
BOJIDAR ANGELOV DRAGANOV*

THE CULT OF HERMES IN MOESIA INFERIOR

Abstract: The article presents a general review of Hermes' cult in *Moesia Inferior*. Attention is paid to a quantitative analysis of monuments, as votive tablets, bronze statuettes, gems and epigraphic sources. At the same time an attempt is made to trace development of cult, as well as the centers of its wide pervasion in *Moesia Inferior*.

Keywords: Moesia, Hermes, monuments.

The cult of Hermes in Ancient Thrace is established well before VIth century B.C. Proves about this are well-known records of Herodotus (V. 7.) and some interesting monuments, as coins of Derroni, Bizalti, Oreski and Tinteni tribes, the helmet from Cotofenești and the "situla" from Pustrovo. Hermes has undoubtedly a deep Indo-European origin. That is why the information received for the development of his cult in Ancient Greece easily can be referred to Thracian soil. And as we know from Herodotus, Hermes along with Ares, Artemis and Dionysus is one of the most worshipped divinities in Thrace. Thracian Hermes is an ancient divinity directly related to the Thracian religion, revealing as a mediator between the three worlds – "Ψυχοπόμπος – Guide of Souls", patron of trade, cattle, young people and the aristocratic institution as a whole. And after the campaigns of Philip IInd Macedonian in the interior of Thrace, this local divinity receives the iconography and cult of Greek Hermes.

In *Moesia Inferior* the cult of Hermes-Mercury penetrates along with Roman legions. Within the territory of the province are differentiated three main areas, where the cult of Hermes-Mercury is widespread. Firstly, these are the Roman city and defence centers along the stream of Danube – Oescus, Novae, Durostorum, etc. Secondly – the ancient Greek colonies on the Western Black Sea coast, as Odessus, Dionysopolis, Callatis, Tomis and Histria, where the cult of Hermes is infiltrated by Eastern merchants already before IVth century B.C. And in the third place is the administrative territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum, where the pervasive influence from Asia Minor creates a precondition for interesting syncretism between Hermes and other Eastern divinities.

In Greek mythology, Hermes is one of the twelve Olympian gods. He is the messenger of gods, the bringer of dreams, the god of flocks and herds, and of the

* Ph.D. Student, University of Sofia "St. Kliment Ohridski" Department of Archeology,
e-mail: b.draganov@abv.bg.

market-place. He is the god of commerce and trade, of inventions, science, and the arts, and of craft in oratory. As an ancient fertility god, he is also a god of wealth, hence of luck, hence of thieves. He conducts the souls of the dead to Hades, and thus is a link between the world of the living and of the dead, equally beloved in both. The Roman Mercury is perceived mostly as a god of commerce, trade and profit. That's why he is pictured with a purse in his hand and his name is linked with Latin words “*merx*” – “merchandise” and “*mercator*” – “buy” (Avery 1962, 552-556).

In Moesia Inferior are discovered a great number of monuments, dedicated to Hermes – votive tablets, epigraphic sources, bronze statuettes, gems, etc. From territory of province are mentioned more than 25 votive tablets, with Hermes' images. On the monuments from Kovachitca, Berkovitca district (*Филюв 1913, p. 332, fig. 261*), Vidlitsa, Montana district (*Александров 1977, p. 59, № 14*), Montana (*Огненова-Маринова 1987, 50-51, fig. 27 а, б*), Pavlikeni (*Султъов 1962, 12-14, fig. 12*), Nicopolis ad Istrum (*Добруджански 1901, p. 732, № 24, fig. 23*), Abritus (*Явашев 1936, p. 50, fig. 43*), Dimitar Ganevo, Dobrich district (*Василичин 113-114, № 5, pl. II 2*), Valchidol, Varna district (*Михайлов 1977, p. 161, № 25*), Odessus (*Тончева 1960, 73-74, pl. IV, fig. 17*), Callatis (*Sauciuc-Săveanu 1941-1944, 276-278, fig. 15, № 2*) and Tomi (*Canarache / Rădulescu / Aricescu / Barbu 1963, p. 136, № 4, fig. 5*) the god is represented alone, in the well-known Roman iconography – upright, nude or with mantle hanging over his left shoulder and left arm, holding a purse in his right hand and a “*caduceus*” in his left. Only on the votive tablet from Kovachitca, Berkovitca district, Hermes is depicted riding on a he-goat. At some of votive tablets the god is represented with a “*petasus*” on his head¹. Frequently next to him are depicted altar² and his sacred animals – ram³, he-goat⁴ and cock⁵. Many monuments represent Hermes together with other divinities and this is evidence about growing up syncretism from IInd to IVth centuries A.D. He is depicted together with Zeus on a votive tablet from Butovo, near by Nicopolis ad Istrum (*Младенова 1967, 44-45, № 14, fig. 14*). On three monuments Hermes is represented in conjunction with Athena – from Butovo (*Султъов 1977, p. 60, not. 71*), Veliko Turnovo (*Мирчев 1951, p. 24, № 52, fig. 52*) and Novae (*Младенова 1967, p. 44, № 13, fig. 13*). Dionysus, Hermes and The Thracian horseman are depicted on a votive tablet from Callatis (*Bordenache 1960, 502-503, № 14, fig. 17*). On three monuments from Odessus (*Мирчев 1953, 12-14, № 10-11, fig. 19-20; Мирчев 1961, 7-8, № 1, pl. I, fig. 1*) are pictured The Thracian horseman, Hermes' herm and a dedication by an association of belted bonito fishermen. On some votive tablets Hermes is depicted in large compositional scenes, together with many other divinities. Together with Zeus,

¹ Votive tablets from Montana and Dimitar Ganevo, Dobrich district.

² Votive tablets from Nicopolis ad Istrum, Dimitar Ganevo, Dobrich district, Valchidol, Varna district and Odessus.

³ Votive tablets from Pavlikeni, Odessus, Callatis and Tomi.

⁴ Votive tablets from Kovachitca, Berkovitca district, Montana, Abritus and Odessus.

⁵ Votive tablets from Pavlikeni, Dimitar Ganevo, Dobrich district and Tomi.

Hera, Demeter, and Heracles, is on the monument from Krivodol, Montana district (*Венедиков 1955, 201-205, fig. 4*). With Athena, Zeus, Hera and Heracles is on the monument from Nicopolis ad Istrum (*Добруски 1901, p. 729, № 22, fig. 20*) and with Venus, Dioscurs, Mars, Saturn, Silvanus, Sol, Luna and Jupiter – on the so called “monument of gods” from Odessus (*Kalinka 1906, 137-139, № 149, fig. 42*).

From territory of *Moesia Inferior* are found some epigraphic monuments, devoted to Hermes-Mercury. In Durostorum, Caius Antonius Herculanus, “*centurio*” from XIth Claudius Legion raises an inscription devoted to Hermes-Mercury and dated to about 198 – 211 year A.D (*Георгиев 1974, 97-98*). From Dolna Beshovitca, Vratsa district descends an inscription dedicated to Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, Victoria, Volcanus and Mercury (*Gerov 1989, p. 75, № 156*). In Vishovgrad (*Gerov 1989, p. 190, № 409*) and Pavlikeni (*Gerov 1989, p. 195, № 423*), near by Nicopolis ad Istrum are discovered two inscriptions, devoted to Sabazius and Mercury. There are two damaged inscriptions found in Odessus (*Mihailov 1970, № 44, 45*) and dated to about Ist century B.C. – Ist century A.D. from which we get some information about an organization connected with official feasts and Odessus’ city games. These games are called *Ермайа* after the name of the trade God Hermes, but dedicated also to Heracles as a symbol of power and courage (*Minchev 2003, p. 232*). Greek inscriptions from Western Black Sea coast and these from territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum contain Thracian names, as *Ερμαιος*, *Ερμας*, *Ερμαφιλος*, *Ερμης*, *Ερμογένης*, *Ερμόδωρος* and *Ερμοκράτης* (*Mihailov 1970, 427-428*), and Latin inscriptions from province contain *cognomina Romana* – *Mercurius* (*Ковачева 1978, 76-81*).

More than 40 bronze statuettes, representing Hermes-Mercury are found in *Moesia Inferior*. Some of them are luxurious import and others – craft of local workshops. From Oescus descends fine bronze composition that depicts Hermes carrying the infant Dionysus (*Ognenova-Marinova 1975, p. 96, № 91*). Usually bronze statuettes represent Hermes-Mercury semi-nude with one end of his mantle hanging down from his left shoulder along his left arm. He is wearing a small winged “*petasus*” on his head and holding a purse in his right hand and a “*caduceus*” in the left. Bronze statuettes of Hermes are found all around the territory of *Moesia Inferior*. There are publications about monuments from Vratsa (*Ognenova-Marinova 1975, p. 98, № 92*), Botevgrad (*Ognenova-Marinova 1975, p. 103, № 101*), Opanets, Pleven district (*Венедиков/Велков 1946, p. 229, fig. 143*), Dimum, now Belene (*Ognenova-Marinova 1975, p. 101, № 98*), Kramolin, Sevlievo district (*Ognenova-Marinova 1975, p. 103, № 102*), Kruvenik, Gabrovo district (*Милчев/Ковачев 1967, 43-44, fig. 5*), Butovo (*Църов 1990, p. 33, № 6, fig. 6*), Nicopolis ad Istrum (*Дончева 2002-2003, p. 216*), Marcianopolis (*Ognenova-Marinova 1975, p. 109, № 115*), Dubravino, Varna district (*Лазаров 2001, с. 46, № 83*) and Rogachevo, near by Dionysopolis, now Balchik (*Василичин 1980, 116-117, № 2, pl. I 1*). From the administrative territory of Abritus, now Razgrad are known nine bronze statuettes – one from ancient city (*Явашев 1936, 67-68, fig. 57*), one from Radingrad (*Радославова/Дзанев 2003, p. 126*), one from Ljublen (*Ognenova-Marinova 1975, p. 108, № 114*), one from

Drinovo (Георгиев/Аманасов 1992, p. 51, № 14, fig. 2, pl. IV), two from Krepcha (Велков 1928-1929, p. 376, fig. 250; Велков 1930-1931, p. 310, fig. 236) and three from Opaka (Гинев 1989, с. 34, № 45, обр. 45; Георгиев/Аманасов 1992, 50-51, № 12-13, fig 4, pl. III; fig. 1, pl. IV). Seven bronze statuettes come from Novae (Ognenova-Marinova 1975 p. 101, № 97; p. 107, № 112; p. 110, № 119; p. 111, № 120; p. 113, № 125; Димитрова-Милчева 1984 18-19; Художествен бронз 1984, № 111), five from Durostorum (Георгиев/Доневски 1980, 119-120, № 1 – 3; 7, pl. I 1 – I 3; III 7; Petculescu 2003, p. 102, № 43) and three from Tomi (Barbu 1965, 14 – 18, № 6 – 8). Sometimes Mercury is represented as Hermes - Thot⁶. He is wearing on his head a “petasus”, with wide brims and two lateral wings framing a lotus flower or a feather on the crown of his head.

Another type of widespread monuments, related to Hermes' cult are gems. From territory of *Moesia Inferior* are originated more than 30 monuments. Some of them are part of Bălăcescu collection (Gramatopol 1974, 56-57, № 223, 229, 240, 242, 245, 246) and they are preserved in Numismatic Cabinet of Romanian Academy of Sciences in Bucharest. More of the gems descend from territory of Novae and Oescus. Probably in Novae existed jewellery workshop, as also an unfinished gem with god's representation is found there (Димитрова-Милчева 1980, p. 21). Sometimes Hermes is depicted on gems together with other goddesses as Izis (Димитрова-Милчева 1980, p. 46, № 61) and Fortuna (Димитрова-Милчева 2005, 264-276, № 4).

Hermes is perceived as a patron of money, profit, good luck and male inception. That's why god's herms are used for decoration of toilet boxes' clasps. These boxes were used for toilet accessories and various valuables as jewellery, coins and objects of luxury. From *Moesia Inferior* are known more than 15 clasps, mostly from territory of Odessus (Kouzov 2003, p. 32, № 23-25; 27-30, fig. 23-25; 27-30), Marcianopolis (Мънзова 1963, 18-19, № 2a; 2b; 7, fig 3; Kouzov 2003, p. 32, № 31, fig. 31), Durostorum (Petculescu 2003, p. 132, № 159) and Nicopolis ad Istrum (Дончева 2002-2003, p.216, fig. 2).

Various monuments with Hermes image are evidence for different aspects of his cult. From Oescus (Младенова 1967, p. 43, № 11, fig. 11), from Odessus' thermal baths (Георгиев 1975, p. 145, № 8, pl. IV, 3, 4) and from Early-Christian church in “Ancient villa № 1”, near by Montana (Александров 1983, p. 68, №1) originated stone statues of Hermes. In *villa rustica* near by Dolna Kremena, Vratsa district (Маюов 1988, 32-33, № 2-3, fig. 2-3) and in Nicopolis ad Istrum (Дончева 2002-2003, 216-218) are discovered god's herms. From Butovo descend terracottas (Султова 1977, p. 87) and clay moulds for applications with representations of Hermes (Кабакчиева/Султова/Владкова 1988, p. 31; 36, № 181; 212). From Montana – clay mould for votive tablets (Велков 1940-1942, 183-184, № 1, fig. 247), and from Gradnitca, Gabrovo district – votive hand, an evidence for syncretism between Sabazius and Hermes-Mercury (Милчев 1972-1973, 48-58, fig. 1 а, б, в, г, д; Тачева-Хитрова 1975, 53-56, № 7, fig. 2).

⁶ Bronze statuettes from Novae, Durostorum and Rogachevo, Balchik district.

There is no temple of Hermes-Mercury found in *Moesia Inferior* and *Thrace*. But this multiform divinity is directly related with human spirit, existence and daily pursuits. He is patron of craftsmen, merchants, shepherds, musicians, athletes, orators, even of thieves. That's why the monuments with Hermes' images are so numerous all over the Roman Empire. They are perceived as an apotropaic amulets that bring good luck and avert evil.

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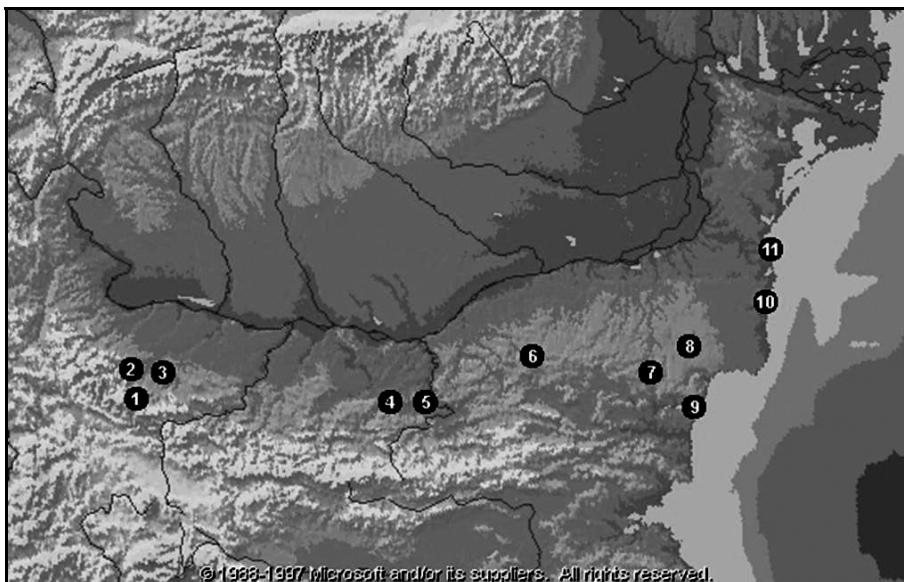


Fig. 1: Votive tablets with Hermes' images from territory of Moesia Inferior. 1. Kovachitsa, Berkovitca district; 2. Vidlitsa, Montana district; 3. Montana; 4. Pavlikeni, administrative territory of *Nicopolis ad Istrum*; 5. *Nicopolis ad Istrum*; 6. *Abritus*; 7. Valchidol, Varna district; 8. Dimitar Ganevo, Dobrich district; 9. *Odessus*; 10. *Callatis*; 11. *Tomi*.

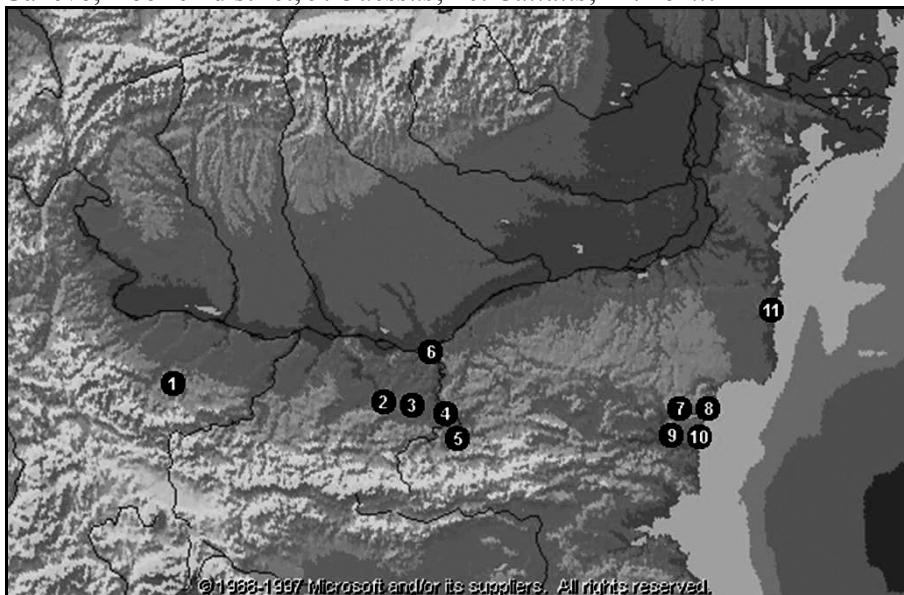


Fig. 2: Votive tablets with Hermes and other divinities from territory of Moesia Inferior. 1. Krivodol, Montana district; 2-3. Butovo, administrative territory of *Nicopolis ad Istrum*; 4. *Nicopolis ad Istrum*; 5. Veliko Turnovo, administrative territory of *Nicopolis ad Istrum*; 6. *Novae*; 7-10. *Odessus*; 11. *Callatis*.

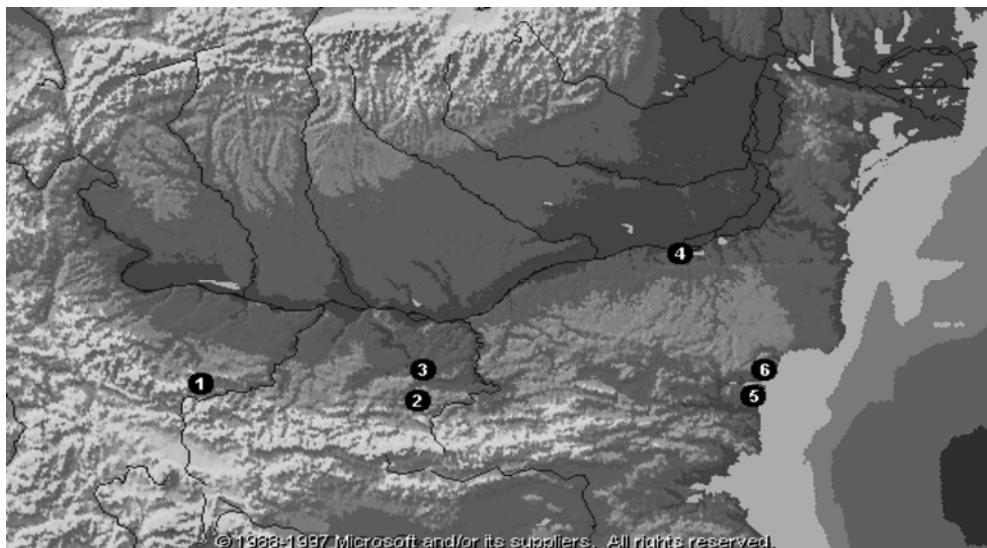


Fig. 3: Epigraphic monuments, devoted to Hermes - Mercury from territory of Moesia Inferior. 1. Dolna Beshovitca, Vratsa district; 2. Vishovgrad, administrative territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum; 3. Pavlikeni, administrative territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum; 4. Durostorum; 5-6. Odessus.

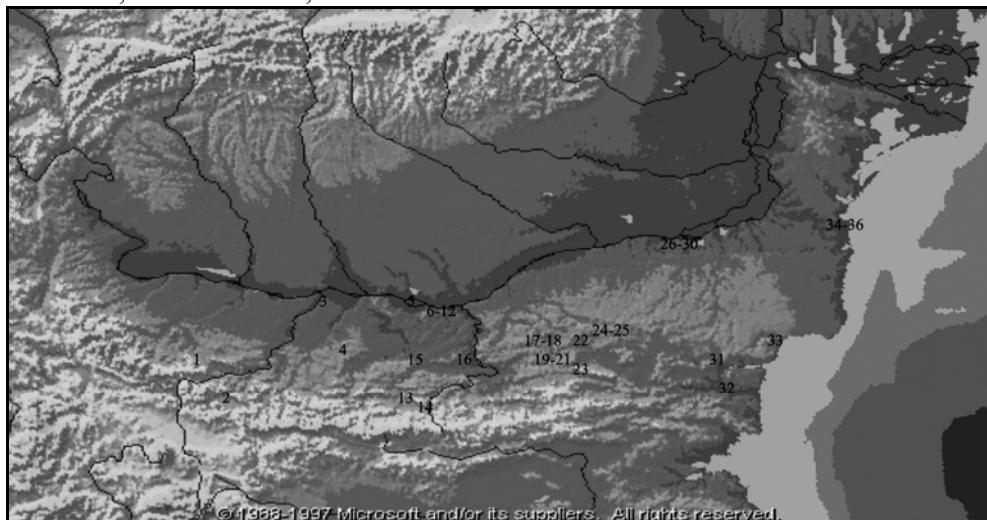


Fig. 4: Bronze statuettes, representing Hermes - Mercury from territory of Moesia Inferior. 1. Vratsa; 2. Botevgrad; 3. *Oescus*; 4. Opanets, Pleven district; 5. *Dimum*; 6-12 Novae; 13. Kramolin, Sevlievo disctrict; 14. Kruvenik, Gabrovo district; 15. Butavo; 16. *Nicolis ad Istrum*; 17-18. Krepcha, administrative territory of *Abritus*; 19-21. Opaka, administrative territory of *Abritus*; 22. Ljublen, administrative territory of *Abritus*; 23. Drinovo, administrative territory of *Abritus*; 24-25. *Abritus*; 26-30. *Durostorum*. 31. *Marcianopolis*; 32. Dubravino, administrative territory of *Odessus*; 33. Rogachevo, administrative territory of *Dionysopolis*; 34-36. *Tomi*.

