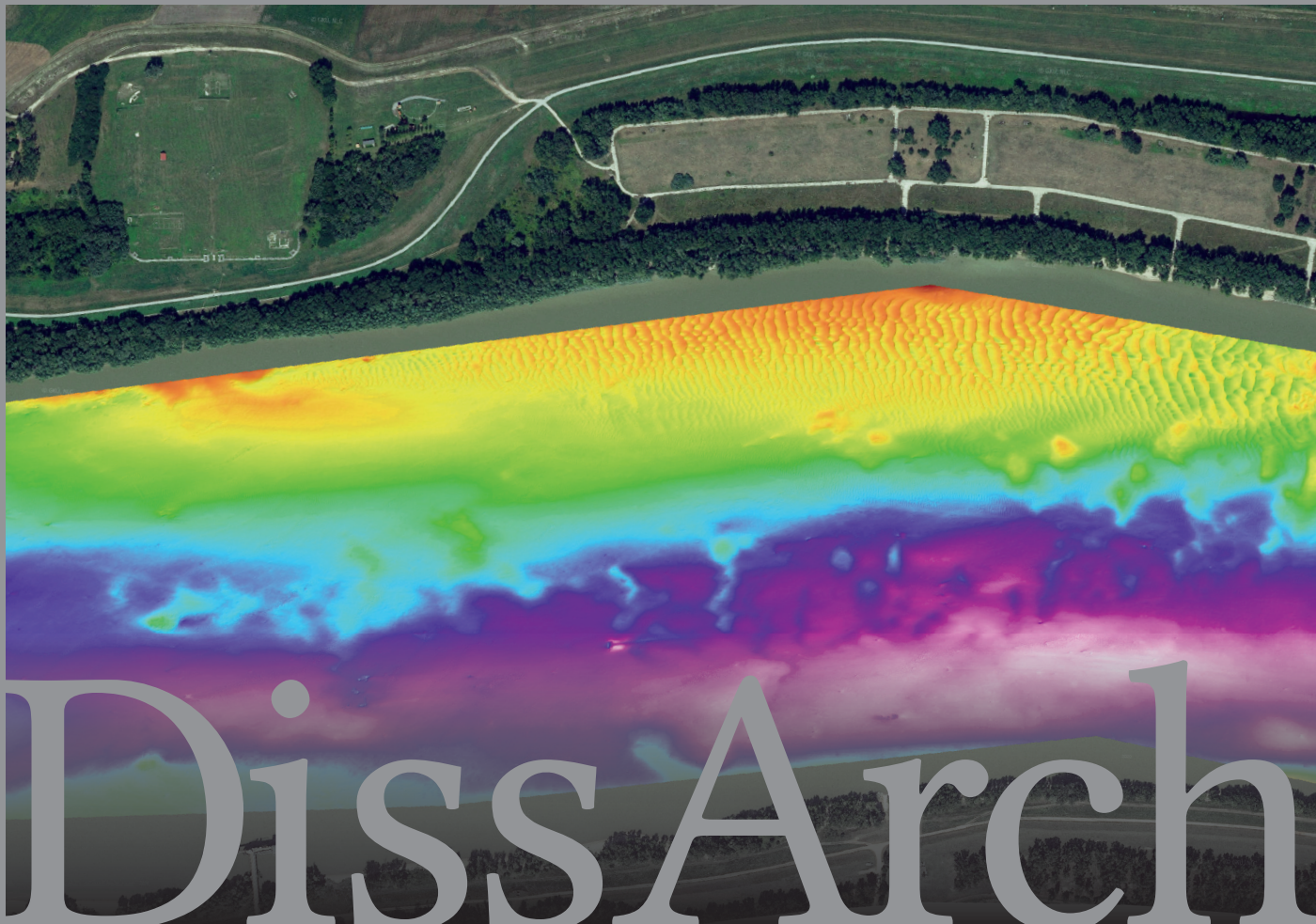


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ex Instituto Archaeologico

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Water Divides – Water Connects

Roman military, commercial and cultural contacts between the Middle Danube Region and the Black Sea

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The *Water Divides – Water Connects* conference, held at the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest on 25–26 May 2023, sought to bring together leading scholars working across a wide array of fields in Central Europe. Although cross-border scientific symposia are common in this region, they still reflect the ancient division imposed by the Roman Empire—most notably the great partition between Rome and the Barbaricum, embodied by the Danube River. Further cultural divisions persist in research, such as those between the Latin- and Greek-speaking populations of the Balkans in Roman times.

The conference aimed to transcend these historical and scholarly boundaries by focusing on the interconnected territories of several Roman provinces—Pannonia, Dacia, and Moesia—as well as the regions beyond the *ripa*. Uniquely, the Black Sea was also included in the discussions. Although geographically distant from Central Europe, the sea—at the mouth of the Danube—remains both a literal and symbolic link, as well as a divide, between cultures to this day.

The inspiration for the conference arose from joint Hungarian–Bulgarian excavations at Caria (Shabla, Bulgaria), on the Black Sea coast. Even through limited scholarly exchange, many similarities and differences in the Roman heritage of these two countries were revealed. From there, it was only necessary to ‘sail up’ the Danube and look to the left and right. The idea of the conference was warmly received by colleagues from nine countries of Central Europe: Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria.



Attendees of the conference at the Roman fort on Visegrád-Sibrik-domb, overlooking the Danube.

The result was a dynamic symposium addressing a wide range of topics, including Roman frontiers, numismatics, fishing, geography, trade, epigraphy, early Christianity, and medieval studies. The event concluded with an excursion to Visegrád, a symbolic site of Central European unity since the meeting of the kings of Hungary, Bohemia, and Poland there in 1335.

Of the twenty papers presented, six are included in this special section of the journal. Even this selective sample reflects the diversity and depth of the topics explored during the conference. The contributions include significant new findings on the Danube bridge between Brigetio and its counterfort, as well as novel research on the forts of Trimamium and Sexaginta Prista, with particular attention to fishing-related remains. Two papers re-examine entrenched assumptions: one concerning the Roman soldier who swam across the Danube, and another on the road leading from Contra Florentiam to Dacia. The sixth study considers the Roman limes in medieval Bulgaria, illustrating the enduring general impact of the Roman presence on European culture.

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