

## Space Sacralization in Antiquity

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### The Case Study of Roman Dacia



FIG. 1. Bronze statuette of Artemis Ephesia  
SOURCE: Szabó, Ota, and Ciută (2016)  
with the confirmation of Dénes Gabler, editor  
of *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum  
Hungaricae*.

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#### Introduction

SINCE PREHISTORIC times, humans have been in constant communication with beings endowed with superhuman forces, known as gods or “not unquestionably plausible divine agents.”<sup>1</sup> The past of the objectified religion(s) and figurative divine agents goes far beyond the temporal dimensions of written history and institutionalized religion.<sup>2</sup> Establishing and maintaining religious communication needs not only a constant interaction between human and divine agents,<sup>3</sup> but shows also an interdependent relationship between space and its materiality.<sup>4</sup>

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Although van der Leeuw introduced a phenomenology of sacred sites in the 1930s, it was only in the 1970s that the theme of ‘space’ truly developed as a research field within religious studies.<sup>5</sup> According to Lefebvre, space is dependent on human interaction, and he coined the term of “space production” to describe how space is created, maintained and reproduced by social interaction between human actors.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, Foucault developed the idea of simultaneity in space, where spatial transformations coexist within both the human body itself, as well as political and social spaces.<sup>7</sup> J. Z. Smith later argued that space sacralization is more than the Eliadian duality of “sacred and profane,” emphasizing the imaginary and interconnected aspects of space in religion,<sup>8</sup> and the fact that the sacralization space produces meaningful places, “sacred spaces.”<sup>9</sup> J. Z. Smith’s theory of *homo faber* created a human agent that, through dialogue with the divine world, “sacralizes” the profane space through an active, dynamic, transformative process.<sup>10</sup> The sacralization of space is thus not possible without the active role of the human agent: there is no “sacred space” without the creative act of human devotion, verbal transmission, habitual repetition or reinvented traditions.<sup>11</sup> However, space sacralization does not end with the creative act itself: its aim is to provide a successful and possibly long-lasting space for the dialogue between the human and divine worlds, so the divine agent also plays a key role in transforming and sacralizing the space. This process involves several tools and strategies.

Based on these theoretical models, along with the paradigmatic works of V. Anttonen<sup>12</sup> which discussed the corporeal and territorial boundaries in religion, K. Knott developed a complex spatial theoretical and methodological approach focusing on five major features: the body, as source of space; the dimensions of space (physical, mental, social); the properties of space (simultaneity, extension); the aspects of space (perceived and lived) and the dynamics of space.<sup>13</sup> The spatial theory of religion developed by Smith and continued by Knott focuses almost exclusively on space itself, particularly the multidimensionality and the lived, transformative aspect of space in which human agency, as the transformative force, is the crucial element. However, the materiality of religion and the macro-spaces of larger clusters (cities, states, economic routes, climate, environmental aspects) are neglected in this theoretical model. Moreover, their model also maintains the dichotomy of ‘local’ and ‘global,’<sup>14</sup> although globality, as a methodological tool in historic narratives, has recently been reinterpreted in more fluid terms as ‘glocality.’<sup>15</sup>

It is therefore necessary to establish a new spatial taxonomy which goes beyond the paradigm of space as social production to understand the dynamic aspects of space sacralization as a facet of religious competence and strategy at the level of both the individual and the group in Roman religious communica-

tion.<sup>16</sup> Placing the materiality of religion in the scaled nature of sacralization and introducing the large clusters of macro-spaces in the new analytic model can help us to do so.<sup>17</sup>

## Deep Mapping Space Sacralization: A New Spatial Taxonomy

**N**EW APPROACHES to the spatiality of religion have developed in the fields of prehistoric and cartographic studies.<sup>18</sup> Understanding prehistoric religion involves the interconnectivity of nature, climate, long distance mobilities and the locality of small groups, with a special focus on the material agency of religion which was the exclusive source of religious communication in this period.<sup>19</sup> P. Biehl and F. Bertemes have produced a complex space taxonomy of religion, which included not only the human and material agency of religious communication, but also large geographic and natural clusters, such as rivers, commercial routes, and social hierarchies.<sup>20</sup> This model has unfortunately remained neglected by classical archaeology and religious studies scholars, who often fail to engage with disciplinary metahistories.<sup>21</sup> Instead, they have tended to focus on the architectural, functional and visual (art-historical, decorative) aspects of the sacred space.<sup>22</sup> There are some exceptional cases where the materiality and human agency of religion has been interpreted through a complex spatial theory, such as that established by H. Cancik, where objects and their users are perceived in the physical, social and imagined simultaneity of landscapes.<sup>23</sup>

Combining the Lived Ancient Religion (LAR) approach<sup>24</sup> with David Clarke's space archaeology and systemic model of past societies<sup>25</sup> evokes the theoretical framework proposed by Biehl and gives a complex framework which goes beyond the previous space-models in religious studies.<sup>26</sup> The LAR approach—currently the leading theoretical approach in Roman religious studies—focuses on the role of agency, individual choices and modes of religiosity, but pays little interest to the spatial aspects of religion.<sup>27</sup> As Biehl's and Cancik's model has shown, space sacralization is not only a product of human interaction but is interconnected with material agency, the natural landscape, and socio-political and economic structures (fig. 2). A systemic model of space sacralization—similar to the paradigmatic deep maps in cartography<sup>28</sup>—aims to unite hierarchies of spaces with levels of religious intensity, appropriations and simultaneity where human and material agencies are interconnected and in constant dialogue with divine powers (gods). In this active, living, transforming and creative act of dialogue between human and divine, the materiality of religion and their hierarchy

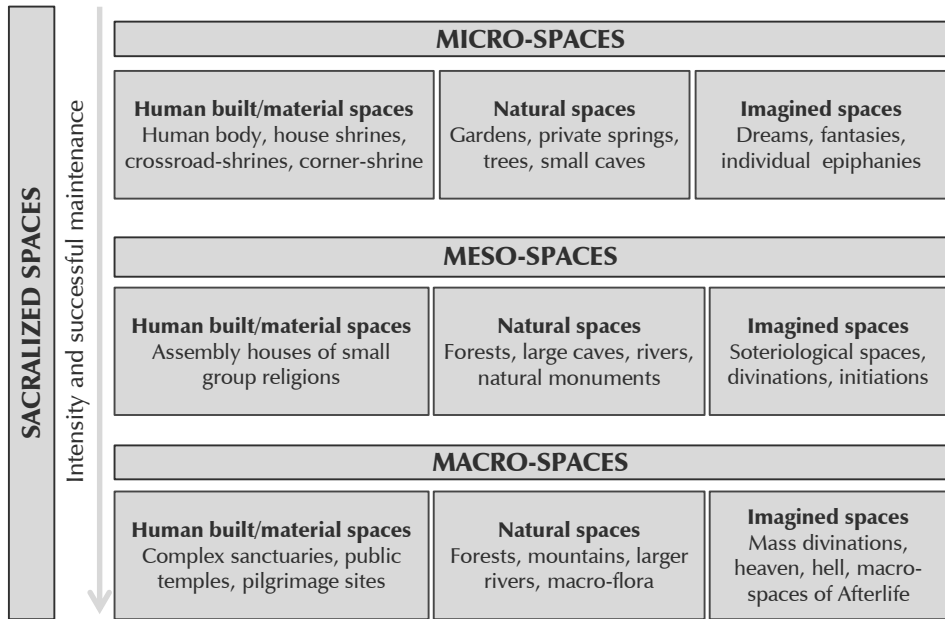


FIG. 2. Taxonomy of space sacralization  
 SOURCE: author.

plays a very important role. The inner dynamics of the four major components of space sacralization (divine agency, human agency, space itself, and materiality of religion) is also influenced by macro-spaces, such as the city (citification of religion), climate changes, economic routes, military interventions, medical and public health issues (such as pandemics) and larger administrative or financial units, such as provinces, routes or customs systems. Within this network, accessibility, personal choice and the intensity of religious experience is crucial: this reflects the simultaneous co-existence of private and public, sacred and profane and the three major spatial categories are often overlapping as the following case studies will show.

In this theoretical framework of a new space taxonomy of religious communication, the material evidence of Roman religion in a provincial context can no longer be referred to as “peripheral” or “local”: the interconnectivity of individuals in micro-, meso- and macro-spaces and their omnipresence in larger clusters within the Roman Empire creates a glocalised spatial network.<sup>29</sup> Here I will discuss this space taxonomy and apply it to the case study of Roman Dacia, focusing not only on the general and global aspects, but also on particular glocal facets of space sacralization in this new context of space taxonomy.

## Space Sacralization and Materiality of Religion in Roman Dacia

**U**NDER THE Emperor Trajan (98–117), the Roman Empire expanded far beyond the natural borders of the *Orbis Romanus*.<sup>30</sup> Among the most important of these new conquests was the Kingdom of Dacia,<sup>31</sup> which subsequently remained part of the Roman Empire for nearly 170 years. During this period, the province became a true cultural bricolage thanks to the imperial trade, road networks and military dislocations. This is attested to not only by the social diversity evident in Dacia, but also by the material evidence relating to religious practices in the province, including nearly 1,600 inscriptions dating to between AD 106 and 271 which were erected in around 140 sacralized spaces.<sup>32</sup> Of these 140 spaces, 54 have been discovered through archaeological excavations, 19 are attested epigraphically, and the remaining 67 have been identified via artifact assemblages discovered in the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>33</sup> After 150 years of research history and the discovery of more than 3,000 artifacts in 140 archaeological contexts, the paradigmatic question is: how do we analyze this corpus of material attesting to religious communication in Roman Dacia?

Romanian literature—following a classical, positivistic tendency in Roman provincial archaeology taken from the 19<sup>th</sup> century German tradition—has traditionally focused on the descriptive and quantitative analysis of these materials. Many of the archaeological materials that had been used for religious communication were published in archaeological catalogues, typologies, and art history albums.<sup>34</sup> In these cases, the objects are only presented as tools, to establish chronological sequences, for prosopographic studies, or in the discussion of architectural/statuary decorations in a Winckelmannian tradition. By contrast, the material and spatial turn, which has had a significant impact on post-processualist approaches to archaeology,<sup>35</sup> has until recently been largely neglected in Central-Eastern European historiography. Recent discussions regarding sacred sites in pre-Roman Romania opened a new tendency in this region as well.<sup>36</sup> In the case of Dacia, recent studies have concentrated on “spiritual interferences” and the role of divine agency in religious syncretism.<sup>37</sup>

By giving special attention to the social agency of objects and the creative act of space sacralization as a facet of lived religious communication, new insights on the archaeological heritage of Roman Dacia can be obtained. Using the abovementioned space taxonomy of micro-, meso- and macro-spaces and their interconnectivity with material, human and divine agents we can understand the local specificities and glocal aspects of Roman religion in Dacia.

Naturally, Roman Dacia would have contained the most intimate dimensions of space sacralization: the human body itself. The sacralization of this

the space could be performed by marking signs on the skin (tattoos, writings, figurative marks, wounds, cuts, mutilations), or through dances, songs and outdoor processions and neurobiological processes caused by religious ecstasy.<sup>38</sup> This level of sacralization is unfortunately not well-attested in the archaeological record: the role of religion and belief in the funerary practices of Dacia has not yet been significantly studied, although this approach can give us valuable insights on individual, macro-religious appropriations and strategies of religious communication.<sup>39</sup> One example could have been the tomb of a priest of Jupiter Dolichenus identified at Ampelum (Zlatna) in the 1980s, but only the funerary stone is preserved.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, small portable objects, vestments and physical aspects of agents in religious communication are attested without figurative representations or archaeological contexts.

A high degree of religious individualism is also attested by the so-called domestic spaces (house shrines, corner shrines, rooms, corridors, private gardens, cellars, etc.). In order to break with the now much discussed “private-public” dichotomy, I will refer to these spaces as micro-spaces.<sup>41</sup> These micro-spaces provide for the participant a high level of religious individuality,<sup>42</sup> creativity and spatial coherence. In these cases, religious experience and the various aspects of lived religion can be observed much more easily.<sup>43</sup> The material evidence of religious communication in micro-spaces also demonstrates a personalized aspect, also with a high level of individuality in visual narratives. The dense network of sacralized micro-spaces and their close intertwining with the diverse world of meso-spaces has already broken the “private-public” duality in contemporary works on spatial theory.<sup>44</sup> However, such micro-spaces in which individual religious choices can flourish are not well attested to in Roman Dacia, and studies of domestic spaces have focused almost exclusively on architectural typologies and specificities.<sup>45</sup> Most of the small finds used in religious communication (bronze and terracotta statuettes, vases, miniature altars) have no documented archaeological context or have not yet been published.

That being said, there are few case studies which can help us reflect on the locality of space sacralization in the micro-spaces of Dacia. One is a beautifully crafted bronze statuette representing Jupiter *in repos en majesté* (h: 12 cm, 15.8 cm with the pedestal) discovered in room no. 5 of the Principia (seat of the legionary commander) in Potaissa (today Turda, Romania). It is the only bronze statuette with a lavishly decorated *postamentum*. The statuette probably originates from the northwestern provinces, as it finds parallels among examples produced in Gaul in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.<sup>46</sup> The statuette was discovered in a private room of a high-ranking military officer in one of the largest public buildings of the province, and it not only illustrates the import of imperial high art and classicism in Dacia, but it also provides a particular case

study of a material evidence of religious communication, where micro-space and individualization (the private room of the officer) combine with the visibility and accessibility of the macro-space, as his room was visited by other officers and guests (in this case, the legionary fortress and its Principia).<sup>47</sup> This statuette may have carried not only the memory of a pre-Roman Dacia and a long lasting familial or personal heritage spanning numerous generations since the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, but also served as a symbol of both the wealth and the religious piety of the chief officer, a personal choice of an individual which is impossible to reconstruct at this stage.

Meso-spaces (e.g. assembly houses, synagogues, small group religious meeting places, spelaeum, Mithraea, springs etc.) have a much stronger social coherence, uniting numerous individuals in the same place, serving as a dynamic physical, visual and imaginary agent (thirdspace) in religious hierarchies and new social structures.<sup>48</sup> Architectural atmosphere and visuality play a secondary function in these spaces, although the layout of the assembly houses could play an important role in the social cohesion of small group religions.<sup>49</sup> These places tended to be occupied for only a short period of perhaps one or two generations, with their longevity and maintenance dependent on charismatic religious leaders and the so-called critical phase of small group religions (i.e., when they expand from familial and personal networks into larger groups and social clusters),<sup>50</sup> although most of these spaces were abandoned before this phase. Roman Dacia is particularly rich in this regard, with a significant number of the 140 sacralized spaces falling into to this category.<sup>51</sup> The popularity of these meso-spaces in Roman Dacia is linked to the many who arrived in the new province following its annexation in AD 106, including active or former soldiers, as well as individuals and organizations connected to Dacia's economic development. These small group religions represent not only the most powerful religious networks (especially Mithraic, Bacchic groups), but also had an important impact on the political and economic networks of the province and beyond.

In Dacia, the vast majority of the sacralized meso-spaces have been found in urban environments, primarily in the two largest cities of the province: Apulum and Sarmizegetusa. These were small buildings, with only several rooms, which usually included a separate kitchen and banquet spaces that could house groups of 10 to 30 people.<sup>52</sup> These small religious groups usually originated from Asia Minor, Dalmatia, or Syria, but often we also find Thracian groups in such spaces. In some fortunate cases, a list of community members has also survived, such as the *album* of the Syrian group from Sarmizegetusa.<sup>53</sup>

These sacralized meso-spaces have received little attention from scholars. Mithraea (sanctuaries dedicated to Mithras) provide special case studies on meso-spaces, where the inner geography of the sanctuary plays an important role



FIG. 3. Torso of Cautes  
with bucranium from Apulum.  
SOURCE: author.

and is part of the religious knowledge of the cult. Of the 20 Mithraea identified in the province, only 4 have been excavated, the most recent one in 2008 and 2013–2016.<sup>54</sup> The rich material evidence related to the cult that has emerged from these sanctuaries reflects not only the wealth and connectivity of the members among the local (urban and provincial) elite, but also the extra-provincial financial networks. Many members of the Mithraic groups active in Apulum, Sarmizegetusa, and Micia were part of the staff of the customs system of the *publicum Portorii Illyrici*, the largest economic cluster in the Danubian area of the empire.<sup>55</sup> Meso-spaces used by these wealthy and influential groups provided unique opportunities for changing and transforming

the visual language of a religion. As a result, the meso-spaces used by Mithraic groups in Dacia created several unique representations of the Mithras myth. One of them is a rare representation of Cautes, a torchbearer of Mithras, who is usually represented as a young male figure in Persianized vestment with a torch in his hand. In some examples from Roman Dacia, the appearance of Cautes has been altered and he appears as a young, beardless person holding the head of a bull (Cautes with bucranium, fig. 3). This iconographic innovation only appears 5 times in the Roman Empire, with examples found at Sarmizegetusa, Apulum, and Boppard (the ancient Bodobriga), suggesting a direct connection between the Mithraic groups in these settlements of Dacia and Germania Superior.<sup>56</sup> The mobility of innovative ideas carried by groups and individuals indicates the importance of social cohesion among the religious meso-spaces in the Roman Empire, which represented one of the major results of the citification of Roman religion.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, most of the votive material in the province of Roman Dacia was produced in the meso-spaces of small group religions.

Macro-spaces (e.g., complex sanctuaries, healing shrines, pilgrimage sites, mountains, forests, etc.) represent the most successful case studies. Such places are maintained through the intense investment of financial and human resources and represent significant concentrations of religious experience, knowledge, and



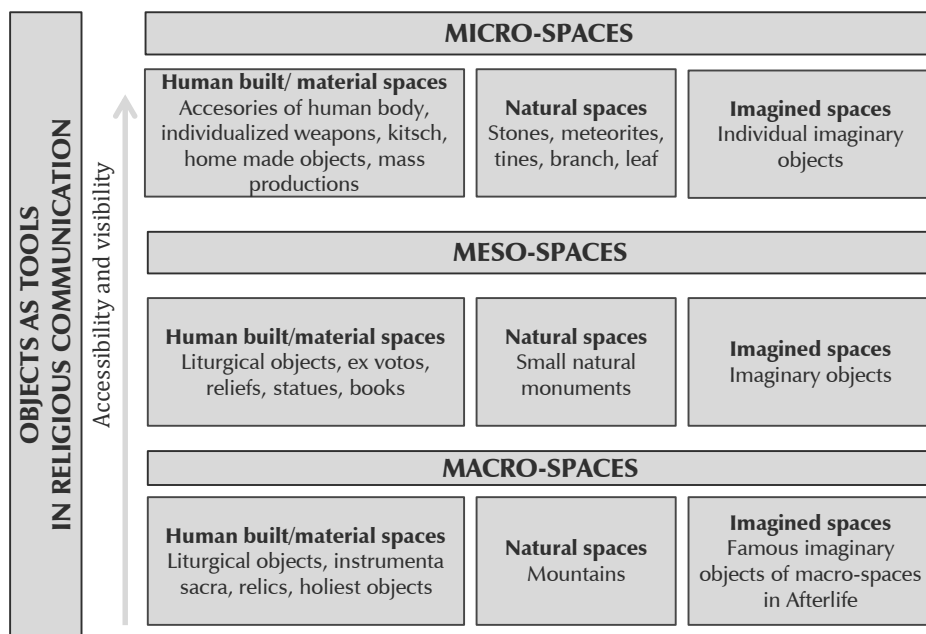


FIG. 4. Hierarchy of objects and their spatial taxonomy  
SOURCE: author.

personnel.<sup>58</sup> Sacralized macro-spaces also tend to have a *longue-durée* existence that relies on religious pilgrimage, monopolization of religious knowledge and divine agencies (central sanctuaries, temples, shrines of religious founders, oracular sanctuaries). In these cases, architecture, visual narratives and monumentality, religious traditions and the memory of the sacred all play crucial roles in the production and maintenance of the sacralized space.<sup>59</sup> The successful survival of these sacralized spaces is dependent of the ongoing communication between humans and the divine and the materiality of religion used as tools in all of the abovementioned locations (fig. 4). These spatial categories are highly interconnected across natural, rural and urban environments, each of them having a direct impact on the transformations occurring in religious practices.<sup>60</sup> Larger spatial units, such as provinces or even macro-economic, political or geographical clusters (e.g., the Amber and Silk Roads, maritime routes, *publicum portorii Illyrici*) also have an indirect but visible impact on the movement of objects and religious groups between places and the sacralization space (fig. 5).<sup>61</sup> In macro-spaces, religious knowledge and experience are controlled, while the accessibility and visibility of the sacred is dependent on a strict hierarchy of religious specialists (*sacerdotes*, priestly *collegia*).

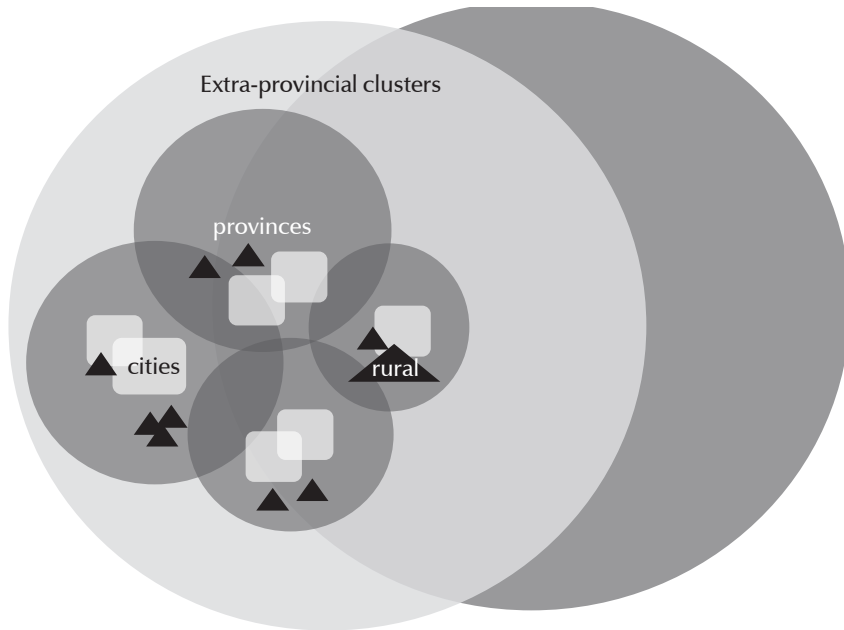


FIG. 5. Macro-structures as spatial factors in religious communication  
SOURCE: author.

There are few well-attested sacralised macro-spaces in Dacia. Most notable among these are the Asklepieia, the healing sanctuaries which appear almost exclusively in urban environments (e.g., Apulum, Sarmizegetusa, and Ampelum). The best-preserved macro-space and complex sanctuary lies in the so-called Area Sacra (sacred area) in the *extra-muros* of Sarmizegetusa.<sup>62</sup> This healing complex had at least three construction phases, which suggests—similarly to the case of Apulum—a constant economic and human investment. The first phase, dated to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, entails an irregular structure with multiple compartments. It is possible that in this phase the structures had another function and did not serve as a sanctuary. In the second phase (early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD) the wall of the sacred precinct was constructed. This demarcated the *temenos* of the macro-space and established the liminality of the site: walls not only separated the sacred from the profane, but also protected the visitors and the sick from the rest of the world. The macro-spaces of Asklepieia are usually well-defined religious zones in Roman urban topography: their insularity is represented by natural islands (the Asklepieion of Rome on the Tiber) or walled *temenos* in watery environments.<sup>63</sup> The Asklepieia were special buildings, where the three categories of space sacralization came together: their macro-spatial aspect is re-

flected by the massive investment of the local elite and the monumentalization of the building complex. In the Asklepieion of Sarmizegetusa, a great number of statuettes, reliefs and mass-produced terracotta objects were found, along with almost 1,400 lamps, which also ensured the successful maintenance of the sacralized space.<sup>64</sup> Sick individuals who visited the sanctuary served as micro-spaces via the ritual of incubation, with the human bodies inside the Asklepieion becoming agents of religious communication.<sup>65</sup> After staying in the healing sanctuary for several days, these individuals would become a coherent group, united by their common medical issue and physical pain, which had the same religious grouping effect as small group religions operating in meso-spaces. Subsequently, the successful religious communication that occurred in these healing sanctuaries was materialized in altars, reliefs or terracotta objects representing body parts, which were then displayed as memories of divine encounters in the *temenos*. Moreover, news of successful religious communication was carried outside of the Asklepieion by worshippers who would speak favorably of the divinity.

It is important to state that these three major categories of space sacralization are modern, artificial concepts. Mapping religious experience and lived religious communication, where human, material and divine agencies are in constant interaction and interconnectivity, is much more complex than creating a hierarchical system of spaces and objects. Religious communication in antiquity was also limited and controlled by legal aspects, religious specialists and traditions. In many cases, the micro-space of an individual is experienced within a macro-space, while in complex spatial environments, especially in cities, spaces of sacralization co-exist in multiple levels and forms. In the remainder of this article, I will discuss two case studies from Roman Dacia where the multi-spatiality of religious communication is well-attested by both small portable objects and monumentalized spaces.

A small bronze statuette used by an individual in a micro-space (domestic environment) was discovered in 2006 on the territory of the *colonia Aurelia Apulensis*, one of the largest Roman conurbations in the Danubian provinces.<sup>66</sup> The small bronze statuette (10.4 cm) represents Artemis Ephesia, the great goddess of Ephesus, one of the most important pilgrimage sites of Asia Minor. The rare, miniature representation of the central statue of Artemis Ephesia was probably the result of mass production at the sanctuary in Ephesus, which carried the memory of a journey between Asia Minor and Dacia. The statuette therefore held a very special, intimate meaning for its owner and was more than just a bronze statuette and a material tool of religious communication in a micro-space (lararium, house shrine). The small object represented the materialized memory and imaginary macro-space of the 1,500–1,800 km-long voyage between Apulum and Ephesus, which took at least 29 (by sea) or 49 days in Roman times

(fig. 1).<sup>67</sup> It also carries the memorization of the macro-space, the grand temple of Artemis in Ephesus: the temple was represented on the *corona muralis* of the divinity in the form of a monumental temple restored by Hadrian. A small object, used in a moving, constantly changing micro-space also carries the memory—the absent presence—of a sacralized macro-space.

The second example is an inscribed statue base discovered in the 1950s within the Principia of the XIII Gemina legion at Apulum (today Alba Iulia, Romania), and it represents a unique case study for material religion used as an active agent in macro-spaces (in this case: the legionary fortress and the Principia). Votive stone inscriptions (altars or statue bases) of the Roman Empire were usually treated as textual sources for prosopographic studies, and for epigraphic or—rarely—art history analysis. Recently, a paradigmatic shift suggested the complex agency role of these inscribed stones and their environment.<sup>68</sup> In these cases, where the provenance of the objects is known, the textual resources can tell us a lot about the impact of such objects in a sacralized space. In this context, the votive epigraphic corpus of Dacia (almost 1,550 inscriptions) offers great research possibilities. The following case study represents a great example of how votive inscriptions can unite the material, human and spatial aspects of sacralization. The monument has been identified as a mid-sized statue base that has been rudimentarily done, with an unusually large corona. The statue is again missing and, as in the other case, it seems to be very hard to identify what it represented. The text of the inscription reads:<sup>69</sup>

*Dis Penatibus Lari/ibus Militaribus Lari / Viali Neptuno Saluti / Fortunae Reduci / (A)esculapio Dianae / Apollini Herculi / Spei Fa(v)ori P(ublius) Catius / Sabinus trib(unus) mil(itum) / leg(ionis) XIII g(eminæ) v(otum) l(ibens) s(olvit)*

The inscription's exact place of discovery is not known but it lay close to the recently discovered Principia.<sup>70</sup> In comparison with the other inscriptions found near to this location, this is by far the most rudimentary, which might indicate that it was unfinished or ordered urgently. The dedicator is P. Catius Sabinus,<sup>71</sup> a loyal servant of Septimus Severus and his successors, although at the time of his arrival in Apulum c. AD 197 Sabinus was still only a *tribunus legionis XIII Geminae*.<sup>72</sup> The precise date of the dedication is unknown, but Sabinus' motivation is quite clear: expressing the loyalty of the army, the officers and himself to the recently elected emperor after an extraordinary event, probably the successful return from a war (perhaps the Civil War of AD 193–197 or the Parthian War of AD 198–199). The dedication of this monument could have even taken place as part of a military triumph or for one of the major military festivals of the Feriale Militum.<sup>73</sup> In any case, it was a public event with the participation

of all the officers, soldiers and civilians, which emphasized the importance of Sabinus's dedication.

The text itself is very unusual. Crowded with rudimentary lines and letters in a small area (c. 35 × 40 cm) the text refers to 12 divinities and personifications: Dii Penates, Lares militares, Lares viales, Neptunus, Salus, Fortuna Redux, Aesculapius, Diana, Apollo, Hercules, Spes, and Favor.<sup>74</sup> Bundling numerous personifications and divinities together represents similar needs to the *sive deus dive dea* or *dis deabusque immortalibus* formulae, while also maintaining a traditional, even archaic, nature of worship.<sup>75</sup> This tendency represents a much elaborated and consciously constructed religious narrative involving Sabinus as part of his familial heritage and religious tradition.<sup>76</sup> In this sense, the dedication served two roles: a) immortalizing the name and fame of the family of the *Catii* and b) supporting the emperor and raising morale among the soldiers, as was the duty of a young senator in such a position.<sup>77</sup> Senatorial power is elegantly combined with the religious duty of a loyal military officer in time of crisis. The enumeration of the divinities—similar to a *carmen* or *vota publica*—was not spontaneous, but devised with a particular purpose for special events, such as the *vota annua pro salute Imperatoris* or *vota extraordinaria*. The inscription could be interpreted as a 'thanksgiving' prayer or a ritual 'reaction' and reply to a *vota extraordinaria* in a military context,<sup>78</sup> a personal thanksgiving of Sabinus and his soldiers who fought with him on the side of the emperor, keeping him and the empire alive. The dual nature (individual and communal) of the prayer-inscription is reflected by the nature of the gods and personifications evoked within it (Italic divinities, some of them, such as Neptune, Hercules, or the Penates appearing in other inscriptions of Sabinus and his family, combined with military divinities, such as the Lares militares). However, this is more than just an individual's list or 'pantheon' of gods with public aspects. It is a sacralized narrative and an immortalized, shorter version of a prayer. The divinity list represents the chronological timeline of a military mission, from leaving home (Dis Penates), under the auspices and protection of the military divinities (Lares militares), travelling on dangerous roads (Lares Viales) and seas (Neptune), then fighting for the health and preservation of the empire (Salus), and escaping from the war with great fortune (Fortuna Redux). The association of Aesculapius–Diana–Apollo can suggest a local characterization from Apulum, where the three divinities were attested in the same healing sanctuary-complex. Their presence on the list emphasizes the importance of healing gods and divinities, probably invoked by soldiers in the *vota extraordinaria* before they left the fort. During their mission soldiers were protected and supported by Hercules, Spes and Favour. The hypothesis that this inscription was an immortalized version of a loudly presented oral prayer is substantiated by Sabinus's personal penchant

for poetic, narrative inscriptions; two dedications made by him at Rome and Ostia also contain a religious narrative as a specific form of prayer.

In summary, although exactly where and why the dedication was made is unknown, the statue base with its small-sized statue was surely installed in the *Principia*, which implies the presence of officers and soldiers as well. The text also suggests a communal act in the name of the whole vexillation. Sabinus' monument is therefore an important and rare example of combining the traditional (Italic) Roman-Senatorial religion with individual and opportunist tendencies in times of crisis.

## Conclusions

**T**HIS ARTICLE has sought to provide a brief summary of the concept and changing methodology of sacralization and presented a new space taxonomy, where materiality of religion plays a significant role in creating, shaping and maintaining a large variety of sacralized spaces. These are more than atmospheres, as “realized semantic potential of socio-spatial arrangements which evoke a specific semantic framework,” as Radermacher argued, but active agents and facets of religious communication and glocalization.<sup>79</sup> In my space taxonomy of space sacralization, human, divine and material agencies are interconnected and shaped by the three major spatial categories which often overlap. This provides a large variety of analytical tools for researchers to understand the complexity of spatial religion and the role of the human, material and divine actors within, breaking some traditional spatial categories, such as “private” or “public” and peripheral or central.

This study has focused on Roman Dacia, a province often labeled in classical literature as “peripheral,” “military,” “ephemeral” or “multicultural.” These traditional socio-economic or cultural categories are also related to the complex notion of Romanization, where religion was a marginal consequence of a political-historical event, such as the conquest of pre-Roman society and its radical transformation. My thesis shows that Roman religious communication in Dacia is more than just a consequence of Romanization: it is the dynamic interaction of individuals and groups in three space categories which often overlap. The case studies I have presented in this study reflect the major characteristics of space sacralization in Dacia. However, micro-spaces of religious communication are less well-attested and in this regard Romanian classical archaeology needs to evolve and further studies will need to focus on domestic architecture, votive small finds, and the promising field of archaeoethnology. The large number of terracotta and bronze statuettes, the few cases of miniature marble statuettes

and curse tablets in Dacia suggest that the province had similar richness in terms of space sacralization and religious communication in micro-spaces to any other provinces of the empire.

A much better-documented category are the meso-spaces of Dacia. Small group religions formed around the cult of Mithras, Liber Pater (Bacchus), Isis-Serapis, Magna Mater, Jupiter Dolichenus and many other divinities (especially home-divinities of the ethnic groups arriving in Dacia) represent a special case of this province. Dacia was particularly rich in small group religions, because the province was formed in the middle of the so called “second paganism,”<sup>80</sup> a period of elementary religious transformations in the history of Roman religion, which began around the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD but has its roots in the late Republican era.<sup>81</sup> In AD 106 the major religious changes in the Roman Empire already produced numerous small group religions, and Dacia represented a new macro-space in the topography of a dynamic religious market, where mobile groups, such as the army, the economic elite and the auxiliary groups thereof (miners, merchants, religious specialists, artists) found their new home. The meso-spaces of Roman Dacia offer not only a replication of the religious realities of the Roman Empire but also provide numerous examples of local religious appropriation and re-invented traditions created within the borders of the province. These meso-spaces saw a high level of religious creativity, unique visual languages, and local varieties of centralized religious knowledge. In particular, this is demonstrated by the case of the Dacian Mithraea and their localized iconography.

Finally, the province also provides several examples of sacralized macro-spaces, most notably healing centers such as the Asklepieia, which became local or sometimes regional centers of pilgrimage and religious tourism. The heavy looting of the major sacralized spaces in urban and military environments (e.g., legionary fortresses, palace of the governor, buildings of the Principiae in forts, seats of the procurators or other dignitaries, major urban public temples, etc.) during the medieval period limits what can be ascertained about this area of the Roman Empire, but the overall number of sacralized spaces in the province is above average among the Danubian provinces.<sup>82</sup> The short existence of the province in the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries (AD 106–271) is the major reason for the extremely large number of votive inscriptions (almost 1,600), with Dacia producing almost twice as many as Raetia or Noricum. However, the majority of materials relating to religion in Dacia (at least 45%) originate from the two major conurbations: the double city of Apulum and the capital of the province, colonia Sarmizegetusa. Subsequently, religious materials from this province were predominantly urban in nature, which highlights the importance of citification in religious communication in global aspect: many of these urban religious groups

were interconnected (especially the Syrian and Dolichenian groups, but also the Mithraic groups) within the province. A few cases also demonstrate extra-provincial mobilities and connections.<sup>83</sup>

The lack of indigenous religious spaces and their transformation in the new provincial context in Dacia is unusual among the Roman provinces, but this could once again reflect the current state of research and the lack of archaeological investigations in the rural and mountainous areas of Romania.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, due to the short existence of the province, Dacia also produced little evidence of early Christian activity.<sup>85</sup> These local specificities do not affect the spatial taxonomy of religious communication in the province, but, on the contrary, they contributed to the more dynamic, explosive nature of material production and to the fast and radical decay of sacralized spaces, abandoned after AD 271.

Dacia provides a great case study on how a politically exceptional history and a geographically specific macro-space can shape and create glocal forms of religious communication and space sacralization. The spatial taxonomy used here as an analytical tool can be a starting point for a more complex digital mapping of the religious communication in the Danubian provinces.<sup>86</sup>



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## **Abstract**

### Space Sacralization in Antiquity: The Case Study of Roman Dacia

This article has sought to provide a brief summary of the concept and changing methodology of sacralization and presented a new space taxonomy, where materiality of religion plays a significant role in creating, shaping and maintaining a large variety of sacralized spaces. In my space taxonomy of space sacralization, human, divine and material agencies are interconnected and shaped by the three major spatial categories which often overlap. This provides a large variety of analytical tools for researchers to understand the complexity of spatial religion and the role of the human, material and divine actors within, breaking some traditional spatial categories, such as “private” or “public” and peripheral or central. My thesis shows that Roman religious communication in Dacia is more than just a consequence of Romanization: it is the dynamic interaction of individuals and groups in three space categories which often overlap.

## **Keywords**

space taxonomy of religion, materiality of religion, religious communication, religious experience, Roman Dacia