

Virginia Rădean

## MODERN COUNTERFEIT OF A BRONZE STATUETTE IN THE MUSEUM OF DEVA<sup>1</sup>

The article raises once again the issue of a Dioscurus statuette that has already made the object of numerous papers<sup>2</sup>. It is a metal statuette (Photo 1-2) of solid cast representing a nude young man in motion, with his body leaning to the right and the head turned left. The left leg, slightly bent, sustains his entire weight. The right arm stretches to the right parallel with the corresponding leg, while the left arm is missing. The metal surface displays a dark-brown patina with golden spots, similar to gilding spots. It is 8.4 cm high, 4cm wide and 1.5 cm thick. The first record of the statuette is found in an inventory register from 1913, property of the Museum of Deva, which specifies Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa as the find spot<sup>3</sup>.

From the iconographical standpoint it has been considered either a gladiator or an athlete in motion, or a warrior originally holding a sword or a dagger in his right hand and a shield in his left. Based on stylistic criteria the statuette was dated between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and the second quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

Unfortunately, both the identification and dating of the piece are based on unrealistic premises. In fact, the statuette represents a Dioscurus, as already noted by Stefan Geppert<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, the statuette was suspected to be counterfeit. The arguments are merely iconographic: the type to which our piece belongs is not present in ancient metal-work, so it must be a modern copy of a monumental marble statuary group standing in Piazza Quirinale in Rome, known as *Rossebändiger vom Monte Cavallo* or *monte et cavalli marmorei*<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 1). A marble copy of the group was brought to Berlin at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and placed on the Altes Museum attic. A few years later a smaller scale bronze copy (Fig. 2) was exhibited in Charlottenburg Castle and was so popular that it was a trademark image used on the stamps in the epoch<sup>6</sup>. This bronze copy might be the prototype of four almost identical metal statuettes properties of the museums in Bonn, Trento, Verona and Deva. Yet the origin and authenticity of the four items were not seriously questioned prior to Stefan

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<sup>2</sup> Römer in Rumänien. Exhibition Köln 1969, 247, G 98 = *Civiltă Romană* in Romania. Exhibition Rome 1970, 240, G 61 (Lucia Țeposu-David) (with the previous literature); C. Pop, *Cîteva reprezentări figurate romane din județul Hunedoara*, Sargetia 9, 1972, 70, fig. 7; H. Daicoviciu, *Les bronzes de Sarmizegetusa: art classicisant et art provincial*, in *Bronze hellénistique et romain. Tradition et renouveau*, in Actes du V<sup>e</sup> Colloque International sur les bronzes antiques, Lausanne 8-13 mai 1978, Cahier d'archéologie romande 17, 1979, 108; A. Rusu, Sargetia 14, 1979, 175; D. Alicu, C. Pop, V. Wollmann, *Figured Monuments from Sarmizegetusa*, BAR International Series 55, 1979, 143; M. Gramatopol, *Dacia Antiqua. Perspective de istoria artei și teoria culturii*, București 1982, 185; L. Țeposu-Marinescu, *Les statuettes en bronze de Dacie*, in *Ancient Bronzes. Actes of the 12<sup>th</sup> International Congress on ancient bronzes*, Nijmegen 1992, 141; L. Țeposu-Marinescu, C. Pop, *Statuete de bronz din Dacia romană. Monografii I*, București 2000, 116.

<sup>3</sup> Entry number 6850 reads: "Roman bronze statuette of a Gladiator. Finding place-Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa." Later, in 1955, a new inventory register was compiled and the item was given a new inv. number – 1175, referred in all the papers ever since.

<sup>4</sup> Stefan Geppert, *Castor und Pollux*, Bonn 1996, 176, B30.

<sup>5</sup> Idem, 99-109; L. Nista (ed.), *Castores: L'immagine dei Dioscuri a Roma*, Rome 1994, 40 sqq.

<sup>6</sup> St. Geppert (n. 3), 176, B33.

Geppert's monography. Whereas the items at Bonn and Verona were acknowledged as modern copies as early as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, those at Deva and Trento, their provenance being well-known Roman sites, were believed to be authentic.

The ultimate proof that the statuette at the Deva Museum is a modern counterfeit is its being ironcast. This significant detail was established by means of a metallographic analysis undertaken by the Steel Laboratory at the Siderurgica Company Hunedoara. "Spectrolat S", an optical emission-based spectrometer, established the composition of the cast metal to be as follows: Fe-82.69%; C-6.75%; Mn-2.28%; Bi, Mg, Pb, Sn, Si, S, Cr, Ni, etc-under 0.1%.

The metallographic analysis was completed by a metal surface examination through a 40 magnitude regular microscope that proved the absence of corrosion compounds, a compulsory presence in ancient artifacts. Moreover, the so-called patina consists of two protective layers: a deep red anti-corrosion layer covered by some yellow substance coating. Specialists<sup>7</sup> have established the yellow substance as organic in nature, a sort of varnish or resin, which gave off a bright shine under the microscope light.

The technical manufacturing is exquisite, with the piece displaying no casting flaws. Some of the body parts, the head, the torso, the left arm, the legs and the left shoulder were cast together, while the missing left arm with the mantle (*chlamis*) was manufactured separately to be later attached by means of a peg. A small circular orifice midway on the shoulder surface, through which the left arm was attached to the body indicates a separate distinct cast.

In conclusion, the Dioscurus statuette is a copy manufactured probably in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sometime around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> it is registered in the Deva Museum collection. Since Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa is indicated as the find place, the authenticity of the statuette was never questioned. One can only assume that the statuette was purchased from an antiquarian, with or without the intent of deception. The first collection of the Deva Museum already in existence in 1882, is known to have comprised mostly donations from aristocratic families who owned antiquities<sup>8</sup>. Such collections might have been "contaminated" by forgeries<sup>9</sup>. It is no secret that several private collections of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries contained forgeries commercialised by counterfeiters taking advantage of the fashionable interest in antiquities of Europe at the time. The ultimate argument in considering the piece to be counterfeit is the iron cast, for it is a commonplace that the Romans did not cast in iron<sup>10</sup>.

Given the above-mentioned facts, it is certain that approaching the issue of authenticity relies on processing a great deal of information. The certification of an item as authentic goes beyond mere archaeological and stylistic considerations. Comprehensive physical and chemical analyses are necessary. Many an "ancient bronze" of old collections in various museums, be their provenance recorded, just might turn out to be counterfeit.

<sup>7</sup> Several specialists in metal restoration from the National History Museum of Romania in Bucharest and the National History Museum of Transylvania in Cluj Napoca undertook the microscopical examination.

<sup>8</sup> I. Andrițoiu, *Constituirea și dezvoltarea colecției de arheologie a Muzeului Județean Hunedoara*, Sargetia 13, 1977, 549-559; Gh. Firczak, R. Andrus, *Bibliografia Anuarului Societății de istorie și Arheologie a comitatului Hunedoara*, Sargetia 25, 1992-1994, 911-937; N. Wardegger, *Premizele înființării și activității muzeului de la Deva în cadrul Societății de istorie și arheologie a comitatului Hunedoara*, Sargetia 21-24, 1988-1991, 393-410.

<sup>9</sup> L. Marinescu, C. Pop (n. 1), 13-17 (with the bibliography).

<sup>10</sup> Taking into account that the four statuettes are almost identical copies of the same prototype, and the one in Deva has been certified as iron cast, the other three are likely to have been manufactured in the same material, by the same technique and the same artisan.

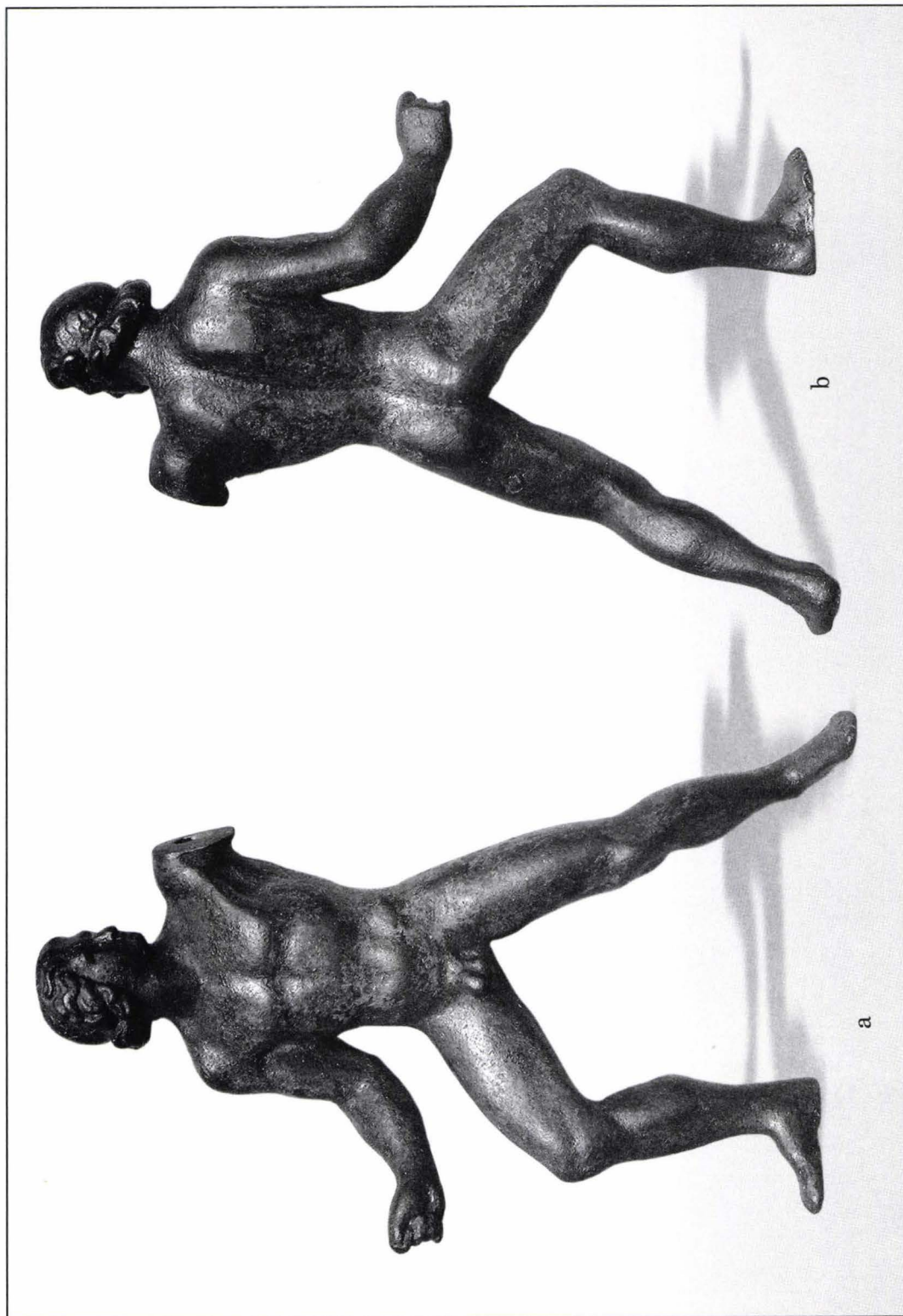


Photo.1a-b. The Dioscurus statuette of the Deva Museum (by Iuliane Heiky)

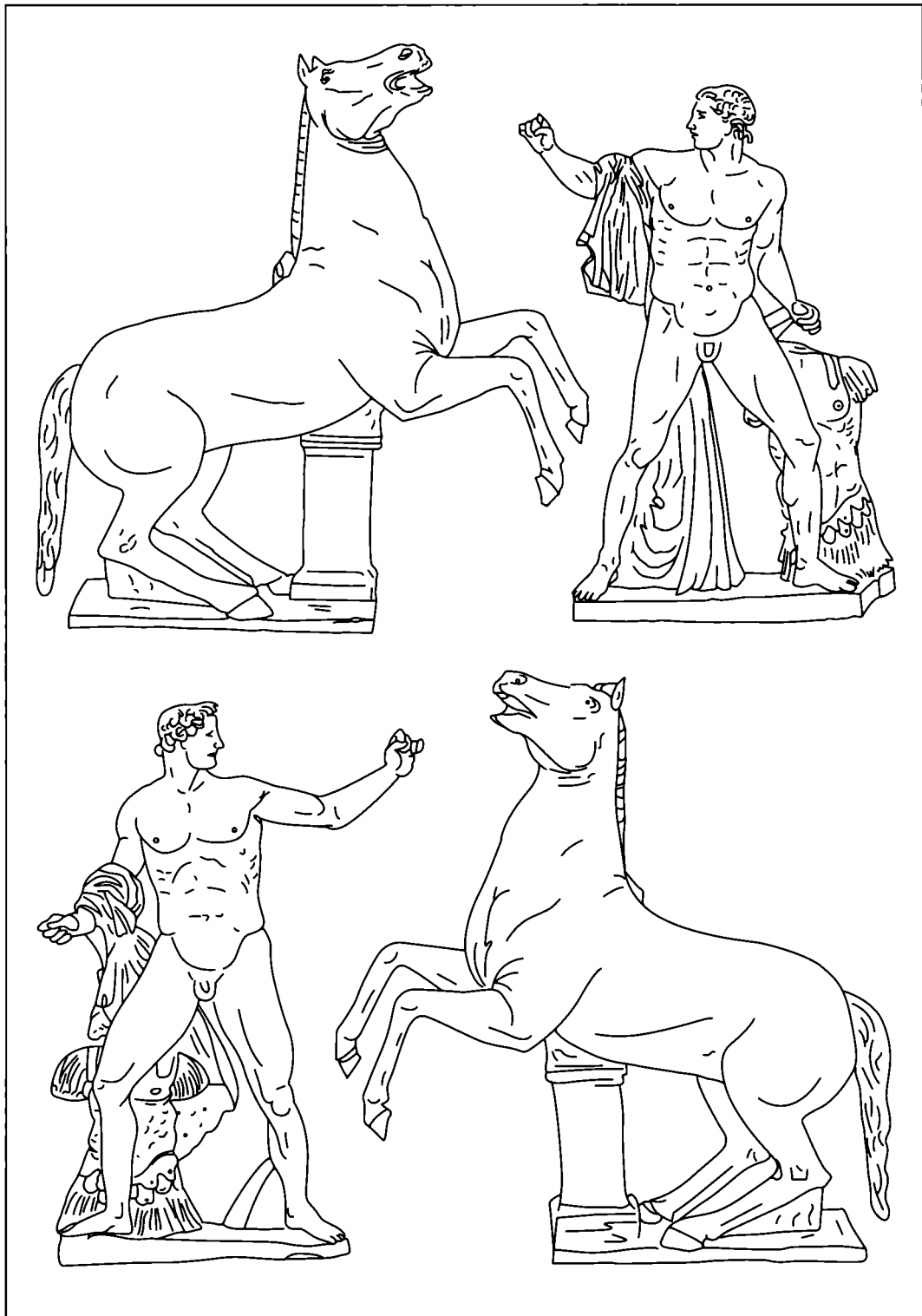


Fig. 1. The monumental marble group of Dioscuri, Rome, Piazza del Quirinale (after Geppert [n. 3], Abb.3)

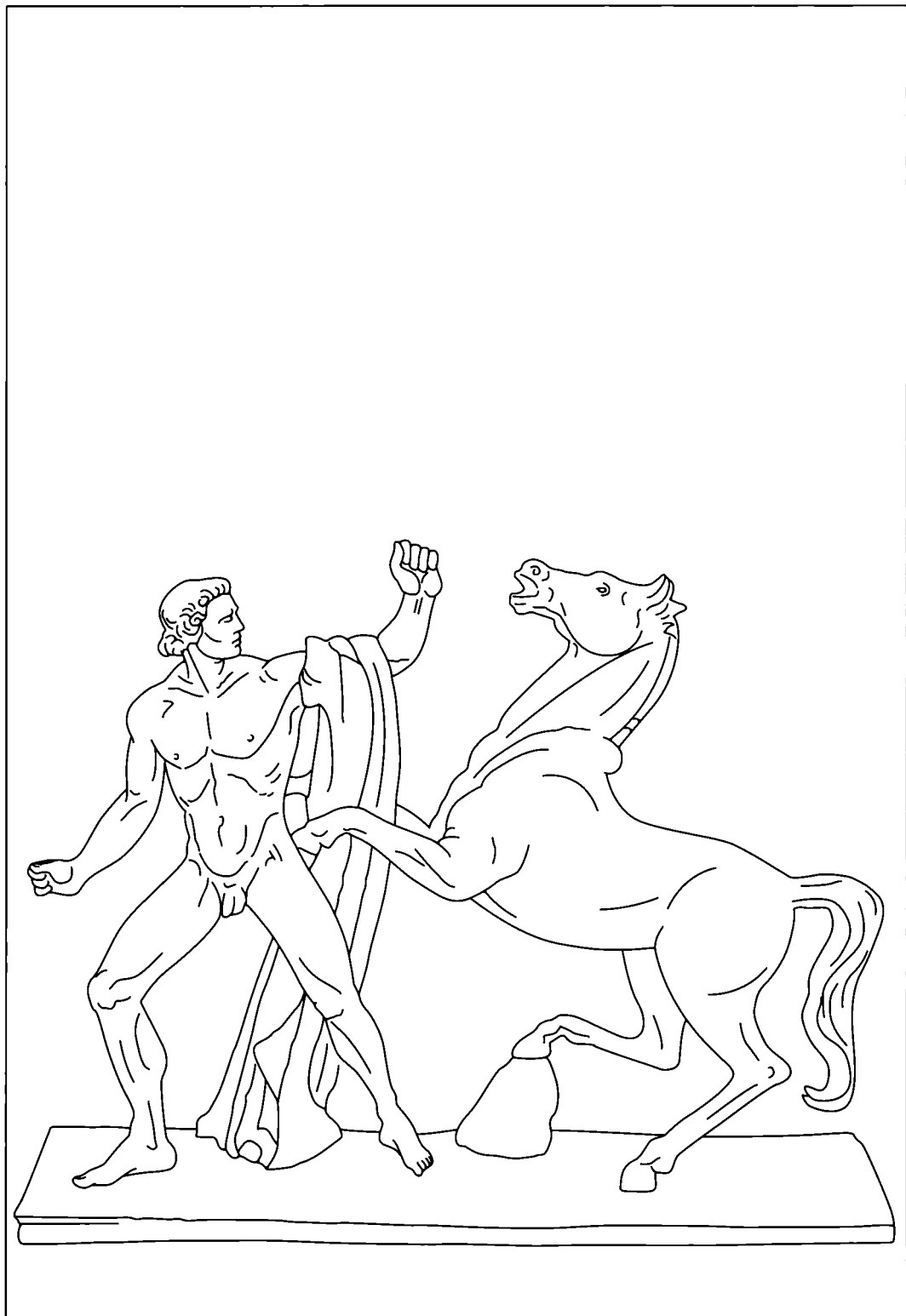


Fig. 2. The small bronze copy of a Dioscurus, Berlin (after Geppert [n. 3], Abb. 162)