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All articles in Archaeologia Bulgarica are submitted to peer review.

On the cover: a late 2nd century marble statue found in *Heraclea Sintica*; see the paper of Vagalinski et al. in this issue.

ISSN 1310-9537 **Printed in Bulgaria**

L'art rupestre d'Alta, Norvège. Chronologie septentrionale

Archaeologia Bulgarica
XXIX, 3 (2025), 1-20

David DELNOŸ

Résumé: La préhistoire de la Fennoscandie débute avec le retrait progressif des glaciers, à la suite du Dernier Maximum Glaciaire. Dès la fin du dixième millénaire A.C.N., les populations humaines s'y installent et prospèrent. De nombreuses traditions se forment progressivement, toujours en relation avec celles plus au Sud et à l'Est. Ces dernières y apporteront certaines innovations, telles la céramique ou les métaux. À Alta, les différentes parois décorées permettent de mettre en évidence quatre périodes d'activité rupestre, entrecoupées de phases d'interruption. Le rapprochement entre l'art gravé et les vestiges archéologiques d'autres natures permet de mettre en relation les phases d'activités graphiques et des moments culturels importants. Ainsi, l'apparition de nouvelles formes d'habitat coïncide avec les différents continuums graphiques relevés à Alta.

Mots-clefs: Alta, Norvège ; Chronologie ; Art rupestre ; Contexte archéologique ; Évolution culturelle.

Introduction

La préhistoire des régions septentrionales de l'Europe possède une genèse récente et un développement rapide. Dès les premiers retraits glaciaires, des groupes humains se sont élancés vers le Nord et y ont prospéré. Depuis, de nombreuses influences extérieures, venues du Sud et de l'orient, ont contribué à la constitution d'entités culturelles. Au travers de notre étude, nous nous concentrerons sur les vestiges archéologiques de Fennoscandie et les panneaux décorés à Alta. Les premiers nous permettront de comprendre le contexte général au sein duquel prennent place l'art rupestre. Les seconds nous offriront d'envisager une chronologie des gravures. Le croisement de ces données nous permettra d'explorer les questions relatives à l'apparition de l'art rupestre à Alta, et plus particulièrement la concordance entre événements archéologiques et phases de représentation. Les données envisagées ici sont issues des domaines de l'archéologie, de la géologie et des relevés réalisés par l'Alta Museum. Tous les secteurs décorés sont envisagés dans notre analyse, à l'exception de deux d'entre eux. Le premier est la Storsteinen, qui se trouve notamment en décrochage d'une pente. Sur ce point, elle s'est à toute époque signalée dans le paysage sans rapport direct avec le niveau de la mer. Nous avons également choisi de laisser de côté le secteur nouvellement découvert de Svartskog. Actuellement, seuls deux figures ont été reconnues pour ce site. Ces données sont très largement insuffisantes pour proposer une comparaison raisonnable avec les autres secteurs d'Alta. Une étude ultérieure offrira une comparaison critique avec les résultats obtenus par notre analyse. L'approche envisagée ici offrira de nouvelles perspectives pour l'art rupestre, notamment au regard de son intégration au sein d'un ensemble de productions culturelles. L'exploration de ces informations nous permettra d'envisager, ailleurs, l'art rupestre d'Alta proprement dit selon une perspective davantage holistique.

L'objectif de notre étude vise à envisager la chronologie de l'art rupestre d'Alta sous trois angles différents. Le cadre de notre analyse

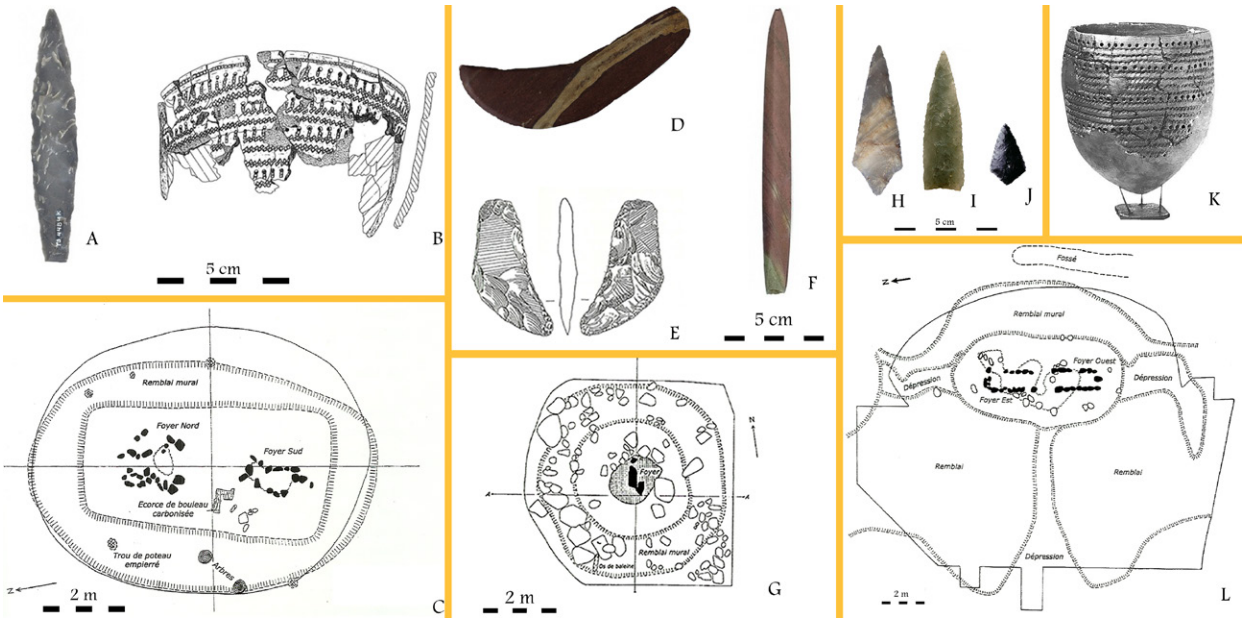

Fig. 3. Vue générale de différents types de productions associées aux sociétés de l'Âge de pierre récent. Pour la première partie de cette période: **A** Pointe en chert gris, Tromsø (modifié d'après Jacobsen a); **B** Reconstitution par le dessin d'une céramique, Latokangas, Finlande (modifié d'après Torvinen 2000); **C** Plan au sol d'un fond de cabane, Nesheim, Norvège (modifié d'après Vourc'h 2013). Pour la deuxième partie de l'Âge de pierre récent: **D** Couteau à tranchant unique, Geithammeren, Norvège. (modifiés d'après Pedersen s.d.); **E** Couteau à poisson, Souvorovo 4, Russie (modifié d'après Plumet 2004). L'industrie lithique est également marquée par l'utilisation du schiste; **F** Pointe en schiste poli de type Nyelv I, Lille Skånland, Norvège (modifié d'après Jacobsen b); **G** Plan au sol d'un habitat de type Karlebotn, Gropbakkeengen, Norvège (modifié d'après Vourc'h 2013). Pour la troisième partie de l'Âge de pierre récent: **H** Pointe de flèches en quartzite gris, Kautokeino, Norvège (modifié d'après Ahlquist s.d.); **I** Pointe en quartzite à retouches couvrantes, Vadsø, Norvège (modifié d'après Anonyme s.d.); **J** Pointe à pédoncule et retouches couvrantes, Meland Nedre, Norvège (modifié d'après Icagic s.d.); **K** Céramique néolithique similaire au type Sperrings, Varsino 6, Russie (modifié d'après Gurina 1987); **L** Plan au sol d'un habitat de type Gressbakken, Gressbaken Nedre Vest, Norvège (modifié d'après Vourc'h 2013)

réalisées attestent d'une occupation au début de l'âge de pierre récent, i.e. entre 4 000 et 3 500 cal. B.C. (Vourc'h 2013, 49-51; Gjerde 2010, 246-255). L'industrie lithique voit le développement du polissage et, outre le quartz ou le quartzite, l'utilisation du schiste. En termes typologiques, l'outillage est caractérisé par des retouches couvrantes et la diffusion de larges couteaux semi-circulaires (Vourc'h 2013, 35-37) (**fig. 3**).

La transition entre l'Atlantique et le Sub-Boréal, vers 3 800 cal. B.C., entraine de nouvelles modifications du paysage (Otte 2009, 144-147). Le début de cette période est marqué par un climat relativement sec, avant de voir une phase plus favorable au développement des lacs, notamment dans les régions orientales de la Baltique (Zernitskaya 1997, 153-160). Les glaciers scandinaves connaissent également une nouvelle phase de croissance (Mayewski et al. 2004, 243-255). Les structures d'habitat changent et nous voyons l'apparition de formes circulaires à foyer unique, dits de type Karlebotn (Vourc'h 2013, 40-43). Devant l'actuel Alta Museum, trois structures ont été repérées, et leur morphologie fait écho au type de structure décris plus haut (Vourc'h 2013, 40-43). Cette position au sein de la crique de Jiepmaluokta, confirme encore l'importance de ce lieu. Durant cette deuxième partie de l'Âge de pierre récent, l'industrie lithique voit très clairement se développer l'usage du schiste et la technique du polissage. Les pointes de Nyelv I sont caractéristiques de cette période, avant de disparaître vers

Hellenistic and Roman Gold and Silver Jewellery from *Heraclea Sintica* and Other Sites in SW Bulgaria

Archaeologia Bulgarica
XXIX, 3 (2025), 21-43

Svenja SIMON

Abstract: This paper presents Hellenistic and Roman gold and silver jewellery from the two necropolises of *Heraclea Sintica* (in the localities of Metlata and Chervenite Skali), as well as from the ancient town of *Heraclea Sintica* itself (Rupite vicinity, Petrich municipality) and other sites in SW Bulgaria. Most of these objects, which include a needle, earrings, omega-shaped ornaments, torques, chains and decorative elements, pendants, a fibula, a diadem, breast plates, appliqués, a bracelet, rings, and belt parts, have not been published previously. These finds cover a time from the 4th c. BC to the 4th c. AD. In addition to presenting the objects, the main purpose is to analyse their different production techniques, in order to gain a better understanding of the craftsmanship and the use of individual fine metalworking techniques.

Key words: Antiquity, ancient Macedonia, jewellery, gold, silver, *Heraclea Sintica*, Bulgaria.

Introduction

The ancient town of *Heraclea Sintica* is located in southwestern Bulgaria, close to the modern village of Rupite in Petrich municipality (Blagoevgrad region). In 1958, the first excavations near the present-day village of Rupite (which was called Shirbanovo at that time) were carried out by A. Milchev. He excavated in the Kozhuh locality and, based on his findings, concluded that the uncovered walls and water pipes were the remains of the ancient city of Petra (Милчев 1960, 457-460; Vagalinski 2022, 10). Twenty years later, from 1978 to 1980, a Bulgarian-Polish team under the direction of M. Domaradzki began new excavations in that area. This campaign aimed to create an archaeological map of Bulgaria. For this purpose, drill samples were taken at various points, and archaeological excavations were only carried out in small areas (Vagalinski 2022, 10). From 1985 to 1988, excavations were carried out in the necropolis of the Metlata locality. The necropolis, which belongs to the ancient city of *Heraclea Sintica*, is located about 500 m south of Kozhuh Hill and is two km northeast of the village of Rupite (which was named Muletarovo in 1985). During these excavations, 167 graves were uncovered, which date from the late 4th c. BC to the late 4th c. AD (Bozhinova 2015, 238). In May and June 1995, a ten-day excavation was carried out in the Chervenite Skali necropolis. The necropolis had already been looted and only eleven graves could be archaeologically recorded, which date from the end of the 3rd c. to the 6th c. AD (Топтанов / Данаилова 1996, 82; Vagalinski 2022, 11). Since 2007, systematic archaeological excavations have taken place in *Heraclea Sintica* under the direction of Prof. Dr. L. Vagalinski.

The majority of the presented gold and silver objects in this study have not been published before. Only a few of them were published in short notes, like one pair of the lion head earrings, the diadem and a breastplate (Bozhinova 2015, 247, figs. 16-18) or the two silver Torques (Божинова et al. 2018, 149, #224). The objects presented here come

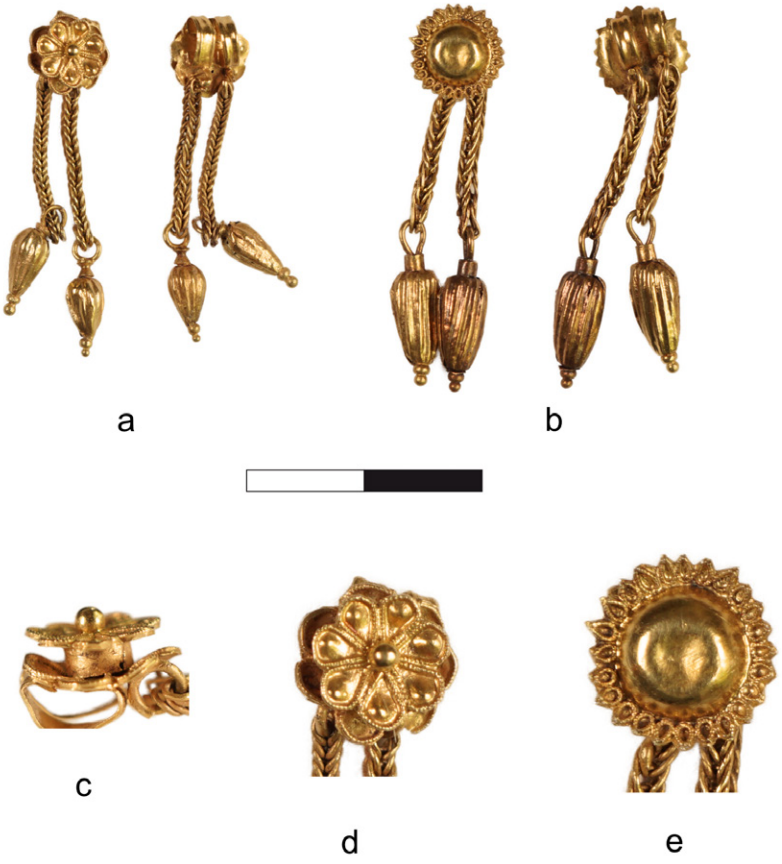

Fig. 3a-e: a The front and backsides of the earring with a rosette; **b** the front and backsides of the earring with a sunflower; **c** a detailed side view of the rosette (without scale); **d** a detailed front view of the rosette (without scale); **e** a detailed front view of the sunflower (without scale) (S. Simon)

a head part (one is worked as a rosette and the other as a sunflower), to which the ribbed loops are attached and two small loops in loop chains hanging underneath with small, stylised flower buds at the ends.

The one with the rosette (**fig. 3a**) has a weight of 0.79 g. It consists of two rosettes, a lower and an upper one. To have more volume, the two parts are not soldered directly onto one another; they are separated by a small cylinder (**fig. 3c**). The two shapes of the rosette have been cut out of a thin gold sheet; the cutting edges are still visible. The petals of the rosette are visualized with a small, beaded wire and separated from each other. The petals on the upper rosette are convex. This was made with a small tool with a rounded tip (a ball punch) as the marks of the punch show (**fig. 3d**). In the centre of the upper rosette, a small golden granule is attached. On the back, there are two small, ripped loops made from a small gold strip. Below these ribbed loops are two loops made of round wire, where a small loop in loop chain is attached. At the end of each chain, there is a flower bud, where two granules are attached.

The sunflower one (**fig. 3b**) has a weight of 0.86 g. Like the rosette, it is made from several parts. The basic shape of the flower is cut out of a thin gold sheet; the cutting edges are still visible. The individual petals (24 in total) are surrounded by a small, beaded wire (**fig. 3e**). The centre of the flower is made with a convex gold disc, which is slightly concave at the top. At the back of the object, two loops made of ribbed gold sheet are soldered on. Below them are two loops made of round wire, where loop in loop chains with a stylised flower bud with two granules at the end is attached.

The Faces of Roman Macedonia: Two Newly Found Marble Male Statues in *Heraclea Sintica*

Archaeologia Bulgarica
XXIX, 3 (2025), 45-80

Lyudmil VAGALINSKI / Arina KORZUN / Philip MACHEV

Abstract: This study presents two newly discovered marble male statues unearthed in 2024 in the Roman city of *Heraclea Sintica*, located in southwestern Bulgaria. The sculptures were intentionally concealed within the unfinished *cloaca maxima*, dated to the late 4th c. AD, at the eastern end of the *forum*. Both were carved from Thasian marble by skilled sculptors, most likely under an official or high-ranking commission. The statues represent portraits of young males whose iconographic type follows the *Hermes Richelieu* tradition. The first, dated to the early 1st c. AD, depicts a youthful nude figure and is plausibly a posthumous image of one of Augustus' heirs. The second, dating to the late Antonine period (AD 175-180), portrays a young aristocrat whose image is influenced by imperial portraiture, combining classical heroized nudity with the refined stylistic tendencies of the late 2nd c. Traces of deliberate blade damage suggest acts of desecration during the Christianization of the city, while their careful concealment indicates the inhabitants' efforts to protect ancestral images and preserve civic memory. Together, these monuments attest to *Heraclea's* prosperity during the Principate and illustrate its cultural resilience and transition from a classical pagan heritage to the Christian world of Late Antiquity.

Kew words: *Heraclea Sintica*, Roman portraiture, *Hermes Richelieu,* Augustus, Gaius Caesar, Lucius Caesar, Roman sculpture, Thasos marble, Roman Macedonia.

1. Introduction

Heraclea Sintica lies in the southwestern corner of Bulgaria near the village of Rupite in the municipality of Petrich near the place where the Strumeshnitsa River flows into the Struma River (**fig. 1**). The city was founded by Philip II of Macedon in the lands of the Thracian tribe Sinti. Heraclea is located at the northeastern end of the ancient Kingdom of Macedonia (**fig. 2**). After the defeat of the latter in the middle of the 2nd c. BC *Heraclea* fell within the Roman province of Macedonia on the border with the future Roman province of Thrace (**fig. 3**). *Heraclea* developed successfully until the end of the 4th c. AD, when it was hit by a strong earthquake. A second such one demolished the city in the second quarter of the 5th c. AD. A well-organized group of Heracleans lived in the 6th c. AD on the Acropolis of the city. *Heraclea* has been systematically studied archaeologically since 2007 (Vagalinski 2022a, 9-12). Several antique statues found in *Heraclea Sintica* have been recently published (Vagalinski 2023; 2020a; 2021; 2022a; 2022b; Korzun 2024).

2. Descriptions

2.1. Description of Statue 1 (figs. 4-10)[1]

The figure is 2 m high, and together with the pedestal it is 2.08 m. The maximum thickness of the statue is about 0.52 m; the maximum width is 0.87 m. The sculpture is modeled from a single marble block, together with the pedestal. The latter measures 0.52 x 0.82 x 0.06/0.07 m. It is roughly leveled at the bottom, where there are no traces of fastening

[1] The statue was cleaned and preserved by Dr. Kitan Kitanov (National Archaeological Institute with Museum – Sofia). It is exhibited in the Historical Museum in the town of Petrich.

Fig. 37. Statue 1 in *cloaca maxima*, second stage of revealing; view from the west (L. Vagalinski)

Fig. 38. Statue 1 in *cloaca maxima*, final stage of revealing; view from the north (L. Vagalinski)

Fig. 39. Laser scanning of the interior of *cloaca maxima*; Statue 2 *in situ*; view from the east (L. Vagalinski)

Fig. 40. Statue 2 *in situ*; view from the east (L. Vagalinski)

Adherence to this type is evident in the portrayal of a naked young man of above human height (around 2 m), with a cloak draped over his left shoulder and leaning on a tree trunk. However, a notable difference in our statue is the turn of the head to the right side, while the left-legged pose is retained from the original type. Any attributes are missing[3].

Since the late Republican period, there was significant interest in copying and adapting classical nude or seminude images of *Zeus, Diomedes, or Hermes* for portrait statues of the Roman elite, and later for members of the Imperial dynasty (Feijfer 2008, 200-227; Hallett 2005, 61-270; Maderna 1988). The size of the statue from *Heraclea*, the selection *of Hermes* as the divine model, and its careful conceal-

[3] For the iconographical type and "formal" replicas, see Maderna 1988, H2-16.

Reading the Myths: Hybrid Mythical Creatures in Byzantine Sgraffito Ceramics According to Venetian *Cynegetica*. Dismantling the Origin of Feasting Cycle

Archaeologia Bulgarica
XXIX, 3 (2025), 81-92

Velichka MARTINOVA

I have solved your riddle, master, comprehended
your story, plunged into your very thoughts;
and if you are the Sphinx, Oedipus is me.
Eustathios Makrembolites
Ismene and Ismenias
12th century

Abstract: A small number of sgraffito plates, adorned with depictions of harpies, griffins, centaurs, sphinxes and the winged horse Pegasus have been bothering scholars for a long time. Although sgraffito pottery is a popular scientific topic in Byzantine studies, little is still known about the semantics behind the ornamental compositions. It is believed that the mythical creatures belong to the feasting cycle – an artistic subject which was also attested in the culture of the Middle East. The ornamental motifs from the feasting cycle adorned not only ceramics, but also silver cups, luxury fabrics, stone works, murals, mosaic floors, scriptoria, and other items. Although the origin of some of the mythological creatures is unquestionably Middle Eastern, the texts of the medieval transcription of *Cynegetica* suggest they rather bear their original Classical mythology symbolism, and they were depicted in sgraffito ceramics because of their long-forgotten relation to hunting.

Key words: sgraffito, *Cynegetica*, hybrids, feasting cycle.

A small number of dishes adorned with mythical creatures, such as harpies, centaurs, griffins, sphinxes and the winged horse Pegasus, are known to exist in Byzantine sgraffito ceramics. It is suggested that the polymorphs belong to the feasting cycle, – probably the most distinguished subject in Middle Eastern and Byzantine art during the medieval period. On the surface, these composite mythological beasts are pagan relics and have no semantic relation to the banquet plotting or hunting. Furthermore, scientists have been bothered why Byzantine potters depicted them on the inner and outer surfaces of some vessels for a long time now. However, little attention has been paid to them by scholars, and the publications that focus on the topic are scarce (Даркевич 1975, 159-187; Maguire 2003, 205-210; Дончева-Петкова 1996). But if we look closely at the Middle Byzantine pieces of art, we shall notice their resistant presence in various secular and religious media. Moreover, the same polymorph creatures also appear on the pages of the medieval transcription of the original Roman hunting treatise of *Cynegetica* – both in texts and in the illustrations.

The selection and evaluation of sgraffito samples in this research have been accomplished by observing primarily depictions of mythological hybrid creatures. The conclusions have been drawn from analysing, interpreting and contextualizing within the broader historical, social and cultural environment of the vases. Through the descriptive-

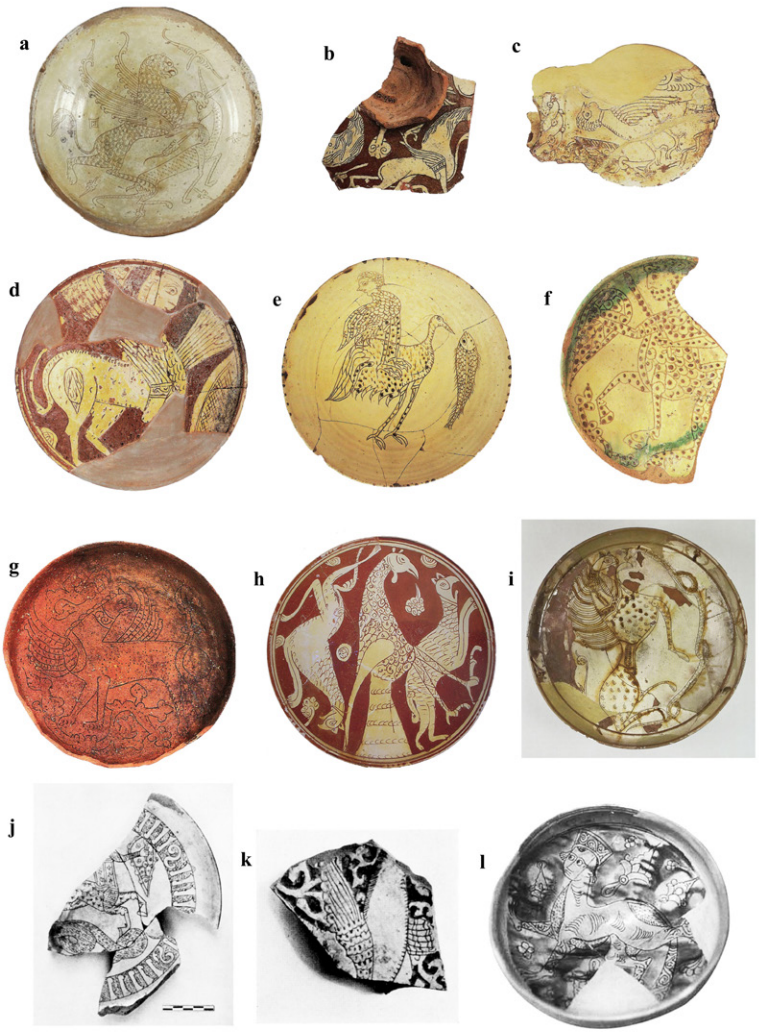

Fig. 1: a Fine Sgraffito, developed style. A griffin attacking a deer, from an unspecified shipwreck, 12th c. (after Wixam 1987, #185); **b** Champleve, outer side. A winged horse – Pegasus, from Larisa, late 12th – early 13th c. (after Papanicola-Bakirtzi 1999, #56); **c** Fine Sgraffito incense burner, developed style. A harpy with floral motifs, origin unknown, 12th c. (after Papanicola-Bakirtzi 1999, #8); **d** Champleve. A sphinx to the right, from Veria, Chalkidiki, late 12th – early 13th c. (after Papanicola-Bakirtzi 1999, #54); **e** Measles Ware. A harpy perched on a water bird and a fish, from Corinth, c.1140-1170 (after Papanicola-Bakirtzi 1999, #196); **f** Measles Ware. A centaur with a spear and a shield, from Corinth, c.1140-1170 (after Papanicola-Bakirtzi 1999, #195); **g** Fine Sgraffito, developed style. A griffin to the left, from the Alonnesos shipwreck, mid. 12th c. (after Papanicola-Bakirtzi 1999, #136); **h** Champleve. Two wingless griffins and a bird, probably a peacock, from Benaki museum, late 12th – early 13th c. (after Papanicola-Bakirtzi et al. 1999, #198); **i** Zeuxippus ware. A griffin fighting a dragon, possibly the personification of Digenis Akritas. From Chersonese, 13th c. (after Залесская 2010, #342); **j** Fine Sgraffito, fine style. A centaur probably fighting a dragon. From Corinth, 12th c. (after Morgan 1942, fig. 92); **k** Champleve. A winged horse – Pegasus, from Corinth, 12th c. (after Morgan 1942, fig. 143); **l** "Port Saint Symeon" style sgraffito bowl with a wingless sphinx, from Limassol, probably an Eastern import, 12th – 13th c. (after Wartburg 2003, fig. 23)

It is assumed that the courtly cycle as well as the sgraffito technique itself have Islamic origin (Morgan 1942, 168; Kapitaikin 2005, 121; Canby et al. 2016, 72-73). It prevailed in Fatimid culture (10th – 12th c.) and it was common in various media, such as – luxury silk fabrics, stone works, Lustreware (Kapitaikin 2005, 120-127). In the 12th century, the Muslim artists painted the ceilings of Roger II of Sicily's palace in Palermo, today known as the Palatin Capella. In the frescoes, there are feasting people, musicians, dancers, acrobats, hunting scenes with lions and raptors, gazelles as well as certain mythological creatures: griffins, harpies and sphynxes (Kapitaikin 2005, 115-148; Maguire 2003, 206-207).

Similar images are found in a collection of 12th century Byzantine silver cups now kept in the Hermitage in St. Petersburg (**fig. 2**). In some cases, the feasting plot occupies the entire outer surface of the cup – like the one from Beriozovo (Даркевич 1975, 78-99). The same characters – a lion, a griffin, a centaur and two harpies – are found on a 12th century secular incense burner from the San Marco Basilica in Venice, Italy (Maguire 1986, 250, #170; Даркевич 1975, 130, #193).

In the 11th and 12th centuries, hunting as a sign of power and well-being became the most popular sport practised only by the privileged part of society. Hawking and cheetah coursing enjoyed currency among emperors and aristocrats, and they hunted for pleasure, not for survi-

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Maria ALEXANDRESCU-VIANU. Une cité antique à travers ses sculptures. La sculpture en pierre à *Tomis* à l'époque du Principat (I^{er}-III^{e} siècles). Editurea Istros A Muzeul Brăila "Carol I", Brăila, 2022, 215 p., 92 figs., 4 drawings, ISBN 9786066544924

Becoming acquainted with a city through its sculptural monuments is not a common approach in modern historiography. This is especially true when the archaeology and, consequently, the ancient topography of the city remain largely unknown. From the outset, it must be acknowledged that one of the three most significant aspects of Roman sculpture – its function within the urban environment – remains insufficiently understood. For this reason, Prof. Maria Alexandrescu-Vianu chose to concentrate on the stylistic characteristics and iconographic programs of the surviving monuments.

The idea of studying the stone sculptures of the Roman city of *Tomis* (1st – 3rd c. AD), modern Constanța, emerged from more than half a century of research devoted to various monuments in *Moesia Inferior.* Although virtually all of these works had been published previously, it is precisely the comprehensive perspective adopted here, together with the consideration of the diverse influences that shaped the artistic tradition, that lends the study both its originality and coherence.

The study is divided into six chapters (with a seventh providing the conclusions). Its narrative is structured around the "manifestations" of different strata and social functions of the urban environment as reflected in sculpture: the city and its elites, its inhabitants, its cults, and its dead. Such an approach naturally presupposes a preliminary understanding of the social processes at work in *Tomis* at the outset of its Roman history. Accordingly, the first chapter – and partially the second – serves as an introduction, outlining the initial stage of the city's social Romanization and the earliest expressions of the Roman artistic tradition.

Tomis, originally a Greek colony, became the administrative capital of the province and a hub for soldiers, veterans, artisans, and merchants under Rome. Prof. M. Alexandrescu-Vianu stresses that sculpture provides unique evidence of cultural transformation as an art form highly responsive to political and social change.

Appealing to the research of Gabriella Bordenache (emphasized Hellenistic survivals) and Zaharia Covacef (highlighted Roman innovations), the author integrates these perspectives within a sociological history of art, seeking a more nuanced reading of Tomitan sculpture.

Chapter 1. Sociology of Tomitan Art. This chapter develops a sociological framework for understanding art in *Tomis*. The city's status changed drastically: from an *emporium,* it became the capital of Scythia Minor. Onomastic studies reveal a sharp increase in Roman names during the 2nd – 3rd c. AD, indicating progressive Romanization of elites, even as the population remained largely Greek. Prosopographic evidence highlights local combined Greek origins with Roman citizenship.

The chapter also stresses the role of immigrants from Asia Minor and Syria and of Roman veterans, who brought Latin epigraphy and "Danubian limes" figurative traditions. Drawing on Pierre Francastel and Paul Zanker, the author distinguishes between *patrons, beneficiar-*

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Archaeologia Bulgarica
XXIX, 3 (2025), 101-104

Julia VALEVA. The Episcopal Basilica of *Philippopolis* in Context. Sofia: New Bulgarian University, 2023, ISBN 978-619-233-262-4, 312 pages, 170 figures, in Bulgarian

The Episcopal Basilica of *Philippopolis* (Plovdiv) has attracted widespread attention in recent years due to its remarkable features: richly decorated mosaics in two layers, a possible early foundation date, impressive dimensions (making it one of the largest basilicas in the Balkans), successful conversion into a popular museum (2021), and the challenges it poses to researchers.

In a rapidly evolving environment, situated on a site of historical and strategic importance within the Roman city system (as the capital of Province of Thrace), the basilica was destined to become a new Christian spatial and spiritual center. Complex in its structure, materials, artifacts, chronology, architectural models, and cultural influences, the basilica sheds light on fundamental questions about both past and present, relating to:

- urban development of the ancient city and its evolution through the early Byzantine and medieval periods;
- the spread of Christianity and the establishment of the episcopal institution;
- early Byzantine church architecture;
- architectural sculpture in the Roman and early Byzantine periods;
- early Byzantine mosaic art;
- artistic traditions, networks, workshops, and artisans;
- the research, conservation, and public engagement with cultural heritage.

These are some of the themes Professor Yulia Valeva explores in "The Episcopal Basilica of *Philippopolis* in Context". The monograph presents a thorough analysis of the basilica, examining both the archaeological evidence and its broader historical, cultural, and artistic context.

This work precedes the complete publication of the archaeological investigation (2016-2019) by site director Zheni Tankova. It builds on numerous studies of specific aspects of the basilica – some still in press (Stanev / Tankova 2024) – as well as the initial investigations (1983-1986 and 2002-2003) led by Elena Kesyakova. As a pivotal contribution to research on the basilica[1], Professor Valeva's book has already garnered two reviews (Dimitrov 2024; Kazaryan 2024), which outline its structure, summarize its content, and highlight several of its many contributions. Given this coverage, I will instead focus on examining the book's methodological approach.

The text is organized as follows:

- Introduction
- Urban Landscape in the Context of Romanization
- Christianization – Religious and Ideological Context
- Location of the Great Basilica in the City
- Deccription of the Great Basilica in *Philippopolis*
- Mosaics

[1] Among the most recent publications of previously unknown artifacts from the basilica, I would mention: Dosseva / Stanev 2022; Dosseva / Kantareva-Decheva / Stanev 2024.

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Payment: per remittance. Annual price: EUR 93.46 + postage.
Single fascicles: EUR 38.50 + postage.
Price of electronic versions: EUR 16.50 for a paper/review.

An exchange is not possible.

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E-mail: LVAGALIN@TECHNO-LINK.COM, LFVAGALINSKI@GMAIL.COM
http://www.archaeologia-bulgarica.com

ISSN 1310-9537 **Printed in Bulgaria**