

MENSA  
ROTVNDA  
EPIGRAPHICA  
NAPOCENSIS

**Editors:**

Radu Ardevan  
Eugenia Beu-Dachin



“BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY | CENTER FOR ROMAN STUDIES

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Mega Publishing House  
Cluj-Napoca  
2016

This volume was published with the financial aid of the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), within the project PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0412, contract nr. 230/5.10.2011, developed under the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca.

Papers of the 4<sup>th</sup> Romanian-Hungarian epigraphic round table,  
*Mensa rotunda epigraphiae Dacicae Pannonicaeque*,  
held in Cluj-Napoca, 16–17 October 2015.

DTP and cover:  
Francisc BAJA

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**Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naționale a României**

**Mensa Rotunda Epigraphica Napocensis** / ed.: Radu Ardevan, Eugenia Beu-Dachin.

- Cluj-Napoca : Mega, 2016

ISBN 978-606-543-747-0

I. Ardevan, Radu (ed.)

II. Beu-Dachin, Eugenia (ed.)

902



EDITURA MEGA | [www.edituramega.ro](http://www.edituramega.ro)  
e-mail: [mega@edituramega.ro](mailto:mega@edituramega.ro)

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## Two inscribed bronze *tabulae ansatae* in the collection of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

Zsolt Mráv

**Abstract:** In this paper the author publishes two inscribed bronze *tabulae ansatae* from the Hungarian National Museum and analyses comprehensively the similar finds from Pannonian provinces (Appendix 1).

**Keywords:** Roman, inscription, *tabula ansata*, *Tricornenses*, votive donation, Pannonian provinces.

The aim of this paper is to publish two inscribed bronze *tabulae ansatae* that came into the collection of the Hungarian National Museum in previous decades and to collect the analogous finds from the Pannonian provinces (Appendix 1).

1. The right half of a bronze *tabula ansata* (Pl. I. 1–2) was seized with thousands of other metal finds by the Kaposvár city police from a metal detectorist around the beginning of the 2000s. The Roman finds were illegally collected from the archaeological sites of Tolna, Somogy and Baranya counties in Hungary. The plaque can currently be found in the collection of the Hungarian National Museum. Dimensions: height: 3.7 cm; width: 3.82 cm; thickness: 0.65 cm. The cast bronze *tabula ansata* was broken horizontally into two equal parts. The left part with its upper left suspension loop is lost. The frontal surface of the rectangular *tabula* with a stamp is enclosed within a frame which is engraved in line, and flanked by *ansa* panels, similarly bordered on the right. The lower part of the plaque ended originally with three round loops (one-and-a half loops are preserved) on which further decorative objects (bells or most probably a bronze lamp<sup>1</sup>) were suspended by chains. The central loop

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the following bronze lamps from Pompeii: De Spagnolis, De Carolis 1988, 70, nr. 50, 146, nr. 120.

could be bigger than the others. Considering the 1<sup>st</sup> century date of some of these suspended *tabulae ansatae*, it is tempting to assume that this plaque was produced in Italy.

The object is interesting because of the maker's stamp which was punched into the centre of the plaque's frontal side. Only the right half of the stamp is preserved. The inscription was placed into a rectangular field, which was divided by a standing oval-shaped field in the middle. This field was filled up with an unidentified representation from which vertically engraved lines run downwards till the lower central loop (lion headed spout or a vessel, or maybe a mountain with trees from which water flows?). The stamp reads as follows:

[ - - - ] | *enus f(ecit)*.

The text of the stamp consists of a name in the nominative case and the verb *fecit*. The other side of the *tabula* was never inscribed. Only three vertically engraved, more or less parallel lines can be seen on the back side of the plaque.

2. Around the end of 1990s the Hungarian National Museum received as a donation – together with a late Roman bronze inscribed casket (?) mount (Appendix 2) – a cast bronze *tabula ansata* measuring 3.8 cm in height, 5.2 cm in width and 0.1 cm in thickness, said to be from the Hungarian part of Roman Pannonia (inv. nr. RR 2011.14.1) (Pl. I. 3). The left third of the plaque with the left *ansa*, as well as the upper and lower part of the right *ansa*, are broken off. There are no holes for nails. The *tabula ansata* contains a three-line engraved Latin inscription. The inscription is properly arranged, with well composed lines. The letter I in the first line is an “i longa”. The height of the meticulously engraved, elegant letters is 0.7-0.8 cm (I *longa*: 1 cm). The carver consequently used punctuation in the form of downward triangles. The shape of the letters permits it to be dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. If we accept that the last line was centred, the original length of the *tabula ansata* could be around 8.2 cm and the length of the oblong rectangular *tabula* could be 5.9 cm (Pl. I. 4).

[ - - - ] ORNESIUM  
[ - - - ] TINAE · SER  
D · D

[....]ornesium  
[... · .]tinae · ser(va)  
*d(onum) · d(edit)*.



Line 1: [...]*ornesium* can be understood as [...]*orne(n)sium* as the simplifying of the -ns- nasal consonants to -s- is a well attested development in Vulgar Latin (-ns->-s-)<sup>2</sup>.

Line 2: or *ser(vus)*

In the first line the enigmatic noun in the plural genitive case means that the donation belonged to a certain group of people, the [- -]*orne(n)ses*. Without any parallels among the inscriptions of *tabulae ansatae*, its exact interpretation is problematic, but we can set up some plausible hypotheses. Only four letters can be inserted to the broken place before the preserved letters, so the most plausible reconstruction of the line is the [*Tric*]*ornesium*, which suggests that the beneficiary people could be the *Tricornenses*. According to the record of Ptolemy, the *Tricornenses* formed a native *civitas* in Moesia Superior (Ptol. *Geogr.* III. 9.2: Τρικορνήνσιοι)<sup>3</sup>. A military diploma dating to AD 120 gave the origin of a woman as *Tricorn(ensi)* (CIL XVI 67 [Ritopek])<sup>4</sup>. Their tribal centre was in Tricornium (today Ritopek in Serbia) on the Danube, where an auxiliary unit stationed and an important non-urban settlement developed in the imperial period<sup>5</sup>. The question remains open whether the beneficiaries were the members of the tribe *Tricornenses* and/or the inhabitants of Tricornium. The lack of any data on the exact provenance of the plaque raises the question, if the mentioned group of the *Tricornenses* stayed in or far from their *civitas/vicus* (for instance in Pannonia?).

The inscription can also be expanded to [*pr(o) s(alute) C*]*ornesium*<sup>6</sup>, where the *Cornenses* mean the inhabitants of Cornus<sup>7</sup>, one of the most important Roman cities of Sardinia (near S. Caterina di Pittinuri)<sup>8</sup>.

Both suggested interpretations can make the Pannonian provenance of the plaque improbable, which is supported by its unusually fine execution and early date.

The donator was a slave, who bore a maximum three-letter long name (for instance Aba, Aia, Ana, Aiu, Aco etc.). The SER. epigraphic abbreviation does not permit us to determine the gender of the dedicator. Her/his mistress also bore a short cognomen, like for instance [*A*]*tina*<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Kiss 1972 – cf. Fehér 2007, 399–400.

<sup>3</sup> Mócsy 1970, 26, 28; Mirković 2007, 52.

<sup>4</sup> Mócsy 1970, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Gudea 2001, 51–52 (with further literature); Mirković 2007, 68.

<sup>6</sup> Without parallel, the [*Dis/Deo/Deae C*]*ornesium* reading can be excluded.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. CIL X 7915, 7917.

<sup>8</sup> PECS 1976, 244.

<sup>9</sup> Lőrincz 2005, 86.

The formula *donum dedit* is also attested on inscriptions of votive *tabulae ansatae*<sup>10</sup>, but it is not possible to say without doubt that the piece, to which the new plaque once belonged, was a sacral donation<sup>11</sup>.

## Appendix 1

### Inscribed metal *tabulae ansatae* from the Pannonian provinces

Together with the two new bronze *tabulae*, 14 similar inscriptions are known from the Pannonian provinces, all of them from Pannonia Superior<sup>12</sup>. The places of finding are seemingly limited to urban centres, like Poetovio (2 pieces), Savaria (1 piece), Carnuntum (4 pieces) and Siscia (3 pieces). The Azaum/Odiavum piece, however, came from an auxiliary *vicus* (Cat. nr. 12). The votive *tabulae ansatae* (Cat. nr. 1–10) can all be connected to sanctuaries of mystery deities, primarily to Isis in Poetovio, Siscia and Savaria (?) (3+1 pieces), I. O. M. Heliopolitanus in Carnuntum (3 pieces) and Mithraic deities in Brigetio, Carnuntum and Siscia (3 pieces). The Savaria fragmentary specimen came to light in the territory of the Isiac sanctuary of the city, so it must have been dedicated to Isis or another Graeco-Egyptian god (Cat. nr. 3). The votive formula V. S. L. M. or its V. S. L. L. M. variant can be read on 4 pieces (Cat. nr. 1, 6, 9–10). One plaque mentions an *ex visu* dedication (Cat. nr. 10), and another piece was inspired [*ex*] *mandatis*, by the order of Jupiter Heliopolitanus (Cat. nr. 5). With the exception of a golden leaf plaque (Cat. nr. 7), the material of the *tabulae* is primarily cast or sheet bronze. The inscriptions were engraved (Cat. nr. 8–9 and the second new *tabula*) or more often dot-punched (Cat. nr. 1–7, 10). Only one known inscription, the largest, was manufactured with *opus interrasile* technique (Cat. nr. 11). The dedicators are military persons (like Sextus Titius Moderatus *centurio* (Cat. nr. 6) or Ulpius Sabinus *miles* (Cat. nr. 8)), civil citizens (Cat. nr. 2, 4–5, 7, 9–10) and slaves (see the second new plaque). The only certainly female dedicator was Volcetia Maxima, who offered her *ex voto* to Isis in Siscia (Cat. nr. 10). This inscription demonstrates the strong and intimate tie which connected the women to Isis, moreover the role of the female worshippers in the cult

<sup>10</sup> See for example the *tabula ansata* with this formula dedicated to *Sardus Pater* from Sardinia: AE 1971, 120 – cf. Mayer i Olivé 2012, 236.

<sup>11</sup> For the votive *tabulae ansatae* connected to sanctuaries, see comprehensively: Mayer i Olivé 2012, 223–245.

<sup>12</sup> This group of inscriptions were omitted by Zs. Visy in his paper on *instrumenta inscripta aenea* from Hungary: Visy 2014, 497–513.

of the Alexandrian gods. Almost all pieces can be dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. The two exceptions are the newly published plaques which permit an earlier, 1<sup>st</sup> century dating. The large lamp suspension from Siscia could also have been manufactured in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Cat. nr. 11).

## Catalogue

### Pannonia Superior

1. Poetovio (Ptuj, SLO), Spodnja Hajdina in 1898 (Pl. II. 1). Regional Museum, Ptuj (inv. nr. R 1010). Dimensions: 2.5 × 5.5 cm × 0.07 cm. The inscription done in *poussée* technique. Literature: CIL III 15184; AIJ 270; SIRIS 658; Cat. Religions 1998, 105, nr. 198; RICIS 613/305.

*Apolinar(is) | Isid(i) v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).*

2. Poetovio (Ptuj, SLO), Spodnja Hajdina in 1935 (Pl. II. 2). Regional Museum, Ptuj (inv. nr. R 4082). Dimensions: 2.6 × 3 × 0.05 cm. Literature: AIJ 271; SIRIS 659; Cat. Religions 1998, 105, nr. 197; RICIS 613/306.

*Is[idi] | Val(erius) A[---] | P(ublius) M[---].*

3. Savaria (Szombathely, H), Iseum (Pl. II. 3). Savaria Museum, Szombathely (inv. nr. R 2009.2.7406). Dimensions: 3.2 × 3.2 × 0.05–0.1 cm. Left part of a *tabula ansata* made of thin bronze sheet. It contains a two-line inscription written with dot-punched letters. Only the remnants of the first or last letters are preserved. Literature: Sosztarits, Balázs, Csapláros 2013, 116, Cat. 8.59.

*+ [---] | + [---].*

4. Carnuntum, *canabae* (Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, A), Mühläcker, sanctuary of Jupiter Heliopolitanus (Pl. II. 4). ÖAI Deposit (find nr. 918/81). Dimensions: 4.3 × 2.6 × 0.26 cm. Cast and gilded bronze *tabula ansata*. The letters of the five-line inscription are dot-punched. At the end of the third line is a *hedera*. Literature: AE 1982, 774; Humer, Krämer 2011, 253, nr. 292 (with further literature).

*I(ovi) · O(ptimo) · M(aximo) He|liopolita|no  | Q(uintus) · Pomponius | Sosipater*

5. Carnuntum, *canabae* (Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, A), Mühläcker, sanctuary of Jupiter Heliopolitanus (Pl. II. 5). ÖAI Deposit (find nr. 224/79). Dimensions: 4.3 × 5.6 × 0.025. The bronze sheet *tabula ansata* holds a dot-punched inscription. Literature: Humer, Krämer 2011, 253–254, nr. 293 (= AE 2011, 1000).

*[. U]lp[us] | [...] + ratus | [...] mandatus | +++++.*

6. Carnuntum, *canabae* (Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, A), Mühläcker, sanctuary of Jupiter Heliopolitanus in 1994 (Pl. II. 6). ÖAI Deposit (find nr. 24/94). Dimensions: 5.3 × 8.2 × 0.025. Bronze sheet *tabula ansata* with dot-punched inscription. Literature: AE 2005, 1233; Humer, Krämer 2011, 254, nr. 294.  
*Sextus Titi|us Moderatus | 7(=centurio) leg(ionis) XIII G(eminae) | M(artiae) V(ictricis) Iovi Optimo | Heliopolitano | v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).*

7. Carnuntum, *canabae* (Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, A) (Pl. II. 7). Museum Carnuntinum (inv. nr. 21471). Dimensions: 2.1 × 4.7 × 0.02 cm. Golden leaf *tabula ansata* with unpublished engraved three-line inscription in a rectangular frame. Horizontal guidelines are visible below each line of text. Literature: Cat. Carnuntum 2009, 251, nr. 987a; Humer, Krämer 2011, 368, nr. 647.  
 The content of its text is a dedication of Gargilius Exsuperatus to Sol.

8. Probably Brigetio (Komárom-Szöny, H) (Pl. II. 8). Hungarian National Museum, Budapest (inv. nr. RR 1/1874.611, collection of György Ráth). Dimensions: 3.8 × 6.6 cm. Cast bronze *tabula ansata* with five-line engraved inscription surrounded by a frame. Points were used as word separators. Literature: RD 414; CIL III 11008; Paulovics 1941, 139, Fig. 21/1; Cat. Religions 1998, 107, nr. 207.

*Deo · invi<sup>r</sup>c<sup>o</sup>to | Ulpius · Sabinus | miles · legio|nis · primae | (A)diutricis.*  
 Line 1: INVIGTO.

9. Siscia (Sisak, HR), bed of the river Kupa (Pl. II. 9). Archaeological Museum, Zagreb (inv. nr. 16893, Dierich collection). Dimensions: 8.2 × 17 × 0.16 cm. *Tabula ansata* of bronze sheet with engraved four-line inscription. Two holes for nails in the middle of the *ansae* for affixation. Literature: CIL III 3959 – cf. p. 1743; AIJ 544; Cat. Religions 1998, 108, nr. 210.

*D(eo) · I(nvicto) · M(ithrae) | Aurelius · Heraclides | et · Agathopus fra|tres · v(otum) · s(olverunt) · l(ibentes) · m(erito).*

10. Siscia (Sisak, HR), during the dredging of the Kupa river in 1909 (Pl. II. 10). Archaeological Museum, Zagreb (inv. nr. 531). Dimensions: 3.6 × 6.5 cm. Bronze sheet *tabula ansata* with an oval-shaped hole in the middle of the upper part. The plaque carries dot-punched inscription. Literature: AIJ 531; SIRIS 653; RICIS 613/202.

*Isidi Aug(ustae) | sac(rum) Vol(cenia) | Maxima | ex vi(su) vo(tum) so(lvit) l(aeta) l(ibens) || m(erito).*

11. Siscia (Sisak, HR) (Pl. III. 1). Archaeological Museum, Zagreb. Dimensions: 17 × 29 × 0.5 cm. The cast bronze *tabula ansata* could most probably be a suspension for a lamp. The openwork Greek inscription is enclosed by a rectangular frame which is decorated with engraved ivy scroll. A semicircle-shaped loop is attached to the middle of the both horizontal edges of the plaque. Literature: AIJ 525; CIGP<sup>3</sup>, nr. 68 (with further literature).

Γαειανός | Διογένος(ς) | ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς | ἀνέθετο.

12. Azaum/Odiavum (Almásfüzitő, H), the *vicus* of the auxiliary fort (Pl. II. 11). Dimensions are not published. The bronze sheet *tabula ansata* with unpublished dot-punched inscription might be a “Besitzermarke” of a soldier. There are holes for nails in the middle of the *ansae*. Literature: Horváth 2012, 24, Fig. 41.1.

## Appendix 2

An unpublished inscribed bronze sheet from Pannonia

The fragment is from the covering sheet of a wooden casket<sup>13</sup> or less probably belonged to a belt mount (Pl. III. 2). The piece got into the collection of the Hungarian National Museum as a donation together with the second newly published *tabula ansata* (inv. nr. RR 2011.14.2). Dimensions: height: 3.7 cm, length: 3.82 cm, thickness: 0.05 cm. At the left upper corner there is a hole for nail or rivet which clearly indicates that it was fixed on something. It is ornamented *en repoussé* with two oblong rectangular fields, produced by hammering the metal into a die matrix. Both of the fields are encircled by rows of beading. The beads running beneath the inscription's field are bigger. The upper field was filled up with an interlaced motif and punched dots. The inscription runs between two lines. The height of the letters is 0.4 cm. The inscription reads:

*Vivas tuis!*

The content of the inscription was a popular motto in late antiquity which was written on different types of everyday objects, jewellery and dress accessories<sup>14</sup>. This is the simpler and shorter version of the *vivas cum tuis in deo* or

<sup>13</sup> See a casket mount representing a hunting scene from Intercisa (Dunaújváros, H) with the inscription: *Vivas, vincas!*: Radnóti 1957, 322, Cat. nr. 8, Pl. LXVII.1.

<sup>14</sup> For example it can be read on gold sandwich glasses: AE 1967, 379 = AE 1968, 428 (Intercisa [Dunaújváros], H), ILCV 2304 (Rome); on glass vessels: AE 1958, 110 (Wint Hill, GB);

*vivas cum tuis pie zeses* motto. Based on the form of the letters and the decoration technique, the inscription can be dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> I am indebted to András Szabó for improving my English.

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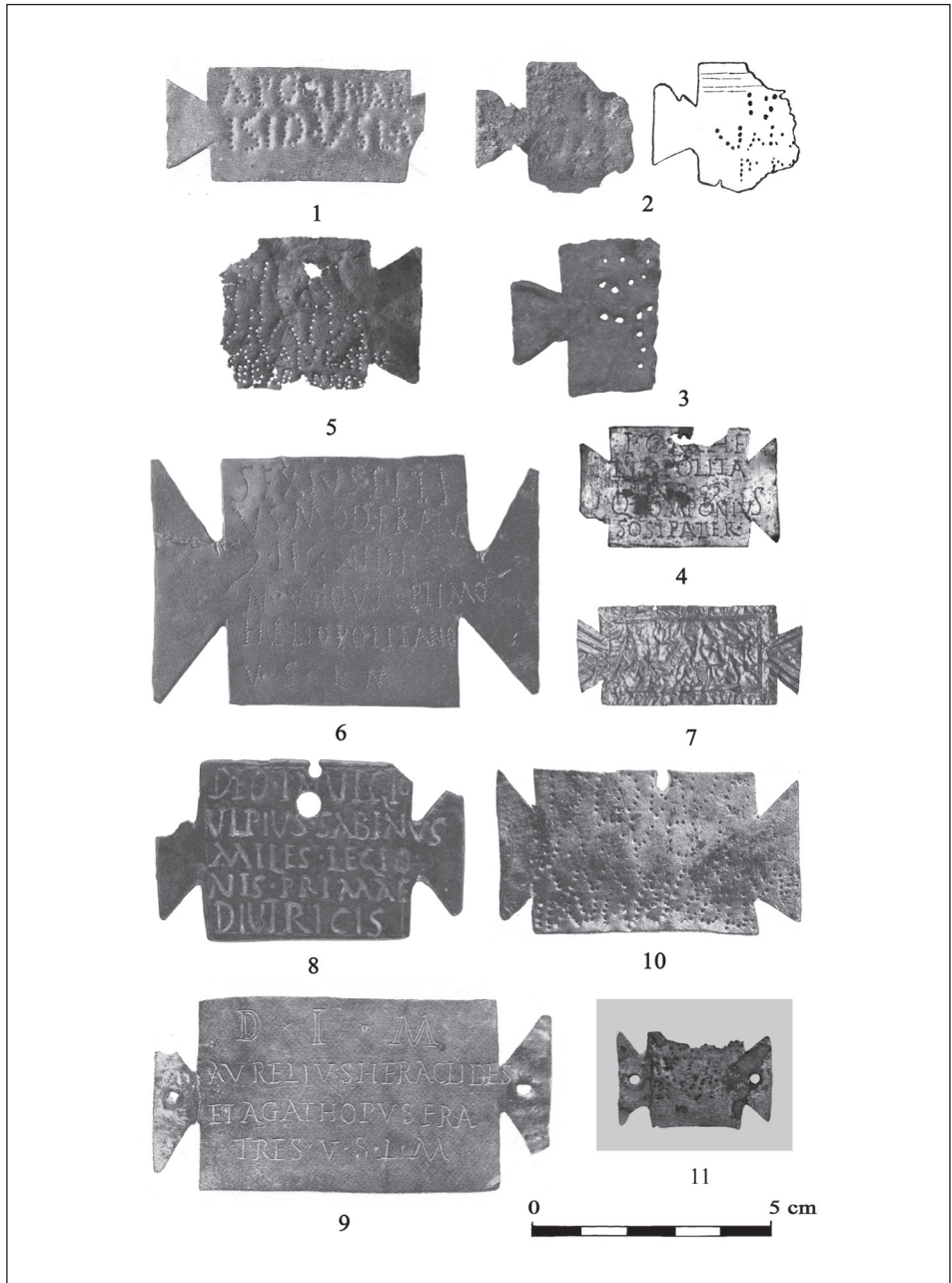
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Pl. I. Two unpublished bronze *tabulae ansatae* in the collection of the Hungarian National Museum. 1–2. A suspended plaque with maker’s stamp. 3–4. Plaque of a (sacral?) donation (RR 2011.14.1) and its reconstruction (photo and drawing Zsolt Mráv).





**Pl. II. (Appendix 1)** 1. Cat. nr. 1 (Poetovio). 2. Cat. nr. 2 (Poetovio). 3. Cat. nr. 3 (Savaria). 4. Cat. nr. 4 (Carnuntum). 5. Cat. nr. 5 (Carnuntum). 6. Cat. nr. 6 (Carnuntum). 7. Cat. nr. 7 (Carnuntum). 8. Cat. nr. 8 (probably Brigetio). 9. Cat. nr. 9 (Siscia). 10. Cat. nr. 10 (Siscia). 11. Cat. nr. 12 (Azaum/Odiavum).



Pl. III. (Appendix 1) 1. Cat. nr. 11 (Siscia). (Appendix 2) 2. Inscribed bronze casket mount (?) in the collection of Hungarian National Museum (inv. nr. RR 2011.14.2) (photo Zsolt Mráv).