

ROMAN FUNERARY LIONS IN THE SEBEŞ MUSEUM COLLECTION

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The permanent collection of the “Ioan Raica” Municipal Museum in Sebeş includes numerous artifacts, several of them belonging to the Roman times. A special category among these are the stone monuments that form the *lapidarium*, such as funerary and votive monuments, inscriptions as well as several sculptures, some of them already published in specialized publications¹.

We aim to present here four Roman funerary lions, unpublished, found at Alba Iulia (Partoş), Benic, Miercurea Sibiului and Vinţu de Jos, and also to mention two other pieces, medieval imitations of the Roman sculptures².

1. *Apulum* (Alba county)

The Sebeş museum purchased, in 1968, from Ecber Comei, a citizen of Vinţu de Jos, the head of a funerary lion. The fragment was inventoried next to a Roman altar dedicated to the goddess Diana. The latter was published at the beginning of the XIXth century, as a copy of an altar from Partoş later arriving at Vinţu de Jos³. Based on this we assume that the funerary lion also came from Partoş.

The lion head was carved out of limestone. The representation is as follows: eyes front, open mouth, tongue out, an expression that was meant as fierce. The features are realistically shown, proving a real artistic sense. The lion's attitude is impressive, with a thick mane of hair curled around the neck area, covering the entire chest and the back of its head. We can also distinguish features that resemble mostly of a canine, like the shrinking of the neck towards the torso. Dimensions: height is 45 cm; maximum width, including the hair is 67 cm; the width at the base of the neck is 47 cm; the inventory number is 4697 (**Fig. 2-3**).

The Partoş area has offered in time rich Roman artifacts originating in the former *Colonia Apulensis*, among which numerous funerary monuments⁴. We also noticed that the number of funerary lions found is rather scarce at *Apulum*⁵.

¹ Wollmann 1970, p. 163-183, fig. 1-17; Pop *et alii* 1972, p. 509; Popa, Aldea 1974, 109-114, fig. 1; Țeposu-Marinescu 1982, p. 193, pl. XXXIII (M 21); IDR III/4, p. 31-34, fig. 10-13; Moga 1988, p. 49-50, fig. 1; Moga 1997, p. 127-129, fig. 1-2.

² Popa, Totoianu 2003.

³ See Wollmann 1970, p. 174, nr. 11, fig. 11.

⁴ As a general reference for roman finds in Partoş, see RepArhAlba 1995, p. 41-43.

After Al. Popa, *Apulum* was regarded as a diffusion center for artistic manifestations, with a major impact on provincial towns nearby⁶. During the IInd century AD it is assumed that here functioned a funerary monument workshop⁷, well within the century and early into the next one⁸. From such a workshop must have originated this fragment of funerary lion from *Partoș*.

2. Benic (Alba county)

In 1973, the Sebeș museum was purchasing, from one Aurelia Preja, a funerary lion that was recovered somewhere within the boundaries of Benic without a more precise location mentioned.

Funerary lion, most likely part of a larger monument (?) carved out of travertine. The lion⁹ is represented with his front legs spread out in front and the hind legs shaped like half of the Omega Greek letter, a furthermore reason to consider this monument as a piece of a larger ensemble. The head was carefully carved and the expression was accurately depicted by the artist. The thick mane surrounds the face, being accurately carved; the mouth is open, in a ferocious manner. The tail is represented on the back side; between the front legs, of which the left is pushed forward, one can vaguely distinguish a prey, really hard to identify. The entire lion sits on a rectangular pedestal with one side poorly finished, with much less detail. Dimensions: height is 108 cm; the length is 105 cm and the width is 30 cm; the inventory number is 4697 (**Fig. 6-7**).

This type of monuments, serving as decoration for an ensemble is usually associated with funerary medallions¹⁰. Some postures depict the lion as a protector, with its prey subdued, as is the case at Benic, signifying the domination of the spirit or the divine over the demons¹¹.

This discovery fits within a special type of such representations in Dacia, that of the lions risen on their front legs and interpreted as guards to important funerary monuments¹². To support this hypothesis comes also this piece, with its poorly carved and flat side, as if to be fixed as a part on a larger monument. Similar fragments are known throughout Dacia: at Aiud there was found an ornamental piece formed out of two lions, parted by the head of a Medusa and a funerary medallion with means of fixating onto a larger construction¹³, as well as

⁵ Protase 1961, p. 138-140, fig. 7; Pop *et alii* 1972, p. 506; Băluță 1974, p. 127-130, fig. 3; Moga 1974, p. 592, fig. 2; Popa 1975, p. 101; Băluță 1988, p. 255, 265, pl. VIII/1, 3; Husar 2003, p. 391, fig. 22. Many are not published (amiable information George Bounegru).

⁶ Popa 1975, p. 101.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 101; Țeposu-Marinescu 1982, p. 70.

⁸ Piso, Blăjan 1993, p. 227-228, 236.

⁹ Illustrated by Miclea 1985, fig. 17.

¹⁰ Isac *et alii* 1973, p. 140-141.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 141.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 143.

¹³ Horhat 1961, p. 277, fig. 1.

two rectangular niches dug out within a funerary lion found at *Apulum* to serve the same mentioned purpose¹⁴.

Such funerary lions depicted with their front legs stretched and eyes facing front are rather rare in the province, similar pieces being found just at Geoagiu (*Germisara*)¹⁵ and Bucerdea Vinoasă (jud. Alba)¹⁶. As for the partial carving of just one side of this lion, a similar situation was found on a piece discovered at *Germisara*¹⁷.

It is not excluded that the lion from Benic is part of a larger funerary monument with two such pieces or even a part of a statuary group such as the one found at Aiud, *Apulum* or Micia / Sarmizegetusa¹⁸.

The boundaries of Benic village are well known for the Roman finds over the last centuries. On one occasion there were discovered within the nowadays village (at number 170) a fragment of a funerary medallion¹⁹ and a votive inscription dedicated to Liber Pater, the latter next to traces of a larger construction and a urn containing carbonized cereals²⁰. On the right side of Valea Gâlzii, next to the village, was found an altar dedicated to Jupiter²¹. Also within the boundaries of Benic, a small marble column, a bronze ring and a Roman hand mill stone were found²². The more numerous findings come from the place called *Fântâna Satului*, where Roman construction materials (bricks and *tegulae*) were found along with the bottom of a wine press carved out of stone and a funerary lion, all probably indicating a Roman rural settlement nearby²³.

We do not know for certain if this funerary lion found at Benic and acquired by the Sebeș museum is the same mentioned by the literature. Nearby the supposed rural settlement or *villae rusticae* (?) from *Fântâna Satului*, there must have been the necropola of this community, a place of origin for all the funerary pieces found here²⁴. Based on the *IOM* altar found at Benic we can state that

¹⁴ Băluță 1974, p. 126, 128.

¹⁵ Wollmann 1968, fig. 1-2, 4.

¹⁶ Wollmann 1969, p. 533-534, fig. 1.

¹⁷ Albu 1971, p. 75, fig. 3.

¹⁸ The three statuary groups are different in the sense that they were carved out of a single stone block; see Protase 1961, p. 138-140, fig. 7; Horhat 1961, p. 276-280, fig. 1; Wollmann 1968, note 1; Isac *et alii* 1973, p. 140; Țeposu-Marinescu, pl. XXXII; Lipovan 1983, p. 147-149, fig. 2/2; Popa, Totoianu 2003, p. 216-217.

¹⁹ Lipovan 1993, p. 147-149, fig. 1; 2/1.

²⁰ Popa, Aldea 1974, p. 109-113, fig. 1; IDR III/4, p. 56-57, fig. 30.

²¹ Daicoviciu 1937-1940, p. 316; Tudor 1968, p. 135-137; Moga 1977, p. 147-149, fig. 1; IDR III/4, p. 55-56, fig. 29.

²² IDR III/4, 55.

²³ Tudor 1968, p. 179; Florescu *et alii* 1980, p. 58; Lipovan 1993, p. 148-149; IDR III/4, p. 55; Enciclopedia 1994, p. 174; RepArhAlba 1995, p. 53. Al. Popa and I. Al. Aldea state the discovery of a rural settlement or a *villa rustica* at Benic, but with no certain reference to the place, whether it is the *Fântâna Satului* location or another (Popa, Aldea 1974, p. 109, note 3).

²⁴ We have to consider the observation made by I. T. Lipovan that forwards the hypothesis of putting together this fragment of a funerary medalion with a monument found at Micia (Gramatopol 2000, p. 230) and kept at the Ploiești museum (Lipovan 1993, p. 147-149). D.

here was the property of one of the upper class magistrates (*quattuorviri*) from Mun. Aurelium Apulense, well within the second half of the IInd century AD²⁵. The Roman habitation at Benic must have continued at least towards the middle of the IIIrd century AD, when the altar dedicated to *Liber Pater* can be dated²⁶.

3. Miercurea Sibiului (Sibiu county)

The Sebeș museum received as a donation, in 1962, the head of a funerary lion found by coincidence at Miercurea Sibiului. The inventory form states that it was found as a result of clay extraction works for a brick and tile manufacture, at a depth of 1,15 m, next to a large pavement of bricks. There is no record of the exact location of the find or local name for this place²⁷.

Funerary lion head piece, carved out of limestone, broken in ancient times. The beast is depicted with its eyes facing forward, in a fierce manner. The face is well depicted, with natural details of the face, having the eyes closed. The snout has a few horizontal incisions on each side, probably depicting the whiskers, and it is open, showing a set of strong teeth. On the head, between the ears (one missing), the mane can be seen to leave the front of the head unveiled. Dimensions: height is 14 cm, length 28 cm, width 14 cm; inventory no 2234 (**Fig. 1**).

Miercurea Sibiului was already known to provide numerous Roman funerary urns found in the village's boundaries. The interpretation given is that here was a Roman tradepost or *vicus*, on the road linking the Olt valley passing to the Roman centre at Apulum, a place identified by some authors as the ancient *Sacidava*²⁸.

A *villa rustica* was partially researched on the left bank of the Secaş river and in unspecified locations several republican and imperial coins were found²⁹. Alongside traces of Roman buildings were found several *lucernae*, a mold for casting *terra sigillata* pottery, as well as a brick bearing the stamp *P. AEL. TER (tius)*³⁰.

Furthermore, at the middle of the XIXth century, near the Budser creek was found a Roman inhumation burial, with a brick and tile sarcophagus, paved with tiles on the inside of which a rich inventory was recovered: pottery, a gold pendant and a Hadrian coin, dating the ensemble within the first decades of the

Protase stated also that this latter monument was originated from either Sarmizegetusa or the middle Mureș valley (Protase 1961, p. 139). If this is the case, the medalion found at Benic was a "travelling stone" brought from Micia (Popa, Totoianu 2003, p. 216-217, note 22; Andrițoiu 2006, note 461).

²⁵ Tudor 1968, p. 179; Moga 1977, p. 147-149.

²⁶ Popa, Aldea 1974, p. 113.

²⁷ The discovery, made in June 1962 is credited to one Moisă Andrei of Sebeșel, the donator of the fragment. It is inventoried as 2234 (as stated in the correspondence registry of the Regional Museum of Sebeș, 1962 at page 414).

²⁸ Tudor *et alii* 2003, p. 139; Popa 2002, p. 173; Luca *et alii* 2003, p. 141.

²⁹ Luca *et alii* 2003, p. 140-141.

³⁰ Tudor 1968, p. 139.

IIInd century AD³¹ or, after dating of gold pendant “Herkuleskeule” typ in second decades of the IIInd century AD, maybe IVnd AD³². A funerary *stellae* and a funerary stone together with two lions (found at a location called *Biserica Albă*) complete the list of funerary monuments for this locality.

This lion head probably originates from an isolated monument but can also belong to a *necropola*. The presence of pavements and building materials at the burial found in 1858 as within the context of our fragment gives room for the hypothesis that it might have originated from the same area of burials.

4. Vințu de Jos-Str. Poștei (Alba county)

In 1996, as the foundations for a house were dug on the Poștei street (Primăverii), a small funerary lion was recovered by our dear departed colleague N. M. Simina and donated to the Sebeș museum.

Funerary lion, single piece, carved out of limestone. The piece, small in size is depicting the lion as seated, with the head slightly bent downwards and eyes facing front. The face area is broken so we cannot describe its characteristics. The head is covered by a mane depicted as series of curled hair strings, carefully carved³³. The tail is also well depicted, laid on the right hind leg. The paws are less carefully carved, more in a schematic manner. Dimensions: height is 29 cm, length 54 cm, width of the back side 20 cm, width of the mane area 23 cm; inventory number 6299 (Fig. 4-5).

Similar pieces with the one found at Vințu de Jos, both in terms of size and depiction, eyes facing forward and downwards, can be found at Peștișul Mare³⁴. A good analogy for the style of depicting the mane comes from a discovery at Gilău³⁵. The missing prey between the legs of the lion found at Vințu de Jos allows it to be interpreted as a monument meant to guard the burial against the grave robbers³⁶.

Vințu de Jos is well known in the literature as a site with Roman discoveries, several areas being delimited as such: the confluence of Pian creek to the Mureș river, nearby the methane gas station and the places named *Cingăi*, *Podei*, *După Gară* or other points within the village boundaries³⁷. On the terrace called *Deasupra Satului* traces of Roman habitation were systematically researched, such as foundations, an altar fragment, pottery, coins, construction materials, probably pointing to the presence here of a *villae rusticae*³⁸.

³¹ Tudor 1968, p. 139; Luca *et alii* 2003, p. 141.

³² Pîslaru 2003, p. 67.

³³ The manner of depicting the mane curls is as “pipe” shaped (cf. Isac, Diaconescu 1980, p. 131).

³⁴ Albu 1971, p. 73-74, fig. 1-2.

³⁵ Isac, Diaconescu 1980, p. 131-132, fig. 14; Ardevan 1989, fig. 6.

³⁶ Isac 1970, p. 16.

³⁷ Tudor 1968, p. 135-137; Moga 1988, p. 49-50, fig. 2; RepArhAlba 1995, p. 209; Simina 1995, p. 473-474, 478, fig. 1.

³⁸ Andrițoiu *et alii* 2004, p. 178-179, pl. III, VI, XXVIII.

Furthermore, D. Tudor stated that here can be located a small *castrum* dependant of *Apulum* and that can be identified with the ancient locality of *Blandiana*³⁹.

To the funerary discoveries at Vințu de Jos we add here another piece, next to the remarkable medallion found at *După Gară*⁴⁰, an inscription⁴¹ and a sphinx found also nearby the train station⁴². We cannot state that these discoveries point to the presence of a Roman *necropola* within Vințu de Jos boundaries⁴³, given the distance between the monuments, all of them dated between the IInd - IIIrd AD.

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Having an Oriental origin, the funerary lions will become characteristic to the Danube and Balkan area funerary art in the imperial period, most likely symbolic to a divine guardian of the soul after death⁴⁴.

Funerary lions⁴⁵ are often met as a crowning element to a funerary monument⁴⁶. It is admitted today that these pieces, with little exceptions, cannot provide better elements to their dating. The three monuments here presented can be placed within the provincial period of Dacia, between the IInd and IIIrd century AD.

With no pretences that we are presenting artistically remarkable pieces, we can state that the three funerary lions at the Sebeș museum, even as mediocre

³⁹ Tudor 1968, p. 136.

⁴⁰ Moga 1988, p. 49-50, fig. 2; RepArhAlba 1995, p. 209.

⁴¹ Ferenczy 1912, p. 92-93; Russu 1965, p. 208, fig. 4.

⁴² RepArhAlba 1995, p. 209.

⁴³ For example I. I. Russu oppinated that the funerary stone slab bearing an inscription was brought to Vințu de Jos from *Apulum* or even *Sarmizegetusa*, therefore it is not of local origin (Russu 1965, p. 208).

⁴⁴ See Florescu 1926-1927; Țeposu, Mărghită 1968, p. 164; Isac 1970, p. 16; Isac *et alii* 1973, p. 138, 142; Băluță 1974, p. 130; Marinescu 1977, p. 133; Țeposu-Marinescu 1982, p. 43.

⁴⁵ For a bibliography on the funerary lions in the intra-Carpathic region of Roman Dacia see Téglás 1902, fig. 191-193; Florescu 1926-1927, p. 104-105, fig. 41-43; Protase 1961, p. 134-135, 138-140, fig. 2-3, 7; Horhat 1961, p. 276-280, fig. 1; Glodariu 1967; Pop 1968, p. 482, fig. 5; Wollmann 1968, p. 109-112, fig. 1-5; Țeposu, Mărghită 1968, p. 163-164, pl. I/2-4; III/2-3; Wollmann 1969, p. 533-535, fig. 1-2; Isac 1970, p. 14, 16, fig. 3-4; Albu 1971, p. 73-75, fig. 1-3; Mărghită 1971, p. 63-64, fig. 39; Pop *et alii* 1972, p. 506; Jude 1972, p. 497-498, fig. 1-4; Isac *et alii* 1973, p. 137-148, fig. 1-24; Băluță 1974, p. 127-130, fig. 3; Moga 1974, p. 592, fig. 2; Wollmann, Grecu 1976, p. 103-104, 109-110, fig. 4, 9-10; Marinescu 1977, p. 133, fig. 6; Rusu 1979, p. 186; Andrițoiu 1979, p. 272, fig. 1; Florescu *et alii* 1980, p. 207; Isac, Diaconescu 1980, p. 131-132, fig. 14; Țeposu-Marinescu 1982, p. 43-44, 155-160, pl. XVI-XVIII; XXIV-XVI; XXXII; Băluță 1988, p. 255, 265, pl. VIII/1, 3; Sântimbrean 1989, p. 164, fig. XX; Ardevan 1989; Blăjan 1989, p. 300, 328; Bălos *et alii* 1998, p. 71; Mărghită 2000, p. 251-253, fig. 1; Gramatopol 2000, fig. 97-98, 103; Moga 2001b, p. 236-237, fig. 1; Moga 2001a, p. 384, fig. 1; Andrițoiu 2006, p. 104-107, pl. 5/2; 45-47; 48/1; Wollmann 2009, p. 108, fig. 3; p. 127, fig. 17. To this we are signaling a new item, seen by us imbedded in a construction at Peșteana (Hunedoara county) (see Popa, Totoianu 2003, note 41).

⁴⁶ Florescu 1926-1927, p. 104; Florescu *et alii* 1980, p. 207.

sculptural achievements, have particularities that make, at least the discoveries of Benic and *Apulum*, rarities within the intra-Carpathians Dacia. At the same time they add to the repertory of such funerary monuments from Dacia, a province that remarkably lacks an actualized catalogue of such pieces of provincial Roman art.

Translated by Călin Șuteu

Lei funerari romani păstrați în Muzeul din Sebeș

O variantă integrală în limba română a lucrării a fost publicată în revista *Sargetia*, XXXI, 2003 (Popa, Totoianu 2003).

Explicația figurilor

Fig. 1 Roman funerary lion from Miercurea Sibiului (1 – photo; 2 – drawing).

Fig. 2 Roman funerary lion from *Apulum* (Alba Iulia-*Partoș*) (1 – drawing; 2 – photo).

Fig. 3 Roman funerary lion from *Apulum* (Alba Iulia-*Partoș*).

Fig. 4 Roman funerary lion from Vințu de Jos (photo).

Fig. 5 Roman funerary lion from Vințu de Jos (drawing).

Fig. 6 Roman funerary lion from Benic (drawing).

Fig. 7 Roman funerary lion from Benic (photo).

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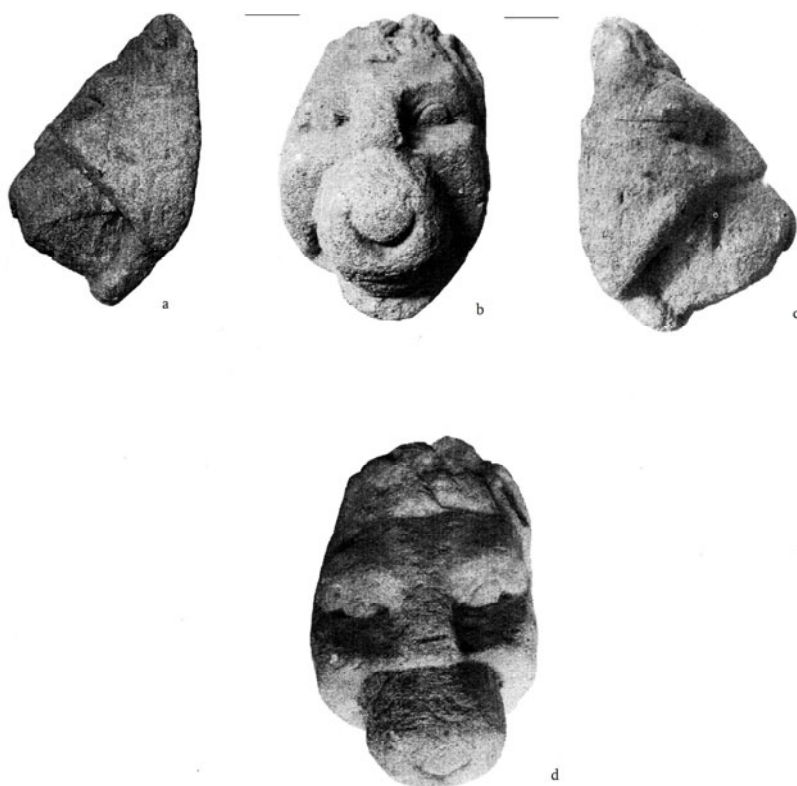
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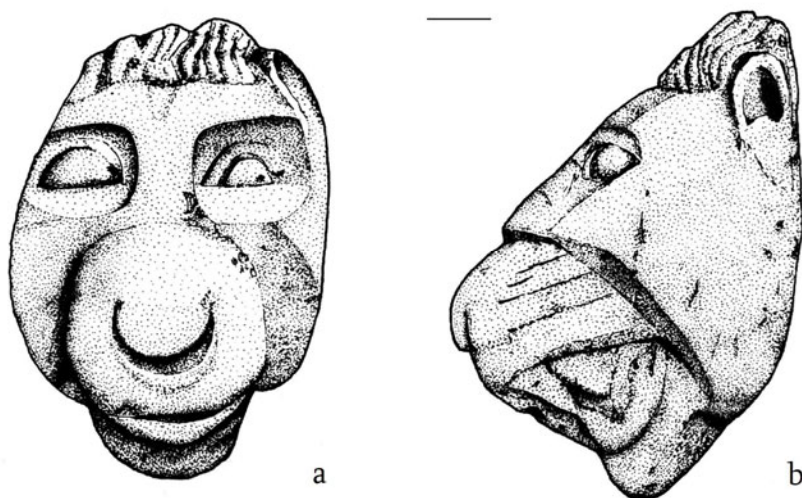
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Cuvinte-cheie: epoca romană, lei funerari.

Keywords: Roman Age, funerary lions.



1



2

Fig. 1. Roman funerary lion from Miercurea Sibiului
(1 – photo; 2 – drawing)

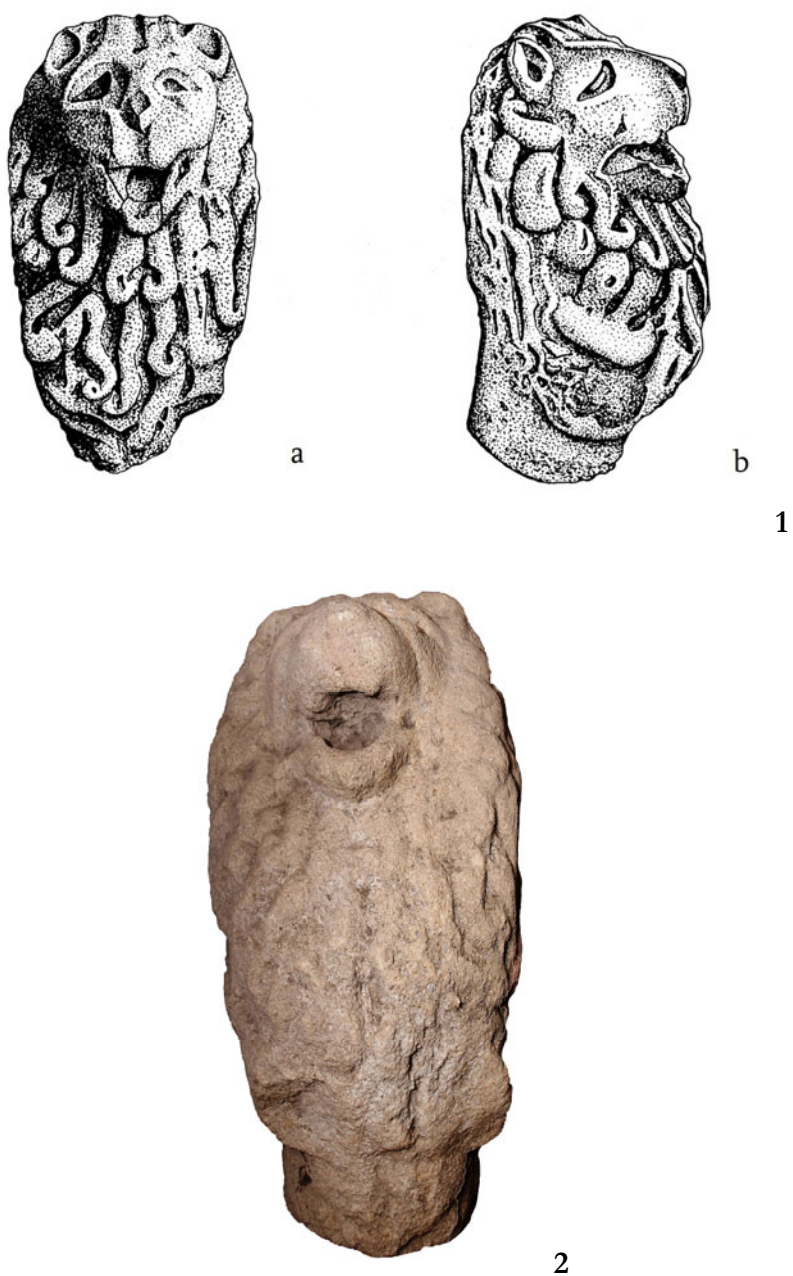


Fig. 2. Roman funerary lion from *Apulum* (Alba Iulia-*Partoș*)
(1 – drawing; 2 – photo)



2



3

Fig. 3. Roman funerary lion from *Apulum* (Alba Iulia-*Partoș*)



1



2

Fig. 4. Roman funerary lion from Vințu de Jos (photo)

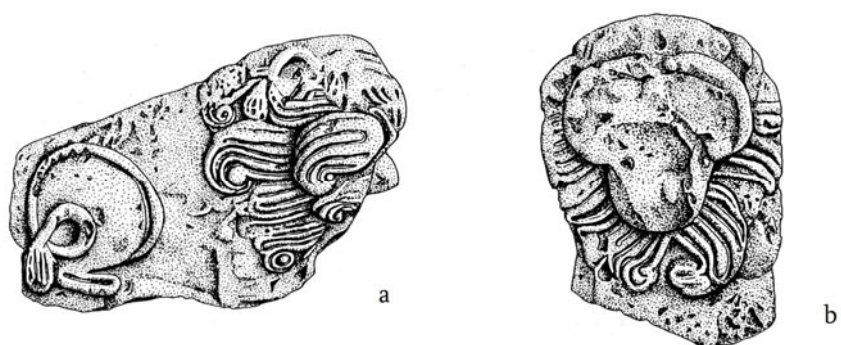


Fig. 5. Roman funerary lion from Vințu de Jos (drawing)

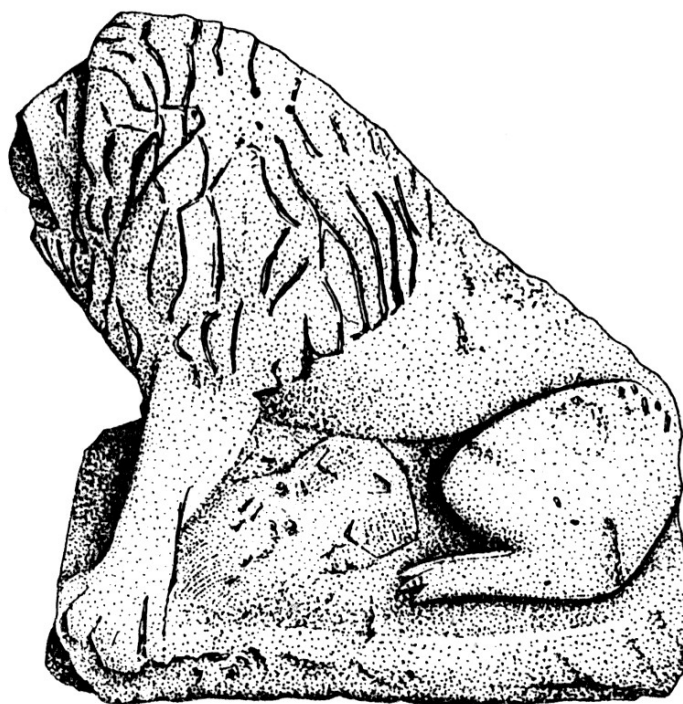


Fig. 6. Roman funerary lion from Benic (drawing)



a



b



c

Fig. 7. Roman funerary lion from Benic (photo)

