

ANOTHER REPRESENTATION OF THE GODDESS VICTORIA ON A GEMSTONE FROM ROMULA¹

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Abstract: *This article brings into attention an antique gemstone with the depiction of a roman goddess engraved on its surface. It has been discovered at Romula, some decades ago and currently belongs to a private collection. The gemstone can be dated in the roman period of Dacia.*

Key-words: *Romula, gemstone, engraving, roman art, deity, religion.*

Capital of Lower Dacia, Romula has experienced a spectacular development in terms of economy, politics, culture and administration² (Fig.1). It has been among the first urban centers awarded with the title of *municipium*³, subsequently being promoted to the rank of *colonia*⁴. As expected, soon it became an important center of agricultural production, resort tax on the way from Sucidava to Olt narrow valley⁵, but also the most important ceramic production center from the southern area of Roman Dacia⁶. The strategic and economic importance of the city follows from the fact that it was situated at the junction of several roads, as follows: two on Olt Valley and another one coming from Drobeta⁷ (Fig.2).

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Without any doubt, at Romula functioned several workshops of cutting and engraving semiprecious gemstones⁸. It is a fact that can be proved, on one hand, by the large number of gemstones discovered here⁹, but especially by the existence of stone cores and processing scraps¹⁰. Most certainly, the development of these workshops of engraving gemstones must have been caused by the widespread use of such accessories as a result of their triple uses (as adornment items, as amulets and seals)¹¹.

Artifacts of this kind, found at Romula, are well-known today to us thanks to Professor Dumitru Tudor. He has collected and reported, in different studies or by brief articles, the majority part of these engraved semiprecious gemstones. Originally located in some private collections, later on a few of them have entered in the patrimony of certain museums (namely from Caracal, Corabia, Craiova), their number currently is estimated to approximately 180 pieces¹².

The themes that were used on the representations engraved on the gemstones from Romula are various and treat diverse and complex scenes with mythological, divine and allegorical characters, fantastic figures, grotesque creatures¹³, zoomorphic and vegetal symbols, or with a gnostic nature¹⁴.

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² Tătulea, 1994, p. 40.

³ Tudor, 1968 b, p. 349.

⁴ Tătulea, 1994, p. 52.

⁵ Tudor, 1968, p. 186; Tătulea, 1994, p. 82.

⁶ Popilian, 1976, p. 22.

⁷ Tudor, 1968, pp. 5-6.

⁸ Gramatopol, 1971, p. 24.

⁹ Tudor, 1938, pp. 14-19.

¹⁰ Gramatopol, 2000, p. 109.

¹¹ Gramatopol, 2000, p. 107.

¹² Gramatopol, 2000, p. 109.

¹³ Tătulea, 1994, p. 109.

¹⁴ Tătulea, 1994, pp. 109-110; Gramatopol, 2000, pp. 111-118.

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In this present paper, I decided to bring into discussion a gemstone found at Romula some decades ago, and which currently belongs to a private collection (Fig.3-a,b,c).

Description. The gemstone has been crafted from red carnelian, slightly translucent type, by engraving in depth and polishing (Fig.3-a). It has an oval shape, with a convex cross-section. Dimensions: 1,2 x 0,9 x 0,25 centimeters.

In terms of iconography, on its surface it can be seen easily a female figure, standing upright, with her body turned to the left. She is rendered wearing a long and draped garment, caught in the waist with a girdle. With her right arm, stretched out forwards, holds a wreath. At its back side, appear figured two wings (Fig.3-b,c).

From the stylistic point of view, the female figure is shown detailed quite enough. It can be notice a special attention for the garment folds, but also for the elements that are composing the wings. There is an obvious disproportionation of the head and hand in relation to the whole body, and facial details are rudimentary treated.

Referring now strictly to the engraving technique, we can see a clean cutting of the stone, clear, without any errors of execution.

The character's identification. Taking into account all these details, we can identify the character engraved on this gemstone with the goddess Victoria. She is rendered in a commonly iconographic style used particularly in numismatology, but no more different from the regular artistical canon practiced in glyptics throughout Roman Dacia.

In roman religion, the goddess Victoria embodied luck and victory, her cult being closely linked to the triumph over death, determining the victory in wars¹⁵. Sometimes, her image appears rendered on some coins, but mostly in Roman art. The iconographic style depicts her always winged and wearing a wreath in one hand, in a moving position or just standing. In some cases, she is pictured alongside another deity or objects.

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The gemstone presented in the pages of this article is not the only one of this kind found at Romula. Four others, with the representation of the roman goddess Victoria, were discovered in this settlement. Nowadays lost, those ones have benefited at the time of their publication of a brief annotation, as well as a very poor illustration¹⁶. Their representations can be included, in terms of typology, in roman cassical art style encountered in glyptics. Moreover, images of Victoria on gemstones abounds in the rest part of the Dacia province. Such examples can be found in the collection of gemstones of Brukenthal Museum from Sibiu¹⁷, but also in the Cabinet of Numismatics of the Romanian Academy¹⁸. Most certainly, their number is bigger¹⁹, but this is relative and it depends greatly on the research in this field, but especially on the stage of their publication.

It should be also mention here the fact that he best analogies for the gemstone presented in this pages, can be found at the south of the Danube, in Moesia (today Bulgaria)²⁰. And this is hardly surprising. This reality is explained by the existence of miniatural cards which made up the design register of any craftsman from this artistic branch, and which could easily be carried on anywhere in the Roman Empire. For this reason, we find, for example, in the collection of the National Museum in Budapest²¹, roman gemstones which shows striking stylistic similarities with the ones from Dacia, particularly to those from Romula.

¹⁵ Balaci, 1969, p. 268.

¹⁶ Regarding these four gemstones, see Tudor, 1938, fig. 19/26 and fig. 21/h, fig. 19/27, fig. 19/28; Tudor, 1967, p. 213, no. 15, fig. 2/14; Tudor, 1968a, fig. 16.

¹⁷ Ţeposu-Marinescu, 1965, p. 97, no. 24-28, pl. III, fig. 12-15, fig. 17.

¹⁸ Gramatopol, 1974, *passim*.

¹⁹ Gramatopol, 2000, p. 112.

²⁰ Milcheva, 1980, *passim*.

²¹ Gramatopol, 1971, p. 28.

As a conclusion, the gemstone with the rendering of the roman goddess Victoria of which we talked in this article, brings only minor changes in the general picture of roman glyptics in Romula. But it is necessary to put this artifact together with the others gemstones from Romula, thus completing the chapter of glyptic arts in this part of the province. It remains a contribution, even if modest, to the research of mythology, iconography, customs and beliefs of the roman period of Dacia.

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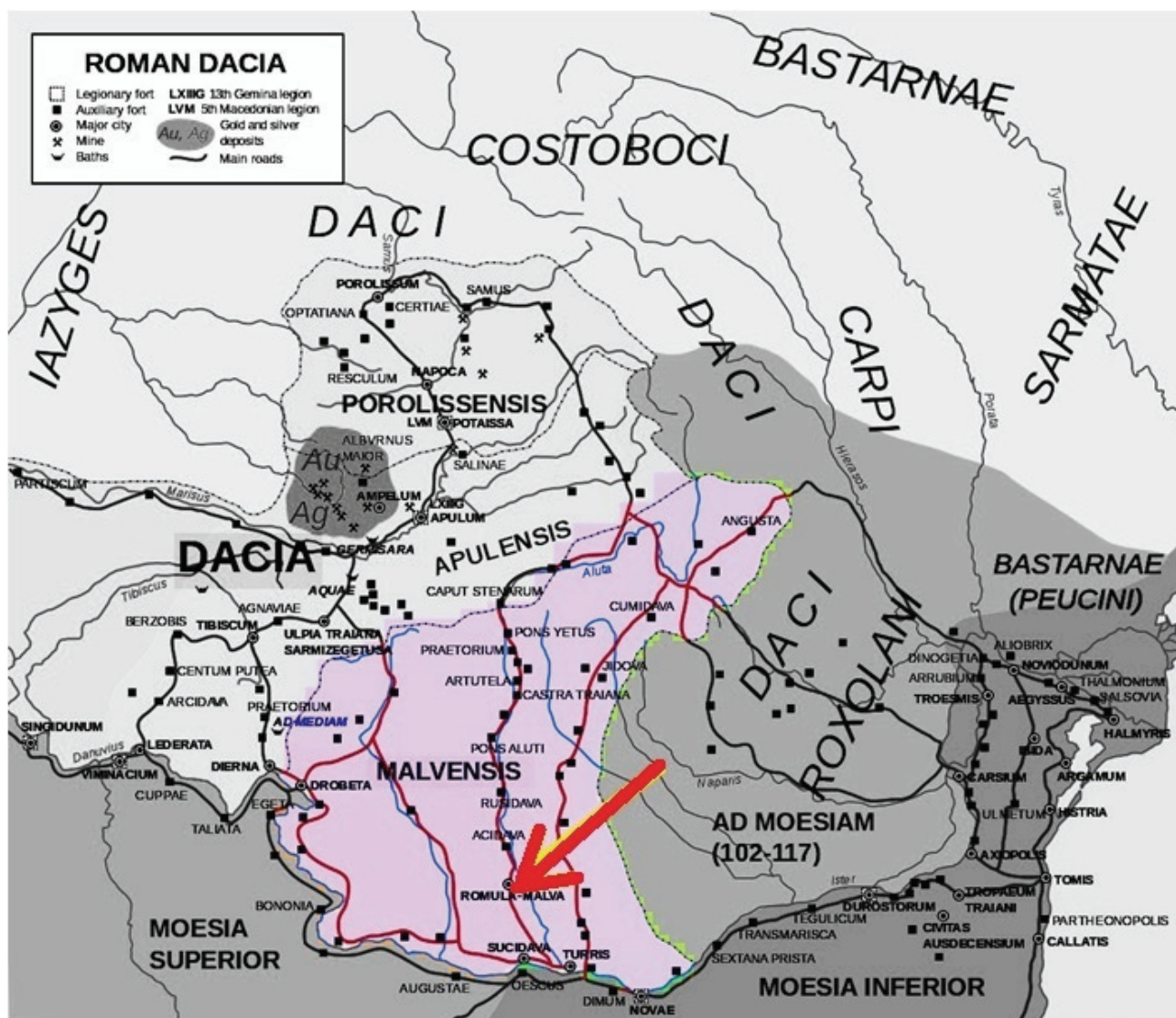


Fig. 1. Romula on the map of Roman Dacia.

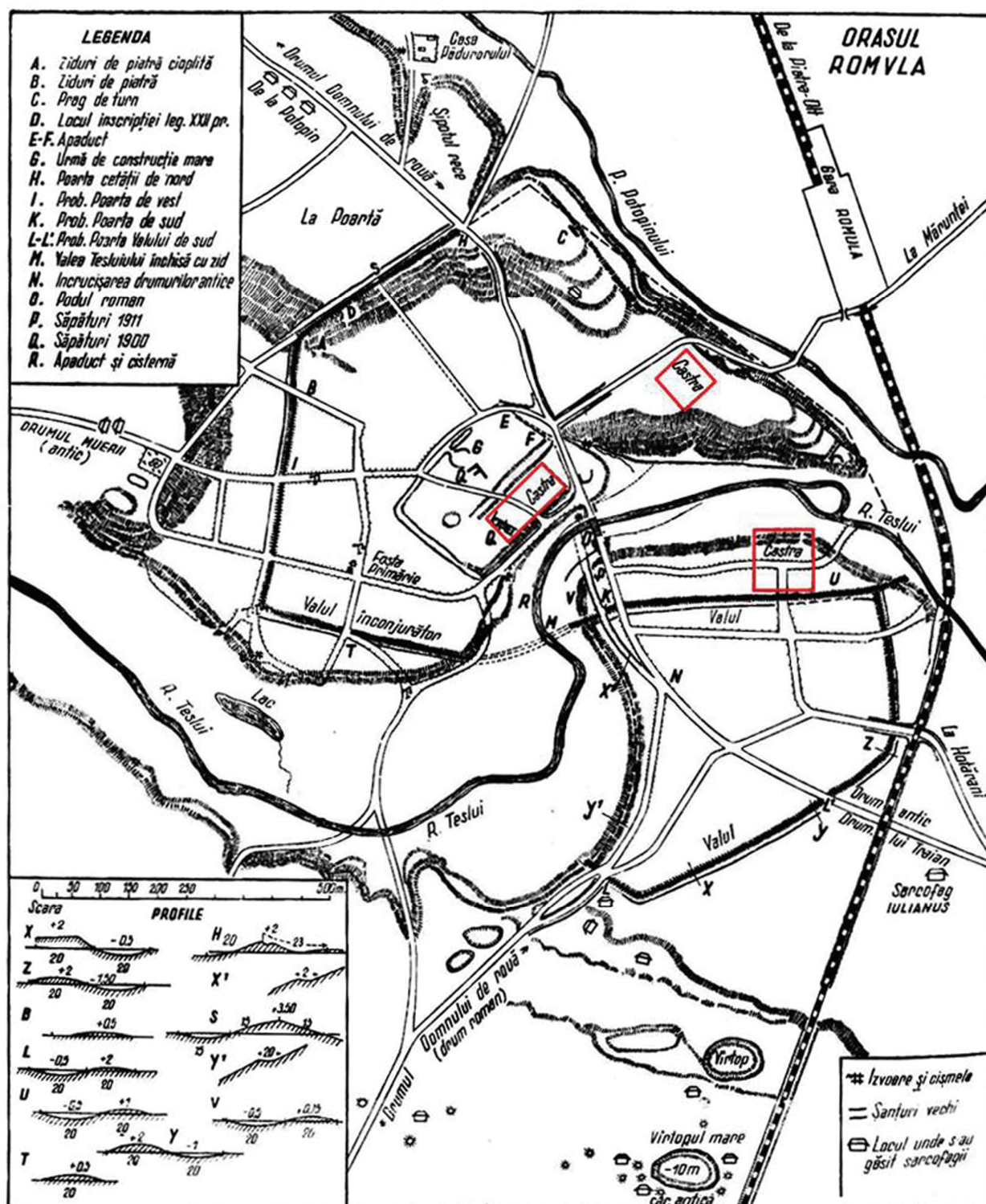


Fig. 2. The Roman city Romula (*after D. Tudor, 1958*).

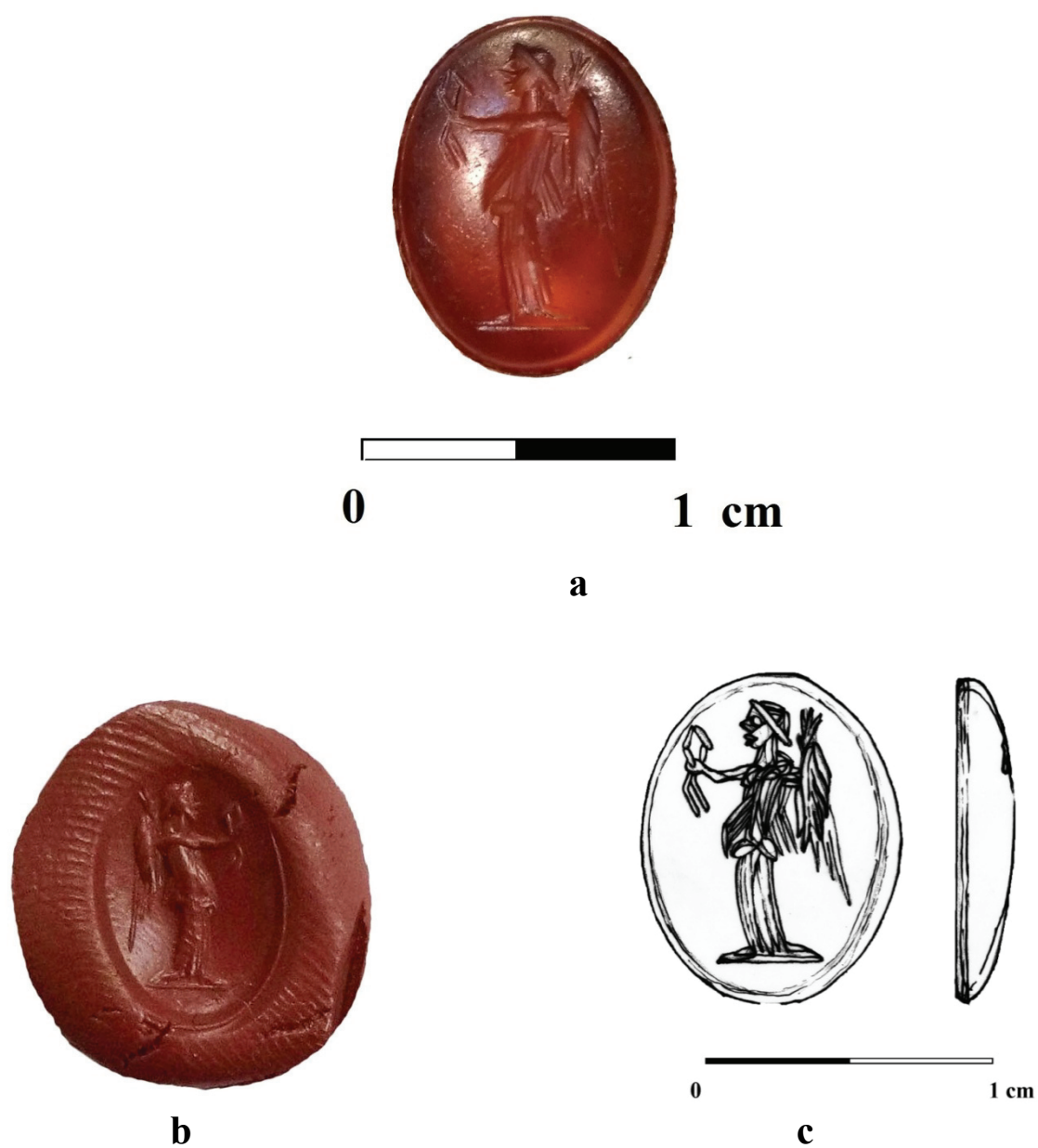


Fig. 3. Roman gemstone discovered at *Romula*, with the depiction of roman goddess *Victoria*:
photography (a); clay mold (b); drawing (c)
(by author)