

THE ROMAN REPUBLICAN HELMET FROM SISAK

The Archaeological Museum in Zagreb holds in its collections an odd Roman helmet discovered in the close vicinity of Sisak, known as Siscia in Roman times and as Segestica during the Iron Age. The helmet may be identified as an Etruscan-Italic type helmet which had been subjected to makeshift repairs. It appears to be a later model which could be approximately dated to the end of the 2nd and the first decades of the 1st century B.C.

Since no Roman military campaign took place in the region of Segestica during that period, we may conjecture that the helmet was either used by local warriors who captured it as war booty outside of Pannonia, or that it was used by Octavian's troops during the siege of Segestica in 35 B.C., either by an auxiliary who adapted an older piece of Roman equipment to suit his own needs, or perhaps by a newly recruited legionary who was given older gear due to lack of adequate up-to-date equipment.

Key words: Roman Republican military equipment, Etruscan-Italic type helmet, Segestica / *Ključne riječi: rimska republikanska vojna oprema, etrušćansko-italski tip kacige, Segestika*

The Archaeological Museum in Zagreb holds a fairly large collection of Roman helmets, consisting of 12 specimens, mostly well preserved, as well as an element of a parade helmet, namely a face mask. The latter and 10 of the helmets were found in Pannonia,¹ and as many as 5 of them were found in Sisak/Siscia or its close vicinity.

Among the finds from Siscia is one of the two likely oldest Roman helmets in the Museum holdings² (**Pl. 1; Figs. 1–7**). It was dredged out of the Kupa near Sisak between the two world wars and given to the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb. The height of the bowl without the decorative knob is 15,6 cm, the diameter is 19,5 x 22 cm, whereas the thickness of the bowl hardly ever exceeds 1 mm.

1 Hoffiller 1911: 177–194; Hoffiller 1937: 29–32; Radman-Livaja 2001a: 46–53, 56–59; Radman-Livaja 2004: 65–75. One helmet was discovered somewhere in southern Italy during the 19th century, while the exact findspot of a cavalry helmet is not known but it is surmised that it was found in Bosnia: Hoffiller 1911: 191, fig. 27 (Bosnia), 193, fig. 28 (Italy).

2 Hoffiller 1937: 29; Radman-Livaja 2004: 65.



Fig. 1. Helmet from Sisak (photo: Igor Krajcar) / *Sl. 1. Kaciga iz Siska (foto: Igor Krajcar)*



Fig. 2. Helmet from Sisak (photo: Igor Krajcar) / *Sl. 2. Kaciga iz Siska (foto: Igor Krajcar)*



Fig. 3. Helmet from Sisak (photo: Igor Krajcjar) / Sl. 3. Kaciga iz Siska (foto: Igor Krajcjar)



Fig. 4. Helmet from Sisak (photo: Igor Krajcjar) / Sl. 4. Kaciga iz Siska (foto: Igor Krajcjar)



Fig. 5. Helmet from Sisak (photo: Igor Krajcar) / *Sl. 5. Kaciga iz Siska (foto: Igor Krajcar)*



Fig. 6. Helmet from Sisak (photo: Igor Krajcar) / *Sl. 6. Kaciga iz Siska (foto: Igor Krajcar)*



Fig. 7. Helmet from Sisak (photo: Igor Krajcar) / Sl. 7. Kaciga iz Siska (foto: Igor Krajcar)

While its shape – i.e a rounded conical bowl terminating at the top with what might be described as a crest-knob, a slightly thickened rim at the base of the bowl, drawn out at the rear to form a small sloping and projecting neck-guard – unquestionably resembles the helmets of the Etruscan-Italic type³ (also known as the Montefortino type according to Robinson⁴, Paddock⁵ and Junkelmann⁶, or as conical helmets with a crest knob⁷), it differs from those in several rather significant details. For instance, the rim at the base of the bowl forming the small neck-guard does not appear to have been decorated, except for two incised parallel lines encircling the rim. This is rather unusual, punched patterns being apparently the norm on later specimens of the Etruscan-Italic helmets.⁸ Even more significantly, the decorative fitting on the top was not cast together in one piece with the helmet (as usual with helmets of that type), but was subsequently soldered to it. This detail may tempt us to consider that it could have been a Celtic bronze helmet, of the type manufactured in northern Italy during the La Tène B and C periods, subsequently used as a model for the Etruscan-Italian helmets.⁹ However, the crest knobs of Celtic bronze helmets were riveted, which does not appear to be the case with this specimen from Sisak.¹⁰ In addition, the fact that finds of similarly shaped

3 Schaaff 1981: 217–221; Schaaff 1988a: 318–322; Waurick 1990: 9–13; Feugère 1993: 83–84; Feugère 1994: 37–41; Poux 2008: 341–342; Pernet 2010: 72–75; Feugère 2011: 46–52; Istenič 2018: 278–289, 298–299; Istenič 2019: 88–90.

4 More precisely his Montefortino B type, Russell Robinson 1975: 13–18.

5 Paddock 1993: 469–639.

6 Junkelmann 2000: 52–62, Etruscan-Italic helmets correspond to his Montefortino/Canosa, Montefortino/Cremona and Montefortino/Rieti subtypes

7 Konische Helme mit Scheitelknauf, as suggested by Ortisi 2015: 27.

8 Schaaff 1988a: 318–322; Junkelmann 2000: 60–62; Pernet 2010: 74; Istenič 2018: 284, 288–289, 298–299.

9 Schaaff 1988b: 315–317; Feugère 1993: 83; Feugère 1994: 61; Feugère 2011: 62–71.

10 A riveted construction was presumed when the helmet was published, but a recent restoration showed that no rivet is to be seen and it clearly appears that the decorative fitting was soldered to the bowl.

Celtic bronze helmets are mostly limited to the territory of Northern Italy and the western Alps¹¹ would not speak in favour of Celtic attribution of our specimen. The campaniform decorative fitting itself finds no parallels with either the Celtic or Italian specimens, which adds another difficulty to the analysis of this helmet (**Figs. 8–9**).



Fig. 8. Decorative fitting of the helmet (photo: Igor Krajcar) / Sl. 8. Ukrasni nastavak kacige (foto: Igor Krajcar)



Fig. 9. Decorative fitting of the helmet (photo: Igor Krajcar) / Sl. 9. Ukrasni nastavak kacige (foto: Igor Krajcar)

¹¹ Schaaff 1988b: 315-317; Feugère 1994: 61, 65; Feugère 2011: 67–68, 71.

It should be mentioned that we know of Roman helmets with a decorative fitting that was subsequently soldered to the dome, dated to the beginning and the first half of the 1st century B.C.¹² However, in spite of this simplified production method, their decorative fittings do not look different in the least from the usual conical form. Interestingly, the Sisak helmet fitting is of a rather crude manufacture, as if it were a later add-on, seemingly a makeshift repair, perhaps done in the field, conceivably by the owner of the helmet himself and not an original part of the helmet, fashioned within the manufacturing process in the production facilities. Presumably, the original crest knob was broken and replaced by this clumsy fitting. The restoration process showed that this fitting had been soldered,¹³ and traces of lead (and presumably tin) are clearly discernible around the base of the decorative fitting (**Fig. 10**).



Fig. 10. Traces of lead around the base of the decorative fitting (photo: Igor Krajcar) /
Sl. 10. Tragovi olova ispod ukrasnog nastavka (foto: Igor Krajcar)

Furthermore, it would appear that the helmet bowl suffered a strong blow to the top and that the damage had been repaired with lead or tin-lead alloy. It appears thus likely that the original crest knob had been broken at the same occasion and was replaced during the subsequent repair.

In any case, a more thorough observation shows clearly that the shape of the bowl and the neck-guard is far more reminiscent of the later Republican models dated to the

¹² Paddock 1985: 145, fig. IVb; Paddock 1993: 491.

¹³ No analysis had been done yet, but we may presume that this is lead-tin soldering; see Istenič 2019: 177-179, 200.

2nd and the early 1st century B.C. than of the earlier Celtic helmets.¹⁴ It should be pointed out that one may perhaps discern traces of an inscription executed in *pointillé* work situated near the interior apex (**Fig. 11**). It might have been an owner's mark, but the spot is rather unusual since linings were most likely glued into the helmets of this type: if this really is an inscription, it should rather be interpreted as a maker's mark.¹⁵



Fig. 11. Possible traces of an inscription inside the helmet (photo: Igor Krajcar) /
Sl. 11. Mogući tragovi natpisa unutar kacige (foto: Igor Krajcar)

Unfortunately, the state of preservation prevents any undisputable reading: two or three letters might be there, the first could perhaps be a P, while the rest defies meaningful interpretation.

Other noteworthy features of this helmet are the rather thin metal sheet and simple workmanship. It is far from being heavy either, since it weighs only 450 g.¹⁶ When one looks to the inside of the helmet, traces of spinning appear rather clearly.¹⁷ (**Fig. 12**).

14 Cf. Russell Robinson 1975: 19, Plate 9 (British Museum); Schaaff 1988a: 321, Abb. 4 (Forum Novum near Rieti); Paddock 1993: 516–517.

15 Paddock 1993: 491–492.

16 For instance, the two Etruscan-Italic helmets from Sv. Anton and Grad near Krn, dated by J. Istenič to the late 2nd and early 1st century B.C., weigh respectively 916 and 746 g; see Istenič 2018: 284. The helmet found in the Ljubljana river at Blatna Brezovica weighs 1182 g, see Istenič 2019: 316. The three helmets classified as the Montefortino/Rieti subtype by M. Junkelmann in his catalogue of the Axel Guttman collection (AG 597, AG 266 and AG 310), dated to the second half of the 2nd and the first half of the 1st century BC weigh respectively 984, 680 and 960 g, see Junkelmann 2000: 111-115.

17 Paddock 1985: 146–147; Paddock 1993: 71–75, 492–493.



Fig. 12. Traces of spinning (photo: Igor Krajcar) / Sl. 12. Tragovi izrade na rotirajućem kalupu na kolu (foto: Igor Krajcar)

Such manufacturing features may point to a period of increased demand, when both speed of production and rapid delivery of a large number of helmets to the troops were of utmost importance. If we stand to a Republican dating of this helmet – which in any case seems more than highly probable – Marius' time, or more precisely the period of his military reforms which took place by the end of the 2nd century B.C., during his war in Numidia and his campaigns against the Cimbri and Teutones, might represent the starting point for the manufacture of such helmets. The very end of the 2nd century B.C. likely could have been the time when such simple helmets, produced without any elaborate workmanship, were first produced in order to be delivered to new recruits who were supposed to be equipped by the state and who were not expected to provide their own equipment as was the case with legionaries before Marian reforms.¹⁸ It should also be pointed out that spinning was likely adopted as a manufacturing technique for this type of helmet by the end of the 2nd century B.C. The Sisak helmet corresponds rather well to the Montefortino type VIII, as defined by John Paddock. It must have been made originally in one piece, it has a bulbous bowl with near vertical slides, and the bowl slopes at the top into a flattened apex, while a small deep sloping neck guard is drawn out at the rear of the bowl. The bottom edge is only slightly thickened while the decoration consists only of two incised parallel lines encircling the rim. The cheek-pieces were not preserved

¹⁸ It is nonetheless quite likely that the state had already started equipping soldiers at public expense in the course of the 2nd century B.C., at least partially but the exact extent of those measures, i.e. the number of soldiers being equipped at state expense is difficult to gauge. Presumably, Marius only officialised this practice and extended it to all servicemen; Gabba 1976: 9–37; Paddock 1985: 145; de Blois 1987: 11–13; Bishop, Coulston 2006: 65; D'Amato 2009: 33–34.

but the hinges were attached by two rivets. Paddock dates this type to the late 2nd century B.C. and presumes that it could have been used as late as the Augustan period.¹⁹

The dating of the Sisak helmet is in fact not really contentious: taking into account all the aforementioned bibliographical references, it can be dated with a rather high level of certainty to the late 2nd or to the first decades of the 1st century B.C. at the latest. Obviously, the time of manufacture does not equate the period of use. A helmet, if well maintained, could have been in use for many years, and a helmet such as this one, perhaps manufactured in Marius' and Sulla's time, could have been carried decades later. Although it is not unlikely that helmets such as this specimen from Sisak could have been encountered among Caesar's legionaries, by then it must have already been superseded by other models. Most authors agree that the production of late Etruscan-Italic helmets ceased during the 1st quarter of the 1st century B.C., but it is not quite certain which type replaced it. Many scholars believe that Coolus-Mannheim type helmets were used by Roman soldiers during the Gallic wars, but the assumption that this was a Roman helmet, i.e. a helmet manufactured in Italian workshops, is still a matter of debate. It might be safer to assume that it was a Celtic, i.e. Gaulish production which was likely adopted and used by Caesar's troops to a certain extent, presumably more by auxiliaries than by legionaries.²⁰ By the mid-1st century B.C., the Buggenum type helmets most certainly started to be distributed to troops on a large scale and this could probably be the type whose production followed the Etruscan-Italic helmets in Italian manufacturing centres.²¹

Since our helmet was found in Pannonia, more precisely in the close vicinity of Segestica, we have to ask ourselves how it could have ended up there and at what time. As a matter of fact, we know the chronological timeframe – such a helmet could have been in use from the end of the 2nd century B.C. till the mid 1st century B.C., possibly even few decades longer – and by relying on the historical context and the data offered by the written sources we may try to establish, with more or less confidence, a credible background to this interesting discovery.

The first time Romans ventured deep in the Adriatic hinterland and reached Segestica must have been in the mid-2nd century B.C., in 159 or 156 B.C., the latter being the likelier date.²² As far as our helmet is concerned, it is certainly way too early since such helmets were not in production at that time. The territory of Segestica's neighbours, the Iapodes, came under the attack of a Roman army led by the consul Gaius Sempronius Tuditanus in 129 B.C. Some scholars presume that the Romans could have reached Segestica at the same occasion, but even if this hypothesis is correct – and it is a matter of discussion – the date still seems too early for our helmet.²³

Could the earliest possible date be the attack on Segestica in 119 B.C.? While the sources do not describe the event in much detail, there is no doubt that an army led by the consul Lucius Aurelius Cotta invested the city, although we do not know if the

19 Paddock 1993: 516–517.

20 Russell Robinson 1975: 26, 29; Schaaff 1988a: 322–324; Waurick 1990: 9–13; Feugère 1994: 41–47; Junkelmann 2000: 66; Bishop, Coulston 2006: 65; Poux 2008: 341–342; Pernet 2010: 74–75, 116–123; Feugère 2011: 52–53.

21 Schaaff 1988a: 325–326; Waurick 1990: 12–31; Feugère 1994: 47–50; Junkelmann 2000: 62–63; Poux 2008: 342–343; Pernet 2010: 75; Feugère 2011: 52–56, 94–96; Ortisi 2015: 27–28.

22 Zippel 1877: 135; Mócsy 1962: 527–528; Mócsy 1974: 12, 22, 32; Šašel 1974: 731; Hoti 1992: 135; Radman-Livaja 2004: 15–16; Šašel Kos 2005: 302–303; Domić Kunić 2006: 85–88; Dzino 2010: 731; Radman-Livaja 2010: 179; Radman-Livaja 2012: 159; Džino, Domić Kunić 2013: 105–106; Šašel-Kos 2013: 184–185; Zaninović 2015: 322–323.

23 Klemenc 1963: 55; Wilkes 1969: 32–33; Zaninović 1986: 60; Hoti 1992: 135; Wilkes 1992: 200; Radman-Livaja 2004: 16; Domić Kunić 2006: 89; Dzino 2010: 69–71; Radman-Livaja 2012: 159–161; Džino, Domić Kunić 2013: 100–102; Šašel-Kos 2013: 187; Radman-Livaja 2014: 136; Zaninović 2015: 335, 343–349; Radman-Livaja 2017: 169.

siege was successful.²⁴ As far as our helmet is concerned, we can hardly claim that it was lost on that occasion. This siege predates Marian reforms and we may rightly question the likelihood that the production of simpler and cheaper helmets started more than a decade earlier before Marius engaged in his recruitment reform. Presumably, one could have manufactured cheaper equipment even before the recruitment policy was relaxed, since impoverished soldiers might have been looking for less expensive gear in the years preceding Marius' election as consul, but such a hypothesis remains in the realm of mere conjecture. I would not necessarily exclude the possibility that this helmet may be connected to the siege of 119 B.C., but it is a highly hypothetical suggestion. What about the period when such helmets were most likely in use? Unfortunately, information provided by the sources about what had been going on between Romans and Pannonians is very scant as far as the first half of the 1st century B.C. is concerned. There is a very conjectural assumption that the Romans may have attacked Segestica in 83 B.C.²⁵ This date would perfectly fit the dating of the helmet but it is not based on concrete arguments. While there could have been some Roman military activity in Liburnia in 84 B.C., nothing proves that Romans advanced into the hinterland, and certainly not all the way to Segestica.²⁶ Military operations against the Iapodes could have occurred perhaps around 78–76 B.C.,²⁷ depending on how we interpret two obscure passages of Sallust (*Hist.* 2. 38) and Frontinus (*Strat.* 2.5, 28). Sallust vaguely refers to a campaign against the Iapodes, likely in the seventies, while Frontinus mentions a certain proconsul Publius Licinius, ambushed by the Iapodes. Regrettably, no one knows for sure who this man was and when this battle took place, although it is likely that Sallust and Frontinus may be referring to the same campaign, which could perhaps be linked to operations further south, against the Delmatae, conducted by the proconsul Caius Cosconius between 78 and 76 B.C.²⁸ Be it as it may, even if this campaign really took place in the seventies – which does not appear utterly improbable – there is no mention of Segestica whatsoever, and nothing implies that the Romans may have campaigned against the northern neighbours of the Iapodes on that occasion.

The last Roman venture against Segestica was in 35 B.C., when Octavian set off with a large army to conquer the hinterland of western Illyricum. This campaign, as well as the siege, is much better documented than the previous conflicts,²⁹ but we may wonder if this type of helmet could have been still in use some 35 or 40 years after production

24 Wilkes 1969: 33; Morgan 1971: 271–301; Mócsy 1974: 13, 22; Zaninović 1986: 59–60; Hoti 1992: 135; Radman-Livaja 2004: 16; Šašel Kos 2005: 307–311; Domić Kunić 2006: 89–90; Dzino 2010: 72–73; Radman-Livaja 2010: 180; Radman-Livaja 2012: 161; Džino, Domić Kunić 2013: 102; Šašel-Kos 2013: 187; Zaninović 2015: 348–352.

25 Klemenc 1963: 55.

26 Wilkes 1969: 34–35; Dzino 2010: 73–74; Seager 1992: 184–185; Džino, Domić Kunić 2013: 104, 110–111.

27 Wilkes 1969: 35; Dzino 2010: 74; Radman-Livaja 2012: 161; Radman-Livaja 2014: 140; Radman-Livaja 2017: 170–171.

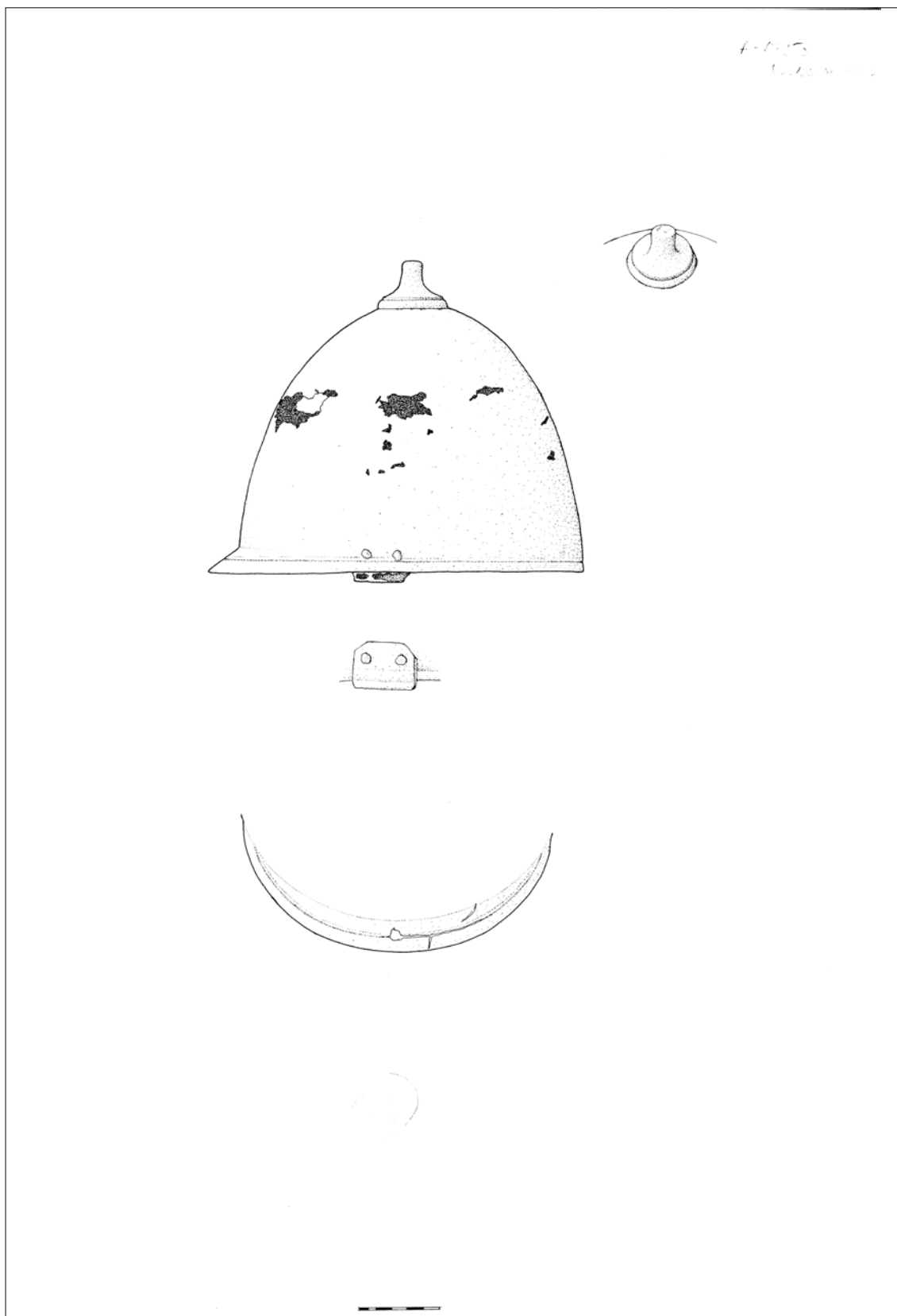
28 Eutropius, VI, 4; Orosius, *Historiae* V, 23, 23; Wilkes 1969: 35; Bojanovski 1988: 39; Šašel-Kos 2004: 158–159; Šašel Kos 2005: 311–313; Dzino 2010: 67–68, 74; Džino, Domić Kunić 2013: 110–112; Radman-Livaja 2014: 140; Zaninović 2015: 359.

29 Veith 1914: 17–58; Swoboda 1932: 3–29; Josifović 1956: 138–144; Mócsy 1962: 538–539; Wilkes 1969: 50–53; Mocsy 1974: 21–23; Šašel 1974: 732; Barkóczy 1980: 87–90; Šašel Kos 1986: 134–142; Zaninović 1986: 62–63; Nenadić 1987: 73; Nagy 1991: 61–64; Hoti 1992: 136–138; Wilkes 1992: 206; Šašel Kos 1997: 187–196; Šašel Kos 1999: 255–263; Radman-Livaja 2001b: 132–135; Radman-Livaja 2004: 16–17; Šašel Kos 2005: 393–442; Domić Kunić 2006: 91–100; Radman-Livaja 2007: 161–162; Dzino 2010: 101–111; Radman-Livaja 2010: 182; Radman-Livaja 2012: 161–162; Džino, Domić Kunić 2013: 148–157; Šašel Kos 2013: 187–193; Goldsworthy 2014: 174–178; Radman-Livaja 2014: 140–146; Zaninović 2015: 407–426; Kovács 2014: 24–26; Radman-Livaja 2015: 28–30; Radman-Livaja 2017: 171–176; Domić Kunić 2018: 34–40; Šašel Kos 2018: 41–44; Radman-Livaja, Vukelić 2018: 408–413; Radman-Livaja, Drnić 2020: 183.

ceased. It is not utterly impossible, Octavian had a large army to equip and older gear might have been used as well, but this assumption is impossible to substantiate with concrete evidence. In any case, I believe it to be the last moment when such a helmet as our specimen might have plausibly been carried by Roman soldiers, although it would have been quite an odd piece of gear, seldom encountered among the troops, equipping perhaps only the last levies for which no better or more modern equipment could be spared. Nevertheless, however archaic or peculiar it might have looked, it would have served its purpose just like any Buggenum or Coolus-Mannheim helmet, and there is no reason to believe that the Romans would have discarded it only because it was old fashioned, as long as it was in good shape and adequate for the task. Nonetheless, linking this helmet to the siege of Segestica, or more precisely to Octavian's troops besieging Segestica, is admittedly rather conjectural. Hoffiller, who published it first, did not doubt that this particular helmet was Roman but since we lack a defined archaeological context, the proposed interpretation is to be taken with caution. I do not doubt either that this helmet was of Roman manufacture, but the question of the helmet attribution may be open to discussion. Since we lack evidence for Segestica being the target of Roman campaigns during the likely period of use of such helmets in the Roman army, i.e. at the end of the 2nd century and in the first half of the 1st century BC, the possibility that it may have been used by local warriors is perhaps not to be excluded.

This might explain the makeshift crest fitting, but it still does not imply that the helmet could have been made in Segestica or elsewhere in Pannonia. It could simply have been war booty, taken from the Romans, presumably decades before the siege of Segestica, and subsequently repaired and/or modified. As such, it could have stayed in use far longer than intended by its original users and it might indeed have witnessed Octavian's siege of Segestica in 35 B.C., but not on the head of a legionary. Lastly, the helmet may have been worn during the 1st century B.C. by a Roman auxiliary, who recycled and adapted an older piece of Roman equipment for his own needs. If so, it may have reached Segestica in 35 B.C. as well, but again, not as part of a legionary's equipment.

The archaeological research in and around modern Sisak still has to provide answers to many questions surrounding the past of Segestica and we may wonder if one day more clues about this particular helmet will be discovered.



Pl. 1. Helmet from Sisak (drawing: Miljenka Galić) / T. 1. Kaciĝa iz Siska (crteĝ: Miljenka Galić)

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SAŽETAK

Rimska republikanska kaciga iz Siska

Arheološki muzej u Zagrebu u svojoj zbirci čuva neobičnu rimsku kacigu otkrivenu u neposrednoj blizini Siska. Kaciga tipološki odgovara kacigama etruščansko-italskog tipa, no čini se da je bila podvrgnuta improviziranim popravcima. Po svemu sudeći je riječ o kasnijem modelu koji bi se približno mogao datirati u kraj 2. i prva desetljeća 1. stoljeća pr. Kr.

Budući da se tijekom tog razdoblja nije dogodio nikakav rimski vojni pohod na područje Segestike, možemo pretpostaviti da su kacigu koristili lokalni ratnici koji su je zarobili kao ratni plijen izvan Panonije, ili da su je koristile Oktavijanove trupe tijekom opsade Segestike 35. godine pr. Kr. Možda je to mogao biti pripadnik neke auksilijarne jedinice koji je svojim potrebama prilagodio stariji komad rimske opreme, ili je tu kacigu mogao rabiti neki tek unovačeni legionar koji je zadužio stariju opremu zbog nedostatka odgovarajuće suvremene opreme.