

PEOPLE OR GODS? AN ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION FOR TWO STATUE BASES OF THE CLASSICAL PERIOD FROM HISTRIA AND OLBIA

Florina Panait-Bîrzescu*

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Abstract: The article discusses two statue bases of the Classical period from Histria and Olbia, which present dedications to Apollo Ietros and similar embedding traces for bronze statues. To the already known hypothesis that these represented the god, an alternative hypothesis is proposed for the identity of the statues, namely that of the dedicator himself. A series of analogies testify to the common practice in the Black Sea cities of erecting a statue of the priest at the end of the service, either by himself or by a family member. The presence of the orifice near the left foot would thus correspond to the staff, an accessory of the citizen's outfit in the Classical period. But the argument that raises the most questions is the reuse of the base from Olbia a century later, for another statue, reuse which is rather particular to honorary statues.

Rezumat: Articolul are în vedere două baze de statui de epocă clasică de la Histria și Olbia, care prezintă dedicații pentru Apollo Ietros și urme similare de încăstrări ale unor statui de bronz. La ipoteza deja cunoscută cum că acestea reprezentau pe zeu, este propusă o ipoteză alternativă pentru identitatea personajului, și anume însuși dedicantul. O serie de analogii stau mărturie pentru practica comună și în cetățile de la Marea Neagră de a ridica o statuie a preotului la sfârșitul serviciului, fie de acesta, fie de un membru al familiei. Prezența orificiului în dreptul piciorului stâng ar corespunde astfel toiagului, un accesoriu al ținutei cetățeanului în epoca clasică. Însă argumentul care dă cel mai mult de gândit este refolosirea bazei de la Olbia un secol mai târziu, pentru o altă statuie, refolosirea fiind specifică mai degrabă statuiilor onorifice.

Part of the ancient urban landscape, the statues were exhibited everywhere inside and outside the city, in public and private contexts. Literary sources, as well as archaeological discoveries describe the image of a “forest of statues”, as it has been called in recent literature,¹ a metaphor for the image produced by their accumulation over time. The marble statues have been preserved most of the time in fragments, the bronze ones have been melted for reuse of the material since antiquity. What we inherited are their bases, some fragmentary, often bearing inscriptions, frequently not discovered in situ, but reused as building material in the walls of later buildings. This is also the case with the statue bases from Histria.

The article discusses the issue of the identity of the represented persons. From the first publications there was a tendency to see in them the image of the god, to whom the dedication was made. Numerous contributions on the bases of statues, which have been of particular interest in recent decades,² substantially nuance this issue, the representation of the dedicator being also quite frequently attested. For this reason, in the absence of clear indications, the identity of the represented person is usually left aside in the studies on statue bases. However, this problem requires an explanation, since depending on how we interpret these bases, not only the image of the Histrian urban landscape changes, but also the displaying of the Histrian elite takes on other dimensions.

At the centre of this paper is one of the best preserved bases from Histria,³ discovered by Vasile Pârvan in the first years of excavations at Histria. It was found in the revetment of the southern side of tower G of the Late Roman city wall. It is a simple rectangular base made of black marble, which presents on

* Institute of Archaeology Vasile Pârvan, Bucharest; e-mail: florina12@gmail.com.

¹ Concept used by Sielhorst 2014, in the phrase “Wege durch den Statuenwald” to describe the display of the honorific statues in relation to the public spaces. A similar topic in Griesbach 2014b, p. 12.

² From the rich literature on statue bases here are several references: Kotsidu 2000; Löhr 2000; on regions: Filges 2007 (Didyma); Krumeich 2007; 2010; 2014; Krumeich, Witschel 2010 (Athenian Acropolis); Griesbach 2013; Griesbach 2010 (Delos); Leybold 2013 (Olympia); Mathys 2014 (Pergamon); Murer 2017 (Italy and North Africa); for the Classical and Hellenistic periods: Griesbach 2014a; Griesbach 2014b; Krumeich 2017; Ma 2007; Ma 2013; Queyrel 2013; Queyrel, von den Hoff 2017; for the Roman period: Deppmeyer 2008; Fejfer 2008; Højte 2005; Lahusen 2010; for the Late Roman period: Bauer, Witschel 2007; for the question of reuse: Leybold et al. 2014; Kristensen, Stirling 2016.

³ Pârvan 1916, p. 534, cat. 1; Lambrino 1927-1932, p. 393, fig. 10, 11; Lambrino 1937, p. 352, cat. 1, fig. 1; ISM I 169; Alexandrescu Vianu 2000, cat. 101.