

## AN AMOR STATUETTE FROM NOVIODUNUM

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**Cuvinte cheie:** *perioada romană timpurie, Noviodunum, Moesia Inferior, statueta din bronz, Amor/Cupido.*

**Abstract:** *Up till now, two statuettes representing the God Amor are known at Noviodunum. A new find from a private collection – nowadays in the Museum of National History and Archaeology from Constanța, has enriched the repertoire of these statuettes. Based on iconographic characteristics and on parallels, the authors date this statuette to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.*

**Rezumat:** *La Noviodunum sunt cunoscute până în prezent două statuete cu reprezentarea zeului Amor. O nouă descoperire aflată într-o colecție particulară a îmbogățit repertoriul acestor piese figurate. Pe baza caracteristicilor iconografice și analogiilor, autorii încadrează statueta în secolul II p.Chr.*

In the repertoire of figurative bronzes from Roman Dobrudja, statuettes representing the God Amor are quite numerous. The ones we know are different in style and artistic value, illustrating precisely the spreading of the divinity cult in the Roman world, as well as borrowing and adapting certain models that were widely spread during those times throughout various centers. The frequency with which the divinity is evoked during Roman times demonstrates the spread of the cult of the protector of love in Greek-Roman society, with deep roots dating back to the Greek archaic period. Aphrodite's son will also know a wide variety of interpretations in Roman times, being one of the most beloved characters from the provincial toreutic, having multiple attributes, from the classical bow, to festive

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symbols, like *tuba*, flower crowns, branches of trees and wine leaves<sup>1</sup>.

### **The statuette**

From the information we have, the statuette was found in unknown circumstance in the surroundings of Noviodunum. It belonged to a private collection and is currently in the collection of the Museum of National History and Archeology in Constanța.

Amor is shown as moving (H-11.3 cm) and is depicted with a lot of naturalness. The left hand that was supposed to be hanging is broken and no longer exists but, based on similar finds, the hypothesis that it had a *patera* in it could prove valid. In the left hand, broken from the elbow down and lifted towards head-level, it had probably a torch – wide-spread attribute among these statuettes. The manner in which the face is depicted is a typical one for this god: round, with protrusive cheeks, rounded chin, small mouth and nose, the eyes have deep orbits. The corrosion faded facial details that were surely done with extreme care and attention to detail, if we look at the attention given to the rest of the body. The hair is depicted as ample lovelocks, and on the crown of the head he has that *cirrus* tied with *taenia* – some specific for Amor's iconography. The torso is narrow, the pectorals are barely visible and the abdomen is ample, with the umbilicus as an incision. The hips are wide, the feet are thick in the upper part, and the ankles have fine wrists. The left foot is fragmentary. The same attention was also given to the back, nicely done, with the asperities carefully removed. The left wing is broken, while the right wing was made of bronze and was slightly affected by corrosion over time. It has a dark-brown patina.

### **Amor in Dobrudja**

Moesian representations belong to different categories, like major statuary, architectonic fragments, glyptic and toreutic. A series of sculptures discovered at Tomis<sup>2</sup>, Histria and Callatis<sup>3</sup> belong to the first two categories; they are monuments that vary in expression, and stylistic execution. Within the glyptic its prevalence is scanty, although the cameo discovered in the harbor of Capidava<sup>4</sup> town is a highly artistic quality document.

In toreutic, Eros is a frequently used deity, as shown by the research underwent by P. Georgiev on the bronze figurines discovered in the southern part of Moesia Inferior<sup>5</sup>. The statuettes discovered at Novae<sup>6</sup> confirm this assertion, but the hypothesis of a common origin is difficult to sustain given the obvious stylistic differences that exists between them.

In the northern Dobrudja, for the representations of the messenger of love we remark the town of Noviodunum where three such statuettes have been found up till now. The first of the aforementioned statuettes was discovered during

<sup>1</sup> LIMC III/1-2, s.v. Eros (Ch. Augé, P. Linant de Bellefonds); Amor, Cupido (N. Blanc, F. Gury).

<sup>2</sup> CHERA 1997, p. 217, 220, fig. 1.

<sup>3</sup> COVACEF 2002, p. 122.

<sup>4</sup> MATEI 1991, p. 241-244.

<sup>5</sup> GEORGIEV 2000-2001, p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> DIMITROVA-MILČEVA 2006, p. 30-32, nos. 10-13.

rescue archaeological research in this town<sup>7</sup> and it is similar as representation to Amor (*Genius*) from Sarmizegetusa<sup>8</sup> and to the Amor from Köln<sup>9</sup>, both dated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Not long ago, V. H. Baumann published a fragmentary statuette discovered during the 2003 research campaign under the denomination of *lar*<sup>10</sup>. Up to a certain point, this opinion is justified, given the fact that we can observe a massive corrosion of the entire statuette and considering the position of the right hand. The features of the face are depicted roughly, the mouth is big, the nose is wide, and the eyes have big orbits. The *cirrus* is badly represented, the same being valid for the rest of the body. The thick neck, the absence of pectorals, the bulky right shoulder and the short torso complete the image of an artistically low quality piece. The left foot is broken and the right one does not respect the artistic "dogma" or the anatomy of the body. The wings and the back, generally, were also poorly done, while the haircut was done with excessive attention. Despite all these flaws, our opinion is that the statuette at Noviodunum is an Amor from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and not a *lar*, as it was initially presented. The *cirrus* and the wings are solid arguments favoring and supporting this statement. Last but not latest, we must also notice the general disposition of the find, that makes us think of a refused object or, maybe, of a local workshop, as it is highly unlikely that the low quality pieces were brought from afar.

In the same region of northern Dobrudja, at "Lozova", near village Valea Teilor (Tulcea County) there was found one of the most spectacular representations of Amor from all Roman provinces<sup>11</sup>. The statuette (H.-13.9cm) seems to be rare within the Roman bronzes repertoire, and its origins should be search in the Hellenistic period. Even though the physiognomy and special quality are similar to those of other numerous statuettes<sup>12</sup>, the elaborate attention with which the torso was made, with the wine garland in diagonal, makes us think about the bronzes with Dionysian themes from the first two centuries AD. A similar statuette comes also from the area of the Lower Danube, from Novae<sup>13</sup>.

Differing in style and realization technique from the statuette previously presented, but with similar dimensions, it is a statuette discovered near the village Valea Seacă (Constanța County) as stray-find. The rectangular-shaped base has a nail from which only the upper part was preserved, which leads us to the idea of a furniture accessory or of a decorative element as part of a chariot. The position of the hands differs from that of the Noviodunum statuette, but the details of the body and the placement of the curls and locks of hair has numerous similarities, specific to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. We must also mention the association the author gave to this Amor with Harpocrates, based on the resemblance

<sup>7</sup> BARNEA, BARNEA 1984, p. 102, pl. 11.

<sup>8</sup> POP 1995, p. 326-327, fig; 8/6.

<sup>9</sup> RITTER 1994, p. 339, no. 2, figs. 4-6.

<sup>10</sup> BAUMANN 2005, no. 71.

<sup>11</sup> SIMION 1984, p. 333-336, 693-694; BAUMANN 1989, p. 57-58, fig. 11; BAUMANN 2001, p. 3, pl. 1/3.

<sup>12</sup> For example Amor from August from 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, see KAUFMANN-HEINIMANN 1977, p. 43, no. 38, pl. 34-36.

<sup>13</sup> KUNZE, KRISELEIT, SCHÖNE 1991, no. 169; DIMITROVA-MILČEVA 2006, p. 30-31, no. 10.

between the *cirrus* and the lotus leaf<sup>14</sup>. Similar to the statuette from Valea Seacă, it is an Amor discovered at Köln, with the right arm slightly distant from the body and with the second arm offering a cloak. This statuette is, nevertheless, of a better quality, the hair is made differently and the wings are wide open<sup>15</sup>.

To the same category, of decorative objects used in functional ensembles, belongs a chariot ornament of an exquisite artistic quality, discovered in an unknown place on the territory of the province and dated as second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD<sup>16</sup>. Also of a similar size is a statuette discovered at Histria that depicts him as a plump child, with a big belly and curly hair; the ensemble was made with great care, which let us believe that it was an old traditional bronze-working workshop<sup>17</sup>. In objects of daily use, the deity appears on a furniture piece, possibly a lid from a *lucerna*, randomly discovered near Istria<sup>18</sup>.

In the civil settlement at Ostrov-Ferma 4, in the territory of the Durostorum, two statuettes of rather small size were discovered. The first (H.- 4.5cm)<sup>19</sup> is a variant from the 2<sup>nd</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> century AD of the Freiburg/Avallon/Chalon-sur-Saône/Saint-Germain-en-Laye group, identified by Hiller<sup>20</sup>. The major difference between the aforementioned group and the Amor from Durostorum lies in the attribute: while the statuettes from Western provinces have the torch, a continuance of Hellenistic tradition, the statuette from the Lower Danube region holds a mirror. The second statuette (H. - 4.4cm)<sup>21</sup> resembles a find from Carnuntum<sup>22</sup> and dates back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> - mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

### Typology of Amor statuettes in Dobrudja

In *Dacia*, the typology of Amor statuettes was established by L. Țeposu Marinescu and C. Pop<sup>23</sup>. The authors distinguished between three groups within the figurines discovered in the province, the Noviodunum find can be placed in the first type, variant *e* - *Amor with a lowered arm and attributes in the other lifted hand*.

For the statuettes in Dobrudja, we can distinguish four schemas of representations:

- 1) *Amor with a torch, a mirror or a tuba in the right hand lifted at head-level, and the left hand hanging, with or without an attribute* (Durostorum – 1 find, Noviodunum – 3 finds, Valea Teilor – 1 find);
- 2) *Amor with a torch in the left hand lifted above the head and the right hand hanging* (Durostorum – 1 find, Histria – 1 find);
- 3) *Amor with torch or another attribute in the left hand extended straight forward and right hand hanging, eventually with attribute* (Valea Seacă – 1 find);

<sup>14</sup> BUCOVALĂ 1982, p. 237-238, no. 2, figs. 3-4.

<sup>15</sup> RITTER 1994, p. 342, no. 5.

<sup>16</sup> ȘTIRBULESCU 2006, p. 239-249.

<sup>17</sup> ȘTIRBULESCU 2005, 509, no. 2, p. 512-513, fig. 2a-b.

<sup>18</sup> PASCALE 2006, p. 335-338.

<sup>19</sup> CULICĂ, MUȘETEANU 1979, p. 448, no. 5, fig. 3a-b.

<sup>20</sup> HILLER 2002, p. 462-477.

<sup>21</sup> MUȘETEANU, ELEFTERESCU 1977, p. 585-586, fig. 1/1-3.

<sup>22</sup> FLEISCHER 1967, p. 82, no. 95, pl. 53.

<sup>23</sup> ȚEPOȘU-MARINESCU, POP 2000, p. 64.

4) *Amor sitting* (Histria – 1 find)**Analogies, workshop and chronology**

The Amor statuette discovered at *Noviodunum* has a series of common characteristics with the finds from Reichshoffen<sup>24</sup>, Carnuntum<sup>25</sup>, Köln<sup>26</sup>, Autun-Jardin Lorrain<sup>27</sup> and Lyon<sup>28</sup>. Similar to the statuette in question is a figurine from *Dacia*, from Stremț, Alba County; it is of small dimensions but with the details of the body worked in a similar manner<sup>29</sup>. In the regions of Lower and Middle Danube, similar statuettes are certified at Barič, Golubac (National Museum in Požarevac)<sup>30</sup>; it is also similar is the Amor or Somnus' statuette from the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. from Borak, Crkvenac (Belgrade Museum)<sup>31</sup>, but also the statuette from mid. 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. discovered at Novae (Svistov Museum)<sup>32</sup>.

The scattering of similar finds on large areas makes difficult to establish the workshop. As can be observed, analogies come both from Western provinces and also from Danubian ones. The notable differences in Moesian representations hold just as many evidence in favor of the argument of different workshops. The quality of the find indicates a prestigious workshop, located in the area of the Danubian provinces where can also be found close parallels. As for chronology, most of the finds of this iconographic schema were dated between 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. However, the Noviodunum statuette can be placed rather towards the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

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<sup>24</sup> SCHNITZLER 1995, p. 86, no. 94; HILLER 2002, p. 469, fig. 17.

<sup>25</sup> FLEISCHER 1967, p. 80-81, no. 92, pl. 52.

<sup>26</sup> RITTER 1994, p. 339, no. 2, figs. 4-6.

<sup>27</sup> LEBEL, BOUCHER 1975, p. 23, no. 14.

<sup>28</sup> BOUCHER 1973, p. 4, no. 7.

<sup>29</sup> ȚEPOSU-MARINESCU, POP 2000, p. 59, no. 55, pl. 29.

<sup>30</sup> POPOVIĆ *et alii*, 1969, p. 97, no. 117.

<sup>31</sup> VELICKOVIĆ 1972, p. 157, no. 80.

<sup>32</sup> DIMITROVA-MILČEVA 2006, p. 31-32, no. 12.

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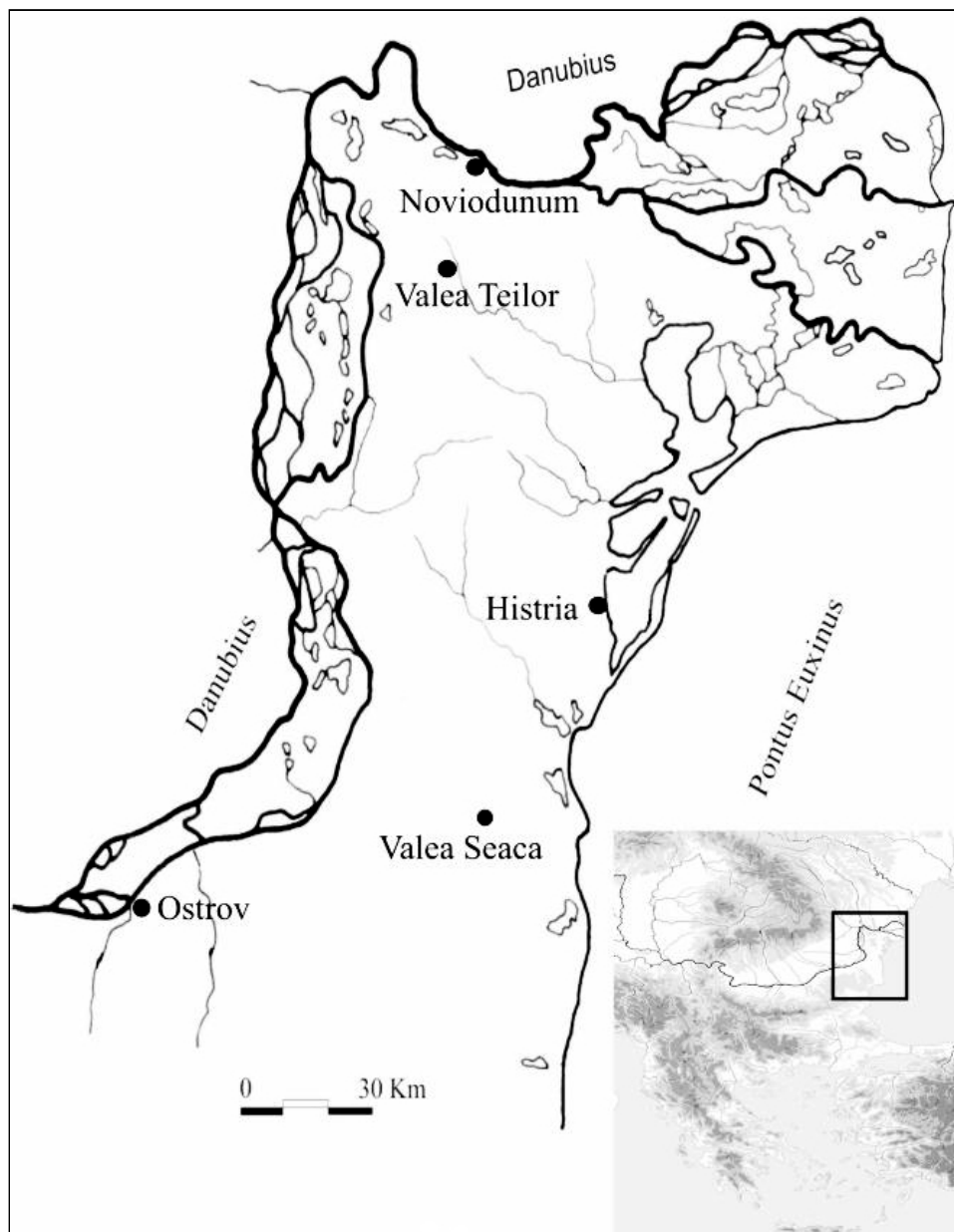
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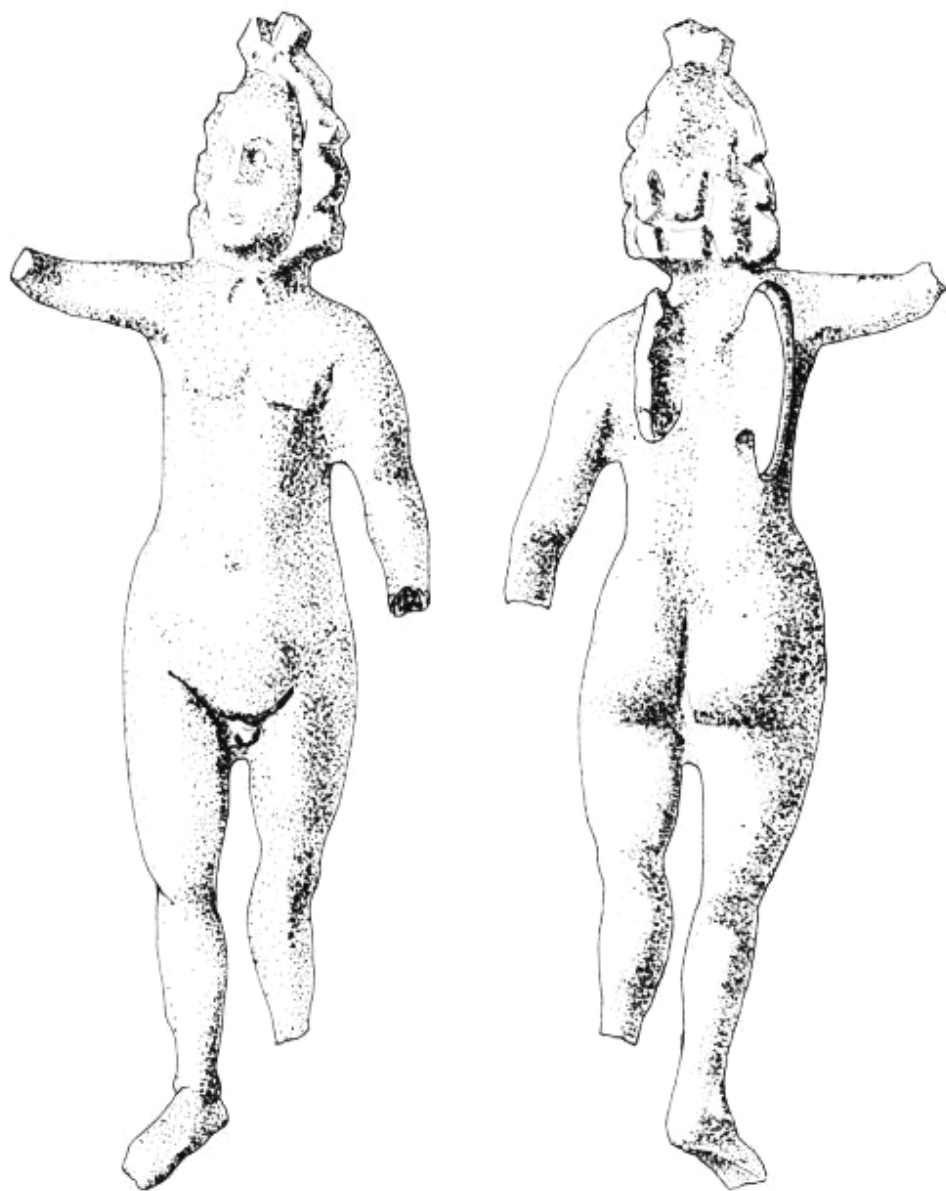
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Pl. 1 - The spreading of Amor statuettes in Dobrudja (Layout G. Nuțu).



Pl. 2 – Amor statuette from *Noviodunum*—(drawing R. Ionescu).



Pl. 3 - Amor statuette from *Noviodunum*– (photo C. Chiriac).