

Mainz Museum Draco replica.

Several years passed since we realized our project Mainz Museum Draco replica.

The comb is mounted with tin as well as the sleeve of the stick rod





The Roman draco developed into a real dragon, without ears but with scales and a crest. The only fully preserved draco was found in the Limes fortress of Niederbieber in Germany, which dates to the 3rd century.



Sources:

<https://www.angelfire.com/realm/vlachs/>

<http://www.legionxxiv.org/signum/>

DRACO (Cavalry Dragon / Snake Head Standard)

Draco Standards were adopted during the Late Empire, 250-400 AD and were generally carried by cavalry units. The hollow head, in the form of a toothed dragon, or snake head was formed from metal and when carried by a rider at a gallop, the wind passing through it would extend a cloth tube tail attached to the neck of the head. There is indication that the air-stream passing through a Draco head carried "at speed" could create a hissing, whistling or droning sound. The Draco was carried by the so-called "Draconarius" rider of a cavalry unit. Draco standards were also used in cavalry "Gymnasia" (games), such as the "Hypakka" where points were scored for strikes (from dummy pilum javelins thrown by another team of "Aggressor" riders) on the tail piece of the Draco standards being carried by the Draco Team acting as "targets".

<http://www.fectio.org.uk/articles/draco.htm>

The Draco was adopted first into the Roman cavalry during the 2nd century AD, possibly with the introduction of Sarmatian cavalry into the Roman army. Arrian, who was

writing c. 137 AD, described it as a Scythian (he most probably meant Sarmatian) invention which was adopted by Roman cavalry. The Romans first began to use the draco in cavalry games, the so-called 'Hippica Gymnasia'. These were described by Arrian as glamorised versions of training exercises, performed in decorated armour. It is possible that the draco was introduced just because it was 'outlandish', foreign and glamorous. Points in the game were scored for strikes on the tail piece of the dracos carried by a team acting as 'targets', from dummy javelins thrown by another team of riders. Arrian recommended that the standard be colorful, adding to the spectacle of cavalry parades. One should be given to each unit to maintain order in both displays and battle. The Roman cavalry adopted the draco probably during or after the Dacian wars, in which the equipment of the Roman cavalry was altered to withstand the charge of the lance-armed cavalry. These equipment changes included the adoption of the fully-armed cavalry (*alae cataphractiorum*) and the long lance. It would be logical to assume that this was the time when also the draco standard was introduced.

The choice for the dragon/serpent as model is not so easy to explain, because the steppe cultures used other animal's heads and continued to do so. However, it has been assumed that it was because of the Thracian dominance in Roman cavalry that the latter adopted the serpent shape. These Thracian horsemen had a deity which resembled a 'flying' serpent with scales, teeth and an upstanding crest, which may well have been a draco or something similar.

It is not documented when exactly the draco was adopted as a normal standard for all troop types. However, sources mention the draco being used with the infantry. The *Historia Augusta* mentions that the mother of Severus (193-211 AD) dreamt of a purple snake before his birth, something very alike what we later hear of the Imperial standard[3]. But since this source was probably compiled later, we can't be sure this has any bearing on a dating. We are on more solid ground with the entry of the reign of Gallienus (253-268 AD), when legionary troops are said to have paraded with a dracon amongst the standards of the legions and the troops of Aurelianus (270-5 AD) also had draconarii amongst the standard-bearers[5]. This may lead us to conclude that the infantry began using dracos during the late 3rd c. On the Arch of Galerius, which was built before 311 AD to commemorate Galerius' war against Persia in 290 AD, several dracos can be seen to his left and right, carried by infantry as well as cavalry (see the image above, 2nd from right).