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**Der Stifter
und sein Monument
Gesellschaft – Ikonographie – Chronologie
14. bis 20. Juni 2017
Graz / Austria**

Barbara Porod – Peter Scherrer (Hrsg.)



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Sculptures of the Imperial Cult in Salona

Jasna JELIČIĆ RADONIĆ – Ana TORLAK

At the end of the first century CE, and simultaneously with the pacification of the province of *Dalmatia*, the imperial cult was established at Salona, the capital of the Roman province. The imperial cult can be traced from the Augustan period, when two small temples were built at the *forum* of the *Urbs vetus*, to the Tetrarchy period, when the Temple of Jupiter was renewed in the *forum* of *Urbs orientalis*. This can be confirmed not only by the imperial statues but also by other findings, remains of temples and architectural decoration and dedicatory inscriptions. A statue of an unknown naked emperor from the second half of the second century CE could be added to these monuments. This statue, which is kept at the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* at Vienna,¹ has not been recorded in the literature. It could give us a better insight into Salonitan heritage and contribute to the knowledge about imperial cult in Salona.

Considering how little the capital, particularly the oldest part of the city, *Urbs vetus*, has been investigated, there are numerous traces of the imperial cult in Salona. When the *forum* in the Southern part of the city was revealed, elements of the cult's substance and individual developmental phases were seen.

The first layout of the Salonitan *forum* known to date is that from the time of Augustus. At that time, twin temples on high *podia* dominated it on the North. A marble sculpture of Augustus in armour, of very good quality, from bronze models, derives from this context. The beginnings of the imperial cult and imperial propaganda arrived after the pacification of the province, and are marked by the building of temples and the positioning of imperial statues on the *forum*.²

In addition to the sculpture of Emperor Augustus, there was probably another of Tiberius, the real general in the *Bellum Batonianum*, as well as members of the imperial family, as can be seen from the sculptures of the boys Nero and Drusus Caesar.³

Moreover, there can be no doubt regarding the cult of Diva Augusta Livia, whom Emperor Claudius had deified, and the marble head of this empress (?), probably originates from that time.⁴

The inscription of the freedman and priest of the imperial cult of Herma (CIL III 1947), the construction of the portico in honour of Jupiter and the divine Claudius, and the imperial cult was clearly connected with the supreme deity.⁵

There are modest clues as to the existence of the cult of the Flavian dynasty in Salona, an inscription of Titus and a marble sculpture of Domitian, rulers who, when they assumed power, endeavoured to emphasize continuity with the houses of the Julians and Claudians precisely through the renovation of the official shrines.⁶ Emperor Vespasian, in particular, was well known for the construction of new imperial shrines, such as the monumental version on two terraces in Tarragona, or the renovation of existing buildings. This is confirmed by examples in many cities along the Croatian Adriatic coast, and perhaps it was in this context that the Augusteum in Narona was laid out, also on two levels or terraces, to which the dedicatory inscription *refecit* probably refers.⁷

The first period of the observance of the imperial cult commenced in its totality with the official deification of Augustus, marked by groups of sculptures of the emperors and members of the imperial families in the temples or in various shrines, and ended with Emperor Trajan. In Salona a bust of him was found that marks the celebration of his tenth year of rule, which rather belongs to the ordinary kind of imperial propaganda, and not to cult buildings. Unfortunately, the only slightly investigated oldest *nucleus* of Salona, the *forum* with the buildings for the cult and for government, are known only in basic outlines. Hence, it is not possible to follow the whole development of Salonitan imperial cult.⁸



fig. 1
Marble sculpture of
Augustus from
Salona (after Poch-
marski 2009).



fig. 2
Marble sculpture of
Nero Caesar and
Drusus Caesar from
Salona (after Cambi
2005).

Changes occurring at a later date in the Roman Empire, particularly in the manner of assuming or inheriting imperial power, are reflected in the observance of the cult. A certain element of the imperial cult from the Antonine era is the pedestal of a sculpture of Empress Faustina, re-used in the construction of a bell tower in Split, although the original location cannot be determined. However, because of the enlargement of the city when the Eastern and Western suburbs were enclosed by new walls in the time of Marcus Aurelius, it can be assumed that there was a cult of this charismatic emperor and his wife Faustina.⁹ In the new Eastern part of the city, the *Urbs orientalis*, a new government centre, a *forum*, was founded, and

a temple of Jupiter was built, elements of which have been found incorporated into the embankment of the main side channel of the river.¹⁰

The best known Salonitan sculpture of Empress Plautilla, in two versions, tells of the observance of the imperial cult in the time of the Severans, while the most recent finding of a pedestal for a sculpture of Empress Prisca confirms the existence of the cult in the time of Diocletian, particularly connected with Salona.¹¹

The base for the sculpture of Empress Prisca recently found in Salona is clear evidence of the cult of the imperial family of Diocletian in the capital of the province of *Dalmatia* as well. The dedicatory inscription of Aurelia Prisca as *nobilissima femina* found in the context of the *spolia* of the Antique temple consecrated to Jupiter shows that her sculpture must have been placed in this temple, and accordingly, a sculpture of Diocletian and those of other members of the imperial family as well. Perhaps there was a portrait of their daughter, Galeria Valeria, to whom the still uncertainly identified portraits of the empresses found in Salona are ascribed. It is clear that this temple housed the cult of the imperial family until the era of the Tetrarchs.¹²

The era of the Tetrarchs was the last period of the imperial cult in Salona, as far as we know, the development of which can be traced from the very beginnings through to the Tetrarchy.

Adding to this short review of Salonitan sculptures of the imperial cult, a marble statue found in Salona in the early nineteenth century and kept in the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* at Vienna can usefully be adduced, not having yet been published in the context of Salonitan monuments.

Confirmation of its provenance is provided in a personal letter addressed to Emperor Francis II (1768–1835) from Austrian Baron Francesco Maria Freiherr Carnea von Steffaneo (1751–1825), who was in service as the Emperor's representative in Istria, *Dalmatia* and Albania, from August 1797 to October 1798. A passionate art lover, he collected a number of ancient monuments from different parts of the province. He then took some of them to Vienna as a present to the Emperor and some of them to his estate in Tapogliano in Italy. In his letter to the Emperor dated September 26, 1801, Steffaneo states that he had found a monumental sculpture made of Parian marble four years earlier. Thanks to the documentation, which has been analysed, it is possible to reconstruct the sculpture's history for the first time. It seems that the Baron sent it from Split to Tapogliano and then via Aquileia to Trieste and finally to Vienna. Finally, the sculpture came into the possession of the *Kunsthistorisches Museum*.



fig. 3
Pedestal of a sculpture of Empress Faustina from Salona (from a bell tower in Split, after Jeličić Radonić 2007).



fig. 4
Pedestal for a sculpture of Empress Prisca (photo: J. Jeličić Radonić).

[...] It is my honour to present Your Majesty with a statue made of Parian marble which I found nearby Split, among the Salona ruins while I was returning from my journey through the Dalmatian Province four years ago. I transported it from Split to Tapogliano and packed it in order to transfer it to Aquileia and then over the sea to Trieste where I am going tomorrow to start the journey of my Commission. If Your Majesty likes this letter, it can be taken as a sign that after its arrival to Vienna, the statue was inspected by the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts and it is worthy of your approval. It seems to me that it is a work of art of Greek origin. The statue has been desecrated. However, it might be useful for the study of students of fine art.¹³

This is a life-size naked male statue, made of marble. However, the head, right arm and left foot, left forearm and left calf are missing. The statue shows a young man of strong and accentuated musculature in the heroic Greek mode. Although he is entirely nude, a *batleus* (leather strap), hangs over his right shoulder and across the chest; it held a *parazonium* (sword), which has not survived. Traces on the sculpture show that it was made of metal. From the left shoulder richly folded drapery falls down the upper arm, winds around the elbow of the bent arm and falls to the ground. A cuirass placed next to his right leg serves as a support for the statue. The armour, or the leather lining, is shown with leather bands on the shoulder and hips, ending in fringes. One row of jointed, short, round *ptyrges* is also shown. Since they are damaged, the motifs depicted are not clearly visible, but on two, a *gorgoneion* and a rosette can be seen.

From the first century BCE on, the depiction of dignitaries¹⁴ or, much less often, ordinary soldiers in heroic or divine nakedness was recorded in Rome.¹⁵ This tradition was to continue, in imperial times in the depiction of emperors and members of the imperial family in the form of deities. The classical Greek types representing gods or heroes were taken as models. The use of such prototypes was supposed to lend the emperor the characteristics of the given god or hero.¹⁶

From the times of the Antonines, private persons were also portrayed as gods, vividly illustrated by examples of the divine couple Mars and Venus.¹⁷

The Salonitan sculpture, however, probably shows one of the divinised emperors. Many emperors – Caligula, Domitian, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius – were depicted in the form of the naked Mars.¹⁸ However, the cuirass shown in profile, casually draped over the pillar against which the portrayed person leans, is characteristic of the Antonine period.¹⁹ There is evidence of the imperial cult in Salona during the Antonines in the scattered finds, such as parts of a temple, an altar of Jupiter and a marble sculpture of a votive character found in

the Eastern part of Salona – *Urbs orientalis* – and an inscription on the base of a statue of Empress Faustina taken out of the bell tower of Split Cathedral.²⁰ The Salonitan sculpture probably depicts an emperor from the Antonine period, when Salona was a large city, that included the Eastern and Western suburbs with the construction of new defensive walls.

The sculpture from Salona is especially valuable for studies of the cultural heritage of ancient Salona, the capital of the Roman province of *Dalmatia*. Over several centuries, monuments from Salona were bought and sold by local and foreign collectors. The common practice of taking sculptures from Salona to the Austrian capital and other trans-Adriatic cities was to be continued throughout the nineteenth century. All information regarding monuments that have been removed from Salona contributes to a better knowledge of the ancient city.



fig. 5
Torso of the Roman Emperor from Salona, *Kunsthistorisches Museum*, Vienna (photo archive KHM, Antikensammlung).

figs. 6 a,b
Marble sculptures
of Empress Plautilla
from Salona (after:
Cambi 2005).



Notes

1

I would like to thank to the director of the Collection of Antiquities at *Kunsthistorisches Museum*, Georg Plattner, for making it possible for me to see its content and his co-worker Ms Rupert Pichler for all the help she provided me with.

2

Schmid 1924, 45–53, tab. V; Stemmer 1978, 56–57, V 1; Cambi 2005, 29–30, fig. 31; Pochmarski 2009, 103–114; Maršić 2014, 7–30.

3

Cambi 1998, 45–58; Cambi 2005, 28–29, fig. 28–29.

4

Cambi 1998, 50, fig.13; Cambi 2005, 50–53, fig. 64–65.

5

CIL III 1947; Dyggve 1933/1991, 247; Suić 2003, 190.

6

Bulić 1897, 33; Cambi 2005, 64, fig. 91.

7

Gros 1996, 229–231; Mar – Pensabe 2002, 37–45; Marin 2002, 104–105; Marin 2003, 14.

8

Cambi 2005, 80, fig. 113.

9

Jeličić Radonić 2007, 49–61.

10

Jeličić Radonić 2009, 307–322 (323–333).

11

Cambi 2005, 95, figs. 168. 169; Jeličić Radonić 2008, 97, figs. 15. 16; Jeličić Radonić 2005–2007, 5–25.

12

Jeličić Radonić 2006, 43–54; Jeličić Radonić 2009, 307–322 (323–333).

13

HHSTA (Haus-, Hof- und Staat Archiv, Vienna), Nachlass Carnea Steffaneo, Karton 1, transl. J. Jeličić Radonić.

14

Such a tradition is confirmed by the depiction of the so-called Aquillian Navarca of the end of the first century BCE or the well known so-called Tivoli general, a portrait of a Roman military man discovered in the Temple of Hercules at Tivoli, from the middle of the first century BCE. For more see: Giovannini et al. 2012, 12; Kleiner 1992, 35. 12.

15

Kleiner 1992, 40–41, p. 22.

16

Such a principle was used from the early imperial period on, for example, in the case of Augustus, who was depicted as Diomedes, after a Greek original of the 5th century BC. Zanker, 2008, p. 73.

17

Such depictions might have been prompted by the imperial couple Marcus Aurelius and Faustina the Younger, who were celebrated as Mars and Venus. Attested by Cassius Dio (81.31), more in: Kleiner 1992, 280.

18

Salomon 1920, 572, pl. 934 (Caligula), 579, pl. 940 (Domitian) 585, pl. 950 (Marcus Aurelius); Wegner 1956., 46, 115; <http://www.lupa.at/monument.php?id=23931> (5.2.2018.)

19

Muthmann 1951, 63–65; Kleiner 1975, 262–263; Kleiner 1981, 538, fig. 9.

20

Cambi 2005, 95–97, p. 140, 141; Jeličić Radonić 2008., 83–104.; Jeličić Radonić 2016, 13.; Jeličić Radonić 2007, 49–61.

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