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ROMAN STONE - WORK FROM MURSA AND ITS SURROUNDINGS: SOME RECENT DISCOVERIES, AND EARLIER UNPUBLISHED FINDS

Various kinds of stonework from the Roman colony of Mursa are discussed and illustrated here which were, either accidentally found or excavated at Osijek between 1946 and 1956, or else long ago acquired by the museum but not so far published. The more important stones which the museum at Osijek acquired from its foundation in 1877 up to the thirties of our century were, of course, published in the Viestnik of the Croatian Archaeological Society by Sime Ljubić, Ferdo Ž. Miler, Dr. Josip Brunšmid, Vjekoslav Celestin, Dr. Viktor Hoffiller and Dr. Josip Klemenc. The bulk of Mursa's inscribed stones can be found in Mommsen's CIL, III. — Not all the stones from Mursa were left at Osijek in this period; a certain number were given to the Archaeological Museum at Zagreb while one or two found their way to the museums at Budapest and Pécs in Hungary.

Since 1946 more attention has been given to stone monuments, and all those which were still scattered in neighbouring places but obviously originated from Mursa, or from nearby Roman settlements, have been gathered into the museum. Thus it was possible to study the whole group as a special collection which will, perhaps, illuminate the art and culture of Roman Mursa. A selection has been made in order to analyse only the more significant pieces which may help to show how our knowledge of Mursa has grown as regards military ranks, civil institutions and nationalities, style in art and stonemasonry, and participation in them by the native people.

Out of six, variously preserved sarcophagi none has ever been published. Two of them are small, having been made for children and of the four of the normal size three are ornamented with the so-called Noric-Pannonian volute motif on both sides of the »tabula ansata« (Figs. 1—3). The front part of a seventh sarcophagus is also preserved and is also decorated with the same ornament (Fig. 4).

Much has been written about this motif in periodical literature; it has finally been agreed that it comes from a native artistic tradition which extended throughout Noricum and Pannonia. (See Schober, »Die römischen Grabsteine von Noricum und Pannonien«, Wien, 1923.). The motivf of geniuses and of twa statues in relief (Fig. 1 and 4) are the most widely spread inheritance of Roman symbolism and artistic tradition on sarcophagi and gravestones. The analysis of all the seven sarcophagi shows that all were of nearly the same shape, made from the same kind of limestone and with the same type of lid (and even mostly decorated with the same ornament). Therefore they are all supposed to have been produced in the same work-

shop somewhere in Pannonia by native stonemasons in the 2nd or 3rd century. The inscription on the preserved frontpiece of a sarcophagus (Fig. 4) was first published by the Slavonian archaeologist Petar Katančić in his work »Istri adcolarum Geographia vetus« (Budae, 1826, Pars I ,Liber V, pag. 429) and then by Mommsen (CIL, III, 3265) and is significant because for the first time an »eques coh. III pretoriae« (officer of Life -Guards) was mentioned here, which makes one think he was connected either with Septimius Severus who reformed the Life-Guards and took non-Italians, especially Illyrians into them, or with Gallienus who in 260 defeated at Mursa his opponent and usurper Ingenuus.

Fragments of gravestones, discussed here (Fig. 5, 7, 8) belong to a very common type divided into panels bearing reliefs and inscriptions. The relief with the Triton and Hippocampus represents the upper part of a stone under which the remains of an inscription can just be seen, while the fragment with the low column between the two very badly damaged lions represents a tympanum on the top of the same type of stones. The low column is shown as made from wickerwork which is often to be found on such parts (sometimes with a bearded face also) throughout Pannonia (Sirmium, Poetovio, Mursa, Teutoburgium, Intercisa etc.) — Dr. Branko Gavela in his paper on Roman monuments of Greek-Egyptian syncretism in our country (Starinar, V—VI, Beograd, 1956. pag. 43—51) explains this column as the »calathos«, basket, symbol of fertility and assumes that this type of tympanum must be connected with the widely spread cult of Serapis in the first and second centuries as is shown not only by the calathos but the two lions which are symbols of this god too. As regards the missing bearded face on our example, we see that it is sometimes missing on other similar examples and explain it by the preference of Pannonian stonemasons to simplify their tasks. — The motif of eroti (Fig. 8) carrying a large garland belongs to a lower part of a gravestone which was stuck into the earth above the grave. This stone also bore an inscription above the relief as could be seen from a few traces of letters in the upper right corner. The gravestone (Fig. 6) with the relief of a horseman under the inscription (now in the National Museum at Budapest) published first by Mommsen (CIL, III, 3286) and then by Schober (op. cit. pag. 32) is republished here only in order to show an early example of a military gravestone which with the relief of a horseman has a native feature favoured and often met in Gaul in early imperial time.

The very simple gravestone (Fig. 9) is published here for the first time. Judging by the inscription it belonged to two or three childern of an emancipated Celtic slave called ATERIX. This stone is a witness of how once the Roman conquerors enslaved the natives and later set them free. Compared with other such stones it tells us something of the economic conditions of emancipated slaves.

A group of stones are then discussed which are probably not connected with graves but possibly used as decorations in temples, sacred places or palaces. These are: Hygiea, the goddess of health with the snake (Fig. 10); Ganymede, the Phrygian boy who was seized by Zeus in shape of an eagle (Fig. 11); Perseus who had to carry out heroic deeds and among them to behead the monster Medusa and is shown here with her head in his left hand (Fig. 12); Tyche or Fortuna, the protectress of a town, in this case of Mursa with the small figure of the rivergod DRAVUS at her feet (Fig. 13); probably Niobe with her youngest daughter in the moment before Apollo's arrows will attack the girl who rushed to her mother seeking protection (Fig. 15); the dancing Menada one of the merry attendants of Dionysos (Fig. 16). Only two of these (Fig. 10 and 16) are sculptures of better quality which might have been imported from Italy or Noricum, the rest are local products of native stonemasons who worked, although without skill, with the help of books of hellenistic patterns. On these products we are interested to see how the natives accepted the overwhelming Roman culture and how in craft and art they created works in a provincial and simplified manner. It is supposed that they started to treat Hellenistic Roman myths from the time of Hadrian onwards when the Hellenistic culture and art were very much favoured and Mursa started to be urbanised.

The beautiful but badly damaged marble head of a Roman lady or empress (Fig. 14) can be dated by the hairdressing which is often met with the coins of Roman empresses; the hair is combed back down nearly to the shoulder and flatly plaited, lifted and fixed on the top of the head. As this was the hairdressing of some

empresses in the middle of the third century this portrait must have been created at that time by an artist of better quality. — The barbaric head (Fig, 17) is significant for its provincial treatment on the whole and in details such as are the eyes, nose, mouth, beard, Nevertheless this is an excellent example and witness of tough and strange artistic tradition of the Celts which survived from prehistorie times up to the Roman domination.

With these examples Mursa is represented as a Roman town which imported objects of art for the higher classes and their cultural needs; but at the same time we see that gravestones or sculptures were ordered from Pannonian stonemasons of lesser quality and only in few cases did the natives give expression to their ancient artistic and primitive traditions.