SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORICAL SCIENCES
INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY - BELGRADE

# HAEMUS INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH NETWORK: ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY OF THE BALKANS IN LATE ANTIQUITY (3rd–8th CENTURIES AD)

## 2nd International Workshop

Shifting Settlement Patterns: Methodological Approaches to Urban and Rural Agglomerations in the Late Roman Balkans (3rd–7th c.)



12–13 november 2026, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts,
Grand Hall, 35 Kneza Mihaila Street, Belgrade

**Archaeology and history of the Balkans in Late Antiquity (3rd–8th centuries)**
**2nd International Workshop**

# Shifting Settlement Patterns: Methodological Approaches to Urban and Rural Agglomerations in the Late Roman Balkans (3rd–7th c.)

Organised by Vujadin Ivanišević, Dominic Moreau, Nadežda Gavrilović-Vitas, Snežana Golubović, Ivan Bugarski and Ivan Gargano

Under the patronage of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade, the University of Lille, the HARTIS-UMR 9028 Research Centre (Université de Lille, CNRS, MC, Inrap), the French School of Athens and the French School of Rome, with the support of the AOrOc-UMR 8546 Research Centre (CNRS, Université PSL [ENS / EPHE]), University of Split, the University of Ljubljana, the Historical Museum of Popovo, the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO) and the RIM Project (Croatian Science Foundation / Institute of Archaeology, Zagreb)

## PROGRAMME

## 12 November 2026

Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Kneza Mihaila 35
Grand Hall, second floor

**8:30–9:00:** *Welcome and registration*

**9:00–9:15:** *Opening remarks*
Snežana Golubović (Belgrade) and
Vujadin Ivanišević (Belgrade)

**9:15–9:45:** *Introduction*
Nadežda Gavrilović-Vitas (Belgrade),
Vujadin Ivanišević (Belgrade) and
Dominic Moreau (Lille)

**Inaugural Keynote Lectures - Comparative Perspectives beyond the Balkans**
(chair: Ivan Bugarski)

**9:45–10:30:** *The Transformations of Urbanism in the Late Roman West*
Simon Esmonde Cleary (Birmingham)

**10:30–11:15:** *Between Local Micro-Ecology and State Macro-Economies: Reconfiguring Settlement and Human Landscapes in the Late Antique/Early Byzantine Eastern Frontier*
Enrico Zanini (Siena)

**11:15–11:30:** *Coffee Break*

**11:30–12:15:** *Urban Planning at an Everyday Level? Urban Government in the Sixth Century East*
Luke Lavan (Canterbury) - Online

**12:15–13:00:** Polis *and City in the Diocese of* Oriens *in the Sixth Century: Words, Texts, and Ideas*
Catherine Saliou (Paris) - Online

**13:00–14:30:** *Lunch*

**Session 1: Rethinking Settlement Categories in Late Antiquity**
(chair: Ivan Gargano)

**14:30–15:15:** Finis Salonae *in Comparative Perspective. Models of Urban Decline in Dalmatia and Neighbouring Provinces on the Eve of the* grande brèche
Ivan Basić (Split)

**15:15–16:00:** *From the New Topography of a City to That of a Province: The Case of Ulpiana-Iustiniana Secunda, between Upper Moesia and Dardania*
Christophe J. Goddard (Paris)

**16:00–16:15:** *Coffee Break*

**16:15–17:00:** *Categorising Hilltop Settlements: Between Spatial and Functional Change*
Orsolya Heinrich-Tamáska (Leipzig) and Ordanche Petrov (Prilep)

**17:00–17:45:** *Proto-Byzantine Illyricum: Settlement Patterns between Cities and Fortified Refuges*
Vujadin Ivanišević (Belgrade)

**Session 2, part 1: Methods and Scales of Evidence**
(chair: Snežana Golubović)

**17:45–18:30:** *Zaldapa and Its Landscape: Integrating Field and LiDAR Data in Settlement Studies*
Dominic Moreau (Lille), Nicolas Beaudry (Rimouski) and Thierry Lucas (Paris / Strasbourg)

## 13 November 2026

Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Grand Hall, second floor

**8:15–8:30:** *Welcome*
**Session 2, part 2: Methods and Scales of Evidence**
(chair: Snežana Golubović)

**8:30–9:15:** *Digital and Field Archaeology: An Integrated Methodological Approach to the Research on Caričin Grad and Its Environs*
Ivan Bugarski (Belgrade)

**9:15–10:00:** *Viminacium LiDAR Survey: A Contribution to Identifying the Elements and Evolution of the Civilian and Military Complexes*
Nemanja Mrđić (Belgrade) and Petar Kojadinović (Belgrade)

**10:00–10:45:** *LiDAR, Geophysics and Excavation at Kovachevsko Kale: Towards an Integrated Archaeological Approach to a Little-Known, Medium-Sized Fortress*
Simon Stanchev (Popovo and Veliko Tarnovo) and Oleg Aleksandrov (Veliko Tarnovo)

**10:45–11:00:** *Coffee Break*

**Session 3: Urban and Rural Transformations**
(chair: Vujadin Ivanišević)

**11:00–11:45:** Urbs, suburbia et villae urbanae*: Naissus and Its Surroundings in Light of Their Significance for the Central Balkans, from the Third to the Seventh Century*
Nadežda Gavrilović-Vitas (Belgrade) and Igor Bjelić (Belgrade)

**11:45–12:30:** *Change on the Edge of the Province: Late Antique Mursa within the Context of Pannonian Crises*
Tino Leleković (Zagreb)

**12:30–13:30:** *Lunch*

**13:30–14:15:** *Balkan Cities New and Old: Establishment and Survival*
Carolyn Snively (Gettysburg)

**14:15–15:00:** *The Archaeological Site of Kale-Stari Grad and Its Environment through Time and Space*
Anita Vasilkova Midoska (Veles)

**Session 4: Connectivity, Networks, and Settlement Dynamics**
(chair: Nadežda Gavrilović-Vitas)

**15:00–15:45:** *Changing Routes, Changing Landscapes? Communication around Late Antique Viminacium*
Ilija Danković (Belgrade)

**15:45–16:00:** *Coffee Break*

**16:00–16:45:** Claustra *after* Claustra*: Reorganising the North-eastern Approaches to Italy in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries*
Tina Milavec (Ljubljana)

**16:45–17:30:** *The Organisation of Roman Villages within the Sirmium–Cibalae–Mursa Triangle*
Ivana Ožanić Roguljić (Zagreb) and Angelina Raičković (Belgrade)

**17:30–18:15:** *Cretan Cities and Settlements: Redefining Connectivity and Isolation (4th-8th Centuries)*
Christina Tsigonaki (Rethymnon)

**18:15–18:45:** *General Discussion and Concluding Remarks*

## 12 November 2026

Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Grand Hall, second floor

**Inaugural Keynote Lectures - Comparative Perspectives beyond the Balkans**
(chair: Ivan Bugarski)

*The Transformations of Urbanism in the Late Roman West*
Simon Esmonde Cleary (Birmingham)

There is a long-standing stereotype of 'the Roman city' across the west of the empire (Balkans, Britain, Gaul, Germany, Iberia, Italy), which is now undergoing serious questioning. The stereotype held that the city of the High Empire was an expression of Roman-style political, economic and social integration, leading to the familiar panoply of street-grids, public buildings, epigraphy, material culture. This was severely disrupted by the invasions of the third century, leading to a redefinition of urban form and functions most profoundly expressed by urban fortifications, to which were then added the monuments of a triumphant Christianity, producing the late Roman city. Just as it is clear that the cities of the High Empire had a broad coherence in forms and functions, so it is now clear that in the Late Empire urban forms became increasingly regionalised, even if the ancient and modern vocabulary for them was unchanged. Better dating evidence shows that urban forms were changing before the 'third-century crisis', and that this latter had avarying impact. Likewise fortifications and churches were often later additions. Can we still talk of a single 'Roman urbanism' in this period? Increasing attention to other classes of evidence such as material culture and palaeo-environment, also the development of scientific analyses, is opening new avenues of inquiry into the populations, activities and functions of these places and thus the extent to which they should be thought of as a coherent urbanism.

*Between Local Micro-Ecology and State Macro-Economies: Reconfiguring Settlement and Human Landscapes in the Late Antique/Early Byzantine Eastern Frontier*
Enrico Zanini (Siena)

In general terms, landscape transformation across the different regions of the Byzantine world can be understood as the outcome of an interaction between long-term micro-ecological dynamics (climate, natural resources and soil conditions) and medium-term macro-economic dynamics (defence, administration, taxation, religion and trade) underpinning the state system. The latter operated upon, and often overlaid, the former. This general pattern takes on a distinctive character in frontier regions, where macro-economic dynamics involved different state systems, for instance in the circulation and exchange of goods. A more specific configuration can be observed along the eastern frontier of the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Empire. Here, long-term micro-ecological dynamics arising from human–environment interactions, attested by archaeological and written evidence for rural settlement networks, intersected with several macro-economic networks. These included roads and systems for managing and exploiting surface water, newly founded cities, the fortifications of the Mesopotamian frontier (*limes*) and networks of monastic settlements. Each of these networks was directly connected to the central administration and played a significant role in shaping and transforming the frontier landscape.

*Urban Planning at an Everyday Level? Urban Government in the Sixth Century East*
Luke Lavan (Canterbury) – Online

The incompetence of late antique municipal authorities has been one of the most important explanations for the altered form of the Mediterranean city of the 4th to the 6th c. AD. In the scholarly imagination, for the last 60 or more years, it has been one of two major causes of 'decline'. This has often been expressed as the 'decline of the curial order': crushed by the rise of a centralised 'dominate'. The final chapter of this story concerns the replacement of the curia / boule by an informal council of notables, led by the bishop, *ca.* 460. This has been seen as marking the end of participatory government in the face of oligarchy or state *dirigisme*, both of which are supposedly new. The second cause of supposed urban dysfunction has been 'religion' (the rise of bishops / desecularisation / Christianisation). At the end of my book *Public Space* (2020), I wrote an essay exploring the relationship between Christianisation and civic government, in explaining the development of the late antique city. So now I turn back to the first cause: the rise of civic government by notables, considering archaeological evidence (drawing on recent excavations) and

epigraphy (including pavement markings such as crosses and gameboards). A nuanced regional picture emerges. 'Oligarchy' seems to work fairly well.

### Polis *and City in the Diocese of* Oriens *in the Sixth Century: Words, Texts, and Ideas*

Catherine Saliou (Paris) – Online

Word usage is constantly evolving while remaining dependent on centuries-old literary or educational traditions. It therefore varies over time and across space, according to literary genre and context of utterance, as well as the authors' education and stylistic choices. Nevertheless, the study of vocabulary sheds light on the evolution of towns and the ways in which they are conceived. A forthcoming study of Greek words relating to the city from the 4th to the 8th centuries shows that we must abandon the description of this evolution as a transition 'from *polis* to *castron*'. Rather, changes in the vocabulary used to designate settlements accompany the development of 'villages' with urban characteristics. This vocabulary also reflects both the importance attached to the hierarchy between cities and its simplification, to the point where it could be reduced to a dichotomy between Constantinople and all other cities. In this paper, we shall focus on 6th-century texts concerning the Diocese of the East, in which cities (*poleis*, civic communities) are increasingly numerous. We shall examine the vocabulary used in these texts and the ideas it conveys about the city (*polis*, civic community), the town (urban agglomeration) and urban space, in relation to the political and economic evolution of this part of the Roman world.

## Session 1: Rethinking Settlement Categories in Late Antiquity

(chair: Ivan Gargano)

### Finis Salonae *in Comparative Perspective. Models of Urban Decline in Dalmatia and Neighbouring Provinces on the Eve of the* grande brèche

Ivan Basić (Split)

This paper examines the advantages and shortcomings of previous approaches to the historical and archaeological record in reconstructing the final phase of urban life in Salona, the metropolis of Roman Dalmatia. It considers the causes, circumstances and consequences of the city's demise, reviewing the written sources (letters, inscriptions and narratives) and archaeological evidence used to establish a relative chronology of events in the early 7th century. Interpretations range between two

extremes: devastation and gradual degradation. The paper compares these models with those proposed for cities in neighbouring regions and more distant areas, including Old Epirus, the Lower Danube region, southern Macedonia, southern Thrace, northern Italy, Asia Minor and the Middle East. These comparisons highlight the diversity of urban trajectories in different geographical, political and cultural settings during the same period. The case studies are situated within the dominant historiographical trends from the mid-20th century to the present, particularly the debate over continuity and discontinuity. By assessing a range of historiographical and interdisciplinary approaches, the paper seeks a more precise understanding of Salona's late antique history and that of comparable cities. This approach allows a more nuanced assessment of the limitations of the evidence and of the models used to explain urban decline.

*From the New Topography of a City to That of a Province: The Case of Ulpiana-Iustiniana Secunda, between Upper Moesia and Dardania*
Christophe J. Goddard (Paris)

Recent archaeological and epigraphic discoveries at Ulpiana-Iustiniana Secunda (Upper Moesia/Dardania, Kosovo) and Scupi (Skopje, North Macedonia) invite us to reconsider the urban topography of the territory of the former province of Upper Moesia. The period under consideration extends from AD 245, the date of the minutes of the provincial assembly at Scupi, to AD 544, when Ulpiana was refounded as Iustiniana Secunda under Emperor Justinian, as attested by two imperial dedications discovered in its cathedral. New archaeological data from excavations at both sites also suggest that we should revise our interpretation of urban planning in Late Antiquity, especially during its second phase, termed 'later late antiquity' by W. Liebeschuetz and extending from the late 5th to the 7th century AD.

*Categorising Hilltop Settlements: Between Spatial and Functional Change*
Orsolya Heinrich-Tamáska (Leipzig) and Ordanche Petrov (Prilep)

This paper focuses on a specific type of late antique settlement landscape: hilltop settlements. The international research network LAHIS brings their study into a European comparative framework for the first time. Emerging in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, both within and beyond the borders of the Roman Empire, hilltop settlements gained in importance in the 5th and 6th centuries as the urban landscape of antiquity declined. Depending on the political context and the archaeolog-

ical evidence, they served as temporary refuges, places of retreat, military outposts or permanently inhabited sacred or political centres. A transdisciplinary approach is needed to define the concept of 'hilltop settlement' more reliably from a dynamic perspective, to compare these settlements and their underlying data across temporal, regional, functional and legal contexts, and to assess their significance for the political and social developments of Late Antiquity. As a case study, we examine changes in settlement patterns in the Demir Kapija Gorge from the 3rd to the early 7th century AD. Archaeological evidence suggests that the third-century crisis initiated a long-term process of reorganisation, beginning with the destruction and contraction of the Roman urban settlement in the plain. Some hilltop sites initially functioned as temporary refuges, while others gradually developed into permanent fortified settlements. By the late 5th and early 6th centuries, this process had culminated in the development of fortified civilian settlements deeper within the gorge. The Demir Kapija evidence thus illustrates the transition from Roman lowland urbanism to the fortified hilltop settlement system characteristic of the Early Byzantine Balkans.

*Proto-Byzantine Illyricum: Settlement Patterns between Cities and Fortified Refuges*
Vujadin Ivanišević (Belgrade)

During the 5th century, central Illyricum underwent profound transformations following the incursions and settlement of numerous barbarian communities, particularly along the Danubian frontier and in the principal cities of Singidunum, Margum and Viminacium. Archaeological research suggests that their presence in the core regions was short-lived and sporadic. This period saw a decline in urban life and the deterioration of numerous villas that had served as important economic units. Alongside these developments, a new phenomenon, probably beginning as early as the late 4th century, involved the construction of numerous fortifications and refuges in the interior of central Illyricum. This phenomenon is reflected in Procopius' *Περὶ Κτισμάτων*, which provides a catalogue of Moesian fortifications along the Danubian *limes* while omitting inland strongholds. The latter are instead listed under the 'urban' territories of Naissus, Remesiana and Aquae. Fortifications in the province of Dardania are recorded, whereas those associated with Dacia Mediterranea are absent. In their place, Procopius describes Justiniana Prima, the new metropolis of Illyricum. This paper analyses the cities and fortifications recorded in the sources, primarily the work of Procopius, and compares them with sites documented through archaeological excavations and field surveys. It focuses on the authority of cities and

their relationship with fortifications, as well as the criteria for distinguishing military installations from places of refuge.

**Session 2, part 1: Methods and Scales of Evidence**
(chair: Snežana Golubović)

*Zaldapa and Its Landscape: Integrating Field and LiDAR Data in Settlement Studies*
Dominic Moreau (Lille), Nicolas Beaudry (Rimouski) and
Thierry Lucas (Paris / Strasbourg)

The study of Zaldapa, a 25-hectare fortified Roman settlement in southern Dobrudja, combines archaeological excavations, field surveys, and an analysis of the surrounding landscape. To complement mapping based on earlier plans, satellite imagery, and field observations, an airborne LiDAR survey was conducted in 2021. It covered a 20-km² area encompassing the site and its surroundings, together with a 10-km² corridor extending northwards to investigate the course of the Roman road linking Zaldapa to *Civitas Ausdecensium*. At the urban scale, different visualisations of the digital terrain model provide a particularly detailed view of the fortifications, street network, and much of the built environment, discernible through robber trenches. These findings refine the settlement plan and complement the results of field investigations. Access to an extramural cistern illustrates this complementarity: integrating LiDAR data with earlier and recent excavation results confirmed the link between a postern and staircase uncovered in 2021 near Basilica 2, and a covered corridor opening into the cistern, recorded in 1949. The LiDAR survey will also guide future archaeological investigations of the surrounding landscape, where it has already revealed roads leading away from the site, possible quarries, and traces of earlier activity including several burial mounds likely related to a Thracian occupation. While most detected features still require field validation, these observations place the Late Antique settlement within a landscape shaped by multi-period occupation. The tracing of the Roman road towards *Civitas Ausdecensium* also demonstrates the value of this combined approach: undetected in the northern extension of the LiDAR survey, its course was successfully identified slightly east of the covered area using satellite imagery. These examples highlight the complementary contributions of the sources and methods employed: from individual structures to the surrounding landscape, their integration refines the understanding of the spatial organisation of Zaldapa and its environs while informing future research.

## 13 November 2026

Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Grand Hall, second floor

**Session 2, part 2: Methods and Scales of Evidence**
(chair: Snežana Golubović)

*Digital and Field Archaeology: An Integrated Methodological Approach to the Research on Caričin Grad and Its Environs*
Ivan Bugarski (Belgrade)

Excavations at Caričin Grad have been ongoing for more than 110 years. Founded around AD 530 by Emperor Justinian I (527–565) as a civic and ecclesiastical centre of northern Illyricum, the city was occupied for only about 90 years. Its short lifespan makes it a valuable context for studying late Roman infrastructure, urban planning, and ecclesiastical and public architecture. Joint Serbian and French teams have investigated the site since 1978, using total stations over the past 20 years alongside stratigraphic excavation, field survey, geophysics and LiDAR. The first geoelectrical survey, conducted in 1980 by a team from the University of Tours, was followed by geomagnetic and ground-penetrating radar (GPR) surveys carried out by German and Austrian teams respectively. The present excavation area in the Lower Town, at the Tetraconch and Sigma Plaza, was selected on the basis of the 2015 GPR results. Since 2011, in connection with the ArchaeoLandscapes Europe project, several LiDAR campaigns have scanned extensive areas around the city. Terrestrial and UAV photogrammetry have also been used over the past decade. Together with the digitisation of earlier field records, these methods have produced a substantial and growing body of archaeological data. A historical and archaeological geographic information system for the Leskovac Basin has been created to analyse it. This integrated approach provides a basis for selecting new excavation areas and directing the field verification of remote-sensing data in and around Caričin Grad.

*Viminacium LiDAR Survey: A Contribution to Identifying the Elements and Evolution of the Civilian and Military Complexes*
Nemanja Mrđić (Belgrade) and Petar Kojadinović (Belgrade)

Viminacium, a Roman city and legionary fortress, is well known for the absence of a modern settlement over its ancient remains. GPS and LiDAR surveys, combined with extensive geophysical investigations, provide an increasingly detailed picture of the urban and legionary complexes, whose layout and chronology have proved far from straightforward. The legionary fortress remained at the core of this development, but excavations over the past 20 years reveal a long and complex sequence of expansion and contraction, with several questions still unresolved. The urban complex and *canabae legionis* changed considerably during periods of war and economic crisis. Identifying the harbour and naval base has proved even more challenging, and several possible locations remain under consideration. Although the landscape appears to show two clear annexes to the city, the status of two further areas remains uncertain. Ground-penetrating radar results suggest that they lay *extra muros*, whereas the digital terrain model suggests that they were incorporated into the ancient defensive system. Understanding landscape change is therefore essential to interpreting the urban and rural zones. Coal mining has transformed the relief, rivers have been diverted into new beds running in directions opposite to their ancient courses, and the level and course of the Danube have changed. Recent discoveries of ships in the coal mine, far from any active river, confirm that the Mlava and Danube once followed very different courses. Of 24 former river islands, only one survives. By examining these changes, the paper seeks to reconstruct ancient Viminacium beneath its modern industrial landscape.

*LiDAR, Geophysics and Excavation at Kovachevsko Kale: Towards an Integrated Archaeological Approach to a Little-Known, Medium-Sized Fortress*
Simon Stanchev (Popovo and Veliko Tarnovo)
and Oleg Aleksandrov (Veliko Tarnovo)

The late antique fortress of Kovachevsko Kale lies approximately 6 km west of Popovo, Bulgaria. Constructed after AD 324 during the reign of Constantine I, it stood in the province of Moesia Secunda on the road connecting Nicopolis ad Istrum and Marcianopolis. Systematic excavations began in 1990. They have uncovered six of the fortress's 17 towers, more than 200 m of curtain wall, a bath complex, two basilicas dating to the 4th and 6th centuries, two cult buildings and part of a

*horreum* covering approximately 1,000 m$^2$. Three geophysical survey campaigns using electrical resistivity tomography, conducted by Nikola Tonkov (NAIM-BAS), have contributed to reconstructing the fortress plan, its internal organisation and its street network. They identified several previously unknown buildings and clarified elements of the internal layout of the *castellum*. In 2022, a trench was excavated in one of the surveyed sectors. The excavation confirmed the geophysical evidence for a substantial masonry wall belonging to a large building that most likely enclosed the area around the two cult structures. This example illustrates how targeted excavation can verify and refine the results of non-invasive investigations. A LiDAR survey of the fortress and its surroundings, conducted by T. Boyadzhiev in the same year, produced a high-resolution terrain model. It provided new topographical data and allowed several elements of Karel Škorpil's 1914 fortress plan to be revised. Together, these investigations demonstrate the complementary contributions of geophysics, LiDAR and excavation to understanding the site.

## Session 3: Urban and Rural Transformations

(chair: Vujadin Ivanišević)

### Urbs, suburbia et villae urbanae*: Naissus and Its Surroundings in Light of Their Significance for the Central Balkans, from the Third to the Seventh Century*

Nadežda Gavrilović-Vitas (Belgrade) and Igor Bjelić (Belgrade)

The ancient town of Naissus (present-day Niš) stood at the junction of routes linking the northern centres of Moesia Superior, including Ratiaria, Singidunum and Viminacium, with southern towns such as Scupi, and the western Roman provinces with eastern centres such as Serdica and, later, Constantinople. Conquered by the Romans in the 1st century BC, the town became a *municipium* in AD 169. Historical sources and archaeological evidence attest to its growth from the late 3rd century, when it became the capital of the newly founded province of Dardania. Major construction projects under Constantine the Great, who was born in Naissus, and his successors contributed to a period of extensive urban development. This paper examines the conditions that shaped the development of Naissus and its surroundings in relation to major historical events. It focuses on archaeological sites, finds and architectural remains in the area of the Roman forum, the late Roman urban settlement with the Building with Octagon, and the necropoleis with basilicas at Jagodin Mala. We analyse the role of suburban settlements, their relationship with the city and their contribution

to its economy within the broader context of the central Balkans. Roads, water-supply systems, granaries (*horrea*) and other facilities influenced access to the city, the distribution of resources and the location of suburban villas. Mediana, the most extensively excavated and documented suburban settlement, provides particularly valuable evidence, including numerous villas and facilities used to supply Naissus with food and goods. The paper also considers the period from the 5th to the 7th century, marked by the Hunnic siege and destruction of Naissus, its Early Byzantine rebuilding under Justinian I, and its final collapse under Avar and Slavic attacks, followed by Slavic settlement in the surrounding region. Despite successive episodes of destruction and renewal, the surviving evidence allows a partial reconstruction of the city's final centuries and its significance within the central Balkans.

*Change on the Edge of the Province: Late Antique Mursa within the Context of Pannonian Crises*
Tino Leleković (Zagreb)

The history of Pannonia in Late Antiquity is sparsely documented in written sources and is increasingly being reconstructed through archaeology. The Roman colony of Aelia Mursa, on the Drava near its confluence with the Danube, offers a case study of urban transformation from the mid-3rd to the early 5th century AD. The transition to Late Antiquity can be traced to the AD 250s–260s, when excavations indicate a marked contraction of the urban area, probably connected with the Plague of Cyprian and the wider third-century crisis. Two of the city's four suburban zones were abandoned, while the extensive western suburb that had flourished during the Severan period contracted significantly. Mursa also underwent a significant military transformation. The *Notitia Dignitatum* records a vexillation of Legio VI Herculia and the headquarters of the Danubian fleet (*classis Histrica*). Possible harbour infrastructure discovered east of the city raises the possibility of a distinct military quarter separated from the civilian settlement by the *limes* road, reflecting patterns known elsewhere along the Danube frontier. Evidence from the bridge area further underlines Mursa's strategic importance as a crossing point. The Battle of Mursa in AD 351, one of the bloodiest conflicts of the 4th century, brought the city into imperial history. Coin hoards and rebuilt structures in both suburban areas indicate continued occupation and partial recovery after the battle. Mursa was also an episcopal centre, and Bishop Valens played a prominent role in

4th-century ecclesiastical politics. Particularly important is the 'Štrbinci–Zmajevac horizon', a group of rural and roadside cemeteries with row-grave burials, walled tomb chambers and elements associated with the *Reihengräberkultur*. Dating from the Constantinian period to the early 5th century, these sites suggest the arrival of new population groups in the colony's territory. They also raise questions about rural settlement patterns: the apparent absence of earlier rural cemeteries may reflect archaeological visibility and research biases rather than depopulation. Although Aelia Mursa survived the Gothic incursions of AD 380, the date and circumstances of its abandonment remain unknown. Evidence from peripheral cemeteries and sites beyond the urban core suggests gradual decline rather than sudden collapse. The paper argues that integrating urban stratigraphy, frontier archaeology and rural funerary evidence can clarify Mursa's final centuries and its place in the transformation of late antique Pannonia.

*Balkan Cities New and Old: Establishment and Survival*
Carolyn Snively (Gettysburg)

In the central Balkans, roughly the Diocese of Dacia and some northern provinces of the Diocese of Macedonia, a number of Roman-period cities ceased to exist or no longer functioned at an urban level in Late Antiquity. Other towns survived into or through this period, and occasionally beyond. New settlements were founded from the 4th to the 6th centuries; while many must be classified as forts or fortified villages, others meet the criteria for cities. What factors determined whether a Roman-period city continued to exist into or through Late Antiquity? In addition to barbarian attacks, floods and lowland or otherwise indefensible locations sometimes caused a city to disappear or relocate to higher ground. Surviving towns often occupied important strategic, economic or political locations that justified fortification and defence despite the difficulties involved. Others already stood in defensible positions protected by walls. Why were new cities established in Late Antiquity? A few, such as Gamzigrad/Felix Romuliana and Justiniana Prima, were imperial foundations apparently created for an emperor's personal reasons. A closer examination suggests that they also served commercial or strategic purposes. Although their functions sometimes remain uncertain, anonymous 6th-century cities such as Gradina on Mt. Jelica and Golemo Gradište at Konjuh were established to meet specific military, commercial or ecclesiastical needs.

*The Archaeological Site of Kale-Stari Grad and Its Environment through Time and Space*
Anita Vasilkova Midoska (Veles)

Kale-Stari Grad is an elongated hilltop settlement on the right bank of the Babuna River, beside the present-day settlement of Stari Grad. Its position combined natural defences, access to arable land and proximity to the Babuna and Izvorchica rivers. These conditions supported occupation from the Eneolithic period into the Middle Ages. Most surviving buildings and structures, particularly domestic buildings and fortifications, date to the Roman and late antique periods. This paper examines the site's strategic importance in Late Antiquity, building on its Hellenistic and Roman foundations. Excavations conducted between 2005 and 2026 have revealed eight fully or partially preserved structures, sections of the fortification wall and a medieval burial ground. The discussion considers the site's earlier role within a network of Hellenistic fortresses or military strongholds in the Babuna–Vardar region, intended to defend against attacks from the north, and the significance of this inherited position in Late Antiquity. It also examines Kale-Stari Grad's relationship with road networks, its role in controlling access to the Pelagonia Plain and its place within the wider network of fortresses and settlements along the Babuna River, a major route for cultural and historical change in the region. By situating the site within its late antique regional context, the paper explores how earlier settlements and strongholds shaped the development of urban centres through their geographical position and existing architectural foundations.

**Session 4: Connectivity, Networks, and Settlement Dynamics**
(chair: Nadežda Gavrilović-Vitas)

*Changing Routes, Changing Landscapes? Communication around Late Antique Viminacium*
Ilija Danković (Belgrade)

Viminacium developed within a complex road network linking the city with its immediate surroundings, the wider Danubian region and the provincial hinterland. These routes played an important role in structuring the urban and suburban landscape, with necropoleis, rural villas, settlements and other features developing along them. One of the principal routes was eventually incorporated into the urban fabric as the *decumanus maximus*. This contribution examines the fate of this

inherited network during the transformations that affected Viminacium from the late 3rd century until its destruction in AD 441. The reduction and reorganisation of the urban area were accompanied by changes in its surroundings: burial grounds and craft activities moved closer to the city, many villas and settlements disappeared while others continued to function, and previously intensively used areas underwent substantial environmental change. Particularly significant is the northern part of the *ager*, crossed by the road towards Lederata, where archaeological evidence suggests that areas occupied and exploited in the 2nd and 3rd centuries subsequently became increasingly waterlogged. Combining evidence for the road network with changing patterns of settlement, burial and land use, the paper asks whether and how everyday movement through the landscape changed as Viminacium was transformed. It examines the extent to which older routes continued to structure the late antique landscape, while particular roads and the activities organised around them adapted or ceased to function in response to changing social and environmental conditions.

### Claustra *after* Claustra*: Reorganising the North-eastern Approaches to Italy in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries*

Tina Milavec (Ljubljana)

The south-eastern Alps, especially present-day Slovenia, experienced a complete shift in settlement patterns during Late Antiquity. In the late 3rd century, and particularly in the second half of the 4th, the Roman state built defensive walls, towers, forts and fortified towns to control the north-eastern approaches to Italy at the lowest point in the Alpine chain. Known to modern scholars as the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*, after an expression used by Ammianus Marcellinus, this system ceased to function in the early 5th century for reasons that remain incompletely understood. During the first half of that century, small fortifications on naturally protected sites between Pannonia and the Alps probably provided at least provisional control. In the second half, the Roman lowland settlement pattern disappeared and permanent settlements developed in defensible locations, often away from major Roman roads. These centres occupied hilltops, promontories between rivers and islands. With rare exceptions in the Sava River valley, the shift was complete; 6th-century settlements are particularly rare in the accessible Pannonian lowlands to the north-east. During the period under consideration, the territory belonged successively to

the Ostrogothic kingdom in Italy, briefly to the Byzantines in the 530s, and then to the Langobards. Rarely mentioned in written sources and often neglected in wider narratives, it nevertheless remained the easiest overland approach to north-eastern Italy, linking it with Pannonia and the Balkans. This paper asks why towns and countryside were so extensively abandoned, and whether military movements and invasions along the main routes were the only causes. Archaeological evidence reveals a relatively dense network of naturally and artificially defended sites, with access to Mediterranean traded goods alongside substantial self-sufficiency. Contrary to some interpretations, a strong elite presence cannot be identified. The exception is Kranj (Carnium) in the Sava River valley, where the large cemetery on the river terrace contains a varied assemblage of objects, suggesting connections, and possibly population movements, across Europe.

*The Organisation of Roman Villages within the Sirmium–Cibalae–Mursa Triangle*
Ivana Ožanić Roguljić (Zagreb) and Angelina Raičković (Belgrade)

While urban centres such as Sirmium, Cibalae and Mursa have traditionally dominated archaeological research in southern Pannonia, the organisation and spatial dynamics of the rural landscape connecting them remain less well understood. This paper examines the settlement patterns and internal organisation of Roman rural communities within the Sirmium–Cibalae–Mursa triangle. Conducted within the Roman Infrastructure Mapping (RIM) project, the study focuses on Apševci as its principal case study. Previous rescue excavations at the site revealed significant archaeological layers and structural remains, providing evidence for the local economy, material culture and integration of rural communities into the wider imperial infrastructure.

*Cretan Cities and Settlements: Redefining Connectivity and Isolation (7th–8th Centuries)*
Christina Tsigonaki (Rethymnon)

Throughout its history, Crete was characterised by a dense network of cities and settlements, located not only along its coasts but also in its mountainous and hilly hinterland. Recent research has challenged the traditional view of mountain settlements as marginal and isolated, highlighting instead their resilience and adaptability within interconnected economic and defensive systems. This paper examines cities and settlements situated in Crete's diverse upland landscapes during

the 7th and 8th centuries AD, a period that saw their radical transformation, mainly through the construction of strong fortifications. It focuses on two sites with distinct statuses and historical trajectories: Eleutherna and Oxa. Drawing on landscape analysis and recent archaeological research, it redefines the notions of connectivity and isolation in Cretan settlements during the turbulent period preceding the Arab conquest of the island.



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