

## AN INSCRIPTION FROM BANOŠTOR DEDICATED TO SOMNUS

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Received: 9. 2. 2023. | UDC: 930.2:003.071=124'02(497.113)'02/03''

Accepted: 21. 6. 2023.

**Abstract:** *In the village of Banoštor, in the year of 1860, a base of a limestone monument with a dedication to Somnus was found. The monument is now kept in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, Croatia. The dedicator of the monument was a praefect Carminius. Up to this day, the monument has not been researched nor dated. Somnus, a personification of sleep, is a deity with iatric or chthonic characteristics. The first goal of this paper shall be to date the monument and the second to discern its nature through analysis of other monuments dedicated to this deity and their contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Somnus, Hypnos, Roman religion, inscription, praefectus, Banoštor, Bonaonia, Malata, Fruška Gora, Pannonia, Roman period*

In the year of 1860, in the village of Banoštor, a limestone block was found with the following inscription (fig. 1, fig. 2):

*Somno | Carminius | praef(ectus)* (Mirković 2017, 222–223, No 255).

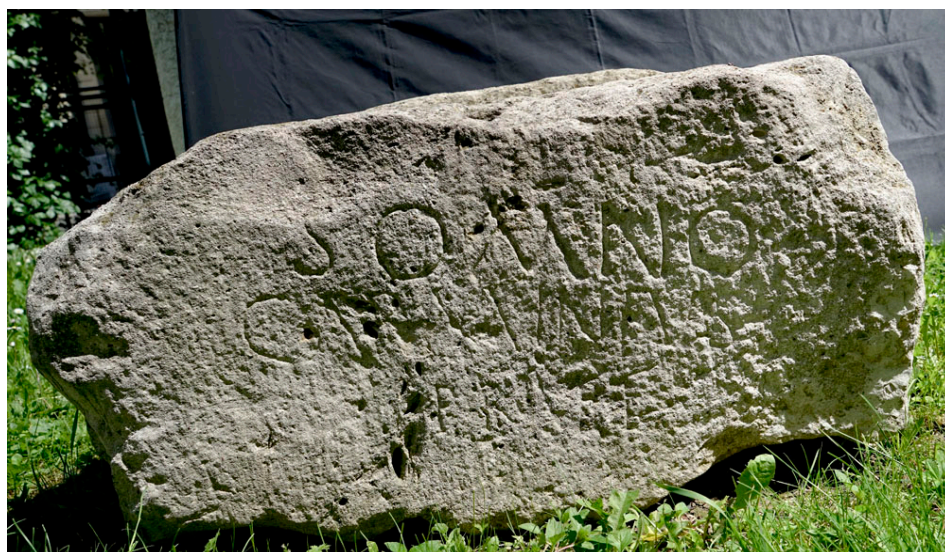
The monument is 56 cm high, 90 cm wide and 84 cm thick. It is fragmented on the bottom side, but is preserved enough so that its side and upper edges can be examined. Three rows of the inscription are preserved. The height of the letters is largest in the first row, ranging from 8 to 10 cm. In the second row, it ranges from 8 to 9 cm and in the third row, the dimensions are the smallest, ranging from 6 to 7 cm. The letters are damaged and the original inscription cannot be read completely. The preserved letters have no serifs.

The exact location where the monument was found is debatable. Flóris Rómer wrote that he had found it in a well of a villager named Aksentije Kicoš (Rómer 1866, 165). It is noted in *CIL* III that the monument had been found next to the road (*CIL* III 3263 + p. 1674). It is more probable that the information from 1866 is the correct one, mainly because it was written by a person who had found the monument. The secondary usage of the monument is not surprising, because it was noted as early as in 1895 that villagers had been using the material out of which the fortification had been built for their own needs (Brunšmid 1895, 183).



**Fig. 1.** The location of Banoštor within the region of Srem (Google Earth Pro)

**Сл. 1.** Локација Баноштора унутар Срема (Google Earth Pro)



**Fig. 2.** Frontal view of the monument (<http://lupa.at/22727/photos/1>)

**Сл. 2.** Фронтални поглед на споменик (<http://lupa.at/22727/photos/1>)





**Fig. 3.** Dowel holes on the top of the monument (<http://lupa.at/22727/photos/2>)

Сл. 3. Рупе од бушења на горњој страни споменика (<http://lupa.at/22727/photos/2>)

The monument was discussed by Josip Brunšmid, Wilhelm Kubitschek, László Barkóczy, Miroslava Mirković and Milena Dušanić (Brunšmid i Kubitschek 1880, 107–108; Barkóczy 1959, 162/2; Mirković 1971, No 85; Душанић 1995, 38; Mirković 2017, 222–223, No 255). The monument is kept in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb under the inventory number AMZ KS-966 (fig. 3).<sup>1</sup>

So far, the monument has not been dated precisely.<sup>2</sup> However, there are some elements which point to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> – early 4<sup>th</sup> century.

- 1) The omitting of the *tria (duo) nomina* naming convention is the process which began in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> – early 4<sup>th</sup> century (Kajanto 1977, 426; Šašel Kos 2018, 249).
- 2) The form of the letters is similar the most to the letters on monuments from this region dated into the period of the late 3<sup>rd</sup> – early 4<sup>th</sup> century. More precisely, the letters *M*, *N*, *P*, *S* and *V* (*CIL* III 3231 + p. 1040; Dautova-Ruševljan 1983, No 20; Mirković 1998, 98, Fig. 2).

The dedicator of this monument was a certain *praefectus Carminius*.

<sup>1</sup> On the website [www.lupa.at](http://www.lupa.at), the monument is described as a base (LUPA 22727). After analysing the photos provided on the LUPA website, the classification of the monument as a base can be accepted, since the dowel holes can be easily identified (<http://lupa.at/22727/photos/2>).

<sup>2</sup> The only dating is provided by *EDH* and *EDCS: 1-300 AD* (HD 074696; EDCS 28600249).

According to *Notitia Dignitatum*, military units present in *Bononia/Malata* in the Late Antiquity period were five cohorts of *Legio V Iovia* and *equites Dalmatae*. More precisely, *Notitia Dignitatum* mentions *praefectus legionis quintae Ioviae cohortium quinque partis superioris, Bononiae* (*Not. Dign. Occ.* XXXII 44). Because of that, it is highly possible that Carminius had been a prefect of this unit (*praefectus legionis*), since there were no other units in *Bononia/Malata* which were commanded by prefects. The *Legio V Iovia* was formed by Diocletian (284–305) around 296 AD. In the late 3<sup>rd</sup> – early 4<sup>th</sup> century, one half of this legion was stationed in *Bononia/Malata* and the other half in *Burgenae* (present-day Novi Banovci in Serbia) (Grosse 1975, 143–151; Петровић 1995, 11–12, 15, 25–26).

Not much about the origin of prefect Carminius can be told. The name Carminius is Latin and it is first noted in the late republican period on an inscription from Tricesimo in Italy (ancient *Ad Tricesimum*) as a *gentilicium* (*CIL* I 2648 + p. 1091, 1093). It was also in use from the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, reaching its peak throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and existing to a lesser extent during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (Weber 1969, No 179; Šašel Kos 1997, No 153; Kremer 2001, No 152; Lettich 2003, Nos 89, 210; Grünwald i Baranenko 2007, No 19; Tóth 2011, No 60; Bouke van der Meer 2012, No 42.3; EDR 145919). Therefore, the Banoštor monument could be the latest epigraphical testimony of this name. It remains unknown whether the name Carminius was used as a *praenomen* or *gentilicium* on this monument.

The situation with the first word of the inscription is a bit more complicated than the previously described identification of the dedicator. The word *somno* on monuments can be a tricky one. There are situations when the word *somno* does not refer to a deity, but is used as an allegory for death (e. g. *somno aeternali* or *somno aeterno*) or as a testimony of the way through which somebody was healed (e. g. *somno monitus*) (Kajanto 1974, 59; Недељковић 2014, 93, note 6; Varga 2015, 244). In other cases, the word refers to a god (*AE* 1993, 1350; *LIMC* V-1, “Hypnos/Somnus”, No 1). Two arguments shall be presented to demonstrate that the word *Somno* on this monument refers to a god, i.e. that the base is dedicated to Somnus:

- 1) When the photo of the monument is observed, it can be discerned that the right edge of the monument is partially preserved and that there is no space for additional text.
- 2) Dowel holes for fixing the statue of Somnus are located on the top of the monument. The word *Somno* has been incised in the first line of the inscription, since there are no traces of letters above it, thus negating

every possibility that the sculpture and the inscription were dedicated to somebody else, apart from Somnus.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the text on the monument is dedicated only to Somnus. Somnus or Hypnos (*Ὕπνος*) was a god and personification of sleep (*LIMC* V-1, “Hypnos/Somnus”; Becatti 2018, 29). He is rarely attested on inscriptions and is usually depicted in art as Eros or Thanatos (Mirković 2017, 222–223, No 255; Varga 2015, 244). Interestingly, Hypnos/Somnus is mostly depicted on monuments as a representation of sleep, as part of the narrative of myths presented on those monuments (e. g. Greek painted vases or *sarcophagi*) or for decoration (*LIMC* V-1, “Hypnos/Somnus”, Nos 66–145; Renberg 2017, 687, note 28). There are cases of votive inscriptions where Somnus is mentioned among other deities as a part of the expression of general gratitude to gods (Becatti 2018, 45, note 220). However, Somnus sometimes had specific roles, which can be:

- 1) Iatric – in this context, he was usually depicted with Aesculapius/Asklepios (*Ἀσκληπιός*) and/or Hygia/Hygeia (*Ἑγεία*), who were considered to be the main healing gods in the Antiquity. As sleep was considered a healing practice, Somnus, the god of sleep, was traditionally connected by researchers with the ritual of *incubatio*, which refers to the practice of sleeping in a sanctuary in order to receive a dream-oracle from the god regarding a particular matter. However, new studies have shown that there is no strong evidence which would point towards the connection between Somnus/Hypnos and the ritual of *incubatio* (Stafford 1993, 98; Varga 2015, 245–246; Renberg 2017, 8, 677–678, 683).
- 2) Chthonic – in this context, he had a role of a psychopomp (*ψυχοπομπός*), whose task was to escort souls of the deceased to the other world (Cumont 1942, 368; Boyancé 1972, 311, 313–315; Гаврилович 2011, 163). Dedications to Somnus were also found in the funerary contexts (*AE* 1993, 1350; *LIMC* V-1, “Hypnos/Somnus”, No 1).

Hence, the aim of this paper is to try to determine the purpose of this monument – was it dedicated to Somnus for healing purposes or was it from a funerary context, dedicated to Somnus the psychopomp? The method which shall be used to answer this question is the analysis of known contexts of other monuments dedicated to Somnus/Hypnos and their geographical environs. Before the discussion, some information on the site itself shall be presented.

Banoštor is located in present-day Serbia, in the region of Srem, on the northern slopes of the Fruška Gora mountain and on the southern bank of the river Danube. Sremska Mitrovica (ancient *Sirmium*) is ca 28 km (19 Roman





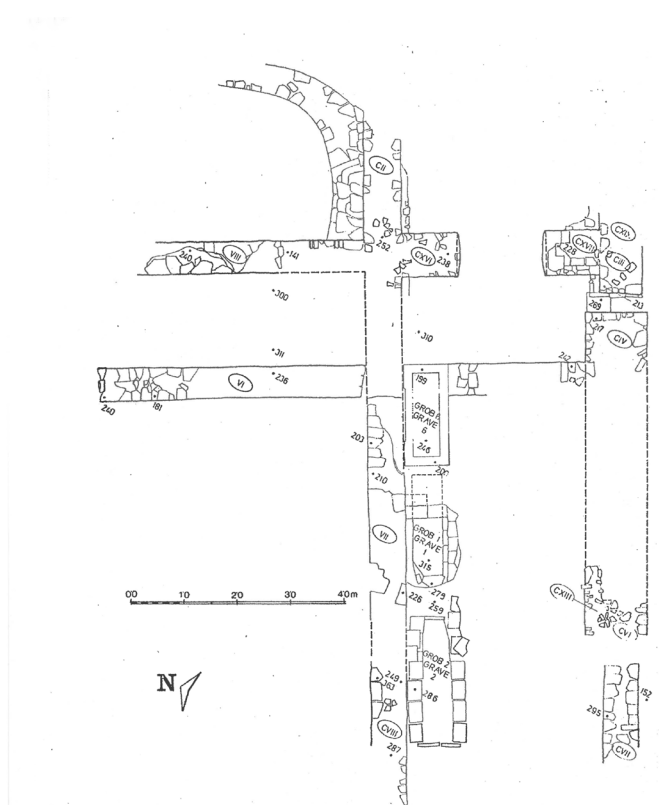
**Fig. 4.** The locations of sites within the village of Banoštor (Google Earth Pro)

**Сл. 4.** Локације налазишта унутар села Баноштора (Google Earth Pro)

miles) south of Banoštor. It is also located between three smaller tributaries of the Danube. Those are: in the west – Tekeniš, in the centre – Čitlučki Potok (Čitluk Creek) and to the east – Potoranj (Vojnogeografski institut 1970a, 378-3-1; Vojnogeografski institut 1970b, 378-3-2). During the period of Roman rule, Banoštor was a fortification, known as *Bononia* and *Malata*<sup>3</sup>, but it was also used as a port on the Danube for *Sirmium*. It is known, for example, that the emperors Julian (360–363) and Valens (364–378) disembarked here while travelling to *Sirmium* (Eadie i Petrović 1982, 2; Црнобрња 2020, 114–115). The first survey report on the site was written by J. Brunšmid in 1895, mentioning several tombs in the village and that the site used to be fortified (Brunšmid 1895, 183). First excavations were conducted by J. Brunšmid in 1894, on the site of Milino Brdo (fig. 4). They were modest in scope and only a grave and a kiln were discovered (Brunšmid 1901, 148).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> On the names *Bononia* and *Malata*, see Mirković 2017, 51.

<sup>4</sup> For general information regarding the site(s) in Banoštor and its close vicinity see Гарашанин, М. и Гарашанин, Д. 1951, 221–222; Klemenc 1961, 20; Mirković 1971, 19–20, 82–83; Даутова-Рушевљан 1978, 23–32; Брукнер 1987, 36; Петровић 1995, 25–26; *Arheološki leksikon*, „Вопонија”; Dautova Ruševljan i Vujović 2006, 64–65; Mirković 2006, 37; Đorđević 2007, 65–66; Mirković 2017, 51, 221–222; Црнобрња 2020, 114–115, 161–162; Pop-Lazić i Rummel 2020: 227–229.



**Fig. 5.** Banoštor – A plan of *thermae* and a possible church (Eadie, Petrović 1982, 4, Fig. 1)

**Сл. 5.** Баноштор – Основа терми и потенцијалне цркве (Eadie, Petrović 1982, 4, Fig. 1)

The archaeological topography of Banoštor is known mostly through accidental finds and small excavations conducted in 1894, 1970 and 1971. The excavations in the 1970s were conducted on the location of the Banoštor Serbian Orthodox Church, but the exact layout of the former fortification had not been traced yet. *Thermae* were partially excavated and dated into the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. There is rectangular structure (a church?) above them, dated into the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The uppermost construction, above the rectangular structure, belonged to the period of Turkish rule. Several graves were excavated and dated into the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, while others were dated into the medieval period. Excavated remains of temporary dwellings were impossible to date. It is believed that *Bononia/Malata* faced destruction around the year of 395 (fig. 5) (Eadie i Petrović 1982, 1–18).

Now is the moment for the discussion of Somnus' possible function. Firstly, the iatric characteristics of the deity will be examined and after that the chthonic ones.

It is accepted that Somnus was considered to be a god of healing. The historical sources which mention Somnus/Hypnos as such are vague and indirect (Stafford 1993, 89–98; Varga 2015, 245–246). On the other hand, several sculptures and reliefs depicting him with other healing deities (Aesculapius and/or Hygia) do exist (*LIMC* V-1, “Hypnos/Somnus”, Nos 146–150; Varga 2015, 241–244). In addition, there are several inscriptions which connect Somnus with Aesculapius and Hygia (for the list, see Renberg 2006, 127, note 87; Varga 2015, 245–246; Becatti 2018, 45, note 220). There are, however, three reasons for which it does not seem probable that the Banoštor monument was dedicated to the iatric Somnus:

- 1) The inscription to Somnus carved on the Banoštor base is dedicated only to him. Aesculapius and Hygia are not mentioned.
- 2) Even though Banoštor has multiple running water sources, none of them are thermal or considered to be healing. If the peaceful location and the quality and healing characteristics of water near an *Asklepieion* are considered important for the construction of such a structure (*De architectura* 1.2.7; Lopac i Bedenko (trans.) 1999, 17; Christopoulou-Aletra et al. 2010, 259–260), it seems illogical to build it in Banoštor, a fortification on the frontier and a port on the Danube for such an important city like *Sirmium*. Additionally, there are numerous, more suitable water sources in relatively close proximity of Banoštor for an *Asklepieion* (Ljuba, ca 35 km, Erdevik, ca 30 km, Vrdnik, ca 26 km – to name just a few) (Филиповић 2003, 111–112; Васиљевић 2014, 283–287, 419–422).
- 3) No inscriptions, nor *objets d'art* dedicated to Aesculapius or Hygia in Banoštor or its environs had been found to this date. The closest find of such character is from *Sirmium*, which is a marble statuette of Aesculapius (Милошевић 2001, 150).

Somnus with chthonic characteristics, more precisely Somnus the psychopomp, is mentioned in literature by Plutarch and Philo the Jew (Cumont 1942, 368; Boyancé 1972, 311–314). There are also depictions of Somnus in art where his role of psychopomp can be seen (frescoes, figurines) (Boyancé 1972, 313–314; Гавриловић 2011, 163). Additionally, Somnus was represented on a funerary monument (*LIMC* V-1, “Hypnos/Somnus”, No 1) in Arčar, Bulgaria (ancient *Ratiaria*). The monument is dated into the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and was discovered in a funerary context. More precisely, it was found between





**Fig. 6.** *Ratiaria* – A monument with an inscription dedicated to Somnus (Rigato 1992-1993, 259, Fig. 1)

Сл. 6. *Ratiaria* – Споменик с посветом Сомнусу (Rigato 1992-1993, 259, Fig. 1)

two *sarcophagi* which belong to the same period, on the site where an ancient necropolis may have existed, along the road axis on the right bank of the river Arčarica – opposite to *Ratiaria* (Rigato 1992-1993, 257). The inscription is as follows (fig. 6):

[S]omno | C. C[- -]I | u(otum) s(oluit) l(ibens) m(erito)  
(Rigato 1992-1993, 258; *AE* 1993, 1350).

With all the presented evidence, there are three reasons for which it seems possible that the Banoštor monument was dedicated to Somnus the psychopomp, i.e. that it was a votive monument from a funerary context:

- 1) The monument was definitely from *Bononia/Malata*, where, as presented above, no *Asklepieia* existed. Secondly, the inscription shows that the monument was dedicated only to Somnus, whereas on the monuments where Somnus had iatric characteristics, Hygia and/or Aesculapius were also present. Thirdly, as seen from a list of epigraphic testimonies of Somnus, diligently collected by Graziella Becatti, there are votive in-

scriptions to Somnus where his role is not specific. More precisely, he is mentioned in monuments of general gratitude towards numerous gods, but the Banoštor monument is not of such type. Therefore, it is most likely that Carminius, prefect of five cohorts of *Legio V Iovia* stationed in Banoštor, dedicated a monument to Somnus close to the grave/graves to secure safe guidance for himself and/or somebody else to the other world. Additional argument for this hypothesis is a funerary stele from Rome with a depiction of Somnus the psychopomp and an inscription to him, as well as the *Ratiaria* monument (*LIMC* V-1, “Hypnos/Somnus”, No 1; *AE* 1993, 1350; Becatti 2018, 45, note 220).

- 2) The similarity between the inscription on the Banoštor monument and the one with known context from *Ratiaria* (period, content of the inscription, the absence of *Asklepieia*) strengthens the argumentation that the monument studied in this paper was a votive monument set in a funerary context.
- 3) The reports of J. Brunšmid from the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century mention tombs from the Antiquity in Banoštor (Brunšmid 1895, 183). An absolute absence of any finds, inscriptions, *Asklepieia* and characteristics of environs which could be connected with Aesculapius and the presence of a graveyard from the Roman period make the funerary context origin of this monument even more plausible.

What remains unanswered is whether this monument had been ordered by prefect Carminius while he was alive, for safe guidance of his soul when he would die, or of the soul of somebody else or even maybe souls of several people.

This paper is a small contribution to the study of such an interesting and uncommon deity, who Somnus definitely was. What is even more interesting is the fact that this is a unique votive monument in these parts of Europe, with almost no analogies (Rigato 1992-1993, 264). Finally, this study puts a small village on the Fruška Gora mountain in the centre of attention, which may hopefully spark the interest of future researchers to focus more on such an archaeologically unexplored and somewhat neglected mountain.

**Acknowledgements:** This paper is a result of ideas which came to my mind while writing a seminary paper on cults in ancient *Sirmium* and its city territory, during my first year of MA studies, for a subject titled Epigrafika, taught by Asst. Prof. Dr Julijana Visočnik. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr Gordana Jeremić, Dr Daniela Rigato, Dr Marjeta Šašel Kos, Dr Csaba T. Szabó, Dr Gil H. Renberg, Dr Harl Ortolf, Mrs Friederike Ortolf, Ms Tomana Barić, Mr Jaren Diviacco and Mr John Whitehouse for all the useful comments and help with obtaining some of the references.

## ABBREVIATIONS

*AE* - *L'Année épigraphique: revue des publications épigraphiques relatives à l'antiquité romaine*

*CIL* - *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*

*EDCS* - *Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby* (<https://db.edcs.eu/epigr/hinweise/hinweis-en.html>)

*EDH* - *Epigraphic Database Heidelberg* (<https://edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/>)

*EDR* - *Epigraphic Database Roma* (<http://www.edr-edr.it/default/index.php>)

*LIMC* - *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*

*LUPA* - *Ubi Erat Lupa. Bilddatenbank zu antiken Steindenkmälern* (<http://lupa.at/>)

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## НАТПИС ИЗ БАНОШТОРА ПОСВЕЋЕН СОМНУСУ

**Кључне речи:** *Сомнус, Хипнос, римска религија, натпис, префект, Баноштор, Бононија, Малата, Фрушка гора, Панонија, римски период*

У сремскоме селу Баноштору, 1860. године, пронађена је кречњачка база с посветом римскоме богу сна, Сомнусу. Споменик се чува у Археолошком музеју у Загребу под инвентарским бројем AMZ KS-966. Садржина натписа је *Somno | Carminius | praef(ectus)*. Сомнус, тј. грчки Хипнос (гр. *Ύπνος*) бог је и персонификација сна, али је још важније што је у питању божанство, које се могло поштовати и као ијатричко и као хтонско. Датовање споменика, које до сада није било нигде прецизирано, на основу одсуства ономастичке формуле *tria (duo) nomina*, као и преко облика слова, одређено је у крај 3. – почетак 4. века. Споменик је подигао извесни префект Карминије, који је преко списка *Notitia Dignitatum* идентификован као префект пет кохорти легије *V Iovia*, смештених у утврђењу у данашњем Баноштору током позне антике. С обзиром на то да је Баношторски споменик пронађен ван контекста, покушај да се окарактерише сама посвета (било да је настала као заветни дар за лечење или као заветни дар Сомнусу психопомпу) био је нешто компликованији, али не и немогућ. Гледе тога да се споменици Сомнусу са ијатричким елементима најчешће појављују у контексту са Асклепијем и/или Хигијом, натпис на овом споменику је оповргао могућност такве карактеризације јер је посвећен искључиво Сомнусу. Друга ствар је што Баноштор нема одговарајућу локацију за изградњу Асклепијона. Трећи аргумент који иде у прилог претпоставци да споменик није ијатричког карактера јесте чињеница да ни у Баноштору ни у околини не постоје споменици или култни предмети (на пример, кипови) који су посвећени Асклепију и Хигији. С друге стране, одсуство било какве везе (култне и просторне са култом Асклепија и Хигије или с другим боговима), постојање гробова и коначно аналогија Баношторског споменика са спомеником из Арчара у Бугарској (античка *Ratiaria*), који је потекао из фунерарног контекста и сличног је садржаја и из сличног периода, наводе на закључак да је Баношторски споменик посвећен Сомнусу психопомпу, водичу душа у загробни свет.

Ово је изузетан споменик пре свега зато што је посвећен врло занимљивом и ретко посведоченом божанству, али је још важнији јер је то једини фунерарни споменик такве врсте на нашим просторима. На крају, значај споменика огледа се и у томе што је фокус овога рада једно село на Фрушкој гори, још увек археолошки слабо истраженој и помало запостављеној регији.