

“LUCIAN BLAGA” UNIVERSITY OF SIBIU  
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PATRIMONY  
INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY AND VALORIFICATION  
OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN PATRIMONY IN EUROPEAN CONTEXT

# ACTA TERRAE SEPTEMCASTRENSIS

IX



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**ACTA TERRAE SEPTEMCASTRENSIS**

**IX, 2010**

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SEPTEMCASTRENSIS**

**IX**

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**Sibiu, 2010**

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**VITIS VINIFERA SPECIE USED IN LIBATIONS AND IN DAILY LIFE  
APULUM-LIBER PATER SANCTUARY**

*In Vino Veritas...*

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**Keywords:** *Vitis vinifera*, libations, sanctuary, Liber Pater, Apulum.

**Abstract:** *The present paper debate the use of Vitis vinifera specie within libations, offerings and in daily life. On the debate topic we reported to a key site belonging to roman era (site Apulum) where during archaeological researches developed in area of ancient Colonia Aurelia Apulensis was revealed a sanctuary dedicated to Liber Pater, a roman deity of wine and vegetation. Liber Pater was an archaic divinity being associated with Dyonisos and Bachus, later at Romans.*

*The results of archaeobotanical analysis carried out on the soil samples picked from the mentioned area have confirmed the presence of Vitis specie in the sanctuary. These realities can afford us to launch the hypothesis that the specie may be used within libations as wine, but also as fruit within ritual deposits.*

### **Introduction**

There is no other plant in the world which has had an older history, being better studied and richer documented than vines. Since the first phase of human society establishment when were created the tales with legendary heroes and the myth of the gods, the vines was considered a symbol of fertility and health and the wine was considered the “*Nectar of the gods*”.

The impression that the wine has left on the humans was so deep and so lasting that soon after the discovery of fermentation, vines took to expand with an amazing power wherever the climate and civilization allowed. The populations less privileged being acquainted with the wine but unable to produce themselves has sought to replace it with other similar beverages.

But after various attempts when they failed to get a good drink were contented to buy it from others offering instead of wine cereals, slaves, metals etc. In this way every developed society sought to supply the water with wine, a different drink, serving to the reconciliation of the gods (libations<sup>1</sup>), honoring guests, honoring leaders, reward winners, extinguish the fire after incineration procession.

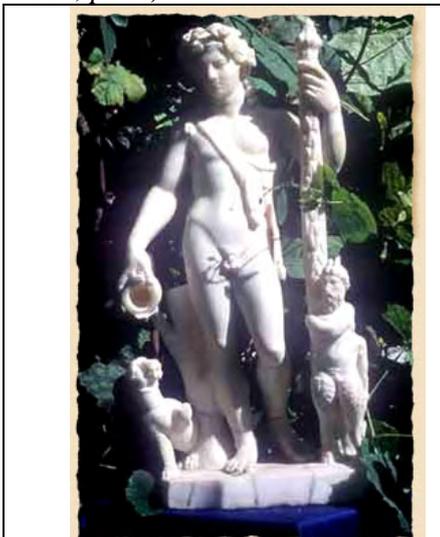
### **The Cult of *Liber Pater***

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<sup>1</sup> Libation: ritual act consisting of wine flowing on the altar, in an honor of God.

Archaic deity from central Italy, *Liber Pater* was together with its counterpart *Libera*, the protector of vines and fields fertility. This circumstance has led to its assimilation with *Dionysus - Bacchus* and his cult has spread in the whole Roman Empire (Teodorescu *et alii* 1966, p. 75) (see fig.1). *Liber Pater*: from the Latin word *libare* which means *flow, sacrifice, taste*, was an old Italic deity of abundance and breeding. Usually *Liber Pater* was associated with *Libera* goddess, both being plebeian deities. The celebration consecrated to *Liber* were been called *Liberalia* and were celebrated on 17 March. After the merging of *Liber* with *Bacchus*, the cultural image of the god was accompanied by Bacchante priestesses called *Bacchantes* during the feasts of *Bacchanalia*, or during the grape harvest held in autumn. The *Bacchantes* dressed with deer skins, bearing lighted torches and waving a *thyrs* during orgies took out the cry: *Evoe!* Being named *evantes*: those that yell! (Teodorescu *et alii* 1966, p. 76).

Originally the ritual of Bacchus was exercised only by women, as well as in Greece, taking place normally, as a sacred ceremonial and social moral was not affected in any way. Much later when were introduced the *Bacchantes*, the Bacchus cult has degenerated into orgiastic rituals. Pacullia Ana, the priestess of Bacchus took the initiative to allow men to participate during the festivities of the cult in nocturnal bacchanal. Because of the mixture these celebrations have slipped down into depravity and moreover, from where the feminine celebrations were limited to three days on year, they came to be held five times on month (Teodorescu *et alii* 1966, p. 76).



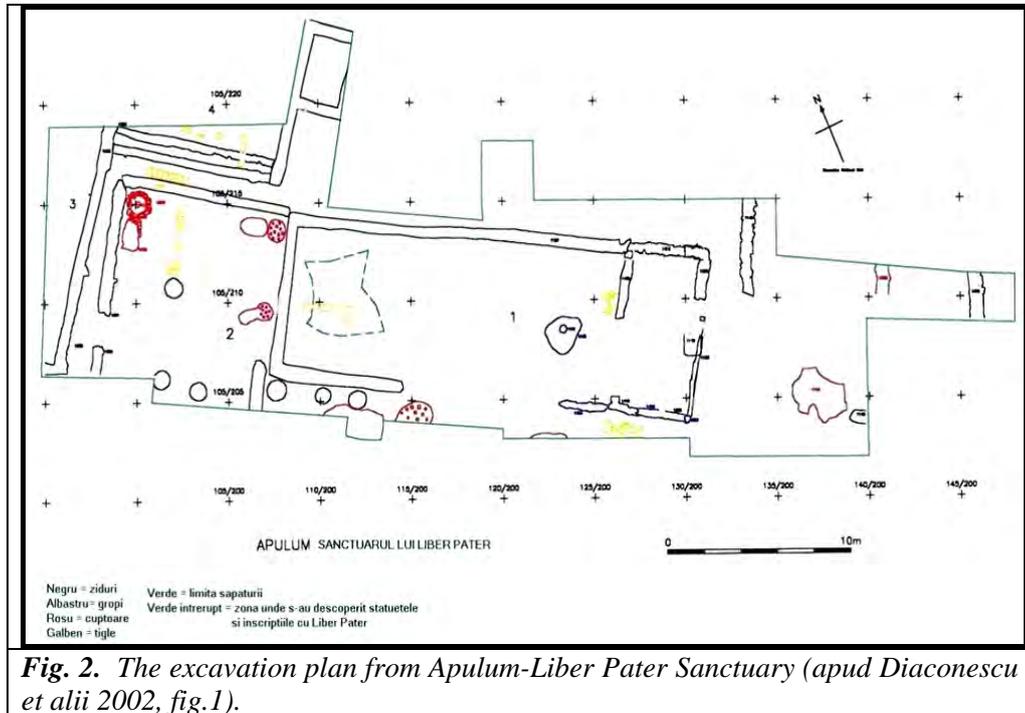
**Fig. 1.** Statue representing *Liber Pater* the God of wine and vegetation at Romans (apud Apulum-Archaeology Homepage: <http://www.apulum-archaeology.com/10.03.2010>).

In order to stop depravity a senatorial edict emitted in 186 B.C., has forbid this degenerated celebration of the *Bacchanalia* in entire Roman Empire. The reason for this edict was based on the fact that while the old *Liberalia* (dedicated to *Liber* and *Libera*) and *Vinalia* were fitting with sobriety practice of the Romans from the beginning of the republic, the orgiastic celebration of Dionysus cult introduced in Rome and in entire empire has degenerated in a real depravity shortly after his introduction (Teodorescu *et alii* 1966, p. 76).

#### The description of archaeological site

In Romania, in close proximity of Alba Iulia is located the roman archaeological site Apulum. Here was discovered in 1989 a sanctuary dedicated to *Liber Pater* (Diaconescu *et alii* 2002, p. 32). The sanctuary of *Liber Pater* is located in the northwest corner of the ancient Roman city

*Colonia Aurelia Apulensis*, within an island belonging to the westernmost series housing. The sanctuary hasn't a very complex stratigraphy (fig.2). According to the research in the *Liber Pater* sanctuary area has took place the following chronological sequence events: over the city ditches of *Aurelium Apulense* were been dug a series of clay pits where were installed several pottery kilns during Antonin late age (*Diaconescu et alii* 2002, p.32-33). In 2002 was excavated a kiln together with the afferent level containing the residual ceramic waste. In 2003 the development of the excavation to the north has led to the identification of the same large clay pits, which apparently bunged down on a considerable stretch the trenches from first Roman fortification.



**Fig. 2.** The excavation plan from Apulum-Liber Pater Sanctuary (apud *Diaconescu et alii* 2002, fig.1).

Perhaps once abandoned the old defensive structure, the potters took advantage from the clay from the walls of the ditches. They excavated on the horizontally the entire space between the defensive trenches (*Diaconescu et alii* 2005, p. 47).

Those resulted in final a pit with cradle form in profile oriented north-south which crosses the whole dug area. The pit, in the early Severian era, (or successive pits) was filled and the ground has been levelled and was build a complex with the appearance of a large suburban villa which is the sanctuary of *Liber Pater*.

In the first stage the walls were been made from wooded beam and adobe (diameter 0,35-0,4 m). In a second phase, dating after Severus Alexander, to walls has made a foundation from gravel and stone pedestal over which was elevated the adobe. Some previous wooden beams were incorporated into a new building which has had exactly the same plane as the first.

A final stage is represented by a few wooden and adobe walls put on the foundation stone and having a slightly different orientation comparative to the older walls. Last phase of the sanctuary is dated by coins of Philip the Arab being the latest found in this site and which not appear until the final contexts which were been dated in the last two decades of province.

It is unclear if not now, or only after the dismantling of pagan worship build by the end of III century, new ceramic ovens were installed in the area, after which there was a complete demolition of the roof and then of the adobe walls. It is clear that the building was devastated by the early Christians which broke methodically wine god statuettes, which were throw into centre of garden sanctuary (*Diaconescu et alii 2005, p.49*).

The building which hosted a Dionysian association from *Colonia Aurelia Apulensis* has measured about 50x50m. The entrance was from the east, where was a rectangular garden and from where was a passing into a courtyard paved with *tegulae* and bricks, placed on a thick bed of gravel.

Next, on the building axis was situated a garden with a black soil rich in humus and from was picked a grape pip. Is very likely that there may have been planted some vines. The court measured 9x9 m and the garden 18x9 m. In the first phase the garden was extended about 9m to the west. In a later stage there was built a hall, oriented north-south.

Between court and garden there was a crossing pavilion made of beams on a foundation of *tegulae* attached with mortar. The northern section of the building was made probably from a square room followed by a long hall from 21m length and 9m width. Latest excavations indicate that to the north there was another hall, measured 4,5 m length and 4,5 m width. In the northwest corner there was a room, where were been identified more brick and mortar foundations for altars and aedicule (*Diaconescu et alii 2005, p.48*).

The main discoveries during 2002 and 2003 were a series of *favisae* (ritual pits, where regularly were been placed the sanctuary offerings). These discoveries determined to extend the excavation period. The ritual pits were placed in halls, which bordered the garden to the north and west. The pits had a depth of about 1.5 m from the ancient level of occupation and a dished form (6-7 m width and 9-10 m length) (*Diaconescu et alii 2005, p. 49*). On their bottom were found a large number of potteries. The specialists estimate about 4-500 pieces of vessel broken in the place of pit, without the scattering of shards. Sometimes the fragment of brick or the stone used to break the vessel was left in place (see fig. 3 and 4). Most (over 60 pieces) are bell-shaped bowls with low and unstable base, made from a coarse paste and burnt in reducing techniques. There are disposable pots for unique usage used in typical offerings. *Turibula* (smoky vessels), follows closely. *Turibula* is specific for burning of incense and other spices, but also could be used as lamps or in libations. It also has been found a lot of *kantharoi* which are cups with two handles, used for drinking wine (*Fiedler, Höpken, 2004, p. 510-516*).

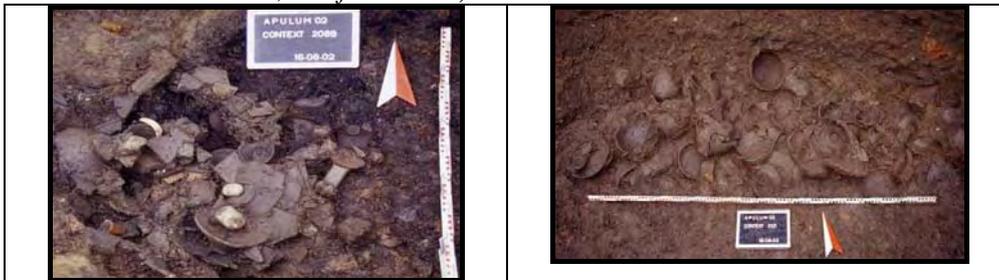
Moreover the accessories of Dyonisos-Liber which are vineyards, kantharos, thyrsos' are within regular funeral motifs (*Bărbulescu 2003, p. 7*).

Among the pieces mentioned were discovered some with specific ritual connotations: a clay model for ritual cake-*Liba*; a clay model for creating ritual masks; a clay relief representing a satire and a bacchante (*Diaconescu et alii* 2005, p. 47).

#### Archaeobotanical analyzes

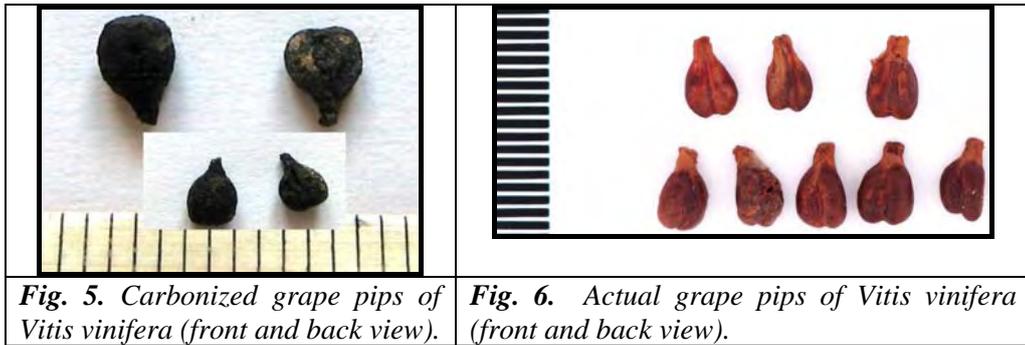
The archaeobotanical analyzes of samples picked during 2000-2003 has confirmed the fact that in the vicinity of sanctuary were been planted species of *Vitis vinifera*. After the flotation and determination of macro remains were been revealed grape pips of *Vitis vinifera* but also two dried berries (see fig. 4 and for comparing fig. 5). Grape pips and dried berries were been discovered in the *favisae* (ritual pits). Certainly in these deposits with ritual state were been placed also bunches of grapes. Besides *Vitis* specie were been found also other plant species, but worth mentioning the few caryopses of *Cerealia*.

The soil samples were been processed by water assisted flotation device. The sieves used in selection process measured 1,6mm and 0,8mm. All samples were fully sorted using a magnifier lamp and were determined under a low power microscope, both by comparison with a modern reference collection (Systemic Archaeology Institute). Seeds were separated from wood charcoal and small fragment bones. All the preserved plant remains were charred. For species verify we used the relevant identification literature (*Beldie et alii* 1972; *Körber-Grohne* 1994; *Săvulescu et alii* 1957; *Renfrew* 1973).



**Fig. 3.** Picture from *Favisae I* containing the cult vessels and the stones used for ritual objects breaking (apud I. Haynes, from *Favisae Project, Apulum-Liber Pater Templum: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hca/staff/haynes/favissae.htm;10.03.2010>*)

**Fig. 4.** Picture from *Favisae II* containing the cult vessels (apud I. Haynes, from *Favisae Project, Apulum-Liber Pater Templum: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hca/staff/haynes/favissae.htm;10.03.2010>*)



**Fig. 5.** Carbonized grape pips of *Vitis vinifera* (front and back view).

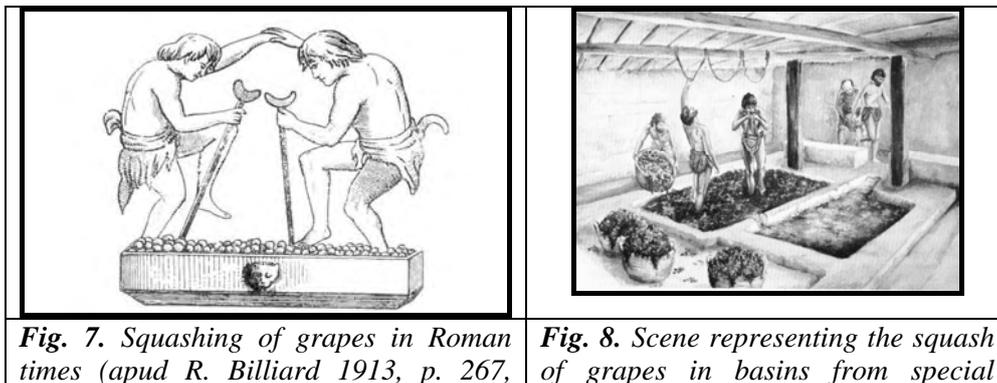
**Fig. 6.** Actual grape pips of *Vitis vinifera* (front and back view).

**Processing the grapes for wine in the roman times**

In the following we describe the main antique processing steps for wine producing from grapes. The simplest method of grapes crushing in the Roman times was squashing with men’s feet. After picking the grapes were put into special tanks/basins that were linked to the collector basin through a channel. From the collector basin the grape juice was recovered and deposited in special amphorae. The human squashes were been held each other not to fall. Sometimes they had in their hands sticks with hooks for clinging. Or were hanging with hands to a support fixed above them and often they were holding on the ropes that were placed over the basins (fig. 7-9).

Also during grape picking the squashes were sure to be respected a perfect hygiene during the operation of grape crushing, too. Their feet have to be in perfect clean avoiding accidentally remains of food to get among grapes. The leaves and any foreign bodies that were getting among the grapes were removed. The hygienic conditions were strictly respected because in the religious libations it could be used only a wine in the most perfect cleanliness (Guerin, Gomez Bellard 1999, p. 383-384).

Originally to the grapes crushing operations only men were taking part. But later were accepted also the virgins because to the assumption that their purity mixed with the flavor of the grapes will make a combination with a very special savor (Valamoti et alii 2007, p. 54-61).

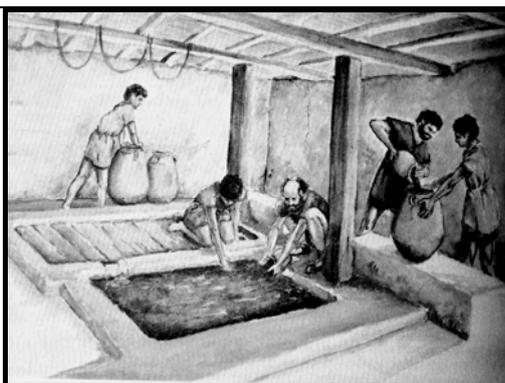


**Fig. 7.** Squashing of grapes in Roman times (apud R. Billiard 1913, p. 267,

**Fig. 8.** Scene representing the squash of grapes in basins from special

fig.104).

rooms (apud Guerin, Gomez Bellard 1999, p.383).



**Fig. 9.** Scene representing the collecting of wine juice and depositing in special amphora's (apud Guerin, Gomez Bellard 1999, p. 384).

### Conclusions

In order to obtain the goodwill of gods and to be protected, the Romans were offered wine to them. Though during these rituals the adulators were consumed wine, too. The boozy caused by wine was turned in to ecstasy where were fall his adulators, wine being the strongest effect of the god in their beliefs.

It should still avoid the confusion between those two conditions: *soul state* at which god raised his adulators and the *physical state* both caused by wine. This confusion was always done, being currently sustained by the meaning of words "Bacchus orgy". Originally, as we have mentioned *Liber Pater* wasn't the god of wine, but later became. In this position, as agrarian god, he supervised various festivities and banquettes where his adulators abused from drinks. Often, the artists from roman times presented *Liber/Bachus* as a victim of such excesses, too.

These abuses must be carefully distinguished from religious festivities that instil the divine spirit. At these festivities, the *neurotic phenomena* raised until *hysteria*, plays the main role (Teodorescu et alii 1966, p. 64).

Also in Roman times wine was among the most commonly liquids used in rituals related to the cult of the dead. The cult of the dead was celebrated during: *Parentalia-Feralia* (13-21 February), *Lemuria* (9, 11, 13 May) and *Rosalia* (23 May) (Bărbulescu 2003, p. 83). At *Parentalia* celebration, in February, the family was met at the grave for the sacrifices, burning animals and making libations with perfume and wine. During *Lemuria*, in May, the family offered a small banquet for the dead who were not buried by tradition or who were not buried at all in order to calm their spirits wandering. By May-June, in *Rosalia*, a widespread celebration in Imperial era, the graves were covered with roses and feasts were offered to the dead. In those days the deceased relatives went to the grave with offerings for the dead. The graves were adorned with flowers and garlands and sprinkled with water and wine. (Bărbulescu 2003, p.13). During religious ceremonies, the Romans were

making libation with *mulsum* too: a mixture of cool sweet wine, prepared with honey and with milk. The wine was in Roman times used in ritual extinction of pyre after incineration of a family member. The family was richer as the more was the quality and price of the wine that was used for this purpose (Bărbulescu 2003, p.12).

Whatever was the destination and purpose of wine usage, this ranged in various destinations, being present both in daily life, and in the offerings for the gods and libations. Therefore the wine deserves its full formula: “*The Nectar of the Gods*”!

In conclusion, we could state that archaeobotanical analysis carried out on samples picked from Liber Pater sanctuary has confirmed that the *Vitis vinifera* species was used as wine and as a fruit during ritual offerings festivities. The presence of grape pips within *favisae*, support the theory that the *Vitis* sp. was a constant presence among the offerings to Liber Pater, the god of vines and vegetation.

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<sup>i</sup> However, Western people practise the reading of vertical texts when they search for items from lists in column, e.g. surnames from telephone directory or sequence of the stations from railway timetable (Laarni et alii. 2004, 75). It is also the instance for some coins (such as the Polish 10 and 200 ZL coins) and notes (like the Lithuanian 500 litas banknote). Huey (1908) Tinker (1955), Coleman and Kim (1961), Coleman and Hahn (1966) have studied reading a column format of text from paper. They conclude that if a vertical text is typically read slower than the standard horizontal text prior to practise, text comprehension may be comparable in the vertical - and standard - text conditions from the very beginning. No acute difference between horizontal and vertical orientation was found for native Chinese (Chen, Chien 2007).