

# A BRONZE FIGURINE OF MINERVA DISCOVERED AT APULUM

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**Abstract:** The authors discuss herein, and present the specialists, a recent find related to the classical Graeco-Roman pantheon. It is a bronze figurine of Minerva discovered in a waste pit from the southern cemetery of the urban centre at Apulum, located on the Furcilor Hill-“Podei”. Although archaeology records no workshop making such pieces, this figurine, rather modest in artistic terms, had likely been produced at Apulum or in one of the workshops from the Roman province of Dacia. It is a solid cast, in the “lost-form” technique, sized as follows: height – 7.2 cm, width – 1.9 cm, thickness – 0.9 cm. On the basis of its execution, which lacks accurate rendering of facial features, yet also the absent Gorgon on the *aegis*, the votive figurine may be dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Since it was not discovered in a grave, but in a waste pit, it is rather difficult to make a connection with any possible funerary function of the goddess. The ancient prototype of this kind of representation is the cult statue of Athena Parthenos of Phidias, housed on the Acropolis of Athens. The other six bronze votive figurines of Minerva discovered in Dacia do not resemble that discussed here.

**Keywords:** bronze figurine, the southern cemetery, Minerva, *municipium Septimium Apulense*

## INTRODUCTION

Yearly, the rescue archaeological excavations yield new evidence of inhabitancy in ancient Apulum, the most important urban centre of the Roman province of Dacia. We shall discuss herein a recent find related to the cults of the classical Graeco-Roman pantheon, namely an interesting votive figurine of Minerva, worked of bronze, discovered in 2008 by the northern edge of the Roman cemetery from the Furcilor Hill-“Podei”.

Subsequent to the construction of the Roman fortress of *XIII Gemina* two settlements that rose to urban status following gradual development had been founded there as early as Trajan: 1. The *canabae legionis* established around the Roman camp, which under Septimius Severus became a *municipium*; 2. A *pagus* of Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, lying to the left of the Mureş, ancient Maris, developed over the time so much that it was awarded the status of a *municipium* under Marcus Aurelius and that of a *colonia* during his successor, Commodus.<sup>1</sup> In the eastern quarters of the *canabae*, the governors’ palace of Roman Dacia was built no later than the rule of Marcus Aurelius, once with the political and military reorganization which the emperor undertook in AD 169.<sup>2</sup> An inscription dated to AD 252–253 proves yet again the exceptional economic and constructional development of the town, namely the epithet *Chrysopolis* – “golden city” – which enriches the town’s title.<sup>3</sup> Both towns, by their spatial extension, yet especially the structure of the buildings and richness of the heritage revealed by the archaeological excavations, represent the most important urban centres of Roman Dacia.

<sup>1</sup> ARDEVAN 1998, 45–46; OTA 2012.

<sup>2</sup> DIACONESCU–PISO 1993, 72–73; RUSU–BOLINDET *et al.* 2011.

<sup>3</sup> IDR III/5, 332–333, no. 432.

Minerva was the deity of wisdom, also known by the Etruscans as Menerva or Menrva. The deity's role was to protect the soldiers, arts, crafts and trade.<sup>4</sup> In Rome Minerva is worshipped in the temple of the Capitoline Triad on the Capitoline Hill and in other temples dedicated to the goddess, on the Caelian and Aventine Hills.<sup>5</sup>

At Apulum, the cult of Minerva is recorded by several epigraphic representations<sup>6</sup> that include a clay votive figurine<sup>7</sup> and several stone sculptural monuments: a relief on a votive marble plaque, which comes from *colonia Aurelia Apulensis*,<sup>8</sup> a marble votive figurine<sup>9</sup> and one *intaglio*, with unknown findspot, which comes from a private collection.<sup>10</sup>

#### FIND CONTEXT

The figurine was discovered during an archaeological rescue excavation conducted in an area by the northern edge of the southern cemetery of the urban centre at Apulum.<sup>11</sup> This burial area lies between the two Roman towns. The figurine was recovered from a pit noted C19, at –1.60 m,<sup>12</sup> which consisted of several filling levels. It was used as a waste pit, most likely during funerary feasts, its inventory with a large quantity of sacrificed domestic animal bones and pottery. Later, the feature was overlapped by three inhumation graves without grave goods (*Fig. 1*).

#### FIGURINE DESCRIPTION AND PARALLELS

The figurine is solid cast (inv. no. R10653), in the “lost-form” technique and is the product of a provincial workshop. Its sizes are as follows: h – 7.2 cm; l – 1.9 cm; weight – 0.9 cm height – 7.2 cm, width – 1.9 cm, thickness – 0.9 cm. To date, such workshop could not be identified at Apulum, although its existence was supposed.<sup>13</sup> The goddess wears a *peplos*, fastened below the chest with a string, which covers entirely her legs. In the neck area, the cut is “V”-shaped. The garment is pinned on shoulders with brooches and hangs down to the hips area. On the chest is rendered the *aegis*, delimited by two serpents, yet without the face of Gorgon Medusa (*gorgoneion*). The key attributes, the spear and shield no longer survive. In the right hand, raised, the goddess holds the spear, and in the other, bent at elbow, the shield. The insertion orifice of the spear through the clasped fist of the hand is still visible. On the head the deity wears a crested Corinthian helmet. The helmet exhibits an interesting detail, which could not be found in any other figurine of Minerva, namely, a stamped decoration consisting of stellar signs: three half-moons on the left side and three circles on the right side. The portrait is rather coarse, with eyes of different sizes, bulging, and projecting orbit. The hair may be distinguished exiting from under the helmet and is rendered following the orbits outline. Body weight rests on the left, extended leg. The right leg is slightly drawn back, thus creating the *contraposto* effect. In general, the artistic level is inferior, much below the average at provincial level. Most likely, it comes from a workshop in Dacia (*Figs 2–3*).<sup>14</sup>

We could not identify identical parallels, yet instead, we found bronze figurines of Minerva with similar peculiarities. For instance, a figurine discovered at Ulpiana depicts the goddess wearing a similar *peplos*, with right hand raised, and the left at the side.<sup>15</sup> Another found at Burnum, in the region of Liburnia, exhibits resembling features of the attire and the same position of the arms.<sup>16</sup> At Volubilis, in Mauretania Tingitana, a bronze figurine of Minerva has a similar garment.<sup>17</sup> The two figurines from Augusta Treverorum, in Gallia Belgica, resemble by only

<sup>4</sup> FERRARI 2003, 554–555.

<sup>5</sup> FILORAMO *et al.* 2003, 105.

<sup>6</sup> In 8 inscriptions the deity is worshipped alone, occasionally with epithets *Augusta*, *Sancta*, *Supera* and *Victrix*. IDR III/5, no. 259–266. Also, the goddess is worshipped alongside the Capitoline triad, beside Jupiter and Juno in 5 inscriptions: IDR III/5, no. 195–199. In the last epigraph (no. 199) the deity is associated with Aesculapius as well.

<sup>7</sup> ANGHEL *et al.* 2011, 52, no. 49.

<sup>8</sup> BĂLUȚĂ 1976, 136, no. 3, fig. 1, 3.

<sup>9</sup> OTA 2011, 160–161, Pl. I/3.

<sup>10</sup> LUX 2011, no. 150; ANGHEL *et al.* 2016, 90–92, fig. 9–12.

<sup>11</sup> A monograph of the cemetery has been published recently. See: BOLOG 2017, with bibliography.

<sup>12</sup> The sculptural piece is mentioned in the above monograph. See: BOLOG 2017, 248.

<sup>13</sup> ȘTEFĂNESCU-ONIȚIU 2008, 192–193.

<sup>14</sup> Complete discussion regarding the possibility of extant workshops for the production of bronze figurines in Dacia may also be noted in: ȘTEFĂNESCU-ONIȚIU 2008.

<sup>15</sup> POPOVIĆ *et al.* 1969, 88, no. 84.

<sup>16</sup> MEDINI 1968, 147–148, no. 3, T. II, 3.

<sup>17</sup> BOUBE-PICOT 1969, 215–216, no. 234, Pl. 164/1–2.

<sup>18</sup> MENZEL 1966, 29–30, no. 60–61, Taf. 28/60, 61.

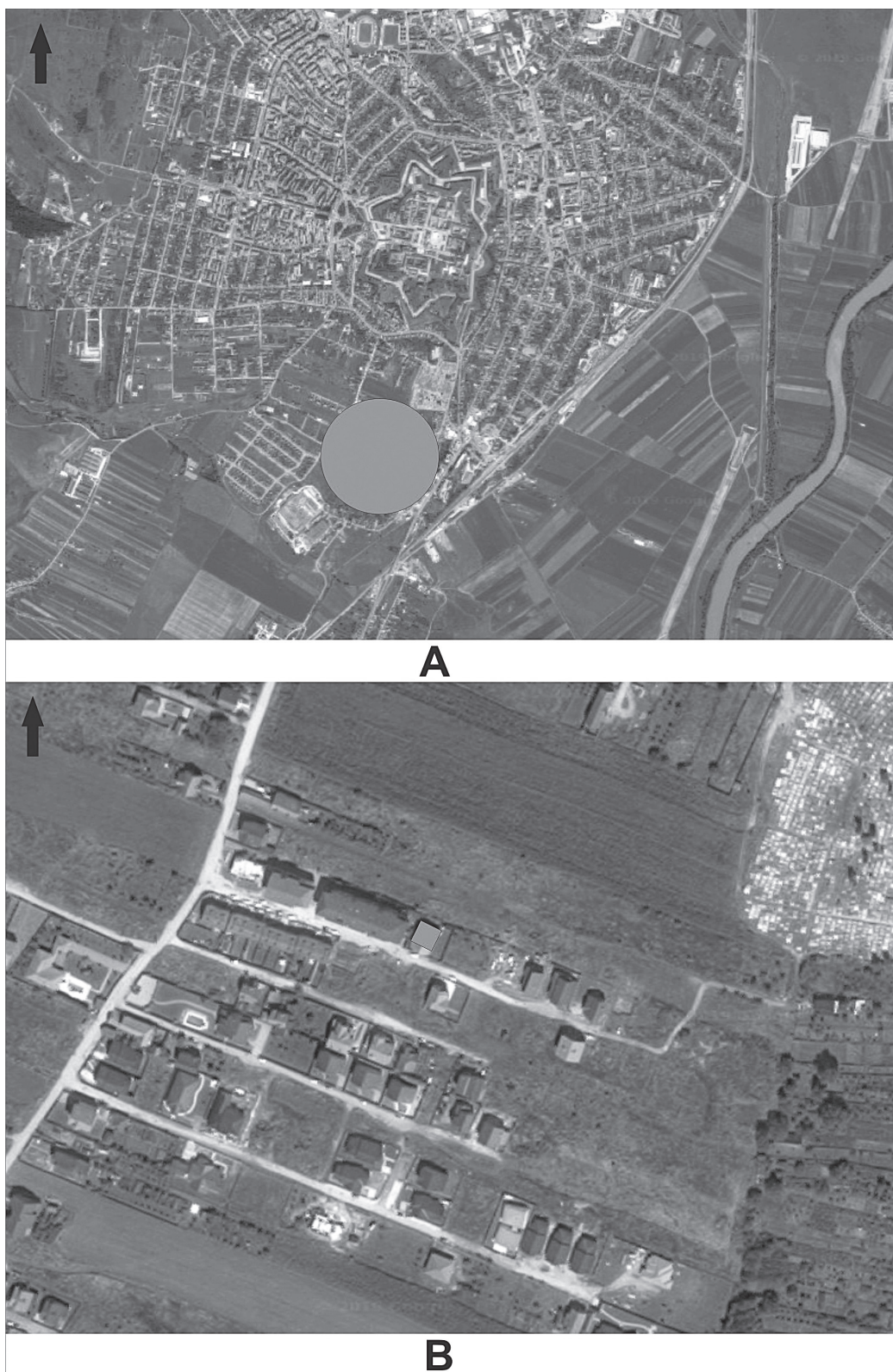


Fig. 1. A: Location of Roman necropolis from Apulum, Dealul Furcilor-“Podei”;  
B: The place where it was discovered the bronze figurine



Fig. 2. Minerva statuette. Photos by Călin Șuteu

the position of the arms, and not the garments.<sup>18</sup> A figurine coming likely from Germania inferior, housed with the Museum of Bonn, exhibits a *peplos* which much resembles the one herein.<sup>19</sup> From northern Italy come three figurines iconographically similar, yet of higher quality in artistic terms, discovered at Tregnano and Verona (2).<sup>20</sup> The votive figurines of Minerva from Dacia, six in number,<sup>21</sup> do not resemble to that examined herein, thus not framing in the typological class suggested for Dacia by Lucia Țeposu-Marinescu and Constantin Pop<sup>22</sup> or for Germania superior by Annemarie Kaufmann-Heinimann.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> MENZEL 1969, 34, no. 21.

<sup>20</sup> BOLLA 1999, 206–207, Fig. 33a–b, 34a–b, 35a–b.

<sup>21</sup> ȚEPOSU-MARINESCU-POP 2000, 76–79, no. 78–83, Pl. 43–45.

<sup>22</sup> ȚEPOSU-MARINESCU-POP 2000, 79–80.

<sup>23</sup> KAUFMANN-HEINIMANN 1977, 60–61.

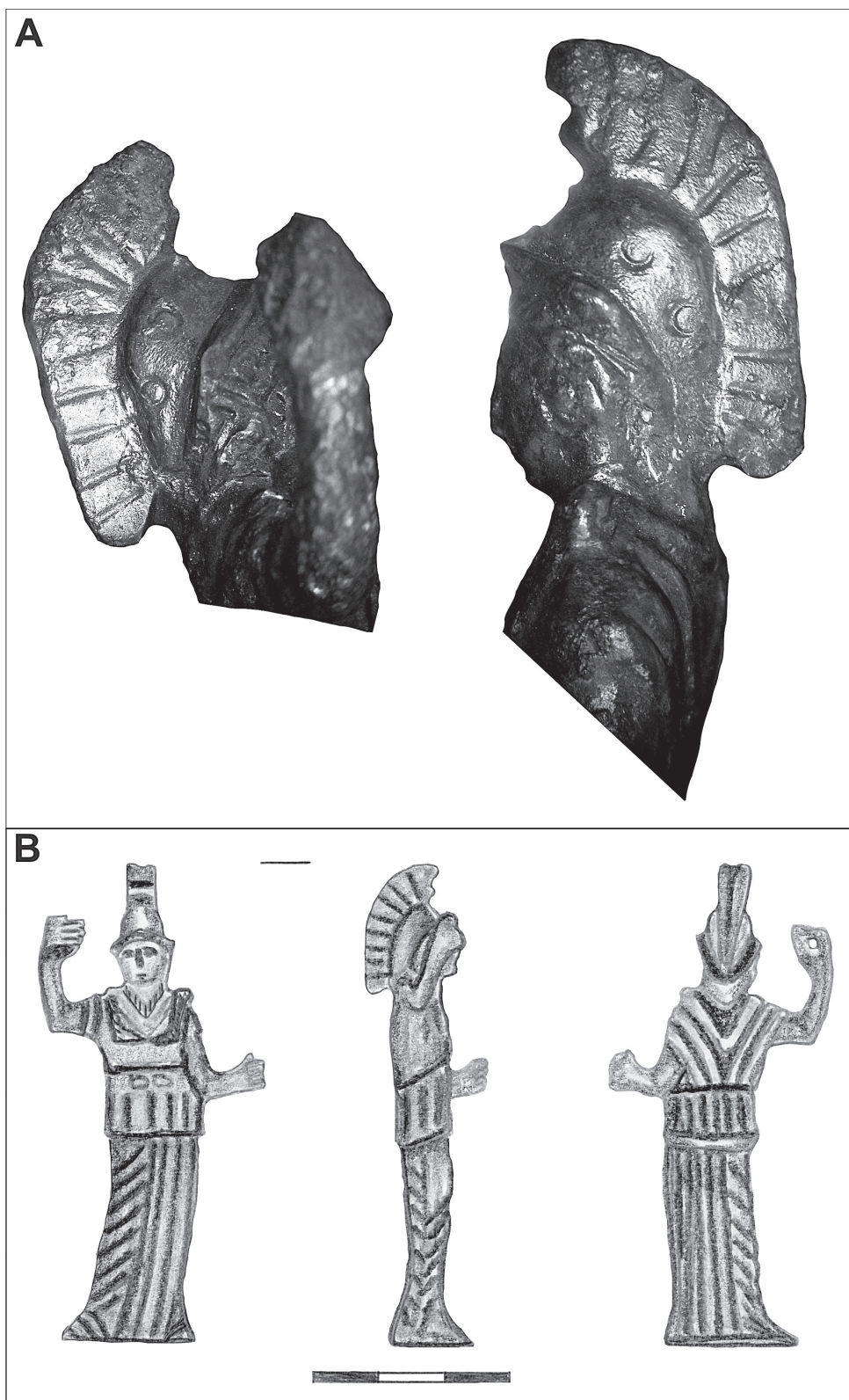


Fig. 3. A: Details of the helmet; B: Minerva statuette. Drawn by Călin Adam

## CONCLUSIONS

The votive figurine of Minerva is of a modest artistic quality, below the average provincial level. At Apulum, there is not a workshop making such specimens identified archaeologically, yet it cannot be excluded that the piece was produced there or in another provincial workshop from Dacia. It is certain though that it does not resemble any other bronze votive figurine of Minerva from Dacia. The pit in which it was found was a waste pit, with three filling levels, and it was overlapped by three inhumations without any grave goods. We do not suppose that the goddess fulfilled a funerary function, yet we do not know either the reason why it was cast away in the waste pit. It seems that in the pit there were cast remains of funerary feasts, as significant quantities of pottery and animal bones were recovered from there. As regards the chronological framing the context is not of much aid, as the pottery is common, while the graves which overlapped the archaeological feature lack any furnishing. Instead, it may be dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD based on stylistic features, which reveal a primitive product with portrait features rendered unequally and asymmetrically and the *aegis* without the *gorgoneion*. The archaic prototype of this type of iconographic representation of Minerva is illustrated by the statue of Athena Parthenos of Phidias, housed on the Acropolis of Athens.<sup>24</sup>

The discovery of this bronze votive figurine of Minerva is yet another proof for the diffusion of the official cults of the Roman state. Furthermore, it is the first bronze figurine of the goddess found at Apulum to date and the fifth iconographic representation from this urban centre.

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