

A ROMAN BRONZE STAMP (*SIGNACULUM EX AERE*) FROM DUMBRĂVENI (ROMANIA) – *MOESIA INFERIOR*



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Abstract: This paper focuses on a bronze stamp – *signaculum ex aere* – discovered in 1989, at Dumbrăveni, in Southern Dobruja, very close to the border with Bulgaria. The phrase *signacula ex aere* refers to the Roman artifacts used to stamp food products, organic materials, construction materials, etc., included in the category *instrumentum domesticum inscriptum Signacula* are important for the inscriptions they bear, such as proper names or abbreviations of names, all in genitive case (often in the plural form). On the *signaculum* from Dumbrăveni there is a Greek name engraved on two lines – ΕΤΤΥΧΗΔΟC, derived from the patronymic ΕὐτύχηC. Based on the analogies with other *signacula* discovered in Lower Moesia, respectively at Marcianopolis, it was possible to date the *signaculum* from Dumbrăveni to the 3rd c. AD. Whatever their primary or secondary utility, such instruments were unanimously assigned an economic and commercial function. *Signacula* are an important epigraphic and historical source, associated with the Roman social elite, who was directly involved in the economic activity of the colonies or provinces where the stamps were discovered.

Rezumat: Autorii prezintă o ștampilă de bronz – *signaculum ex aere* – descoperită în anul 1989, în comuna Dumbrăveni din sudul Dobrogei, foarte aproape de granița cu Bulgaria. Prin termenul de *signacula ex aere* sunt încadrate în categoria de *instrumentum domesticum inscriptum* obiectele romane folosite la marcarea prin ștampilare a produselor alimentare, materialelor organice, a materialelor de construcție etc. *Signacula* sunt importante pentru inscripțiile pe care le poartă, fiind nume proprii sau prescurtări de nume redată la genitiv, de multe ori la genitiv plural. Pe *signaculum* de la Dumbrăveni se regăsește un nume grecesc gravat pe două rânduri - ΕΤΤΥΧΗΔΟC, derivat din patronimicul ΕὐτύχηC. Prin analogii cu alte *signacula* descoperite în Moesia Inferior, respectiv la Marcianopolis, s-a putut stabili o încadrare cronologică în sec. al III-lea p.Chr. Oricare ar fi fost utilitatea lor principală sau secundară, li s-a atribuit în mod unanim o funcție economico-comercială. *Signacula* sunt o sursă epigrafică și istorică importantă, asociată cu elita socială romană, care era în mod direct implicată în activitatea economică a coloniilor sau provinciilor unde au fost descoperite.

Keywords: *signaculum ex aere*, bronze stamp, epigraphy, Moesia Inferior, 3rd century AD.

Cuvinte cheie: *signaculum ex aere*, ștampilă de bronz, epigrafie, Moesia Inferior, sec. III p.Chr.

INTRODUCTION*

In 1989, the Museum of National History and Archaeology in Constanța purchased a Roman bronze stamp, known in the specialised literature as *signaculum ex aere*. The stamp is, so far, the only object of this kind in the museum's collection but also in Romania. The item was unpublished until now, hence, by using following the process of scientific value, we have an important new epigraphic testimony regarding the economic-social ensemble of the province of *Lower Moesia* (Fig. 1).

* We would like to express our gratitude to Mr. George Mihailov and Mr. Daniel Schmidt for helping and supporting us in this research.

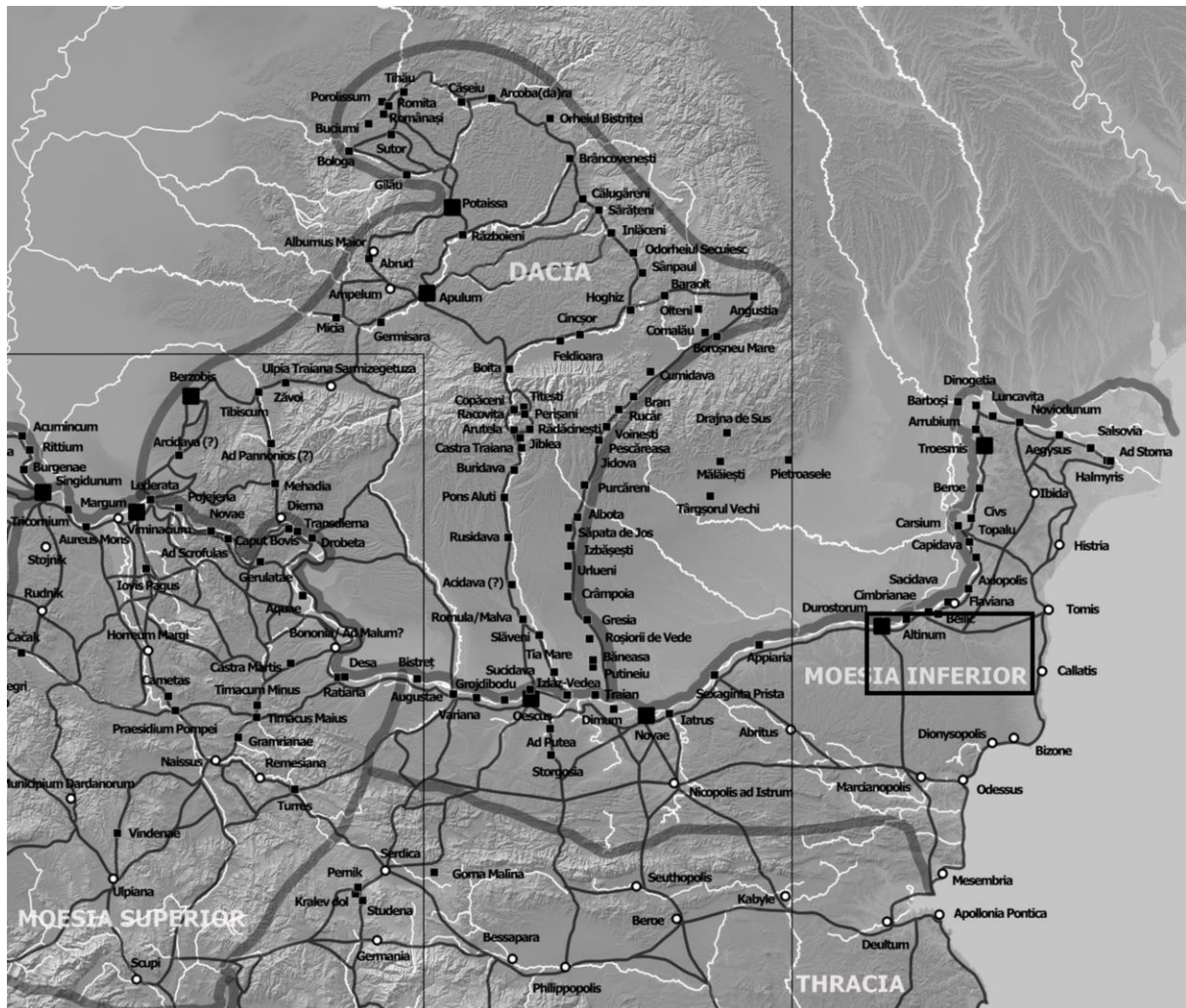


Fig. 1. Map of *Moesia Inferior* in the 2nd-3rd century AD.

The term *signacula ex aere* includes in the category of *instrumentum domesticum inscriptum*¹, Roman tools used for marking by stamping food products, perishable materials, construction materials, etc.² The objects are made of a bronze plate of different geometric shapes, embossed with an inscription, rendered retrograde, on one or two lines. There is also a perforated ring-shaped handle for handling on the plate. *Signacula* were very popular in the Roman world as shown by the many discoveries throughout the Empire, many of them currently being in the custody of major European museums or private collections.³ So far, more than 3,000 objects have been discovered throughout the Roman Empire.⁴

Being a fortuitous discovery, during our study we will try to establish a chronological framing, by analysing all the historical, archaeological and epigraphic data at hand, and by corroborating with close analogies from other provinces of the empire. Taking into account all the hypotheses made over time, we will also try to answer, probably to the most important question that hovers over this category of objects: *After all, what was their use?*

¹ Baratta 2014a, 181.

² Baratta 2007, 99.

³ Toniolo 1994, 429.

⁴ Braitto 2014, 486.

DESCRIPTION OF THE OBJECT

Located in the MINA Constanța collection with inventory number 50.622, the *signaculum* is complete and in a good state of preservation (Fig. 2). The object is made entirely of bronze, and has been manufactured by moulding. The plaque is in the shape of a human foot – *planta pedis*, – and is composed of two parts: the upper part, on which the retaining ring is placed. On the active side, there is a Greek inscription engraved in negative on two lines – ETVXHΔOC. The letters are of different sizes, uneven and have an uneven positioning with different distances between them. The plaque and letters contain clear traces of erosion. As in other cases, the active surface is smooth, with noble patina, a sign of prolonged use.⁵

Anatomically, seen from above, the foot is deformed, being wider than it should be. The fingers are rendered schematically, separated by incised lines. The two straps represented in the form of the letter **V**, which start between the first and the second toe, suggest that the foot is wearing a *solea*.⁶

The ring was later attached to the plaque and is positioned in the centre. Its dimensions easily allow the use of the stamp by a mature man. The length of the object is 9.6 cm, the width is 4.2 cm and the total height is 2.6 cm. The letters have a height between 1.2 cm and 1.6 cm. The dimensions of the ring are 3 cm long and 2 cm wide and the hole is 2 cm × 1.5 cm.

TYOLOGY AND FORM

From a typological point of view, Giulia Baratta divided the bronze stamps, according to the shapes they have, into 11 categories marked from **A** to **K**.⁷ Regardless of the model, the *signacula* contains proper names or name abbreviations, written in retrograde in the genitive case, and in some cases in the plural genitive.⁸ Due to the material of which they are made, their shapes, as well as the retaining ring attached directly to the plaque, the stamps were not used to mark by heating, as was the case with live animals,⁹ or to mark by pressure by the “*Schlagstempel*” technique. The latter was used for certain types of products that could be stamped, such as those made of wood, metal or leather. Such stamps were made of hard materials to withstand the technique of hammering.¹⁰

Bronze stamps are supposed to have been used to imprint perishable or fragile materials (such as leather, wood, papyrus, fabrics, etc.) with ink or paints of different colours; or without paint on soft materials such as wax, under the form of seals, on products and objects which were to be transported or stored to ensure their integrity.¹¹ According to

⁵ Minčev 1987, 72.

⁶ Analogies for *signaculum* type *planta pedis* wearing a *solea*, come from Italy, Baratta 2014b, fig. 5.

⁷ Baratta 2014b, 109.

⁸ Baratta 2007, 100.

⁹ The stamps used to mark animals were made of iron, having one or two long arms, so that they could be handled after the active part was heated in the fire. They are found in many examples, such as in the border provinces, in military contexts, as is the case of *Dacia* province. The stamping of animals ensures the ownership of legions and auxiliary units, thus being involved in the equipment and direct maintenance of troops. In this case, they acquire a certain juridical significance (Isac 2001, 71); in the civilian environment, one of the most eloquent examples is found on a mosaic in Barcelona, where the represented horses are marked with the name of the owner or breeder (Baratta 2007, 103, Fig. 9).

¹⁰ Baratta 2014b, 104.

¹¹ Baratta 2014a, 184.

the Spanish researcher Marc Mayer i Olivé, these distinguishing features by stamping the products, in particular by using names in the genitive case, would mark the distribution of production between different owners or recipients.¹² Thus they would indicate a group of persons, defined by the Latin *partes*, who would be operating in the same commercial or production field.¹³



Fig. 2. The *signaculum* of Εὐτύχης from Dumbrăveni (drawings made by Ingrid Linda Petcu-Levei).

Returning to the *signaculum* from Dumbrăveni, it typologically classified into category **F**, namely the stamps in the shape of *planta pedis*, which Giulia Baratta also divided into two sub-categories: F1a – the foot turned to the left and F1b to the right.¹⁴ The object of our study is part of the latter.

The diversity of shapes may be related to a certain whim or the personal taste of those who owned them, being considered an aesthetic factor to avoid continuous repetition. It is also possible to be influenced by a certain fashion or a certain renowned manufacturing centre. Moreover, the choice of shapes can also have a practical functionality the choice of shapes, being closely related to the products to be stamped and, thus, a differentiation can be made between various goods that have been marked for commercialisation or storage.

The closest analogy for our *signaculum* comes from the collection of the Museum of Varna. It was discovered at *Marcianopolis* (modern day city of Devnya, Bulgaria) in 1964, near the Christian basilica located in the northern part of the city, and is very similar to the one from Dumbrăveni, having the shape of *planta pedis* oriented to the right. Regarding the

¹² Mayer i Olivé 2014, 26.

¹³ Baratta 2014a, 184.

¹⁴ Baratta 2014b, 120.

inscription, a name of Thracian resonance is written in Greek in the genitive – ΡΥΜΕΤΑΛΚΟΥ¹⁵ (Fig. 3). According to Minčev, the palaeography of the letters on the Ρυμεταλικης stamp would indicate a chronological frame in the second half of the 3rd century AD.¹⁶

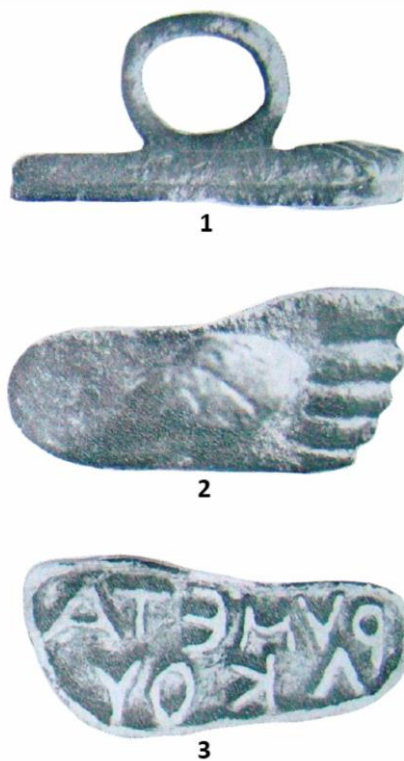


Fig. 3. The *signaculum* of Ρυμεταλικης from *Marcianopolis* (Minčev 1987, Tab. I/1-3).

The similarity of the letters on the two stamps, leads us to believe that both were made by the same craftsman, probably at *Marcianopolis* (?), where there were a series of workshops specialized in the crafting of metal objects and who also honoured special orders from the inhabitants of the province.¹⁷ The good workmanship of the two stamps indicates a high professional level. At the same time, the uneven letters and their orientation in the inscription, show that the production of *signacula* was a common activity in that workshop.¹⁸

The form, as well as the epigraphic text found on each *signaculum*, can be considered two ways of transmitting the stamped message.¹⁹

SCRIPTUM

From the epigraphic point of view, *signacula* are important for their contribution to ancient onomastics from the Roman provinces where they were discovered, offering us lots of information about the names of some domain owners, Roman citizens with a certain social status, directly involved in aspects related to local and provincial production and economy.²⁰

¹⁵ Minčev 1987, 72; Tab. 1/3.

¹⁶ Minčev 1987, 74.

¹⁷ According to the *Notitia Dignitatum* at the beginning of the 4th century AD at *Marcianopolis* there was a *fabrica* for the production of military equipment (Cascarino, Sansilvestri 2009, Fig. 5.1).

¹⁸ Minčev 1987, 74.

¹⁹ Baratta 2014b, 107-108.

²⁰ Clavel-Lévêque, Feugère 1997, 17.

On the *signaculum* from Dumbrăveni, we undoubtedly have a Greek name in the genitive case ΕΤΥΧΗΔΟC, derived from the patronymic ΕΥΤΥΧΗΣ. The name, in its main form, as well as in Latin - Eutyches, but also under different phonetic variants ΕΥΤΥΧΟΣ, Eutyclus, Eutyclus, etc., is frequently used in the Greco-Roman world, being attested countless times. In Rome alone, 359 cases were registered in the form Eutyches and 337 cases in the form Eutyclus.²¹

In the eastern provinces of the empire we find this name on two funerary *stelae* discovered near the church of St. John of Ephesus, dated in the 3rd-4th centuries AD.²² Also in the same period in Athens, the name is recorded on lamp moulds, along with the names of other well-known producers.²³ Also on an oil lamp, but this time in its genitive form, it was discovered in Cyprus, the object is dated in the 4th century AD.²⁴ Approaching our area of interest, the name ΕΥΤΥΧΗΣ is found on an inscription discovered in the north of the Black Sea at *Phanagóreia*, dated between 130 and 170 AD.²⁵

On the territory of *Moesia Inferior* a slightly different form of the name -Αἴλιος) ΕΥΤΥΧΟΣ- is found at *Histria* on a *stelae* which list the winners of a sacred contest, respectively a musical competition in honour of Dionysus. The inscription is dated in the middle of the 2nd century AD, or to the time of the Severans.²⁶ At *Tomis* we have a mention for T. ΦΛ. ΕΥΤΥΧΗΣ, member of an association of the cult of Cybele who, together with his guild colleagues put a dedication in honour of the emperor Septimius Severus and his family, as well as in honour of the governor of the province. The inscription was dated between the years 197-202 AD.²⁷ In the same city, on a fragment of an inscription which is believed to be a catalogue of a college or an annexe to a decree dated to the 3rd century AD, we find a mention referring to a certain ΕΥΤΥΧΗΣ, about whom the authors consider to be "undoubtedly a slave, frequently encountered in colleagues", who holds the position of defender – *ἐκδικιος*.²⁸ Further north inside the province, at Cataloi (Tulcea county), on the ruins of a *villa rustica*, a funerary inscription was discovered mentioning Ulpus Eutyches, probably a Greek colonist who received Roman citizenship somewhere in the early 2nd century AD.²⁹

Other mentions of the name come from Greek inscriptions discovered on the territory of Bulgaria – ΕΥΤΥΧΗΣ: at *Odessos*;³⁰ at *Philippopolis* on a marble *stelae* which bears a representation of *Esculap*, *Higea* and *Telesphorus*³¹ at *Cillae* on a limestone *stelae* dedicated to Dionysus from the time of Gordian III and Sabina Tranquillina (241-244 AD).³²

The name is also found in the Danube *limes* area, in Latin, where we are probably dealing with civilian or military settlers. Thus, we find it recorded in two inscriptions at

²¹ ISM V, 104.

²² SEG XLIII, 809, 811.

²³ SEG XLIII, 111.

²⁴ SEG XLIII, 1234.

²⁵ SEG XLIII, 512.

²⁶ ISM I, 196.

²⁷ ISM II, 83(49).

²⁸ ISM II, 468(18).

²⁹ ISM V, 244.

³⁰ IGB II, 846.

³¹ IGB III, 1, 912.

³² IGB III, 1, 1517.

Oescus,³³ on a *stelae* at *Novae*³⁴ and at *Carsium*, on a funerary *stelae* dated to the middle of the 3rd century AD, we have a mention about Iulius Eutyches, who lived 60 years.³⁵

The most important epigraphic testimony, for the present study, comes from a fragment of a sarcophagus (?), dated to the 3rd century AD found at *Tropaeum Traiani*, on which parents Eutyches and *Victoria* placed the funeral epitaph in honour of their son *Martiales* who died at the age of nine.³⁶ At the moment, it is considered that Dumbrăveni was part of the territory of the former Roman colony.³⁷

From a prosopographical point of view, the *signaculum* represents a new mention of the name in the administrative territory that the city had under control. As we have shown from the few data we have presented, the name Εὐτύχης/Eutyches is very common in the ancient Greco-Roman world of the 2nd-4th centuries AD, with slightly high popularity in the 3rd century AD. An important aspect that supports the dating of the *signaculum* that we are analysing.

Taking into account the Greek origin of the name, we will further analyse the location where it was discovered as well as the involvement of the Greek communities in the socio-economic life of the *municipium Tropaeum Traiani*.

LOCATION AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As mentioned before, the stamp was acquired in 1989 from a villager of Dumbrăveni situated in the central area of Dobrudja, very close to the current border with Bulgaria (Fig. 4). Taking into consideration the fact that it was a fortuitous discovery, to better understand the circumstances, we consider necessary to briefly discuss the historical and archaeological context where the object comes from.

From a historical point of view, it is assumed that the territory of the current commune of Dumbrăveni was part of *teritorium municipii Tropaei Traiani*. Unfortunately, the ancient territorial administrative organisation remains utmost unknown. Likewise, information regarding the number of settlements of any type is scarce.³⁸ From the information we have at our disposal, we know important data about the Greek community from this territory and even from the city. Excluding the former Greek colonies from the Black Sea, the existence of such communities in the central Dobrudja is mentioned in inscriptions at *Noviodunum*, which, together with *Tropaeum*, are important strategic, military and economic centres in Roman times.³⁹

At *Tropaeum Traiani* they were primarily involved in agriculture. This was inferred from the altar dedicated to *Zeus Ombrimos* by *Protogenes*⁴⁰ (dated in the years 236-238 AD), magistrate of a Greek *vicus* located near the *Tropaeum*,⁴¹ probably located at Urluia (?),⁴² where at the end of the 2nd century and the beginning of the 3rd century AD, another *μαγιστρατος* is attested.⁴³ On the other hand, the Greek communities were involved in the

³³ ILBR, 43 & 84.

³⁴ ILBR, 269.

³⁵ ISM V, 104.

³⁶ ISM IV, 69.

³⁷ Bărbulescu 2001, 303, cat. no., 272.

³⁸ Bărbulescu 2001, 120-121.

³⁹ Barnea 1977, 353.

⁴⁰ ISM IV, 18.

⁴¹ Suceveanu 1977, 74.

⁴² Bărbulescu 2001, 192.

⁴³ ISM IV, 44.

exploitation of stone quarries, such as the one at Deleni, and to the construction of the triumphal monument at the beginning of the 2nd century AD.⁴⁴

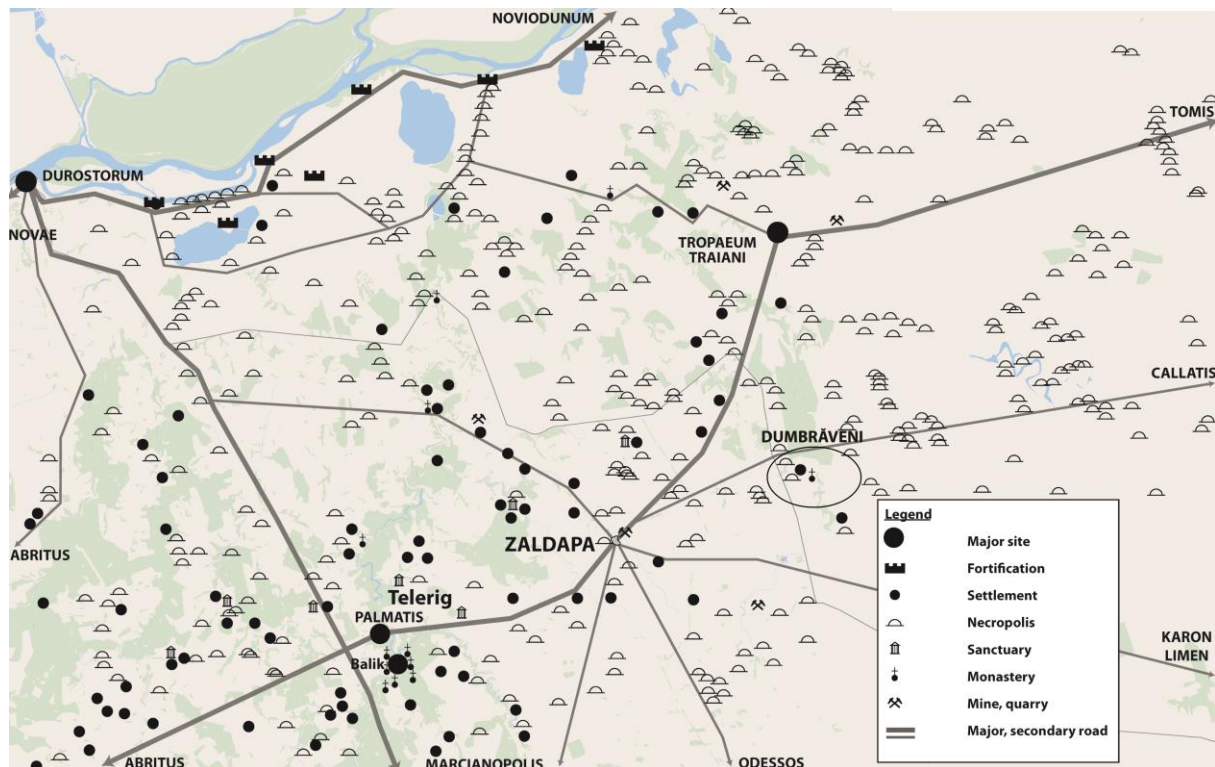


Fig. 4. Detailed map with the southern area of Dobrogea, location of the site from Dumbrăveni, in relation to the main Romanian sites (map after Dana *et alii* 2019, 73, Fig. 2).

Last but not least, the idea that the name **Εὐτύχης** comes from a family of military veterans who owned land in the area of Dumbrăveni must not be excluded. The discovery of a military diploma from 112 AD at *Tropaeum Traiani*,⁴⁵ records the discharge of several soldiers from the auxiliary troops of the province, being very possible that some settled in the administrative territory of the city. Also, the presence of a *vexillatio* from *legio I Italica Moesica* and *legio V Macedonica Dacica*,⁴⁶ as well as the presence of several active soldiers from *legio XI Claudia*,⁴⁷ advocates for the discharge and land ownership of several veterans in the administrative territory held by the colony, who are likely to be owners of *agri viritim adsignati*.⁴⁸ The action of colonisation and division of land lots was carried out in several ways. Unlike the civilian citizens brought in as settlers, who received their lands by drawing lots – *agri colonici*; those designated by *adsignatio viritana* received properties with a very well delimited area.⁴⁹

Analysing all the epigraphic testimonies discovered so far at *Tropaeum Traiani*, it can be deduced that the territory of the city had, from a legal-administrative point of view, several types of possessions: from *agri stipendiariis asignati* for the citizens of the city or *agri viritim adsignati* for veterans, up to *agri vectigales* for Roman civilians who acquired citizenship

⁴⁴ Suceveanu 1977, 145-146.

⁴⁵ ISM IV, 3.

⁴⁶ ISM IV, 26.

⁴⁷ ISM IV, 27, 31.

⁴⁸ Bărbulescu 2001, 191.

⁴⁹ Beaudouin 1895, 157-161.

more recently.⁵⁰ As a result of this Roman organisation, it was possible to expand grain crops and viticulture, in an area that from a geographical point of view and natural resources is by excellence conducive to animal husbandry.⁵¹ The economic life at *Tropaeum Traiani* was based less on local production and more on trade, thus entering in the sphere of influence of the Greek cities from the 2nd-3rd centuries AD.⁵²

By analogy with other discoveries in the empire, for example in southern Gaul, it can be observed that a very large number of *signacula* come from the former Roman colonies that have a high concentration of veterans. They were also discovered in *villae rusticae* located near important provincial roads or in the suburbs of large cities where trade was practised. To date, no *signaculum* has been found on a less important site, such as a simple farm or an isolated *vicus*.⁵³

It is considered that the *signacula* were used only by Roman citizens, descendants of settlers/veterans that came from the Italian peninsula. The owners of such objects were mainly engaged in agriculture or the making of bakery and food products, meat, cheese or organic materials, cloth and leather, and their marketing. Whatever their occupation, the stamping of goods provided a guarantee for the quality of the products. Moreover, it is supposed that their use on goods meant for export provided relief from taxes, which was beneficial to both the producer and the colony's economy, thus controlling the origin of the products in question.⁵⁴

Considering the large-scale municipal construction that took place at *Tropaeum Traiani*, we may deal with a private producer of construction materials (bricks and tiles). Being a hilly region covered with forests and pastures, it is favourable to the development of crafts related to the processing of ceramics, iron and building materials.⁵⁵ Although the use of bronze stamps to mark bricks is rarely confirmed, they do exist. One such case was the discovery at *Salona* in *Dalmatia* in 1895 of a brick bearing the name of *C. Vallius Scipio (Cai Valli Scipionis)*, and more recently in Sardinia, a *signaculum* of the same name that fits perfectly with the stamp on the brick (Fig. 5).⁵⁶ It was inferred that the owner of the stamp had interests in both places, probably related to land ownership and related productions, or to the economic and commercial dynamics of a wide range of products.⁵⁷

Since the beginning of Roman rule on the Lower Danube, the evolution of rural properties of the *villae rustica* type has been shaped according to current needs. The acute need for construction materials gives rise to private *figlinae*, which produced in parallel with the *officinae* found in large urban centres from the province. At the end of the 2nd century AD, we can speak of specialisation of rural farms and their evolution towards an economy correlated with the local needs, thus integrated into the provincial economic structure.⁵⁸

An inscription discovered at Dumbrăveni⁵⁹ in 1984 in the Turkish cemetery and two more discovered, one in *Tomis*⁶⁰ and the second at Poarta Albă⁶¹ in the territory of the

⁵⁰ Suceveanu 1977, 107.

⁵¹ Suceveanu 1977, 109.

⁵² Suceveanu 1977, 146.

⁵³ Feugère, Mauné 2005, 444-446.

⁵⁴ Feugère, Mauné 2005, 449.

⁵⁵ Baumann 2017, 150-151.

⁵⁶ Braitto 2014, Fig. 3.

⁵⁷ Braitto 2014, 490.

⁵⁸ Baumann 2017, 151-152.

⁵⁹ ISM IV, 84.

metropolis (all three dated to the end of the 1st-2nd century AD), attest *A. Tiberius Claudius Mucasius*, a Romanised Geto-Thracian (the name of Thracian origin *Mucasius* is used in this case as a cognomen),⁶² who was part of a large family of landowners in the territory of the city of *Tomis* and the province.⁶³ We, therefore, have a possible mention of a landowner in the area of interest of our study, which, as we previously stated, was in the sphere of economic and commercial influence of the former Greek colonies.



Fig. 5. The *signaculum* of *C. Vallius Scipio* (mirror image) and its imprint on a tile (Braitto 2014, Fig. 3).

From the point of view of the archaeological discoveries from the territory of Dumbrăveni commune, they are very few and the specialised bibliography is being extremely scarce. In the following, we will briefly present the published archaeological discoveries, to better understand the potential of the area. Certainly, future archaeological research will provide important data, which will answer some yet unresolved questions regarding the socio-economic and territorial-administrative situation of the region during the Roman and late Roman era.

Dumbrăveni came to the specialists' attention starting with 1981, when a small cave church, dating back to the medieval period of the 10th-11th centuries AD, was identified about 2 km south-east of the commune. It is located in a limestone massif, on the bank of a stream, the area being popularly called by the locals "Canaraua Fetei".⁶⁴ The site was researched in two campaigns in the early 1990s and two levels of habitation were identified. The discovery of a tomb which was partially destroyed by the altar of the church and of a coin dating from the time of Valentinian II (383 AD) inside it, led to the idea of the existence, of a Paleo-Christian community at Dumbrăveni prior to the group of Christians from the early medieval period.⁶⁵ In addition to the coin mentioned above, four other numismatic discoveries come from the territory of the commune: 1. an imperial coin minted at *Markianopolis* during the double reign of Caracalla and Geta, dated to the years 210 (?) - 213 AD;⁶⁶ 2. a denarius issued with the effigy of Fulvia Plautilla, Caracalla's wife, discovered in 1992 on one of the streets of the commune, dated to 204 AD;⁶⁷ 3. and 4. two coins dated to the 4th century AD from the time of Constantine the Great 335-337 AD and Constantius II - Constans from 346-350 AD.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ ISM II, 227.

⁶¹ ISM II, 128.

⁶² Dana 2014, 236.

⁶³ Russu 1959, 141-142.

⁶⁴ Chiriac 1988-1989, 249.

⁶⁵ Papasima, Chiriac 1995-1996, 267-268.

⁶⁶ Bărbulescu, Ocheșanu 1990, 229.

⁶⁷ Papasima, Chiriac 1995-1996, 268/1.

⁶⁸ Papasima, Chiriac 1995-1996, 268/2-3.

From the archaeological information we have, we can conclude that on the territory of Dumbrăveni there are traces of habitation specific to the 2nd-4th centuries AD, probably with a higher intensity in the 3rd-4th centuries AD.

CHRONOLOGY

The chronological framing of the Εὐτύχης *signaculum* is not an easy task. Taking into account the prosopographic analysis of the name frequently encountered in the Greco-Roman world of the 2nd-4th centuries AD, with a slight popularity in the 3rd century AD; the administrative territorial context of the *municipium Tropaeum Traiani*, where the epigraphic sources indicate the constant presence of the Greek communities in the politico-social life of the city and its rural settlements in the 2nd-3rd centuries AD; the presence of veterans who became land owners in the territory of the colony since the beginning of the 2nd century AD; the minimal archaeological discoveries made on the territory of the commune and their chronological classification; the analogies from other areas of the Empire (in *Gallia Narbonensis signacula* are dated during the 1st-3rd centuries AD and are closely related to the economic activity of the province⁶⁹); as well as the most important clue: the analogy with the stamp of Ρυμεταλλικης from *Marcianopolis*, dated by A. Minčev in the second half of the 3rd century AD, where the palaeographic similarity between the two is clear; we consider, with the necessary reservations of course, that the two stamps must have been contemporary, and we agree with the chronology proposed by Minčev dating to the 3rd century AD, with the mention that future discoveries of *signacula* on the territory of Dobrudja, or the conduct of further archaeological excavations at Dumbrăveni, may bring new information on the chronological classification of such objects.

FUNCTIONALITY

The most common types of *signacula* encountered are those of rectangular shape,⁷⁰ following this statement, the universally valid hypothesis regarding the main use was to stamp the bread, having as support the archaeological discoveries from Pompeii (Fig. 6). It is well known that the distribution of bread in the Roman world was a very well organized operation, especially in cities. The findings in *Gallia Narbonensis* suggest that this practice spread to rural areas, where there were property and *villae rusticae* owners who were in charge of the whole process from baking to selling the bread.⁷¹ In large urban centres, the stamping of bread was done before baking, to distinguish the products from the kiln and to facilitate their distribution, this being a symbol of the manufacturer's guarantee on his products, being a personal brand that could be easily read.⁷² The discovery at Pompeii of several stamps and some stamped breads⁷³ indicates the use of public kilns by several bakers at the same time.⁷⁴ A. Minčev also attributes the *signaculum* of Ρυμεταλλικης from *Marcianopolis* to a bread maker, and concludes that the custom of stamping bread for both daily and religious needs was very common in antiquity, a guarantee of the product's quality, but also an advertisement for the producer.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Feugère, Mauné 2005, 452.

⁷⁰ Baratta 2014a, 103.

⁷¹ Feugère, Mauné 2005, 441

⁷² Toniolo 1994, 434.

⁷³ Cicala 2014, 238, Fig. 3.

⁷⁴ Baratta 2007, 104.

⁷⁵ Minčev 1987, 72.

Starting with the 4th century AD, stamped breads were adopted by Christians and used in religious processions. Blessed bread is closely linked to the worship of certain Saints and certain religious holidays where it was distributed. This custom is documented in Christian texts from the beginning of the 5th century AD and practised mainly in the 6th century AD. But it must be considered that the *signacula* used by Christians to stamp bread were, the vast majority of them, round and wore inscriptions relating to divinity or Christian symbols.⁷⁶ A study of Christian stamps from Jordan, dated to the 7th-8th centuries AD, shows that they were made out of clay.⁷⁷

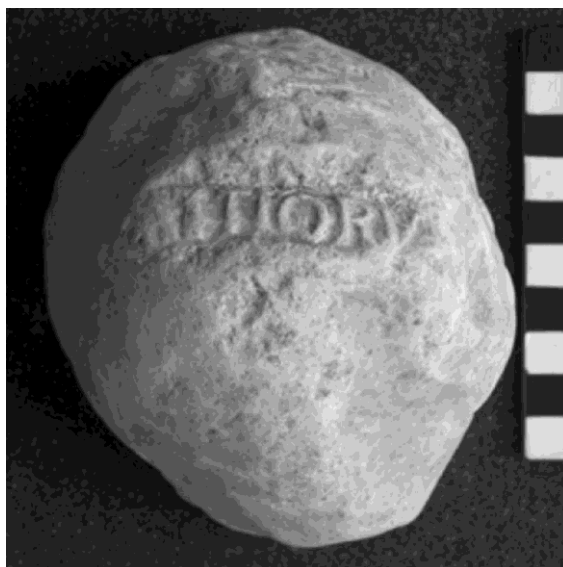


Fig. 6. Stamped bread with a *signaculum* discovered at Pompei (Cicala 2014, 238, Fig. 3).

Another theory regarding their functionality is that they were used to stamp hard materials, such as lead, marble, wood, terracotta objects, but also pottery and bricks.⁷⁸ Even if they were not made to be used for this purpose, it seems that archaeological findings indicate a secondary use in this regard.⁷⁹ A small bronze stamp discovered in the Byzantine fortification (10th-11th centuries AD)⁸⁰ from Păcuiul lui Soare in southern Dobrudja, as well as an amphora fragment from the same period bearing a similar stamp;⁸¹ plus another small circular bronze stamp found at Noviodunum in 2005 dated in the 11th century AD,⁸² demonstrates a continuity of this custom that was taken over and used by the Byzantine craftsmen.⁸³

As mentioned before, the *signacula* could be used for stamping organic products of various types from food to fabrics, leather, wood, papyrus, etc. The discovery of a fairly large number of *signacula* in *Ravenna*, led Daniela Rigato to put them in a probable connection with the imperial properties north of the city. This led to the hypothesis of direct links between the *signacula* and the needs of the fleet made through the port of *Ravenna*. Namely, the labelling

⁷⁶ Buora, Lafli 2014, 421-422.

⁷⁷ Kakish 2014, 19-31.

⁷⁸ Baratta 2014b, 103.

⁷⁹ Feugère, Mauné 2005, 440-441.

⁸⁰ IGLR 181.

⁸¹ IGLR 182.

⁸² Stănică 2007, 515-520.

⁸³ Baraschi 1973, 541-544.

of the products that were to be shipped with the help of the fleet to a specific destination were products reserved for "state" use. These could be wine, wool, leather, etc.⁸⁴

Another hypothesis regarding the functionality of stamps is that they were used on archival documents or cadastral documents, deeds of possession or leases or on administrative documents, important for the economy of the colony or its territory.⁸⁵

Whatever their use, it can be concluded that the *signacula* are found in economically important locations, especially through the commercial function to which they were unanimously assigned. Those who owned them and in whose name they were used, were important people in their field of activity and undoubtedly belonged to the high social classes in the Roman provinces. This is attested by the presence of a large number of objects in the important provincial centres but also along the main communication routes.⁸⁶

Signacula are an important epigraphic and historical source, which remind us of the Roman social elite that was directly involved in the economic activity of the colonies or provinces of which they were part. The study carried out on the *signacula* from *Gallia Narbonensis*, showed from a prosopographic point of view a rather high percentage of Greek names, leading, thus, to the opinion that they were active predominantly in trade and less involved in agricultural activities.⁸⁷

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⁸⁴ Rigato 2014, 216.

⁸⁵ Feugère, Mauné 2005, 442.

⁸⁶ Feugère, Mauné 2005, 446.

⁸⁷ Feugère, Mauné 2005, 452.

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