

GEORGE VALENTIN BOUNEGRU  
National Museum of the Unification  
Alba Iulia, Romania  
E-mail: bounegru\_g\_viziru@yahoo.com

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## A UNIQUE REPRESENTATION OF HERCULES DISCOVERED AT APULUM

### ABSTRACT

*The material presents a currently unique piece among finds from the former Roman province of Dacia. On the occasion of archaeological research for a real estate project, a clay lamp with the disc decorated in relief was discovered among other archaeological materials. The setting, preserved fragmentarily, renders the scene of one of the labours of Hercules, the third, the capture of the deer of the goddess Artemis. The artefact is manufactured from clay, modelled in a bivalve pattern and represents an import to Apulum. It was discovered in an early context, probably brought by the colonists who settled here after the establishment of the Roman province.*

**KEYWORDS: LAMP, APULUM, LABOURS OF HERCULES.**

### INTRODUCTION

The Roman site of Apulum, a veritable Roman conurbation in the province of Dacia, includes, besides the two urban centres at a distance of up to three km, the praetorium consularis and the camp of the XIII Gemina Legion, five distinct burial areas, arranged along the main communication pathways of the era. Preventive research occasioned by the development of the present city have revealed in recent years both archaeological structures that provide a coherent image of the ancient urban development, and heritage pieces with documentary value, some of them with a unique character.

The discovery to which we will refer below was made in the Partoş neighbourhood from Alba Iulia, Gemenilor Street, no number, during preventive archaeological research determined by the construction of an estate (Fig. 1). The research, still unpublished, led to the discovery of some traces from removed walls, corresponding to the urban phases of development, but also to an early level of a habitation with traces of wooden walls<sup>1</sup>. The archaeological material discovered was

mainly ceramic, comprising the entire typological range of household dishes, but also fragments of luxury dishes - terra sigillata.

### DISCUSSION

A lamp with the disc decorated in relief attracts attention from among the common usage pieces discovered. The piece was in a fragmentary condition, being glued and completed upon restoration. It comes from the early levels of habitation, from the same context from which a Cociş 19a1-type fibula (Bounegru *et alii* 2011, no cat. 229) also came.

The lamp belongs to the type with volutes and a rounded beak (Fig. 3). The border has a circularly arranged pearl ornament on the outside. The decor of the disc depicts a scene in which a bearded character holds a herbivore in his left hand by the muzzle while pulling its head back, while his right arm is raised. He is pressing the back of the animal with his left leg, which is bent at the knee. The animal, seen in profile, is a deer or roe deer, it is quite difficult to distinguish the forked ear and horn on the right side. Although fragmentary, the image retains a defining attribute for the interpretation of the character: under the right arm is depicted a club. The tank is hemispherical in profile,

<sup>1</sup> Considering the topography of the first urban settlement at Apulum, our research concerns its eastern area.



Fig. 1 Map of Apulum with the location of the discovery marked.



Fig. 2 Oil lamp discovered at Carthage, apud Deneauve 1969.

supported on an annular base. Two small holes eccentrically located on the right side are preserved on the disk. An insertion orifice is also preserved on the beak. It has an overhanging, circular ear with a central groove.

Dimensions: length-15 cm, disc diameter – 10.4 cm, H. basin - 3.2 cm.

The tank is made of fine paste, and covered with a scarlet-coloured slipware. The beak and one of the sides show traces of functional wear. The artefact is a provincial import. The accuracy of detail indicates the use of a pattern copied from an original piece. The handle has two asymmetrical edges, and is crookedly glued to the tank.

The depicted scene represents the third labour of Hercules, the capture of the deer of Kerineya. Hercules seems to have on his head an *exuvia leonis*, while the club is positioned separately. According to mythology, the hero was required to catch the golden-horned deer of the goddess Artemis without hurting it, as this would upset her. After chasing it for a year he catches it on the plains of Arcadia without harming it. The labours of Hercules are a favourite theme in imperial art, with different forms of representation, especially

on monuments,<sup>2</sup> but also on ceramics or on the discs of some Roman lamps.

In Vindonissa the discs of the published lamps illustrate a diverse iconography, several featuring the image of Hercules (Löeschcke 1919 cat. 49, 50, 71, 394). Several pieces decorated with the head of Hercules or Hercules' mask on an altar were discovered at Viminacium (Korać 2018, 613, 615).

In 1983 C. L. Băluță indexed all the oil lamps from intra-Carpathian Dacia. Studying the paper, preserved only as a manuscript, we noted that there are no pieces with iconographic representations related to Hercules or his labours. Later, in 1994, D. Alicu analysed typologically and stylistically the lamps originating in the research of Ulpia Traiana, the de jure capital the province. He mentions five representations of Hercules on the disc of some type I lamps (Alicu 1994, 42; cat 14-18). However, the iconographic composition is a simple, frequent one (Löeschcke 1919, pl. IV, 49;

<sup>2</sup> For the representations on the monuments in Dacia, see Bărbulescu, Nemeş 1975, Bărbulescu 1977 and Bărbulescu 1978.



Fig. 3 Oil lamp discovered at Apulum.

Iványi 1935, pl. V, 10), Hercules sitting on a throne with a club in the front, without any reference to his labours. Representations of Hercules are also not usually found in the former province of Dacia Porolissensis,<sup>3</sup> which gives the piece from Apulum a special status.

Lamps decorated with scenes from the mythology of Hercules have been discovered in several provinces of the Empire. Several of the labours of Hercules have been found in Vindonissa since the beginning of the last century. The

ninth labour, the battle with Hippolyte, queen of the Amazons, to obtain her belt, is illustrated on the disk of a Löeschcke IV-type lamp (Löeschcke 1919, 393, Abb. 29). The second labour, the killing of the Hydra of Lerna, is displayed on the disk of another lamp (Löeschcke 1919, 394). The same iconographic scene is found on a piece discovered in Cyprus (Oziol 1977, cat. 455, pl. 24). The hero fights Hydra dressed in a lion's fur, hitting her with the club he holds above his head in his right hand. In his left hand he has two arrows, and next to him is the bow with two additional arrows.

<sup>3</sup> See: Roman 2006.

The disc of a lamp discovered in Germania displays the sixth labour, the fight against the Stymphalian bird.<sup>4</sup> Hercules shoots a bow using arrows poisoned with Hydra's blood.

Several Italic lamps with a disk decorated with the image of Hercules are also present in the British Museum collection (Bailey 1980, 32-35). Of these, four present iconographic compositions representing the theft of apples from the garden of the Hesperides and the fight with the Stymphalian birds.

Another labour is presented in the collection of pieces from Carthage, in the necropolis of Bordj Djerdid, namely the struggle with the serpent in the garden of the Hesperides (Fig. 2). The only analogy with our artefact also comes from this site. On a Löeschcke VIII-type lamp from this site, with a border decorated with vegetal decor, we find an identical scene. Hercules grabs the deer by the horns with both arms, pulling its head back, while with his left knee he presses the animal to the ground (Deneauve 1969, 197, cat. 939, pl. LXXXV). Behind it, in the secondary plan, the club is depicted. The animal is better defined than on the Apulum artefact, having prominent horns and a well-defined mane.

## CONCLUSIONS

Even though clay lamps are a frequent category in Roman-era finds, given the low purchase value they had and the large quantity in which they were produced, and the fact that most of them were locally manufactured. At Apulum there are many imported pieces, mostly Pannonian copies, which are distinguishable by the accuracy of the details or by the different quality of the paste or the applied slipware. They arrived as a result of commerce and were obviously a step-up, primarily in terms of quality, from the local production. Decorated lamps from Apulum are not numerous and mythological scenes are rare. The head of the Gorgon Medusa appears on two discs from lamps, one discovered in the area of the canabae (DAU 2008, 74) and the other east of the Municipium Aurelium. A third lamp shows a scene common-

ly found on these types of artefacts, that in which Zeus, transformed into a swan, seduces Leda (Ota 2009, 462).

The lamp presented by us is included in this set of decorated pieces that arrived in Apulum as imports, supplementing the local production. Its dating in an early context places it in the pre-municipal period of Apulum, being probably a piece brought directly by the population who settled here. In conclusion, we can state that our piece is, to date, the only lamp decorated with the works of Hercules known from the former Roman province of Dacia.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Clay\\_oil\\_lamp\\_depicting\\_Hercules\\_defeating\\_the\\_Stymphalian\\_Birds\\_\(the\\_Sixth\\_Labour\),\\_Staatliche\\_Antikensammlungen,\\_Munich\\_\(8957464087\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Clay_oil_lamp_depicting_Hercules_defeating_the_Stymphalian_Birds_(the_Sixth_Labour),_Staatliche_Antikensammlungen,_Munich_(8957464087).jpg)

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**REZIME****PREDSTAVA HERKULA IZ APULUMA****KLJUČNE REČI: LAMPA, APULUM, HERKULOVIZADACI**

Predstavljeni materijal jedinstven je među nalazima iz rimske provincije Dakije otkrivenim do sada. Tokom arheoloških istraživanja, pokrenutih zbog građevinskog projekta, glinena lampa sa diskom ukrašenim reljefom nađena je među ostalim arheološkim materijalom. Dekoracija, fragmentarno sačuvana, prikazuje scenu iz jednog od Herkulovih zadataka, konkretno, trećeg – hvatanje košute boginje Artemide. Artefakt je izrađen od gline, sa šarom u obliku školjke, i predstavlja uvoz u *Apulum*. Pronađen je u ranom kontekstu, verovatno su ga doneli kolonisti koji su se naselili ovde nakon zasnivanje ove rimske provincije.

\* \* \*

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