

THE PRESENCE OF THE *SISTRUM* IN THE BALKAN AND DANUBIAN PROVINCES OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

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Abstract

*This paper focuses on the sistrum, the well-known instrument strongly connected to what modern scholars define nowadays as Isis, found on multiple occasions during the Graeco-Roman period in the geographic area of the Danubian and Balkan regions. These include the realia as well as portrayals on a variety of archaeological finds, for instance: wall plaster, altars, rock-cut reliefs, funerary monuments, gems and so on. The main purpose of the paper is to offer a contextualization and subsequently, an interpretation of the finds discovered so far in the region mentioned above.**

Keywords: Roman religion – Isis – sistrum – Danubian-Balkan region.

Introduction

“Nam dextra quidem ferebat aereum crepitaculum, cuius per angustam lamminam in modum baltei recurvatam traiectae mediae paucae virgulae, crispante brachio trigeminus iactus, reddebant argutum sonorem.” (Apuleius, *Met.* XI. 4).

When Lucius shared his experience about the appearance of Isis in the *Metamorphoses*, he diligently described the goddess' *sistrum* held in her right arm. A series of iconographic evidence portrays this instrument in the Balkan and Danubian provinces, from Raetia, Dalmatia and Pannonia to Dacia, Moesia, Thrace or Macedonia. These pieces of evidence

* Dan Deac's work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2021-0165, within PNCDI III.

come in various forms: the instruments themselves, yet still more are representations of them in a variety of forms. This paper explores these items, advancing an answer on the importance the *sistrum* played in the Isiac cults along the Balkan-Danubian provinces and the importance of the iconography of *sistra* in connection to *Isism*.¹

***Isism* in the Balkan Danubian provinces of the Roman Empire. A short introduction**

*Isism*² can be epigraphically spotted as soon as the Early Hellenistic Period on the coastlines of the eastern and south-eastern Balkan Peninsula, mainly through the worship of Sarapis, in strong connection with the cultic centre from Delos.³ Yet during the Roman Imperial Period, the region under analysis was split by two major cultural backgrounds.

In what is the more militarized area of the frontier provinces, where Latin prevails, sacralised spaces dedicated to Isis were consecrated during the major chronological stages when *Isism* was fuelled by support of the central government in Rome, the imperial household, from the Flavian Period up to the Severan Dynasty. Behind this agency was the provincial elite, the provincial government, and the members of the Roman army, using this process of religious communication as a tool of showing (among other things), political loyalty towards the imperial household.⁴ On the other hand, in the Hellenophone environment, the Greek epigraphic habit has left behind many instantiations which offer more details in reconstructing religious communication, agency, and so on, connected to the deities of the Isiac circle.⁵

Regardless of one region or another, after the Severans, staging *Isism* publicly declined considerably, as did other activities related to Isiac sanctuaries; the only pieces of evidence preserved have a more personal, intimate dimension connected to them.⁶ An exception is perhaps the Arch of Galerius at Thessalonica where Isis and Sarapis are portrayed in a heavily politicized context.⁷

In the region under analysis there are only a few sanctuaries dedicated to Isis or Sarapis (or both) which have ever been archaeologically investigated, either partially or in their entirety. For instance, in Pannonia, a sanctuary dedicated to Isis was discovered at Savaria⁸ while another one was identified at Scarbantia.⁹ Both are located on

1 For the *sistrum* in the Greco-Roman period see the overview in Genaille 1984. For the *sistrum*-instruments see Saura-Ziegelmeier 2017, 211–212, quoted in Gasparini 2021a, 52. For the *sistrum* in nearby regions, for instance Roman Greece, see Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 202–204.

2 We employ the term *Isism* as understood and defined by J. Rüpke (Rüpke 2018, 72).

3 See Deac, forthcoming, for a more detailed analysis.

4 E.g. for Pannonia, Dacia and Moesia in Deac, forthcoming.

5 See further Deac, forthcoming.

6 See further Deac, forthcoming.

7 Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 350, II 20, S. 37, II 178, fig. 43, with references.

8 For the Isis sanctuary of Savaria, the most comprehensible bibliographic reference is Sosztarits et al. 2013. For a latest overview of this sanctuary, see Deac, forthcoming, chapter 3.2.3.

9 For the Isis sanctuary from Scarbantia see Mráv and Gabrieli 2011 and most recently Deac, forthcoming, 3.2.2.

the Amber Road, were consecrated sometime during the Flavian Period, and in both cases, evidence of the *sistrum* was encountered.¹⁰ In Dacia, a *Serapeum* was found in the area of the *praetorium procuratoris* at Sarmizegetusa, built as early as the reign of Caracalla, based on the current state of affairs, but in this settlement this Isiac symbol, the *sistrum*, is unknown.¹¹ At Stobi, in Macedonia, another Isiac sanctuary, consecrated sometime at the beginning of the 2nd century AD, was archaeologically investigated.¹² Furthermore, an Imperial era sanctuary was found at Philippi, but the identification remains obscure.¹³ In another important settlement, Thessalonica, the sheer number of finds as well as the archaeological excavations point to the existence of a sanctuary from the 3rd century BC to the 2nd century AD.¹⁴ Many other sanctuaries are presumed based on the epigraphic evidence in different locations from the region.¹⁵

The *sistrum* in the Balkan Danubian provinces (map 1)

As will be apparent in the following, the *sistrum* is encountered most often in relation to the sanctuaries dedicated to Isis and to the funerary environment. Some exceptions exist, for instance, a mould from Micăsasa depicting Isis-Luna possibly holding a *sistrum* in her left hand and some carnelian gems found at Micia, Oescus and Carnuntum portraying Isis holding the *sistrum* in her left hand. The lack of a clear-cut archaeological context for the discovery of these latter artefacts, as well as the lack of testimonies regarding the carving of the images from Philippi, hinder any further pertinent analysis. However, it should be noted that on all representations, Isis is portrayed holding the *sistrum* in her right hand, including the altar from Scarbantia where the *sistrum* is depicted on the right side (cat. no. 7), a feature also present in Greece on the Attic grave reliefs.¹⁶ Regarding the mould from Micăsasa, one can observe that it had to be applied on vessels, casting on them the image of the goddess possibly holding the *sistrum* in her right hand. Similarly, perhaps the gems were used as seals, thus portraying the goddess on the applied surfaces in a similar fashion.

Compared to their Egyptian ancestor¹⁷ or the Hellenistic *sistra*, the ornamentation of the object is very refined, generally retaining only the top.¹⁸ At the top, there is usually a cat alone or nursing a few kittens, with or without a headdress.¹⁹ This element is

10 For an overview see Deac, forthcoming.

11 For an overview see Deac, forthcoming, 3.3.3.

12 For a detailed approach on the archaeological investigations carried out in this sanctuary see Blaževska and Radnjanski 2015 and latest Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 92–105.

13 Latest on this sanctuary Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 21–34.

14 On *Isism* at Thessalonica and its sacralised spaces, see Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 35–70.

15 Latest for Raetia see Cibu and Rémy 2004; for Pannonia, Dacia and Moesia see Deac forthcoming; for Thrace see Bricault 2007, *passim*; for Dalmatia e.g. Bugarski-Mesdjian 2007; Vilogorac-Brčić 2019; for Macedonia see Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, *passim*.

16 Observations of this feature in Matricon-Thomas 2011; Martzavou 2011; Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 203. A thorough analysis of these reliefs was recently made also by Veymiers 2021, *passim*.

17 Hickmann 1949, *passim*; Ziegler 1984; Genaille 1984.

18 Saura-Ziegelmeyer 2017.

19 Saura-Ziegelmeyer 2019.

the only one, besides the *sistrum* itself, which refers to the Isiac story and more particularly to Bastet, whose mythology is detailed by Plutarch in his *De Iside et Osiride* (Plutarch, *Moralia*, V 63).

The bronze *sistrum* of Oescus belongs to a type which appears in the Imperial Period and remains the only instrument found so far in the region, perhaps except for the discoveries from Cambodunum. It is important to specify that this specimen is the most oriental of the Roman Imperial type findings, which shows a sort of refashioning of objects in the Eastern Mediterranean Isiac contexts influenced by the existing situation in the Italian peninsula.²⁰

So far, the presence of the *sistrum* in the iconography is above all associated with an overall classical image of Isis standing, which is found on gemstones, as well as on coins and reliefs. In addition, in a few exceptions, there are other versions of the goddess, for instance, Isis-Sothis.

The presence of the *sistrum* in the reliefs when Isis is not represented is complex. In the case of funerary representations, one wonders for example whether the deceased, when the *sistrum* is worn, was a priestess or a simple devotee of Isis, or whether its status was connected to Isis in another form.²¹ In death, the deceased imitates the divine figure, taking up its attributes, thus individualizing their religious leanings, here towards the Isiac cults. In the case of the Balkan Danubian provinces, we do not have any humans (except for what were interpreted as “priests”) bearing the *sistrum*, highlighting a very important aspect: the *sistrum* is first of all a divine attribute before being a cult object. However, it is difficult to tell which models the manufacturers based their objects on, or if there was a reciprocity and influence between the *realia* and the images of *sistra*.

The earliest contextualized *sistrum* depiction from the region under analysis comes from Thessalonica,²² dated to the second half of the 2nd century BC, where a marble stela depicts a series of devotees of Isis, among them being a veiled priestess of Isis holding a *sistrum* in her right hand. The Greek text above the image mentions Osiris’ *mystes* and three individuals, Demetrios, Alexandros, son of Demetrios and Nikaia, daughter of Charixenos, this being one of the first pieces of evidence from the region involving initiations into the Isiac mysteries (cat. no. 22). On the other hand, the latest such depiction is from a limestone “false-door” discovered at the entrance of a tomb from the Late Roman necropolis from Tomis, in Scythia Minor, dated to the Constantinian period (cat. no. 12). However, the oldest item, in terms of its fabrication, is the granite statue of a Late New Kingdom official, named Hapi-Chai, who holds a *sistrum* in the form of Hathor, a monument which was discovered in a Roman context, in 1800, in Vindobona (cat. no. 3).

20 Contrary to what has sometimes been claimed. See, for example, Wilkes 1998, 101: “Presque tous les monuments religieux des I^{er} et II^e siècles sont de type romain, les quelques exceptions à cette règle étant les temples de cultes orientaux”.

21 For a wider discussion, which for the moment remains open to debate see Martzavou 2011; Matricon-Thomas 2011; Laubry 2015; Saura-Ziegelmeier 2018; Bricault and Veymiers 2020, esp. 293–296; Veymiers 2021; Saura-Ziegelmeier 2022, *passim*.

22 Cross reference to Touloumtzidou.

In Raetia, two *sistra* were found in a grave located in the necropolis of Cambodunum, modern-day Kempten, Germany (cat. nos. 1, 2).

In Pannonia, all the finds relate to contexts connected to Isiac sanctuaries, except for a red carnelian gem depicting Isis holding a *sistrum* which is a stray find from Carnuntum (cat. no. 8). Further south, at Savaria, the 1st century plaster decorations of the sanctuary depicted a *sistrum* and a veiled priestess of Isis, or the goddess herself, holding this instrument; these plaster decoration fragments had been buried near the *aedes* when the sanctuary of Isis had been dismantled and reconstructed anew, sometime at the beginning of the 2nd century AD (cat. nos. 5, 6).²³ Moreover, the sanctuary had been remodelled during the Severan Period, when one panel of the main frieze of the *aedes* depicted Isis holding the *sistrum* and riding the Sothis dog (cat. no. 4), a feature that had a very precise meaning for the members of the Isiac *gens* who frequented the sanctuary.²⁴ At Scarbantia, one of the altars consecrated to Isis, part of the inventory of the local Isiac sanctuary, depicted a *sistrum* on one of its sides (cat. no. 7).

In Dacia, only two such depictions are known. A recently found dark red carnelian gem depicting Isis with her typical iconography, holding the *sistrum* and a *situla* in her hands, was found in the military *vicus* adjacent to the auxiliary fort from Micia, an important Roman settlement located on the western frontier of the province, on the banks of the *Marissos* (modern-day Mureş) river. This gem was found in a pit which had cut through all the Roman strata, but based on the manufacturing features, one is able to advance the idea that it had been produced perhaps sometime during the early 3rd century AD (cat. no. 9). The second find represents a clay mould depicting Isis-Luna, possibly holding a *sistrum* in her left hand; this mould was used for decorating pottery vessels and was part of the tool-kit of Myrinus, one of the pottery craftsmen active during the late 2nd and early 3rd century AD from the biggest and most important pottery production centre (so far) of the province of Dacia, namely the Roman settlement from modern-day Micăsasa (cat. no. 10).

In Moesia Superior, the only depiction which can be referenced is rather questionable and comes from Viminacium (cat. no. 11). To the east, in Moesia Inferior, a bronze *sistrum* and a red carnelian gem depicting Isis holding perhaps a *sistrum* in her left hand, rendered in a similar fashion as the one from Micia (*vide supra*) were found at Oescus (cat. nos. 13, 14). The latest datable find from the region under analysis is from Tomis, as mentioned above,²⁵ where on a “false-door” found at the entrance of a tomb dated to the Constantinian era, in one of its registers, a female goddess or a priestess is holding in her right hand what seems to be a *sistrum* (cat. no. 12). Set apart from the other regions discussed in this paper, cities of the provinces of Moesia Inferior and Thrace struck coins depicting Isis holding the *sistrum* and the *situla*. This situation occurs at Nicopolis ad Istrum where on the reverse of provincial coins struck during

23 For a recent detailed approach on the archaeological analysis of the discoveries see Bíró and Soszartits 2023 esp. 38 with references.

24 For a more detailed discussion see Deac, forthcoming.

25 For the Isiac cults at Tomis see Deac, forthcoming, 3.4. Here, the discoveries related to *Isism* are known in a large number, making this settlement one of the most important Isiac centres from around the shores of the Black Sea.

the reigns of Antoninus Pius and Commodus, Isis is depicted standing, facing left, holding the *sistrum* in her right hand and *situla* in her left one. The earliest depictions of Isis holding a *sistrum* occur however in Thrace, at Perinthus, as early as the reign of Claudius, followed by Serdica, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, Traianopolis depicting Faustina the Younger on the obverse, Philippopolis and Hadrianopolis during the reign of Commodus (also Hadrianopolis struck coins depicting Sarapis on the obverse and Isis on the reverse) and Byzia during the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Philip the Arab; two coin types, from Byzia, depicting Faustina the Younger and Otacilia Severa respectively on the obverse stand out, as in these cases Isis is portrayed standing, facing right and holding with her left hand the *sistrum* and the *situla* with the right one.²⁶

In Macedonia, a bronze pendant in the shape of a *sistrum*, which remains to be published, was found during the archaeological excavations of the local Iseum at Stobi (cat. no. 17). To the south of Stobi, a marble funerary relief possibly depicting a priestess of Isis was discovered at Kavadarci (cat. no. 18). Other such attestations identified in the scientific literature as *sistra* suggest a defunctionalization, or a highlighting of a function other than the sound one. Indeed, most of the contextualized *sistra* findings, some of which are considered amulets, have been found in funerary contexts.²⁷ This is the case for the Nesactium *sistrum*,²⁸ showing a particular connection in death to the cult of Isis and its afterlife conception, and an apotropaic protection given to a young (and perhaps female) deceased by an instrument of the cult, made of a copper alloy, which can have its own importance.²⁹ Further analysis will shed light on the interpretation of the find from Stobi, a key issue in this regard being the archaeological context. A sanctuary dedicated to Isis was discovered at Dion, which thrived from the 2nd to the 4th century AD, when it was destroyed by an earthquake.³⁰ Except for the marble stela already mentioned from Thessalonica (*vide supra*), a Hadrianic era sarcophagus of Annia Tryphaina from the same settlement depicts on one of its long sides a woman, interpreted as performing a ritual, and next to her the depiction of a *sistrum* (cat. no. 21). Two anepigraphic marble plates depicting feet and *sistra* were found at Neine and Levunovo, both connected to presumed sacralized spaces dedicated to the goddess Isis (cat. nos. 15, 16). These petrosomatoglyphs were some sort of *vestigia* placed most commonly in connection to the staircases of the *aedes* of an Isis sanctuary by the followers, thus activating the religious communication between them and the goddess and, at the same time, making the environment where these were set up a lived space, as V. Gasparini puts it.³¹ At Philippi, a series of three rock-cut depictions on reliefs were carved in the upper city depicting Isis and/or her priestesses and many Isiac symbols, among them the *sistrum* (cat. no. 19). Furthermore, an altar dedicated to Isis

26 For a detailed discussion see Peter 2008.

27 Saura-Ziegelmeyer 2018.

28 See further Perc 1968, 157–158 no. 14; Budischovsky 1977, 137 pl. IX; Bricault 2001, 123; Giunio 2002, 26 pl. 6/1; Tomorad 2005a, 17; Tomorad 2005b, 48 no. 3 fig. 3; *ROMIC* I, 16 no. 7; Bugarski-Mesdjian 2007, 318; Tomorad 2015, 175, 179 no. 5; Tomorad 2018, 59, 64.

29 Sánchez Muñoz et al. 2022.

30 Latest on this sanctuary Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 71–91, which stresses previous archaeologists' difficulties of investigating this site due to the water rising.

31 Gasparini 2021b, esp. 307.

Lochia – a divine epithet specific for the region similar to *Lactans*³² – which has a depiction of the *sistrum* beneath the text, was found at Beroea; the altar was presumably connected to the local Isiac sanctuary (cat. no. 20).³³

In Roman Dalmatia, at Diluntum and Narona, a funerary *cippus* and a stela, respectively, depict the *sistrum* alluding to the fact that either the deceased individuals mentioned in the Latin texts or the individuals who were commemorating them were connected to the goddess Isis, in one form or another (cat. nos. 24, 25). At later, an altar dated to the late 1st century AD is dedicated by Publius Quinctius Paris to Isis, Sarapis, Liber Pater and Libera, the goddess Isis being rendered agitating the *sistrum* (cat. no. 23). This monumental altar is considered to have been part of the inventory of an Isiac sanctuary located here.³⁴

Conclusions

Despite the large geographic area under analysis, the testimonies relating to the *sistrum* contain only a few real objects. Indeed, of the corpus considered, only two instances can be regarded as testimonies of *realia*, the one from Oescus and the ones from Cambodunum, to which one may add the amulet from Stobi. Among these documents, at least the first artifact, that from Oescus, seems to have preserved its initial function as a sound object. Regarding the two *sistra* of Kempten, we simply do not have any detailed information about them except for their identification, without a detailed description, by G. Grimm. We therefore prefer to act with caution since several objects from the Germanic space, described as *sistra* in a modern meaning, revealed non-Isiac realities.

All other examples fall within the domain of iconographic depictions in various forms. The relief from Tomis is problematic mainly because cases of individuals carrying double *sitra* are indeed not attested and the instrument is always shaken with the right hand, following the canon described by Apuleius. If the general shape (a handle and an oval) could correspond to the instrument held by the right hand, the absence of branches, although present on small representations, goes against a certain identification for the instrument from her left one. Examples of double *sistra* finds are quite rare, including just two cases in Europe, at Nemausus, now lost, and Ambracia, where one encounters two *sistra-simulacra*.³⁵

If no literary or epigraphic testimony are indeed attested for the term *sistrum* in the local contexts discussed in this paper, the image of the *sistrum* is sometimes associated with an inscription. Figural sources are the most common source depicting a *sistrum* in several configurations. Most of them show the goddess holding the instrument, in the right hand. In other cases, the *sistrum* is represented alone, on documents of various kinds. The most precious testimonies are undoubtedly those from the tem-

32 Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 121–122 with references.

33 See further on *Isism* at Beroea in Tzanavari 1993 and Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 121–123.

34 Latest Vilogorac-Brčić 2019, esp. 357.

35 Saura-Ziegelmeier 2018.

ple of Savaria. Indeed, the fresco fragments complete a corpus of very rare painted *sistra*, the equivalent of which can only be found in Campania, in Pompeii and Herculaneum. The *sistrum* is represented in detail in an almost vermilion color, suggesting that the bronze composing the objects was polished and shiny. This rarity is reinforced by the representation of a five-pointed *sistrum*, which is not attested on the *realia*, and which exists only in a few rare examples in the iconography.³⁶ The top ornamentation is circular. The other more classic representation shows a *sistrum* with four branches. Many Isiac-themed coins show the *sistrum*, most of the time as an attribute of the goddess. These types from Moesia and Thrace present a classical version of the standing Isis, holding the *situla* and the *sistrum*, wearing the *basileion* and the Isiac knot. When the instrument is carried, it is always carried in the right hand, with the exception of objects made in negatives such as gems or terracotta, as we can see here, and the coins from Byzia. If other symbols and attributes (such as the *basileion*, the *situla*, the rudder) make it possible to identify different forms of Isis, the size of the *sistrum* is disproportionate, highlighting the object, especially on the gems. On the *signaculum*, the *sistrum* is not held by the hand of the goddess but placed at her side, above her shoulder, likewise other terracotta objects or reliefs, perhaps suggesting that the goddess was indeed holding the instrument with her hand. The only specificity is the location of the *sistrum*, as discussed above, on the left side, because what we see is the print of the mould used to make this object.

Thus, the *sistrum*, handled or not, hanging from other visual symbols or alone, constitutes a reminder of Isis and helps identify the goddess or a devotion to her. This symbolic charge is obviously very far from the musical instrument and real objects, as shown by the fact that the object itself retains its original shape, the oval and the branches being the only elements necessary for the recognition of the artefact.

The focus on the Danubian provinces strongly shows this phenomenon, which can be confirmed for other regions of the Mediterranean basin. While the percussion instrument is not found widely, its image is found on a great variety of media and in much larger proportions, thus participating in Isiac propaganda and always referring to the image of the Romanized goddess.

36 Saura-Ziegelmeyer 2017.

37 A relief depicting a *sistrum* next to an ear was probably found in Dalmatia but the context of its discovery is unknown (Ubi Erat Lupa 30595); for this type of representation, see Gasparini 2016.

CATALOGUE OF *SISTRUM* INSTRUMENTS IN THE BALKAN-DANUBIAN PROVINCES³⁷

Cambodunum (Kempton, Germany) – Raetia

1–2. Two bronze *sistrum*-like instruments were found in a Roman burial. No other data are preserved regarding these two objects. Dating: Roman Period.

Bibliography: Grimm 1969, 201 no. 111; Cibu and Rémy 2004, 169 no. 54.

Vindobona (Vienna, Austria) – Pannonia Superior

3. Granite statue of an official named Hapi Chai, depicting a *sistrum* in the shape of Hathor. Found around 1800 in the Wiener Neustädter canal together with other Roman finds, and later donated in 1825 to the museum in Vienna. Dimensions: height = 49.5 cm; width = 19.8 cm; thickness = 31 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, inv. AES 64. Dating: Late New-Kingdom.

Bibliography: Kenner 1897, 123–124 fig. 81; Leclant 1953, 1–2; Satzinger 1977, 208–210; Komorzynski 1965, 61, 159, 201–202 fig. 53; Bricault 2001, 128; Rogge 1990, 126–134 (facsimile of the inscription with a commentary of the text); Satzinger 1994, 5–6; Binder et al. 2010, 103.

Savaria (Szombathély, Hungary) – Pannonia Superior

4. Limestone relief depicting Isis riding Sothis and holding a *sistrum* in her right hand (fig. 1). Dimensions: height = 89.5 cm; width = 72 cm; thickness = 43.5 cm. Found in 1955 during the archaeological excavations conducted by T. Szentléleky in front of the *aedes*, in the courtyard. Savaria Museum, inv. R.2009.2.6893. Dating: Severan Dynasty.

Bibliography (selective): Szentléleky 1957, 78–79 pl. XXII/1; Szentléleky 1959, 197–198; Wessetzsky 1959a, 28–29; Wessetzsky 1959b, 276; Szentléleky 1960, 17–21 fig. 14; Wessetzsky 1961, 32–34 pl. III fig. 5; Balla et al. 1971, 99 no. 72 fig. 58, a–b with a complete list of bibliographic references; Tóth 1977, 183; Clerc 1978, 257–259 pl. XXXI; Wild 1984, 1819 (with an updated list of bibliographic references); Wessetzsky 1989, 20–21; Tran Tam Tinh 1990, 787 no. 322; Clerc 1994, 129; Tóth 1998, 329–330; Bricault 2001, 127–128; Mráv 2005, 26–29 fig. 8 and previous bibliographic references; Sosztarits 2008, 199 no. 134; Mráv 2013, 47–48 cat. no. 4.1; Tóth 2015, 141–142 fig. 97; Mráv 2016, 32 fig. 4; Ubi Erat Lupa 8007.

5. Fragment of a mural painting depicting a *sistrum*, made on plaster (fig. 2a, b). Dimensions: height = 16.5 cm; width = 10 cm; thickness = 2.8 cm. Part of a decoration of an interior *tympalum* of a timber phase of the temple of Isis. Found during the archaeological investigations of the early 2000s in a pit located next to the *aedes*, where the older wall decorations were thrown. Savaria Museum, inv. no. PR.6998. Dating: early 2nd c. AD.

Bibliography: Sosztarits 2008, 206 no. 149; Sosztarits 2010, 147 pl. 33C; Harsányi and Kurovsky 2013a, 4–5 fig. 11; Harsányi and Kurovsky 2013b, 83 cat. no. 7.8; Harsányi and Kurovsky 2014, 108 fig. 11.

6. Fragment of a mural painting depicting a priestess of Isis holding a *sistrum* in her right hand (fig. 3a, b). Dimensions: height = approx. 60 cm. It is depicted on a plaster wall decoration of a timber phase of the temple of Isis. Found during the archaeological investigations of the early 2000s in a pit located next to the *aedes*, where the older wall decorations were thrown. Savaria Museum. Dating: early 2nd c. AD.

Bibliography: Sosztarits 2010, 147 pl. 33A; Harsányi and Kurovsky 2013a, 2 fig. 1; Harsányi and Kurovsky 2013b, 81 cat. no. 7.5; Harsányi and Kurovsky 2014, 103–105 figs. 1, 2; Harsányi and Kurovsky 2017, 523–524 fig. 1.

Scarbantia (Sopron, Hungary) – Pannonia Superior

7. Altar dedicated to Isis *Augusta* by Tiberius Iulius Ambi[---] and Iulia (fig. 4). Dimensions: height = 54.5 cm; width = 32.5 cm; thickness = 26.5 cm. Height of the letters = 3.4–4 cm. Found in 2002 in the area in front of the *aedes* of the Iseum of *Scarbantia*. On the right side there is a depiction of a *sistrum*. Liszt Ferenc Museum, Sopron. Dating: late 1st–early 2nd c. AD.

Text: [I]șidi Aug(ustae) / [Ti(berius)] Iu[li]u[s] / [A]mbi[- -] / [Iul]ia [- -].

Bibliography: Gabrieli 2003, 69–70; Gabrieli 2006, 69; *RICIS* 613/0604; Gabrieli 2010, 49 pl. 10; Mráv and Gabrieli 2011, 216–220 no. 2 figs. 11, 12; *AÉ* 2011, 969; *RICIS suppl. III* 613/0604; Deac, forthcoming, App. PS 015.

Carnuntum (Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, Austria) – Pannonia Superior

8. Red carnelian gem rendering Isis, holding the *sistrum* and *cornucopia*. Dimensions: height = 10.3 (8.7) cm; width = 0.87 (0.61) cm; thickness = 0.36 cm. Isis-Fortuna wearing a *kalathos* is portrayed standing, to the right, holding the *sistrum* in her left hand and the *cornucopia* in the right one. The rudder is depicted in the lower part of the register. Stray find. Archaeological Museum Carnuntinum Bad-Deutsch Altenburg, Austria, inv. 17898. Dating: 3rd c. AD according to G. Dembski.

Bibliography: Dembski 2005, 84 no. 322 pl. 32/322; Humer and Kremer 2011, 286 no. 382 and 284 no. 382.

Micia (Veșel, Romania) – Dacia Superior

9. Dark-red carnelian gem rendering Isis (fig. 5). Dimensions: height = 0.16 cm; width = 1.18 cm; thickness = 0.2 cm. The goddess Isis is facing right, wearing a *basileion*. She is holding the *sistrum* in the left hand, and in her lowered right hand, beside her leg, a *situla* for carrying Nile water. Found in a pit located in the military *vicus*, adjacent to the auxiliary fort. National History Museum of Romania, Bucharest, inv. 358807. Dating: first half of the 3rd c. AD.

Bibliography: Simion and Deac, forthcoming.

Micăsa (Romania) – Dacia Superior

10. Ceramic mold depicting Isis (fig. 6). Dimensions: diameter = 8.4 cm. Height of the letters = 1–1.5 cm. The goddess is facing frontally, wearing a *basileion* and a lunar crescent behind her. In her left hand she is holding the *sistrum*. Next to the goddess, girdles are visible. Found in 1993 during archaeological excavations carried out by I. Mitrofan. National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, inv. 47286. Dating: end of the 2nd – early 3rd c. AD.

Text: *si(g)n(aculum) Myrini*.

Bibliography: Deac 2016, 60–61 (with previous bibliographic references), 63–64 pl. II.1; Deac 2020, 124; Piso 2021, 519–521 fig. 2a–b.

Viminacium (Kostolac, Serbia) – Moesia Superior

11. Votive marble relief depicting what the editors interpreted as Isis-Fortuna, holding in her left hand possibly a *sistrum* (fig. 7). Dimensions: height = 13.9 cm; width = 13.2 cm; thickness = 2.9 cm. Found in building 1, near the amphitheatre. Documentation Center Viminacium, inv. C-6360. Dating: 2nd–3rd c. AD.

Bibliography: Jovičić and Bogdanović 2022, 157–158 no. 53.

Tomis (Constanța, Romania) – Moesia Inferior

12. Limestone door decoration depicting in the upper registers Harpocrates and Isis; the latter is holding two *sistrum*-like instruments in both of her hands (fig. 8). Dimensions: height = 128 cm; width = 76 cm. Found in the 19th century in a tomb west of the city. Now in the collection of the V. Pârvan Institute of Archaeology, Bucharest (formerly National Museum of Antiquities), inv. L 500. Dating: Constantinian period.

Bibliography: Bordenache 1968 with previous bibliographic references; Bordenache 1969, 138–139 no. 310, pls. CXXXVIII–IX/310; Barnea 1972, 257–260 fig. 6; Vidman 1989, 1006; Clerc 1994, 130; Barnea 1997; Barnea 1998, 3–7, 10–12 fig. 5–7.

Oescus (Gigen, Bulgaria) – Moesia Inferior

13. *Sistrum* made of bronze (fig. 9). Dimensions: height = 19 cm. Stray find. Archaeological Institute and Museum in Sofia, inv. no. 6844. Dating: Roman era.

Bibliography: Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 5 no. 4 pl. II/4, with previous Bulgarian references; Bricault 2001, 31; Bricault 2007, 255.

14. Red carnelian gem rendering Isis (fig. 10). Dimensions: height = 0.13 cm; width = 0.9 cm; thickness = 0.3 cm. Isis faces right, holding in her left hand the *sistrum* which was obliterated by chipping and a *situla* in her right hand. Stray find. Archaeological National Museum of Sofia, Bulgaria, inv. 4955. Dating: 1st c. AD.

Bibliography: Dimitrova-Milcheva 1980, 54 no. 97.

Neine (Gorna Gradeshnitsa, Bulgaria) – Macedonia

15. Anepigraphic marble plate (fig. 11). Dimensions: height = 40 cm; width = 78 cm; thickness = 15 cm. The register with the depictions is 65 cm wide and 30 cm high. Now in the school in Kresna. On its main register two feet imprints were carved and two *sistra* at the sides. Dating: 2nd–3rd c. AD.

Bibliography: Gerassimova-Tomova 1980, 96 fig. 5; Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 20–22 no. 35 pl. IX/35; Dunbabin 1990, 86 fig. 3; Bricault 2007, 254–255, n. 49; *RICIS* 114/1902; Popova 2016, 215; Gasparini 2021, 318 cat. no. 12.

Levunovo (Bulgaria) – Macedonia

16. Marble plate with the depiction of human footprints, a *sistrum* and two *basileia*. Stray find. Dimensions: height = 30.5 cm; width = 34.5 cm; thickness = 9.5 cm. Regional Historical Museum in Blagoevgrad, inv. 1.2/225. Dating: Roman period.

Bibliography: Sharankov 2020, 88, n. 35; Sharankov 2021, 10–11 fig. 10.

Stobi (Gradsko, North Macedonia) – Macedonia

17. Bronze pendant. Dimensions, context and whereabouts not given. Dating: Roman period.

Bibliography: Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 98, n. 520.

Kavadarci (North Macedonia, south of Stobi) – Macedonia

18. Marble funerary stela depicting two busts, among them being one of presumably a priestess of Isis holding a *sistrum* in her right hand. Other information lack is lacking.

Bibliography: Düll 1977, 414–415; Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 127, 204–205; II 80, S81.

Phillippi (Phillipoi, Greece) – Macedonia

19. Rock cut figures of Isis or her priestesses accompanied by different Isiac symbols such as the *sistrum*. Dimensions of the objects not specified. Unknown dating.

Bibliography: Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 203; II 2–3, S. 5–7 (with references), II 160, figs. 5, 6.

Beroea (Veria, Greece) – Macedonia

20. Marble altar. Dimensions: height = 87.2 cm; width = 61.4–64.2 cm. Height of the letters = 1.5–4.8 cm. Under the text there is a *sistrum* depiction, 16.5 cm tall. Archaeological Museum of Veria, inv. Λ 313. Dating: 2nd c. AD.

Text: Εἴσιδι Λοχία / καὶ τῇ πόλει τὸν / βωμὸν ἀνέθηκαν / Λ. Βρούτιος Ἀγαθο-^ς φόρος
καὶ ἡ γυνὴ / αὐτοῦ Ἐλευθέριον / ὑπερ τῆς θυγατρὸς / Μειλησίας εὐξάμε-^{νοι} ἐπὶ ἱερέως διὰ
10 βίου Λ. Βρουττίου / Ποπλικιανοῦ.

Bibliography: Tzanavari 1993, 1671–1672; *RICIS* 113/0301; Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 121, 123, 203, 220, 253; II 74, I. 84, 215, fig. 153.

Thessalonica (Thessaloniki, Greece) – Macedonia

21. Marble sarcophagus of Annia Tryphaina. Dimensions: height = 119 cm; width = 237.5 cm; thickness = 115 cm. Height of the letters = 3 cm. On its main side, it depicts a *sistrum* and a *caduceus* next to a woman performing rituals. It was found in 1878 in a house, in the west wall of the city. Now in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, inv. 1722. Dating: Hadrianic.

Text: Ἀννία Τρύφαινα ν Ἀννίου Βάσσου θυγάτηρ ν τὴν ληνὸν καὶ τοὺς ὑποκειμένους γράδους ἑαυτῆ καὶ τοῖς // ἰδίσις νννν ἔτους νν ζξρ´ σεβαστοῦ ν τοῦ καὶ νν βπσ.

Bibliography (selective): *CSIR Greece* III 1, 66; *IG X*, 2/1, 573; *RICIS* 113/0559; Stefanidou-Tiveriou 2016 with references; Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 203, II 20–21, S. 38; Ubi Erat Lupa 27957.

22. Marble stela dedicated to Osiris *mystes*. Dimensions: height = 1.21 cm; width = 52–54 cm; thickness = 20 cm. Height of the letters = 0.7–1 cm. It depicts a series of devotees of Isis, among them a veiled woman portrayed holding a *sistrum* in her right hand. Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, inv. MΘ 997. Dating: second half of the 2nd c. BC.

Text: Ὅσειριδι μύστει (*vacat*) Ἀλέξανδρον Δημητρίου καὶ Νίκαιαν / Χαριξένου Δημήτριος τοὺς αὐτοῦ γονεῖς.

Bibliography (selective): *IG II* 1, 107; *RICIS* 113/0505; Bricault 2013, 429–431 no. 142/a; Mazurek 2022, 41 fig. 8; Cross reference Christodoulou.

Iader (Zadar, Croatia) – Dalmatia

23. Votive altar made of limestone. Dimensions: height = 94 cm; width = 59 cm; thickness = 46 cm. Height of the letters = not given. On the left part of the main side there is a depiction of Sarapis and Isis agitating the *sistrum* with her right hand. Museo lapidario Maffeiiano, inv. 28377. Dating: late 1st c. AD.

Text: *Isidi, Serapi, Liber[o] / Liberae voto / suscepto pro salute / Scapulae filii sui / ⁵P. Quinctius Paris / s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).*

Bibliography (selective): *CIL III*, 2903; Drexler 1890, 38–39; *ILS* 4379; Perc 1968, 225 no. 72; *SIRIS* 676; Katter-Sibbes 1973, 180 no. 908; Budischovksy 1977, 178–179 no. IV,1 pl. XC/a–c; Selem 1999, 31; Bricault 2001, 128; *RICIS* 615/0201; Bugarski-Mesdjian 2007, 304–305; Zović and Kurilić 2015, 428 no. 61; Vilogorac Brčić 2019, 349–351; Ubi Erat Lupa 23456.

Diluntum (Stolac, Bosnia-Herzegovina) – Dalmatia

24. Rectangular marble *cippus*. Dimensions: height = 111 cm; width = 143 cm; thickness = 80 cm. Height of the letters = 4.3–7.4 cm. On the top right corner, above the in-

scription, there is a depiction of a *sistrum*. Found in 1939 in the Bregava river. National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dating: late 1st–2nd c. AD.

Text: *T(ito) Flavio Blodi f(ilio) / Plasso patri / pientissimo an(norum) L / et Flaviae Tattae matri / ⁵ an(norum) XXXX bene meritae / et T(ito) Flavio Epicado fratri / an(norum) XII et T(ito) Flavio Laedioni / [---] aed(ili) Illvir(o) i(ure) d(icundo) Naronae / [---] Laedio f(ilius) vivos (sic) sibi et s(uis) f(ecit).*

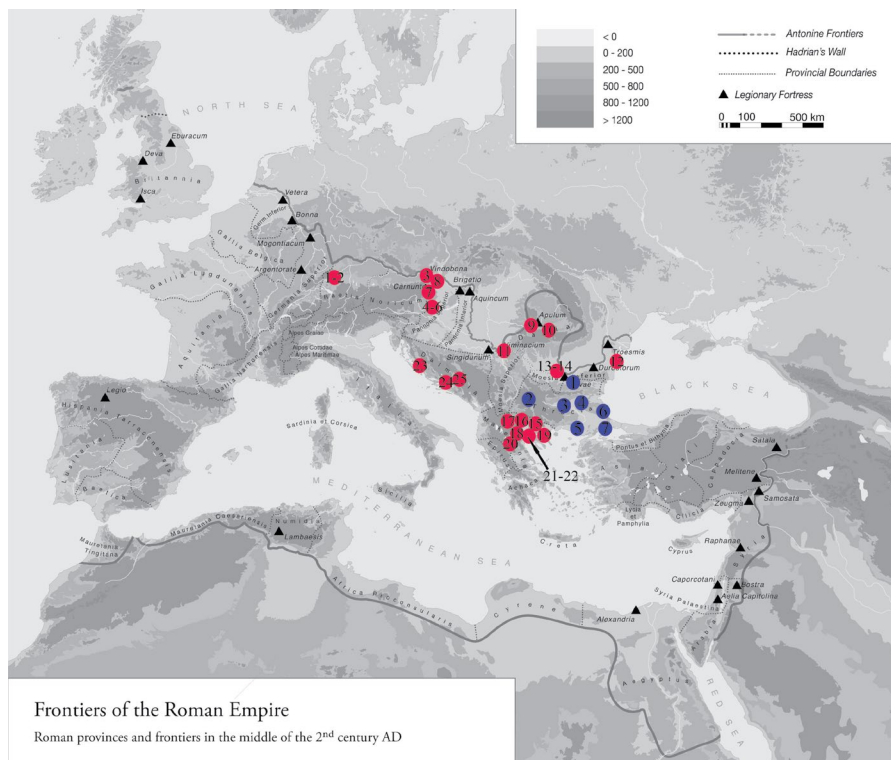
Bibliography (selective): *ILJug* I, 117; Budischovsky 1977, 188–189 no. D XV, pl. XCIV/b; *RICIS* 615/0601; Bugarski-Mesdjian 2007, 318; Paškvalin 2012, 259–260 no. 12 fig. 12a–c; Tomorad 2018, 73, 82; Vilogorac Brčić 2019, 347–348; *RICIS suppl. IV*, 615/0601.

Narona (Vid-Croatia) – Dalmatia

25. Funerary stela depicting two *sistra*. Unknown material or dimensions. Now lost. The conditions of discovery, as well as its whereabouts, are unknown. Dating: Roman period.

Text: *D(is) m(anibus) s(acrum) / L. Magn(o) / Victor(is) / L. Cluenti(o) / ⁵ Corneli(o) / [c]onserv(o) (?)*.

Bibliography: *CIL* III, 1864; Drexler 1890, 49; Perc 1968, no. 96; *SIRIS* 678; Budischovsky 1977, 187 D XIV,1; *RICIS* 615/0501; Bugarski-Mesdjian 2007, 318; Tomorad 2018, 73.



Map 1. Danube Limes – UNESCO World Heritage / Pen&Sword / CHC – University of Salzburg, authors: David Breeze and Kurt Schaller, modified by the authors with the location of the finds from the catalogue marked with red and the towns which struck provincial coinages depicting Isis holding the sistrum marked with blue: 1) Nicopolis ad Istrum; 2) Serdica; 3) Philippopolis; 4) Hadrianopolis; 5) Traianopolis; 6) Byzia; 7) Perinthus.



Fig. 1. The relief of Isis riding Sothis (© Ubi Erat Lupa 8007)



Fig. 2. a) Sistrum detail (apud Sosztarits 2008, 206 no. 149); b) reconstruction (apud Harsányi, Kurovszky 2013, 5 fig. 11)



Fig. 3. Left: Fragment of a mural painting depicting the sistrum discovered at Savaria (after Sosztarits 2006, pl. 33c). Right: Reconstruction of the wall painting depicting a priestess holding a sistrum (apud Harsányi, Kurovszky 2017, 524 fig. 1)

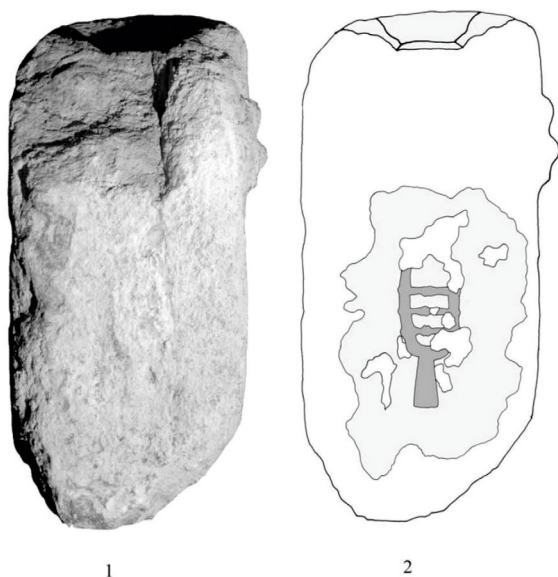


Fig. 4. The right side of the altar dedicated to Isis Augusta depicting a sistrum. 1) photo; 2) drawing (apud Mráv and Gabrieli 2011, 218 fig. 12)



Fig. 5. The gem depicting Isis discovered at Micia (photo Marius Amarie, National History Museum of Romania, Bucharest)



Fig. 6. Medallion depicting the frontal bust of Isis, with the inscription on the back (S. Odenie, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, Romania)



Fig. 7. Votive relief depicting the sistrum (?) (after Jovičić and Bogdanović 2022, 157–158 no. 53)

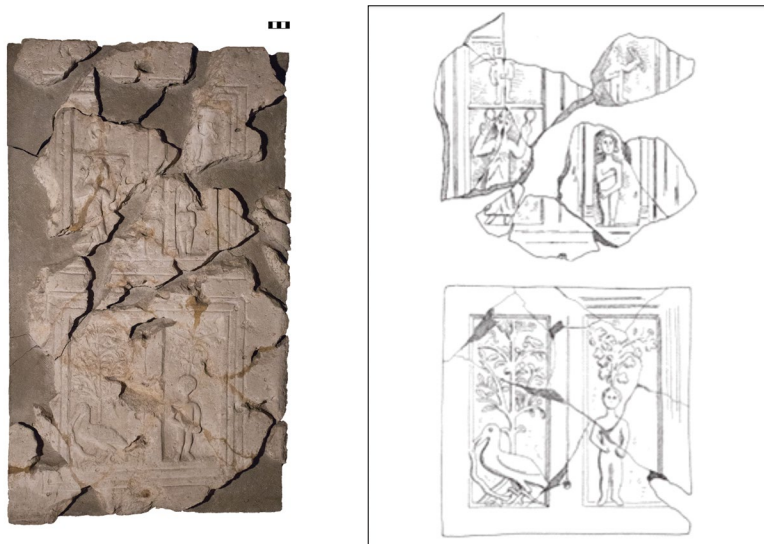


Fig. 8. Photo of the door decoration (Cătălin I. Nicolae, “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology, Bucharest, Romania; drawing after Barnea 1998, 10 fig. 5)

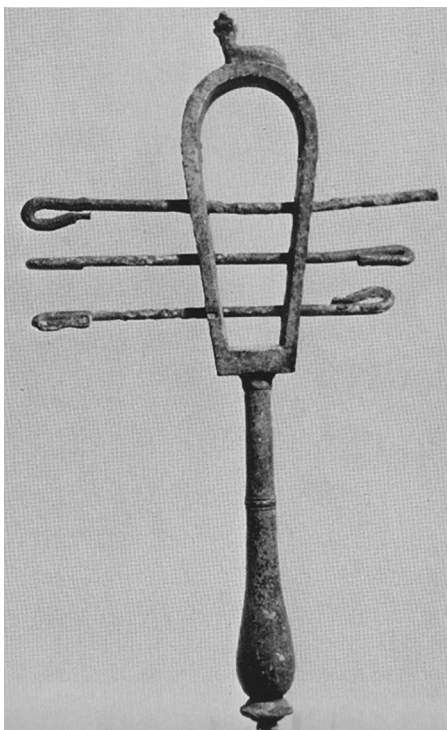


Fig. 9. Sistrum discovered at Oescus (after Tacheva-Hitova 1983, pl. II/4)



Fig. 10. Gem depicting Isis from Oescus (photo Vessela Atanasova, PhD, Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia)



Fig. 11. Marble plate from Neine depicting two sistra (after Tacheva-Hitova 1983, pl. IX/35)



Fig. 12. Detail of the Annia Tryphaina sarcophagus (© Ubi Erat Lupa 27957)



Fig. 13. Photos of all sides of the altar dedicated to Isis, Sarapis, Liber Pater and Libera from Iader (© RICIS online)



Fig. 14. Funerary cippus depicting a sistrum (© RICIS online)

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