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IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR SABIN ADRIAN LUCA

The present issue of *Acta Terrae Septemcastrensis* is dedicated to Professor Sabin Adrian Luca, on his 65th anniversary.

Professor Luca started his academic career at *Lucian Blaga* University of Sibiu on the 1st of October 1991, as a Lecturer at the Faculty of Letters, History and Law, today the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, the Department of History, Heritage and Protestant Theology. Stating with 2003 he became a professor, and since 2007 a Ph.D. Supervisor. He also held some administrative positions in the university, such as Head of the Department of Ancient and Medieval History at Faculty of History and Heritage (2000-2004), Vice-Dean of Faculty of History and Heritage (2004-2006) or Director of the *Institute for Research and Valorization of Transylvanian Cultural Heritage in the European Context* (2001-2014).

Until his retirement, in the fall of 2024, more than thirty generations of students were initiated by him in discovering the scientific field of archaeology and particularly the traces that the prehistoric communities that lived on the nowadays Romanian territory, are to be found. From the classes that he taught at the *Lucian Blaga* University of Sibiu, at bachelor or master level we mention here: Archaeology, Romanian Prehistory, General Prehistory, Museology and Civilization of the Old Europe.

The theoretical approaches that he presented during the classes in the university were combined with coordinating the archaeological excavations from the sites of Orăștie-Dealul Pemilor (Hunedoara County), Turdaș-Luncă (Hunedoara County), Mirecurea Sibiului-Petriș (Sibiu County) or Tărtăria-Gura Luncii (Alba County), where numerous students got in contact, most of them for the first time, with an archaeological excavation. For some of the students, archaeology became a full-time job, in museums, universities, or as researchers in other institutions, but for many others the period spent on the archaeology fields coordinated by Professor Luca remained as treasured memories from their student period.

We also want to emphasize the fact that Sabin Adrian Luca was the one that started *Acta Terrae Septemcastrensis* in 2002, a scientific magazine that was annually published, now reaching 23 numbers and 1 thematic issue. Between 2002 and 2017 Professor Luca was the Editor in Chief of the Magazine, today being the Honorary Editor.

In the end we want to congratulate Professor Sabin Adrian Luca for his impressive career, for the many notable results of his life-time work and wish him good health and the peaceful retirement he richly deserves!

The editorial committee

Sibiu, December 2024

ONCE AGAIN ABOUT THE VENUS OF LIMBA AND THE STARČEVO-CRIȘ – VINČA SYNCHRONISMS IN THE MIDDLE MUREȘ VALLEY

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Keywords: *Middle Mureș valley, Neolithic, anthropomorphic idol, Starčevo-Criș - Vinča cultural synchronism*

Abstract: *The authors try to make a contribution to the knowledge of the evolution of successive Early and Developed Neolithic communities belonging to Starčevo-Criș (IIIB) and Vinča (A) cultures, starting from the analysis of the anthropomorphic idol, "Venus type", discovered in the Vărărie sector of the Limba-Oarda de Jos archaeological site. In this manner are presented the context of the discovery, the characteristics of the artifact and the comparative-typological analysis. The complex stratigraphy, the planimetry and the materials revealed are very important in clarifying important aspects of the Early and Developed Neolithic phenomenon in the south-western Transylvanian area. The description of the type, the manufacturing technologies, the specific anatomical features, the specific characteristics are presented by the authors. Finally, are advanced, generically, some assumptions most frequent disseminated in the literature regarding the significance of these artifacts, respectively short interventions with similar findings analogies from Transylvania and Banat. Regarding the artistic aspect, we note different trends. The artist drew a particular attention to some parts. Anatomical elements are sometimes represented accurate, with an overflowing realism, while others are rendered sketchy, geometrical, leading to abstraction. In the case of Venus from Limba, we noticed a harmonious junction between Starčevo and early Vinča elements. In the recent light of the possible cohabitation, of this site, by the communities of Starčevo and Vinča cultures, the work hypothesis is strengthened by the symbiosis of the morphologic elements present on the same artifact: Venus from Limba.*

Fourteen years ago, a study was published in which I presented, for the first time, a remarkable artifact discovered at the archaeological site of Limba-Oarda de Jos¹. More precisely, the artifact in question, the Venus of Limba, was discovered in fragments during the 1997 excavation campaign, within a research unit conducted in the Vărăria sector. Specifically, it was found in the northwestern extremity of this sector, in an area where unspecified anthropic interventions had

¹ Ciută 2010, 13-22; Paul et alii 1998. Subsequently, the statuette was analysed in other specialized studies as well: Ciută 2010a; Ciută Florescu 2010.

led to the partial collapse of the terrace slope (LI-LII/1997 – **Fig. 1**). The situation was perceived by researchers as an opportunity to obtain, through the specific manual straightening of the slope (**Fig. 2**), a clearer understanding of the stratigraphic sequences in this previously unexplored sector. This was aimed at planning the strategy for positioning future research units within this area of the site.

In the aforementioned study, I noted that the statuette was discovered in fragments (**Fig. 3**), at a depth of approximately 1.80 meters, within the layer situated immediately above the archaeological sterile layer, composed of yellowish loess-like clay (**Fig. 2**). Based on the specific characteristics of the materials contained within this habitation level - essentially the earliest Neolithic habitation horizon in the Vărăria sector - it was attributed to the early phase of the Vinča culture (A). Subsequent research conducted in this sector (1998², 1999³, 2001⁴) confirmed the stratigraphic sequences - and their cultural content - revealed in LI-LII/1997.

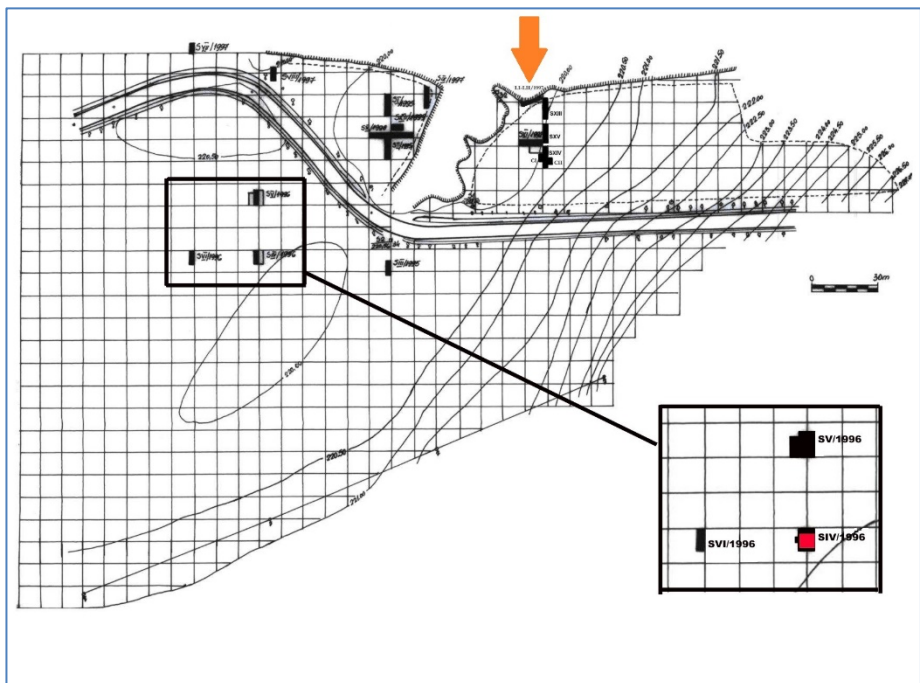


Fig. 1. The topographic survey of the sectors investigated between 1995 and 2001, indicating the location of research unit LI-LII/1997 (orange arrow).

² Paul et alii 1998.

³ Paul Ciută 1999.

⁴ Paul et alii 2002.



Fig. 2. General view of the research unit LI-LII/1997 at the end of the excavation.

After presenting the context of the discovery, and after providing a detailed description of the female anthropomorphic figurine⁵, from technological aspects (paste, temper, firing, surface treatment) to morphological and typological aspects (head shape, facial features, anatomical elements of the arms, pelvis, and legs), we observed that this remarkable artifact, striking from the first glance, combines specific elements of the late Starčevo-Criș tradition with those characteristic of the anthropomorphic representations of the early phases of the Vinča culture⁶.



Fig. 3. The *Venus* figurine, fragmented, at the time of its discovery.

⁵ Since the detailed description of the piece was provided in the referenced work (Ciută 2010, 13-22), we will not dwell on these elements here.

⁶ Ciută 2010, 13-22.



Fig. 4. The *Venus of Limba* in different postures (after Ciută 2010a).

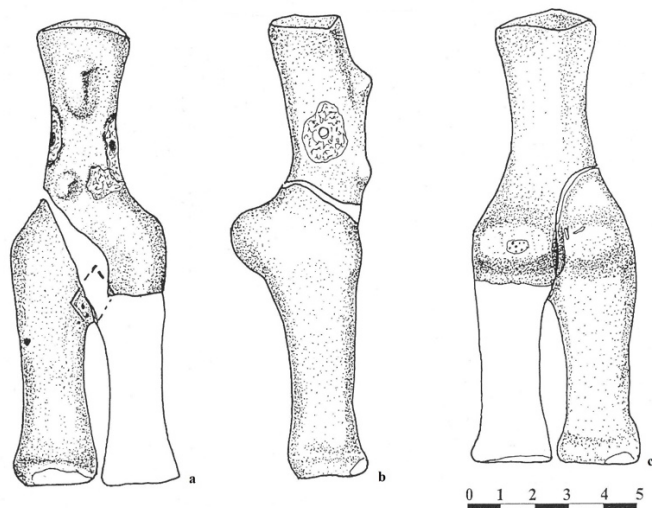


Fig. 5. *Venus of Limba* (after Ciută 2010).



Fig. 6. The *Venus of Limba* and the Vinča A and ceramic materials associated with it.

The latest findings revealed through the processing and analysis of Neolithic complexes uncovered during the preventive archaeological excavations prompted by the crossing of the Sebeş-Turda Highway (2016-2017)⁷, have led to a re-examination of previously formulated hypotheses and working assumptions. In many cases, these have served to confirm some of the ideas advanced during the interpretation of results from earlier systematic excavations (1995-2001). Thus, in a series of recent studies, we noted the presence of several material and technological elements that confirmed the fact that within the early Neolithic

⁷ Ciută, Tudorie 2021; Ciută Tudorie 2022; Ciută, Tudorie 2024; Ciută, Ciută 2018.

habitation complexes, the ceramic materials exhibited a series of characteristics that indicated a very strong connection with materials discovered in Vinča settlements. These material clues led us to propose the hypothesis of a direct adoption of superior Vinča technological elements by the Starčevo-Criș habitants present at the Limba-Oarda de Jos site.

Moreover, the aforementioned preventive excavation led to the discovery of earlier Vinča settlements (A2) in the *Bordane* and *Vărăria* sectors, which were previously considered the earliest in this site (Vinča A3). This situation called into question the existence of a stratigraphic and chronological hiatus between the Starčevo-Criș IIIB level and the first Vinča habitation complexes in this site⁸.

In this new situation, we find ourselves in the position of reevaluating certain previously published artifacts, such as the *Venus of Limba*, and interpreting them from the perspective that the Starčevo-Criș communities and the early Vinča groups at Limba-Oarda de Jos may have established direct contact, even within this very site.

We reiterate, without doubt or room for interpretation, that the archaeological layer in which the figurine was discovered belonged to the Vinča settlement, most likely the earliest habitation horizon in this sector. The piece was found about 5-8 cm above the lower boundary of the archaeological layer, immediately above the loess-like archaeological sterile layer. Furthermore, in *Vărăria* sector there are no traces of Starčevo-Criș settlement, according to the current research! The ceramic materials discovered in its vicinity, of certain Vinča origin, further reinforce the assertion that the figurine belonged to the bearers of the Vinča culture, who occupied the terrace in the *Vărăria* sector (**Fig. 6**).

The technological aspects revealed through direct observation of the artifact also support the acceptance of its Vinča cultural affiliation: the homogeneous paste with fine sand as temper; the absence of chaff in the paste composition; the construction of the artifact by separately attaching its component parts (the legs, separately, and the body, distinct) before drying/firing; excellent quality reducing firing, at temperatures that ensured penetration to the core of the piece; the dark gray-black color, and the overall appearance given by the smoothing/polishing of the exterior surfaces.

The morphological and typological analysis of the figurine also reveals elements of originality. The general type of figurine is an early Neolithic one, with the archetype being older, specific to the Upper Paleolithic, when various forms of Venus figurines appeared. Such female representations, standing with evident steatopygia, in a special posture (with hands on the abdomen or in the air), became widespread from the earliest phases of the early Danube Neolithic. We are referring here to the famous *Red-Haired Goddess* from Donja Branjevina⁹ (Fig. 7), as well as to the frequent versions of the '*Venus*' from the Körös culture.

⁸ Ciută 2002, 3-33.

⁹ Karmanski 1975. Sl. 33.



Fig. 7. *Red-Haired Goddess* from Donja Branjevina.

(source: a. <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=2659934814318261>

b.

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2899333060378434&set=a.1674107459567673>.

c.

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=290580353975568&set=a.137203619313243>).

The closest analogy to our piece, both typologically, stylistically, culturally, and chronologically, remains the Venus of Zăuan (Fig. 8), discovered in 1975 at the eponymous site¹⁰. Since it is contemporary with the one from Limba, belonging to phase IIIB of the 'Starčevo-Criș culture' evolution, it is the artifact to which we will most frequently refer in our attempt to compare the similar piece.

¹⁰ Lako 1977, 41-51.

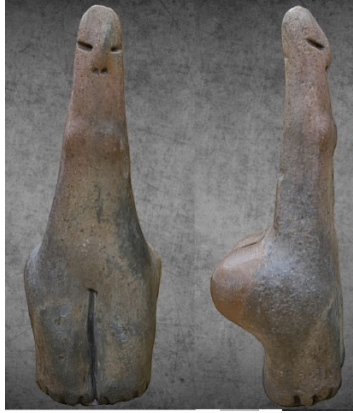


Fig. 8. *Venus from Zăuan* (source: <https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/venus-de-zauan-jud-salaj-14d02a69c0dc47779e9d5beebe77c65>).

We will note from the outset that, although, as mentioned, it is overall a type of figurine (idol) specific to the early Neolithic, the upper part of the figurine from Limba is different. The manner in which the head is depicted, with a triangular, flattened crown and a triangular face, lacking the distinctive facial features (eyes, mouth, nose), which are abstractly represented by a simple oval prominence, pointed in the central area and with a vertical axis, unmistakably points to the Vinča model for creating female figurines. At the Limba site, the majority of idols from the Vinča habitation levels are depicted in this manner¹¹. We do not exclude the possibility that in this case, the face may have been covered by a mask, with all the implications of its presence¹². There is no indication suggesting the existence of a neck or torso.

Furthermore, the entire upper part of the figurine's body is represented as a simple cylinder¹³, terminating flat at the crown of the head (Fig. 5).

The arms are missing, but in the lateral area corresponding to their point of origin, two oval spots remain, indicating the place where they were attached, with a deep hole in the centre of each, revealing the presence of small wooden fragments that supported the arms at the time the piece was modelled (Fig. 2-5). The absence of elements proving the detachment of the palms from the abdomen or the upper part of the legs leads us to believe that the figurine's hands were oriented upward, in the specific position of the orants (as in the Körös culture¹⁴),

¹¹ Ciută 2010a; Ciută, Florescu 2010.

¹² The mask, in mentality of Neolithic human, was played probably the role of intermediary in the relationship with the divinity³⁸. On a general view we could see general similarities, especially common for distinctive elements from early Vinča (phase A2 and A3), but also the individualization of certain elements which appear only in Transylvania (during on the phases B1 and B1-B2) and which not appear in Banat or in Vinča site, like the case of lid vessels (Ciută, Florescu 2010, 93; Ciută 2010a).

¹³ The net domination of cylindrical idols is an additional argument of the early placement of Vinča plastic within general evolution of this cultural phenomenon (Ciută, Florescu 2010, 90, note 17)

¹⁴ As would be the case with the *Venus of Mehtelek* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%B6r%C3%B6s_culture) or *Venus of Ludvar* (<https://nepi.kultura.hu/helyszin/szeged-gyalaret>), booth from Körös culture area.

and not resting on the abdomen, hips, or legs. The breasts, also depicted schematically, are small sized, lacking elements of steatopygia or naturalism.

The lower part of the figurine, made from two separate pieces joined during the modeling process at the hip level¹⁵, is less carefully crafted. The posterior is prominently emphasized but in a similarly schematic manner, lacking the rounded, naturalistic, voluptuous elements typical of early Neolithic figurines. The smoothing of this posterior anatomical part even resulted in the formation of angles, which further suggest the same idea of schematization. There is a clear separation of the buttocks, achieved through the creation of a central vertical groove (Fig. 5).

An element of originality would be the naturalistic depiction of the pubic triangle (in this case, a rhombus!). Similarities can be observed with the *Red-Haired Goddess* from Donja Branjevina (Fig. 7), which is somewhat older than the *Venus of Limba*.

Finally, the figurine's legs, massive, cylindrical, and tall, are not fused together¹⁶ like those of the *Venus of Zăuan* or the figurines from the Körös culture, but are instead separated, adhering more closely to the tradition of the *Red-Haired Goddess* from Donja Branjevina. At the lower end, they are slightly thickened, suggesting the idea of feet, allowing the figurine to stand upright on its own (Fig. 5).

The *Venus of Limba* is not the only Vinča figurine that exhibits strong figurative elements rooted in Starčevo cultural traditions. For instance, in the case of another fragmentary figurine discovered in a Vinča complex, we observe the same steatopygia, complemented by the presence of a belt (girdle) above the hips. This belt features certain protomes suggesting the existence of buckles or decorative elements with aesthetic value, both elements being of definite Starčevo tradition.¹⁷ (Fig. 9-10).



¹⁵ Similar to the figurine *Venus from Zăuan* (Lako 1977, 42).

¹⁶ At Limba-Oarda de Jos, within the context of Vinča habitation levels, cases of figurine legs fused together along their entire length have also been discovered.

¹⁷ Ciută, Florescu 2010, 90.



Fig. 9. Steatopygous figurine with a belt and protomes from Limba-Oarda de Jos (after Ciută, Florescu 2010, fig. 17).

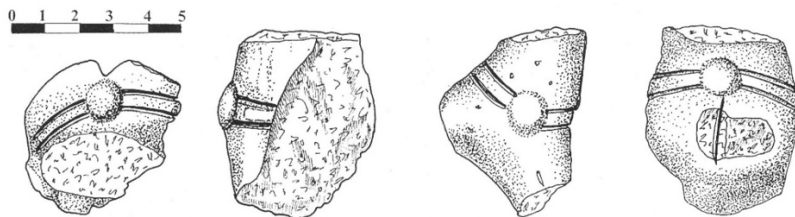


Fig. 10. Steatopygous figurine with a belt and protomes from Limba-Oarda de Jos (after Ciută, Florescu 2010, fig. 17).

At the same time, we note that in the case of plastics it is recorded the loss of the Starčevo elegant or natural forms in the benefit of Vinča brutal forms, more massive, more schematic, respectively by typical Vinča ceramic clay.

The aspects presented above demonstrate that, in the case of early Vinča anthropomorphic figurines from Limba-Oarda de Jos, we observe an original symbiosis of Starčevo-Criș tradition elements, which are integrated into the existing models of the Vinča community. This community reached the area of the Limba-Oarda de Jos site as part of a migration process along the Middle Mureș Valley.

As we have shown on another occasions, this phenomenon gives to anthropomorphic plastic from northeast area of Vinča culture, respectively of Transylvanian version, its archaic character supplemented by certain Starčevo traditions that transcend in some plastics archetypes. It could be discerned the basic elements of microasian origin spirituality grafted on the original elements, indigenous, which gave the appearance of Intracarpethian customization features of Transylvanian culture. In this way plastic figurine acquiring forms of expression and features distinctive from the south area, where it is originating¹⁸.

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ANTLERED FEMALE DEER: THE ARCHEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON A PHANTASMAGORIC ANIMAL

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Keywords: *Horned (antlered) hind (doe). Greek-Roman mythology and iconography. Ancient history and archaeology. Comparative religious studies. Cult of the deer. Deer-Goddess.*

Abstract: *The article examines the rare phenomenon of a hind crowned as a stag, a creature that only male red deer typically embody due to their antlers. In mythology and folklore, creature is fantastical, akin to the unicorn or phoenix.*

Only male red deer possess antlers. Hinds crowned as stags are an exceptionally rare phenomenon in nature. In mythology and folklore, this creature is seen as phantasmagoric, akin to the unicorn or the phoenix. Such a being, inherently ambivalent, was often perceived as a monstrum, violating the natural order and evoking both wonder and fear.

However, when a majestically antlered hind is described as miraculously saving starving humans by breastfeeding them, it introduces the wondrous world of the divine, life-giving female deer, symbol of fertility and renewal. Emblematic of this is the mythical rescue of ancient heroes, such as the Greek Telephus, the son of Herakles, as documented in related archaeological records.

In the archaic folklore of Central-Eastern Europe, the antlered female deer is sometimes compared to a girl or bride, acting as a substitute for her or embodying her most intimate nature. The parallels between a young virgin and a doe sprouting horns are deeply rooted in ancient Greek myths, particularly those involving metamorphoses orchestrated by the goddess Artemis-Diana. Noteworthy examples include Taygete and Titanis (Cos), who were transformed into golden-horned does. Additionally, in some versions of the myth, a horned hind is offered by Artemis-Diana as a substitute for the sacrifice of Princess Iphigenia. The mythological figure of the female deer with antlers is also associated with the goddess's chariot, as well as the Ceryneian Hind, a target of one of Herakles' labors.

Expanding the focus to ancient Celtic and Gallo-Roman religion, we find the goddess Cernunna, a female equivalent and partner to the god Cernunnos, "The Horned One," depicted with antlers—a feature typically reserved for male deities.

These ancient goddesses, either with antlers or transformed into antlered hinds, are rooted in ancestral mythological traditions where dominant women were larger-than-life figures capable of transforming into deer, or vice versa. According to this totemic

narrative, these supernatural women, initiated into the Deer-Mother cult, ruled the world and appeared as stags, covered in hair and with enormous branching antlers. The enduring figure of the Stag Goddess has been reinterpreted in neo-Pagan and Wiccan spirituality as a continuation and revision of these ancient divinities.

This article aims to explore the archaeological evidence that, in ancient times, brought to life the extraordinary creature of the crowned hind and her transformation into an antlered goddess.

1. Distinguishing between true females, intersex individuals, and pseudo-intersex cases

The antlered female red deer is a true anomaly of nature, because only male red deer possess antlers. Premier deer biologists still research on the exceptional biological mechanisms that create a horned hind, because it remains poorly understood.

Some deer are biologically female; therefore they are able to conceive, bear and breastfeed fawns. At the same time, they manufacture above-average levels of testosterone, giving them a masculinity expressed through the sprouting of imposing, hardened antlers, that crown of bone that bucks grow each year ahead of mating season.¹ In conclusion, experiencing a hormonal imbalance resulting from high levels of testosterone these true females can develop antlers like males, but at the same time give birth to a fawn and nurse it.²

In other cases, antlered hinds may be cryptorchid males (pseudo-intersex individuals or pseudohermaphrodites): they have male reproductive organs, at least one teste, which are not apparent because they are buried in body fat, typically they are deep in the abdominal cavity or between the abdomen and skin. The presence of a teste would explain the hardened antlers because they need testosterone to complete a growth cycle.³

A third category comprises hermaphrodites (intersex individuals) that possess both male and female genitalia. However, while ovarian production of male hormones may sometimes trigger antler growth in hinds, these antlers are never of the branch-antlered, hardened types. Instead, they are typically blobs of velvet, sometimes partially hardened.⁴

To understand the uncertainty of common sense in identifying these biologically liminal creatures (not only animal but also human), and how politics can short-circuit it with the scant certainties of science and the outdated rules of the

¹ Helliker 2015.

² Ozoga 2011.

³ Ozoga., Whitetail Intrigue; Karnes S., “16-point antlered doe killed in Monroe County is 'pretty darn rare,' says deer biologist,” Springfield News-Leader, 12 January 2015, <https://eu.news-leader.com/story/sports/outdoors/2021/12/01/16-point-antlered-doe-killed-monroe-county-missouri-rare-deer-biologist/8806857002/>

⁴ Ozoga, Whitetail Intrigue; Schmidt D., “Is it an antlered doe? Probably not,” Dan Schmidt Deer Blog - Whitetail Wisdom, 4 December 2019, <https://www.deeranddeerhunting.com/content/blogs/dan-schmidt-deer-blog-whitetail-wisdom/is-it-an-antlered-doe-probably-not>.

organizations that regulate our lives, especially when large geopolitical interests are at stake, it is appropriate to recall the discussions sparked by the presence of boxer Imane Khelif at the Paris 2024 Olympics.⁵

The uniqueness of “antlered does” renders these deer exceptionally remarkable as they represent a genuine faunal anomaly. However, the true nature behind their anomaly was interpreted as an abnormality by *ancient* human imagination: the generation of a *monstrum* that, violating the natural norm, instills a mixture of fear and scandal. A hind with majestic, branched and/or hardened antlers resembling those of a buck was regarded as a phantasmagoric creature akin to the unicorn or the phoenix. It was expressed as a powerful entity in archaeology and art of ancient cultures, and in mythology, as its unusual appearance held significant, polarized symbolic value, often imbued with uncontrollably positive and/or negative magical qualities.

Sometimes these extraordinary hinds not only possess huge powerful horns, but also harmful magical powers. For example, a man who struck one of them with an arrow might be immediately blinded in his right eye and fall ill.

Conversely, when a big-antlered hind captivates with her grace and beauty, protects a human being, or saves an individual by quenching him/her with her milk, we enter the miraculous world of divine life-giving female deer. Here, the figure of a female deer with antlers becomes a symbol of fertility and renewal.⁶

2. Four strands of archaeological documentation to understand the multifaceted role of the antlered hind in human imagination

The active presence and symbolic significance of the fabulous hind with antlers in human imagination are documented across various mediums, including archaeological masterpieces, myths from ancient civilizations such as Greek, Roman, Celtic, and Norse traditions, folkloric tales, visual art, religious texts, and literature.

Undertaking an archaeological survey, four strands of documentation can be identified to understand the multifaceted role of the antlered hind across different ancient cultural landscapes.

1. *Humans rescued and nursed by an antlered hind or milking it.* Late Mesolithic and Early Neolithic rock art images depict the milking of an ultramundane hind with antlers.⁷ Additionally, antlered hinds/does are described as miraculously saving orphaned or abandoned children by breastfeeding them. Emblematic is the mythological ancient Greek hero Telephus.

⁵ Khelif is a woman with Variations of Sex Characteristics (VSC), better known so far as DSD (Differences in Sexual Development), born with congenital variations of sexual characteristics (hyperandrogenism), which cause higher than normal levels of testosterone in the blood.

⁶ Merlini 2024.

⁷ Merlini 2023; Merlini 2023a; Merlini 2024a.

2. *Antlered female deer compared to girls or brides or even replacing them.* For instance, in Greek mythology a horned doe was sacrificed in place of Iphigenia. The antlered hind is a central figure in the folkloric Balkan ritual poetry celebrating the winter solstice within a cyclical notion of time. A progenitor of it was the antlered goddess Cernunna. Venerated by ancient Celts, she was the female equivalent and partner of the god Cernunnos, “The Horned One”.

3. *Heroes in pursuit of a horned doe as a training and profound transformative activity.* The initiatory-formative myth of Herakles chasing the divine Ceryneian Hind serves as the benchmark for these stories.

4. *Hinds with stag crown revered as mothers of the Earth and rulers of the World.* Across various ancient pagan religions, mythologies, and folk tales, from the British Isles to Scandinavia, from Russia to across the Bering Strait land bridge, the Antlered Deer Goddess, or Antlered Mother Deer, was a revered spiritual figure associated with fertility, motherhood, and regeneration. In particular, this creature played a crucial role as the marker and protagonist of the cosmic drama of the winter solstice during which old Sun dies and young Sun is born.

In this article, we will explore the first two strands of documentation.

3. A nurse with horns for the hero Telephus, Herakles’ son

The transformation of the Birth-giving Goddess into a hind/doe is attested to by historical sources and folk memories. The Sumerian Goddess of childbirth was also a stag.⁸ Significant are cases in which antlered female deer breastfeed orphaned or abandoned children, as the extraordinary case of Telephus, miraculously saved by an antlered hind. However, Greco-Roman mythology is replete with discarded newborn babies at risk of dying, who are miraculously rescued/nourished by wild animals, which sometimes are much more ferocious than an innocuous doe, including bears, she-wolves, bees, wild mares, and untamed goats.⁹

⁸ Gimbutas 1989, 113.

⁹ Atalanta was abandoned by her father, but a bear nursed her until hunters eventually found her. Similarly, when Paris was born, King Priam instructed the servant Agelaus to leave him on Mount Ida, near Troy. Agelaus obeyed, but after five days, he returned to report that the child had survived, having been nourished by a bear in the wilderness. Minos’s grandson, Miletus, was also abandoned, but Apollo commanded she-wolves to guard and provide milk for him. The twins Lycastus and Parrhasius, sons of Ares and Phylonome, were suckled by a wolf before being rescued by a shepherd. Meliteus, the son of Zeus and Othreis, was saved by bees that fed him. Aegisthus, who was nourished by a goat, survived similarly. Hippothous, son of Poseidon and Alope, was rescued and suckled by a wild mare before being discovered by shepherds. Unlike these instances, the divine Jupiter was not abandoned but hidden in a cave on Mount Dicte by his mother to prevent his father, Cronus, from devouring him. He was nurtured and raised by the untamed goat Amalthea. The story of Romulus and Remus, who were saved, fed, and cared for by a she-wolf, remains paradigmatic.

A sixth-century BCE scholium from the third Olympic ode by Pindar attests that, in Ancient Greece mythical tradition, the nurturing hind *par excellence* is the one that suckled a human, specifically Telephus.¹⁰ This hero was the son of Herakles and Auge, daughter of the king of Tegea (in Arcadia), Aleus. According to a version of his myth, Aleus received an oracle that foretold his grandson, Telephus, would kill his maternal uncles. Fearing for his sons, Aleus exposed the infant Telephus on Mt. Parthenion, hoping that, through the child's death, the oracle could be avoided. Miraculously, however, Telephus was saved and suckled by a hind. According to another version of the myth, Telephus was fathered by his mother in a forest on Mount Parthenium while she was being taken to Nauplia to be drowned.¹¹ The newborn was hidden in a bush to avoid being killed and was saved because, by the agency of Herakles, he was nursed by a wild hind. He was then rescued by shepherds and brought to their king Corythus, who raised him. Telephus later became king of Mysia, in modern-day Turkey, and founder of the city of Pergamon.

Visual art generally depicts the savior animal as being antlerless.¹² However, Aelian (ca. 175 – ca. 235 CE) maintained that it was golden-antlered, citing the authority of ancient famous authors such as Pindar, Anacreon, Sophocles, and Euripides.¹³ The myth according to this version is represented on artistic masterpieces and coins.

¹⁰ Schol. Pind. Ol., 3.52 in Drachmann A. B. ed., “Scholia vetera in Pindari carmina, vol. I,” in *Scholia in Olympionicas* (Lipsia: B. G. Teubneri, 1903), 120.

¹¹ Auge was then sold to merchants who had recently arrived in Nauplia and they, in turn, sold her to Teutra, king of Teutrania in Mysia.

¹² The model of the infant Telephus kneeling and suckled by a standing hind is replied in Ancient Greek and Ancient Roman coins. It occurs on a bronze coin from a Tegea (Alea, Arcadia, Peloponnese, Greece) mint, c. 370 - 240 BCE; on a copper an alloy coin minted in Capua 216-211 BCE; on a bronze medallion struck for Roman Emperor Gordian III in Hadrianopolis (Thrace) in 238-244 AD (Jurukova J. N., *Monetosečeneto na gradovete v Dolna Mizija i Trakija II - III V.: Hadrianopolis* (Sofija: Izdatelstvo na Bulgarskata Akad. na naukite, 1987), 192, nr. 440. Varbanov I., *Greek Imperial Coins and their Values (The Local Coinage of the Roman Empire)*. Vol. II 2. Thrace (from Abdera to Pautalia) (Bourgas: ADICOM, 2005), 313, nr. 3797). Very famous is the Roman fresco depicting Hercules watching his son Telephus suckled by a dappled fallow doe from the Basilica of Ercolano and held in the National Archaeological Museum, Naples, inv. no. 9008.

¹³ Aelian C., *De natura animalium (On the Characteristics of Animals)*, trans. Scolfield A. F. (London: Harvard University Press, 1958), 7.39. His list includes not only the hind that nursed Telephos, but also an antlered female substituted for Iphigenia, the Ceryneian hind, the golden hind of Taygete, and an antlered female deer that abandons a fawn. However, Aelian's inventory is incomplete. Lora Holland Goldthwaite has added numerous additional references to antlered females, including Callimachus's Hymn 3 to Artemis of the third century BCE (Callimachus, Hymn 3, 99–114 in *Callimachus, The Hymns*, ed. and trans. Stephens S. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) and later evidence. See Holland Goldthwaite 2023, 156 ff., table 3.

3.1 Gems depicting the providential animal breastfeeding the abandoned divine child

The providential animal exhibits noticeable antlers on a blue-gray gemstone of chalcedony, which offers a smooth, translucent appearance. The artifact is dated to around 450 BCE.¹⁴ The horns of the hind serve to highlight her divine nature. It's worth noting that female deer with antlers are usually consecrated to Artemis. They also emphasize the exceptional and fortunate circumstance of a newborn baby being nursed by a wild beast.¹⁵



Image 1. Telefo Rhode Island School of Design 25.097.

We must imagine the newborn in a situation of risk and extreme need (abandoned in the forest, alone, crying and in urgent need of food). The timely animal exhibits an encouraging attitude towards the baby.¹⁶ Telephus, kneeling, greedily sucks the breast according to a visual pattern that would later become famous with the twins Romulus and Remus.¹⁷ No specific attributes indicate his heroic nature, other than the antlers of the doe that is nursing him.¹⁸

A gem held in Vienna has an image depicting Herkules sitting on a rock with the club in resting position.¹⁹ On the ground is Telephus with an antlered hind, on a rock the eagle of Jupiter; in the background stands a column.

The myth of Telephus, son of Herakles, informs us how a hero becomes one by enduring crisis and passing the first and most significant test (*epreuve*) from very

¹⁴ The piece is in the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, inv. n. 25.097.

¹⁵ Hackens 1976, 146; Pellizer 2000/2001, 145-157, 156, fig. 1; Merlini 2021, 5-101, 21, Image 8.

¹⁶ Hackens 1976.

¹⁷ A coin minted in Pergamon (193-211 CE) during the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus and Roman Empress Julia Domna features an abstraction of the Great Altar of Pergamon. This altar, once located in a sacred precinct on the acropolis of the ancient city, is now housed in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin. The Great Altar includes a frieze illustrating the life of Telephus, consisting of many panels that describe various people and events from his story. Notably, one panel depicts Telephus being suckled not by a doe, as is typical in classical myth, but by a lion (Poole 1892, 144 no 277).

¹⁸ Merlini 2024.

¹⁹ This gem is housed in the Kunsthistorisches Museum and is part of the museum's collection of Greek and Roman antiquities. Cf. the catalogue of Eduard Freih von Sacken und Friedrich Kenner: Sacken E. F. von, Kenner F., Die Sammlungen des K.K. Münz- und antiken-Cabinetes (Wien: W. Braumüller, 1866, no. 663); Ogle 1916, 389–390, 389, n. 3.

early childhood, well before facing dramatic challenges and life circumstances as a teenager and an adult.²⁰

3.2 Coins from Ancient Greece and Rome portraying the celestial nursing hind

Some coins from ancient Greece and Rome depicting the divine antlered nursing hind. We present just a few emblematic examples. Coins depicting Telephus being nursed by a doe are typically from the ancient Greek city of Pergamon (modern-day Bergama, Turkey). Pergamon had a strong connection to Telephus as he was considered its legendary founder. The reverse side of the coins often depict the infant Telephus being suckled by a doe, symbolizing his mythical nurturing and protection by the divine animal and highlighting the mythological significance and the city's pride in its legendary heritage. The obverse side typically features a deity or a prominent figure, such as the head of Heracles or another relevant mythological or divine figure.

The Telephus coins were often made of bronze or silver. They were minted during the Hellenistic period and the Roman era, particularly when Pergamon was under the rule of the Attalid dynasty (circa 281-133 BC) and later as a part of the Roman Empire. The imagery of the divine animal – divine founder served to reinforce the cultural and historical identity of Pergamon, linking the city's origins to divine and heroic figures.²¹



Image 2. Telephus coin from Tegea.

The doe shown in a nurturing pose, with the infant Telephus lying down and reaching towards the doe is evident on the reverse b face of a small bronze coin from Tegea, Arkadia, Peloponnese minted around 250 BCE. On this

AE Dichalkon, the infant Telephus is depicted kneeling on the left and being nursed by the hind with long horns, which is standing on the right with her head turned to the left looking solicitously at him. The scene is shown in a naturalistic style, emphasizing the nurturing relationship between the infant and the animal. However, the horns of the hind emphasize her strength and protective nature, aligning with the mythological narrative of Telephus being nurtured and protected by an extraordinary animal.²²

²⁰ Pellizer 2000/2001, 145-157.

²¹ A very similar image occurs on a Sardonyx dating back to the 1st century BCE, illustrating the hind suckling infant Telephus. However, in this depiction, the animal is hornless. The masterpiece is housed in the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg. Inv. n. Ж 246 (Neverov 1994, 92-93, cat. 34).

²² Merlini 2024.

The pair, consisting of a hind with imposing antlers and suckling newborn, also appears on the b face of a bronze coin from Damascus minted under the Roman Emperor Gaius Vibius Trebonianus Gallus, 251-253 CE.²³



Image 3. Telephus Roman bronze coin Trebonianus Gallus.

The coin reflects the high level of craftsmanship involved in ancient minting processes. The rendering of the hind's standing posture is naturalistic, typical of Roman art, capturing the elegance and grace of the animal. Her body is proportionate and detailed, showing the strong musculature and natural lines of the cervid. Her paws rest solidly on the ground, rendered by a long horizontal line that

enhances the naturalistic setting. However, the antlers of the doe are a distinctive feature as befits a divine being: large relative to her body; majestically long; and intricately rendered to highlight their branching with several points. The horned crown has a design very similar to a sacred laurel or olive wreath. Therefore, it emphasizes the mythical and mystical nature of the nurturing animal.

The infant is depicted kneeling beneath the animal, firmly grasping a nipple with his hands to greedily suckle the milk. Telephus seems to embody his name, which could derive from the noun *thelé* (θήλυ- ἔλαφο), meaning female breast, nipple.²⁴ This coin featuring the antlered doe not only served as a monetary instrument, but also as a rich historical and cultural emblem that provides insights into the artistic, religious, and societal values and related iconographic symbolism of the period under Emperor Gaius Vibius Trebonianus Gallus during the mid-3rd century CE.²⁵

The coin I present is from the Garth R. Drewry Collection. The caption naively reads "While the reverse of this coin must allude to the myth of Telephus being suckled by a doe, the engraver has clearly depicted a stag. Perhaps the die-cutter had never seen a deer before?"

The continuity of the symbolic iconography of the doe with large horns that saves Telephus in the dynasty of Trebonianus Gallus is demonstrated by a very similar image engraved



Image 4. Telephus Roman bronze AE 24 Volusian.

²³ Lindgren-Kovacs 1985, 2152; Holland Goldthwaite 2023, 156, table 2.

²⁴ Pellizer E., "Miti di fondazione e infanti abbandonati," in *Filosofia, storia, immaginario mitologico*, eds. Guglielmo M., Gianotti G. F., *Atti del Colloquio del P.A.R.S.A.*, Torino 1996 (Alessandria: Ed. Dell'Orso, 1997), 81-93, 87.

²⁵ Merlini, *Heroes and saints*.

on the reverse of a bronze coin issued by his son Gaius Vibius Afinius Gallus Veldumnianus Volusianus. Volusianus was a Roman emperor from 251 (ruling with his father) to 253. His coin was minted in Damascus, Syria in 252-253 CE. The dynasty of Trebonianus Gallus evidently identified itself with the divine savior hind and wanted to convince that it was capable of saving the Roman empire symbolized by Telephus. If the empire had submitted to it like the suckling Telephus under the divine horned doe, it would have nourished it and therefore saved it.

In conclusion, ancient coins depicting Telephus, a legendary figure in Greek mythology, and the antlered hind (a divine nurse) offer valuable insights into how different ancient societies exploited coinage to convey cultural and political messages in response to various challenges.

The city of Pergamon utilized its coinage featuring Telephus and the antlered hind to celebrate, preserve, and propagate its mythological heritage. By depicting these legends, the city reinforced its cultural identity, political pride, historical significance, and continuity of tradition. Coins served as a medium to keep these uplifting stories alive in public memory, ensuring that both locals and traders were aware of the city's heroic past.

Imperial Roman coins illustrate how coinage could be employed as a widely circulated tool for political propaganda during times when a civilization is at risk and attempts are activated for saving it. In periods of economic difficulty, military threat, or political instability, the messages on Roman coins aimed to reassure the populace of the empire's stability, strength, and continuity of the empire, while fostering unity. Emperors used coins to project their image as strong leaders, divine protectors, and restorers of peace, thereby promoting their legitimacy and encouraging loyalty.

4. The antlered female deer as a substitute for girls/brides and its sacrificial symbolism

In medieval folklore, the antlered female deer is sometimes compared to a girl or bride, acting as a substitute for her or expressing her most intimate nature. In Celtic folklore, the hind often assumes masculine features, while the stag takes on feminine connotations. In an Irish tale, the beautiful maiden Sadb (Sadhbh, Sive), daughter of the druid Bodb Derg, is transformed into a doe with antlers by Bob Doireach (or Fear Doirche), the dark druid of the Men of Dea, for refusing his love. Sadb's transformation into an antlered hind symbolizes enchantment, punishment, and the tragic consequences of magical interventions.

At night, the young woman regains her human form and meets her beloved hero, Fionn mac Cumhaill. The hind's dual nature (human by night, hind by day) underscores the tragic tension between the magical and the mundane, highlighting the struggle between fate (her cursed state) and personal agency (her enduring connection to Fionn).

Sadb is eventually discovered by the evil druid Bob Doireach and condemned to remain in the form of the antlered hind forever. This weird animal form represents both her loss and the enduring punishment imposed by her father's enemy.

After much searching, Fionn encounters the antlered hind again, nursing a human child he recognizes as his own son, whom he names Oisín (“little fawn”).²⁶

In old Balkan wedding songs, the motif of a hind hunted for her antlers symbolizes the ritual bride hunt and the condition of a future bride. The Wedding Deer acts as a psychopomp, guiding the bride through the ritual death and birth as part of the rite of passage.²⁷ Strikingly, these poems compare the girl/bride to a doe with antlers before the wedding, symbolizing virginity, and to a hind without horns after the wedding, symbolizing a married woman. This binary opposition (antlered hind = virgin vs. un-antlered hind = married woman) illustrates the dramatic passage from childhood and adolescence to marriage and motherhood.

This tradition is a long-lasting legacy from ancient archaic Greece and the authority of Artemis on a girl's transition to marriage and motherhood. Young unmarried girls were considered partly savage creatures, not yet realized as women, to be tamed. The peculiarity of pubescent and unmarried girls is precisely in their not belonging to any statute and therefore dear to Artemis who controls and protects the liminal sphere. A paradigmatic representation of this theme is symbolized on an Oxford Attic black-figure plate made between the mid to late 6th century BCE, known as the “Plate of the Hind Struggles. It illustrates the fight between Heracles and Apollo for the Ceryneian Hind whose horns had previously been torn off. The metaphorical association between wild deer and young women, tamed through marriage, is evident.”²⁸

This tradition probably influenced the once-recorded custom among the Slavs, where married women wore the *kika*: a horned cap resembling a cow's head, which may have been an apotropaic object supposed to replace the lost strength of virginity. In some regions, a *kika* with small horns was given to a newly married woman, then replaced with one with bigger horns after the first child delivery. The most respected woman wore the biggest horns. These horned caps of Old Balkan tradition reminded people of antlered hinds associated with a deity of fertility, and possibly of death.²⁹

²⁶ Arbois de Jubainville M. Henri d', *L'Épopée celtique en Irlande, Cours de littérature celtique*, 5 (Paris: Thorin, 1892); Dunn J., *The Cattle Raid of Cooley (Táin Bó Cúalnge): The Ancient Irish Epic Tale Táin Bó Cúalnge* (London: D. Nutt, 1914); Аранђеловић-Лазич Ј., “Женско оглавље у облику рога као одраз примитивне идеје о плодности”. *Гласник Етнографског музеја*, 34 (1971), 37–74 (Arandelović-Lazić 1971, 37-74; Ashe 2016).

²⁷ Марковић 2001/2002, 223–226. (Marković 2001/2002, 223–226), 224.

²⁸ Sourvinou-Inwood 1987, 137-139; Sourvinou-Inwood 1989, 102, n. 298, 104, n. 315; Bergeron, *Revisiting a plate*.

²⁹ Аранђеловић-Лазич, *Женско оглавље*, 71; Trubarac Matić 2019, 172-175.

Antlered hinds appear in medieval imagery, rooted in folklore tales.³⁰ In the 14th century, Francesco Petrarca celebrated a white doe with two bright golden horns as an allegory of the beloved woman.³¹

In some modern reinterpretations and neo-pagan practices of the medieval Arthurian corpus,³² the Lady of the Lake is described with deer-like features, including antlers, symbolizing a fusion of ancient animal symbolism and mythical narratives. One modern interpretation of the Lady of the Lake with antlers can be found in the concept of the giant Antlered Mother or Stag-Woman that appeared in the Stone Age. This character embodied a totemic myth about the origin of humans and animals from a common ancestor and was widespread in Eurasian rock art in Neolithic times, persisting into the Bronze and Iron Ages among deer hunter societies. This figure embodies both male and female characteristics, symbolized by the presence of antlers on a female form, highlighting the duality of nurturing and strength, merging the qualities of a guardian and a provider.³³

4.1 The metamorphic sacrifice of Taygete into a golden-antlered hind

The parallels between a young virgin and a horned doe are deeply rooted in ancient Greek myths, particularly those involving metamorphoses orchestrated by the goddess Artemis-Diana. Taygete is transformed into a golden-horned doe by Artemis-Diana, either to help her escape Zeus' advances or as a result of succumbing to them. Titanis (Cos) is likewise metamorphosed into a golden-horned hind and expelled from Artemis's group due to her beauty. Additionally, a horned hind, consecrated to Artemis-Diana, is offered by the goddess as a substitute for the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the daughter of King Agamemnon and Queen Clytemnestra. The mythological figure of the antlered doe is also associated with Artemis's chariot.

Taygete is an obscure figure whose story is rarely recounted in Classical literature and is not widely represented in ancient Greek or Roman art. She is one of the Pleiades, the seven daughters of the Titan Atlas and the sea-nymph Pleione, who are often depicted together in ancient mosaics, pottery, and sculptures. These representations generally include all seven sisters, sometimes with their father, or in connection with their transformation into stars.³⁴ Taygete

³⁰ Gabriele Rossetti, in the third volume of his book *The Mystery of Platonic Love in the Middle Ages*, dedicated some remarkable pages to the antlered doe, both learned, bizarre and acute. See Rossetti G., *The Mystery of Platonic Love in the Middle Ages* (London: Richard and John E. Taylor, 1840), 841 ff.

³¹ Petrarca F., *Canzoniere* (Rerum vulgarium fragmenta), Polinnia, vol. 21 (Firenze: Casa editrice Leo S. Olschki, 2008), sonnet 190.

³² Malory 1927; Aldhouse-Green 2015.

³³ Mykhailova 2023, 9-26.

³⁴ Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 155, in Hyginus 1960; Pindar, *Olympian Ode*, 3.28-30, in Pindar, *Olympian Ode*, Arnson Svarlien D. trad., Perseus.tufts.edu, 1990; Pausanias, *Description*

also lends her name to Mount Taygetos in Arcadia, near Sparta, and is the mother of Lacedaemon by Zeus, who is the ancestor of the Spartan kings, as well as the mother of Eurotas and Pelops by Tantalus.³⁵ In a rare variant of the myth, she is referred to as the daughter of Agenor.³⁶ Above all, Taygete is a companion of Artemis in her archaic role as Potnia Theron, the "Mistress of Animals." She is Elaphaia, "She of the Red Deer" and Elaphebolia, "She Who Strikes or Hits the Red Deer" who at an Attic festival of this name receives a deer sacrifice and honey cakes in the shape of a deer.³⁷

Like her Pleiades sisters, the titaness-nymph Taygete was renowned for her beauty, which unfortunately attracted the attention of Zeus. The story of her transformation into a hind with golden antlers varies slightly depending on the classical source. However, the core narrative focuses on her desire to remain chaste and avoid Zeus's relentless advances. In desperation, she prayed Artemis—the virgin goddess of the hunt and fierce protector of chastity—seeking refuge from Zeus. Artemis responded by transforming Taygete into a hind with golden horns. However, the outcome of this metamorphosis is ambiguous. Did it suffice to thwart Zeus's advances?

In one version of the myth, Taygete's transformation by Artemis allowed her to escape an impending rape by Zeus, thus preserving her chastity.³⁸ In the convoluted accounts from Pindar's scholars, it seems Taygete, in her doe form, completely escaped seduction.³⁹ This tale mirrors the plots of the Daphne and Arethusa stories. However, Taygete is a double of Artemis herself. Just as Artemis metamorphosed Taygete into a hind to escape Zeus, she once transformed herself into a hind to evade the Aloades. It has been suggested that Taygete might have been a name for Artemis on Mount Taygetos in Laconia.⁴⁰ After the danger passed, Artemis restored Taygete to her titaness-nymph form. In gratitude, Taygete dedicated the golden-horned hind to Artemis. This version emphasizes themes of purity and the protection of virginity, both central to Artemis's identity.

However, the same Pindaric scholium suggests a second version of the myth, concluding with Taygete dedicating the gilded hind after being wed to Zeus.⁴¹ In this account, the titaness-nymph, a skilled hunter in Artemis's retinue, becomes the prey herself and is eventually caught by Zeus despite her transformation. This event occurs while she is in an unconscious state, having lost human awareness.

of Greece, 3.18.10, in Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Spiro F. trans. (Leipzig: In aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1903); Aelian, *De natura animalium*, 7.39.

³⁵ See Timothy Gantz for the variants: Gantz 1993, 213; 215–17; 386.

³⁶ Dictys Cretensis, 1.9, in *Dictys cretensis ephemeridos belli troiani*, ed. Meister F. (Leipzig: in aedibus B. G. Teubner, 1872).

³⁷ Gimbutas 1989, 113.

³⁸ Pindar, *Olympian Ode*, 3.53.

³⁹ Forbes Irving 1990, 64, n. 3.

⁴⁰ Hoenn 1946, 47.

⁴¹ Pindar, *Olympian Ode*, 3.53.

This narrative emphasizes the inevitability of Zeus's will, even in the face of Artemis' divine intervention.⁴² Zeus's relentless pursuit of Taygete in her stag form appears to be a literal representation of the hunting metaphor, with the titaness-nymph punished for sexual intercourse, even if it was against her will.

According to a third account, Taygete accepts or succumbs to Zeus's love, prompting Artemis to punish her by transforming her into a horned hind and expelling her from her group.⁴³ Euripides' version of the Taygete story does not mention a child, but her punishment through transformation and expulsion seems to logically follow her seduction.⁴⁴

Regardless of the reason behind Taygete's metamorphosis, the fact remains that the titaness-nymph was transformed into an animal sacred to Artemis, marked by golden antlers, and closely connected to the goddess's mythological narratives. The result of Taygete's union with Zeus was a son, Lacedaemon, the mythical founder of Sparta on the banks of the Eurotas River,⁴⁵ after whom the region of Lacedaemon is named.⁴⁶ This legacy adds a layer of cultural significance to Taygete's story, linking Artemis's divine intervention to the founding myths of one of the most important Greek city-states.

Taygete's transformation into a hind with golden antlers was not just a change of form, but also a symbolic demonstration of divine power. It underlined the sacredness of the act, marking the titaness-nymph as being favored by the goddess. By turning Taygete into a creature emblematic of her own attributes, Artemis effectively brought her under her protection, aligning the unfortunate nymph with her values and domain. The antlers, typically associated with male deer, added an element of power and majesty to the creature, suggesting that Taygete, even in her transformed state, retained a celestial and protected status. After regaining her human form, Taygete either gilded or attached the horns to the hind (blurring the boundaries between her human and animal forms) and dedicated the deer to Artemis Orthia/Orthosia.⁴⁷ Pindar identifies this animal with the Ceryneian Hind, the object of one of Herakles' labors.⁴⁸ Eventually, the story of the fortunate (or failed but forgiven) virgin was reconciled with the tradition that makes Taygete the mother of the hero Lacedaemon. In this way, the myth of the titaness-nymph transformed into a golden-horned hind reinforces

⁴² Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 3.10, in Wagner 1926.

⁴³ Euripides, *Helen*, 382, in Euripides, *Helen*, trans. Coleridge E. P. (New York: Random House, 1938); Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 3.1.2, 3.20.2, 3.18.10, 9.35.1; Kerényi 1959, 146.

⁴⁴ Forbes 1990, 64, n. 3.

⁴⁵ Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 155; Pindar, *Olympian Ode*, 3.26; Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 3.10.2, 1926; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 3.20.2.

⁴⁶ Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 3.10.

⁴⁷ Pindar, *Olympian Ode*, 3.28-30; Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 2.5; Robbins 1982, 295-305; Makkay 2006, 17; Holland 2003, 149.

⁴⁸ Pindar, *Olympian Ode*, 3.28-30.

and justifies a positive Spartan attitude towards strong women and the cult of Artemis Orthia/Orthosia.⁴⁹

The sanctuary of Artemis Orthia/Orthosia in Sparta was an important religious site. Numerous votive offerings and inscriptions found there provide insight into the worship practices associated with the goddess. While these offerings are not directly connected to Taygete, they reflect themes from the cult of Artemis that resonate with the myth of the titaness-nymph, particularly her transition from one state to another under the goddess's protection. For example, the recurring depiction of hinds (in terracotta and bronze figurines) among the votive offerings reflects the cultural memory of Taygete's myth.

Callimachus's *Hymn 3 to Artemis* mentions the antlered deer only in passing.⁵⁰ However, the hymn later references Mount Taygetos in Arcadia as one of Artemis's favorite haunts. Connected with an antlered female deer, it possibly alludes to the metamorphosis of the titaness-nymph. The Spartans had a deep connection with the myths surrounding the divine mother of the founder of their city. Mount Taygetos, named after Taygete, was not only a significant geographical landmark but also a place of ritual importance, where the ritual training of Spartan youth culminated.⁵¹

In some versions of the myth, after her transformation into a golden-horned hind, Taygete was eventually placed among the stars as one of the Pleiades. On the

throne of Bathykleas, Pausanias described a scene in which Zeus and Poseidon elevate Taygete and her sister Alcyone, both Pleiades, to the heavens.⁵² This celestial connection underscores her divine status and adds another layer of symbolism to her transformation, linking her story to the broader cosmic order.⁵³



Image 5. Diana of Versailles.

⁴⁹ Holland 2003, 149.

⁵⁰ Callimachus, *Hymn 3*, 99–114, 2015; Vestrheim 2000, 62–79, 72; Callimachus, *The Hymns*, 100.

⁵¹ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 3.1.2, 1903.

⁵² Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 3.18.10, 1903.

⁵³ The main sources discussing Taygete's celestial placement after her transmutation include ancient Greek texts and later mythological references. A point of reference is the Latin author Gaius Julius Hyginus. See Hyginus *Fabulae*, 192 and Hyginus *Poetica astronomica*, 2.21.4, in Hyginus C. J., *Poetica astronomica*, trans and ed. Grant M., *The Myths of Hyginus* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Publications in Humanistic Studies, n. 34, 1960); Condos 1997. In the *Bibliotheca*, a compendium of Greek myths and heroic adventures, Apollodorus includes Taygete among the seven sisters who were

Depictions of Taygete specifically with the golden hind are rare, as this myth is not as commonly represented in art as other Greek myths. However, marble or bronze sculptures that depict Artemis-Diana with an antlered hind can be connected to Taygete's story. This is exemplified by the celebrated "Diana of Versailles,"⁵⁴ a Roman marble copy (1st or 2nd century CE) of a lost Greek bronze attributed to Leochares of Athens, dating back to around 325 BCE.⁵⁵ The figure was found at Gabii in Latium Vetus (Italy).⁵⁶

In the "Diana of Versailles" composition, Diana, the Roman equivalent of Artemis, is depicted in a dynamic pose, hastening forward as if in pursuit of game. She looks to the right and raises her right arm to draw an arrow from her quiver. The goddess of the hunt is accompanied by a small antlered hind,⁵⁷ an integral part of the composition that adds depth to the statue's interpretation,

transformed into the Pleiades stars by Zeus, but does not detail her transformation into a hind (Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 3.10.1). In his *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, Publius Ovidius Naso does not provide a detailed account of Taygete's transformation into a hind. However, he includes her as one of the Pleiades, reflecting the general tradition of their apotheosis. See Ovidius, *Metamorphoses*, 1.668, 6.165, 1618 in Ovidius, *Metamorphoses* (Antwerp: apud heredes Martini Nutii, 1618); Ovidius *Fasti*, 5.455, 5.80, 5.663, in Ovidius, *Fasti*, 2 vols, ed. Bömer F. (Heidelberg: Teubner, 1957); Ovidius, *Fasti*, ed. Alton E. H., Wormell D. E. W., Courtney E. (Heidelberg: Teubner, 1978). In his epic poem *Silvae*, Statius alludes to the Pleiades and their transformation into stars, including Taygete (Statius, *Silvae* 1.6.20, 3.2.70, in Statius, *Silvae*, Statius' *Silvae*, ed. Shackleton-Bailey D. R. (Cambridge: CUP, 2003).

Nevertheless, in ancient narratives women are continually punished for being the victims of rape and their suicide is a common response to violence. See the stories of Leucothoe, Psamathe, Alope, Arne, Danae, Aura, and Pelopeia. According to a version narrated by Pseudo-Plutarch, Taygete hanged herself, in grief and shame after being raped by Zeus, on the heights of Mount Amyklaios, thereafter called Taygete. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 3.18.10 (cf. 3.1.2); Pseudo-Plutarch, *De fluviis*, 17.3, in Pseudo-Plutarch, *De fluviis*, trans. Banchich T. M. (Buffalo, New York: Canisius College, 2010); Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 3.10.3; Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 155.3; Hyginus, *Poetica astronomica* 2, 21.

⁵⁴ The statue is also known as Diana à la Biche (Artemis and the Hind), Diane Chasseresse ("Diana Huntress"), and Artémis de la Chasse (Artemis of the Chase). It was installed in the Grande Galerie of Versailles by Louis XIV. It is now held in the Musée du Louvre, Paris. Comparable Roman replicas of the same model have been found at Leptis Magna (Libya) and at Antalya (Turkey).

⁵⁵ Brunn *et al.*, Brunn E., Brunn H., Bruckmann F., *Denkmäler griechischer und römischer Sculptur* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1888), pl. 420; Fitzwilliam Museum, Waldstein C. Sir, *Catalogue of Casts in the Museum of Classical Archaeology* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Company, 1889), 104, no. 553; Charbonneaux J., *Catalogue sommaire des marbres antiques* (Paris: Musée national du Louvre, 1922), 36; Lippold G., *Die Griechische Plastik* (Munich: HdArch 3,1, 1950), 270 (n.4), pl. 98.2.

⁵⁶ Gauthier M., *The Louvre: Sculpture, Ceramics, Objets d'Art* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1964), 86.

⁵⁷ The sculpted deer does not have a visible male organ.

potentially alluding to the goddess's role in saving the titaness-nymph by transforming her into a golden-horned doe.

The hind is sculpted in a state of alertness, closely positioned by Diana's side, slightly behind her, as if following her lead. Her body is lean and graceful, with a smooth, naturalistic form that conveys agility and attentiveness. The deer's head is turned slightly upward towards Diana, with the goddess's hand resting gently on her antler, emphasizing the bond between the goddess and her animal companion, and reflecting her role as a protector of wild creatures and a nurturing guardian of wildlife.⁵⁸ The statue might subtly reference this aspect of Diana's mythology, as seen in her intervention to save Taygete. It highlights her role as a guardian who protects those under her care by transforming them. The ambiguity surrounding the gender of the deer, emphasized by the antlers on a seemingly feminine form and without the depiction of any male sexual organ, is noteworthy. The hind is the female of the species, but here with antlers usually reserved for males, this emphasizes Taygete's dual nature as both a nymph and a deer, blending the feminine and the divine. The small scale of the deer in relation to Diana suggests her status as both a companion and a symbol of Diana's power over the natural world.

In conclusion, Taygete's metamorphosis into a golden-horned hind, her eventual return to human form, and her dedication of the antlers to Artemis signify a complex interplay of transformation, divine intervention, and sacred symbolism. This myth highlights the intricate relationship between mortals and gods in



Image 6. Herakles & Cerynithian Hind
Louvre.

Greek mythology, where the boundaries between human and divine, as well as between human and animal, are fluid and subject to the will of the gods. The representation of Taygete as a golden-horned hind, an unusual and potent symbol, evokes the ambiguity of the divine metamorphosis: the sanctity of the new creature, but also the punitive nature of the transformation. It served as a powerful reminder of Artemis's dominion over nature and her role as a protector of chastity, while also reinforcing the cultural and religious significance of this myth in ancient

Greek society, particularly within the Spartan context.

As previously noted, the knowledgeable mythographer Pindar suggested that the mythic doe with golden antlers, into which Taygete was metamorphosed, continued to exist even after being slain and offered to Artemis, only to be hunted

⁵⁸ Haskell 1981, 196.

once again by Herakles as the Ceryneian Hind—one of his labors.⁵⁹ Although these depictions do not directly feature Taygete, artworks illustrating Herakles capturing the Ceryneian Hind are indirectly related to her myth.

One of these depictions can be seen on the previously examined bronze fibula from Boeotia, dating back to the early 7th millennium BCE, depicting Herakles meeting the Ceryneian Hind and her fawn. The topic action of the hunt, when the hero leaps upon the animal, pushes down her hindquarters to the ground with his left knee while seizing one of her antlers with both hands and pulling the animal's head back, is illustrated on an Attic Red Figure Kylix attributed to the Antiphon Painter (ca. 480 BCE).⁶⁰



Image 7. Thomas Matthews Rooke *Artemis and Taygete*.

Images specifically featuring Taygete with the golden hind are rare, even in the revival of classical myths during the Renaissance and Baroque periods. However, the oil painting *Artemis and Taygete* by the British artist Thomas Matthews Rooke (1842–1942), who was associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, offers a notable exception. This lesser-known work, created in 1893, exemplifies

⁵⁹ Robbins 1982, 295-305.

⁶⁰ The masterpiece is housed in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, with the inventory number Louvre G263. The same action and posture of the hero have been successfully depicted for at least a millennium. This is evidenced on the fifth metope of the West Pediment of the Temple of Zeus in Delphi (ca. 513–500 BCE), now in the Delphi Archaeological Museum; on a carnelian scarab of Etruscan-Italic art (ca. 325–200 BCE) held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; in a bronze fountain from Pompeii (House of Sallustio, VI 2, 4), likely a copy from Lysippos (1st century BCE), now in the Regional Archaeological Museum in Palermo; on a mosaic depicting the Labors of Herakles (3rd century CE) in the Archaeological Museum of Paros; in a bronze statuette from the Orsi di Scifo wreck (ca. 310 CE); and on a marble relief slab of Constantinopolitan origin, probably part of the decoration of the "Basilica Herculis" (6th century CE), preserved in the National Museum of Ravenna. Of particular interest is the sculptural group depicting Heracles and Apollo from the Sanctuary of Portonaccio in Veio, now preserved in the National Etruscan Museum of Villa Giulia, Rome. In this composition, Heracles has just captured the golden-horned doe, crushing it to the ground with his knee while holding her horns tightly. Apollo advances with his left arm menacingly stretched forward, the other lowered, possibly holding a bow, as he prepares to confront Heracles in an attempt to free the doe, which is sacred to his sister. This sculptural group is an example of Etruscan-Italic art, dated to around 510 BCE.

Rooke's mastery of narrative and symbolism, drawing on classical mythology for its subject matter.⁶¹

The octagonal composition captures the conclusive moment when Taygete, after the rape and childbirth, is under Artemis's protection. The ending of the story is marked by the celestial antlered hind moving away beyond the horizon, while a newborn baby is cradled in the nymph's arms. With her other hand, Taygete reaches for the hand of the goddess.

The figures are depicted in a serene landscape, with Artemis shown in a protective pose towards Taygete. The goddess holds Taygete's hand, symbolizing the protection and compassion she offers. Taygete's posture is gentle and reserved, with an expression that conveys a mix of gratitude and resignation.⁶² Her face shows a blend of tranquility and subtle melancholy, reflecting her plight in the myth. This depiction can be interpreted as a commentary on the roles and fates of women in mythology, who are often subject to the whims of gods.⁶³ However, the nymph's gaze is fixed on the observer, who is called to witness the positive resolution of her tragic story, symbolized by the simultaneous presence of the future hero in her arms and the departing deer.

The mystical antlered hind is a significant element of the composition, representing Taygete after her transformation by Artemis and embodying the divine intervention and protection bestowed by the goddess. The animal is depicted with elegant legs and a delicate yet strong body, with the added majesty of antlers typically associated with stags. These antlers are long, elegantly curved, branching out symmetrically, giving the creature an almost regal appearance. They highlight the otherworldly intervention of Artemis, symbolizing her divine power and the protection she offers. The hind's coat is rendered in a soft color between light brown and a golden hue, further emphasizing the divine nature of the intervention and the purity associated with the goddess.⁶⁴ The position of the hind's ears, slightly tilted backward, suggests

⁶¹ The masterpiece, 35 by 45cm., was recently restored and auctioned. It is now kept in a private collection.

⁶² Taygete's body is slightly turned towards Artemis, seeking protection or solace. One hand reaches out to Artemis, symbolizing the bond between them and her plea for help. The nymph is portrayed with the grace and beauty characteristic of Pre-Raphaelite depictions of mythological figures. The artist renders her as a youthful and delicate figure with classical features, embodying the ideals of purity and innocence associated with her story, despite holding an infant in her arms who plays with her necklace with one hand. Taygete's hair is depicted as flowing and loose, long and falling in shades of golden and coppery brown, enhancing her ethereal and nymph-like quality. Her attire is likely a classical, flowing garment, a pale, diaphanous gown that clings lightly to her form. The fabric is almost translucent, emphasizing her vulnerability and purity.

⁶³ This reflects the Pre-Raphaelite interest in intimate, often melancholic interpretations of mythological and literary subjects from classical antiquity.

⁶⁴ At the same time, a subtle shading gives the animal fur a lifelike texture, reflecting the naturalistic approach of the Pre-Raphaelites. Rooke paid close attention to the texture

attentiveness, as if the animal is acutely aware of its surroundings—qualities associated with Artemis as the goddess of the hunt.

4.2 Titanis (Cos), the daughter of King Merops, metamorphosed into a hind with golden horns

The fascinating myth of Titanis (Cos), daughter of King Merops, who was transformed into a hind with golden horns, is less commonly discussed in classical literature than other myths involving transformations, such as those of Daphne or Actaeon. However, this motif aligns with themes of metamorphosis in Greek mythology.

King Merops is often depicted as an early ruler of the island of Cos, in the Aegean Sea. His entertaining with the goddess Rhea suggests a time when gods and men dined together. In various myths, Merops is associated with his kingdom, his rule, and his family. His wife, the nymph Echemeia (Ethemea), was killed by Artemis for daring to compare herself to the goddess and for neglecting to worship her.⁶⁵ In Euripides' tragedy *Helen*, a tale is mentioned about the king's beautiful daughter, Titanis (Cos), which is similar to that of Taygete.⁶⁶ The virgin was turned into a golden-horned doe by Artemis.⁶⁷ This divine punishment was reserved for Titanis because of her beauty. Subsequently, she was expelled from the group of Artemis's companions.

The brief passage in *Helen* is ambiguous, leading to various interpretations by scholars. Is Titanis the name of Merope's daughter or does it designate her as a titaness without giving her a proper name?⁶⁸ The ambiguity of the name Titanis could imply a connection to the Titans, suggesting a possible divine lineage or status, though this is not explicitly clarified in the text. Moreover, the reason for Artemis' anger is unclear. It is not explicit what Euripides meant when he wrote that Artemis expelled her on account of her beauty. It could be that Titanis boasted of being more beautiful than Artemis, or that she sought to escape the advances of Zeus who was attracted to her beauty, or that her beauty aroused Artemis' jealousy.⁶⁹ What we seem to have here is a motif similar to the story of Callisto, in which Artemis expels a companion for being seduced by Zeus.⁷⁰ However, the golden horns of the hind are symbols of the divine and the sacred, signifying both the animal's elevated status and the divine punishment involved.

and sheen of the coat, rendering it with a lifelike quality that adds to the realism of the scene.

⁶⁵ Etymologicum Magnum, 507.56, in Etymologicon Magnum, ed. Gaisford T. (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1848); Hyginus, *Poetica astronomica*, 2.16 1960; Smith 1870; Forbes Irving 1990, 123.

⁶⁶ Euripides, *Helen*, 381–383, 1938; Kerényi 1959, 146; Fontenrose 1981, 131–132; Holland Goldthwaite 2023, 157, table 3.

⁶⁷ Euripides, *Helen*, 381 ff., 1938.

⁶⁸ Fontenrose 1981, 131.

⁶⁹ Fontenrose 1981, 131.

⁷⁰ Forbes Irving, 219.

In any case, the transformation of Titanis is referenced by Euripides as a vivid example of how the gods interact with mortals and the natural world, aligning with the play's exploration of identity and change. Consistently, in the *Orphic Hymns*, Titanis appears as an epithet of Artemis herself.⁷¹

While ancient art includes many representations of Artemis and transformations involving deer or hinds, there are no well-documented artworks specifically illustrating the myth of Titanis. This myth, mentioned in Euripides' *Helen*, appears to be less represented in the visual arts of ancient Greece and Rome.

This lack of representation may be due to fact that the myth of Titanis (Cos) is one of the more obscure tales in Greek mythology, and there is limited information available about her and her metamorphosis. However, her transformation into a hind with golden horns is part of a larger pattern in Greek mythology where humans are transformed into animals as a form of divine punishment, protection, or escape. This theme is prominent in myths involving figures like Callisto, Actaeon, and Daphne. In Titanis's case, her transformation by Artemis involves the metamorphosis into an animal revered for its sacredness and connection to the goddess herself. This feature was expressed by the golden antlers.

4.3 A crowned doe as Iphigenia's sacrificial substitute, The Pompeian interpretation of a 4th Century BCE Greek masterpiece

The depiction of Iphigenia's sacrifice was frequently reproduced in classical Greek and Roman art, because this myth is rich in symbolic meaning and reflects themes of fate, struggle between duty and personal desire, *philia* (family affection and loyalty), ultimate obedience to the father's wishes, self-sacrifice, and divine intervention. Iphigenia "is doomed to perish by that relentless power which has linked her destiny with crimes and contests, in which she has no part but as a sufferer".⁷² In the standard version of the tale, she does so, thereby appeasing the goddess and enabling the Greek armada to sail on to Troy. It is the seminal version in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

However, in some masterpieces of Roman art, based on Euripides' version, the ending is different, and the hind is depicted with antlers. An example is a mural

⁷¹ *Orphic Hymn* 36 to Artemis line 2; *The Orphic Hymns*, 1977; Id., 2013. Scholars debate whether Titanis is truly a distinct character or whether her myth was conflated with other similar stories, like that of Taygete or Callisto. Several scholars identify Titanis with Taygete, and the transformation into a golden-horned hind makes this identification plausible. Otherwise, we must suppose that there were two nymphs whom Artemis transformed in this way (Fontenrose 1981, 132). Others have questioned the identification, noting that even if one considers Titanis a description rather than a name, her father is Merops, not Atlas, and that she was expelled from Artemis's band as punishment (Fontenrose, 1981, 132; Forbes Irving, 1990, 219). This debate reflects the fluid nature of mythological narratives, where characters and stories often overlap or evolve over time.

⁷² Jameson 1832, 208-209.

painting in the Fourth Style from the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii (VI, 8, 3.5).⁷³ This fresco, dating back to the mid-1st century CE, is now preserved at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples.⁷⁴

According to the myth, as narrated in Euripides' *Iphigenia Aulidensis* (ca. 406 BCE)⁷⁵ and *Iphigenia in Tauris* (ca. 413 BCE),⁷⁶ the Achaean ships bound for the expedition against Troy were stranded in the port of Aulis due to unfavorable winds. The seer Kalchas identified the cause as the anger of Artemis, provoked by Agamemnon, king of Mycenae and leader of the Greek armies. Most sources suggest that this anger was due to Agamemnon having killed a deer sacred to the goddess during a hunting trip. According to other authors, having killed a doe while hunting, he claimed to be a hunter superior to Artemis.⁷⁷

Kalchas determined that the only way to resolve the stalemate and allow the Greek fleet to sail to Troy was to appease Artemis by sacrificing the king's eldest daughter, Iphigenia.

Iphigenia arrived in Aulis under the false promise of a marriage to the hero Achilles. However, her true union was destined to be with Hades, the god of the underworld. The *proteleia* - the preliminary rites to the wedding - were, in reality, rites of death. Understanding the inevitability of her fate, Iphigenia willingly offered herself for sacrifice, thereby prefiguring the glory she would attain for securing Greece's salvation and victory.⁷⁸

However, at the moment of her immolation on the sacrificial altar, the goddess Artemis replaced the maiden with a hind and then brought Iphigenia to the distant, wild land of Tauris (modern-day Crimea),⁷⁹ where she became a venerated and untouchable priestess, presiding over human sacrifices of foreigners in honor of the goddess⁸⁰ - a rite attested by archaeological evidence

⁷³ Helbig 1868, n. 1304; Mau 1907; Janovic-Osers 1996, 98-101; Wood 1996; Coarelli 2002, 288 ff; Allison 2004; Dobbins-Foss 2007; Mattusch 2008; Beard 2008; Poehler et alii 2011.

⁷⁴ Inventory number 9112.

⁷⁵ Fr. 857. See also in Aelian, *De natura animalium*, 7.39.

⁷⁶ Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* in Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, ed. Cropp M. J. (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 2000); Dowden 1989, 158-170; Kyriakou 2006.

⁷⁷ Hyginus, *Fabulae*, 98.

⁷⁸ Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 147-55, 184-247 in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, ed. Lloyd-Jones H. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970); Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, in Euripides *Iphigenia in Aulis*, ed. Grene D., Lattimore R., trans. Walker C. R., Euripides IV: *Rhesus, The Suppliant Women, Orestes, Iphigenia in Aulis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Pausania, *Description of Greece*, 9, 13, 5.

⁷⁹ The earliest mentioning of the not-sacrifice of Iphigenia is in the 7th century Kypria by Stasinos. In the Kypria after Agamemnon killed a deer, Artemis got angry and demanded a virgin sacrifice. Artemis substituted a hind for Iphigenia and subsequently made the girl immortal and transported her to the land of the Taurians. See Bernabé 1987, 41; Bernabé 1982, 81-87;

⁸⁰ Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, 28-30, 1462-67; Puliga-Panichi 2012, 88.

from Minoan-Mycenaean Greece.⁸¹ The myth of Iphigenia thus forms the foundation of another crucial rite of passage under the dominion of Artemis: the female initiatory ritual. Iphigenia embodies the paradigmatic role of the *parthenos*, whose symbolic sacrifice, often replaced by an animal, represents the death of her former life as she transitions into sexual maturity.⁸²

Aelian quotes a now-lost line of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* in which Artemis declares that she will substitute an antlered hind for the girl.⁸³ However, this myth was depicted in various ways in Greco-Roman art, showing the hind both with and without antlers. Greco-Roman sacrificial practice suggests that in artistic representations of the Iphigenia's myth even antlered cervids with no visible genitalia should be identified as female. A general -but not absolute - norm in sacrificial practice was that victims should share the same gender as the deity to whom they were sacrificed. This would be even more crucial in the case of a substitution sacrifice, since offering a male victim in place of a female, or vice versa, could alter the nature of the rite and call into question its acceptability to the deity.⁸⁴ It is more plausible to posit that all these depictions represent female deer, sometimes with and sometimes without antlers.



Image 8. Sacrifice of Iphigenia, Pompeii.

The sacrifices of Iphigenia and Polyxena are included in the Trojan saga, respectively at the opening and closing of the war. Artistic representations of the Iphigenia myth had prominence in Roman culture.⁸⁵

The moment when Iphigenia is about to be sacrificed on the altar in Aulis, as painted on the rear wall of the peristyle of the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii, is notable for its dramatic and detailed portrayal of the mythological narrative. This domus was

excavated in the early 19th century and has provided a wealth of insights into Roman domestic life and art.⁸⁶ It

⁸¹ Hughes 1991; Holland 2023, 149.

⁸² Bettini 2021.

⁸³ Gantz 1993, 587.

⁸⁴ Holland 2023, 129. Actaeon was transformed and sacrificed as a stag and not as a doe. Only girls played the she-bear, not boys in the primary rite of Artemis cult at Brauron. See Hangard 1996, 645a; Perlman 1989, 111-133; Blundell 1998, 33.

⁸⁵ Anderson 2001, 243-266.

⁸⁶ McKay 1975; Wallace-Hadrill 1988, 43-97; de Caro 1990; Coarelli 2002, 188, 288 ff. It is a notable residence ultimately inhabited by a family of extremely wealthy freedmen (Zanker 1998), 179).

is famed for its elaborate floor mosaics and frescoes depicting Greek mythological subjects and theatrical scenes. It was at the same time a real villa and an art gallery, as persuasively described by K. Schefold.⁸⁷ The exposed artworks collectively underscore the cultural importance of Greek mythology and drama in Roman society⁸⁸ and reflect the cultural and intellectual aspirations of the house's owner and his desire to showcase his education, cultural sophistication, and moral values.⁸⁹

The mural depicting the sacrifice of Iphigenia, as well as the other frescoes and mosaics in the house, is executed in the Fourth Style, which is characterized by a combination of architectural elements, framed mythological panels, and intricate decorative motifs. This style was prevalent from c. 50 CE to c. 79 CE.⁹⁰ The wall painting under analysis is one of the most notable frescoes in this house.⁹¹ It captures the dramatic climax of the myth, just before Artemis intervenes to save Iphigenia. The first character to be analyzed is the desperate father of Iphigenia, king Agamemnon, because he is central to the decision to sacrifice his daughter.⁹² Agamemnon sits on the left side of the panel, physically separated from the other characters and facing away from the group by his pose and his head enveloped in the folds of his mantle. By hiding Agamemnon's face, the painter allows the viewer to imagine a pain more profound than any that could be conveyed through facial expression.⁹³ This positioning and gesture emphasize his emotional isolation and despair over the impending sacrifice of his daughter. They convey his inner turmoil and reluctance to witness the sacrifice, highlighting the tragic nature of his role as both a father and a leader, chief agent and chief sufferer.⁹⁴

An archaic statue of Artemis, with a *modium* hat on her head, stands on a pillar on which the king leans. The goddess is surrounded by two of her antlered hinds. Iphigenia is depicted at the center of the composition, underscoring her role as the focal point of the narrative. She is shown nude, wrapped in a cloth that drapes over her back and sides, resembling a pure animal ready for sacrifice while the officiants prepare the altar. However, the girl is depicted neither in a state of resignation or terror, nor with one of serene acceptance of the inevitability of fate, but rather with an expression of hope. She has arms stretched outwards, a gesture that suggest not surrender or fear, but a request for protection towards the goddess and at the same time a sign of understanding of her destiny through

⁸⁷ Schefold 1952, 32 ff.; Schefold 1972, 50 ff. See also Jucker 1950, 29, 35 ff.

⁸⁸ Guzzo 2003.

⁸⁹ Anderson 2001, 243-266.

⁹⁰ Clarke 1991; Ling 1991; Parise 1993, 527-603; Richardson 2000; Coarelli 2002.

⁹¹ Borda 1961, 39; Reinach, 1970, 169; de Vos 1982, 223; Baldassarre et alii 2002, 160-164; Bragantini 2009, 332. However, according to Susan Woodford. "There is little to move the heart in this insensitive picture" See Woodford 1993, 37.

⁹² Anderson, 2001, 243-266.

⁹³ Woodford 1993, 37-38.

⁹⁴ Woodford 1993, 37; Anderson 2001, 243-266.

the ongoing intervention. Her gaze is directed towards the miracle occurring in heaven. She has suddenly realized that her *philia*, or self-sacrificing family love, has been repaid, and that the impossible salvation is, in fact, coming true.

An elderly bearded man dressed in *exomis* (Ulysses) and a beardless young man in *chlamys* (Diomedes or Achilles), depicted as burly muscular characters, have Iphigenia in their grasp and are about to place her on the altar as a sacrificial offering to the goddess Artemis-Diana. Nevertheless, their expressions convey the tension and uncertainty of the moment. One is watching with terror at what is happening in the sky, while the other observes with perplexity the indecision of the sacrificing priest.

Indeed, Kalchas is hesitating to carry out the sacrifice. His over-large figure stands near the altar, crowned with laurel and dressed in a long *chiton*. He turns away his head looking up. At the same time, he holds his hand and the unsheathed sacrificial knife to cover his mouth to indicate the moment of divine epiphany taking place.⁹⁵ Kalchas recognizes the presence of Artemis and the imposed substitution of the hind for Iphigenia.

In fact, Artemis-Diana is depicted above the scene in a light cloud, intervening at the last moment. The goddess has a showy diadem, *chiton* and mantle and holds a bow with her left hand. She launches herself into the sky depicted in the upper right area of the tableau, while ordering one of her nymphs to bring her one of her consecrated hinds, which she accepts as a substitute for the girl.⁹⁶ In response to her command, in the upper left area of the scene, a nymph emerges from a cloud. She rides a doe grabbing her horns.⁹⁷

It is the climax of the drama, the moment immediately before Artemis's substitution, that the mural in the House of the Tragic Poet depicts. As Charles Walker notes, Euripides has changed Iphigenia's character "from an unwilling victim to a true saint,"⁹⁸ a martyr who offered herself, but was freed by the divinity from this task. She was completely at the



Image 9. Sacrifice of Iphigenia, Pompeii. Detail.

⁹⁵ AA.VV 1911.

⁹⁶ While here the doe is antlered, in the fresco depicting the sacrifice of Iphigenia in the frieze of the triclinium of the House of the Vettii it is without horns (Coarelli 2002).

⁹⁷ Gell 1837, Ch 8, T. XXXV; Helbig 1868, 283-284; Mau 1907, 318; Bergmann 1994, 225-256; Poppiti 2018, 1-100.

⁹⁸ Euripides, Iphigenia in Aulis, 210.

mercy of the men in her life,⁹⁹ but was finally freed from this fate of submission by her consecration to the female divinity.

The fresco in the House of the Tragic Poet is a crucial piece for studying the intersection of Roman art and Greek mythology, because it reflects this cultural blend and the Roman fascination with Greek drama, paralleled in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹⁰⁰ The themes depicted in the fresco are not only artistic but also literary, drawing from the works of Greek tragedians like Euripides and Aeschylus, as well as later Roman adaptations by poets such as Ovid. Greek tragedies, particularly those by playwrights such as Euripides involving Iphigenia, influenced Roman wall paintings and the importance of visual representations in conveying complex narratives and emotions, similar to those found in the original Greek plays. The Roman elite audience, familiar with Greek culture, would have fully understood and savored the references and emotional depth in such depictions.

The scene is portrayed with intense emotional detail to emphasize the tragic elements of ancient Greek mythology, incorporating them into the context of domestic art. The fresco focuses on realistic human expressions and dramatic

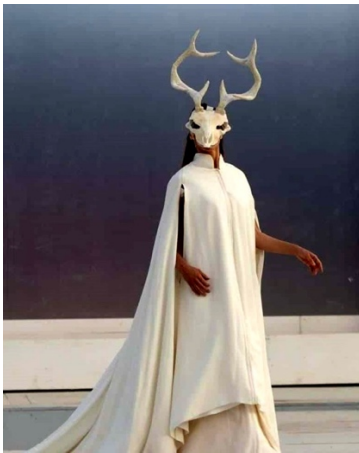


Image 10. Ifigenia Pompeii
Theatrum Mundi 2022.

poses. The use of color, light, and shadow enhances the emotional and spectacular impact of the scene. It was probably copied to some degree from a famous painting by Timanthes of Cythnus, a celebrated ancient Greek painter of the 4th century BCE, whose masterpiece, the *Sacrifice of Iphigenia*, still existed in Rome during the time of Augustus highlighting the long-lasting influence of Greek art on Roman aesthetics.¹⁰¹ The two celestial upper figures, however, are probably additions by the copyist.¹⁰²

Timanthes was known for his ability to convey complex emotions, a trait that seems to have been emulated in the Pompeian fresco, which showcases the dramatic

interpretation of ancient Greek mythology in the context of Roman domestic life of the elite, indicating a sophisticated understanding of Greek tragedy and its themes and the status of the homeowner as a patron of the arts or even an eminent poet.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Hokom 2015.

¹⁰⁰ The sacrifice of Iphigenia is narrated in book XIII, verses 27-38.

¹⁰¹ His masterpiece was mentioned by Cicerone (*The Orator*), Quintilianus (*Institutio oratoria*), and Pliny the Elder (*Naturalis historia*).

¹⁰² AA.VV., Guida illustrata, 1911.

¹⁰³ Bergmann 1994, 225–256.

4.4 Artemis-Diana intervenes to save Iphigenia leading a consecrated antlered doe: a Roman mosaic from Empúries, Spain

Empúries, also known as Emporiae, is the most significant Greco-Roman archaeological site in Catalonia, Spain. It includes both Greek and Roman layers, providing a unique blend of cultures. The broader excavation efforts at Empúries began in earnest in 1846.¹⁰⁴

An exquisite mosaic from ancient Roman Empúries illustrates the dramatic moment preceding the scene represented in the Pompeii mosaic. In this tableau, Iphigenia is portrayed being dragged to the altar like an animal for sacrifice. However, Artemis-Diana is intervening to rescue her, leading an antlered doe as a substitute.



Image 11. Sacrifici d'Ifigènia (Empúries).

This *emblema* was discovered in 1849, in a yet-to-be-excavated 1st century CE *domus* in this ancient city,¹⁰⁵ which highlights the wealth and cultural sophistication of the Roman inhabitants of Empúries. The mythological theme of Iphigenia's near-sacrifice is represented in a square measuring half a meter on each side.¹⁰⁶ The mosaic was placed in one of the *triclinia*, where it could be admired by guests during banquets. This setting underscores the role of this mosaic as both status symbols and conversation pieces, reflecting the homeowner's education, cultural affiliations, and wealth.

In the foreground, a stone altar is surrounded by branches. A torch, a *bucranium* (ox skull), and a small image of an ithyphallic herm are positioned around the sacrificial place. At the center of the mosaic, Iphigenia is shown in the dramatic moment of being led to the altar. She is typically depicted with an expression of resigned sadness, emphasizing the emotional weight of the scene. Her attire is that of a young noblewoman, draped in flowing garments intricately detailed

¹⁰⁴ Casellas 1908; Buscató-Pons Pujol 2012.

¹⁰⁵ Barral 1990; Buscató-Pons Pujol 2002, 195-209; Bendala 2003; Oliveras 2008, 12-16, 12.

¹⁰⁶ The mosaic is now held in the Museu Arqueològic de Catalunya deu d'Empúries (L'Escala, Catalunya, Espanya). The museum's collection provides a broader context for the mosaic, including other artifacts from the Greco-Roman city, which help to illustrate the daily life, art, and culture of the time.

with tesserae to suggest the folds and textures of the rich fabric.¹⁰⁷ They are white in color, the color of purity and elevation.

Iphigenia's central placement and portrayal draw attention to her willingness to sacrifice herself, which is considered a key element of the scene's dramatic tension. Therefore, the mosaic would illustrate when the princess herself emphasizes the pivotal role of her virgin sacrifice in the destruction of Troy and makes the connection between the salvation of the civilized world, Greece, and the barbarian, Troy, with her body offered to the goddess.¹⁰⁸ Consistently, her portrayal in this masterpiece reflects her transformation from a passive victim to a figure of active self-sacrifice.¹⁰⁹ After much thought, she agreed to obey her father and sacrifice herself for the victory of his army. However, her left hand is held firmly by Ulysses, identifiable by his *pileus*, a conical felt cap. The hero is dressed in brown robes and brandishes a spear.

Ulysses directs his merciless gaze towards Agamemnon, who stands on the left of the altar. The king is partially covering his face with his right hand to express determination in spite of his anguish. His clothing and posture convey his royal status and inner turmoil over the necessity of sacrificing his daughter, alongside an awareness of its inevitability.

The seer and sacrificial priest Kalchas stands to the right. Dressed in white with a ribbon on his head and holding a raised knife in his right hand, he is ready to carry out the human sacrifice. To the far right, Menelaus is depicted holding a long scepter. In front of him, there is a naked child of noble class, assisting the officiants.

Above a column, statues of Athena and Apollo dominate the scene, with a shield that reproduces the image of Artemis resting at the foot of the pillar. In the background, a group of young people attending the sacrificial act can be glimpsed.¹¹⁰ The priest, attendants, and witnesses are all preparing for the sacrifice, contributing to the solemnity and ritualistic atmosphere of the scene.

In the distant background, tall cypress trees stand and, in the upper right corner, the goddess Artemis-Diana is seen watching over the scene, leading the antlered deer destined to replace Iphigenia as the sacrificial victim at the last moment. In her other hand the goddess holds a lit torch.¹¹¹ Iphigenia's fate hangs in the

¹⁰⁷ Buscató-Pons Pujol 2002, 195-202.

¹⁰⁸ The fresco would have masterfully illustrate understanding that without her sacrifice, the Trojan War would not have come about, as she herself contends, "Bring me away; the sacker of Ilium and the Phrygians" (Euripides Iphigenia in Aulis, 1475-1476) and the Greek civilization would not have conquered the barbarian: "Make the sacrifice! Eradicate Troy! For a long time to come that will be my monument, my children, my marriage, my fame" (Euripides, Iphigenia in Aulis, 1398-1399).

¹⁰⁹ Anderson 2001, 243-266.

¹¹⁰ They are five young men without weapons (four under a tent and one behind the column) and a soldier partially covered by a tree, possibly Achilles or Ajax. A female figure is shown behind Ulysses' shoulders.

¹¹¹ Mangieri 2017, 57.

balance. As the drama reaches its climax, Artemis-Diana has not yet revealed herself to the humans, nor has she converted the sacrifice from human to (sacred) animal. Observing the mosaic, the owner of the luxurious villa and his guests likely recited in their minds the liberating verses from Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*: "By the craft of Ulysses, they took me from my mother, pretending a marriage with Achilles. I came to Aulis; held up high over the altar, I, the unhappy one, was about to die by the sword; but Artemis gave the Achaeans a deer in exchange for me and stole me from them".¹¹²

The mosaic from Empúries is an excellent example of *opus vermiculatum*¹¹³ that can be compared to other famous mosaics of the period, such as the Alexander Mosaic from Pompeii, in terms of its intricate detail and narrative content.¹¹⁴ The fine detailing of facial expressions, clothing textures, and anatomical features showcases the skill of the mosaicists.¹¹⁵

The mosaic was created by artists from a workshop in the eastern Mediterranean.¹¹⁶ It possibly copied a Hellenistic painting from the 4th century BCE,¹¹⁷ as the Hellenistic tradition expressed a similar theatrical pathos, utilized a similar rich palette of colors and explored effects of light and optics from associated colors.¹¹⁸ However, the not perfect technical precision, with the juxtaposition of colors not providing a gradual range of hues, the absence of aerial perspective effects and the static rendering of the characters mostly suggests that this masterwork was executed in the last third of the 1st century CE.

¹¹² Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

¹¹³ The *opus vermiculatum* is a technique characterized by the use of tiny tesserae cut in the direction required by the figuration to create highly detailed and intricate images. The numerous very small, colored, natural stone tesserae are meticulously arranged to create a vivid and intricate image and to obtain a pictorial quality. This technique was typically reserved for the most prestigious mosaics, often found in the most important rooms of Roman homes. In Empúries, Iphigenia's myth is represented within a polychrome square-shaped frame, typical of Roman floor mosaics, and forms the heart of a larger decorative scheme that would have adorned the floors of this luxurious villa. Reds, blues, greens, and whites of semi-precious stones and glass paste are used to bring the characters and the scene to life, with shading to suggest depth and volume.

¹¹⁴ Barral 1986, 94-99.

¹¹⁵ Santos 2003, 150-151; Rodà 2016, 69-77, 72.

¹¹⁶ The relationship with Asia Minor was shaped by the Greek origins of the *Municipium Emporiae*. The Roman city coexisted with the pre-existing *Palaiapolis*, founded by settlers from the island of Phocaea in 575 BCE and known as *Emporion*. During the reign of Augustus, the Phocaeans were granted Roman citizenship, leading to the physical unification of the Greek and Roman cores of the city.

¹¹⁷ Some stylistic details, such as the semicircle of figures placed around the altar, the hanging cloths, and the columns, along with the theatricality of the scene, suggest the existence of a Greek pictorial original that was used as a model for the creation of the mosaic.

¹¹⁸ Devambež 1972, 333-334.

Like the fresco in the House of the Tragic Poet in Pompeii, the mosaic from Empúries served not only as a decorative element, but also as a symbolic tool, reflecting the cultural and intellectual koine of Roman society. It indicates how Greek tragedies were interpreted and adapted into Roman visual culture within a domestic setting. The choice of a critical and well-known episode from Greek mythology demonstrates the Romans' appreciation for Greek culture and their desire to align themselves with its prestigious traditions.¹¹⁹ This mosaic is a striking example of how Greek tragedy was not only valued as literature but also as a source of visual and emotional impact in Roman art. Moreover, the depiction of such a poignant mythological event underscores themes of fate, duty, sacrifice, tragedy, and the role of the gods in human affairs, resonating with Roman moral values, religious thought, and their interpretation of heroic narratives.

4.5 A Hellenistic colored hind with horns from the Horti Sallustiani, Rome

A notable example of a masterpiece with an antlered hind is the elegant statue group of Artemis and Iphigenia discovered in Rome within the area of the *Horti Sallustiani*.¹²⁰ The *Horti Sallustiani* was a luxurious garden complex in Rome, originally developed by the Roman historian Sallust. The complex became imperial property and was further embellished under subsequent emperors, particularly Hadrian.

This composition was originally intended to adorn a nymphaeum facing the palace in the *Horti Sallustiani*,¹²¹ bearing many similarities to Hadrian's villa in Tivoli.¹²² The presence of such a statue group in this setting highlights the elite status of the area and the importance of mythological themes in Roman art and architecture. Its dramatic narrative would have resonated with Roman audiences familiar with the myth's moral and religious implications.



Image 12. Reconstructed antlered hind Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

¹¹⁹ Cortadella 2009, 153-262.

¹²⁰ Poulsen 1951, 83, cat. nr. 83-83a; Nielsen-Østergaard 1997, cat. no. 12.

¹²¹ Moltesen 2006, 193-218, 208, 209, fig. 11.

¹²² Cima-La Rocca 1998, 180-181.

The group is now housed in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.¹²³ Its dating has been debated, with suggestions ranging from the late fourth century BCE to the Roman imperial period.¹²⁴ Some scholars argue that the group is either a late classical or a mid to late Hellenistic original.¹²⁵ Others believe it to be a Roman copy of a lost bronze composition, possibly created between the late fourth and mid-first century BCE.¹²⁶ In any case, the statue group exemplifies the Hellenistic style, characterized by dramatic expression and dynamic composition. It was established that the marble originates from Asia Minor, raising the possibility that the Artemis-Iphigenia-hind group was initially exhibited in that region and later transported to Rome during the Roman Empire.¹²⁷



Image 13. Artemis saving Iphigenia Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek.

The remains of the group, reconstructed in the early twentieth century by Franz Studniczka, consist of the torsos of the two women and the fragmentary head of a hind, held together by numerous struts.¹²⁸

The group captures the emotionally charged climax of the myth,¹²⁹ when Artemis rescues the young Iphigenia by snatching her from the altar where her father, Agamemnon, is about to sacrifice her, offering an antlered hind in her place.¹³⁰ This scene is considered “typically Hellenistic” due to its focus on the most dramatic moment of the episode, when the characters are at the peak of physical and psychological tension.¹³¹

Originally, the statue of Artemis was partially covered in gold leaf, while Iphigenia’s dress was painted in vivid colors.¹³² Contrary to the white marble

¹²³ Inv. no. IN 481-482a.

¹²⁴ Sargent-Therkildsen 2010, 11-26, 14; Anguissola 2018; Anguissola 2018a, 579-612.

¹²⁵ According to Frederik Poulsen and Anne Marie Nielsen, the group dates to the third to 1st centuries BCE. See Poulsen 1951; Nielsen-Østergaard 1997, 38-9, no. 12; Cima-La Rocca 1998, 180-181; Sargent-Therkildsen 2010, 14; D’Angelo 2022, 52. Conversely, Erika Simon considers it to be a product of the first-century BCE ‘classicism’ taste. See Simon 1984, 363-446, 837-8 no. 337.

¹²⁶ Ridgway 1990, 283; Smith 1991, 120, fig. 139; Moreno 1994, vol. II, 584-585.

¹²⁷ Poulsen 1951.

¹²⁸ Studniczka *et alii* 1926; Cain 2009, 6, fig. 1.

¹²⁹ The emphasis on capturing a critical moment is a hallmark of Hellenistic art.

¹³⁰ Poulsen 1951; Nielsen-Østergaard 1997, 208, 209, fig. 11.

¹³¹ Nielsen-Østergaard 1997, 38.

¹³² Sargent-Therkildsen 2010; Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Statue group of Artemis and Iphigenia, Tracking Colour, 2021. <https://www.trackingcolour.com/objects/22#>.

look commonly associated with ancient statues today, many were originally painted in vibrant colors. The hind's head, recognized by L. Pollak in Jandolo's shop on Via del Babuino in Rome, was eventually purchased in 1902.¹³³ The head preserves traces of red paint on her mouth, fur, and antlers, contributing to the polychrome palette.¹³⁴ In their reconstruction, Sargent and Therkildsen positioned the animal's head tilted downward with her antlers outstretched. They reattached the antlers to the head, added plaster pieces to the surviving fragments of the palmate antlers, and connected the antlers with bar supports.¹³⁵

4.6 Silver skyphos depicting Artemis soaring across the sky, holding a lit torch and the antlers of a horned hind

A significant Roman silver skyphos (deep drinking cup), dating to the late 1st century BCE or early 1st century CE, features an intricate relief centered around the myth of the interrupted sacrifice of Iphigenia. This scene, possibly inspired by a now-lost wall painting, exemplifies the finest Roman craftsmanship. The pivotal mythological event is masterfully rendered on the highly polished silver surface, which accentuates the intricate detailing and vividly brings the scene to life.



Image 14. Skyphos, iphigenia 1st century BC - 1st century AD (silver).

The moment captured is one of suspended time, akin to the mosaic at Empúries, depicting the critical instant at the beginning of the human sacrifice. Artemis is seen soaring across the sky behind the seer and sacrificer Kalchas, holding the antlers of a hind in her right hand and a lit torch in her left. Her dramatic entrance signals that the goddess is about to descend to rescue Iphigenia by substituting the maiden with the animal.¹³⁶ However, Kalchas, intent on the preparation of the sacrificial ritual, remains unaware of the goddess's impending intervention. He grips a lock of Iphigenia's hair in one hand and the sacrificial knife in the other, poised to sever her hair before delivering the fatal blow.

Iphigenia, the intended victim, stands in a state of vulnerability with her head bowed before Kalchas. Her posture conveys the gravity of her impending doom. The scene includes an altar adorned with ritualistic items, further emphasizing the sacrificial context and the tension of the narrative moment.

¹³³ Guldán 1988, 134-137; Cima-La Rocca 1998, 180-181.

¹³⁴ Sargent-Therkildsen 2010; Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Statue group.

¹³⁵ Sargent-Therkildsen 2010.

¹³⁶ Mangieri, *Virgin Sacrifice*, 56, IPH 50, Color Plate 5.

Artemis is portrayed dynamically in flight, embodying urgency and divine power. Her posture suggests rapid movement, underscoring the question of whether she will arrive in time to prevent the sacrifice.

In Roman culture, rich in storytelling, skyphoi were often used during festivities and dinners, where the depicted literary scenes, inspired by the great Greek tragedians, served as an elegant stimulus for conversation. The illuminating torch held by Artemis encapsulates multifaceted symbolism.

As a traditional symbol of transition, the lit torch plays a crucial role in the myth, signifying both Artemis's divine authority and mercy. The torch's light symbolizes the revelation of the goddess's will, her power to alter the course of events she herself has determined, and her intervention at the moment of Iphigenia's intended sacrifice. Artemis, a protector of the young—particularly young women like Iphigenia—and closely associated with the moon, is often described as the goddess of the moon's light. She illuminates the night sky, mirroring her celestial duties. The torch on the skyphos signifies her watchful presence even in the darkest moments, guiding and protecting Iphigenia and granting her a new purpose.

Within this framework, the torch also iconographically illustrates Artemis's dual nature as both a nurturing and destructive force, embodying her control over life and death. While Iphigenia stands on the brink of death, Artemis's torch, representing the power to navigate the space between life and death, guides her through this dramatic transition—not to the afterlife, but to a new life as a priestess who gives ritual death. The torch thus symbolizes the passage from one state of being to another, emphasizing Artemis's role as a guardian of critical human thresholds.

Torches were commonly used in ancient Greek rituals and festivals, especially those dedicated to Artemis. By holding a torch, Artemis highlights the sacredness of the sacrificial act, ensuring that it aligns with her divine will and order. Specifically, in ancient rituals, torches were often employed in purification ceremonies. In the context of Iphigenia's myth, Artemis's torch symbolizes the purification of the Greek fleet through the intended sacrifice.

4.7 A rhyton with the antlered head of Iphigenia symbolizing the substitution of the hind

A terracotta head rhyton from the necropolis of Camposanto at Timmari (Matera County, Basilicata)¹³⁷ portrays a female human head adorned with a pair of antlers. This artifact, dating to approximately 340 BCE, is notable for its complex iconography and the high level of craftsmanship. It is associated with the work of the Darius Painter or the Underworld Painter.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ It was found in the male tomb 12-1911. Lo Porto 1991, 40 ff.

¹³⁸ The masterpiece is held in the Museo archeologico nazionale Domenico Ridola, Matera. Inventory number 11013. Lattanzi, E., *Il Museo Nazionale "Domenico Ridola" di Matera* (Matera: Soprintendenza Archeologica Basilicata, 1976), 123, pl. 42, 1. The

According to Arthur Dale and Alexander Cambitoglou, the head depicted on this Apulian vase represents Iphigenia, with the antlers symbolizing the hind that was substituted at the last moment in Aulis, a pivotal element in her myth.¹³⁹ The antlers on the vase thus represent the hind that Artemis provided in Iphigenia's place.¹⁴⁰ Their presence on this head vase emphasizes the moment of divine intervention and underscores Iphigenia's connection to Artemis, reinforcing her association with the goddess and the themes of sacrifice, protection of the innocent, and salvation.¹⁴¹

Above the antlered head, the neck of the rhyton, rendered in red-figure technique, depicts a woman surrounded by flowers. She is seated, offering a sacrifice of ivy leaves with a patera in her hand, and wearing luxurious sandals. This figure could be an Amazon,¹⁴² but more likely represents Iphigenia herself after becoming a priestess consecrated to Artemis among the faraway Taurians.



Image 15. Timmari Iphigenia with the antlers.

Ivy, a plant that thrives in wild, wooded areas, carries symbolic meanings such as eternal life, fidelity, and resilience due to its evergreen nature. In ancient Greek culture, this quality made ivy a symbol of immortality through the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Then, it was used in funerary practices to symbolize the idea of life continuing after death. Its ability to cling and grow even on the most inhospitable surfaces also symbolized the soul's resilience and continuation after physical death. In the context of the iconography of the rhyton from Timmari, ivy is associated with Artemis's dominion over wild, untamed nature and resilience, symbolically aligning her with the themes of birth, growth, death, and rebirth. As a protector of women during childbirth, Artemis played a crucial role in a moment viewed as a liminal space between life and death. The symbolism of a sacrifice with ivy leaves thus complements the representation of

Darius Painter is the conventional name assigned to an Apulian ceramist (active 340 - 320 BCE). He is the most eminent representative of the late Ornate Style in red-figure vase painting in Magna Graecia. The Underworld Painter (active about 340 - 310 BCE) is the principal successor of the Darius Painter.

¹³⁹ Cambitoglou 1978, *Late Apulia*, Vol II, 616.92.

¹⁴⁰ *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, 13 - LIMC 13 (Zurich and Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1981–1999).

¹⁴¹ According to a different interpretation, the vase depicts the unfortunate hunter Actaeon during his transformation into a stag (Frisone-De Cristofaro 2011, 582-604; Bottini-Lecce 2016, 46, tav. 54). However, the facial features are feminine.

¹⁴² Trendall-Cambitoglou 1978, Vol II, 616.92.

Artemis as a goddess who oversees natural transitions, including those related to life and death.

The rhyton was found in the tomb of a male individual of high social status, notable for the rich array of grave goods, which included valuable ceramics such as pelikes, cup-skyphoi, skyphoi, amphoras, and bell kraters. The terracotta head rhyton depicting Iphigenia stands out as one of the most significant pieces in the tomb's assemblage. The deceased was buried according to funerary customs associated with elite drinking rituals. The imagery on the rhyton creates a clear parallel between the salvific transformation of Iphigenia, the symbolism of a sacrifice with ivy leaves, and the continuity of life for the deceased in the afterlife. This artifact thus provides valuable insight into the syncretism between Greek and indigenous Italic cultures in southern Italy, particularly regarding funerary practices during the Hellenistic period, and highlights the importance of ritual and symbolism in the afterlife beliefs of the time.

4.8 The success of the Iphigenia myth in Renaissance and Baroque art: the horned hind replacement

The theme of Iphigenia being saved by Artemis-Diana, who replaces her with an antlered hind at the moment of sacrifice, achieved significant success in art during the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Although we cannot explore this topic in depth here, it is essential to mention a few prominent artworks that highlight this narrative. Most of these works interpret Euripides' version through the lens of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. We will briefly describe three of these masterpieces, following the narrative sequence that leads to the non-sacrifice of Iphigenia, akin to capturing sequential scenes from a suspenseful horror movie.

Domenichino

(Domenico Zampieri) was a prominent figure of the Baroque period, known for his classical approach and emphasis on clarity and harmony. *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia*, dated 1609, is a quintessential Baroque masterpiece that pays homage to an ancient civilization, leaving the observer in suspense.¹⁴³ It was one of several scenes



Image 16. Domenichino *Iphigenia Sacrifice* 1609.

¹⁴³ The painting is located in the “Camerino di Diana” in Palazzo Giustiniani-Odescalchi in Bassano Romano.

depicting various mythological subjects created by Domenichino for the Cappella Herrera in the Church of San Giacomo degli Spagnoli in Rome.¹⁴⁴ In the painting, everything is prepared for the sacrifice.¹⁴⁵ Iphigenia is led to the altar with her hands tied, unlike the Greco-Roman version, where the priest grips her head with his left hand and raises an ax with his right. The royal girl, with her irresistible tenderness, sorrowful sweetness, and virginal innocence, appears destined to perish.¹⁴⁶ The participants in the ritual kneel, waving their arms and screaming in anguish.¹⁴⁷

Artemis-Diana descends from the heavens, bringing with her a long-horned hind.



Image 17. Tiepolo Giovanni Battista, *Sacrifice of Iphigenia*, 1760, Weimar.

However, nothing in the painting assures the viewer that she will arrive in time to change the course of this dramatic narrative, heightening the emotional impact on the viewer. In this painting Domenichino expresses at his best the dramatic and emotional tension between the impending violence and the potential for mercy, which is a hallmark of Baroque art.

In Giambattista Tiepolo's *Sacrifice of Iphigenia* (ca. 1760), housed in the Schlossmuseum in Weimar (Germany), the depiction of the antlered deer holds significant symbolic meaning, contributing to the painting's narrative and emotional impact.¹⁴⁸ Our horror movie has moved to the next sequence: the animal has just descended from the

sky and is ready to replace the human virgin.

It is depicted with lifelike accuracy: her body gracefully poised, her musculature well-defined, and her stance naturalistic. This precision in rendering the animal's

¹⁴⁴ The original frescoes in the chapel were later removed and transferred to canvas in the 19th century. Some were damaged or lost during this process, but *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia* has survived.

¹⁴⁵ Spear 1982.

¹⁴⁶ Jameson 1832, 208-209.

¹⁴⁷ In a nod to the ancient Greek painter Timanthes of Cythnus veiled Agamemnon's face to avoid depicting the king's overwhelming grief. See Spampinato 1996, 224-231, 231; Alberti L. B., *De pictura* (Basel: Bartholomäus Westheimer, 1540), § 42). Domenichino places an army chief on the left edge of the fresco. This figure is about to cover his face with a cloak, but still gazes out at the viewer, as if to say, "Look, I am doing what Timanthes of Cythnus did not dare" (Strunck 2003), 147-192, 177).

¹⁴⁸ Alpers-Baxandall 1994; Pedrocchi 2002; Calasso 2006.

anatomy showcases Tiepolo's skill as a prominent Italian painter of the late Baroque period, while also underscoring the pivotal role of this goddess's companion in the myth's narrative.

Tiepolo uses light to emphasize the deer, creating a luminous effect that reveals her celestial origin and consecrated status. The deer's fur, painted with rich texture in shades of brown and white, emanates a glow that enhances her numinous presence. The garland draped elegantly around the deer's neck is a significant detail that deepens the painting's narrative and symbolic depth. Her bright golden color stands out against the natural tones of the deer's fur, signifying the cervid's divine origin, its association with the goddess Artemis-Diana, and its role as a sacred substitute for Iphigenia. The decorative nature and visual richness of the garland also reinforce the deer's symbolism of purity and the sanctity of the sacrificial act. This transformation from a mere animal into a sacred offering underscores the theme of divine intervention.

The deer interacts directly with Iphigenia. This act symbolizes innocence and purity that mirrors the virgin's own attributes and identifies the animal as the divine savior. Iphigenia returns the hind's gaze, her expression and body language conveying a mix of fear and acceptance, highlighting her tragic fate. The deer's role as a divine substitute in the sacrifice is also expressed through its calm demeanor and almost ethereal expression, resonating with Iphigenia's calm resignation but contrasting sharply with the tension and sorrow experienced by the human participants in the ceremony. This contrast heightens the emotional impact of the scene, emphasizing the dramatic turning point in the story. The deer is depicted as fully aware of representing the intervention of the goddess Artemis-Diana, consciously embodying an act of divine mercy that saves Iphigenia and transforms the narrative from one of tragedy to one of divine salvation.

In the Genoese Baroque oil on canvas *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia* by Giovanni Andrea Carlone (1639–1697),¹⁴⁹ the sacrifice has now been theatrically consummated, and divine intervention is recognized. Strong contrasts between light and dark, as well as the emotional expressions of the figures, heighten the tension and drama of the scene. The



Image 18. Carlone Giovanni Andrea *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia*.

horned doe burns on the macaw and the delicate shape of her long antlers stand out against a smoky sky, while Artemis-Diana carries Iphigenia away to serve

¹⁴⁹ The artwork is held in a private collection.

her at her sanctuary among the far-away Taurians. Sacrificed animal and sacrificing priest stare at each other, to seal the perfection of the rite. King Agamemnon looks gratefully at the goddess.

5. Goddesses and semi-goddesses crowned with antlers

5.1 Deer-women hybrids and shamanic collapse of boundaries

Portrayals of women characterized by the seeming paradox of significance in their depiction—female heads sprouting red-deer antlers—appear in several ancient cultures. These images twist both gender and species realities, serving as "memory capacitors" for extremely archaic layers of consciousness, each with its own unique meanings and nuances. They narrate ancestral mythical times when dominant women, antlered like harts, were more than life-sized figures capable of transforming into deer—or vice versa, deer could transform into these women.¹⁵⁰ According to this totemic saga, these supernatural women were initiated into the Deer-Mother cult, ruled the world, and appeared as stags: covered in hair and with enormous branching antlers on their heads.¹⁵¹ They represented the theriomorphic form of a great goddess, the mother and owner of the land.¹⁵² Remnants of this myth can be found in Central Asian Kyrgyz traditions¹⁵³ and Caucasian mythology.¹⁵⁴ Notably, in iconography, antlers are usually the key zoomorphic feature on these deer-women hybrids; the face and body are generally human.¹⁵⁵

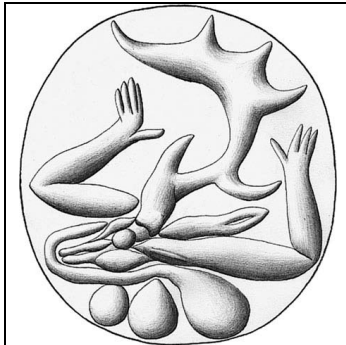


Image 19. Minoan seal stag dancer Zakros.

An intriguing Late Bronze Age Minoan seal from the palace of Zakros (Crete), known as the *elafokefalos* (deer-head man), portrays a probable stag dancer with a head resembling that of a red deer, complete with large antlers bearing six points indicating he was at the edge of the height of maturity (around 3-4 years old). The figure has upraised arms and pronounced breasts, possibly representing a deer priestess performing in ceremonial attire. The artifact likely depicts a scene from Minoan ritual practices conducted by restricted elites, showcasing a stag dancer engaged in a perilous athletic display: a contorted pose with massive antlers branching upward from above the ears and arms raised high.¹⁵⁶ This hybrid image effectively conveys

¹⁵⁰ Gimbutas 1989, 113.

¹⁵¹ Anisimov 1959, 28, 49 ff; Rybakov 1965, 2, 35; Gimbutas 1974, 171.

¹⁵² Merlini 2021, 18.

¹⁵³ Abramzon 1971, 281-283.

¹⁵⁴ Virsaladze 1976, 34; Mykhailova 2017, 64.

¹⁵⁵ Aldhouse-Green 2001, 80–93, 2001a; Aldhouse-Green 2001a, 203–232.

¹⁵⁶ Gimbutas 1989, 115.

the shamanic collapse of boundaries between human and animal. The shaman-woman is depicted in the liminal stage of transformation between human and animal forms, illustrating the inner experience of metamorphosis brought on by an intense state of trance and spirit possession during a masked and costumed performance.¹⁵⁷ Consequently, the seal may also represent a supernatural being, an "imaginary creature," or a "monster" that emerged from the ritual and communicated with the religious practitioner.¹⁵⁸

John G. McKay describes a totemic ritual in which a deer-priestess donned her vestments, a deer hide with antlers and hooves attached.¹⁵⁹ In pre-Celtic England and Germany, the tradition of stag dances around the New Year also persisted, with men dressed as women wearing antler head-dresses. These stag dances were performed to promote regeneration and secure happiness for the coming year.¹⁶⁰ This was a time "when man himself was in the hunting stage of development."¹⁶¹ The tradition of stag dances can be traced back to much earlier times. At Star Carr, a Mesolithic camp in Yorkshire dating from around 8000-7500 BCE, stag skulls were hacked into head-dresses with the antlers still in place. The interiors of the crania were smoothed, and the temples were punctured to allow thongs to pass through.¹⁶² A similar practice occurred eight thousand years later in Roman Britain, where a similarly modified pair of red deer antlers was found in a pit at Hook's Cross in Hertfordshire, associated with pottery dating to the 2nd century CE.¹⁶³

Dancers wearing stag masks are also found in ancient Aegean art. Notable examples include terracotta figurines from Cyprus, one of which depicts a figure removing his stag mask, while another, clad in a rough skin garment, holds his mask in his hand.¹⁶⁴

5.2 A Boeotian antlered goddess flanked by fierce lionesses

A valuable Boeotian vase from around 800 BCE features a simple, rounded body that narrows into a slender neck with two handles. The artwork depicts highly stylized figures and patterns painted in dark tones against a lighter background, typical of the early geometric style in Greek pottery.¹⁶⁵

The main body of the vase presents a frieze centered on the tall, standing figure of an antlered and crowned woman, her arms raised. Her fantastic antlers, sprouting from the crown, are likely inspired by those of a red deer.

¹⁵⁷ Tully-Crooks 2015, 129-158, 144, 145, fig. 19.

¹⁵⁸ Hogarth 1902; Weingarten 2009, 139-150. It has been suggested that the artist responsible for this image may have suffered from schizophrenia (Gill 1981, 83-90).

¹⁵⁹ McKay 1932, 144-174, 156.

¹⁶⁰ Gimbutas 1991, 294.

¹⁶¹ McKay 1932, 144.

¹⁶² Burl 1981, 33; Smith 1992, fig. 7.4.

¹⁶³ Aldhouse-Green 2001, 85, 87, fig. 7.9.

¹⁶⁴ Lawler 1964, 69.

¹⁶⁵ Hoernes 1915, 65, fig. 4; Golan 1991, 50, fig. 60.2.

Characterized by their large, branching structure, these antlers were a recognizable and symbolic choice to represent power and divinity. Both the antlers and crown—symbols of authority—are combined here to underscore her godly status. Her raised arms suggest a gesture of blessing, offering protection, or demonstrating power. The figure wears a long, flowing robe, a typical marker of status and importance in ancient Greek art.



Image 20. Antlered goddess beotian vase.

Two smaller women side the chimerical central figure, possibly representing priestesses or worshippers engaged in a ritual. They are depicted in gestures of reverence, reinforcing the divine nature and significance of the primary figure.

The antlered deity is symmetrically flanked by two rampant lionesses with open mouths, closely resembling those depicted atop the Lion Gate at the citadel of Mycenae, dating to around 1250 BCE. In Mycenaean culture, lionesses symbolized dominance, regal authority, and divine protection. They guarded a strategic site such as this iconic gate of the citadel, and at the same time symbolized the power of the citadel and its rulers.¹⁶⁶ The heraldic placement of the lionesses above the gate emphasized that Mycenaean rulers were backed by both divine and earthly power. In this context, the lionesses flanked a central column, symbolizing a deity or sacred space, further enhancing the religious significance of the gate. This has led to interpretations that the fierce felines not only symbolized royal power, but also served as protectors of the principal deity of Mycenae or the associated templar space.¹⁶⁷

The lionesses on the vase under examination carry similar connotations, with their iconography tracing back to Mycenaean symbolism and, even earlier, to the Near East, particularly Mesopotamian and Hittite art, which influenced early Greek ceramic design. Positioned on either side of the antlered goddess, they embody strength, courage, and guardianship, further emphasizing the goddess's authority and protective nature.

In ancient Boeotian art, lionesses depicted in a rampant pose, with open mouths and tongues exposed, signify readiness to defend or attack, emphasizing their fierce and combative nature. On the vase, their dynamic posture and elevated stance convey an impression of potency and alertness, ready to strike or defend. This protective posture may also symbolize nurturing, as lionesses are known for their fierce protection of their young. By placing lionesses with these characteristics beside the antlered goddess, the artist underscores their role as her

¹⁶⁶ Aström-Blomé 1964, 159-191; Bloedow 1996, 1159-1166; Blakolmer 2010, 49-66.

¹⁶⁷ Golan 2003.

guardians, reinforcing themes of both the sense of security provided by her power, but also the potential danger that surrounds her presence.

At the base of the vase, walking female deer are depicted in close association with the antlered deity. In red deer social structure, hinds are typically led by a dominant female. The scene on the vase reinforces the connection of the group of hinds with the dominant woman crowned as a red deer stag, who is positioned at the highest point of the composition, highlighting her authoritative presence. This imagery may reflect the belief that mythologized antlered hinds, when appearing in nature as potent, otherworldly versions of a familiar species, assumed leadership over the does, who had been part of the alpha stag's harem. The antlered deity thus evokes an ancestral era dominated by women who embodied the power of the horned hinds. This imagery collectively underscores themes of power and protection aligned with the natural order.

As previously analyzed, in ancient Greek mythology and art, hinds often symbolize fertility, nature, and the nurturing aspects of the divine. One of the hinds, in the center of the scene and perfectly aligned vertically with the goddess, is depicted giving birth. By including a procession of hinds, the artist emphasizes the role of the crowned, antlered woman as an initiator, nurturer, and protector of the natural cycles of birth and life.

In conclusion, the symmetrical and balanced composition of this vase describes a ritual scene that stages a mythological event related to fertility and the natural cycles of life. At its core is an antlered goddess, whose authority and protective nature dominate the tableau. This half-animal, half-human deity is possibly linked to a totemic myth about the origin of humans and animals from a common giant ancestor: a mythic, dominant antlered female cervid who appeared in the Stone Age, whose otherworldly powers were absorbed by the ancient Greek goddess.

5.3 Cernunna: the Celtic and Gallo-Roman goddess sprouting red-deer antlers

In ancient Greek and Roman art, the hybrid motif of women sporting stag antlers was not part of the mainstream artistic canon. The Iphigeneia from Timmari is a very rare instance. When we broaden our perspective to include ancient Celtic and Gallo-Roman religion, we find a goddess wearing antlers, a feature usually reserved for male divinities.¹⁶⁸ We can call her Cernunna,¹⁶⁹ because she was the

¹⁶⁸ Merlini 2021, 20.

¹⁶⁹ Some scholars assimilate her with the Goddess Fortuna (Boucher 1976, 174, 177. A 100-200 CE inscription engraved on a marble votive column discovered Slovenija was dedicated to the goddess *Carvonja*, whose name literally means 'Doe': *Ca]rvoniae / Aug(ustae) sacr(um) / pro salute / C[n(aei)] Atili / Iuliani*. It implies that the goddess was worshipped in the shape of a deer. The consecration for Carvonja was secondarily installed at Sempeter v Savinjski dolini - Dobrtesa vas (Zalec,) and is now held in the store room of the Celje - Pokrajinski Muzej. See Scherrer, *Der Kult der namentlich bezeugten Gottheiten*, 121, n. 27; Šašel Kos, *Roman Divinities*, 137-138, 137; Visocnik 2017, 402 no. 410; de Bernardo Stempel – Hainzmann 2020. The case of the dedication

female equivalent and partner of the stag-god Cernunnos, the *Horned One*,¹⁷⁰ who is often portrayed as the *Lord of the animals* with the feature of the majestic antlers of the Supernatural Deer, as evidenced by the 1st century BCE Gundestrup Cauldron.¹⁷¹

The identities of Cernunnos and Cernunna can be traced back to the shared Indo-European religious and mythical archetype of the antlered or horned couple of gods. This model appears in various forms across different Indo-European cultures, as confirmed by iconography, linguistics, and inscriptions. For example, iconographically similar Stag Divinities exist in the Anatolian pantheon.¹⁷² Lycian linguistic data¹⁷³ and 8th century BCE Hieroglyphic Luvian inscriptions found in southeastern Anatolia (Cilicia) also provide evidence of this archetype.

Calvert Watkins refers to a cult scene in relief on the silver Schimmel rhyton (also known as the stag rhyton), which dates to the 14th-13th centuries BCE.¹⁷⁴ Here, the tutelary god standing on a stag is labeled in gold with the hieroglyph for 'antler' (CERVUS2). This god, mentioned in several myths, is known in Hieroglyphic Luvian as (DEUS) CERVUS, (DEUS) CERVUS2.¹⁷⁵ According to Fred C. and other scholars, the stag represents the tutelary deity of the stag-god.¹⁷⁶ Another figure on the rhyton is pouring a libation, identified as the goddess Ala, the consort of the stag-god.¹⁷⁷

In the religious tradition of the Indus Valley Civilization (circa 7000–600 BCE), the horned god Pashupati (*Lord of Animals*) bears a striking resemblance to

to Carvonia is problematic. Unlike Cernunnos, there is no link between this theonym and an iconographic source.

¹⁷⁰ The beardless stag god Cernunnos was a divinity of the forest and wild animals. He was also revered as a god of wealth, fertility, and male power. See Ross 1967, 176-197.

¹⁷¹ The large Celtic 'Cauldrons of Plenty' often feature stag motifs amongst their ornate decoration. The magnificent silver Gundestrup Cauldron, a richly decorated silver vessel from Denmark, shows an antlered man who sits on the ground in cross-legged posture alongside a male deer and other wildlife. He holds a torc and a ram-headed snake, a typical Celtic mythological animal. The figure, closed eyes and open mouth, appears to be singing (Gimbutas 1999, 181). Totally dominating the scene are the two pairs of divine and animal antlers, with those of Cernunnos identical to those of the stag on his right. However, the animal has one more antler tine than the god, to indicate it is the mythical deer incarnated by Cernunnos that connected Earth and Heaven. See Clark 1954, 169; Ross 1967.

¹⁷² Watkins 1998, 15.

¹⁷³ Neumann 2007, 165.

¹⁷⁴ Taracha 1996, 71 – 77, 72.

¹⁷⁵ Watkins 1998, 15, see pp. 16-7 for further iconographic representations of the deity on the seal of Kurunta and the stag god (in human form) at the rock sanctuary of Yazilikaya.

¹⁷⁶ Woudhuizen 2013, 333-344.

¹⁷⁷ Hawkins 2004, 355-369, 366.

Cernunnos.¹⁷⁸ This "proto-Shiva" god is depicted as a seated figure surrounded by animals, emphasizing his role as a protector of life-giving forces in the wilderness and dominus over the cycle of life and death.¹⁷⁹

Similarities can also be seen in ancient Greek and Roman mythology. For instance, the Greek god Pan and the Roman god Faunus, both associated with nature, fertility, and rustic life, share features with Cernunnos. Pan is depicted with goat horns, and both deities are considered protectors of forests and animals. The connections between Cernunnos and Cernunna and similar deities across the Indo-European *koine* suggest they were part of a broader, ancient religious tradition. The antlers of these deities indicate power and authority, representing their dominion over the natural world and their role as protectors of both animals and humans. The occurrence of antlers on a goddess' head symbolizes her ability to change her human form and transfer the fertile aspects of deer to herself. A parallel motif is found in the representations of deities with bird wings, which grant the ability to fly.¹⁸⁰

Archaeological evidence, such as small bronze seated figurines, indicates that the antlered Celtic and Gallo-Roman goddess, the partner of Cernunnos, was worshiped across Europe from the Bronze Age through the Medieval period.¹⁸¹ This continuity suggests a deep and lasting reverence for her among populations with Celtic roots. Even as Christianity spread across Central and Northern Europe, elements of Cernunna's worship were absorbed into local practices and folklore, contributing to the survival of certain pagan traditions. John G. McKay informs us of the antlered goddess in early Irish mythology, who owned the flock and milked the animals, deer included.¹⁸² Her worship was brought from Gaul to the British Islands by soldiers and traders. Flidhais was a goddess or a woman of the Otherworld associated with the forest and wild animals, especially deer. She was represented as a deerherd, treating the wild animals as if they were domestic cattle. In some tales, she is said to have the ability to command deer and ride a chariot drawn by stags. She is even referred to as "the woman of the deer" (*Bé Fiannaigecht*). Flidhais appears to have been both a herder and hunter of deer and other wild creatures, embodying the personification of raw nature, with imagery that encompassed both sexuality/fertility and destruction.¹⁸³

The Christianized Celts in Britain and Ireland preserved this goddess with ambivalent symbolism: as keeper of the forest and the animals, but sometimes

¹⁷⁸ A seal depicting this pre-Vedic god was discovered in during the excavation of the Mohenjo-daro archaeological site (2600–1900 BCE).

¹⁷⁹ Thomas 1961, fig. 5, 9; Ross 1967, 182.

¹⁸⁰ Green 1989, 27.

¹⁸¹ Lambrechts 1942, 25, n. 31; Alcock 1963, 118-123; Piggott 1963, 116-118; Boucher 1976, 174, 342, pl. 66, fig. 317; Scherrer 1984, 121, n. 27; Deyts 1992, 40; Šašel Kos 1999, 137-138, photo p. 137; Gimbutas 1999.

¹⁸² McKay 1932, 144–174.

¹⁸³ Aldhouse-Green 1995.

also as an epiphany of the female version of Satan or the Anti-Christ, rather than representing an overt effort to perpetuate a still-potent cult.¹⁸⁴

5.4 The few figurines portraying Cernunna

The figurines describing the antler-bearing Cernunna were created for domestic worship between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE. Although rare, they have been found in an extended area from France to Germany, to the British Isles, reflecting a widespread cult. In Gaul (modern-day France), some examples from the Romano-Celtic pantheon have been discovered in Puy-de-Dôme (Arverni, in the Massif Central) and others in Besançon and Broye-lès-Pesmes (department of Haute-Saône).¹⁸⁵ Horned (not antlered) goddesses are depicted on a fragment of pottery from Richborough (Kent), on a stone from Ribchester (Lancashire), and at Icklingham (Suffolk).¹⁸⁶



Image 21. Cernunna
Puy-de-Dome 1907.

The bronze statuettes depicting Cernunna share common features. The figure is middle-aged and sitting cross-legged, a common pose for Cernunnos. Her branching antlers, resembling those of an alpha-stag, sprout directly from the top

of her head, indicating that she is the counterpart of the horned Celtic deity Cernunnos. She holds symbols of divine wealth: in her right hand, she carries an offering patera, and in the crook of her left arm, a long, narrow horn filled with fruit and other foods, known as the cornucopia or horn of plenty.¹⁸⁷

These images might also depict not goddesses, but women wearing antler headdresses. Dressing as deer was a tradition among officiants at certain shamanic religious ceremonies, as documented in the Minoan seal from Zakros analyzed earlier. Close scrutiny of

the antlered figure described on the Gundestrup cauldron suggests that he may be wearing an animal headdress, rather than being a true hybrid creature.¹⁸⁸ In this case, the Gallo-Roman female figurines would represent priestesses dressed

¹⁸⁴ Ross 1967, 190.

¹⁸⁵ Gassies 1907, 184-185; Lambrechts 1942, 25, n. 30; Deyts 1992, 42-43. Georges Gassies mentions also a very mutilated statuette discovered in 1861 and preserved at the Melun Museum, where it is considered a goddess of the hunt, very much in her place in a locality situated between two of the great forests of Gaul.

¹⁸⁶ Ross 1967; Boucher 1976; Deyts 1992.

¹⁸⁷ Lambrechts 1942, 25, n. 31; Boucher 1967, 174, 342, pl. 66, fig. 317, 318; Deyts 1992, 40.

¹⁸⁸ Aldhouse-Green 2018.

as stags, rather than "genuine" hybrid beings. However, the statuettes themselves provide no indication that artificial antlers were strapped on.¹⁸⁹

The small bronze figurine portraying Cernunna from Puy-de-Dôme is held in the Musée Bargoin in Clermont-Ferrand. It was discovered before 1885 near the Jonas caves in the municipality of Saint-Pierre-Colamine (Puy-de-Dôme). The archaeological context of the discovery is unidentified; all we know is that it was found alongside a second statuette representing the Goddess Fortune. Cernunna is illustrated with stag horns emerging from abundant curly hair. Her right hand once held an object that has since disappeared, while the lower part of a horn of plenty is still visible in her left hand.¹⁹⁰ She is seated cross-legged in what was described as a "Buddhist attitude" in the late 19th century in the *Revue d'Auvergne*.¹⁹¹



Image 22. Cernunna Besançon Martin.

A very similar statuette combining the attributes of Cernunnos and the mother goddesses was unprovenanced in Gaul and is now lost.¹⁹² It was once housed in the former Jesuit Collection in Besançon, which was known for its variety of artifacts, artworks, and historical items collected by the order.¹⁹³ The goddess is dressed in draped clothing. According to Georges Gassies, the figurine is dressed, like the mother goddesses with the tunic forming a fold under her breasts and holds a fruit in one of the hands.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Aldhouse-Green 2004, 177. Phyllis Pray Bober lists a female head from Compiègne with slots for the top for antlers or wings, but it is missing. See Bober 1951. A Gallo-Roman bronze figurine of a seated man with removable antlers was found in Savigny, Burgundy (Aldhouse-Green 2004, 157, fig. 6.6). The tricephalos from Condat (Dordogne) has two holes in the crown for the insertion of antlers (Fox 1958, pl. 80 no. 23; Ross 1967, 182, fig. 29). The detachable antlers possibly were been intended to represent the stag's annual cycle of antler-growth and -shedding, perhaps to tie into different seasonal festivals (Aldhouse-Green 2018).

¹⁹⁰ Reinach S., National Antiquities. Reasoned description of the Saint-Germain-en-Laye Museum, II, Figurative bronzes of Roman Gaul (Paris: F. Didot, 1894), 198, 199, n. 179; Id., Catalogue illustré du Musée des Antiquités Nationales au Chateau de Saint-Germain-en-Laye II (Paris: Musées Nationaux Palais du Louvre, 1921), 165; Maître 1899, 142-153, 148; Lambrechts 1942, 25, n. 30, 31; Bober 1951, 45, fig. 6; Boucher 1967, 174, 342, pl. 66, fig. 318; Deyts 1992; Provost 1994, 310.

¹⁹¹ *Revue d'Auvergne* (Clermont-Ferrand: Société des amis de l'Université de Clermont; Société d'émulation de l'Auvergne, 1884).

¹⁹² Martin 1727, 184-185, fig. 35; Gassies 1905, 372-374, 373, n. 2.

¹⁹³ Alcock 1963, 118-123; Piggott 1963, 116-118; Aldhouse-Green 2001a, 203-232; Bober 1951, 13 s. 45, n. 4; 1964, fig. 45.

¹⁹⁴ Gassies 1906, 53-58, 54. It is a globe of the Fortune Invincible, according to Martin 1727, 185.

Furthermore, she is adorned with an impressive set of stag antlers branching into four points (typical of a 2-3-year-old animal). Dom Jacques Martin calls her a sylvan, forest, rustic, or pastoral goddess of Gauls, and he associates her with the Divine mothers.¹⁹⁵

Another representation of the goddess Cernunna, in the form of a bronze statuette with a very large pair of red-deer antlers, was found in Broye-lès-Pesmes before 1710 and is now kept in the British Museum, London.¹⁹⁶ In this specimen, the goddess is also seated cross-legged, holding a patera and a horn of plenty.¹⁹⁷ Miranda Jane published a drawing of this figure by Anne Leaver.¹⁹⁸ The scholar, perhaps underestimating the mythological and spiritual significance of the deliberate gender-twist and the blend of human and animal forms of this divine creature, comments that “the image may depict a ‘genuinely’ monstrous hybrid creature, or it may alternatively be read as a cross-dressing female, wearing the motif of a male animal... by transvestism.”¹⁹⁹

There are a few representations from Britain related to the cult of an antlered goddess.

The most significant comes from Richborough (Rutupiae, Kent). It is depicted on a small fragment of gray coarse pottery of local ware, dating to around the 2nd century CE. The features are crude, describing a horned female bust in low relief, with the breasts demarcated by blobs of clay. A knob-horned male head was found at the same site.²⁰⁰

One of the two goddesses portrayed on the Ribchester stone (Bremetennacum, Lancashire) has projections from her head that may represent horns or a horned headdress, suggesting the figure as a native equivalent of the hunter goddess Diana.²⁰¹ However, the damaged nature of the stone makes such precise interpretation hazardous. While the goddess appears to wear something on her head, the object could just as well be a lunar crescent or a mural crown. The



Image 23. Cernunna Broye-lès-Pesmes.

¹⁹⁵ Martin 1727, 185.

¹⁹⁶ Inventory number 1975,0309.1. Ross 1967, fig. 103. According to Boucher, it could be the missing statuette from Besançon (Boucher 1967, 174).

¹⁹⁷ Walter 1976, 197-284, 211-216; Duval 1957, 45, fig. 16; Bober 1951, 45, fig. 6; Boucher 1967, 174, 342, pl. 66, fig. 317.

¹⁹⁸ Aldhouse-Green 2004, 79, fig. 3.12.

¹⁹⁹ Aldhouse-Green 2004, 79.

²⁰⁰ Ross 1967, 190, 279, 295, fig. 103.

²⁰¹ Ross 1967, 276-277, 295, 463, fig. 144.

stone, dedicated to the northern god Maponus, originally featured four figures in relief.

According to Georges Gassies, the figurines representing the female counterpart of the god Cernunnos provide evidence of an indigenous Gaulish cult devoted to Mother Earth and a nurturing goddess.²⁰² Image-making is a historically complex process. The antlered goddess Cernunna was revered as a symbol of the survival of ancestral beliefs, particularly those associated with the above-mentioned pre-agricultural giant female deer sporting antlers, which were considered mothers of the Earth. These divine hinds represented a balance between gentleness and strength. They roamed mystical forests, guiding seekers toward hidden truths.

Over time, the image of the totemic mother-ancestress evolved to incorporate more human features. Cernunna's anthropomorphic shape along with the huge branching deer antlers on her head expressed her powerful heritage from the totemic Stag Goddess who ruled the world. Her crown of stag horns, which serves as natural weapons of defense in the animal kingdom, indicated her role as a guardian of the natural world of the forest and its creatures. Similar to Cernunnos, Cernunna's antlers were also believed to symbolize fertility and abundance. Their annual shedding and regrowth were interpreted as a metaphor for the cycles of life and the earth's regenerative powers, governed by the goddess.

The association of male deer, the exclusive possessors of antlers, with the sun, and female deer with the moon, was a common theme in many ancient traditions. The cyclical hormonal processes of antler growth and loss provided an accurate calendar of the seasons, being controlled by the annual cycle of the Sun. Antler growth and the entire stag reproductive timing are biologically triggered and governed by the increasing hours of sunlight in the spring. Antlers grow larger with the waxing summer sun. As a result, each deer antler can be seen as a natural record representing one solar year.²⁰³ The females are impregnated under the light of the moon and seven months later give birth to the new generation.²⁰⁴ This suggests that the antlered hinds and goddesses as well as the women who wore antler headdresses were symbolically and ritually linked to the sun's cycles and timing.

5.5 Revival and reinterpretation of goddesses wearing stag antlers in contemporary art

In contemporary Pagan and Celtic-inspired spirituality, there is a tendency to reimagine and reinterpret ancient goddesses with new symbols, creating an evolving narrative about the divine feminine. The enduring figure of Cernunna has been reinterpreted in neo-Pagan and Wiccan spirituality as a continuation and revision of the ancient Celtic and Gallo-Roman goddess. Although largely a

²⁰² Gassies 1907, 184.

²⁰³ Murray 2014, 199.

²⁰⁴ Murray 2014, 201.

modern construct, she is venerated as a powerful and multifaceted deity embodying the harmonious balance between the nurturing and protective essence of the natural world and its wild features, as well as the balance between life-giving and destructive forces, gentleness, and strength. Consequently, she holds special reverence among practitioners who follow nature-based spiritual paths and seek a deeper connection with the Earth and its mysteries.

In some interpretations, Cernunna is also associated with themes of gender fluidity and balance. As the feminine counterpart to the traditionally male Cernunnos, she represents the blending of masculine and feminine energies, underscoring the importance of harmony within both nature and oneself.

Cernunna is typically depicted highlighting her majestic antlers, and her imagery often includes elements such as stag headdresses, cornucopias, and symbols representing the seasons, reflecting her influence over growth and renewal. Rituals dedicated to Cernunna typically involve offerings of natural items such as flowers, fruits, antlers symbols, and deer figurines, aligning with her role as a protector and life-sustainer of the natural world. Participants engage in dance, chanting, or meditative practices to connect with her energy and seek her blessings for fertility, protection, and harmony with nature. Cernunna is also associated with the cycles of the moon and the changing seasons, making her a central figure in seasonal celebrations such as Beltaine (which now corresponds to May-Day) and Samhain (November 1st, which celebrates the end of summer and the return to cold and darkness), where her influence is invoked to honor the cycles of the earth. Devotees often seek her wisdom in matters of personal growth, ecological stewardship, and maintaining balance between the material and spiritual aspects of life.

This reinterpretative mechanism of Cernunna is similar to that applied to the above-mentioned Flidhais, a figure in early Irish mythology. While Flidhais is closely linked to deer, there is no specific mention in the original sources of her having antlers. However, in some contemporary spiritual interpretations and artistic representations, she is sometimes portrayed with antlers as a symbolic extension of her role as a goddess deeply connected to deer and the forest.

The contemporary neo-pagan cult of Elen of the Ways, a Deer Goddess often bearing stag's antlers, mixes the characteristics of the Elen of the Hosts (The legendary Welsh patroness of Roman road-building) with those of Saint Helen of the Cross (mother of the Emperor Constantine).²⁰⁵

In contemporary art inspired by Pagan and Celtic spirituality, representations of goddesses with branching stag antlers have reemerged as powerful symbols of transformation and connection to nature. Some prominent artists convey emotion and symbolism in ways that challenge our understanding of human cultural identity by portraying women crowned with antlers. The worship of Cernunna and Flidhais reflects the adaptability and enduring relevance of ancient mythological archetypes within the context of contemporary spiritual practices,

²⁰⁵ Wood 2021, 15-22; Mykhailova 2023, 15.

and these characteristics are often mirrored in the artistic depictions of these deities.

Brian Froud, a well-known British fantasy illustrator, often blends nature-inspired folklore and mythology with imaginative element. He has created numerous works featuring mystical creatures and women with animal attributes, including deer horns. This creates a narrative quality, inviting viewers to imagine the transformative story behind the hybrid image.

Josephine Wall is a British artist renowned for her fantasy art, which is rich in mysticism and femininity. She has created several pieces where women are portrayed with elements of nature, including antlers and flowers in their hair, merging human and animal forms to symbolize a connection of humans with the natural world. Her artwork *Autumn Splendor* is an excellent example of how contemporary artists like Wall continue to explore and reinterpret ancient and mythological themes in visually stunning ways. This ethereal, fantasy-inspired painting celebrates the beauty of nature during the changing seasons. The focus is on the arrival of autumn, as evident from the rich, warm colors and the imagery of foliage, flowers, mushrooms, and the antlers on the head of the woman who



Image 24. Josephine Wall
Woman with antlers.

personifies this transitional season. The antlers, glowing among her leaf-like hair, indicate a deep connection to the wild and untamed aspects of nature, evoking a sense of otherworldly beauty and harmony with the natural environment.

environment.
Sylvia Ji is a contemporary artist known for her striking and evocative paintings, which often feature women adorned with symbolic and cultural elements such as femininity, death, and nature. Ji's work frequently explores themes of identity, particularly female identity, through stylized and symbolic portraiture. In some of her *La Catrina* series, she depicts women with deer

antlers, blending Mexican cultural motifs with natural elements.

Her painting *Red Caribou*, created in acrylic and mixed media on wood panel, showcases her signature style, merging realism and surrealism through a vibrant color palette and intricate details inspired by ancient cultural motifs. In this piece, the woman is adorned with deer antlers on her head, feathers in her hair, and geometric traditional patterns, evoking themes of indigenous culture, nature, and hybridization. The prominent antlers contribute to the intensity and emotional impact of the portrait. They symbolize strength, wilderness, and a connection to nature—qualities of an animal as the deer associated with spiritual intuition and guidance in the Native American and Mesoamerican cultures that Ji explores. The symbolism of the feathers complements that of the antlers, particularly those arranged in her hair and hanging from the horned crown, representing

communication with the spirit world, freedom, and ascension. The red face paint adds an element of ritual or ceremonial significance.

The subject in *Red Caribou* is portrayed with a strong, serene expression, suggesting a sense of power and self-awareness. Ji brings her to life by combining realistic portraiture with symbolic, almost dreamlike elements. The antlers, feathers, deep reds, and earthy tones, commonly used in her work, communicate strength, beauty, and a deep connection to the spiritual core of the natural world. The vivid, almost otherworldly atmosphere created in this piece gives it both an ancient and contemporary feel. *Red Caribou* stands out as a compelling example of how modern art can draw on ancient symbols and themes to create something that resonates across time and culture.

In neo-pagan and Wiccan art, the imagery of women with antlers is widespread, often symbolizing the mystical connection between the feminine and the untamed natural world. This imagery appears in various forms, including paintings, illustrations, and ritual objects, as part of a larger narrative exploring identity, nature, and transformation.

Frida Kahlo is widely regarded as the progenitor of artistic representations of women with deer antlers on their heads. The Mexican artist frequently incorporated symbolic elements into her self-portraits, and her use of antlers is a powerful example of this practice. The most notable instance is her surreal oil painting *The Wounded Deer* (1946), where she portrays herself with the body of a young deer, complete with nine-point antlers emerging from her hair.²⁰⁶ Antlers are often seen as symbols of power and masculinity. By adopting them, Kahlo challenged traditional gender roles, expressing her own strength, resilience, and defiance in the face of adversity.²⁰⁷ Kahlo's decision to depict herself with both female and male features (the male genitalia are prominent) also reflects her bisexuality.²⁰⁸

However, the antlers, traditionally associated with strength and vitality, are paradoxically depicted as part of a creature fatally wounded by nine arrows. The background, featuring a desolate forest with nine dead trees on the left side of the painting and broken branches, evokes feelings of fear and desperation. This juxtaposition of the animal-human and female-male hybrid highlights Kahlo's ongoing struggle with physical suffering, as well as emotional sadness and



Image 25. Sylvia Ji *Red Caribou*.

²⁰⁶ In the Aztec calendar, Frida Kahlo was born on day nine, symbolizing earthly elements, as well as the underworld.

²⁰⁷ Dosamantes-Beaudry 2001, 5-17; Grimberg 2008, 26-27; Delgado 2010.

²⁰⁸ Delgado 2010.

frustration. A bus accident left her with severe injuries and lifelong health issues. In the year she created this self-portrait, Kahlo had undergone spinal surgery in New York, hoping it would relieve her severe back pain, but the operation failed.²⁰⁹ Additionally, she was emotionally tormented by her tumultuous relationship with the artist Diego Rivera.²¹⁰

Despite the wounds on the body of the mythical deer, Kahlo's depiction remains one of strength. The antlers crown her head, and the body is that of a strong, supple stag. Kahlo does not paint a face of anguish but rather one of strength.



Image 26. Kahlo Frida The Wounded Deer 1946.

Her neck and head are upright and alert, and her steady gaze is fixed on the viewer.²¹¹ Antlers are a symbol of vitality, often associated with nature, growth, and regeneration, as deer shed and regrow them annually. They might symbolize a cycle of suffering and healing in Kahlo's life. In various mythologies, the stag or deer is a sacred animal representing the soul or spirit, which might suggest Kahlo's exploration of her own identity and inner life in

pursuit of healing and regeneration.

In conclusion, the chain of assertions and denials embodied in the self-portrait *The Wounded Deer*, with its depiction of antlers on Kahlo's head, creates a multifaceted symbol that represents the complexity of her sense of identity, her suffering, and her healing. In the lower part of the picture, Kahlo wrote the word “*Carma*” (“fate”), emphasizing that the main theme of *The Wounded Deer* is her destiny. Kahlo gave *The Wounded Deer* as a wedding gift to her close friends Arcady and Lina Boytler.²¹²

Conclusions

The phenomenon of a hind crowned as a stag—a rarity in nature, as only male red deer typically possess antlers—holds a distinctive place in mythology and folklore. Among cervids, only female reindeer (*Rangifer tarandus*) bear antlers. Reindeer were widespread across Europe during the extremely cold Upper Paleolithic and served as a vital resource for both *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals. The ancestral memory of antlered female reindeer from the

²⁰⁹ Kahlo 1995, 265; Chicago 2012, 238.

²¹⁰ Drucker 1991, 105; Bauer 2007, 107.

²¹¹ Bauer 2007, 107.

²¹² Herrera 1993, 188. The masterpiece is now on display in the Museo Dolores Olmedo in Mexico City.

Aurignacian period may have influenced later depictions of otherworldly female red deer with antlers in post-Paleolithic art.²¹³ This myth left a legacy in ancient Greek, Roman, and Celtic cultures, expressed through various visual, oral and written traditions and exhibiting a remarkable capacity for cross-cultural transmission, as attested by archaeological records. This article explored diverse ancient interpretations of the hind sprouting antlers, particularly in relation to themes of fertility, divine intervention, and feminine power. This fabulous imagery persisted until just a few centuries ago in Eurasian cultural, religious, and folkloric traditions.

Rare natural occurrences of antlered hinds lent a sense of verification to their myth, reflecting a broader cultural and psychological desire to encounter supernatural beings in reality.

This phenomenon parallels how colossal fossilized bones of mammoths, rhinoceroses, giant giraffes, cave bears, and dinosaurs led ancient peoples to believe in heroes like Achilles and Ajax, mythical creatures such as the Cyclopes and giants, and legendary animals like griffins and chimeras.²¹⁴

Putting in synergy archaeological evidence and mythological narratives, the article introduces several accounts in which antlered hinds breastfeed orphaned or abandoned children. One remarkable example is the legend of the hero Telephus, one of the Greco-Roman myths in which a discarded newborn, facing near-certain death, is miraculously rescued and nourished by wild animals.

Parallels between young virgins and horned hinds are deeply rooted in ancient pre-Greek and Greek myths, particularly those involving metamorphoses arranged by the goddess Artemis-Diana. Notable instances discussed include the transformations of Taygete and Titanis (Cos) into golden-horned hinds. In several versions of the Iphigenia myth, Artemis-Diana provides a horned hind as a substitute for the princess in the sacrificial ritual. The memory of a powerful high priestess, symbolized by a female deer developing branching antlers, became legendary and was preserved in oral traditions across regions associated with the cult of Artemis, from Boeotia to Crete and Crimea.

This enduring motif, persisting into the Roman Empire, suggests that Artemis-Diana's association with masculine strength was positively related to young girls. Antlers, traditionally symbols of power and virility in male deer, when

²¹³ Merlini 2003a; Merlini 2024b, fig.1; Merlini 2024c.

²¹⁴ Several scholars documented fossil antlers of an extinct deer from a Minoan shrine at Knossos, on Crete. See Bate 1918, 209–222, 221; Rothenberg 1988, 267; Reese 1995; Meier et alii 2024. In the area of Messenia (southwestern Peloponnese), for example, archaeologists unearthed antlers of extraordinary size, tusks, a large animal skeleton in a tomb ascribed to a Homeric hero. See Mayor 2000. This mechanism of identification and recognition does not belong only to the European and Mediterranean cultures. The British paleontologist Kenneth Oakley has demonstrated that certain features of the traditional Chinese dragon bones, such as the distinctive antlers resembling those of fossil deer, replicated the lineaments of Pliocene and Pleistocene prehistoric mammals of northern China and Mongolia. See Oakley 1965, 9-17, 117-24, 123–124.

attributed to a female figure, served as an appropriate iconographic representation of the balance between masculine and feminine energies, strength in nurturing.

The article further explored the theme of divine hybridization between a woman and an antlered hind, introducing figures like Cernunna, Flidhais, and other Celtic and Gallo-Roman goddesses. The identities of these deities are traced back to the Indo-European religious and mythological beliefs about the antlered female partner of the stag god. In turn, this Indo-European construct originated from the pre-agricultural archetype of supernatural female creatures who ruled the world appearing as stags with majestic antlers. Contemporary Pagan and Celtic-inspired spiritual movements are reinterpreting these ancient goddesses with new symbols, creating an evolving narrative about the divine feminine.

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THE CHURCH OF ȘINTEREAG: MONOGRAPHIC SKETCH

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Keywords: Transylvania, Șintereag, Gothic architecture, reformed church, 14th century

Abstract: The village of Șintereag is part of the commune of the same name, located in Bistrița Năsăud county, in the North central part of Transylvania. From the archaeological point of view, the locality of Șintereag is known by the Neolithic settlement discovered in the point “Pe Cremene”, located on a high terrace of the river Șieu, today, behind the school, but also for the discoveries from the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the post-Roman and Medieval ages. Also the main point of attraction that is the basis of our research, is the Gothic-style church, an architectural monument, built in the 14th century with later additions.

The village of Șintereag is part of the commune with same name, being located in Bistrița Năsăud county, the Northern central part of Transylvania (fig. 1), the village being a place where the conviviality between the ethnic groups is peaceful.

The history of the locality is fairly well represented thanks to documents and certain writings. The name has changed over time until it reached its present form, so in 1327 the name was Sumkers, in 1553 Somkerek and in 1830 Somkerék, the present name being Szintyerág - Șintereag¹. The name of the village is closely related to its location, it was once surrounded by a thick forest of antlers, hence the name Somkerek. Today, you can still see the lost traces of the antler forest, (kerek=wheel) on the hilltops. Similar to this locality, the names of other villages like Alma (alma = apples), Szil (szilvas = plums), Meggykerek (rosehip forest) etc. were formed.

From the archaeological point of view, the locality of Șintereag is known by the Neolithic settlement discovered in the point “Pe Cremene”, located on a high terrace of the river Șieu, today, behind the school², but also for the discoveries from the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the post-Roman and Medieval

¹ Kádár 1901, 93. Ghinea-Ghinea 2000, 522.

² COD LMI BN-I-S-B-01415

ages³. Also the main point of attraction that is the basis of our research, is the Gothic-style church⁴, an architectural monument, built in the 14th century with later additions⁵.

In the Middle Ages the village of Șintereag was part of Solnocul Dinăuntru county, located on the lower course of the Șieu river, east of Beclean. Although it appears in documents only in 1325, since in this year a transfer of ownership takes place, we can assume its existence since the 13th century. During the two centuries (XIII-XIV) the village was a noble property, first of the Vireag family, then of the de Gimbaș family.⁶ In 1327 the ownership of Șintereag changes from the territorial administrative point of view. From now we have important information, according to which, in 1333 Gombasi Domokos built a stone church here in honor of the Virgin Mary⁷.

Another important figure was Master Andrei, who had two sons: Dominic who no male offspring and Petru who probably before 1343. In this context, due to the lack of direct descendants, they gave their estates to the church in Alba Iulia, i.e. half of the Ciumbrud and Gâmbaș estates, as well as the Romanian village of Păgida in Alba county, together with the right of patronage over the churches there. In exchange for these estates, Bishop Andrei gave them the episcopal estates of Herina, Nețeni and Domnești in Dăbâca county, with the right to them for the rest of their lives. After his father's death, Magistrate Dominic gave up his control over the Herina episcopal estate in exchange for an annual annuity. Dominic was married to Margareta, daughter of Geleth of the Becsegergély family. In 1325, Margaret's brothers gave Dominic the Șintereag estate in Solnocul Interior county, where he built a stone church. Another important moment is when Dominic established his residence at his estate of Corușu ("Dominicum de Gumbas nobilem de Koroug"), where he disputed with Stephen Nadási the episcopal tithes from the Mérai nobles of the Corușu domain. Dominic loaned to the committean Nicolae Radnai, son of Benus, the sum of 300 florins, in exchange for which he obtained as a guarantee the Măgheruș estate in the county of Dăbâca. Probably around 1360, Dominic had a conflict with the bishop of Transylvania, because he demanded the transcription of all the contracts concluded with bishop Andrei. Dominic's financial situation worsened, as he had to pledge his part of the Turdaș estate to his Csesztvei relatives in order to pay a financial obligation to his wife's relatives. Before his death, in the spring of 1363, Master Dominic bequeathed to his ex-wife's relatives most of his assets: the Șintereag estate and his goods from all his debtors, especially from the bishop of Transylvania. To his grandsons, Petru Herepei and Ștefan Tátéi ("nepotibus

³ [HTTP://RAN.CIMEC.RO/SEL.ASP](http://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp) 11.12.2018

⁴ COD LMI BN-II-M-A-01714

⁵ Popa 1981, 51-52.

⁶ Kádár 1901, 93.

⁷ DIR-C, II, 368-369; 1333: Teleki, I, 46-47.

suis"), he left them each a sum of money and pieces of armament (two plates and a chariot with four horses). Many years after Dominic's death, two of his female relatives, residents of Totoiu, tried to obtain from the episcopate of Transylvania the estates taken over by the bishop: Păgida, Gâmbaş, Ciumbrud and Coruşu. The king forbade them to claim anything else, and his position is explained by the intervention of the bishop of Transylvania. It should be noted that he does not name the two descendants with the noble title, but only residents of Totoiu. Their mother, noble Gombasi, married a non-noble, a peasant from Totoiu⁸.

Historical data from monographs and from the work "Drumeții în Ardeal" confirm that the church was built around 1327-1333. About the year 1327 we cannot say that it can be accepted as the year of the beginning of the construction of the church because the historical data do not confirm this fact. But we can certainly take 1333 as the year in which the church was already built. The information taken from the work "Drumeții în Ardeal" cannot be certain because it is almost impossible that in such a short time (six years), such a big church could have been built⁹.

The writings refer to the fact that Gombasi Domokos Domokos built a stone church, but we cannot know with certainty whether it is this church or another edifice built on another structure. Thus, it is very likely that the construction of the church started around 1200 (probably the wooden one) and the year mentioned in the historical data, namely 1333, is the year of the completion of the construction (the stone one). It is also recalled that in the years 1332-1337 the parish priest of the church of Șintereag was priest Tilman. So already in 1332 the Reformed church of Șintereag had a parish priest. Thus, we are certain that the construction of the church began in the 1300s, and it is a fact that the church was already built in 1333. In 1363 Gombasi Domokos bought Șintereagu from Gilet's sons for money, leaving them the church he built in Șintereag, a vineyard and 10% of the mill. After Gombasi's death, Șintereag returned to the ancestral rulers, who in 1392 divided Șintereag into 3 parts. Thus, the first part belongs to Istvan son of Viragosberky Beche, the second part belongs to Janos son of Nemegyei Mihaly and the third part is divided into other parts, namely between Laszlo son of Somkereký Gilet, Janos son of Miklos and Antal, and between Marton son of Andras. The last branch of nobles was given the right of permanent estate, and the island of Șintereag was also divided into 3 parts¹⁰.

At the beginning of the 14th century, the noble family that owned Șintereag had four branches: Léli (after 1258), Bethlen (after 1282), Almarkéki Apafi (after 1298) and Somkeréki (after 1298), which continued throughout the 14th century within the Somkeréki family started by Gelet (attested between

⁸ Diaconescu 2013, 169-170

⁹ Géza 1943, 8; Felszegi 2013, 17.

¹⁰ Kádár 1901, 93.

1298-1304), through his descendants the Nemegyei (after 1325) and Virágosberki (after 1325) families, and then the Erdélyi Somkeréki (after 1391) following the disappearance of the direct Somkeréki branch (after 1391/92-1410), through the death of Ladislaus' grandchildren (attested between 1325-1364). The Virágosberki and Nemegyei families will disappear also, respectively, after 1392 and after 1415, so that the Erdélyi Somkeréki will remain the only heir of the Somkerék family, until its disappearance and the taking over of the inheritance by the Bánfi family, then Teleki in the 17th century (fig. 2.)¹¹.

In 1407 Somkerekéi László Somkerekéi László donated some relics and religious objects of great value to the church. It was probably around this time that the vaulting of the church was completed. In the years 1603-1603, Basta's brigands damaged the church and pillaged the village. We do not know to what extent the church was damaged, but there are reports suggesting that the church had to be rebuilt, but this did not happen¹². Continuing the chronological timeline, the following dates tell us that in 1661 during the Turkish-Tatar invasion, both the community and the church were destroyed. Then, in 1675, the voivode Apaffi Mihály I built the church and the school¹³.

On August 6, 1744, thanks to Maria Banffy's letter of donation, the inhabitants of the territory of Sintereag had to pay taxes from all that they produced for the building of the church here, leaving the Saturday toll of the two mills also to be sent as a contribution for the monument. All this was going to happen until the church is completely built including the tower. Then the place of worship was to be furnished with chairs and furniture. Its construction in Gothic style was done later. At the entrance on a plaque the following benefactors who contributed to its renovation and improvement are mentioned in the following lines (fig. 3):

*“Nehai Migos Groff Losontzi Banfi Maria Asszony o Excellenciaja Somkereken ruinaban levo Isten Haza renovalisara es ekeszetesere legalt koltseggel es magaival renovaltattott mindeneket MMLgos Groff Camerarius es Cotenellus Maros-Nemeti Iffjabb Gyulai Ferentz Ur u Nga kedves elete parja Mlgos Groff Szepesi Susanna Asszony o Ngaval egyutt Anno Domini 1767”*¹⁴. (Maria Banffy took care of the renovation and endowment of the church in ruins, the renovation being completed in 1761. She commissioned the priest Boloni Samuel to take care of such a church. Also in this period, the ceiling of the church is painted, the interior is improved with painted furniture, with the pulpit, as well as the painted gallery on the western side. The spire of the tower was built in 1716, the tower and the church being covered with shingles.)¹⁵.

¹¹ Hasan 2015, 131.

¹² Kádár 1901, 104.

¹³ This being the defining point for the adoption of the Gothic style.

¹⁴ Kádár 1901, 106.

¹⁵ Kádár 1901, 101.

From a historical point of view, no more data is known about the monument, but we can remember the fact that on October 23, 1553, King Ferdinand convened a National Assembly in the reformed church in Şintereag. We can also remember that on June 24, 1848, Captain Bem (poti sa zici ce capitan era?) visited the church, and in 1898, the existence of a male choir made up of 48 members is mentioned¹⁶.

The current parish priest of the village, interested in the lack of a chronologization of the parish priests of the village of Şintereag, tried to present a list of them after much research, wishing that future generations will complete his work. So I will expose the list of these church leaders and by this work I complete a small part of the history of Şintereag and at the same time I respect the wish of priest Felszegi Imre. This list can be found inside the church next to the tablet which states that in 1761 Maria Bamffy was in charge of the renovation of the building.

TIME FRAME	PRIESTHOOD
1332-1337	Tilman plebanos
1485	Mihaly plebanos
1675	Gyarmati Istvan
uncertain date	Banyai Istvan
1712-1716	Banyai Andras
1716-1718	Zilahi Marton
1719-1782	Boloni Samuel
1795-1824	Szilagyι Mihaly
1824-1877	Kovatsi Mihaly
1878-1879	Dombi Lajos
1881-1912	Csejdi Istvan

¹⁶ Kádár 1901, 108.

1912	Elek Istvan
1912-1922	Gergely Kovacs Istvan
1923-1933	Beregszaszi Gyorgy
1934-1935	Valadi Gyorgy
1935-1943	Gyenge Gyorgy esperes
1943-1944	Farkas Ferencz
1945-1949	Kovacz Istvan
1949-1969	Jaray Marton
1969-1975	Varga Laszlo
1976-1978	Herman Mostert Janos
1979-1984	Jakab Jozsef
1985-1990	Molnar Arpad Levente
1991-1994	Vincze Minya Istvan
1995-2001	Takacs Lajos
2001- up to the present date	Felszegi Imre

Although the edifice has undergone several changes over time, elements of Gothic architecture are still preserved. We can observe the massiveness of the building preserved from the previous style where we can see the buttresses, belonging to the Romanesque architecture, but also to the Gothic one, whose distinctive sign are the ogives (Fig. 4). The ogival windows are ornamented with moldings belonging to the mature Gothic style, where we can observe the stone frieze lacework (Fig. 5). This type of ogival windows can also be found in the architectural context of other buildings, such as the Evangelical Church in Sibiu

¹⁷, the Evangelical Church in Dîrloș¹⁸, the Church in Ațel¹⁹, etc. The tall pedimented west facade is undecorated and has only the main ogival entrance with stone surround and a round window made from fragmentary stone moldings. The corners of the tower, decorated with bosses, are supported on the ground floor by three robust buttresses. At the top level, the tower has on three sides, on the North, South and East, large ogival windows decorated with rich moldings. Under the pyramidal roof, with its very slender octagonal top, stands a perimeter gallery with a wooden parapet (Fig. 6).

The North wall of the nave has no window openings, but is rhythmized by four buttresses in two sections rising three-quarters of the height of the façade. The corners of the choir are reinforced with identical buttresses, the one on the north side being missing. The South wall of the choir is pierced by two ogival windows, and in the next segment of the choir enclosure there is one such window. Its mullions are damaged or missing altogether. The South side of the nave, due to the tower, has only two buttresses, and in the transoms are placed ogival windows with fragmentary mullions. On this facade there is a portico with segmental arches and a South side entrance with a Gothic doorway with a lintel on consoles (Fig. 7).

Today the nave is covered by a cylindrical vault with openings supported by late Gothic console and pillars attached to the wall. The original vault was similarly supported by consoles and narrow pillars with a polygonal plinth, attached to the wall, from which the ridges started, some of which have survived to this day under the west gallery and in the median area of the nave. Both the ogival door under the gallery and the semicircular window open into the tower. They indicate that the church originally had a gallery built of wood or stone. Between the nave and the choir is the ogival triumphal arch. The choir is covered with simple cross vaults, set on late Gothic consoles of various shapes. In the north wall of the choir can be identified a door opening with a straight doorway, which gave access to the former sacristy. Following the reform, the sacristy lost its function and was demolished (Fig. 8).

The wooden ceiling under the west gallery is supported by two wooden pillars and is ornamented with stars, while the parapet of the staircase bears vegetal ornament with decorative border of painted dotted fir-tree motifs. The five panels in the central area of the parapet are decorated in the style of the Umling family of painters, depicting vegetal compositions of pomegranate, acorn, tulip, and other flowers, which are set in Italian vases or simple cups set in Renaissance niches with parapet. (Fig. 9)

The middle panels have a greenish-brown painted background and the four side panels are painted in pointilist technique. On the plank beneath the

¹⁷ Lupescu 2020, 204; Marcu-Istrate 2020, 181.

¹⁸ Jenei 2020, 7.

¹⁹ Luca et alii 2003, 43-45.

parapet boards, on a white background, there are vegetal ornaments with vrejuri and the following inscription: „*Pred. V. k. L. Vers Őrizd meg mind a két lábaidat mikoron mégy az Istennek házához hogy hajlandó légy a halgatásra inkább, hogy nem mint a bolondoknak modgyok szerint valo áldozatra, mert ezek nem tudgyák, hogy Gonoszt tselekesznek Anno 1760 Umling Lőrintz Által.*” V. k. L. Vers. (V. k. L. Vers Take heed to thy feet when thou goest into the temple of the Lord: if thou draw near to hearken, it is better, than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they know only to do evil. Anno 1760 by Lőrintz Umling) (Fig. 10).

The stone pulpit, leaning against the north side of the triumphal arch, bears a wreath of fretworked wood, painted with floral ornaments, on the top of the volutes is represented the sacrifice of Christ through the symbol of the pelican that feeds its sons with its own blood. Around the crown are arched wooden elements of various sizes, painted with flowers, and the cornice's entablature bears the biblical quotation: "*Isa 58. P. L. V. Kialts tellyes Torokból meg ne szünnyél, mint a Trombita emeld fel a te szodat és mond meg az én népemnek az ő binöket és Jákob Házának az ő hamis ...*" (Isaiah 58, Shout with all your might and do not stop, let your voice sound like a trumpet, proclaim to My people their sins and to the house of Jacob...) (Fig. 11).

The Lord's Table is round and made of wood with X-shaped legs. The outside is decorated with tulips. Arriving in Europe only in the 16th century, these flowers native to Persia and Turkey spread rapidly. A beautiful Turkish legend explains their significance: after a young prince learns that the young woman he fell in love with has died, he kills himself, and from his blood the tulips are born, representing pure love. Returning to the table, it bears the following inscription: „*Ímé az én ebédemet el készítettem az én tulkaim és hizlalt állatim megölettettek és mindenek készek. Math. R. XII. V. 4.*” (Behold, I have prepared my feast; my bullocks and fattened ones have been slaughtered and everything is ready. Matthew 22, 4) (Fig. 12).

The parapets of the choir stalls and the first benches have rectangular-shaped boards with tessellated corners or rectangles extended with triangles, which are decorated with free ornamental motifs of tendrils and flowers. The backs of the choir stalls are painted with architectural motifs with pilasters on whose "capitals" are birds. The cantor's chair in the east gallery is decorated with a wreath of flowers with the following inscription in the middle: „*Propriis Sumptibus Fieri Curavit Steph Szigethi Scholae Rector Ano 1761*” (At the own expense of teacher István Szigeti in 1761) (Fig. 13). The organ cabinet is also the work of Lőrintz Umling senior, its surface is painted in imitation of marble, and at the top it ends in a winged angel's head (Fig. 14). The interior of the church is fitted with painted wooden furniture, enriching its value (Fig. 15). Remaining traces from the Romanesque style can be observed inside the monument, for example at the base of the pillar supporting the stairs that lead to the bell tower, a column base specific to style with ornaments can be seen (Fig. 16).

Having exposed a brief history of the village, we tried to develop an evolution of the monument in parallel with the historical evolution of the village, since its appearance in documents until today, showing the importance of the place of worship in a community. The description of the monument was made with the help of pictures from the personal archive and the Bistrita-Năsăud County Museum by comparison with a series of monuments that are part of the same architectural style in the Transylvanian space.

Putting in parallel the characteristics of the Gothic style with the styles that complete the monument, with small traces still remaining from the Romanesque, then with an evolution that improves the interior of the church with baroque renovations, here referring to the interior furniture dated 1761 following a donation, the roofs, etc., we can observe the historical process of development, which occurs gradually over the centuries. The worship place had a special role in the collective mentality of the community, being important both religiously and culturally. Unfortunately, today the church-going community is not so large and risks to dissolve with time. The importance of the monument is obvious, because we can see how over the centuries the community has developed and been influenced by the church.

This work has an informative/scientific purpose, but it is also an alarm signal about the fact that in the following repair of the shingles on the roof, many irregularities were found in the way the monumental rehabilitation was done. Although the church is a historical monument (Code: LMI:BN-II-m-A-01714) its condition is deteriorating. In doing this study we found some irregularities in the roof restoration process that took place and the already changed parts are in a deplorable state, the monument being exposed to the weather and inevitable destruction (Fig. 18).

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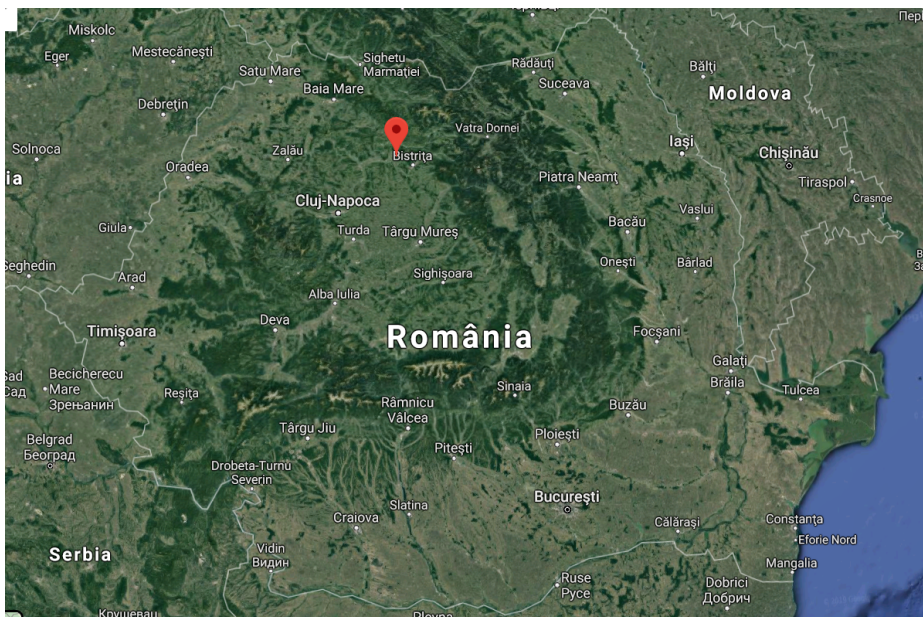


Fig. 1. Location of the village on the map.



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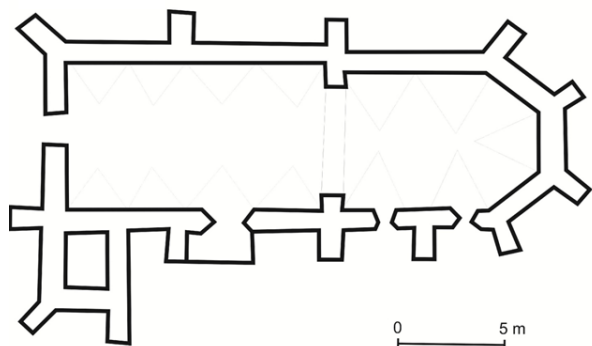


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Fig. 16. Romanesque architectural detail.



Fig. 17. Romanesque architectural detail.



Fig. 17. Romanesque architectural detail, 31.05.2024.

THE «CRUSADE» OF THE EXCOMMUNICATE VOIVODE: THOMAS SZÉCSÉNYI IN FALL 1330

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Keywords: Pope John XXII, Andrew (András) Szécsi (bishop of Transylvania), Thomas (Tamás) Szécsényi (voivode of Transylvania), King Charles-Robert of Anjou, Papacy, Hungary, Transylvania, excommunication, crusade.

Abstract: On 10 January 1331, Pope John XXII demanded from Andrew Szécsi, bishop of Transylvania, and the cousin of Denis, former ban of Severin, not to publicize the excommunication of the voivode of Transylvania, Thomas Szécsényi. The pope acted at King Charles-Robert of Anjou's request, who had urged him to forgive the voivode and convinced him – after the excommunication – that the voivode had acted in the king's rightful interest. John XXII did not say anything about the reasons that had led to Szécsényi's excommunication, although he mentioned that this was not the first time that Szécsényi had been excommunicated by Szécsi.

On 6 January 1331, Pope John XXII, at Thomas' demand, had already granted the voivode a full remission of his sins in the eventuality of his death, provided that the voivode would not commit his previous crimes. "In both Papal registers in which the remission was preserved, it was entered after the message sent by the pope to Bishop Szécsi. We can only speculate as to the reasons of the "delay". John XXII was not exactly completely open towards his Hungarian correspondents. Additionally, Charles-Robert had just returned from a disastrous campaign in Wallachia. Furthermore, Transylvania already had its fair share of "private conflicts".

According to Louis I of Anjou's *Illuminated Chronicle* (late 1350s), in autumn 1330, Thomas Szécsényi († 1354) and Denis Szécsi († c. 1341), former ban of Severin, had instigated Louis' father, Charles-Robert († 1342), to attack Basarab, voivode of Wallachia, in autumn 1330. According to John XXII, in 1327, Basarab, alike Thomas himself, was one the 'Catholic princes' under Charles-Robert's arch-royal authority. In this framework, the letters published here widen the complexity of otherwise well-known royal troubles of 1330.

Keywords: Pope John XXII, Andrew (András) Szécsi (bishop of Transylvania), Thomas (Tamás) Szécsényi (voivode of Transylvania), King Charles-Robert of Anjou, Papacy, Hungary, Transylvania, excommunication, crusade.

According to King Louis I of Anjou's *Illuminated Chronicle* (late 1350s),¹ Thomas Szécsényi († 1354), voivode of Transylvania,² and Denis Szécsi († c. 1341), former ban of Severin,³ instigated Louis' father, King Charles-Robert,⁴ to attack Basarab of Wallachia⁵ in autumn 1330⁶. According to more recent theories (late 1990s-2010s),⁷ Charles-Robert's campaign (which ended in disaster for him in November 1330)⁸ was in fact a crusade against the 'schismatic' Basarab, a 'tsar' moreover.⁹

Archaeology (the princely church in Argeş was not burnt down by Charles' troops, unlike the nearby residence of Basarab)¹⁰ and documents (for Pope John XXII, Basarab was a devout Catholic prince, just like Thomas Szécsényi,¹¹ and the same pope then refused to endorse Charles' vengeance against Basarab¹²) contradict such militant and forceful "grand designs".¹³ Nevertheless, the churchly context of 1330 is worth a closer inspection, from a Western, however,¹⁴ and not an Eastern point of view, considering both the conflicts within the (Avignonese) Latin rite Church¹⁵ and the fact that the information discussed was seemingly known since the days of World War II (prior to 1942).¹⁶

¹ Kersken 2018, IX-XXIV; Lucherini 2015: 58-72. *The chronicle ended with Louis' enthronement in the summer 1342 and did not deal with any of the subsequent events.*

² Wertner 1893: 119-134, Kovács 2005: 78-85.

³ Zsoldos 2011, 311-313; Farkas 2022: 18-45, at 23-28.

⁴ Bagi 2021: 131-143.

⁵ Schmitt-Ursprung 2021, 9-218 (at 61-72), and 269-326 (at 286-292).

⁶ We cite the Romanian edition of the text: Popa-Lisseanu 1937, 109-110.

⁷ Cazacu-Mureşan 2013. See also Pippidi 2008: 5-20, at 17-18.

⁸ See also Bonfini 1936, 201-202; Thuróczy 1985, 113-114; Michael 1997, 278.

⁹ The idea predates in fact World War I (e.g. Haşdeu 1893, CLXXXII).

¹⁰ Constantinescu 1984, 145.

¹¹ Pascu et alii 1977, no. 9, p. 20, nos. 21-22, pp. 44-47.

¹² Simon 2014: 59-76; Piti 2016: 381-392, at 384 (note 25);

¹³ The problem can also be ascribed to the immediate post-Trianon context (e.g. Minea 1925: 404-405 and 410).

¹⁴ E.g. Jamme 2014, 279-341

¹⁵ Simon 2023: 30-72.

¹⁶ Pascu 1945, here at 24-25. The text read (in both editions): [...] *Regele ungar voia să pedepsească pe Toma, dar voevodul, așteptându-se la aceasta, ia măsurile necesare, cerând intervenția papei. Papa, la rândul său, scrie episcopului Transilvaniei să intervină în favoarea lui Toma, să-l împace cu regele, iar regelui îi scrie să-l ierte pe voevod*². *Că aceste fapte erau consecințele războiului, reiese clar: războiul se sfârșise în luna Noemvrie a anului 1330, iar voevodul trebuia să scrie papei în aceeași lună sau în cea următoare, pentruca răspunsul să fie*

On 10 January 1331, Pope John XXII demanded from Andrew Szécsi, bishop of Transylvania, and the cousin of Denis,¹⁷ not to publicize the excommunication of voivode Thomas Szécsényi.¹⁸ The pope acted at Charles-Robert's request, who had urged him to forgive the voivode and convinced him – after the excommunication – that the voivode had acted in the king's rightful interest.¹⁹ John XXII did not say anything about the reasons that had led to Szécsényi's excommunication, although he mentioned that this was not the first time that Szécsényi had been excommunicated by Szécsi.

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trimis în luna Ianuarie 1331 [...]. In translation: [...] ‘The Hungarian king wanted to punish Thomas [for instigating him to attack Basarab], but the voivode, expecting this, took necessary measures, asking for the pope's intervention. The pope, in his turn, wrote to the bishop of Transylvania to intervene in Thomas' favour, to reconcile him with the king, and to the king he wrote to forgive the voivode⁷². That these deeds were the consequences of the war is evident; the war had ended in the month of November of the year 1330, and the voivode had to write to the pope either in that month or in the following one, for the response to be sent in the month of January 1331' [...]. The references in footnote 72 were: *Reg. Av. vol. 37, f. 270 și 303 și Reg. Vat. vol. 98, f. 197 și 201*. Strangely enough (for a scholar of Pascu's stature, in spite of the – largely later – controversies surrounding him), the sources do not support Pascu's reading. The discrepancy between them and Pascu's interpretation is so evident that we must conclude that his error was deliberate. The word “excommunication” could not have been overlooked, not even by someone with a more modest education.

¹⁷ Eszterházy 1866: 90-94; Temesváry 1922, 141-147; Hegi 2019: 69-94, at 74, 78.

¹⁸ Archivio Segreto, Vaticano, Vatican City (ASV), Registra Vaticana (Reg. Vat.) [no.] 98. 1330-1331, f. 197^v. Photocopy: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltár (MNL-OL), Budapest, Diplomatikai Fényképgyűjtemény (DF), no. 291538.

¹⁹ The document was calendared in *Lettres communes de Jean XXII (1316-1334)*, ed. Guillaume Mollat, X. 5 septembre 1330-4 septembre 1331 (Paris, 1914), no. 52,295, p. 115, and in *Anjou-kori oklevéltár. Documenta res Hungaricas tempore regum Andegavensium illustrantia 1301-1387*, XV. 1331, ed. Ildikó Tóth, Szeged, 2004 (AOkl.), no. 28, p. 19.

²⁰ ASV, Reg. Vat. 98, f. 201^v; MNL-OL, DF 291539. Alike in the case of the cited Papal letter to Szécsi, the references in AOkl., XV, no. 11, p. 12, are mingled. The cited folios (f. 270^v and f. 303^v) belong to the coeval copies in the ASV, Registra Avenionensia (Reg. Aven.), reg. 37. 1330-1331 (cf. Pascu 1945, 25, note 72).

²¹ ASV, Reg. Aven. 37, ff. 270^v (10 January 1331), 303^v (6 January 1331); Reg. Vat. 98, f. 197^v (10 January 1331), 201^v (6 January 1331). The “late addition” is more than visible in the case of the folios of Reg. Aven. 37.

reasons of the “delay”.²² John XXII was not exactly completely open towards his Hungarian correspondents.²³

Roughly a month later (15 February 1331), Szécsényi was one of the Hungarian notabilities addressed by John XXII²⁴ in order to convince both Charles-Robert and his wife, Elisabeth Piast, not to further delay the marriage of their first-born (Louis) with the daughter (Joanna) of the late Duke of Calabria, Charles (the son of Robert the Wise, king of Naples).²⁵ Things had rather rapidly returned to normal between pope and voivode, as – certainly for the former – Italian (Angevine)²⁶ affairs took precedence over the events and deals at the eastern borders of the (Angevine) Kingdom of Hungary.²⁷

There, Charles-Robert had most likely moved against Basarab with an excommunicated voivode of Transylvania at his side, as indicated by the king’s request to “hold” the excommunication²⁸. Due to the distances between Avignon and Buda (not to mention Transylvania),²⁹ the request could have been made the soonest after the ill-fated royal expedition (late November-early December 1330).³⁰

²² Charles was certainly afraid that Basarab might cross the Carpathians (into Transylvania/ into the Banat) and kept his remaining troops concentrated until mid-January 1331 (Piti 2016, 384, note 25, with additional data). *An excommunicated voivode was certainly a major royal inconvenience under such (potential) circumstances.*

²³ Due also, both in 1330 and in 1331 too, for financial (tax) reasons (e.g. Augustin Theiner, *Vetera Monumenta Hungariae Historica, I. Ab Honorio P.P. III usque ad Clementem P.P. VI*, Roma, 1859, nr. 816, p. 527, nr. 830, p. 536; nr. 836, p. 540), or to the – not so un-disimulated – Papal support granted to the anti-Angevine rebel Salomon, Saxon count of Braşov (see also Sălăgean 2007, 178).

²⁴ The source, never published in full, was last calendared in AOKl., XV, no. 62, p. 36.

²⁵ Kelly 2003, 33, 39. Joanna later married Louis’ younger brother, Andrew.

²⁶ On 4 December 1330, Robert I had named Joanna, and her younger sister, Mary, as his rightful heirs (Casteen 2015, 9-10). For a while, Pope John XXII had been planning to move from Avignon to Italy, if not to Rome, then to Bologna (Borghi 2017: 121-141, at 133-134). For this, John XXII needed Naples on his side, even if only “via” Buda.

²⁷ Eventually, Charles-Robert’s retaliation campaign against Basarab had to be cancelled (AOKl., XV, no. 100, p. 58).

²⁸ We must emphasize that the pope did not lift the excommunication, but only had halted its proclamation (public reading).

²⁹ Some 1 500 km separated Avignon from Buda (2 000 km stood between the Holy See and Alba Iulia, the seat of Szécsi). In 1331 (March/ April-June/ July), Papal tax collectors covered the distance without haste in two-three months (Á. Maleth, “The Career of the Papal Tax Collector *Raimundus de Bonofato* in the Light of Unedited Documents in the Vatican Apostolic Archives,” in Pécout-Mathieu 2024, 219-226, at 223, 225). In Balkan comparison (Krekić 1952: 113-120), couriers connecting Ragusa to Constantinople (nearly 1300 km apart) easily reached their destination in three weeks.

³⁰ A strange deed: Almasi,-Kófalvi 2004, pp. 347-348.

Aside from the personal conflict between Andrew Szécsi and Thomas Szécsényi³¹, the reasons for the intriguing excommunication remain cannot be separated from the complex – Papal and royal Hungarian – issue of the Transylvanian Saxons.³² The voivode was certainly at odds with Salomon, Saxon count of Braşov,³³ listed in 1327 by John XXII as one of the ‘Catholic princes’ under Charles-Robert’s arch-royal authority (like Basarab of Wallachia or Thomas himself).³⁴ Transylvania had its fair share of private conflicts that could influence grander policies,³⁵ such as the feud brutally settled by Lack, count of the Szeklers and the founder of the “Lackfi dynasty”, while Charles-Robert and Thomas Szécsényi were on campaign in Wallachia (normally, Lack should have been with them).³⁶

The issue(s) that had triggered Szécsényi’s excommunication was/ were beyond doubt profound. Not even Louis, who deeply disliked the voivode of Transylvania (his mother’s favourite),³⁷ did not mention the matter,³⁸ though he placed the responsibility his father’s Wallachian disaster on Thomas and explicitly admitted that Basarab had not wronged Charles-Robert prior to the royal expedition.³⁹

Appendix

I. Pope John XXII to Thomas Szécsényi, voivode of Transylvania (6 January 1330)

Archivio Segreto, Vaticano, Vatican City, Registra Vaticana, [no.] 98. 1330-1331, f. 201^v
(Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltár, Budapest, Diplomatikai Fényképgyűjtemény,
[no.] 291539).

³¹ A conflict usually neglected in Hungarian historiography (e.g. Varga 2003, 215-226).

³² E.g. Popa-Gorjanu 2006, 143-177.

³³ See also Zimmermann-Werner 1892, p. 448; no. 494, p. 449.

³⁴ Tăutu 1962 pp. 182-184.

³⁵ See, under the circumstances, the deed issued by Charles-Robert for the royal city of Cluj on 10 July 1331, following his explicitly mentioned transalpine campaign and the interferences of voivode Thomas Szécsényi (Jakab 1870, pp. 41-42; AOkI., XV, no. 267, p. 152).

³⁶ Pascu et alii 1977, no. 36, pp. 66-67.

³⁷ For a more positive image: Zsoldos 2017, 188-192.

³⁸ We could thus speculate that Szécsényi was excommunicated after entering Wallachia. Caution is gravely advised.

³⁹ Lucherini 2015, 109-110. The Romanian edition abruptly and wrongfully ends with the so-called battle of *Posada*.

Dilecto filio nobili viro Thome Woyuode Transilvano salutem.// Prouenit ex tue deuotionis affectu quo nos et Romana ecclesia rederis ut petitiones tuas⁴⁰ illas presertim que anime tue salutem respiciunt, ad exauditionis gratiam admictamus. Hinc est quod nos tuis supplicationibus inclinati ut confessor tuus quem duxeris eligendum omnium peccatorum tuorum de quibus corde contritus et ore confessus fueris eam plenam remissionem quam Romani pontifices consueunt interdum per speciale priuilegium personis aliquibus impartiri tibi quatenus clauis ecclesie se extendunt et gratum in oculis diuine maiestatis extiterit semel tratum in mortis articulo auctoritate apostolica concedere ualeat, deuotioni tue tenore presentium indulgemus. Sic tamen quod idem confessor de hiis de quibus alteri fuerit satisfacto impendenda, eam tibi per te si superuixeris uel per heredes tuos si tunc forte transieris faciendam iniungat, quam tu uel illi facere teneamini ut prefertur. Et ne quod absit propter huius gratiam reddaris procliuior ad illicita imposterum committenda, volumus quod si ex confidentia remissionis huius aliqua forte committens quod ad illa predicta remissio tibi nullatenus suffragetur. Nulli quoque (?) et cetera nostre concessionis et voluntatis uise (?) et cetera. Datum Auinione VIII Idus Ianuarii anno quintodecimo.

II. Pope John XXII to Andrew Szécsi, bishop of Transylvania (10 January 1330)

Archivio Segreto, Vaticano, Vatican City, Registra Vaticana, [no.] 98. 1330-1331, f. 197^v
(Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, Országos Levéltár, Budapest, Diplomatikai Fényképgyűjtemény,
[no.] 291538).

Venerabili fratri ..⁴¹ episcopo Transilvano salutem.// Significauit nobis carissimus in Christo filius noster Carolus rex Vngarie illustris, quod tu pro eo in dilectum filium nobilem virum Thomam Woiuadam Transilvanum excommunicationum sententias aliquotiens fluminas (?) minus iuste quia idem Thomas prout honori regio conuenit et ad compescendum nephandos ausus quamplurimum expedire dinoscit in officii per eundem regem sibi commissi executione procedit. Cum autem si est ita in hac parte tam regi quam Thome prefatis inferre grauem uidearis iniuriam nec censure debite sic excedere limitem deceat iusti iudicis grauitatem, fraternitati tue pera postolica scripta mandamus, quatenus taliter a premissis absteineatis, quod nos super hiis non oporteat remedium adhibere. Datum Auinione IIII Idus Ianuarii anno quintodecimo.

⁴⁰ Unfortunately, no preserved Papal supplication registers predate the pontificate of Clement VI (Bossányi 1916).

⁴¹ The Pontifical chancery commonly marked with two dots (..) the names of ecclesiastical figures in the registers, where the copies of the Papal messages sent to them were entered.

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THE COSTS AND HOPES OF THE ANTI-OTTOMAN WARFARE: THE CASE OF MOLDAVIA IN THE SECOND HALF OF 1476

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Keywords: *Stephen III of Moldavia, Sixtus IV, Mehmed II, Matthias Corvinus, Venice, Papacy, Wallachia, crusading, diplomacy.*

Abstract: *The paper provides a short overview of a frequently neglected twofold question: what were the costs of anti-Ottoman crusading and what were the profits that one hoped that anti-Ottoman crusading would trigger? The documentary appendix provides some insight into these issues, based on the special case of Stephen III of Moldavia in 1475-1476. He had become the athlete of the Papacy and was to face the might of Sultan Mehmed II. Stephen survived, with (belated) support from Matthias Corvinus, king of Hungary, his (unwanted) suzerain.*

Starting with autumn 1475, the plague ravaged Rome, Bologna, in the West, and Cetatea Albă,¹ in the East (by the *Redemptor Noster* bulla of January 1476²), were turned into alternative Jubilee pilgrimage sites. In Bologna, the pilgrims had to visit to the churches of Saints Peter, Petronius, Anton and Francis.³ In Cetatea Albă, on the shores of the Black Sea, their destinations were two cathedral churches (*duas ecclesias cathedrales*)⁴, quite the uncanonical Christian rarity.⁵ Nevertheless, pilgrims listened to the Papal call and came to Moldavia, and even found the

¹ von Pastor 1906³, 283-284, 288-289, chiefly 284, note [1]. The transfer to Bologna was usually dated to 1475, but according to Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga the transfer was accomplished only shortly before May 6, 1476.

² Halecki 1861¹, 102.

³ di Paolo Masini 1666, 92.

⁴ Theiner 1859, 453-454.

⁵ Simon 2021. Such situations can be encountered semi-officially at the inner borders of the Latin rite world, in Bergamo or in Dublin. Yet, in both cases, the designation cathedral did not cover two distinct Episcopal seats/ <arch-> bishoprics.

country in good order on the eve of Mehmed II's Moldavian campaign of July-August 1476.⁶

Moldavia paid its tribute as a land of crusading.⁷ This was what the Venetian envoy Emmanuele Gerardo, almost involuntarily reported on August 19, from Brețcu, at the Transylvanian border between Stephen III of Moldavia, the 'athlete' of the Papacy, and King Matthias Corvinus.⁸

At that time, because of the plague, Sixtus IV had already left the city on the Tiber and taken-up residence in Foligno, in Umbria.⁹ The pope learnt of both the sultan's forced retreat from Moldavia and of Stephen's and Matthias' failure to crush the Conqueror.¹⁰ The question was what to do then with the 200,000 ducats crusader levy already agreed by most of the Italian states.¹¹ Giampietro Arrivabene, Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga's secretary, was quick to report, from Foligno, to the margrave of Mantua, foremost because Sixtus IV, more preoccupied by the purity of the air, had entrusted the most delicate matter to Francesco, the margrave's son.¹² Foligno had witnessed heated discussions between the ambassadors summoned to Sixtus' new residence,¹³ chiefly between those of Naples and of Venice. Ferdinand of Aragon, king of Naples wanted the entire subsidy to be sent to Matthias of Hungary, his son-in law to be.¹⁴ The Republic of Venice demanded the disputed sum for her Eastern favourite, Stephen of Moldavia.¹⁵ In the end, both Matthias (*il Hungaro*) and Stephen (*il Valacho*) came out empty-handed from this intricate affair (in November 1476, Venice barely saved Stephen from being deposed as the athlete of the Papacy),¹⁶ which then only allowed - pro-Ottoman – Poland to present her own "candidacy" for the most generous crusader subsidy.¹⁷

⁶ Sebald Rieter Junior's text was recently (re)translated and commented by Ciociltan 2016, 433-436.

⁷ E.g. Veress 1914, p. 22.

⁸ Simon 2015, 375-384.

⁹ He was housed in the Palazzo Trinci (Flavio di Bernardo, *Un vescovo umanista alla corte pontificia: Giannantonio Campano (1429-1477)* (= *Miscellanea Historiae Pontificae*, 39) (Rome: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1975), 337-338).

¹⁰ Simon 2012, "Valahii de la Marea Neagră și valahii din Ungaria în cruciada anului 1476," *Revista Istorică*, NS, 22, nos. 3-4 (2012): 269-290, at 285-286.

¹¹ This was almost the value of the dowry of the Neapolitan princess Beatrice of Aragon, estimated at 170,000 ducats in May 1476. She wedded Matthias in December (Nagy- Nyáry 1876, 310).

¹² Pop-Simon 2021: 43-61.

¹³ Unwilling to renounce her Ottoman commitments (Babinger 1963: 305-361), Florence was ready to contribute just 15,000 ducats to the crusader fund.

¹⁴ E.g. Thallóczy 1913, 36-38.

¹⁵ Cf. already Xenopol 1907, 364.

¹⁶ Simon 2013, 71-92.

¹⁷ See for instance *Fontes rerum polonicarum e tabulario reipublicae venetae*, ed. August Cieszkowski, I-2. *Acta Vladislao Jagellonide Regnante* (Poznan, 1890), nos. 69-76, 157-178.

This also led to clash of May 1477 between Venice's requests and Stephen's demands.¹⁸ It ended with the republic reminding the athlete that, in summer 1475, as well as in autumn 1476, both she and Sixtus IV had turned a blind eye to Stephen's lucrative – Christian – slave trade, valued by the Serenissima at precisely 200,000 ducats (in the summer of 1475, Stephen had seized the sultan's personal and human booty taken after the Ottoman conquest of Caffa).¹⁹ As to Matthias, he publicly entered talks with Mehmed.²⁰ Matthias then allowed the Ottomans to raid the Italian lands of Venice in October 1477,²¹ while Stephen was gathering his troops for the Wallachian campaign Venice had called for during their disputes of May, in order to diminish the Ottoman pressure, focused once again on the republic's besieged Albanian city of Scutari.²²

Curiously enough, crusader dreams had largely come to an end with the death of Vlad III the Impaller (December 1476), for whose recent re-enthronement in Wallachia Matthias and Stephen taken (sole) credit.²³ In January 1474, Ragusa had informed Venice that, through his recent anti-Ottoman campaign in Wallachia, Stephen was preparing the return to power of Vlad, the “captive” and relative by marriage of Matthias.²⁴ Then Stephen had officially acknowledged the authority of Sixtus (November 1474).²⁵ He rose as the greatest anti-Ottoman victor since John Hunyadi.²⁶ The appended document indicate the costs and the stakes involved by ‘athlete’ Stephen's transformation.

Appendix

I. After the Storm

1. Brețcu, 19 August 1476

Emmanuele Gerardo to Pietro Mocenigo, doge of Venice

(Archivio di Stato di Milano, Milan, Archivio Ducale Sforzesco, Potenze Estere, *Venezia*, cart. 363. 1476, fasc. 8. *Agosto*, not numbered)

¹⁸ Simon 2009, 37-53.

¹⁹ E.g. Baczkowski 1989, 239-251, Appendix, no. 1, 242-248 (September 16, 1476).

²⁰ E.g. Kronthal 1893, no. 274, 218 (July 31, 1477).

²¹ Cusin 1937, 201-202.

²² See also Przewdziecki 1887, 650-651.

²³ For instance: Andreescu 1977: 259-272, at 270.

²⁴ Pop 2020, 17-34, Appendix, no. 2, pp. 30-31.

²⁵ Iorga 1914-1915: 1-76, Appendix, no. 11, p. 33.

²⁶ See also the encounter between the Milanese “spies” and the Moldavian envoys sent to Rome in Pop 2019-2020, 163-170.

[...] *humilamente commendamus. Per l'alligata del XVI de questo*²⁷ *Vestra Celsitudine [...] per timore de non capitare ne le mano del Turcho [...] et fracassati quelli Turchi IP^m et [?]. Ad hora significo <que>sto exercito potentissimo de la Maiesta Regia*²⁸ *era presso Totros*²⁹ [...] *stipendiati da esso Illustrissimo Signore*³⁰ *fra de paexani suo che trageno [...] in modo che dicono li messi ha mandato questa communita [?] al [...] che uno messo del prefato Illustrissimo Signore Stephano de la Moldavia cha [...] et che cum quelli era partito da Hotino*³¹ *et riduotisi a [...] signor capitaneo Re prefato*³² *se mandasse in Moldavia, et questo perche lo [...] cominciato targetare de le suo gente in Bulgaria [...] et lo Signor Bassaraba*³³ *era andato a li logi suo. Al dicte tal [...] et adviso, con questa celerita, gli estato possibile il suo [...] se havano tempo questi duo Signori*³⁴ *de potersi athacar con [...] quello seguira ne daro noticia ad Vestra Serenita quale voglio sia [...] ho se levi, et indi ad la malhora sua*³⁵, *che questo exercito [...] ha veduto, anchora el se digi de quod la Maiesta B*³⁶ *era andata [...] de qui el se levi; tamen, le levato per la fama de questo potere [...] et fanti de le XL^m come instruti hoi da bene, mi [...] Burzie*³⁷, *advirixando la Vestra Serenita che questo exercito [...] Cama [?], ovvero a la Maiesta del Re, ma e facto de la borsa [...] piu gente de quelle utile et bone; un Serenissimo Principe [...] solute ad Christiani, et ruina al Turcho regandose [...] del Re de Pollonia*³⁸ *cum questo*³⁹, *et questi duo Valachi*⁴⁰ *fra si [...] conditione, che cum lo mezo de la Santita de Nostro Signore*⁴¹ *et Vestra Serenita [...] <Dom>ino Re, quale de proximo devo compire. Il primo Re po mettere [...] qual se dapeo XL^m, il Re de Ungaria altratanti fra stipendiarii [...] Valachi XV^m per uno a campo, vede ista Signoria la potentia de questi Signori [...] <[?]>cendosi stagimo uniti, et provisione debita poi el Turcho tegera [?] [...] l'ha da stretto qua, quale con tanta [?], et tanta commodita [...] unde, ne le inscere, et core, che e cossa stupendo, essendo da Moldavia [...] <que>ante piccole VI per mia prima da Moldavia in Constantinopoli VIII <die?> [...] et per questa commodita de esser offexo, dicto Turcho se caveria volentiere [...] ghochii, quelle quante se avesse*

²⁷ August 16.

²⁸ Matthias Corvinus.

²⁹ The town of Trotuş, on the Moldavian side of the border between the Kingdom of Hungary and Stephen III's state.

³⁰ Stephen III of Moldavia.

³¹ The fortress of Hotin, at the Moldavian-Polish border.

³² Stephen Báthory, judge of the royal court.

³³ Pro-Ottoman Basarab III Laiotă/ anti-Ottoman Basarab IV Ţepeluş.

³⁴ Stephen III and Matthias/ Stephen III and Vlad III.

³⁵ I.e. of Mehmed II.

³⁶ Beatrice of Aragon.

³⁷ Burzenland/ Land of Bârsa in the south-eastern Saxon corner of Transylvania.

³⁸ Casimir IV Jagiello.

³⁹ This figure cannot be identified because of the badly damaged document.

⁴⁰ Stephen III and Vlad III?

⁴¹ Pope Sixtus IV.

*cavato in damnecia ipso facto la Vallachia Magiore*⁴² [...] *volesse poi, con seguritate del stato suo*⁴³. *Io ho dicto ultra lasser nova et queste pochi* [...] *elisse et devotissimo servitore de Vestra Signoria, il bene de la quale e de questa inclita pria mia mi* [...] *recentemente Vestra Signoria faci de hano la cruciata in queste bande, che se semper insito nel coro* [...] *utile, se havera molte gente, et bone, che haviano ad auxilio, dicta cruciata duci* [...] *belle, et costoso modo se hava piu gente, et consequenter potrasse pare* [?] *con molto meno* [...] *de tuti signori contribuisseno ad la spexa de questa guerra. Gratie amicitie Vestre Signorie me comendo* [...] ⁴⁴ *Bressbuis, die XVIII^{mo} augusti 1476.*⁴⁵

2. Foligno, 24 September 1476

Giampietro Arrivabene to Ludovico III *il Turco* Gonzaga, margrave of Mantua

(Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Mantua, Archivio Gonzaga, E. Affari esteri, XXV.
Roma, busta 834. 1404-1499, not numbered)

1476, 24 settembre

*Illustrissimo Signor mio, La Signoria Vostra, per altre mie, hara intieso li rasonamenti havuti de la obligatione del subsidio al Hungaro, per la/ impresa del Turco è la replicatione ne fu fatta à Fiorentini*⁴⁶ *per quello suo mandato etc. Lor de novo hanno rescritto/ che non li pare de venire à questo contracto di 3 anni, per che havendo pur molte suoe mercantie de la, quando el/ Turco sentisse lor essersi convenuti in tal liga à suo preiuditio, li puoria fare gran danno, perho non se extendeno à*⁴⁷ *piu. Et/ in summa, per viam oblationis, senza venire ad altro contracto, offereno pagare liberalmente la rata sua di XV mille ducati/ per uno anno tucto*⁴⁸, *ma intenda la Signoria Vostra che questa rata se intende per che di CC mille ducati,/ quali fu ditto se pagariano, lor offeressero prima/ li XV mille, non agiongendo mo la parte del Papa, del Re*⁴⁹ *è de Venetiani, à li CC mille, quali ne se offereno anche lor. È forse/ etiam pur de*⁵⁰ *lo Duca de Ferrara*⁵¹, *el qual ha dicto volere pagare. Lor*

⁴² Wallachia.

⁴³ I.e. Stephen III's Moldavia.

⁴⁴ All [...] markings stand for torn or stained parts in the extremely poorly preserved copy of the report, a report that due of its place of issue can only be ascribed to Emmanuele Gerardo, the known Venetian envoy in Moldavia.

⁴⁵ Unfortunately, we know little about the career of Gerardo (see also Paulus 2020, 208-260, at 227, note 72).

⁴⁶ That is, in fact, Lorenzo *il Magnifico* di Medici.

⁴⁷ Written above.

⁴⁸ Words written, starting with *per*, outside the line, at its margin.

⁴⁹ Ferdinand of Aragon, king of Naples.

⁵⁰ Written above.

⁵¹ Ercole d'Este, duke of Ferrara, Ferdinand of Aragon's son-in-law.

pagaranno tanto mancho di XV mille, quanto pigliara la/ rata sua per tuto questo che manchasse fin á la summa de tutti CC mille. È stimase che non serrano piu che X o XI mille. È cussi,/ heri, in consistorio, per non perdersi questo puocho, el Papa è li altri ambasciatori presero partito de acceptare questo. Et essi mo/ anche riducta la cosa, che per li altri non se fara piu contracto, ma da ugni canto solum per via oblationis. È restare/ contenti questi ambasciatori che stia in arbitrio de nostro Signore de dispensarli ó al Hungaro⁵² ó al Valacho⁵³ aut alibj á chi li/ parira piu expediente; che è stato impasso de non puocho difficultate, per che 'l Re tirava quod darentur Hungaro et Venetiani al Valacho. È per questo, tra li ambasciatori sono state piu volte de male parole. Et papa, el Re è Venetiani fanno vista/ et offereno liberamente la rata sua promessa absolvere⁵⁴ per li 3 anni. Qui, gratia de Dio, stamo pur bene. Questi/ di li fu un puocho de suspecto, ma se restiolto in niente. È monsegnore⁵⁵ cum tuta la famiglia è sano. Á Roma, per quanto se/ sente, va pur diminuendo la peste, ma daltre infirmitate ve ne moreno assai. Comprendo quanto se resani, vi tornaremo/ la verso San Martino⁵⁶. Et interim, se stara qui. El papa ugni di attende á far la terra piu ariosa. È manda/ á terra tuti li porticali. Me raccomando á la Signoria Vostra, Fulginti, XXIIIJ Septembris 1476.

*Illustrissime d<ominationis> V<estre>
Arrivabenus⁵⁷*

Servitor Ioannes P<etrus>

<On the verso> Illustri Principi et Excellentissimo Domino, domino meo/ singularissimo L<udovico>, Domino Marchioni Mantue,/ ... ducali Locumtenenti Generali etc.

II. Before the Storm

1. Rome, 1 July 1475

Pope Sixtus IV to Ludovico III il Turco Gonzaga, margrave of Mantua⁵⁸
(Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Mantua, Archivio Gonzaga, E. Affari esteri, XXV.
Roma, busta 834. 1404-1499, not numbered)

Dilecte fili, salutem et apostolicam benedictionem!// Novissime litteris dilecti filij nobilis viri Petri Mocenigo, ducis Venetiarum, accepimus inmanem illum Turchum

⁵² Matthias Corvinus.

⁵³ Stephen III of Moldavia.

⁵⁴ Misspelled: *absolve*.

⁵⁵ Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga.

⁵⁶ Saint Martin's Day (November 11).

⁵⁷ On Arrivabene, see in particular Chambers 1984, 397-438.

⁵⁸ An identical message was sent by the pope du Lorenzo il Magnifico di Medici (Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Florence, Archivio Mediceo avanti il Principato, *Responsive copiari*, reg. II [1468-1483], f. 88^v; Virgilio 2015, Appendix, no. 204, 470; Pop-Simon 2023, 9-18).

Christiani nominis hostem acerrimum/ classem validam et instructissimam retinere, quam sicut signis et aliquorum relatione habetur per Mare Maius versus partes Moldavie, pro iniurijs ulciscendis cladis ibidem sus/cepte convertere intendit. Ea denuntiatio nos merito commovit ad commiserationem calamitatis Christiane et ad hec ipsa pericula consideranda. Primum igitur quod ad nostrum pasto/rale attinet officium supplices Deum oravimus et per alias personas Deo acceptas preces effundi fecimus, ut ipse qui prepotens est, pro sui nominis gloria decertantibus assistat animos/ Catholicorum regum et principum ac fidelium populorum uniat, ut hic truculentissimus hostis Christianorum viribus repellatur, tue vere excellentie significandum duximus/ et copiam litterarum memorati ducis presentibus introcludi fecimus, ut plane intelligas quanto in discrimine non solum Moldavie partes, verum etiam omnium Christianorum versentur, velis/ itaque prout Catholicum principem debet de aliquo subsidio cogitare et illis partibus bello laborantibus, prout expedire videris ope tua succurrere. Nos vero considerantes quod ad/ tantam belli molem sustinendam nostre et ecclesie facultates nullomodo sufficerent, concurrentibus auxilijs Christianorum presidia exhibere, iuxta vires nostras pollicemur, neque ali/quo pacto unacum alijs huic Dei et fidei cause deerimus. Cogitare et ante oculos tuos ponere velis quod si dilectus filius, nobilis vir Stephanus Vayvoda, qui nuper victoria potitus stragem/ et iacturam maximam Turchis intulit, ab eisdem bello lacesitus Christianorum auxilijs se destitutum senserit, et loco ceserit, quod Deus avertat, quantis periculis Ungari et Germanorum populi/ devotissimi et reliqua Christianitas subiacerent. Quare eandem excellentiam tuam, per viscera misericordie Dei nostri et pro ipsius Dei et Christiani nominis reverentia, hortamur in Domino ac de/precamur, ut iuxta vires tuas aliquam subventionem facere velis, prout tue conscientie visum fuerit. In quo Deo in primis gratissimum obsequium prestabis eritque anime tue ad/ modum salutare et ad gloriam ac laudem tui nominis cedet. Datum Rome, apud Sanctumpetrum, sub annulo piscatoris, die prima Iulij, MCCCCLXXV, pontificatus nostri, anno quarto.// Marcellus⁵⁹.

<Verso:>Dilecto filio nobili viro Ludovico de Gonzaga, marchioni Mantue.

2. Florence, 27 July 1475

Leonardo Botta to Galeazzo Maria Sforza, duke of Milan

(Archivio di Stato di Milano, Milan, Archivio Ducale Sforzesco, Potenze estere, Venezia, cart. 361. 1475, fasc. 7. Luglio, not numbered)

Illustrissimo Signore mio

Hogi messer Alyyse Guizardini⁶⁰, oratore fiorentino, me ha monstrato/ una littera che la sua Excelsa Signoria li scrive et con essa li manda la copia de uno/ breve apostolico per lo quale la Santità del papa scrive alla prefata Excelsa comunità havere/ inteso per littere della Signoria de Venetia li grandi metuendi apparati ch'el

⁵⁹ Marcello de' Rustici, Papal secretary between 1449 and 1481 (Lee 1978, 59-60).

⁶⁰ On him and his family, see Goldthwaite 1968, 119-121; Mallett 2003, sub voce.

Turco/ fa per andare contra el Valacho Steffano Vayvoda. Et doppo molte bone et cristianissime/ parole, sua Beatitudine conforta et prega l'antedicta Excelsa Signoria voglia fare qualche contributione/ pro rata sua et pro illa portione che ad Lei medesima parerà honesta alli subsidii contro/ il Turco, offerendosi Sua Santità, quando li altri contribuirano exponere etiam lei tute le facultà sue et vitam propriam, se'l serà expediente, ne tam iusto et sancto operi de esse/ videatur etc. A che havendomi el prefato messer Alyyse dimandato se'l me pareva/ ch'el dovesse dire cosa alcuna ad questa Signoria della receuta de essa copia, io li resposi/ che existimava fusse ben facto non farne mentione alcuna, perché havendo questa Signoria/ significato alla Santità del papa questi apparati, perché essa intendesse quo indiscrimine res/ cristiana versabatur, et non havendo con nuy conferito alcuna cosa, seria quodamodo/ uno cerchare spesa ad summo studio. Et cosi el dicto messer Alyyse ha deliberato non/ parlare de dicta receptione sive continentia de esso breve. Acio non intramo in/ disputatione de quelle cose che non se fa per nuy. Et maxime che io sono certo che questa/ Signoria scripse quella littera alla prelibata Santità del papa più tosto per farli intendere le mali/ conditioni occurevano alle cose cristiane, ch'a per provisione existimasse li potesse fare sua Beatitudine. Me racomando humilmente alla Vostra Sublimità.

Datum Venetiis, die XXVII Iulii MCCCLXXquinto.

Illustrissimi domini domini vestri servus Leonardus Botta⁶¹.

3. Rome, February 18, 1476

**Francesco Filelfo to Cicco Simonetta, the secretary of Galeazzo Maria Sforza,
duke of Milan**

(Biblioteca Trivulziana, Milan, Ms. 873, f. 510^v)

Frater Philelfus Ciccho Simonetae, equiti aurato, ducalique secretario salutem!

Etsi brevi Mediolanum sum rediturus nolim tamen praetermittere quin, ad te scribam quae/ hic geruntur memoratu digna Sanctissimus D<ominus> noster Sistus, Pontifex Maximus,/ omni studio diligentiamque incumbit ad exigendas pecunias, quas mittat ad Matthian,/ Hungariae regem, quo se tueatur ab impetu ferociamque Turcorum. Ii enim nullum tempus reliquum/ faciunt, quomodo Balacchos primo, dein Hungaros, opprimant, quippe qui recenter superato/ Danubio in Balacchiam, magnis cum viribus irruerunt, quibus magna ex parte Caesis, eorum/ subassis, vir bellicosus et audax, quoddam Balacchiae oppidum se recepit, ad quod/ expugnandum, Matthias rex litteras as pontificem dedit, se cum viribus suis continuo profectum. His autem significat se cum exercitu equitum quem conflarat, ad viginti millia sub id oppidum/ constituisse. Praeterea Stephanum Vaivodam, qui Moldaviae dominatur, habere paratus copias/ militum octoginta millium eumque brevi adfuturum cum opus fuerit. Moldaviam appellant/ vulgo Balacchiam Superiore, quae et ipsa in Scythia est, et

⁶¹ For Botta in Venice, see Calabro 2016; Petrucci 2018.

*alias atque alias gentes/ complectitur in primisquam et Alanos et Gotthos, populos sane ferocissimos. Gotthos vero et Ge/tas eosdem esse. Eas ego regiones omnis quia tempestate admodum iuvenis vel potius adhuc/ adolescens quippe quod agerem quintum ac vigesimum aetatis annum á Iohanne Palaeologo, Ma/nuelis filio, qui Constantinopolin tenebat imperio, sum orator missus ad Sigismundum/ regem et vidi et peragravi, nam quam rectum in Hungariam iter intercludebatur á Turcis/ trajiciendum mihi fuit per Mare Euxinum ad Asprocastrum, quod oppidum aestate proxima Turci, qui Theodosia hoc est Capha potiti sunt, frustra oppugnare. Praeterea/ idem Matthias ijsdem litteris scribit venisse ad se nuncium á Bassiade Romaniae, is/ est dux, qui pro impio tyranno Mahometo universis Graeciae exercitibus praeest,/ qui quidem nuncius verbis illius Bassiade petebat publicae fidei litteras, quibus/ tuto liceret legatum mittere de solvendo bello rebusquam componendis inter Dominum/ suum, regemquam Matthian, ad quem ipsum Bassiaden ait respondisse se nominem omnino/ auditurum bellumque malle quam pacem, nec illud aliter quam sola pugna solvi oportere./ Addebat autem in ijsdem litteris sibi grandi pecunia opus esse ad continendum exer/citum. Itaque summus pontifex, ut est unus omnium religiosissimus et optimus, nul/li rei magis studet, quam cogendis exigentisque pecunijs, quas ad Matthian mittat,/ quas brevi et exactas et collectas fore puto, modo novus Galliae Transal/pinae motus ac tumultuatio rem ipsam non impediat, id quod et Christianis de/trimentorum foret et Turcis non mediocriter conduceret. Vale!*⁶²
Ex Urbe, XIII. Kalendas Martias M^o CCCCLXXV^o.

<Keywords written in red, along the left margin, by the same hand, as a sort of summary of the letter>

*Mediolanum./ Sistus pontifex./ Matthias rex./ Turci./ Balacchi./ Ungari. Balacchia./ Danubium./ Stephanus Vaivoda./ Moldavia./ Scythia./ Alani. Gothi./ Getae./ Iohannes Palaeologus Imperator./ Constantinopolis./ Manuel Imperator./ Sigismundus Imperator./ Mare Euxinum. Asprocastrum/ Theodosia Capha./ Matthias./ Bassias Romaniae./ Mahometus tyrannus./ Gallia transalpina.*⁶³

⁶² On the Filelfo family, Bisaha 2004, 89-92; Papacostea 2006, 363-375; Meserve 2010, 47-65.

⁶³ For the majority of the humanist's numerous letters see Jeroen De Keyser's (re)edition: Filelfo 2018.

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ANTI-OTTOMAN CRUELTY AND CHRISTIAN RITE: THE DEEDS OF THE “REPENTING” VLAD III OF WALLACHIA

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Abstract: *When Byzantium fell, Western attitude towards Greek rite Christians began to change, whether they were ‘schismatics’ or in union with Rome, following the troublesome enactment of the Council of Florence (1439). The modification, noted for Balkan Christians, crossed the Lower Danube. There laid the mostly Greek rite zones that stayed outside of Ottoman direct authority, even after Mehmed II’s victories in Serbia (1459), in Bosnia (1463) or in the Crimea (1475). These zones formed two (divided) states: Wallachia and Moldavia. The change of attitude towards Greek rite Christians was visible also in the Kingdom of Hungary, the traditional suzerain of Wallachia and Moldavia, and, by definition, Christendom’s anti-Ottoman ‘bulwark’. The realm had been shielded by a series of “buffer states”. These lands had largely collapsed by the early 1470s.*

No ruler of Wallachia or of Moldavia was “blacklisted” in the realm (and by its representatives) as ‘schismatic’ after the Ottoman conquest of Byzantium, as well as after “the miracle of Belgrade”, in 1456. The long and predominantly tolerant reign of Sigismund of Luxemburg had certainly altered the “so-to-say” Angevine rhetoric of the 1300s (that is, the Wallachians, and their lords, were ‘schismatic’ “lowlife” to be crushed). Still, the documentary (at least) change, in favour of Greek rite Wallachians appears dramatic.

In this framework we turn to the controversial figure of Vlad III Dracula of Wallachia. The ‘Germans’ may have been correct: Vlad was the monster of one – single- Christian faith. This may explain why his deeds did not lead to a collapse of the unstable Christian compromise at the Danube borders of the Ottoman Empire. Vlad was a Greek-Latin Golem (officially by calling, not by making), whose death was later lamented by both King Matthias Corvinus and Stephen III of Moldavia, the Greek rite athleta of the Papacy, Vlad’s relatives.

When Byzantium fell, Western attitude towards Greek rite Christians began¹ to change, whether they were ‘schismatics’ or in union with Rome, following the troublesome enactment of the Council of Florence (1439). The modification, noted for Balkan Christians,² crossed the Lower Danube. There laid the mostly³ Greek rite

¹ See Housley 2012, 26-29, 41-43, 102, 108).

² Petkov 1995: 171-192, at 176.

³ We recall two special “minorities” (both worth attention): the Szeklers and the Armenians.

zones that stayed outside of Ottoman direct authority, even after Mehmed II's victories in Serbia (1459), in Bosnia (1463) or in the Crimea (1475).⁴

The alteration was visible in the Kingdom of Hungary. By definition,⁵ Buda was Christendom's anti-Ottoman 'bulwark'.⁶ Its realm had been shielded by a series of "buffer states". These lands had largely collapsed by the early 1470s.⁷

No ruler of Wallachia or of Moldavia was "blacklisted" in the Hungarian realm (and by its representatives) as 'schismatic'⁸ after the Ottoman conquest of Byzantium, as well as after "the miracle of Belgrade", in 1456. Then, even the previously pro-Ottoman voivodes Peter Aaron of Moldavia and Wladislaw II of Wallachia had sided with 'athlete' John Hunyadi. He was betrayed in return by Vlad III the Impaller and by future Stephen III the Great of Moldavia (later, after 1475, John's and Skanderbeg's successor as the 'athlete' of the Papacy).⁹

The long and predominantly tolerant reign of Sigismund of Luxemburg had certainly altered the "so-to-say" Angevine rhetoric of the 1300s (*id est*: the Wallachians, and their lords, were 'schismatic' "lowlife" to be crushed).¹⁰ Still, the documentary (at least) change, in favour of Greek rite Wallachians appears dramatic.¹¹ In the Hungary, there was otherwise no shortage of enraged words to describe the treacherous stands of various voivodes of Wallachia and Moldavia.¹² The voivodes, known also for crusader "double-dealings",¹³ remained pious donors on Mount Athos¹⁴ and even loyal to the – pro-Ottoman – Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, at least nominally.¹⁵

De Dragule crudelitate

These "curiosities", that fitted the Renaissance policy of the Papacy (who saw in the Wallachians the "lost Romans" in the East"),¹⁶ may explain the contents of a letter

⁴ Pilat-Cristea 2017, 160-164; Pálosfálvi 2018, 211-218.

⁵ Preiser-Kapeller 2011, 37-62.

⁶ Srodecki 2015, 231-234.

⁷ Weber 2013.

⁸ For the edited and unedited sources, see the database <http://siebenbuergenurkundenbuch.uni-trier.de/> (the updated *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen* collection).

⁹ E.g. Simon 2021, 99-105.

¹⁰ Magina 2008, 283-294.

¹¹ Simon 2021a: 153-168

¹² Cristea 2014, 85-99.

¹³ Coman 2021, 189-221.

¹⁴ Bojović-Năsturel 2003, 149-176.

¹⁵ Simon 2008, 587-600, at 590-591.

¹⁶ For (Pontifical) Wallachian changes: Pop-Simon 2022, 33-54.

that reached Rome in March 1476. It was deemed important enough to be copied for the Sforza in Milan,¹⁷ as well as for the Gonzaga in Mantua.¹⁸

The letter was addressed to Sixtus IV, a peculiar crusader and unionist heir of Saint Peter,¹⁹ by Gabriele Rangoni, the bishop of Eger and former bishop of Transylvania.²⁰ The lengthily report focused on the anti-Ottoman exploits of Matthias Corvinus' captains: 'the magnificent Ladislas, named Dragula' (i.e. Vlad III, *olim* voivode of Wallachia) and of the Serbian despot Vuk Branković.²¹ By the start of spring 1476, their campaign in the Ottoman parts of Serbia and Bosnia had proven to be a complete success, both militarily and financially.²²

Rangoni was however utterly disgusted in particular by Vlad's massacres and the cruelties.²³ Yet, at no point, did he call either Vlad or Vuk²⁴ 'schismatics', nor did he connect their violence to their – undisputed – Greek rite background, though he recalled even the "private" acts of cruelty of *Dragula*, the new husband of Justine Szilágyi, Matthias' maternal cousin.²⁵ In his report, the bishop neither mentioned this matrimonial union (1473/1474), nor noted that the "non-public" mad-deeds of Vlad dated back to the days when he had been married to Matthias' *sister* (1460s), or immediately after her death (previously, since 1453, Vlad's first Hunyadi wife had allegedly been John's *sister*).²⁶

On one hand, Rangoni kept his silence about the family ties that connected Vlad to Matthias. The ties were no secret.²⁷ On the other, the prelate provided a most vivid account of Vlad's violence. That violence was already common knowledge.²⁸ Seemingly, for Rangoni, Vlad and Vlad alone was the problem, a problem that – manifestly – the same bishop tried to isolate from its context.²⁹

¹⁷ Archivio di Stato di Milano, Milan (ASM), Archivio Visconteo-Sforzesco/ Ducale Sforzesco (A.D.S.), Potenze Estere, *Ungheria*, cart. 650. 1452-1489, fasc. 22. 1476, not numbered (nn).

¹⁸ Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Mantua (ASMa), Archivio Gonzaga (A.G.), E. Affari esteri, V. *Ungheria*, busta 533. 1395-1692, nn (an identical copy). On these copies, see most recently Weber et alii 2020, no. 89, pp. 115-123, at 115-116.

¹⁹ Weber 2004, 309-321.

²⁰ E.g. Hlaváček 2010, 107-118.

²¹ For the main edition: Thallóczy-Áldásy 1907, no. 369, pp. 265-268.

²² For the events: Andreescu 1977, 259-272, in particular 262-264.

²³ This was already noticed, yet was also over-emphasized by Iorga 1901, 149-161, at 160-161.

²⁴ Injured Vuk was viewed positively by Rangoni (in comparison to Vlad), meaning, under the circumstances, that he had efficiently served King Matthias, the bishop's secular master.

²⁵ Most recently: Nagy-Szilágyi 2022, 125-164.

²⁶ The second Hunyadi wife of Vlad was still alive in fall 1464 (Gündisch et alii 1981, no. 3389, p. 192; no. 3400, 200).

²⁷ For Vlad's third marriage: Kubinyi 2008, 17-18.

²⁸ For instance: Willcocks 2007, 183-196, mainly at 188-189, 193-194.

²⁹ His words were quite explicit: [...] *But I will not pass under silence the cruelties of Dragula that are all too well-known to the entire world* [...] ([...] *Sed Dragule crudelitatem non*

Only some three years earlier (1472-1473), Nicholas, bishop of Modruš, turned into Matthias' opponent,³⁰ had depicted Vlad as a monster, defining for the degenerate eastern heirs of the Romans: the Wallachians.³¹ A decade before him (1463), Pope Pius II had deplored the fate of the Roman Wallachians. They *had become more barbarous than the barbarians*, ending up under Vlad's rule. Yet, on the eve of his ill-fated Crusade of Ancona,³² Pius had also offered a literally "get-out-of-jail card" to *good-looking* Vlad: Vlad was being *wasted* in prison.³³ Still, neither Nicholas, nor Pius II had labelled Vlad and the Wallachians as *schismatics*.³⁴ Though, unlike the bishop of Modruš and the pope, he made no references to the "larger – Roman (Wallachian) – picture", Rangoni followed in their footsteps when he said nothing about the (real) faith of Vlad *Dragula*.³⁵

I. Church Union and Holy War in the Eastern Borderlands of Christendom

A twofold question emerges. 1. Was the Union of Florence still deemed valid in 1476 in the Kingdom of Hungary and at its outer limits?³⁶ 2. Were massacres justified as long as they served the purposes of Holy War?³⁷ Recent scholarship provides an adaptable positive answer to the first part of the issue:³⁸ depending on contemporary interests (outlined by Sixtus IV himself in the "Greek rite instructions" sent to the Hungarian clergy in early 1477)³⁹ the Florentine union was valid, in Hungary at least until the extinction of the male line of the "half-blood" Hunyadi family (1504-1505), the natural supporters of this Christian compromise.⁴⁰ Recent scholarship also offers a quite negative – less adaptable – response to the second part:⁴¹ in the pre-

pertransibo a qua toti orbi notissimus est [...]). Rangoni's words also sounded almost like a "disclaimer".

³⁰ Špoljarić 2019, 457-491.

³¹ For the text and an analysis, see also Papacostea 1965, 15-24, at 20-21.

³² E.g. O'Brien 2015, 15-17; Housley 2012, 9-11, 120-123.

³³ Simon 2021, 50-51, 151-152.

³⁴ The original texts: *Pii Secundi Pontificis Maximi Commentarii rerum memorabilium que temporibus suis contigerunt*, "ed. Johannes Gobellinus" (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1614), XI.12, pp. 296-297 (edition available online); Mercati 1937, 205-267, at 217-218.

³⁵ On this disputed confessional matter: Simon 2021b, 31-60, at 38-39.

³⁶ Érdühelyi 1897, 28-56, at 48-53; Diaconescu 1997, 29-62, at 50-56.

³⁷ The question is at least as old as crusading (Kedar 1998: 11-31). Yet, a new approach is needed.

³⁸ In particular: Pop 2020, 66-78, 260-261.

³⁹ Theiner 1859, no. 657, p. 454 (henceforth VMHH).

⁴⁰ Rusu 1999, 77-127.

⁴¹ See Annas-Paulus 2020. Die *Geschichten* were a complex junction between contemporary *dispacci* and the later *Flugblätter*, seasoned with humanistic excerpts from Suetonius and the *Historia Augusta*, as well with Christian references to the Roman imperial tyrants Nero or Diocletian. Consequently, these *Geschichten* had coeval traction.

Reformation German environment, the deeds of Vlad III of Wallachia were sadistic crimes, pure and simple.⁴²

The latter point is particularly important. 1. Vlad's and Vuk's actions from early 1476 impacted not only Muslims (Turks above-all), but also Christians (of the Greek rite), and led to – arguably – the first massacre of Srebrenica.⁴³ 2. Vlad and Vuk, both former adversaries of the Hunyadis, had spent time in active Ottoman (Muslim) service⁴⁴ before eventually returning to the Christian side. 3. *Dragula* and Vuk Branković, the *Drachendespot*,⁴⁵ were the offspring of Vlad II *Dracul* (Vlad III's father)⁴⁶ and Stephen Lazarević (Vuk's great-uncle),⁴⁷ members of the Order of the Dragon established by Sigismund of Luxemburg and lords who had never renounced their Greek rite faith.⁴⁸

These details bring to attention “nuances”. They are particularly important in the framework of the German and the Russian *post-mortem* Draculian stories from the late 1480s.⁴⁹ Both the marriage of Vlad to Matthias' ‘sister’ (which took indeed place in early 1462)⁵⁰ and his conversion to Catholicism by Matthias (after the same king had sent Vlad to prison at the end of the same year 1462)⁵¹ were recorded either to redeem Vlad's life⁵² or to further tarnish his career.⁵³

Irrespective of aim (general or particular, in the case of the abovementioned events), the stories were constructed around congenital violence in regions viewed as “blood-lands” by 1476.⁵⁴ There, long after Vlad's death (in winter 1476-1477), conflicts, involving up to 400 men on each side, were not deemed breaches of Ottoman-Hungarian prolonged truces.⁵⁵ Vlad's career (and that of Vuk) in Matthias's service perfectly fitted the picture. Rangoni too admitted this in fact in his letter to Sixtus IV: Vlad was the ‘greatest fear of the Turks’ and this – somehow (the bishop

⁴² “Dracula during the Reformation” could prove a most rewarding modern research topic.

⁴³ In this respect: Simon 2018, 517-540, at 521.

⁴⁴ E.g. Stoicescu 1976, 33; Mitrović 2003, 19-33. Vlad too spent (as a hostage however) some six years in the Ottoman Empire (from 1442 to 1448).

⁴⁵ See also Unrest 1957, p. 68 (on August 1476).

⁴⁶ Minea 1919.

⁴⁷ Popović 2010, 103-106. Vuk was the son of Grgur, the blinded – by the Ottomans – heir of despot George Branković, who had succeeded his maternal uncle, Stephen Lazarević (1427).

⁴⁸ Chihaiia 1993, 64-83; Ivanović 2021, 137-150 (Constantine the Philosopher's “selective memory” of Stephen's rule).

⁴⁹ For the transactions: Cazacu 2017, Appendix, 357-363, 364-369.

⁵⁰ Bianu 1883, 30-47, at no. 1, p. 34; Weber et alii 2020, 204-207.

⁵¹ According to Michael Beheim, Jan Jiskra, John Hunyadi's nemesis, who had just entered the service of Matthias, conducted the arrest of Vlad (Simon 2021, 118, note 12).

⁵² In the German narrative (see Ursprung 2018, 45-60).

⁵³ In the Russian narrative (see also Luria 1964, 5-18, at 14-16).

⁵⁴ Perspectives: Motta 1889, 145-153; Kidwell 1989, 32-37.

⁵⁵ Until the early 1520s: Kubinyi 2011, 365-434, at 375, note 29.

of Eger avoided explicit phrasing)⁵⁶ – justified Matthias’s decision to “un-cage” the ‘magnificent Ladislas, named Dragula’.

II. An Observant Franciscan Bishop of Transylvania

For the prelate, the zealous and trusted disciple of Giovanni da Capestrano and naturally an observant Franciscan,⁵⁷ the –anti-Ottoman and Hunyadi (too)– existence of Vlad was in itself a compromise, as much as he avoided saying that when addressing Sixtus IV, the former minister-general of the Franciscan Order.⁵⁸ Well acquainted with East-Central European affairs and anti-Ottoman (as well as anti-Hussite) crusading since the early 1450s,⁵⁹ Rangoni had been bishop of Transylvania (1472-1475)⁶⁰ at the time of Vlad’s “liberation”, and of the crusader rise of Vlad’s and Matthias’ foe and friend, Greek rite Stephen III of Moldavia, Venice’s favourite.⁶¹ Sixtus had also appointed him legate for the war against the Turks (1474),⁶² amidst the anti-Ottoman attacks conducted in Wallachia by Stephen (attacks reported to enable the return to power of Vlad, Matthias’ favourite).⁶³ Rangoni was familiar with the conflicts and compromises of the multi-ethnic Transylvanian voivodate,⁶⁴ not so much with its “daily facts” (because of his absences from the province), but with its “grander issues” (due to his activity as Papal envoy and as royal diplomat).⁶⁵

Pius had placed Transylvania at the heart of both *Dacia* (the name of the old Roman province),⁶⁶ a kingdom “added” to the disputed Hungarian crown of Matthias

⁵⁶ [...] *Tandem vero superiori anno liberum fecit et ad expeditionem in Turcos destinavit, quibus singulari est terrori* [...]. Previously, Rangoni had stated that Matthias had kept Vlad in prison for 15 years (!).

⁵⁷ See also Pellegrini 2017, 5-26, especially 11-13, 21-22.

⁵⁸ E.g. Goffen 1986, 218-262. Sixtus continued to wear the Franciscan habit underneath his Papal robes.

⁵⁹ Kalous 2016, 75-89.

⁶⁰ He was named bishop of Transylvania on December 16, 1472, nuncio *cum potestatis legati de latere* on August 16, 1474, and bishop of Eger on April, 24, 1475 (Untergehrer 2012, 476-478).

⁶¹ Cristea-Pienaru 2012, 17-36; Housley 2012, 33-34; Pilat-Cristea 2017, 143-149.

⁶² Kalous 2010, 229-230; Untergehrer 2012, 477.

⁶³ Simon 2007, 25-39, here 30-33.

⁶⁴ Kubinyi 1988, 65-73, at 67; Pop 2011, 93-101.

⁶⁵ In this respect, he was quite similar to John Filipec, another of Matthias’ favourites, appointed bishop of Oradea (at Matthias’ request) prior to – noteworthy – March 1476 (Tóth et alii 2016, 51-52). In February 1474, the Ottomans had burnt Oradea as retaliation for the Wallachian campaign of Stephen III.

⁶⁶ Pius II, while still Enea Silvio Piccolomini and bishop of Siena, had brought this land, once part of the Roman Empire, to the attention of Pope Nicholas V in the summer of 1453, when the first news on the fall of Constantinople reached the West (Wolkan 1918, no. 109, 190-191).

(March 1462),⁶⁷ and of Vlad's malice that, as recorded only by the same Pius, made him offer Matthias to Mehmed (November 1462).⁶⁸ Unlike Nicholas of Modruš, Rangoni did not dwell on these matters when portraying Vlad.⁶⁹ For Rangoni's mentor, Capestrano, whose attitude towards Greek rite Christians can be described, at best, as controversial,⁷⁰ Transylvania had been largely a nightmare, even in the "Hunyadi cradle", in the Hațeg Land.⁷¹ Young Matthias' first wife had been the Greek rite Elisabeth of Cilly (Celje) (1455), the grand-daughter of despot George Branković and the first cousin of Vuk.⁷²

It is difficult, if not outright impossible,⁷³ to estimate how difficult it was for Gabriele Rangoni (who otherwise enjoyed and benefited from Matthias' trust)⁷⁴ "to stomach" such border arrangements. In the 1460s, the Latin rite hierarchy in eastern Hungary had opposed unionist bishop Makarios († 1470).⁷⁵ Though supported by Matthias, he died "heirless" in Transylvania, quite hostile (on "Latin rite soil") to the king even after the Hunyadi monarch had annihilated the rebellion of 1467.⁷⁶ Towards Serbia, in the so-called Banat as well as further south, Latin resistance to "Greek adjustments" was still great at the time of cited Rangoni's report, leading to Sixtus IV' intervention in January 1477.⁷⁷ The clashes were largely the result of a void of authority, which, in return, enabled "private arrangements",⁷⁸ needed at the border with the *Turk*, most hostile to Church Union, both prior and after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453.⁷⁹

⁶⁷ Pop 2020a, 41-52. The ignored source had already been published by Ludwig von Pastor in a "variant" of his *Acta inedita* (1904).

⁶⁸ In Pius' *Commentarii* (1614), XI.12, p. 297 (in Weber et alii 2020, I-2, no. 61, 194-200).

⁶⁹ The main question should be: why did Matthias "move" Rangoni to Eger, replacing him in Transylvania with the king's cousin, Ladislav Geréb, immediately after the much celebrated – in Rome too – victory of Stephen over the Ottomans in January 1475 (I Pop 2020b, 163-170). Matthias asked for Rangoni's promotion to cardinal, granted by Sixtus, only in December 1477 (Untergehrer 2012, 478), after the dreams of crusader victory had largely fade away (e.g. I Pop-Simon 2021, 43-61).

⁷⁰ Most recently: Andrić 2016, 202-227, in particular 210-215, 223-225.

⁷¹ Damian 2011, 119-140, 197.

⁷² Erdélyi 2011, 109-127, at 109-110, note 1; Szabó 2020, 159-165.

⁷³ Rangoni was a politician and a Franciscan. Franciscans were not known for their "Greek benevolence". Yet, compromises were possible, like in 1456 (see Andrić 2016, 226).

⁷⁴ Eschenloer 2003, 908.

⁷⁵ On the few documents: Diaconescu 1997, 48-51; Pop 2020, 69-72.

⁷⁶ Chiefly Poland built her hopes on these tensions. Noteworthy enough, these Jagiellonian Transylvanian designs were connected to "Byzantine plans" (Simon 2020, 105-113).

⁷⁷ VMHH, II, no. 657, p. 454. The pope reacted based on the information conveyed to him by Matthias' envoy to Venice and Rome, the Serbian Stephen Jakšić (see the Appendix, no. IV).

⁷⁸ Gastgeber 2009, 317-338.

⁷⁹ Blanchet 2008, 234-246, 378.

Up to a certain point, anti-Ottoman desperation and Greek-Latin tolerance went hand in hand.⁸⁰ In comparison to the 1450s, twenty years after the death of Capestrano (1456), the “atmosphere” seems – however – to have been more relaxed, evidently to the dissatisfaction of so-called Orthodox and Catholic hardliners.⁸¹ Even the attitude of Viennese Thomas Ebendorfer, the author of a most dark portrait of Vlad,⁸² towards Greek rite Christians was benevolent.⁸³

III. The Converted Christian Beast

This draws attention to the “ecumenical” nature of Vlad’s crimes in the so-called *German reports* (*Deutsche Berichte*) on his life, that were quite well-spread since before his death.⁸⁴ Vlad of Wallachia executed *heiden, juden, cristen, ketzen und Walchen*.⁸⁵ Schismatics were not explicitly listed among the victims, though the same *reports* focused at length on the cruel deeds of the voivode during his Danube campaign of early 1462 against the – Christian (i.e. Greek rite Bulgarians) and Muslim – Ottoman subjects of Mehmed II.⁸⁶ Additionally, Vlad had misled his own – Wallachian – people into that war with the *Turk*.⁸⁷

The same reports had made one thing very clear from their very beginning, in “Episode 1” of Vlad’s nefarious career.⁸⁸ Vlad and an unnamed brother had converted to (Latin) Christianity after John Hunyadi, regent of Hungary and Matthias’ father,

⁸⁰ This was made particularly clear by Petkov in his seminal, yet neglected study from 1995.

⁸¹ We recall in this context the policies of Mara Branković, George’s daughter, Murad II’s widow and Mehmed II’s trusted advisor. She arranged peace talks between Venice and the Porte, in 1475-1476 too, that did not involve Matthias or other “mid-way operatives” (e.g. Popović 2018, 774-783). Mara was also on “non-speaking” terms with her family in Hungary (Čuk 1977, 103-116). Her Athonite heirs were in the end Wallachians.

⁸² Ebendorfer 2003, 917-924.

⁸³ This was already noticed by Petkov 1995, 182.

⁸⁴ Annas-Paulus 2020, 102-104 (already in the years 1463-1468), 118-119. The *German reports* are – basically – defined by the absence of any reference (except one) to Vlad’s imprisonment by Matthias or to Vlad’s subsequent “rehabilitation”, as well as death (Annas-Paulus 2020, 193-218; for the edition of all preserved variants).

⁸⁵ Annas-Paulus 2020, 203 [= Episode 17]. The heretics (Hussites?) and the Wallachians (an ethnical name for schismatics?) placed among Vlad III’s victims may suggest that the listing had a chiefly rhetorical value. A closer look into the tactics employed by Matthias’ troops during his “Bohemian Crusade” (in 1468 or 1469) might prove relevant.

⁸⁶ According to the *German reports*, his campaign along the Lower Danube was slaughter. This took precedence over the – completely omitted – anti-Ottoman nature of Vlad’s attack.

⁸⁷ Annas-Paulus 2020, 209-210 [= Episode 25]. This accusation should be regarded in connection to the problematic reception of anti-Ottoman crusading in the Holy Roman-German Empire (Wolf 1999).

⁸⁸ Annas-Paulus 2020, 193 [= Episode 1]. [...] *Item der alt guebrantor* [John Hunyadi], *der hat den alten Dracol* [Vlad II Dracul] *lassen to^eten. Und der Dracol* [Vlad III the Impaller] *und sin bru^oder* [Radu III the Handsome/ Vlad IV the Monk?!], *die haben abtretten von irem globen und verheissen und geschworn, der cristen globen zu^e beschirmen un<d> zu^e halten* [...].

had executed their father, Vlad II *Dracul* (1447).⁸⁹ Historically speaking, this was impossible because at that time, *Dragula* was still in the Ottoman Empire.⁹⁰ His conversion predated his crimes and his rule and was not a redemption of sins (or a fall into the abyss, in the Russian *tales*) that came after his imprisonment (the punishment for his wrongdoings). Whatever crimes Vlad committed, he did so a Christian, even if a convert.

Three apparently divergent images emphasize the importance of the story. 1. Vlad ruled as a pious Greek rite ktetor and donor both in Wallachia and on Mount Athos (1456-1462).⁹¹ 2. After Lazar, the son of George Branković and Vuk's paternal uncle, was seriously considered as king of Hungary at the death of Albert of Habsburg (1439-1440),⁹² with Vuk began the new Branković line of – Greek rite – barons of Hungary.⁹³ 3. For Observant Franciscans, the validity of the Greek rite baptism was mitigated – to put it mildly⁹⁴ – even in a unionist frame, as in 1455 and the dispute between Giovanni da Capestrano and George Branković;⁹⁵ and, as late as 1476, Matthias had to halt Franciscan excesses in the Banat, at the old Serbian-Hungarian border⁹⁶. In sum, each story could be “flipped”: a Greek rite Christian could seat on the throne of Hungary and a Greek rite Christian could be subject to militant Latin rite persecution.⁹⁷

⁸⁹ On the (real) Wallachian events: Pall 1963, 1049-1072.

⁹⁰ He returned north of the Lower Danube only a year later (see also Cazacu 1971, 131-139).

⁹¹ The timing of the gestures was very precise (Simon 2021b, 35-39): in (1) 1457, after the beheading of Matthias' brother, Ladislas, the sworn enemy of Vlad, in (2) 1458, after Vlad's reconciliation with Matthias, the recently elected king of Hungary, and in (3) 1461, in Wallachia (where he apparently made amends for deposing and executing Wladislaw II in 1456) and on Athos (for the Philotheou Monastery, deemed *Albanian*, while Skanderbeg was on his Italian *condotta* in Naples' and Rome's service). “Likewise” John Hunyadi (following in the footsteps of Sigismund of Luxemburg and chiefly in 1444, before crossing the Danube and entering the road that led to Varna) and Matthias took care of Greek rite monasteries in Western Wallachia (*Oltenia*), the latter even on the eve of the planned (certainly according to rumours on the Bosphorus) – but postponed until 1476 – Wallachian return of Vlad (1473).

⁹² Cf. Pálosfálvi 2018, 85, note 40. Under Albert's – eventual – successor, Wladislaw III Jagiello of Poland, Church union played a key role in the attempted “reform” of the realm and in the anti-Ottoman combats that brought Christian fame to John Hunyadi (see Jefferson 2012, 55-68, 168-190, 263-271, 295-305; not flawless).

⁹³ In spite of the fact that Vuk died heirless (Ćirković 2004, 116).

⁹⁴ For an overview: Magina 2008, 285-289; Damian 2011, 184-193.

⁹⁵ This story Matthias knew all too well because it had stood at the core of his marriage to Elisabeth of Cilly (Andrić 2016, 207-208, with focus on John Hunyadi's misdoings).

⁹⁶ King Matthias' action led to Sixtus IV's cited intervention in early 1477 (VMHH, II, no. 657, p. 454; also in de Hurmuzaki 1891, no. 219, 244-245 (henceforth *Hurmuzaki*)).

⁹⁷ The same applied to Vlad's “post-prison conversion” in *German* and *Russian tales* on him.

In Vlad III's case (and possibly in that of Vuk as well), this may have meant that, at some point either in the early 1450s (when Vlad reconciled with John Hunyadi)⁹⁸ or in the early 1470s (when the former voivode was returned to the main stage),⁹⁹ the son of a member of the Order of the Dragon agreed to be re-baptized, that is to be properly baptized according to Latin rite rules.¹⁰⁰ But, according to "appendixes" of the Union of Florentine, changing rites was forbidden, and both 'Latins' (e.g. Pope Nicholas V)¹⁰¹ and 'Greeks' (e.g. Stephen III of Moldavia)¹⁰² reacted against it. At any rate, Vlad was on slippery ground in Wallachia, in particular after his main nemesis, his own brother, Radu III, wed *Maria Despina*,¹⁰³ most likely a niece of the

⁹⁸ The dating fluctuates between 1451/1452 and 1453/1454 (see Cazacu 2017, 72-77; new researches are needed). Nevertheless, according to the document discovered and analyzed by Nagy and Szilágyi in their previously cited study, it was in those years (prior to 1456) that Vlad would have wed John Hunyadi's (older) sister. This matrimony "coincided" thus with the two marriages of 1454 (early) and 1455 (August) between Matthias and Elisabeth (see the unique document in Erdélyi 2011, 109-110, note 1).

⁹⁹ In early 1477, Venice learnt that the Turks [...] *sono etiam corsi nella Valachia Maggiore, et di novo le hanno riacquistata tutta et hanno tagliato ad pezzi Dracula, capitaneo del dicto Re, con circa quattro mille persone, et similiter hanno morto Bozarab, Signore della dicta Valachia* [...] (Nagy-Nyáry 1876, no. 234, p. 339; henceforth MDE). This would indicate a joint-rule (between Vlad III and Basarab IV) motivated not only by local (between boyars) or "foreign" (between Matthias and Stephen) rivalries, but also by Vlad's re-baptism, which rendered him unfit for a Greek rite throne (thus, only Basarab was named lord of Wallachia, while Vlad was just Matthias' captain). However, neither Matthias' documents, nor Vlad's deeds issued in Wallachia in late 1476 reveal a ruler of Wallachia other than Vlad. In return, it is possible that the authority over the lands between the Lower Danube and the Carpathians was partitioned as suggested by the lines in Rangoni's cited report from March 1476: [...] *Tandem cum aque excreverint quemadmodum prius conceperat in Regnum Transalpinum cum Moldavis et ipsius Vualachie Maioris exercitu convenire intendit* [...].

¹⁰⁰ In May 1455, when the conflict between George Branković and Giovanni da Capestrano was approaching its climax, Ladislas Hunyadi, Matthias' elder brother, and Elisabeth of Cilly petitioned Pope Callixtus III to annul the marriage between Elisabeth and Matthias because the marriage had not been consummated (Erdélyi 2011, 109-110, note 1). Callixtus refused. Aside, from the quite shocking family story, the petition makes it clear that the marriage between Matthias and Elisabeth had not infringed any Latin rules. The question of Elisabeth's baptisms (Greek and Latin rite) should be reviewed. This would have a direct impact upon Vlad's "conversion".

¹⁰¹ [Odorico Rinaldi,] *Annales ecclesiastici ab anno MCXCVIII ubi desinit Cardinalis Baronibus auctore Odorico Raynaldo accedunt*, XVIII (Rome, 1693), *Ad annum 1449*, no. 10, p. 359 (reprinted in [Cesare Baronio,] *Caesaris S.R.E. Card. Baronii Annales ecclesiastici*, ed. A. Theiner, XVIII. *1424-1453* (Bar-le-Duc, 1874), *Ad annum 1449* [again (!)], no. 10, 523). The message sent to the Dominicans (not the Franciscans) was remarked and translated by Setton 1978, 105).

¹⁰² Bogdan 1913, nos. 176, 180, 411, 451.

¹⁰³ Apparently, the marriage was celebrated in Wallachia after Vlad lost the throne to Radu and was also "imprisoned" by King Matthias (for the wedding invitation sent by Radu to the

influential anti-unionist Sultana Mara Branković, George's daughter and Mehmed II's respected step-mother.¹⁰⁴

Hunyadi *Dracula* between Christian Compromise and Christian Rivalry

In the 1480s, in his Western conflict with Emperor Frederick III, Matthias, who had already started – successfully – claiming that he was related to the Ottoman sultans,¹⁰⁵ used without any hesitations the Serbian “crew”, that – much to the horror of Franciscan Rangoni – had fought at the side of late Vlad (1475-1476).¹⁰⁶ The “comments” regarding the faith of these soldiers were scarce and did not have an impact upon the contested Hunyadi monarch.¹⁰⁷ To say the very least, special rules apparently applied for these warriors of Greek rite,¹⁰⁸ even after Matthias was no longer crusading against the High Porte, his ally in fact after 1484/1486.¹⁰⁹ It would be perilous to expand the compromise(s) that were valid in the cases of these men to other “social strata” or “professions”.¹¹⁰ In a world still built on fear, it would be however unwise to discard or even to minimize the “tolerant union” that – most evidently – was operational through the very useful force of these men.¹¹¹

At the time of Rangoni's report from March 1476, East and West, largely due to the efforts of Venice, the strange ally of Matthias at war with the Porte since 1463,¹¹²

elite of the Transylvanian Saxon city of Sibiu, see Gündisch et alii 1981, VI, no. 3290, 123-124).

¹⁰⁴ On her, see also Iorga 1920, 121; Schmitt 2009, 44-45, 51-52.

¹⁰⁵ Simon 2011, 15-22.

¹⁰⁶ E.g. Wolf 2005, 151-152. Some of Matthias soldiers were also dressed-up as Turks to inspire supplementary fear.

¹⁰⁷ E.g. Unrest 1957, 128 ([...] *darunder Retzen und recht Turckhen warn, die des kunigs waren* [...] mid-1482); Stauber 1991, 17-54, at 37 (M was supported by [...] *am maysten Ungern, Pechaim, Walachen, Ratzsen und Hussaren* [...] *und villeicht Turken und ungelaubig* [...]; late 1485). Seemingly, for the Greek rite Christians had not been “taken” from the body of the Latin rite Church, they were viewed – the closer one came in particular to German-speaking parts – as a lesser problem than (chiefly) the Hussite ‘heretics’.

¹⁰⁸ The issue seemingly long predated Vlad III's rule, who himself was the son of knight of the Order of the Dragon (Windecke 1893, 294). Vlad II's illegitimate father, Mircea I (never accused of being a schismatic), apparently had his own order of knights in the 1390s into which he inducted a Moravian nobleman, who was fighting the Turks in Wallachia (see Rohlik 2007: 155-174, at 166). According to Jan Dugosz, Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Greek, Serbian or Wallachian knights competed in the joust organized in Buda, in the honour of King Wladislaw II Jagiello of Poland, in 1412 (after the foundation of the Order of the Dragon) by Sigismund of Luxemburg (Przedziecki 1878, 141).

¹⁰⁹ Salihović 2019: 93-120; Pálosfálvi 2018, 278, 280-284.

¹¹⁰ An interesting example: Marek 2016, 65-76.

¹¹¹ To this picture, we should add the proven – since the days of the Council of Basel – need for Eastern (Greek rite) support during Western (Latin rite) conflicts (see in this respect two reference works: Gill 1959, 83-84; Stieber 1978, 200-202).

¹¹² See Pop-Simon 2015, 5-66 (with additional data).

had witnessed over the past three years the crusader rise – “under their own banner” – of the admittedly Greek rite Wallachians.¹¹³ As Rangoni too wrote to Sixtus IV in early spring 1476, the heavy anti-Ottoman fighting was to be carried in the lands of those Wallachians.¹¹⁴ Still, he said nothing about the main figure among the Wallachians, a figure that was not Vlad, but Stephen of Moldavia. Appointed ‘athlete of the Christian faith’ by Sixtus prior to Matthias’ much celebrated conquest of Šabac (February 15, 1476),¹¹⁵ Stephen was set to embark on a conflict over crusader subsidies and monarchic rewards with Vlad’s Hunyadi protector (this dispute ultimately ruined the chances of vanquishing Mehmed II that summer).¹¹⁶

Until 1472-1473,¹¹⁷ except for some “incidents” in the mid-1460s¹¹⁸ Stephen had been primarily associated with the anti-unionist pro-Ottoman Greek-rite camp and had proven to be a largely loyal Ottoman vassal.¹¹⁹ Then, Stephen removed the Moldavian hierarchs from his princely council,¹²⁰ and started constantly attacking pro-Ottoman Wallachia, until the Albanian army of the sultan lifted the siege of Venetian Scutari and moved against Stephen.¹²¹ The result was a complete triumph for him (according to the statement made by Mara Brankovic in front of the Venetian envoy sent afterwards to the Porte, the Turks had never suffered a greater defeat¹²²). Sixtus IV embraced him and called for Christian support for Stephen, more than “a new Skanderbeg”.¹²³

According to the Papal encyclical from July 1, 1475 (preserved only in the copy sent to Ludovico III il *Turco* Gonzaga, margrave of Mantua), ‘[...] if Our beloved son, the noble man Stephen Voivode, who recently inflicted a major massacre and loss to the Turks through his victory, felt that he was abandoned by the Christians and deprived of aids, and would start to back down, God forbid!, how great peril the Hungarians and the most faithful German people, and the rest of Christendom, would

¹¹³ For an overview, Housley 2012, 33-34; Pilat-Cristea 2017, 143-144.

¹¹⁴ See also the discussion on (the) Wallachia(s) in the notes on the letter, in Appendix, no. III.

¹¹⁵ On the siege, see the lengthily presentation in Pálosfálvi 2018, 243-253.

¹¹⁶ Simon 2004, 205-224.

¹¹⁷ Until roughly Vlad’s “release from prison” and Stephen’s Crimean marriage to Mary of Theodoro in autumn 1472 (on the context, see also Pilat-Cristea 2017, 143-149).

¹¹⁸ They led to Matthias’ Moldavian campaign of 1467. He had been betrayed by Stephen, involved in the Hungarian plot that had prevented the king from aiding Skanderbeg, re-attacked by Mehmed (Simon 2012, 75-94).

¹¹⁹ Berindei 1986, 47-72. In August 1473, his men even joined Mehmed’s army in Asia Minor on the eventually victorious campaign against Usun Hassan, Christendom’s main anti-Ottoman hope until then (see Simon 2016, 53-68, at 58).

¹²⁰ In October 1473, as already noticed by Ursu 1925, 425).

¹²¹ Matthias (too) was paid by Venice for his contribution to the Ottoman retreat (Predelli 1901, no. XVI-73, p. 215). He received 40,000 ducats on October 31, 1474.

¹²² Sagredo 1843, 112.

¹²³ This was abundantly made clear by his subsequent – crusader – disputes with Matthias.

suffer [...]'.¹²⁴ The pope's concerns had been fuelled by – naturally – the doge of Venice, Pietro Mocenigo. Sixtus IV did not fail to mention that. In return, he said nothing about Matthias', Stephen's "crusader superior" and suzerain.¹²⁵ With Vlad back on the front, Matthias was in fact caught – before even facing Mehmed – between "a madman" and "a challenger", both of the Greek rite. In this respect, Rangoni did an admirable job of advocating the case of his king.

When calling-out for support for Stephen III, Sixtus IV did not mention that the ruler was a Greek rite Christian. The voivode was his son, like the lords of Italian Venice or Mantua. No other nuances were inserted in the Papal call. In November 1474, less than a year earlier, Stephen had acknowledged Sixtus' authority.¹²⁶ For Sixtus, that was enough. Seemingly, the Florentine union had served its purpose. Sixtus made this clear at the start of 1477, after a year of crusader failures. His Hungarian "instructions" on the Greek rite Christians mentioned neither the schism nor the union. Tolerance was advised so that all Christians should one day be Catholics.¹²⁷ In respect, the 'Germans' were correct: voivode Vlad III of Wallachia was the monster of one – single- Christian faith.

This may explain why his deeds did not lead to a collapse of the unstable Christian compromise at the Danube borders of the Ottoman Empire. Vlad III was a Greek-Latin *Golem* (officially by calling, not by making), whose death was later lamented by both King Matthias and Stephen III. German and Russian words then tailored Vlad's "conversion" to suit the extremes, Latin and Greek.

Appendix

I. Rome, September 6, 1448

Pope Nicholas V to the inquisitor and to the provincial of the Dominican Province of Greece¹²⁸

([Cesare Baronio,] *Caesaris S.R.E. Card. Baronii Annales ecclesiastici*, ed. Augustin Theiner, XVIII. *1424-1453* (Bar-le-Duc, 1874), *Ad annum 1449* (!), no. 10, p. 523)¹²⁹

Dilectis filiis haereticae pravitatis inquisitori et provinciali provinciae Graeciae Ordinis Praedicatorum, salutem.// Pervenit ad aures nostras, quod in locis, quae

¹²⁴ ASMa, A.G., E. Affari esteri, XXV. *Roma*, busta 834. *1404-1499*, nn (in the Appendix, no. II).

¹²⁵ In the context, see also Bogdan 1913, II, nos. 144-146, 324-336.

¹²⁶ Iorga 1914-1915, 1-76, in the Appendix, no. 11, 33.

¹²⁷ VMHH, II, no. 657, p. 454. The message ended: [...] *ut sic presentes et futuri ad amplectendum ritum catholicum alluciantur et incitentur* [...]. There should not have been any doubt about that.

¹²⁸ Possibly: Tomasso de Gubbio, from Genoese Caffa (in Crimea), and/ or Simon, from Venetian Candia on Crete (Delacroix-Besnier 1997, 448-449; Setton 1978, 105, note 92).

¹²⁹ Unfortunately, none of the editions indicate the signature of the much neglected message.

Catholicis in Graecia subjecta sunt, multi Catholici unionis praetextu ad Graecos imprudenter transcunt ritus. Mirati admodum sumus, mirarique non desinimus nescientes quid sit, quod eos a consuetudine ac ritibus, in quibus nati nutritique sunt, in alienigenarum ritus transposuit. Nam etsi laudabiles Orientalis Ecclesiae ritus sint, non licet tamen Ecclesiarum ritus permiscere, neque id nunquam sacrosancta Synodus Florentina permisit. Quas ob res nos quibus, quamvis immeritis, hujusmodi rerum omnium cura divinitus imposita est, cupientes citius ne malum longius serpat, huic rei providere, vobis et utriusque vestrum sub virtute sanctae obedientiae districte mandamus, ut auctoritate Apostolica in omnibus locis praedictis, cum ea ex officio vestro visitabitur, permixtionem rituum omnino prohibeatis, invocato ad hoc, si opus fuerit auxilio brachii saecularis.¹³⁰ Datum Romae apud Sanctum Potentianam in anno etc. MCDXLVIII, VIII idus Septembris. Pontificatus nostri anno secundo.

II. Rome, July 1 1475

Pope Sixtus IV to Ludovico III *il Turco* Gonzaga, margrave of Mantua
(Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Mantua, Archivio Gonzaga, E. Affari esteri, XXV.
Roma, busta 834. 1404-1499, not numbered)¹³¹

Dilecte fili, salutem et apostolicam benedictionem!// Novissime litteris dilecti filij nobilis viri Petri Mocenigo, ducis Venetiarum,¹³² accepimus inmanem illum Turchum Christiani nominis hostem acerrimum classem validam et instructissimam retinere, quam sicut signis et aliquorum relatione habetur per Mare Maius¹³³ versus partes Moldaviae, pro iniurijs ulciscendis cladis ibidem susceptae convertere intendit. Ea denuntiatio nos merito commovit ad commiserationem calamitatis Christianae et ad hec ipsa pericula consideranda. Primum igitur quod ad nostrum pastorale attinet officium supplices Deum oravimus et per alias personas Deo acceptas preces effundi fecimus, ut ipse qui prepotens est, pro sui nominis gloria decertantibus assistat animos Catholicorum regum et principum ac fidelium populorum uniat, ut hic

¹³⁰ In 1500, amidst major political tensions, Wladislaw II Jagiello of Hungary confiscated the lands of the nobles of Porecha in the Banat, for they had abandoned ‘the religion of the Christian faith’ and joined ‘the reprehensible schismatic sect of the Wallachians or of the Serbians’ (*Hurmuzaki*, II-2, no. 376, 448). The reasons behind the (costly) decision of the nobles remain unknown.

¹³¹ The document (Setton 1978, 320, note 23) was first published in Pop-Simon 2021a, 65-80, in the Appendix, no. 2, pp. 77-78). No other copies of the letter are known to us.

¹³² As suggested by Mara Branković too in April 1475 (Malipiero, *Annali Veneti*, 112), Pietro Mocenigo, doge of Venice, a seasoned soldier (Cippico 2016, XIX-XXIII), used Stephen III’s anti-Ottoman victory of Vaslui (January 1475) to conclude a six-month truce with the sultan. This allowed Mehmed to take Genoese Caffa in the Crimea (June 1475) and to besiege Stephen III’s Pontic and Danubian harbours (Simon 2011a, 383-396). The fall of Caffa also led to the treaty of Iași-Buda (August 1475). Stephen re-acknowledged Matthias as his suzerain. Then, by spring 1476, in front of Sixtus IV, he refused to admit that king was his lord and master.

¹³³ Black Sea. For Papal Pontic anti-Ottoman *topoi*: Arner 2004, no. 101, 111-112.

truculentissimus hostis Christianorum viribus repellatur, tue vere excellentie significandum duximus et copiam litterarum memorati ducis presentibus introcludi fecimus, ut plane intelligas quanto in discrimine non solum Moldavie partes, verum etiam omnium Christianorum versentur, velis itaque prout Catholicum principem debet de aliquo subsidio cogitare et illis partibus bello laborantibus, prout expedire videris ope tua succurrere. Nos vero considerantes quod ad tantam belli molem sustinendam nostre et ecclesie facultates nullomodo sufficerent, concurrentibus auxilijs Christianorum presidia exhibere, iuxta vires nostras pollicemur, neque aliquo pacto unacum alijs huic Dei et fidei cause deerimus. Cogitare et ante oculos tuos ponere velis quod si dilectus filius, nobilis vir Stephanus Vayvoda, qui nuper victoria potitus stragem et iacturam maximam Turchis intulit, ab eisdem bello lacesitus Christianorum auxilijs se destitutum senserit, et loco ceserit, quod Deus avertat, quantis periculis Ungari¹³⁴ et Germanorum populi¹³⁵ devotissimi et reliqua Christianitas subiacerent. Quare eandem excellentiam tuam, per viscera misericordie Dei nostri et pro ipsius Dei et Christiani nominis reverentia, hortamur in Domino ac de precamur, ut iuxta vires tuas aliquam subventionem facere velis, prout tue conscientie visum fuerit. In quo Deo in primis gratissimum obsequium prestabis eritque anime tue ad modum salutare et ad gloriam ac laudem tui nominis cedit. Datum Rome, apud Sanctumpetrum, sub annulo piscatoris, die prima Iulij, MCCCCLXXV, pontificatus nostri, anno quarto.// Marcellus.¹³⁶

<Verso:>*Dilecto filio nobili viro Ludovico de Gonzaga, marchioni Mantue.*¹³⁷

III. Buda, March 7, 1476

Gabriele Rangoni, bishop of Eger, to Pope Sixtus IV

(identic copies: Archivio di Stato di Milano, Milan, Archivio Visconteo-Sforzesco/ Ducale Sforzesco, Potenze Estere, Ungheria, cart. 650. 1452-1489, fasc. 22. 1476, not numbered Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Mantua, Archivio Gonzaga, E. Affari esteri, V. Ungheria, busta 533. 1395-1692, not numbered)¹³⁸

¹³⁴ The pope did not name Matthias, officially Stephen's suzerain. The absence of the lord of the *German people*, Emperor Frederick III of Habsburg, Matthias' nemesis, was thus natural.

¹³⁵ In this Western context, see the (in)famous Giovanni Mario Filelfo, Manetti 1978, 196-197, 202 (1475-1476).

¹³⁶ Secretary Marcello de' Rustici (Lee 1978, 59).

¹³⁷ Lazzarini 2006, *sub voce*. Earlier in March, Ludovico had been informed by Giampietro Arrivabene, Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga's secretary, that *duca Stephano vaivoda*, appointed king of Bosnia by Matthias was to be crowned king in Rome by Pope Sixtus IV (A. Simon, "Duca Stephano vaivoda intitolato re <de Bosna>dal Re de Hungaria și <Nicolaus>Bosniae et Valachiae Rex: despre identitatea regală a valahilor," in Bolovan et alii 2021, 147-174); Stephen thus – erroneously – "became" the third or even fourth king of Bosnia at that time).

¹³⁸ For various editions, based on the Milanese copy, see Weber et alii 2020, I, no. 89, 116.

Beatissime pater et clementissime domine. Post pedum oscula Beatorum. Obtenta feliciter munitissima arce Sabacz¹³⁹ significaveram sanctitati vestrae regiam maiestatem decrevisse mittere ad devastandam civitatem Sebernicze¹⁴⁰ argentifodinis famosam, et omnem circumcirca regionem, quod sine ducibus illustri Boch, despoto Rascie, magnifico Ladislao, Dragula dicto, et quibusdam aliis capitaneis effecit. Hi nanque traiecto clam Savo subito incurso omnia iuxta vota et mandata regia complevere, quemadmodum hesterno die a nuntio dicti dispoti non vulgari letissimis animis accepimus; quomodo vero deus illi incursioni faverit vestre sanctitati perstringam. Cum pervenissent ipsi duces cum exercitu suo prope dictam civitatem nihil villarum aut oppidorum in via vastantes noctuque habitatam terram per montes et silvas transeuntes, premissi sunt quinquaginta et centum equites viri delecti in habitu Turchorum qui iussu ducum paulo ante diluculum exteriora civitatis suburbia nihil hostilitatis intentantes ingressi sunt; erat ille dies fori multusque hominum vicinorum locorum conventus, dum vero quisque, ut moris est, rebus venalibus intendit, premissique milites veluti Turci se se ceteris comiscunt, et nihil suspicionis habetur, impetu facto despotos cum aliis in oppidum irruunt, supra quingentos capiunt, reliquos usque ad internitionem occidunt; erat enim oppidum VII centum domorum, ubi preda magna facta est: centum viginti septem milia asperorum, quinque salme argenti, hec cesaris erant, merces multe, panni serici et omnis generis, cum esset emporium regionis, reperta sunt, et ut ille nuntius rettulit argenti massas, quas in civium domibus inveniebant, milites securibus inter se se dividebant. Demum facta preda et cum capturis remissa, oppidum igne consumunt. Inde autem eodem animo contra oppidum Cuzelath¹⁴¹ dictum quod tribus miliaribus hungaricis distabat festinantes tripartitis aciebus incedebant; habuerunt hominum tantum quinque millia, cumque ad silvam quandam vicinam loco pervenissent, iamque cives illi vicine vastationis territi occurrissent, et arbores pro obstruendis viis, ne equites pertransirent starent, hoc singulari dolo circumventi sunt; dimissi namque sunt quadringenti qui pedes cum illis manus consererent et potius occuparent quam impugnarent; erant illi duo millia, interea festinant cum exercitu duces et remotioribus locis silvam pertranseunt, a tergo hostibus veniunt, omnes nullo evadente concidunt, cadavera in grandem accervum comportantes, multosque palis affigentes, ut eorum horrido spectaculo Turci si quando supervenirent in terrorem verterentur; his peractis contra Savonich¹⁴² properant. Savonite autem sicut et Cuzalite silvam intermediam hostium furore percepto succidere et vias obstruere ceperant. Sed superveniente exercitu in fugam conversi ad locum tutum confugerunt, ibi despotos sagitta est in pede vulneratus, de cuius tamen salute bene speratur. Tunc demum reverti nostri ceperunt nihil villarum nihil domorum intactum relinquentes,

¹³⁹ Šabac (see also Fine 1995, 181-196, here at 190-191).

¹⁴⁰ Srebrenica (see also MDE, II, no. 237, 345; Rangoni to Sixtus from Šabac, on February 15).

¹⁴¹ Kušlat (see

http://old.kons.gov.ba/main.php?id_struct=50&lang=4&action=view&id=2551).

¹⁴² Zvornik (http://old.kons.gov.ba/main.php?id_struct=50&lang=4&action=view&id=2551).

omnia ferro et igne consumpserunt. Aiunt beatissime pater qui regionem noverunt si centum miliaribus Turciam versus irruissent, non potuisse Turcis graviora damna intulisse. Sed Dragule crudelitatem non pertransibo a qua toti orbi notissimus est. Nam manibus suis membratim captos Turcos dividens ad palos frustas figebat, inquiens: cum hec Turci venientes viderint, territi terga nobis dabunt et fugient; hic est ille qui silvas impalatorum hominum fecit. Asserunt primi huius regni eum ultra centum millia hominum cum waivodatui Transalpino¹⁴³ preesset, palis et aliis horrende mortis suppliciis occidisse, ob quam rem maiestas regia ipsum XV annis in artissimo carcere tenuit, sed, nec ibi ferritatis oblitus, mures capiebat, et membratim divisos parvis ligneis claviculis, prout homines palis consuevit, affigebat. Tandem vero superiori anno liberum fecit et ad expeditionem in Turcos destinavit, quibus singulari est terrori. Addit nuntius iussu Basse Alibek¹⁴⁴ tenere se in Montibus Nigris.¹⁴⁵ Ipsum vero post ubi subvenire Sabocz nequivit regressum ad consulendum cesarem. Ex his clare intelligitur quanti comodi obtentio Sabocz esse iam ceperit, ex qua non solum incursiones Turcorum prohibite sunt, sed contra eos incursiones parate, quantequae utilitatis rei publice Christiane sit allatura, cum ex illo loco quicquid in regno Bozne et vicinis regionibus Turcus possidet turbari maxime possit. Verum etiam considerandum puto quam gravi animo hec turcus sit laturus, et quo apparatu in vindictam nisi ei potenter obviatum fuerit exiturus; regia maiestas dispositis qui Sabacz rehedificent, et magis quam prius muniant, quique pontes super Savo et Danubio componant, data aliquali respiratione militibus qui sub Sabacz fuerunt, hue velocissime concessit percepto obitu regentis Castrum Budensem¹⁴⁶, in cuius manu omnis regius thesaurus erat; sed et thesaurarius vir magnus et potens hesterno die cum magna exequiarum pompa et honore presentie regie sepultus est. His ordinatis et quibusdam aliis occurrentibus negotiis ad prosequendum que cepit paucis post diebus convolabit. Nam et pontes ipsi iam parari ceperunt, exercitus quoque non longe a Bello Grado¹⁴⁷ existit. Spero in Dei bonitate quod Serviam maxima in parte prius quam Turchus occurrere possit devastabit. Tandem cum aque excreverint quemadmodum prius conceperat in regnum Transalpinum cum Moldavis et ipsius Vualachie maioris¹⁴⁸ exercitu convenire intendit. Si autem has tantas

¹⁴³ ‘The Transalpine voivodate’, the traditional Hungarian designation for Wallachia proper since the Angevines. This “official name” was also used by the voivodes in their Latin charters.

¹⁴⁴ Ali Mihaloğlu, bey of Vidin and Smederevo, who had raided Oradea in February 1474 (on this Serbian “renegade”, see already Zirojević 1971, 9-27; Decei 1974, 296-301).

¹⁴⁵ Montenegro or more likely the Crna Gora (the Black Mountain), just north-east of Mostar.

¹⁴⁶ John Ernuzst/ Hampó († after March 2-prior to March 7, 1476), a Viennese converted Jew and Matthias’ trustee, who was also ban of Slavonia at that time (Kubinyi 2008, 78).

¹⁴⁷ Belgrade. Rangoni did not use the Latinized Hungarian name *Nandoralba* (Nándorfehérvár).

¹⁴⁸ Rangoni too distinguished between the ‘Transalpine land’ or ‘kingdom’ (Wallachia proper, based on the union between Western Wallachia/ Oltenia and Eastern Wallachia/ Muntenia) and ‘Greater Wallachia’, which most likely designated the parts east of the river Olt. This may

impensas diu sufferre possit non est opus ut amplius repplicem: si quid acturi sunt quibus attinet, moras tollant, quia nocuit semper differre paratis. Comendo me humiliter pedibus beatissimis vestre sanctitatis quam Altissimus conservare dignetur in evum pro felici Regimine Ecclesie Sue Sancte. Bude, VIIa Martii MCCCCLXXVI.// Eiusdem Vestre Sanctitatis humillima creatura Gabriel, episcopus Agriensis.

IV. Rome, January 28, 1477

Pope Sixtus IV to the bishops, the prelates and the clergymen in the Kingdom of Hungary and elsewhere

(Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Vatican City, Registra Vaticana, [no.] 667, f. 182^r)¹⁴⁹

Sixtus Episcopus etc. Universis et singulis Episcopis, prelati et ordinariis in Regno Hungarie et alibi constitutis salutem etc. Relatione dilecti filii nobilis viri Stephani Iakeyta Carissimi in Christo filii nostri Mathie Ungarie et Bohemie Regis Illustris oratoris,¹⁵⁰ percepimus, quod in ea parte Hungarie, que Servie est contermina, multi christiani ritu Greco baptizati inter catholicos habitant, illisque sunt permixti, quos ipsi catholici evitare, et ut male baptizatos apud populum in predicationibus asserere solent. Quo fit, ut iidem christiani affligantur plerumque et scandalum in suis conscientiis patiantur, id quod potius reipublice christiane obsit, quam fidei orthodoxe commodum vel emolumentum importet.¹⁵¹ Nos ergo paterno affectu considerantes, quod hii, qui christianam fidem sectantur, potius sunt humanitate et mansuetudine ab erroribus, si quibus imbuti sunt, revocandi, quam acerbè affligendi aut reiiciendi, quodque sancte recordationis Romani pontifices predecessores nostri alias super hoc providerunt,¹⁵² duximus pro cura pastoralis officii huic rei provide occurrendum, ut quo isti humanius habiti et tractati fuerint, eo libentius, qui teterrimo dominatu Turchorum premuntur, et sub eorum ritu sunt baptizati, ad alios transeant christianos. Quocirca vobis tenore presentium iniungimus, et apostolica auctoritate mandamus, quatenus huiusmodi christianos in vestris diocesis constitutos non

explain apparent division of power between Vlad III and Basarab IV at the end of that year (for the Wallachian divisions in the 1470s and 1480s: A Simon 2021c, 153-168).

¹⁴⁹ Editions: VMHH, II, no. 657, 454 (republished in *Hurmuzaki*, II-2, no. 219, 244-245).

¹⁵⁰ The envoy was the Serbian nobleman Stephen Jakšić, spelled also *Jakchita* (Fraknoi 1898, 74, note 4), the brother of Matthias' better known diplomat Dmítar. The brothers, first of all men of arms, had settled in the Hungarian county of Cenad (1464). They fought for Matthias from Serbia and Bosnia to Bohemia and Transylvania (Krstić 2017, 129-163, at 145-148). Matthias' choice of Stephen Jakšić as his Italian envoy in autumn 1476 (together with Michael Szántai, canon of Buda) was not accidental and was of impact (it was not without reason that Sixtus did not mention Szántai in the message to his "superiors").

¹⁵¹ In particular, at the border with Serbia, tensions were otherwise high between *Latins* and *Greeks*. Hence, Sixtus emphasized that this was only a compromise to ease to full conversion (see also A Simon 2023, 277-292).

¹⁵² The pope turned to precedents: to the unspecified decisions of his unnamed predecessors.

permittatis clam vel palam a predicatoribus,¹⁵³ vel aliis quibuscumque prefata occasione vexari, sed eos benigne, mansueteque tolerantes, in vestris cimiteriis et ecclesiis, dum ad hoc fueritis requisiti, humari sepeliri que permittatis, deficienteque ritus eorum sacerdote, in confessionibus audiri, absolvique facere in forma Romane ecclesie debeat, nec sacramentum baptismatis ritu Romano, dum requisiti fueritis, denegatis, ut sic presentes et futuri ad amplectendum ritum catholicum alliciantur et incitentur.¹⁵⁴ Datum Rome apud sanctum Petrum. Anno Incarnationis dominice millesimo quadringentesimo septuagesimo sexto. Quinto Kalendas Februarii. Pontificatus nostri Anno Sexto.

¹⁵³ Sixtus IV alluded to the Franciscans the only *preachers* active in those Serbian parts of the Hungarian realm (Magina 2008, 283-294). The message was evidently not well received by local Franciscans. Within a year, they apparently secured from Matthias (1478) the confirmation of the “anti-schismatic” rights granted to them by Sigismund of Luxemburg (1428), based on Louis I of Anjou’s harsh decisions (1366). The authenticity of the documents, especially Matthias’ confirmation, is however questionable (see also Pop 2020, 265).

¹⁵⁴ In essence, Sixtus IV allowed *the commingling of rites* (to use Nicholas V’ words) in the hope that those from today, as well as from tomorrow, will be drawn and incited to embrace the Catholic rite. The problem seems to have been more widespread and the Greek rite population far too numerous. In 1479, Matthias had to entrust the Greek rite Christians spread from the Banat – across Transylvania – to Maramureş to the metropolite of Belgrade (de Apşa 1900, no. 313, 536). The problem was sorted only in the 1480s, when the *Archbishopric of Severin and Transylvania*, was established, “for the” Wallachians, and the Bishopric of Mukachevo (Munkács) was “revived”, “for the” Ruthenians (Rus 2010, 63-70). These royal solutions proved superior to the one attempted with the *uniata* Makarios (a refuge from Halych, settled in the Hunedoara area in the 1460s). Rangoni’s stand in these matters, as Latin bishop of Transylvania (1472-1475), is open only to speculations.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

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Key words: *Cultural Heritage, China, strategies, legislation, preservation*

Abstract: *This paper explores the multifaceted landscape of Chinese cultural heritage management, emphasizing the critical role of state authorities in safeguarding cultural assets. The study delves into the historical evolution of Chinese cultural heritage management, tracing its roots from ancient practices to contemporary legislative efforts. It also offers a brief incursion into the history and culture of China. By analysing successful models from other countries, this research aims to provide valuable insights and strategies for enhancing Romania's cultural heritage protection. The findings advocate for a holistic approach to heritage management, aligning Romania with global standards and fostering a renewed commitment to cultural preservation.*

Cultural heritage reflects a people's identity, making its protection and effective management a collective responsibility for all stakeholders involved in its preservation. This responsibility for safeguarding cultural heritage often rests with state authorities, most of the time, but not always, in collaboration with experts, NGOs, and other members of civil society. However, the outcomes, methods, and resources allocated vary significantly from one country or region to another. It is imperative to note that this collective goal, while theoretically articulated, necessitates practical considerations. The protection and management of heritage hinge upon the availability of essential financial resources and the institutional prioritization of heritage protection.

Over time the list of archaeological sites, monuments, and movable cultural assets requiring protection, steadily expands; unfortunately, the corresponding financial resources seldom witness a proportional increase. Hence, cultural heritage management should incorporate commercial objectives that contribute to financial gains. Establishing coherent heritage legislation that comprehensively addresses all relevant aspects, coupled with functional mechanisms to enforce these laws, is crucial for effective management.

Unfortunately, the approach to cultural heritage management in Romania leaves much to be desired. Consider, for instance, the state's handling of issues

like treasure hunting¹, resulting in a significant number of heritage objects illicitly leaving the country and falling into the hands of criminal groups on the black market. Additionally, numerous archaeological sites remain neglected, without preservation plans, and existing heritage legislation lacks completeness and consistency². In this context, research endeavours such as this one, scrutinizing heritage protection and management practices in other countries, serve to identify potential models for adaptation, impart valuable lessons, and caution against avoidable mistakes.

Brief Insight into China's History and Culture

Summarizing the essential aspects of Chinese culture and the pivotal moments in its history is a complex endeavour. This complexity arises from the vast array of documentation available and the diverse opinions and theories that have been developed. However, such an approach is necessary for this study, as the intricacies of cultural heritage management in China are deeply influenced by its multifaceted history and culture, as well as the diversity of academic perspectives.

Domestically, there is a tendency to view Chinese culture and history as a cohesive whole, transitioning seamlessly from one dynasty to another. This perspective is rooted in the traditional theory that Chinese culture originated in the Yellow River valley and spread across the territory of modern China. The Chinese Communist Party even asserts that “Chinese civilization is the only great civilization in the world to have continuously developed to the present day and to have done so as a country.”³ However, archaeological discoveries reveal a more complex reality, with a mosaic of Neolithic cultures that developed multiple centres of civilization, influencing each other.

China’s political environment often promotes a narrative of linguistic, cultural, and spiritual unity, rarely influenced by external factors. In reality, such unity has existed for perhaps only half of the two-millennial history of imperial dynasties, with China frequently under the rule of foreign dynasties. Despite this, the importance of the diverse cultures that emerged within the current territory of China remains significant, as they constitute one of the cradles of civilization.⁴

This brief exploration of China’s history and culture links to the beginnings and evolution of modern Chinese archaeology, particularly the major excavations of the 1920s. These excavations, focusing on the Palaeolithic and Neolithic eras, aimed to unravel the origins and identity of modern China. Interest in these periods persisted until the 1980s, with significant investments in research at sites such as the Zhoukoudian cave, where the famous Peking Man was discovered, and the Neolithic settlement of Banpo near Xi’an. The latter site

¹ Ciută 2021, *passim*.

² Ciută 2014, *passim*.

³ Qun 2023.

⁴ Rossabi 2014, 7.

gained prominence after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, as its discoveries seemed to support Marxist theories related to the birth of civilizations, indicating an egalitarian society without social classes.⁵

Understanding the evolution of Chinese civilization requires a chronological framework and a system of periodization, which I will provide in the table below.

	Dates	Period	Dynasty	Notes
1	c. 6000 - 2000 BCE	Neolithic Age		
2	c. 2000 - 1520 BCE	Xia		
3	c. 1520 - 1030 BCE	Shang		
4	c. 1030 - 722 BCE	Western Zhou period	Zhou Dynasty	
5	c. 722 – 480 BCE	Spring and Autumn period		
6	480 – 221 BCE	Warring States period		
7	221 – 207 BCE	Qin Dynasty	Qin Dynasty	
8	202 BCE – 9 CE	Western Han	Han Dynasty	
9	9 – 23 CE	Xin interregnum		
10	25 – 220 CE	Eastern Han		
11	221 – 265 CE	Three Kingdoms period	Three Kingdoms	Period of partition
12	221 – 264 CE	Shu (Han)		

⁵ Elisseff 2002, 11.

13	220 – 264 CE	Wei		
14	222 – 280 CE	Wu		
15	265 – 317 CE	Western Jin	Jin Dynasty	
16	317 – 420 CE	Eastern Jin		
17	420 – 479 CE	Liu-Song Dynasty		
18	479 – 502 CE	Qi Dynasty	Northern and Southern Dynasties	Period of partition
19	502 – 557 CE	Liang Dynasty		
20	557 – 587 CE	Chen Dynasty		
21	386 – 535 CE	Northern Wei		
22	535 – 554 CE	Western Wei		
23	534 – 543 CE	Eastern Wei		
24	550 – 577 CE	Northern Qi Dynasty		
25	557 – 581 CE	Northern Zhou Dynasty		
26	581 – 618 CE	Sui Dynasty	Sui Dynasty	
27	618 – 906 CE	Tang Dynasty	Tang Dynasty	
28	907 – 960 CE	Five Dynasty period	Liang, Tang, Jin, Han, Zhou	
29	907 – 1125 CE	Liao Dynasty	Liao Dynasty	Qidan Tartar
30	1144 – 1211 CE	West Liao Dynasty	West Liao Dynasty	Qara - Khitai
31	990 – 1227 CE	Xi Xia State		Tangut Tibetan
32	960 – 1126 CE	Northern Song Dynasty	Northern Song Dynasty	

33	1127 – 1279 CE	Southern Song Dynasty	Southern Song Dynasty	
34	1115 – 1234 CE	Jin Dynasty	Jin Dynasty	Jurchen Tartar
35	1260 – 1368 CE	Yuan Dynasty	Yuan Dynasty	Mongol
36	1368 – 1644 CE	Ming Dynasty	Ming Dynasty	
37	1644 – 1911 CE	Qing Dynasty	Qing Dynasty	Manchu
38	1911 - 1949	Republic of China	Republic of China	
39	1949 - Present	People’s Republic of China	People’s Republic of China	

Table 1. Periodization of Chinese history⁶.

Researchers view Chinese history through the lens of dynastic cycles, where imperial dynasties rise, develop, and fall, giving way to new dynasties, each characterized by specific historical events and cultural aspects. This cyclical nature influences the archaeological context and the state of conservation of discovered artifacts. It may seem surprising that a country with over 4,000 years of history does not preserve ancient structures similar to those in Egypt or Central America. This is largely due to the historical practice of total destruction during dynastic transitions, where new dynasties sought to erase all traces of their predecessors. An illustrative example is the total destruction of the Qin dynasty palace by Xiang Yu, leading to the burning of Xiangyang for over three months. Consequently, China has few localities with multiple habitation levels and lacks large ancient structures, with notable exceptions such as the Great Wall and the Grand Canal.⁷

The origins of Chinese history can be traced to its two major rivers: the Yellow River and the Yangtze. Chinese creation myths mention Nuwa and Fuxi, two half-human, half-dragon deities who moulded people from clay.⁸ The fertile plains of these rivers attracted large populations since the Neolithic era, enabling the cultivation of diverse crops and the raising of animals. This gave rise to cultures such as the Dawenkou⁹ (4100-2600 BCE), Liangzhu¹⁰ (3400-2250

⁶ Shanghai Museum.

⁷ Zhang 2022, 3.

⁸ Rossabi 2014, 13.

⁹ Loewe and Shaughnessy 1999, 52.

¹⁰ Ibidem, 60.

BCE), and Longshan¹¹ (3000-1900 BCE), during which silk production and refined pottery developed. These early cultures were vulnerable to catastrophic floods from the rivers, leading to the emergence of the Xia Dynasty, associated with the Erlitou culture (2100-1600 BCE). The Xia Dynasty, shrouded in legend, is said to have emerged from the ruling class that organized flood control works. Ancient chronicles mention Yu, the architect of these works, as the founder of the Xia Dynasty.¹²

The Xia Dynasty was conquered by Tang, the king of the vassal state of Shang. With the Shang Dynasty (1600-1050 BCE), China entered the Bronze Age and the historical record, being the first dynasty to use writing. The Shang were warriors who subjugated other cultures within China, enslaving entire populations.¹³

The Shang Dynasty was overthrown by the Zhou (1050-256 BCE), aided by numerous slaves seeking to escape Shang tyranny.¹⁴ The Zhou Dynasty established fundamental institutions underpinning Chinese culture, including Taoist philosophy, which promoted humility and religious piety, and Confucianism, which emphasized rationality, filial obedience, and respect for authority. During the Zhou Dynasty, a feudal-like socio-political system emerged, with over seventy semi-independent states subject to the Zhou emperor. Over time, these states developed distinct identities, leading to fragmentation and perpetual conflict, especially during the Warring States Period (475-221 BCE).¹⁵

After centuries of chaos, the Qin state, under Emperor Qin Shihuang, unified all other states under the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE). Qin Shihuang is widely regarded by historians as the first leader of a unified China, a unity forged through violent means. His reign saw the execution of numerous scholars and the extensive destruction of books and manuscripts to erase the histories of the formerly independent states, thereby creating a unified language, history, and national identity.¹⁶

Qin Shihuang initiated the construction of the Great Wall, with significant portions built during his reign. Another monumental infrastructure project he began was the Grand Canal, which still connects northern and southern China. Additionally, he commissioned a grand tomb in Xi'an, which remains unexcavated but is renowned for the terracotta army discovered in its auxiliary structures, intended to protect the emperor in the afterlife.

¹¹ Ibidem, 61.

¹² Rossabi 2014, 15.

¹³ Loewe-Shaughnessy 1999, *passim*.

¹⁴ Ibidem, *passim*.

¹⁵ Ibidem, *passim*.

¹⁶ Twitchett-Fairbank 2008, *passim*.

Despite these achievements, the Qin dynasty was short-lived, largely built on the formidable reputation of Qin Shihuang. Following his death, widespread revolts erupted, leading to the rise of the Han culture, which consolidated power and unified many of the independent states under the Western Han and Eastern Han dynasties. The Han dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE), contemporary with Ancient Rome, exported vast quantities of silk and other goods via the Silk Road. The profitability of this trade prompted the Han to expand westward to control these routes. This era is considered China's first golden age, marked by significant social, cultural, and scientific advancements.¹⁷

The Han dynasty eventually fragmented into three entities (Shu Han, Jin, and Wei), each with its own emperor claiming the imperial throne. The Jin were descendants of generals' families who had rebelled against the imperial throne. This period, characterized by instability and conflict, saw China split into 16 warring states, with Wei in the north and Qi in the south (420 – 589 AD) eventually rising to prominence. During this time, barbarian invasions from the north intensified.¹⁸

The Sui dynasty (581 – 618 AD) played a crucial role in unifying the northern and southern dynasties and restoring the dominance of the Han ethnic group. This period marked the beginning of the integration and cultural assimilation of barbarian tribes that had settled in China during centuries of instability.¹⁹

The Tang dynasty (618 – 906 AD) is considered the pinnacle of Chinese civilization, characterized by internal stability, scientific development, and cultural refinement. During this period, Chinese culture spread throughout Asia, the population grew from about 50 to 80 million, and relations with other states and cultures flourished. The Chinese imperial court became a melting pot for philosophers, artists, and scientists from various cultures and religions. However, the decline of the Tang began with the persecution of Buddhists and increasing authoritarianism to quell revolts among integrated populations.²⁰

The fall of the Tang dynasty led to the Five Dynasties period (907 – 960 AD). Between 960 and 1279, the Song dynasty ruled China, a period noted for scientific progress, including the inventions of the magnetic compass, gunpowder, and printing, which led to the creation of the world's first paper banknote.²¹

The Song dynasty ended abruptly with the Mongol invasion, and Kublai Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan, founded the Yuan dynasty (1279 – 1368 AD). For the first time, the Silk Road from China to Europe was controlled by a

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, *passim*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, *passim*.

¹⁹ Twitchett 1979, *passim*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, *passim*.

²¹ Herbert-Twitchett 1994, *passim*.

single power, enhancing material and cultural exchanges. However, the Yuan dynasty was short-lived, collapsing after the death of Kublai Khan.²²

From 1386 to 1644, the Ming dynasty ruled China, a period of prosperity and peak development in art and literature. The Ming dynasty was succeeded by the Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911 AD), which began as a golden age but ended disastrously with the Opium Wars between China and the British Empire. These conflicts arose when China banned the opium that the British were exporting to avoid paying hard currency for Chinese tea. Following the Opium Wars, China experienced a period of stagnation and isolation from the West. In 1911, the last emperor of China was deposed following an agreement between the palace administration and republican revolutionary forces.²³²⁴

Imperial China was succeeded by Republican China, a period marked by internal conflicts among various factions led by local warlords, followed by the Japanese invasion. The end of World War II and Japan's defeat reignited the conflict between the Republicans and the Communists led by Mao Zedong. This conflict culminated in the Republicans' retreat to Taiwan and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, with the Communists taking control of mainland China.²⁵²⁶

History of Chinese Cultural Heritage Legislation

Concerns related to the protection of cultural heritage, especially ancient objects and manuscripts, have been manifested among Chinese scholars since ancient times, but these concerns were overshadowed by the political realities that unfolded at the end of each dynasty, when the new power sought to erase the previous dynasty from existence, first of all by destroying all the architectural ensembles created by the previous dynasty and especially their capitals from where they governed. "In general, as past dynasties ended, people tended to create chaos. Wherever wars have occurred, cities have been ruined. All the buildings were set on fire, and the treasures in them were lost. Moreover, the robberies were widespread. In addition to the arsons, grain was also stolen. The essence of a generation has been lost."²⁷

Although architectural monuments have suffered significant destruction during periods of transition from one dynasty to another, archaeological artifacts have traditionally been revered by the Chinese who believe that they contain the essence and souls of their ancestors.²⁸

²² Ibidem, passim.

²³ Mote-Twitchett 1998, passim.

²⁴ Twitchett-Mote 1998, passim.

²⁵ Fairbank-Twitchett 1983, passim.

²⁶ Fairbank-Feuerwerker 1986, passim.

²⁷ Zhang 2022, 2.

²⁸ He 2021, 21.

As early as the Song Dynasty, scholars in the service of the elites sought to catalogue, analyse, and protect ancient relics, some of which were even used in ceremonial state rituals.²⁹

Despite all these early efforts, the first attempts to formulate laws aimed at protecting cultural heritage did not appear until the end of the Qing dynasty, representing only passing mentions in laws aimed at other matters. Thus, on January 18, 1909, the "Regulation for the Self-Government of Villages, Cities and Communes of China" was promulgated, where in Chapter 1, Section 3, Article 5, it is mentioned as a purpose, among other things, "to protect the ancient sites, arts and crafts of the less privileged social categories".³⁰

Also in 1909, the imperial court proposed the promulgation of a law entitled "Measures for the preservation of antiquities". At the same time, provincial governments received instructions to "preserve and catalogue ancient tombs and ancestral temples."³¹ However, this initiative did not have a real impact in practice, due to the political instability that brought about the end of the last imperial dynasty. Although it failed, this first attempt was due to the existence of an intellectual elite that was becoming increasingly aware of the value of the national cultural heritage and the need to protect it. For the first time, the notion of "cultural heritage" was used, a concept that did not exist in China until the beginning of the twentieth century and that was imported from the West.³²

Along with the concept of "cultural heritage" came other terms such as *guwu* 古物 - ancient objects, *guji* 古迹 – ancient sites, *wenwu* 文物 – cultural relics, *guobao* 国宝 – national treasure.³³

During the Republic of China, founded in 1912, the destruction of ancient sites intensified, the theft and illicit sale of heritage goods attracted the attention of the government, which decided in 1914 to issue, through the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a set of "Instructions on the Effective Preservation of Historical Objects, Monuments and Sites of the Past", while drawing attention to the need to adopt comprehensive legislation aimed at protecting the "Our country cannot protect its own antiquities, but must rely on foreigners to facilitate their preservation. This is not dignified for our country. Therefore, we must declare strict laws and instructions to protect them."³⁴

In October 1916, "Temporary Measures for the Protection of Antiquities" are issued. This temporary document did not materialize in a body of laws, but nevertheless the *Measures* of 1916 and those of 1909 are considered by

²⁹ He 2021, 22.

³⁰ Zhang 2009, 29.

³¹ Zhang 2022, 3.

³² Vecco 2010, 322.

³³ Lai 2016, 54.

³⁴ Zhang 2022, 4.

researchers as the foundation on which the heritage legislation in China was built. These *Temporary Measures* listed cultural relics in need of protection, including mausoleums and tombs belonging to key figures in Chinese history, manuscripts, paintings, calligraphic inscriptions, bronze relics, statuettes, as well as buildings of historical significance.³⁵

A comparison between the measures issued by the imperial court in 1909 and those created by the republican government in 1916 clearly indicates that the republican regulation was heavily influenced and was based on that of the Qing dynasty, which in turn was influenced by the "Law on the Protection of Ancient Temples and Shrines" issued in Japan in 1897. It was expected that the first ideas related to the protection of China's heritage would come from Japan, many intellectuals of the time from Asia were studying in Japan, and Japan was one step ahead of the other countries in the Far East, being in the midst of a period of reform and modernization, known as the Meiji period. Despite all these influences, the 1916 law nevertheless presents new elements. The list of categories to be included in the protection scheme is extended to include fortresses and walls of fortified cities, towers and temples, bridges and gardens. Very progressive for that time, the need to protect the "natural landscape of the past" as well as some old and famous trees is also mentioned.³⁶

The problem with both *Measures* is that they did not have a real impact in practice, as they did not stipulate the establishment of a state institution to deal with the protection of heritage, the implementation falling in the hands of provincial governments, which had to do so as they saw fit. Although both documents mention "severe punishments", these sanctions as well as the methods of application are not explained.³⁷

Between 1927 and 1937, the Republic of China was in a period of relative stability and even economic and cultural development, and changes in the management of cultural heritage were not long in coming. From the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, modern archaeology was gradually introduced to China by Western researchers, but in 1928 a series of archaeological sites under the direct control of Chinese archaeologists began: the ruins of the city of Yin Xin, the Zhoukoudian cave, the sites of Chengziya, Yanxiadu and Liangzhu.³⁸

In addition to this debut of domestic archaeology, new steps have been taken in terms of heritage legislation. Thus, in September 1928, the Ministry of Internal Affairs published the "Regulation for the Preservation of Historical Sites and Antiquities", being a reference document in the history of heritage legislation

³⁵ Zhao-Doyon 2021, 148.

³⁶ Zhang 2022, 5.

³⁷ Li 2015, 155.

³⁸ Zan et alli 2018, 23.

in China. The *Regulation* creates clear categories of heritage elements to be protected, as well as criteria for their identification.³⁹

In 1930, the "Law for the Protection of Antiquities" was promulgated, with 14 articles defining what constitutes antiquities, their excavation, registration and excavation, as well as the organization of agencies in charge of protecting and preserving heritage.⁴⁰

For the proper functioning of the 1928 Regulation and the 1930 Act, the executive government then issued several rules and regulations: "Rules on the Excavation of Antiquities" 1935, "Rules on Foreign Research Institutes and Private Individuals in Relation to the Excavation of Antiquities" 1935, "Regulations on Passports for the Export of Antiquities" 1935, "Regulations on the Handing Over of Accidentally Discovered Antiquities" 1936.⁴¹

All these legislative efforts ceased in 1937 with the onset of the Sino-Japanese War, followed by World War II. In 1949, the communists led by Mao Zedong took political power in China.⁴²

Starting in 1953, the communist government implemented the five-year plans, which promoted intensive agricultural and industrial activities. These activities endangered the conservation and protection of numerous heritage objects and structures. In response, the government placed a new law targeting cultural heritage on its agenda. Although a series of provisional measures and regulations were issued in the following years, the promulgation of a new law did not occur until after the tumultuous period of repression and political purges known as the Cultural Revolution.⁴³

In 1978, China began a process of reform and opening-up, and in November 1982, the "Law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage" was promulgated. This law, comprising 33 articles, laid the foundation for the current heritage legislation in China.⁴⁴

The 2002 amendments brought significant changes to align the legislation with the realities of cultural heritage management, adding 47 new articles to the 1982 law.⁴⁵ Also in 2002, ICOMOS China published the "Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China," the first publication by heritage specialists rather than a state institution.⁴⁶

In 2011, the "Law for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage" was promulgated. Although based on the 2003 UNESCO Convention on Intangible

³⁹ Zhou 2007, 119.

⁴⁰ Zan et alli 2018, 24.

⁴¹ Zhang 2022, 6.

⁴² Zan et alli 2018, 24.

⁴³ Zhang 2022, 8.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 8.

⁴⁵ Rong-Li 2023, 18.

⁴⁶ Zan et alli 2018, 29.

Cultural Heritage, this law reflects the specific cultural, social, and political realities of China.⁴⁷

As of this year (2024), the Chinese government has begun taking the first steps to enact a new law targeting national cultural heritage.⁴⁸

Current legislative framework and government agencies for safeguarding Chinese cultural heritage

In a bid to enhance its political legitimacy, the Chinese Communist Party has made cultural heritage a top priority, one of the results being frequent updates to cultural heritage legislation.⁴⁹ China currently has in force the following laws and regulations⁵⁰ directly targeting or making extensive reference to national cultural heritage:

Laws:

1. Law on Protection of Cultural Heritage 2002⁵¹
2. Urban and Rural Planning Act 2007⁵²
3. Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage 2011⁵³
4. Environmental Protection Law 2014⁵⁴

Regulations of the State Council:

1. Regulation on the implementation of the law on protection of cultural heritage 2003⁵⁵
2. Regulation on the Protection of the Great Wall 2006⁵⁶
3. Regulation on the conservation and management of underwater cultural heritage 1989⁵⁷
4. Regulation on tourist attractions 2006⁵⁸

⁴⁷ Xu et alli 2022, 570.

⁴⁸ China Culture 2024.

⁴⁹ Maags 2021, passim.

⁵⁰ Zhang 2022, p. 11.

⁵¹ Wenwu Baohu Fa (文物保护法).

⁵² Chengxiang Guihua Fa (城乡规划法).

⁵³ Feiwuzhi Wenhua Yichan Fa (非物质文化遗产法).

⁵⁴ Huanjing Baohu Fa (环境保护法).

⁵⁵ Wenwu Baohu Guanli Zanxing Tiaoli (文物保护单位暂行条例).

⁵⁶ Changcheng Baohu Tiaoli (长城保护条例).

⁵⁷ Baohu Degui Ze Heshui Xia Wenhua Yichan De Guanli (保护的规则和水下文化遗产的管理).

⁵⁸ Fengjing Mingsheng Qu Tiaoli (风景名胜区条例).

5. Regulation on the conservation and protection of villages, communes, and towns of major importance for history and culture 2008⁵⁹
6. Regulation on the Protection of Traditional Arts and Crafts 1997⁶⁰
7. Regulation on nature reserves 1994⁶¹
8. Regulation on the conservation of paleontological fossils 2010⁶²

There is also a wide range of departmental regulations that I will mention and reflect upon, in detail, on a different occasion.

In terms of what constitutes cultural heritage, under the 2002 “Cultural Heritage Protection Law”, and how exactly does the law categorise them, Zhang⁶³ notes the following. Under immovable cultural heritage we have archaeological sites, ancient tombs, historic buildings, cave temples and stone carvings, historic memorial sites and exemplary buildings from the modern and contemporary periods. All of these are categorised as national protected heritage sites, provincial protected heritage sites, municipal and county-level protected heritage sites, and registered immovable cultural heritage.

For movable cultural heritage we have precious works of art and handicrafts; literature, manuscripts, and books of historical value; exemplary material objects reflecting social systems, production methods, and lifestyle. All of these are categorised as ordinary heritage objects or valuable heritage objects, with the latter being further split into three grades, with grade one object being the most important, while grade three objects are the least important.

When it comes to government agencies tasked with cultural heritage protection, there should be noted a “high level of decentralisation between central and local government, as a general element of the Chinese state”.⁶⁴

The first state agency dedicated to protecting cultural heritage was established in 1949 under the name State Bureau of Cultural Relics.⁶⁵ Today the National Administration of Cultural Heritage (NACH) also known as State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH), affiliated to the Ministry of Culture

⁵⁹ Lishi Wenhua Mingcheng Mingzhen Mingcun Baohu Tiaoli (历史文化名城名镇名村保护条例).

⁶⁰ Chuantong Gongyi Meishu Baohu Tiaoli (传统工艺美术保护条例).

⁶¹ Ziran Baohu Qu Tiaoli (自然保护区条例).

⁶² Gushengwu Huashi Baohu Tiaoli (古生物化石保护条例).

⁶³ Zhang 2022, fig. 1.

⁶⁴ Zan et alli 2018, 20.

⁶⁵ China Heritage 2006.

and Tourism of the People's Republic of China, is responsible for the development and management of museums as well as the protection of cultural relics of national importance and it plays a role of regulation and professional control. The “operating responsibility [is] delegated to the local level. Even for very important sites of national significance, operations are run at the local level, sometimes with greater financial support from the central administration, as in the case of national Key Protected Units”. This has various negative consequences, especially in the case of salvage archaeology. “If there is a project carried out at the local level for economic development, poverty reduction, or even mere speculation which has negative impacts on heritage, the people in charge of protection can easily become hostages to the level of government they report to. If the mayor is in favour of the project, there is little that heritage professionals can do when they must report to the same mayor more or less directly”.⁶⁶ The efficacy of the mechanisms in place and agencies tasked with cultural heritage protection in China will be a topic which we will reflect upon some other time.

Conclusions

China, positioned as the world's second-largest economic power, stands as a civilization shaped by a rich history spanning millennia, boasting an extensive cultural heritage and unprecedented conservation efforts. Surprisingly, to the best of our knowledge, there is a total absence of Romanian studies dedicated to the management of Chinese cultural heritage. The current paper aims to rectify this oversight and provide a new angle of reflection on Romania’s cultural preservation efforts.

In advocating for equality on Europe's negotiating and political platforms, it is imperative that we recognize the symbiotic relationship between a nation's investment in culture, including heritage, and its global standing. A nation that neglects these vital aspects compromises its ability to present itself with dignity to the international community.

This paper represents just the beginning of a more complex academic endeavour, that seeks to bridge the existing gap and become a valuable resource for the Romanian heritage sector, its stakeholders, and government institutions, and to act as a catalyst for change, offering insights and strategies that can steer Romanian heritage onto a trajectory of enhanced protection, preservation, and effective management.

By acknowledging the importance of investing in culture, this study aims to contribute to a more holistic approach to heritage, aligning Romania with the global dialogue on cultural conservation and management. Ultimately, the hope is that the findings of this study will resonate as a call to action, inspiring a

⁶⁶ Zan et alli 2018, 21.

renewed commitment to safeguarding our cultural treasures and positioning Romania as a responsible custodian of its invaluable heritage.

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