

RECENZII / BOOK REVIEWS

Maria ALEXANDRESCU VIANU, *Une cité antique à travers ses sculptures. La sculpture en pierre à Tomis à l'époque du Principat (I^{er}-III^e siècles)*, Istros Publishing House, Brăila, 2022, 300 pg. (92 illustrations + 34 fig. in text), ISBN 978-606-654-492-4.

The book gathers a series of contributions from the author's (MAV) lifelong career on the sculptural finds of Roman period from Tomis and the region between the Danube and the Black Sea, not as a mere collection of articles, but as a review and update of previous ideas and observations, along with the resumption of several recently published papers. In the 1st-3rd centuries AD, Tomis reached a remarkable development, and became the seat of the Roman administration and of the West Pontic community (*Hexapoleis*). However, the ratio between the importance of the city that yielded numerous discoveries over decades and the sheer number of monographic publications is rather contrasting. In this regard, the systematization of most of the sculptural material with detailed stylistic and iconographic analyses, although it does not exhaust the subject, fills a substantial gap in the literature.

The structure of the work reveals the effort to surpass the stage of traditional analysis of art history, and to approach the sculpture from the sociological perspective that sees the object as a product of society. The methodological intention is explicit in each title of the first six chapters, where the sculptural finds are classified following several categories within the city (elites, inhabitants, gods, deceased), corresponding to the various functions of the sculptural representations: decorative, honorific, cultic, and funerary.

The first chapter, entitled *Pour une sociologie de l'art de Tomis* (pp. 11-20), is an introduction to several concepts related to the social actors involved in art making, such as the benefactors (*commanditaires*) and the beneficiaries. The first term is part of the equation *commanditaires* – *spectateurs* meant to respond to a complex set of questions about sculpture from its creation until the final setting.¹ The lack of documented archaeological contexts at Tomis, in spite of many decades of archaeological discoveries, forced MAV to leave aside the question of the spectators, hence of the art reception and display, and to dwell upon those who had the initiative of erecting statues: the benefactors (*les commanditaires*). A point is made about

their role in determining the artistic creation.² Also, probably wanting to emphasize the fact that such a role was rather limited at Tomis,³ MAV introduces the term beneficiaries, which would lie between *commanditaires* and *spectateurs*, partially overlying the first. But on a closer view the terminology is debatable; the meaning of the word beneficiaries points to those who use the artistic product, which seems more likely to be the public in the first place, while the term of benefactor fits better to the sponsor of the monument.

One of the main ideas of the book concerns the 1st century AD, when following the integration of the region into the Roman Empire the spectrum of artistic influences extended from the traditional centres of Greece to the western provinces of the empire. The increase in the city's social dynamic inevitably brought with it cultural transformations notable in the partial loss of traditions and the acquisition of new ones.⁴ This observation is detailed in the second chapter, *Les débuts de l'art en Mésie Inférieure* (pp. 21-37), where there are brought into discussion the sculptural discoveries from the 1st century AD. Here there is taken into account the entire region between the Danube and the Black Sea, probably because of the few available finds, some of which have no indication about the place of discovery. Several portraits on the Lower Danube *limes* and from Tomis show characteristics of *Augustan art*, indicating a close relationship between the two areas, a relationship also documented by epigraphic documents. In addition to these, another two statues of *togati* attest influences coming on new paths from Northern Italy and the Rhineland through the Roman army.⁵ At the same time, other categories of finds, such as the funerary *stelae*, attest the continuation of traditional links with centres of the

¹ Paul Zanker, « Nouvelles orientations de la recherche en iconographie. Commanditaires et spectateurs », *Revue archéologique* 2, 1994, pp. 281-293, esp. p. 282.

² « Les commanditaires sont ceux qui déterminent l'acte artistique par leur goût et par leurs nécessités culturelles et spirituelles », p. 18.

³ « L'histoire de l'art de Tomis n'est pas une histoire de chefs-d'œuvre ou de formules innovatrices, mais l'histoire d'un art de série, souvent utilitaire... », p. 19.

⁴ « ...la société de Tomis aux II^e et III^e siècles est une société ouverte, passant par une restructuration sociale de longue durée. Une société ouverte perd, partiellement du moins, ses traditions, elle noue de nouveaux rapports avec l'extérieur et elle est capable d'assumer de nouvelles expressions culturelles », p. 16.

⁵ « La conclusion qu'on peut tirer jusqu'à présent est que les débuts de l'art romain dans cette région sont strictement liés à la présence de l'armée romaine. Ce n'est qu'au début du II^e siècle que la production artisanale se développe d'une manière indépendante », p. 23.

Greek world, especially from north-western Anatolia (Propontis as a source of marble; Bithynia as a source of workshops and sculptors). Thus, unlike her predecessor, Gabriela Bordenache, who saw a continuation of a Greek *koine* of the Hellenistic period, MAV speaks for an art of its time, noticing especially in the study of the funerary stelae “l’impétueuse pénétration des formes romaines, ainsi que la désagrégation des formes grecques (p. 17)”.

In the chapter *La cité et ses élites. Le second classicisme romain et les ornementa* (pp. 38-64) the emphasis is laid on the quality of execution of 13 statues (mainly of Aphrodite, Apollo, and Dionysos) belonging to the classicizing trend of the 2nd century AD art. Each of these are discussed at length in a sequence of catalogue notes, with detailed descriptions and well-argued comments on chronology. These have been set apart from other deity representations from the chapter on cults, and treated as *opera nobilia*, also because of the lack of archaeological contexts. As for the *ornamenta*, the marble furniture is illustrated by an exceptional find, a table leg in the shape of Aphrodite, the study of which is fully resumed here. Special attention is called in this chapter on the artistic quality of these statues and the elevated cultural level of the elite that could afford such luxury items. Certainly wealth, obvious in the financial effort of procuring costly sculptures, is the best criterion to identify the elite.⁶ However, a small clarification is required concerning the simultaneous presence of wealth, social status, and education. High quality sculpture and an educated elite may very well not always go hand in hand. In addition, as MAV had already noticed, these sculptures might have been not private house adornments, but part of public architectural settings (like baths, fountains, theatres, temples, squares, and gardens).

The following chapter, *La cité et ses habitants. Statues et portraits honorifiques* (pp. 65-87), contains a series of catalogue notes on heads and bodies of marble statues from the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, preceded by a short overview on statue bases. A statistic reveals that the bulk of honorific dedications was made for emperors, followed by officials and notables, and other benefactors. This digression is meant to introduce us to the matter of the honorific practice that used to embellish the towns with what was called by some authors a “forest of statues”. However, MAV warns us that the lack of archaeological contexts prevents any considerations about their setting, or even about their precise function, since besides the honour of having a statue in public places, during the Roman period there appeared the habit of erecting statues next to funerary monuments.

Although it does not intend to be a history of the cults from Tomis, the chapter *La cité et les cultes* (pp. 88-130) does not limit its investigation to the sculptural representations of deities, but relates them with the epigraphic evidence, making constant references to coin images. In the first pages there are presented several deities of the Roman period (Dionysos, Cybele, Serapis). Further on is resumed the study on the treasury of sculptures from Tomis, each find being examined, sometimes with extensive expositions of the documentation related to cult (e.g. Dioscuri). Finally, the results of several studies on funerary monuments are synthesized in the chapter *La cité et les morts* (pp. 131-147) following a typological order: steles (funeral banquets and standing figures) and statues, sarcophagi, and funerary constructions. The concluding chapter (pp. 148-154) summarizes the main idea of the book, namely that during the Roman period the sculptural art of Tomis is shaped by two trends: a Greek one of northwestern-Anatolian origin, and one related to the Roman military presence. But the biggest part of the chapter of conclusions deals with the question of marble and workshops, on which occasion MAV responds to several recent studies. Finally, two appendices reproduce an article on a funerary relief from Tomis (*Sur le relief funéraire inv. MNA L 616*, pp. 155-163), and on the triumphal monument from Adamclisi (*Les monuments de propagande impériale sur le Bas Danube. Tropaeum Traiani*, pp. 164-189).

A constant that appears throughout the book is the lack of contexts. With few exceptions (e.g. the treasure of sculptures), the sculptures from Tomis have the appearance of a collection, a fact rather to be imputed to the archaeologists, not to the art historian. However, although laudable, the intention to surpass the traditional way of studying sculpture and to see society beyond the object remains a desideratum at Tomis, the lack of archaeological contexts representing a serious impediment in problems regarding functionality, display, or eventual reuse, as MAV often remarks. Sometimes even their attribution to Tomis is questionable (e.g. the finds of 1st c. AD), and hence so could the conclusions. On the other hand, the monographic publication of the material and the questions raised by the new methodological insight (new for Tomis) offers a good base for further investigations. By far the biggest gain of the book consists in the thorough analyses of the finds, with detailed descriptions and well-argued chronology, which brings the work closer to a handbook of Roman sculpture with Tomis as a case study.

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⁶ On definitions of the elite see Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens. Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People*, Princeton, 1989, p. 11.