

HAEMUS International Research Network  
Archaeology and History of the Balkans  
in Late Antiquity (3rd-8th century AD)

**1st International Workshop**

**Late Antique *villae* in the Balkans (3rd-7th c. AD):  
Current Research Questions and Perspectives**

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Organised by Orsolya Heinrich-Tamáská, Christoph Rummel, Carla Sfameni,  
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**Abstracts**

(listed by author)

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***The villa of Nerodime and its Late Antique Representation of the Seven Wise Men***

Marigona ADEMI (Paris)

One of the most striking discoveries of recent years in Kosovo remains the late-antique villa of Nerodime e Poshtme, with the mosaic of the "Seven Sages" that stood on its ground. The archaeological excavations during the 1970s/80s, and the documents in archives at the Museum of Kosovo and Archaeological Institute of Kosovo, allow us to specify its archaeological context in a fairly precise manner. We thus have detailed data on the location of the pavement within the building, as well as on its dating. These different points allow us to place this iconographic theme, very fashionable in Late Antiquity both in the East and in the West, in its cultural, religious and social context. In the case of Kosovo, we can even note that the mosaic was regularly maintained and remained visible for almost two centuries. My paper will review the various examples known to date of the representation of the Wise Men in the East and in the West, revisiting each time their archaeological context in order to compare them with our Kosovar example.

***Villa rustica in Obelya (Sofia): Economic Specifications, Everyday Life and Abandonment***

Anani ANTONOV (Sofia)

The *villa rustica* in Obelya (Sofia) is one of eight similar sites in the immediate vicinity of Serdica, the provincial capital of Dacia Mediterranea in Late Antiquity. The complex is

located 7 km west of the fortified area of the city. It was excavated during three archaeological campaigns: in 1961, 1962, and 1964. In the archaeological literature, the complex is counted among the fully explored ones in the vicinity of Serdica. Through the years, the interpretations of the chronology and the economic development of the site became a benchmark for all the *villae rusticae* in close proximity of present-day Sofia. In 1981 the results of the excavations were published in a relatively short article. Several aspects of the *villa* in Obelya piqued my interest. That's why I decided to get acquainted personally with the documentation and some of the metal finds stored in Sofia Museum. The analysis showed some new possibilities for the end of the life in this place, traditionally associated with the Hun invasions in the middle of the 5th century AD. At the same time, some finds and archaeological situations suggest the economic specialisation of the complex. This information allows us to assume that in its last period the site functioned as a slaughterhouse (*laniena*) and/or meat market (*macellum*).

### ***Cercadilla, a Late Roman villa in Hispania***

Javier ARCE (Lille)

Cercadilla, in Spain, in the province of Baetica, near *Corduba* is a huge archaeological complex situated 600 meters outside the wall of the ancient city of Corduba, founded by the praetor Claudius Marcellus in 169 b.C. as *Colonia Patricia Corduba*. In Caesar's time it was *caput provinciae* (of Baetica). Its enormous dimensions (22 m wide and 48 long with an apse of 18m diameter, and a total excavated area of 2 ha.) has lead the excavators to identify it as a *palatium*. Moreover they suggest that it was the *palatium* of Maximian Herculus who crossed the Iberian Peninsula on his way to Africa in the year 296. The archaeologists have dated the construction of the building to the years 293-305 as the emperor's residence and headquarters for the campaign in Africa. In my paper I discuss these proposals and specifically consider the significance of *palatium* in the texts, arriving at the conclusion that Cercadilla cannot be a *palatium* because we have no evidence at all that the emperor M. Herculus resided there in any period of his reign.

### ***From the Laecanii to Tito. The villa maritima expolitissima in the Verige Bay (Brioni, Croatia)***

Mario BLOIER (Weissenburg)

The Brioni Archipelago is comprised of a total of 14 islands lying northwest of Pula that were collectively known in Antiquity as *Pullariae Insulae*. Both its fortuitous geographic location, directly across from Fažana, and close to the Roman trade route on the Adriatic leading to Aquileia, sufficed to endow the island with great strategic importance. Evidence for the settlement of the largest island in the archipelago, Veli Brijun (Great Brioni), is traceable from the Neolithic period to the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD – with at least six Roman *villae rusticae*! The start of the Roman presence on Veli Brijun is marked by the existence of a *villa rustica* at the west end of the island which is dated to the late Republic. The *villa maritima expolitissima* in the Verige Bay, as it appears today, represents the third phase of building. The structures predating this, the *villa rustica polita* from the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and the *villa maritima* dating from the late Augustian/early Tiberian period, can both be differentiated from their successor. The last phase resulted in the completion of development

for the entire bay area. The *villa*'s prosperity presumably resulted from a flourishing trade in Istria's renowned agricultural products such as oil and wine, a commerce that had existed since late Augustan times. The *amphora* finds especially confirm the intimate contact with the motherland and to some extent support the frequently quoted connection with the *Laecanius Bassus* family, which was possibly the owner of the Verige Bay *villa*, the entire island, as well as the pottery at Fažana and other *villae* on the mainland. Underwater investigations started in the early 1990s and ended with a Croatian-Bavarian campaign 1996/97. The summary and further conclusions from the excavations prove older ideas and result in a new thesis concerning the end of the *Laecanius-amphorae* as well as the end of the Verige Bay *villa* in the 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> century and the connections to the Byzantine settlement, another former *villa rustica*, the ›Byzantine Castrum‹ at Val Madonna Bay. In modern times – after ownership by Roman emperors, Byzantine rulers, Venetians and Austrian entrepreneurs, the archipelago became the residence of Tito, president of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and was a restricted area until the 1990s.

### ***Diaporit (Albania): From villa to Pilgrimage Centre?***

William BOWDEN (Nottingham)

This paper will discuss a major *villa maritima* at Diaporit (close to Butrint in Albania), excavated with Prof. Luan Përzhita of the Institute of Archaeology (Tirana). The villa's early development seems to reflect the close relationship between Epirus and the Italian senatorial aristocracy and by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD it had become a major establishment spread across several terraces on the shore of Lake Butrint. It was abandoned in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century before being reoccupied as an Early Christian centre in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The new site included a church apparently focused on three graves. Although largely empty on excavation, radiocarbon dating of sparse remaining skeletal elements gave a date of AD 80-250, significantly earlier than the construction date of the church (c. AD 490), suggesting that earlier skeletal remains of patrons or martyrs had been translocated to the church. Other facilities included a bathhouse, a chapel and storage facilities and the complex has been interpreted as a centre of pilgrimage. The site was relatively short-lived and seemingly fell into disuse in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, although it was clearly recognised as a cult locus into the later Middle Ages, when the focal graves were largely emptied of skeletal remains. The paper will outline the findings from this site and put the results in the context of discoveries from the nearby town of Butrint and the recent discussions of the afterlives of villas in the late and post-Roman West.

### ***What can Geophysics Bring to the Study of Roman villae? Comparison from 20 Different Surveys***

Michel DABAS (Paris)

Even if Roman villae are settlements that are often encountered in excavations and trial trenches, non-destructive technics like aerial photos and geophysical surveys have brought a wealth of information about these settlements for many years. Specifically, in this talk, we will show the pros and cons of using different geophysical techniques for discovery and mapping. First, a comparison of different geophysical techniques will be given. Then, we will

focus on a recent case study for a comparison between the information given by test trenches and the information gained from geophysical anomalies.

### ***From villae to Landscape***

Michael Doneus (Vienna) and Nives Doneus (Vienna)

Traditionally, the study of archaeology has revolved around sites and artefacts. For a century, artefacts were arranged in typological tables based on evolutionary presumptions and stratigraphic observations. As a result, excavations have become the most important source of archaeological information. Today, this view is being challenged by the rapid development and application of a broad spectrum of non-invasive approaches, which has shifted the focus from an artefact-based interest in single sites to a holistic view of cultural landscapes. One aspect of archaeological prospection focuses on Roman sites and landscapes, as the urban centres, monuments and villas, especially large-scale infrastructure projects like aqueducts or transport networks shape the landscapes of Europe to this day. The presentation will introduce the potential of non-invasive archaeological prospection to analyse Roman *villae* in their landscape context. It will provide examples from Eastern Austria and Mediterranean Croatia focusing on a wide range of components including roads, field systems, burial places, industrial features, and environmental conditions (sea-level change). Our results show that remote sensing methods in particular hold great potential for the analysis of Roman agriculture and land use on a landscape scale. They offer possibilities that go far beyond mapping of centuriations or localisation of Roman estates and support the development of new research and conservation strategies at a regional level.

### ***Roman Architecture of Vižula, Croatia: Research Strategy for Large-Scale Coastal Settlement Sites***

Nives Doneus (Vienna) and Michael Doneus (Vienna)

For many decades the *villa maritima* of Vižula was considered one of the largest of its kind in Istria, Croatia. Archaeological research into such large monuments is confronted with very specific problems, as they can have a size that is – even by today’s standards – of overwhelming dimensions. Moreover, *villae maritimae* were built close to the shore line and are today partly submerged, which leads to the separation of archaeological research into terrestrial and underwater parts. Archaeological prospection offers not only the possibility of investigating large-scale sites but also of transcending the division between land and sea. The example of Vižula will be used to show how the integration of non-invasive prospection techniques with terrestrial and underwater surveys and excavations has created a new foundation for the study of the site. Furthermore, the results show that the combined methodology is able to integrate detail and context into an interpretative coherent model of a landscape going far beyond the analytical capabilities of each individual method.

## ***The Theodosian Palace at Stobi, the Residence of an Elite Roman Citizen***

Ljubinka DŽIDROVA (Skopje)

Archaeological excavations at Stobi on the Vardar River, the capital of the province of *Macedonia Secunda* or *Salutaris*, today in the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia, have provided evidence of almost continuous settlement since prehistory until the Early and even High Middle Ages. Its most powerful period (IV-VI c.) was marked by radical reshaping of the urban plan developed on the upper SE hill slope between the two main streets, the *Viae principales superior* and *inferior*, where a row of private residences was organised. The House of Peristeria/Theodosian Palace, here united under the second name, is an intriguing and complex architectural compound, still fully unresolved from the aspects of function and ownership. It was composed of several clearly separated parts to underline their specific function, particularly the ceremonial access for the guests, or the limited free access to the family members and the staff at all times. The villa has several clearly recognised chronological phases, yet with little nuance, since most of the excavations were performed in the early 20th century, and not much of the material finds or the stratigraphic record is preserved. Still, the general trend of expansion of the engaged *insula* with major encroachment into neighbouring public areas as part of the private ambitions of the wealthy residents, and the subsequent adaptation to the decline of economic standards and the disregard for the municipal laws regulating construction within the city's territory, which gave way to the preservation of the pagan beliefs well into the sixth century, give us a hint of the cultural trends and beliefs in this segment of the city.

## ***Villae in the Late Roman West as Expressions of Aristocratic Culture***

Simon ESMONDE CLEARY (Birmingham)

Spain, Gaul and Britain in the fourth to fifth centuries are distinguished by their large numbers of villas, many of them of significant size and richness of appointments. This paper seeks to show how aristocratic cultural and social attitudes and activities are encoded in them and may be decoded. Villas were places where the importance, wealth and educated tastes of their owners were displayed, in particular to those whose networks of friendship or of patronage they wished to access and to perpetuate. The layouts of the villas, particularly in aspects such as reception rooms, baths, dining areas, were designed to house these activities in sumptuous surroundings. As well as the architecture, aspects such as mosaics, wall-paintings or gardens enhanced the effect. The importance of sculpture is increasingly appreciated, and together with the subject matter of mosaics gives a window into the worlds of culture and taste acquired through *paideia* and which allowed an individual to be placed in a cultural as much as a social hierarchy. The architecture and decoration acted as the framing for a series of social activities such as hunting, bathing and dining, which allowed the proprietor to create and maintain social networks. These aspects may also help explain the marked regional presences and absences of villas across the late Roman West.

## ***Constantine the Great's Legacy at the Late Antique Complex of Mediana (Naissus)***

Nadja GAVRILOVIĆ VITAS (Belgrade)

In 364, as Ammianus Marcellinus writes in his History, after hastening through Thrace, both emperors Valentinian and Valens arrived in a suburb of Naissus called Mediana, where they shared the Empire between them, by sharing their generals, and afterwards went their separate ways, leaving the Roman Empire for the first time divided into an Eastern part and a Western part. The location where the division of the Roman Empire took place is here for the first time mentioned in historical sources by its name, Mediana. It was described as being three miles distant from Naissus and long afterwards, thanks to the first researches of Felix Kanitz in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the settlement of Mediana was identified and started to be archaeologically excavated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Being situated on the ancient *via militaris* which connected Constantinopolis to the northern parts of the central Balkans like Singidunum through Viminacium, Naissus, and Serdica, Mediana comprises about 80 hectares, of which only a small part has been archaeologically researched, mainly the northern part of the settlement. It encompasses an enclosed complex in its central part – a villa with peristyle, *thermae*, monumental gate and large courtyard. To the west and east of the villa with peristyle, there are military barracks and workshops, with a large *horreum* in its centre. Some 200 m north from the villa, the remains of an even bigger and more luxurious villa with octagon were discovered, while about 500m southwest of the villa, a fortification which defended the imperial complex at Mediana was situated. A water tower, *castellum aquae*, was built in the vicinity, as well as several country villas, warehouses and two smaller necropolises. The real surprise followed in 2005 and 2007, with the discovery of two small early Christian churches dating from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, built between the western enclosure wall of the villa with peristyle and the military barracks in the west. During the excavations from 2000 to 2011, the whole villa with peristyle comprising around 6000m<sup>2</sup> was researched as were *thermae* on the north-west side of the villa with peristyle in the period from 2015 to 2019, which are the largest private *thermae* from antiquity in Serbia.

## ***Villae and Religions in Late Antiquity: Misunderstandings and Illusions***

Christophe J. GODDARD (Paris)

### ***Interactions between villae and the Military? Villae and/or Fortifications in the Danube and Balkan Provinces during Late Antiquity***

Orsolya HEINRICH-TAMÁSKA (Leipzig) and Christoph RUMMEL (Frankfurt am Main)

In the late Roman period, many Roman villas – which previously seemed primarily to take the form of open rural settlements ranging from small farmsteads to major estates – developed a more defensive character. While in North Africa, for example, fortified country houses developed that could easily be defended by their inhabitants, from the mid to late 3<sup>rd</sup> century onwards major defended sites occur in the hinterland of the Limes, especially in the Danube provinces and the Balkans. One group of these sites (“defended *villae*”) seem to parallel major military forts in terms of their defences, but also contain luxury elements and high-status structures within these fortifications. Some are interpreted as imperial palaces (e.g. Split, Gamzigrad, Sarkamen). Another group of these sites are fortifications, but the inner

structures show parallels with civilian architecture, e.g. *villae* (“villae in forts”). They are often explained as military centres for collection of the *annona* (*militaris?*), stations for the mobile army/*comitatenses* (e.g. Keszthely-Fenekpuszta, Abritus) or major rural estates (e.g. Mogorjelo). This paper will identify type sites of this late Roman phenomenon and assess to what extent their architecture and layout allow more nuanced interpretations of their function. It will build on past discussions in an attempt to differentiate between various terms for architecturally similar structures such as *principia*, *praetoria* and *villae* in order to explore the interactions between the civilian and military spheres at such sites.

### ***The Development of Rural Settlements around Ibida Fortress during the 4th Century AD***

Ștefan HONCU (Iași)

The evolution of rural settlements in the province of Scythia Minor experienced a swift development in the fourth century. After the economic and military crisis in the second quarter of the third century, the rural area of the province was reconfigured by "restoring" the old settlements but also by founding new ones. During this period, a series of sites were developed - rural settlements, which revolved around the "big cities", having a well-defined role. The strategic position of the cities influenced the economic development of these rural settlements. Systems were set up in which the fortress represented the "planet", and rural settlements were the satellites orbiting it. Several such rural sites have been researched and identified in Scythia Minor, especially in the northwest of the province. Around the Ibida fortress, archaeological research suggests in our opinion that those settlements had the role of providing the "mother fortress" with various products. Most probably, this system was developed during the timespan between the reign of Constantine the Great and that of Emperor Valens, thus allowing the specialisation of the multiple settlements to produce consumer goods for the fortress they were orbiting around.

### ***The Villa Armira in Thrace (Bulgaria): Current Research Questions***

Gergana KABAKCHIEVA (Sofia) and Benjamin FRERIX (Vienna)

The Villa Armira is located 4 km south of modern Ivaylovgrad in south-eastern Bulgaria on the border with Greece. Built in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD in the newly established Roman province of Thrace, it is located near a Roman road connecting the *Via Egnatia* and the *via diagonalis*. Nearby is the eponymous river Armira, a tributary of the Arda, which was navigable in antiquity. The *pars urbana* features at least four construction periods and is built around a central peristyle courtyard with an *impluvium*. In addition, the two-storey villa boasts a hypocaust system for reception rooms and a *balneum*. The manor is luxuriously endowed with several mosaics of high artistic quality and lavish white marble decoration. The *pars rustica* was heavily damaged by excavator work in the course of the construction of a dam in 1964. Due to this work, the villa was discovered and due to relentless effort was preserved from its fate on the lake bottom. Since 2018 new investigations in the vicinity of the villa and new research on the provenance analysis of the white marbles has shed new light on the origin of the splendid interior design.

## ***A Roman villa discovered in Tirana***

Mariglen MESHINI (Tirana) and Rigert ÇAKO (Tirana)

XXX“*Villa Rustica*” in the city of Tirana was discovered during construction work in the late 1980s, and rescue archaeological excavations proceeded. These were interrupted but continued again with limited campaigns in 2004 and 2008. The ruins suggest that the“*Villa*” had a considerably extended plan; so, it was necessary to proceed with a scientific excavation, to determine the exact date of this monument. The Ministry of Culture of Albania approved an open archaeological excavation in 2021, as the next step in order to excavate unaffected and unknown areas. Archaeological excavation was led by the National Cultural Heritage Institute in collaboration with Regional Directorate of Cultural Heritage of Tirana and the Faculty of History - Philology, Department of Archeology. Archaeological excavations were carried out during May of 2021 and August 2021. These excavations discovered the continuation of the ruins and living quarters of this villa, as well as the possible traces of a fortification of the 4th century AD. Also, through the archaeological material discovered, it was possible to determine this *villa* was in use. The prediction was that it would be dated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. It has now been determined with certainty that the *villa* coincides with the end of the 1st century AD until the beginning of the 6th century AD. Also, for the first time we have documentation of the resumption of life in this area during the 11th-12th century, through the presence of ceramics found in the original context. One of the previously unknown elements in this area is related to the possible traces of a 4th century fortification, which is located under the ruins of the 5th century. These structures will be the object of excavation and study in the future.

## ***The Luxury villa of Valerius Dalmatius, Governor of Lugdunensis III at Nagyharsány, Hungary***

Zsolt MRÁV (Budapest)

The Nagyharsány late imperial villa estate is situated in the south of Baranya County, Hungary close to Villány, at the southern foot of the scenic Szársomlyó Hill. The most spectacular period of the settlement’s history is the second half of the fourth century, when the already existing villa was transformed into a luxury residence with reception and banquet halls furnished with mosaics, new dwellings and bathhouses, and garden facilities. This presentation aims to present this late Roman high-status *villa* and especially its banquet halls. Besides the architectural remains and mosaics, hundreds of tiny fragments of luxurious glass vessels came to light from the corridor in front of the banquet hall and the floor of a room opening from here. Some pieces among them represented the highest quality of late Roman glass craftsmanship, for instance cage cups with inscriptions (*vasa diatreta*) and/or dichroic glasses. A peculiarity of the Nagyharsány villa is that we know its rich owner by name: he must have been Valerius Dalmatius, once governor of the province of *Lugdunensis III*. A bronze slab with an inscription mentioning him came to light at neighbouring Beremend in 1901. The mosaics depicting the multiple personifications of the city make the direct connection between the luxury villa in Nagyharsány and Senator Valerius Dalmatius certain. The luxury reflected by the interior decoration and the artefacts of the banquet hall prove that the educated and wealthy imperial aristocracy was present in the late Roman Pannonian provinces, understood the literary and visual culture based on the classical education of the elite, and spoke its sophisticated language.



## ***Palace and/or villae? A status quaestionis***

Lunda MULVIN (Dublin) and Nigel WESTBROOK (Perth)

The session aims to examine new findings in the architectural study of the later antique palace and high status *domus* with papers by participants presenting new evidence on case studies ranging from Gamzigrad, Šarkamen, Armira, the high-status villa at Nagyharsány (H), a newly-discovered *villa* near to Sirmium (Glac), a Roman *villa* discovered in Tirana and also new evidence at the palace complex at Cercadilla (Cordoba). As architecture is a means of communicating contexts, in this session, we hope to explore matters of influence and evolution of form on palace and *villa* types using existing methodologies as a framework. For instance, as Karl Swoboda established a formalist art historical methodology for approaching typologies, this methodology is assessed in the panel as to whether it is still a valid means of determining continuities and innovations in palace development. The cross-cultural translation of architectural motifs as revealed in introductions of different plan types is also considered as a theme. The term “late antique *palatium*” implies large-scale structures with functioning processional routes, and an enlargement in the scale of reception and ceremonial spaces: this shared monumental language of monuments is found across the Mediterranean and is considered here also, with Cercadilla presenting a comparative transformation of the monumental type with source indicators of the late *palatium*. Key words in this session will be architecture of power, evolution and influence; connectivity.

## ***Complexity and Contradiction in Diocletian’s Palace***

Goran NIKŠIĆ (Split)

Based on recent archaeological research, on the reinterpretation of historic sources and on the architectural analysis of Diocletian’s Palace in Split, a new reading is proposed of this complex and contradictory building, in terms of design and construction process. Mistakes in the design and execution, and the unfinished decoration can be explained by the changes of architectural brief, and by the very short deadline given to the builders. The original use as the imperial textile manufacture was altered during the construction process, first with the addition of the *villa/palatium* for the retired emperor, followed by the insertion of the ceremonial/religious compound. The choice of the low ground, the opening up of the upper part of the perimeter walls with wide arches, and external entrances of the towers are strong evidence that the building had only the appearance of a well-defended place, meant to impress the visitor. Instead, the “fortification” elements served the purpose of controlling the activity inside the building. Architectural elements depart from their usual treatment. The general design is both schematic and intricate, utilitarian and symbolic. There is a clash between the industrial and domestic use, between the profane and sacred, proletarian and imperial. However, these contradictions and ambiguities were not intentional; they are a result of the pragmatic procedure of the architect obliged to solve the seemingly incompatible requirements of the emperor.

***The Decoration of the Piazza Armerina Roman villa and the Manifestations of Luxury in Late Antique Society***

Patrizio PENSABENE (Rome) and Paolo BARRESI (Enna)

It is well known that luxury, in late antique decoration, was expressed in marble architectural elements, as well as in mosaics and sculptures, not to mention perishable elements such as fabric curtains. It was not only the residences of the state ruling classes that displayed this kind of decorative luxury, aimed at gaining social recognition and prestige, but also episcopal complexes, usually urban, which often reused building materials from public architecture. However, in the decoration of private residences, signs of Christianity are rare, while statues of pagan deities continue to exist until very late. The decoration of late antique residences shows the ruling class's desire to preserve the classical cultural heritage even within the Christian empire, opposing the erasure of pagan memory. This is not mere conservatism, but the manifestation of a philosophical and religious culture of the elites opposed to the Christian culture. A series of examples taken from late antique villas, and in particular from that of Piazza Armerina, will help to clarify what we are saying.

***Glac: A High Status villa Complex in the Hinterland of Sirmium***

Stefan POP-LAZIĆ (Belgrade) and Richard MILES (Sidney)

This paper will present some of the results of the archaeological investigation at the site of Glac, Vojvodina province, in northern Serbia, carried out between 2017 and 2019 by the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade and the University of Sydney. The existence of a late antique *villa* complex on this site, 4 km east of Sirmium (modern Sremska Mitrovica) and close to the River Sava, has been known since the 19th century when informal and non-archaeological excavations uncovered several walls and mosaic floors. Despite two limited archaeological projects in the early 20th century and in 1994, the site has never been comprehensively excavated or recorded. Based on three seasons of excavation of the current project, information from previous excavations and an extensive geophysical survey undertaken by the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute, Vienna, our presentation will concentrate on evidence of initial occupation of the site in the 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD, before a major expansion of the site in the Tetrarchic period with the addition of a number of grand architectural features including a large apsidal hall-like structure, a monumental western entrance building, and an elaborately decorated suite of rooms constructed along the eastern side of the *villa*. Finally, we will examine the extensive archaeological evidence for the partial occupation and use of the *villa* site in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

***Gamzigrad-Felix Romuliana: Palace and/or villa?***

Stefan POP-LAZIĆ (Belgrade) and Christoph RUMMEL (Frankfurt am Main)

Since 2004, a German-Serbian cooperation project has been investigating the late Roman fortified site identified as Felix Romuliana, palace of the tetrarchic emperor Galerius, near Gamzigrad in Eastern Serbia. The focus of this work has been to contextualise the main site in its surroundings using both landscape archaeological methods and targeted excavations. Felix Romuliana has been the subject of much discussion over more than 70 years of systematic

archaeological excavation and it has seen many different interpretations. Today, it is generally agreed that it is to be seen as the memorial palace of the Emperor Galerius, following a model established by Diocletian at Spalato/Split. The paper provides an overview of the different past interpretations and academic disputes, as well as an analysis of the structures at Romuliana to identify which aspects make it palatial, and which aspects place it in the wider type group of late Roman *villa* sites. Using and building on definitions developed during the 2008 colloquium on late Roman *villae* and palaces at Bruckneudorf (von Bülow and Zabehlicky 2011) the paper seeks to offer suggestions on where the line between *villa* and palace may run.

***Inside but Outside – Absentee Land Owners: Collapse but Surprising Continuity on the Lower Danube***

Andrew POULTER (Nottingham and Birmingham)

With notable exceptions, excavations of villas have focused upon the main house, apparently occupied by the owner, whereas other buildings, up to 1 km from the primary focus, provide more detail about the economic and social role of villas. In particular, dependent communities (presumably estate workers) have been identified by excavation (Montana 1-3) and intensive, site-specific surveys (Poulter). Moreover, significant storage facilities at the larger villas suggest the existence of *horrea* (granaries) capable of storing substantial quantities of foodstuffs. What is also notable is the existence of small churches, regularly outside the main villa but clearly associated with the estate; the fact that they were not within the primary villa but outside suggests that the building was used, not only by the primary occupants of the villa but by others, presumably estate workers. What is surprising is that the villa churches must have been in existence before the late 4<sup>th</sup> century since the majority of villas were destroyed and abandoned in the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. There are other indications of close links between the main villa and the extramural community. At villa no. 2 (Montana) there are two bath buildings, one only accessible from inside the inner courtyard (presumably for the owner and his entourage) but a second bath which could only be entered from the outside of the court (therefore probably for a dependant community of agricultural workers). There is also the question of who lived in the villas. The numerous gravestones almost invariably describe the deceased as members of the town council (*buleuta*), therefore directly connected with the administration of the city. What is discernible in most cases is both the absence of decorative expenditure and the absence of hypocausts. Anybody who has experienced the freezing temperatures of a Balkan winter would keenly appreciate the need to provide for heating! The most obvious conclusion is that the villa owner and his family were not in residence during the winter months. In the case of Nicopolis, the city had plenty of private and public hypocausts, including a '*termoperipatos*'. As noted, the villa owners were regularly members of the city council, a function which could hardly be performed from the sometimes distant estates. The conclusion would seem to be that villa owners only lived on their estates during the summer months but then decamped to the warmer city for the winter, a regular change in location, leaving the headman of the villa owner to run the estate. The villa at Pavlikeni suggests that some extra provision was made for the farm workers. Although there is no hypocaust in the main villa building, one was provided for a long building on the opposite side of the courtyard – perhaps for the estate workers who had to endure the cold winters? It is generally presumed that the Goths, Huns and then the Avars devastated the countryside after the collapse of the villa economy in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century. However, this was not so. Excavations in a military fort south of the Danube (Dichin) show that it housed what

must have been a small garrison but had at least six granaries. As the fort was on the banks of the river Rositsa (which offered access to the Danube down the Yantra) it seems likely that the fort acted as a collection centre for agricultural produce provided by the lands along the valley of the Rositsa, presumably to be shipped to the military garrisons on the Danube. The environmental finds from a destruction level c. 500 contain the same range of agricultural and animal remains as would be expected when the villas were in existence. A final destruction c. 585 showed no significant diminution in the quality of agricultural foodstuffs; just a slight increase in the consumption of wild species. Therefore, it would seem that the end of the villas was not mirrored by a collapse in the economy. This is an understandable sign of continuity: even Goths, Huns and Avars had to eat! But the way of exploiting the rich resources had changed even if the garrisons of forts and the indigenous population still worked the fields.

### ***The Changing Relationship between villae and Cities in the Late Antique Balkans***

Eftymios RIZOS (Serres) and Konstantinos KETANIS (Volos)

This paper offers a selective comparison of trends and changes in residential housing in cities and countryside in different parts of the Balkan area, aiming to assess the impact of war periods and internal reforms from the third to sixth centuries. The importance of the *Limes* provinces in the Tetrarchic empire distinguishes the Latin north in the early fourth century, while the flourishing of residential architecture in the southern provinces occurs with some delay in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, perhaps reflecting a development under the impact of Constantinople. From the tumultuous mid-fifth century on, however, luxury residential building comes to an effective end in the countryside and presents clear signs of decline in the cities. Based on a detailed overview of villas and farmsteads in the province of Macedonia Prima, we shall address the following questions:

- a) What are the implications of changes in the *villa* landscape for the relations between cities and their rural hinterlands?
- b) Are luxury features (triclinia, peristyles, mosaics) the only expression of wealth or prosperity?

We will also discuss the pitfalls of problematic dating and quality of publication for a general synthesis and conclusions.

### ***The Archaeology of villae during Late Antiquity: status quaestionis and Research Perspectives***

Carla SFAMENI (Rome)

Does a “late antique” *villa* exist? And, if it does, what are its specific features and functions? In the historical debate on the economic, social and cultural transformations of Late Antiquity, the *villa* represents a complex issue in which the residential characteristics complement the productive functions as part of a long tradition. The archaeological research of the last century and in particular of the last twenty years focusing on buildings with strong evidence of *high status* residence, often referred to as “residential villas” in the literature, has recognised some planimetric types and architectural and decorative elements that allow us to

distinguish a late antique building from one of a previous era. It is more difficult to explain the historical, economic and social reasons for these changes, especially considering the fact that many different meanings have been provided for the term “*villa*”, both in literary as well as archaeological contexts. In some cases, the existence of “late antique” *villae* has been denied as a category itself, emphasising more the link with pre-existing buildings and suggesting new interpretative formulas. This paper intends to offer an overview of the main studies conducted on *villae* in Late Antiquity, with a particular reference to the contributions of the last twenty years, highlighting the topics at the centre of the historical-archaeological debate on *villae* in the various regions of the late Roman Empire and illustrating new methodology and research perspectives.

### ***From Points to Meshes. Villa Landscape Researches in Pannonia***

Máté SZABÓ (Lille)

The former Pannonia now covers the territory of several countries, so we also find differences in the state and method of research of the Roman *villae* on its area. We can find many good examples of new research approaches. and, among these, the complex site survey and landscape archaeological approach instead of building-centric studies is becoming widespread in Hungary as well. Previously, the Roman *villa* sites and their network were mapped on the basis of field surveys, on the scattered small finds and building debris. In addition, relying on fundamentally limited archaeological excavations, we were able to gain insight into their structure and daily life. However, due to their limited nature, these studies focused primarily on the main buildings, bathhouses, practically on the richer parts (which are also more attractive to the general public), so that exploration of the Roman *villa* as a ‘working economy’ was limited. Following the fall of the Iron Curtain, with the resumption of aerial archaeology and the spread of geophysical surveys and with the legal use of metal detectors, a completely new dimension of Roman *villa* research appeared in Hungary. It is not primarily the number of sites, but the amount of available information about their structure and environment that has increased, and their restructuring can be observed. Shifting the focus of research and using landscape archaeological approach have given us the opportunity to move towards a ‘mesh’, a network of Roman *villae* instead of sites as ‘points’. This presentation will illustrate the *villa* research in the Hungarian part of Pannonia with examples.

### ***Villae & Landscape: New results from the Hinterland of Treveris and Northern Spain (La Olmeda)***

Felix TEICHNER (Marburg) and Florian HERMANN (Marburg)

Many elements of Roman rural settlement - namely the *villae (rusticae)* - have been known for some time and are considered to be generally very well researched. However, more and more research gaps (*desiderata?*) can be observed. On the one hand, it can often be observed that the investigations carried out so far have focused primarily on the residential areas (*partes urbanae*), which are distinguished by their architecture, bathing facilities and mosaic floors, while the associated economic sectors (*partes rusticae*) have not been taken into account. On the other hand, the traditional approaches ignored the integration of the site into the historical and geographical context in which it was situated. This shortcoming is relatively common in classical archaeology, and can be understood as an example of the disconnection

between archaeological sites and their immediate surroundings in a territorial sense. On the basis of two projects of the Seminar for Prehistoric Archaeology at Marburg University, this paper presents two approaches to overcome these problems using the examples of *villae* in the Trier hinterland (Germany) and in the Palencia region (Spain). This will draw on the expanded range of methods used in archaeological fieldwork, particularly in the field of remote sensing and non-invasive geophysical prospecting. Two of the sites, La Olmeda (Palencia, Spain) and Oberweis (Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany) have been the subject of research for decades and were considered "well researched". However, the new approach after 50 and 100 years of traditional research reveals large gaps in the knowledge about the sites and their immediate surroundings. It can be shown how landscape archaeology and geophysical prospecting has opened the way to formulating and answering new questions and research to better and more holistically understand the Roman *latifundium*, its palaeo-environment, its temporal evolution and its agricultural economy. Similarly, the built stock within the settlements themselves can be better classified and recorded. The third of the sites presented, Bitburg-Mötsch (Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany), is an excellent example of the knowledge gained from large-scale remote sensing and geoarchaeological investigations on "virgin" sites with no prior in-depth knowledge.

### ***Late Antique villae in the Balkans: Current Research, Questions and Perspectives***

Tin TURKOVIĆ (Zagreb)

There are a significant number of sites that can provide a relatively clear picture of late antique Dalmatian non-urban landscape and illustrate its transformative processes, especially in the coastal region – the same was concluded by W. Bowden in the chapter “The villas of the eastern Adriatic and Ionian coastlands” (2018), in which he referred to V. Gaffney (2006), who claimed that there had not been any real progress in the understanding of “rural” Dalmatian landscape from the times of J. J. Wilkes. However, the problem of the language barrier is immense, and it has prevented the international public from gaining an insight into Dalmatian monuments and its late antique cultural landscape in general. Thus, Dalmatian late antique *villae* have remained a mystery for the general public. Was Dalmatia really a “comparatively tranquil backwater”, and “a haven for the refugees of all social levels” fleeing from the north during late antiquity, as Wilkes stated about 5<sup>th</sup> century Dalmatia, or was it actually more than that? Our evidence points to the conclusion that the coastal Dalmatian non-urban landscape passed through several phases of transformation between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> century; and while it indeed was a “comparatively tranquil backwater” during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, precisely that characteristic made it an attractive haven for some of the refugees of the upper social levels fleeing from the unstable northern part of the Empire. Hence, the newcomers introduced a new type of architecture – “*Villae mit Eckrisaliten*”, brought from their home regions. An excellent example of this new kind of luxurious building are the remains of an unusually grand *Haupthaus* situated in the small village of Krcatovići beneath the mountain of Biokovo, in the heart of central Dalmatia. Its extent is astonishing for Dalmatia, and its design is quite novel. The same pattern and the same outlines sprang up all over central Dalmatia from the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, of different sizes and in various alterations. It can only be assumed that the process was accompanied by consolidation of larger estates acquired by the settlers. Meanwhile, central and southern Dalmatian islands as *subsecivae* must have remained in imperial ownership and were leased out, so they were still exploited by wealthy urban landowners. Specific change happened again in the time of Diocletian. With his presence in his retirement palace in Spalato, and the previous rearrangement of the southern

border of the province, the whole governing system of the province and its revenue was elevated to a higher level. The island of Brač (ancient *Brattia*) became of prime importance for the imperial project in Spalato, and thus the imperial quarries acquired a new centre of control in Mirje on Brač. Meanwhile, collection of *portorium* became quite important. Hence, new and monumental architecture, mirroring liaisons with imperial power, came into existence, as exemplified by the grand edifice in the deep bay of Polače on the island of Mljet (ancient *Melita*), one of the first *portorium* stations for those entering the coastal waters of Dalmatia from Praevalitana. At the same time, control of the vital land routes towards the mining districts in the Dalmatian hinterland was strengthened, especially the water ways. Thus, the *Strata Diocletiana* consisted of a series of fortresses, like the one in Mogorjelo, north of the city of Naron, all of them following the pattern of late antique military architecture. It should also be kept in mind that luxurious mosaics in many of the *villae* around Naron and in the Dalmatian hinterland were made just about the same time, and the complexes were significantly increased in size – as, for example, in the grand estate in Višići near ancient Naron. Taking everything into account, it can be concluded that central and southern Dalmatia passed through pretty intensive transformative processes during Late Antiquity, being far from a “rural backwater”. It should be mentioned that the northern Dalmatian coast with its islands (ancient *Liburnia*, modern Kvarner) was excluded from this overview since its development was, in many respects, quite different from the rest of Dalmatia from the beginning, i.e. from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. In this presentation we will try to demonstrate the major outlines of the developments of architecture and ownership of late antique *villae* in Dalmatia, using the most representative examples as case studies, in an attempt to put late antique Dalmatian villa on the overall map of the late antique Empire.

### ***New Results of Archaeological Research of Late Antique and Early Byzantine Sites in Montenegro***

Mladen ZAGARČANIN (Bar)

Very little is known about the late antique villas on the Montenegrin coast. The reason lies in the fact that most studies have focused on ancient cities, such as Doclea (Duklja), Risinium (Risan), Butua (Budva), Olcinium (Ulcinj). In recent times, the number of systematic archaeological excavations of Roman and Early Byzantine sites has increased, which has allowed this problem to be solved by the use of modern methods of archaeological research, especially to understand the development of large latifundian estates and their relationship with small antique ports, connected with the main trade centres of the Mediterranean. The scope of this paper is to present the results of all recent research in Montenegro (2010-2020), especially on the Adriatic coast, at Mirište in Petrovac and Prevlaka in the Bay of Kotor, but also to present systematic research of the main Roman and Byzantine underwater archaeological sites in Montenegro.