



## Bulgarian-Italian scientific and cultural collaboration through the National Institute of Archaeology with Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

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In 2024, five years after the last joint Bulgarian-Italian exhibition “Colourful visions of Ancient Rome: mosaics from the Capitoline museums” in the National Archaeological Museum, a new series of collaborative events took place, in which the National institute of archaeology with museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences played a central role. This renewed partnership coincided with the celebration of 145 years of diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Italy, highlighting the enduring cultural and academic ties between the two nations.

The first notable event of the year occurred on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May in the Central Hall of the National Archaeological Museum, where a reproduction of Petar Bogdan Bakshev’s manuscript, “The antiquity of the fatherland’s and the deeds of the Bulgarians”, was presented. This first historical treatise on Bulgaria (fig. 1), written in Latin and completed around 1667, runs to 200 pages and explores the Christian past and present of the Bulgarian lands, with the aim of garnering support from Catholic Europe for the liberation from Ottoman rule<sup>1</sup>. The priceless historical reproduction was donated to Bulgaria by the Italian authorities, the Galleria Estensi (fig. 2) and the Municipality of Modena, on the initiative of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Rumen Radev. The event commemorated the 155<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the 145<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Library “Sts. Cyril and Methodius”.

Special guests at the ceremony included Alessandra Necci (Director of Gallerie Estensi), Monsignor Luciano Suriani (Apostolic Nuncio in Bulgaria), Amelia Gesheva (Deputy Minister of Culture of Republic of Bulgaria), Ivan Vasilev (Deputy Mayor of Sofia), Plamen Slavov (Cultural Advisor to the President of Bulgaria), Krasimira Alexandrova (Director of the National Library), as well as representatives of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches (fig. 3).

The event was complemented by two poster exhibitions in the museum’s Central Hall. The first, entitled “The antiquity of the fatherland’s and the deeds of the Bulgarians”, was curated by Tzvetan Vasilev (Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”), the translator of the manuscript. It explored the manuscript’s fascinating history. The second, “Catholics in Bulgaria: 17<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century”,

<sup>1</sup> For a long time, neither the original manuscript nor a copy could be found, until Bulgarian historian Bozhidar Dimitrov discovered the editor’s notes on Petar Bogdan’s manuscript in the 1970s. At the end of 2017, Lilia Ilieva discovered the complete manuscript of the oldest history of Bulgaria in the Campori collection of the Estense Library in Modena (Ilieva 2020, 98–101). The translation of the manuscript was published in 2020 (Vasilev 2020).

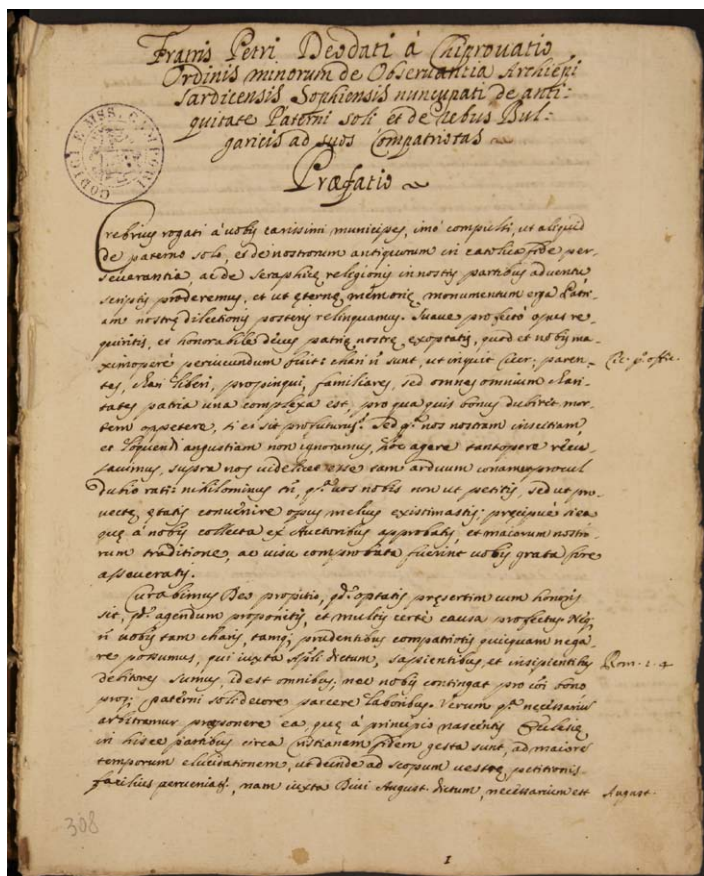


Fig. 1. The manuscript of Petar Bogdan  
(photo Gallerie Estensi)  
Обр. 1. Ръкописът на Петър Богдан  
(снимка Галерии Естенци)

curated by Radoslav Spasov (National Library “Sts. Cyril and Methodius”), highlighted the role of the Catholic community in preserving the national consciousness and supporting the restoration of Bulgarian statehood.

As part of the celebration of Bulgarian heritage, the original manuscript was exhibited at the Galleria Estensi on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May, in honour of the Day of the Holy Brothers Cyril and Methodius. This event was dedicated to the Bulgarian alphabet, education, culture, and Slavic literature.

Another important event at the National Archaeological Museum was the opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Roman Danubian Provinces on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 2024 (<https://danubianprovinces7.naim.bg/>) (fig. 4). Recognised as one of the most important events in archaeology, this year’s conference was hosted by Bulgaria. Co-organisers included the National institute of archaeology with museum, the Municipality of Vidin, the Regional History Museum Vidin, and the University of Ferrara in Italy. The conference was organized by a committee that includes Ludmil Vagalinski, Georgi Atanasov, Zdravko Dimitrov, Ivo Topalilov, Vladislav Zhivkov, and Varbin Varbanov, with Gergana Kabakchieva and Evgenia Gencheva serving as honorary members. Among the organisers were the young scholars of NAIM–BAS Maria Avramova, and Alexander Ivanov.

The opening ceremony was attended by the Director of National Institute of Archaeology with Museum, Hristo Popov, the Ambassador of the Republic of Italy in Bulgaria, H.E. Giuseppina Zarra and the Director of the Italian cultural institute of Sofia, Maria Mazza. The conference began with a keynote presentation by Livio Zerbini from the University of Ferrara, who shared insights from fifteen years of research on the Roman Danubian provinces, setting the stage for a range of Bulgarian and international scholarly presentations. Fourteen talks were presented, covering a range of topics, including the current status of the nomination of the Bulgarian section of the Danube Limes as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (Lyudmil Vagalinski, Silva Sabkova, Kalin Dimitrov), a methodologi-



Fig. 2. The University library of Estense, Modena, Italy (photo Gallerie Estensi)  
 Обр. 2. Университетска библиотека Естенсе, Модена, Италия (снимка Галерии Естенси)

cal overview of the rural settlements around the military centres *Sacidava*, *Axiopolis* and *Troesmis* (Cristina Alexandrescu), a review of the archaeological research at *Ulpia Oescus* over the past two decades (Gergana Kabakchieva), the topography and modelling of the legionary fortress of *Brigetio* (David Bartus), and a historical overview of Moesia and Lower Moesia during the 1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD (Dilyana Boteva). The second session focused on the Danubian landscapes. The topics included the mapping of rural landscapes around *Histria*, with a case study of the *villae* (Lucrețiu Bîrliba and Ana Honcu), and the road construction in Pannonia, Dacia and Moesia during the reign of Maximinus Thrax, as evidenced by milestones (Florin-Gheorghe Fodorean). Other presentations examined the role of the military in shaping the provinces of Moesia and Pannonia through public buildings and infrastructure (Davide Redaelli), and a possible road route linking *Novae*, *Nicopolis ad Istrum* and *Sostra* via the Rositsa River Gorge (Kalin Chakarov). The session also covered the mapping of rural settlements beyond the city walls in Scythia Minor (Alina Streinu, Marius Streinu and Bogdan Șandric), and the strategic location of *Poetovio* at key trade crossroads (Iva Ciglar, Mojca Vomer Gojkovič). Additionally, interdisciplinary research into a Roman rural settlement and funerary space near *Histria* was presented (Valentin-Victor Bottez's team) together with new epigraphic evidence shedding light on the governors of Moesia Inferior (Nikolay Sharankov). In the following days, the conference continued with additional sessions in the city of Vidin.

The third notable event of 2024 took place in Rome at the Bulgarian Cultural Institute, where the poster exhibition “The world of the Thracians” (“Il mondo dei Traci”) was presented (fig. 5). It was organised within the second year of the National Scientific Programme “Development and Promotion of Bulgarian studies abroad”, in which the National Institute of Archaeology with Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences participates. The exhibition was curated by Miglena Stamberova and Kaloyan Pramatarov.





*Fig. 3. The official ceremony presenting the reproduction of Petar Bogdan Bakshev's manuscript, held in the Central Hall of the National Archaeological Museum (photo M. Stamberova)*

*Обр. 3. Откриване на официалната церемония по представянето на репродукцията на ръкописа на Петър Богдан Бакшев в Централната зала на Националния археологически музей (снимка М. Стамберова)*



*Fig. 4. Opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Roman Danubian Provinces by the Director of NAIM–BAS Dr H. Popov (photo M. Stamberova)*

*Обр. 4. Откриване на Седмата международна конференция на Римските дунавски провинции от директора на НАИМ–БАН д-р Х. Попов (снимка М. Стамберова)*



Fig. 5.1. The title poster of the exhibition “The world of the Thracians”; 2. From left to right: Dr K. Pramatarov, O. Boseva (Galleria Bulgaria), I. Lozanov (Director of the Bulgarian Cultural Institute in Rome), and Dr M. Stamberova; 3. Galleria Bulgaria with the exhibited posters (photos Galleria Bulgaria and M. Stamberova)

Обр. 5.1. Заглавният постер на изложбата „Светът на траките“; 2. Отляво надясно: д-р К. Праматаров, О. Босева (Галерия България), И. Лозанов (директор на Българския културен институт в Рим) и д-р М. Стамберова; 3. Галерия България с експонираните постери (снимки Галерия България и М. Стамберова)



Fig. 6.1–3. Open lesson “Games and toys in antiquity” at the Bulgarian school “Assen and Iliya Peykovi” in Rome (photos M. Stamberova)

Обр. 6.1–3. Открит урок „Игрите и играчките в древността“ в българското училище „Асен и Илия Пейкови“ в Рим (снимки М. Стамберова)

The exhibition consisted of two thematic sections: “The panoply of Thracian warriors”<sup>2</sup> (“La panoplia dei guerrieri traci”) authored by Miglena Stamberova and Kaloyan Pramatarov, and “The mirror of time: female beauty in Thrace” (“Lo specchio del tempo: la bellezza delle donne in Tracia”)<sup>3</sup>, created by Yana Dimitrova (NAIM–BAS) and Nataliya Ivanova (NAIM–BAS). Both sections were designed with a unified aesthetic, featuring a total of 29 posters. They featured vivid photographs of remarkable archaeological finds, graphic reconstructions and detailed maps. The texts are in Bulgarian and Italian<sup>4</sup>.

The exhibition explores two key aspects of the societies in Ancient Thrace. The first focuses

2 This exhibition was previously presented in 2022 in Tsaribrod, Serbia, in Bulgarian and English (Stamberova, Pramatarov 2023).

3 This exhibition is part of the 2016 exhibition, “The mirror of time: female beauty through the ages”, which features a selected section on the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC.

4 The texts were proofread with the help of Consuelo Maneta (Scuola Normale Superiore) and the NAIM–BAS Erasmus student Carlotta Sardella (University of Macerata, Italy).

on the Thracian army, warfare and interactions with neighbouring cultures, showcasing warrior depictions on artifacts and monuments. It highlights the exceptional craftsmanship of helmets, shields, cuirasses, greaves, and ceremonial armour. Four notable warrior burials from Svetitsata and Golyama Kosmatka mounds in Kazanlak, Zlatinitsa-Malomirovo in Yambol, and Dolna Koznitsa in Kyustendil illustrate the power and prestige of Thracian noble warriors, emphasizing their armour as symbols of status and authority. The second section of the exhibition explores the notion of beauty and fashion of women in inland Thrace and the Greek Black Sea colonies of Apollonia Pontica and Messambria in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. It highlights their clothing, jewellery, accessories and hairstyles, along with unique practices like tattooing, which reflect the cultural values and aesthetic ideals flourished in the eastern Balkans at that time.

The poster exhibition “The world of the Thracians” was launched in Galleria Bulgaria in Rome (Via Monte Brianzo 60), near Piazza Navona. This event marks an important moment in the promotion of the Thracian heritage in Italy, following the landmark exhibitions such as “The glory of Thrace” in Florence (September 1997 – January 1998) and “Treasures of Bulgaria. From the Neolithic to the Middle Ages” at the Quirinal Palace (February – March 2006). Guests at the event included Diana Gergova and archaeologists from the Sapienza University of Rome.

Together with the exhibition, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2024, Kaloyan Pramatarov gave an open lesson in the Bulgarian School “Asen and Iliya Peykovi” in Rome (Via San Sebastianello 16) for children aged 7 to 10 on “Games and toys in antiquity”. This special programme took the young explorers on an exciting journey back in time, introducing them to the games and pastimes of prehistory and antiquity through hands-on demonstrations and interactive activities.

## References

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