

EST MODVS IN REBVS

ESSAYS PRESENTED TO
PROFESSOR MIHAI BĂRBULESCU
AT HIS 75TH ANNIVERSARY



INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY OF ART CLUJ-NAPOCA
BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA

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Editors:

SORIN NEMETI • IRINA NEMETI
FLORIN-GHEORGHE FODOREAN • SORIN COCIŞ

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WHERE THE LIGHTNING STRIKES, WHEN THE GODS INTERVENE. DIVINE AGENCY AND SPACE SACRALISATION IN ROMAN DACIA

JUAN RAMÓN CARBÓ GARCÍA

Abstract: Following new trends in the historiography of Roman religious studies, which focus primarily on atomising religious experience, this study proposes an approach to the different forms of religious experiences in natural environments through the specific case of the places of manifestation of Jupiter as a celestial lord, god of lightning and thunder. Through the analysis of inscriptions mentioning Jupiter Fulgurator in Dacia and the comparative study of certain scenes on Trajan's Column in Rome and on that of Marcus Aurelius, we can detect the sacralisation of the concrete space in which the phenomenon of lightning strike happened, to maintain the spatial memory of the *prodigium*. But we can also detect the conversion into *prodigia publica* of a collective religious experience of the intervention of a powerful divine agency and in which a charismatic religious leader is present. This study should contribute to a deeper knowledge of religious experiences in Roman Dacia around epiphanies related to the direct intervention of the gods.

Keywords: Roman religion; Dacia, Jupiter Fulgurator; sacralisation; divine agency; *prodigium*.

It has normally been considered that the large number of finds of inscriptions and sculptural representations of Jupiter Optimus Maximus should be related to manifestations of loyalty and adherence to Rome and imperial power. However, the popularity of his cult during the centuries of the Principality means that the possibility that many of these cultural manifestations actually came from authentic religious feelings cannot be disdained either, as Mac Mullen already pointed out.¹ As a uranic divinity, he gathered within himself the same attributes of heaven, as infinite and immutable, high and powerful. With the epithets *Optimus* and *Maximus* – the best and the greatest – Jupiter took on an imperialist character that tends to encompass other similar divine figures of the cults of the indigenous inhabitants of the different territories incorporated into the Empire.² The different epithets that usually accompany him in many epigraphic monuments show his attributes, similar to those of Zeus. Some of them refer to his condition as a meteorological god, celestial lord, god of lightning and thunder, such as *tonans*, *fulminans*, *fulgur*... We will immediately focus our attention on this aspect in these pages. Others are related to his creator, fertilizer aspect, as a god of the rain that brings life, such as *imbricator*, *frugifer* or *pluvius*. Since he was the sovereign god par excellence, he also gathered the character of conservative of the laws and punisher of those who violate them – such as *feretrius* or *pistor* –. But the civic character of his cult developed especially around his character as a god of victory and conservative of the Empire, as shown by the epithets *victor*, *conservator*, *stator* or *custos*. However, he did not have these epithets and attributes in exclusivity since other gods could also sometimes carry them.³

¹ Mac Mullen 1981, 7: “the sizable presence of Jupiter... overwhelming in public inscriptions, contradicts the view that worship of the supreme deity was mere empty ceremony” (in reference to the case of Pompeii).

² Nemeti 2005, 219.

³ On the cult of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, the best synthesis continues to be that of Fears 1981, 3–141 (with all the bibliography that appeared on the subject between 1919 and 1978, 122–138).

In essence, it was a political, state cult, of a god who at first was of the *Urbs* and then was for the Empire, fulfilling the double role of maintaining order inside and ensuring victory abroad. The *Urbs* became *Orbis*.⁴ Rome had ceased to be a city, properly speaking, to become a symbol.⁵ In the Roman Empire, as in other empires of a “universal” character, emperors sought their legitimacy by appealing to the superior power of the gods. As an ecumenical empire, its ideology was based on the designation of the *princeps* by the gods, which had its expression in imperial worship. With Trajan and Hadrian, the Jovian theology of power would evolve to constitute the central element of the ideology that ensured the integration and cohesion of the Roman *oikumene*. The emperor was the delegate of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on earth and that image was propagated by Pliny in his Panegyric and also by the iconography of Trajan’s propaganda constructions, such as the Arch of Beneventum.⁶ To *Iuppiter Optimus Maximus* in heaven corresponded *Traianus optimus princeps* on earth.⁷

In Dacia, as in most of the Empire,⁸ Jupiter is presented as the main divinity, of an “absolute” character, supreme god of the state and center on which the imperial ideology pivots, and as such he receives numerous offerings,⁹ external manifestations of civic *pietas*, going accord with the well-known contractual and political character that Roman religion had.¹⁰ Other common explanations have been those of expressions of loyalty of the Roman soldiers and magistrates in the province, and even the identification of Jupiter with some of the so-called provincial “tutelary divinities”.¹¹ Today, the countless variations of *interpretatio antiqua* (*romana, greaca, celtica...*) expressed through epithets, iconography and ritual forms mean that the phenomenon has also been interpreted in terms of religious syncretism, so that its flexible nature for *interpretatio romana* would also explain the popularity of Jupiter.¹² However, Fears, in emphasizing the three main aspects of the cult – the military one, that of the imperial cult, and that of the imperial ideology –, also pointed out that the public and more ideological aspect of the cult exposed by the imperial and local authorities was overshadowed by the most significant part of materiality: its private worship. Therefore, for him, “religious feeling and patriotism are not mutually exclusive”.¹³

New trends in the historiography of Roman religious studies focus primarily on atomising religious experience. Following these trends, this study proposes an approach

⁴ Ov, *Fast.*, II, 684: *Romanae spatium est urbis et orbis idem*.

⁵ Turcan 1996, 17.

⁶ Plin. *Pan.*, 2, 3; 52, 2.

⁷ Plin. *Pan.*, 80, 4. The Senate proclaimed Trajan as *maximus optimus princeps*. His title of *optimus princeps* referred to the expansive character of his foreign policy, in addition to issues related to his civic image and the moderate way of exercising power in compliance with the principle of *leges super principem*. From this perspective, *optimus*, although it refers to the civic character of the ruler, is also the result of the accumulation of titles such as military leader and conqueror. That is why he only accepted it after having obtained the others. This was intended to present their military successes as a means to reach peace and carry out an evergetic policy based on *alimenta*, integrating the military and the civic aspects. On the other hand, *optimus* expressed a special relationship with divinity, since together with *maximus* was the epithet of Jupiter, who chose him as the best *cives* to exercise imperial power. In addition, *optimus* resembles *maximus*, superlative of *magnus*, which was the Latin epithet of Alexander, so that Trajan, by assuming the Alexandrian model, strengthened his charismatic image of *cosmocrator* in relation to the Roman *oikumene*, which reached its maximum extent during his rule. See Hidalgo de la Vega 1995, 115–116; Hidalgo de la Vega 1999, 73–84; Hidalgo de la Vega 2008, 47–62; Carbó García, Hidalgo de la Vega 2008, 63–86.

⁸ In Africa, Jupiter gives Saturn the place as the most popular god. In this regard, see Le Glay 1966.

⁹ Bărbulescu 1985, 21–38; Bărbulescu 1984, 130 ss.; Bodor 1989, 1082–1091; Nemeti 2005, 219–224.

¹⁰ Bărbulescu 1984, 131; Bărbulescu 1985, 37; Nemeti 2005, 223.

¹¹ Still in recent times, Piso 2010, 269–278.

¹² Fears 1981, 104–105; Nemeti 2005, 223–224. About the *interpretatio* of the divinities in relation to the processes of resistance and integration in the Empire, see Marco Simón 1996, 217–238. On the very notion of *interpretatio* and the problems it raises, see Bonnet 2013, 43.

¹³ Fears 1981, 100–101.

to the different forms of religious experiences in natural environments through the specific case of the places of manifestation of Jupiter as a celestial lord, god of lightning and thunder. In other words: where the lightning strikes.

We will be able to detect, then, that the essential part of the study is focused on the role of the sacralisation of space, from the *LAR* perspective (“Lived Ancient Religion”), emerged from the research group of the University of Erfurt led by Jörj Rüpke.¹⁴ Key theoretical notions such as “sacralisation of space”, “religious appropriation”, “religious individualization”, “group identities” and “strategies for the maintenance of religious communication” are some of those introduced in this new *LAR* school.¹⁵ The “sacralisation of space” would be defined as a spatial strategy of religious communication between humans and superhuman divine agents.

When we talk about storms, thunder, and lightning, we place ourselves in the framework of the natural environment, a modern concept that did not even exist in Roman times.¹⁶ As elements of this natural celestial environment, the meteorological manifestations of the storms played the role of agents in religious communication and in the sacralisation of space, contributing to the intensification of religious communication by their mere presence. In addition, from the moment these natural elements were integrated into religious communication, the spaces were transformed.

Lightning was considered the most outstanding sign of the *numen adest*, the presence and intervention of the god, his most common personification, but undoubtedly also the most extraordinary one. The Romans differentiated between night stormy phenomena and lightning, which they attributed to the god Summanus, and those others, more frequent, that occurred during the day, usually at sunset or at the arrival of twilight, which were attributed to Jupiter Fulgurator (Fulminator).¹⁷

Palisades surrounded the places reached by the lightning and the area closest to them, so that they were not desecrated by passing over them unconsciously. They became inviolable places¹⁸ and the lightning – or rather the remains they had left – were buried in a small mound of earth. Any remnants and the scorched earth were to be burned in a hole at the site of the lightning strike, by the priests. Anyone killed by lightning had to be buried where lightning struck, as opposed to traditional cremation. It was considered a sacrilege to walk on that point: you could not pass by, or even look at it after finished.¹⁹ Thus, in most cases, the areas hit by lightning were subject to a prompt transformation into sacralised spaces protected by law.²⁰

As part of the religious rituals that were developed for that transformation into a sacralised space, a monument was then erected, a *bidental*, and the priests who officiated ceremonies or atonements in these places were called *bidentales*,²¹ a name derived from the 2-year-old sheep (*bidens*) that usually the *haruspices* sacrificed in that place. The

¹⁴ European project *Lived Ancient Religion; Questioning “cults” and “polis religion”* of the University of Erfurt, within the framework of the research group “Religious individualization in historical perspective”.

¹⁵ Csaba Szabó has been the researcher who first introduced these notions in the studies on religion in Roman Dacia, but they have yet to gradually make their way into the Romanian literature of the specialty. See especially Szabó 2018.

¹⁶ Scheid 2015, 305.

¹⁷ Plin. *Nat. Hist.*, II. 53; II. 138. Festus 75 M, 66 L; 227 M, 254 L.

¹⁸ Festus 92 M, 82 L: *Fulguratum, id quod est fulmine ictum, qui focus statim fieri putabatur religiosus, quod eum deus sibi dicasse videretur.*

¹⁹ Plin. *Nat. Hist.*, II. 145.

²⁰ Szabó 2018, 40.

²¹ Sometimes, because of the similarity of the structure to the mouth of a well, it was called *puteal*, as in the case of the *puteal Libonis* or *Scribonianum*, at the eastern end of the Roman Forum (Hor. *Ep.* 1.19, 18; *Sat.* 2.6, 35; *Pers.* 4.49), and the other one in the *Comitium* (Cic., *de Div.* 1.1. 7; *Liv.* 1.36, &c.).

sacralisation of the place itself was an activity of a legal nature. As such it was carried out by the augurs or other religious authorities, and it was confirmed by the other religious activities: the already mentioned sacrifice, the formation of a special installation to preserve the memory of the *prodigium* or the burial of a statue or a votive deposit.

Throughout the Roman Empire, more than 70 inscriptions are known that mention the *prodigium*,²² whose shortest and most common formula is that of *fulgur conditum*, although there are variants, such as *dium (diuum) fulgur conditum*, *fulgur diuom conditum* or *louium fulgur*.²³ Similarly, in the most common dedications, Jupiter was associated with lightning through the denominations of *Iuppiter fulgur*, *Iuppiter fulmen* or *Iuppiter fulgur fulmen*, and epithets such as *fulgurator*, *fulgerator*,²⁴ *fulguralis*, *fulminalis* or *fulminator* can be found.²⁵ The problem is that very few of these inscriptions have an attested archaeological context, which makes it difficult to study more deeply the transformations in sacralised spaces.

In the case of Dacia, we only find five inscriptions that mention Jupiter Fulgurator,²⁶ of which only two have a documented context about the place of its discovery, probably outside the strictly urban environment. They are, obviously, the ones that may have the greatest interest to be able to carry out a study of the spatial strategy of religious communication between humans and superhuman divine agents.²⁷

The first of these two inscriptions, from Apulum, is the only one known in Dacia to date that mentions the *fulgur conditum*.²⁸ In it, the name of the worshipper does not appear, although Jupiter Fulgurator is explicitly mentioned as the object of the dedication and, therefore, he is pointed out as the god who manifests himself in the form of a lightning bolt, the divine agency. What is also intended to be highlighted in the text is the ritual aspect, the fact that the lightning has been buried in the place where it fell.

The small altar was found in an area located outside the walls of the Municipium Septimium Apulense, which had been contaminated by subsequent interactions and in which, unfortunately, it has not been possible to attest or document the presence of a *bidental*. In any case, the importance of this testimony, unique in the province on this mode of sacralisation of space, remains.

As far as the very ritual used in that spatial strategy of religious communication between humans and the superhuman divine agent is concerned, we can think that a priest of Apulum – whose name is not collected – acting as a *bidental* – an augur, an haruspex... – had to be in charge of marking the place where the *prodigium* of divine intervention had

²² See the Claus-Slaby Database.

²³ See Piso, Drîmbărean 1999, 109–110.

²⁴ This form being a variant of the previous one, also attested in the epigraphic register (CIL VI 377 = ILS 3051: *aram loui fulgeratoris* [sic]) and in monetal issues of the time of Claudius II (RIC V/1, p. 215, n° 51: *loui fulgerat(ori)*), Diocletian (RIC V/2, p. 237, n° 167–168: *loui fulgeratoris*) or Maximianus (RIC V/2, 278, n° 510–51 O a; p. 280, n° 522: *loui fulgeratoris*).

²⁵ Piso, Drîmbărean 1999, 110, with examples.

²⁶ AE 1910, 132 (Potaissa): *I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) F(ulguratori) / P(ublius) Ael(ius) Ma- / ximia- / nus augu(r) / Col(oniae) v(otum) s(olvit)*; IDR III/5, 705 (Apulum): *I(ovi) / Fulgera(tori) / h(ic) fulg(ur) cond(itum)*; IDR III/5, 216 (Apulum): *I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / divo ful[gu-] / rali sacrum / Iuliano et Cris- / pino co(n)s(ulibus) [---] / [----] / co(n)s(ularis)*; IDR III/2, 249 (Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa): *I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / [F]u[lg]ur[a]tor[i] pro / salute sua et su- / orum M(arcus) A[u]r(elius) De- / coratus dec(urio) / col(oniae) Aeq(ui) flam(en) / aedil(is) et M(arcus) Aur(elius) [P]hili- / ppi[a]nus de[c(urio)] col(oniae) / A[e]q(ui) quaes(tor) [---] / v(otum) s(olverunt) l(ibentes) m(erito) / Perpetuo et / Corneliano / co(n)s(ulibus) VIII Idus / Iunias; CIL III 821 (Napoca?): *I(ovi) Fulg(uratori) / pro salute dd(ominorum) nn(ostrorum) [[[---]]] / [[[-----]]] / [[[---]]] Augu- / storum c(o)ho(rs) / prima Britta- / n(n)ica / (milliaria) / v(otum) l(ibens) p(osuit)*.*

²⁷ An approach that has already been made by Szabó 2018, 41.

²⁸ IDR III/5, 705.

happened. This could be deduced from the other inscription, from Potaissa, for which we have a documented context.²⁹

In this second inscription,³⁰ dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus Fulgurator, the name of the worshipper does appear: Publius Aelius Maximianus is precisely an augur of the colony. Regarding the context of its discovery in Turda, István Téglás points out that it was found accidentally by some peasants who worked in a crop field and who took it from its location. And, right after that, the place was struck by lightning. Residents told Téglás that there were frequent lightning strikes during storms in that area. As Szabó points out, echoing the curious anecdote collected by Téglás, it would be “a particularly interesting example for the continuity of religious memory bridging ages and religious transformations”.³¹

When it comes to maintaining the spatial memory of the *prodigium*, for this case we could affirm that the ancient Roman religious traditions and laws, like memory, played a role perhaps more important than that of epiphanies, religious experiences or narratives by groups or individuals, which have usually given rise to most sacralised spaces.³² But what would happen to the *prodigia* we are analyzing – storms, lightning and thunder – when there was no record of the specific place where, for example, lightning had struck? If this particular *prodigium* had been of special importance, could it not be the case that, when establishing the strategy of religious communication, instead of a sacralisation of space – because it is unknown – to maintain the spatial memory of the *prodigium*, what occurred instead was a sacralisation of the moment, to then maintain the temporal memory of the *prodigium*? And that this could be done elsewhere, in a different space?

Not only where the lightning strikes, but when that intervention of the gods happens.

When it comes to valuing divine agency, the most important thing – or the only possible thing, in some cases – is not the sacralization of space to maintain the spatial memory of the *prodigium*, but to maintain the temporal memory of it, turning it into *prodigia publica*.

At what point did the intervention of the gods take place? And in the case at hand, at what point did Jupiter manifest himself through its lightning and thunder?

In this sense, we continue to find ourselves in the field of epiphanies, an extensive and relevant aspect of religious experience with special significance. They represent direct and intense contacts with the divine presence, in which both divine agency and human agency are equally present.³³ Its temporal aspect, emphasizing the “now” and the immediate, produces an intensification of the sensory and cognitive aspects of religious experiences among which would be the direct interventions of the gods, such as lightning.

And precisely as an epiphany or example of *prodigia publica*, Csaba Szabó raises the divine intervention on the occasion of the Marcomanic Wars of Marcus Aurelius and the so-called “rain miracle”, when an Egyptian magician, named Arnuphis, evoked this miracle with the intervention of the god Hermes-Thot. But in the official Roman religious discourse, divine interventions came from Jupiter, as supreme god and guarantor of the emperor.³⁴ The storm not only saved the Romans, but caused the defeat of the enemies, struck by lightning, and drowned under torrents of water. In this divine epiphany, the presence of a charismatic religious leader (the magician Arnuphis or the emperor himself, in his

²⁹ Szabó 2018, 41.

³⁰ AE 1910, 132.

³¹ Téglás 1909, 161–162; cited by Szabó 2018, 41.

³² Cusumano, Gasparini, Rüpke, Mastrocinque 2013, 135–137.

³³ Today, the definition of “epiphany” continues to raise a terminological problem and a historiographical question. In this regard, Georgia Petridou defines it as a “manifestation of a deity to an individual or a group of people in sleep or in a waking reality, in a crisis or cult context”. Petridou 2015, 2. See also Lipka 2022.

³⁴ Szabó 2022, 171.

capacity as *pontifex maximus*) was as important as the intervention of a powerful divine agency, be it Hermes-Thot, Jupiter or even Christ.³⁵ The collective religious experience and long-lasting impact of the *prodigium* legitimized its transformation into a celebrated public miracle (*prodigia publica*), so that, naturally, it was immediately chosen as one of the most iconic visual narratives of the Column of Marcus Aurelius in Rome (Scene XI). It is curious, however, that Szabó then speaks of the sacralisation of the places where lightning strikes and does not refer to a second miracle at the same time, merged with the previous one, which is also reflected in the same scene of the Column of Marcus Aurelius, collected by the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*: lightning would have burned the military machines of the enemy, following the emperor's prayer.³⁶ Jupiter Fulgurator, then?

From column to column, let us now analyze another example directly related to the Roman presence in Dacia, at the time of the wars of conquest, and where – here without possible adjudication of divine intervention to another different god – we see Jupiter intervening in favor of the Roman side. I refer, of course, to scene XXIV of Trajan's Column, in Rome, which illustrates the battle of Tapae with the XXV, probably in July 101 AD.

In this scene we can see an image of Jupiter, usually considered as *tonans*, in the act of throwing lightning on the Dacians – *fulgurator*, then? –, and thus, supporting the Roman soldiers in battle. Certainly, it is possible that the weather conditions changed when a sudden storm broke out and that they not only hindered the movements of the Dacian defenders, but even affected the morale of part of their forces, which would have conditioned the result of the violent and bloody encounter, which resulted in a Roman victory and the retreat of the Dacian army to the east.³⁷

But the image has been interpreted in various non-exclusive ways: first, that during the battle of Tapae a storm took place and, in some way, it favored the Roman victory;³⁸ on the other hand, that official Roman propaganda attributed the victory, obtained under stable climatic conditions, to the intervention of Jupiter, representing their supreme divinity fighting alongside the Romans;³⁹ or, thirdly, that both previous possibilities are complementary.⁴⁰ Following this third interpretation, if a sudden storm helped the Romans to force the Dacians and their allies to retreat, this meteorological phenomenon, interpreted as a favorable divine intervention, would have been subject to a sacralisation to maintain the temporal memory of the *prodigium*. And this would have been done elsewhere and in a different space – Rome, Trajan's Forum, and the Column – thus turning it into *prodigia publica* and including it within the entire propaganda apparatus of Trajan in the *Urbs* related to the Dacian Wars. As an epiphany, it would be an almost identical case to the one already mentioned of the Column of Marcus Aurelius and the “miracle of rain”.

However, there is something significantly different for historians which has caused precisely diverse interpretations about the scene with the intervention of Jupiter, the only one of the *dii consentes* represented in the Column: apart from the image, the written sources available to us make no mention of a possible storm. Thus, Cassius Dio states that:

When Trajan in his campaign against the Dacians had drawn near Tapae, where the barbarians were encamped, a large mushroom was brought to him on which was written in Latin characters a message to the effect that the Buri and other allies advised

³⁵ Later Christian tradition states that miraculous rain fell because of the prayers of Roman Christian soldiers. However, according to Tertullian (*Ad Scapulam*, 4), many people regarded Jupiter as the author of the miracle of rain..

³⁶ SHA, *M. Ant. Phil.*, 24, 4: *fulmen de caelo precibus suis contra hostium machinamentum extorsit*.

³⁷ Soria Molina 2016, 232 (including all previous bibliography).

³⁸ Stefan 2005, 555.

³⁹ Depeyrot 2008, 40; Pogorzelski 2012, 48; Oltean 2015, 89.

⁴⁰ Lepper, Frere 1988, 71.

Trajan to turn back and keep the peace. Nevertheless, he engaged the foe, and saw many wounded on his own side and killed many of the enemy. And when the bandages gave out, he is said not to have spared even his own clothing, but to have cut it up into strips. In honour of the soldiers who had died in the battle he ordered an altar to be erected and funeral rites to be performed annually.⁴¹

The absence of direct mention of the storm, rain or lightning has led to consider the issue only as a possibility, and even to dismiss the idea of adverse weather conditions as something “unlikely”, considering that abundant rain would have turned the battlefield into an impracticable quagmire for both armies – ignoring then that this is precisely what happens in the story of the “miracle of rain” in the Column of Marcus Aurelius and in the written sources –.⁴²

But a careful reading of Cassius Dio’s passage could perhaps give us another perspective: the mention of the message sent by the Buri and other Dacian allies to Trajan to urge him to retreat is a very strange case, not because of the message itself, but because of its surprising and unusual support, a huge mushroom (μύκης μέγας). What could be the reason for its use instead of a more normal support? Apparently, it is an umbrella mushroom or basidiomycete. Although Cassius Dio writes in Greek, the message is written in Latin, but it is tremendously unlikely that, even knowing how to write in Latin, the allies of the Dacians could have known the figurative senses of the Latin word fungus, such as “imbecile”, “stupid” or “fool”, senses used very often by Horace, for example. So, the great mushroom used as a message carrier is just that: a great mushroom.

Frankly, it is very easy to get into the situation described by Cassius Dio, especially for those who have experienced a stormy summer phenomenon in the Transylvanian region⁴³: the Dacians and their allies are settled in their defensive positions when the Romans arrive and prepare for battle, and then, the sky suddenly darkens, begins to thunder and it is even possible that it will begin to rain. And then, they send a message to Trajan to urge him to retreat, because in such conditions it will be difficult to present battle, and they do it by mocking the emperor, writing the message in a huge mushroom... Honestly, is it possible to visualize the scene with that great mushroom, and not capture the sense of “umbrella”, so that the emperor, and therefore all the Romans, seek shelter from the rain and retreat, as they tell them in the written message?

But, for the Romans, the imminence of the storm can only be indicative of the intervention of Jupiter Optimus Maximus himself: Jupiter *tonans*, when the thunder begins; Jupiter *fulgurator*, when lightning strikes. Trajan, as *pontifex maximus*, interprets the epiphany that he himself and all his men are living. The Romans attack, morale high, and after intense and bloody combat, the Dacians and their allies retreat. As in the case of the “rain miracle” in the Column of Marcus Aurelius, the storm not only helped the Romans, but caused the defeat of the enemies, struck by lightning and their defenses perhaps dismantled

⁴¹ Cassius Dio, LXVIII, 8. 1–2: στρατεύσαντι δὲ τῷ Τραϊανῷ κατὰ τῶν Δακῶν καὶ ταῖς Τάπαις, ἔνθα ἐστρατοπέδευον οἱ βάρβαροι, πλησιάσαντι μύκης μέγας προσεκομίσθη, γράμμασι Λατίνοις λέγων ὅτι ἄλλοι τε τῶν συμμάχων καὶ Βοῦροι παραινοῦσι Τραϊανῷ ὀπίσω ἀπιέναι καὶ εἰρηνῆσαι. συμβαλὼν δὲ αὐτοῖς ὁ Τραϊανὸς πολλοὺς μὲν τῶν οἰκείων τραυματίας ἐπέϊδε, πολλοὺς δὲ τῶν πολεμίων ἀπέκτεινεν: ὅτε καὶ ἐπιλιπόντων τῶν ἐπιδέσμων οὐδὲ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἐσθῆτος λέγεται φείσασθαι, ἀλλ’ ἐς τὰ λαμπάδια ταύτην κατατεμεῖν, τοῖς δὲ τελευτήσασι τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἐν τῇ μάχῃ βωμόν τε στήσαι καὶ κατ’ ἔτος ἐναγίζειν κελεῦσαι.

⁴² Soria Molina 2016, 232, n. 954.

⁴³ An experience that I was able to live in person several times at the end of the spring of 2007, in Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu, Alba Iulia and Hunedoara – very close to the place where the battle should have taken place – and that, due to the suddenness of the phenomena, the impressive appearance of the sky on each occasion and the violence of the storms, I certainly remember as something overwhelming.

under torrents of water, which would have raised even the level of the Mureş River. In this divine epiphany, the presence of the charismatic religious leader, the emperor himself, in his capacity as *pontifex maximus*, is as important as the intervention of the powerful divine agency, Jupiter Optimus Maximus. The collective religious experience on the part of the Roman army and the long-lasting impact of the *prodigium* legitimized in the same way its transformation into a celebrated public miracle (*prodigia publica*). Thus, as Marcus Aurelius would do later, it was chosen to appear in Trajan's Column in Rome, in the scenes depicting the battle of *Tapae*.

In conclusion, either with the sacralisation of the concrete space in which the phenomenon of lightning strike happened, to maintain the spatial memory of the *prodigium*, or with the conversion into *prodigia publica* of a collective religious experience of the intervention of a powerful divine agency and in which a charismatic religious leader is present, the examination of these examples should contribute to a deeper knowledge of religious experiences in Roman Dacia around epiphanies related to the direct intervention of the gods.

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Juan Ramón CARBÓ GARCÍA

Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia

email: jrcarbo@ucam.edu



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Pl. I.1. Altar dedicated to Jupiter Fulgurator (Apulum, IDR III/5, 705; photo from Szabó 2018);
2. Detail from the Column of Marcus Aurelius, scene XI, the “rain miracle”
(Wikicommons. Open access).



Pl. II. Detail from Trajan's Column, scene XXIV, *Jupiter tonans* (Wikicommons. Open access).