

## DEUS COMMAGENUS

### A NEW DEITY IN THE PANTHEON OF ROMAN DACIA?

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The cult of Baal from Doliche spread in the Roman world after enclosing Commagene in 71 AD, his penetration in the provinces taking place different (in areas such as Africa and Pannonia he does not appear before the reign of the emperor Hadrian)<sup>1</sup>. The issue of this cult in the Roman world and in Dacia was investigated in many studies<sup>2</sup>. We intend to refer to what we believe to be a confusion in the analysis of the epigraphical monuments raised for Jupiter Dolichenus, that generated a new deity - Commagenus.

In the monograph of the cult of Dolichenus in Dacia the authors say that „le plus souvent, Jupiter Dolichenus apparaît seul dans les inscriptions. Parfois, on le trouve en association avec IOM Heliopolitanus, Deus Commagenus, Salus et Caelestis Brigantia”<sup>3</sup>. In a recent study<sup>4</sup>, C. Petolescu says that: „dintre divinitățile cărora se încină militarii acestei trupe (cohors II Flavia Commagenorum n.n), inscripțiile menționează fie divinități romane: Iupiter Optimus Maximus, Minerva Augusta et genius cohortis II Flaviae Commagenorum, Mars Gradivus, Mercurius, Liber Pater, Hercules, Fortuna Augusta, precum și orientale: IOM Dolichenus și Iupiter Turmasgadis. De altfel, inscripțiile de la Micia prezintă un interesant repertoriu de dedicări către divinitățile orientale; dintre dedicăriile pentru divinitățile siriene, mai menționăm pe cele pentru Iupiter Erapolitanus (Hierapolitanus), IOM D(o)lichenus C(ommagenorum) și Dea Syria”.

The reading of the two excerpts above reveals the existence of an oriental deity, different from Iupiter Dolichenus, called Deus Commagenus or IOM Dolichenus Commagenorum. The question is who this deity is and what is his connection with Dolichenus.

The word Commagenus and its derivatives appears in Roman Dacia in five inscriptions, coming from Micia<sup>5</sup>, Săcădate<sup>6</sup> and Ampelum<sup>7</sup>. Among them, the inscriptions from Micia, Săcădate and one coming from Ampelum<sup>8</sup> do not raise special problems. The deity invoked in these three inscriptions is Iupiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus Commagenus (Micia), Iupiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus Commagenus or Commagenorum (Săcădate) and Deus Aeternus Commacenus Dulcenus (Ampelum). In these three situations the specialists agree that

<sup>1</sup> Turcan 1998: 192

<sup>2</sup> Berciu, Petolescu 1976; Merlat 1951; Merlat 1960; Popa, Berciu 1978; Russu 1969; Sanie 1981; Turcan 1998

<sup>3</sup> Popa, Berciu 1978: 5

<sup>4</sup> Petolescu 1995, II: 252

<sup>5</sup> IDR III/3, 66; Sanie 1981, nr. 23; Russu 1969: 182; Popa, Berciu 1978, nr. 23

<sup>6</sup> Russu 1969: 182; Popa, Berciu 1978, nr. 37; Sanie 1981, nr. 30

<sup>7</sup> IDR III/3 298-299; Merlat 1951, nr. 27-29; Sanie 1981, nr. 5, 6, 9; Popa, Berciu 1978, nr. 9, 11, 12

<sup>8</sup> Popa, Berciu 1978, nr. 9; Merlat 1951, nr. 27; Sanie 1981, nr. 9

Commagenus is an epithet of the god Dolichenus that suggests the native country of the god and probably, we believe, the quality of a national god (I.I.Russu attributes the inscription from Micia to the presence here of a Commageni unit, while Al. Popa and I. Berciu say that „contrairement à la plupart des descriptions, celle-ci indique la patrie du dieu, la province syrienne de Commagene”<sup>9</sup>; about the inscription from Ampelum the same authors sustain that „ainsi, le consécrateur anonyme, très probablement un Oriental, tient à préciser que Dolichenus este originaire de Commagène”<sup>10</sup>).

Very disputed are the appreciations about the other two inscriptions from Ampelum<sup>11</sup>. Analyzing the first votive column, raised for Iupiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus et Deo Commaceno by Aurelius Marinus, Adde Barsemei and Oceanus Socratis, sacerdotes, Pierre Merlat distinguished two deities, because „ce sont des prêtres même de ce dernier qui établissent la distinction”<sup>12</sup>. The difference between Dolichenus and Commagenus exists also, in P. Merlat's opinion, for the other votive column from Ampelum, dedicated to Iupiter Optimus Maximus Commagenorum Aeternus by a sacerdos lovi Optimo Maximo Dolicheni named Marinus Bassus.

To motivate his theory once more, the author offers an example from Pannonia Inferior<sup>13</sup> - Aquincum, where there were identified two altars with an almost identical inscription, raised for lovi Optimo Maximo Dolicheno et Deo Paterno Comageno by M Aurelius Apollinaris, decurio municipii Murselensium<sup>14</sup>. P. Merlat says that „cette double dédicace confirme ce que j'ai déjà dit de la différenciation entre Dolichenus et le deus Commagenus. On y voit le même effort, non pour séparer et désunir les deux divinités, mais pour mieux indiquer que le dieu latinisé pouvait ne pas traduire, aux yeux des fidèles, tous les aspects du dieu primitif”<sup>15</sup>.

The idea stated by P. Merlat was taken over by the Romanian literature. About the same inscriptions, the monograph of Dolichenus in Roman Dacia asserts that „encore une dédicace, par conséquent, à Dolichenus, à côté duquel apparaît cette fois ci une autre divinité syrienne, Deus Commagenus”<sup>16</sup>. The authors find „une liaison étroite entre Dolichenus et cette divinité” (Commagenus, n.n)<sup>17</sup>.

K. Angyal and L. Balla, on their turn, saw the approach between Deus Commagenus, (who is present mostly in Dacia) and Iupiter Dolichenus, as well as the variety of names that were

<sup>9</sup> Popa, Berciu 1978: 29

<sup>10</sup> Popa, Berciu 1978: 11

<sup>11</sup> IDR III/3 298-299; Merlat 1951, nr. 28-29; Sanie 1981, nr. 5, 6; Popa, Berciu 1978, nr. 11, 12

<sup>12</sup> Merlat 1951: 31

<sup>13</sup> beside the five inscriptions from Dacia and the two identical from Pannonia Inferior in the Roman Empire there is only one inscription, in Noricum (Merlat 1951, nr 127) for IOMD Deo Commageo et Genio Mascellio, with an unknown dedicant. As we can see, most of the inscriptions that prove these „associations” come from Dacia

<sup>14</sup> Merlat 195, nr. 63-64

<sup>15</sup> Merlat 1951: 58

<sup>16</sup> Popa, Berciu 1978: 13

<sup>17</sup> Popa, Berciu 1978: 54

attributed to Deus Commagenus<sup>18</sup>. The authors believe that „le culte de deus Commagenus ne disposait pas d'une organisation indépendante, du moins on n'en a aucune preuve. Le culte de cette divinité devait rester attaché à celui de Jupiter Dolichenus et c'étaient les prêtres de celui-ci qui se chargeaient de l'entretenir”<sup>19</sup>.

G. Wissowa and Fr. Cumont saw in Deus Commagenus a „Landesgott”, worshipped at Commagene beside Dolichenus<sup>20</sup>.

For K. Angyal and L. Balla, Deus Commagenus is a Semite Baal, that appeared after Dolichenus, during the II-III centuries AD (unlike Merlat who considered Commagenus an archaic god, and Jupiter Dolichenus a latine deity): „deus Commagenus n'est autre qu'une variété nouvelle de la figure de Jupiter Dolichenus, une „réédition” plus „nationale” de Baal de Doliche, devenu, avec le temps, de plus en plus universel. Le culte de deus Commagenus a été utilisé – et peut-être élaboré – par les prêtres de Dolichenus en vue de répandre celui de Jupiter Dolichenus”<sup>21</sup>.

S. Sanie agrees to the idea of P. Merlat, that in the inscription for IOMD ET DEO COMMACENO there are two gods, „indiferent dacă admitem că sunt contopite sau separate”<sup>22</sup> and suggests to solve this problem by putting an A before ET, that would be read AET(ernus), a frequent epithet of the oriental god (this hypothesis had already been rejected by A.H.Kan and P. Merlat<sup>23</sup>). About Jupiter Optimus Maximus Commagenorum, S. Sanie considers that behind this name it must definitely be Dolichenus, the supreme god of the Commageni<sup>24</sup>. For I.I.Russu this new deity does not exist, it is the complete name of the god: Jupiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus et Deus Commagenorum<sup>25</sup>. Nor M. Macrea identifies a new deity. He says that „uneori el (Dolichenus, n.n) este numit în inscripții IOM Commagenorum sau Deus Commagenus”<sup>26</sup>.

Analyzing all the opinions on this matter, we believe that Dolichenus and Deus Commagenus are one and the same god, because, as S. Sanie stated, Dolichenus is the supreme god of the Commageni<sup>27</sup>.

To support our theory, there is an inscription coming from the Aventin dolichenum from Rome<sup>28</sup>: B(ona) F(ortuna) / EX PRAECEPTO I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) D(olicheno) A(eterni) [CONS]ervatori / TOTIUS MUNDI AUR(elius) MAG[NES]I / US CANDID(atus) ET PATRONUS

<sup>18</sup> Angyal, Balla 1972: 89

<sup>19</sup> Angyal, Balla 1972: 90

<sup>20</sup> apud Angyal, Balla 1972: 92

<sup>21</sup> Angyal, Balla 1972: 93

<sup>22</sup> Sanie 1981: 47

<sup>23</sup> Merlat 1951: 32

<sup>24</sup> Sanie 1981: 48

<sup>25</sup> IDR III/3 299

<sup>26</sup> Macrea 1969: 369

<sup>27</sup> the association of Dolichenus to another deity can be found in Pannonia, where there is a syncretism between Dolichenus and Heliopolitanus; four inscriptions prove this connection (Merlat 1951, nr. 71, 73, 113 and 279). Among them, one inscription (nr. 73) juxtaposes the two gods - IOMD et IOM Heliopolitanus. The inscription nr. 113 was raised for IOMD ET H, and the others for IOM Dulcenio Heliopolitanus.

<sup>28</sup> Merlat 1951, nr. 195

HU[US] / LOCI PRO SALUTE SUA ET AUR[ELI] / SARAPIACI PATRONI HUIUS [LOCI] / ET  
 SUORUM OMNIUM MACERIA S[AE] / PSIT LOC(um) SACR(um) DEI MAGNO  
 COMMA[G](enorum) / PER M(arcum) AUR(elium) HOINOPIONEM ACACIUM / SACERDOTEM  
 ET PATRE CANDIDATOR(um).

The inscription talks about an enclosed precinct for Deus Magnus Commagenorum, the great god of the Commageni, ordered by Jupiter Dolichenus (which means that before that the cult took place in the open). As Merlat stated, these are the construction stages of Dolichenus' temple on the Aventin<sup>29</sup>. This is the most clear example that the two gods are alike. In the same dolichenum there were identified statues for other gods, such as Hercules, Diana, Silvanus, relieves with Mithras killing the bull. No precincts was made, inside the sanctuary, for any other god, which means they must be identical.

The inscription from Rome probably explains the inscriptions from Ampelum. Those who raise these inscriptions are sacerdotes. It is well known that the priests are the one who tried to preserve the cult in its original aspect<sup>30</sup>. Thus, it is justified the insistence to remind in the inscriptions from Ampelum and Rome that Dolichenus is the supreme god of the Commageni.

As for the situation in Pannonia where Dolichenus approaches to assimilation by Heliopolitanus, P. Merlat sustains that usually the assimilation is due to soldiers, while the distinction - to the adepts, who insist to mention the origin of the ancient Baal and the relation with Commagene<sup>31</sup>. We believe there is the same situation in Dacia. The inscriptions from Săcădate and Ampelum (for Deo Aeterno Commaceno Dulceno) are fragmentary, the name and the position of the dedicants is unknown. Iulius Trophimus in the inscription from Micia does not mention his position. The dedicants on the two votive columns from Ampelum are *sacerdotes* and, according to P. Merlat, they try to remind the oriental origin of the cult.

K. Angyal and L. Balla suggested that it is possible that Deus Commagenus was an "invention" of the priests, in order to strengthen the cult of Dolichenus. We believe that Commagenus is not a new god, but an aspect of Dolichenus' cult, that names his quality of a *deus patrius*. It is probably a traditionalist reaction of the priests who try to underline the origin of the oriental god in the context of the Romanization of Dolichenus' cult.

C. Petolescu says it is possible that the inscriptions from Ampelum were related to the presence in the area of a detachment from cohors II Flavia Commagenorum. He also believes the altar from Săcădate could be connected with a possible presence of cohors I Flavia Commagenorum on the upper stream of the river<sup>32</sup>, which is not proved by the stamps<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Merlat 1951: 187

<sup>30</sup> Sanie 1981: 245

<sup>31</sup> Merlat 1960: 122-124

<sup>32</sup> Petolescu 1995, II: 249

<sup>33</sup> Cohors I Flavia Commagenorum is known only at Acidava, Romula and Slăveni (Rusu 1969: 172).

Referring to the inscriptions from Ampelum, I.P. Haynes said that „none of the three refers to the regiment or indeed anything specifically military and all of the named dedicants are priests. The altars therefore may have nothing to do with the cohort”<sup>34</sup>.

If the priests were related or not to a military unit is very difficult to say. Such an alternative is not impossible, as there is a precedent (Flavius Barhadadi sacerdos in legio XIII Gemina). Thus, the priests from Ampelum could have a relationship with a military unit, but unfortunately we have no proof.

We believe that there is no distinct god called Commagenus. In all the situations, Commagenus is an epithet of Dolichenus that underlines and reminds his oriental origin, his position of a supreme god for the Commageni, that the syncretism with Jupiter blurred to complete oblivion.

#### Epigraphical supplement:

I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) D(olicheno) C(ommageno) / IUL(ius) TROPH / IM(us) VO(tum) S(olvit) / L(ibens) M(erito)

(altar; sand stone; 100x50x45 cm; letters 5 cm; the field of the inscription is corroded; found in 1943 south from the railway and west from the block station 301, closed to the camp from Micia; History Museum Deva; IDR III/3, 66, fig. 53; Sanie 1981, nr. 23; Russu 1969: 182; Popa, Berciu 1978: 23)

I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / DO[LICHENO] / COM[MAGEN...] / V...

(altar; audit-andezit; fragmentary; letters 5,5-7 cm; Săcădate; Brukenthal Museum Sibiu; Russu 1969: 182; Sanie 1981, nr. 30; Popa, Berciu 1978, nr. 37)

DEO [AETER] / N(o) COMM / AC(eno) DULC(eno) /

(altar; Ampelum; Popa, Berciu 1978: nr. 9; Merlat 1951, nr. 27; Sanie 1981, nr. 9; Popa, Berciu 1978, nr. 9; Russu 1969: 182)

I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) COMMA / GENORIJM [AE] / TERNO MA / RINUS MA / RIAN(i) BAS(us) SACERDOS I(ovi) O(ptimi) M(aximi) D(olicheni) PRO S(alute) S(ua) SUORUMQ(ue) O / MNIUM V(otum)

(votive column; sand whetstone; fragmentary; 110x35 cm; letters 6 cm; the lines 1-2 and the right side of the lines 3-4 extremely corroded; ligature r4 E+T; Ampelum; Zlatna Museum; IDR III/3, 298; Merlat 1951, nr. 28; Sanie 1981, nr. 6; Popa, Berciu 1978, nr. 12; Russu 1969: 182)

I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) D(olicheno) ET / DEO COM / MACENO / AUREL(ius) / MARINUS / ET ADDE / BARSEME / I ET OCEA / NUS SO / CRATIS SA / CERDOTES / V(otum) L(ibentes) P(osuerunt)

(votive column; reddish whetstone; 192x35 cm; letters 3 cm; Ampelum; Zlatna Museum; IDR III/3, 299, fig. 222; Merlat 1951, nr. 29; Sanie 1981, nr. 5; Popa, Berciu 1978, nr. 11; Russu 1969: 182)

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