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The Roman Tombstone in the Košice Lapidarium

During the reconstruction works on the Košice Dom (cathedral) in the 19th century, a larger amount of tombstones was found belonging to a nearby cemetery around a medieval parish church as well as from underneath the floor of the Dom. At first, they were stored in the area of a freshly established Upper-Hungarian museum. Later, 17 pieces were bricked into external walls of the reconstructed St. Michael's Chapel.

The remaining 27 pieces were bricked into the external walls of the Urban Tower and its newly built arcade in 1912. Since then, until 1947, 9 other pieces had been added. This had completed the makeover of this baroque belfry arcade into the so-called "Košice lapidarium."¹

The tombstones of the citizens of Košice from the 14th to the 19th centuries belong to the lapidary. However, one of the tombstones is chronologically and geographically different from the rest. Actually, it was made more than a thousand years earlier than the oldest medieval tombstone in the Košice lapidary. It was produced during the times when the whole Mediterranean territory was under the rule of the Roman Empire, most probably, in one of its northern provinces near the Danube. It is a fragment of a Roman tombstone (στῆλη) with a relief. This Roman tombstone was probably imported to Košice during the period of the establishment of the Upper-Hungarian Museum when people were bringing various curiosities to its collections. It is believed that a certain Mr. Gergely brought it to the museum from the territory of East Pannonia,² however, I have not been able to verify this information from primary sources.

At the beginning, the tombstone was placed in a garden of the museum together with other stone and sculpture relics so that Dr. Eugen Sabol could brick it into the northwest corner of the Urban Tower in 1947 where it is still located.

On the preserved part, we can see a relief of a fam-



Fig. 1. Košice lapidarium



Fig. 2. Roman stele, Košice lapidarium

ily in an arch tabernacle embroidered on a girth with egg ornament on a short rib. There are three figures placed on a bed (or chair) called *kline*. On the left side, there is a man with a moustache and a beard; his hair is precisely combed onto his forehead, he is dressed comfortably in a folded tunic. He holds a drinking vessel in his left hand; the right hand is not visible. On his right side there is a child also dressed in a tunic. His hair is also combed onto his forehead but in a different way than on his father. Probably, it is a boy. The fragment of the relief is completed by a figure of a woman dressed in a folded tunic whose face is considerably damaged. Because of this damage, it is very difficult to identify her haircut. Based on the place under her ear as well as the visible part of her body, it can be assumed that the haircut is one which was worn by women during the dynasty of Septimus Severus (the first half of the 3rd century).

The last figure on the preserved scene is a smaller figure of a slave, who stands on the left to the *kline*, probably holding a jug in his right hand. Over his shoulder there could have been a scarf called *mappa*. The *kline* has a high back whose backside or the top we can see over the heads of the figures. It stands on high shaped legs. The scene depicts its upholstery. We can not see the right side of the chair because of the damage to the stone. In front of the *kline* is a round table on three shaped legs with indications of a meal. In the upper right corner of the stele above the tabernacle a dolphin is depicted, a frequent and popular theme on Roman tombstones.

Due to the damage, we have only a part of the relief,



Fig. 3. Roman stele, Košice lapidarium

but considering the arch tabernacle it can be assumed that it is half of a scene measuring 90 (72) in width and 54 (42) in height. The placement of the child and the table implies that there could be no other family member present. However, the presence of a slave woman can be assumed on the right side of the chair, and, naturally, a dolphin in the upper left corner. Beneath the main scene, there are remains of another scene or an inscription.

Presumably, it is a scene from a family feast from the life of the deceased, which should communicate to an observer that the deceased had a comfortable life, had plenitude—he and his family—, or it can depict enjoyment of life, comfort in an ideal family, and personal happiness. The man is not dressed in an army uniform (sagum or army tunic), but in a folded civil tunic. He

does not have a rough beard or haircut but has a carefully combed hairstyle and beard, which is almost invisible. This can lead to the assumption that he was not a soldier, but a rich civilian, probably a merchant. He is not holding a roll which could imply that he received a citizenship after his army service. Presumably, he had already had it for a long time. Of course, it must be mentioned that emperor Caracalla gave citizenship to all the free citizens of the empire. Nevertheless, he was a fully Romanised citizen of Rome.

It is not easy to date the stele, either, mainly because of the damage to the relic and the loss of the inscription, which usually identifies the precise date of the tombstone. So we have to base our conclusions on the character of the relief. The most accurate dating means are the haircuts, especially the female haircut. They can be analyzed according to the fashion trends in the empire, which were set by female members of the imperial family. As I have already mentioned, due to the damage of the female face it is not easy to identify the haircut but presumably, it is the kind which was worn by women during the rule of the dynasty of Severus in the first half of the 3rd century. The woman is not wearing a costume (garb), which was worn during the 1st century and the first half of the 2nd century in Pannonia. She is a Roman.

Also, Dr. Friderike Harl, who specializes in researching Roman tombstones in Vienna, dates the scene of the feast with *klina* in eastern Pannonia in the period of 150–230.³ Consequently, we can date the origin of the Roman tombstone in Košice to the first decades of the 3rd century (200–230) A.D.

I have found no mention of this Roman relief in scholarly literature. Also, little information has been published in the local press and in the internal papers of the Museum and Heritage Office in Košice on the analysed relic.

Notes

- 1 SABOL, Eugen: *Košické lapidárium*. Archive KPÚ Košice.
- 2 DUCHOŇ, Jozef: *Neskororímska rarita*. In: *Košický Večer* 25.3.1994, s. 8.
- 3 www.ubi-erat-lupa.org, ID 3190.