

Dear colleagues,

Dearest friends – old ones and hopefully new ones,

Welcome to Sofia and our Alma mater – Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”!

Welcome to Bulgaria, the land of the greatest accumulations of gold and silver coin hoards in the Graeco-Roman times, as convincingly calculated by Prof. François de Callataÿ in 2022.

We are all here now because three and a half years ago, five of us in this hall had a dream – not as universal as Martin Luther King’s one precisely 60 years ago (in the summer of 1963), but still no less bold one.

At a pre-Silvester meeting at the very end of 2019, following the cheerful invitation of Dr. Valentina Grigorova-Gencheva to a cocktail afternoon, within a general talk about the passing year, we inevitably came to discuss an issue burdening all five of us. As Bulgarian University lecturers, it is a painful topic that we clearly haven’t done enough to earn the trust of the world’s numismatic community as reliable partners, hardworking colleagues, and sound experts – a duty we also owe to our students who are following in our footsteps. With two of us almost at the end of our academic careers, right there to catch the moment without delay, we outlined an action plan to make Bulgarian numismatics more visible and open to the world and to ensure continuity in the Bulgarian scholarly community within the field of Numismatics. The latter is essential for us, as we have witnessed a generation break with a substantial negative impact. During the following weeks, this action plan was turned into real steps within five different directions.

To our delight, everything was going smoothly until early in March 2020, when the whole world was struck by the COVID lockdown. Personally, I was so shocked and discouraged, almost paralysed both in my academic responsibilities and concerning our action plan. Thank God, I am blessed by having next to me two highly skilled and brilliant young colleagues – brilliant in every sense of this word – Assoc. Prof. Dr. Julia Tzevtkova and Assis. Prof. Dr. Lily Grozdanova, who did not even for a second intend to stay and wait to see what would happen.

Within a couple of days, they transformed the planned onsite seminar and conference into digital ones, giving to those of us, wittily named by Prof. Ilya Prokopov “the BBC-s”, i.e., “**born before computer**”, the hope that what was started as a dream at the very end of 2019 could be carried out, no matter what, into a successful and fruitful realization.

Now, just three and a half years later, here is what we have achieved:

1) Creating a project for an *international numismatic seminar* with leading experts (receiving immediate approval for funding by the “Heritage BG” Centre of Excellence, to which here I express our huge gratitude). It was transformed into a webinar and took place online in May–June 2020 (<https://www.nasledstvo.bg/numismatic-webinar/>).

2) Elaborating a complex scientific project aiming to implement the digital technologies and methods of empirical sciences in the studies of ancient Thrace, including, of course, the coinage issued on its territory during different historical periods. The project *Measuring Ancient Thrace* (no. КП-06-H50/3 from 30.11.2020, financed by BNSF) shortly labelled as *DiGiThrace* with Assoc. Prof. Julia Tzevtkova as a Coordinator, was ranked second in the 2020 call of the *Bulgarian National Research Fund* and received the needed financial support starting in November 2020 (<https://digithrace.uni-sofia.bg/about/>). Within this project, we are collaborating with *Corpus nummorum* (Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities), as will be presented during the conference.

3) Establishing a regular numismatic forum named *Bulgarian Numismatic Readings* for Bulgarian and international specialists in the field of numismatics, history, archaeology, art history, anthropology, etc. (<https://www.bg-numismatic-readings.com/>). It is viewed as a platform for presenting researchers’ observations on coin minting and circulation, economy, trade, finances, etc., as a contribution to the picture of the past of Southeastern Europe from Antiquity to the Ottoman period (6th century BC – 19th century). The First issue of these readings on the topic *History and Society in Numismatic Perspectives* took place in November 2020 in the Webex virtual

room of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. The Second issue (“*Traditional Numismatic and Digital perspectives*”) is organized together with the “10th Joint Meeting of ECFN and Nomisma.org” and is the topic of our present conference.

4) Starting the procedures needed for a digital numismatic journal. Since March 2023, the 1st issue has been available under the open science concept, with free online access. *The Bulgarian Numismatic Journal* is an open-access peer-reviewed edition. It is the first e-journal for numismatics in Bulgaria and the neighbouring region, offering exclusive online content to its authors and readers (<https://bulgnj.com/index.php/e-journal>). The journal aims to advance the numismatic research focused on the Balkan Peninsula and the Southeastern Europe region, where the Bulgarian lands form the natural geographic core. Its mission is to promote numismatic research on coinages from Antiquity and the Middle Ages up to the modern era, providing a free, accessible online platform following high-quality scientific and publication standards. Precisely in the supplementary series of this e-journal, we intend to publish the contributions of this forum.

5) Initiating a regular *Sofia Numismatic School* at the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (<https://digithrace.uni-sofia.bg/sofia-numismatic-school/about-the-sofia-numismatic-school/>). The first issue is coming in September 2023, i.e., in three months, with the selection of the participants already finalised. The school will be focused on the ancient numismatics of Thrace and the Black Sea Region.

And last but not least, using the expertise of both Ilya Prokopov and Valentina Grigorova and in an effort to develop further what they had achieved so far, in July 2021 we started the *Ancient Coins Counterfeits Scientific Network*, sponsored by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (<https://accs-network.com/>). The first international experimental numismatic workshop of this network took place in the spring of 2022 and was devoted to the identification of forgery techniques. Dr. Nina Hadzhieva helped hugely with its organisation. Under the scientific guidance and expertise of Prof. Dr. Dr.Sc. Ilya Prokopov, the participants from Bulgaria and abroad were able to explore and test a variety of practices for the identification of forgery techniques; they were involved in intensive discussions and conducted practical experiments, amongst which XRF analyses on test materials. The force behind all activities of ACCSN is Assist. Prof. Dr. Lily Grozdanova, who has been my tireless and almighty strength during the last few years.

Now, three and a half years after our already legendary pre-Silvester cocktail afternoon of 2019, two of them marked by the COVID lockdowns, all five of us are allowed to say – “Yes, we achieved much!” and “Yes, We Can!”. Hopefully you all, our guests this week, will feel that we deserve to be trusted as reliable partners in research and international projects on Greek, Macedonian, Roman and Thracian coinage.

Here I would like to pay homage to our beloved University Professor in ancient history and Thracian studies, the late Prof. Dr. Dr.Sc. Margarita Tacheva – an exceptional and bright personality, who was doing even the impossible, overcoming huge obstacles, to introduce her students to numismatics. I dare to hope that she would have been delighted and proud of what we, her students, have achieved so far.

Among us, there are two special colleagues, who should be named also with deep gratitude.

Firstly, the one whose merits to the Bulgarian numismatics have been numerous for 30 years already, starting in 1993. Prof. François de Callataÿ has promoted the achievements of Bulgarian numismatists via joint publications, presenting books of Bulgarian researchers in prestigious editions, participating in research projects administered by scholars from Sofia University, etc. Because of all this, Sofia University distinguished him with the honorary degree of *doctor honoris causa*.

The second name is Dr. Ulrike Peter, with whom we have a long history of collaboration and who has been helpful for over twenty years. Her efforts were recognized by the General Assembly of the National Archaeological Institute with Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, which elected her as honorary member of the Institute.

All listed achievements would not have been possible without the enthusiastic and tireless support of the Dean of our faculty, the Faculty of History at Sofia University, Prof. Dr. Mira Marko-

va. To her, we are deeply grateful beyond possible words.

We owe sincere thanks also to the management of Sofia University, and personally to *Prof. Eliza Stefanova*, Vice-rector and coordinator of activities 3.1 and 3.2 of the project *Sofia University Marking Momentum for Innovation and Technological Transfer* (SUMMIT), as well as to the building manager of the Rectorate, *Boris Angelov*, for all-round support in organizing our conference.

On our way, we found supportive partners:

National Archaeological Institute with Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

First Investment Bank

Regional History Museum – Sofia

Regional History Museum – Blagoevgrad

History Museum Petrich

To all of them, we also extend our sincere thanks.

The conference was conducted within the framework and as a result of the cooperation of the following projects:

SUMMIT: Sofia University Marking Momentum for Innovation and Technological Transfer

№ BG-RRP-2.004-0008 - summit.uni-sofia.bg

“Measuring Ancient Thrace” Project no. КП-06-H50/3 from 2020, financed by BNSF - <https://digithrace.uni-sofia.bg/>

BGR 1074508 HFST “Ancient Coins Counterfeits Scientific Network (ACCS Network): Digital Assets for Prevention of Cultural Heritage Forgery” - <https://accs-network.com/>

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Thank you for your attention!

Prof. Dr. Dr.Sc. Dilyana Boteva-Boyanova (Sofia University),

In the name of the Organising Committee