

## A BRONZE HERM OF PRIAPUS IN A PRIVATE COLLECTION

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**Rezumat:** Autorii analizează o mică hermă din bronz descoperită în Dobrogea și aflată într-o colecție particulară. Este a doua reprezentare în bronz a lui Priapus, zeul fertilității animale și al renașterii vegetale, din această zonă unde, până în prezent, au fost descoperite relativ puține monumente referitoare la cultul acestei divinități agreste.

Printre reprezentările lui Priapus descoperite în Dobrogea, fragmente sculpturale din marmură, un altar votiv, statuete din terracotta și bronz sau în evidența numismatică, majoritatea se înscriu tipului de reprezentare clasic, cu mantie lungă de tip oriental, bonetă rotundă sau de tip frigian și simbolurile abundenței - fructele și florile - aflate în poalele veșmântului de sub care apare phallus-ul. Priapus nud, lipsit de simbolurile forței sale generatoare este întâlnit mai rar, cum ar fi cazul unei statuete din terracotta din colecția Severeanu. În ceea ce privește aria de răspândire a monumentelor figurative dedicate lui Priapus, nordul Dobrogei este reprezentat prin două piese, o statueta fragmentară din marmură descoperită la Niculițel și un altar din calcar de la Celic în timp ce, în zona litoralului, în orașele pontice Tomis și Callatis, descoperirile sunt mai numeroase, mai ales în zona ultimului, demonstrând puternica influență a zeului fertilității în acest teritoriu care depindea atât de producția agricolă cât și de comerțul cu astfel de produse.

Datarea piesei este dificilă, mai ales că nu cunoaștem locul descoperirii acesteia; pe baza analogiei cu o hermă descoperită într-un context sigur la Micia dar și datorită faptului că în sec. II p.Chr. sunt datate majoritatea reprezentărilor lui Priapus din Dobrogea, se propune această încadrare cronologică.

**Cuvinte cheie:** Dobrogea, perioada romană timpurie, hermă priapică, bronzuri figurate

**Keywords:** Dobrudja, early Roman period, Priapic herm, figurative bronzes

There were discovered several objects preserving the image of Priapus among the representations of rustic divinities on the territory of Roman Dobrudja; less numerous but spread both in rural and urban centres of the province, they confirm however the importance given to the protector of vegetal and animal fertility in predominantly agricultural or living on trade in farming products areas. The impact of such cult in the Roman Dobrudja is hard to explain, mainly because it is based on the rare representations in marble, bronze or *terracotta*. Nevertheless, the uncommonness of the divinity's illustrations determined us to publish a new object, a small herm representing this god. It is now placed in the private collection of I. Matei (Bucharest), but its discovery place remained unknown to us.

Priapic herm. Measures: 3.3 cm height, 11.58 g weight. Solid cast, deep green patina, preserving signs of corrosion. Priapus is represented nude, with his hands on his thighs and straight bodied. On the head level there are strong marks of corrosion, but a short round cut beard may still be noticed. Although his chest and abdomen are scantily represented, his *phallus* is well brought out. On the lower side, the herm is square shaped in section. It is well preserved. It is a modest workcraft, showing no artistic value; however, the slight schematization reflected by the object is probably due to the fact that it belonged to a complex assembly, possibly a piece of furniture (Pl. 2/1-3).

Analysing Priapus' representations discovered on the territory of Dobrudja (Pl. 1), we have noticed the small number of such pieces and the fact that only ten descriptions of the fertility god were published up to the present. Nine of them are marble sculptural pieces and

*terracotta* statuettes and only one is a bronze statuette. Also, the monetary inventory has revealed both Priapus and Aphrodite/Venus on a coin found at Callatis and published by G. Severeanu<sup>1</sup>.

Two monuments related to the Priapic worship come from the northern Dobruđja. One of them is a limestone altar discovered in the village of Celic, in the church area<sup>2</sup>. There, Priapus is represented wearing a big beard, a round bonnet and holding in the lap of his tunic a heap of fruits, supported by an enormous *phallus*. The two bunches of grapes, illustrated around the god's head, reflect the syncretic feature of his representation, by gathering the two symbols of fertility and opulence<sup>3</sup>. The second monument connected with the vegetal and animal fertility god was discovered in a *villa rustica* from the west of Niculițel. It is a votive statuette fragment, of white marble, which stands for Priapus in the classical iconographical scheme, showing him dressed in a long, oriental garment, which on the lower side leaves his *phallus* uncovered, and wearing a long two-tows separated beard<sup>4</sup>.

In the southern Dobruđja, along the Pontic seashore, the number of monuments symbolising Priapus is greater and reflects his powerful influence here. The west Pontic cities Tomis and Callatis, especially the latter, had many worshippers of this god, more of his representations being discovered *intramuros* or in the cities' *territorium*. The discovery of a marble statue lower side representing the god, dressed in typically oriental long clothing, took place at Tomis, with the occasion of the researches from Bazilica Mare<sup>5</sup>. Also, G. Bordenache published a Priapus statue head, found in the same Pontic city and dating back in the first half of the second century A.D.<sup>6</sup> The most numerous Dobruđjan representations of Priapus are attested at Callatis: three *terracotta* statuettes and a bronze one<sup>7</sup>, a fragmented marble statuette representing the god together with two Erotes<sup>8</sup>, and also a coin having both the god and Aphrodite/Venus represented on. These discoveries reflect the existence, among the locals, of a worship celebrated in the honour of Priapus, as a protector of agricultural living<sup>9</sup>. The coin issued at Callatis during Commodus can be looked upon as an extra proof of the appreciation for Priapus in this Pontic city. Most of the monuments representing Priapus and discovered in the Roman Dobruđja come from the provincial cities area, while the altar and votive statuette found at Celic and Niculițel are the only representations discovered in rural surroundings<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Severeanu 1925, 16-18; see Künzl 1970, 125, figs. 24-25 and 127, fig. 27, for other representations of Aphrodite/Venus in association with Priapus.

<sup>2</sup> Tudor 1935, 28-29, no. 18, fig. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Tudor 1935, 29; in I. Stângă's opinion (Stângă 1998, 70, pl. 16/6, pl. 24/2) this Priapic altar is a local workcraft from Drobeta, although D. Tudor was very clear when he said that the piece was discovered at Celic and that it belonged to the private Dobruđjan antiquities collection of dr. Istrati, cf. Tudor 1935, 24, 28-29.

<sup>4</sup> Baumann 1983, 73, pl. 9/2; Baumann 1984, 208, no. 3, 599, fig. 3/a-b; Baumann 2006, 233, fig. 9/a.

<sup>5</sup> Covacef 1970, 227-229, no. 3, figs. 3-4; Covacef 2002, 132.

<sup>6</sup> Bordenache 1969, 67, no. 122, fig. 53/122.

<sup>7</sup> Severeanu 1925, 18-19, nos. 1-4, pl. 1/ 1-4.

<sup>8</sup> Scorpan 1966, no. 30, fig. 30.

<sup>9</sup> Severeanu 1925, 16-18.

<sup>10</sup> See Baumann 2006, 225-242; Covacef 2002, 125-133; Bărbulescu 2001, 252-259, as regards the rural worships from Dobruđja.

However, this situation is similar to the Roman Dacia's one, where only a quarter of the monuments representing this god were discovered in rural areas<sup>11</sup>.

From the iconographical point of view, the Priapus representations discovered in the Roman Dobrudja correspond to the classical type, which illustrates the god dressed in a long cloth or mantle, holding some fruits, supported also by his *phallus*. The *terracotta* statuette belonging to Severeanu's collection makes an exception<sup>12</sup>, but it might be added to the grotesque representations so largely spread in the Roman art<sup>13</sup>. Another exception is Priapus' representing on a marble *aedicula* discovered at Tomis, on which the god appears nude, holding some fruits in his hands, as a disciple of Dionysus, here called *Kathegemon*, together with Pan, Silen, the panther and less usual, the Thracian Knight<sup>14</sup> (Pl. 4/1). As the monetary inventory of Moesia concerns, Priapus is represented on coins issued at Callatis<sup>15</sup>, Nicopolis ad Istrum and Marcianopolis<sup>16</sup>.

The only bronze Priapic statuette from Dobrudja (7 cm height) was discovered in the surroundings of Callatis in 1915<sup>17</sup> (Pl. 3/1). The statuette follows the same classical iconographical scheme: the god wears a *peplum*, a pointed bonnet on his head, holding some fruits and flowers in his hands and showing his *phallus*, the symbol of fertility, under. The primitive work style of this statuette, reflecting no artistic value, as G. Severeanu remarked too, could indicate a local workshop, situated in Lower Moesia and indeed a later dating, while the typically Phrygian pointed bonnet draws attention to the oriental features of this god.

The Dacian monuments representing Priapus are not greater in number than the Dobrudjan ones<sup>18</sup>. Analysing the bronze representations discovered in this area, two major ways of illustrating Priapus should be pointed out: first, there is the classical representation of the fecundity and also animal and vegetal fertility god, covered by a long clothing, holding fruits and flowers under which the *phallus* is revealed and the second situation, when Priapus is worshiped as a *panthee* divinity<sup>19</sup>. In the second case the god preserves some of other divinities' characteristics, such as Pan, Mercurius<sup>20</sup>, Silvanus<sup>21</sup> or Jupiter<sup>22</sup>, but from the chronological view point, this second way of representing Priapus is specific to the third century A.D. As a matter of fact, the only Dacian inscription dedicated to this god names him *Priepos Pantheus*<sup>23</sup> and it was discovered at Apulum, dating back in 235 A.D.

<sup>11</sup> Bărbulescu 1985, 131.

<sup>12</sup> Severeanu 1925, pl. 1, fig. 3.

<sup>13</sup> See Alicu 1994, 17-22.

<sup>14</sup> Canarache, Aricescu, Barbu, Rădulescu 1963, 32-33, no. 4, figs. 13-16; Scorpan 1966, 21-23, fig. 1; Covacef 1978, 123-124; Covacef 1998, 166-167; Covacef 2002, 128, pl. 14/2; ISM II, 121; Bărbulescu 2001, 258, fig. 47/1.

<sup>15</sup> Severeanu 1925, 16-17; Iacob 2004, 218, 238, Catalogue A 49.

<sup>16</sup> Severeanu 1925, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Severeanu 1925, 18, no. 1, pl. 1/1; Gramatopol 1982, 183, pl. 10/2.

<sup>18</sup> As regards the Roman Dacia, thirteen representations of Priapus were listed (Bărbulescu 1998, 203).

<sup>19</sup> Bărbulescu 1985, 131.

<sup>20</sup> Pârvan 1913, 66.

<sup>21</sup> A representation of Priapus, assimilated with Silvanus and wearing a *chlamys* and *nebris*, belonged to Niessen collection; now it is placed in Römisch-Germanischen Museum Köln (Franken 1994, no. 46, 439-440, figs. 92-94).

<sup>22</sup> Bărbulescu 1985, 131.

<sup>23</sup> See to Pârvan 1913, 66; Tudor 1935, 29; Bărbulescu 1985, 131, the discussion on Priapus *Pantheus*.

The god was discovered in the classical manner, supporting his lap full of fruits with his *phallus*, at Sucidava (5.3 cm height)<sup>24</sup> (Pl. 3/3), while two herms<sup>25</sup> presenting him as *pantheus* were found at Devesel and Micia. At Devesel, Priapus (10.5 cm height) is illustrated as a bearded man, with two small horns on his forehead, crowned by a garland and wearing a long mantle revealing his phallus underneath<sup>26</sup> (Pl. 3/4). The herm from Micia<sup>27</sup> was discovered in a level dated back between 106 and 170 A.D. The artefact, presenting the god in the nude, with a beard and *kalathos*<sup>28</sup> on his head, reflects a series of resemblances to Matei collection's herm, such as its similar sizes (4.2 cm height), the god's arms position on his thighs and the similar lower side (Pl. 3/2). There is another bronze herm, now gone, discovered by Gr. Tocilescu in Romula's baths and still preserved in a short description of D. Tudor<sup>29</sup>, and also two other representations, on two chandeliers, the former found at Turda<sup>30</sup> and the latter at Napoca<sup>31</sup>.

As to the discoveries from the other Roman provinces, Priapus is represented dressed in a long garment, whose lap full of fruits and flowers is supported by his *phallus*. Such examples are the statuettes discovered at Rimini<sup>32</sup>, Augsburg and Kunsthandel<sup>33</sup>, Würzburg<sup>34</sup>, Poliez-Pittet<sup>35</sup> (the god wears a *kalathos*) or placed in the National Library collection from Paris<sup>36</sup>. A modestly worked statuette dated in the second-third century A.D. was unearthed at Abrittus (Lower Moesia)<sup>37</sup>, another one, believed to be an imported work was found at Gladnici, in Dalmatia<sup>38</sup>, while a herm, product of the Alexandrine workshops, was discovered at Viminacium (Upper Moesia)<sup>39</sup>.

Following the typology established by W.-R. Megow, we could include the herm present in Matei collection in *Lordosis C*, III type<sup>40</sup>, an iconographical type specific to herms representing Priapus in the nude, with the upper side of his body widely bent backwards and the pelvis side strongly stretched<sup>41</sup>. However, the bronze statuettes and herms illustrating the god deprived of his fecundity power symbols are less usual. Besides the one discovered at

<sup>24</sup> Tudor 1945-1947, 193, no. 38, fig. 38/2; Tudor 1978, 390; Țeposu-Marinescu, Pop 2000, 57, no. 47, pl. 27/47.

<sup>25</sup> See Devambež 1968, 139-154; Mattusch 1995, 54, for a general view upon herms.

<sup>26</sup> Pârvan 1913, 66, no. 32, pl. 8/4; Tudor 1978, 229, 390, fig. 100/3; Țeposu-Marinescu, Pop 2000, 57, no. 49, pl. 27/49; Petculescu 2003, 104, no. 51 (L. Marinescu).

<sup>27</sup> Țeposu-Marinescu, Pop, 2000, 57, no. 48, pl. 27/48; Petculescu 2003, 104, no. 52 (L. Marinescu).

<sup>28</sup> Sanie 1994, 236; Cios 1995, 245.

<sup>29</sup> Tudor 1978, 390.

<sup>30</sup> Pop 1995, 319, no. 2, fig. 2/2 (from Kemény József earl collection).

<sup>31</sup> Pop 1995, 325, no. 25, fig. 7/4.

<sup>32</sup> Kaufmann-Heinimann 2004, 250-251, fig. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Parlasca 1954, 295, figs. 1-2.

<sup>34</sup> Menzel 1975 (1977), 99-100, no. 5, pl. 41/1-3.

<sup>35</sup> Leibundgut 1980, 34-35, no. 27, pl. 33/27.

<sup>36</sup> Babelon, Blanchet 1895, 215-217, nos. 499-503, 505-506; see Reinach 1897, 73-75; Reinach 1898, 523, no. 9; Reinach 1904, 21-22 for other bronze Priapic statuettes.

<sup>37</sup> Radoslavova, Dzanev 2003, 127, fig. 43; another statuette representing Priapus was discovered at Oescus (*Le bronze sculpté* 1984, no. 142).

<sup>38</sup> Žanić-Protić 1988, 30-31, no. 40, pl. 6/40.

<sup>39</sup> Spasić-Durić 2002, 67, 71, fig. 44.

<sup>40</sup> Megow 1997, 1031-1033.

<sup>41</sup> See the discussion on *Lordosis* type to Megow 1997, 1030-1034, 1042.

Micia, there is another herm found in Cyprus (6.5 cm height)<sup>42</sup>, but in this case the vegetal fertility symbols are replaced by the symbol of abundance – *cornucopia* (Pl. 3/5). Priapus is represented in the nude<sup>43</sup> or wearing a garment<sup>44</sup> on the statuettes and herms classified as *Priapus pouring*, in which case the god seems to pour some essence from an *alabastron*, a practice explained as a ritual, aiming the revitalisation of potency or rather the libations assuring a rich harvest<sup>45</sup>. Another type is exemplified by the statuettes from Ligerz<sup>46</sup>, Tongeren<sup>47</sup> and La Comelle-sous-Beuvray<sup>48</sup>, on which Priapus is presented in a very simple manner, in the nude, with a thin body bent forwards, his hands on his thighs and an erect *phallus*; however, the dating and even the classification of these pieces as representations of Priapus remain uncertain. We find the same situation in the case of the statuettes clasified as ‘*cucullus* with a *phallus*’ type, which are considered Priapus representations<sup>49</sup>.

Finally, we could conclude that the herm discovered on the territory of Dobrudja and now present in Matei collection, stands for a provincial toreutic work, a product of one of Lower Moesia’s centres. As for its chronology, we suggest the second century A.D., due both to the resemblance between the Dobrudjan piece and the small herm discovered at Micia (the closest analogy to the Lower Moesia neighbouring areas until now) and to the fact that most of the Dobrudjan monuments representing Priapus are dated back to this century. We must emphasise that most of the studied statuettes and herms, honouring the fertility god, reflect a wide early Roman chronological period, depriving us of a closer dating. This dating results both from the use of the same Roman figurative bronzes features for a long time and the discovery by chance of these objects, usually acquired without knowing the context of their discovery. Regarding the object’s functionality, we think that it is less possible to have been used as a votive object inside the domestic *lararium*, taking account of its form; it rather belonged to a complex assembly, probably a piece of furniture.

The fact that we do not know the place of its discovery represents an obstacle in our approach, for this minor piece of art could have joined the other early Roman Dobrudjan bronze pieces, clearly placed, contributing this way to the deeper study of an interesting archaeological problem, the one concerning the existence and definition of some local figurative bronzes workshops in the Danubian province.

Translation by Natalia Midvichi

<sup>42</sup> Babelon, Blanchet 1895, 216, no. 504.

<sup>43</sup> Comstock, Vermeule 1971, 121, no. 129; Boucher 1973, 104, no. 166.

<sup>44</sup> Grant *et alii* 1975, 125-127.

<sup>45</sup> Grant *et alii* 1975, 125.

<sup>46</sup> Leibundgut 1980, 152-153, no. 205, pl. 186/205.

<sup>47</sup> Faider-Feytmans 1979, pl. 192/B 8 (taken as Pan).

<sup>48</sup> Franken 1994, 496-498, no. 118, figs. 252-254 („Mann mit Widderhörnern”).

<sup>49</sup> Franken 1994, 440-441, no. 47, figs. 95-97; Žanić-Protić 1988, 30, no. 39, pl. 6/39.

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## CATALOGUE

I. Marble and limestone  
sculptural fragments

1. Statue fragment of large sizes (head);  
MNIR, inv. L 1323.  
Discovered at Tomis?  
H – 23 cm.  
Only the head was preserved, although destroyed most of it. It probably belonged to a statue or herm. It is a local work, of a good quality.  
First half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.  
Bibliography: Bordenache 1969, 67, no. 122, pl. 53/122; Covacef 2002, 132; Baumann 2006, 232, 241, fig. 7/b.
2. Fragmentary statue (lower side); MINA Constanța, inv. 17671.  
Discovered at Tomis in 1961.  
H – 21 cm; l – 26; g – 16 cm.  
Only the lower side of a statue of Priapus was preserved: the god's feet, wearing *caligae*, sitting on a circular pedestal. His pleated garment, partly preserved, falling down to his feet, points to the classical image of god.  
The end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.  
Bibliography: Covacef 1970, 227-229, no. 3, figs. 3-4; Covacef 2002, 132; Baumann 2006, 232, 241, fig. 7a.
3. Votive statuette fragment; ICEM Tulcea, inv. 900.  
Discovered in the western Niculițel, Tulcea County, in a *villa rustica*, in 1973.  
H – 10 cm; l – 3-3.5 cm; g – 4.5 cm.  
It is a small sized votive statuette. Priapus is represented as propped up by a *phallus*, dressed in a *tunica*, wearing a split beard and hooved feet.  
The 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.  
Bibliography: Baumann 1983, 73, pl. 9/2; Baumann 1984, 208, no. 3, 599, fig. 3/a-b;
4. Fragmentary statuary group; MINA Constanța, inv. 75.  
Discovered at Callatis.  
H – 50 cm; l – 21 cm.  
Priapus is presented in a protective attitude, wearing a *chiton* around his waist, a slightly pointed beard and a garland on his head. His hooded mantle falls down in pleated shades to the lower side of his body. Also, the god holds some fruits with both his arms. He is flanked by two Erotes, the one on the right side almost completely destroyed.  
The 3<sup>rd</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.  
Bibliography: Scorpan 1966, 75, no. 30, fig. 30; Covacef 2002, 132, pl. 16/3; Baumann 2006, 232, 241, fig. 8/a.
5. Votive plaque, in the shape of an *aedicula*, honouring Dionysus *Kathegemon*; MINAC, inv. 2014.  
Discovered at Tomis.  
H – 47 cm; l – 37 cm; g – 37 cm.  
Priapus is illustrated as a disciple of Dionysus, in the nude, sitting on a small pedestal, against which a panther props up. The god's features are hardly perceived because of the material's corrosion; he wears a long beard and most probably a round bonnet, similar to the one described on the altar discovered at Cilic.  
The 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.  
Bibliography: Canarache, Aricescu, Barbu, Rădulescu 1963, 32-33, no. 4, figs. 13-16; Scorpan 1966, 21-23, no. 1; Covacef 1978, 123-124; Covacef 1998, 166-167; Covacef 2002, 128, pl. 14/2; ISM II, 121; Bărbulescu 2001, 258, fig. 47/1.

Baumann 1998, 255; Baumann 2006, 233, 242, fig. 9/a; Bărbulescu 2001, 257.

6. Limestone altar; MPF Drobeta Turnu Severin.

Discovered in the church area of Cilic Dere, Tulcea County, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

H – 100 cm; bas-relief H – 41 cm.

Priapus wears a waist-deep *tunica*, a round bonnet and holds a bunch of fruits and flowers, revealing a *phallus* under; two bunches of grapes rise from his head.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.

Bibliography: Tudor 1935, 28-29, no. 18, fig. 6; Stângă 1998, 70, pl. 16/6, 24/2; Bărbulescu 2001, 257; Baumann 1998, 255; Baumann 2006, 233, 242, fig. 9/b.

## II. Terracotta statuettes

7. Statuette. Severeanu collection.

Discovered at Callatis.

H – 9 cm.

Priapus is represented sitting on a circular pedestal, wearing a pointed beard and a long mantle, turned down above his *phallus*.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.

Bibliography: Severeanu 1925, 18-19, no. 2, pl. 1/2.

8. Fragmentary statuette. Severeanu collection.

Discovered at Callatis.

H – 10.5 cm.

Priapus is in the nude, wearing a beard and a garland of flowers and leaves on his head. He has a twisted body, his

hands on his thighs and his pelvis bent forwards.

The 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.

Bibliography: Severeanu 1925, 19, no. 3, pl. 1/3.

9. Statuette. Severeanu collection.

Discovered at Callatis.

H – 21 cm.

Priapus with *syrinx*, is represented sitting on a stone, cross-footed, wearing a bush of hair and beard and a mantle on his shoulders.

Roman period.

Bibliography: Severeanu 1925, 19, no. 4, pl. 1/4.

## III. Bronze representations

10. Statuette. Severeanu collection.

Discovered at Callatis.

H – 7 cm.

Priapus is covered by a *peplum*, wearing a pointed bonnet and holding a bunch of flowers and fruits in his arms.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.?

Bibliography: Severeanu 1925, 18, no. 1, pl. 1/1.

11. Herm. I. Matei collection (Bucharest).

Dobrogea, *passim*.

H – 3.3 cm.

Priapus is in the nude, holding his hands on his thighs, wearing a round cut beard and lacking any fertility power symbols.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.

Unpublished.

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