

## A 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY SIGNET RING WHICH BELONGED TO LOGOTHETE NICULA

### UN INEL SIGILAR DE SECOL XVI CARE A APARTINUT LOGOFĂTULUI NICULA

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#### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present a signet ring, found in April 2014 in the forest area near the Răsuceni village, which is at the present moment a part of the collections of the National History Museum of Romania. The structure of the paper is divided in three sections: in the first section is presented the finding context of the artefact which is not so rich, the ring being found with a metal detector in an isolated area, the second section is dedicated to the description of the ring and a short comparison with similar items, while the third part focuses on the logothete named Nicula and a hypothesis regarding his possible identity, according to the sixteenth century documents.

**Keywords:** Signet ring, intaglio, logothete, Nicula, Wallachia, 16th century.

#### Introduction

In the last few years, the use of the metal detectors in Romania has led to the finding of some impressive artefacts, among which is a sixteenth century signet ring<sup>1</sup>, which I will present in this paper (Fig. 1). Although, it is impossible to draw helpful information regarding the dating and the owner of the ring from the context of the finding, the ring presents some specific features which support the framing of the item in the Wallachian autochthonous style. In order to present as many data as is it possible about this artefact, along with the description of the object and the historical information that the ring offers to us, I tried in this short study to present a hypothesis regarding the possible identity of the logothete Nicula who, according to the ring inscription, is the owner of the ring.

#### Find context

Signet rings bearing the name of the owner are rather rare finds, most rings of this type being found in funerary contexts, during archaeological excavations. The ring this article deals with has been found with a metal detector in April 2014,

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<sup>1</sup> The inventory number of the ring is 348199 (National History Museum of Romania collection).

in a forest area near the Răsuceni village, Giurgiu County<sup>2</sup>. It is noteworthy that in the same forest there were also uncovered a medieval coin, a medieval bronze ring and a hoard containing: 20 coins issued during the sixteenth century (five trojaks issued by Stephan Bathory and Sigismund III Vasa for Riga and Poland, one dirhem issued by Murad III, and fourteen akçes issued by the sultans Suleyman II and Murad III), six fragments of jewels and one ring, which is similar in style, but worked with less care than the ring that is the focus of this article. Although these items were found scattered in the same forest, which is indicated on the map<sup>3</sup>, around the finding place of the ring there weren't uncovered any objects that could suggest that the ring is part of a larger hoard buried in order to be hidden. Therefore, we can come up with two hypotheses regarding this isolated find. Thus, it is possible that the ring could have been buried due to an unpleasant situation that determined the possessor of the ring to hide it or that the ring was simply lost. The second hypothesis seems to be more appropriate due to the fact that it is hard to believe that the ring was the only valuable object that could have been owned by the person who buried such an expensive item. But, in the absence of more details or information that could have been provided by the find context, both hypotheses must be taken in consideration.

#### **Description of the signet ring**

The ring has a massive body, with the high octagonal shaped bezel being an integral part of the ring. The broad hoop has a trapezoidal cross section in the upper part, which thickens near the bezel area and a simple flat rectangular cross section in the lower area. The silver ring is weighing 32.35 g and it has the following dimensions: maximum height – 31.90 mm, maximum width 27.70 mm, while in the inside of the hoop the maximum diameter is measuring 20.40 mm and the minimum diameter 19.45 mm. Concerning the bezel of the ring, the height is measuring 10.55 mm, while the bezel width is measuring 22.75 mm (Fig. 5). Regarding the conservation status, the ring is covered with lots of scratches, while the flat surface of the bezel is worn-out, a fact that suggests that the signet ring was intensely used.

The hoop sides are decorated with engraved acanthus leaves, while the empty space left between the leaves was filled with *niello*, a deep black metallic alloy made from sulfur, silver and lead (Fig. 2). Unfortunately, most of the *niello* decoration, which was also filling the spaces between the letters of the inscription is lost, this material being very fragile, and in this case especially due to the ring preserving conditions. Also on the sides of the hoop, from the upper area, a linear decoration is incised which gives a twisted appearance like rope design (Fig. 3). The same rope like design decorates the lower and upper areas of the bezel,

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<sup>2</sup> The ring was found by Mr. Cristian Eugen Dragomir.

<sup>3</sup> The map is an image captured in the program Google Earth.

flanking the inscription. The flat surface of the ring has in the center an oval shaped carnelian that has a light brown colour that is engraved with the figure of a roman god. Around the stone the same acanthus leaves design is incised, just like on the hoop sides (Fig. 4). It is important to mention that on the acanthus leaves decoration from the flat area of the bezel, on the rope design decoration and on the inside part of the hoop gilding traces are visible.

The carnelian stone has a convex upper face and it depicts an engraved personage. The height of the gem measures 10.45 mm, while the maximum width measures 9.35 mm (Fig. 4). The engraving style is very simple, the character being suggested by a few strokes, a style which from the chronological point of view can assign this *intaglio* to the 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. Regarding the origin of this gem, it is clear that it is a Roman *intaglio*, bearing the representation of a Roman god. Unfortunately, the stone is chipped in the lower right side and alongside with the fact that the image is not so elaborate, it is more difficult to identify the portrayed character. Therefore, the figure represents an undraped sitting man with a wide-brimmed hat, holding in his right hand something like a palm branch. One assumption regarding the identity of the depicted figure is that this is a representation of the god Mercury/Hermes. Considering the fact that Mercury is one of the most often represented divinities during the Antiquity, probably due to its association with a protective role, it is possible that the figure portrayed on this gem might be the roman god Mercury. The iconographical representation of Mercury has evolved during the times and therefore a series of Mercury hypostasis are known, one of them being very similar with the one figured on the carnelian of this signet ring. Hence, the image of Mercury undraped, holding in one of his hands a sacred branch as emblem of peace is known. According to the nineteenth century historian E. M. Berence, the use of a branch instead of the *caduceus*, the symbolic element carried by the Greek Hermes, is a changing identity process caused by the refusal of the *fetiales*<sup>4</sup> to recognize the Roman god Mercury as being the same god as Hermes<sup>5</sup>. A gem with a similar representation is mentioned in the book about Salamina's antiquities, published in 1884 by Alessandro Palma di Cesnola. Starting from the assumption made by Berence, Alessandro Palma di Cesnola is describing an *intaglio* (item 18 in the chapter *Gems and precious stones*) with the representation of an undraped Mercury who is holding a sacred branch in one of his hands<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> A group of Roman priests whose duties were advising on foreign relations and consecration of various treaties.

<sup>5</sup> E. M. Berence, *The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome*, London, Blackie & Son, 1880, p. 124.

<sup>6</sup> Alessandro Palma di Cesnola, *Salamina (Cyprus). The History, Treasures and Antiquities of Salamis in the Island of Cyprus* (second edition), London, Whiting & Co., 1884, p. 145.

The ancient gem collection of the Thordvaldsen Museum from Denmark is available online on the site of the museum, a fact which allowed me to identify three intaglios more carefully engraved that are illustrating the sitting figure of Hermes, who is holding in his right hand his *caduceus* or a stick<sup>7</sup>. Concerning the first gem<sup>8</sup>, alongside Hermes a tortoise is depicted, recalling probably the Homeric Hymns episode dedicated to Hermes, when he used the shell of the tortoise in order to make his lyre<sup>9</sup>. Although the other two stones do not have any specific element from which we could deduce that we are dealing with Hermes, this hypostasis is likely known due to some ancient bronze statues, representing Hermes seated holding sometimes a purse in his hand, an attribute linked with his roman role as god of commerce<sup>10</sup> or simply resting, like the bronze statue of Seated Hermes, found in 1758, in Herculaneum, a type which is likely known as *Hermes Merida-Vienna*.

However, recalling the numismatic iconographic resources another ancient roman god that could be associated with the image depicted on the ring gem could be Apollo. Therefore, a bronze coin issued by Quintillus in 270 bears on the obverse the standing figure of Apollo undraped, holding in his right hand a palm branch and his left hand resting on lyre<sup>11</sup>. The same image could be seen on a carnelian intaglio<sup>12</sup> and on a glass gem<sup>13</sup> preserved in the collections of the Thorvaldsen Museum. In addition, returning to the numismatic iconographic resources, representations of Apollo seated, holding a branch in his hand are also known. On the obverse of two silver coins, one issued by Caracalla<sup>14</sup> and one

<sup>7</sup> On another stone Hermes is illustrated standing, holding a branch in one of his hands. Inventory number of the item is I195; image available online at the following link: [http://www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/en/collections/antikke\\_gemmer/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&order=inv\\_no&q=I308](http://www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/en/collections/antikke_gemmer/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&order=inv_no&q=I308).

<sup>8</sup> Inventory number of the item is I195; image available online at the following link: [http://www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/en/collections/antikke\\_gemmer/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&order=inv\\_no&q=I300](http://www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/en/collections/antikke_gemmer/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&order=inv_no&q=I300).

<sup>9</sup> Homer, *The Hesiodic Hymns and Homeric Hymns*, Hugh G. Evelyn-White translation, The Loeb Classical Library, London, Harvard University Press, 1982, pp. 364-367.

<sup>10</sup> See the bronze statuette of Hermes seated on a rock from the Metropolitan Museum, accession number 20.202, image available online at the following link: <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/250955>.

<sup>11</sup> Reference: RIC 9 – P. H. Webb, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. 5, I: Valerian to Florian, London, 1962.

<sup>12</sup> Inventory number of the item is I195; image available online at the following link: [http://www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/en/collections/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&order=inv\\_no&q=I195](http://www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/en/collections/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&order=inv_no&q=I195).

<sup>13</sup> Inventory number of the item is I687; image available online at the following link: [http://www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/en/collections/antikke\\_gemmer/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&order=inv\\_no&q=I687](http://www.thorvaldsensmuseum.dk/en/collections/antikke_gemmer/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&order=inv_no&q=I687).

<sup>14</sup> Reference: RIC. 238 A - H. Mattingly, E. A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. 4, I: Gordian III-Uranian Antoninus, London, 1936.

issued by Gordian III<sup>15</sup>, the god Apollo is represented sitting on a throne, leaning on his lyre and holding a branch.

In this context, considering that the gem is damaged and the engraving style is very simple, without specific details regarding the illustrated theme, it is quite difficult to indicate with precision who is the depicted character.

The style in which the ring was fashioned reveals the fact that the ring was most probably made in a Transylvanian workshop or by Transylvanian jewelers who were brought in Wallachia at the request of the princes. Lots of documents preserved in the Romanian archives reveals this custom of the nobility to order gold and silver objects from the goldsmiths' guilds from Braşov, Sibiu and so on<sup>16</sup>.

The re-use of ancient stones during the Middle Age centuries as part of other jewels dates back to the Occidental European space of the twelfth century and this act is seen as part of the twelfth century Renaissance, characterized by a growing interest in the classical Antiquity world<sup>17</sup>. However, the use of Roman gems during the fifteenth and sixteenth century must be understood as a specific aspect of the classical Italian Renaissance<sup>18</sup>, through which one of its central desideratum which is the revival of the Roman and Greek civilizations reaches its peak. In Wallachia a series of rings decorated with classical gems were found. Although they can be dated in the fourteenth century, it is noteworthy mentioning that amongst the best preserved and outstanding gem rings are two rings found in the tombs from Curtea de Argeş. The first ring, found in tomb no. 10 is made of gold and has a Latin inscription written with gothic characters on the hoop of the ring (IESUS AUTEM TRANSIENS PER MEDI), while the circular low rectangular bezel has a carnelian intaglio with the profile of a man who wears a laurel wreath on his head<sup>19</sup>. The second ring is called Udoba's ring and has an antique stone with

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<sup>15</sup> Reference: RIC 88 – H. Mattingly, E. A. Sydenham, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. 4, III: Gordian III-Uranus Antoninus, London, 1949.

<sup>16</sup> Ştefan Pascu, *Meşteşugurile din Transilvania până în secolul al XVI-lea*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1954, pp. 206-209.

<sup>17</sup> Mertin Henig, *The Re-use and Copying of Ancient Intaglios set in Medieval Personal Seals, mainly found in England: An aspect of the Renaissance of the 12th Century*, in Noël Adams, John Cherry, James Robinson, eds., *Good Impressions: Image an Authority in Medieval Seals*, pp. 26-34. See also: Herbert Bloch, *The New Fascination with Ancient Rome*, in Robert Louis Benson, Giles Constable, Carol D. Lanham (ed.), *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1999, pp. 615-620; Ernst Kitzinger, *The Arts as Aspects of a Renaissance. Rome and Italy*, in Robert Louis Benson, Giles Constable, Carol D. Lanham, eds., *op.cit.*, pp. 645-652; Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1971.

<sup>18</sup> Mertin Henig, *op.cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> Gheorghe Brătianu, *Les bijoux de Curtea de Argeş et leur éléments italiens*, în *Revue Archéologique*, 17, 1923, pp. 94-102; Virgil Drăghiceanu, *Curtea domnească din Argeş*, în *Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice*, X-XVI, 1923, pp. 43- Luminia Dumitriu,

the representation of Hygea and Asclepius, separated by a snake coiled on a staff; around the oval cornelian *intaglio* is inscribed with Cyrillic characters the inscription referring to Udobă as the owner of the ring<sup>20</sup>. During the archeological excavations made in 1956 at the medieval church from Retevoiești village, Argeș County, tomb no. 20 was uncovered, where a fifteenth century gold ring was found, which has as a seal a carnelian *intaglio*, engraved with the representation of the Zeus seated on a throne, holding on his right hand a Nike. Around the base of the high bezel an inscription in Slavonic, reminds the name of the owner: „THIS RING BELONGS TO VLAICU GREAT LOGOTHETE”<sup>21</sup>. In the same church, but in tomb no. 15 another ring made of silver with a Roman gem was found, engraved with the representation of two clasped hands. A signet ring found in a funerary context in Străulești-Măicănești (medieval village, nowadays area of Bucharest), dating from the sixteenth century,<sup>22</sup> is part of the same group of rings. The ring has an antique stone decorated with the image of Jupiter sitting on a throne. The Roman god is accompanied by Mercury, who is giving to Jupiter the *cornucopia*, a richness symbol. The ring also has an inscription in Slavonic which was not yet translated<sup>23</sup>.

Thanks to other archeological researches performed at the Tutana monastery (Argeș County) in 1987, in tomb no. 4 a gold signet ring with an ancient nicolo gem inserted in the bezel was found. The *intaglio* has an octagonal shape and is decorated with an engraved satyr, who has his right hand raised while in his left hand he holds a *pedum*. At his feet is depicted an *oenochoe* type vessel<sup>24</sup>. Another signet ring with an ancient gem was found in the tomb of cup-bearer Radu, found in the medieval church of Buda, Buzău County<sup>25</sup>. The silver gilded ring has in the center of the bezel a red *intaglio*, which is depicting a winged woman with a staff in her hands, most probably a representation of Nike. A very similar ring is preserved in the National Museum of Art of Romania (inventory number 14577/P. 353)<sup>26</sup>. The ring has the same vegetal decoration on the hoop as

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*Der Mittelalterliche Schmuck des Unteren Donaugebietes im 11.-15. Jahrhundert*, București, Tipored srl, 2001, p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> Virgil Drăghiceanu, *op.cit.*, pp. 65-67.

<sup>21</sup> Dorin Popescu, Dinu V. Rosetti, *Săpăturile arheologice de la Retevoiești (r. Curtea de Argeș, reg. Pitești)*, în *Materiale și cercetări arheologice*, VI, 1959, pp. 703-717.

<sup>22</sup> Dorin Popescu, Dinu V. Rosetti, *op.cit.*, p. 711-713; Luminița Dumitriu, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>23</sup> Panait I. Panait, *Șantierul arheologic Băneasa-Străulești*, în *Cercetări Arheologice în București*, vol. II, 1965, pp. 210-212; Luminița Dumitriu, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>24</sup> Spiridon Cristoccea, Carmen Oprescu, *Cercetările arheologice de la mănăstirea Tutana (jud. Argeș) și problema încadrării tipologice a unui nou triconc de la cumpăna veacurilor XIV-XV*, în *Revista muzeelor și monumentelor. Monumente istorice și de artă*, 2, 1988, pp. 45-58.

<sup>25</sup> Virgil Drăghiceanu, *Săpăturile din Buda, Lapoș și Tisău – Buzău*, în *Buletinul Comisiei Monumentelor Istorice*, XXIV, 1931, p. 173.

<sup>26</sup> Item number 423 in the exhibition catalogue *Comori de artă Românească: 2050 de ani*, the National Museum of Art of Romania, București, 1980.

the ring uncovered in the tomb from the church of Buda, while the circular bezel has a cornelian *intaglio*, around the gem and also around the bezel's lower part being written with Cyrillic characters the name and the court position of the holder (This seal [is owned by] *sluger* Mihăilă). It is very important to mention that the stone is in fact reconstituted from two fragments, the upper part illustrating the representation of Athena, while on the lower fragment is engraved the figure of Jupiter or Neptune, but in a less careful style, a fact that suggests that even if the two fragments have a Roman origin, these date from different periods of time<sup>27</sup>.

Between the two World Wars, in the area of Suslănești village, the ruins of a medieval church were found, where 24 tombs dating from the second half of the sixteenth century were preserved. The inventory of tomb no. 2 contained a ring with a Roman *intaglio*, with an almost identical image as the ring uncovered in Răsuceni: an undraped seated character, holding in his left a staff, which is identified by the archeologist who led the excavation as probably being Mercury<sup>28</sup>. In the article dedicated to the excavations performed in Suslănești, Dinu V. Rosetti mentions an example of another similar ring with antique gem, which had probably an inscription, because Dinu V. Rosetti refers to this item as the ring of the lady Preia<sup>29</sup>. At this moment, this is probably the only medieval ring with inscription and antique gem that seems to be used by a woman.

A ring having a similar shape of the bezel as the ring found in the forest area of Răsuceni, but without a stone and it is preserved in the collections of the National Museum of Art of Romania. Unfortunately, the stone was lost, but due to the shape left on the bezel it is very likely that the ring was also decorated with an antique gem<sup>30</sup>. Due to the carved inscription decorated with *niello* we know that „THIS RING WAS MADE BY DUMITRU BAN”. The fine details and the mixture of Balkan and Renaissance elements reveal that the ring was made in a Transylvanian workshop<sup>31</sup>.

It is important to also mention a ring, sadly missing photographs, that is described as having a Roman gem in the exhibition catalogue „Comori de artă românească. 2050 de ani”<sup>32</sup>. Based on an inscription the ring is dated in the fifteenth century and is called „the ring of Opre”. According to the information

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<sup>27</sup> *Arta Țării Românești în secolele XIV-XVI*, exhibition catalogue, the National Museum of Art of Romania, București, 2001, item number 84, p. 172.

<sup>28</sup> Dinu V. Rosetti, *Vestigile feudale de la Suslănești (jud. Argeș)*, în *Buletinul Monumentelor Istorice*, XLI, 1972, p. 34.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 34. The ring was found on the property of George D. Florescu, in Bucharest.

<sup>30</sup> Item number 422 in the exhibition catalogue *Comori de artă Românească: 2050 de ani*, the National Museum of Art of Romania, București, 1980.

<sup>31</sup> *Arta Țării Românești în secolele XIV-XVI*, exhibition catalogue, the National Museum of Art of Romania, București, 2001, item number 83, p. 171.

<sup>32</sup> Item number 421 in the exhibition catalogue. At that moment the ring was kept in custody by the National Museum of Art of Romania.

provided in the catalogue, the ring was found in the necropolis of the Saint Nicholas Church from Șcheii Brașovului, Brașov County.

By analyzing these rings I was able to observe that these rings could highlight some important features of the high class daily life of the Wallachian nobility, which are not yet researched. The literature consulted in order to identify similar artefacts is focused only on the description of the objects and not on the reconstruction of historical details that might help in the understanding process of these centuries.

Given that the rings presented below have some similar characteristics such as the use of an ancient gem and, for the most part, the presence of the inscription with the name of the owner, I consider that these items must be seen as a separated class of rings, which reveal a specific taste for the occidental fashion, through which a revitalization of the antique style was proposed.

These rings all appear to testify that we are generally dealing with a common custom, the wearing of this type by high ranking persons and being dedicated especially for men. This fact proves the importance of creating an identity, in which these small items have an important role, on the one hand due to their authentication function, the signet rings being used in order to seal documents and, on the other hand, due to their intrinsic value. Therefore, these types of rings become a symbol of the wealth and authority of the possessors.

### **Nicula Logothete**

Regarding the inscription carved on the bezel of the ring, it is written with Cyrillic characters and can be transliterated as follows: †SŪPRÁ<sup>1</sup>ENÁSÁ<sup>1</sup>V0 [...] NIKOLĀLŌGofETÁ, and in translation the text means *this ring is made by Nicula logothete*. Although the inscription starts with a cross symbol, the short text ends with the depiction of a winding dragon or snake. Thanks to this inscription we know the name of the owner of the ring, but the name is not enough for the identification of the historical character.

Unfortunately the find context cannot provide any information about the identity of the owner of the ring. Therefore, starting from the *Documenta Romaniae Historica* series B dedicated to Wallachia, I tried to identify the possible logothete whose name was inscribed on this ring. Looking thorough the documents issued during the sixteenth century and published in *DRH*, I was able to find only one Nicula<sup>33</sup> that could help me to construct a working hypothesis. The first document that caught my attention was the document no. 67 from the sixth *DRH* volume, series B<sup>34</sup>, a document issued in 1568 by Prince Petru, in which he is recognizing to Nicula logothete and to his nephew, also named Nicula, who was

<sup>33</sup> Necula or Nicula in the translation of the documents from the *DRH*.

<sup>34</sup> *DRH*, seria B. Țara Românească, volum VI, București, 1985, Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, doc. 67, p. 90.



*ghrammatikós*, their property rights over the Racovița settlement. According to the document they bought this area, part of the Vlașca County during those times, from a man called Mîinea. The second document<sup>35</sup> that I found important is similar with the first one mentioned above, because it is also a document that states the right of property over the area of the Racovița village, of Nicula logothete and of his nephew Nicula, as the inheritant of his uncle's possessions. Therefore, this document was issued in 1575 by Prince Alexandru, in order to clarify the status of the Racovița village that was the subject of a dispute between Nicula logothete and Bratul, a man who was claiming the right of property over this village. As the document says, Nicula was able to bring twelve boyars who gave testimony in favor of Nicula and, in the end, to prove that he is the rightful owner of the village. It is important to mention that the nephew of Nicula logothete appears as grămătic, the person who is writing the official papers, in seven documents issued between the years 1571 and 1575<sup>36</sup>. As a short conclusion, it is clear, thanks to the family affiliation with Nicula grămătic and to the geographical indication that in these two documents Nicula logothete is one and the same person.

The question that rises at this moment is why I found it to be relevant the name of this Nicula logothete and why I do think that it is possible that he could be the owner of the signet ring that is the topic of this short study. The only argument that I could propose in order to find a link between the Nicula named in the documents and the Nicula owner of the ring could be explained through a geographical approach. Therefore, in the geographical dictionary of the Vlașca County, Racovița, the same settlement as the one owned by Nicula logothete mentioned in the documents, is described as belonging to an uninhabited manor, owned at the end of the nineteenth century by Ion Marghiloman and having a surface of 679 hectares<sup>37</sup>. During the last century Racovița was integrated in the territory of Căcaleți commune, but nowadays the medieval Racovița is part of the Gogoșari settlement. It is very important to mention that Răsuceni, the area where the ring was uncovered and Căcaleți (Gogoșari), were part at the beginning of the twenty century of the same territorial subdivision of the Vlașca County, called the Marginea<sup>38</sup> administrative subdivision. Thus, the distance between the two settlements was not that big. As you can see on the map, captured using the Google Earth program, which offers a contemporary satellite view of the Giurgiu County,

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<sup>35</sup> DRH, seria B. Țara Românească, volum VII, București, 1988, Editura Academiei Socialiste România, doc. 209, pp. 278-282.

<sup>36</sup> DRH, seria B. Țara Românească, volumul VII, București, 1988, Editura Academiei Socialiste România, documentele: 10, 28, 105, 166, 186, 192, 215.

<sup>37</sup> P. S. Antonescu-Remusi, *Dicționar geografic al județului Vlașca*, București, Stabilimentul Grafic I. V. Socec, 1890, p. 244.

<sup>38</sup> Ion Boldescu, *Studiu istoric și economic asupra județului Vlașca*, Giurgiu, Bratanescu G., 1900, p. 5.

the distance between Răsuceni and Gogoșari is about 30 kilometers. In this context, considering that Răsuceni is not so far from Racovița and that Nicula logothete was often traveling because of his official position and the administrative and judicial duties attached to it, it might be possible that Răsuceni could have been a point on the road to the princely residence. Following this hypothesis, it can be assumed that the ring was lost by Nicula logothete lord of Racovița or that he was robbed during a trip undertaken between his manor and another important Wallachian city.

### **Conclusions**

My primary concern here was to offer a general description of the ring, in order for this specific signet ring to be known by the specialists who are studying this period or medieval jewelry. But in this brief survey I tried to highlight the importance of this special finding by joining this ring to the list of similar signet rings decorated with ancient gems, uncovered on the territory of Romania, a fact that proved that the signet ring provides equally important evidence about the social status as well as about the political authority of the possessor. In the end, although the finding context cannot provide any information about the owner of the ring, I tried to find a possible link between the Nicula logothete mentioned in a series of sixteenth century documents and the Nicula logothete whose name is inscribed on the bezel of the ring.



