeting between Silvanus and Mercurius in North Africa and their fusion into a single entity called *Mercurius Silvanus* occurs in the fertile coastal regions, where olive cultivation is practiced.³⁴

Rufus, the prefect who dedicated the altar to Silvanus in the temple from *Micia*, leaves two other ex-votos, one for a god called Pluto³⁵ and the other for *Liber Pater*.³⁶ The analysis of his religious preferences could suggest the identity of the gods understood as *dii patrii* by the *Mauri* from *Micia*.

One of the altars commissioned by the prefect Rufus is dedicated, as we have already mentioned, to the god Pluto: *[P]luto(ī) / Rufus / praef(ectus) / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*. Petolescu, who completed line 1 – *Pluto(ī)*, had the same idea, that this inscription is not about the god of the Underworld, but rather about the Greek god of wealth – Plutus.³⁷ The altar dedicated by the *praefectus* Rufus in the temple of the ancestral gods of the Moors suggests a case of *interpretatio Africana* of a Greco-Roman god. Just as Silvanus from the temple of the gods of the *Mauri* is an African Silvanus, Pluto from the inscription of the same dedicant from *Micia* is an African god worshipped under the name of the corresponding Roman god. Dedications to Pluto are quite common in the Latin epigraphy of North Africa: *cultores Plutoni* are attested there,³⁸ the god has specific epithets (*Frugifer*, *deus Variccala*) and is associated with local deities (*Cereres*).³⁹ This African Pluto with specific local features is either

31. Cadotte, 2007, pp. 113-164.

32. Léglay, 1971, p. 129, no. 3, fig. 3.

33. Deonna, 1959, pp. 6-8 and 40-41.

34. Léglay, 1966, pp. 244-245; Bénabou, 1976, p. 346.

35. *IDR* III.3, 116.

36. *IDR* III.3, 104: *Libero / Patri / Rufus / praef(ectus) / v(otum) s(olvit) m(erito)*.

37. Petolescu, 1980, pp. 457-458, fig. 2; still, one more letter is visible at the end of the row 1, a part of an N, therefore PLVTON(I) or an I, and the lecture should be PLVTO(N)I. Anyway, the minor Greek god Plutus is never attested in Latin inscriptions, comparing to Pluton, attested in circa 100 inscriptions (many originating in North Africa: https://db.edcs.eu/epigr/epi_ergebnis.php).

38. *CIL* VIII 9609.

39. Toutain, 1907, pp. 266-267.

a god of Punic origin who would have borrowed the name of the Greco-Roman god, or a local aspect of this Greco-Roman Hades-Pluto who comes from Sicily to Carthage at the same time as Demeter and Kore.⁴⁰

A third altar is dedicated to the god Liber *Pater* by the prefect Rufus;⁴¹ in Africa, apart from the Classical aspect of Liber *Pater* / Bacchus, he also appears as a local god, who is called Shadrappa in a bilingual (Latin and neo-Punic) inscription of *Lepcis Magna*.⁴² This African Liber *Pater*, *deus patrius* at *Lepcis Magna*, part of Emperor Septimius Severus' group of patron gods, appears on the Ghorfa stelae next to a Venus-Astarte and is associated with the great African god Saturn (at Ghorfa, Maktar, *Žama Regia*).⁴³ Liber *Pater* in Africa is the subject of a very popular cult, particularly in the coastal Phoenician cities (*Achalla*, Carthage, *Gigthis*, *Lepcis Magna*, *Lepcis Minor*, *Oea*, *Sabratha*), but also in the interior regions (Maktar, *Thuburbo Maius*, *Thugga*, *Žama Regia*). He enjoys particular popularity in Numidia, where sanctuaries and priests are known in different cities (especially *Madaura* and *Thubursicu Numidarum*, *Cuicul*, *Sitifis*, *Satafis*, *Auzia*, *Volubilis* and *Lambaesis*). In any case, it is difficult to establish which god was worshipped in Roman Africa under the name of Liber *Pater*: the Greco-Roman god, the Phoenician god Shadrappa, or a Berber god.⁴⁴

To this group of *dii patrii* of the *Mauri* from *Micia* we can add a goddess that was very popular in the Danubian provinces. An altar from the Deva Museum dedicated to Diana *Sancta*⁴⁵ was read in different ways by several authors, considering that the donor's name was Magnus, or Potentinus *nummularius*.⁴⁶ In fact, it is a collective dedication, made by a group of soldiers, *i.e.*, *numerus Maurorum Miciensium*, to a goddess with rare epithets, *Diana sancta potentissima*.⁴⁷ Diana is not on the list of interpreted goddesses in North Africa, as established by Bénabou or Cadotte,⁴⁸ starting from the epigraphic and sculptural material from the North African Roman

40. Gsell, 1972, p. 297; Beschtaouch, 1973, pp. 103-107.

41. *IDR* III.3, 104.

42. Leglay, 1975, p. 134.

43. Bénabou, 1976, pp. 353-355.

44. Bruhl, 1953, pp. 224-237.

45. *CIL* III 1418; *IDR* III.3, 65; *IDR* III.2, 198a.

46. Sanie, 1999, pp. 174-175.

47. Rădeanu, 2004: *Dianae / sanctae / potent(issimae) / num(erus) M(aurorum) / v(otum) s(olvit)*; *CIL* III 1418 reading in row 4 is *Magnus*, but the letters are N+V+M and another M. S. Sanie has read, for example, *numm(ularius)* in the row 4 – Sanie, 1999, pp. 174-175.

48. Bénabou, 1976; Cadotte, 2007.

provinces (excepting the inscription from *Sitiffs* dedicated to Diana Maurorum).⁴⁹ But in this case, due to the fact that it is a collective act of piety, and the donor is the unit of the *Mauri*, one may also count Diana among the Roman formulas used by groups from North Africa in order to express their religious preferences.

2. THE INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR DISCREPANT IDENTITY

The contact between the Greco-Roman civilization and Carthage led to the overlap of the African pluristratified polytheisms and the Classical ones, and to the dissolution of the ancient divinities into the Roman religious system.⁵⁰ The barbarian and Punic theonyms preserved in Roman Africa are quite few, for example Bacax, Bonchor, Iocolon, Varsutina, etc. *Africitas* can be traced in the art of the votive monuments, in the practiced rituals, in the preference for a great god, Saturnus, preference that contradicts the Roman “polytheist” availability. Aesculapius, Caelestis, Hercules, Liber *Pater*, Mars, Mercurius Silvanus, Neptunus, Saturnus, Venus are merely Latin names that the Africans chose to designate their Punic-Barbarian gods in a more or less consistent manner: Arish, Astarté, Ba'al Hammon, El Qone Aras, Eshmoun, Milk'ashtart, Shadrapha, Tanit, a Berber god whose attribute is a scorpion (maybe Baal Addir), etc.⁵¹

The discoveries made by modern research – depending on the adopted perspective – underline different valences of these *interpretationes*: one of the components, the Classic or the Berber-Punic, is minimized in order to support the *Africanization* or the *Romanization* of these divine characters, the Romanization of the North-African worshippers or their “resistance in front of the Romanization”.⁵² These categorical and generalizing interpretations are both abusive. The Africanization and Romanization vary depending on the people, the social environments, and the era. The North Africans in Dacia repeat – *mutatis mutandis* – the gestures of the ones that stayed at home.

49. *CIL* VIII 8436.

50. Gasparini, 2015.

51. Nemeti, 2019a, pp. 111-123.

52. For the evolution of the Romanization concept see Woolf, 1998, pp. 1-23; Webster, 2001, pp. 210-219.

2.1. P. RAECIUS PRIMUS

There are several individuals in Dacia, civil functionaries and officers of confirmed African origin. P. Raecius Primus from Potaissa, *beneficiarius legati legionis V Macedonica*, is an *Afer*, *domo Zigali*.⁵³ The settlement indicated as *origo* should be identified as *castellum Zugal* (present-day Aïn Temda, in the territory of Cirta / Constantine).⁵⁴ For the African P. Raecius Primus, Ba'al Hammon and Tanit form a new couple (Saturnus and Latona) that does not appear in the Greco-Roman *pantheon* and mythological system in this manner. Latona is the *mater* of Apollo and Diana, a popular pair in the Danubian provinces. That popularity could influence the donor's choice of Latona as a Latin name for African Tanit (instead of consecrated Caelestis).⁵⁵

2.2. OLUS TERENTIUS PUDENS UTTEDIANUS

Olus Terentius Pudens Uttedianus, *legatus legionis XIII Geminae*, worships a Roman-African quasi-official divinity, Caelestis, together with the popular gods from *Lepcis Magna* and the *Genius* of the *Daciae*.⁵⁶ The altar is a nice example of a travel inscription (as defined by Paul Veyne)⁵⁷ where one can find the pattern with two groups of gods – *dii patrii* and *dii hospites*. The first group includes North-African (Punic) gods with Roman names: Caelestis *Augusta* for Tanit, Aesculapius *Augustus* for Eshmoun, and *Genius Carthaginis* for a goddess of the Astarte/Aphrodite type.⁵⁸ The category of *dii hospites* consists of an anonymous *Genius Daciarum*.⁵⁹

53. *AE* 1984, 739; Bărbulescu & Căţinaş, 1979, p. 218, fig. 2: *Numini Saturno / reg(i) patri deo/rum / et Latonae / P(ublius) Raecius / Primus ben/ef(iciarius) leg(ati) leg(ionis) / (quintae) M(acedonicae) P(iae) F(idelis) p(osuit) ex / v(oto), domo Zigali / afer*.

54. Bertrandy, 1992; Leglay, 1992, p. 76.

55. Leglay, 1992, p. 75.

56. *CIL* III 993; *IDR* III.5, 41: *Caelesti Augustae / et Aesculapio Au/gusto et Genio / Carthaginis et / Genio Daciarum / Olus Terentius / Pudens Uttedi/anus leg(atu)s Augg(ustorum) / leg(ionis) XIII Gem(inae) leg(atu)s / Augg(ustorum) pro praet(ore) / provinciae R(a)e/tiae*.

57. Veyne, 1987, pp. 382-384.

58. For Caelestis and Eshmoun, see Cadotte, 2007, pp. 65-111 and 165-200.

59. Nemeti, 2016, p. 83; Nemeti, 2019, pp. 121-122.

2.3. M. HERENNIUS FAUSTUS

An erudite like M. Herennius Faustus classicizes by connecting some rare cultic epithets with the African Ba'al Hammon, turned into *Saturnus securus*⁶⁰. The origin of the governor is not known, but he was a *tribunus militum legionis III Augustae* from *Lambaesis*, in Numidia. M. Herennius Faustus was probably the *legatus legionis XIII Geminae* between 115-117 CE, period during which he erects three votive altars to *Saturnus Securus*, *Mercurius Hilaris* and *Minerva Supera*.⁶¹ It is quite certain that the dedication to *Saturnus* refers to the Punic god Baal Hammon, but the presence of the gods called *Mercurius Hilaris*⁶² and *Minerva Supera*⁶³ is not easy to explain by means of an *interpretatio*. In the case of *Mercurius*, we had connected the epithet with the opposite one, i.e., *Sobrius*. *Mercurius Sobrius* is worshipped in *vicus Sobrius* in Rome, which, according to the definition offered by the version of Festus (p. 382 L.), is a district where there were no *tabernae*, *ni quod in eo Mercurio lacte, non vino, solitum sit supplicari*.⁶⁴ Milk libations are very rare in Rome and frequent in Punic rituals, but the only information on such libations and non-alcoholic priests comes from North Africa. This is also where the only epigraphic dedications to *Mercurius Sobrius* or *Mercurii Sobrii* always come from.⁶⁵ The votive gesture constitutes an attempt to isolate one aspect of the African cult of Mercury: it is not a question of the god who is adored with libations of milk, but of a Mercury who receives libations of wine, perhaps even a Roman Mercury. However, simple adoration as *hilaris* testifies to the knowledge of the African aspect of the worship.

2.4. THE IMPERIAL SLAVES. NEMESIANUS AND LIBERALIS

Nemesianus and Liberalis are members of the *familia Caesaris*, and are probably of African origin, considering their implication in the cult of Caelestis at *Ulpia Sarmizegetusa*. Belonging to the category of “universal” African cults – accepted and popularized by the imperial court⁶⁶ – the goddess had worshippers at *Ulpia Sarmizegetusa*,

60. IDR III.5, 314: *Saturno / securo / M(arcus) Herennius / Faustus / leg(atus) Aug(usti)*.

61. Berciu, 1947-1949; Piso, 1993, pp. 214-217; Varga, 2017, pp. 231-242.

62. IDR III.5, 708: *Mercurio / hilari / M(arcus) Herennius / Faustus / leg(atus) Aug(usti)*.

63. IDR III.5, 265: *Min[ervae] / Su[perae] / M(arcus) Her[ennius] / Fau[stus] / leg(atus) [Aug(usti)]*.

64. Palmer, 2001, p. 80.

65. Palmer, 2001, pp. 86-87 and 91-92.

66. Halsberghe, 1974.

Apulum and *Potaissa*.⁶⁷ In the capital of the province, an imperial slave, Nemesianus *librarius*, erected a temple at his own expense, in which the name of the goddess is accompanied by the epithet *virgo*, frequent in Africa.⁶⁸ Another dedication, to Dea Caelestis, comes from another imperial slave, *Liberalis adiutor tabularii*,⁶⁹ while the third dedication is an altar whose dedicant is anonymous, and contains a versified inscription related to rituals specific to the cult.⁷⁰ Ioan Piso translates the inscription as “the goddess Caelestis will be appeased with the prescribed wine mixed with honey. On this altar we offer to the other gods incense and unmixed wine”.⁷¹ The text is difficult to translate, but other explanations are possible: the other gods are praised with wine (*merum*), but Caelestis with some non-alcoholic beverage (*mulsa*, rainwater mixed with honey).⁷² And in this case, we remain in the African ritualistic context characterized by non-alcoholic libations.

2.5. AURELIUS MARCELLUS

For P. Raecius Primus, Olus Terentius Pudens Uttedianus, M. Herennius Faustus, Nemesianus and Liberalis, African origin or simple knowledge about cults and rituals from North Africa is a given fact. A curious inscription from Gilău, near the Roman city of *Napoca*, is dedicated by a *praefectus alae I Silianae*, Aurelius Marcellus.⁷³ We do not know much about his career or provincial origin. The fragmentary altar was read by Dan Isac, who proposed the word *deae* in the first line, and in the second one the epithet *virgo*. The dedication reads as follows: *Deae / virgini / Di/ anae stabili / venatrici / examina/ trici*, and the author considered that the votive act is addressed to a single goddess, Diana, labelled as *dea virgo* and praised with rare

67. Nemeti, 2019a, pp. 119-120.

68. *IDR* III.2, 17: *Caelesti Virgini / Augustae sacr(um) / Nemesianus Caes(aris) n(ostr) / servos librarius tem/plum a solo pecunia su/a ex voto fecit*.

69. *IDR* III.2, 192: *Deae Caelesti / sacrum / Liberalis Aug(ust) / n(ostr) vern(a) adiut(or) / tabul(ari) v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*.

70. *AE* 1993, 1345; Piso, 1993b, pp. 223-237: *Caelestis mul/sa propria / placabitur. Ara / hac divis aliis / tura merumq(ue) / damus*.

71. Piso, 1993b, p. 234.

72. Cenati, Murzea & Gonzáles Berdús, 2023, pp. 145-149 (the interpretation of Victoria Gonzáles Berdús).

73. *AE* 1991, 1350: *[Dea]e(?) / V[ir]gini Di/an(a)e stabili / venatrici / examina/trici Aur(elius) / Marcellus / pra[e]fectus] eqq(uitum)*.

epithets like *Stabilis*, *Venatrix* and *Examinatrix*.⁷⁴ A better solution offers the reading with a theonym in the first line and two goddesses mentioned. *Virgo* is almost a formular epithet for Caelestis⁷⁵ and the dedication could be read as *Caelesti virgini, Dianae Stabili Venatrici Examinatrici*. The goddess Nemesis rarely received the epithet *virgo* in epigraphy⁷⁶ and, theoretically, a possible lecture of the first two lines could be *Nemesis virgini / Dianae venatrici stabili examinatrici*. The association between Caelestis and Diana could be added to the dossier of Danubian influences in the Caelestis cult in Dacia, where the African goddess is called Latona (Diana's mother). We also recall here the inscription from Micia dedicated by the *numerus Maurorum* to a goddess called *Diana Sancta Potentissima*.

3. CONCLUSIONS

From the epigraphic material of Dacia, we can argue that the inhabitants of Roman North-Africa did not place the inheritance of the Punic civilization and the contribution of Rome on antithetical, irreducible positions. These divinities of African essence and Roman aspect show that their loyal worshippers found a way of interpretation and integration. The soldiers from the *numerus Maurorum* express their corporate African identity by building and renovating a temple for their ancestral gods named with Roman names, like Silvanus (*et*) Mercurius, Liber *Pater*, Pluto, and maybe Diana (*Maurorum*). Romanized and well-integrated Roman officials, officers and imperial freedmen express their discrepant identity by means of Classical tools (Latin epigraphic apparatus, Roman name for the Punic gods who had been well-established for a long time, like Saturnus, Caelestis, Aesculapius). Behind the Classical figures, we might infer not a *resistance* à la Bénabou, but rather the specificities of an inherited religious knowledge (like the non-alcoholic libations for Mercurius and Caelestis).

74. Isac, 1991.

75. *AE* 1911, 84; *IDR* III.2, 17; *CIL* VI 37170 and VIII 9796.

76. *CIL* VI 531.

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