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Kateryna Savelieva

Private places of worship in Tyras during Roman times*

Key words: Tyras, Roman period, household shrines, sculpture, terracotta figurines, lamps.

Cuvinte cheie: Tyras, epoca romană, altare domestice, sculptură, figurine de teracotă, lămpi.

Kateryna Savelieva

Private places of worship in Tyras during Roman times

The aim of this paper is to summarize and consolidate information on private cult practices based on sources found in the residential houses of the ancient city of Tyras. Over years of investigation, several rooms from different houses dating to the 2nd-3rd centuries AD have been excavated. Some of these rooms may have served as home shrines – spaces where families performed religious rituals and made offerings to the gods. Evidence for this includes the discovery of objects associated with cult practices, such as sculptures of deities, votive reliefs, terracotta figurines, ritual vessels, and lamps. In one case, a herm of Dionysus, a votive relief depicting seated goddesses, and a statue of an unidentified male deity were found in the northeastern corner of a room, alongside inscribed cups likely used for ritual purposes. In another house, two votive slabs with relief depictions of the Thracian Horseman were discovered, presumably installed in a niche in the southeastern corner of the room. Beyond images of deities, other religious objects found throughout the residential areas of Tyras further attest to the practice of domestic cults. Interpreting these finds is one of the key objectives of this research.

Kateryna Savelieva

Locuri private de cult în Tyras în perioada romană

Scopul acestui studiu este de a rezuma și consolida informațiile privind practicile cultice private, bazându-se pe sursele descoperite în casele rezidențiale din orașul antic Tyras. De-a lungul anilor de investigații, au fost studiate mai multe încăperi aparținând unor case rezidențiale diferite, datând din secolele II-III e.n. Unele dintre aceste încăperi ar fi putut servi drept altare domestice – spații în care familiile desfășurau ritualuri religioase și aduceau ofrande zeilor. Dovezi în acest sens includ descoperirea unor obiecte asociate cu practicile cultice, precum sculpturi de zeiță, reliefuri votive, figurine de teracotă, vase rituale și lămpi. Într-un caz, un herm al lui Dionysos, un relief votiv reprezentând zeițe așezate și o statuie a unei zeițe masculine neidentificate au fost găsite în colțul de nord-est al unei camere, alături de cupe inscripționate, probabil utilizate în scopuri rituale. Într-o altă casă, au fost descoperite două plăci votive cu reprezentări în relief ale Călărețului Trac, presupus amplasate într-o nișă în colțul de sud-est al camerei. Pe lângă imaginile zeilor, alte obiecte religioase descoperite în zonele rezidențiale ale Tyras-ului atestă în continuare practicile cultice domestice. Interpretarea acestor descoperiri reprezintă unul dintre obiectivele principale ale acestei cercetări.

Investigating the layers of Tyras presents significant challenges. A portion of the ancient city is overlain by the medieval Akkerman fortress and the modern city (fig. 1,1). The residential quarters of Tyras are poorly preserved due to intensive construction activities in later historical periods. Nevertheless, archaeological excavations of Roman dwellings have provided evidence of various cultic practices. Domestic religion was an integral aspect of Greek and Roman cultures alongside the official state religion, making it highly likely that certain rooms or areas within houses in Tyras functioned

as domestic shrines – spaces where families performed religious rituals and made offerings to the gods. The discovery of artefacts associated with cultic practices, such as small portable statues, votive reliefs, terracotta figurines, ritual vessels, and similar items within these houses, supports the occurrence of such activities. While individual cult objects found outside their original context do not directly confirm the presence of a domestic shrine in a specific room, they nonetheless provide valuable insights into the religious beliefs of the household's inhabitants.

Between 1928 and 1930, Paul Nicorescu excavated a trench in the Civil Courtyard of the medieval fortress (point 21) [Nicorescu 1933, 559]. At this location, the basement of a house with an

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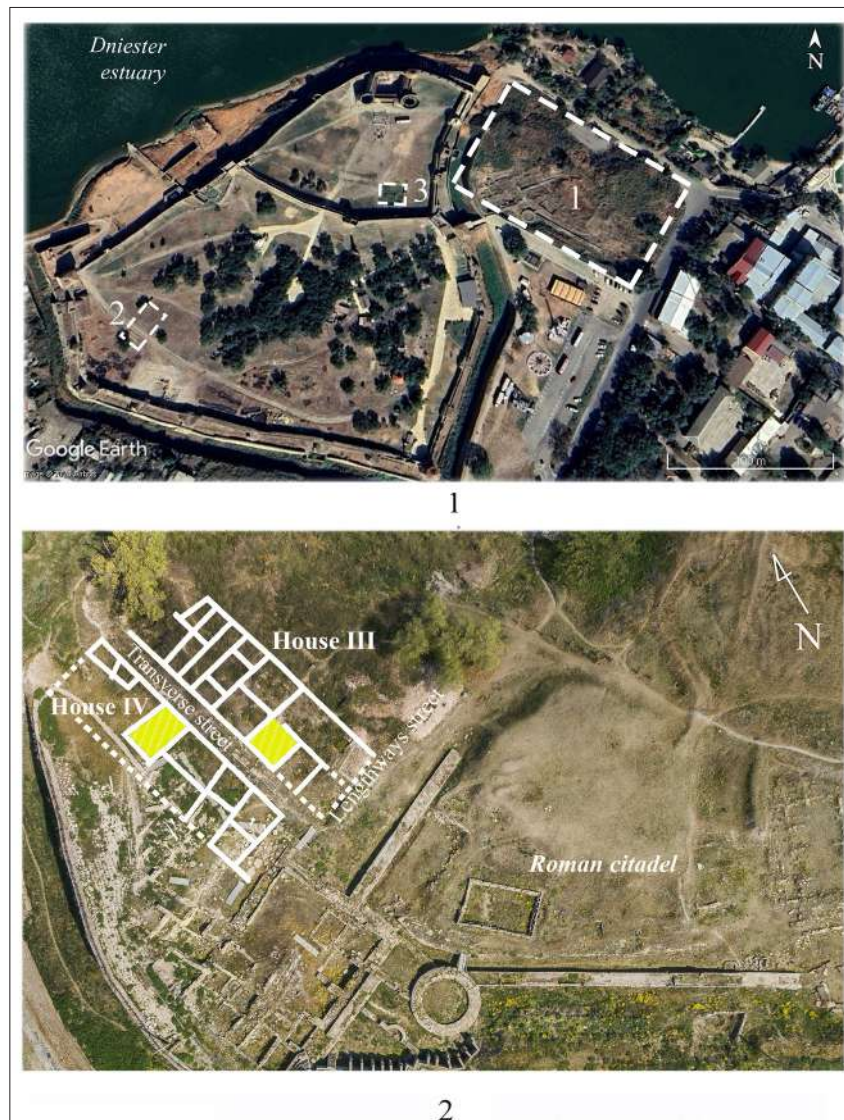


Fig. 1. Tyras. 1. Excavated areas: 1) Central excavation site; 2) trench excavated by P. Nicorescu (point 21); 3) excavation site RK-4 (© Google Earth 2024 [9.17.2021], modified by the author). 2. View of Houses III and IV, streets, and the Roman citadel at the Central excavation site (drone snapshot taken by O. Hymanov 2020, modified by the author 2024). The rooms with the presumed domestic shrines are highlighted in yellow.

exit leading to a corridor in the southern wall was investigated. The basement walls were carefully plastered with limestone mortar. Near the exit, a large number of lamps were discovered (fig. 2,5-12), along with a glass bead featuring a gold clasp found in the southeastern corner. The fill of the basement contained numerous bricks and fragments of Roman pottery. During the excavations of this location, two fragments of marble slabs with Greek inscriptions and one with a Latin inscription were recovered. The latter fragment, chipped on all sides, is likely a dedication made on behalf of a soldier from the V Macedonian Legion

[Nicorescu 1933, 570; Ivanchik 2021, 172]. Several items potentially related to cultic practices were also found here: the head of a female terracotta figurine (fig. 2,1), a terracotta bull's head (fig. 2,2), an incense burner (*turibulum*) (fig. 2,3), and a ceramic unguentarium (fig. 2,4) [Nicorescu 1933, 573–588]. The findings of lamps in the basement are of particular interest. P. Nicorescu, in his article, mentioned a large number of these artefacts without specifying their exact quantity. Among the lamps, two of the same type (type Broneer XXVII C) from the late 2nd-3rd century feature relief images on the discus [Nicorescu 1933, 589]. Accord-

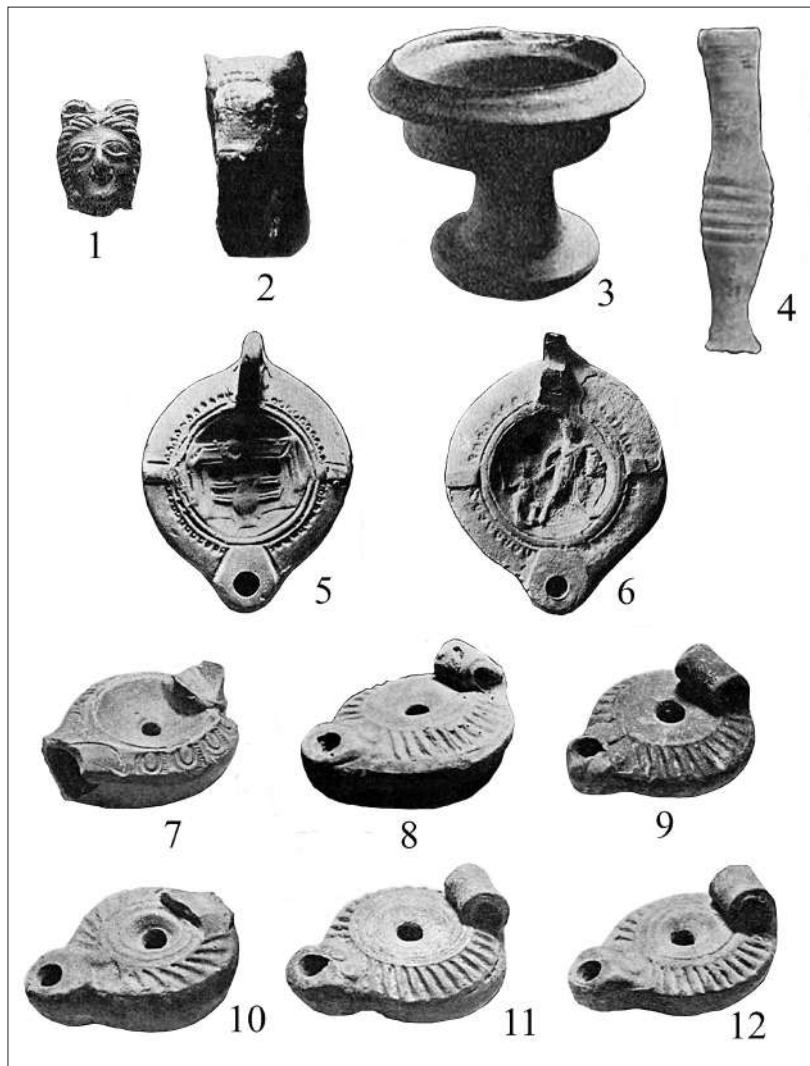


Fig. 2. Finds from point 21 (after: Nicorescu 1933). 1-2. Terracotta figurines. 3. Incense burner (*turibulum*). 4. Unguentarium. 5-12. Lamps.

ing to author's description, the first lamp depicts a hydria (or maybe an oenochoë) in the foreground, with a four-legged table with crossbars visible in the background (fig. 2,5). On the table lies a round object, likely a wreath. There are three holes on the discus. A stamp ΠETHIC is present on the base. The second lamp (fig. 2,6) depicts a satyr holding a syrinx in his left hand, while with his right hand, he pulls another smaller satyr by the hand. The latter is holding a long object in his right hand, possibly a staff (or more likely, a torch). A similar lamp was found in Olbia [Sheiko, Puklina 2019, 83]. According to the description of the authors of the publication, the discus depicts a satyr holding the hand of a small female figure. This scene appears to be connected to the mythology of Dio-

nysus, possibly depicting an episode from a myth involving a Satyr or Pan and a Nymph.

Only with great caution can it be assumed that the basement housed a domestic shrine. Excavations of sanctuaries have shown that lamps were used not only to illuminate rooms but also in various rituals, including sacrifices [Bookidis, Pemberton 2015, 15-16]. Additionally, lamps themselves – particularly those depicting mythological subjects – could be dedicated to the gods, along with other objects such as sculptures, terracotta figurines, and similar items. In this case, however, we cannot be certain that the lamps served a cultic function rather than a utilitarian one. Nonetheless, the presence of other cult-related artefacts may support this interpretation. For



Fig. 3. Finds from the excavation site RK-4. 1. Lead statuette of Aphrodite/Venus (after: Samoilova, Ostapenko, Savelev 2010). 2. Fragment of an Isis lactans terracotta figurine (photo and reconstruction by the author). 3. Leg of a terracotta figurine, likely representing a Roman warrior (photo by the author).

example, incense burners (*turibula*) were used to burn aromatic substances, which, combined with the light of the lamps, were believed to attract the attention of the gods.

Terracotta figurines are another category of artefacts associated with household cults. Of particular interest is a female terracotta head, which belongs to a small group of statuettes representing a female deity. The style of this head differs significantly from that of most terracotta statuettes of this period uncovered during the excavations of Tyras. She features a distinctive hairstyle, with two high tufts of hair. Stylistically similar is a figure of a goddess wearing a pointed headdress and a long, wide dress, seemingly made of sheepskin (the entire surface of the dress is covered with short incisions made before firing). Her shoulders are draped in a himation. According to Isaac Kleiman, these figurines depict a local barbarian goddess [Kleiman 1970, 25]. Natalia Son proposed that these figurines represent a syncretic image of Aphrodite, the patroness of fertility and sheep herds [Son 1993, 103, 130]. However, their local provenance remains uncertain; they may have been imported or, given their small number, brought by an individual. Notably, stylistically similar artefacts have been uncovered during excavations of

the settlement of Ostrov near Durostorum [Băltăc, Știrbulescu 2007-2008, 175]. The identification of such images remains problematic to this day.

Between 2008 and 2012, a room in a Roman house (106-RK) was partially investigated in the garrison courtyard of the fortress at excavation site RK-4 [Samoilova, Ostapenko, Savelev 2010, 218-219]. Within the fill of this room, a lead statuette of Aphrodite/Venus, measuring 6.5 cm in height, was discovered (fig. 3,1). Additionally, fragments of terracotta figurines were recovered from the Roman-era layer at this site, including a fragment of an Isis lactans figurine (fig. 3,2) [Savelev, Saveleva 2012, 99]¹ and the leg of a figurine with a hole for suspension, likely representing a Roman warrior (fig. 3,3).

In summary, the investigations conducted at these sites was limited, and we lack a comprehensive understanding of the layout of the uncovered houses or the specific designation of spaces for household cults within them. Nevertheless, the

1. The earliest evidence of the cult of Egyptian gods in Tyras is found in dedicatory inscriptions dating to the 2nd-1st centuries BCE [Ivanchik 2021, 92-93]. Another dedicatory inscription is attributed to the 2nd century CE [Ivanchik 2021, 98]. A fragment of a terracotta figurine depicting the head of Serapis, discovered in a mixed context, also dates to the Roman period [Dmitrov 1955, 121; Kleiman 1970, 26].

findings thus far present promising avenues for further investigation.

The residential quarters at the Central Excavation Site were the most thoroughly investigated. This area revealed a Roman citadel and adjacent residential houses located to the north and northwest of the defensive walls. Between 1947 and 1985, two large residential houses, designated as Nos. III and IV, were excavated (fig. 1,2). These houses were positioned opposite each other on either side of the Transverse Street, which was paved with large stone slabs. Both houses were constructed during the second half of the 1st century and were destroyed in the mid-3rd century due to a large fire caused by the Gothic invasion of the city. Although the houses were poorly preserved, rooms were excavated in both structures that can be identified as spaces designated for religious rituals – domestic shrines. This identification is supported by the assemblage of finds recovered from these rooms, including sculptures and ritual vessels.

House III was situated to the east of Transverse Street and north of Lengthways Street, just a few meters from the wall of the Roman citadel. The house, belonging to a wealthy family, was notably large. According to Adel Furmans'ka's calculations, its total area reached approximately 500 m² [Furmanskaia 1979, 5,6]. In one of the rooms, beneath a layer of tiles and charred wood, a hoard of 26 silver and 154 copper coins was discovered. Alongside the coins were a silver fibula, a gold ring with a carnelian insert engraved with a depiction of Hermes/Mercury (fig. 4,1), and a gold serpentiform ring (fig. 4,2)². These pieces of jewelry undoubtedly reflect the religious preferences of their owner³. The coins and jewelry were likely kept in a purse that was lost in the fire rather than being deliberately hidden. In another room, a small pot containing 61 coins (5 silver and 56 copper) was unearthed. Several rooms in the house served production purposes: one contained two small furnaces used for smelting metal items, while another housed a kiln designed for firing small

vessels and clay objects [Dmitrov 1955, 115-116; Furmanskaia 1957, 84-85; Karishkovsky, Klejman 1994, 232-234].

The most significant finds relevant to this study were uncovered in Room 29, located in the southern part of the house and measuring 19 m². The room was excavated in 1961. Its fill consisted of ash, bricks, tiles, and the remains of charred logs and ceiling beams. Beneath this debris, two slabs featuring relief depictions of the Thracian Horseman were uncovered [Furmanskaia 1965, 158-159]. However, no other items associated with cult practices were found here. Only household objects were discovered, including two intact amphorae and numerous fragments of red slip ware, red-clay ware, and gray-clay ware⁴. Among the finds was a copper coin from Tyras, depicting Julia Mamaea, dated to after 235 CE. Nevertheless, the slabs themselves are of significant interest.

The first slab is made of limestone and depicts a boar hunting scene (fig. 5,1). Its dimensions are 27.5×35×7.5 cm. A recess is present at the bottom right for fixing the slab in place. The scene shows a horseman in a short tunic and a fluttering cloak, holding a whip, riding a galloping horse to the right. Beneath the rider's feet is a dog attacking a boar. To the right, a pine tree entwined by a snake is depicted. The back of the boar's body is partially hidden behind the tree. While the snake and boar are rendered with realism, the rider's figure appears somewhat rough and disproportionate.

The second slab, made of white marble, presents a more intricate scene involving several figures (fig. 5,2). Its dimensions are 20×16.5×2.5 cm. The image is framed, with the bottom frame measuring 2 cm in height, while the top and side frames are 0.5-1 cm high. The back side is carefully finished. The slab has sustained some damage: the upper right corner is broken, and the lower left corner is chipped. The relief is low; at the center of the composition, a horseman is depicted riding a horse moving to the right. In his raised right hand, he wields a long spear pointed downward. He is dressed in a short tunic, with a cloak draped behind him. His horse is slowly approaching a kneeling bull with its head lowered (A. Furmans'ka

2. The ring with the insert has a diameter of 1.9 cm and weighs 14.8 g. The serpentiform ring has a diameter of 2 cm, weighs 14.4 g, and shows significant signs of wear [Furmanskaia 1962, 127-129].

3. A connection exists between snakes, serpent rings, and the cult of Mercury [Cool 2000, 34; Hamat, Georgescu 2022, 572].

4. According to A. Furmans'ka's report, a niche measuring 0.72×0.70 m was located in the eastern wall near the southeast corner [Furmanskaia 1961, 3]. However, the report does not include a photograph of this niche. It is plausible that the votive reliefs were originally installed there.



Fig. 4. Finds from House III (after: Furmans'ka 1962). 1. Gold ring with a carnelian insert engraved with a depiction of Hermes/Mercury. 2. Gold serpentiform ring.

mistakenly identified the animal as a boar). Under the horse's body, a dog is depicted with its front paws raised. To the left stands Hercules, holding a club in his raised right hand. In his bent left arm, he holds a rhyton in front of him, with a lion skin draped over his forearm. The bull is positioned between the legs of the horse and Hercules. On the right side of the relief, behind the horse's tail, stands a man in a short tunic and cloak. He holds

an elongated object in his right hand and a round object at neck level in his left hand. According to A. Furmans'ka, these are a short spear and a shield. However, it seems more plausible that the items are ritual attributes – a tympanum and a torch. In the upper left corner, above the man, there is a depiction of what appears to be a seashell.

This scene likely symbolizes a sacrificial ritual. The kneeling bull represents a voluntary offering,



Fig. 5. Votive reliefs of the Thracian Horseman from Room 29 of House III (photo and drawing by the author).

Hercules seems to be the recipient of the sacrifice, and the Thracian horseman acts as a mediator between the dedicator and Hercules [Savelieva 2022, 25]. It is possible that the slab was custom-made. This assumption is supported by its non-standard nature (no close analogies are known to us). The customer may have personally chosen the composition, reflecting an episode from their own experience – possibly their participation in mysteries.

Slabs depicting the Thracian Horseman, discovered in a domestic context, raise questions about the ethnic and social origins of their owner. The distribution of such reliefs in the Northern Black Sea region is closely associated to Thracian soldiers. These reliefs are predominantly found in areas where Roman garrisons, recruited from Lower Moesia and Thrace, were stationed for extended periods [Shshelglov 1969, 135-136; Zubar' 2002, 199]⁵. However, an analysis of the dedicants' names in the inscriptions on slabs from Thrace and Moesia reveals that they often include not only Thracians but also Romans and individuals who had acquired Roman citizenship [Boteva 2007, 87; Alexandrov 2013, 167168]. The discovery of Thracian Horseman reliefs in a private house does not definitively confirm that the homeowner was of Thracian origin, although it remains a plausible possibility. What is certain is that he belonged to the upper social class of the city⁶. It is also possible that he was a Roman army veteran who may have participated in local administration or held the office of a priest after his service⁷. Consequently, it can be cautiously concluded that some of the cults revered by Roman soldiers and officers gained popularity beyond the confines of the garrison, influencing the religious landscape of the city.

To the west of Transverse Street stood **House IV**. It was significantly less well-preserved than House III. Its western section was almost entirely destroyed, leaving the layout of the house reconstructed hypothetically⁸. However, eight rooms

and a courtyard paved with slabs were excavated. Like House III, the southern section of this structure featured production rooms⁹.

The household shrine was likely located in Room 24, which was excavated between 1958 and 1959 [Furmans'ka 1962, 130-133]. It measured approximately 30 m². The entrance to the room was in the southern wall, where a threshold and a step in front of it were excavated. Almost directly opposite the entrance, 1.40 meters to the east, was a clay structure resembling a rectangular platform, measuring 100×90 cm and 15 cm in height. The platform had rounded edges and was coated with a clay layer. According to A. Furmans'ka's hypothesis, this raised structure likely served as an altar [Furmans'ka 1962, 131].

The room contained numerous artefacts, including a large number of amphora and jar fragments with burnt barley and wheat grains, as well as fragmented and intact molded cooking pots and tableware. Other finds included iron objects, fragments of glass vessels, small ceramic vessels, lamp fragments, several ceramic spindles, and glass beads. In the northwest corner, the lower part of a large red clay amphora (type Zeest 80) was preserved in situ, embedded in the floor. Also discovered in the room were fragments of a human skeleton and an iron spear lying beside it. This individual, likely defending the house, appears to have perished during an attack on the city in the mid-3rd century. Dog bones were also found on the floor in the southeast corner.

In the northeastern corner, beneath a layer of tiles and collapsed ceiling beams, three stone sculptures were uncovered: a herm of Dionysus, a fragment of a relief slab depicting seated goddesses, and a sculptural representation of an unidentified deity, which A. Furmans'ka described as a "barbarian warrior". The sculptures appear to have fallen from an elevated position during the fire that caused the collapse¹⁰.

5. Another fragmented slab from Tyras may be associated with the cults of the Roman garrison, as it was discovered just a few meters away from the citadel walls and a structure with an apse [Savelieva 2023, 645].

6. The presence of ethnic Thracians among the local elite of Tyras is attested in an honorary decree from 181 CE [Ivanchik 2021, 6668].

7. On the active participation of veterans in the social life of Lower Moesia see O. Martem'ianov's work [Martem'ianov 2021].

8. For a reconstruction of the layout is based on the latest excavation results see the article by I. Kleiman [Kleiman 1993, 102].

9. In particular in one of rooms, jewelry production was likely carried out: a furnace was discovered in the corner, along with a casting mold and a small thick-walled vessel with a drain found in the backfill. In another room, located in the north-western part of the house, the remains of a furnace and several small pits filled with ash were uncovered. A hand-made stone mill, fragments of glass vessels, and ceramic spinners were also discovered here [Karishkovsky, Klejman 1994, 237].

10. According to Valentyna Krapivina, the shrine was located on the second floor of the house, as the sculptures were discovered above the remains of the floor beams [Krapivina 2012, 195-196]. In this context, the clay platform might have served a utilitarian function, especially considering the significant number of household-related items found nearby.



Fig. 6. Finds from Room 24 of House IV. 1. Herm of Dionysus (photo by the author). 2. Fragment of a relief slab depicting seated goddesses (photo by the author). 3. Sculptural representation of an unidentified deity (photo by the author). 4-6. Cups with inscriptions (4 – after: Furmans'ka 1962; 5-6 – photo by O. Saveliev).

All three sculptures are made of marble-like limestone, and their surfaces have turned grey as a result of the fire. The herm featuring the head of Dionysus measures 18×9.5×5.5 cm (fig. 6,1). The tip of the nose and the beard are damaged. The god is depicted with a beard and shoulder-length curls. His forehead is adorned with a broad band, and his head is crowned with a wreath of ivy leaves featuring two corymbs.

A relief depicting two seated goddesses was found with its front side facing upward [Furman-skaia 1960, 80-81] (fig. 6,2). A large part of the slab has not been preserved. The fragment meas-

ures 20×18×6 cm. The relief is framed by a rectangular border 2.5 cm wide. The two goddesses are shown seated in the same pose: their left hands rest on their knees, while their right arms are bent at the elbows and extend forward, likely holding an object. However, the left hands of both figures are damaged and incomplete. Low benches are depicted beneath their feet. Both figures wear chitons girded beneath their breasts and are draped with himations. The upper body and head of the left figure are damaged and missing.

The figure on the right is slightly smaller than the one on the left. This asymmetry suggests the

possible presence of a third, smaller figure to the left of the larger one. A similar depiction of three seated goddesses in an aedicule on a 3rd-century BCE slab from Histria includes a dedicatory inscription to the Moirai [Bordenache 1967, 147]. Based on this analogy, Maria Kobylina, followed by other researchers, argued that the relief from Tyras depicts the goddesses of fates [Kobylina 1971, 251-252; Son 1993, 124; Karishkovsky, Klejman 1994, 236]. Another relief, from the Roman period, depicting three seated goddesses alongside the head of a bearded river god, was discovered on Delos and is dedicated to the Nymphs Minoides [Bruneau 1970, 437]. The slab from Tyras, however, lacks a dedicatory inscription or any clear markers identifying the goddesses depicted, making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions based solely on analogies.

The third sculpture from this complex, depicting a standing male figure, is also difficult to interpret [Furmanskaia 1960, 82-83]. The figure is disproportionate, with a large head and arms but a very short torso and legs (fig. 6,3). Its dimensions are 19×10×6 cm. The figurine was found face down. The head had been chopped off in antiquity and was found separately. The right side of the sculpture is damaged. The back side is untreated. The figure is dressed in wide trousers, a belt marked with vertical incised lines and decorated with five round plaques, and a hood-like garment on his head. In his lowered left hand, he holds an oval object, which A. Furmans'ka interpreted as a shield, identifying the figure as a soldier from one of the local barbarian tribes. However, this object appears rather small for a shield (its it measures 4×3 cm, smaller than the figure's head), which could be attributed to the overall disproportionality of the image. Even if we accept that the figure depicts a warrior, it seems unlikely that an image of an ordinary warrior would have been intended as a dedication to the gods. Instead, it is more plausible that the inhabitants of the house regarded it as a representation of a deity.

Among the ceramic vessels discovered in the room were three red clay, one-handled cups with inscriptions painted in white on their surfaces (fig. 4,4-6) [Furmanska 1962, 133]. Their heights range from 7.5 to 9 cm. Two of the cups bear the phrase Πειν εὐφραίνου (“Rejoice in drinking”) while the inscription on the third vessel is poorly

preserved. Such cups, adorned with various dedicatory inscriptions in Greek and vegetal ornamentation painted in white, were most likely used for ritual purposes, possibly for libations in honor of the gods. The cups from Tyras are also unlikely to have served a utilitarian purpose due to their impractical design, characterized by thin walls, poor firing quality, rough surfaces, and unstable paint¹¹. According to Vitaliy Zubar', the inscription “Rejoice in drinking” implies an association with wine, linking these vessels to the cult of Dionysus [Zubar' 1990, 66-70].

Small objects were also discovered in House IV, presumably associated with cult practices. Two intact lamps (fig. 4,7-8) and a broken red slip vessel shaped like a reclining ram [Kleiman 1985] (fig. 4,9) were found in the household room 7-F. A fragment of a terracotta figurine of a warrior (fig. 7,6), a fragment of a *turibula* and a red slip lamp (type Loeschke VIII) featuring an image of Maenad sitting on a donkey on the discus [Savel'ev 2013, 289] (fig. 7,4) were uncovered in household room 23-F.

Fragments of terracotta figurines were found in various parts of House IV. Their distribution makes it difficult to determine their functional purpose. Some may have served a cultic function, being dedicated to the gods. In particular, a fragment of a large female terracotta figurine was found in the house's courtyard 9-F (рис. 7,5). This fragment, which preserves part of the head (8.3 cm in height), has been identified as depicting Athena [Furmanska, Maksimov 1955, 65].

The function of some figurines remains controversial: they may have been used in cult practices or served as children's toys. For instance, a

11. These cups are most commonly found in funerary contexts [Moreva, Angelova 1968, 31-32; Solomonik 1973, 60; Zubar' 1982, 76-78; Papanova 2006, 212]. Ella Solomonik linked the purpose of these vessels to the funerary cult, suggesting that they were placed in graves as apotropaic items to secure the protection of the deceased's souls by their patron gods [Solomonik 1973, 69-74]. She also proposed that the cups from Tyras might have been specifically prepared for funerary ceremony. Vitaliy Zubar' emphasized the cups' significant role in funerary rituals but argued they were not exclusively associated with burials. In his view, items with inscriptions are connected to chthonic cults and, in some cases, were used in purification rites [Zubar' 1982, 76-78]. Finds outside the funerary context are also documented. For instance, at a villa in Tauric Chersonesus, several examples were discovered in two rooms with household functions [Kovalevskaia 1998, 95]. In Olbia, cups were uncovered in a stratigraphic layer during the excavation of the Roman citadel [Krapivina 1993, 120].



Fig. 7. Finds from House IV. 1. Ram-shaped figurative vessel (photo by O. Saveliev). 2-3. Lamps (photo by the author). 4. Lamp depicting Maenad (photo by the author). 5. Fragment of a terracotta figurine probably representing Athena/Minerva (photo by the author). 6. Fragment of a terracotta figurine depicting a Roman warrior (photo and reconstruction by the author). 7. Fragment of a female terracotta figurine. 8. Fragment of a terracotta figurine of a rooster.

fragment of a terracotta figurine depicting a Roman warrior with articulated legs was discovered in Room 23-F [Karishkovsky, Klejman 1994, 239; Saveleva, Savelev 2012, 43] (fig. 7,6). These figurines typically depict a young warrior dressed in a tunic, cinched with a Roman military belt, and a *sagum*. In his left hand, he holds an oval shield

adorned with relief ornamentation. His right arm, bent at the elbow, contains a hole meant to hold a sword or dagger. In some examples, a dagger is shown hanging at the warrior's side. The design of such figurines suggests they were intended for suspension. They feature a hollow body with a hole at the top of the head and two holes on the sides, de-



Fig. 8. Representations of Dionysus/Bacchus and his thiasos. 1. Fragment of red slip plastic vessels depicting the head of Dionysus (photo by the author). 2-3. Fragments of red slip plastic vessels depicting Silenus (photo by the author). 4. Lamp with a relief image of a satyr on its discus (photo by the author). 5-6. Fragments of figural lamps depicting Silenus and Pan/Faunus (photo by the author). 7. Bronze appliqué in the shape of a Pan/Faunus head (photo by O. Saveliev). 8. Terracotta actor's mask (photo by the author).

signed to accommodate a rod for suspending the legs. A cord would pass through the hole in the head, allowing the figurines to be hung.

Several other fragments of such figurines have been discovered in Tyras [Savel'eva, Savelev 2012, 43], including legs (fig. 3,3), which most likely belonged to warrior figurines, as no other similar designs have been identified in the region so far. Most specimens were found outside of archaeological complexes. In other regions, warrior figurines have been documented in graves, including children's graves [Tsimplidou-Avloniti 2017, 139], where they likely served a protective role. In Pergamum, several figurines were uncovered in a building believed to be associated with the cult of Dionysus, possibly the residence of a priest [Japp, Schwarzer 2015, 253]. In Parion, similar figurines have been found in burials and in the chamber of the northern *versurae* of the theater [Kasapoğlu 2018, 254-257].

Most commonly, researchers use terms like "puppets" or "dolls" to describe these figurines, suggesting they were originally intended as children's

toys. However, an alternative perspective suggests that the figurines held ritual significance. According to Anatoly Burakov, the movable legs of these figurines indicate their use in rituals [Burakov 1988, 74]. He also proposed a connection with the cult of Mithras, the patron deity of soldiers. Notably, the relief images on the shields of the warriors from Olbia are particularly intriguing. Two variants of relief images have been identified: one depicting a man's head and the other a man's figure dressed in a tunic and wearing a rayed crown. Both versions are accompanied by a crescent moon with its edges pointing upward and stars [Savel'eva, Savelev 2012, 44]. These designs appear too intricate to be intended for ordinary toys. Unfortunately, there is no additional evidence, such as the discovery of figurines in sanctuaries, to support their use in specific contexts. Proving that they were used exclusively as children's toys is also challenging. It is possible that their purpose was not definitive and that the use of these figurines varied.

Terracotta figurines were also discovered embedded in a wall and beneath the floor of the

rooms. The head of a rooster figurine was found beneath the upper floor of Room 456 (fig. 7,8). Additionally, during the dismantling of one of the walls, a fragment of a female figurine – a head with a high braided hairstyle – was uncovered (fig. 7,7) [Kleiman, Son 1983, 54-55].

Artefacts found within the layers at the site of dwellings can also be considered evidence of private cult practices. Notably, based on the available – albeit incomplete – data, artefacts from the Roman period predominantly relate to the cult of Dionysus/Bacchus. The veneration of Dionysus in Roman-era Tyras is further evidenced by his depiction on the city's coins [Zograf 1957, 46]. This god was highly esteemed in the city during the Hellenistic period, and in the first centuries CE, his cult appears to have experienced a revival in prominence. Additional evidence of the worship of Dionysus/Bacchus in Tyras includes artefacts depicting the god or representatives of his thiasos. These finds include fragments of red slip plastic vessels depicting the head of Dionysus (fig. 5,1) and Silenus (fig. 5,2-3), a lamp with a relief image of a satyr on its discus (fig. 5,4), fragments of figural lamps depicting Silenus and Pan/Faunus (fig. 5,5-6), a bronze applique in the shape of a Pan/Faunus head with a pin remnant on the back¹² (fig. 5,7), and an actor's mask, symbolically associated to Dionysian rituals and performances during religious festivals (fig. 5,8). A significant portion of these discoveries is concentrated within the residential quarters to the northwest of the Roman citadel. Other cults are represented by a limited number of terracotta figurines and small statues depicting Cybele, Aphrodite, Priapus, Hygieia, Serapis, and Isis. Some images lack distinctive markers, making it difficult to determine which cult they are associated with.

Conclusion

The excavation of Roman dwellings in various parts of Tyras, particularly two large houses at the Central Excavation Site, has provided valuable insights into the private cult practices of the city's population. Although there is little convincing evidence, we speculate that certain spaces may have served as centers for family rituals and sacrifices.

Unfortunately, no well-preserved complexes have been identified in Tyras, and architectural features indicative of domestic shrines – such as altars, partitions, or niches – are scarcely discernible within the rooms. Furthermore, pinpointing the precise locations of items associated with sacred rituals remains a significant challenge. Nevertheless, the finds within these houses confirm the integration of cult practices into various aspects of everyday life.

Each house undoubtedly reflects the religious preferences of its owner: one venerates traditional Greek deities, particularly Dionysus, while the other favours the cult of the Thracian Horseman. The presence of a Roman garrison in the city, along with the broader process of Romanization, clearly influenced the religious life of Tyras's inhabitants. In particular, it was during this period that the cult of the Thracian Horseman, along with other cults unrelated to Tyras's traditional religious practices, became established in the city. However, the available data remains insufficient to fully reconstruct the cultural and religious transformations that took place.

Certainly, this study is not exhaustive, as it covers only a fraction of the evidence for private worship in Tyras. It serves as a preliminary assessment that requires further investigation. A thorough analysis necessitates a comprehensive cataloging of all materials related to private religious practices.

12. It may have served as a decoration for a lock or chest [Kleiman, Son 1983, 54], or, alternatively, it could be interpreted as a piece of horse harness [Zubar', Son 1999, 121].

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