III. THE CULT OF SABAZIOS

A. Catalogue with Commentary on the Monuments

MOESIA INFERIOR
(III, 1-7)

1. Montana (formerly Koutlovitsa, today Mihailovgrad).

CIL III 7448; Dobrouski MSb 16-17, 1900, 79; Todorov, Paganizmut, 223, No 528.

Limestone altar. Measurements: height 1.07 m, length 0.42 m, width 0.28 m. Now lost.

Numini Sabazi(o) Cessicius
[.... Iu]lianus ex vo-to posuit.

Domaszewski and Mommsen (CIL III 7448) and later B. Gerov and L. Vidman read the dedication in the inscription as Numini Sarapi.¹ Dobrouski, however, revises that reading and his reading has been accepted by Y. Todorov and me. B. Gerov has searched for the inscription, but to no avail since it obviously has been lost. The name of the dedicator betrays his Italic origins.² The use of numen for Sabazios is rather rare in the Sarapis monuments (see Vidman, SIRIS, Nos 535, 694). It establishes a relationship between the Thracian inscription and the dedication on the silver tablet of Vichy (Gaul). The god there is in syncretism with Jupiter and is represented in his interpretatio graeca: Numin(i) Aug(usto) deo Iovi Sabasio G. Iul(ius) Carassounus v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).³

2,2 bis. Village of Touchenitsa, Pleven district.

A right and a left bronze hand, 0.125 m long.

I. Velkov and H. Danov in IAI I 2, 1938, 442, No 2, fig. 237.

The tumb, index and middle finger are extended and slightly apart, while the fourth and little fingers are bent down upon the palm. This gesture, which is characteristic of many other similar relics associated solely with the cult of Sabazios, is known as benedicatio latina. Snakes coil around the wrists and their heads are pointed at the thumbs. In addition to the hands and wrists, these representations occasionally feature part of the forearm (cf. hand III, 7 which is shown to the elbow). Another find from the same site was, according to the publication, a small statue of Asklepius, as well as Roman coins struck
before the reign of Constantius II. In the writer's opinion, the hands were votive offerings to Sabazios. P. Gorbanov, however, does not share this view, but thinks that they used to be placed at an altar during cult ceremonies.  

There is more justification for the latter view and I adopted it before I had the opportunity of examining the hand from Tolbukhin district. I now believe that the unique presence of a right hand as well as of a left one and their small size set them apart from the rest of the hands which have been previously classified by H. Blinkenberg. As they carry no other symbolic representation but the snake, they fall into group C and have a close parallel in hand C 4.  

This classification notwithstanding, they should be regarded as having been fashioned separately and as being accessories to a representation of the deity itself, something that Blinkenberg points out in his study and believes that they were part of the bronze hands. The size of our relics precludes the possibility of assuming that they were part of a representation of the deity on another and bigger hand. I find it easier to believe that Sabazios' representation to which the two hands belonged, was a cult or a votive one. It is difficult to date the hands but a terminus ante quem may be fixed at 337 AD, while it is not probable that they should have been made after the end of the 3rd century.

3. Nicopolis ad Istrum.

Limestone base. Measurements: height 1 m, length 0.48 m, width 0.46 m. At the Archaeological Institute and Museum in Sofia, No 2258.

Mihailov, IGB II, 677.

Ἤγαθῆ τύχη.
Μουκαζεώς Αγυλο-
κενθου θεῶ ἐπη-
χόω Σαβαζίων Ἀρ-
σίμην ύπερ ἔαυτοῦ.

The name of the dedicator is entirely Thracian. The ethnicon Ἀρσίμηνος is Thracian and is a derivative from the name of a locality.


Limestone altar built into a house at Nikyup and chipped on all sides. Visible measurements: height 0.50 m, length 0.38 m.

Mihailov, IGB II, 678.

[Θεός] ἰδείας μεγάλης
[καὶ τῷ Διὶ Ἡλίῳ μεγι-