

**Silvia Mustața**

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The Roman Metal Vessels  
from Dacia Porolissensis

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Silvia Mustața

# **The Roman Metal Vessels from Dacia Porolissensis**

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Anthropomorphic bust-shaped vessel from Moigrad/Porolissum  
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Toreutics, the art of metalworking, represents a research area which is increasingly attracting the attention of archaeologists. The toreutical products, especially those belonging to the fine arts, captured the interest of the ones fond of ancient culture ever since before the Renaissance. However, with the exception of the decorative, luxury vessels made of gold, silver, or even bronze, the scholarly interest on metal vessels had a slower start, and it got intensified only during the last century. The metal vessels, mainly those made of copper based alloy, did not come to the attention of the archaeologists before the 1900's. Generally, the archaeological literature refers to the fundamental works of Willers (1901, 1907), of the Scandinavian scholars, such as Ekholm, Norling-Christensen, Klindt-Jensen (3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> decades of the century), of Radnóti (1937, 1938) and especially of Eggers (1951). I believe that from this enumeration (which I have mentioned here just for the sake of exemplifying) an important name has unfortunately gone unnoticed, namely that of Alexandru Odobescu! His concerns for the publication of the Pietroasa hoard led him to a thorough study in the field of the toreutics of metal vessels. In the final publication of the hoard (Paris, 1889–1900), a great number of metal vessels from several European collections has been included and discussed, while being illustrated with high quality drawings. Only in the second half of the past century, under the influence of European archaeology, the attention of the Romanian specialists was directed towards the detailed research of the material culture from the classical Antiquity. I refer mainly to the 'mobile' material which had a secondary role for a long time, and which was mentioned in the publications of the archaeological excavations only illustratively, in the form of catalogues.

It is only the specialization on various categories of small finds that has revealed the great potential of interpretation and of dating, as well as the high quantity of information which can be obtained from the analysis of such objects. Of course, within these categories of material, there are significant differences in the quality and quantity of the information they can provide. Until recently, coins, terra sigillata, brooches or lamps were considered the main sources for the dating of the archaeological contexts. The glass and bone objects, or the bronze vessels (and their fragments) did not use to belong to this pre-eminent category. Yet, the research is advancing in this respect, as well: the detailed investigations carried out both for the glass objects and especially for the metal vessels have been showing a considerable progress.

Starting from the premise that, with respect to such aspects as form, technique and decoration, nothing is produced unchanged for a period of time reaching up to two or three decades, and provided that even the use of objects might change or cease, it became possible for scholars to isolate and confine the stages of such changes. In this way, a typology and a very close dating of whole series of metal vessels from the pre-Roman and Roman period have been achieved.

However, the archaeological research referring to the Roman metal vessels is, unfortunately, not equally developed on the whole territory occupied by the Romans and the adjacent areas.

In the case of Romania such discoveries are only partially known and a synthesis on the topic of the metal vessels discovered until the present times is missing.

One should mention that before the Roman conquest (1<sup>st</sup> century BC – 1<sup>st</sup> century AD) the territory of today's Romania was part of the Barbaricum, and therefore, the vessels (of Roman origin) arrived here as import pieces from the Roman Empire. After the conquest, the vessels discovered on the territory of Roman Dacia (2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD) are not 'imports' anymore (even if they are not local products!), unlike those found outside the Dacian province (in the Barbaricum). The differentiation is important from the point of view of dating and, perhaps, also for determining the time span and the way of usage which might be different within the two aforementioned territories.

Mrs. Silvia Mustățã's doctoral research comprised in this volume represents the fulfilment of this desideratum, as it provides the field of archaeology, and especially that of Romanian archaeology, with a detailed analysis and presentation of the metal vessels from a clearly delimited area, namely that of the former Roman province Dacia Porolissensis. Her initial intention to include in her study an analysis of the whole Roman Dacia proved to be unachievable for several reasons; the huge quantity of material to be processed is just one of them. The intensity and quality of the investigations in this more restricted area proved to be much more efficient as, due to the lack of time, the material from the whole province could not have been thoroughly studied.

The author of the present book realized very early during her scientific activities in the field of Roman archaeology, the importance of studying bronze vessels as a significant source for archaeological research, not only in view of dating and establishing a proper chronology, but also because of the information they can offer regarding the reconstruction of the economical, social and even cultural life in the Roman world and beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. The result of her interest in the field is shown by a series of publications on the topic, culminating in the present volume.

Without insisting more on the necessity of such a study for the Romanian and European archaeology, which otherwise is explained in the introduction by the author, one should emphasize the way she approached the subject. The author aimed to provide an exhaustive examination of this specific material category, starting from the actual state of the art in the field, in Romania. The volume is structured into four main chapters, along with the annexes. Without emphasizing the importance of each chapter separately, there are two specific aspects which highlight the contribution of the present work, compared to the previous studies on the topic:

- the establishment of an **appropriate terminology** in Romanian concerning the bronze vessels, directly linked to the existing terminology in other European languages, finalized in Annexe III, in the form of a comparative terminological table;

- the **exhaustive, monographic analysis** of the topic, extended to the whole Europe. Starting with the ancient sources, and continuing with the production technology, metal alloys and workshops, the produced forms, repairs, the geographical distribution and the chronology etc., the author takes into consideration all the aspects related to the bronze vessels industry from the Roman Empire, and she integrates the vessels from Dacia Porolissensis in this broader context.

Due to its approach, the present volume represents a *Novum*, a pioneering work, not only within the Romanian archaeological research, but also in the field of European archaeology! It is a reference work, which must be taken into account by the future research in the field of Roman metal vessels, both in Europe and in Romania. It will be necessary for further research to follow the model established in the present volume, while analyzing the archaeological discoveries from other areas of Romania (from inside and outside of the Roman province).

I am convinced that this publication, which fulfils a long-awaited desideratum, will be extremely useful for the specialists, and especially for the Romanian archaeologists, as it offers them a recommended model to follow, as well as an adequate terminology.

Speyer, 25 June 2017

Richard Petrovsky