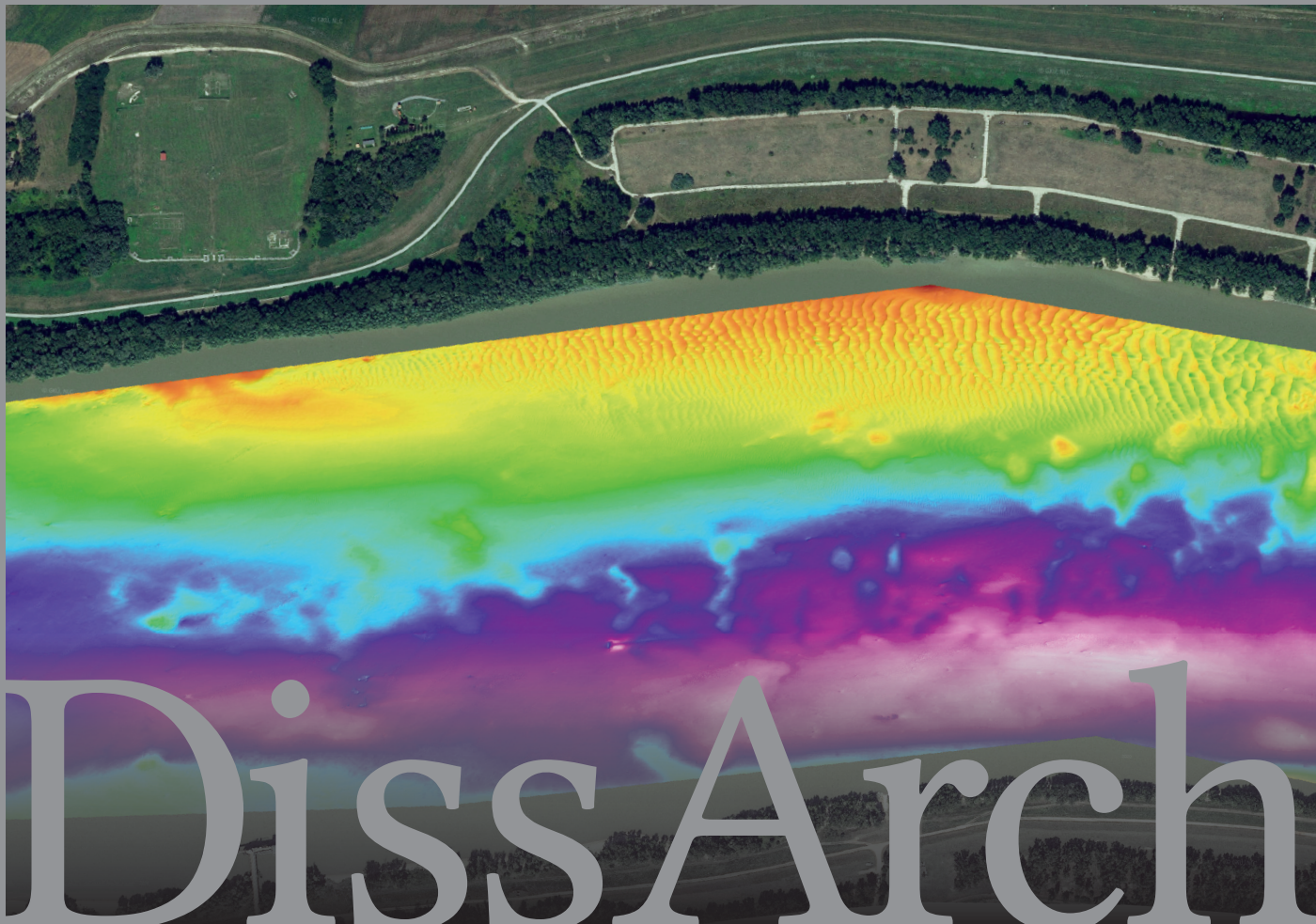


DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE

ex Instituto Archaeologico

Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



DissArch

Ser. 3. No. 13. | 2025

Dissertationes Archaeologicae
ex Instituto Archaeologico
Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae

Ser. 3. No. 13.

Editor-in-chief

Dávid BARTUS

Editorial board

László BARTOSIEWICZ (Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden)

Ondřej CHVOJKA (University of South Bohemia, České Budějovice, Czech Republic)

Alexandra ANDERS (ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary)

Miroslava DAŇOVÁ (University of Trnava, Trnava, Slovakia)

Mario GAVRANOVIĆ (Austrian Archaeological Institute AAS, Vienna, Austria)

Hajnalka HEROLD (University of Exeter, Exeter, United Kingdom)

Tomáš KÖNIG (Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia)

Tina MILAVEC (University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia)

Gábor V. SZABÓ (ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary)

Tivadar VIDA (ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary)

Technical editor

Gábor VÁCZI

Proofreading

Katalin SEBŐK, Emilia GRANDI, Zsófia GYURKA, Borbála NYÍRI, Julianna REY-BENE

Cover picture

HELICOP s.r.o.

Aviable online at <http://ojs.elte.hu/dissarch>

Contact: dissarch@btk.elte.hu

Support: vaczi.gabor@btk.elte.hu

ISSN 2064-4574 (online)

Publisher

Lénárd DARÁZS

© Author(s)

© Institute of Archaeological Sciences, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University

Budapest 2025



PKP
PUBLIC
KNOWLEDGE
PROJECT



DOAJ

ERIH PLUS
EUROPEAN REFERENCE INDEX FOR THE
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



CONTENTS

WATER DIVIDES – WATER CONNECTS: ROMAN MILITARY, COMMERCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTACTS BETWEEN THE MIDDLE DANUBE REGION AND THE BLACK SEA

Lajos JUHÁSZ 7

Water Divides – Water Connects: Roman military, commercial and cultural contacts between the Middle Danube Region and the Black Sea

Chiara CENATI 9

Aequora Danubii cunctis transnare sub armis: A new interpretation of the poem CLE 427

Nikola RUSEV 25

Trimammium: The Roman limes fortress and the necropolis

Miroslava DAŇOVA – Klaudia DAŇOVA – Ján RAJTÁR 51

The Danube riverbed near the Roman fort at Iža-Leányvár: Results of investigations, 2019–2022

Varbin VARBANOV 63

Evidence of fishing from the excavations of the Roman fortress of Sexaginta Prista (Ruse, Bulgaria)

Svetlana VELIKOVA 75

Medieval life along the Roman limes at the Danube, Ruse Region

1ST NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ARCHAEOLOGY STUDENTS

Dániel HÜMPFNER – Bence PÁRKÁNYI – Rita Helga OLASZ 87

Introduction

Rita SULIMAN 89

Egyptian influence on Late Bronze Age (1600–1200 BC) ivory artefacts from the kingdoms of Ugarit and Qatna

Mirtill ÁRVAI	105
<hr/>	
Some Thoughts on five Mycenaean Terracotta Figurines from the Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest	
Bence PÁRKÁNYI	119
<hr/>	
Not all Gorgons are Greek: A red-figure kylix fragment in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest	
Virág Veronika SZÁNTÓ	131
<hr/>	
Representation and object: <i>Pyxis</i> on the sarcophagus of Titus Aelius	
Dániel HÜMPFNER	147
<hr/>	
New data on the settlement history of the so-called <i>villa</i> , a Roman period building, at Testvérhegy	
Rita Helga OLASZ	167
<hr/>	
Child graves from Brigetio	
Márton SZABÓ	189
<hr/>	
Imported ceramics from the Roman camp at Almásfüzitő	
Ferenc BARNA	211
<hr/>	
Gestempelte Ziegel aus den Ausgrabungen von Komárom/Szőny-MOL-Kiskertek (Brigetio) im Jahr 2015	
Regina Viktória CSORDÁS	257
<hr/>	
From the table to the grave? The question of animal sacrifices in Avar cemeteries on the Little Hungarian Plain	
Kata SZATHMÁRI	279
<hr/>	
Possible ways of use of medieval and early modern bone tools based on results of use-wear analysis, experimental archaeology, and ethnographic parallels	

ARTICLES

Attila PÉNTEK – Ferenc CSERPÁK – Krisztián ZANDLER – Szilvia GUBA	297
<hr/>	
First Open-Air Mousterian Site in the Mátra Mountains (North Hungary): Preliminary Results from Szurdokpüspöki-Lapos-tanya	

Kristóf István SZEGEDI – Annamária BÁRÁNY – Julia BLUMENRÖTHER – Endre DOBOS – Tibor MARTON – Gergely PÁLL-BARNA – György LENGYEL	321
<hr/>	
Szekszárd-Palánk and the postglacial recolonization of the Pannonian Basin	
Eszter SOLNAY – Zita HRABÁK – Péter HORNOK – Péter KISS – Zsuzsanna M. VIRÁG – Zsuzsanna SIKLÓSI	353
<hr/>	
Pottery technological analysis of the Copper Age Transdanubia (Western Hungary)	
Gábor SÁNTA	381
<hr/>	
Ceramic Depositions, Ritual Features, and Irregular Burials of the Tumulus Culture in Hungary	
Ákos MENGYÁN – Ferenc KRISTÁLY	413
<hr/>	
Pots for a purpose? Interdisciplinary analysis of small amphorae from the Late Bronze Age cemeteries of Maklár (Northeast Hungary)	
Attila MRENKA	447
<hr/>	
A peculiar Late Bronze Age find from Sopron-Warischberg	
János Gábor TARBAY	459
<hr/>	
Late Bronze Age Arrowheads from Transdanubia and Beyond: Distribution, Chronology, Bronze Technology, and Use-Wear	
Ábel GARCZIK	543
<hr/>	
New data on base marks of Late La Tène <i>situlae</i>	
Máté Róbert MERKL – Gábor CSÜLLÖG – Gabriella DARABOS – Ilona PÁL – Maria HAJNALOVA – Enikő Katalin MAGYARI	563
<hr/>	
The vegetation of the Roman province of Pannonia based on wood charcoal, pollen, anthracological and carpological studies (1st–5th century AD)	
Dávid BARTUS	611
<hr/>	
Roman Bronze Figurines Depicting Iuppiter from Brigetio	
Radu PETCU – Ingrid PETCU-LEVEI	633
<hr/>	
A bronze statuette of the Héros Horseman (Thracian Rider) discovered near Tomis (Palazu Mare), Moesia Inferior	
Kata DÉVAI – István FÓRIZS	645
<hr/>	
On the functionality of <i>vasa diatreta</i> : The case of the cage cup fragments from Gorsium	

Linda DOBOSI 663

Pieces of gaming equipment from Roman Pannonia: The Collection of the Kuny Domokos Museum in Tata (Hungary)

Bence GULYÁS – Tamás CZUPPON 699

A stirrup type with Byzantine provenience in Central and Eastern Europe

Alin FRÎNCULEASA – Daniel GARVĂN – George TROHANI – Elena RENȚA – Mirela MIHON – Cristian MANAILESCU – Oana GAZA – Doru PACESILA – Alexandru PETRE – Erwin GÁLL 713

Absolute dating of the Early/Pre-state Medieval date burial features in Muntenia (the 7th–14th century AD)

Attila TÜRK – Flórián HARANGI 743

A 13th-century headwear fragment with metal threads from southeastern Hungary and the Bulgarian connections of Árpád Age headdresses

FIELD REPORTS

Dávid BARTUS – Melinda SZABÓ – Rita Helga OLASZ – Ákos MÜLLER – Bence SIMON – Szilvia JOHÁCSI – Lajos JUHÁSZ – Tibor NÉGYÖKRŰ – Kitti IVANCSICS – László BORHY – Emese SZÁMADÓ 763

Excavations in the legionary fortress of Brigetio in 2025

Bence SIMON – Szilvia JOHÁCSI – Ákos MÜLLER – Bence PÁRKÁNYI – Lőrinc TIMÁR 781

Pilisszentiván-Hárs-erdő 2025: New buildings and finds from a Roman village in the northwestern hinterland of Aquincum

Attila Botond SZILASI – Attila TURI – Rita RAKONCZAY 791

2000 years of settlement horizons in the area of the second inner courtyard of the *Neue Residenz* in Salzburg

THESIS REVIEW ARTICLES

Nóra SZABÓ 827

Change and transformation during the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age along the capital region of the Danube: Settlement structure analyses based on particular sites from the Vatyá III – Koszider Period and the Early Tumulus Culture

A bronze statuette of the Héros Horseman (Thracian Rider) discovered near Tomis (Palazu Mare), Moesia Inferior

Radu PETCU  

Museum of National History and Archaeology from Constanța, Constanța, Romania
radupetcuarheo@gmail.com

Ingrid PETCU-LEVEI 

Museum of National History and Archaeology from Constanța, Constanța, Romania
ingridpetculevei@gmail.com

Received 3 November 2025 | Accepted 18 November 2025 | Published 30 January 2026

Abstract: This paper presents and analyses a bronze statuette of the Thracian Rider (Ἡρώς) discovered in 2019 at Palazu Mare, near ancient Tomis (Moesia Inferior). The artifact, dated to the 3rd century AD, was found in a Roman *vicus* and provides valuable insights into the persistence of Thracian religious traditions within the Roman provincial environment. Compositional XRF analysis identified its material as tin bronze, an alloy typical of small ritual objects. Stylistically, the statuette exemplifies the syncretic fusion between local Thracian beliefs and Greco-Roman artistic conventions. Comparative evidence from the Balkans situates the find within a broader iconographic corpus associated with the cult of the Thracian Horseman—a chthonic, protective, and mediatory deity symbolizing fertility, renewal, and the afterlife. The study underscores the statuette’s significance as both a votive artifact and a marker of cultural continuity, illustrating the adaptation of indigenous hero worship within the Roman Empire’s socio-religious framework.

Keywords: Moesia Inferior, Tomis, Hero Knight, Thracian Rider, Roman religion, Palazu Mare

Introduction

Real estate developments in the municipality of Constanta have, in recent years, prompted a series of preventive archaeological investigations, which have resulted in the discovery of rich archaeological material. These include a bronze statuette found at the Palazu Mare neighborhood of Constanta. Here, a habitation nucleus from the Roman period was identified, previously indicated by various archaeological discoveries.¹ The archaeological site (most likely a Roman *vicus*) at Palazu Mare (LMI CT-I-s-B-02724, RAN 60446.01) has been more clearly defined thanks to numerous preventive archaeological surveys and research conducted in the area by specialists from the Museum of National History and Archaeology in Constanța. Based on the information gathered so far, the main core of the settlement is located in the area of the Ionel Teodoreanu, Tache Ionescu, Iuliu Maniu, and Jean Bart streets. The settlement was dated to the 2nd–3rd centuries and the first decades of

1 BUCOVALĂ – PAPUC 1981, 215; BĂRBULESCU – OCHEȘEANU 1990, 233–234; BĂRBULESCU 2001, 49–50; ISM II, no. 10, no. 86, no. 137, no. 205, no. 340.



Fig. 1. Localization of the Roman settlement at Palazu Mare.

the 4th century AD.² The site is situated approximately 6 km north of Tomis and belongs to a group of satellite settlements developed near the city (Fig. 1).³

Following preventive archaeological research conducted in 2019 on 29C Tache Ionescu Street, a single complex was identified, consisting of a large ditch or pit (C1). Approximately 75% of the feature was uncovered. Its walls slope slightly inward, and its bottom appears at different depths: between -1.70/-1.75 m at the western and eastern ends, and -2.50 m in the central area, towards the southern profile. The initial fill consisted of black-brown soil that had silted up over time, in which very few Roman ceramic fragments were found. In a later phase, the complex was levelled with a looser fill that contained numerous archaeological finds (especially pottery, but also metal objects and coins). Inside, at a depth of -1.50/-1.60 m, a bronze statuette representing the Hero Knight (Thracian Knight) was discovered. The complex dates to the 3rd and early 4th centuries AD (Fig. 2).⁴

2 BĂJENARU *et al.* 2018, 162–163.

3 PETCU-LEVEI – PETCU 2024b, 334.

4 We would like to express our gratitude to the authors of the archaeological excavations carried out in 2019 on 29C Tache Ionescu Street, our colleagues Constantin Băjenaru, Cătălin Nopcea, and Marius Lascu from MINA Constanța, for the information provided for this study. We would also like to express our appreciation to Mr. Răzvan Petcu and Mr. George Mihailov for their assistance throughout our research.

Description of the statuette

The fragmentary statuette is 11.2 cm high and 7.6 cm wide, with visible traces of age-wear and destruction on its surface. The right foot is missing. The statuette depicts a young male figure, his face turned slightly to the right, wearing a laurel wreath. Depicted nude, he wears a pleated *chlamys* on his left shoulder, fastened with a fibula(?) on his right shoulder. The *chlamys* covers his entire left arm. The features of the body are harmonious, and the details of the face are relatively well preserved. His left hand is stretched out in front of him, and his fist is clenched. His right arm is raised, and the position of his fingers indicates the gesture of *benedictio latina*. The position of his legs apart indicates the equestrian position of the character. Unfortunately, the horse is missing and was not found during the archaeological excavations. He wears a pair of high *caligae* (Fig. 3).

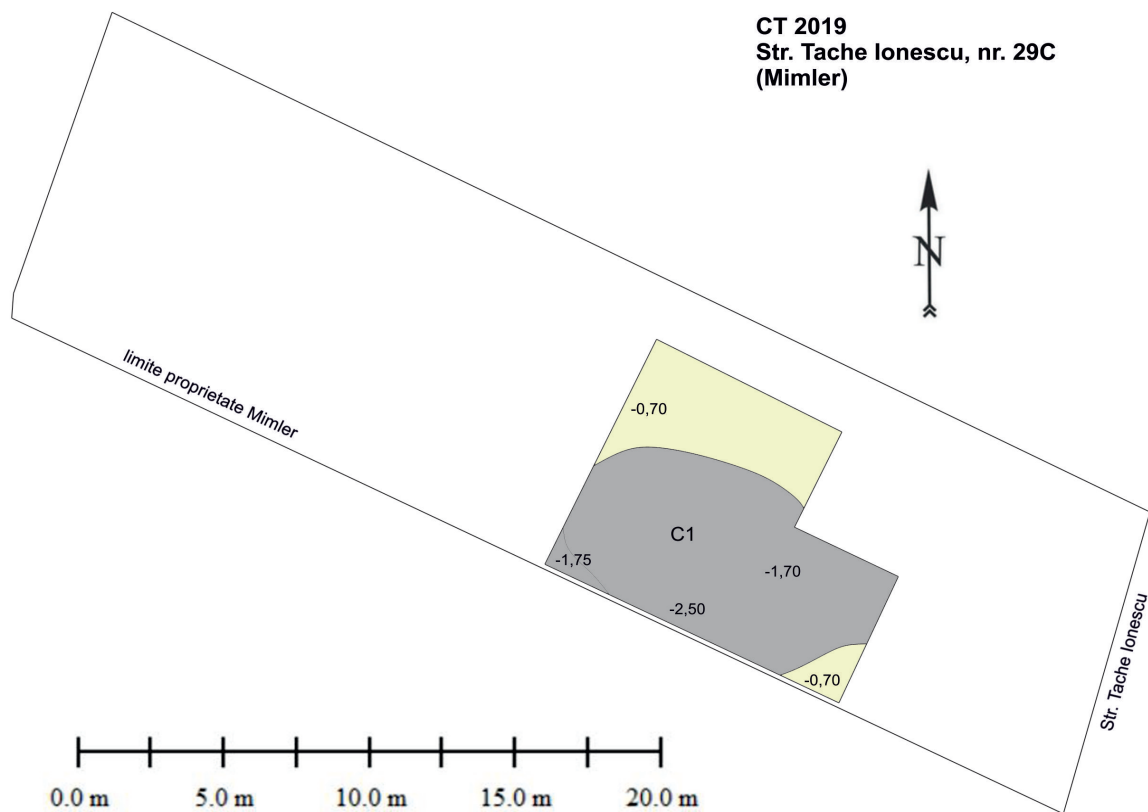


Fig. 2. The plan of the preventive archaeological excavations from 29C Tache Ionescu street where the statue was discovered in 2019.

The chemical analysis conducted with a handheld X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectrometer provided a detailed elemental profile of the statuette. The results indicate that the object is composed primarily of copper (78.32%), combined with a significant proportion of tin (8.91%), suggesting that it was produced from a tin bronze alloy, commonly employed in antiquity for small-scale sculptures and ritual objects due to its mechanical strength and good casting properties. The presence of silicon (5.97%) may be attributed either to intentional alloying to improve fluidity during casting or to contamination from the surrounding depositional environment during burial. In addition to these primary elements, trace amounts of other metals, such as lead, iron, and arsenic, were detected; however, their concentrations are minimal and do not significantly affect the artifact's overall technological interpretation.⁵

5 On this occasion, the authors wish to express their gratitude to Mr. Grigore Leon Rațiu for the analysis of the statuette.

The closest analogy comes from the territory of Thrace in Bulgaria. It was discovered in 1896 near the Arapovo Monastery, located about 6 km from the town of Asenovgrad in south-central Bulgaria, at the foot of the Rhodope Mountains. Unfortunately, the statuette available in the Bulgarian museum's collection today is a modern replica of the one discovered at the end of the 19th century. The only difference between the two figurines is that the one found in Bulgaria has a quiver of arrows on its back, while the one from Palazu Mare does not.⁶

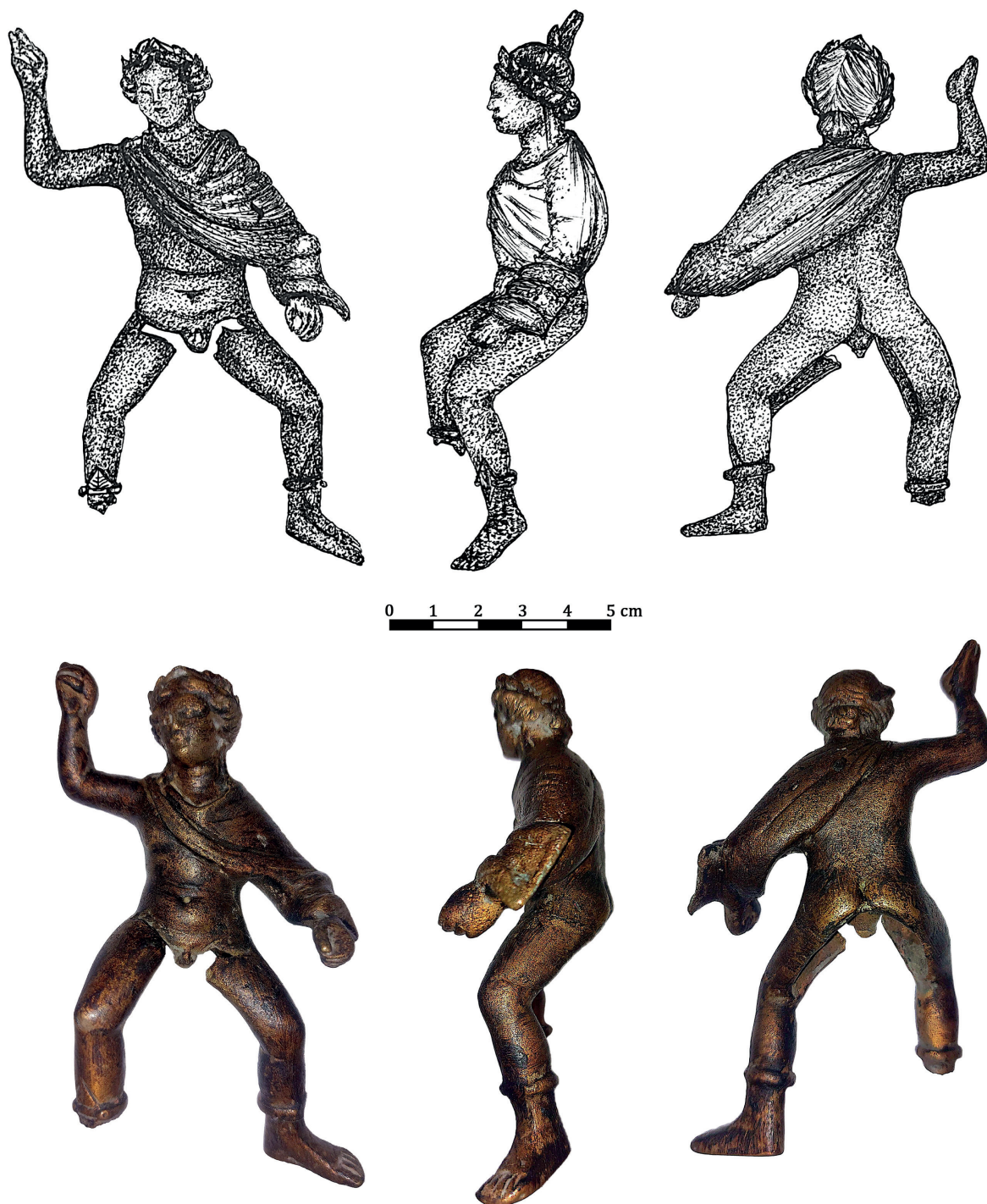


Fig. 3. Bronze statuette depicting the Héros Horseman discovered at Palazu Mare (drawings and photos made by I. Petcu-Levei).

6 OGNENOVA-MARINOVA 1975, Cat. 24.

The *benedictio latina* hand gesture was considered to be an oratorical posture.⁷ Over time, a series of connotations and interpretations have been proposed: guidance, blessing and healing, luck and divine help, protection, divine power, or the representation of the divine trinity of Persephone, Zeus, and Sabazios. The gesture is also closely linked to the cult of Sabazios, where it has been interpreted in various ways, including the recitation of a prayer, in which bronze hands were used as objects of worship.⁸ At the same time, during the Roman Empire, it was proposed as a symbol of *logos*, of teaching through oral discourse, and as an indicator of discourse between orators and actors. The gesture itself represented the spoken word and also served as an instructive gesture.⁹ Given its discovery context and the analogies, we date the statuette to the 3rd century AD.

The Cult of the “Ἡρώς Knight

The artistic representation of the Knight Hero, conventionally referred to as the Thracian Knight, the Thracian Hero, the Hunter Knight, etc., expressed among the ancient populations of the Balkan region the belief in the victory of good, truth, and justice over evil and enemies. The Knight Hero was also the god of vegetation, soil fertility, life, and death (especially life after death).¹⁰ He is a protective deity who embodies all aspects of a male cult, with chthonic characteristics, and is associated with fertility, a significant issue in human life.¹¹

The cult of the Thracian Horseman is one of the most prominent religious manifestations in the Thracian Balkan area, attested by a wide variety of votive reliefs. A comparative analysis of the iconographic repertoire shows that these monuments are not mere decorative or funerary objects but convey a coherent theological message. The representations are relatively homogeneous in terms of composition, and the high frequency of certain symbolic elements suggests a unified religious conception.¹²

The most common element associated with the Horseman is the serpent, appearing either as an independent figure or symbolically facing the hero. Analysis of the data shows that the serpent symbolizes a higher divine being, while the Horseman occupies a subordinate role in relation to it. The iconography between the two confirms the Horseman’s mediating role, connecting humans to the revered divinity. Notably, the scene is characterized by its chthonic nature, associated with fertility, regeneration, and the afterlife.¹³

The monuments conventionally designated as ‘Thracian Rider’ form a distinctive religious corpus whose interpretation relies primarily on epigraphic evidence, given that inscriptions often constitute the only reliable means of determining the cultic function and identity of the depicted figure, especially in the absence of secure archaeological contexts. These small stone reliefs (c. 30–40 × 20–30 cm), depicting a right-facing mounted horseman in motion or at rest, are known from over 2,000 examples across approximately 350 sites in Thrace and the adjacent regions, spanning from the Hellenistic period to the Roman era, when their popularity reached its apogee.¹⁴

7 BERNDT 2018, 152.

8 The most important archaeological objects attributed to the cult of Sabazios are bronze statuettes in the shape of hands decorated with various symbols, in the *benedictio latina* style. The hands were attached to particular objects and carried in religious processions. The army most likely spread this practice in the early Roman imperial era (BERNDT 2018, 151).

9 BERNDT 2018, 165.

10 SCORPAN 1967, 3.

11 GOČEVA 1998, 121.

12 BOTEVA 2002, 817.

13 BOTEVA 2002, 819.

14 DIMITROVA 2002, 209–210.

Iconographically, the material falls into recurring compositional types:

- a cultic scene with a female figure, altar, and snake-entwined tree;
- a venatory scene showing the horseman attacking a wild boar;
- a post-hunt type with a stag, often treated as a subtype of the second group.

Approximately one-third of the monuments bear Greek or Latin inscriptions, predominantly votive ones with the remainder of a funerary character; their formulaic structure typically includes the deity's name in the dative and that of the dedicator, or, in epitaphs, the name of the deceased.¹⁵

The iconography of the Knight Hero is, with a few minor exceptions, the same on all sculptural monuments: the mounted Thracian Knight riding to the right, his cloak fastened on his left shoulder with a fibula and flutters behind him. With his left hand, he holds the horse's reins. In front of him is the sacred tree, and among its branches can be seen the snake and an altar with a burning fire.¹⁶ A dog usually accompanies him. Sculpturally, the diverse character of the figure is suggested either by his representation walking calmly, holding a *patera* or a *rhyton* in his right hand, or making the gesture of *benedictio latina*, or galloping, raising a spear with his right hand, with which he will pierce the game, aided by the dog. The prey is most often a wild boar. Sometimes, instead of a wild boar, there is a hare or a deer.¹⁷

The name 'The Thracian Knight' was a 20th-century creation based primarily on the geographic association of the main areas where monuments depicting the hero have been discovered.¹⁸ It was considered highly unlikely that the deity originated from a local Thracian god.¹⁹ On the other hand, the cult spread throughout the province of Thrace, neighbouring territories, and other parts of the Empire where Thracians were present.²⁰ An essential factor in its spread throughout the Roman world was the Thracian auxiliary troops, who served in the Imperial Roman Army in both external and domestic conflicts during the 1st–3rd centuries AD.²¹ In Fayum, Egypt, a temple dedicated to the Thracian Knight was built by a unit of Thracian soldiers, and the cult of the Dioscuri later joined it. Similarly, the Thracians settled in Rome had a sanctuary on the Esquiline Hill where, alongside other gods, the Hero Knight—*Deo Sancto Heroni*—was also worshipped.²²

During the Roman era, most monuments dedicated to the Thracian Knight were discovered in *Moesia Inferior* and the neighbouring provinces.²³ It has been found that many discoveries are concentrated in the former Greek colonies along the Black Sea coast.²⁴ A study of the monuments at Odessos shows that the iconography of the Thracian Horseman was established in the late Hellenistic period, or slightly later, in the region inhabited by Hellenes, especially the Microasian Greeks, but in accordance with the cult's particularities. The rich iconography of the monuments at Odessos is explained by the sphere of Greek influence and by the high degree of Hellenization of the dedicants. In the hinterland of Odessos, the iconography is very simplified. The Thracian population did not need inscriptions or details in the presentation to understand the multiple aspects of the Hero.²⁵ Of all the Greek cities on the Pontic coast, Odessos was the first to adopt the cult of the Hero

15 DIMITROVA 2002, 210–211.

16 COVACEF 2002, 169.

17 PETCU 2024, 41.

18 BARNEA 2006, 99.

19 PETOLESCU 1994, 267.

20 DIMITROVA 2002, 210.

21 ZAHARIADE 2009, 169.

22 DOBRUSKÝ 1907, 34.

23 DUCA 2015, 178.

24 BARNEA 2006, 100.

25 GOČEVA 1998, 128.

Knight and perhaps Thracian elements in general. The reason for this was that the Greek colony was founded on the site of an ancient Thracian settlement, as indicated by its non-Greek name. The oldest monument representing the Knight Hero from Odessos is the stele of Karabazmos, dated to the middle of the 1st century BC.²⁶

The vast majority of monuments known from the provinces of Dacia and Moesia Inferior date from the 2nd–3rd centuries AD. Likewise, the earliest representations of the Thracian Knight come from Histria and comprise two votive terracottas dated to the 3rd century BC;²⁷ and the latest ones are classified in the first half of the 4th century AD.²⁸

The cult of the Thracian Horseman, which aligns with an ancient Thracian religious belief, began to take distinct forms well before the Roman era. This development occurred within the boundaries of the Odrysian kings' state and was influenced by Hellenistic culture.²⁹ Within Thracian-Odrysian society, the image of the horseman reflects the aristocratic social structure and the cavalry's essential military role. Associated with the warrior elite and local nobility, equestrian iconography appears on royal coinage, signet rings, weaponry, and prestige vessels, becoming a symbol of power, status, and aristocratic identity. In the regions inhabited by the Getae and Triballi, the image of the horseman had a more limited distribution; however, funerary rituals, such as the burial of horses alongside warriors or the symbolic deposition of bridles, confirm the horse's central role in warrior ideology and the representation of social hierarchy.³⁰

In some modern interpretations, the deity has been identified with the Thracian hero Rhesus, based on mythical and cultic analogies (hunting, horses, connections with the underworld, and associations with Dionysus). Still, there is no direct evidence, and the conclusion remains hypothetical. Rhesus is a Thracian hero or king, known from Greek epic tradition and mentioned in the *Iliad* and the tragedy *Rhesos*. The connection between “Ἡρώς Knight and Rhesus is based on numerous cultic similarities: both are horsemen, hunters, have protective and healing functions, and are associated with the underworld and Dionysus. Rhesus appears in literary sources as a deified hero worshipped in Thrace, and the Thracian Knight is depicted in reliefs with a similar role. Therefore, some researchers consider Rhesus to be a local manifestation of the Thracian Knight, but this hypothesis is not directly confirmed by epigraphic evidence.³¹

It has been found that the motif of the Rider-God, inaccurately known as the ‘Thracian Rider,’ is in fact widespread and can be considered part of the Hellenistic, Iranian, or Thracian tradition.³² The iconography of the Rider-God, who slays a wild animal with his spear, paved the way for the holy Christian horse riders who came from Egypt.³³

Bronze representations of the “Ἡρώς Knight

Studies in Bulgaria have identified over hundred bronze statuettes attributed to the Knight Hero in Thrace, including both those depicting the rider on horseback and those depicting separate riders or horses, as in our case.³⁴ Moreover, a concentration of discoveries can be observed in the

26 GOČEVA 1998, 122–123.

27 COJA 1974, 283–288.

28 HAMPARȚUMIAN 1979, 7–8. See, for example, the funerary stele of Val(erius) Victorinus *biarcus* discovered at Ulmetum and dated to 324 AD (IGLR, nr. 206).

29 VULPE 1964, 339–340.

30 RABADJIEV 2014, 501.

31 LIAPIS 2011, 95–104.

32 PÂRVAN 1926, 640.

33 SAUCIUC-SĂVEANU 1944, 44.

34 BOTEVA – SHARANKOV 2024, 34.

southeastern part of Thrace.³⁵ Depending on their execution—either more schematic and attributed to local workshops, or more elaborately crafted by specialized artisans—the statuettes retain the same iconography. However, a distinctive element depicted on some of them is the quiver that the figure carries on his back. This led Bulgarian researchers to attribute some of the representations to a religious syncretism between Apollo and the Knight Hero,³⁶ also supported by archaeological research conducted in the sanctuary near the village of Lozen in Bulgaria, which is considered one of the earliest sites where connections between the cult of Apollo and that of the Thracian Horseman could be observed. At the end of the 19th century, a series of bronze statuettes depicting two deities were discovered here, along with other artifacts.³⁷ The syncretism can also be seen on votive monuments, which feature representations of the horseman with inscriptions dedicated to Apollo.³⁸ The quiver is rarely present, having been identified in only four statuettes discovered across a vast territory. This low occurrence suggests that it does not reflect any specific regional iconographic characteristics. While literature often draws parallels between the bronze statues of horsemen and the stone images of the so-called Thracian Hero or Thracian Horseman, it is essential to highlight that, in the latter case, the quiver is typically not depicted, even in images with explicit dedications to Apollo.³⁹

The cult of the Knight Hero is illustrated in many votive representations and dominates, as the most revered deity, all other deities in the Greco–Roman pantheon in Thrace and Lower Moesia. His iconography and cult testify that he was a tutelary deity of the populations whose main occupation was hunting. He was associated with Apollo, with whom he shared the same attributes: god of hunting and animals, protector of herds, omniscient and savior, and, last but not least, the Hero Knight.⁴⁰ After the cult of Apollo was introduced in Thrace, it overlapped with the cult of the local anonymous male deity, and during the Roman period, a fusion occurred, represented as a protective deity, between the anonymous one and the Knight Hero.⁴¹

Another syncretism, this time between the Knight Hero and Asclepius, was observed among the discoveries of votive altars in Thrace. The dedicatory inscriptions preserved on the votive reliefs depicting the Thracian Horseman are addressed to Asclepius, reflecting the complete fusion between the two. Asclepius, syncretized with the Thracian Horseman, is venerated in the Thracian regions as a supreme god who serves as a protector and savior from various forms of evil. This aspect of the Asclepius cult in Thrace aligns with the broader trends of the time, specifically the universalization and pantheization of Asclepius' worship throughout the Greco–Roman world.⁴²

Although the image of the horseman has a Greek iconographic origin, in the Thracian environment, it acquired local religious significance. It became an artistic convention for representing a male divinity or hero.⁴³ We are witnessing a form of syncretism with deities from the Greco–Roman pantheon, depicted in the image of the Knight, who in turn serves as a local god to whom various epithets are attributed.⁴⁴

35 BOTEVA – SHARANKOV 2024, 36–37.

36 OGNENOVA-MARINOVA 1975, 20, Cat. 17–25.

37 VASSILEV 1994, 429.

38 GOČEVA 1992, 166–168.

39 BOTEVA – SHARANKOV 2024, 58–59.

40 OGNENOVA-MARINOVA 1975, 20.

41 DUCA 2015, 179.

42 DONTCHEVA 2002, 323–324.

43 DIMITROVA 2002, 227.

44 DONTCHEVA 2002, 324.

Apart from the statuette discussed in this study, only one other statuette of this type has been discovered in Romania, and comes from the territory of the former province of Dacia. It was found by chance somewhere near the city of Mediaş, and the exact location remains uncertain. Surveys conducted near the city have identified several settlements dating to the 2nd–4th centuries AD. The statuette is considered the creation of a local craftsman, a modest provincial product dating from the 2nd–3rd centuries AD.⁴⁵

Stylistically, these statuettes combine local Thracian religious tradition with Roman artistic conventions, and feature realistic musculature, standardized armor, and controlled horse motion. The metallurgical composition and patina suggest small workshop production rather than state-sponsored manufacture. Yet, the high quality of casting demonstrates the persistence of skilled local craftsmanship. Unlike the more numerous marble reliefs, the bronze versions were portable and personal, likely serving as votive offerings or household cult images rather than monumental dedications. Many were placed in small roadside shrines or carried by soldiers, reflecting both private devotion and the spread of a common iconography across Thrace, Macedonia, Pannonia, Moesia, and Dacia.⁴⁶

Bronze representations of the *Heroes* follow a remarkably stable iconographic pattern: a young rider depicted in motion, dressed in a short chiton and a cloak fluttering in the wind, often to the right, mounted on a dynamically posed horse.⁴⁷ These motifs encapsulate the essential aspects of the Thracian Hero's divine function, protector and intermediary between the living and the dead.⁴⁸ The compact size of the bronzes (usually 10–25 cm in height) and the technical execution in cast bronze or bronze-lead alloy demonstrate their function as portable cult images, suitable for use in private shrines, graves, or roadside sanctuaries.

In religious terms, the bronze horseman embodies the fusion of the indigenous Thracian Hero with the Greco–Roman heroic ideal, a mediator between men and gods, guardian of life and death, and symbol of the continuity of Thracian spiritual identity within the Roman Empire.⁴⁹

Other representations of the Knight Hero, as rare as bronze statuettes, include marble statues, in addition to the large number of bas-reliefs. Two such monuments have been discovered so far in Dobrogea, both very detailed and well-carved. The method of execution allowed them to be dated to the 2nd century AD.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The discovery of the statuette in the Roman settlement of Palazu Mare only reinforces our assumptions about the site's character and its importance in Roman times. Therefore, the development of the *vicus* is normal, given its location near Tomis, as well as on the road connecting the city and Histria. Archaeological research conducted over the last ten years in Constanța has revealed the development and demographic growth of the peri-urban area of Tomis, particularly in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. The statuette joins two other representations of deities discovered at Palazu Mare: a lead statuette depicting a Genius Cucullatus and another ivory statuette embodying Thanatos, the god of death.⁵¹ The typology of the three statuettes and the domestic contexts in which they were discovered suggest personal cults rather than official ones.

45 BLĂJAN – MOGA 1977, 195–199; ȚEPOSU-MARINESCU – POP 2000, 115, Cat. no. 141, Pl. 71.

46 BARNEA 2006, 100.

47 DÉLEV 1998, 129.

48 BARNEA 2006, 100.

49 SCORPAN 1967, 3.

50 COVACEF 1978, 119–120, Figs 1–4.

51 PETCU-LEVEI – PETCU 2024a, 377–393; PETCU-LEVEI – PETCU 2024b, 333–342.

Regarding the existence of a place of worship dedicated to the Thracian Knight in Tomis or nearby, Zaharia Covacef states that the edicule depicting him alongside the goddess Cybele, as well as the numerous representations discovered, constitute the primary evidence.⁵² Another monument confirming the presence of a temple is a limestone stele divided into three registers. The knight is depicted in the middle section, while the lower section features an inscription dedicated to the hero by several donors, including an association, a sacred herald, a priestess, etc. As for the temple's location, Z. Covacef believes it is near the Tomitan enclosure wall, where a series of monuments dedicated to the god have been discovered. Or outside the city in a wooded area, or with the entrance to the sacred place surrounded by trees.⁵³

One of the best-researched sanctuaries of the Thracian Horseman is the one at Sostra in Bulgaria. It is located about 750 m north of the military camp, in the periphery of a large *vicus*, only tens of meters from the route of one of the most important Trans-Balkan roads from *Oescus* to *Philippopolis*. The topographic position and the nature of the votive materials connect the sanctuary with the garrison of the nearby fort. Most of the dedications are made by persons bearing Roman names and military titles. The archaeological materials indicate that the sanctuary was established in the mid-2nd century AD and continued to exist, with interruptions, until the beginning of the 5th century AD.⁵⁴

The analysis concludes that the image of the Thracian Horseman embodies a structured religious doctrine: he is an intermediary divinity with psychopompic, protective, and mediatory functions, reflecting the specific nature of Thracian religion.⁵⁵ The Thracian Horseman bears strong religious and eschatological connotations, being associated with the afterlife and the veneration of heroic ancestors.⁵⁶ As an intermediary between worlds, the horse symbolizes the ability to traverse cosmic boundaries, while equestrian representations in tombs and sanctuaries indicate an aristocratic ancestor cult. Under Hellenistic influence, the image evolved from an aristocratic and military symbol into a cultic one, and in the Roman period it merged into the syncretic figure of the Thracian Hero, a protective deity with funerary and soteriological functions, venerated throughout Thrace.⁵⁷

Bronze statuettes of the Thracian Horseman represent a significant though relatively rare category of votive and decorative objects within the material culture of the Roman Balkans. These figurines demonstrate the persistence and adaptation of the indigenous Thracian heroic cult within the Roman Empire's socio-religious framework. Their typology, iconography, and archaeological contexts indicate that the bronze versions, unlike the more numerous marble reliefs, were intended as personal devotional objects closely linked to military and roadside cult practice. The bronze statuettes of the Thracian Horseman stand as eloquent witnesses to the integration of Thracian cult practice into the Roman cultural and military world, revealing how local hero worship evolved into a trans-provincial, portable, and enduring symbol of protection and identity.

In conclusion, the bronze figurines of the Heros serve not only as artistic representations but also as ritual agents of cultural synthesis. They connect the Thracian heroic ideal with Roman concepts of divine patronage, mobility, and imperial order. Their enduring presence provides a unique insight into how local traditions adapted within a cosmopolitan empire while still maintaining a distinctly Thracian spiritual identity.

52 For more details about the edicule, see TUDOR 1935, 109–113, Tab. 5, Fig. 3.

53 COVACEF 2006, 168.

54 HRISTOV *et al.* 2013, 245–250.

55 BOTEVA 2002, 821.

56 DÉLEV 1998, 132.

57 RABADJIEV 2014, 502–503.

Sources

- IGLR: Popescu, E. 1976: *Inscripțiile grecești și latine din secolele IV-XIII descoperite în România*, București.
ISM II: *Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris Graecae et Latinae, Vol. II, Tomis et Territorium*. București, 1987.

References

- BĂJENARU, C. – VASILESCU, D. – LASCU, M. F. 2018: 78. Constanța. jud. Constanța. Sit: Așearea romană de la Constanța – cartier Palazu Mare. Punct: Str. Tache Ionescu, parcela A 467/3/1 (proprietatea Prodan Vasile-Marcel). *Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice 2018. Campania 2017*, 162–163.
- BĂRBULESCU, M. – OCHEȘEANU, R. 1990: Descoperiri monetare în așezările rurale din Dobrogea romană (14 D. Cr.–270 D. Cr.). *Pontica* 23, 225–265.
- BĂRBULESCU, M. 2001: *Viața rurală în Dobrogea Romană (sec. I–III p. Chr.)*. Constanța.
- BARNEA, A. 2006: Eroul Cavalier / Le héros cavalier. In: Mihăilescu-Bîrliba, L. – Bounegru, O. (eds): *Studia historiae et religionis Daco-Romanae, in honorem S. Sanie*. București, 99–103.
- BERNDT, S. 2018: The hand gesture and symbols of Sabazios. *Opuscula Annual of the Swedish Institutes at Athens and Rome* 2, 151–168. <https://doi.org/10.30549/opathrom-11-08>
- BLĂJAN, I. – MOGA, V. 1977: Un bronz roman în Muzeul de Istorie din Mediaș (jud. Sibiu). *Acta Musei Napocensis* 14, 195–199.
- BOTEVA, D. – SHARANKOV, N. 2024: Bronze statuettes of horsemen and horses at the National History Museum, Sofia. *Proceedings of the National Museum of History* 37, 33–61.
- BOTEVA, D. 2002: The Heros of the Thracian Iconic Narrative: A Data Base Analysis. In: Fol, A. (ed.): *Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Thracology. Thrace and the Aegean. Sofia – Yambol, 25–29 September 2000*, Vol. 2. Sofia, 817–821.
- BUCOVALĂ, M. – PAPUC, Gh. 1981: Date noi despre fortificația de la Ovidiu-Municipiul Constanța (Campania 1980). *Pontica* 14, 211–216.
- COJA, M. 1974: Terres Cuites d'Époque Hellenistique Représentant le Cavalier Thrace, Trouvées à Histria, *Dacia* 18, 283–288.
- COVACEF, Z. 1978: Aspect inedit de manifestare a cultului Cavalerului Trac. *Pontica* 11, 119–125.
- COVACEF, Z. 2002: *Arta Sculpturală în Dobrogea Romană, secolele II–III*. Cluj-Napoca.
- COVACEF, Z. 2006: Templele Tomisului, *Peuce* 3–4, 159–172.
- DÉLEV, P. 1998: Observations sur le Cavalier Thrace. *Pulpudeva. Semaines Philippopolitaines de l'Histoire et de la Culture Thrace – Supplementum* 6, 129–135.
- DIMITROVA, N. 2002: Inscriptions and Iconography in the Monuments of the Thracian Rider. *Hesperia* 71:2, 209–229. <https://doi.org/10.2972/hesp.2002.71.2.209>
- DOBRUSKÝ, V. 1907: *Trakiški Konnitsi i drugi bogove-ezdachi. Pametnitsi po kulta na Asklepiū v Trakiya. Pametnitsi po kulta na Zevs, Khera, Atina*. Sofia.
- DONTCHEVA, I. 2002: Le syncrétisme d'Asclépios avec le Cavalier Thrace. *Kernos* 15, 317–324. <https://doi.org/10.4000/kernos.1391>
- DUCA, M. 2015: Eroul Cavalier pe un nou relief descoperit la Capidava. *Cercetări Arheologice* 22, 175–188. <https://doi.org/10.46535/ca.22.07>
- GOČEVA, Z. 1992: Le culte d'Apollon, *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 18:2, 163–171. <https://doi.org/10.3406/dha.1992.2020>
- GOČEVA, Z. 1998: Particularités de l'iconographie du Cavalier Thrace à Odessos et dans son territoire. *Pulpudeva. Semaines Philippopolitaines de L'Histoire et de la Culture Thrace – Supplementum* 6, 121–128.
- HAMPARȚUMIAN, N. 1979: *Corpus Cultus Equitis Thracii. IV. Moesia Inferior (Romanian section) and Dacia*. Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain 74.II.2. Leiden. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004295520>
- HRISTOV, I. – TORBATOV, S. – IVANOVA, B. – IVANOV, S. – NINOV, L. 2013: *The Sanctuary of the Thracian Horseman by Sostra*. Sofia.

- LIAPIS, V. 2011: The Thracian Cult of Rhesus and the Heros Equitans. *Kernos* 24, 95–104. <https://doi.org/10.4000/kernos.1938>
- OGNEENOVA-MARINOVA, L. 1975: *Statuettes en bronze du Musée national archéologique à Sofia*. Sofia.
- PÂRVAN, V. 1926: *Getica*. București.
- PETCU, R. 2024: Bas-relief dedicated to the Thracian Horseman discovered at Capidava (2nd–3rd centuries AD) (MINAC inv. no. 50616). In: Hamat, A. C. – Georgescu, Ș. – Potârniche, T. (eds): *Pontic Treasures Artefacts from the collections of the Museum of National History and Archaeology from Constanța I*. Cluj-Napoca, 41–43.
- PETCU, R. – PETCU-LEVEL, I. 2024a: A Lead Votive Statuette Depicting a Genius Cucullatus Discovered Near Tomis (Moesia Inferior). *Acta Musei Apvlensis Apulum* 51, 377–393.
- PETCU-LEVEL, I. – PETCU, R. 2024b: An ivory statuette depicting the god Thanatos discovered near Tomis (Moesia Inferior). *Dissertationes Archaeologicae* 3.12, 333–342. <https://doi.org/10.17204/dissarch.2024.333>
- PETOLESCU, C. C. 1994: Cavalerul trac. In: Preda, C. (ed.): *Enciclopedia arheologiei și istoriei vechi a României, Vol I, A–C*. București, 267.
- RABADJIEV, K. 2014: *The Horse, the Chariot and the Horseman. On the Interpretation of Images in Thracian Culture*. Sofia.
- SAUCIUC-SĂVEANU, T. 1944: Un relief în marmoră al zeului cavaler din Mangalia (vechiul Callatis). *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice* 37, 41–44.
- SCORPAN, C. 1967: *Cavalerul Trac*. Constanța.
- ȚEPOSU-MARINESCU, M. – POP, C. 2000: *Statuete de bronz din Dacia Romană*. București.
- TUDOR, D. 1935: Un nou monument al Cavalerului Trac descoperit la Tomi. *Cronica Numismatică și Arheologică* 101, 109–113.
- VASSILEV, V. P. 1994: *Bronzestatuetten aus dem Heiligtum bei Lozen. Akten der 10. Internationalen Tagung über antike Bronzen*. Forschungen und Berichte zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Baden-Württemberg 45. Stuttgart, 429–434.
- VULPE, R. 1964: Ex-voto au cavalier thrace provenant de Callatis. *Dacia* 8, 335–344.
- ZAHARIADE, M. 2009: *The Thracians in the Roman Imperial Army. From the first to the third centuries AD. I Auxilia*. Cluj-Napoca.

