

M. BĂRBULESCU, *POTAISSA: L'ARTE ROMANA IN UNA CITTÀ DELLA DACIA* (Studia Archaeologica 211). Rome: 'L'Erma' di Bretschneider, 2016. Pp. 342, illus. ISBN 9788891311146. €200.00.

M. BĂRBULESCU, *ARTA ROMANĂ LA POTAISSA*. Cluj-Napoca: Editura Mega / Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2015. Pp. 308, illus. ISBN 9786065436121/9789732725627. 79.99 LEI.

How do we define provincial art? How do we analyse and interpret art works from a city in Dacia? How many categories of objects are to be related to this subject? How generous was archaeology with the patience of a researcher who for more than forty-five years explored the same site?

The volume under review is the Italian translation of Mihai Bărbulescu, *Arta romană la Potaissa*, first published in Romanian in 2015. The translation comes with the helpful addition of an index. The book is divided into five chapters: I. 'La città e la gente' (19–48); II. 'Categorie artistiche' (49–222); III. 'Artigiani e officine' (223–38); IV. 'L'arte romana a Potaissa' (239–60); V. 'Il destino dei monumenti d'arte di Potaissa' (261–94). It is generously illustrated with 445 figures, some in colour.

In the first part of the work, B. surveys the history of Potaissa (modern Turda, in Cluj, Romania) from the conquest of Dacia until the third century. This is a very useful introduction to the topography of the city, including the possible location of the forum and other important areas, such as pottery-producing *fabricae* and a mason's workshop. B. also discusses the population of Potaissa, which he estimates at around 20,000 inhabitants, including 5,500 soldiers from Legion V Macedonica, garrisoned here after A.D. 168.

In ch. 2, B. describes numerous objects, some from the legionary fortress, some from the town, others from local antiquarian collections. The individual items are presented in a separate catalogue (with bibliography) at the end of the book. Objects in stone are treated first, with some noteworthy religious, funerary or decorative statues: a head of Serapis discovered in the fortress baths (52, figs 9–14); a fragmentary Hercules (Farnese type) (54, figs 16–18). B. also discusses to what extent funerary monuments might be considered to offer portraits of the deceased. He notes instances of monuments with inscriptions which refer to a different number of persons, or a different sex, to those portrayed. Here the text is clearly primary. Indeed, B. observed that the greater the number of persons commemorated in the inscription, the more distant the relationship with the sculpted images on the funerary monument.

Among the bronze statues in the catalogue, the most beautiful are those representing Jupiter (a small bronze discovered in the legionary fortress, height 15.8 cm) (128–9, figs 145–9), Mars (height 23 cm) (116–19, figs 118–21), Venus (121, figs 125–7), and a Dionysus (124, figs 133–5). All these are imported objects, which arrived in Potaissa together with the soldiers or other inhabitants. Another interesting piece (also from the fortress) is a so-called *pondus examinatus* — a standard weight (164, figs 241–2).

In ch. 3, B. deals with workshops and artisans. He rightly notes that the art of the imperial period is anonymous: sculpture, with only rare exceptions, is not signed. In Potaissa there is not a single epigraphic text to indicate how the sculptors, stone-workers or other artisans described their occupation. The majority of the monuments are worked in chalk, extracted from the nearby village of Săndulești. Sculptures in marble are rare, no doubt due to the lack of resources in the vicinity. In ch. 4, B. analyses the importance of art in Potaissa. The chapter begins with an interesting debate on the concept of 'provincial art' — a term favoured by the art historian R. Bianchi Bandinelli (223). B. suggests a convenient tri-partite division of art in Potaissa: (i) exceptional (imported); (ii) local production; (iii) small-scale works.

What happened to these monuments after A.D. 271 and the abandonment of Dacia? As B. discusses in ch. 5, the sculpted stone was often re-used (some during Roman times, others after). The same happened to metal objects. Funerary monuments and inscriptions were re-used as construction materials for a thirteenth-century church in Luncani, a village close to Turda. Analysing the medieval documents, B. concludes that the perimeter wall of the fortress was no longer standing by the end of the sixteenth century. Only the gates were still visible. The chapter ends with a description of some of the local collections owned by well-known Hungarian antiquarians (Kemény József, Botár Imre, Téglás István).

The work is erudite. The information is dense, but clear — detailed but readable. On the other hand, B. is cautious and balanced in his approach. In sum, the book represents an important contribution for all those interested in Roman provincial art and how it should be both presented and understood.