

The Cult of Azizos in Roman Dacia: New Approaches

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Abstract. *The spread of the cult of the divinity of Syrian-Arabic origin Azizos from the East to the Danubian provinces and Rome has traditionally been related to its importance in the Syrian city of Edessa and to different Roman military campaigns against the Parthians and the Sassanid Persians in that same area, in the second and third centuries A.D. Through the analysis of the epigraphic repertoire of this divinity in Dacia, as well as with the study of certain monetary emissions of the time of Emperor Elagabalus and with the revision of the ancient literary texts, we present certain results, which can open new perspectives of study. The importance of Edessa as the origin of the spread of the cult of Azizos in Dacia can be generally confirmed, in the cases of some inscriptions of precise dating and by the military character of the dedicants. On the other hand, a new proposal is introduced in relation to the inclusion of the god in the triad of the city of Emesa and with the possible diffusion of the cult jointly or parallel to the Sol Inuictus Elagabal in the time of Emperor Elagabalus, when we refer to inscriptions of imprecise dating at the time of the Severan dynasty and the dedicators are not military and have no direct relationship with any of the campaigns in Parthia.*

Rezumat. *Răspândirea cultului divinității de origine siro-arabă Azizos din Orient în provinciile dunărene și la Roma a fost legată în mod tradițional de importanța sa în orașul sirian Edessa și de diferite campanii militare romane împotriva parților și a perșilor sasanizi din aceeași zonă, în secolele II- III d.Hr. Prin analiza repertoriului epigrafic al acestei divinități în Dacia, precum și prin analiza anumitor emisiuni monetare din vremea împăratului Elagabal și cu revizuirea textelor literare antice, prezentăm unele rezultate care pot deschide noi perspective de studiu. Importanța Edesei ca origine a răspândirii cultului lui Azizos în Dacia poate fi general confirmată, în cazul unor inscripții precis datate și prin caracterul militar al dedicanților. Pe de altă parte, propunem o nouă ipoteză legată de includerea zeului în triada orașului Emesa și de posibila difuzare a cultului în comun sau paralel cu Sol Inuictus Elagabal în vremea împăratului Elagabalus, atunci când ne referim la inscripții din timpul dinastiei Severilor care nu pot fi datate cu precizie, iar dedicanții nu sunt militari și nu au nicio relație directă cu campaniile din Parthia.*

Keywords: *Azizos; Roman Dacia; Roman cults; Syrian cults; Emesa; Edessa; Elagabalus.*

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the twentieth century, the divinity *Aziz*, of Arab origin, was studied by Drijvers (1972 and 1980), as part of his detailed analysis of the cults and beliefs developed in the Syrian city of Edessa. The remarkable number of testimonies of his cult in Roman Dacia has made this god receive adequate attention to his importance in the historiography dedicated to

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the study of Roman Cults of Eastern origin – those that were traditionally called "the Oriental Cults" – in the Dacian provinces. Sanie (1981, pp. 117-122) included him in his monograph on the Syrian and Palmyrenian cults in Dacia and, internationally, Frey (1989) and Turcan (1996, p. 184) did the same when studying the religious policy of Elagabalus, the first, and the cults in the Roman Empire, the second. Already in the twenty-first century, Carbó García (2010a, pp. 806-819) made an analysis within the framework of the "oriental" cults in Dacia, including the corpus of inscriptions and a study of the dedicants. More recently, Carbó García (2016) carried out a study of his diffusion in Dacia in relation to the Roman military campaigns in the East, and Vágási (2017) examined his presence in the Danubian provinces.

Aziz was part of a triad of the style of those favored by the Phoenicians, especially in coastal cities such as Byblos, Tyre, Sidon and Berytus, and in the inner regions of Syria, in cities such as Hatra, Palmyra or Baalbek-Heliopolis. If in the highest position of that triad was the Semitic, Arab and originally Babylonian deity *El* or *Il* –the *Baal* of Emesa, *Ilāh hag-Gabal*, known as *El Gabal* and Latinized *Elagabalus*–, the accompanying Arab divinities were *Salman –Aziz–* and *Mun'im*, respectively the deities of the morning star and twilight, equivalent to the Greek Dioscuri and appreciated as protectors of the journey, of caravanners and shepherds (Frey, 1989, pp. 55-56; Levick, 2007, p. 15). In Palmyra, *Aziz(os)* also personified the morning star, along with his twin brother, *Arsu*, who personified the evening star. As an astral tutelary god, *Azizos* is usually depicted riding a horse or dromedary, with *Arsu*. Drijvers, who studied his cult in the Syrian city of Edessa (Drijvers, 1972), mentions that, in Syria, *Azizos* was venerated separately, especially by the Emesenes, always as god of the morning star, and in that case, in the company of the astral god *Mun'im –Monimos–* (Drijvers, 1980, p. 147). In fact, *Aziz(os)* is a theophoric name used in the dynasty of king-priests of Emesa, of great popularity and still surviving in the Arab Muslim world and even in non-Muslim peoples of the Near East (Levick, 2007, p. 16). In the Arabic language, it has the meaning of "strong, powerful", and it refers to the power and glory of deities and kings. We should add that, in Islam, *Al-Aziz* is one of the appellations of *Allah*. In the Surah of Yusuf, in the Qur'an, the Prophet Joseph (Yusuf) holds that title, and so does Putiphar, whom he refers to as *Aziz*, precisely.

The character of *Azizos* was militarized when Syria became a Roman province. As a horseman god, protector of the steppe, represented in reliefs riding a dromedary and armed with spear and shield, it was identified with *Ares* or *Mars* and his cult was even officially introduced into the Roman army (Levick, 2007, p. 16; Vágási, 2017, pp. 53-54). This can be seen in different inscriptions in military camps (Drijvers, 1980, p. 170). When he appears in Latin inscriptions, his name is usually followed by different epithets, such as *bonus puer*, *puer inuictus*, *deus bonus puer*, *puer conservator* or is even substituted by the meaning, such as *deus fortis phoebus* (Carbó García, 2010a, p. 192). He was identified with the Greek *Phosphoros* and with the Roman *Lucifer*, in the sense of being a harbinger of the sun, bearer of light and life (Turcan, 1996, pp. 211-212). Certainly, this aspect made him a companion of the *Sun* god.

As for the other member of this triad of Emesa, *Monimos*, he appears as *Hesperos* in reliefs of this city, Palmyra and Baalbek-Heliopolis, and although *Azizos* appears as *Phosphoros*, these two gods were not always worshipped together, so they should not be regarded as inseparable twins (Vágási, 2017, p. 54).

The main ancient literary source is a text by emperor Julian, in which he reproduces the annotations of Iamblichus in a speech delivered by the emperor in December 362, in Antioch, in honor of Helios. According to the text, the inhabitants of Edessa worshipped the *Sun*, accompanied by *Azizos* and *Monimos*, whom Iamblichus identifies respectively with *Ares* and *Hermes*, and *Azizos*, as forerunner of the *Sun*, the morning star, would precede Helios in the procession (Iul., *Orationes*, IV, 150 d, 154 b.):

And yet, again, I wish to mete out a little more of the theology of the Phoenicians ---- whether to good purpose my argument will discover as it goes on. Those who inhabit Edessa, a place consecrated to the Sun, from time immemorial, place on the same throne with him two gods called "Monimos" and "Azizos." By these names are understood (as Iamblichus says, from whom I have borrowed these few things out of his abundance) by "Monimos" Mercury, by "Azizos" Mars, the assessor of the Sun, who also diffuses, as a channel, many blessings upon the region encompassing the earth (...) That Mars, called "Azizos" by the natives of Edessa in Syria, is the harbinger of the Sun...

Drijvers (1980, pp. 147-148) notes that, in Loeb's edition by W.C. Wright, he read Emesa instead of Edessa, and that many scholars, following Spanheim, considered these references to a *Sun* cult more applicable to Emesa than to Edessa, although all manuscripts unanimously read Edessa. This has had the consequence that most of the studies carried out on the diffusion and presence of the cult of *Azizos* in the Danubian provinces or, more specifically, in Roman Dacia, which we have already mentioned at the beginning, have focused on an alleged diffusion of the cult from Edessa. They put it in relation to the relevance of this Syrian city in several of the military campaigns developed in the area by the Romans against the Parthian Empire (Carbó García, 2016).

The interpretations of the epigraphic monuments that we will reflect in the next section also reflect this traditional perspective, necessary because it can be perfectly valid, on the one hand, and because it gives rise to new perspectives of study and interpretation of the testimonies of his cult, on the other hand. Together, both perspectives should contribute to enriching and deepening our knowledge and understanding of this divinity of Syrian-Arabian origin and his important diffusion and presence in Roman Dacia.

PRESENCE OF THE CULT IN DACIA

As a solar and armed god, the cult of *Azizos* spread in the Danubian provinces thanks to the army, especially, in such a way that it is present in Pannonia, in Dacia and in Dalmatia, apart from Rome. The inscriptions dedicated to this god are usually addressed only to him, although sometimes he appears associated with *Apollo*, as in several inscriptions of Dacia (Carbó García 2010a, p. 192); but the fact remains that, although his cult enjoyed some popularity and diffusion in the Danubian provinces, the same did not happen with *Monimos*, since his name has only been found in the onomastic record (Vágási, 2017, p. 55, note 9).

In Dacia, he appears in 15 inscriptions in different forms (see repertoire): *Bonus Puer*, *Bonus Puer Phosphorus*, *Azizos Bonus Puer* or *Deus Fortis Phoebus*. This divinity had a temple epigraphically attested in Potaissa (Rusu-Pescasu and Alicu, 2000, pp. 134-135) and it is very likely that there was another in Apulum, where 9 inscriptions come from, while three others come from Potaissa, one from Napoca, one from Suceagu and one from Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa.

In these inscriptions, the dedicants with Roman or Italic names stand out above the Greco-Orientals, and the presence of a person of Syrian-Arabic origin can hardly be detected in a single inscription, found in Napoca. The diffusion of *Azizos* in Dacia seems to have followed a path like that of *Jupiter Heliopolitanus* from the East – although in later times – and relying on Romans and Italics and not on Syrians or Greco-Orientals, in general, for his diffusion. The solar character of the divinity, his frequent associations with *Apollo* and the more popular Roman denomination of *Bonus Puer* seem to have much to do with his popularity among Romans and, to a lesser extent, among Greek-Orientals, rather than among the Syrians. This is different from what was detected for other cults in the same field, such as *Jupiter Dolichenus* or the Palmyrene gods. But he is only worshipped with the name of *Azizos* on a single occasion, in one of the two inscriptions from Potaissa.

The study of the possible dating of the monuments is of enormous importance, together with that of the dedicants, in order to approach the understanding of their dissemination. An inscription from Apulum mentions the *municipium Aurelium Apulense*, which existed in the time of Marcus Aurelius, between 161 and 180 AD, becoming *colonia Aurelia Apulense* under the reign of Commodus, between 180 and 193 AD. This implies that the monument can be dated to the reign of Marcus Aurelius or even to the early years of Commodus' reign (see rep. 5). Another inscription, also from Apulum, could be dated in the last decades to the second century according to the *peregrinus* name of the dedicant, as Piso has observed (see rep. 6). In this sense, we can see that the introduction of this cult is prior to the Parthian campaign of Septimius Severus, and it is very likely that it is due to the direct knowledge of new divinities during the participation of the *legio V Macedonica* in the campaign of Lucius Verus against the Parthians (Popescu, 2004, p. 134).

More complex is the dating of a third monument of this divinity, dedicated by a centurion of the Macedonian V legion, on which *Azizos* appears next to *Apollo Parthicus* (see rep.

12). It is the same title carried by several emperors with the meaning of "victor over the Parthians", and everything seems to indicate that in this case it would refer to a victory over them. In his day, Mircea Macrea pointed to the victory that took place in the time of Lucius Verus, between 161 and 166 AD, a campaign in which the *legio V Macedonica* took part with all its troops. Then, Edessa was also taken, a city-fortress where the god *Azizos* was worshipped, as we have already mentioned (Macrea, 1971, pp. 352-353). However, it has also been argued that the *pia constans* title for the unit in the inscription is from the time of Commodus, 185 or 187, so Speidel dated the altar after the Parthian war of Septimius Severus and related it directly to this campaign and not to that of Lucius Verus. But he did not treat it as a testimony of the cult of *Azizos* and interpreted it rather as a sample of syncretism between *Mithras* and *Apollo* (Speidel, 1978, pp. 479-482). On the other hand, Nemeti did not exclude even a later dating, in relation to the Parthian campaigns of Gordian III, Philip the Arab, Trebonianus Gallus or, above all, Valerian I, if we consider the other inscriptions of Potaissa (Nemeti, 2005, p. 184; Nemeti, 2007, p. 231). Specifically, one in which, as in this one, the god called *Deus Fortis* also appears (see rep. 13). It is a surprising epithet for this divinity, since it does not appear on other occasions neither in the epigraphic record nor in the ancient literary sources assigned to the god, although it does appear with divinities of the military field, such as *Hercules*, *Mars* or *Liber*. The coincidence of two inscriptions in the same locality with this unusual epithet could suggest the same dating for both in the third century and after Caracalla's *Constitutio Antoniniana*, as we will explain shortly. The dedicant, *Caius Cassius Vitalis*, centurion of the *legio V Macedonica*, would have participated with the whole unit or with a *vexillatio* in a Parthian campaign. In any case, he would have played a role in the direct diffusion of the cult of *Azizos* in Dacia in connection with his presence in the East. This is an inscription in which the god hides under a strong *interpretation*. Instead of using the common denomination of *bonus Puer*, it has been preferred to translate the original meaning of the name of the Syrian divinity, and *Phosphorus* has also been changed by *phoebus*, so that *Azizos* is closer to *Apollo* just as he is closer to *Azizos* thanks to the epithet *parthicus*. *Phoebus* meant "the bright one" or "the luminous one", highlighting the solar attributes that, of course, *Apollo* possessed, but that *Azizos* also had (Nemeti, 2005, pp. 182-184).

Four inscriptions dedicated to *Azizos* can be dated generally to the third century, without further precision, although they have been placed in relation mainly to the time of the Severan dynasty (see rep. 1, 3, 8 and 13). The concentration of some of these inscriptions (see rep. 1, 2, 3 and 6) in the same area of Apulum, corresponding to the location of the ancient *canabae*, would suggest the existence of a temple to this god, according to the interpretation of Piso (*IDR III/5*, 300).

Among the inscriptions generally datable in the third century, is the one mentioned a few lines earlier, in which appears the god *Azizos* called *Deus Fortis* (see rep. 13). Considering the space that appears damaged in the first line, it is certain that the denomination of the divinity

would be accompanied by other names or divine epithets, as can be observed in other inscriptions of Azizos in Dacia. For example: *Deo For[ti Apollini Parthico]* or *Deo For[ti Bono Puero Apollini]* (Nemeti, 2005, p. 183; Nemeti, 2007, p. 230). The plaque is dedicated to the health of the emperor or emperors, in a typical formula that, in union with an “oriental” divinity, indicates a connection with the Imperial Cult. At that time of great propagation of “oriental” cults, it intends to use its popularity for its dissemination and, at the same time, to exercise a certain religious and social control over the cults and their followers. The dedicants, if we take into account the deleted spaces, would have been at least ten. They are Roman citizens, although we do not know their origin, and most of them have the demonym *Aurelius*. In a successful proposal for reconstitution, Nemeti proposed that the fragment be a part of the same inscription with the other larger fragment collected in *CIL III, 7688*, a list of veterans of the *legio VMacedonica* (Nemeti, 2007). The complete list would have come to comprise approximately 75 names. The repetition among them of the demonym *Aurelius* seems to indicate a later dating to Caracalla's *Constitutio Antoniniana*, in the year 212. As we said before, the coincidence of two inscriptions in the same locality with the unusual denomination of the god as *Deus Fortis* and his association with *Apollo* could suggest the same dating for both in the third century and after the *Constitutio Antoniniana*. Nemeti then interpreted that the list of legionaries participating in the dedication of the inscription would most likely have been a list of veterans of some later Parthian campaign, such as that of Gordian III, that of Philip the Arab, that of Trebonianus Gallus or especially that of Valerian I. A very suggestive idea, although we do not have enough elements to be able to contrast it, would be to interpret these two inscriptions to *Deus Fortis – Azizos* in the framework of the first Parthian campaign of Valerian I and the return to Dacia of a *vexillatio* of the *legio V Macedonica*, that is, between the end of 256 and 258. They would thus coincide in time with another inscription dedicated to this god in Potaissa, which is also the latest found to date in this locality. And it would coincide with it – at least, the inscription we are dealing with – in its dedication for the health of the emperors, as we will see shortly. However, we cannot forget that the mention of the epithet *pia constans* for the legion in the inscription dedicated to *Deus Fortis Phoebus Apollini Parthicus*, and the non-appearance of the nicknames *Antoniniana* (granted by Caracalla), *Severiana Alexandriana* (by Severus Alexander) or *Gordiana* (by Gordian III) (Petolescu, 2010, p. 198), seems to point rather to the Parthian campaign of Septimius Severus in the case of that inscription.

Precisely the later inscriptions of all the cults of Syrian origin in Dacia are two dedications to this same god. The first one, from Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, in which Azizos accompanies *Apollo* in a dedication to the *numina* of both gods, was erected by an imperial procurator who was acting governor of Dacia between 251 and 253 AD, according to another inscription of Apulum (IDR III/5, 68). This places it in the years of reign of Trebonianus Gallus and Volusianus, precisely at the time when, on the eastern front, the Persian king Shapur I conquered the province of Syria (see rep. 15).

The second one, from Potaissa, mentions the emperors Valerian and Gallienus, as well as Caesar Valerian, son of Gallienus, and Cornelia Salonina, wife of Gallienus (see rep. 11). Thus, it can be dated generally between 255 AD, when Valerian, the first son of Emperor Gallienus, is named Caesar, and 258-259, when Emperor Valerian is captured by the Sassanids in Persia, in the framework of their "Parthian" campaign and before the walls of Edessa. And more likely between the end of 256, with the end of the first Parthian war of Valerian I and the return to Dacia of a *vexillatio* of the legion, and 258 AD (Nemeti, 2007, p. 231). The epithet *III pia fidelis* carried by the legion would have been granted after the fighting on the northern border of Dacia against the free Dacians, at the latest in the year 257, as revealed by the title *Dacicus Maximus* that Gallienus receives. (Popescu, 2004, p. 135). It is the later Latin inscription found in Potaissa and it is also one of the last of Dacia prior to Christianity, among those which can be exactly dated. In this inscription, the name of *Azizos* appears, along with its more common denomination of *bonus Puer*, and the *conservator* epithet. This appears in the inscriptions of other Syrian gods and especially when they take on a military character, such as *Jupiter Dolichenus*. It is considered that it was a symbol of stability, something very necessary at the time in which the monument was erected, and that comes to redound the mention of the imperial family, with members of three generations. This gives an idea of a necessary stability around succession. In addition, the inscription testifies to the completion of the reconstruction works of a temple of the divinity in Potaissa by the *legio V Macedonica*.

Thus, these two testimonies of Potaissa would support the hypothesis of the presence of *Azizos* among the *dii militares*, in the official pantheon of the third century AD. This was a difficult time in the political-military and economic grounds, when the military unit resumes a civil building work which had begun much earlier. Therefore, the inscription is dedicated for the health of the emperors and the imperial family. The dedicator, Donatus, was the prefect of the *legio V Macedonica*, which has been noted as probably originating in the African provinces (Sanie, 1981, p. 120). The invocation reflected in the inscription seems to have responded on the one hand to the wishes that the god protected the legion, after it had suffered losses in the last battles in northern Dacia. On the other hand, it expresses loyalty and concern for the emperors: in the case of Valerian the younger, son of Gallienus, the desire for his speedy recovery, thanks to the healing qualities of the original divinity of Edessa, and in the case of Valerian I, the protection and guarantee of success for the old emperor in his fight against the Persian attackers (Popescu, 2004, p. 135).

In sum, previous research that has attempted to piece together the history of the spread of the cult of *Azizos* in Dacia reveals a close relationship with the same history of the campaigns in the East by the Roman emperors, from Marcus Aurelius to Valerian and Gallienus. However, not all inscriptions can be dated accurately and some of them could be related to some of the military campaigns in the East, in a general way. But we can't specify much more. The chronology of the spread of his cult corresponds to the general chronology of the spread

of Roman cults of eastern origin in Dacia. The time in which more monuments can be dated is that of the Severan dynasty, comprising the last decade of the second century and the first ones of the third century AD, being very notable the difference with the number of testimonies datable in other times. The cult of *Azizos* was introduced in Dacia as a result of the Parthian campaign of Lucius Verus, in the time of Marcus Aurelius. Later, the campaigns of Septimius Severus in Parthia would help explain the importance of the cult of *Azizos* in those years. The later campaigns, from Caracalla or Severus Alexander to Valerian and Gallienus, definitely explain the later manifestations of that same cult in Dacia.

However, with the exception of the inscriptions which can be clearly dated to the years of Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius, for the beginning of the cult in Dacia, and those which can be dated with equal certainty to the time of Valerian and Gallienus, for its end, most are integrated into that general set of imprecise dating which we record as "from the time of the Severan dynasty". The importance of the Syrian city of Edessa in relation to the cult of *Azizos*, already commented on in the introduction, as well as the existence of these Roman military campaigns led by different emperors against Parthians, first, and Sassanids, later, seem to have led specialists to set aside other possibilities. This is especially noticeable when we talk about that time of the emperors of the Severan dynasty. For them, if there is no Parthian campaign in between that establishes a connection with Edessa, it seems that we have not been able to propose other possible explanations about the spread of the cult and to find another nucleus of diffusion, whether an alternative or complementary to that Syrian city.

NEW PERSPECTIVES

In the first place, the existence of the cult of *Azizos* in different cities of the Syrian area should make us rethink the preponderant role of Edessa in the explanations about the diffusion of the cult towards the European provinces of the Roman Empire. The aforementioned studies of Drijvers (1972; 1980) led almost inevitably to many later studies on *Azizos* placing this Syrian city as the center of his cult and, above all, as the original nucleus of his subsequent expansion, always in relation to the Roman military campaigns in the East. However, we have already advanced other possibilities. The god personified the morning star also in the city of Palmyra, along with his twin brother, *Arsu*, who in turn personified the twilight star. Drijvers himself (1980, p. 147) pointed out that he was worshipped elsewhere in Syria, and especially by the Emesenes, always as god of the morning star, although in the case of Emesa, he did so accompanied by the astral god *Monimos*, god of the twilight star (Frey, 1989, pp. 55-56). But, although they appear together in the reliefs of various cities, as in Emesa itself, in Palmyra or in Baalbek-Heliopolis, they were not inseparable twins and could be worshipped – and represented – separately. Even so, in the case of Emesa, we have already seen how Martin Frey (1989) and Barbara Levick (2007, pp. 15-16) placed both as the companions of the *Baal* of Emesa, *El Gabal*, latinized *Elagabalus*.

Thus, and although he could be worshipped individually, we should not contemplate the study of *Azizos* simply as another divinity, to classify him along with other gods of the Syrian or Syrian-Arabic area, attending only to his ethno-geographical origin. Precisely, the most interesting thing, which undoubtedly, we must take into account for his study, including the issues related to his diffusion, is his quality as part of a triad like the usual ones of the Phoenicians. Beyond the influence that his cult could have in the city of Edessa in the face of his spread to the Danubian provinces and to Rome, through the participation of Roman military units in the Parthian campaigns (Carbó García, 2016), his character as an integral part of the triad of Emesa must have provided a way of access to the heart of the Empire by the hand of the members of the Severan dynasty. In particular, from the hand of the child-emperor who adopted the name of his main god, *Elagabal*, and moved him to Rome.

The cult of *Azizos* reached the western provinces of the Roman Empire and Rome itself with that of the *Sol Inuictus Elagabal*, as companion god and forerunner. The emperor introduced a large number of new rituals into the *Sun* cult in Rome, when he made official the cult of *Sol Inuictus Elagabal* and placed it at the top of the Roman pantheon. He mainly adopted Syrian customs and even Syrian servants for ceremonies, with him came other priests of the cult – including his cousin, Alexian, the future Alexander Severus– and developed great ceremonies (Sánchez-Sánchez 2018, pp- 49-51). In this sense, it is perfectly acceptable and not surprising at all that the boy-emperor took this triad with him to Rome, and not only the betyl of *Sun Inuictus Elagabal* (Levick, 2007, p. 15).

Following this, the numismatic sources of the reign of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus - Elagabalus- are analyzed to try to demonstrate the transfer of this triad from Emesa to Rome and the western provinces of the Empire (Carbó García, forthcoming).

There are three types in coins that appear on different reverses and that we can analyze to this end: first, a star that accompanies the personification of the Sun; on the other hand, a star that appears next to the emperor, as an officiating priest of sacrifice, before a shrine; and finally, a star located on the chariot that bears the betyl of the god *El Gabal*. The representation of the Emperor as *Helios* and, above all, the very frequent appearance of the symbol of the star on coins in which he appears offering a sacrifice have been associated with his alleged birth in Syria and his position as supreme priest of the sun god *El Gabal* in the city of Emesa. But some of these representations could be the result of the immobilization of the design, inheritances of those used by previous emperors in their coins. Their presence could be explained by the obsession with astrology of the emperors of this dynasty, but we could try to identify the stars represented on Elagabalus' coins with some specific star, then accepting an astronomical value. And maybe we could make from it a religious interpretation of these symbols.

Nevertheless, to be able to do it, we should operate within four established parameters: first, the dating of the coin with astronomical symbol; secondly, to discard the aspect of

repetition by tradition and immobilization of the design, we should check that the astronomical symbol is presented for the first time for that coinage design or, at least, that it is a reintroduction after a significant period of time; thirdly, it must be established that the astronomical event has occurred; and finally, historical evidence that supports the observation and importance of the specific phenomenon must be presented. Anyway, without the fulfillment of that last parameter, any correlation between a symbol in a coin and an astronomical fact would be mere speculation (Faintich, 2008, p. 5).

Certainly, that a star appears next to the personification of the Sun –*Sol Inuictus*– is not an exclusive motif of Elagabalus. We can observe it before, on different coins of Septimius Severus, and then, on others, of Gallienus, Maximinus Daya, Licinius and Constantine. If this type appears on the coins of Septimius Severus for the first time, due to the influence of the Empress Iulia Domna, its reintroduction after the years of the reigns of Caracalla and Macrinus has an obvious historical explanation, given that Varius Avitus Bassianus was a priest of the god El Gabal from Emesa and, in this case, it would not be an immobilization of the design². Precisely, the type in which the emperor appears as a priest, officiating a sacrifice before a shrine, accompanied by a star, is extremely frequent in the coinage of Elagabalus³. As for the type in which the transfer of the betyl of the god can be seen, the star makes its appearance on the quadriga and to the left of the sacred stone. The known coins date from the year 222 (*RIC* 61) and refer to a very specific event, that of the celebration of the summer festival in Rome in honor of the god, in which the betyl was moved from his temple in the city –the *Elagabalium*– to another temple that must have existed on the outskirts. Herodian notes that the event took place on the summer solstice, like the apotheosis of the *Sun* and its triumph over the shadows (*Hdn.*, V, 6, 6-9). At dusk of the summer solstice, as a culmination of these festivities, the *Sun* god was present in the *Elagabalium*, while he was offered the rites and sacrifices described by Herodian of Antioch, all thanks to an astronomical theophany, possible thanks to the alignment of the atrial axis of the building, at 24° north of the west. It is likely that this festival also served to commemorate the transfer of the betyl from the East to Rome. Another very similar type, related to that one, shows us the emperor Elagabalus himself on the chariot, and the star in exactly the same position (*RIC* 35 y 308).

When, on these coins, the star accompanies the personification of the *Sun* or the emperor himself, officiating as *Sacerdos Amplissimus Dei Inuicti Solis Elagabali*, or the chariot that transports the betyl from the *Elagabalium*, during the celebration of the summer solstice in Rome, that star would be *Azizos*, the morning star, the forerunner of the *Sun*, in the absolutely

² *RIC* 28, 37, 38, 39, 40, 63, 301 (star to the left of the personification of the Sun) and 300 (star to the left or right of the personification of the Sun, according to different examples).

³ *RIC* 46, 46var, 46 *limes denarius*, 49, 51, 52, 53, 88, 88var, 146, 147, 177, 191, 323error, 325 and 327 (2) (star to the left of the emperor, as a priest, before a shrine); *RIC* 135 y 327 (star on the right); *RIC* 131 (star on the left or right, depending on the examples).

majority cases in which the star appears on the left. Or it would be *Monimos*, the twilight star, in the much less numerous examples in which the star appears on the right. After having verified the much higher number of times in which the star appears on the left and after also noting the diffusion and popularity of the cult of *Azizos* in Rome, the Danubian provinces and Dacia, specifically, in the face of the total absence of *Monimos*, the importance of the character of the first of these deities as a forerunner of the Sun would seem evident in the coins.

Perhaps this could be explained by the character of the morning star as forerunner of the Sun, while the evening star announced its disappearance; and it could also have to do with the image of the emperor himself, a young man of 16 years at the time of his arrival in Rome, easily identifiable himself with the *bonus puer Azizos*, forerunning *El Gabal*. Perhaps now we should try remembering Herodian's description of how the young emperor preceded the chariot with the god's betyl, walking backwards so as not to take his eyes of it, forerunning the *Sol Inuictus Elagabal*, then⁴.

This interpretation complies with the four parameters quoted above: the mentioned coins can be dated; we discard repetition by tradition and immobilization of design; we know astronomically the morning star –the planet Venus– and the evening star –again the planet Venus, visible at twilight–; and we have presented the historical evidence that indicates the religious importance of these stars as the gods *Azizos* and *Monimos*, companions of the *Sol Inuictus Elagabal* in Emesa and in other Syrian cities, in the transfer of the betyl to Rome by the hand of the emperor, and in the ceremony that he arranged in Rome on the summer solstice.

Following this hypothesis, some interesting perspectives would be opened that could also affect the knowledge of the diffusion of the cult of *Azizos* in the Roman Empire. And, of course, in Dacia, which is the case that concerns us in these pages.

To begin with, we should not try to explain the inscriptions dedicated to *Azizos* in Dacia that present an imprecise dating "at the time of the Severan dynasty" only in terms of the military campaigns in Parthia closer in time. In other words, we should not try to force the dating to try to ascribe them to the campaign of Septimius Severus, or that of Caracalla, or that of Alexander Severus, when we do not have any data to that effect. In fact, those inscriptions in which the presence of military units or individuals cannot be detected among the dedicators or recipients of the votive offerings, could be explained, at least partially, but more easily than through the influence of the military, by the political-religious promotion of Emperor Elagabalus of the cult of *Azizos* as a companion and forerunning of the *Sol Inuictus Elagabal*.

Another perspective that opens up when dealing with the cult of *Azizos*, not only individually, perhaps coming from Edessa or another city in the Syrian area, but as part of the

⁴ HDN., V, 6, 7: *A six-horse chariot bore the sun god, the horses huge and flawlessly white, with expensive gold fittings and rich ornaments. No one held the reins, and no one rode in the chariot; the vehicle was escorted as if the sun god himself were the charioteer. Elagabalus ran backward in front of the chariot, facing the god and holding the horses' reins. He made the whole journey in this reverse fashion, looking up into the face of his god.*

triad of Emesa, is the one that would affect the study of the other two gods of that triad in Dacia: we have already commented that, to date, no inscription dedicated to *Monimos* has been found in Dacia and we provided a possible explanation; on the other hand, there is no epigraphic monument in Dacia explicitly dedicated to the *Sol Inuictus Elagabal*, which does not mean that some of the many inscriptions dedicated to *Sol Inuictus*, in general, could refer to this god without mentioning his specific appellation (Carbó García, 2010b). The point is that the presence of the cult of *Azizos* in Dacia, when it does not have a direct relationship with a diffusion from the military field, could even be associated in some cases with the presence of followers of the cult of *Sol Inuictus Elagabal*, without naming it explicitly, in the same way as it happened in Rome, where we have evidence of the introduction of the cult of *Elagabal* before the reign of Elagabalus and also without explicitly mentioning the name of the Syrian divinity (Carbó García, 2010b, pp. 593-594).

In the case of Roman Dacia, those inscriptions dedicated to the *bonus Puer – Azizos* and dated imprecisely in the years of reign of the emperors of the Severan dynasty, without a direct relationship with the military field, perhaps had nothing to do with any of the Parthian campaigns and we can try to understand them in terms of the inclusion of the god in the triad of Emesa, next to the cult of the *Sun Inuictus Elagabal*. For example, we could try to apply this hypothesis to the case of the inscription dedicated by *Titus Flavius Italicus*, first *quattorvir* of the *municipium Aurelium Apulense*, to the *bonus Puer* (see rep. 5) very possibly in the same location of Apulum in which three other inscriptions appeared, dedicated to *Jupiter Optimus Maximus* (IDR III/5, 144), to *Diana* (IDR III/5, 52) and, precisely, to the *Deus Sol* (IDR III/5, 351). In short, it would be a question of adding a new perspective to the existing ones, in this specific case, around the existence of this artificial pantheon whose cult has been interpreted according to the Imperial Cult and the official civic religion, although Szabó has recently provided another explanation related to the presence of several religious narratives and local myths (Szabó, 2018, pp. 50-51). Certainly, now we have more elements to try to understand better the presence here of *Deus Sol* and *bonus Puer – Azizos*.

In conclusion, the different perspectives, old and new, can be combined to deepen the study of the cult of *Azizos* and his diffusion, his dedicants and how, being understood as part of a triad and not only individually, the manifestations of his cult could be put in relation to those of other gods, as could be the case of *Sol Inuictus Elagabal*.

CATALOGUE OF INSCRIPTIONS:

1-Apulum (Alba Iulia). Upper fragment of a votive altar or base of a statue. It is not preserved today.

Main references: *CIL* III, 1130; *ILS* 4348; Sanie, 1981, p. 264, nº 46; *IDR* III/5, 300; *CODR* II, 103.

Deo bono / Puero / [p(h)]osphoro / [---]?

2-Apulum (Alba Iulia). Fragment of votive altar or base of a statue, without crowning or base. The inscription is not preserved today.

Main references: *CIL* III, 1136; Sanie, 1981, p. 265, nº 52; *IDR* III/5, 305; *CODR* II, 105.

Bono Puero / p(h)osphoro / Lael(l)ia Cu- / rill(i)a pro sa- / lute sua suo- / rumque v(otum) s(olvit) / I(ibens) m(erito)

3-Apulum (Alba Iulia). Fragment of votive altar or base of statue without crowning or base. It is not preserved today.

Main references: *CIL* III, 1138; *ILS* 4347; Sanie, 1981, p. 265, nº 54; *IDR* III/5, 307; *CODR* II, 106.

Deo b(ono) p(h)os- / phoro Apol- / lini Pythio / D(ecimus) Iulius Ru- / sonius cust(os) / armorum / pro salute sua / et suorum / v(otum) s(olvit) I(ibens) m(erito)

4-Apulum (Alba Iulia). Votive altar or marble statue base. It is preserved in the Unirii Museum of Alba Iulia.

Main references: *CIL* III, 1131; Sanie, 1981, p. 265, nº 47; *IDR* III/5, 301; *CODR* II, 107.

Bono / Puero / Aur(elius) Ch- / restus / v(otum) s(olvit) I(ibens) m(erito)

5-Apulum (Alba Iulia). Votive inscription, probably an altar or base of statue. It is not preserved today.

Main references: *CIL* III, 1132; *ILS* 7142; Sanie, 1981, p. 265, nº 48; *IDR* III/5, 303; *CODR* II, 108.

Bono Deo / Puero p(h)os- / phoro / T(itus) Fl(avius) Italicus / primus IIII / vir m(unicipii) A(urelii) A(pulensis) / cum Stati- / lia Lucia / coniuge et / suis ex voto

6-Apulum (Alba Iulia). Upper fragment of a votive altar or base of statue. It is not preserved today. Main references: *CIL* III, 1137; Sanie, 1981, p. 265, nº 53; *IDR* III/5, 302; *CODR* II, 104.

Bono P- / uero ex v- / ot(o) A[ph]ro- / di[s]i]us Alex- / andri po[s(uit)]

7-Apulum (Alba Iulia). Votive inscription. It is not preserved today.

Main references: *CIL* III, 1135; Sanie, 1981, p. 265, nº 51; *IDR* III/5, 304; *CODR* II, 109.

Iulia Secunda / Puero p(h)osphoro / D(eo) O(ptimo) M(aximo)? / d(ono) d(edit) d(edicavit)que

8-Apulum (Alba Iulia). Votive altar or base of statue in limestone. It is preserved in the Museum of Sebeş.

Main references: *CIL* III, 1133; *ILS* 4346; Sanie, 1981, p. 265, n° 49; *IDR* III/5, 306; *CODR* II, 110.

Deo bono / Puero p(h)os- / phoro Apol- / lini Pythio / T(itus) Fl(avius) Titus et / T(itus) Fl(avius) Philetus / p(ro) s(alute) s(ua) s(uorumque)

9-Apulum (Alba Iulia). Votive altar with inscription found in Apulum, but coming from Sarmizegetusa, according to Verantius. It is not preserved today.

Main references: *CIL* III, 1134; Sanie, 1981, p. 265, n° 50; *IDR* III/5, 2*; *CODR* II, 116.

L(ucius) Fl(avius) Valens / ob honorem / flamonii / b(ono) P(uero) d(edit)

10-Napoca (Cluj-Napoca). Votive altar of hard sandstone. It is preserved in the National Museum of Transylvanian History, in Cluj-Napoca.

Main references: Sanie, *Cult.Or.I*, p. 266, n° 57; *CODR* II, 111.

Puero / bono / Arim- / o v(otum) l(ibens)

11-Potaissa (Turda). Votive inscription discovered at the base of a temple. It is not preserved today. Main references: *CIL* III, 875; *ILS* 4345; Sanie, 1981, pp. 265-266, 55; *CODR* II, 112.

Deo Azizo bono P[uero conserva-] / tori pro salutem dd(ominorum) [nn(ostrorum) Valeriani et Gal-] / lieni Augg(ustorum) et Valerian[i nobiliss(imi) Caesaris] / et Corneliae Salonina[e Augustae et] / leg(ionis) V Mac(edonicae) III piae fid[elis ---] / Donatus praef(ectus) leg(ionis) eiusde[m ---] / templum ince(p)tum perfecit v[---]

12-Potaissa (Turda). Votive altar in sandstone. It is preserved in the Regional Museum of Turda.

Main references: Macrea, 1971, 350; *AnnÉp* 1972, 454; *ILD* II, pp. 199-200, n° 482; *CODR* II, 113.

Deo Forti / phoebo / Apollin(i) / Parthico / C(aius) Cassius / Vitalis (centurio) / l(egionis) V M(acedonicae) p(iae) c(onstantis) / l(ibens) posu(it)

13-Potaissa (Turda). Fragmentary marble votive plate. It is not preserved today.

Fragment A.

Main references: *ILD* II, p. 200, n° 483; Nemeti, 2007; *CODR* II, 114.

Deo For[ti ...] / pro salute impera[toris, torum?] / Aur(elius) Quintianus [...] / Aur(elius) Augustinianu[s ...] / Iul(ius) Rufinus [...] / Aur(elius) Surus [...] / Aur(elius) Marcu[s ...]

Combined reading with *CIL* III, 7688.

Main references: *CIL* III, 7688; Nemeti, 2007; Carbó, 2010a, pp. 1244-1245.

Deo For[ti...] / pro sal(ute) imperat[or(um)? et ...] sacerdotalis Daciae / Aur(elius) Quintianus e[x ...], [...], [...]ius ex dup(lario), Aur(elius) Iulianus, Aur(elius) Anice[tus ex ...], / Aur(elius) Augustianus [...], [...], [...]nes, Aur(elius) Statilius ex dup(lario), Aur(elius) Firmidius ex...], / Iul(ius) Rufinus e[x ...], [...], [...]nus, Aur(elius) Valens, Ael(ius) Aufidius [...], / Aur(elius) Surus [...], [...], [...] ex dup(lario), Aur(elius) Valens, Aur(elius) Victorinus ex eq(uite), / Aur(elius) Marcu[s ...], [...], [...]us, Sep(timius) Alexander ex dup(lario), Aur(elius) Verus ex eq(uite), / [...], [...], [...]s, Val(erius) Valens, Aur(elius) Firmus ex dup(lario), / [...], Aur(elius) Vict[or ex ...], [...]us ex dup(lario), Aur(elius) Flavianus ex imm(une), Aur(elius) Maximinus, / [...], Aur(elius) Farnax [...], [...] ex dup(lario), Aur(elius) Viatorinus, Aur(elius) Sedatus ex im(mune) lib(rario), / [...ex c(ustode)] a(rmorum), Aur(elius) Lucilius ex opt(ione), Aur(elius) Vital(is) ex dup(lario), Aur(elius) Crispus, Aur(elius) Crescens, / [...], Aur(elius) Gaianus, Aur(elius) Celsus ex dup(lario), Aur(elius) Verus, Aur(elius) Iulius ex be(neficiario) tr(ibuni), / [...ex s]pec(ulatore), Aur(elius) Mucianus ex c(ustode) a(rmorum), Aur(elius) Valeria[nus] EM GN, Aur(elius) Maximus ex arc(ario), Aur(elius) Quintillianus, / [...ex] dup(lario), Aur(elius) Maximus ex c(ustode) a(rmorum), Aur(elius) Sabin[us ..], Aur(elius) [...], Petr(onius) Marcianus ex lib(rario), / [...ex] opt(ione), Aur(elius) Cassius ///IL, Sep(timius) Crisp(us) ex ca(n)d(idato), Aur(elius) Valerius ex c(ustode) a(rmorum), Aur(elius) Valentinus ex tub(icene), / [...ex] opt(ione), Aur(elius) Lucius ex c(ustode) a(rmorum), Aur(elius) Lu[... ex] dup(lario), Aur(elius) Domnio ex imm(une), Ael(ius) Maximia[nus] ex tess(erario), / [...ex] dup(lario), Aur(elius) Agrippa ex c(ustode) a(rmorum), [...ex] opt(ione), Aur(elius) Valerius, Sep(timius) Volusius, / [...]us vet(erano) ex b(ene)f(iciario) leg(ati) m[armo]ra ex suo posuit.

14-Suceagu. Calcareous stone votive slab. It is not preserved today.

Main references: *CIL* III, 7652; Sanie, 1981, p. 266, n° 56; *CODR* II, 115.

Bono Pue- / ro Firmi- / [n]ius Bellic- / us vet(eranus) ex c(ustode) [a(rmorum)?] / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)

15-Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa (Grădiște-Sarmizegetusa). Marble votive base of statue. It is preserved in the National Museum of Transylvanian History, in Cluj-Napoca.

Main references: *AnnÉp* 1983, 841; *ILD* II, p. 129, n° 264; *CODR* II, 117.

Numinibus prae- / sentissimis Apol- / lini et bono Puero / M(arcus) Aur(elius) Marcus, v(ir) e(gregius) / proc(urator) Aug(usti) n(o)stri age(n)s / vice praesidis / Heraclida alumn- / us pro salute patro- / ni sui posuit

Abbreviations

AnnÉp

L'Année Épigraphique

<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
<i>CODR II</i>	Carbó García, J.R., 2010. <i>Los Cultos Orientales en la Dacia Romana. Vol II: Corpus Epigráfico</i> . Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca.
<i>IDR</i>	<i>Inscripțiile Daciei Romane / Inscriptiones Daciae Romanae</i>
<i>ILD I</i>	Petolescu, C.C., 2005. <i>Inscripții latine din Dacia. I</i> . Bucharest: Acad. Române.
<i>ILS</i>	Dessau, H., 1892-1916. <i>Inscriptiones Latinae selectae</i> , Berlín I-III.
<i>RIC</i>	<i>The Roman Imperial Coinage</i>

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