



RaLATH VII Conference

Visible and Invisible Frontiers in Roman and Late Antique Thrace

Veliko Tarnovo, 1-4 October 2026

PROGRAM & ABSTRACTS



National Archaeological Institute with Museum
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
www.naim.bg



Regional Museum of History Veliko Tarnovo
www.museumvt.com

1st OCTOBER

Grand Hotel Yantra, Conference Hall

14.00-15.30 *Registration*

15.30-16.00 *Opening Remarks*

SESSION 1

CULTURAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE BORDERS OF THRACE

Chair: Dilyana Boteva-Boyanova

16.00-16.20

Nicolay Sharankov

Boundaries in Thrace. The epigraphic evidence

16.20-16.40

Maria Gabriella Parissaki

Between cities and tribes – the friendly kingdom of Thrace as “middle ground”

16.40-17.00

Ivaylo Lozanov

Regio Caenica: from frontier territory to provincial district in Roman Thrace

17.00-17.20

Slavtcho Kirov, Alberto Dalla Rosa

Thrace between royal and imperial power: landed legacies and the organization of space

Venue: Old town, Panoramic platform

18.30-20.30 *Official cocktail and “Sound and Light” show at Tsarevets Hill*

2nd OCTOBER

Grand Hotel Yantra, Conference Hall

SESSION 2

THRACE, ITS NEIGHBOURS, AND THE CONTACT ZONES

Chair: Lyudmil Vagalinski

09.00-09.20

Vedat Keleş, Sadık Tuğrul

Propontis: frontier or corridor? Contact zones and networks between Parion and Thrace

09.20-09.40

George Velenis, Michael Velenis,
Polyxeni Adam-Veleni

Fora romana in Thessaloniki and Philippi

09.40-10.00

Viktoria Videvska

Which emperor? Reconsidering a bronze cuirassed statue from Nigrinianis

10.00-10.20

Mustafa H. Sayar

The Thracians overseas

POSTER:

10.20-10.25

Hristina Ivanova-Anaplioti

Heraclea Sintica's economic transition in the Early Roman empire: connectivity and separation reframed through numismatic iconography

10.25-10.40 *Coffee break*

SESSION 3

CITIES OF THRACE AND THEIR TERRITORIES

Chair: Nicolay Sharankov

10.40-11.00

Kalin Chakarov

Limits of the administrative territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum

11.00-11.20

Zdravko Dimitrov

Nicopolis ad Istrum and the Lower Danube Limes – influences and interactions in the architectural traditions of the Ionic and Corinthian orders

11.20-11.40

Nadezhda Kirova-Yovcheva

Visible and invisible boundaries of the territory of Serdica in Roman and Late antique Thrace

11.40-12.00

Stephanie Daneva

Letter forms in stone inscriptions from Roman Thrace as markers of administrative affiliation. Paleographic characteristics of the inscriptions from Augusta Traiana

POSTERS:

12.00-12.05

Tsvetelina Slavkova, Emil Nankov

Geophysical surveys of Via Diagonalis in the western urban territory of Philippopolis

12.05-12.10

Mihajlo N. Džamtovski

Considerations of the provincial affiliation of Naissus in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries

12.10-12.15

Ivan Tsarov

The small forum of Nicopolis ad Istrum – an attempt at reconstruction

12.15-12.20

Marin Marinov, Nicolay Sharankov,
Simeon Angelov

New data on the buildings extra muros west of Novae

12.20-14.00 *Lunch break – free time*

SESSION 4

NATURAL BORDERS AND MAN-MADE DEFENSES OF THRACE

Chair: Marina Tasaklaki

14.00-14.20

Ayça Beygo

Fortifications as frontiers: the changing urban topography of Bizye (Vize) from Roman to Byzantine Thrace

14.20-14.40

Dilyana Boteva-Boyanova

The 4th century AD fortification of Abritus: a case study from the point of view of a historian

14.40-15.00

Metodi Zlatkov, Reni Petrova,
Nikolay Dimitrov

The visible defense: new data on the Late antique fortress walls of Bozhenishki Urvich

POSTERS:

15.00-15.05

Lyudmil Vagalinski, Lyuba Traykova

Weapon finds in Deultum as evidence of its historical borders

15.05-15.10

Melpomeni Karta, Varvara Ioannidou,
Vassilis Evangelidis, Despoina Tsiafaki

The Roman-period Rhodope: changes and continuities in upland landscapes

15.10-15.15

Eugen Paraschiv-Grigore,
Ioana Paraschiv-Grigore

At the fringes of empire: daily life in sixth-century Dinogetia

20.00 *Official dinner at Grand Hotel Yantra*

3rd OCTOBER

Grand Hotel Yantra, Conference Hall

SESSION 5

THE CULTURAL DIVIDES OF THRACE

Chair: Mustafa H. Sayar

09.00-09.20

Ifigenia Anagnostou

*Constructing narratives of 'self' and the 'other':
conceptualising wine consumption in ancient
Thrace as a mark of cultural distinction*

09.20-09.40

Mariya Avramova

*Thermalism in Thrace: exploring the boundary
between indigenous practices and Roman
influence*

09.40-10.00

Arina Korzun

*Visualizing the arena: illustrated invitationes ad
munera in the Roman Balkan provinces*

10.00-10.20

Milena Raycheva

*A goddess or a muse? On the interpretation of a
statue from Deultum and the invisible cultural
trends in the colony*

10.20-10.40

Svenja Simon

*Roman jewellery from Deultum: materials,
techniques and the comparison with other Roman
jewellery*

POSTERS:

10.40-10.45

Adela Bâltac

The cult of the Thracian hero in a domestic context at Histria (Constanța county, Romania)

10.45-10.50

Sorin Paliga

Late Thrace – how many languages were spoken in the area?

10.50-11.00 *Coffee break*

SESSION 6

CONNECTING THRACE: NETWORKS, SUPPLY, CIRCULATION

Chair: Maria Chrysafi

11.00-11.20

Vasiliki Anevlavi, Petya Andreeva,
Walter Prochaska, Kalin Chakarov

Between local resources and long-distance marble supply for Roman sculpture at Nicopolis ad Istrum

11.20-11.40

Petya Andreeva, Anton Atanasov,
Dragan Iliev

Craft production and the circulation of votive monuments in the sanctuaries of Apollo in Roman Thrace

11.40-12.00

Lily Grozdanova

Testing the frontiers of digital numismatics: the DigiDeultum case study

12.00-12.20

Hristo Preshlenov

Interactions. The anthropogenic space along the Southwestern Black Sea coast in Antiquity

12.20-12.40

Marina Tasaklaki

Visible and invisible frontiers in Roman Thrace through provincial coinage

POSTERS:

12.40-12.45

Petya Andreeva, Vasiliki Anevlavi,
Walter Prochaska, Kalin Chakarov

Material frontiers of worship: marble, cult, and community in Nicopolis ad Istrum

12.45-12.50

Pantelis Charalampakis, Nikolay Dimitrov,
Milena Raycheva

*Mapping borders through sealing objects: the
Digital Sigillographic Corpus of Bulgaria
(DigiSigiCorpBG)*

12.50-14.00 *Lunch at Grand Hotel Yantra*

14.00-19.00 *Excursion: Roman water catchment at Musina – Lesicheri funerary pillar –
Nicomopolis ad Istrum**

4th OCTOBER

Grand Hotel Yantra, Conference Hall

SESSION 7

BETWEEN THE LIVING AND THE DEAD IN THRACE

Chair: Milena Raycheva

09.00-09.20

Constantina Kallintzi, Maria Chrysafi,
Kyriaki Chatziprokopiou

*Settlements and cemeteries along the route of the
Via Egnatia in the regional unit of Xanthi*

09.20-09.40

Lyuba Radulova

*Thrace as a periphery both of the East and of the
West. Foreign influences on the inscriptions
relative to funerary law*

09.40-10.00

Nadezhda Atanassova, Kalin Chakarov

*Anthropological characteristics of the population
of Nicopolis ad Istrum and its rural territory,
based on data from excavated burials and from
epigraphic monuments*

10.00-10.20

Yordana Nikolova

*The necropoleis of Serdica in the 2nd century
AD: material and intangible evidence*

10.20-10.40

Philip Kolev, Kaloyan Pramatarov

*At the boundary of Thrace and Macedonia:
funerary practices from a Necropolis in the
Middle Strymon Valley (3rd – 4th c.)*

POSTERS:

10.40-10.45

Kalin Chakarov

Selected Roman-era necropolises from the territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum

10.45-10.50

Ivo D. Cholakov

On the border between worlds. Objects for the afterlife from the southern necropolis of the Roman colony of Deultum

10.50-10.55

Marin Marinov, Kalin Chakarov,
Nicolay Sharankov, Nadezhda Atanassova,
Simeon Angelov

New data on the Western necropolis of Novae

10.55-11.15 *Coffee break*

11.15-11.45 *Closing remarks*

Note: Throughout the event, participants will be granted free access to various museum sites in Veliko Tarnovo upon presenting their conference badges.

**Excursion times may vary depending on atmospheric conditions.*

ABSTRACTS

SESSION 1

CULTURAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE BORDERS OF THRACE

Boundaries in Thrace. The epigraphic evidence

Nicolay Sharankov

The paper presents an overview of the boundary inscriptions from Roman and Late antique Thrace, examines the roles of Roman and local officials in border disputes, and analyzes the terminology used in the texts. Inscriptions related to provincial boundaries and imperial property were typically composed in Latin, whereas those for settlements and smaller areas were in Greek—the official language of the Roman province of Thrace. The demarcation procedures and the assignment of boundaries were associated with both Roman authorities (such as provincial *legati Augusti pro praetore* and *censitores*) and special judges (ὄροθέται) in the local communities. In a number of cases, the act of demarcation is explicitly stated to have been carried out by order of the emperor (*ex auctoritate Imperatoris*, κατὰ θεϊαν ἀπόφασιν), particularly with regard to provincial borders, administrative territories of settlements, and imperial estates.

Between cities and tribes – the friendly kingdom of Thrace as “middle ground”

Maria Gabriella Parissaki

The world of ancient Thrace is often described and studied through the lens of a basic dichotomy between the old Greek colonies of the shores and the tribally organized world of the Thracian interior. Although this distinction – with all its fluctuations, degrees of intensity and transformations – remained visible well into Roman times, these two worlds developed close relations and remained deeply interconnected throughout the centuries. This paper focuses on the client kingdom of Thrace, covering the period from roughly the mid-1st century BC to AD 46. Drawing on inscriptions related to this kingdom but originating from the old Greek colonies along the shores – such as Perinthos and Byzantion –, it examines how the representatives of Thrace’s last ruling dynasty negotiated Thracian, Greek, and Roman realities across the kingdom’s political, economic and cultural spheres. In doing so, the dynasty facilitated new forms of interaction between coastal and interior communities but also decisively contributed to the creation of a new, shared space of understanding, in the years preceding the region’s organization as a province of the Roman empire.

***Regio Caenica*: from frontier territory to provincial district in Roman Thrace**

Ivaylo Lozanov

Regio Caenica has long been known through Pliny's account of Thrace (*NH* IV.11), echoed by later sources. Its status is first attested in the famous "*Lex de provinciis praetoriis*" (ca. 100 BC), which identifies it as a provincial subdivision of Macedonia, situated in the far corner bordering the lower course of the Hebros River and the Propontic region. This paper examines the fragmentary evidence surrounding the emergence of a Roman frontier, tracing its scope, development, and transformation within the shifting political and administrative landscape of Thrace during the 1st century BC and the Early Principate.

Thrace between royal and imperial power: landed legacies and the organization of space

Slavtcho Kirov, Alberto Dalla Rosa

The study of imperial landed property in Thrace has not yet been the subject of a systematic and comprehensive investigation, despite the region's strategic position and economic significance within the Roman Empire. Scholarly research has traditionally privileged political history and administrative structures, while the transformation of royal estates into imperial property and their integration into the *patrimonium Caesaris* has received only limited attention. This paper seeks to address this gap by examining how the transfer of land from royal to imperial control shaped the organization of space in Roman Thrace.

The first part of the paper focuses on the fate of royal domains belonging to the Odrysian and Sapaean dynasties from the Late Republican period to the establishment of the Roman province. Through inheritance, confiscation, legacies, and direct imperial intervention, these estates were progressively absorbed into imperial ownership. This process reflects both shifting political alliances during the Roman civil wars and the gradual erosion of royal autonomy under the early Principate, while older territorial structures continued to influence local administration.

The second part analyses epigraphic and archaeological evidence for imperial estates in Thrace proper, including boundary stones (*termini*), administrative inscriptions, and material associated with road stations (*mansiones*) and agricultural exploitation. Case studies from the regions of Diocletianopolis, the *Via Diagonalis*, and the *agri Blaesiani* illustrate how imperial landownership introduced new forms of spatial organization, reshaping local territories and economic landscapes. These estates were closely linked to major communication routes and appear to have supported diversified economic activities, such as cereal production, horse breeding, and pastoralism.

By examining imperial estates as a key structuring element of space, this paper highlights Thrace as a frontier region where royal legacies and imperial practices intersected. The

persistence of pre-provincial territorial frameworks alongside new imperial mechanisms of control contributed to the emergence of a complex landscape of overlapping jurisdictions and boundaries within the Roman provincial system.

SESSION 2

THRACE, ITS NEIGHBOURS, AND THE CONTACT ZONES

Propontis: frontier or corridor? Contact zones and networks between Parion and Thrace

Vedat Keleş, Sadık Tuğrul

Propontis (the Sea of Marmara) is frequently described as a frontier between Europe and Anatolia. From a Parion-centred perspective, it can also be approached as a corridor shaped by short crossings, coastal mobility, and harbour-to-harbour connectivity. The present study explores how Parion's relations with the Thracian shore operated as contact zones that changed in direction and intensity from the Archaic period to Late Antiquity, with particular emphasis on the Roman and Late antique periods. Connectivity is treated as a multi-layered phenomenon formed not only by exchange, but also by the movement of people, skills, institutions, and narratives.

The discussion brings together multiple categories of evidence: transport *amphorae* and other portable finds (including consumption practices and funerary contexts), coin circulation and iconography (as indicators of mobility, networks, and civic representation), burial architecture and the mobility of craftsmen (as mechanisms of stylistic transfer and social negotiation), epigraphic and diplomatic practices (such as proxeny and civic ties), and ancient literary constructions of Thrace as "other" or as a frontier. Considered together, these strands allow an assessment of how "visible" borders (administrative and political frameworks) interacted with "invisible" boundaries (status, identity, language, and religious landscapes).

Long-term continuities are evaluated alongside moments of disruption in order to clarify when the Propontis functioned as a separating line and when it facilitated interaction. The Parion-centred case study proposes that the Propontis is best understood as a corridor punctuated by episodic frontiers. Material culture and institutional practices point to persistent cross-water entanglements even in periods when political discourse framed Thrace as peripheral or warlike. In this way, Parion and its Propontic setting contribute to wider debates on connectivity and frontier-making in Thrace and its neighbouring regions.

Fora romana in Thessaloniki and Philippi

George Velenis, Michael Velenis, Polyxeni Adam-Veleni

The Roman forums of the imperial period in Thessaloniki and Philippi will be presented in terms of their urban integration, their architectural organization and their relationship with the neighbouring monuments. Their architectural peculiarities, functions, similarities and differences, and their chronological phases in relation to the corresponding archaeological data from other Roman-era markets in the Balkans, and especially in the region of Thrace, will also be highlighted.

Which emperor? Reconsidering a bronze cuirassed statue from Nigrinianis

Viktoria Videvska

The current paper re-examines a bronze statue of an emperor from Nigrinianis (modern Malak Preslavets, Bulgaria), traditionally identified as Trajan, and argues instead for its attribution to Domitian. Despite its fragmentary state, the statue preserves parts of the torso, bearing a richly decorated cuirass with a centrally placed *Palladium*, standing atop an acanthus leaf and crowned by two Victories – a rare iconographic motif that appears consistently in statues of Domitian and later lends itself to the more popular Eastern Breastplate type of Hadrian. This reassessment is supported by both iconographic parallels and by scholarly testimony reported by T. Sarnowski, according to whom the German archaeologist H. U. Nuber identified the cuirass type of the Nigrinianis torso as Domitianic rather than Trajanic when the find was first presented.

This interpretation gains additional support from the historical context of Nigrinianis, a site plausibly named after M. Cornelius Nigrinus Curvatus Maternus, a prominent general under Domitian and governor of Lower Moesia between AD 86 and 89. If the military camp did indeed carry his name, the display of a statue honoring the reigning emperor and imperial patron would be both expected and politically significant. The erection of the monument may therefore be linked to Domitian's presence in Lower Moesia in connection with the Dacian wars, situating the statue within a broader program of imperial representation along the Danubian frontier.

The Thracians overseas

Mustafa H. Sayar

Within the scope of this paper are examined the Thracians living inside the borders of the province of Asia, established and founded in BC 133/129, and the province of Bithynia et Pontus, which was declared established in BC 74 and founded by Pompeius in BC 64/63. The data presented will concern the presence of Thracians in the Mysia region south of the Sea of Marmara and the Bithynia region to the east of it, within the province of Thrace, which was established in AD 45/46. The data about Thracian presence in the regions of

Mysia and Phrygia within the borders of the Asian province during the Roman Empire, as well as in the Bithynia region, includes Thracian individuals' names encountered in inscriptions related to burials in *tumuli* or other structures that bear a strong resemblance to Thracian *tumuli*. In addition to the numerous personal names found on tomb inscriptions in the regions of Mysia, Phrygia, and Bithynia, a significant number of Thracian elements can be identified among the epithets of gods mentioned in votive inscriptions, and among the individuals who made the offerings in these regions. Therefore, it may be possible to consider the regions of Mysia, Phrygia, and Bithynia, or at least the regions along the coast of the Propontis, as the invisible overseas borders beyond the visible borders of Thrace.

The high standard of living achieved during the Roman empire ensured that people inhabiting rural areas, in particular, enjoyed better economic conditions. The Thracians, who lived mainly in rural areas rather than cities, emphasized their cultural identity by naming it in their tomb and votive inscriptions. Within the scope of the paper, the names of individuals mentioned in Roman imperial period inscriptions found in the regions of Mysia, Phrygia, and Bithynia will be evaluated in comparison to each other. Additionally, ancient authors who provide information about the Thracians' expansion around the Propontis will also be considered.

Heraclea Sintica's economic transition in the Early Roman empire: connectivity and separation reframed through numismatic iconography

Hristina Ivanova-Anaplioti

This poster presents a follow-up to recent methodological advances made by the author in the study of ancient borderlines, applying digital numismatics to the first case study of Heraclea Sintica. Reassessing previous data with a new research question, the project traces Heraclea's transformation from a riverine nexus to a filtering node in the early Roman Empire. Initially a connector within regional trade networks, Heraclea Sintica's economic role shifted as it began to filter incoming currency — excluding Thracian coins and developing its own coinage. The city's repositioning as an economic hub is marked by the introduction of Macedonian coinage bearing Roman iconography, revealing different dynamics in currency circulation compared to other media. Through systematic iconographic analysis, the poster demonstrates how numismatic evidence reflects impactful strategies of spatial and economic realignment, integration, and filtration. The methodology combines digital cataloguing and iconographic adaptation, in line with current frontier studies approaches. By reframing connectivity and separation through coin imagery, this research illuminates invisible frontiers and economic shifts within Roman Thrace, contributing to broader debates on urban adaptation and regional identity. The poster aligns with the focus on visible and invisible limits, offering new perspectives on the economic and cultural boundaries of Thrace.

SESSION 3

CITIES OF THRACE AND THEIR TERRITORIES

Limits of the administrative territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum

Kalin Chakarov

Nicopolis ad Istrum is a Roman urban centre on the northern limits of the province of Thrace, found in the first one or two decades of the 2nd c. AD. The territory it administrated most probably started to function together with the foundation of the city. Unlike other Roman cities in Thrace and Lower Moesia, as Odessos, Dionysopolis, Marcianopolis, Augusta Traiana, Serdica, Deultum, there are no terminal stones marking its limits in one direction or another. However there is a series of epigraphic and anepigraphic monuments that can be used as sources for the definition of the spatial dimension of the administrative territory.

During the Thracian period of province affiliation of Nicopolis ad Istrum the terminal stones for the boundaries between Lower Moesia and Thrace from AD 136, found between the rivers of Ossam (ancient Asamus) and Yantra (ancient Iatrus), most probably mark also the western and the northern limits of the territory of the only city centre in the area – Nicopolis ad Istrum. The Thracian *emporium* Discoduratae, which since its foundation in 2nd c. belonged to Augusta Traiana, became part of the territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum already in AD 270/271. This change gives information on the southern limits of the city territory at certain point. A military diploma and a burial stela from Butovo indicate that the western limits of the territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum reached the Asamus river in that area.

An important source for the limitation of the administrative territory is the distribution of organogenous limestone products from the quarries of Nicopolis ad Istrum, a stone which is typical for the local area and differs from the stone materials from the neighboring cities and military sites.

Nicopolis ad Istrum and the Lower Danube Limes – influences and interactions in the architectural traditions of the Ionic and Corinthian orders

Zdravko Dimitrov

The studies of the architectural environment of Roman Nicopolis ad Istrum are among the most detailed in Bulgaria. The generally accepted opinion is that this was an urban center whose architectural models were built on Hellenistic prototypes. The urban planning solutions, the architectural constructions and, above all, the architectural decoration show a number of models typical of Hellas, not only from the Roman imperial era, but even from much earlier times. But does Nicopolis ad Istrum contain and provide us only with architectural models that are typical of the Greek world?

As a center established on the border of the province of Thrace and very close to the Lower Danubian Limes, Nicopolis also allows us to trace the development of the Corinthian order.

It is the main architectural order of choice at the western entrance of the agora. The large *propylaea* were built in the Corinthian style and they give an idea of all the architectural details from the bases and pedestals to the parts of the entablature.

This is why the straightforward opinion that the architecture of Nicopolis ad Istrum is typically Hellenistic should be approached more carefully. The connection of Nicopolis and its architecture with the Lower Danubian Limes of the Roman empire is visible and strongly expressed and it deserves to be discussed and explored further. The influences are mutual. For example, it was from Nicopolis that the significant infiltration of the Ionian order into Novae started, in accordance with Asia Minor principles.

This is precisely the purpose of the present study: to arouse interest in the connection of a city of distinct Hellenistic traditions and origins with the limes system of the Roman Empire. In a sense, it explores the transparent borders of the Roman world, which form the basis of its essence.

Visible and invisible boundaries of the territory of Serdica in Roman and Late antique Thrace

Nadezhda Kirova-Yovcheva

In Antiquity, the city and its surrounding territory formed an inseparable unit, shaped by administrative decisions, strategic considerations, and socio-cultural practices. This paper examines the boundaries of the urban territory of Serdica (modern Sofia), since its establishment in the early 2nd century AD up until Late Antiquity, focusing on both visible and invisible frontiers within Roman Thrace.

The study reassesses the traditional reconstructions of Serdica's territorial limits through a combined analysis of written sources, epigraphic evidence, and numismatic data. Particular attention is paid to the contested southern boundary between the territories of Serdica and Pautalia, an area that has long been debated in scholarship. New interpretations of inscriptions, milestones, and coin finds from sanctuaries located in this border zone allow for a reconsideration of the extent of Serdica's territory, suggesting that its southern limit may have extended at least as far as present-day Pernik.

Beyond administrative borders, the paper explores the role of sanctuaries situated near territorial edges as instruments of spatial control and symbolic domination. These cult places may be interpreted as "invisible frontiers," reinforcing civic authority and territorial identity through religious practice. The deliberate placement of major sanctuaries at boundary zones reflects broader mechanisms of control typical of Roman provincial organization.

By situating Serdica within the wider framework of Roman and Late Antique Thrace, the paper contributes to ongoing discussions about peripherality, frontier dynamics, and the interaction between geography, administration, and religion.

Letter forms in stone inscriptions from Roman Thrace as markers of administrative affiliation. Paleographic characteristics of the inscriptions from Augusta Traiana

Stephanie Daneva

Inscriptions in different ancient cities functioned not only as carriers of textual information, but also as instruments of public communication, identity, and self-representation. The paper analyzes paleographic data as marker manifesting the identity of the ancient city, by applying a new methodological framework.

Particular attention is paid to recurring features of lettering that may be associated with local workshops, as well as to the placement of inscriptions within the city and along the boundaries of its administrative territory.

The author aims to identify and categorize these paleographic tendencies in order to demonstrate how letter forms may serve as markers of administrative and civic affiliation. The paper presents a case study on those features, using epigraphic data from the city of Augusta Traiana and its administrative territory.

Geophysical surveys of *Via Diagonalis* in the western urban territory of Philippopolis

Tsvetelina Slavkova, Emil Nankov

This paper presents the recent results of the non-destructive archaeological studies on the trans-Balkan road known as *Via Diagonalis* along the western urban territory of Philippopolis (modern Plovdiv, Bulgaria). Both geophysical surveys and digital elevation models of the surface were conducted on two different sections of the hypothetical course of the road, situated in the area of the road station Bona Mansio and *mutatio* Alusore. The registered anomalies interpreted as a trace of ancient road, buildings, hearths and *tumuli* provided a clear picture of the actual course of the Roman road and its infrastructure. Along with the geophysical surveys a series of field surveys have been carried out in its vicinity as well, providing additional information about the settlement patterns of the *Via Diagonalis* area in the section of Upper Thrace Valley and of the city territory of Philippopolis.

Although *Via Diagonalis* is the most important trans-regional artery between the Haemus and the Rhodopes, there is still a lack of systematic studies devoted to its ancient course and affiliated facilities. This report aims to provide new information based primarily on archaeological research.

Considerations of the provincial affiliation of Naissus in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries

Mihajlo N. Džamtoovski

Ancient Naissus (Niš, Serbia) is traditionally associated with the birthplace of Emperor Constantine I (AD 306–337). Situated at an important strategic position where the *Via Militaris/Diagonalis* intersected with routes leading towards the Lower Danube, the Aegean, and the Adriatic, the city often hosted several late Roman emperors who stayed there or passed through. Roman rule in the region was established in BC 28. The province of Moesia was organised sometime between the late 1st century BC and the early 1st century AD, and the territory around Naissus formed part of it. Following the administrative reforms of AD 86, this area became part of Moesia Superior. A significant reorganisation followed Emperor Aurelian's (AD 270–275) abandonment of the Dacian provinces north of the Danube. A new Dacia was created south of the river, but the timing of its later division and the exact extent of its territory remain debated. It is uncertain whether this new Dacia immediately included cities in Thrace, such as Serdica (Sofia, Bulgaria) and Pautalia (Kyustendil, Bulgaria), or whether its jurisdiction extended deeper into Moesia Superior to include Naissus. The situation is further complicated by some authors who assign Naissus of this period to the Late Antique province of Dardania. The aim of this presentation is to clarify the complex *status quaestionis* concerning the provincial affiliation of Naissus in the period before the Council of Serdica of AD 343/344. At that council Naissus was recorded as belonging to the province of Dacia, specifically the future Dacia Mediterranea, distinct from Dacia Ripensis, together with Serdica. By examining historical sources and epigraphic evidence, the presentation seeks to provide a clearer understanding of Naissus' administrative position in this transitional period.

The Small Forum of Nicopolis ad Istrum – an attempt at reconstruction

Ivan Tsarov

After several seasons of archaeological excavations in the southwest part of the forum complex and the adjacent streets, it has been established that this urban area results from a uniform architectural concept that was carried out simultaneously. It has become clear that it comprises an open-air space (*area*) and a covered portico that opens to the west. One construction mistake, the subsequent partial catastrophe, as well as the measures taken to reduce the damage, have provided us with a rare chance to determine the architectural order of the portico. The total floor area of the so-called Small Forum is 780 sq. m.

The open-air space occupies 220 sq.m. It is paved with stone slabs and was drained through at least two small canals.

The covered portico takes up an area of 552 sq.m and can be provisionally divided into three wings, accessible from all sides by three steps. The central wing meets end-to-end the *odeion*, through the west entrance of which the two buildings had a functional connection. In this wing were unearthed ten foundations, perhaps of statue bases. The

north wing is headed by a pediment that bore a relief decoration of shield and spear. Perhaps the south one was executed in the same manner. The number of columns used is 46, the two in the inner corners being of heart-shaped section. The columns carried 44 frieze architrave blocks of two different sizes.

The various discoveries: inscriptions, fragment of a limestone armchair, and *sekomata* with gladiator scenes, point to the multi-functional use of this urban section of Nicopolis ad Istrum.

New data on the buildings *extra muros* west of Novae

Marin Marinov, Nicolay Sharankov, Simeon Angelov

In 2022 – 2025, the excavations in Sector VIII A west of Novae continued to reveal the remains of buildings *extra muros* and a necropolis situated there. Some of the data obtained show how the terrain was used after the peristyle building (the 80s of the 2nd – the first quarter of the 5th century AD) ceased to function.

Three lapidary monuments were discovered within the perimeter of the western wing of the peristyle building. A four-sided altar with sculptural decoration and a pedestal were found placed on the bottom of pits, dug into a stratum containing fragmented *tegulae* and *imbrices*. The former monument bears a votive inscription to Jupiter Depulsor, the latter to Mercury, and both are set up by legates of *Legio I Italica*. One monument with relief decoration was found in a debris layer and was placed next to a ruined wall. It has a votive inscription to Jupiter Conservator made by another legate of the legion identified as the brother of Emperor Septimius Severus.

The text of the inscriptions, along with the design and decoration of the monuments reveal they originally belonged to a shrine. Given their size and possible weight, the shrine must have been situated not too far from the peristyle building. It is difficult to explain the purpose of placing the three inscribed monuments in the ruins of this building. It is worth noting they were all found arranged vertically.

Eleven graves were discovered south of the basilica (from the beginning to the 80s of the 6th century AD) and within the premises of the peristyle building's southern wing. They all belong to the Christian necropolis (last quarter of the 5th century AD) in which the foundations of the basilica were laid and which developed on the ruins of the peristyle building. Anthropological analysis helps us learn more about the deceased who were buried without inventory.

SESSION 4

NATURAL BORDERS AND MAN-MADE DEFENSES OF THRACE

Fortifications as frontiers: the changing urban topography of Bizye (Vize) from Roman to Byzantine Thrace

Ayça Beygo

Located in today's provincial district of Kırklareli, the ancient city of Bizye presents a good example of long-term urban continuity in Thrace, shaped by shifting political, military, and religious frontiers from the Roman Imperial times to the Late Byzantine periods. From its role as a Thracian royal center and a prosperous Roman city under Trajan and Hadrian, to its transformation into a fortified Late antique and Byzantine stronghold, Bizye illustrates how urban topography responded to both visible and invisible boundaries.

This paper examines the historical topography of Bizye through the lens of its fortifications, which constitute the most prominent and best-preserved elements of the city's urban fabric. Based on the results of architectural and topographical surveys conducted in 2011 and 2012, the fortification system reveals multiple construction and repair phases reflecting Roman, Late antique, and Byzantine interventions. These phases correspond closely to broader geopolitical developments, including the militarization of the region from the 9th century onward in response to Bulgarian pressure and later Latin and Ottoman threats.

Rather than functioning solely as defensive structures, the fortifications of Bizye acted as dynamic frontiers that defined the city's spatial organization, controlled access, and structured patterns of settlement and monumentality. While other urban elements survive only fragmentarily, the fortifications provide a stable framework for reconstructing the city's changing boundaries and internal organization across time.

By situating Bizye within broader chronological and geographical dynamics, this paper argues that fortifications served not only as visible military borders but also as markers of invisible transformations in political authority, urban identity, and landscape use. The case of Bizye thus contributes to a broader understanding of how frontier dynamics shaped provincial cities in Southeastern Europe during Late Antiquity and the Byzantine period.

The 4th century AD fortification of Abritus: a case study from the point of view of a historian

Dilyana Boteva-Boyanova

The paper deals with the 4th century AD fortification wall of Abritus, traditionally viewed as part of the second defensive line backing the Lower-Danubian limes. However, some of its features question such an approach, requiring a reconsideration of the context and the main target. Such re-evaluation goes hand in hand with an obvious need of re-thinking the

settlement pattern during the Principate and the Dominate, thus affecting also other Roman cities in Thrace and Lower Moesia.

The study has been carried out within the second stage of the project "*Upgrading the Historical Narrative: From Deultum to DigiDeultum*", funded by the BNSF (KII-06-H80/7 from 08.12.2023).

The visible defense: new data on the Late antique fortress walls of Bozhenishki Urvich

Metodi Zlatkov, Reni Petrova, Nikolay Dimitrov

The fortress of Bozhenishki Urvich is situated on the strategic northern slopes of the Pre-Balkan range within the Western Stara Planina (Haemus) zone, currently in Botevgrad municipality. It is primarily known for its remains from the 13th and 14th centuries, as well as the famous inscription of Sevast Ognyan. Still, the site also contains a significant cultural layer dating from the 4th to the 6th centuries AD.

This paper presents the results of recent archaeological excavations conducted between 2023 and 2025, focusing on new data regarding the planigraphy and chronological development of the fortress walls. Recent research reveals previously unknown details about the fortification system's layout, including specific structural modifications. Through an analysis of stratigraphic data and associated finds, the study offers a refined chronology of the defensive structures during the Late antique period. These discoveries highlight the role of Bozhenishki Urvich as a "visible" physical frontier, designed to provide security for its inhabitants during the turbulent 5th and 6th centuries AD.

A significant part of the new data about the life of the fortress has been provided by the coins discovered in the recent seasons, allowing for more precise dating of the fortress walls and of the buildings between them. Among the discovered numismatic material, the most impressive finds are two gold solidi of Emperor Justinian I.

Weapon finds in Deultum as evidence of its historical borders

Lyudmil Vagalinski, Lyuba Traykova

Military units were not permanently stationed in Deultum. In this sense, finds of weapons and armaments point to extraordinary circumstances in the Roman colony. Their chronology has been compared with available archaeological data on turning points in the city's history.

The Roman-period Rhodope: changes and continuities in upland landscapes

Melpomeni Karta, Varvara Ioannidou, Vassilis Evangelidis, Despoina Tsiadaki

The Rhodope Mountains were diachronically a zone of transition, trade, and passage between the Aegean and inland Thrace. At the same time, they remained a realm of the

local: a landscape perceived in Graeco-Roman tradition as remote and enigmatic and always controlled by coastal Greek powers. Even systematic efforts at domination, such as the fortified networks established by the Macedonian kings and later adapted under Roman rule, proved only partially effective, as upland landscapes continued to bear strong Thracian cultural characteristics.

Drawing on evidence from the *THRACE-CONNECT* project (an H.F.R.I.-funded project aiming to map mountainous landscapes in the area of Aegean Thrace alongside the connections between coastal and inland areas), this poster examines the formation of upland landscapes and networks of movement across the Rhodope. Through archaeological and spatial analysis, it will highlight changes introduced by the new conditions of the Roman world, alongside enduring continuities in settlement, mobility, and landscape use, revealing the Rhodope as a space shaped by both visible and invisible frontiers.

At the fringes of empire: daily life in sixth-century Dinogetia

Eugen Paraschiv-Grigore, Ioana Paraschiv-Grigore

Dinogetia, a fortified settlement on the Lower Danube frontier, occupied a strategic position during Late Antiquity. Although the site has been extensively published, existing studies have largely emphasized architecture, chronology, and individual categories of archaeological material. This paper proposes a synthetic review of the published evidence relevant to the 6th century, drawing more broadly on material dated between the 4th and 7th centuries.

The contribution adopts a broad perspective on daily life in a Late antique frontier settlement, bringing together archaeological evidence that has so far been addressed separately in the literature. Without privileging specific categories of material or advancing predefined interpretative frameworks, the paper considers how the available evidence may be read in relation to everyday practices at the site. Through this approach, Dinogetia is revisited as a lived environment within its historical context, offering a framework for discussing everyday life at the margins of the Late antique Danubian frontier.

SESSION 5

THE CULTURAL DIVIDES OF THRACE

Constructing narratives of 'self' and the 'other': conceptualising wine consumption in ancient Thrace as a mark of cultural distinction

Ifigenia Anagnostou

As far as wine consumption is concerned, literary sources draw clean lines between the inhabitants of the 'civilized' South and those of the 'unruly' North. In them, the Thracians

are typically portrayed as avid drinkers and with a love for neat wine, habits that matched those of their neighboring Macedons, but nevertheless came in sharp contrast to those of the Southern Greeks, whose drinking style was characterised by moderation and who considered drinking unmixed wine a barbaric custom.

Produced within Roman context, these accounts often reproduce older stereotypes and are heavily colored by moral judgments and the predispositions of their authors. Indeed, underlying in them are perceived boundaries and constructed concepts of 'self' and the 'other', marked not only by the geographical distance that separated the Thracians and even the Macedons with the rest of the Greek world, but also by distinct cultural differences reflected in their different drinking styles. At the same time, archaeological evidence related to sympotic culture points to cultural contacts between the Thracians and the Greeks and reveals the societal norms of the elites who used the sympotic context as a space to negotiate their political power.

Taking these observations as point of departure, and drawing on selected Roman sources and archaeological evidence, this presentation will discuss the sympotic practices of the ancient Thracians and their neighbors, with the aim to shed light on their role in the construction of certain cultural and social identities. It will be argued that the distinct drinking styles served not only as a mark of cultural differentiation, but also as a means through which political power was made visible and enforced.

Thermalism in Thrace: exploring the boundary between indigenous practices and Roman influence

Mariya Avramova

Mineral springs represent natural phenomena that have captivated humanity for millennia, and this fascination persists today. Thermalism, which is defined as the utilisation of mineral water for healing and therapeutic purposes, possesses deep historical roots. There exists a common assumption that the use of mineral water in Thrace was introduced by the Romans — a notion that is similarly observed in numerous other provinces of the Roman Empire. However, a detailed analysis of the archaeological evidence originating from the mineral sources in Thrace suggests a more nuanced and intricate situation. While it is undeniable that the Romans made significant contributions to the establishment of sophisticated and ornately designed *thermae*, such as those located in Hisarya and Starozagorski mineralni bani, these establishments were not the only ones utilising mineral springs during the Roman era. A variety of other sources were frequented, despite their lack of the elaborate infrastructure of Roman baths. This raises several inquiries: How can one interpret the variances in these practices? What evidence supports the existence of indigenous thermalism traditions in Thrace? Furthermore, how did the indigenous practices involving the therapeutic use of mineral water coexist with the Roman bathing customs? Ultimately, was there a distinct boundary between Roman thermalism and indigenous practices in Thrace?

Visualizing the arena: illustrated *invitationes ad munera* in the Roman Balkan provinces

Arina Korzun

This paper examines the illustrated *invitationes ad munera*—a rare category of inscribed and figured announcements of gladiatorial games and *venationes*—preserved in the provinces of Thrace, Moesia Inferior, and Macedonia. Six examples are currently known: from Philippopolis and Serdica in Thrace; Odessos in Moesia Inferior; and Parthicopolis and Thessaloniki in Macedonia. Dating from the late 2nd to the early 4th centuries CE, these monuments emerged during a period of intensified cultural exchange between these provinces, marked by urban expansion, military settlement, and the construction of amphitheaters and *stadia* across the region.

To date, these invitations have not been examined as a coherent group of monuments. Previous researches have focused primarily on their inscriptions or on the artistic program of individual examples.

Although drawing on established iconographic traditions of funerary relief and mosaic art, the paper argues that the illustrated *invitationes ad munera* crystallize a distinct artistic phenomenon localized in the Balkans. The aim of the study is to identify the reasons for its emergence and to define its principal artistic characteristics. The compositions of these figurative “posters” often adopt an elliptical structure that echoes the form of the arena, framing textual announcements with multiple simultaneous scenes—gladiatorial duels, animal hunts, animal-on-animal combats, pantomime performances, and acrobatics. Well-preserved examples from Serdica, Odessos, and Thessaloniki display this narrative simultaneity particularly clearly, suggesting an attempt to convey the dynamic, multi-scenic nature of actual spectacles. The monuments also reveal distinct regional traits, visible in the selection of gladiatorial types and animals, as well as in their reflection of shifting entertainment practices in Late Antiquity.

By situating these monuments within their archaeological and cultural context, the paper argues that the illustrated *invitationes ad munera* document both the adaptation of imperial spectacle forms and a local artistic reinterpretation shaped by the social and artistic contexts of Thrace, Moesia Inferior, and Macedonia.

A goddess or a muse? On the limits of interpretation of a statue from Deultum and the invisible cultural trends in the colony

Milena Raycheva

The paper is dedicated to a marble statuette found in Deultum, currently displayed at Burgas Regional Museum of History: a headless, draped female figure wearing a *nebris* across the chest and holding an unknown object in her left arm. The statuette is a chance find and nothing is known of its original context. It has been interpreted as Artemis (Diana), whose cult was thriving in the city. According to this view, the goddess is

represented as *Phosphoros* and bears a torch. The work is believed to be a local, Roman-era copy of a Classical original, finding some resemblance in a statue from the theatre of Delos. Based on a number of other parallels, more recent publications and re-examination of the known evidence, it can be argued that the statuette in fact represents a muse (Euterpe, Thalia?) that was most probably part of a set – the so-called Thespiades cycle. The paper focuses on the sculpture's iconography, its possible original setting – private or public, and comments on its meaning for the cultural milieu within the Roman colony.

Roman jewellery from Deultum: materials, techniques and the comparison with other Roman jewellery

Svenja Simon

This study presents gold and silver jewellery from the Roman colony of Deultum (Thrace) that was founded in AD 70 by the Emperor Vespasian and is located to the southwest of the city of Burgas (SE Bulgaria). The different jewellery objects come from four findspots, which are Mound "Helicon" (located in the northwest of the colony), the Ancient Tomb (part of the western necropolis of Deultum), the south flat necropolis (located to the south of the colony) and the Roman *thermae* (located inside the colony). A total of 36 objects from 17 graves and two finds from the colony itself were analysed in May 2024. These objects comprise earrings, medallions, a pendant, a ring, parts of a chain and bracelets. The 36 objects were examined through macroscopy and photography, in order to gain information about the manufacturing techniques, materials and working tools used.

In its second part, the study focuses on comparing the jewellery from Deultum with pieces from other Roman cities. This aims to highlight possible differences in terms of craftsmanship, underlying raw materials, and possible variations in jewellery against a regional backdrop. It raises the question, if there is a boundary within which certain types of jewellery have not been found, or whether the tradition of Roman jewellery is the same in every province.

The cult of the Thracian hero in a domestic context at Histria (Constanța county, Romania)

Adela Băltăc

One of the most widespread deities in Thracian environment is undoubtedly the Hero Horseman. Despite numerous representations on votive monuments throughout the Thracian territory and beyond, several aspects of his cult remain unknown. Dedicatory reliefs of this deity have been discovered in urban and rural settlements and sanctuaries alike, in funerary or religious contexts. Most of the representations are stone reliefs in the form of *aediculae*, *stelae*, plaques, etc., with or without inscriptions. Very rarely, there are statuary images of him. In my opinion, it is rather striking that despite the fact that clay is the by far the cheapest material, representations in ceramic are not as numerous as we

would have expected. Recent discoveries at Histria have provoked the return to this topic, especially since certain artifacts were found in a clear archaeological context, indicating the practice of worship within a domestic setting, through the discovery of a stone relief along with several ceramic plaques depicting the Rider. In the ancient Greek city on the seashore, the cult of the Thracian Horseman is quite well documented through numerous discoveries of reliefs, funerary *stelae*, and even ceramic objects, but the new discoveries clearly indicate that it was also practiced within the household. These new discoveries will be presented and an attempt will be made to reinterpret some aspects of the Thracian Hero cult from a domestic perspective.

Late Thrace – how many languages were spoken in the area?

Sorin Paliga

In a presentation at a conference held in Sofia (May 2014), with its proceedings published a year later, I tried to sketch the linguistic tableau during the years preceding the process of Romanization. I used the outstanding analysis of Fanula Papazoglu, and added other considerations regarding the linguistic aspect of historical interpretations. Romanization clearly brought and expanded a certain cultural unity, which persisted, be it in restricted forms, for many centuries to come.

Nevertheless times were changing. The Empire began to gradually disintegrate, even if the complete fall of its eastern part may be considered the year 1453. Its history was tortuous, though. The period of migrations brought successive waves of linguistic and cultural changes, while Christianity gradually spread to new areas. There are debates regarding the relation between tradition and innovation. What happened with the indigenous populations of Thrace? The answer to this question has major implications in understanding the role of *substratum* languages in contouring southeast Europe, an area later known as the Balkans. How important and is the Thracian *substratum* in the languages known as *Balkansprachbund*? The problem was already evidenced in the first volume of Bálgarski etimologičen rečnik (BER, 1962), where a word like *ватах, ватаџфин* was accepted as a *substratum* element, while *жупан* was described as ‘*етимологията не съвсем ясна.*’ In vol. 7 of the same work, published in 2010, *стопанин* is also accepted as a *substratum* element: ‘*би могло да бъде субстратна балканска дума.*’

Discussing the role of the Thracian *substratum* and its relations with other languages of the area, first of all with Latin and Greek, but also with Illyrian may clarify many details regarding the linguistic evolution of Southeast Europe.

SESSION 6

CONNECTING THRACE: NETWORKS, SUPPLY, CIRCULATION

Between local resources and long-distance marble supply for Roman sculpture at Nicopolis ad Istrum

Vasiliki Anevlavi, Petya Andreeva, Walter Prochaska, Kalin Chakarov

Despite extensive research on marble exploitation in the Mediterranean, the Balkan Peninsula, and the Roman province of Thrace in particular, remains unevenly represented in existing archaeometric datasets. This imbalance limits broader assessments of resource management, economic organisation, and patterns of connectivity within the Roman world. Marble provenance analysis provides a valuable framework for addressing these gaps by documenting the relationship between raw material sources, production strategies, and consumption practices at a regional scale. This paper presents new archaeometric evidence derived from marble sculptures recovered at Nicopolis ad Istrum, a key urban centre in northern present-day Bulgaria. The study examines the relative contribution of locally available resources and non-local supplies, with particular attention to regional marble from Berkovitsa alongside marbles attributable to established supra-regional quarrying centres, including Dokimeion and Prokonnesos, among others identified during ongoing analysis. The analytical methodology integrates stable carbon and oxygen isotope analysis, multi-element trace analysis by ICP-MS, and petrographic examination. These combined approaches enable a refined characterisation of marble provenance and allow the reconstruction of supply strategies employed in sculptural production. The results contribute to a more precise understanding of marble circulation in Roman Thrace and provide a basis for future comparative studies of provincial material economies and interregional connectivity.

Craft production and the circulation of votive monuments in the sanctuaries of Apollo in Roman Thrace

Petya Andreeva, Anton Atanasov, Dragan Iliev

Extra-urban sanctuaries in Roman Thrace functioned as integrated complexes, where temples, votive monuments, and ritual practices collectively shaped worship, social networks, and cultural identity. This paper examines the production, circulation, and social significance of votive monuments, with particular attention to Apollo sanctuaries. The impetus for this study is the recently excavated sanctuary of Apollo on Alamura Hill near Augusta Traiana, which offers a rare opportunity to analyze a sanctuary as a coherent complex. Here, the temple and a wide range of votive monuments – marble, metal, and ceramic – were found *in situ* and documented in detail, preserving the layout as it existed at the end of the sanctuary's use in the late 4th century AD.

Alamura Hill was selected not only for its well-preserved assemblage but also for its location in a region with the highest concentration of Apollo sanctuaries in Roman Thrace, many showing syncretic connections with the cult of the Thracian Horseman. The site thus provides a unique perspective for understanding how individual monuments functioned within dense sacred landscapes, interconnected social networks, and shared ritual practices. It also offers a basis for comparative analysis with other Apollo sanctuaries in the region, potentially revealing recurring patterns or notable variations in votive assemblages.

By situating votive monuments within their sacred and social contexts, this study illuminates the often-invisible networks linking worshippers, artisans, and sanctuaries. It demonstrates how these monuments both shaped and reflected broader regional religious dynamics, contributing to a deeper understanding of extra-urban sanctuaries in Roman Thrace – sites for which contextual evidence remains limited.

Testing the frontiers of digital numismatics: the DigiDeultum case study

Lily Grozdanova

Within the second stage of the KII-06-H80/7 from 08.12.2023, "*Upgrading the Historical Narrative: From Deultum to DigiDeultum*", funded by the BNSF, the exploration of the frontiers of Digital Humanities, and in particular Digital Numismatics, is entering a new phase of testing the potential for an updated historical narrative based on the already compiled digital data.

Digital Numismatics is an especially intriguing scientific field, as it is at the stage of intense development and definition. This research concept has potential that is often recognised and acknowledged, but only by identifying its limits would an actual definition of the research field be possible.

The current paper explores Digital Numismatics and its potential to enhance knowledge through the case study of the Roman colony of Deultum, in the province of Tharce, and the coin finds recovered during archaeological research there. The materials are especially intriguing because they have been processed both traditionally and through innovative digital technology and methodology. This facilitates putting the research focus on exploring and presenting the specifics and preliminary results of the applied digital workflow. Furthermore, to showcase whether the approach actively facilitated the formulation of new questions and interpretations of the materials, or whether it was a mere change of practice.

By exploring the frontiers of Digital Numismatics, the current work does not aim to pinpoint the field's limitations or issues, but rather to clarify its concept, purpose, methodology, and specifics.

Interactions. The anthropogenic space along the Southwestern Black Sea coast in Antiquity

Hristo Preshlenov

The coexistence and coevolution of society and nature presents a problem arising from the objective contradiction of humankind's position within its environment: on the one hand, as living beings, humans are an integral part of nature itself, on the other, their activities interact with it.

The beginnings of the development of a cultural and landscape environment along the Southwestern Black Sea coast can be traced back to the Chalcolithic period. In the Late Neolithic, coastal settlements reveal a culture distinct from that of the inland Balkan regions; however, permanently established settlements in this area can only be documented from the 14th to the 13th centuries BC.

A fundamentally new stage of anthropogenic environmental impact begins with the second wave of the Great Hellenic Colonization and the founding of *polis* settlements. The result is a harmonious unity of nature, urban planning, architecture, and topographical continuity that persists until the end of Antiquity. Changes in environmental conditions in the territory of the ancient southwestern Pontic cities became particularly evident during the Principate and the Dominate.

The cultural and landscape environment of the Southwestern Black Sea coast is also subject to the influences of several geological and climatic processes and phenomena, which are often interconnected. These include earthquakes, tsunamis, eustatic fluctuations in sea level, abrasion, erosion, landslides, and rockfalls. Builders and architects were virtually powerless against these high-risk geological and climatic processes.

Changes to the natural landscape also resulted from the construction of engineering structures such as harbors, coastal terraces, fortress walls and ramparts, roads, and aqueducts. Furthermore, interventions occurred through the operation of quarries, the mining of iron and copper ores, and the extraction of organic raw materials through agriculture, fishing, and hunting.

The cultural landscape that developed in Antiquity in the area of the Southwestern Black Sea coast ultimately forms the basis for the development of medieval and modern settlement agglomerations.

Visible and invisible frontiers in Roman Thrace through provincial coinage

Marina Tasaklaki

In Roman Thrace, local coinage provides a sensitive means of exploring the visible and invisible frontiers within the provincial landscape. While administrative boundaries formally structured the region, defining civic territories and hierarchies of status, coinage reveals a more complex negotiation of identity that often transcended such borders.

From the outset, Greek *poleis* and cities founded or re-founded by the Romans issued coins according to established civic practices: each city produced coinage bearing its own ethnic

identity and asserting its locality. At the same time, shared iconographic elements — most notably the imperial portrait and widely circulated reverse types — progressively blurred the boundaries between cities, and at times even between provinces. While early provincial issues often followed administrative borders and maintained clearer distinctions in reverse iconography, these visual boundaries gradually weakened, giving way to a more homogenized iconographic language across Thrace.

This apparent convergence of iconography does not signal the disappearance of boundaries, but rather their transformation. Coin imagery reflects the emergence of new, less visible frontiers, shaped by cultic affiliations, workshop practices, and regional networks of production and circulation. In this sense, provincial coinage embodies an oxymoronic dynamic in which administrative or civic distinctions are overshadowed by the creation of alternative symbolic and cultural boundaries.

Examining selected case studies from Thracian mints, this paper argues that provincial coinage functioned as a space where Roman authority and local traditions were continuously negotiated, and where local identities intersected with broader processes of imperial integration. Coins thus reveal invisible divisions relating to status, cultural alignment, and economic integration, offering a nuanced perspective on how frontiers — both tangible and intangible — were formed and redefined in Roman Thrace.

Material frontiers of worship: marble, cult, and community in Nicopolis ad Istrum

Petya Andreeva, Vasiliki Anevlavi, Walter Prochaska, Kalin Chakarov

Marble votive monuments constitute a significant body of material evidence for the study of visual culture and religious practice in the Roman provinces. Situated at the intersection of raw material availability and local craftsmanship, these artefacts reflect patterns of cult worship, social display, and cultural interaction within provincial communities. Beyond its aesthetic and practical qualities, marble carried strong social and symbolic value, making it a particularly effective medium for investigating economic networks, cultural exchange, and identity formation in the Roman provincial world.

This paper examines a representative group of marble votive monuments from Nicopolis ad Istrum and its territory through the lens of material studies, with particular emphasis on the results of a systematic archaeometric investigation into marble provenance. By integrating petrographic, isotopic, and geochemical analyses, the study reconstructs patterns of marble supply, strategies of material selection, and the relationship between local workshops and marble distribution systems in Roman Thrace.

The study identifies material frontiers, visible in the distribution of locally sourced marble and in the establishment of local supply networks that have not been previously investigated. However, the use of marble in votive contexts was also shaped by invisible frontiers, manifested in iconographic choices guided by artisanal traditions and workshop practices. Together, these findings indicate that marble selection for votive monuments was determined not only by practical considerations but also by the active interplay

between raw materials, commissioners, and workshops, revealing a well-developed and largely self-sustaining marble network operating at both local and provincial levels.

Mapping borders through sealing objects: the Digital Sigillographic Corpus of Bulgaria (DigiSigiCorpBG)

Pantelis Charalampakis, Nikolay Dimitrov, Milena Raycheva

Sigillographic artefacts (sealings and matrices for sealing and stamping) are of great importance to the study of history and archaeology, especially when discovered during systematic and rescue excavations, i.e. with known find-spots. Today, museums and private collections in Bulgaria hold approximately 4,500 specimens (Roman, Late Roman, Byzantine, Arabic, medieval Bulgarian, Western European, Ottoman, etc.). These large quantities are challenging to work with, especially through printed publications.

Modern technologies can take this material a step forward, enabling scholars within Bulgaria and abroad to take full advantage of its potential for systematic scientific research on border studies. The Digital Sigillographic Corpus of Bulgaria Project (DigiSigiCorpBG), funded by the National Scientific Programme “*Development and Promotion of Bulgarian Studies Abroad*” (2022 – 2026) and developed by the National Archaeological Institute with Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, in partnership with museums throughout the country, has created an innovative, multilingual, open access, electronic database. It is designed with the current methods applied according to the SigiDoc standard, including seals and matrices for sealing and stamping discovered in Bulgaria. The specimens are presented through high quality images and are included in an interactive georeferenced map with find-spots. The project puts special emphasis on the optimal accuracy of find-spots for more precise research, thus these are labeled with three accuracy levels: certain (found in archaeological context – marked on the map with green); probable (chance find from certain location, reported by the finder to the authorities – marked with orange); and uncertain (alleged unverifiable account, from possible illegal activity – marked with red). This poster presentation will focus on the development of the interactive map and its accuracy, through the examples of particular archaeological sites and seals dated in Late Antiquity and discovered along border areas (Durostorum, Odessos, Serdica etc).

SESSION 7

BETWEEN THE LIVING AND THE DEAD IN THRACE

Settlements and cemeteries along the route of the *Via Egnatia* in the regional unit of Xanthi

Constantina Kallintzi, Maria Chrysafi, Kyriaki Chatziprokopiou

Long-term surface surveys conducted in the context of administrative projects, together with rescue excavations, have brought to light evidence concerning the location of settlements and cemeteries dating to the Imperial period and Late Antiquity in the part of

the Regional Unit of Xanthe associated with the route of the ancient *Via Egnatia*. The first systematic attempt to compile this evidence was made in 2011 in the doctoral thesis of Constantina Kallintzi, entitled "*The Chora of Abdera: A Contribution to the Archaeology and Historical Topography of the Southern Part of Xanthe Prefecture*". Since then, new data has been added.

The present paper seeks to provide a comprehensive synthesis of the available evidence and examines its relationship to the route of the ancient *Via Egnatia*. Settlements located in the plains and foothills of the Rhodope Mountains, either continued to be occupied from the Hellenistic period or appear for the first time during the Imperial era. Dispersed domestic sites, rural installations, workshops, and cemeteries complete the picture of intensive use of the vital space created by the passage of the *Via Egnatia*.

Thrace as a periphery both of the East and the West. Foreign influences on the inscriptions relative to funerary law

Lyuba Radulova

The paper analyzes the corpus of inscriptions relative to funerary law in the province of Thrace, focusing on the opposition between local phenomena and external influences.

Firstly, through onomastic and prosopographical analysis, the paper tries to identify an eventual foreign origin of the persons who were interested in foreign law, in order to check whether the protection of the grave was a point of interest predominantly for the locals or for the immigrants.

Secondly, the linguistic analysis of the formulas, relative to funerary law, focuses on distinguishing between common formulas, largely diffused in the Graeco-Roman world, local innovations, and formulas that are geographically specific for areas outside of Thrace. The main question here is whether the funerary law texts in Thrace reproduce external models or create new concepts and expressions. The second question is whether the models are Roman concepts and formulas, be them realized in Latin or translated into Greek, or follow conceptual and linguistic examples typical for the East, mainly for Asia Minor.

Lastly, the observations about the previously discussed points will be put together in order to answer the general question of whether the interest in funerary law in Thrace reflects an influence from Rome or from the Eastern world.

Anthropological characteristics of the population of Nicopolis ad Istrum and its rural territory, based on data from excavated burials and from epigraphic monuments

Nadezhda Atanassova, Kalin Chakarov

Several necropolises have been excavated in the rural territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum. Only for these excavated during the last six years, there is information about the anthropological characteristics of the deceased. The investigated burials came from

inhumation or cremation graves belonged to flat or tumular necropolises of villas or villages. The sites are from different parts of the rural territory of the city: Pavlikeni, Lyaskovets, Polski Senovets and Nova Varbovka, i.e. western, southern, northern and eastern.

In contrast, the burial monuments from the necropolises of Nicopolis ad Istrum and sites from its rural territory are numerous. The epitaphs from the city necropolises were written mainly in ancient Greek. In the rural territory is the other way around – Latin is the predominant language on burial *stelae* and altars. However, only in single cases these monuments were found in their sepulchral context. Usually most of them are with less known provenance and many are fragments. The preserved texts from the epitaphs sometimes give valuable information on the age of the deceased, less often, the cause of death, and in some cases, the origin of the buried persons.

Despite the small number of grave structures with anthropological identification of the individuals, the analysis of the available information provides a good starting point for future research. The combination of the anthropological results and the data from the epitaphs shed light on the population of Nicopolis ad Istrum and its rural territory.

The *necropoleis* of Serdica in the 2nd century AD: material and intangible evidence

Yordana Nikolova

During the reign of Emperor Trajan (AD 98–117), the settlement was granted the status of a Roman city under the name Ulpia Serdica. At the beginning of the second century, this elevated status was expressed primarily through its administrative role rather than through its architectural appearance. Excavations at the site of Metrostation II-8 have demonstrated that around AD 110/112–133/138 a gradual transformation had taken place, during which the civilian (possibly veteran) settlement that had developed on the site of the former military camp evolved into a small provincial urban centre. Only at a later stage were significant public buildings constructed. The invasion of the Costoboci marked a major turning point in the city's development. The subsequent construction of the fortification walls during the joint reign of Emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, signalled a new phase in the urban development of Serdica. During this period, Serdica also began to mint its own coinage; compared to others in the province of Thrace, its monetary production was relatively short-lived.

The present paper aims to trace the development of the so-called “city of the dead” and to examine the extent to which the transformations of the 2nd century were reflected in the necropolis of Serdica. Particular attention will be paid to the types of funerary structures and their diachronic development, as well as to preferences in burial rites. The analysis will also incorporate numismatic and epigraphic evidence, supplemented by grave goods. For this period, the necropolis of Serdica has a limited body of published and analysed archaeological material; nevertheless, on the basis of the available evidence, an attempt will be made to assess the demographic profile and social status of the population, and to

develop a more comprehensive view of the processes taking place in the necropolis of Serdica during the 2nd century AD.

At the boundary of Thrace and Macedonia: funerary practices from a necropolis in the Middle Strymon Valley (3rd – 4th c.)

Philip Kolev, Kaloyan Pramatarov

The paper presents a Roman-period necropolis in the Middle Strymon Valley, a region characterized by a clearly defined border between the Roman provinces of Thrace and Macedonia and by a predominantly rural Thracian population. The necropolis is situated approximately 0.65 km west of the centre of the modern village of Struma, Municipality of Sandanski, on a rocky elevation south of its contemporaneous settlement, at an altitude of 220 m a.s.l.

The site has been significantly affected by modern construction activities and illicit excavations. Despite these disturbances, the investigated necropolis displays a biritual funerary pattern, with cremation as the predominant rite. A total of 88 graves were excavated, including 50 cremation burials and 38 inhumations. Cremation was carried out both within the burial pit and externally, with the cremated remains subsequently deposited in the grave. Cremation burials generally consist of simple burial pits, sometimes covered with stones or roof tiles; in several cases, a smaller pit was cut into the bottom of the main burial pit. One burial contained cremated remains placed in an urn.

Inhumation graves are characterized by poor skeletal preservation or entirely absent skeletal remains; however, the dimensions of the burial pits indicate a predominance of children burials. The deceased persons were consistently oriented with the head to the west. Inhumations were placed in simple burial pits, either uncovered or covered with stone slabs, and more rarely with roof tiles. Grave goods are generally modest and typically include coins and ceramic vessels, while additional items comprise personal ornaments (earrings, bracelets, necklaces, etc.) and elements of dress such as buckles, fibulae, and related fittings. The necropolis appears to have been in use from the 3rd to the early 4th c. AD.

The necropolis illustrates the coexistence of local traditions and Roman imperial funerary practices within a border zone between Thrace and Macedonia and represents an important case study for the investigation of burial practices in a contact area between the considered provinces.

Selected Roman-era necropolises from the territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum

Kalin Chakarov

Situated initially on the northern limits of the province of Thrace and later being part of Lower Moesia, Nicopolis ad Istrum had different dynamics of habitation – settling of Asia Minor population in the city centre, Roman citizens and veterans in the rural territory and,

naturally – local Romanized Thracian population. This cultural diversity could be traced to a certain extent by the studying of necropolises.

During the last six years five important necropolises from different parts of the territory of Nicopolis ad Istrum were excavated: a flat one not far from the ceramic manufacture centre and villa in the Varbovski livadi area near the town of Pavlikeni; two flat ones from near the ancient settlement in the northwestern part of Pavlikeni; a flat one near the village of Nova Varbovka; and a tumulus near the town of Lyaskovets. All of them provide valuable information on anthropological data, burial rites and grave finds, and are noteworthy: the Varboski livadi site with the first known inhabitants of the villa, the ancient settlement in the northwestern part of Pavlikeni with its remarkable relief mirror, the Nova Varbovka graves with the sad story they tell, and the Lyaskovets burial mound with its wealthy deceased and rare burial rites.

On the border between worlds. Objects for the afterlife from the southern necropolis of the Roman colony of Deultum

Ivo D. Cholakov

The southern necropolis of the Roman colony of Deultum has been investigated for several years. As a result, 453 graves have been uncovered, including 336 inhumations and 117 cremations. They date from the end of the 1st century to the first quarter of the 3rd century AD. In almost all of them, various objects were found, placed there to accompany the deceased in the afterlife. The majority of these grave goods are typical for the period – ceramic and glass vessels, coins, toiletries, personal belongings of the buried individuals, and parts of their clothing. Some unusual objects discovered as grave goods during the exploration of the necropolis are presented. Among them are a folding iron chair with six legs, a bone whistle – *aulos* / *tibia*, glass vessels, and an amulet which is currently the earliest archaeological evidence of Christians in modern-day Bulgarian lands.

New data on the Western necropolis of Novae

Marin Marinov, Kalin Chakarov, Nicolay Sharankov, Nadezhda Atanassova,
Simeon Angelov

Rescue excavations in 2025 revealed the eastern part of the western necropolis of Novae. Five graves, robbed before the archaeological survey began, were excavated in a relatively small area southwest of the fortress wall of the Roman military camp, later a Roman and early Byzantine town.

Data on the necropolises of Novae, and in particular the western one, are generally scarce. The five graves are of various types and represent different rites. Four contained inhumation burials, and one contained a cremation. Among those with inhumation and in general, three stand out: two cists and one brick grave. The cist graves are made of

limestone slabs, some of which are *stelae* taken from earlier graves and partially broken off before used as construction material. The brick grave is made mostly of ceramic building material and stones, and is the only one in which archaeological finds have been discovered. Based on the finds, its construction could be dated no earlier than the middle of the 3rd century AD.

The *stelae* taken from earlier graves provide new epigraphic evidence on the Roman army. Three of them, used in one of the cist graves, are funerary monuments of two veterans of *Legio I Italica*, and of a centurion of the same legion. Two of them, used in the other cist grave, are funerary monuments of a veteran of an unidentifiable Roman military unit, and of a legionary of *Legio XI Claudia*.

The choice of building materials and construction methods of the three graves raise some questions. For instance, was efficiency preferred over quality, and if so, for what reason(s)? A possible explanation is a change in the socio-economic status of the population to which the necropolis belonged.

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