



## International Conference “The *Quaestura Exercitus* in its Regional Context: Historical and Archaeological Perspectives”, Varna, 16<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> September 2025

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The first international conference “The *Quaestura Exercitus* in its Regional Context: Historical and Archaeological Perspectives” took place from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> September 2025 in Varna (fig. 1). The event was co-organised by NAIM–BAS and the Varna Regional Museum of History which kindly provided its magnificent “Odessos” Hall as the conference venue. The conference allowed for both in-person and online participation, and featured paper and poster sessions. Speakers from seven countries presented a total of 35 contributions (fig. 2).

Despite its focus on a specific phenomenon – Justinian’s administrative and fiscal establishment of AD 536, comprising areas of the Lower Danube, the Aegean islands, Cyprus and parts of Asia Minor – the event was far from a selective “boutique” convention. The scope of the conference also covered the broader spatial and temporal context of the *quaestura* and considered multiple aspects of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> c. in the regions in question, based on archaeological, historical, epigraphic and sigillographic evidence (fig. 3.1). The diversity of subjects, either strictly specialised or more general, provoked the active audience for stimulating discussions, often lasting longer than the actual presentations (fig. 3.2).

The city of Varna – the descendant of ancient Odessos, seat of the *quaestura* – was deliberately chosen as the conference venue, which was met with much enthusiasm by all participants. The organisers offered a slightly unconventional approach with two keynote speeches, an opening and a closing one, serving as a structural frame of the event. The first lecture was by Ch. Diamanti who presented a case study on the imperial stamps on *amphorae* containers and explored the mechanisms of state control on the goods transported within the *quaestura*. The closing keynote lecture was delivered online by J. Wiewiorowski, revisiting his classic work on the dual functions – civil and military – of the *quaestor exercitus*. The remaining papers covered various subject areas. A number of them focused on the methodological and theoretical problems of the *quaestura*, drawing on different types of testimonies. For instance, O. Karagiorgou’s contribution explored the complex evidence of previous Late Antique supply networks and forms of state control as the patterns on which the *quaestura* itself was probably modeled. In a similar way, V. Dintchev chose to focus on the decades predating and leading to the creation of the *quaestura*, by elaborating on the socio-economic situation in Scythia and Moesia Secunda. M. Bodnaruk made a concise overview of what is known on provincial administrators and prominent functionaries of the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> c. in the Balkans and Eastern Mediterra-

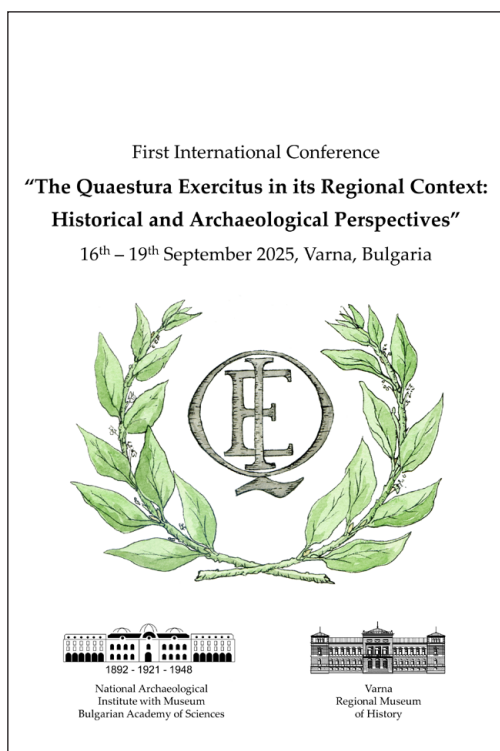


Fig. 1. Poster of the conference

nean, based on the sporadic epigraphic evidence. The particular issue of the administrative border adjustment between Moesia Secunda and Scythia based on historic and archaeological evidence was examined by I. Holubeanu.

Another group of papers was dedicated to a wide range of subjects relating to supply and storage. Those included an extensive presentation by I. Opreș on the 6<sup>th</sup> c. distribution of LRA 2 *annonae* containers in the Lower Danube area and E. Klenina’s talk on the *horrea* of Novae in Moesia Secunda. A particularly intriguing contribution was delivered by D. Hálmagi and colleagues who presented a selection of special *dipinti* on *amphorae* from Histria that shed light on the surprisingly centralised system of control and distribution of particular types of oil. A thought-provoking presentation on the peculiar 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> c. underground structures of Tomis as shown by C. Băjenaru and colleagues sparked debates on their function as storage facilities. The presence of goods under seal from West Asia Minor cities within the Lower Danube area was the main subject of the talk delivered by E. and I. Paraschiv-Grigore.

Sigillographic evidence as indication of communication networks was at the core of many contributions. Most authors chose a prosopographic approach, where lead sealings were used as evidence for the *cursus honorum* of particular individuals active in the Justinianic era and its aftermath – like P. Charalampakis’ insight on Chilbudius, a prominent general known from Procopius’ works, N. Elam’s list of 6<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> c. officials from unpublished or re-examined examples from Byzantine Thrace, and I. Lazarenko’s presentation of Areobindus, an eparch and *commercarius* active in mid-6<sup>th</sup> c. Constantinople. Ch. Malatras chose a more overarching approach where he explored 7<sup>th</sup> c. sealing practices in general and their significance in identifying emerging early thematic officials. The potential of sigillographic evidence for the study of correspondence and geographic connections of the time period was addressed in the DigiSigiCorpBG project presentation by P. Charalampakis and colleagues.

Inevitably, many authors’ perspective involved fortified sites along the Lower Danube. The series of such papers was opened accordingly by A. Harizanov and colleagues who offered an ex-



Fig. 2. The conference participants in front of the Varna Regional Museum of History (photo R. Kostadinova)

tensive presentation on the fortified settlement and probable 6<sup>th</sup> c. crisis refuge of Dimovo. It was followed by V. Zhivkov's concise but fascinating paper reflecting on the frontier defence changes that occurred near Ratiaria in the 6<sup>th</sup> c., including the transformation of earlier towers into forts. C. Băjenaru presented the 6<sup>th</sup> c. Ulmetum's dynamic habitation record, including the reconstruction phase reflected by Procopius. An archival approach in combination with archaeological evidence was employed by V. Yotov when analysing the current state of knowledge of the Late Antique walls of Odessos.

Architecture (civic and especially ecclesiastic) was the topic of choice for several authors. Urban planning and housing was addressed predominantly by G. Talmaçhi and C. Şova who delivered a detailed presentation on Late Antique Tropaeum Traiani. V. Rusu-Bolindeţ and I. Iliescu contemplated on both civic and liturgical spaces by examining an array of archaeological evidence from the *Basilica extra muros* sector in Histria of the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> c. I. Achim offered her thoughts on the “Constantinopolisation” in Christian architecture and the decorative patterns used in the coastal cities of Scythia in Late Antiquity. Another element of décor, the floor mosaics of 6<sup>th</sup> c. churches in the diocese of Thrace, and its potential link to liturgical space, was emphasised in I. Topalilov's paper. A much-discussed contribution was the one by A. Milanova and colleagues where the authors presented reconstructions of marble ambos from churches in Zaldapa. V. Tenekedjiev attempted to cover the ambitiously vast topic of the complex archaeological record of 4<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> c. churches in and around Odessos, and reflected on the potential monastic interpretation of certain sites. The 6<sup>th</sup> c. basilica of Sucidava–Celei and its relation to Justinianic construction activity in the area was presented by D. Bondoc and G. Filip, while Hr. Preshlenov juxtaposed the ground plans of several basilicas in the southwest Pontic area, arguing that their inner space was organised in accordance with a “golden section” construction principle.

Specific types of archaeological finds typical for this period was the preferred topic for A. Minchev who presented a selection of mould-made relief ceramic lids. S. Mihaylov explored the 5<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> c. coins at Dzhanavara church and monastery complex near Varna. A. Panaitie examined the glass



Fig. 3. 1. A. Minchev and O. Karagiorgou during the conference sessions (photo R. Kostadinova); 2. The audience during the conference sessions (photo V. Tenekedjiev); 3. The organisers: V. Tenekedjiev, P. Charalampakis, M. Raycheva, O. McIlpatrick, A. Harizanov (photo E. Mircheva)

finds from Tropaeum Traiani and the patterns of circulation and recycling, while I. Iliescu took into consideration the ceramic material from Histria and its significance for tracing supply and distribution in the region. A. Harizanov contemplated on lead-weighted darts (*plumbatae*) and their probable use in Justinianic times in Dacia Ripensis.

In closing, organisers A. Harizanov (NAIM–BAS), V. Tenekedjiev (Varna RMH), P. Charalam-



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Fig. 4. 1–2. The participants during the guided tour in the Varna Regional Museum of History (photos A. Harizanov, P. Charalampakis)

pakis (NAIM–BAS), O. McIlfatrick (Varna RMH), and M. Raycheva (NAIM–BAS) offered some concluding remarks and comments on the key highlights of the event (fig. 3.3). Several questions were repeatedly addressed throughout the discussions, such as the exact prerogatives of the *quaestor exercitus*, the date and reasons behind the end of the *quaestura*, the complexities of supply and distribution networks, and the forms of their control. As remarked by many, a notable absence remained the lack of contributions from Cyprus and Caria in Asia Minor which could reveal several important



*Fig. 5. 1–2. The participants during the excursion to Byala: at the basilica of St. Atanas Cape and in front of the Municipal Cultural Institute / Museum of Byala (photos D. Doncheva, B. Torbatova)*

aspects from “the other side” of the *quaestura*.

Along with the session programme, the participants enjoyed guided tours to the Varna museum’s impressive collection and the archaeological remains of ancient Odessos, both led by V. Tenekedjiev (fig. 4). The post-conference excursion took the participants to the Late Antique archaeological site at St. Atanas Cape in Byala, presented by A. Minchev (fig. 5).

The conference is set to continue as a series with a second forum due in Athens in 2027, where hopefully some of the unsolved issues may find answers, and new evidence and insights on the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> c. Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean will be put forward.