

THE BUILDING PROGRAMS OF THE ROMAN EMPERORS: MARCUS ULPUS TRAIANUS AND THE LOWER DANUBE – THE MONUMENTAL ARCHITECTURE OF THE ROMAN COLONIES OF OESCUS AND RATIARIA

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Since the late Roman Republic demonstrative public building works were an essential part of the manifestation of Roman nobleman. From Julius Caesar (46 BC) to Trajan (AD 113) in Rome follows a phenomenon of constant “competition” among rulers in the construction of more grandiose complexes. First under the Reign of Augustus, later during the Flavians, but mostly by the Emperor Traianus that competition in the construction programs of the Roman Caesars is transferred also to the provinces.

After the Dacian Wars (AD 101–106) in the region of lower Danubian provinces Trajan begins some of the largest construction activities. In that area were built several Roman colonies and individual monuments. Impressive as architectural models and decoration are ensembles of Sarmizegetusa, Ratiaria, Oescus and Adamclisi. They have very similar architectural and decorative patterns – mainly in the Corinthian order. For the realization of this new Roman imperial program are “harnessed” huge resources.

In the Roman colonies along the Lower Danube Trajan’s building programs are clearly visible – architectural decoration, town planning decisions, sacral areas, commemorative monuments and forum places. The main purpose of this presentation is to be certain analogies between colonies, towns and monuments that show the overall dimensions of this imperial building campaign, so typical for the Principate. One of the other main goals is to study the realization of the Trajan’s building projects in the region of Lower Danubian limes. In these less urbanized barbarian lands of Dacians and Thracians Emperor needs skilled stonemasons for the rapid implementation of his ideas. The work of Anatolian sculptors – sent by Trajan in Moesia and Dacia – could be explored perfectly in the first half of the II c. AD in Oescus, Ratiaria and Sarmizegetusa.

Key words: Lower Danube, Roman Limes, Roman Architecture

As early as the time of Gaius Julius Caesar (the 40s BC) the monumental building constructions demonstrating obviously political power were of pivotal importance for the Roman Caesars. Thus during the period from the late Roman Republic to the reign of Trajan (113 AD) rulers in Rome were trying all

the time to “outpace” one another in architectural achievements. New ever more majestic buildings, monuments and entire complexes were constructed. The building programs are most visible on the Imperial forums in Rome (Sear 2000: 49–68, fig. 27; Ward-Perkins 1994: 45–95).

During the reign of Octavian Augustus, later on during the time of the Flavians, and above all during the reign of Nerva and Marcus Ulpius Traianus the competing building develop as much as possible. Finally, this particular competition between Caesars rulers spread in the provinces too.

After one of the most strenuous and tough victories in the entire history of Rome – the Dacian Wars (101–106) – Trajan commemorated the triumph most appropriately. Several colonies and individual monuments were erected along the Lower Danube limes of the Roman Empire. The complexes of Sarmizegetusa, Ratiaria, Oescus and Tropaeum Traiani – Adamklissi, are unique in terms of architectural models and decoration.¹ There are many similar architectural decorative models in them – most of them in the Corinthian order (Ivanov & Ivanov 1998: 118–126, catalogue of the details; Dimitrov 2015: 566–568, pl. 3–5). Huge resources were geared into the implementation of this Roman imperial program.

Trajan's building programs are easy to identify in the Roman colonies along the Lower Danube – by the architectural decoration, the layout solutions of the sacral areas, the monuments and the forums.

The purpose of this study is to highlight the analogies between the individual colonies, which indicate the common features of this imperial development campaign so typical for the period of principate. One of the major lines of investigation is the implementation of Trajan's projects. Highly skilled stonemasons were in great demand for the fast implementation of the emperor's ideas in the poorly urbanized barbarian lands of the Dacian and Thracian people. The works of the Anatolian stonemasons – commissioned by Trajan in Moesia and Dacia – are perfectly recognizable during the first half of the 2nd century in Ulpia Oescus, Ulpia Ratiaria and Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa.

TRAJAN'S CONSTRUCTION WORKS IN ULPIA OESCUS

At present, a good deal of the public architectural complexes of the Roman colony can be analysed based on the intense archaeological excavations in the 1970s and 1980s of Professor Teofil Ivanov (Ivanov & Ivanov 1998: 92–188). Nearly the whole centre of Oescus was unearthed during these terrain studies.

The town planning solution of this section of the colony is by and large a replica of the architecture of the imperial forums in Rome. At the centre of Oescus there was a huge forum, flanked on all sides with porticoes in the Corinthian order. A civil basilica and three monumental temples were built north of the square – temples of the Capitoline Triad: Jupiter, Juno and Minerva (Fig. 1).

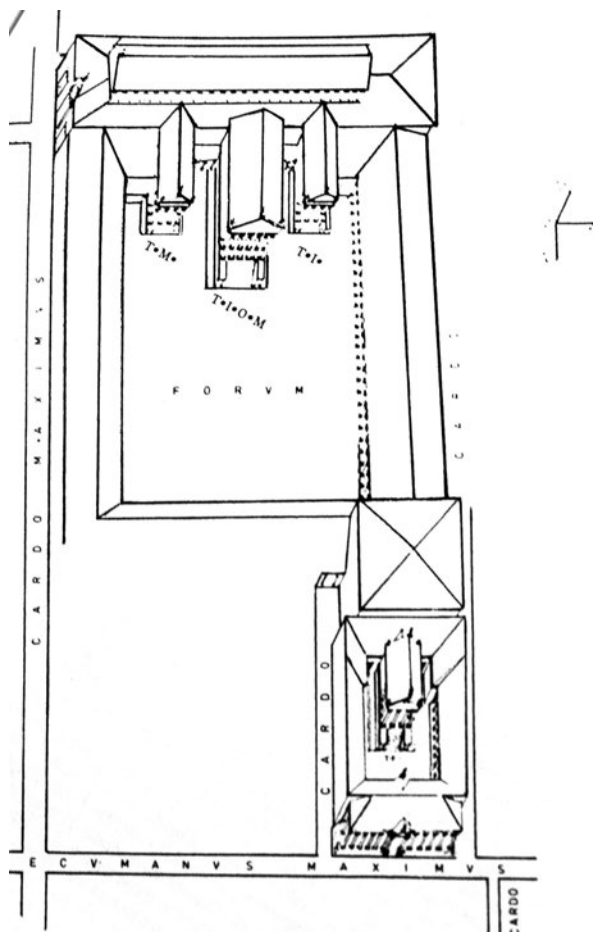


Figure 1. Graphic reconstruction of the forum complex of Ulpia Oescus (author: arch. Farkov).

Judging by its layout solution, the forum in Oescus must have been the most impressive city square in the new Roman provinces developed in the Thracian lands south of the Danube.

CORINTHIAN ORDER AT THE FORUM IN OESCUS

The capitals in the forum have a complete schema of decorative elements – i.e. they contain all the elements of the canonical version of Corinthian capitals. They contain two rows of acanthus leaves; they

¹ Studnizka 1904; Ivanov & Ivanov 1998: 96–118, fig. 75, 76, 103–104; Piso 2006; Kabakchieva 2014: 181–193; Matei–Popescu 2014: 205–223; Dimitrov 2015: 563–579, pl. 1–6.



Figure 2. Corinthian capital from the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus (author: Z. Dimitrov).

have volutes, helices, caulises and all the other elements (Fig. 2).

The models are typically Anatolian and the analogies are mainly in Pergamon (Rohmann 1998: 79–81, 133, Nr. 28–33, Taf. 45–47 (1–3)). It is not by chance that the scholars, examining the architectural decoration from the Roman period in Bulgaria, have

repeatedly identified this group of details as produced according to Anatolian samples, moreover by Anatolian team of stonemasons.

The temples of the Capitoline Triad, the focal point of the newly built colony of Trajan, contain the most celebrated examples of architectural decoration. And they are again in the Corinthian order – high base details, smooth columns, Corinthian capitals,



Figure 3. Frieze-architrave block with garland decoration from the forum in Oescus (author: Z. Dimitrov).

yet the peak of the sculptural achievements is in the friezes and pediments in these temple buildings.

The main idea of the triumphal Trajan architecture surfaces in the decoration of these three temples is in the model for the garland decoration (Fig. 3).

All the friezes in the porticoes surrounding the forum, as well as the temples themselves, are covered with endless, extravagant and elegant garland motifs. They are carried by two types of figures – bull's heads and figures of Eros (Ivanov & Ivanov 1998: fig. 71, 75, 86, 91–93).

The architectural garland decoration combined with bull's heads or figures of Eros in the frieze architraves of the buildings in the forum in Oescus, raises several questions, namely:

1. Why was decoration with bull's heads, Eros figures and garlands selected in all these cases? What does this type of ornamentation symbolize?
2. What is the chronology of the above groups of details – from the temples and from the porticoes at the forum?
3. Is there any relation between the decorative models in the individual groups?
4. Where are the prototypes and the direct analogies of the garland decoration; how did this interesting decorative model reach Oescus; how was it produced in Oescus?
5. What is the quality of the produced images? Does the decoration of numerous monumental buildings in Oescus lay the foundations of a strong tradition in the processing of stone details?

The analysis of the decorative limestone works on the frieze-architrave blocks from Oescus should first of all deal with the vast number of details decorated with bull's heads, figures of Eros and garlands. A total of over 50 monuments have already been localized (Dimitrov 2007: 184–204, kat. 260–321). According to studies of the forum complex this type of decoration in the frieze frames was found to be most popular in nearly all the complexes – in the peristyle of Fortuna, the peristyle porticoes of the area itself, temple of Juno (Fig. 3), and most probably of Minerva too, and finally in the small colonnades between the temples.

The main cult building of the temple of Jupiter was decorated with figures of Eros and garlands.

The second major problem in the analysis of the decorative motifs at the forum of Oescus has to do with the dating and the development of the individual groups of ornaments in the different buildings.

The central zone of the town started to be developed from the northern part of the forum, i.e. from the three temples of the Capitoline Triad. The comparison between the stylistic features of the frieze-architraves in the temple to Juno with the ones in the north-eastern and south-eastern parts of the forum indicates that the earliest monuments are in the north sector. According to the researcher Prof. T. Ivanov the three temples there were erected during the late Trajan and early Hadrian period (Ivanov & Ivanov 1998: 117–118).

The decoration with bull's heads and garlands in these buildings does not contradict the above conclusion. Certainly the frieze-architraves in the portico were produced a couple of years after the ones in the temple to Juno.

Of the three groups the earliest is the one on the façade of the temple to Juno. It was used as a model for the decoration of the porticoes at the forum and for the decoration of the small colonnades between the temples. They can be assumed to be synchronic with their prototype, as they must have been produced within ten years. With regard to the precise dating in the late Trajan time, I am inclined to agree with Prof. T. Ivanov, basically because of the model reproduced in the Ionic cymae in the blocks.

The fourth group of frieze-architraves with bull's heads, the group from the south-eastern section of the forum, was definitely produced during the reign of Hadrian.

The third major question with regard to the details with bull's heads and garlands from Oescus is whether there is any relation between the decorative models from the different groups.

The four groups from the forum temples and porticoes were produced according to the same model. This is the scheme of a true-to-life bull's head – the *boukephalion*.

Perhaps the key problem raised by the most numerous group ornamented with bull's heads and garlands from the Balkan Peninsula is about the prototypes, which were used and in about the way in which these decorative models reached and spread in Oescus? Where are the analogies of these monuments?

Architectural details with this type of decoration were also found in Ratiaria, in the temple to Bacchus (Atanasova & Gerasimova 1978: 21, Fig. 1, 2) and there are such details in the Museum in the town of Lom, where the original details were localized in the ancient Almus. There are finely carved bull's heads and garlands also on the well-known sarcophagi from Ratiaria – Fig. 4 (Filov 1910: 11, fig. 4; Dimitrov 2017: fig. 2–11).



Figure 4. Sarcophagus with garland decoration from Ratiaria – today in front of Regional Museum of History – Vidin (author: Z. Dimitrov).

The analogies are definitely to be found on architectural details from Asia Minor. The early prototypes of the decoration are from Magnesia on the Maeander from the Hellenistic period. Later on the model was reproduced in the Augustan architecture of Ephessos.

The decoration with bull's heads and garlands, used as a principal model in the temple of Juno in the early 2nd century, finds its direct prototype exactly on the altar slab in the temple of Domitian in Ephessos.

The garlands, as decorative motif, were widely used in Italy too. It's only fair to note that the decoration principles in the Roman period were largely borrowed from the tomb stones (predominantly sarcophagi) and especially altars.

To conclude this analysis, we have to point out that the prototype of the bull's heads from the forum in Oescus could be found in the early Hellenistic works. They were brought back to life, elaborated and enriched by masters from Asia Minor in the 1st – 2nd centuries AD. The main centres dictating the leading garland decoration schemes from the Roman period of Asia Minor are Ephessos, Pergamon and Miletus.

The last issue I shall dwell upon in the architraves with bull's head ornamentation from Oescus is their style of work. The works exhibit very advanced artistry. All the items were produced in raised relief combined with a detailed processing of each and every attribute on the bull's head, the garlands and the figures in the frames. There is even drill-work at some places in the floral ornamentation of the back sides. This is also an indication of advanced carving techniques, quite likely produced on the spot by travelling teams of Anatolian masters.

TRAJAN'S AND HADRAIN'S ARCHITECTURAL POLICIES IN RATIARIA

Five years ago our team started regular archaeological excavations at the other Roman colony along the Lower Danube from the reign of Trajan.

At present, after 25 years of looting, the situation at the archaeological site is quite complicated. We are not in a position to present the same data and archaeological finds from architectural complexes as in Oescus.

Nonetheless, during the recent campaigns several architectural details in the Corinthian order were found and preserved, evidencing beyond doubt that the same grand construction program was in place in Ratiaria during the reign of Trajan and especially during the reign of his successor Hadrian.

Several Corinthian capitals as high as 1.20 m were localized along with base details of the same architectural order (Dimitrov 2015: 571–579, pl. 3–4). One of the biggest pieces unearthed is a huge pediment block. Indisputably it is a detail from the uppermost part of the temple (Fig. 5). The pediment found in 2014 in Ratiaria is not the only one of its kind. Two more such monuments are kept in the Danubian Park in Vidin (Dimitrov 2015: 572, pl. 5–6).

All these architectural artefacts indicate overwhelmingly that the same development program, so typical of the Roman Caesars, was successfully implemented in the Roman colony of Ulpia Traiana Ratiaria, though perhaps a little later in time.



Figure 5. Pediment complex in the Archar village – from the temple in Ratiaria (author: Z. Dimitrov).

In 2015 two inscriptions with dedications from the Roman provincial governors, were uncovered in the temple of the goddess Diana.

We, as a team of archaeologists, examining the terrain of the Roman city, are convinced that during

the forthcoming excavations we shall be in a position to localize the remains of these early temples in Ratiaria dating to the reign of Trajan or at the latest to the time of the principate of his successor, Hadrian.

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