# ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL AND REPORTS

# TOY FRAGMENTS DISCOVERED IN NORTHERN VICUS OF **RĂZBOIENI-CETATE (ALBA COUNTY)**

Abstract: The current paper presents a few Roman toys discovered at Războieni-Cetate; more precisely, we are dealing with two Risi statuettes and fragments from three pull toys. The artefacts were found in civilian, presumably domestic, contexts in the northern part of the vicus and most probably are products of local officinae.

Keywords: Roman toys, military vicus, Risus

The artefacts we are going to present were discovered during the archaeological diagnosis undertaken in 2016 at the site of Războieni-Cetate (Alba County).1 The village is situated on the Transylvanian Plateau, at about 1 km north-west from the bank of the river Mureș.<sup>2</sup> As the river meadow was constantly exposed to flooding, the human habitations from prehistoric times up to the modern age - have been placed on the eight terraces of the riverfront. During the Roman period, here was the garrison of ala I Batavorum milliaria – the only ala milliaria from Dacia. This particular ala is archaeologically attested through inscriptions and an impressive number of stamped tiles. The presence of the military element naturally led to the economic and demographic development of the adjacent civil settlement (or settlements). The variety of artefacts reveals the place's prosperity.

The fragments we are discussing were mostly discovered in the first layer, thus more or less similar to field research finds from the viewpoint of context; the whole area is heavily affected by agriculture, as the interventions can be identified even as deep as 50 cm (these type of ploughing stopped about two decades ago, but its effects are, of course, permanent). The finding spot is situated at about 90 metres north from the north-western corner of the auxiliary fortress (Pl. I - section S1). The region, possibly a production area of the northern vicus, is extremely rich in archaeological finds. Among them, toy fragments - presented here along with others discovered during field research - were found only a couple of metres east of S1.

Toys have always represented a pastime, as well as a way of expressing oneself. It took various forms and it employed various rules, gestures and objects. For the Roman world, toys were very diverse in both terms of function, aspect and employed materials. While the ones made of organic

## George Bounegru

National Museum of the Union, Alba Iulia bounegru\_g\_viziru@yahoo.com

## Rada Varga

Center of Roman Studies, University 'Babes-Bolyai' of Cluj-Napoca radavarga@gmail.com

DOI: 10.14795/j.v4i1.230

ISSN 2360 - 266X ISSN-L 2360 - 266X

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The research team comprised Dr. George Bounegru – the National Museum of the Union, Alba Iulia (excavation supervisor), Dr. Rada Varga, Dr. Imola Boda and Anamaria Stănescu (student) -Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj Napoca.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> For a topographical overview, see POPOVICI/VARGA 2010, 47-58; VARGA 2012, 809-811.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> PETOLESCU 2002, 61-62.

# **Studies**

materials were generally subjected to decay, numerous toys made of bone, metals and clay have survived. The artefacts we are currently discussing are pieces of coroplastic art. The fabrication technique was based on moulds, in which the objects gained form. Subsequently, they were slowly dried in the sun and then burnt in kilns. The more complicated figurines, as the Risi, were made in bivalve moulds, while the simpler ones were pressed onto one valve forms.

#### RISI

The Risus is a type of toy quite common in Dacia,4 especially for the Apulum area. In Apulum, from the first archaeological researches undertaken at the end of the 19th century by Adalbert Cserni, a series of terracotta fragments, representing a physically atypical individual type (big ears, flat nose, big eyes with prominent eye lids) were discovered. The face of the character suggested the artefacts were meant to stir up laughter - and thus they were called Risi (singular Risus). E. Tudot, one of the first researchers to deal with them at the scale of the Empire and the one who named them after their seemingly happy faces, considered them unknown representations, correlated with popular beliefs and quasireligious purposes.<sup>5</sup> Today, we consider these terracotta figurines to have been toys, possibly preserving some of their initial magical valences. Recently, S. Talvas<sup>6</sup> dealt with Gallo-Roman terracottas and discussed Risi as well. Although slightly different from the Dacian representations, they nonetheless have similar attributes and were also discovered in various contexts. In Dacia, one must note, the figurines were discovered in all types of contexts: funerary, domestic, cultic<sup>7</sup> and workshops.<sup>8</sup>

The collections of the National Museum of the Union in Alba Iulia comprise circa 30 such objects, most of them in a fragmentary state. 9 They generally belonged to either the old museum or private collections and have an unknown place of discovery. The ones discovered more recently come from the XIII Gemina canabae/Municipium Septimium Apulensis -7 pieces, Municipium/Colonia Aurelia Apulensis – 1 piece and funerary contexts – 7 pieces.

The artefacts from Războieni<sup>10</sup> are a complete figurine (Pl. IIa) and the face of a Risus character, with few anatomical elements still visible due to deterioration (Pl. IIb). The first one<sup>11</sup> is a complete terracotta statuette, with an orifice on the lower side; the Risi are generally hollow: they might have contained beads, thus serving as rattles. Our character is represented wearing a lunula. The second object of the category is much more deteriorated, but, nonetheless, one can still see the ears, the chin and parts of the mouth and

Risi were discovered at Apulum, Napoca, Sucidava, Potaissa, Drobeta (UNGUREAN 2008, 48-49; BEU-DACHIN 2010).

- TUDOT 1860, pl. 49, 55.
- <sup>6</sup> TALVAS 2007, 35.

- The largest part of collection (29 artefacts) was published in ANGHEL/ OTA/BOUNEGRU/LASCU 2011, 67-80. Besides these, in 2013 a fragmentary brain pan, coming from the same type of figurine.
- They are included in the collection of the local history teacher, Pantilimon Popovici, to whom we thank for his continuous support.
- <sup>11</sup> POPOVICI/VARGA 2010, 86; VARGA 2012, 816-817.

cheeks. Formally, our artefact is from the same category as the ones from Apulum and from Dacia: child bust, with exaggerated physiognomy, wearing a torques-type necklace with a lunula.

Another interesting artefact of the same category was discovered in a child inhumation grave from the flat necropolis of Sucidava. 12 D. Bondoc republished it along with other ceramic figurines, presumably discovered by D. Tudor, 13 but we are obviously dealing with two different artefacts. The one discovered by D. Tudor in a cist tomb made of tegulae, along with 3 pitchers, has a lunula around the neck and clearly represents a child's bust. The one presented by D. Bondoc is different. If the latter truly comes from Sucidava as well, then there, as well as at Apulum, we encounter different types of representations. Besides artefacts from the two mentioned sites, a toy from the same category is held at the Museum of Aiud (provenance unknown, but most probably from the area around Apulum).14

#### **PULL TOYS**

Coroplastic artefacts involving animals and/or an equestrian representation are habitually more complex. The latter were usually made in double moulds, one representing the horse and one the rider; the two pieces were glued together after being extracted from the mould and were subsequently burnt together. 15 The wheels were made separately as well, in simple single-faced moulds and were attached to the toys after burning, along with the spindles (probably made of thin wooden sticks or reed).

In 2016, we discovered two wheel fragments<sup>16</sup> and a fragment of the horse's croup, where the spindle was attached. For this toy, a good analogy might be represented by a pull toy discovered at Apulum, 17 which represents an equestrian figure holding a shield in his left hand and the reins with his right. The wheels were attached to the horse through two lateral perforations. An identical perforation was found in the area of the muzzle, serving for attaching a rope by which the toy could be pulled. As described above, the artefact was made in a bivalve mould.

For Dacia, some pull toys were published, but Apulum is the only site with a comprehensive catalogue (which also documents the artefacts from Ampelum).<sup>18</sup> Based on the existing parts and analogies, the pottery restoration laboratory of the National Museum of Unification reconstructed such a toy in a proportion of 90%, the only part lacking being the figure of the individual (Pl. IVb). Besides this reconstructed artefact, up until now other 14 fragments of pull toys have been discovered in Apulum, representing parts of the horse, rider, wheels, etc. From among these, 5 are horses' heads, 2 are croup fragments with the perforation for the spindle, 2 are parts of the rider's bust and 5 are wheel segments. 19 Another two wheel fragments

- <sup>12</sup> BONDOC 2005, 56.
- <sup>13</sup> TUDOR 1978, 106, fig 32/4, 408, fig 123.
- $^{\rm 14}$   $\,$  Information from Mr. Paul Scrobotă.
- ANGHEL 2010, 532.
- Theoretically, it is possible that one of the wheels comes from a domestic object; with this note of caution, we opted for including the piece in the current article.
- ANGHEL/OTA/BOUNEGRU/LASCU 2011, 109.
- <sup>18</sup> ANGHEL/OTA/BOUNEGRU/LASCU 2011.
- <sup>19</sup> As far as we know, more terracotta fragments were lately discovered in

As far as we are aware, Apulum is the only place where we can affirm that we are dealing with a religious, non-funerary, context (DIACONESCU/ HAYNES/SCHAFER 2005, 38-45; ANTAL, 2016, 5).

coming from Ampelum are kept in the collections of the same museum. Besides these fragments, a similar artefact from Sucidava is also known.<sup>20</sup> The differences between the Sucidava toy and the reconstruction from Apulum lie in the character's garments, as well as in the fact that the former presents a rider, while the latter - a chariot driver. Even so, we have two types of the same large category of pull toys. Another interesting fragment comes from Romula:21 here we have two clay horses' heads and an entire horse, made in a bivalve mould, with the orifices for the spindles visible. These artefacts are quite common all over the Empire: in Moesia Superior, at Viminacium, such a toy was discovered, along with a guttus, in a child's grave.<sup>22</sup>

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

Even if fragmentary, the artefacts discovered at Războieni-Cetate bring forth information regarding the spreading of these toys in Roman Dacia. The abundance of pottery shreds, moulds and waste clearly indicates the existence of local workshops, some of which were surely specialized in coroplastic as well. Consequently, we can assume that the toys we found might be results of the local production. Without representing extraordinary discoveries, these toys reveal part of the local everyday life and help us in reconstructing of the military vicus' general image.

#### **CATALOGUE**

- 1. Human figurine. Made of clay, in a bivalve mould. It has an orifice on the lower side and is hollow. Dimensions: height – 12 cm; diameter – max. 7 cm. Pl. IIa.
- 2. Human head. Made of clay, in a mould, with the lateral joining line visible. The centre of the face and the left ear are badly deteriorated. Dimensions: 5.1 x 4 cm. Pl. IIb.
- 3. Chariot wheel. Made of clay, fine fabric, pressed in a simple mould. Three spokes are visible, as well as a part of the exterior frame and the hub. The conserved part represents about 25% of the wheel. Dimensions: radius – 3.6 cm. Pl. IIIa.
- 4. Chariot wheel. Made of clay, pressed in a simple mould. The pressing was made on a plank, whose traces are visible on the artefact. The conserved part represents about 40% of the wheel. Dimensions: radius – 2.2 cm. Pl. IIIb.
- 5. Fragment of a horse's croup. Made in a mould. The perforation for inserting the spindle in visible. Dimensions: 5.9 x 3.8 cm. Pl. IIIc.

### REFERENCES

ANGHEL 2010

Anghel, D., Restaurarea unor figurine ceramice din epoca romană aflate în colecția Muzeului Național al Unirii, Alba Iulia, Apulum 47, 525-536.

ANTAL 2016

Antal, A., Risus, Cucullatus, Venus. Divine Protectors and Protective Divinities of childhood in Dacia and Pannonia, Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Seria Historia 61/1, 1-14.

Apulum, but they are still unpublished.

#### **BEU-DACHIN 2010**

Beu-Dachin, E., Figurină de teracotă reprezentând bustul unui copil. In: Glodariu, I./Gheorghiu, G. (eds.): Studii de istorie și arheologie. Omagiu cercetătorului Dr. Eugen Iaroslavschi (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut), 237-250.

#### BONDOC 2005

Bondoc, D., Figurine ceramice romane. Muzeul Olteniei Craiova (Craiova: Sitech).

#### BONDOC/DINCĂ 2005

D. Bondoc, D.-R. Dincă, Roman moulds and figurines of ceramic from the ceramic centre from Romula. The Museum from Caracal, Craiova, 2005.

#### ANGHEL/OTA/BOUNEGRU/LASCU 2011

Anghel, D./Ota, R./Bounegru, G./Lascu, I., Coroplastica, medalioane și tipare ceramice din colecțiile Muzeului Național al Unirii Alba Iulia (Alba Iulia).

#### DIACONESCU/HAYNES/SCHAFER 2005

Diaconescu, A./Haynes, I./Schafer, A., Apulum: the shrine of Liber Pater, Current World Archaeology 10, 2005, 38-45.

#### **GUDEA 1996**

Gudea, N., Porolissum 2, Vama romană: monografie arheologică; contribuții la cunoașterea sistemului vamal din provinciile dacice (Zalău).

#### KORAĆ/GOLUBOVIĆ 2009

M. Korać, S. Golubović, Viminacium. Više grobalja (Beograd: Arheološki institut Beograd).

#### PETOLESCU 2002

Petolescu, C. C., Auxilia Daciae (București: Ars docendi).

#### POPOVICI/VARGA, 2010

Popovici, P./Varga, R., Ad Vatabos. Monografie arheologică a localității Războieni-Cetate (Cluj-Napoca: Mega).

#### TALVAS 2007

S. Talvas, Recherches sur les figurines en Terre cuite galloromaines en contexte Archéologique. (Toulouse: PhD. Thesis manuscript. Université de Toulouse II - Le Mirail).

#### **TUDOR 1978**

D. Tudor, Oltenia Romană (București: Ed. Acad. R.S. România).

#### **TUDOT 1860**

Tudot, E., Collection de figurines en argile: Oeuvres premieres de l'art gaulois avec les noms des ceramistes qui les ont executes (Paris: C. Rollin).

#### **UNGUREAN 2008**

Ungurean, O., Teracote figurate in Dacia Romană (Cluj-Napoca: PhD. Thesis manuscript).

#### VARGA 2012

Varga, R., Pre-excavation research at the site of Ala I Batavorum (Dacia). In: W. Börner, Uhlritz, S./Dollhofer, L. (eds.), International Conference on Cultural Heritage and New Technologies, November 14-16, 2011. Proceedings (Wien: Museen der Stadt Wien - Stadtarchäologie), 806-820.

GUDEA 1996, 186, fig. 46A.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> BONDOC/DINCĂ 2005, 59-62.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> KORAĆ/GOLUBOVIĆ 2009, 247.

# Studies



**Plate I**. Plan of the auxiliary fort (red) and trench S1 (yellow). The trench sizes 8 x 2 m (http://geoportal.ancpi.ro/geoportal/imobile/Harta.html; Topografic measurements by George Cupcea)



Plate II. risi – a-b) Războieni; c) Apulum (apud ANGHEL/OTA/BOUNEGRU/LASCU 2011, 86)



**Plate III.** Wheel fragments (a, b) and fragmentary croup of toy horse (c).

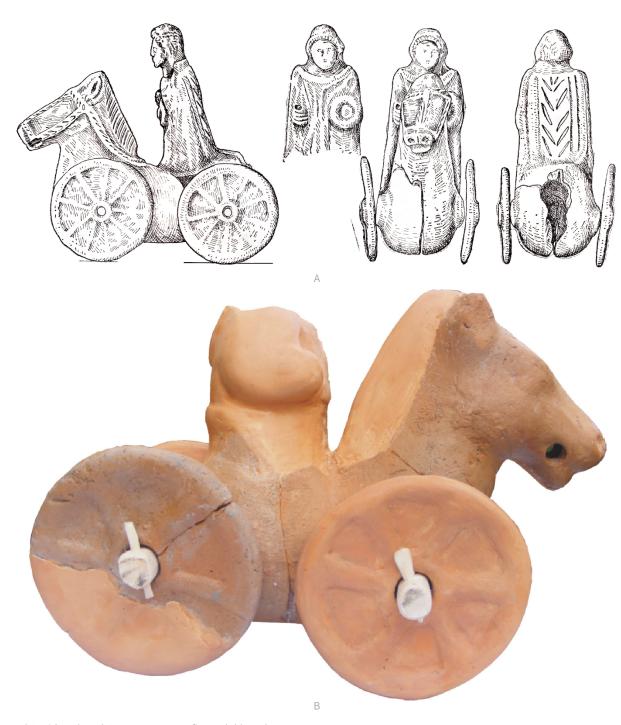


Plate IV. a) Sucidava (apud GUDEA 1996, 186, fig. 46a); b) Apulum.