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The Roman State Cult Outside the Cities of Thrace

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ABSTRACT
While almost all evidence about emperor worship in Roman Thrace originates from the urban context, little is known about state religion outside the cities. The paper explores the attestation of veneration practices in the cities' territories and in non-urban structures by examining data from such things as road stations, emporia, komai, sanctuaries, recreational facilities, and domains. The sites are classified according to their primary or most probable identification. Some of these had multiple functions that challenge their interpretation. Most evidence comes from inner Thrace, the area between Philippopolis and Augusta Traiana. Perhaps this can be explained by the economic resources of these two cities and the more advanced archaeological research. The data from the Aegean coast and the Via Egnatia is limited to inscriptions about roadworks and border marking. This picture probably is due to the frequent imperial journeys through Via Diagonalis and the multiple occasions for central authorities' direct involvement in local matters. Imperial veneration practices in most non-urban contexts, such as setting up statues and using special formulae, are linked to practical and economic reasons. The emporia present a more city-like organization, with more versatile instances of emperor worship practices.
Keywords: Roman Thrace, Roman official religion, imperial cult, non-urban settlements, city territories

While the official worship of the imperial family, dea Roma, and the Capitoline Triad is more or less well attested to inside the cities of Roman Thrace,[1] knowledge about veneration practices in the cities' territories in the 1st-3rd century AD remains somewhat limited, with the subject having received little attention. This can mostly be explained by the nature of the state cult, which involved considerable administration and a high level of publicity. Therefore, urban spaces have always provided most of the information for scholars to dwell on.

Nevertheless, occasional evidence of state cult practices emerges outside the urban fabric of Roman Thrace (Fig. 1). This paper is an attempt to review these practices and to

1 Roman Thrace as used here is considered the maximum expanded territory of the Roman province of Thrace for the whole period from the establishment of the province until Diocletian's reforms and includes the cities that changed their administrative attribution at a certain point during this period and that had not always belonged to Thrace (i.e., Nicopolis ad Istrum, Marcianopolis, Mesambria, Byzantium). The purpose for this is to examine as much evidence as possible in order to better assess this issue, regardless of the province's changing borders.

consider, where possible, the links with the nearby cities. This text will deal mostly with evidence found in civilian non-urban settlements, specifically road stations, emporia, komai, sanctuaries, recreational facilities, and domains. The list of places presented here is by no means an exhaustive one. The sites are classified according to their primary identification as accepted in scientific literature. This is necessary not only for the sake of structure but also in an attempt to discern the motive behind ruler veneration with regard to a certain settlement's presumed function. However, many of these sites share more than one function and can therefore be assigned to more than one category, thus posing a challenge for determining the original context and intent of the evidenced practices.

Figure 1. Map of Roman Thrace with non-urban settlements mentioned in the text

Roads and Road Stations

When Thrace became part of the Roman Empire, the new province was amalgamated into an elaborate network that facilitated army movement, enabling the proper function-

ing of the postal services and, naturally, the transportation of people and merchant goods.[2] Alongside the roads, several stations appeared all over the province.[3] The management of *viae* and *stationes* is a complex matter, as suggested by the fragmented literary and archaeological evidence: While infrastructure belongs to the special category of state-regulated activities under the care of several magistrates, it is at the same time placed within a certain city's jurisdiction for maintenance, with local authorities and sometimes private landowners expected to contribute.[4]

Some road houses had a rather simple layout, while others combined military outposts, inns, taverns, recreational facilities, emporia, sanctuaries, and private satellite establishments that were adapted to the particular local conditions and tailored to meet the specific needs and budgets of all kinds of travelers.[5] The reason behind this spatial and functional diversity was due to a number of factors, one of which had to do with the moment when the road stations appeared, namely whether they had been an original structure at a given location or had been developed in the vicinity of pre-existing features impacted their internal organization. One should also bear in mind the problem of identification when evaluating the evidence, considering the limited number of fully excavated sites.[6] For instance, an indicative example of diversity is found at Sostra,[7] a station along the trans-provincial road leading from Oescus

2 For infrastructure in Roman Thrace, see Mitko Madzharov, *Roman Roads in Bulgaria. Contribution to the Development of Roman Road System in the Provinces of Moeasia and Thrace.* Sofia: Faber, 2009. Concise overviews are also offered in Сергей Торбатов, "Пътна мрежа в Тракия и Мизия (I-III в.)". In: Иванов, Р. (ed.) *Археология на българските земи, том 1*, 2004, p.76-95, and most recently in Anne Kolb, "Transport in Thracia" in Vagalinski, L./Raycheva, M./Boteva, D./Sharankov, N. (eds.) *Proceedings of the First International Roman and Late Antique Thrace Conference "Cities, Territories and Identities"*. Sofia: National Institute of Archaeology with Museum, 2018, p. 269-278.

3 Madzharov, p.44; Kolb, Transport in Thracia, p.272.

4 Cornelis van Tilburg, *Traffic and Congestion in the Roman Empire*. London, England: Routledge, 2012, p.32-37; Anne Kolb, "Mansiones and Cursus Publicus in the Roman Empire" in Basso, P./Zanini, E. (eds.), *Statio Amoena: Sostare e Vivere Lungo le Strade Romane.* Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing, 2016, p. 6.

5 On the general variety of roadhouses and their features, see Lucietta Di Paola, "Mansiones e stathmoi nelle fonti letterarie tardoantiche: destinazione d'uso, equipaggiamento, immagini / Mansiones and stathmoi in literary sources of Late Antiquity: their destinations, equipment, descriptions" in Basso, P., Zanini, E. (eds.), *Statio Amoena: Sostare e Vivere Lungo le Strade Romane.* Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing, 2016, p.10-15; about the layouts of stations in Thrace: Торбатов, p.81-82; Madzharov, p.48-51.

6 For an ecample on the methodological difficulties of identifying road stations and their functional parts, see Enricio Zanini, "Qualche appunto per un'archeologia contestuale delle stazioni di sosta nel mondo romano e tardoantico" in Basso, P., Zanini, E. (eds.), *Statio Amoena: Sostare e Vivere Lungo le Strade Romane.* Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing, 2016, p.72-73; and Marie-Adeline Le Guennec, "Identifier une auberge romaine. Quelques réflexions méthodologiques / Methodological Thoughts on the Identification of Roman Inns" in Basso, P., Zanini, E. (eds.), *Statio Amoena: Sostare e Vivere Lungo le Strade Romane.* Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing, 2016, p. 83-84.

7 Sostra will be considered here as part of Thrace, despite the fact its administrative designation has shifted from one province to another. One reason for this is that evidence suggests that it had been within Thrace's jurisdiction for some time in its history – e.g. Sharankov and Hristov, "A Milestone of Emperor Philip the Arab from the Road Oescus – Philippopolis Found at the Eastern Wall of the Castellum of Sostra." *Archaeologia Bulgarica,* 23(2) (2019), p.66-67. Another reason is that Sostra is among the few extensively investigated sites and therefore can be used as a case study for both Thrace and Lower Moesia, being located on border of the two.

to Philippopolis. The initial settlement core was a small military detachment established in 142 AD by Antoninus Pius, but it evolved over time to include a road station, two civil *vici*, a sanctuary, and a mausoleum.[8]

The evidence of ruler veneration in road stations in Thrace is mostly indirect, with the earliest examples able to be seen in the wording of building inscriptions that have been able to be positively linked to the infrastructural aspect of these sites. A few road stations provide valuable evidence of inscriptions that mention construction or repair works conducted under different emperors. Very soon after the establishment of the road network in Thrace, four identical Latin inscriptions honoring Nero were set up, dating between 59-63 CE and recording the construction of two types of road stations in Thrace (*tabernas* and *praetoriae*).[9] While their main purpose was to document building activity, their careful execution, neat layout, and use of the dative case in the dedications are reminiscent of honorary monuments usually found in urban contexts. Another Latin inscription about a major state-funded repair campaign under Marcus Aurelius is seen in Viamata[10] on the Oescus-Philippopolis road, documenting the reconstruction of *stabulae* that had collapsed due to old age. A *pro salute* dedication for the well-being of the Severans documents road works near Traianopolis.[11] Honorary inscriptions such as on statue bases seem to be less commonly found, perhaps due to the state of research. Among the known examples is a statue base for Severus Alexander[12] at Egerica station, set up by the polis of Serdica.

These monuments are few but eloquent and have given scholars reason to note the high degree of involvement and the long-term commitment of central authorities (at least until Severan times) in Thrace, not just in major road construction but also in maintenance and repair, especially in comparison to other provinces. The reason for this is usually sought either in the emperors' careers or personal interests in this particular area, or in the fact that Thrace was not urbanized enough to allow the full-scale participation of the cities, and many repairs that should have fallen on the local population were in fact undertaken by state officials.[13] In response, inscriptions seem to contain excessive praise with a religious aspect. Naturally, they were set up in visible locations where passengers, including the authorities, could see. This was a subtle yet efficient expression of gratitude and loyalty to the ruler.

Milestones are another type of monument clearly linked to infrastructure and also appear relevant to this discussion. Road distance markers, usually columns, were placed by cities throughout major roads in the territories throughout the empire. In the context of ruler

8 See Ivan Hristov, *Praetorium Sostra. A Study of the Roman Roadside Station of Sostra – II-III Century.* Sofia, 2015, p.9-11.

9 IGBulg V 5691; Kolb, Transport in Thracia, p.272.

10 (AÉ) Alf Merlin, "Périodiques." *L'Année Épigraphique* vol. 1961 (1962), p.318.

11 IAT 433, 447 - Loutra; Kolb, Transport in Thracia, p.273.

12 IGBulg IV 1992.

13 Kolb, Mansiones and Cursus Publicus in the Roman Empire, p.5-6; Transport in Thracia, p.272.

veneration, milestones seem to have been very important for Thrace, as scholars have noted the texts on milestones to often have been formulated as honorary or dedicatory monuments rather than simply keeping to the original practical purpose of showing mileage, thus also serving as propaganda tools.[14] While the mile count is in fact often missing (or perhaps had been painted), ample space was given to the carving of names and titles of emperors. Most of the milestones in Thrace are in Greek and date to the end of the 2nd century AD or later. They are frequently formulated as *pro salute* or even direct dedications using the dative case. Again, a merge of epigraphic genres is observed, for the inscriptions transcend their utilitarian purpose and resemble honorary ones. The formulations used are comparable to those used in a religious context.

The temporal and spatial concentration of milestones in Thrace surpasses the practical aspect of road upkeep. In terms of chronology, a great number of milestones appeared along the central road in Thrace in the 3rd century AD over a comparatively short period of time, especially due to the imminence of imperial visits. For example, this is evidenced by the multiple milestones honoring Severus Alexander under the governor Rutilius Pudens Crispinus that are found in the territories of at least four cities along the road.[15] What is more impressive is that his two immediate successors, Saturninus Fidus and Cattius Celer, also set up a number of road markers along the same route[16] in the territories of different cities, respectively for Maximinus and Gordian. This implies that governors in their efforts to manifest loyalty for the travelling emperors preferred to erect new stones rather than re-carve or paint over the old ones, which were usually condemned. Tugugerum, a *mutatio* [change] in Philippopolis' territory,[17] illustrates well this phenomenon: The area around it has yielded milestones set up under all three governors for the rule of the three consecutive emperors[18] in the course of less than 20 years, which can hardly be explained with constant road renovations. One can assume that the situation was similar at the remaining road stations and roads in the province. The better-documented Sostra sheds some further valuable light on the context of the milestones of the 3rd century AD, as demonstrated by a very rare example of a milestone discovered *in situ* by the road at the entrance of the road station.[19] The milestone bears the names of Philip the Arab and his son; it contains two unofficial titles and appears

14 The impracticality of these monuments as road markers in Thrace has been emphasized by scholars on a number of occasions – cf. Богдан Филов, „Епиграфически ситнежи". *Периодическо списание на българското книжовно дружество*, 67, 1907, p.625-629; Геров, Б. *Проучвания върху западнотракийските земи през римско време. Част III*, 62(2), 1968-1969, София: Наука и изкуство, 1969, p.128.

15 IGBulg 2012, 2040 (territory of Pautalia); IGBulg IV 1982a (territory of Serdica); IGBulg III, 1 1373, 1382 (territory of Philippopolis); IGBulg III, 2 1827, IGBulg V 5604 (territory of Hadrianopolis).

16 IG Bulg IV, 2000 (territory of Serdica); IG Bulg III, 1 1069, 1337, 1375 (territory of Philippopolis).

17 Димитър Цончев, "Римският път Philippopolis – Tugugerum – Bessapara." *Годишник на Народния археологически музей в Пловдив,* 2 (1950), p.71-83.

18 IGBulg III, 1 1373, 1374, 1375.

19 Sharankov and Hristov, A Milestone of Emperor Philip the Arab from the Road Oescus – Philippopolis Found at the Eastern Wall of the Castellum of Sostra, p.57-62.

to have been hurriedly erected, perhaps in relation to the son's proclamation as Caesar before being subsequently put to *damnatio memoriae.*[20] While the count of 1 mile is perhaps symbolic, the titles and the display are rather special and give the impression of an effort at demonstrating loyalty.[21]

The location of milestones proved especially useful in the 3rd century AD and onwards when rulers traveled through the province often enough. Their location was perhaps also due to the increasing number of emperors originating from the Balkans. Literate travelers, including the emperors themselves, were exposed to the visual messages of these monuments that had been set up on the initiative of cities and/or eager provincial governors. Large cities like Serdica, Philippopolis, and Pautalia were thorough in covering their territories with milestones that contained multiple epithets (e.g., "Lord of the earth and the sea")[22] and wishes for the well-being of the imperial family. Accordingly, they kept current with the political situation: names of emperors were diligently condemned when dead rulers were subject to having their memory erased. Their use as propaganda tools continued well into the 4th century AD with the political transformations of the Tetrarchy: Thrace offers telling examples from the time of Constantine and family,[23] and even an especially fascinating case of glorifying Julian's pagan policy by setting up milestones with special wording in the territory of Serdica.[24] Furthermore, road markers often mention the titles of cities (e.g. *neokoros* for Philippopolis).[25] Many of the mechanisms of official religion and propaganda appear to have been applied on the roads

20 Ibid., p.65.

21 However, this does not justify the recent hypothesis about an imperial cult sanctuary having been located in this place. I. Hristov suggested an excavated structure/platform to perhaps have been a roadside sanctuary related to emperor worship – see Ivan Hristov, "A roadside sanctuary with a milestone (miliarium) from the time of Emperor Philip the Arab on the route of the ancient road Oesucs – Philippopolis at the Sostra castellum." *Известия на Националния исторически музей* 32, p.161-163, and lately, Sharankov and Hristov "A Milestone for Emperor Trajan Decius Erected by the City of Nicopolis ad Istrum at the castellum of Sostra." *Archaeologia Bulgarica* 26, 3 (2022), p. 75. The arguments cited involve the multitude of honorary and dedicatory inscriptions discovered in and around Sostra, as well as the rather symbolic milestone of the Philips set up right next to the road and in front of the gates. This approach seems rather incorrect, as the quantity of inscriptions found throughout Sostra over various periods of time is irrelevant to the identification of a sanctuary. With so many different operational bodies at work around the road station, finding evidence of the many aspects of the settlement is unsurprising: the statue bases erected by the resident cohort and found within the *principium* are not necessarily related to the life of the road station. The milestones' location, although undoubtedly propagandistic, can hardly replace the function of a proper altar in front of a sanctuary. As for the structure itself, no explicit evidence exists, such as layout, a votive, or a building inscription, to imply its dedication to the emperor(s). Furthermore, it could hardly have accommodated the administration of an imperial cult celebration or the necessary level of formality. More likely, if the structure had had any religious functions at all, it could have been a space for ceremonial reception of delegations, or, if a shrine indeed, for one of the traditional gods worshipped by travelers or merchants.

22 E.g. IGBulg V 5604, Castra Rubra, for Severus Alexander and Julia Mamaea.

23 Emil Nankov, "From Utility to Imperial Propaganda: (Re)discovering a Milestone of Constantine I from the Vicinity of Bona Mansio and Emporion Pistiros and Its Significance for the Study of the 'Via Diagonalis' in the Territory of Philippopolis." *Bulgarian e-Journal of Archaeology*, 12(1), p.97-116.

24 Nicolay Sharankov, "Infectam usque fatale exitium: The Milestones of Emperor Julian in the Territory of Serdica and the Conflict of Paganism and Christianity." *Archaeologia Bulgarica,* 23, 3, p. 41-70.

25 IGBulg III, 1 897, 898.

just as they would be applied within the urban environment. Naturally, one can expect these processes to be more intensive in the vicinity of cities and road stations than in remote areas.

Roads and road stations were therefore key places where provincial loyalty can be attested to, especially in turbulent times. Road facilities provide a limited but focused stage for the expression of ruler veneration. A road station attracts larger groups of people and provides the opportunity for passengers to focus on the actual text of the inscription. The examples above demonstrate that, as far as roads and road stations are concerned, two main occasions appear to be found that triggered responses of gratitude and excessive praise: 1) infrastructure upgrades and 2) imperial journeys. These expressions exceeded standard construction inscriptions and distance markers and can be recognized as imperial cult manifestations. One can note the temporal dynamic as well: While road construction inscriptions are among the earliest examples of epigraphic record in Roman Thrace and even predating urbanization in some cases, the majority of discovered milestones date to later times, especially after the Severans, and were not so much due to road repairs as to their propaganda potential when used along the routes of imperial journeys.

Certain differences occur in comparison to cities' ruler veneration. Due to the nature of road stations, they lack certain urban features such as festival infrastructure, administration, priests, calendars, and athletic *agones* [contests]. They also certainly lack the audience capacity and logistics. Furthermore, imperial festivities in the cities sprang from various occasions such as imperial birthdays and accession anniversaries, but here the context appears to be more straightforward, the audience is a passing one, and the expressions of loyalty are momentary.

Border Markers (*Cippi*)

A group of monuments that mark the territory of places should probably also be considered here. Although not related to one single settlement or facility, the *cippi* can also contribute to the discussion. Just like milestones, *cippi* are found outside urban (or any kind of settlement) context but were related to processes in the communities that erected them and are sometimes very indicative of ongoing religious and political trends.

While most of the border stones are simple markers of territory, some *cippi* in Thrace are more informative. They could have a religious character and were often phrased with dedications to various deities. From Abdera's *chora* comes an impressive border marker by Hadrian's Abderitans, where the emperor is called with a divine epithet and hailed as Zeus *Ephorios* [of the borders] to commemorate their territorial gain, set up all the way next to rival Topeiros.[26]

26 IAT 78, 79 – Toxotes. The text is strikingly different from other border stones in the Aegean, which tend to be brief and exact even when they mention emperors – cf. the group of Tetrarchic border markers – IAT 382, 383, 398.

Bendipara, a village and a *komarchia*[27] in the territory of Philippopolis, documented its satisfaction with an imperial decision. This village showed an aspect of ruler veneration after an imperial intervention to benefit the villagers. Three border stones issued under the joint rule of Caracalla and Geta obviously resulted from the settlement of a border conflict. The stones record the people's gratitude for an imperial decision: κατὰ θεῖαν ἀπόφασιν [[by divine judgement].[28] Although not an uncommon expression in the Eastern world and especially in Asia Minor, it is encountered only here within Thrace and contrasts to the simple to-the-point border inscriptions known from other places in the province. This could mean that Bendipara's border dispute and its favorable resolution might have been significant enough to commemorate on a border stone. Another *cippus* comes from the mining area near Malko Tarnovo in Strandzha: a *pro salute* dedication to Zeus and Dionysus on a border marker and altar on behalf of Caracalla, Julia Domna, the imperial house, the senate, the legions, and the city council and people of Bizye. The dedicator was Aurelius Dionysios, son of Themison, who'd set up the monument at his own expense in the area of a presumed sanctuary of Zeus and Dionysus.

The instances are rather eloquent. In one, the emperor's provision is called divine, while another has a *pro salute* dedication to the imperial house. This can be seen as a practical way to remind neighbors of the favorable imperial intervention in border disputes, as well as a creative and less common method of attesting to their gratitude and loyalty to the ruler. The fact that this is not a widely attested phenomenon in Thrace indicates that this also was not a central practice but rather a very individual matter that had been provoked by particular events.

Emporia

Emporia [marketplaces] are another fixture in the territories of the cities that are worth examining. By definition, these were places of commerce and interaction. In the absence of thorough systematic excavations, a clear distinction of the function cannot be always made, as numerous cases are found where *emporia* and other structures such as road stations or rural settlements may co-exist and even overlap in the same locations. *Emporia* were somewhat larger non-urban settlements with permanent residents possessing a more complex administrative structure in comparison to road stations. The settlers could be either volunteers or a group of people relocated there by decree. Roman *emporia* had existed in Thrace at least since the second half of the 2nd century AD,[29] as seen in the earliest clearly dated inscriptions from an *emporium* in the province at Discoduraterae[30] and implied by the renowned

27 Венцислав Динчев, "Бендипара – първата точно локализирана комархия в Римска Тракия." *Минало* 1 (1996a), p.19-20.

28 IGBulg III, 1 1455, 1472; IGBulg V 5534.

29 More recently regarding the *emporia* in Roman Thrace, see: Илиян Боянов, *Дискодуратере и емпориите в Римска Тракия.* София: Авалон, 2014.

30 Ibid., 11-15.

inscription of Pizos.[31] Septimius Severus' rule is traditionally considered a key period when a number of *emporia* had sprung up or been reorganized in Thrace.[32]

The existence of a larger space and permanent inhabitants, as well as the commercial character of the place, made it possible to apply some methods of state religion that were typical for the cities which oversaw the *emporia*. The spatial organization and the resident audience allowed for the use of different visual messages and modes of reception, such as erecting of imperial statues and perhaps even a regulated system of festivities where the emperor was treated as a god.

Discoduraterae, initially located within Augusta Traiana's territory and eventually transferred to Nicopolis ad Istrum's jurisdiction,[33] has yielded by far the largest collection[34] of honorary inscriptions (at least nine) for various emperors outside the cities of Thrace that had been set up under a number of different provincial governors. One characteristic of the settlement is the persistent honoring of emperors and empresses as founders., such as done for Marcus Aurelius, Septimius Severus, Severus Alexander, Maximinus Thrax, Philip the Arab, and Otacilia Severa. The inscriptions usually indicate the statues to have been placed by "the citizens of Augusta Traiana within their *emporion*". Overcoming the Balkan range obviously posed no problem;[35] officials from the city fulfilled their duties, even if it meant transporting statues and stones, up until the moment the *emporium* was transferred into the care of Nicopolis ad Istrum. Moreover, the presence of governors' names on the inscriptions emphasizes the official character of this veneration on a provincial level, which most probably required proper organization and administrative units. The regular statue erecting was perhaps entrusted to individuals more or less professionally involved in the process, as evidenced by the discovery of a carnelian gem with the engraved images of Gordian III and Tranquillina[36] that had most likely been a personal item belonging to an imperial cult functionary. An interesting aspect about those responsible for the cult can be seen in the statue base for Severus Alexander as set up by the *epimelete* [civil/religious official] Marcus Aurelius Asiaticus.[37] His career can be traced due to a number of inscriptions also found in Augusta Traiana, where he was *bouleutes* [councillor/senator], *archiereus di Hoplon* [high priest of Hoplon], a priest of the goddess

31 IGBulg III, 2 1690; see the commentary on the establishment of Pizos in Dilyana Boteva, "Another evidence for the establishment of Pizos", *Studia in memoriam Velizari Velkov = Thracia*, 13 (2000), p.21-26. with lit.

32 Georgi Mihailov, "Septimius Severus in Moesia Inferior and Thrace" in *Acta Antiqua Philippopolitana. Studia historica et philological*. Sofia, 1963, p.123-126.

33 Sometime in the 3rd century – see Боянов, p.19.

34 IGBulg II 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 734; IGBulg V 5257; Ивайло Лозанов, "Нов надпис от тържището Дискодуратере в Тракия" in *Phosphorion. Studia in honorem Mariae Cicikova*. София: Академично издателство Проф. Марин Дринов, 2008, p.534-540.

35 Васил Василев, "Работилници за императорски и монументални статуи в Тракия и Мизия", *Studia Archaeologica, Supplementum I: Сборник в памет на д-р Петър Горбанов.* София, 2003, p.183.

36 Боянов, p.85-85.

37 Лозанов, p.534-540.

Roma, *Pater Patridos* [noble father], and undoubtedly a prolific benefactor in his town.[38] This suggests that urban imperial cult institutions, priests, and individuals were also active within the city territories, maybe even in the same capacity. However, no evidence of the cult of *Dea Roma* or gladiatorial shows has been documented so far in the *emporium*.

Statues are also known to have been set up in other *emporia* in Thrace, although only on a lesser scale and this perhaps due to the state of research. The emblematic Pizos in Augusta Traiana's territory was established (or reformed) under Septimius Severus in 202 AD specifically with the purpose of maintaining a road station. The same document provides interesting information that the provincial governor had been given the task of establishing or consolidating the *emporia* of Thrace. Imperial veneration was thus unsurprisingly practiced under the Severans, as evidenced by the erection of statues of the imperial family , of which a statue base for Julia Domna survives, signed by the *boule* and *demos* of Augusta Traiana.[39]

Parembole, originally established as a *mutatio*[40] near Philippopolis, is also mentioned in later sources as an *emporium.*[41] The original context of evidence from later imperial times is disputable in the absence of excavations. A statue base for Balbinus was found together with some pieces of the bronze gold-plated statue itself.[42] According to the inscription, the statue had been set up by the city of Philippopolis in 238 AD using surplus moneys. That such a short-lived emperor received so much veneration within the mere four months of his rule is remarkable at a non-urban location, meaning that one could expect even more lavish decoration for rulers that lasted longer and aided the cities in any way. The use of gold on bronze in this case is of particular significance,[43] not matched by any other emperor statue found so far in Thrace. An interesting example of special treatment for the rulers in Parembole also is found in a statue base for Philip Minor, hailed with the divine epithet *Neos Helios* [Our Sun].[44]

Cillae is best known as a *mansio*-type road station located in the territory of Philippopolis, but the evidence regarding the current topic originates from a connected settlement,

38 Буюклиев and Шаранков, "Новооткрит епиграфски паметник за строителната дейност и обществения живот в Августа Траяна при Северите." In: Boshnakov, K., Boteva, D. (eds.) *Jubilaeus V: Studia in honorem Prof. Dr. Margaritae Tacheva.* Sofia, 2002, p. 82-93; Буюклиев and Шаранков , "Още два надписа за Марк Аврелий Азиатик – πατὴρ πατρίδος на Августа Траяна." In: *Проблеми и изследвания на тракийската култура,* 2. Казанлък, 2007, p.176-188.

39 Буюклиев and Шаранков, "Два новооткрити надписа от Пизос." *Епохи* 12, no. 1-2 (2004), p.206-208.

40 It. Burd. 568.6: *mutatio Paramuole mil VIII*.

41 Mihailov, p.124. Боянов, p.138-139.

42 IGBulg III, 1 1510 = IGBulg V 5547; Василев, p.184.

43 This paper will not discuss other impressive precious metal imperial likenesses found in extra-urban contexts as stray finds due to their uncertain provenance (e.g., the gold bust of Septimius Severus from Didymoteicho or the silver non-canonical small-format portrait of Julia Soaemias [?] found near modern-day Tuchenitsa slightly off the borders of Thrace). Their function also remains unclear, although they resemble imperial images of precious metals used as standards or imperial cult paraphernalia – cf. respectively De Pury-Gisel 2019, 319-327 and Иван Христов, "Проучване на викус (vicus) от римската епоха в околностите на с. Тученица, Плевенско." *Известия на Националния исторически музей – София*, 16 (2005), p.48.

44 IGBulg III, 1 1511.

most likely an *emporium*, although the sources do not attest to it being such specifically.[45] Its unclear identification regarding the type of settlement warrants careful examination of the material, but Cillae nevertheless still offers interesting evidence. An honorary statue base for Maximus[46] was erected by the polis Philippopolis also from surplus moneys here. Apart from the official setting of statues, Cillae further offers some more religious aspects of emperor veneration. The evidence of it being at least indirectly related to the imperial cult is its lengthy inscription[47] dated 241-244 AD and being erected by a Dionysiac *speira* that was active there. The group had set up an enormous slab, a *pro salute* dedication for Gordian III and his wife Fulvia Tranquillina, which also records the names of society members as dedicants. It begins with a classic well-wishing formula for the imperial family. More interestingly, the inscription features among the list of members a cult office quite specific to Bithynia, that of *sebastophantes*, which is attested twice to two different individuals. This office (or title) is comparatively rare and has been commonly associated with the imperial cult and characteristic of Asia Minor, as encountered predominantly in inscriptions from Bithynia and Galatia, as well as in Caria, Ionia, Lydia, and Phrygia.[48] The inscription from Cillae in Thrace is so far the only mention outside Asia and the westernmost attestation of this term. The *sebastophantai* of Cillae are not listed among the chief offices in the catalogue, but are still among the leading ones. The precise nature of their role within society is not clear, due to the lack of any other evidence in Thrace. Their status here apparently was not as high as that of their Bithynian counterparts. Undoubtedly, however, this unconventional office was related to the imperial cult, and its sporadic appearance in Thrace should be explained by an Asia Minor influence.

One site in Pautalia's territory is Golemo Selo, which has been interpreted as a possible *emporium*, and is connected to a noteworthy dedication: "To the divine family and to the

45 A number of scholars are inclined to interpret the settlement as a marketplace with settlers mainly from Asia Minor due to the discovery of a list of names quite similar to that of the Pizos Charter: Mihailov, p.124. Бояновp.137-138.

46 IGBulg III, 1 1515 = IGBulg V 5548.

47 IGBulg III, 1 1517 = IGBulg V 5550.

48 The function of *sebastophantes* has been much discussed but is still unclear, with various scholars attempting to link it to imperial cult mysteries (at least etymologically, with a role similar to that of *hierophantes* and *theophantes*), or to interpret it as someone who reveals imperial images during ceremonies, not necessarily in the mysterial context – cf. Henri Willy Pleket, "An Aspect of the Emperor Cult: Imperial Mysteries." *The Harvard Theological Review* 58(4) (1965), p.345–346; Louis Robert, "Documents d'Asie Mineure" *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique (BCH)* 101(1) (1977), p.101; S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power. Asia Minor and the Imperial Cult.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1984, p.190-191; Duncan Fishwick, *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West, vol. 2.1: Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire.* Leiden: Brill, 1987, p.573; Barbara Burrell, *Neokoroi: Greek Cities and Roman Emperors*. Leiden: Brill, 2004, p.152;346. The connection to the imperial cult is beyond doubt, as seen in the name of the office or title; and regional differences appear to exist regarding the *sebastophantai*, which can be both male and female. In Asia, for instance, it is an office of high prestige, where the bearer of such title is sometimes also head of the provincial *koinon*, *archiereus*, *agonothetes*, or other leading positions within the imperial cult framework – see Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.114. In Bithynia, it was an occupation reserved for the elite – Henri-Louis Fernoux, *Notables et élites des cités de Bithynie aux époques hellénistique et romaine*. Lyon: Mom Editions, 2004, p.350-352.

Olympic gods,"[49] by a group of individuals of various ethnic origins, some of whom are mentioned by their profession. Clearly, the divine household is not part of the traditional deities, which would be included in the Olympic gods. According to Gerov, a possible temple of the imperial cult could be sought in the settlement near Golemo Selo,[50] although so far no solid evidence has been found to attest to this. The exact same wording dedicated to the "divine family" is attested to on an inscription from the city of Pautalia.[51] A dedication to οἴκῳ θείῳ [the House of God] is also featured in a sundial there, most probably displayed at the agora.[52] As for the context in which the dedication from Golemo Selo had been displayed, most likely the intended location was the nearby identified sanctuary of Zeus Zbelsurdos, as other votive columns have been recorded in this vicinity.[53]

The above-mentioned examples from presumed *emporia* in Thrace are by no means complete, but they do lead to the observation that the main recorded reasons for cult observances in marketplaces may often have stemmed from changes in statute and above all must be linked to the economic gain of the cities to which they were related. Clearly, the fact that a more religious aspect was present can be attested to, as well as an involvement of more varied groups of dedicators. Perhaps this owes to the fact that the *emporia* were indeed like little towns with professional and commercial profiles. The methods for expressing loyalty to the ruler were somewhat more limited than in the city but far more varied than in road stations. The evidence from Parembole is of particular importance, showing unexpected outbursts of veneration, which might be explained by the place's key location next to a busy road station or perhaps by the thriving public religious life in nearby Philippopolis. The dedicators were varied, not only comprising the state as represented by the governor but also the cities themselves as represented by religious and professional groups. Of course, this picture is based on the current state of research and may change with more thorough investigations of the *emporia* in the future. One circumstance that is clearly shown by Discoduraterae and Golemo Selo is that most probably the same individuals and practices were common both in the *emporia* and in their mother cities; as such, the *emporia* can be seen as projections of the

49 IGBulg IV 2214; Борис Геров, "Проучвания върху западнотракийските земи през римско време. Част I", *Годишник на Софийския университет, Философски факултет,* 54(3) (1959-1960), София, 1961, p.276, fn. p.60; Mihailov, p.124; Боянов, p.215.

50 Геров, Проучвания върху западнотракийските земи през римско време. Част I, p.300.

51 IGBulg IV 2072.

52 IGBulg V 5779 – an inscription on a sundial, dedicated to the "divine family" and the city. No indication is found for the original location of the sundial, but one can assume an open-air, visible, and frequented place, such as the area of the agora. One could suggest that similar devices existed in many public places of Thrace, as fragments are also found in other places. The particular formula in the inscriptions from Pautalia, however, finds no parallel in the province. Gerov has argued that the "divine family" must be seen as the imperial house – cf. Геров, Проучвания върху западнотракийските земи през римско време. Част I, p.270-271. The connection of the Roman ruler to time, eternity, and the sun is laden with propaganda and is a tradition stemming from Augustus and his *Horologium* on Campus Martius.

53 Иван Вълчев, *Извънградските светилища в римската провинция Тракия (I-IV век).* София: Университетско издателство „Св. Климент Охридски", 2015, p.254-255; also see below.

same processes when addressing the imperial cult practices that were going on in the cities. This may lead to the hypothesis that evidence of some so-called strictly "urban" cults, such as that of Dea Roma or the Capitoline Triad, can also be expected to surface in the *emporia*.

Komai

Naturally, this study should also take a look at the settlements interpreted as villages.[54] Again, the designation between *emporia* and villages must be emphasized as being not quite so clean-cut, as the two can also be part of the same organism. Unfortunately, evidence clearly linked to village life and state cult observances is fragmentary.

To expect that villages must have had some more imposing constructions and statues in their central and public areas, perhaps some of them related to emperor veneration, would be logical, but very little evidence of that exists. However, some indirect information does exist pertaining to imperial architecture and sculpture decorations in urban territories, although the context is unclear. From Bessapara near Philippopolis, a marble head has been interpreted as a portrait of Antoninus Pius.[55] The deviation from official types has led to many discussions in scholarly literature regarding its identification, even some skepticism toward it being an imperial portrait at all.[56] Another curious and much debated monument relevant to this topic is the statue base for Caracalla from the time of his sole rule found some 12 km north of Selymbria[57] and signed by the city authorities of *Neokoros* Perinthos. If indeed originally from Selymbria, this base is rather significant as it confirms the settlement to have also been within Perinthian jurisdiction after Septimius Sevreus' rule and his punishment of Byzantium by reducing its *chora* (possibly including Selymbria) to the benefit of Perinthos in the aftermath of the civil war against Pescennius Niger. Moreover, the inscription clearly attests to the fact that the city organs had the practice of setting up monuments in their *komai* and that imperial statues could be seen in the villages of Thrace. Still, estimating whether this had been done for any emperor or only in situations with propagandistic potential as in the example of Selymbria is difficult.

Apart from honorary monuments, some further, albeit limited, evidence is found among the villages in Thrace. The previously mentioned border markers of Bendipara record the "di-

54 *Komai* (Lat. *vici*) is used here to mean civilian villages (i.e., unfortified settlements of rural character) in the sense defined and applied by Венцислав Динчев, "Полуградските неукрепени селища през римската, къснoримската и ранновизантийската епоха (I – началото на VII в.) в днешните български земи." *История*, V, 3 (1996), p.99-104.

55 Rumjana Milčeva, *Antike Skulptur in Bulgarien. Band I: Römische Porträts im Archäologischen Nationalmuseum Sofia.* Langenweißbach: Beier & Beran, 2005, p.49-51.

56 Ваня Попова-Мороз, "Римската портретна пластика от Бесапара и нейната територия." *Годишник на Националния археологически музей – София,* 8 (1992), p.203-205.

57 Perinthos-Herakleia 307, with discussion. In the commentary of the inscription, M. H. Sayar allows the possibility that the base had been moved from Perinthos.

vine judgement"[58] of the emperors (obviously in favor of the villagers) and demonstrate that these small settlements had also been familiar with border disputes and to have documented their gratitude to the ruler accordingly. In the context of villages seeking a resolution to their problems from the emperor, his review would also be incomplete without mentioning Scaptopara, a non-localized settlement in the area of modern Blagoevgrad. The settlement, referred to as a *kome*, fell within the administrative territory of Pautalia and was famed for its thermal springs. According to a renowned petition[59] sent to Gordian III by the villagers under the representation of the soldier and co-landowner Pyrrhus, the village was situated next to a marketplace and in the vicinity of two military camps. This caused much trouble with non-regulated visits and unauthorized demands from the villagers for free accommodations and food. While the inscription offers a valuable insight into the practice of where such documents had been erected in Rome, nothing unfortunately is known of the context of Scaptopara's copy. The monumental stele would suggest a public display, even in light of Gordian III's less-than-satisfactory decision. Scholars have speculated that the care for the production of this stele despite the disappointing results indicates that it may have been Pyrrhus himself who'd erected the monument in order to emphasize his own efforts in forwarding the petition.[60] In any case, one can expect that the inscription was meant to be seen by the wider public, so perhaps it had been displayed in the village's main square

So far, emperor worship practices in the villages of Thrace appear to be attested to only in connection with official matters, such as border or other land disputes. In this sense, village observances resemble some of those in the cities but lack the luster of organized festival life. Less information is found regarding the motives and methods, or even who the individuals were who took care of these processes.

Extra-urban sanctuaries

While considering the divine treatment of the emperor, the attention mustof course be turned toward a clearly religious context as well: the sanctuaries outside the cities. Although scholars so far have presumed or identified nearly 180 sanctuaries that functioned largely between the 2nd-4th centuries in Thrace,[61] nearly none of these reveals information pertaining to state religion. Despite the fact that a number of dedications in sanctuaries in the *chorai*

58 IGBulg III, 1 1455, 1472; IGBulg V 5534; see above.

59 IGBulg IV 2236 / SEG 44:610.

60 Hauken described it as "a private or semi-official record" of Pyrrhus' efforts. Tor Hauken, *Petition and Response: An Epigraphic Study of Petitions to Roman Emperors, 181–249*. (Monographs from the Norwegian Institute at Athens 2). Bergen: The Norwegian Institute at Athens, 1998.

61 Most recently, counted and catalogued in Вълчев.

of larger cities like Philippopolis,[62] Pautalia, and Serdica had been set up by functionaries of the imperial cult (e.g., *thracarchai, bouleutai, gerousiastai, archiereis,* and *philarchoi),* these were almost exclusively private in character and not placed in the official capacity of the dedicator.[63] Such dedications mostly reveal personal religious preferences but do not extend to the professional duties of the dedicators.

The above-mentioned dedication for the well-being of the "divine family" on a votive column from Golemo Selo placed by *emporiastai* (?) in the local sanctuary is among the very scarce piece of evidence. The dedication[64] from Malko Tarnovo to Zeus and Dionysus on a border marker and altar for Caracalla's imperial house was discussed earlier in this article and was set up in the area of the sanctuary. The indication of the municipal organs of Bizye in the text implies that the sanctuary was within the city's jurisdiction and not part of the nearby mining domain. However, this does not clarify the role or context of the dedication, and this single monument is not sufficient for determining anything more about the organization of emperor worship in Bizye and its sanctuaries. A few more private dedications for the health of emperors, possibly set up inside sanctuaries by individuals, are known from Thrace, such as the *pro salute* dedication[65] to the Mother of Gods on behalf of the imperial family from Bogdanitsa in the Philipppopolis territory dated to the 2nd-3rd centuries AD and a dedication to Dolichenus by two private individuals for the emperors (maybe Geta and Caracalla) from the ruins of the nymphaeum outside Augusta Traiana.[66] The scarcity of such monuments in Thrace so far points to the observation that this was not a common practice and perhaps personal reasons were present behind these dedications.

The appearance and use of dedications to the gods alongside formulae such as for the health, salvation, victory, well-being, happiness, or eternal life of the dedicated involve a type of well-wishing popular in the Greek and Latin inscriptions of the Principate. These monuments comprise an interesting group in the context of the imperial cult. On one hand, they demonstrate that gods and emperors are differentiated, while on the other hand, the population of the empire was engaged in invoking the emperor's well-being. These formulae were generally popular in Thrace, especially in terms of building and dedicatory inscriptions. Texts of this kind are often found on architraves, as plaques on the façade of a construction itself, or upon altars but are

62 The renowned Philippopolitan sanctuary of Apollo Kendrisos which earned city the title of *neokoros* is allegedly located on Dzhendem tepe, a hill *extra muros*, has been excluded from this review. One reason for this is that the temple at the top (if located there) is still essentially an urban feature within a two hours' walk and climb from the city center. Another reason is that a recent reassessment of the evidence makes the identification of the structure on Dzhendem tepe with the *neokoros* temple of Philippopolis less certain – cf. Вълчев, p.185-186; Милена Райчева, "Бележки върху локализацията на неокорния храм във Филипопол." *Годишник на Регионалнен археологически музей – Пловдив,* 12 (2014), p. 238-242.

63 Вълчев, p.187-188.

64 IGBulg V 5659; Петър Делев, "Епитафията на Хреста и светилището на Зевс-Дионис в Малко Търново." *Археология*, 25(3) (1983), p.7-8.

65 IGBulg III,1 1452.

66 IGBulg V 5600.

never found on statue bases. Less commonly, they are seen on milestones. In Thrace, these inscriptions are well known from the times of the Antonines onwards, with the well-wishing most frequently being applied to the entire *Domus Augusta*. With the exception of milestones, however, they are almost exclusively encountered in the cities and in direct connection with a certain event or benefaction. The dedications listed here remain rare and among the very few found in a religious rather than official context. This confirms that no clear connection exists between the sanctuaries in the hinterland and the official state cult organization in the cities. For the most part, the sanctuaries in the *chorai* remained connected to local cults and private worship.

Recreational facilities

Thermal springs and *balnea* are frequently found at or near sanctuaries and sometimes constitute large complex facilities in their own right. They attracted various visitors and provided yet another stage for public interactions outside the urban context.

Indeed, a very precious piece of evidence regarding the imperial cult in Thrace in general comes from a thermal resort near Augusta Traiana (Starozagorski Mineralni Bani), which has been used as such since antiquity up to the present. An impressive *pro salute* inscription[67] documents the construction and decoration of a bathhouse for the health and well-being of Marcus Aurelius and his entire family. The dedicators are archpriests and the spouses Valeria Frontonilla and Ulpius Hieronymus from Nicomedia. The dedication implies the presence of a sanctuary of the Nymphs nearby, which has not yet been identified archaeologically. The inscription is definitely not private, as it contains the titles of the couple and other official information, they were most likely not involved in the operation of the sanctuary[68] but rather as some community benefaction. Whether the bathhouse was linked to an adjacent settlement that took care of it or if it was a self-sustained recreation center is not entirely clear.

One could expect functionaries to have endowed other such resorts containing thermal springs and the like in the *chorai* of cities in the same way for the public good; similar to the mechanism by which city and emporia are connected. Perhaps one can expect that similar benefactions were made in other places such as Pautalia or Aque Calidae.

Domains

The knowledge about imperial and private domains in Thrace is hardly sufficient.[69] Due to their character and sizeable territory, they are not easy to identify archaeologically, with most of the evidence coming from a number of inscriptions and sources or their function

67 IGBulg V 5599; Димитър Николов, "Строителен надпис от римска баня край Стара Загора." *Археология,* 1 (1968), p.43-47.

68 Вълчев, p.188.

69 The issue has been most thoroughly researched in Boris Gerov, *Landownership in Roman Thracia and Moesia (1st-3rd century).* Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1988, p.69-83.

being presumed due to the presence of certain features such as natural commodities and ore mines. Nevertheless, taking a cautious look at these establishments and their potential connection to state religion is worthwhile.[70]

So far, no solid evidence exists for organized or spontaneous imperial veneration in domains, whether private or otherwise. The recent excavations of a site near Elhovo in the Tonzos Valley between the Sakar and Strandzha Mountains have suggested the existence of an imperial domain and/or residence dating back to the 1st-2nd century AD. The site features a peristyle complex with a sanctuary and a possible tholos. One of its interpretations[71] has been that it is related to the cult of the emperor based on its solid make and appearance, but this hypothesis has not been supported by other evidence (e.g., inscriptions, sculptures). If it were supported, this would be an early example of emperor worship structures in Thrace, dating from the time of the establishment of the province and predating its urbanization. The hypothetical setting in a private context also provokes thinking about the ownership of the property, but so far the idea remains conjectural and awaits further exploration in the future. Another possible imperial domain[72] has been assumed in a mining region in the Strandzha Mountain near the modern town of Malko Tarnovo. Inscriptions originate from the area that point to this interpretation, notably a dedication to Apollo Aulariokos, which documents the existence of a community of Greek miners dated to the "18th year of the rule of Antoninus (Pius)".[73] The specific way of dating according to the emperor's regnal year rather than being based on consuls, provincial governor, or city archons is not common in Thrace. The lack of sufficient evidence regarding the administration of imperial mines and quarries in the province does not allow for analyzing whether this kind of veneration had been standard for such places of work. However, some expression of loyalty and gratitude should cetainly be expected, especially in state-owned facilities.

Also confusing is the situation involving other indirect evidence of possible imperial veneration in a domain near Philippopolis. This can be seen in an event described in the Lives of the three martyrs of Marcianopolis: Maximus, Asclepiodota, and Theodotus.[74] According to the *passio*, the martyrs had been put to death by decapitation in the times of Galerius Maximianus. The execution had been carried out by Teres – the governor himself, possibly a

70 I owe my gratitude to N. Sharankov and S. Kirov for the valuable discussion on domains in Thrace.

71 Агре et al. "Трако-римски селищен обект в м. Св. Илия в землището на с. Стройно, общ. Елхово." *Археологически открития и разкопки през 2020 г.* София, 2021, p. 875-876. The imperial cult hypothesis has been announced predominantly in media interviews, with a thorough publication of the site still expected: https://elhovo.news/?p=143513 (last accessed 08.02.2024).

72 Gerov, p.80-81.

73 IGBulg III, 2 1859.

74 BHG II, 108, 1239-1240b.

vicarius in charge of the entire diocese of Thrace.[75] The place of martyrdom was called Saltys and was on the road from Hadrianopolis to Philippopolis, some 30 miles before the latter. It is described as a place rich in natural springs[76] but has not been identified with certainty. The place called Σάλτυς has been suggested to in fact be a *saltus* that might be located near the road station Cillae and within the possible domain.[77] Whether this could be an imperial or a private estate is not entirely clear, as the area is rich in various epigraphic monuments, including evidence of a domain of a *thracarch*.[78]

If the information in the *passio* is to be believed, the fact that the governor carried out a legal process and performed an execution outside the city despite the martyrs having been previously tried and punished on arenas and stages in the other cities they'd been taken to is very significant. Considering the diversity of Cillae, that the described events are related to one aspect of the settlement or another (e.g., station, emporium, village in a domain) cannot be determined for sure. The versions of the Lives mention a village, but having in mind the purpose and genre of the text, this is less than definitive in determining the type of settlement. An official state matter such as an execution requires a proper context, accessibility, and visibility. If the decapitation was performed in an agrarian village, it was possibly carried out on the agora. Naturally, an *emporium* would be more fitting from a logistical point of view, but a domain could also have offered enough convenience. However, one should bear in mind that none of these would permit as large and organized an audience as an amphitheater would have, and the February weather hardly seems a favorable setting for a planned event. Therefore, the execution could plausibly have been prompted by the fact that the martyrs simply could not endure the journey all the way to Philippopolis, which was most likely the intended place for torture and where performing the execution in an entertainment building would make

75 Velizar Velkov, "Hagiographic data on the history of Thrace in the IV c. (Passio SS Maximi, Theodoti et Asclepiodotae)" in *Roman cities in Bulgaria: Collected studies by V. Velkov.* Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1980, p. 139; Николай Шаранков, "Надпис за реконструкция на филипополския театър", *Годишник на Регионален археологически музей – Пловдив,* 12 (2014), p.283; Martinova-Kyutova and Sharankov, "The Ancient Theatre of Philippopolis (Plovdiv, Bulgaria)." In: Vagalinski, L./Raycheva, M./Boteva, D./Sharankov, N. (eds.) *Proceedings of the First international Roman and Late Antique Thrace Conference "Cities, Territories and Identities"* (Bulletin of the National Archaeological Institute 44), 2018, p.73, no.9; Nicolay Sharankov, "Notes on Governors of Roman Thrace." In: Vagalinski, L./Raycheva, M./Boteva, D./Sharankov, N. (eds.) *Proceedings of the First international Roman and Late Antique Thrace Conference "Cities, Territories and Identities"* (Bulletin of the National Archaeological Institute 44), 2018, p. 105-106, no. 9.

76 AASS Sept V, 35-36: *Πρὸς δὲ τριάκοντα μηλίων τῆς πόλεως ἐν κώμῃ τινί (Σάλτυς δὲ τῇ κώμῃ τὸ ὄνομα, ἕλλην δὲ γλῶσσα βρύον ἀν αὐτὴν μετεφράσετο) καὶ γὰρ ὑδάτων βρύχουσι ἄφθονες πηγαί, καὶ δένδρων παντοδαπῶν καὶ ἀμπέλων εὐθηνία τερπνὸν παράδεισον ἀπερχάζονται τὸ χωρίον.*

77 Gerov, p.78, note 54; Velkov, p.143-146. For a commentary on the interpretation of Saltys as a *saltus* (i.e., an imperial domain) or as derived from the Latin verb "to spring" but without identification of the place, see Шаранков, Надпис за реконструкция на филипополския театър, p.282, note 23.

78 From a presumed sanctuary of Zeus and Hera near Bratya Daskalovi, only around 10 km north of Cillae, originates an altar with a dedication to Hera set up by a *pragmateutes* employed at the domain of the *thracarch* Eustochios Celer – IGBulg III, 1 1538. According to Gerov, this estate is not to be confused with a possible horse-breeding imperial property in the area, as attested to indirectly in a dedication to Heros from a sanctuary near Cillae; IGBulg II, 1 1519; Greov, p.78, note 53.

more sense, just as in Marcianopolis and Hadrianopolis. Other known early martyrdoms were usually timed to coincide with festivals and sought maximum visibility.[79] Unfortunately, the extant evidence is not enough to reach definite conclusions as to whether or not extra-urban executions had been deliberate manifestations of imperial loyalty or the exception. This topic is worth exploring further, as it brings up interesting issues such as how and by whom such events were organized, and did they have the same ceremonial character as in the cities (i.e., set in large entertainment buildings or open spaces, and taking place on special occasions)? These aspects will unfortunately remain unclear until more evidence surfaces.

Conclusions

One important conclusion from this review is that the evidence in question has been found predominantly in the core of Thrace in the area between Philippopolis and Augusta Traiana (**Map 1**). To a certain extent, this is predictable when considering the economic resources of these two important cities, the existing conditions (e.g., major roads, accessibility, fertile lands), and the more advanced archaeological research that has occurred there. On the other hand, the evidence from the Aegean coast and along the *Via Egnatia* is surprisingly little and limited to inscriptions about roadworks and border markings, despite the existence of similarly favorable natural and economic conditions. One may suggest, therefore, that the concentration of evidence in inner Thrace has to do with the frequency of imperial journeys through *Via Diagonalis*, as well as the greater occasions of central authorities' direct involvement in local matters, such as construction activities, status changes, and territorial disputes. One may also speculate that, in general, the old Greek colonies of Aegean Thrace, similar to those on the Black Sea coast, felt little need to praise or thank the Roman emperors, bearing in mind the establishment of new cities in their hinterlands considerably diminished their significance. The so far unexplored state of Southeastern Thrace and the Propontic coast sadly prevents any conclusions from being drawn about these practices in the hinterland of the capital Perinthos.

A major methodological difficulty is also present, as posed by the fact that non-urban settlements are not always clearly discernible without explicit epigraphic identification. For this reason, the results of this research remain tentative, as the lack of certain archaeological contexts impedes the interpretation of official cult practices, and the multiple functions of extra-urban sites (i.e., *emporia*, stations, domains) often overlapped.

This review has demonstrated that, although the examined sites were not located inside the urban nucleus, they remained essentially related to urban culture. Cult arrangements were unsurprisingly made mostly by the cities to which these sites belonged. One very important observation is that no monuments so far have been found related to *Dea Roma* or the Capi-

79 For instance, St. Theodota's execution in Philippopolis during Hadrian's rule was timed to coincide with the Apollo festival in the city; see Николай Шаранков, "За датата и мястото на мъченичеството на света Теодота от „града на Филип"." *Bulgaria Mediaevalis,* 6 (2015), p.22.

toline Triad. These so far would seem to have remained strictly city cults designed for large public events. Outside the cities, the living emperor was usually the sole receiver of honors and occasionally in combination with other family members. No data is found regarding the veneration of deified deceased emperors.

Regarding the types of monuments encountered outside the cities, the *pro salute* dedications are by far the most prevalent and encountered in most types of settlements. This is hardly surprising, because this is a very versatile group (i.e., able to range from architraves to milestones and fit many purposes and media). Essentially, these inscriptions are often connected to constructions. Less commonly, simple construction inscriptions and honorary inscriptions on statue bases are encountered outside the cities.

From an archaeological point of view, no clearly identified temples, entertainment buildings, or open-air structures that can be positively linked to emperor worship have been found yet outside the city context. This is also not surprising, given the small number of identifiable imperial cult structures in general, as well as the state of research. Based on the available evidence, no information is found regarding regular festivals and their organization, although city institutions and functionaries are indicated to have been involved in statue erecting outside the cities; thus, one can speculate that perhaps their duties also extended to the observation of an official state festival calendar in the cities' territories.

Until now, no solid information has been presented concerning the private sphere (i.e., villas and other types of establishments, including domains). Although villas seem to have been frequently excavated in Thrace and also comparatively easier to identify, no dedication, statue, or portrait has yet been found that points directly at the delicate issue of a private imperial cult. Currently, the few indications of private worship of the emperor in Thrace appear to be limited to the cities.

The available evidence leaves the impression of a more practical side to imperial veneration in the non-urban context. Essentially, the known reasons for setting up statues or using special formulae and divine epithets were mostly economic. In infrastructure-related places, the monuments of imperial veneration were to the point and displayed in key locations. In *emporia* (when identifiable), perhaps because they had a more city-like structure, the family aspects of imperial power were also acknowledged. Emporia also had more varied groups of monuments and dedicators and in general and more creative manifestations of emperor worship. In order to build a fuller picture of the issue of state religion outside the cities of Roman Thrace, a substantial amount of evidence remains to be had, especially regarding *komai* and domains.

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