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Any correspondence will be sent to the editor:
INSTITUTUL DE ARHEOLOGIE ŞI ISTORIA ARTEI
Str. M. Kogălniceanu nr. 12–14, 400084 Cluj-Napoca, RO
e-mail: choprean@yahoo.com

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THE JEWS IN ROMAN DACIA. A REVIEW OF THE EPIGRAPHIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA*

Cosmin Onofrei[1]

Abstract: *The aim of the present paper is to re-evaluate the data on Jewish communities in Roman Dacia. Even with a decent amount of articles focused on this subject, some of them recent (see the bibliography); there is a need to review the proofs on the presence of this ethnic community in the province. Our analysis is focused on the cults of Theos Hypsistos and Deus Aeternus, divinities directly connected with the Jewish community, but also on the inscriptions and other archaeological finds. From the methodological point of view, the analysis will use an interdisciplinary approach, by correlating the data from ancient literary sources, epigraphy, archaeology and onomastics.*

Keywords: *Jewish communities, Theos Hypsistos, Deus Aeternus, Asia Minor, Roman Dacia*

A look over the information on the various ethnic groups present in Roman Dacia shows that the evidence on Jews presence in the province are modest, relative at least to the number of inscriptions discovered. Because of the scarcity of archaeological and epigraphic evidence, conclusive results in identifying Jewish communities in the studied area are still to be discovered, at least from our point of view. Even if the subject has been the focus of some researches[2], a reassessment of the Jewish presence in the province is a necessity.

The cult of Theos Hypsistos and its connections with Jewish communities

It is a fact that a community cannot exist without knowing or imagining its origins up to a certain point. Mythical origins are often subject to manipulation of the present and depending on the situation, old myths are adapted to new needs. Generally, though Roman religion was flexible, it had a huge power of assimilation and often old beliefs were not excluded, but integrated and reformed[3]. The flexibility and adaptability of the Roman religion can be properly revealed in the case of two abstract divinities, which were often tied with the Jewish communities: *Theos Hypsistos* and *Deus Aeternus*.

In *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa* three finds are connected with the cult of *Theos Hypsistos*. The first is an altar[4] dedicated to the god by *Aelius Apollinarius*, *procurator* of *Dacia Apulensis*

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[1] Institute of Archaeology and Art History of Cluj-Napoca, Romanian Academy Cluj Branch, str. M. Kogălniceanu nos. 12–14, 400084, Cluj-Napoca, Cluj county, RO; e-mail: onofreicosmingabriel@gmail.com.

[2] GUDEA 1999/2000, 179–184 (with the bibliography); MOGA 2011.

[3] DERKS/ROYMANS 2009, 7–8.

[4] AE 1939 5 = IDR III/2 222. Aelius Apollinaris erects a monument with the inscription for Fortuna Augusta; for the find, see: PISO 1983, 239, nr. 6.

and his wife, *Maxima*. The second, another altar[5] is dedicated by *Aelia Cassia.* The third and last element linked with this divinity is a fragmentary votive plaque[6] on which the name of the dedicant[7], partially visible, and two ears were chiselled. Ears' depiction includes this deity among the *theoi epekooi* (the gods that listen the prayers of the worshiper). Another find worth mentioning at this point is an altar[8] discovered at Mytilene, dedicated to the same divinity by a *decurio* of the *colonia Sarmizegetusa*.

The god is considered to be of oriental tradition, the names of the dedicants and the fact that the inscriptions are in Greek further support this fact[9]. The monuments from *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa* were linked with a find[10] from *Apulum* (an altar dedicated to *Iupiter summus exsuperantisimus*[11]) in an attempt to assign the dedicants to an ethnic group, their Jewish descent being argued in some studies[12] more or less compelling. For a better framing of these individuals in an ethnic group, a more careful documentation is needed on this cult for the eastern area of the Empire and especially *Asia Minor*[13], from where come most of the finds connected with *Theos Hypsistos*.

The 3rd century AD is a transition period for the religions across the Roman World, and, in Asia Minor, as in other parts of the Empire, there are three dominant groups from a religious point of view: pagans, Jews and Christians. Even if at first sight, it seems relatively simple to discern between the three groups, we will try, through a series of examples to show that the assigning of monuments to one of the three cannot be easily done and that the relations between pagans, Jews and Christians are more complex than initially thought.

An inscription[14] discovered at *Malos*, in north-eastern *Galatia* is dedicated to "the great God, highest and ruler of heaven, and to his holy angels"[15]. If the text hadn't have contained the word *proseuche*, term that names the Jewish place for prayer, we could have assumed that

[5] AE 1930 136 = IDR III/2 223.

[6] IDR III/2 224 = CIGD 107.

[7] SANIE 1981, 160 with the possible alternative I. Ateim(os).

[8] MITCHELL 1999, nr. 117.

[9] For the oriental traits of these gods, see: IDR III/2 222, 223 explanations: CUMONT 1929, 117–124, 190–191 RUSSU 1969, 183–184; SANIE 1981, 140–163.

[10] CIL III 1090 = ILS 2998 = IDR III/5 231.

[11] For a wider discussion on the god's cult, see: NEMETI 2005, 288–293.

[12] DAICOVICIU 1932, 85 insists on the Syrian aspect of the god; MACREA 1969, 374 the author sees in Zeus Hypsistos the Jewish Jehovah, in a syncretic blend with other Phrygian and Syrian deities; SANIE 1977, 135–142 rallies to Cumont's opinion, but does not exclude the propagation of the cult through semi-followers that were at their turn in contact with the Jewish diaspora; SANIE 1978, 1092–1115 and SANIE 1981, 156–157 identifies this anonymous deity with one of the many Syrian Baals; PISO 1983a, 239 regards *Ailios Apollinarios* as an oriental or even a Jew, and considers Theos Hypsistos a syncretic judeo-syrian deity; PETOLESCU 1995, 108 is reserved in assigning the finds in Sarmizegetusa to Jewish ethnic elements; GUDEA 1999/2000, 199–200 includes the discoveries in his study on the Jews in Roman Dacia, cataloging them as clear evidence for identifying these ethnics on the territory of the north-danubian province; NEMETI 2005, 270–279 where there are presented both the finds and the older bibliography. He rejects the identification of *Theos Hypsistos* with some Syrian Baal. Also it cannot be read as Theos Hypsistos Yahve, without additional elements that support the presence of Jewish ethnics. The same author states (278–279) that in Sarmizegetusa there probably was a religious community, a sect of the *hypsistarians*, who worshipped their god without excluding the other divinities of the official politheism; MOGA 2011, 180–184 takes the older bibliography and presents the finds from Dacia and other provinces.

[13] On the discoveries from Asia Minor connected with Theos Hypsistos, see: DREW-BEAR/NAOUR 1980, 2032, notes 480, 481 with the whole bibliography on the problem. Until now, no less than 375 inscriptions were documented that contain dedications to *Theos Hypsistos*, *Zeus Hypsistos* or simply *Hypsistos*. For the catalogue of the finds and new bibliography, see: MITCHELL 1999, 128–148; MITCHELL 2010, 167–208.

[14] RECAM II 209b.

[15] Translation after: MITCHELL 1993, II, 46.

the dedication to *Theos Hypsistos* was made by a pagan, not a Jew. Similarly, in an inscription[16] from *Sibidunda* (*Pisidia*), *Theos Hypsistos* is associated with the Sacred Refuge (ἁγία καταφυγή), a concept derived from the Old Testament, from the psalms to be more precise[17]. The term θεὸς ὕψιστος was used by Jews in the Early Hellenism for naming Yahve, but in the 2nd–3rd centuries A.D. the name can be found on inscriptions with pagan dedicants. In these cases, many times, the form *Theos Hypsistos* is replaced by *Zeus Hypsistos*[18], with a representation of the god accompanied by the eagle.

The influence of Christianity is also visible in the text of an epitaph from *Hadriani* (*Mysia*), where: Neikatoris, the son of Xenophon," had gained greatest honour among all men, and brought joy to the holy people of the highest God, and charmed them with sacred songs and readings, and who sleeps now immaculate in Christ's place"[19].

The fact that Theos Hypsistos' worshippers are discernible from the Christians with great difficulty is highlighted by another inscription discovered in the mountainous regions (Yapildak) of *Phrygia*, south of *Nacolea*, where *Zosimus*, who was part of *Theos Hypsistos*' worshippers[20], used the Scriptures and Homeric verses to compile prophetic answers which he wrote on a writing tablet[21]. Even if these verses can be considered pagan, the Scriptures (πνευματικαὶ γραφαί), those *graphai*, are Christian; also, there are some influences from the classical mythology in the versified texts of Christian epitaphs from this region of *Phrygia*[22].

Names like *Hypsianistai* or *Hypsianoi* are mentioned for the first time by *Gregory of Nazianzus*[23] and also, later, the *Hypsistianoi* appear in a discourse by *Gregory of Nyssa*[24] from 374 AD. The members of the sect knew God as *Hypsistos* or *Pantokrator*, but refused its attribute of *Father*. Also in the works by *Epiphanius of Salamis*[25] there are mentions to the Hypsistarian sect, but they are named here under the names *Massaliani* or *Euphemitai*.

The members of this sect are described as pagans, accepting the existence of more gods but worshiped only one, named *Pantokrator*. These followers prayed at sunset and sunrise, in open-air places of worship (*euketeria* or *proseuchai*), by lighting torches and lamps. They rejected the idols and the ritual sacrifices and kept dietary restrictions, but, unlike the Jews, they didn't practice circumcision. According to S. Mitchell, the description from *Panarion* is closely similar to the mention in the text of an inscription uncovered in *Oenoanda* (Lycia), where the believers dedicated lamps to Theos Hypsistos, who was, according to the oracle there, the god who *dwelt in fire*[26].

The monuments, counting no less than 375, are distributed almost exclusively in the Oriental part of the Roman Empire[27]. The exceptions are Dacia and the two *Moesiae*, where inscriptions mentioning Theos Hypsistos were also found. The big number of inscriptions shows that Theos Hypsistos was one of the most worshipped gods in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean and the Near East[28], and, as the epigraphic examples showed, in many cases it is difficult to discern if the dedications were made by Jews or pagans.

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[16] RECAM II 418; MITCHELL 1999, no. 230.
[17] MITCHELL 1993, II, 49.
[18] MITCHELL 1993, II, 49.
[19] Translation after: MITCHELL 1993, II, 50, note 293; MITCHELL 1999, no. 184.
[20] MITCHELL 1993, II, 50; MITCHELL 1999, no. 220.
[21] MITCHELL 1993, II, 50, note 291
[22] LANE FOX1986, 404.
[23] *Omilii.*, XVIII, 5.
[24] *In Eunomium*, II.
[25] *Panarion*. 80. 1–2.
[26] MITCHELL 1993, II, 51; MITCHELL 1999, no. 233.
[27] MITCHELL 2010, 167.
[28] MITCHELL 1999, 99.

Some of the Church Fathers mentioned in their writings the Hypsistarians' sect. The adepts were venerating a single god, without excluding the existence of the other gods of the ancient polytheism, in humble places of worship, the majority of them in open-air structures. The Hypsistarians excluded the sacrifice and, as we noted above, ritually lit torches and lamps in the sanctuaries at sunrise and sunset. Although, from the total number of inscriptions, the formula *Theos Hypsistos* is predominant (188 instances), there are other dedications for *Zeus Hypsistos* (88 instances), a form of the supreme god of the Olympian pantheon, and also some simply mention its name, *Hypsistos*[29].

Due to the influence of the oracles, especially those from *Dydima* and *Claros*, whose pagan theology can be compared with that of the Chaldean oracles, of the religious philosophies of *Numenius* and, later, of *Iamblichus*[30], it is apparent that the religious ideas of many cultural environments (especially pagan and Christian) intertwine, paving the way towards the Christian monotheism. Until the victory of the Christianity[31], it can be noticed people's choice to worship a more abstract god, Theos Hypsistos, *The Highest God.*

The tendency towards the abstract is also felt at the level of its emissaries, the *theios angelos*, documented in *Stratonicaea* (Caria)[32]. A similar position is occupied by *Hosios* and *Dikaios*. The two deities personifications of the abstract notions of Sanctity and Justice, well-known in Phrygia, who watched over the conduct and daily lives of the people living there, and were represented as redeeming gods in the mountainous areas of this province. In the vicinity of *Cotiaeum*, the place where a secular sanctuary of *Hosios* and *Dikaios* is attested, a *stela*[33] was found, dedicated in their honour by *philangelōn symbiōsis* (the society of the Angels' lovers/ worshippers). The last inscription certifies that the two deities can be interpreted as angels in some cases[34].

Point by point, from the data presented above, we can extract the following: the theology of the cult was influenced by both the Jewish religion and the Greek-Roman paganism. From the total number of the dedications for this deity, the form Theos Hypsistos is predominant, fewer using the names Zeus Hypsistos or Hypsistos. Their classification allowed the observation that in those cases where the name Zeus, his attributes or the association with other known deities are present, the worshippers might be pagans. In the same way, a series of inscriptions are to be credited to the Jewish Diaspora, but only if clear evidence is to be found in the text of the inscription or if a connection can be made between the find and Jewish communities attested in that area[35].

No less than 178 inscriptions can be assigned to neither Jewish nor Pagan communities[36]. Another important argument is that women play an important part in the dedications for *Theos Hypsistos*, no less than 73 of the inscriptions mention them as individual dedicants[37]. The inscriptions from Roman Dacia show no exception from this rule; among worshippers we can find *Maxima* and *Aelia Cassia*. Another notable feature for Dacia is the fact that among the god's devotee we can identify also magistrates, as usually the more modest monuments were not

[29] MITCHELL 2010, 167.

[30] MITCHELL 1993, II, 44, note 253.

[31] On the transformations in the pagan world and the subsequent conversion to Christianity see: MITCHELL 2007, 225–256.

[32] In Stratonicaea the amount of the inscriptions dedicated to Theos Hypsistos is larger, see MITCHELL 1999, no. 140–156.

[33] SHEPPARD 1982, 87–91, no. 8- 9.

[34] SHEPPARD 1982, 77–101 with a rich catalogue of the inscriptions mentioning the term "angel". The same author points out that a series of pagan cults are influenced by Jewish religious traditions.

[35] IJO I.

[36] MITCHELL 2010, 186–187.

[37] MITCHELL 2010, 179.

attributed to the elite. It is clear that the worshippers of this cult were not competing with the specific grandeur of other edifices erected for other provincial deities.

Returning to the inscriptions from *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa* we believe there is not enough evidence for arguing that the three inscriptions are a clear marker of Jewish or Christian presence in this settlement[38]. The finds from *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa* more likely show the presence of a Hypsistarian sect[39].

The sculpted ears and the mention *epekoos* show the god was listening to the prayers of the worshipper. Most certainly, a part of the altars were erected following the prescriptions given by the god to the dedicant in a dream or through an oracle. The inscriptions from Roman Dacia are all written in Greek, which supports the assigning of the cult to the Oriental part of the Empire. The worshippers of the Highest God have Greek names: Αἰλιος ᾽Απολλινάριος, ᾽Ιούλιος ᾽Ατείμητος, Π. Αἰλιος ᾽Αρριανος ᾽Αλέξανδρος (Mytilene) and possibly semitic: Αἰλία Κασσία[40] and originate in the Orient.

Deus Aeternus, places of worship of the Jews attested in Pannonia and the cult of angels in a find from Dacia

Another enigmatic deity present in Roman Dacia is *Deus Aeternus*. The god is named *Deus Aeternus* in most cases, but also appears in inscriptions as *Iupiter Optimus Maximus Aeternus* or simply *Aeternus*. Unlike *Theos Hypsistos*, the cult of *Deus Aeternus* is spread mostly in the Western part of the Roman Empire[41]. *Aeternus*, the eternal, is an epithet attached to several deities, with perennial qualities: *Caelus, Ignis, Iuppiter Dolichenus, Victoria, Luna, Nymphae, Sol, Pax* etc.[42].

In establishing the origin of this divine figure, more hypotheses were proposed. One of them features the inclusion of *Deus Aeternus* in the Pantheon of Oriental Gods, the Syrian ones to be more precise. The God is seen as an evolution from Baalshamîn, without a clear substance or attributes[43]. We don't believe that this type of cumontian approach is suitable in this case.

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[38] In fact, the inscriptions aren't included in IJO I and not even recorded as Jews-related by MITCHELL 1999, 81–148; MITCHELL 2010, 167–208.

[39] NEMETI 2005, 279.

[40] SANIE 1981, 228 a possible Judaic origin of the name Κασσία, which in Aramaic means cinnamon. See also PETOLESCU 1984, 156 where the anthroponym Κασσία appears on a monument next to a *menorah* chandelier. All things considered, based on the distribution pattern of the name, we cannot ascertain the Judaic origin of the worshipper from Sarmizegetusa.

[41] For the monuments' distribution see: VELKOV 1994, 793–794 (Roma–1, Aquileia–3, Verona–1, Africa de Nord–6, Germania–2, Dacia–28, Pannonia–2, Moesia Superior–2, Moesia Inferior–5, Dalmatia–1, Macedonia–2). A personal analysis of a set of inscriptions showed a much larger number: Pannoniae–7, Moesiae–8, Dalmatia–5, Macedonia–2, Germania–2; Roma–6; Italia- Apulia et Calabria (II)- 2, Samnium (IV)–1, Venetia et Histria (X)–15. Even if the catalogue didn't include all the Western provinces, being an incomplete one, it is apparent that the number of inscriptions found from 1994 to 2007 is rising. For the epigraphs from Dacia, see: NEMETI 2005, 373–377, no. 300–327.

[42] NEMETI 2005, 279, note 281.

[43] CUMONT 1929, 119–120; DRIJVERS 1981, 254 where the author compares *Deus Aeternus* with thee Anonymous God of Palmyra, considered a development from Baalshamîn. The explanation is recently repeated in I. Piso, IDR III/5 22. The other Romanian authors position themselves as follows: FLOCA 1935, 204–249 does not include *Deus Aeternus* among Oriental deities; MACREA 1969, 369–370 the author identifies *IOM Dolichenus* with *Aeternus* and 374 accepts the semitic origin of the *angeli*; RUSSU 1969, 184–184 Syrian deity; ISAC 1971, 545 deity with a Semitic origin; SANIE 1981, 140–144 celestial deity of a Syrian origin, which cannot be unequivocally correlated with a Baal; PETOLESCU 1995, 108 abstract deity, maybe a synthesis between the Judaic monotheism and the supreme deity of the Roman Pantheon; BĂRBULESCU 1985, 25 with the mention that a distinction is difficult to make between the cases where *Aeternus* is an epithet for the *IOM* and those where it names the Syrian deity; BĂRBULESCU 2003, 183 Syrian celestial deity; NEMETI 2005, 282–283 sees as a methodological error

As S. Nemeti observes, the formulas in the inscriptions show similarities with the ones used for *Theos Hypsistos*. The Latin dedications are for *IOM Aeternus, Deus Aeternus* or *Aeternus*, while the Greek inscriptions use the formulas *Zeus Hypsistos, Theos Hypsistos* or *Hypsistos*. But with all these similarities, the two deities are not the same[44]. *Zeus Hypsistos* is a *Zeus* with the epithet of Highest, the one who lives in the ether and *Theos Hypsistos* or *Hypsistos* are defined as abstractions of *Zeus Hypsistos*. The god, even if sometimes is understood as *Zeus*, the main deity of the Pantheon, has more names and its essence cannot be covered by only one of them, as the oracles of *Apollo* from *Claros* state[45].

A paralell discution is the evolution of *IOM Aeternus*. This deity must be regarded as Iupiter, but, compared with *Zeus Hypsistos* does not inhabit the Ether. He is the eternal one, undisturbed by the passage of time, without a beginning or an end. The subsequent abstracting will give birth to a divine figure, *Deus Aeternus*, which conserves all the attributes and Jovian symbols in its iconography, or simply, *Aeternus*[46].

Thus we observe, through the preferences of the worshippers in the time of the Imperial Age, two deities that develop in parallel: *Zeus Hypsistos* and *Iupiter Aeternus*. If in the case of the first one we had literary sources on the cult, followers and ritual, for the latter we have none.

We will not feature all the inscriptions for *Iupiter Aeternus* discovered in Pannonia and Dacia because for the majority of them no analogies with ours subject could be found. Meaningful for our discussion above are the epigraphs from *Intercisa* (Pannonia Superior), where *Cosmius* dedicates a monument[47] for *Deus Aeternus* in the Jewish synagogue, not in a pagan temple, and from *Mursa* (Pannonia Inferior), where at the end of the 3rd century AD a Jewish *proseucha* is renovated[48]. The second inscription is connected by P. Selem with another one, dedicated to the same god, which mentions data on pigs' restriction in sacred spaces. The author sees in this *Deus Aeternus* from *Mursa* no other than the Jewish Yahve[49].

These inscriptions from the two *Pannoniae* can be connected with a third one, from *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*[50]*, where M. Procilius Aphrodisius* links *Deus Aeternus* with the *angeli*. In the representation accompanying the inscription an eagle carved inside the fronton is visible and on the inscription there is a mention of Iuno. This Iupiter, accompanied by Iuno and with the Jovian symbol attached, is a supreme god, positioned on the highest step in the divine hierarchy, and who acts in the world through his messengers, the *angeli*[51].

As it was pointed out, the pagan angels are present in inscriptions from the 2nd–3rd centuries AD (see above), and their main function was that of messengers; but, as we have seen

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the attempt to discern in the inscriptios between the mention of *Iupiter Optimus Maximus* and the invocation of a hypothetical Syrian deity and that the common elements must be analysed, in this case the epithet *Aeternus*. The same author establishes that the Supreme God of the Greek-Roman pantheon receives more often the epithet.

[44] NEMETI 2005, 283.

[45] NEMETI 2005, 283, note 295; MITCHELL 1993, 43–45, 48 (for the veneration of the Ether as an abstract function).

[46] NEMETI 2005, 283.

[47] OIJ I, 9–10; CIL III 3327 = AE 1966 302 = ILS 3981: *Deo Aeter/no pro sal(ute) d(omini) / n(ostri) Sev(eri) Al[exan]/[dr]i P(ii) F(elicis) Aug(usti) e[t Iuliae] / [Mamae]ae Aug(ustae) mat(ris) Aug(usti) vot(um) / red(dit) l(ibens) Cosmius pr(aepositus) / sta(ionis) Spondill(...) synag(ogae) Iud(a)eor(um).*

[48] SELEM 1980, 258, note 3: *[Pro salute Im]p(eratorum) p(iissimorum) / [L(ucii) Septimi Severi Pe]rtinacis / [et M(arci) Aurelii Antonini] Augg(ustorum) / [et P(ublii) Septimii Getae Caesaris] / [et Iuliae Aug(ustae) Matri cast] trorum / [Sextus? Valerius? Se]cundus / [Praepositus? pro]seucham / [Iudeorum? vetu]state / [collapsam a so]lo / [impensis suis exstruxit].*

[49] SELEM 1980, 261–262.

[50] AE 1914 106 = IDR III/2 190: *Deo aeterno et Iono/ni et angelis / M(arcus) Procilius Aphrodi/sius Aug(ustalis) col(oniae) metropol(is) / et Seximia Hermione / et Prociia filia / colitoribus d(ecreto) d(ecurionum) p(osuerunt*).

[51] NEMETI 2005, 286.

in the case of *Theos Hypsistos*' cult, these are seen as distinct deities, even worshipped separately in some cases. We can accept, broadly, that *Angelus* is the Christian equivalent of the Pagan *Genius*, but the cult of angels in the Christian world, and elsewhere, is considered of Judaic origin[52]. At this point it is also worth mentioning the evidence for a possible temple for Aeternus at Apulum[53], if we also take in to account the high number of finds connected with this cult (13 finds)[54]. Even if there is the possibility that *M. Procilius Aphrodisius* came from the Orient, names like *Aphrodisius, Apollonius, Achilleus* etc. are rather due to general trends in the Empire[55], without a connection with a certain ethnic group.

Consequently, the epigraphic discoveries show the presence of two divine figures in Roman Dacia, *Zeus Hypsistos* and *Iupiter Aeternus*, concentrated in the most important urban settlements, *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa* and *Apulum*. The focus on the ideas around these two cults was presented with the purpose of better understanding their nature and that of their dedicants. The finds from Dacia connected with *Theos Hypsistos* must be assigned to the hypsistarian sect, even if those who erect the monuments brought the cult in Dacia from the Oriental part of the Empire, which is also, most likely, their origin.

In the case of *Deus Aeternus* we cannot make a connection between the discoveries in Dacia and the alleged Jewish communities, as is the case in *Mursa* or *Intercisa*. Although the votive marble slab from *Sarmizegetusa* was included by some scholars among the evidence attesting the Jews in the province[56], we cannot accept the dedication as a certainty of their presence, the mention of Iunona and the eagle pictured seems to point towards a jovian-type deity and not Yahve.

Jewish Onomastic Practices in Roman Dacia?

This chapter opens with a simple question: what are the criteria for choosing the names of the descendants, in the various ethnic groups from Antiquity? We have seen in previous sections that Roman religion was flexible and adaptable, but we cannot claim the same thing about the onomastics. In most cases the name can offer information about social, economic professional and cultural status of the individual[57]. Although the population from the Orient had a certain degree of conservatism in keeping their names (which are more diverse than those inherited from Republican stereotypical onomastics), behind the anthroponomy lies a series of criteria that had a direct influence on the choice of names.

As Karen Stern points out in her book regarding North African Jewish Communities, onomastic paradigms shifted according to region and time and evaluation of the anthroponomy requires sensitivity to this variation. The author's central assumption is that name allocation results from undetectable negotiations between name choice and name constraint. 1. One aspect of name formation may relate to a choice of the parents or inheritants who build the grave, and in some cases people may name their children in certain ways because of the cultural environment. 2. Another factor also maybe the restricted individuals' freedom to choose a name (e.g. slaves). In some cases, a person death maybe the only time that the person name would have ever been written. The possible dissonance between a name and its commemorated form anticipates that some naming practices might respond to the context of name commemoration and its audience, and need not represented what a person was actually called during lifetime. 3.

[52] SHEPPARD 1982, 77–101.
[53] RUSU-PESCARU/ALICU 2000, 133–134.
[54] NEMETI 2005, 373–375, no. 300–313.
[55] LASSÈRE 1988, 98.
[56] GUDEA 1999/2000, 198.
[57] LASSÈRE 1977, 386.

The name may provide an indication of cultural context, but naming practices are also subject to the dictates of fashion[58].

From the beginning the name of the individual on a dedication or an epitaph shows his social status, that of his parents or heirs, because in Dacia, but also in other provinces, not anybody had the financial power to erect a monument, even a modest one. In the case of Oriental onomastics, except its conservatism, we can note, in some cases, a predilection for theophoric names, but this choice could be interpreted sometimes as the effect of religious conversion and the embracing of new practices.

Returning to the inscriptions of Roman Dacia, one of the dedications to *Theos Hypsistos* from *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa* conserved the name of *Aelia Cassia*. The *nomen Cassius* and its derivatives, even if it is the well-known name of an old plebeian *gens*, had various interpretations over time.

One of the first opinions issued was that it represents a theophoric name, derived from the name of *Zeus Kasios* from *Beotia*[59]. A second possible origin is a semitic lineage, meaning cinnamon in Aramaic[60]. The Aramaic spelling – QSY'H, the Hebrew one – KSY'H, transliterated in Greek as Κασσία, were arguments for including the name in the Oriental anthroponomy, and, in combination with the dedication to *Theos Hypsistos*, implied a jewish origin for the dedicant[61]. Also, the nomen *Cassius*, as its version, *Cassianus* are especially widespread in the oriental cultural environment[62]. The combining of the inscription above with an epitaph from Pannonia[63], erected for a *Cassia* and *Judah*, bearing the representation of a menorah, enforced the jewish origin of the *Cassia* from Dacia.

A characteristic of many inscriptions dedicated by members of the Jewish community is the mention of the person's *supernomen* (*agnomen* or *signum*), marked in the Greek inscriptions by the expression ὁ/ἡ χαί[64]. For a better identification of the area various ethnic elements come from, direct references can be used, like *domo* or *origo*. But these elements are seldom mentioned in the inscriptions from the beginning of the 2nd century AD.

In the case of the inscription from *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*, the oriental origin of the dedicant is apparent through the use of Greek, but also by the dedication to *Theos Hypsistos*, a god worshipped especially in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, without additional proof (the mention of a Jewish house of prayers or the discovery of epitaphs with clear Jewish elements) we cannot include the find among those that testify a Jewish presence in the province.

As a parallel explanation to our onomastic hypothesis, the anthroponym *Cosmos*, can be used, with its variants *Cosmia*, *Cosmius*, *Cosmianus*. Cosmos and its derivative forms, argued as specific for Jewish ethnics, were also used as *supernomen*, *agnomen* or *signum*[65]. Some examples feature the inscription on a mosaic in *Phillippopolis* (Thrace), written in Greek and uncovered in the synagogue, mentions a *Cosmianus*, also named *Joseph*[66]. *Another example is the inscription*[67] *from Intercisa* (*Pannonia*), dedicated to *Deus Aeternus* for the health of *Severus Alexander* and *Iulia Mamaea* by a *Cosmius*, member of the Jews' synagogue there.

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[58] STERN 2008, 102–105.
[59] ROBERT 1963, 179; PARKER 2000, 58, table 1.
[60] SANIE 1981, 228 (with the earlier bibliography).
[61] SANIE 1981, 162 and 228; ZUGRAVU 1999, 98; GUDEA 1999/2000, 187–190.
[62] PISO 1975, 165; PAKI 1988, fig.1, table 6.
[63] OIJ I, 1–3.
[64] PANAYTOV 2004, 47–48 (with a series of examples); see also KAJANTO 1966, 5–7.
[65] PANAYTOV 2004, 46, note 6.
[66] OIJ I, 42.
[67] OIJ I, 9–10.

Both cases show two members of the Jewish community from *Phillippopolis* and *Intercisa* and that, even if the first inscription is in Greek and the latter in Latin, both settlements have sanctuaries for local the Jewish community[68]. Using all the available data from the inscriptions we can state that in such cases, *Cosmianus* and *Cosmius* are Jews or, at least proselytes; but when additional information is missing, the Greek personal names derived from *Cosmos*, more frequent in *Greece*, *Cyrenaica*, *Illyria* and *Sicilia*, may lead towards different ethnic groups and, subsequently, to other conclusions[69]. A similar situation is that of the names *Cassia*, *Cassiana*, *Cassius*, *Cassianus* etc.

The other dedicants of *Theos Hypsistos* and *Deus Aeternus* from Dacia bear names (*Aelius Apollinarius*, *Maxima*, *Ateimos*?, *M. Procilius Aphrodisius*) who do not allow a clear ethnic label.

Of Jewish descent[70] is considered also *P. Aelius Iacubus*, *dec(urio) mun(icipii) Porolissensis*. His *cognomen* is surely derived from Jacob and is a first among the personal names from Dacia[71].

The Jewish origin of *P. Aelius Iacubus* was challenged by R. Ardevan who considers Roman citizenship and his position of *decurio* to be incompatible with the Jewish religion[72]. The same argument raises Adela Paki, who considers the Judaic origin to belong to his very remote ancestry, since the bearer was the fourth generation from his family with Roman citizenship, the monument being erected in the 3rd century AD[73]. Cautiously, I. Moga only mentions also *Publius Aelius Iacubus* among the names with a Jewish origin[74]. N. Gudea argues in favour of the Jewish origin of the name based on the religious elasticity of the Jewish religion in the Diaspora[75].

Indeed, in 50/49 BC L. Antonius, the *proquestor* of *Asia*, notified the population of *Sardis* that the Jews in town were to receive a space (place of judgement) where they could resolve the common problems of their community. In *Sardis* the archaeological research documented a synagogue; the Jews there were allowed, by decree, the right to practice their religion[76]. Even if the Jewish community was regarded differently from the rest of the ethnic groups in the city, these privileges show they were an integrated part of *Sardis*' population and had a certain influence, offering them a certain degree of autonomy[77].

From *Acmonia* is the epitaph of *Aurelius Frugianus*, of a Jewish origin, a former *agoranomos*, *sitonēs, paraphylax, strategos,* and also went through all the steps of the civil magistratures[78]. It is apparent that the Jews, too, could be Roman citizens, exercise one or more magistratures and still follow their religion and traditions, under the indulgence of the Romans.

Another version would be to connect *P. Aelius Iacubus* with the Iturei troops documented in *Porolissum*. *Ituraea* is the Greek equivalent for *Jetur*, the biblical name of the son of *Ishmael*. The *Iturei* tribes, known in Roman times as fierce bandits but also excellent archers, were conquered in historical times by David and later (105 BC) *Aristobulus* had their territory integrated in Judea, also imposing the Judaic religion[79].

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[68] SELEM 1980, 261–262, PANAYTOV 2004, 38–50.

[69] LGPN 1, 1987, 270–271; LGPN 3a, 1997, 255–256.

[70] GUDEA 1999/2000, 185.

[71] SANIE 1981, 292, points out that in the case of the heterogeneous population from the Desert City mutual influences in antroponyms are documented, which proves that the author doesn't necessarily consider *P. Aelius Iacubus* is a Jew.

[72] ARDEVAN 1998, 188, note 173.

[73] PAKI 1988, 219–220, 224.

[74] MOGA 2011, 132.

[75] GUDEA 1999/2000, 185.

[76] MITCHELL 1993, 32.

[77] TREBILCO 1991, 38–39; see also: CRAWFORD 1999, 168–177.

[78] MAMA VI, 335.

[79] In this respect see: SADDINGTON 1975, 112–137; ŢENTEA 2012, 15–17.

A mass conversion of the *Iturei* is certainly out of the question, but it is likely that, in time, some traditions could have been adopted. Subsequently, in the time of *Augustus*, *Trachônitis* will be under the rule Herod the Great and his successors. Considering the area's past history, it is not unlikely for an iturean to take as a *cognomen* the latinized version of a Jewish name, like Jacob. *P. Aelius Iacubus* was a *decurio* of *Porolissum* in the 3rd century AD, but, as his name indicates, could have been a Roman citizen for generations. The latinized form of the name, *Iacubus*, and his votive gesture, the altar for *IOM* shows a high degree of Romanization. Considering the period when our character lived, sometime during the Severan dynasty, the resurgence of barbarian names, many of them specific for various parts of the Empire (*Dules*, *Maximi*, *Atpatinius Rufi*[80]), shouldn't come as a surprise.

According to some authors, through the Jews in the province must also be added *Barsimso Callistenis f(ilio) Caes(area)*[81]. The military diploma[82] from *Tibiscum* is issued for an *ex pedite* from *cohors I Vindelicorum miliaria*, *Barsimsus,* the son of *Callistenis*. The fact that the recipient of the diploma, dated in 157 AD, is mentioned as being from *Caesarea* (Palestine), makes N. Gudea to include him among the Jews attested in Dacia, considering that there are renegade Jews in the Roman Army under Hadrian[83]. The same scholar, counting a 15–20 years of military service for the auxiliary troops, proves that the owner of the diploma was recruited around the years 137–14[84].

Firstly, we do not have data that would indicate a military service for auxiliary troops shorter than 25 years, without taking into account a *missio causaria*. The researcher shortens the military service time of the veteran in order to place his recruitment after the second Jewish uprising, suppressed in 135 AD. Although he was from *Caesarea* (Palestine), *Barsimsus* shouldn't have necessarily been a Jew, other Semitic groups also inhabited in that area.

Following the Bar Kokhba/Ben Kosiba[85] uprising *Jerusalem* and *Caesarea* become *colonia* and the name *Judaea* disappears from the official records, replaced by the name *Syria Palestina*[86]. The indication of the place of origin might be the wish of the diploma's recipient to keep alive the memory of his birthplace. The auxiliary unit in which he serves had had other soldiers with Semitic non-Jew names, like the Palmyrian *P. Aelius Theimes*[87].

The name of the veteran must be included among those who express the kin relationship between the bearer and the god: *Barsemei*, *Barsemia*, *Barhadadis*, *Bolhas*, *Bars* and probably *Barbarcas*[88]. As *Barsemei* can mean the son of god *Semios* and *Barsemia* the son of the goddess *Semia*[89], likewise *Barsimsus* can be translated as the son of *Shamash*[90].

[80] It is an established fact that *barbarian cognomina* begin to reappear in the inscriptions from the 3rd century AD. and the phenomenon must be connected with the policies of the Severan dynasty. This is also the case of *Atpatanius* son of *Rufus* whose name appears on column shaft (IDR III/5 113) dedicated to *Iupiter Bussumarus*, or that of *Dules* son of *Maximus* mentioned on a funerary stele (IDR III/4 438).

[81] GUDEA 1999/2000, 185; MOGA 2011, 132.

[82] CIL XVI 107 = IDR I, 15.

[83] GUDEA 1999/2000, 185.

[84] GUDEA 1999/2000, 196.

[85] YADIN 1971; MILLAR 1993, 107–108; SCHÄFER 1999, 119–132 for the status of the province and the ethnic structure of the garrison during the riot.

[86] ECK 1999, 89, note 98 the choice for this specific name, *Syria Palestina*, was more a suggestion of the non-jewish population than Hadrian's idea. Hadrian's wish to punish the Jews was in consonance with that of the non-jewish population; see also ISAAC 1998, 71–74, where the author insists that different elements of the population, Jewish, Samaritans, Christians or pagan, lived together in both rural and urban areas.

[87] CIL III 12387 = IDR III/2 369.

[88] SANIE 1981, 210.

[89] STARK 1971, 79 for form like BRSMY', 'BSMY' and 'BSYMY'.

[90] KAIZER 2002, 99. In *Palmyra* it is hypothesized the existence of a sanctuary for multiple Arabian deities, grouped around Shamash and Allat.

The patronymic *Callistenis* is frequent among the populations from the Orient, but even if it is used in some cases by the Jews[91], a more prudent approach must be taken when assigning it to an ethnic group, more than the mention that it is a form of the Greek name *Kallistos.*

The most obvious discoveries connected with the jews of Roman Dacia are an inscription with the *Tetragrammaton* for *Jehovah* and a small sandstone plaque with a representation featuring a ram in its centre, David's star to the right and a flaming altar with 7 human heads and the inscription *Iudaea*. From the small finds worth mentionin is the one from *Porolissum*, probably a gaming piece with the Star of David[92] scratched on it.

Besides the cults and onomastics problems, the coins issued in the time of the Bar Kokhba uprising, found in Pojejena and *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*[93], but also the gnostic elements remain open. In the matter of the coins we consider the most plausible hypothesis is the diffusion through the military channel, being brought in the province by soldiers that took part in the conflict. Also, the Gnosticism is connected with the Jews, but the finds do not necessarily testify the existence of a Jewish community in the places of discovery.

Finally, a series of gems are worth mentioning, found in *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, Romula, Drobeta, Dierna, Porolissum* and Orlea[94]. This type of gems, named in modern times *abrasax* – type gems, is closely connected with magic practices and with a series of divine epithets: *Iaô*, *Abrasax*, *Sabaoth*, *Adonai* etc. The Jews, praying to a mysterious deity without a representation, like *Jehovah*, were considered in Antiquity the main practitioners of magic. The finds attest the presence in Roman Dacia of adepts performing and using magic elements, yet there is no evidence about the ethnic group they belong to.

Conclusions

Summing up, the inscriptions dedicated to *Theos Hypsistos* from *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa* marks the probable presence of the hypsistarian sect in the main urban center of Roman Dacia. The monuments follow the characteristics of those erected for this deity, mostly in Asia Minor, and some of the dedicants are women. The same can be said in the case of another abstract god, *Deus Aeternus*. We do not support the low social status of the dedicants because the majority of the poor could not afford the expense for erecting even modest monuments. Another fact worth mentioning is the influence and the acceleration in the development brought to these cults by Judaism, but this influence is not reciprocal.

We saw that both divinities can be connected with Jewish communities only if there is documented evidence of a sanctuary and/or of inscriptions connected with that community, like the cases from *Sardis* (*Lycia*), *Phillippopolis* (*Thracia*), *Intercisa* (*Pannonia Superior*), *Mursa* (*Pannonia Inferior*). Even if about the communities from *Phillippopolis* or *Intercisa* we do not have data on priviledges, as is the case in *Sardis*, the existence of sanctuaries proves the cultic practices were allowed, and the Jewish communities and the proselytes kept their religious identity. Last but not least it should be noted that the Jews were able to keep their traditions with the consent and with the support of Rome, with the communities from Asia Minor (*Sardis, Priene, Acmonia, Smyrna, Apamea*) being the main proofs of this fact.

Without exclude, in the case of Roman Dacia, the hazard of the archaeological discoveries, until further evidence is available, we cannot certify the existence of Jewish communities in the main urban centres of Dacia, like those from Asia Minor, Thracia, Pannonia or other parts of the Empire.

[91] MOGA 2011, 132

[92] SANIE 1981, 161–162; GUDEA 1999/2000, 194–195 (with the bibliography).

[93] SANIE 1981, 4–5; GUDEA 1999/2000, 192–194 (with the bibliography).

[94] NEMETI 2005, 297–306 for an extended discussion on the Jewish contribution to the practice of magic and these type of gems; MOGA 2011, 133 (with the bibliography)

Assigning an ethnic label based on the worshipped deities might function to a certain point, but many times this is possible only if the inscriptions' dedicants wish to express it on the written slab. There are enough examples across the Empire, but the finds from Dacia linked to *Theos Hypsistos* and *Deus Aeternus* are not among them.

Our epigraphic analysis showed that the inscriptions from Roman Dacia do not show similar name patterns specific to the Jewish compared with other provinces, where their unique names appear some times as *supernomen, agnomen* or *signum*. *Aelius Appolinarius* and *M. Procilius Aphrodisius* have names that follow rather the global trends in the Empire than an ethnic identification, and the wife of the first, *Maxima*, bears a name derived from the patronymic *Maximus*.

Aelia Cassia can be included among the Orientals in Dacia due to the dedication for *Theos Hypsistos* and to the fact that the inscription is written in Greek, but its Jewish origin cannot be proven without additional elements. The same can be said about the other *Theos Hypsistos*' dedicant, *Ateimos?*.

From the onomastic point of view, in the case of *Barsimsus* son of *Callistenis*, it is apparent the Semitic theophoric *cognomen* with a patronymic from the Greek *Kallisto*. The mention of the veteran's hometown of *Caesarea* (*Palestina*) doesn't necessarily make him one part of the Jewish ethnic group in Dacia. It is uncertain that a Jew carried a name that is to be linked with the Arabian deity *Shamash* attested at *Palmyra*.

An interesting case is that of *P. Aelius Iacubus* from *Porolissum*. He has a *cognomen* obviously derived from Jacob, but it is hard to discern if behind the dedication to *IOM* hides *Yahve*.

The other finds in Roman Dacia can provide information only on the presence of some Jewish individuals, but not that of whole communities, as is the case in other provinces. The lack of additional information hinders our attempts to identify the Jewish communities in Roman Dacia, in case they existed, but also, further on, to assess their role in the development of the urban settlements or to determine their status and their interaction with other ethnic groups.

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