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## A FRAGMENT OF A KRATER WITH A VOTIVE INSCRIPTION FROM ASSERIA

### *Summary*

The first systematic excavations of Asseria were carried out at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Austrian Archaeological Institute. A fragment of a stone votive vessel was found near a profiled base located within a small sacral structure on the forum of Asseria, to the northwest of the church of the Holy Spirit. This was a fragment of a krater with an inscription on the rim, the preserved fragment with five letters: [—]CVL. VO[—]. The walls of the vessel bear depictions of initiates into the mysteries, with grape vines with leaves and bunches of grapes depicted between these human figures. The upper row between the third and fourth figure (from the right side of the panther) has a depiction of attributes of Dionysus (Liber), a staff wrapped in grape vines, with a terminal in the shape of a pine-cone – *thyrsus*. The handle of the vessel was made in the shape of a beast of prey in full relief. This was an image of a panther in profile with the head turned towards the rim of the vessel. The vessel was made of limestone. The greatest preserved dimensions of the fragment were: 27 cm in height, 31 cm in length, with wall width of around 3 cm. On the basis of these dimensions the reconstructed diameter of the vessel would measure 42 cm.

Having available a preserved length of one sixth of the inscription and the small handle in the shape of a panther, the Austrian archaeologists Liebl and Wilberg read the inscription as follows: ***[Liberō patri Pro]cul(us) vo[st]um solvit libens merito***.

Thus this would represent a vessel ordered by one Proculus in honor of the god Liber. Since it was found in a temple located on the forum of Asseria, this could well be its original site of use, and with a great deal of caution it can be suggested that this was a temple to Liber. Preserved examples of cult sites dedicated to Bacchus-Liber are rare in the Graeco-Roman world. An analogy to a temple of Liber located on a forum can be found in the small Italian town of Cosi, where in the 4<sup>th</sup> century a small room was transformed into a sanctuary of Liber on the southeastern side of the forum constructed in the Republican period.

One funerary monument found at Asseria mentions a member of the Iulius clan with the cognomen Proculus, L. Iulius Proculus. The bearers of this gentilicium at Asseria were of autochthonous origin and belonged to the local aristocracy. If it is hypothesized that the Proculus from the krater was a member of the mentioned *gens* Iulius, the importance of this vessel would be even greater, as it would indicate an interest of the local Liburnian population in such rare ritual objects intended for the worship of the cult of Liber.

It should be noted that a sacrificial altar to Liber also comes from the Asseria area, erected by Iulia Firmilla. This proves that members of the Iulius family were involved in the cult of Liber and worshipped him in various manners, raising sacrificial altars, and perhaps even dedicating this vessel to him.

The Asserian vessel was made of limestone. Since Asseria is located in a region with abundant stone, where even today stone working is one of the main economic branches, most probably the stone for making the vessel was of local provenience. This vessel could have been the product of some local workshop that also made the Liburnian *cippi* of the Asserian group.

Asseria is located at the border between the geographic regions of the relatively flat Ravni Kotari and the hilly Bukovica. The fertile rolling plains of the Ravni Kotari and the mild Mediterranean climate offered excellent possibilities for cultivating grapes and other agricultural crops. In the Roman period, the owners of agricultural estates in this area would undoubtedly have been the magnates of Asseria. The land offered them economic prosperity, and hence for the Asserian inhabitants it was important to worship such a deity, who represented fertility and the cyclical changes of nature, a deity upon which their very existence depended.

The Asserian cult vessel as a ritual object located within a temple or placed there as a ritual sacrifice to the god Liber, as an act of piety performed by Proculus, indisputably indicates the importance and significance of the god of fertility in the everyday life of the Asserian inhabitants. If it was in fact a gift to a temple, with a considerable dose of caution the existence of a temple to Liber in the framework of the Asserian forum can be suggested.