

## A ROMAN BRONZE *AQUILA* FROM SĂLCUȚA, DOLJ COUNTY

DOREL BONDOC  
Muzeul Olteniei, Craiova

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Absolutely by chance, a Roman bronze *aquila* (**Fig. 7/ a-d**) has been discovered in the ploughed field in the area of the locality Sălcuța, Dolj County. A short time after the discovery, it was given to me for study<sup>1</sup>; consequently it was bought<sup>2</sup> and donated to the Museum of Oltenia, Craiova. Because it is an important discovery, we have decided to publish it, to introduce it as fast as possible into the specialized literature.

The piece was fully cast, and its weight shows that the metal composition contains, except for bronze or other metals, an important quantity of lead. On its surface there is a greenish patina, characteristic of ancient bronze pieces; this patina is "interrupted" from place to place because the piece was gilded on the entire surface. The golden film has been preserved here and there (**Fig. 7/ a - b**).

The representation is a little bit distorted (**Fig. 1/ a - c**), with the right wing lower than the left one; this distortion could have come from a strong compression; because of this, the feathering of the right wing is a little bit erased in comparison with the left wing. The anatomical features have almost been destroyed: the eyes, the beak and the mouth cannot be distinguished, and the legs have been pulled half down. The wings are oversized related to the sizes of the body, and they are wide-open as if the bird had been flying. The tail looks like a fan. The few preserved details allow us to consider that the *aquila* was carefully made. If we take into consideration that the piece was gilded then we can say that it is a valuable representation belonging to an important military unit; it cannot be specified now if it was a unit of *legio* type or an auxiliary troop. Dimensions: the length- 16.8cm; the height- 8.2cm. Weight- 340g.

1. It is possible that we are dealing with a representation which was attached on top to a wooden rod, carried by an *aquilifer*<sup>3</sup>. The proud attitude of the bird and the golden film on the surface supports this hypothesis. Against this

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<sup>1</sup> By Lili Șipeanu and Silviu Răduță.

<sup>2</sup> By dr. Adrian Gheorghe.

<sup>3</sup> An artistic impression at Simkins 2001, p. 58, plate 6; see also the representation of Gnaeus Musius, *aquilifer* of legio XIV Gemina, on his funeral stone, acc. to Goldsworthy 2008, p. 96.

theory, the small weight and sizes of the *aquila* from Sălcuța can be invoked. However, if we take into account the fact that the feet of the bird have not been preserved, and also the fact that the *aquila* must have held a bunch of lightning in its claws (not preserved), then the sizes and the weight do not represent a problem. This kind of objects usually belonged to the legions<sup>4</sup>. To the south of the place of discovery, there is the village Cioroiu Nou, where a detachment of Legio VII Claudia has been attested by inscriptions and stamped bricks from the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century<sup>5</sup>.

2. Another possibility is that the *aquila* presented here may be a representation of *signum militaris* type, attached to a standard (together with other images or symbols) which was carried by a *signifer*<sup>6</sup>. In this case, I have also consulted the study of A. von Domaszewski, which was published a century ago<sup>7</sup>. According to this study, during the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries A.D., the representations of *signum militaris* type were placed in the middle of the standards, while from the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century, they were fixed on the top<sup>8</sup>. If this is correct, the *aquila* from Sălcuța seems to belong to the second category; other details cannot be given because the lower part of the bird's feet has not been preserved. The bird's claws might have been drawn together and they could have also been a fixing system.

My attempts to locate precisely the place of the discovery have failed. The situation is similar to the other Roman *aquilae* discovered on the territory of Romania<sup>9</sup>; some of them were also discovered by chance; others are known because of their presence in different private collections. Therefore, the archaeological context cannot be used.

On the map of Roman Oltenia made by Professor D. Tudor (**Fig. 2**), the locality Sălcuța is not represented as a Roman site; in the vicinity of Sălcuța, there is Tencănuș village, where Roman coins and a fragment of a funeral stela have been found<sup>10</sup>. During a surface survey, I have seen pottery fragments and fragmentary tiles and bricks spread on a large area. It could be an important Roman settlement.

With the *aquila* from Sălcuța the number of the discoveries of this type from the present territory of Romania increases<sup>11</sup>. It is confirmed once again, if

<sup>4</sup> Plinius, *Naturales historiae*, X, 6; Feugère 2002, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> Bondoc 2010, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> A brief typology of the standards at Feugère 2002, p. 50, fig. 40, acc. to P. Filtzinger, 1975.

<sup>7</sup> Domaszewski 1909, p. 1-15.

<sup>8</sup> Domaszewski 1909, p. 12-13.

<sup>9</sup> Pop 1977, p. 111-131.

<sup>10</sup> Tudor 1978, p. 225; Bondoc 1997, p. 272, no. 2.

<sup>11</sup> The bibliography of this issue, at Pop 1977, p. 111, the footnote 2.

necessary, the intense presence of the Roman army in this space from the conquest to abandonment, and also the military character of this province.

#### APPENDIX 1

The composition analysis of the Roman bronze aquila, from Sălcuța  
(dr. Bogdan Constantinescu)

The gilded part: Sn=51%; Cu=18.5%; Pb=16.6%; Au=8.5%; Sb=3%; Fe=1.4%; Zn=traces. The correct composition is the one from the bronze part (see below), the percentage of gold is just a tracer of the golden pellicle from the surface.

The bronze part: Sn=77.6%; Cu=1.5%; Pb=14.6%; Sb=4.2%; Fe=1.4%; Au=traces.

The bronze part- the wing point: Sn=78.9%; Cu=2.3%; Pb=12.1%; Sb=5.1%; Fe=1.1%; Au=traces.

The bronze part- tail point: Sn=55.8%; Cu=10.0%; Pb=23.3%; Au=5.7%; Sb=3.1%; Fe=1.3%; Zn=0.8%. The tail was gilded; the correct composition of the bronze is the one from the previous measurements (see above).

Comments: It is about an unusual bronze, in fact an alloy of tin, lead and much antimony, with a rather lower melting point and many possibilities of moulding, that is specific to Roman statuettes and statues. The large amount of copper in the gilded part of the piece, suggests that the pellicle of gold is in fact an alloy of gold and copper. The iron comes most probably from impurities like ground, dust, etc.

#### APPENDIX 2

Analogies for the Roman *aquila* from Sălcuța coming from the territory of Romania are the following: Barboși- two pieces<sup>12</sup>, Răcari<sup>13</sup> and Orlea<sup>14</sup>. There are other representations of Roman *aquillae* in this area (Desa, Romula), but they belong to another type of representations, probably with the same significance.

Apart from the size and weight differences, taking into account its posture, the similar pieces to the *aquila* from Sălcuța are presented below.

1. Barboși: a bronze *aquila* (**Fig. 3**), rendered in vertical position, waiting, a little bent to the left; the wings are half-open; the bird has a strong beak, open eyes, strong feet with prominent claws, rich feather suggested by incisions; very well preserved; accidentally found; when it was published, the piece belonged to dr. N. Macellariu private collection; the sizes are unspecified.

Bibliography: Gh. Ștefan, *Nouvelles découvertes dans le «castellum» romain de Barboși*, Dacia, V-VI (1935-1936), 1938, p. 345, fig. 6.

2. Barboși: a bronze *aquila* (**Fig. 4**), rendered in vertical position, with the head to the right and open wings; the eyes are open, the neck is strong, the feather was

<sup>12</sup> Ștefan 1938, p. 345, fig. 6; Dragomir 1983, p. 63-68.

<sup>13</sup> Tudor 1936, p. 186, no. 8; Pop 1977, p. 117, no. 4; Bondoc, Gudea 2009, p. 206, no. 494.

<sup>14</sup> Țeposu-Marinescu, Pop 2000, p. 126, no. 167.

suggested by incisions; on its chest there is an orifice<sup>15</sup>; sizes: height- 4cm; length- 6cm; accidentally found in the area of the Roman camp; the Museum of Galați.

Bibliography: I.T. Dragomir, Vultur de bronz, o nouă emblemă militară romană descoperită în sudul roman al Moldovei, Muzeul Național, VII, București 1983, p. 63-68.

3. Răcari: a bronze *aquila* (**Fig. 5**), rendered when the bird was ready to fly, the head is turned to right, the details of the face, the feather, even the claws were carefully made by incised lines; the feet are covered by abundant feather; at the lower part of the tail, there is an orifice made for fixing the piece in a socle. Sizes: length- 9.5cm; height- 9cm. When it was published, the piece belonged to Gh. Georgescu-Corabia private collection.

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C. Pop, *Signa militaria de bronz în Dacia romană*, 1977, ActaMN, XIV, 1977, p. 117, no. 4.

D. Bondoc, N. Gudea, *Castrul roman de la Răcari. Încercare de monografie*, Cluj-Napoca 2009, p. 206, no. 494.

4. Orlea: a bronze *aquila* (**Fig. 6**); the bird was rendered in vertical position on a socle, with open wings, exophthalmic eyes, the feathers were sketched using incisions; an object of poor quality from artistic point of view; height- 4cm. The Museum from Orlea.

Bibliography: L. Țeposu-Marinescu, C. Pop, *Statuete de bronz din Dacia romană*, București 2000, p. 126, no. 167.

*Translated by dr. Mihaela Pena*

## O ACVILĂ ROMANĂ DE BRONZ DE LA SĂLCUȚA, JUD. DOLJ

### REZUMAT

Absolut din întâmplare, o acvilă romană de bronz (**Fig. 7/ a - d**) a fost descoperită pe teritoriul localității Sălcuța, jud. Dolj, pe o arătură din vecinătate. Piesa a fost turnată "plin", iar greutatea sa indică faptul că în compoziția aliajului din care a fost realizată, pe lângă bronz și alte metale, a fost folosită o cantitate importantă de plumb. Pe suprafață poartă o patină de culoare verzuie caracteristică bronzurilor antice; patina este "înteruptă" însă din loc în loc datorită faptului că piesa a fost aurită pe întreaga suprafață. În prezent, pelicula de aur nu se mai păstrează decât pe alocuri (**Fig. 7/ a-b**). Reprezentarea este ușor deformată (**Fig. 1/ a - c**), cu aripa din dreapta mai lăsată decât cea din stânga, deformarea putând proveni ca urmare a unei presări puternice; din această cauză penajul de pe aripa dreaptă este mai șters decât de pe cealaltă. Dacă luăm în calcul faptul că piesa fusese aurită, atunci ne aflăm în fața unei reprezentări valoroase, aparținând unei unități militare importantă; nu se poate specifica în acest moment dacă este vorba despre o unitate de tip *legio* sau una auxiliară. Dimensiuni: lungime- 16,8cm; înălțime- 8,2cm. Greutate- 340g.

Analogii pentru acvila romană de bronz descoperită la Sălcuța s-au mai găsit pe teritoriul României, după cum urmează: Barboși- două piese (Ștefan 1938, p. 345, fig. 6; Dragomir 1983, p.

<sup>15</sup> A similar orifice was made on the chest of a marble *aquila* discovered at Perișor, acc. to Bondoc 2000, p. 253-256.

63-68), Răcari (Tudor 1936, p. 186, nr. 8; Pop 1977, p. 117, nr. 4; Bondoc, Gudea 2009, p. 206, nr. 494) și Orlea (Țeposu-Marinescu, Pop 2000, p. 126, nr. 167). Mai există însă și alte piese cu reprezentări de acvile de bronz descoperite în acest spațiu (Desa, Romula), dar acestea aparțin unui alt tip de reprezentări, foarte probabil cu aceeași semnificație.

#### LISTA ILUSTRAȚIILOR

- Fig. 1. a - c Acvila romană de la Sălcuța, județul Dolj.  
 Fig. 2. Localitatea Sălcuța pe harta Olteniei romane.  
 Fig. 3. Acvilă romană de la Barboși, după Gh. Ștefan, 1938.  
 Fig. 4. Altă acvilă romană de la Barboși, după I.T. Dragomir, 1983 și [www.migl.ro/colectii/arh/vultur/html](http://www.migl.ro/colectii/arh/vultur/html).  
 Fig. 5. Acvila romană de la Răcari.  
 Fig. 6. Acvilă romană de la Orlea, după L. Țeposu-Marinescu, C. Pop, 2000.  
 Fig. 7. a - d Acvila romană de la Sălcuța, județul Dolj

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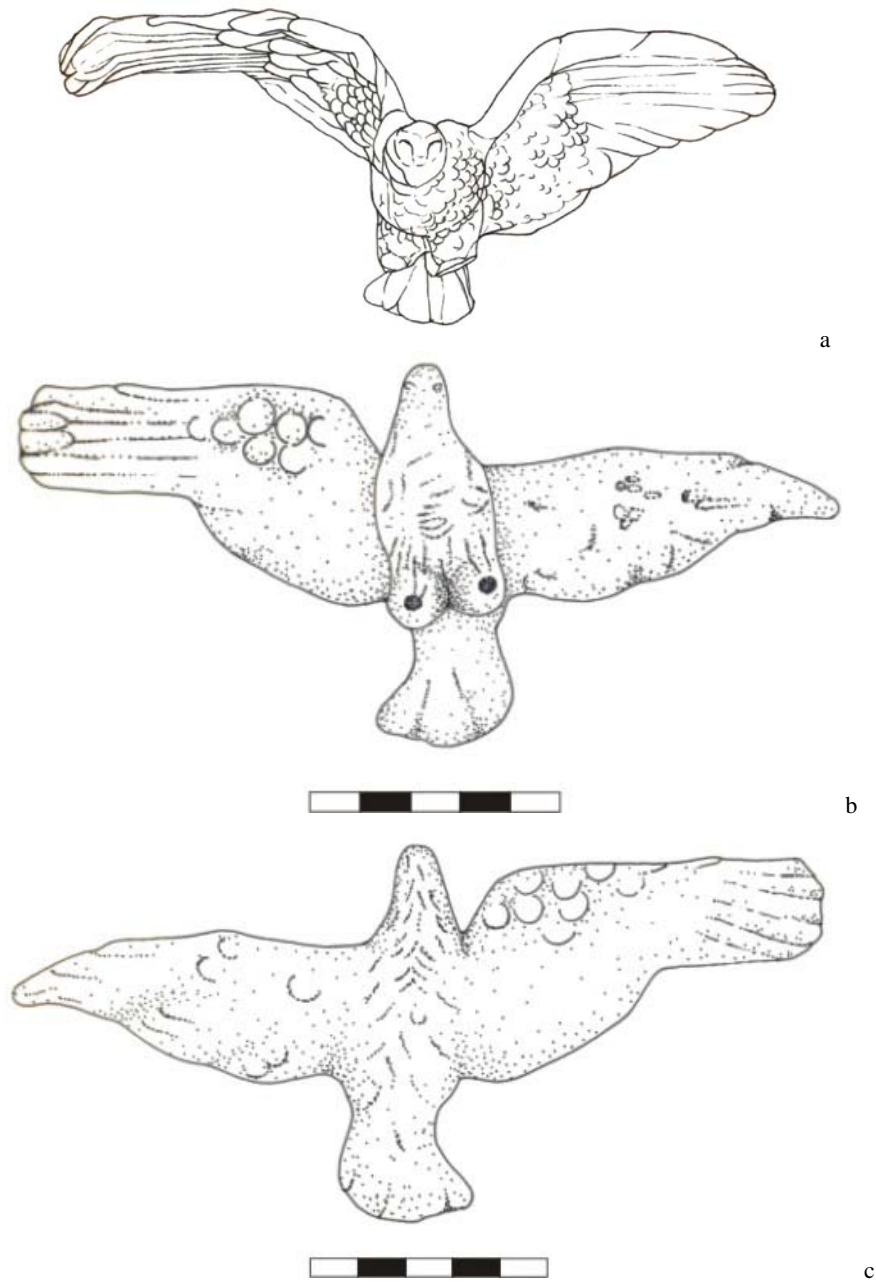


Fig. 1 a - c. The Roman *aquila* from Sălcuța, Dolj County.

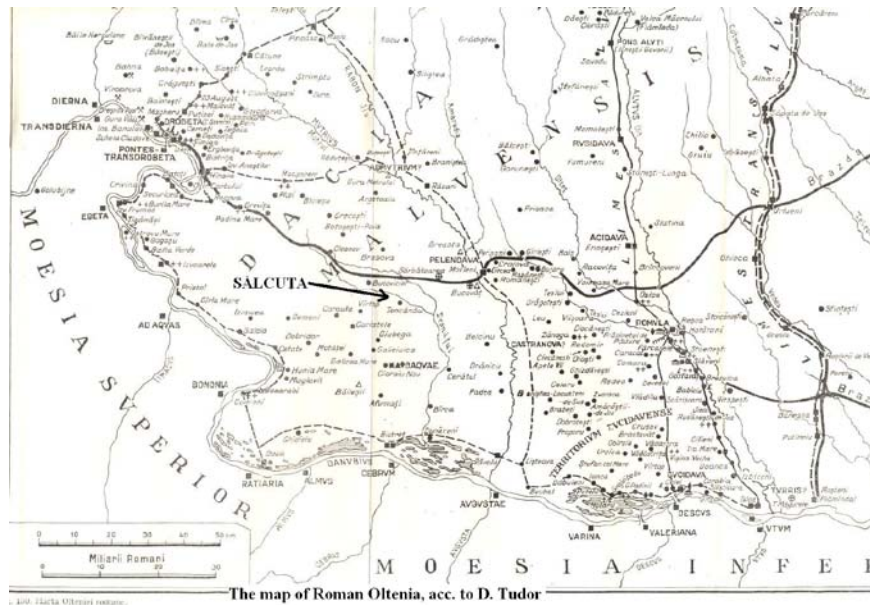


Fig. 2. The locality Sălcuța on the map of Roman Oltenia.



Fig. 3. A Roman *aquila* from Barboși, acc. to Gh. Ștefan, 1938.



Fig. 4. Another Roman *aquila* from Barboși, acc. to [www.migl.ro/colectii/arh/vultur/html](http://www.migl.ro/colectii/arh/vultur/html); I.T. Dragomir, 1983.



Fig. 5. The Roman *aquila* from Răcari.



Fig. 6. A Roman *aquila* from Orlea, acc. to L. Țeposu-Marinescu, C. Pop, 2000.





a



b



c



d

Fig. 7. The Roman *aquila* from Sălcuța, Dolj County.