

AKTI VIII. MEĐUNARODNOG KOLOKVIJA O PROBLEMIMA RIMSKOG PROVINCIJALNOG UMJETNIČKOG STVARALAŠTVA

AKTEN DES VIII. INTERNATIONALEN KOLLOQUIUMS ÜBER PROBLEME DES PROVINZIALRÖMISCHEN KUNSTSCHAFFENS

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 8TH INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON PROBLEMS OF ROMAN PROVINCIAL ART

LES ACTES DU VIII^{ÈME} COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL SUR LES PROBLÈMES DE L'ART PROVINCIAL ROMAIN

ZAGREB 5.-8. V. 2003.

RELIGIJA I MIT KAO POTICAJ RIMSKOJ PROVINCIJALNOJ PLASTICI

RELIGION UND MYTHOS ALS ANREGUNG FÜR DIE PROVINZIALRÖMISCHE PLASTIK

RELIGION AND MYTH AS AN IMPETUS FOR THE ROMAN PROVINCIAL SCULPTURE

LA RELIGION ET LE MYTHE COMME INSPIRATION POUR LA SCULPTURE ROMAINE PROVINCIALE

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PROVINCIALE

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RELIEFS OF THE LABOURS OF HERACLES ON A ROMAN “SARCOPHAGUS” IN THE CHURCH OF ST CAIUS IN SOLIN

BY JASNA JELIČIĆ-RADONIĆ

In the Church of St Caius today in the western part of Solin there is a Roman “sarcophagus” with depictions of the labours of Heracles. This remarkable work of art was accidentally discovered long ago in 1818 during the visit of the Austrian Emperor, Francis I, to Dalmatia and the monuments of Salona. Originally, the monument was picturesquely sited in nature on a slope between two brooks, in a little cave cut into the cliff, which is very interestingly described in the first accounts of the important discovery.

“We then set off to Solin along the road towards Trogir, as if to Trogir. To the right and left of the road there were some real sarcophagi or just the lids of them. On the right of the road lies a section of wall of quadrangular stones, along the way. After about half an hour of driving, to the right of the road, you go a few hundred steps along some olive grove, and come to a little cave, hollowed into the cliff. Here there is a very large sarcophagus, which occupies the whole of the width of the cave. On the front of the sarcophagus is a fine, large bas relief, which is already slightly damaged. There is no longer a lid to it. By the cave you can see a square of stone, which, it would seem, is the foundation of some little temple that was erected in front of the cave. In this area there is also a small painted cave. But the pictures are hardly visible.”¹

In order to preserve the sarcophagus, it was determined to turn the cave into a chapel and dedicate it to one of the local saints. In 1822 the cave was extended

and dedicated to St Caius the Pope, and the sarcophagus has been used as an altar since that time. Ever since, many people in the discipline have published items about the sarcophagus, mainly, however, restricting themselves to describing the depictions of the Labours. F. Carrara was the first to investigate the surroundings of the monument, i.e., the chapel:

“On a slope that dominates the royal road, between the Slano and Blandište brooks, a sarcophagus can be seen with a relief that, after its discovery in 1818 was protected by order of the Emperor Francis. In order to be preserved from the savagery of the people, since time had not damaged it, it was turned into a chapel dedicated to the Salonian St Caius Pope and Martyr, and was thus preserved. The front of the monument shows three fields with four of Heracles’s labours: Heracles and Cerberus, Heracles bringing up Alcestis from the underworld, Heracles and the birds of the Stymphalian marshes, and the apples of the garden of Hesperides. Steinbuechel wrote of this relief in his report about his journey around Dalmatia in the *Jahrbucher der Literature* in 1820. In the Viennese Imperial Museum I have seen a plaster copy made according to the original. As far as I know, the walls that surrounded the sarcophagus were not at all excavated down to their foundations, nor was a plan drawn. For this purpose I had everything around excavated and arranged in such a way that it should be revealed as decora-

¹ I. Pederin, *Franjo I i počeci antičke arheologije u Hrvatskoj*. Vjesnik Arh. i Hist. Dalmatinsku 78, 1985, 141. – I. Pederin, *Franjo I o Splitu i Trogiru u svom dnevniku*. Njemački putopisi po Dalmaciji, priredio i preveo I. Pederin, Split 1989, 99–100.

tion of the monument and for the curiosity of scholars.”²

In the mid-19th century, i.e., in 1856-1858, an church was erected for which the chapel with the Roman sarcophagus was used as sanctuary and altar, and was dedicated to the same saint. The cult of St Caius on the altar in the form of a sarcophagus gradually put the ancient scenes in the shade, and legends grew up that he had actually been interred here. The ancient iconography of Heracles's exploits was soon forgotten and replaced through vernacular interpretation with scenes of Adam and Eve. This was pointed out by Don Frane Bulić in his study on St Caius Pope and Confessor, giving it as an example of the way a pious tradition and a hagiographic legend is created. On the feast of St Caius, 22 April, the place was the aim of pilgrims, as it was indeed the whole year round. The water that dripped into the sarcophagus from the cliff from which the chapel had been hollowed out was collected by them and, under the impression that the saint had lain here, was taken away as holy or miracle-working water. Although the sarcophagus was discovered way back in 1818 in the presence of his Imperial Majesty Francis I and its importance started off the beginning of the archaeological investigation of Salona and the foundation of the Archaeological Museum in Split, the sarcophagus was soon forgotten.³

In more recent times, N. Cambi has written several times about the sarcophagus. In a general work about antique sarcophagi he includes it among those Salona sarcophagi that have mythological motifs, a relatively modest group, created under the influence of imported works from the great workshops of the ancient world. The unusual division on mythological sarcophagi into separate fields in this case arose from the individual units of Heracles's labours. In terms of sculptural treatment, the reliefs recall Attic models, which was crucial for Cambi's dating of the sarcophagus to the 3rd century AD, when the import of Attic sarcophagi into Dalma-

tia reached its peak, although the theme of the Heracles cycle was not all that popular on them. Recently studying the cult of Heracles and the iconography relating to it on monuments in Croatia, M. Sanader has included the “sarcophagus” from the Church of St Caius.⁴

Greek Heracles, Roman Hercules, was a very popular deified hero in the ancient world. Son of Zeus and Alcmene, wife of Amphytrion, King of Thebes, a hero of exceptional strength with very human features, he went in for a number of important military campaigns and many a battle to liberate mankind from various troubles, for which in the end he was rewarded with immortality on Olympus. His exploits were dogged by the unremitting enmity of Hera, which led to his becoming a servant of the King of Mycenae, Eurystheus. Some scenes from his life were often represented in ancient art, like the famed Twelve Labours performed for Eurystheus.⁵ Three of the exploits from this famed cycle are shown in the reliefs in the Church of St Caius.

In a one-time cave, within the stone gully through which the brook flowed and the water drained that welled out of the stone, a chest like a recipient was carved in the rock. The front surface was levelled flat and framed with a simple moulding that separates it from the walls of the rock. This can be seen at the bottom, where the roughly carved slope of the natural rock can still be seen, and the emphasised moulded pedestal of the relief, which goes the whole width. The side walls of the relief were partially covered during the conversion of the chapel and later of the construction of the Church of St Caius, as was the upper edge, on top of which a concrete slab was later placed. The interior is carved out in the form of an orthogonal chest with raised side walls, with a subsequently levelled concrete bottom to make the collection and drainage of the water easier.

In bas relief, the familiar labours of Heracles are divided among three rectangular fields, metopes set apart from each other by slightly stylised mouldings. In the first section is shown the last labour, the most

² F. Carrara, *O iskapanjima u Saloni 1847–1848*, Antička Salona (Split 1991) 183–184. – F. Lanza, *Monumenti salonitani inediti* (Vienna 1856) 7 Tav. II Fig. 1 – F. Lanza, *Le origini primitive di Salona dalmatica*, Heraclea Illinica, (Venezia 1889) 19–21.

³ F. Bulić, *S. Gregorio Magno papa nelle sue relazioni colla Dalmazia* (a. 590–604, Bull. Arch. et Stor. Dalmata 27, 1904, 15–16 note 5. – F. Bulić, *Sv. Kajo papa i konfesor*. Bull. Arch. et Stor. Dalmata 39, 1916, 91 i d. Tav. XXVI, Izabrani spisi, Split 1984, 393–402, v. XXXV. – M. Ivanišević, *Antica rediviva*. In: E. Marin (Ed.) *Longae Salona I* (Split 2002) 650–654.

⁴ N. Cambi, *Sarkofazi na istočnoj jadranskoj obali (III–VII st. n.e.)* (Zagreb 1975) 347–350. – N. Cambi, *Portreti grčkih tragika i scene iz grčkih tragedija u antičkoj likovnoj umjetnosti u Dalmaciji*. Antički teatar na tlu Jugoslavije, 1981, 139, sl. 14. – N. Cambi, *Atički sarkofazi u Dalmaciji* (Split 1988) 27 i d. – M. Sanader, *O kultu Herkula u Hrvatskoj*. Opuscula Arch. (Zagreb) 18, 1994, 87–114. – M. Sanader, *Zur Ikonographie der Herkulesdarstellungen in Kroatien*. In: B. Djurić/I. Lazar (Hrsg.), *Akten des IV. internationalen Kolloquiums über Probleme des provinzialrömischen Kunstschaffens*. Celje 8.–12. Mai 1995. Situla 36, 1997, 207–212 Taf. 60.

⁵ LIMC IV 1, 728–838. – T. H. Carpenter, *Art and Myth in Ancient Greece* (London 1998) 117–134.

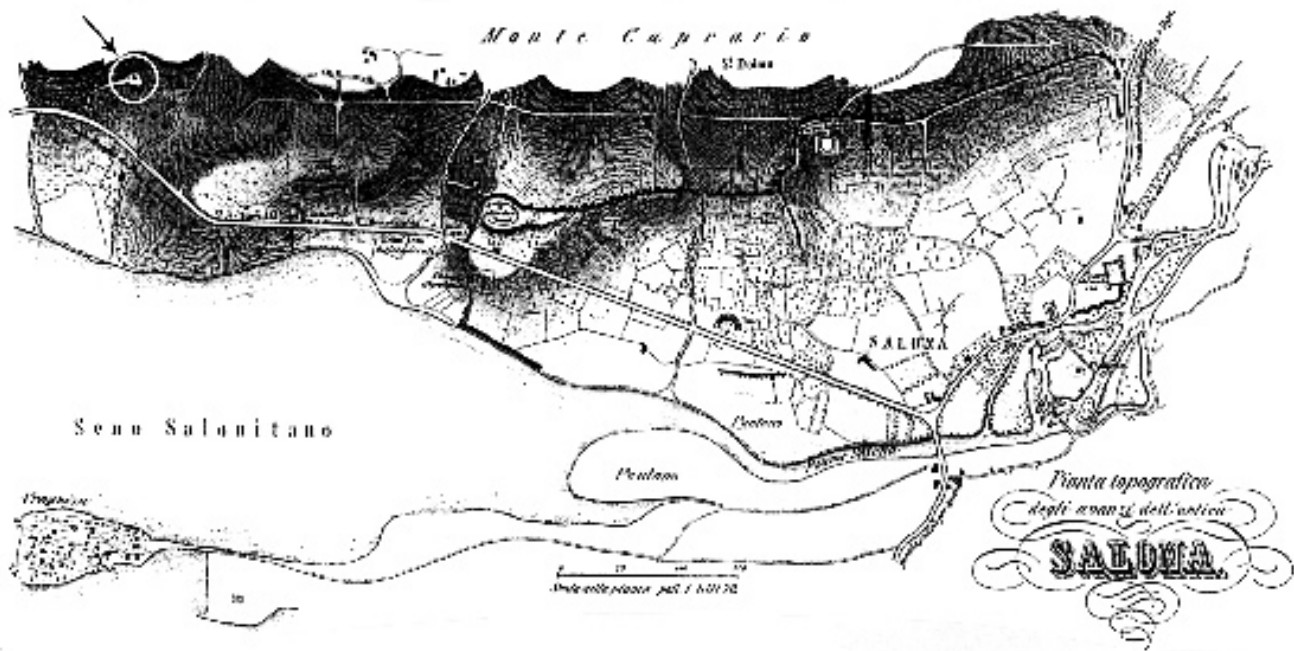


FIG. 1 MAP OF SALONA WITH POSITION OF CHURCH OF ST CAIUS (ACCORDING TO F. LANZA).

difficult task of all from the series of Heracles's 12 feats, his descent into the underworld, whence he was to haul up the terrible Cerberus. In the foreground is Heracles in years of maturity with a beard. The nude figure with powerful muscles, a lion skin loosely cast over the shoulders, is in vigorous motion. In his left hand he holds a club of a wild olive, held behind his head. In his right hand, by which his bow is dropped, he is hauling a chain to which is bound the three-headed monster whose tail ends with a serpent's head. The terrifying guardian of the world of the dead is resisting by sitting caninely on his hind legs. In the background behind the dog there is foliage with shimmering leaves that fill in the free space of the composition. The supernatural beast is mastered by the gigantic power that wells out of the main character.

In the central metope there is a real compositional group – Heracles drawing the shade of Alcestis from the underworld. This is the story of the beautiful princess who consented to die instead of her husband Admetus. While visiting the court of Admetus, Heracles decided, having found out about the sorrowful event and the grief that had overcome them, to wrestle directly with the god of death, Thanatos, and bring back the deceased

queen. On the relief Alcestis is in semi-profile, wrapped up with her had covered, typical of the departed. Heracles has taken Alcestis by her left forearm and is bringing her back to life again. The fearless hero is once again in characteristic motion, in a stride in which his right leg is stretched out and his left is bent at the knee, as in the preceding scene. In his left hand he has taken hold of the club and he is clad wrapped in the lion skin over his shoulder. The relief is damaged and is missing the head of the hero, however, from the lion's paws linked over his chest it can be assumed that he had the head of the lion on his own as a kind of helmet.

Although this action by Heracles does not directly belong to the cycle of the Labours, it is linked with the theme of the underground world.

The last metope contains two of Heracles's feats. Once again the protagonist is in the usual motion with his right leg out and his left bent; however, his head is in profile. Although only the outlines of the face are preserved and the relief is damaged at this place it would seem that this is a youthful Heracles, with no beard. In his left hand he is carrying his bow, from which he has just winged a deadly arrow that has hit and brought down a Stymphalian bird. The right arm is bent at the

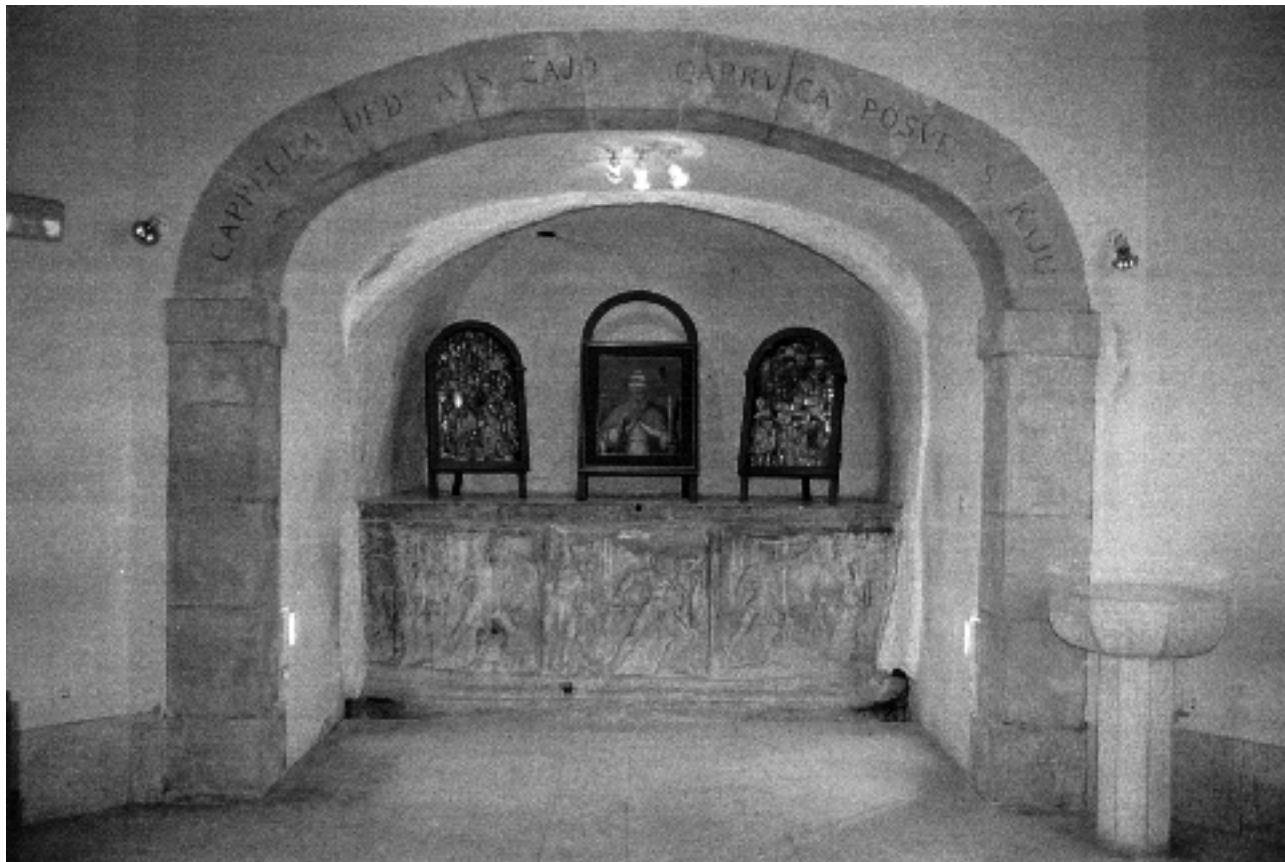


FIG. 2 INTERIOR OF CHURCH OF ST CAIUS WITH RELIEFS OF HERACLES.

elbow and tight by the body, betraying the movement of releasing the arrow. By the bent left knee the open quiver has been put down, leaning against a stone and showing a sheaf of arrows.

In the second part of the composition is a tree with foliage on which the other Stymphalian birds, and apples, are shown. The trunk is wound about by the famous dragon Ladon, guardian of the apples of the Hesperides. Here there is a synthesis of two stories about the birds from the Stymphalian marshes in Arcadia, killing people by releasing bronze feathers and then devouring their victims. Heracles frightened them with a rattle and drove them off, killing many of them with his arrows. The work celebrates Heracles as the healer, driving out the evil spirits, identified with the marsh birds. The second feat took Heracles to the extreme ends of the world, to the far west, because the setting sun was a symbol for death. Here were the

gardens of the Hesperides in which the golden apples grew, guarded by the ever-vigilant many headed dragon Ladon. When Hercules, according to the mythographers, was thirsty in the Garden of the Hesperides he produced a spring of water by kicking a rock (*Apoll. Rhod. 4, 1441-1449*). It is precisely in this metope that the hole through which the water collected in the recipient flowed away, linked, then, with the spring in the gardens of the Hesperides.

Thus, in a natural cave, through which a brook flowed and from which water wells out, scenes of the feats of Heracles were carved out of the rock. As the Greek mythographers recorded in their works, Heracles often had springs dedicated to him, as is confirmed by inscriptions. Athene, Nympe and Hephaestus gave Heracles hot springs at which he refreshed himself. Hot baths in general were dedicated to Heracles – *Herakleia loutra*. Athena or Nympe gave Heracles warm baths



FIG. 3 THE RELIEFS OF HERACLES IN THE CHURCH OF ST CAIUS IN SOLIN.

on Sicily at Megara and Chimera after his battle with Geryon (*Schol. Pind. O. 12, 27*). Bathed by Nymphe in the warm springs of Hyllos and Achesion, Heracles was healed, and gave their names to his two sons. Baths and drinking springs were given to Heracles by Nymphe. A source in Troezen was discovered by Heracles and hence bears his name (*Paus. 2, 32, 4*), while baths in Thermopylae were dedicated to him (*Strabon 9, 4, 13*). In Spain, Eritria, some identify him with the island of Leon, where the most ancient city of Gades was located, on the eastern cape there was a temple of Heracles famed because of a spring that dried up when there was a high tide and came out at low tide. Heracles had a spring in Caere (*Liv. 22, I, 10*) and hot springs in Allifa and in Mehadia (*fontibus calidis*). It has been shown that in Vichy, where there are warm water springs, *aquae calidae*, there was a cult of Heracles the healer. The well-known shrine to Heracles in Deneuvre stands out for its highly original design. Alongside the pools that are linked by a path there are monuments with figural presentations of Heracles, about a hundred of them

having been discovered. In Cerne Abbas an ithyphallic figure with a club has been carved on the rock, below which is a spring. The cult site was later adopted by Christianity, and a monastery was built by the healing spring.⁶

In Pula, Roman colony in which Heracles was the titular patron, the city bearing the name Colonia Iulia Pollentia Herculanea, there were shrines in nature devoted to him. There are a large number of Heracles altars and inscriptions around the Heracles Gate alongside the road that led from the town to the amphitheatre, particularly in the general area of the springs (Karolina). Close by is a Heracles altar concerning the building of the shrine. *C(aius) Domitius f(ilius) – II viri aedem / Herculis / d(e) d(ecurionum) s(ententia) c(oeraverunt) i(demque) p(robaverunt)*. According to a decision of the city council, and under the supervision of the two duumvirs, as was written on the inscription found in the place, a shrine was built to Heracles, perhaps a *lucus Herculis* in a grove, i.e., in nature. In this place, a church to St John of Nymphaea was later built. On the

⁶ LIMC IV 1, Herakles at a fountain, 797–798. – G. Sassatelli, *Spina nelle immagini etrusche: Dedalo e il problema dell'acqua*, Spina, Storia dei una città fra Greci ed Etruschi (Ferrara 1994) 126–127 Fig. 105. – Allifa / CIL IX 2338. – Mehadia / CIL III 1566. – E. Thevenot, Le culte d' Hercule a Vichy, Ogam: Tradition celtique, histoire, langue, archeologie, religion, T. VI, fasc. I, fevrier 1954, 216–217. – G. Moitrieux, *Hercules salutaris, Hercule au santuaire de Deneuvre (Meurthe-et-Miselle)*, 1992, 122–128; 200–205. – S. Deyts, *Images des dieux de la Gaule* (Paris 1992) 121–123. – J. H. Croon, *Heracles at Lindus*. Mnemosyne ser. IV, Vol. 6, 1953, 283–299.



FIG. 4 RELIEF OF HERACLES WITH CERBERUS.

other side of the town, in the south east part, where there was a watercourse in ancient times, in the ruins of the Church of St John in the Arsenal, another altar dedicated to Heracles has been discovered (today part of the Uljanik wall). In the Pula *ager*, by the natural pool of the lake at Bale, where there was a complex of shrines, a statue of Heracles has been discovered. It is very likely that Heracles was worshipped in nature here too, as was the case not far from the Heracles Gate in Pula. In Aquae lassae (Varaždinske toplice) where the ancient hot springs have been kept working right until the present day, another altar dedicated to Heracles has

been found: *Herculi / Aug(usto) sac(rum) / M(arcus) Au[r] el(ius) / Cassius / b(ene)fficiarius co(n)s(ularis)*.⁷

Thus, not only are altars to Heracles erected in the vicinity of springs and watercourses, but he figures as a deity who is useful for health. There are many references by Greek mythographers to the medicinal herbs discovered by Heracles. Apart from the common monkshood, an antipyretic, Heracles also found wild marjoram, with a slender stem and red flower and a leaf like coriander that grows alongside lakes and rivers, and is an excellent simple remedy against wounds inflicted by iron, as well as henbane, which provokes dizziness

⁷ Izložba – Pula iza Herkulovih vrata. Arheološka istraživanja 1997–1998. g. Pula 2001. – A. Starac, *Istraživanja kod Herkulovih vrata. Antički epigrafski spomenici*. In: Sportula Dissertationum Marino Zaninović Dicata. Opuscula Arch. (Zagreb) 23/24, 1999/2000, 133–141. – A. Starac, *Osservazioni sui bronzzetti di Ercole dell' Istria*, Bronzi di età Romana in Cisalpina, Novità e riletture, Antichita Altoadriatiche LI, Trieste 2002, 17–30, Fig. 3, 5, 6.

⁸ LIMC IV 1, 803. – P. Aupert, *Le dieux guerisseurs du domaine celtico-romain*, 65–66, Catalogue. Le dieux salutaires et leurs sanctuaires, Herculi not. 28–33, a b. 153–156 / Dieux guerisseurs en Gaule romaine, Lattes 1992; Mehadia / CIL III 1572, Apulum / CIL III 972, 1028. – D. Pinterović, *Mursa i njeno područje u antičko doba* (Osijek 1978) 133. – Sanader (note 4) 87–114.

and madness. The cult of Heracles as healer god is confirmed by votive inscriptions as in Mehadia where he is called *Herculi Salutifero* and in Apulum, where altars were erected to both Heracles and Aesculapius by the same dedicator. Well known too is the altar that was put up in Osijek by Gaius Valerius Mucianus *pro salute sua sorumque omnium*.⁸

Roman Hercules was a complex deity. Although in the Greek world he was used very early on for political propaganda by the Greek states, and by Alexander through the Roman period, he was associated with mortal kings and emperors, backing up the Roman state ideal, and greatly revered as soldier, he was the patron of herdsmen, sailors, families and healers, and was also celebrated as god of the underground, who had in his protection everything and everyone under the ground. He was the greatest of the heroes, and his courage drew the favour of the gods while he was carrying out his deeds for the good of mankind; this won him great popularity in ancient art. For this reason the Salona reliefs carved out of the living stone through which the water ran out drew in several of the scenes located with the underground world whence no one until then had returned. The direct descent into the underground and the conquest of the gatekeeper of the world of the dead, the monster Cerberus, and the conflict with the death god Thanatos and the restoration of beautiful princess Alcestis, as well as his departure to the end of the world, the far west, for the setting sun meant death, to the garden of the Hesperides where he produced a spring from the ground; or Heracles as healer driving out the evil spirits identified with the swamp birds – all these perfectly corresponded to the shrine to Heracles set up in nature. Crucial was the source of the water that welled miraculously in the cave. The natural gully lay between two fairly large brooks, the Slano and the Blandište, which were clearly and visibly marked on the survey maps of the 19th century. The brook that welled out in the cave, and is located precisely between these two in the direction of the rock beside where the Church of St Caius was built, is marked on the hydrographic maps. Its course was cut by the building of the main road, and today the source has dried up. Very likely it ran as an underground current that then surfaced at the site of the cave, which in the ancient world would have been crucial for place for a shrine. Since water is an important element in almost all religions, particularly

as a border of and passage into the underground, it is not unusual that at this place certain feats of Heracles's directly connected with the underground should have been shown, i.e., a temple to Heracles should have been built. Unfortunately, one does not know what it was that stood in front of the cave, although according to the first descriptions of the discovery of the monument it is clear that it was a matter of some built structure. When it was recorded in the first descriptions, like that in the diary of the Austrian emperor, the foundations of some little temple were to be seen before the cave. This prompted Carrara to explore in further detail the context of the cave and the relief, without publishing, however, his more detailed observations. Considering the changes that have taken place over the two centuries, it would be hard to carry out review research.

Also difficult to determine are the characteristics of the source and its medicinal qualities, which are of course linked with the Heracles cult. Perhaps in the later tradition linked with the cult of St Caius and the collection of the miraculous water that ran out of his sarcophagus a hint of the same features of the ancient spring can be discerned.

This shrine of Heracles in nature, with a spring in the walls of the cliff from which the reliefs with the Labours of Heracles are carved, is an excellent example of the cult of a deified ancient hero. This outstanding work of art, the stone polished and shining like marble, was done by the local masters of the Salona workshops after samples of imported carving very much present in the capital of the province. The reliefs were carved on a stone chest that in its appearance recalled a sarcophagus, only one without a lid, which they noticed when it was discovered; in addition, it lay in the immediate vicinity of the Salona necropolis; it was identified early on with the grave of St Caius, used as it was as an altar in the sanctuary of a church dedicated to him: all this was crucial for the monument's being interpreted as ancient sarcophagus, which is how it is recorded in the literature. However, the very fact of the existence of the source, and the water that collected in the stone chest or recipient, from which it drained as if consecrated, totally excludes any possibility of interpreting it as an ancient sarcophagus, and shows the cult of Heracles in a new light, and not only in Salona and Dalmatia. For Heracles monuments have been found in many places – statues, reliefs, dedicatory inscriptions as in Salona and its envi-

⁸ J. Jeličić, *Heraklov žrtvenik i ostali nalazi u Segetu donjem kod Trogira*. Vjesnik Arh. i Hist. Dalmatinsku 75, 1981, 97–103.

rons, particularly in the quarries in Brač and Seget near Trogir.⁹ However, the cult of Heracles at a spring, in the context of a shrine in nature, is a completely excep-

tional example that considerably enriches our current knowledge of the Heracles cult and shows a completely new aspect of it in the Roman province of Dalmatia.

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