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ASSERIAN FUNERARY ARAE

Summary

The funerary sculpture of Asseria is one of the best researched groups of this kind in the eastern Adriatic. However, one kind of monument has remained neglected and insufficiently studied in investigation and written discussions to the present. These are funerary arae (altars) or – as some call them—funerary cippi.

The Asserian funerary arae consist of a group of only 5 tombstones. Two were found during the excavations of the Austrian Archaeological Institute in 1900 west of the Trajanic gate (nos. 1-2), two during the excavations performed at Asseria after the Homeland War (nos. 3-4), and one during land clearance in the village of Lepuri (no. 5).

1. A large fragment of the central quadra remained from the first ara /Fig. 1a-b/, to which H. Liebel and W. Wilberg added another amorphous fragment discovered in 1901 at the cemetery to the east of the Church of the Holy Spirit /Fig. 2/. The identical height of the letters and the content of the smaller fragment led to this. Although they could not be joined along an extant break, Liebl and Wilberg fictively joined them, in this manner reconstructing most of the text of the first three lines, from which it could be concluded that the ara was erected by *Lucius Iulius Proculus*, for himself, *Sextus Iulius Aetor*, and his wife, from whose name only the nomen *Barbia* remained. In CIL, however, the fragments are listed separately, the fragment of the quadra as CIL 3 15032, and the smaller fragment as 15031/1. The possibility of joining the fragments was not mentioned in either place.

Today only the smaller fragment is preserved in the Archaeological Museum in Zadar, while the larger one has either decayed or been lost. Luckily, it was published with two good photographs, so certain facts can nonetheless be stated about the entire problem. The thickness of the amorphous fragment is not original, but resulted from secondary carving. The manner in which the inscription was carved is identical to that on the large fragment: on both the height of the first line measured 13 cm, and the second line 11 cm, the letters have an identical morphology, and the distance between the lines is identical. There is no doubt whatsoever that the content bearing side of the smaller fragment truly represents an ideal supplement to the larger one. Even if this possibility did not exist, it would still be valid to hypothesize that a filiation certainly existed in the continuation of the first line, probably followed by a citation of a tribus, while the end of the line would have been filled by the beginning of the cognomen. And then the dative *Aetori* would

require a nomen, with one more name after it. Could all these cited correspondences be coincidental? It seems they cannot and that the Liebl-Wilberg reconstruction should be accepted without reserve /Fig. 3/.

2. The second ara was erected by *Baebia Oppia* to her sixteen year old son Gaius Oppius Clementus Rusticellus. The central quadra was preserved, with the inscription framed by an S-profile (*cyma reversa*) /Fig. 4/.

3. Within the late Roman walls, in a line from the added late Roman tower towards the southwestern gate of Asseria, almost in front of the gate itself, an ara was discovered of the aedile and duumvir Gaius Titius Priscinus /Fig. 5-7/. Like the preceding two examples, Priscinus' ara was composite, with a tripartite structure. The lower part consisted of a small base, the central and most important part of a vertically elongated quadra with the inscription, and the upper section functioned as a crown, like those of the true temple altars. The central quadra was bordered on the front and sides with *cyma reversa* profiles. The bordered field on the front bore the inscription, while the lateral fields were undecorated /Fig. 5/. The base was simply made, with a high straight band (plinth) and somewhat lower and oblique upper part /Fig. 6/. The crown was divided into two sections /Fig. 7/. The lower part was almost identical to the base, but the profiles were arranged in reverse order. The lowest was the *cyma reversa* profile, surmounted by the indented profile, then a small band, and a tall *cyma recta* with a straight band on the top. The upper part of the crown had an approximately square form and its ends bore pulvins with laurel leaves. The center of each pulvin was connected with a leaf-like ribbon (*balteus*). Four-leafed rosettes were placed in small circular fields at the end of the pulvins. Between the pulvins was an elevated field of square form, on which the final element of the monument must have stood, most probably a pine-cone.

4. The next example of a funerary ara was used as part of the lid of the late Roman walled grave no. 13 /Fig. 8a-c/. It is clear that this is a fragment of a funerary altar from the manner of working of the sides, where remains of a profiled frame can be seen (*cyma reversa*). Such workmanship can be connected only to a funerary ara, and specifically to its central quadra or cubus. The front side of the quadra of the ara was well preserved, and the inscription did not suffer great damage. It can be read that the ara was ordered made by Julia Severina for her son Titus Plaetorius Postuminus, son of Titus.

5. The ara discovered during removal of a stone mound at the position of Dolac in Lepuri was monolithic, but with an internal division identical to the previous composite examples /Fig. 9/. The central part of the ara with an inscription in the upper section ends in a simplified profile of the *cyma reversa* type, with the same profile inverted in the lower section. The chipped-off high straight band (plinth) and the partly preserved semicircular profile (*torus*) belonged structurally to the base or pedestal of the ara, while another such profile and a characteristic pediment with acroteria and a rosette in the center belonged to the crown. Pediments with acroteria and the described profiles were also carved on the lateral faces of the altar. A circular depression (*focus*) was made on the upper face of the crown for pouring libations /Fig. 10/. According to the inscription, the tombstone was erected by Rubria Restuta for herself during her lifetime.

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All five of the Asserian funerary altars known today are structurally composed of a base (pedestal), a central section with the inscription (the body or block), and the crown. These sections were separately formed for altars nos. 1-4, and they can be characterized as arae of the composite type. Only ara no. 5 was monolithic.

The corresponding base was discovered only for the ara of G. Titius Priscinus. It was simply made, with a high straight band (plinth) and somewhat lower and oblique upper part.

The central section of all arae was the part with the inscription, made in the form of a vertically elongated quadra, where the depth and width were more or less the same. The arae can be classified into three main types on the basis of their workmanship.

The first type is known as *Altäre mit rankengerahmter Vorderseite* or *Rankengerahmte Altäre*, and is represented by the fragmentary ara of L. Iulius Proculus (no. 1). The character of the decoration with acanthus leaves, the lack of the consecration formula *Dis Manibus*, as well as the naming of the deceased with filiation and cognomen are all elements that firmly date the manufacture of the ara to the late Flavian or at the latest the Trajanic period. This in turn means that the ara of L. Iulius Proculus is the earliest Asserian example of this form of funerary monuments.

The second type is classified as *profilgerahmter Altartyp*, *profilgerahmte Altäre* or *Altäre mit profilgerahmtem Schaft*, and its characteristics are exhibited by three Asserian arae: G. Oppius Clementus, G. Titius Priscinus, and T. Plaetorius Postuminus (nos. 2-4). The last two belong to a variant with all three profiled sides of the quadra. The manner of production of the lateral sides is unknown for the ara of G. Oppius Clementus. Only the front side was published by Liebl and Wilberg, and in the meantime all trace of the ara has been lost.

The ara of G. Oppius Clementus Rusticellus is certainly the earliest of the group. The inscription does not contain the formula *Dis Manibus*, the naming concludes with the formula *tria nomina* with citation of the tribus, and the capital was of similar workmanship as the ara of Proculus. These are sufficient elements to date it to the last quarter of the 1st century or the very beginning of the 2nd century. The other two altars are from the first or at latest second quarter of the 2nd century. Both contain dedications to *Dis Manibus*, and the names of the deceased are cited with the same formulae, in the dative. The filiation *T(it)i f(ilius)* was evidently added subsequently to the ara of T. Plaetorius Postuminus.

The ara of Rubria Restuta was the only one made from a single piece of stone. This is also the only one to have a crown in the form of a triangular pediment with acroteria and a *focus* for pouring libations. The gable has all the characteristics of small profiled stelae made during the late 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. Typologically the ara belongs to the type with a straight body (*Altartyp/ Altäre mit glattem Schaft*), or rather altars where the body was formed like a straight undivided pedestal (*postamentförmige Altäre* or *Postamentgrundform*).

The crowns were preserved on two Asserian altars. On the ara of Priscinus it was of classic workmanship with pulvins and on the ara of Rubria Restuta it was square with a pediment and acroteria.

If the altars found at Asseria are chronologically correlated with what are known as Liburnian cippi or stelae, it can be concluded that they appear as the last in a series of forms of Roman sepulchral sculpture of the 1st century, as much as can be judged at present, at the earliest during the Flavian period. This would be expected on the one hand, but the lateness in relation, for example, to Salona, where such altars already appeared in the Tiberian period, is still too great. The reasons for this should perhaps be sought in the popularity and permanency of the Liburnian cippi and stelae. It seems that the canonization of this type of stone sculpture falls in the middle of the 2nd century, when it is even possible to speak of mass production. This is indicated on the one hand by the almost identical outlines of the altars of G. Titius Priscinus and T. Plaetorius Postuminus, and on the other hand by the canonical formation of the base or crown: on one end a *cyma recta*, on the other a *cyma reversa*, with a *torus* in the center, flanked by two fascias. As far as can be judged at present, large composite funerary altars did not survive the 2nd century.

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It is impossible not to direct attention to the context in which three of five Asserian arae were found, a context that is more than indicative. The three mentioned altars were found within the structure of the late Roman defensive wall, in the function of ordinary building material (*spolia*). The period of removal of the three monuments from their original context in the necropolis of Asseria must accordingly be the period of construction of the wall. At that point many monuments of the pagan period were simply removed from the cemetery and were built into structures of essential importance for the town. A similar fate was met by the ara of T. Plaetorius Postuminus. Part of its central quadra served as the cover of a late Roman grave, while what happened to its other parts remains unknown. Considering the case of the ara of G. Titius Priscinus, it can justifiably be suggested that other parts of the altars of Proculus and Postuminus are located somewhere within the late Roman wall.

Indeed, at several places along the exterior face of the late Roman defensive wall examples of carved stone can be noted, and their characteristics and workmanship mean that they very probably or even certainly belong to funerary or possibly ceremonial altars /Fig. 11-17/. It will be necessary to very carefully search through all such places as soon as possible, and if necessary remove the *spolia* and replace them with copies. Following this, the dimensions and traits of the decoration on each must be compared to those altars where such sections are “lost”. There is no doubt that this would result in many new questions, but at the same time new and valuable knowledge would be acquired.