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CONTENTS

STUDIES

ANCIENT HISTORY

Ian PLANT

THE EVIDENCE FOR WOMEN'S LITERACY IN ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL ATHENS 5

Osman EMİR, İsmail KÖSE, Yasin TOPALOĞLU

AN EVALUATION OF THE ANCIENT TRAPEZOUS-SATALA ROAD: KARAKABAN ROAD AND ALTERNATIVE ROUTES 26

Ovidiu ȚENȚEA, Ioan Carol OPRIȘ

REDISCOVERING SUCIDAVA MOESICA: INSIGHTS FROM RECENT LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY 42

ARCHAEOLOGY

Marius-Mihai CIUTĂ, Anamaria TUDORIE

BEGINNINGS OF THE NEOLITHIC IN TRANSYLVANIA: A FRAGMENTARY FIGURINE FROM LIMBA-OARDA DE JOS-BORDANE (ALBA COUNTY) 61

Zerrin AYDIN TAVUKÇU, Sinem COŞKUN

TRACES OF THE GOD DIONYSUS IN THE SOUTH NECROPOLIS OF TRALLEIS: A TERRACOTTA MASK 76

Cristinel PLANTOS

OLD FINDS, NEW INTERPRETATIONS. ABOUT A POSSIBLE HELLENISTIC TYPE BED IN THE LA TÈNE DATE SETTLEMENT AT CRAIVA - PIATRA CRAIVII (ALBA COUNTY) 84

Cristina-Georgeta ALEXANDRESCU

INSIDE THE GOVERNOR'S PALACE AT APULUM: A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF SPACE, FUNCTION, AND DECORATIVE EXPRESSION WITH AN EMPHASIS ON MARBLE USE 93

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL

Cristian Ioan POPA

THE EPONYMOUS SITE OF THE PETREȘTI CULTURE (I). BALKAN CONNECTIONS OF SOME CERAMIC VESSELS 110

Denis TOPAL, Lavinia GRUMEZA

THE MEDUSA-GORGON OF MERENI (REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA) AND HER MYTH 126

Rada VARGA, Claudiu TĂNĂSELIA,

Erika Andrea LEVEI

MATERIAL ANALYSIS OF 'BATAVIAN' POTTERY FROM ROMAN DACIA: X-RAY FLUORESCENCE AND GRAPH CLUSTERING 142

Abdullah Kasım SONKAYA

NEW INSIGHTS INTO EASTERN LYDIAN SCULPTURE: AN ANALYSIS OF A RECENTLY DISCOVERED MARBLE HECATE STATUETTE FROM THE BLAUNDOS EXCAVATIONS 154

Vitalie BÂRCĂ, Cristinel PLANTOS

AN ENAMELLED ZOOMORPHIC BROOCH RECENTLY DISCOVERED IN THE NORTHERN CEMETERY OF APULUM (ALBA IULIA) 164

Irina ACHIM, Cătălin PAVEL

VICTORIA-FORTUNA INTAGLIO INSCRIBED "ZOH" FROM CAPIDAVA (SCYTHIA) IN ITS ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT 177

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MAPPING

Astrid VICAS

MAPPING THE EARLY SPREAD OF COPPER METALLURGY IN EUROPE: PICKING UP GENETIC TRAILS 195

Florin-Gheorghe FODOREAN

MAPS OF ROMAN DACIA. VII. ADRIEN-HUBERT BRUÉ (1786-1832) AND 'CARTE DE LA DACIE ANCIENNE DE LA PANNONIE DE L'ILLYRIE ET MOESIE' (1875) 223

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOPOGRAPHY

Edmond NOGYI

FROM MÁGURA CĂLANULUI TO THE ORĂȘTIE MOUNTAINS: PREDICTING LIMESTONE TRANSPORTATION ROUTES WITH LEAST-COST PATH ANALYSIS 227

EPIGRAPHY AND PAPHYROLOGY

Imre Áron ILLÉS

EPIKLESIS (OGIS 458): RENUNTIATIO OR APPELLATIO? 242

Emine HAJDARI, Slavche ATANASOVSKI, Arben HAJDARI

THE SODALES OF THE COLLEGIUM OF MINERVA AND HERCULES IN A RECENT DISCOVERED FUNERARY MONUMENT FROM SCUPI 250

NUMISMATICS

Adela BÂLTĂC, Mihai DIMA

A HOARD FROM THE EARLY 3RD CENTURY AD DISCOVERED IN THE MAIN GATE - MAIN TOWER SECTOR IN HISTRIA (CONSTANȚA COUNTY, ROMANIA) 256

CULTURAL HERITAGE PROTECTION

REVIEWS

Claudiu PURDEA, Cătălin BORANGIC

LOST ARTEFACTS: THE CASE OF THE DACIAN SICA WEAPONS
FROM THE ORĂȘTIE MOUNTAINS 267

Sergiu MUSTEAȚĂ

WORLD HERITAGE SERIAL PROPERTIES: FROM CONCEPTUAL
FOUNDATIONS TO EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT. A CRITICAL
STUDY WITH APPLICATIONS TO ROMANIA 289

Victor COJOCARU

John Ma, *Polis: A New History of the Ancient Greek City-State from
the Early Iron Age to the End of Antiquity*. Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 2024. XVIII + 713 pages, 71 illustrations, 1 table,
and 16 maps integrated into the text 299

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EPIGRAPHY AND PAPHYROLOGY

THE *SODALES* OF THE *COLLEGIUM* OF MINERVA AND HERCULES IN A RECENT DISCOVERED FUNERARY MONUMENT FROM SCUPI

Abstract: This study examines a newly discovered inscription from the eastern necropolis of Scupi, which sheds light on the role and function of the *collegium* of Minerva and Hercules in the funerary and associative life of the local community during the Roman period. The monument in question is a funerary stele dedicated to Tiberius Claudius Ianuarius, a soldier of Legio VII Claudia, erected by the fellows (*sodales*) of the *collegium* in fulfillment of their role as a funerary association. Through epigraphic analysis and comparison with other evidence from Scupi and neighboring provinces, the study aims to establish the chronology, social composition, and function of the college. The results indicate that the association combined a dual function—cultic and funerary—emerging as a *collegium funeraticium* assembled under the patronage of Minerva and Hercules. Beyond its religious dimension, it was primarily concerned with ensuring the burial and commemoration of its members, thus reflecting an interaction between military and civilian components. As the only attested evidence so far for this *collegium* in Scupi, the inscription significantly enhances our understanding of an under documented aspect of religious and associative life in Dardania (the southern part of Upper Moesia), while also illustrating broader processes of social integration and Romanization in a provincial context of the Roman Empire.

Keywords: *colonia Flavia Scupinorum*; *funerary stele*; *sodales*; *collegium funeraticium*; *collegium Minervae et Herculis*; *legio VII Claudia*.

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As part of a rescue project, intensive preventive archaeological excavations have been underway since March 2022 in the eastern necropolis of *colonia Flavia Scupinorum*, nowadays Skopje. These investigations, directed by archaeologists of the National Conservation Centre Skopje, Slavcho and Vera Atanasovski, have so far brought to light more than 3,500 tombs, yielding abundant archaeological material, including a significant number of spolia inscriptions reused in funerary contexts. Based on the archaeological material documented so far, including ceramics, metal artefacts, tomb typologies, and numismatic finds, the necropolis shows a broad chronological range of use, spanning from the 1st century AD to the 5th century AD. Among the epigraphic inscriptions recovered from this necropolis and reused as spolia, only one has been published to date.²

¹ Corresponding author.

² GODDARD/HAJDARI/ATANASOVSKI 2025, 283-312.



Fig. 1. Archaeological context in which the stele was discovered (Photograph by S. Atanasovski).

Among these, a funerary monument dedicated to Tiberius Claudius Ianuarius, a former soldier of the Legio VII Claudia and member of the College of Minerva and Hercules, is of particular interest. Discovered in 2023 in tomb no. 2031, and currently preserved in the Archaeological Park of Scupi, the monument had been reused as a cover slab for the grave.³ Its discovery not only enriches the corpus of inscriptions from Scupi, but also provides important evidence for the participation of inhabitants of the colony in Legio VII Claudia⁴ and for the functioning of religious associations within the colony.

The stele, carved from local limestone, measures 150 × 60 × 24 cm. The monument is, on the whole, well preserved, though it shows damage in the lower section and along the left part of the pediment. The pediment is adorned with a four-petal rosette set within an arched pattern, flanked by two lateral acroteria, of which only one survives. Aside from these features, no further decorative elements can be securely identified. The simplicity of the ornamentation, combined with the selective survival of the acroteria, may point either to the modest ambitions of the dedicators or to the limited repertoire of the workshop responsible for its production.

The epigraphic field, measuring 79 × 37 cm, is delimited by a simple frame and contains an inscription of eleven lines,

³ During the excavation, no grave goods were recovered, precluding a precise chronological determination of the burial. Nevertheless, on the basis of its stratigraphic context and the morphological and typological characteristics of the grave architecture, the burial can most plausibly be assigned to the 3rd–4th century AD. The stele that had served as its cover slab was found in a secondary position, thereby unequivocally indicating its reuse as spolia.

⁴ The participation of inhabitants of the Colonia Scupinorum in this legion is well attested; see the list in CIL III 14507 = IMS II 53, which records that many of the soldiers discharged in AD 195 (39 individuals) originated from Scupi.

which on the whole remains relatively easy to decipher. The letters, carefully executed with regular strokes, generally range between 3.5 and 4 cm in height. Notably, in the fifth, sixth and tenth lines several characters (L. 5 = N, L. 6 = O, E, G and L. 10 = A) are rendered in a slightly smaller size. This irregularity may be attributed either to spatial constraints, suggesting that the available surface had not been calculated with precision, or to a certain degree of negligence on the part of the stonecutter. In addition to these variations in size, the inscription also displays a marked inconsistency in the shaping of the letter G, which in Zmaragdi appears in a form resembling the letter C, in contrast to the more regular variant employed in LEG, indicating that the stonecutter made use of at least two distinct graphic forms. Such variations, although minor, can provide insight into the technical practices of local workshops and the varying degree of skill among artisans responsible for the production of funerary inscriptions.

D · M ·	D(is) M(anibus),
TIB · CL TIB FL	Tib(erius) Cl(audius), Tib(erii) f(i)l(ius),
IANVARIUS	Ianuarius,
LEG VII CL	leg(ionis) VII Cl(audiae),
VIX AN L H S E	uix(it) an(nis) L. H(ic) s(itus) e(st).
SODALES COLEG	Sodales col(l)eg(ii)
MINERVAE ET	Mineruae et
HERCVLIS	Herculis,
SVB CVRA C A-	sub cura C(aii) A-
TIENI ZMA-	-tieni Zma-
RAGDI F C	-ragdi, f(aciendum) c(uraverunt).

Punctuation marks are attested only in the first two lines of the inscription and are absent in the remainder of the text. Ligatures are not employed in a systematic fashion, but occur sporadically: in line 7 (NE, VAE), in line 8 (HER), and in line 9 (VR). These epigraphic features are faithfully reflected in the transcription of the text, which appears as follows:

TRANSLATION

To the Divine Manes, Tib(erius) Claudius Ianuarius, son of Tib(erius), of the VII Claudia legion, lived 50 years.

He rests here. The fellows of the *collegium* of Minerva and Hercules took charge of erecting (this monument), under the responsibility of C. Atienus Zmaragdus.

COMMENTARY

L. 1 - 5: These lines contain the essential information about the individual in whose memory the monument was erected. Following the standard formula *Dis Manibus*, the name and military service of the deceased, Tib. Claudius Ianuarius, son of Tiberius, are presented. He served as a

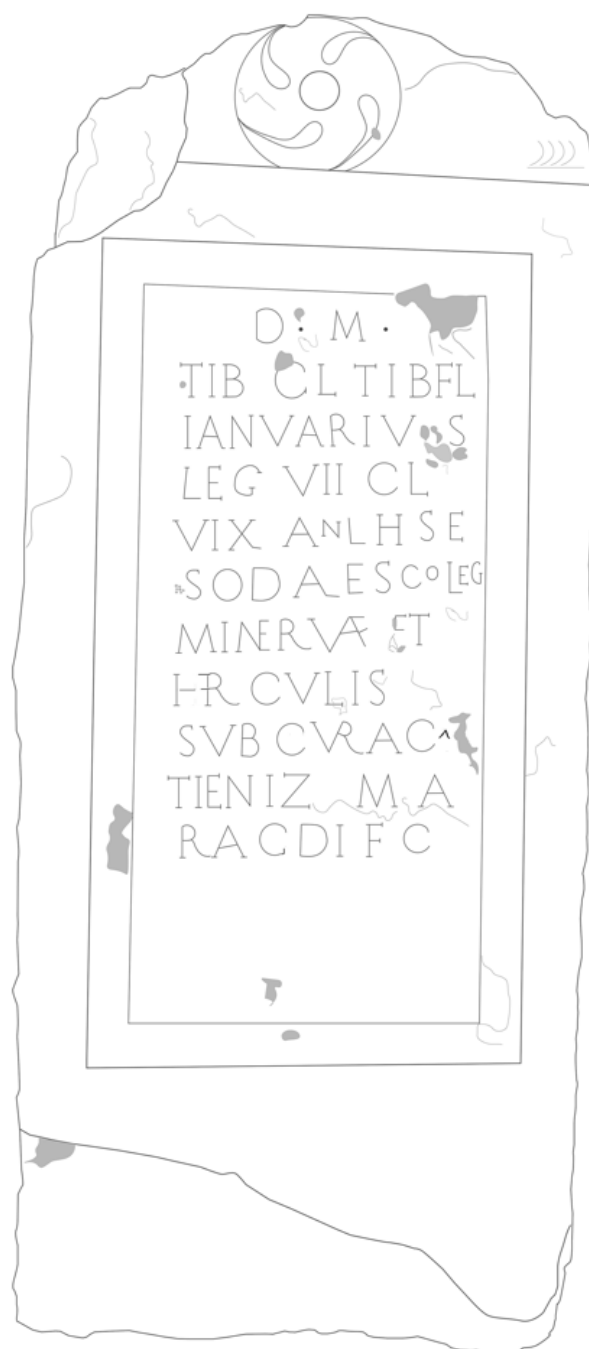
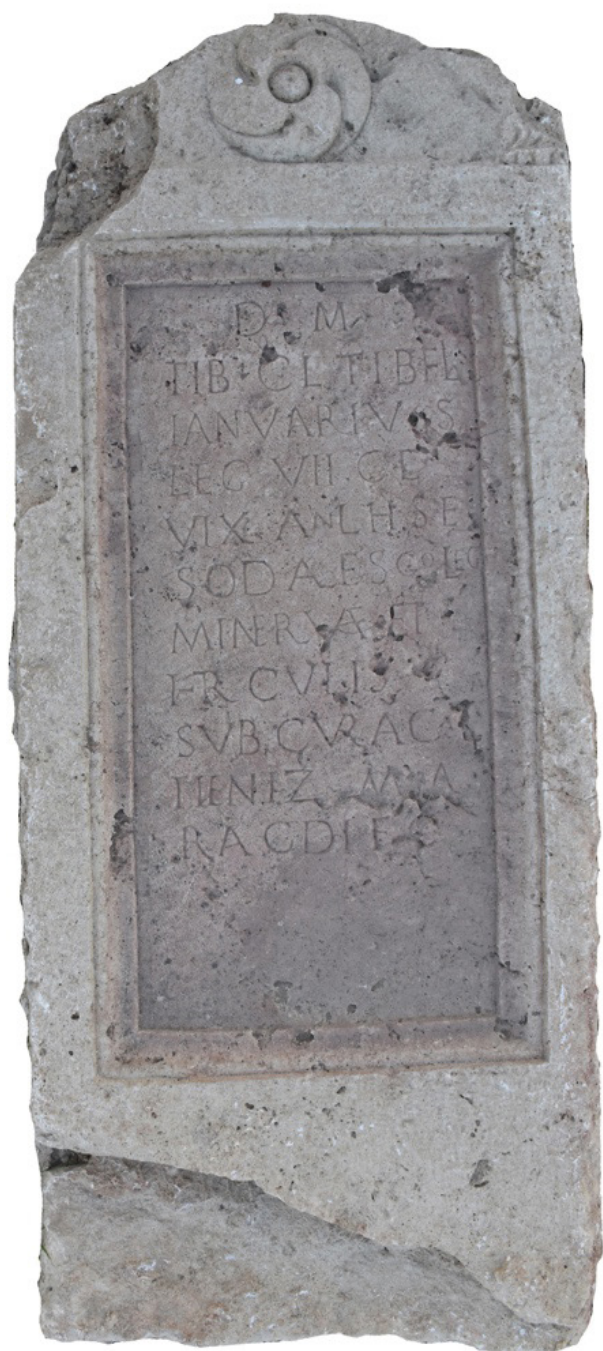


Fig. 2. Stele of Tiberius Claudius, from the eastern necropolis of Colonia Scupinorum (Photograph by A. Hajdari; drawing by T. Berbatovci).

soldier in the VII Claudia legion, whose presence in Upper Moesia is well known and attested by epigraphic sources.⁵ The following lines mention the age at which the deceased passed away, and this section concludes with the funerary formula *H S E. (hic situs est)*. Although the title *veteranus* is not attested in the inscription, the deceased's age, 50 years, makes it unlikely that he was still in active military service at the time of death. Furthermore, the absence of the honorific title *Severiana Alexandriana* suggests that the stele was erected prior to 228 AD, the year in which this designation was formally conferred upon *Legio VII Claudia*.⁶ This provides a reliable *terminus ante quem* for dating the inscription. In addition, the epigraphic features employed here, namely the combination of the formulae *D M* and *H S E*, together with the nominative case used for the deceased, correspond well to practices attested from the second half of the 2nd century AD onwards. When considered together with the abbreviated form *VII CL*, these elements suggest that the inscription is most plausibly dated to the second half of the 2nd century AD, or at the latest to the early 3rd century AD. The mention of the legion without specifying the position held by Ianuarius within the *Legio VII Claudia*, a detail regularly recorded in other military inscriptions from Scupi,⁷ represents a deviation from the standard pattern, which may be attributed either to limited care in the execution of the inscription or to particular circumstances surrounding its production.

L 6 - 8: The mention of the deceased as a *sodalis* of the *collegium* of Minerva and Hercules clearly attests his membership in this association, although the inscription does not specify his exact role within it. The participation of soldiers in such *collegia* was a widespread and well-attested practice from the Augustan period onward. Officers appear to have been initially excluded from membership, a restriction which was lifted during the reign of Septimius Severus.⁸ Furthermore, as N. Tran⁹ has observed, the very notion of a strict functional division between "military" and "civilian" *collegia* is a historiographical construct, without explicit support in the ancient sources.

L 9 - 11: The information preserved in these lines indicates that the *collegium* of Minerva and Hercules, while presenting itself under the patronage of these deities, included among its functions the responsibility of organizing the funerals of its members (*collegia funeraticia*). Although modern scholarship, following the terminology introduced by Th. Mommsen in 1843,¹⁰ often designates such associations as *collegia funeraticia*, this classification only partially reflects the ancient realities, since funerary duties rarely constituted their sole purpose. As is widely attested across the Empire, these associations combined religious devotion with broader

communal and commemorative activities.¹¹ In the present case, it was the college itself that took the initiative to erect the funerary monument in honor of one of its *sodales*, a task entrusted to C. Atienius Zmaragdus. Such collective initiatives underline the corporate identity of these associations, which assumed responsibility for ensuring the dignified commemoration of their members. It is worth noting that another inscription from Scupi mentions a Zmaragdus¹² active among the *cultores templi Herculis*. Since only his cognomen is given in that inscription, it cannot be determined with certainty whether he is the same individual. Nevertheless, the reference to the *cultores templi Herculis* provides important evidence for the functioning of this religious community of Hercules in Scupi and for the existence of a temple dedicated to this deity.¹³

The deceased, *Tib. Claudius Ianuarius*,¹⁴ is recorded with the full *tria nomina*, as expected for a Roman legionary citizen, a formula which in provincial contexts also reinforced claims to Roman civic identity. The name of the dedicant, C. Atienius Zmaragdus, bears the cognomen Zmaragdus, of Greek origin, which belongs to an onomastic repertoire widely associated with freedmen and provincials of Eastern background.¹⁵ Such names often reflect broader patterns of cultural mobility and integration within the Roman Empire. The absence of any military or civic title in his designation suggests that the *collegium* of Minerva and Hercules included, alongside members with military status such as Tiberius Claudius Ianuarius, individuals without an active military role, thus illustrating the heterogeneous social composition of such *collegia*.

In conclusion, while epigraphic evidence frequently attests to colleges dedicated separately to Minerva¹⁶ and to Hercules,¹⁷ no other source, apart from this funerary

¹¹ TRAN 2006, 12-13.

¹² AE 2005, 1317.

¹³ In addition to the evidence from Scupi itself, an inscription from Tetovo (AE 2009, 1190 = BRANCATO 2024, 48) further corroborates the presence and vitality of the cult of Hercules within the wider territory of the Colonia Scupinorum. The text records Julius Symmachus, an *augustalis* of the colony, who dedicated a funerary monument to his mother on behalf of the *collegium Herculis*. This testimony not only confirms the existence of an organized *collegium* devoted to Hercules but also demonstrates its active role in commemorative and communal functions. Taken together, the Scupi and Tetovo inscriptions offer significant and mutually reinforcing evidence for the establishment, institutional structure, and sustained activity of the cult of Hercules in the colony and its surrounding region.

¹⁴ In Upper Moesia, individuals bearing the *praenomen* and *nomen* *Ti. Claudius*, a name well attested across numerous provinces and diverse social contexts cf. OPEL II, p. 214, are relatively well documented cf. Scupi, IMS VI, 104; 106; CIL III, 8212; Viminacium, AE 1999, 1313; CIL III, 8113; Naissus, IMS IV, 34; CIL III, 1681; Ram / Lederata, CIL III, 8100; Timacum Minus, IMS II, 30; Rudnik, CIL III, 6114 = CIL III, 8334; Runjeve / Runeve, CIL III, 8184 (p. 2328, 108). *Ianuarius* is attested as a *cognomen*, in Upper Moesia: Scupi, IMS VI, 74, 96, 69; CIL III, 8215; Ratiaria, AE 2009, 1187; Viminacium; CIL III, 14507, 8123; IMS II, 108; Ranovac, AE 1987, 854 = AE 2018, 1367; Timacum Minus, CIL III, 14584; Velika Mostanica, IMS I, 137. In all these inscriptions *ianvarivs/ianvaria* are cognomina.

¹⁵ KAJANTO 1965, 705. The name *Smaragdus* (Σμάρραδος) - emerald, cf. GAFFIOT, 2016, s.v. "smaragdus", <https://www.gaffiot.fr>, is attested in various forms such as *Ismaragdus* and Σμάρραδος is a cognomen commonly found throughout the Empire, cf. OPEL IV, p. 805. Whereas in the province of Upper Moesia, this cognomen is attested for the first time in this form.

¹⁶ InscrIt III.1, 94 = AE 1955, 195; MAZZOCCA 2024, 443. See also: GERER 2011, 1 = AE 2012, nr. 397; MAZZOCCA 2024, 457.

¹⁷ CIL II.14, 799; SEBarc. 2014, 158; HERRERO 2014, 1; BRANCATO 2024, 1; MAZZOCCA 2024, 76; AE 1979, 141; BRANCATO 2024, 104; CIL VI,

⁵ IMS VI; MIRDITA 1981; FERRI 2001; KALAJA-HAJDARI 2017; HAJDARI/GODDARD 2023, 1198-1215.

⁶ CIL III, 8112; cf. AE 1912, 53, which is not dated and displays this imperial epithet in an abbreviated form: SA; HAJDARI/GODDARD/KABASHI 2021, 632-662.

⁷ IMS VI, 9, 29, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 227, 241

⁸ LASSERRE 2007, 777-780.

⁹ TRAN 2006, 10-15.

¹⁰ MOMMSEN 1843, 92-116.

monument discovered in Scupi, attests to the existence of a Roman *collegium* in Dardania (the southern part of Upper Moesia) bearing the name *sodales collegii Minervae et Herculis*. Neither literary sources nor the principal epigraphic corpora record a *collegium funeraticium* that had chosen Minerva and Hercules jointly as its tutelary deities. The Scupi inscription therefore represents the only attested case so far, offering valuable evidence for the ways in which funerary *collegia* in the Roman provinces combined associative structures with commemorative practices.

At Scupi, additional dedications related to *collegia* have been uncovered,¹⁸ however, the available epigraphic evidence does not support the conclusion that these associations were primarily composed of veterans. Rather, they appear to have been integrated into the civic and social fabric of the colony. A significant indication in this regard is provided by the *sodales Platiae Superae*,¹⁹ who most likely represented traders or comparable groups. These cases suggest that such associations did not necessarily possess a military character, but could instead encompass traders or other civilians. When considered alongside the case of the *sodales collegii Minervae et Herculis*, this evidence points to the heterogeneous composition of such associations in the context of Scupi and underlines their integration into the broader civic and social structures of the colony.

From this perspective, the joint reference to Minerva and Hercules may be seen to carry symbolic significance. While the association of these two deities is not entirely unknown in Roman tradition, their appearance in the title of a *collegium* is uncommon. It should nevertheless be emphasized that the Scupi inscription refers more to a *collegium funeraticium*, which assembled under the names of its tutelary deities, than to a community primarily devoted to their cult. The choice of Minerva and Hercules should therefore be understood not as evidence of active worship, but rather as a conventional way of framing the group's identity within the broader spectrum of Roman civic religiosity.

Within this symbolic framework, it may be suggested that the members of the *collegium* were local citizens who organized under the tutelage of Minerva and Hercules. The monument may therefore be understood primarily as a funerary commemoration, while also illustrating the associative practices through which provincial communities structured commemoration and mutual support.

The case of *Tib. Claudius Ianuarius* and *C. Atienius Zmaragdus*, who present contrasting onomastic and social profiles, the former a veteran from a legion, the latter bearing a cognomen of Greek origin, widely attested in the epigraphic record of the eastern provinces, often among freeborn individuals, illustrates the heterogeneous composition of the *collegium*, which combined funerary responsibilities with cultic reference to its tutelary deities. Although the available evidence does not permit any reconstruction of the *collegium's* size or internal organization, the inscription nevertheless provides valuable testimony to the presence and activity of such associations in the provincial context.

1339; BRANCATO 2024, 152; CIL VI, 31691; BRANCATO 2024, 153.

¹⁸ IMS VI, 221, 223 ; AE 2005, 1316.

¹⁹ IMS VI, 221, 223.

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