

ALEXANDER AS HERCULES ON A SMALL BRONZE FROM SARMIZEGETUSA

The statuette with the attributes of Hercules presented in this paper (Fig. 1-4) was found in 1995 during the expedition organized by the University of Cluj and Global Research and Discovery Network, in the surroundings of Sarmizegetusa (see also in this volume A. Diaconescu, *A bronze Maenad from Sarmizegetusa*) and is now the property of the local museum (inventory number 31999). The detectorist Frank Adams discovered it East of the Roman town, in a region - conventionally called "Field L" -, actually an area covered with ruins in the immediate vicinity of the town. The statuette was lying in the topsoil, and it is obvious that, because of repeated plowing, its archaeological context was disturbed.

The actual height of the piece is 6.2 cm; originally it must have had around 10 cm without the pedestal. This statuette is only partly preserved: the inferior limbs are broken (the right one from above the knee, the left one from under it). Most of the upper limbs are also missing. From the right one it is preserved only the shoulder with half of the arm and the hand which was holding the bludgeon. But from the left one it is missing only the hand with the apples of the Hesperides. The left side of the face is partly corroded. The patina was accidentally damaged in the abdominal zone, on the shoulders and partly under the left arm and around the right fist. Otherwise it is well preserved and has a noble greenish-brown color.

Hercules is represented nude, beardless, the weight of the body being supported by the right foot. The right superior limb was bent and slightly oriented backwards. The hand which holds the bludgeon is resting on the right haunch. The left arm is well separated and stays away from the body. The head of this young Hercules, which is slightly bent and turned to the right, is covered by the fur of the Nemean lion (*exuvia*). One side of the animal's skin is knotted on the hero's chest, the other comes down the back and is then twisted around the left elbow and forearm. The rather thick neck and some accentuated muscles give him an athletic aspect. In front the pectoral and abdominal muscles were carefully rendered, taking into account the reduced dimensions of the piece. In the back side the trapezius and the posteriors are shown strained. The difference between relaxed and strained muscles is clearly rendered, sometimes only by the means of deep lines. The position of the body, supported by the right foot but strongly bent to the left, was meant to stress the tension of the figure. It is a pathetic, moving position.

The oval, slightly oblong, face has a youthful aspect. The elements of the portrait are well individualized. The forehead ends down in prominent eyebrows. Up in the middle two symmetric ringlets are plainly visible the rest of the hair being covered by the lion's scalp. The eyes are in shape of two lozenges and the straight cuts at their end, suggesting the eye lids, give the impression that the eyes are oblongs. The prominent arches and the deep eye sockets create the illusion of an intense glance. The nose has a fine contour but the mouth is rudimentary rendered by a simple cut. Although the statuette is very small the face has a pathetic air given by the careful work of the eyes.

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In Roman Dacia Hercules is a frequent character both from epigraphic and iconographic point of view¹. After the classification adopted by L. Țeposu-Marinescu for the province of Dacia our piece would belong to type i (“standing and holding the apples with the hand down”), but the presence of the lion’s fur, *exuvia*, would point to type iii (“with the bludgeon over the head”)². The closest parallel to our statuette in Dacia is a fragmentary marble one coming from Porolissum, but far more rudimentary worked³.

The piece from Sarmizegetusa is a craftsman’s product not an artist’s one, of exquisite quality, well executed, and which invites us to search for its models and for the prototype where it derives. After St. Boucher such a beardless young Hercules, wearing the lion’s scalp and holding the apples with his left and the bludgeon in his right hand, could be traced back from Roman times till classical Greece. Yet the prototype was attributed to several masters but no hypothesis could be convincingly sustained⁴.

Even so, the statuette from Sarmizegetusa as a whole shows some trends surely identifiable in the second half of the 4th century B C. The best example is Heracles Borgheze, derived from a Greek prototype of the 4th century B C⁵, but his right superior limb does not show the typical flexion from the elbow of the Sarmizegetusa piece. This detail can be encountered at Meleager, a masterpiece of Scopas which recalls our small bronze not only in this detail⁶. The position of the body which is bent to the left because of the haunch which is strongly pushed towards the right is absolutely similar. Such an exaggerated *contraposto* with the support on the right foot but needing a supplementary support is common to the Sarmizegetusa statuette and to Meleager. A Scopaic prototype for our small bronze is thus to be taken into consideration.

It is known that the Parian master has dealt at least twice with Hercules, but the information about his sculptures of the kind are scarce. If earlier the beardless head wearing the lion’s scalp from Tegeea was unanimously attributed to Hercules⁷, A. F. Stewart⁸ and then Srauss⁹ have later doubted this interpretation, preferring to see in the Tegeean head the son of the hero, Telephos, whose fight with Achilles was the main scene of the pediment, and not Hercules himself which by then must have been much older. More reliable is the information in Pausanias 2, 10, 1 about the statue of Hercules executed by Scopas for Sicyone and which is reproduced on some Roman imperial coins of the town. The hero is beardless, with his head turned to the left and holding the apples in his left hand. The folds of the *exuvia* are visible around the left forearm. The right superior limb with the hand holding the bludgeon on the haunch has the same position like in Sarmizegetusa¹⁰. Unfortunately the coins are not well preserved and some details are questionable, as for example the presence of the lion’s scalp on the head of the hero¹¹.

¹ M. Bărbulescu, *Cutul lui Hercules în Dacia romană*, AMN 14, 1977, p. 117 ff.

² L. Țeposu-Marinescu, *Tipuri de statuete de bronz din Dacia*, in *Sargetia* 21-24 (1988-1991), p. 66. *Eadem*, in *Akten der 10. Internationalen Tagung über antike Bronzen. Freiburg 18-22 Juli 1988*, p. 274 (with the previous literature).

³ C. Pop, *Monumente sculpturale din Transilvania*, in *Apulum* 9, 1971, p. 556-559, Fig. 4/3.

⁴ St. Boucher, *Recherches sur les bronzes figurés de la Gaule Pré-Romaine et Romaine*, Rome, 1976, p. 28-31, and specially notes 115-118, p. 28.

⁵ *Ibidem* and O. Palagia in *LIMC* IV, 1988 s.v. Heracles, p. 746, no. 305.

⁶ Ch. Picard, *Manuel d’Archeologie Gréque. La sculpture* III, 2, Paris 1948, Fig. 313, 316-317 and for the relation Hercules-Meleager specially p. 714 and *idem*, *op. cit.* vol. IV, 1, Paris 1954, p. 173 sq.

⁷ Ch. Picard, *op. cit.* vol. IV, 1, Paris 1954, p. 173-183, Pl. 4 and Fig. 81, 85.

⁸ *Scopas of Paros*, 1977, p. 53 ff, no. 16, Pl. 13-14.

⁹ *LIMC* VII (1994), p. 866, no. 49 (s.v. Telephos).

¹⁰ Ch. Picard, *op. cit.* vol. III, 2, Paris 1948, p. 703, Fig. 307, and p. 708 and 711, note 1.

¹¹ *Idem*, *op. cit.* p. 711, note 2, and 712 ff.

Still the resemblances between this Hercules by Scopas and the statuette from Sarmizegetusa are obvious. The main difference is that the Sicyonian piece has a different *contaposto*, with the support on the left foot and the head turned to the left. As in the case of Meleager the Scopaic quotations are undeniable, but yet we can not identify the Sarmizegetusan Hercules with the one worked by Scopas for Sicyone.

A Scopaic prototype was already supposed for two other Roman bronze statuettes. One is a small Asclepios from Volubilis¹² and the other is a Hercules from Athens. After the descriptions his position is almost identical with the one of the piece from Sarmizegetusa. He is beardless and wears the lion's fur. In his left hand he holds the apples of the Hesperides and his right is relying on the haunch, but does not hold any bludgeon¹³.

There are also some Lysippian trends which can be identified in the case of our statuette. For instance the colossal bronze statue of Hercules Aemilianus from Rome has close resemblances to the Sarmizegetusa small piece, specially as far as the disposition of the limbs and the position of the body is concerned¹⁴. Yet the support is on the left foot, not the right one, and the whole attitude reflects in a mirror the one of the Sarmizegetusa statuette. Hercules Aemilianus is dated towards the middle of the 2nd century B C, and has good analogies in two bronze statuettes from Byblos and Tyros, which can be attributed to the Syro-Phenician branch of the Lysippian school¹⁵. These late Hellenistic statues have a different aspect, the muscles being largely exaggerated. They also have no *exuvia*. A better parallel to the Sarmizegetusa Hercules is a statuette from Smirna of Lysippian character. Hercules is young and beardless, with his head turned to the right, prominent eyes, large nose and shut mouth. The body is bent to the left, the right upper limb is broken, but the left one is very similar to Sarmizegetusa. The arm is away from the body, the *exuvia* lies around the elbow and the forearm. The only difference is that the support is on the left foot. The anatomic details and modelling of the Smirna statuette were put in relation to Lysipp's *Apoxiomenos* by E. Von Schwarzenberg¹⁶. Still no Lysippian prototype can be identified for the Sarmizegetusa Hercules, although the body of a young athlete is undoubtedly a Lysippian quotation.

So far our analysis has identified an eclectic prototype inspired by masters of the second half of the 4th century B C. But if we concentrate on the only significant detail of hair style of the Sarmizegetusa statuette, one can not miss the resemblance of the two ringlets from here and the *anastole* of Alexander the Great¹⁷. Before Alexander this element of hair style is to be met in the case of gods, generally long haired and bearded characters, rarely young ones like Apollo or Helios. In our case the *anastole* is a strong argument to see in the Sarmizegetusa statuette an image of Alexander as Hercules. Our portrait recalls more the so called Alexander Schwarzenberg, considered the closest parallel to "Alexander with lance" of Lysippus¹⁸, and it has less trends of another series of portraits of Alexander, depicting the Macedonian king at the age of 18, the so called

¹² *Idem*, *op. cit.* p. 698, Fig. 303.

¹³ St. Boucher, *op. cit.*, p. 29, note 124. Unfortunately the literature quoted there was unaccessible to us.

¹⁴ S. Ritter, *Hercules in der römischen Kunst von den Anfängen bis Augustus*, Heidelberg, 1995, p. 38-40, Taf. 2, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Der lysippische Alexander*, in *Bonner Jahrbücher* 167, 1967, p. 98, Abb. 21.

¹⁷ T. Hölscher, *Ideal und Wirklichkeit in den Bildnissen Alexanders des Großen*, Heidelberg 1971, p. 28, note 84.

¹⁸ E. von Schwarzenberg, *op. cit.* p. 58 ff; T. Hölscher, *op. cit.* p. 54 f.

“*Eubouleus*” -Alexander Rondanini type¹⁹. The Alexander Schwarzenberg type depicts the king at the age of 22 and the original must date from the life time of Alexander (the copy known to us dates from the 3rd century B C ²⁰). This head is slightly turned to the left, as Lysippus has always represented Alexander (cf. Plutarh, *Alex. et Caes.* 4), while the Sarmizegetusa statuette looks to the right. The “Alexander with lance” of Lysippus has also the support on the left foot²¹, being thus different from our statuette.

Alexander was often depicted wearing the lion’s scalp, on his own tetradrachmas and on those of his successors (some representing themselves with *exuvia*)²². The meaning of this scene could be interpreted in several ways: Alexander in relation to Heracles, or Heracles with the trends of Alexander, or just the god without connection to the king²³. In the case of Alexander the lion’s scalp was an allusion to Heracles, the men-god, the hero, that gained immortality through his deeds and virtues. Not always divine attributes were meant to say that the Hellenistic king was himself a god; they would serve more as metaphors illustrating the ambiguous position of the sovereign between earth and heaven²⁴. Besides monetary images there is only one stone portrait showing Alexander with *exuvia*, the one from the sarcophagus in Sidon²⁵.

On the other hand the attributes of Heracles and a shorter hair²⁶, as we see it under the *exuvia*, try to express an athletic ideal which the Macedonian king intended to cultivate. But he preferred more royal sports like hunting and even fighting in real battles, than the athletic contests like those in Olympia (Plutarh, *Alex. et Caes.* 4)²⁷. Such Heracleian attributes are not necessarily a new acquisition, they can come from a long dynastic tradition, Amythas III and Philippus II being depicted on coins with Heracleian symbols²⁸. Thus the athletic ideal is mixed with a traditional image, and Lysippus was the best to express this synthesis since he obtained the real excellence in rendering young athletic bodies with ideal trends.

At this point of our demonstration the next logical question is: did it really exist a life time statue of Alexander with the attributes of Hercules, like those on the coins? If the answer is yes it must be attributed to Lysippus. And if the statuette in Sarmizegetusa in a craftsman’s copy of other copies after the Greek original, its resemblance with Agias of Lysippus is not meaningless²⁹. The position of the inferior limbs of the Sarmizegetusa statuette has clear affinities with Agias, although its right haunch is more prominent and the left foot seems to be oriented towards the exterior. The body of our statuette in

¹⁹ C. Bertelli, in *EAA*, I, p. 238 s.v. Alessandro Magno; T. Hölscher, *op. cit.* p. 25 and 29 f, Taf. 1 and 2.

²⁰ I. Jucker, *Ein Bildniss Alexanders des Großen*, München 1994, p. 16.

²¹ T. Hölscher, *op. cit.*, p. 54-56, Taf. 5.

²² D. Mannsperger, *Alexander der Große im Bild der Münzen*. Ausstellungskataloge der Universität Tübingen, No. 15, Tübingen 1981, nr. 11-12.

²³ D. Svenson, *Darstellungen Hellenistischer Könige mit Götterattributen*. [Archäologische Studien 10], Frankfurt am Main 1995, p. 100-103, 139-141, 251-253, Taf. 50, p. 192-196, Taf. 51.

²⁴ R. R. Smith, *Hellenistic royal portraits*, Oxford 1988, p. 38 ff.

²⁵ T. Hölscher, *op. cit.* p. 26 and p. 46 note 173. R. R. R. Smith, *op. cit.* 40, 60, 63 ff; D. Svenson, *op. cit.* p. 100 f, Kat. no. 190, Taf. 49 mentions other two marble heads of Alexander but their attribution is far from being sure.

²⁶ T. Hölscher, *op. cit.* p. 30 f.

²⁷ Reliefs like those on the Sidon sarcophagus have a heroic-funerary character. See M. A. Elvira, *Reflexiones sobre el quadro de caceria en la epoca de Alejandro*, in *Neronia IV. Alejandro Magno, modelo de los imperadores Romanos* [col. Latomus 209], 1990, p. 120.

²⁸ T. Hölscher, *op. cit.* p. 45 ff and 47 with note 175; D. Svenson, *op. cit.* p. 100 and note 467.

²⁹ A. F. Stewart, *Lysippian studies. Agias and Oilpouer*, in *AJA* 82, 3, 1978, p. 301-313.

more dynamic than the one of Agias. So, in absence of any clear Lysippian prototypes such a statue of Alexander as Hercules executed in the life time of the great Macedonian king has little support.

The undoubtedly Scopaic quotations and the eclectic character underlined above plead also against the Lysippian attribution. Even if life time coins show Alexander with *exuvia*, the bronze statue depicting him as Hercules must have been elaborated later, when Scopaic and Lysippian trends could be combined together, *i.e.* in late Hellenistic or even Roman times, when such eclectic works are to be expected³⁰.

For centuries Alexander's image was still vivid³¹ and in Roman times it was even the object of a special cult in Asia Minor³². The statuette in Sarmizegetusa could not have been meaningless to the inhabitants of the Dacian colony of Trajan and probably it did not depict any Hercules, but the Macedonian king-hero. Thus this small bronze adds a new paragraph at what may be called "the novel of Alexander".

³⁰ More examples at Ch. Picard, *op. cit.* vol. III,2, Paris 1948, p. 706-712.

³¹ W. Wohlmayr, *Alexander in Etrurien*, in JOAI 58, 1988, p. 58 ff.

³² Jucker, *op. cit.* p. 26.





Fig. 1-4. The bronze statuette of Alexander as Hercules from Sarmizegetusa