



A Lurking City: Nicopolis ad Nestum between Mark Antony and Trajan

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ABSTRACT

Despite longstanding archaeological research in *Nicopolis ad Nestum* in Roman *Thracia*, the site still has not yielded any conclusive evidence on its foundation date. Instead, the debate has long been focused on scanty numismatic and ancient literary sources, pointing largely to city's Trajanic origins. Latest attempts to re-evaluate the situation in favour of an earlier enterprise taken by the triumvir Mark Antony in the last years of the Roman Republic are much disputable. Along with many arguments denying *Nicopolis*'s Antonian foundation, the present paper discusses several neglected documents – military diplomas, issued to veteran-sailors from the Ravenna fleet in the summer of AD 142 after 26 years of service. Three copies speak of “*Nicopolis ex Bessia*” as sailors' home, which is to be identified with *Nicopolis ad Nestum*. Peculiar expression “*ex Bessia*” is not to be understood strictly formulaic as “*city ex province*” (i.e. “*ex Thracia*”), as is the case with the majority of later documents, but rather as a residual practice from the 1st century in designating the tribal home of the veterans. In a larger sense it is the territory (or at least part of it) of the Thracian *Bessi*. The evidence is met by Pliny (NH 4.11.40), and his “*Bessorumque multa nomina*” inhabiting the Middle Mesta (Nestus) region. Thus “*Nicopolis ex Bessia*” has entered military records upon soldiers' recruitment in AD 116, marking a new-born civic foundation and the still incipient phase of organizing the urban territory within the larger tribal area of the *Bessi*. Therefore, the discharge documents in question can only confirm the information from other sources and in the same time to narrow the foundation date of *Nicopolis ad Nestum* under Trajan somewhere between AD 107, after the Dacian wars, and the emperor's Parthian campaign of AD 116.

KEYWORDS

Nicopolis ad Nestum, foundation, Mark Antony, Trajan, military diplomas

The present study aims at presenting further arguments on the foundation date of *Nicopolis ad Nestum* in the southwest corner of *provincia Thracia* (fig. 1). It is not surprising that the problem has met controversial interpretations since the 19th century (critical commentary in Komnick 2003, 1–5; Boteva 2007a–b), largely because, beside the short description in Ptolemy (*Geog.* 3.11.7 (13); 8.11.7) and the legends on the city's bronze coins reading ΟΥΛΠΙΑΣ ΝΙΚΟΠΟΛΕΩΣ ΠΡΟΣ ΜΕΣΤΩ, no other document was found sufficiently elucidating to build up a conclusive case. The evidence is likely to speak for one of the numerous Trajanic foundations in the province.

Recently the subject has been extensively reviewed in a couple of studies offering fresh reconsideration. Revisiting an old idea of W. Tomaschek published in 1867 (see below), a new scenario has been contrived having the foundation of *Nicopolis* ascribed to the triumvir Mark Antony as an important step in his propaganda war against Octavian in the years after the Battle at Philippi until the two rivals finally met near Actium (42–31 BC). Ultimately, victorious Octavian took care to wipe away his opponent's achievement. It was only at the beginning of the 2nd century, in the context of the large-scale urbanizing programme in Thrace that Trajan decided to re-vigour the civic community



Fig. 1. Southwestern Thrace and Eastern Macedonia
Обр. 1. Югозападна Тракия и Източна Македония

at Nicopolis, commemorating at the same time his recent military triumph over the Dacians (Boteva 2007a; 2007b with bibl.). Given the importance of these conclusions, both for the historical geography and the general processes of urbanization in the region, and the echo within the scholarly debate, the issue calls for re-examination.

The argument is built up exclusively on the following basic assumptions: Nicopolis should have been founded on the site of a battle; the successful outcome at Philippi has *necessarily* prompted the establishment of a “City of Victory”; it was Antony’s initiative looked through his military, political and administrative activities on the Balkans that gave birth to the project. However, the whole construct is accompanied by various problematic conjectures, which are hardly to be addressed individually.

Before entering into a more detailed discussion, some preliminary remarks on the foundation theme as seen by Tomaschek are considered appropriate. In a brief passage he dwelled on a certain *Caesaropolis* (Καίσαρόπολις), attested only in Medieval sources as suffragan see to the archbishopric of Philippi in Macedonia. A most peculiar city-name, reminiscent of the honourable foundations under Caesar and Augustus, it was Tomaschek’s obvious inspiration to project back the enterprise to Octavian. The city was supposed to serve as a bridgehead against the still-free mountain area of the Sapaei. Further on, taking into consideration *Kaisaropolis*’ place next to Philippi, the author proposed to identify this city with the Roman Nicopolis ad Nestum, located some 80 km north (Tomaschek 1867, 719 f.).

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Tomaschek's identification has long remained unchallenged, except being noticed *en passant* by K. Jireček, who saw some incongruities of geographical character (Jireček 1888, 282, note 5). Still more can be added. Kaisaropolis is listed in the *Notitiae episcopatum* from the 10th century and later, and is also referred to as **Casiropolis* in a letter of pope Innocentius III from AD 1212 to the archbishop of Philippi (*Not. ep.* 7.619, 9.493, 10.583, 13.633, éd. Darouzès 1981); Innocentii III Romani Pontificis, *Opera omnia in quattuor tomis distributa* (ed. Migne 1855, Ep. LVI, p. 585). There is a seal of *Agapios, bishop of Kaisaropolis*, dated to the 11th–12th century (Nesbitt, Oikonomides 1991, No. 441). According to P. Lemerle, the city was founded in the 9th century and the bishopric (initially suffragan to Philippi, then to Serres) is to be sought within the district of Zavalta (Lemerle 1945, 263–266 refuting earlier identification with Eion/ Chrysopolis; further criticism by Papazoglou 1988, 402, n. 123). Another localization, near the confluence of the Angitits and the Strymon, is adopted by later authors dealing with that problem (Lefort 1982, Carte 1; Moustakas 2001, 23). Since the name is not corrupt in the extant manuscripts of the *Notitiae* and the reading is sure (corroborated by the seal), one can assume that it is a Byzantine renaming of an older foundation, most probably located west-southwest of Phillipi. The problem cannot be solved without further explicit evidence. Whatever the case is, it remains certain that Kaisaropolis was placed in Macedonia, while in contrast Nicopolis ad Nestum has originally been part of Roman Thrace and later of the Byzantine ecclesiastical system in the Thracian diocese as a suffragan see, then as an autocephalous archbishopric (*TIB* 6, s.v. *Nikopolis*). Both names come out concurrently in the Byzantine sources, particularly in the *Notitiae*. Therefore, any attempt at the identification of Kaisaropolis with Nicopolis should be abandoned. Does it actually make Tomaschek's idea on the Augustan origins of Nicopolis completely unreasonable?

It was P. Perdrizet who raised two principle objections: a Thracian Nicopolis is mentioned nowhere in the *Res Gestae*; and that Thrace was still not a province in the time of Augustus (Perdrizet 1906, 221). The first one could be dismissed since both historically attested Augustan *Nicopoleis* – the one in Epirus and the other in Egypt – are also omitted in the Princes' account (the fact is duly noticed by J. E. Jones 1987, 102). Augustus is thought to let them skipped in the *Res Gestae* out of his desire to emphasize – at the end of his life – the divine mission upon which he has built his power and not upon the military victories (Krinzinger 1987, 112–113). Perdrizet's second argument is more substantial, though strangely enough has escaped notice in the later discussions. Its implications suggest that the area of Nicopolis stood outside *provincia Macedonia* and it is therefore most unlikely to meet an urban foundation of presumed importance to have taken place on non-Roman soil. The Thracian border was particularly sensitive. Fluctuations in time would escape precise territorial delineation because they largely depended on the governors' individual sphere of command (on the *nominal* and *notional* boundaries of the province in the Republican period, see Papazoglou 1988, 74–89; Kallet-Marx 1996, 21–24; Vanderspoel 2010, 258–259). Nevertheless, at present there are more arguments to maintain that our region has traditionally been part of the independent territory of the Bessi (see below). It is true, in some “client-kingdoms”, which were regarded as part of the Roman *imperium* (Cotteloni-Trannoy 2014, 99 f.), one can find honourable foundations bearing imperial names. Suffice to list Herod's contemporaneous initiatives in Judaea, first to re-organize Jerusalem into *Antonia* and then, after having switched his allegiance to Octavian/Augustus, to re-name older sites like Strato's Tower and Samaria into *Caesarea* and *Sebaste*. The last two were amply rebuilt and freshly resettled by a population of mercenaries and civilians from the neighbouring country (Jones 1971, 269, 272; Lichtenberger 1999, 35 ff, 80 ff, 116 ff; Chancey, Porter 2001, 169–171). However, it is beyond an allied ruler's power and discretion to found a “City of Victory”; the very name is exclusively reserved to an outstanding military achievement by an *imperator*, the one who puts certain territory under Roman sway (Jones 1987). Pompey's Nicopolis offers an instructive case. The city was originally incorporated into the province of Pontus and Bythinia, then, through Antony's re-arrangements

by 37 BC it fell with a portion of the province's eastern part to the native kingdom of Polemo. Later provincial adjustments under Augustus and Vespasian saw further transfers to Cappadocia and Armenia Minor (Jones 1971, 157, note 20; Marek 2003, 36, 41, 45).

Thus, we are coming to the question: how the founding of Nicopolis in an area remote from the main communications of southern Thrace and outside Roman provincial land should be considered a “successful propaganda move”? It is necessary to emphasize how little can be deduced with certainty from the scanty and distorted record for Antony's colonial and urban foundations after Philippi. Our conclusions rest almost entirely on the coin-evidence and on occasional remarks by the ancient authors. Some documents containing official decisions of Antony in the East from 42–31 BC are referred to by Josephus Flavius, relating to Syro-Palestinian cities and tyrants (Joseph. *AJ* 14.12.3–5), others came through epigraphic monuments (commentary in Millar 2002, 249 f.). No doubt, there were plenty of similar decisions intended to introduce a new order of the provinces and the client-kingdoms in Asia Minor.

Significantly, during his long stay in the eastern provinces, even when we are mindful of Augustus' efforts to wipe away the whole record of it, Antony, who otherwise sought to imitate Alexander the Great, Pompey and Caesar, is far from being renowned for his urbanizing activities. For the triumvirs one of the most sensitive social and economic issues in the post-Philippi period was to satisfy their veterans' demands for land and other benefits; it continued to be a recurring problem even in the next decades (Goltz Huzar 1978, 130 ff; Pelling 1996, 14 f; Bleicken 2015, 199 f, 218 f.). Caesar projected his colonial policy in the East at accommodating veterans and dispossessed Italians, creating clientele, keeping watch and controlling provincial territories, and finally at promoting the urban life by honouring the cities and strengthening their human resources (Vittinghoff 1952, 23–33; Sartre 2001, 119–126). Antony earned credit in continuing this policy. The debate was triggered by M. Grant (1946, 238 ff, 302 ff), who identified many hitherto unknown or neglected colonial coinages in Macedonia and Asia Minor commemorating foundation/refoundation under Antony through his *legati*. Grant's conclusions were accepted by some scholars (Magie 1950, 414 f; Goltz Huzar 1978, 151 f.), others tried to disprove the bulk of his arguments or at least to cast certain doubts (Vittinghoff 1952, 85 ff; Bowersock 1965, 62 ff). The rarity and poor execution of the Macedonian colonial bronzes make their identification particularly cumbersome (Grant 1946, 272; Daubner 2014, 111). Besides Philippi, recent numismatic studies can more positively relate to Antony's colonial reinforcements at Dyme in the Peloponnese and probably at Pella (Papageoriadou-Bani 2004, 26–30; against Pella see Daubner 2014, 112), Sinope (Casey 2010, 127–129; Barat 2011) and Apamea in Bythynia (Fernoux 2004, 172 f).

In a more pragmatic manner, Antony reversed Pompey's policy of premature urbanization in recently created provinces; in some instances (Cilicia, Pontus) he found it preferable to transfer the burden of direct administration to reliable client-kings in ensuring more effective control over vast territories (Syme 1939, 172 f.; Magie 1950, 433–436; Buchheim 1960, 49–84; Pelling 1996, 22 f.). Imitating the style of Hellenistic royalty, he apparently agreed to be honoured only with a few ostensible “foundations”: a city changed its name to *Antoniopolis*, (former Apollonia on the Maeander, see below) while the centre of Eumeneia in Phrygia was renamed *Fulvia*, after his third wife (the evidence rests entirely on bronze coins with reverse legends ΦΟΥΛΟΥΙΑΝΩΝ and a magistrate's name – *RPC* I, 3139–40; *RPC Cons. Suppl.* I–III, 3139–42; *RPC Suppl.* IV, 3145–46; see also Jones 1971, 394, note 67 (*Fulvianopolis* [sic]); Traina 2003, 85). Macedonia's major city Thessalonica having been granted “freedom” by Antony started a new civic era to commemorate its promotion, and even paid divine honours to the triumvir (Voutiras 2011). However, this is not exactly the same as to found entirely new civic communities. In the lack of other evidence Antony's alleged Nicopolis in Thrace would have been his only *ex-novo* foundation of a Hellenistic type – a decision highly in-

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compatible with the rest of his dispositions and in a region barely influenced either by his own, or by any other Roman magistrate's presence, between 42–31 BC (contra Boteva 2007b, 82 who suggested that Nicopolis was founded during Antony's stay on the Balkans at the eve of Actium). None of the triumvir's known itineraries after 42 BC led him close to Southwestern Thrace (concise account in Groebe 1894, 2605–2610). In the autumn of 32 Antony began to transfer his army from Asia Minor taking the traditional route from Ephesus via Samos to Athens and thence to Patrae where he spent the winter in preparation to face Octavian. None of his legates is said to have operated in Thrace in that time; the land was seen mostly as recruiting ground (see below). The overall situation seems highly unfavourable for Antony to have ordered a new foundation.

Antony's Eastern coinage is also instructive on his propaganda intentions and self-representation. Two issues of denarii from 35 and 34 BC commemorate the conquest of Armenia and its following reduction into a province (Newman 1990, 49–50, nos. 35.1 and 34.3.). Triumvir's portrait on the obverses is considered a direct borrowing from the iconography of Alexander the Great (Crawford 1974, 102, 743, 747, nos. 539.1, 534.1, Pl. LXIV, dating the issue in 32 BC). It was the only augmentation of the Roman eastern territories under Antony to compensate the earlier failure against the Parthians and probably to answer the resounding effect of Octavian's surging military successes at the same time in Illyricum. Antony managed to recover the situation on diplomatic level and to regain his positions in the East (Traina 2003, 113–114). However, the conquest was not accompanied by creation of new civic foundations or even re-founding/re-naming of old cities, though the moment presented itself as most inviting. In contrast with the "Armenian" representative coin-series, throughout the whole period characterized as "a dialog in the coinage of Octavian and Antony" (Newman 1990) the latter did not make a single attempt to exploit further the theme of his victory at Philippi in an empire-wide context. The subject stood locally restricted to the colony's bronze coinage.

An important part of the foundation-scenario of Nicopolis is focused on the closing episodes of the second battle at Philippi. Accordingly, vanquished Brutus withdrew with an army to the Middle Mesta valley and suffered there his final defeat, which in consequence led Antony to commemorate the event by founding a "City of Victory" (Boteva 2007b, 83). Yet again doubts arise out of this conjecture, which is thoroughly contradicted by our main source Appian. In the end of the second battle Antony sent forth his cavalry to prevent any organized escape of the enemy and the gathering of another army. Brutus himself is said to have fled to the *nearest mountains* with a considerable force (incomplete four legions) from where he intended to return to his camp by night, or to reach the sea. Antony succeeded to cut him off by fortified outposts, thus forcing Brutus to desperate decisions and to eventual suicide (App. *BCiv.* 4.16.129;17.130–131). The whole episode is strictly limited to Philippi's surroundings and the evidence cannot be pressed further. It is plain to see that the failed intention of the republican commander was to join his fleet stationed at the port of Neapolis and on the opposite island of Thasos from where he could have tried the only successful retreat and recovery. The surviving body of the Brutus' army, approximately 14.000 people, surrendered to the triumvirs. It is practically incredible to have even isolated survivals breaking through a hostile territory (now the local Sapaean allies were consolidated on the victorious side) at a distance of more than 50 miles north. Even so they would hardly have been capable to fight another major battle let alone to provide a worthy occasion to either of the triumvirs to boast of such a "victory". In fact, the huge losses on both sides (the modern estimate varies between 40.000 and 50.000, cf. Goltz Huzar 1978, 127 with bibl.), and the pressing task to reorganize the immense mass of soldiers would have made Antony and Octavian most unwilling to waste time and efforts into a distant pursuit through the mountains. All the more, a large part of the republican *nobilitas* was waiting on Thasos to offer its surrender (App. *BCiv.* 4.17.135–137).

Thus, instead of being "*surprising if the historical battle at Philippi were not celebrated with a*

certain “*Nicopolis*” (Boteva 2007b, 81), the alleged foundation would be inadequate to serve the victorious claims of the triumvirs. It was the colony at Philippi, founded mainly on Antony’s initiative and styled *Colonia Victrix*, where the subject was sufficiently exploited (cf. the foundation coin-issue combining an obverse legend: *A[ntoni] I[usu] C[olonia] V[ictrix] P[hilippensis]* or *P[hilippensium]* with Antony’s portrait on the larger denominations (Collart 1937, 224 ff; Grant 1946, 274 f; *RPC* I, 1646–1649; Papageorgiadou-Bani 2004, 31). And it was the only proper way to proclaim the successful elimination of Caesar’s murderers and the anticipated restoration of peace in the Roman world. In contrast to what Octavian did ten years later after having defeated twice Antony and Cleopatra at Actium and near Alexandria, the situation was thoroughly different. Propaganda machine of 33–32 BC has already exposed Antony as an eastern tyrant and a traitor to Rome. Stripped of his triumviral power, he was condemned for assisting a Roman *hostis*. To mobilizing Italian resources, Octavian still felt it necessary to disguise the imminent clash as if against a foreign enemy, hence the war was formally declared to Cleopatra (Cass. Dio 50.5.5, 6.1, 26.3–4; Plut. *Ant.* 60.1; Syme 1939, 270 f; on the constitutional interpretation see Rheinhold 1982, 97 f.). Consequently, the manner in which both victories of Octavian were commemorated by founding two *Nicopoleis* next to the battle places, took an international overtone, recalling Alexander’s and Pompey’s victorious triumphs over the “Eastern menace” (Achaemenid Persia and Mithridates VI).

The idea for a pervasive *damnatio memoriae* upon Antony’s foundations (Papageorgiadou-Bani 2004, 31 for the colonies in Macedonia) also served in explaining the eventual concealment of the Thracian *Nicopolis* by the Augustan propaganda after 31 BC. The assumption that it was soon before Actium, in 32 BC, when Antony founded *Nicopolis*, helped to explain “*why this establishment had left neither a trace in the ancient literary tradition, nor any other kind of evidence*” (Boteva 2007b, 82). It was not specified what that should mean in a practical way: total destruction, abandonment or suppression of legal status? Neither of these is likely to have happened. It is true, as late as 30 BC Antony’s memory was condemned by an official senatorial decision, his name was erased, and his images and figural representations were torn down (Plut. *Ant.* 86.5; *Cic.* 49.6; Cass. Dio 51.19.3). We can hardly imagine, however, the real extent of these measures, their application and how they evolved in time. Once Octavian securely installed himself as Augustus, concerned in remedying the trauma of the internecine conflict, there were signs of a partial rehabilitation of Antony. His name was restored in the triumphal *fasti* by 19 BC. For Augustus it was now a question of not commemorating the civil wars and respecting the family ties with his former colleague (sources and discussion in Hollard, Raymond 2014, 5 f, 18–20).

It must be remembered also that Augustus not merely played as a “founder/restitutor” of cities and colonies, but actually proceeded with their reinforcement suppressing only their Antonian origins (Bowersock 1965, 66 ff; Bleicken 2015, 416–421. For the colonies in Macedonia refounded by Augustus cf. Papazoglou 1988, 109 (Dium), 136 f. (Pella), 407 (Philippi), 425 (Cassandra); Papageorgiadou-Bani 2004, *passim*). A special reference to the deified Julius (statue representations and legends *DIVO IVLIO*) in the coinage of Philippi and Apamea in Bithynia places Augustus in direct line of Caesar, a way of erasing all trace of Antony as founder (Papageorgiadou-Bani 2004, 42; Fernoux 2004, 178 f). Surprisingly and in contrast to what ancient authors make us believe, the placard “foundation” of *Antoniopolis* did not suffer damnation. Pliny listed the city within the provincial assizes of Asia under the formula “*Tripolitani, iidem et Antoniopolitae*” (*NH* 5. 30.111). An inscription of Flavian date provides convincing data for the parallel use of the two names: “*Ἀντωνιοπολεῖται νῦν δὲ Τριπολεῖται*” (Habicht 1975, 65, II.1.26–27). Both references go back to an official register drawn up under Augustus (Habicht 1975, 69, 83–84). The alleged “Thracian *Nicopolis*” has to be seen against a similar background and in a strong regional alignment with Philippi. Along with the massive deduction of loyal veterans and Italians, which changed profoundly its political and religious



Fig. 2. The Middle Mesta region
Обр. 2. Районът на Средна Места

life (Collart 1937, 231–235; Bormann 1995, 32 f), Philippi’s transformation affected the official colonial titulature now referring to Augustus as a founder (new obverse types with legend *COL[onia] AVG[usta] IVL[ia] PHIL[ippensis] IVSSV AVG[usti]* – *RPC I*, 1650). Importantly, one must expect a “City of Victory” to comply with the general purposes and practical results of its foundation. The type is usually a product of synoecism, characterized by a larger resettlement of both local and foreign population (veterans, Romanized and Hellenized civilians); it is “not simply a war memorial”, nor just a military bulwark; it is primarily designed to systematic improvement of the social and economic infrastructure of the region where the victorious battles were won (Purcell 1987, 76–77). There are also tangible benefits of memorizing: public buildings, religious edifices, urban facilities to make such a project physically recognizable.

Nothing of the sort seems to have happened in the Middle Mesta region in the last decades of the 1st millennium BC. Recent studies of the site at Koprivlen, brought to a re-evaluation the idea of

the settlement life in the area (fig. 2). Although limited in size, the archaeological research outlined the growth of a centre, maintaining regular contacts with the Mycenaean *koine* on the North Aegean coast between the 15th and 12th centuries BC. This centre continued to exist with a leading role in the different periods of changing political and economic environment from the 7th to the 1st century BC. Throughout its whole existence the primary role of contacts with the South, reflected in an abundance of imported objects, intense coin circulation, and absorption (albeit in part and on a more modest scale) of the achievements of Hellenic representative architecture has been proven. The observed continuity and internal characteristics of the site at Koprivlen undoubtedly define it as an urban centre with the resulting organizational and economic potential, placing it at the top of the settlement hierarchy in the area. Its significance is determined by its key-location at the south entrance of the Middle Mesta valley along the trade route connecting the Aegean coast from the Nestos estuary to the north through the Rhodopes and the Upper Thracian lowland and the possibility of organizing and controlling metal mining in the area along with the presumable export of metals to the south (Bozkova et al. 2002; Delev 2002b–c; Popov 2002, 60–70).

As late as the Hellenistic period, the components of the settlement system seem to enjoy a bigger variety. There are clusters of sites, recorded in some instances by pairs “settlement-necropolis”, and displaying different nuances of a higher social status (Tsvetkova 2002, 46–50). Most of the sites can be positively related to residents of the local aristocracy, who apparently drew their richness (not exclusively) from military craft, enjoyed luxury goods and treasured money in “cash”. If we accept that this material wealth corresponds to a transparent elite, the latter should have demonstrated its organizing abilities in the exploitation of the land (mostly mining), control over the transport, processing and merchandising of the product, which is further reflected in the shaping the settlement system. Therefore, it is natural to have at least one large distributive centre, but also fortified sites on the main roads in securing communications and facilitating the transport. Possible intra-regional contacts with the Upper Mesta region regarding the exploitation of the ore deposits and the transfer of raw or processed products can be considered in connection with the development of gold mining in the vicinity of the Razlog plain, documented by the survey at Babyak Sanctuary (Tonkova 2008, 269–70). Although functionally different, the sites at Koprivlen and Babyak share synchronous developments in the 1st millennium BC, which is hardly accidental. Similar connections should be expected with the sites on both sides of the Dabrash massif, where gold and silver deposits are also recorded (See the map in Tonkova 2008, 266, fig.1). The contacts in question apparently formed the basis of the micro- and macro-regional infrastructure, whose natural centre until the late 1st century BC was the site at Koprivlen (Popov 2002, 69–70; Delev, Popov 2002, 61–62). A single find of a coin flan links the site with the massive production of imitations of the Macedonian bronzes of the so-called Strymon/Trident type in the area in the second half of the 1st century BC (Prokopov 2002, 254–257), and opens further perspectives in assessing the economic functions and development of the local market centred around Koprivlen. Isolated coin finds dating to the reigns of Claudius or Nero (Prokopov 2002, 247 f.) remind us about the possible continuity of settlement life until the third quarter of the 1st century AD. At the same time, there are no symptoms of shifting the settlement network around a new nucleus (Nicomolis?). That said, it has to be noted that the idea shared by some numismatists (Prokopov 2000, 376; Paunov 2013, 191–193) who sought to relate the production and territorial distribution of the imitations of the Strymon/Trident type to the emergence of a “Celtic state” in Southwestern Thrace (including the Middle Mesta valley) must be abandoned. It is clearly based on ill-founded speculations and misinterpretation of the ancient evidence about the short-lived presence of the Bastarnae under Clondicus in Dardania in 179–175 BC and again in 168 BC at the northeastern Macedonian frontier (for the Bastarnae see Papazoglou 1969, 124–130 with sources and bibl.).

Coin-hoards from the region dated to the second half of the 1st century BC, including those

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containing Antony's silver, open much room for speculations (e.g. Boteva 2007b, 83; Boteva 2014, 202 sees them as a sign for "possible tension", "turbulent times and uncertainty in the region ca. 42 BC and ca. 32 BC"). Besides being difficult to connect a decade of turmoil with an emerging urban centre, the coin content and burial-dates of the hoards do not allow such wishful *terminus*. Those from Ognyanovo and Garmen, considered as "extremely suggestive", are actually dated *after* 32 BC with a preference to the 20's (Paunov, Prokopov 2002, nos. 45 and 105). Recent observations on the deposits closing with Antony's legionary denarii in Thrace (in our region Ognyanovo) set their concealment in the aftermath of Actium, mainly ca. 31/30 BC (Paunov, Prokopov 2013, 115–116, Table 1). The hoards from Bogolin, Ablanitsa and Kornitsa, containing exclusively imitative bronzes of the Strymon/Trident type, can only have a fluctuating date as evident by author's diverging remarks (Prokopov 2002, 247 f. "the second half of the 1st century BC and more precisely in the early years of the Principate of Augustus"; and again in the catalogue (254 ff, VI.2.4) "the end of the 1st century BC – beginning of the 1st century AD"). Wider observations on the purposes and the pattern of coin circulation in southern Thrace in the late 2nd and the 1st centuries BC reveal the possible reflection of multiple intentions: payments of mercenaries, in-cash bribes or tributes to Thracian potentates, booty etc. that should be interpreted individually (here one should consider the whole mass of coinages inspired or promoted by the Roman authorities in Macedonia – Kremydi 2011, 176–177; Paunov 2013, 202 f.). Further on, there are particular signs indicative to our zone. Certain hoards may rather mark nuclei of intensive recruiting for the Roman wars, which is otherwise confirmed by the contemporary written sources. Caesar refers to the Thracians, and more specifically to the Bessi, as volunteers and mercenaries in the armies of Pompey (Caes. *BCiv.* 3.4). Dio's narrative of Antony having sent two commanders, Quintus Dellius and Amyntas, into Macedonia and Thrace to secure mercenaries before the battle at Actium (Cass. Dio 50.13), provides a most fitting parallel to our situation. However, one should be aware of the difference between the circumstances of accumulating and the reasons for subsequent burial of the coins. The latter could have happened some time later than the date of the most recent coins in a hoard in result of an emergency. Certain deposits may well correspond to the devastating effects upon the Western Thracian lands, including those of the Bessi, in result of M. Crassus' punitive campaign in 28 BC (Cass. Dio 51.25).

The idea of Nicopolis' "latent" existence from the end of the 1st century BC until the time of Trajan, not recorded in any source and having left no material traces – representative architecture, epigraphic monuments etc., apparently is compromised by further considerations. Significantly, it is absent from Pliny's section on Thrace. The lapse is not necessarily to be explained as a (deliberate) neglect in his Augustan sources (cf. above the case with Antoniopolis). An epigraphic document with a Flavian date places the region under the command of a Thracian *strategus* as a testimony for the continuing use of the system of *strategiae*, probably inherited by the client kingdom after AD 45/46. The inscription is set up by certain *Flavius Dizalas*, who took 8 consecutive(?) posts (*IGBulg IV*, 2338 = *IGBulg V*, 5982). The text refers to the site and sanctuary of *Keirpara*, where the *strategus* performed important religious ceremonies. The site, which is likely to have been *strategus*' residence and consequently a major centre in the local network, has been variously located by the scholars. B. Gerov tentatively placed it near the modern village of Gospodintsi some 8 km north of Nicopolis ad Nestum (Gerov 1961, 220), while G. Mihailov believed it was the Thracian settlement (*para* = village) preceding the foundation of the Roman city by Trajan (*IGBulg IV*, p. 292). Recently P. Delev suggested a reading *Ketripara* relating the toponym to the local dynast *Ketriporis* of the mid 4th century BC and cautiously identified this place with the site at Koprivlen (Delev 2002b, 25, 27, n. 153; Delev 2002c, 297). With this exception, the regular setting up of inscriptions in the Middle Mesta valley, as prove of an "epigraphic habit" and the existence of a corresponding urban environment, began only by the second half of the 2nd century AD (Gerov 1961, 224–225).

Along with the arguments denying the earlier foundation date of Nicopolis, some neglected evidence from the military diplomas can help to build a positive case for the city's Trajanic origins. At present, there are four known transcripts of a constitution of Antoninus Pius dated to August 1, AD 142 – two intact diplomas and two fragments – issued to sailors of the Ravenna fleet. Significantly, three of the copies refer to Thracians originating from *Nicopolis ex Bessia*. (*AE* 1995[1998], 1824 = *RMD* IV 264 [*ex gregale L. Petronio Eptaezeni f. Eptaetrali*]; Roxan, Holder 2004 = *RMD* V 392 [*ex gregale M. Ulpio Byzae f. Rivozi*]; a fragment in Weiss 2002 = *AE* 2002 [2005], 1761 = *RMD* V 394 [to an anonymous]; another fragment where the soldier's name and the *origo* are not preserved is likely a copy of the same constitution – *RMD* V 393). A diploma of June 21, AD 159 was issued to another Thracian (*ex gregale Suri Dialpuri f.*), whose *patria* is Nicopol(is) – probably the same as in the documents of AD 142 (*RMD* V 422). No document has an established provenance to confirm which of the two Thracian cities named Nicopolis is meant here (the editors of *AE* and *RMD* believe it is rather Nicopolis ad Nestum, while Weiss 2002, 224–225 is less determined). The recipients served 26 years, so it can be presumed that they have been enlisted in the spring/early summer of AD 116. The obvious explanation, in addition to other cases supported by the extant evidence, implies that due to the increased demand in the legions, caused by the losses in the opening campaigns of the Parthian war in 114–115, it has been resorted to the already trained and sometimes battle-hardened soldiers of the *auxilia* – and here mostly of the fleets. This automatically increased the need for filling up vacancies in the fleet, resulting in a larger number of redundancies and diplomas 26 years later (Eck, Pangerl 2008, 97–99). In our case it was the organization of the *classis Syriaca* stationed at Se-leucia Pieria to answer the logistical needs of Trajan's Parthian expedition (Reddé 1986, 514) which provoked the relocation of units of the two Praetorian fleets there and the consequent replenishing of the gaps with new recruits in their place. Other suggestive evidence in constitutions from the first half of AD 142 and 145 refers to the creation of auxiliary cohorts out of sailors of the Misene fleet (*cohors I Aelia classica* and two *cohortes Aureliae classicae*, as part of the garrison of Arabia under Pius – Weiss, Speidel 2004, 259–262), throwing additional light on the urgency of complementing the land forces in 116. Similarly, the Judean revolt of Bar Kohba in AD 133–134 provoked transfers of fleet soldiers to the on land *auxilia* (e.g. the Thracian sailor of *RMD* V 422 was discharged as veteran from the *Ala I Thracum Victrix*). The emergency is made apparent by the privileges bestowed on the new recruits of the Ravenna fleet who were probably given Roman citizenship *upon* joining military service (see the commentary in *RMD* IV 262 and *RMD* V 392). Judging by the number of the known copies of the constitution from August 1, AD 142 many of the recruits came from Thrace. Usually the personal data including the name, the patronymic and the origin of the soldier were picked up, collected and archived at the local command from where they were copied into the later discharge certificates (Eck, Pangerl 2008, loc. cit). The peculiar and so far unique expression *EX BESSIA* can be related to the first century formula where the home of the recipient is often given as a tribe or people (in that case of the Bessi). On the other hand, in the beginning of the 2nd century the new format “city ex province” was on its way to enter the record, which can explain how the tribal home of the sailors was converted to the name of a province without realizing that it should have been *Thracia* instead of *Bessia* (Roxan, Holder 2004, 273). Hence the term marks the still incipient phase of organizing the urban territory within the larger tribal area of the Bessi. The latter is traditionally located in Southwestern Thrace, mainly the Western Rhodopes and the area around the massif of Rila (and probably of Pirin) with the Upper plain of the rivers Mesta (Nestos) and Maritsa (Hebros) (see Delev 2002a, 273–275; 2014, 178–181 with bibl.; 2002b, 14–16; 2009, 249 f). Even in the recent studies the Middle Mesta region has not been definitely attributed to this territory. It is partly due to the vague account of the ancient sources and the silent epigraphic record. Our diplomas, however, should be regarded as an important piece of evidence for the localization of the Bessi or their

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branches, matching Pliny's reference to "*Bessorumque multa nomina*", who inhabited the left bank of the Strymon "as far as the river *Mestus*" (Plin. *NH* 4.11.40). Also, the context in Dio (47.25.2) having the Bessi attacked by Brutus and the Sapaean Rhaskouporis in 43 BC suggests a close-range operation launched from the Lower Mesta region to the north. Therefore, *Nicopolis ex Bessia* is to be identified with Nicopolis ad Nestum.

More complications would arise if one is willing to extend *Bessia* to Ptolemy's *strategia Bessike* (*Geog.* 3.11.6), an administrative unit which must be clearly distinguished from the tribal territory. Having examined the *origo* of the Thracian soldiers mentioned in the military diplomas, B. Gerov noted that for the whole 1st century AD it corresponds more or less to the names of the *strategiae* (Gerov 1970, 130, n. 2). Recently, his opinion was shared in its essence and slightly modified (Parissaki 2009, 351). The problem is further accentuated with particular emphasis on the Bessi. M. Tacheva, having analyzed the second century inscriptions indicating the veterans' civic home, argued that the *strategia Bessike* was divided between at least four urban territories (those of Apri, Philippopolis, Serdica and Scupi) situated along the mountains of Haemus and Strandzha. Thus, military districts (*regiones*) were organized, from which the recruits upon their conscription were necessarily designated with the ethnonym of the Bessi (Tacheva 1997, 279, 293 with the epigraphic documentation). However, if this was the case, an enormous *super-strategia Bessike* should have emerged on the map of Western Thrace, Upper and Lower Moesia, which obviously does not fit into the administrative realities. On the other hand, it is unlikely to interpret the ethnonym *Bessus* (as well as *Sapaeus*, *Cololeticus*, *Caenus*) as corresponding to certain *strategia*. In many inscriptions starting with the earliest fleet diploma of AD 52 the full phrasing *nat(ione) Bessus* undoubtedly refers to a tribal homeland expressing the concept of a soldier's ethnic relationship with the region. A classic example is *nat(ione) Bessus, domo Serd(ica)* (an ex-sailor from *Leg. II Adiutrix*, 70 AD – cf. the list in Tacheva 1997, 282–283, Tab. C 2–3). The exponent *domo*, followed by the name of municipality always indicates the juridical belonging of the person to it (Perea Yébenes 2007, 147), consequently, veteran's administrative "home" should have been *strategia Serdike*, not *Bessike*. Notably, for the whole period between AD 46 and the time of Trajan and Hadrian there is not a single reference to recruiting districts in Thrace other than the existing cities or tribal areas. From the civic territories of the first century, so far there is only one Maronitan from AD 85 (cf. the list in Roxan, Holder 2004, 273, Table 1).

Our military diplomas date back exactly to the time when Ptolemy is believed to have compiled his list drawing from Trajanic sources (Gerov 1970, 123 f.), and therefore led solely by this presumption, one can easily be tempted to identify *Bessia* with *Bessike* (so for example Topalilov 2013, 19). In spite of some difficulties on their localization, the geographical order in the list of Ptolemy clearly places *Bessike* in the "intermediary belt" of the *strategiae*, between the ones facing the Aegean coast and those along the Haemus range, with the important notice that it lay "*north of Maidike*", whose location can be determined more or less accurately. Following Ptolemy's description, compared to other evidence, P. Delev locates *Bessike* into the plain of Dupnitsa along with the northern slopes of the Rila mountain stretching up to the east on the upper course of Maritsa around Belovo-Pazardzhik, possibly including the northern skirts of the Rhodopes (Delev 2009, 249–250). Accordingly, *Bessike* did not extend south to the Middle Mesta valley and it is also missing from the inscription of the *strategus Flavius Dizalas* (*IGBulg* IV, 2338 lists eight *strategiae*: Ὀλυ[θ]ία, Ροιμηλητική, Δρησαπαϊκή, Θουκυσιδαντική, [- -]σηλητική, Ζραϊκή, Ἀθιουτική, Βιολητική). G. Mihailov dates the inscription between the end of Vespasian's and the beginning of Domitian's reign. B. Gerov (1970) prefers Domitian (as late as AD 87–90), while M.-G. Parissaki (2009, 244–245) offers a dating in the early years of Vespasian. She believes also that the rest of the evidence for the emperor's activity in Thrace is indicative of a large-scale administrative reform including the crea-

tion of Ptolemy's *strategiae* later in his reign, between AD 76–78, Even taking into account that the list refers to a period in which the *strategiae* in Thrace were more numerous and smaller than Ptolemy's fourteen and the possibility that in the last quarter of the first century AD the area could have been swallowed up by a larger *strategia*, the latter could not have been *Bessike* as seen by the geographical order discussed above. Again, similar considerations give preference to *Drossike* (Mihailov 1967, 40–41; Delev 2009, 248–249), which in turn might have been preceded by *Dresapaike*, though other conjectures are also possible (Jones 1971, 11 argues for Βιολητικὴ, perhaps for being the last mentioned in the list). It is worth noting that all smaller *strategiae* in the inscription of *Flavius Dizalas* seem to belong to the mountainous region of Southwest Thrace, but with the only exception of *Dresapaike*, no other can be related to a known tribe from the region. Considered to a local scale this fact is a reminder of the original intent of the Roman authorities in pursuit of security after AD 45/46 to split up the major Thracian tribes into fragmented administrative divisions. From the present point of view, it remains of secondary importance whether the administrative changes that brought about the creation of Ptolemy's larger *strategiae* have been made under the Flavii or early in the reign of Trajan.

The extant copies from the constitution of AD 142 come to substantiate the existence of Nicopolis ad Nestum around 116. The date appears as a reference point to the city's foundation by Trajan, which until now could only be perceived by Ptolemy's information and the epithet *Ulpia* on the coins. Besides being a sign for the lack of organized urban life beforehand, the evidence fits into the general pattern of recruitment in the territories of the inner Thracian cities during the 2nd and the first half of the 3rd centuries AD. A particular question of lesser importance for the present study is whether the city was preceded by an older (Thracian) settlement as is traditionally suggested (Gerov 1961, 220–221; *IGBulg* IV, p. 285; Vaklinov 2002, 51 with bibl.; Petrova 2012, 292.) or it was established in a previously uninhabited area. It is still a haunting problem of the study of Nicopolis ad Nestum, despite more than 35 years of archaeological research. Except some occasional finds, mostly coins from the 2nd and the 1st centuries BC (Petrova 2012, 337, n. 12), no stratigraphic observations were made to confirm or to reject this hypothesis (information kindly provided by Dr. Ivan Valchev, former curator at the Museum at Gotse Delchev).

In such context, the date and circumstances of the foundation of Nicopolis must be seen as a result of Trajan's victorious military campaigns. The city may have been founded to celebrate the Parthian victories, the first news of which reached the capital early in 116 (Trajan's conquests were solemnly confirmed by the Senate in February 116 – cf. Bennett 1997, 198–199; Kienast 2004, 123, which may be taken as the earliest possible *terminus* for commemorative foundations in the provinces), but this would mean to press the evidence too far. At present, it is preferable to favour a loose dating between summer 107 and spring/summer 116. The initial date can only be deduced indirectly. The war in Dacia ended late in 106, while Trajan celebrated his second Dacian triumph in Rome in May or June 107 (Bennett 1997, 102–103; Kienast 2004, 122). In 107/108 a provincial census was carried out in Thrace (Le Glay 1981, 181), which – it is believed – was preceded by a promotion of the province's rank from procuratorial to praetorian and the start of a major administrative reorganization, including a pronounced urbanization of the interior (Stein 1920, 10–12; Parissaki 2009, 348). However, Mitchell (2014, 227) is arguing for a reorganization around AD 110, which was to involve the redefining of the cities' territories. It is remarkable that, quite near to Nicopolis, we hear of another commemorative foundation – *Parthicopolis* (modern Sandanski) in Northeastern Macedonia, established in AD 116–120 (on the foundation of Parthicopolis see Sharankov 2016, 60). It is also worth noting that the reasons for creating *Nicopoleis* in the Ripe Principate can go beyond Hellenistic antecedents. Nicopolis in Judaea stands out as an alternative reminder lacking an obvious military context. It was an honourable refoundation/renaming of the former Emmaus under Elagabalus (Eck,

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Kossmann 2016). From a local perspective, both Trajanic foundations would stimulate further economic and social developments in an isolated and somewhat backward border region of Thrace and Macedonia, having at the same time a deep symbolical and ideological meaning, a reminder of the everlasting power of the Empire to conquer and to civilize.

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Спотаеният град: Никополис ад Нестум между Марк Антоний и Траян

Ивайло Лозанов

(резюме)

Статията предлага дискусия по проблема за основаването на Никополис ад Нестум, разположен в югозападния дял на провинция Тракия. Дългогодишните археологически проучвания в района, както и на самия обект, все още не дават категоричен отговор на въпроса за датата на възникване на римския град. За сметка на това традиционно утвърденото схващане, че градът е основан около 106 г. при управлението на император Траян, за да ознаменува победния край на войните с даките отвъд Дунав, напоследък бе разколебано от една нова хипотеза. Последната гласи, че името и основаването на града трябва да се свържат с дейността на триумвира Марк Антоний като отзвук от победата над републиканските армии при Филипи през 42 г. пр. Хр. и като част от пропагандната война между Антоний и Октавиан в последвалото десетилетие на напрежение и конфликт.

Тук са изложени аргументите срещу една подобна реконструкция. На първо място са посочени общите сведения за дейността на Антоний между 42–31 г. пр. Хр. Активната политика на триумвира по реорганизация на източните владения на римската държава, войните с Армения и Партия, както и ангажиментите в Египет, го държат през цялото време далеч от Тракия. Същевременно в изворите почти не се срещат данни за урбанизационни процеси, пряко инициирани от Антоний – дори на места (например в Армения), където подобни ходове биха имали видимо благоприятен пропаганден ефект. По-детайлни възражения могат да се направят по конкретния сценарий относно възникването на мнимия ранноримски Никополис. В тезата за ролята на Антоний като основател е предположено, че оцелелите части от войските на Брут и Касий след втората битка при Филипи се оттеглили на север, в района на Средна Места, където при последното сражение срещу преследващия ги неприятел са били окончателно разгромени. Това бил и формалният повод за въздигането на „град на победата“, възроден по-късно от Траян, но вече с нови пропагандни внушения. Изворовите данни, особено подробния разказ на Апиан (*BCiv.* 4.16.129;17.130-131) за хода и последиците от сраженията край Филипи, не оставят място за подобен сценарий. Остатъците от републиканските армии (около 14 000 души) се предават на победителите. Големите загуби са притискали Антоний и Октавиан към бърза реорганизация на частите, към решаването на спешни логистични проблеми и най-сетне към преговори с оцелялата републиканска върхушка, очакваща съдбата си на съседния остров Тасос. Същевременно, силите на съюзните сапейски царе – сега обединени около каузата на триумвирите – са били в състояние да блокират движението на каквито и да било отцепници от републиканските армии в планинските райони на север. В този контекст е безполезно да се реконструират допълнителни сблъсъци между победители и победени на около 80 km от Филипи.

Към аргументацията могат да се добавят и наблюденията за развитието на селищния живот през втората половина на първото хилядолетие преди Христа в посочения район. Проучванията в Гоцеделчевско, при с. Копривлен, откриха наличието на сериозен селищен център с водеща роля в околността през късножелязната епоха. Вътрешните характеристики на обекта при Копривлен го определят като градски център с безспорен организационен и икономически потенциал. Значението му се определя от ключовото местоположение на южния вход

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към долината на Средна Места по търговския път, свързващ брега на Егейско море от устието на Нестос на север през Родопите и Горнотракийската низина и възможността за контрол над добива на метали в района, заедно с предполагаемия износ на метална суровина на юг. Обектът изглежда продължава да съществува поне до края на I в. пр. Хр., ако не и през ранноимператорската епоха, без да има видими данни за възникването на конкурентен в организационно и икономическо отношение център в съседство (предполагаемия Никополис на Антоний?). Наличието на съкровища от околността, заровени около началото на последната третина на века, само сочи за настъпването на смутни събития (например кампаниите на македонския управител Марк Крас срещу бесите през 28 г. пр. Хр.), но с нищо не подсказва възникването на нов селищен център от елинистически тип.

Още едно възражение, изказано отдавна, но останало незабелязано, следва да се има предвид – до организирането на провинция Тракия (45/46 г.) районът на средна Места се намира извън територията на римската държава, което в нашия случай изключва прякото участие на римски магистрат в основаването на нови градове. В тази връзка е важно да се спомене, че през втората половина на I в., при изграждането на провинциалната уредба на Тракия, районът на Средна Места е част от поне една административна единица (стратегия), начело със стратегии от тракийски произход, но отново липсват каквито и да било данни за съществуването на урбанизиран център от провинциален тип (представителна архитектура, епиграфски паметници и пр.). При това положение ми се струва невъзможно да се говори за една „спяща“ структура от времето на Марк Антоний, внезапно възродена почти век и половина по-късно от Траян.

Освен доводите, отричащи съществуването на пред-провинциален Никополис на Места, в текста са анализирани данните от някои слабо използвани до момента епиграфски документи. Става въпрос за информацията от няколко военни дипломи с дата 1 август 142 г., издадени на моряци от Равенския флот, достигнали почетно уволнение след 26 години служба. Като родно място на три от лицата е посочен *Nicopolis ex Bessia*, идентифициран от повечето изследователи като Никополис ад Нестум. Масовото набиране на тракийски рекрути, и тук основно от племенната територия на бесите, за преторианския флот се свързва с внезапно отворените празнини, породени от прехвърлянето на по-опитните моряци на служба в сухопътните части по време на партската война на император Траян (114-116 г.). Данните от дипломите очертават сигурното съществуване на Никополис ад Нестум по това време, но необичайната формулировка, използвана в регистрите (*Nicopolis ex Bessia* вместо *Nicopolis ex Thracia*), показва една остатъчна практика от I в. за означаване на родното място на ветераните по племенен принцип, която от своя страна свидетелства за началния етап от формирането на града и неговата територия. Следователно, въпросните документи подкрепят предположенията основани на информацията у Клавдий Птолемей и данните от по-късните монетни емисии с епитета *Ulpia*, че Никополис ад Нестум е възникнал при управлението на император Траян. Този акт може да се постави най-рано след победоносното за Рим завършване на Втората дакийска война, вероятно в началото на 107 г., когато според мнозина в Тракия е начената административна реформа, и най-късно в 116 г. – датата, известна от военните дипломи. Името и основаването на града не са задължително обвързани с мястото на военна победа, а по-скоро са резултат от прагматичния опит на римските власти за повишаване на административния и икономическия потенциал в един изостанал район (подобно на създаването на съседния град Партикополис в Североизточна Македония), и същевременно в символичен план пропагандират възможностите на Империята да завладява и да цивилизова.