

## Mars from Aegyssus

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**Rezumat:** În următoarele pagini, autorul prezintă o statueta din bronz a zeului Marte descoperită în zona extra-murană a orașului roman Aegyssus. Pe baza analizei stilistice și analogiilor, această statueta – unică până în acest moment în repertoriul bronzurilor figurate descoperite în Dobrogea – este considerată import gallic și datată la mijlocul secolului II p.Chr.

**Cuvinte cheie:** Moesia Inferior, Aegyssus, perioadă romană, bronzuri figurate

**Key words:** Moesia Inferior, Aegyssus, Roman period, figural bronzes

The discussion between the following lines concerns one of the most interesting bronze statuette located in the collections of Tulcea Museum, an object which impresses by its naturalism and the expressiveness of its details.

The statuette was acquired from an inhabitant of Tulcea, who discovered it in the north-eastern part of the city, at about 100 m South-West from Dealul Monumentului, the place where the ruins of the ancient fortress Aegyssus were located<sup>1</sup> (Pl. 1/1-2). Nearby the rock massif on which the ancient city is placed, a series of rescue archaeological researches led to the discovery of an outside dwelling, whose intensity and chronological frames were hard to define. The findings, especially the pottery, prove that the place was inhabited starting with the La Tène period up to the medieval times. Regarding the Roman and Roman-Byzantine periods the recent researches brought to light three dwelling levels, two of them belonging to the early Roman time and the third to the Late Roman one<sup>2</sup>, but the lack of some ample researches, impossible to fulfil in the contemporary housing conditions, makes difficulties in establishing the stratigraphical sequence and the planimetric evolution of the place during the Roman period.

Under these circumstances, the archaeological context of this statuette cannot be specified and this situation is similar to most of such discoveries inside the Empire.

The statuette is now located in the collection of the Institute of Eco-Museal Researches, Tulcea, having the inventory number 46344. Its sizes: H = 9.4 cm. Full moulding, green-reddish patina. Because of a starting corrosive process the object was cleaned and stabilized, at the present reflecting a gold colour (the colour of bronze).

The god is represented nude, wearing a *chlamys* (*paludamentum*)<sup>3</sup> pinned on his left shoulder and wrapped up on the lower side around his left arm. On his head he wears a Corinthian helmet, characterised by a high and vast *crista* with feathers displayed on two rows. His hair, shown off by the helmet, frames his entire face. Slightly corrosive, his features reveal a beardless young man. The weight of his body leans on his right foot, while his left one is withdrawn backwards, suggesting a gentle move.

Fragmentary preserved, his right hand was holding a spear while in his left hand he had a sword with its end turned on his back, taking into account the orientation of his palm towards his body. Probably the sword's point was ending on the top of the *chlamys*, in the left pectoral area, where a small dot, resulted from moulding, was still preserved. His slim body reflects well stressed anatomical details, less characteristic to the pubic area, which is slightly marked. The whole image of the god generates a feeling of power and energy, while the details of his muscular body confer an impressive picture (Pl. 2; 3). The object's stylistic features suggest a good quality work, manufactured in a traditional figurative bronzes producing centre.

The representing of Mars is rare among the figurative bronzes discovered on the territory of Roman Dobroudja. The only statuette illustrating the god is a bracket-statuettes, representing a *vexillum* point or chariot object, discovered in the area of Poarta Albă, but probably coming from the centre of Dobroudja, from Nicolae Bălcescu<sup>4</sup>. In view of the iconography, this statuette combines the two hypostasis of the god, the young and

<sup>1</sup> On any bibliography relating to Aegyssus see: DID II, *passim*; TIR L 35 s.v. Aegyssus; Suceveanu, Barnea 1991, *passim*; Zahariade 2006, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Paraschiv, Stănică 2005, 389; two early Roman levels (the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries) were discovered on April 2003, see also Paraschiv, Stănică 2004, 352-353.

<sup>3</sup> Bieber 1977, 40-41; Stone 2001, 34.

<sup>4</sup> Covacef 1987, 337-340, fig. 1-4.

beardless with the type of *Mars Ultor*<sup>5</sup>. A beardless nude young Mars, wearing a Corinthian helmet and holding a shield and a spear is represented also on the helmets discovered at Ostrov, inside one of the ancient *Durostorum*'s cemeteries<sup>6</sup>, on two bas-reliefs similar to the statuette from *Aegyssus* in the way of depicting the divinity. This similarity regards the same attitude, a well proportioned body, with elegant lines, the right arm holding the lance much raised. But, unlike the statuette under discussion, Mars is in the nude, showing his head turned to the right and leaning upon a shield with his left arm<sup>7</sup>. The two busts – representations of the god on brackets discovered in the North of Dobroudja, at Telița – complete the series of this iconographical type. There is the same representing approach, as the one discussed above. However, the objects' functional character stirred several discussions. While the first publishers thought these belonged to a war chariot<sup>8</sup>, they were subsequently seen as component parts of a tripod<sup>9</sup>. As the illustrated character regards, I believe that it is Mars, in spite of some objections. Although proper enough, these underline the handicraftsman's „avoidances” in pointing out some details which would have made possible a better identification (Mars or Achilles)<sup>10</sup>. The type of *Mars Ultor* is less attested at the province level, although the triumphal monument from Adamclisi is dedicated to it. Beside the *ex-voto* discovered at Târgușor and a red carnel gem, attached on a lead ring, discovered in a tomb from Tomis and therefore introduced in numismatic records, there are no more attested monuments following this iconographical scheme<sup>11</sup>. The only epigraphic document, dedicated to Mars on the territory of Roman Dobroudja, is represented by a votive fragmentary altar illustrating *Mars Conservator* beside *IOM*, which was revealed at Histria and dated back at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>12</sup>

On the occasion of publishing the Mars statuette discovered at Blicquy, M. Amand analyzed the god's illustrating bronze statuettes discovered in the western side of the Empire<sup>13</sup>. Also the statuette discovered at *Aegyssus* belongs to this first type, exemplified by a nude Mars, usually beardless, with an adolescent body, a Corinthian helmet, holding a spear in his right hand and a sword, shield or rock in his left<sup>14</sup>, although, in this case, Mars is wearing a *chlamys* wrapped up around his left arm. The orientation of this arm, with its palm turned to the body, definitely makes me believe that there was a sword, with its end leaned upon god's shoulder. This posture suggested a victorious Mars, whose functional characters were “plus protectrices que guerrières”<sup>15</sup>, but it must be underlined the fact that this iconographical type was not specific only to the statuettes representing Mars in the nude. The statuettes discovered at Grozon (Jura)<sup>16</sup>, Ambleuse<sup>17</sup>, Vienne<sup>18</sup>, Gherla<sup>19</sup> (Pl. IV, 2), coming from Severeanu collection<sup>20</sup> or belonging to the National Museum of Budapest<sup>21</sup>, represent the god beardless and armoured, holding a sword in his right hand with its end turned on his shoulder.

The series of Mars representations, in the nude, wearing a Corinthian helmet, spear and sword, is well known among the Roman bronze statuettes. In 1942 K. A. Neugebauer dedicated a study to this category<sup>22</sup> and later M. Amand<sup>23</sup>, H. Menzel<sup>24</sup> and S. Boucher<sup>25</sup> published new regards on the subject. In Neugebauer<sup>26</sup> and Menzel's opinion<sup>27</sup> the inspiring model was a Hellenistic one, but its prototype must be sought in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC major statuary, most probably preserved in Roman copy of Lysippos' or his disciples' statue, a statue

<sup>5</sup> Covacef 1987, 338.

<sup>6</sup> Rădulescu 1963, 535-551.

<sup>7</sup> Rădulescu 1963, 544-547, fig. 8-11.

<sup>8</sup> Irimia 1966, 12-14, nos. 4-5; Rădulescu 1971, 279-285, pls. 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Simion 1988, 367, 376, footnotes 7-8.

<sup>10</sup> Simion 1995, 218, 221, fig. 5, 1/a-b, catalogue no. 6; on the same problem see Chew 1996, 159-167.

<sup>11</sup> Covacef 1987, 340-343, fig. 7; Covacef, Chera-Mărgineanu 1977, 193, 199-200, no. 7. A statuette from *Nicopolis ad Istrum*, inlaid with silver and having *Mars Ultor*'s representation on, was published by S. Reinach 1897, 190, no. 9.

<sup>12</sup> IGLR 109; ISM I 132.

<sup>13</sup> Amand 1967, 82-91.

<sup>14</sup> Amand 1967, 82. Type I after Kaufmann-Heinimann 1977, 26; Type P after Simon, Bauchhens 1984, 441-451, nos. 51-85. On a typology of Mars statuettes discovered in Dacia see Țeposu-Marinescu, Pop 2000, 27-32, pls. 4-7.

<sup>15</sup> Boucher 1975, 254.

<sup>16</sup> Reinach 1894, 56, no. 36, fig. 36; Reinach 1897, 191, no. 4; Chew 2004, 23, fig. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Mina *et alii* 2004, 606, pl. 3/2.

<sup>18</sup> Reinach 1897, 190, no. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Gramatopol 1982, 182, pl. 9/8; Țeposu-Marinescu, Pop 2000, 30, no. 10, pl. 7/10.

<sup>20</sup> Gramatopol 1982, 261, no. 1 (*Supplementum*), pl. 21/1; Băluță 1994, 29, no. 5, pl. 1/5.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas *et alii* 1982, 38, no. 29, fig. 29.

<sup>22</sup> Neugebauer 1942, 228-236.

<sup>23</sup> Amand 1967, 82-91.

<sup>24</sup> Menzel 1967, 92-95; Menzel 1970, 223-226.

<sup>25</sup> Boucher 1975, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Neugebauer 1942, 236.

<sup>27</sup> Menzel 1970, 224, fig. 5.

illustrating Alexander. The same time, accepting its Greek origin, S. Boucher insisted upon this type's diffusion in Gaul, without using Roman intermediaries<sup>28</sup>. Even the lack of this type in the repertoire of the bronze statuettes discovered in Italy stands for the manufacture of numerous statuettes in Gallic workshops. As an exception is one singular statuette illustrating Mars in the nude, whose origin is unclear<sup>29</sup>, although at the province level it is represented on military equipment objects, *terra sigillata* and in numismatic evidence (Pl. 4/5-6)<sup>30</sup>. We find the same posture on a 192 A.D. medallion, towards the end of Commodus' reign, where Mars is revealed holding a sword in his right hand and standing in front of a Victoria's statuette, put on a pedestal<sup>31</sup> (Pl. 4/3).

The existence of some cult statues, of large sizes, could have been the starting point for the numerous small sized statuettes of Mars discovered in Gaul and designed for domestic *lararia* or used as offerings for public sanctuaries. Among these large cult statues, so called "grand bronzes", our attention is drawn to "Mars de Coligny" (1.74 m), whose prototype is reflected by a Lysippean work<sup>32</sup>, and also "Mars de Thiennes", a "moyenne bronze"<sup>33</sup>.

Various similar statuettes were discovered in the North and North-East of Gaul and the West of Germany<sup>34</sup> (Pl. 4/4). As far as the manufacture centres concerns, a workshop may be attested close to Trier (*Augusta Treverorum*), but this idea is treated with reserve because of the uncertainty of the place where the statuettes from this area were discovered<sup>35</sup>. On the other hand, numerous small sized statuettes are attested in a clear context at Bavay and Blicquy and thus they prove the existence of several local workshops which manufactured statuettes of this type<sup>36</sup>.

A few statuettes, representing Mars in the nude, with his right hand raised probably for holding a spear and his left handling the sword or shield (attributes lost by now), are attested in the area of Dacia. But none of them sets up an evident analogy with the statuette found at *Aegyssus*. Comparing it with the fragmentary statuette discovered at Orlea, and already analysed by S. Boucher<sup>37</sup>, they obviously present the same posture of the body, the head slightly turned to the right but the second's helmet is of Macedonian origin, while its pectorals and pubic details more stressed<sup>38</sup>.

The various objects, found in the West of the Empire and presenting analogies with the one from *Aegyssus*, number also the statuettes discovered at Dronrijp<sup>39</sup>, Herbaijum<sup>40</sup>, Blicquy<sup>41</sup>, Rognée<sup>42</sup>, Winringen<sup>43</sup> and Spire<sup>44</sup>. Except those from Dronrijp and Blicquy, the statuettes are small. However, despite their size differences, the iconographical typology is unitary, reflecting a nude Mars, weighting his body on his right foot, while his left is slightly withdrawn, wearing Corinthian helmet with ample feathers, with his right hand raised, holding the spear while his left, easily bended, holds a sword with its end turned on his back, characteristic to the samples from Dronrijp, Blicquy and Winringen. In the case of the Regensburg<sup>45</sup> and Waasmunster<sup>46</sup> statuettes we confront with the same representation of the god, but, unlike those reminded above, the god holds the sword

<sup>28</sup> Boucher 1975, 254-256.

<sup>29</sup> Boucher 1975, 254, footnote 2; Boucher 1974, 160-162, footnote 92.

<sup>30</sup> In monetary issues: *P. Clodius* (42 BC), *Lepidus* (38 BC), *L. Mescinius Rufus* (16 BC), see Galestin 1994, 157; Menzel 1970, 224; Chew 2004, 22.

<sup>31</sup> Froehner 1878, 140-141.

<sup>32</sup> Boucher 1975, 254.

<sup>33</sup> Boucher 1972, 129-132 (Mars de Thiennes).

<sup>34</sup> According to H. Menzel, the objects discovered outside the borders of the Empire may be explained by the presence of the pedlars or exchange artefacts, brought by veterans who had acquired the statuettes before their release (Amand 1967, 88-89, footnote 11). An interesting point of view is the one presented by M. Galestin, who believes that this god's popularity inside the region (analyzing the spread of this type in the Frisian area, outside de borders of the Empire) could be due to a local divinity which reflected features similar to Mars (Galestin 1994, 159).

<sup>35</sup> Galestin 1994, 158.

<sup>36</sup> Faider-Feytmans 1973, 276-277.

<sup>37</sup> Boucher 1974, 162, footnote 90.

<sup>38</sup> Tudor 1978, 381, fig. 104, 1/a-b; Țeposu-Marinescu, Pop 2000, 28-29, no. 8, pl. 4/8.

<sup>39</sup> Zadoks-Josephus Jitta, Peters, Van Es 1967, 54-57, no. 23 (Leeuwarden, Inv. FM 50-13, H – 16.5 cm).

<sup>40</sup> Galestin 1994, 155-159, fig. 1/a-d (private collection, no size mention).

<sup>41</sup> Amand 1967, 82-91, pls. 1-6; Faider-Feytmans 1979, 53-54, no. 11, pls. 8-9 (Bruxelles, Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Inv. B 4456, H – 19.8 cm).

<sup>42</sup> Faider-Feytmans 1973, 276-277, no. 5, pl. 60/5 (Charleroi, Musée de la Société Archéologique, Inv. P. 109; R.D. III, 2<sup>1</sup>, H – 6.3 cm); Faider-Feytmans 1979, 56, no. 19, pl. 11/19.

<sup>43</sup> Menzel 1966, 10, no. 20, pl. 9 (Trier, Rheinischen Landesmuseums, Inv. 12022, H – 14.1 cm).

<sup>44</sup> Reinach 1898, 792, no. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Menzel 1969a, 21, no. 8, pl. 2/4 (Museum der Stadt Regensburg, Inv. A 2162, H – 13.6 cm).

<sup>46</sup> Faider-Feytmans 1979, 54, no. 12, pl. 10/12 (Gent, Rijkuniversiteit Museum vor Oudheidkunde, Inv. 10, H – 8.4 cm). Another statuette discovered at Forêt de Compiègne (Oise) and acquired by Musée d'Archéologie Nationale, Paris adds to these (*L'activité scientifique du Musée d'Archéologie Nationale*, Antiquités Nationales 38, 2006-2007, 3).

with his right hand. Another statuette discovered at *Porolissum* and recently published adds to the last two objects. It presents a young man, wearing a fragmentary mantle on his left shoulder, a Corinthian helmet and a sword (*parazonium*) turned in his right hand<sup>47</sup> (Pl. 4/1 a-b). It is probably a „deviation” of some less important workshops, taking into account the reduced number of the samples discovered.

The *chlamys* wrapped around the left arm of the statuette from *Aegyssus* is rarely met in other cases, although it is not unique among the repertoire's other figurative Roman bronzes representing Mars. Nevertheless, there are also a reduced number of Mars statuettes which corresponds to this iconographical type. It is the case of the statuettes from Tongeren<sup>48</sup>, Bonn<sup>49</sup> and Toulouse<sup>50</sup>, although the first one is different from the statuette discovered in the North of Dobroudja. A bracket-statulette of the god, used as coupling ornament and discovered at *Volubilis*, in *Mauretania Tingitana*, reveals the same *chlamys* on the left shoulder, but the god holds a fruit in his hand<sup>51</sup>. Analysing the statuettes published in different *corpora* and the articles dedicated to the Roman bronzes, the closest analogy to Mars from *Aegyssus* is the statuette preserved in Römisch-Germanischen Museum Köln and whose discovery place is uncertain<sup>52</sup>. Its sizes are similar to the object under discussion (H – 9.8 cm) and they share the same stylistic features. Its workshop is uncertain, but basing on the stylistic criterion S. Riter dates the statuette in “hadrianisch antoninische Zeit”.

The analogies with similar objects found in the West of the Empire could stand for a better dating of the statuette from *Aegyssus*. However, it should be underlined the fact that very few of them were chronologically framed. Among the bronze statuettes, similar in dimensions with the object under discussion, only those from Herbaijum and Köln are dated more accurate - both of them at the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D.<sup>53</sup> As far as the place of producing this statuette regards, there might be a Gallic producing centre, possible Bavay, in *Gallia Belgica*, where the statuettes of this same quality were numerous, proving a mass production destined to satisfy the local requests and the overplus probably for “export” to other regions.

<sup>47</sup> Mina *et alii* 2004, 606-608, pls. 1-2.

<sup>48</sup> Faider-Feytmans 1979, 59, no. 28, pl. 13/28 (Liège, Musée Curtius, Inv. 10/69, H – 7,8 cm).

<sup>49</sup> Menzel 1969b, 14, no. 4 (Bonn, Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Inv. 22094, H – 10,1 cm).

<sup>50</sup> Reinach 1897, 179, no. 9.

<sup>51</sup> Boube-Picot 1975, 215, no. 336, pls. 147-148 (Musée de Rabat, Inv. 197, H – 26,6 cm ); another statuette of Mars wearing a *chlamys* see at Reinach 1897, 179, no. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Ritter 1994, 354-355, figs. 50-52 (Köln, Römisch-Germanischen Museum, Inv. 25401, former in the Braubach Collection); Eck 2004, 486, fig. 200.

<sup>53</sup> Galestin 1994, 157; Ritter 1994, 355.

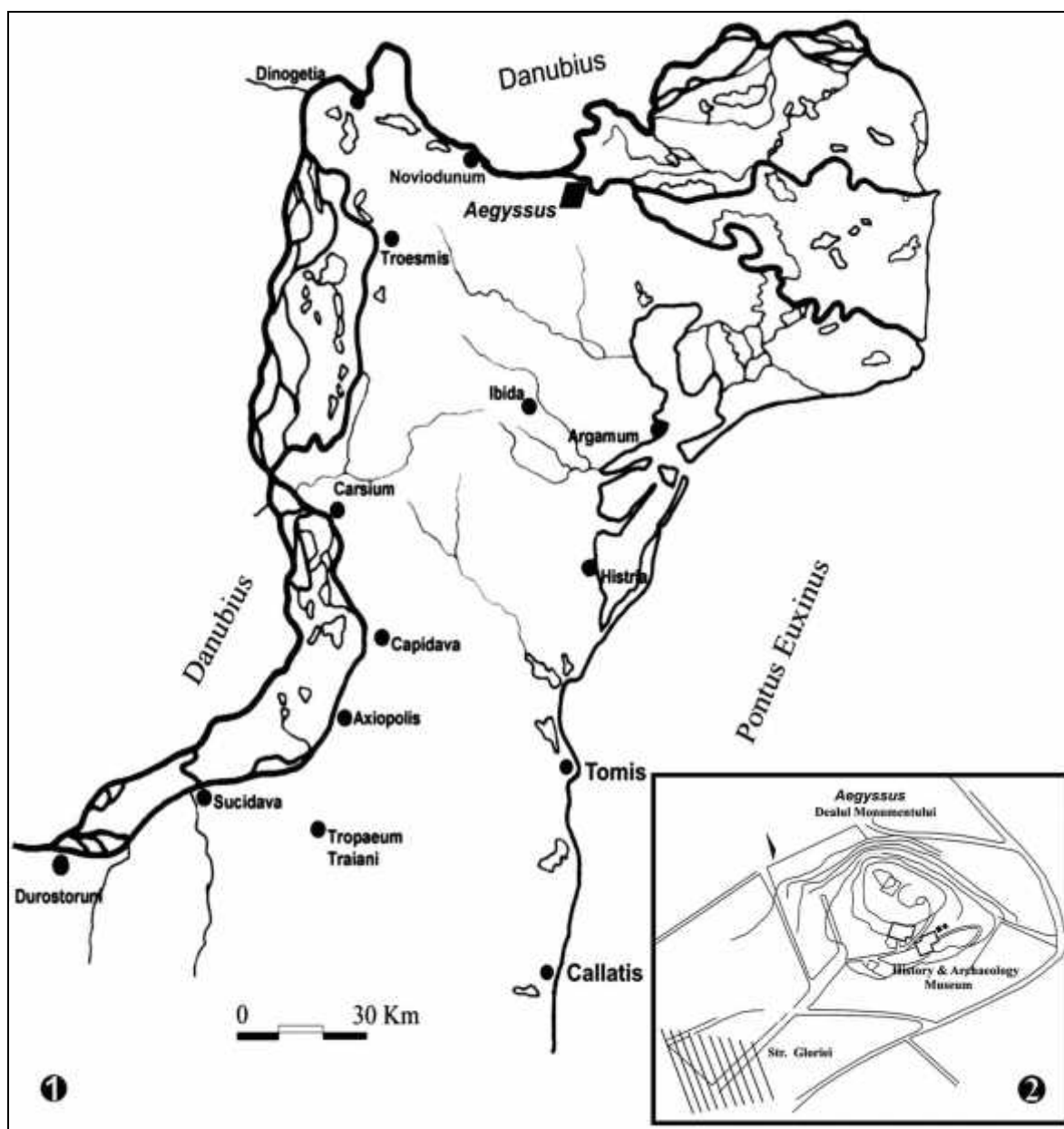
\* I am truly obliged to my colleague D. Paraschiv, who acquired and lent me this artefact to publishing.

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Pl. 1. 1 – The Map of Roman Dobroudja; 2 – The finding spot of the statuette from Tulcea (*Aegyssus*), in the South-West of Dealul Monumentului area.



1



2



3

Pl. 2. Mars from *Aegyssus*.





1

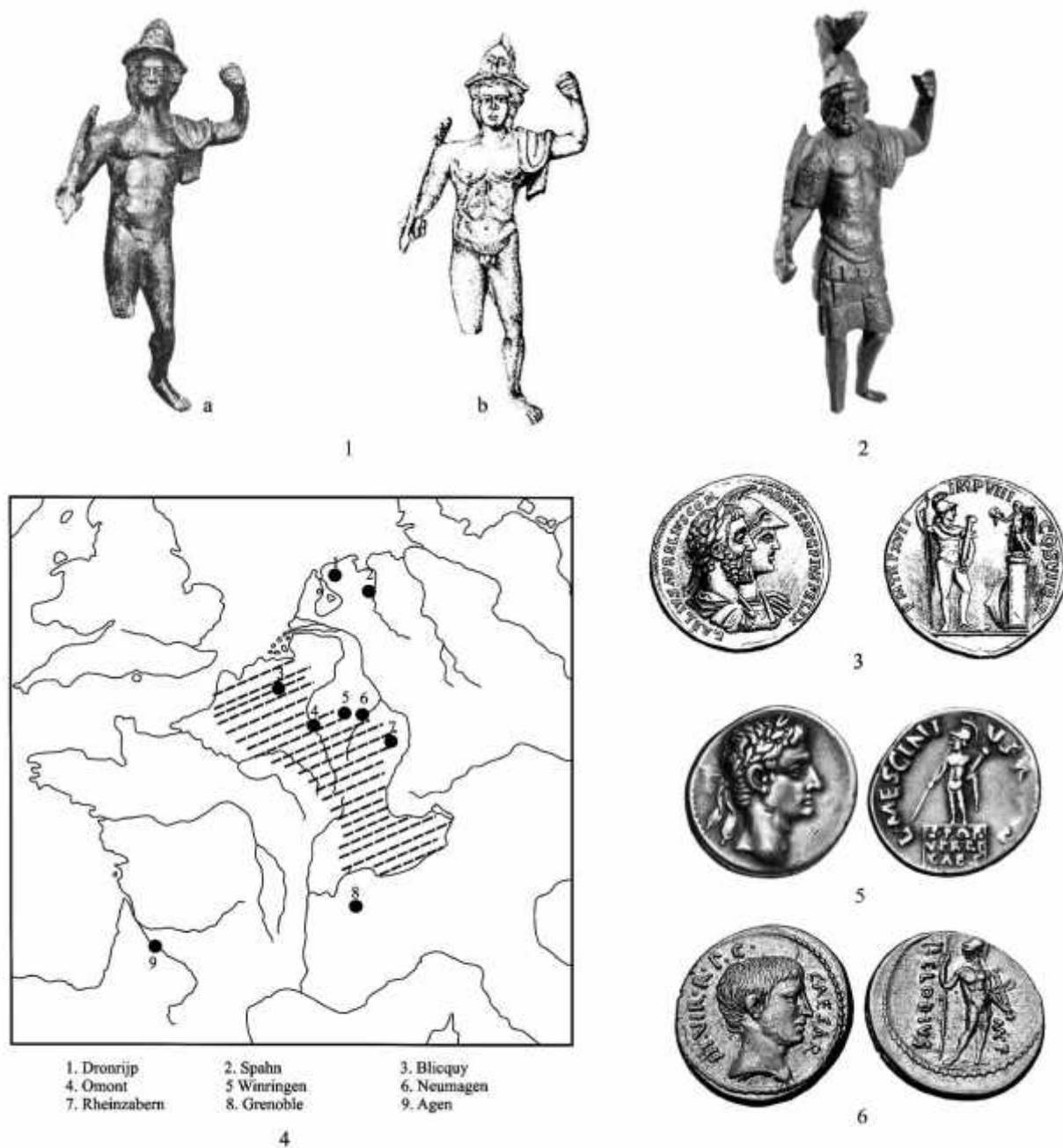


2



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Pl. 3. Mars from *Aegyssus*.



Pl. 4. 1 – Mars from *Porolissum*, *apud* Mina et alii 2004, pl. 1-2; 2 – Mars from Gherla, *apud* Țeposu-Marinescu, Pop 2000, pl. 7/10; 3 – Medallion, 192 A.D., *apud* Froehner 1878, 140-141; 4 – The spreading area of Mars representation with a sword in his left hand, *apud* Amand 1967, fig. 13 (graphic restitution by the author); 5 – Coin of *L. Mescius Rufus* (Fritz Rudolf Künker Münzenhandlung, Auktion 124, march 16<sup>th</sup> 2007, no. 8677); 6 – Coin of *P. Clodius* (Gemini LLC, Auction II, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2006, no. 297).