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The Impact of the Bithynian Provincial Coins on Thracian Mints during the Roman Era

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Abstract: The strong historical relationship between Thrace and Bithynia is evident throughout antiquity. In Aegean Thrace, this connection is confirmed through coin circulation and various other forms of material culture, including sculptures and reliefs. While Bithynian coins are relatively scarce and primarily originate from Nicaea, coins from other cities are also found in the region. Their presence is more likely attributed to the movements of traders, craftsmen, and other non-military individuals, as Aegean Thrace was not situated within the limes and the Via Egnatia was not a route commonly used by soldiers, at least during the 1st to the first half of the 3rd century AD. Therefore, this article aims to explore the connection between these two neighbouring regions through the circulation of coins and the shared iconography found in them. Of particular interest is, of course, the adoption of a significant number of iconographic types by Thracian mints, serving as a focal point for our investigation.

Keywords: Roman Provincial Coins, Roman Thrace, Pontus-Bithynia, Coin iconography.



Introduction

The enduring and close relationship between Bithynia and Thrace has deep roots, stretching back to ancient mythological times. References in the Homeric epics highlight the collaborative efforts of Thracian tribes alongside the Trojans, opposing the Achaeans (Hom. Il. 2. 816–877, esp. 844–847). The shared ancestry of the inhabitants, with Thracian tribes settling on both sides of the Propontis, has served as a cornerstone for maintaining these strong ties. However, the primary catalyst for this long-standing relationship lies in the geostrategic significance of the two regions, acting as a vital bridge between the East and West via various sea and land road axes (**Fig. 1**). Trade and military routes facilitated the movement of goods, people, and ideas, fostering cultural exchange and religious diffusion.¹ Since the second colonisation period, beginning in the 7th century BC, this movement predominantly flowed from east to west. Colonies along the maritime zone of Aegean Thrace were established by Ionian cities, such as Clazomenae, Teos, and Samos/Miletus, further solidifying the symbiotic relationship between colony and metropolis, a dynamic that persisted well into Roman times and notably exemplified

¹ For iconographic interactions on reliefs between Thrace and Bithynia, see Andrianou 2017, 162–164; References related to trade and military routes fostering cultural exchange and religious diffusion is enormous; indicative are Sherk 1988; Alcock 1993; Whittaker 1994; Horden, Purcell 2000; Harris 2005; Van Tilburg 2007; Scheidel 2012; Erdkamp 2013.

by the relationship between Abdera and Teos.² In the Roman era, both Bithynia and Thrace developed more or less along the same course, and the common point is the city of Byzantium, which changed provinces.³ Upon closer inspection, one could highlight that, apart from the fact that in Thrace active mints were always less in number –especially during the 1st century – urbanisation of the province was also delayed. Furthermore, while the number of active mints in Bithynia increased steadily from the 1st to the 3rd centuries, in Thrace there was a decline during the Flavian dynasty.



Fig. 1. Map of the Roman provinces of Thrace and Bithynia-Pontus.

One of the most crucial pieces of evidence showcasing the interactions between the two regions is the coinage minted by the cities. Indeed, their circulation beyond the borders of their issuing authorities indicates contacts and movements of people, suggesting a significant level of connection between them, even if systematic commercial relations are not explicitly documented. Thus, through this paper that was presented as part of a panel dedicated to tracing the presence of Bithynian coins in Europe, my intent is to understand the factors behind their distribution.

As the purpose of the panel was first to trace Bithynian coins in Europe and to understand the reasons for their presence, generally speaking, it can be argued that only a very limited number have been traced. While only a limited number of Bithynian coins have been identified, it is noteworthy that beyond coin circulation, certain iconographic types also traverse regions. These types, originating in Bithynia and Asia Minor, are later reproduced by Thracian mints. As such, this article delves into the connection between these two neighbouring areas through an analysis of coin circulation and shared iconography. The primary focus lies on the adoption of a significant number of iconographic types by Thracian mints, which presents a compelling aspect for our investigation.

² For Abdera and its mother city Teos, see Graham 1992; Moustaka et al. 2004, and especially the paper of Loukopoulou, Parissaki 2004, 305–310; Chrysanthaki-Nagle 2007, 27–30.

³ Byzantium until the era of Septimius Severus belonged to the province of Bithynia-Pontus; see Tasaklaci 2020, 22–23, esp. n. 91.

Bithynian coins in Aegean Thrace

In Aegean Thrace, a region defined by the Rivers Nestos to west and Hebros to the east and the Rhodope Mountains to the north, almost all of the Bithynian coins originate from Nicaea (Table 1, Fig. 2). To be more specific and moving from west to east, three coins of Nicaea under Marcus Aurelius (Serapis),⁴ Commodus (Demeter),⁵ and Alexander Severus (military standards)⁶ have been discovered in Abdera and its *chora*. Going further to the east, two additional coins from Nicaea (possibly of Alexander Severus with military standards) have been found in Maroneia,⁷ with one being located close to the port. Two more coins of Nicaea depicting Lucius Verus (Nike) and Julia Domna (Tyche) on the obverse along with one from Nicomedia featuring Septimius Severus on the obverse and Hercules on the reverse, were delivered by citizens to the Ephorate of Antiquities of Rhodope.⁸ These coins are believed to have originated from areas near the Via Egnatia. No coins of Bithynia have been discovered in Zone, Molyvoti – often identified as the ancient colony of Thasos – Stryme, and Dikaia, which are all ancient city-states that were abandoned during the Hellenistic period and later reinhabited during the Roman era due to the presence of natural harbours.⁹



Fig. 2. Map of the Roman province of Thrace and modern administrative borders.

⁴ For the type, see RPC online IV.1 5519, 10008.

⁵ For the type, see RPC online IV.1 6004.

⁶ For the type, see RPC VI 30165.

⁷ Coins are corroded and can only with reservations be attributed to Alexander Severus, bearing on the reverse *aquila* between two military standards. For the type, see RPC VI 30165. For the coins found in the city of Hellenistic and Classical Maroneia, see Psoma et al. 2008.

⁸ Nicaea: RPC online IV.1 5542 (Lucius Verus); Classical Numismatic Group, Auction 226, 27.01.2010, 226 (Julia Domna); Nicomedia: Classical Numismatic Group, electronic Auction 278, 25.04.2012, 199 (Septimius Severus).

⁹ For coins found at Zone, see Tasaklaki forthcoming.

The pattern observed in Aegean Thrace finds a similar reflection in southern and southwestern Bulgaria as well (**Table 1, Fig. 2**). For instance, in the Haskovo district (**Fig. 2. 5**), situated just north of the Rhodope Mountains, records from the publication of 'Coin Collections and Coin Hoards from Bulgaria' indicate an absence of Bithynian coins.¹⁰ In Smolyan (**Fig. 2. 6**), only one coin of Nicomedia during the reign of Alexander Severus has been documented in the relevant CCCHBulg.¹¹ Moving to Blagoevgrad (**Fig. 2. 8**), two coins of Nicaea and Creteia Flaviopolis under Septimius Severus, along with one of Alexander Severus have been found.¹² The comprehensive view we obtain west of the Via Diagonalis/Militaris indicates a notable absence of Bithynian coins prior to the Severan dynasty. It is only from the period of Alexander Severus (AD 222–235) onwards that coins from Nicaea begin to emerge, albeit in isolated instances, across the entire province, including the southwestern regions situated far from the Via Diagonalis/Militaris.

Xanthe (Abdera) district (3 specimens)	
	Nicaea
Marcus Aurelius	1
Commodus	1
Alexander Severus	1

Smolyan district (1 specimens)		
	Nicomedia	
Alexander Severus	1	

Blagoevgrad district (3 specimens)		
	Nicaea	Creteia Flaviopolis
Septimius Severus	1	1
Alexander Severus	1	

Rhodope district (5 specimens)		
	Nicaea	Nicomedia
Lucius Verus	1	
Septimius Severus	1	1
Alexander Severus	2	

Pazardzik district (7 specimens)			
	Nicaea	Byzantion	Chalkedon
Caracalla	1	1	
Elagabal	1		
Alexander Severus	1		1
Julia Mamaea	1		
Gordian III	1		

Kystendil district (9 specimens)	
	Nicaea
Commodus	1
Caracalla	1
Alexander Severus	4
Gordian III	3

Serdica district (10 specimens)	
	Nicaea
Alexander Severus	1

Table 1. Distribution of Bithynian coin in the Roman province of Thrace.

It may be also beneficial to examine the dispersion of Bithynian coins in Thrace from a different perspective, focusing on their distribution over time from the Classical to the Roman periods. Once again, only isolated issues have been identified in Aegean Thrace. Relying solely on this evidence, it is difficult to substantiate the existence of strong relationships between those two regions. In Abdera there is one silver coin of Chalcedon, one of Prusias II, and one of Mithridates Eupator (Chryssanthaki 2004, 822–823, nr. 185-187). In Zone, although the city was restricted in a walled area, there is a coin of Prusias II, while in Molyvoti, one coin of Nicomedes I has been

¹⁰ For the coins in the regional museum at Haskovo, see CCCHBulg VII.

¹¹ For the coins in the regional museum at Smolyan, see CCCHBulg III.

¹² For the coins in the regional museum at Blagoevgrad, see CCCHBulg IV.

found.¹³ Additionally, a limited number of coin hoards were found in the area.¹⁴ It is worth noting that no such coins have been discovered in the southwestern part of Bulgaria.

At this juncture, expanding the scope of comparative analysis to other fields is necessary. It reveals a sustained and multifaceted relationship. Throughout the 1st century AD, evidence of interactions is evident in two main domains: coin iconography and relief iconography. With regard to the reliefs that have been discovered in Aegean Thrace and in the Roman province of Thrace as a whole, Dimitra Andrianou already identifies influences originating from the regions of Kyzikos, Byzantium, and the broader area of Pontus (Andrianou 2017, 166–167). Reliefs depicting funerary banquets are mainly of Kyzikian tradition, and they are in demand especially when combined with the rider in the *Stockwerkstele* from Maximianoupolis, now at the Archaeological Museum of Komotini. Of course, this might be explained by the presence of itinerant stone carvers who worked in the area when expansion projects were ongoing in the new province. This is probably more obvious in cities like Perinthos, Serdica, or Philippopolis – especially the latter, which was the metropolis of the *koinon* of Thrace. Even from the era of Domitian, its extremely large construction projects show a propensity toward the repertoire known from cities like Nicaea, Nicomedia, Kyzikos etc. To this, elements like the *onomasticon* and the creation of sylloges can be added to confirm immigration of people in both areas (Dana 2014; Giannakopoulos 2016).



Fig. 3. Coins of the imperial mints of Thrace or Bithynia; adopted iconographic types by Thracian and Bithynian mints.

Iconographic Interaction between Bithynia and Thrace

In Roman imperial coins, there exists a series of sesterces that have divided scholars over the mint attribution due to similarities with issues from both Thracian and Bithynian cities. It consists of issues from the time of Domitian dated between AD 80–82 (**Fig. 3**). The depiction of the emperor, with its muscular neck and strong facial features, is distinctive and points to a singular engraver. The majority of scholars tend to attribute that imperial mint to the Thracian territory based on the fact that they have been found in areas of modern Bulgaria and Serbia.

¹³ For Zone, see Tasaklaki forthcoming, while for Molyvoti, see Psoma et al. 2008, 41 nr. PM155.

¹⁴ For coin hoards, see IGCH 723 (Thasos, Byzantion, Chalkedon, 340–335 BC), IGCH 724 (Byzantion, Chalkedon, Cius, 340–335 BC), IGCH 725 (Byzantion, 340–335 BC), IGCH 867 (Byzantion, Chalcedon, Cius, 220–200 BC), IGCH 971 (Maroneia, Thasos, Lysimachos, Prusias II, Nicomedes II, Abydos, Alexandreia Troas, 85 BC).

Moreover, issues of Philippopolis and Perinthos are just as stylistically similar in the engraving of the emperor's portraits with very muscular necks, large figures on the reverse, and very crowded letters in inscriptions. In favor of this attribution, namely a Thracian mint (preferably Perinthos), the editors of RPC II found this group of 'Roman-style' coins quite problematic:

“Although the case was not accepted by Carradice, CFRD, who preferred to see them as unusual products of Rome, the evidence for their minting elsewhere is quite strong. In this catalogue they are attributed to a mint in Thrace, perhaps even Perinthos. The coins seem to have circulated principally in Thrace, to judge from their presence in the museums at Belgrade, Sofia and Istanbul, but some are also reported as coming from Turkey” (RPC II 13, 87–91).

Recently, Barbara Zająć, a scholar who worked on Bithynian coins under Hadrian, refers in her book and in an article to that specific group and the reflection of their iconography to local issues. She is also in favour of the Thracian mint but also highlights the great extent of their adoption by Bithynian mints like Nicaea, Nicomedia, Prusias ad Hypium, and Juliopolis (Zająć 2019, 132 ff., esp. table 1; Zająć 2021, 118–124). The impact is strong enough that during the reign of Trajan almost all iconographic types reappear.

The second, even more problematic 'Roman-style' issue is that of sestertii, dupondii, and asses, which follow the weights and metals in use at Rome and date to AD 80–82 and include coins for Titus and Domitian, as well as some 'restored' coinages.

However, considering that Bithynia-Pontus was already more advanced in terms of infrastructure and urbanisation – with this province not only maintaining its urban centres but also continuing to grow, albeit modestly, and supporting ten active mints – it is difficult to insist that significant developments occurred in Thrace. At the same time, in Nicomedia, the capital of the province of Bithynia-Pontus, new trends emerged alongside marble mining and processing, including the establishment of a sculptor school. In Thrace on the other hand, where there were only just a few cities in the hinterland and six active mints with limited issues (Tasaklaci 2021, 376–382, tab. 2) – among them the capital of the province, Perinthos, and the metropolis of the Koinon, Philippopolis – only two of the known iconographic types were repeated.

	Thrace			Bithynia		
Artemis Phosphorus	Perinthos	Plotinopolis	Bizye	Byzantion	Prusa	Cius
Apollo tripod	Plotinopolis	Hadrianopolis		Amisos		
Apollo ¾ from behind	Plotinopolis Serdica	Philippopolis	Hadrianopolis	Nicaea	Nicomedia	
Asclepius on serpent	Pautalia			Nicaea		
Athena feeding serpent	Topeiros Serdica	Pautalia	Philippopolis	Nicaea	Nicomedia	
Demeter on biga with serpent	Plotinopolis	Hadrianopolis		Nicaea		
Dionysos on panther	Plotinopolis Bizye	Pautalia Augusta Traiana	Hadrianopolis Philippopolis	Tium	Nicaea	
Griffin	Philippopolis			Nicaea		
Hercules on rock	Topeiros				Amastris	
Triptolemus	Hadrianopolis			Nicaea		

Table 2. Common iconographic types between the Roman provinces of Thrace and Bithynia-Pontus.

To gain a clearer understanding of the developments at the end of the 1st century, it is instructive to examine the numismatic production and iconography of the subsequent period. In the first half of the 2nd century AD, stylistic similarities with coins from Bithynia-Pontus and Asia Minor

indicate continued interaction between these regions, particularly during the reign of Antoninus Pius. From that time onwards, with the sudden activation of 13 mints in Thrace — five of which were new (Tasaklaki 2021, 375, tab. 1) — certain iconographic types first appeared in cities such as Nicaea, Nicomedia, Amisos, and Amastris or other cities of Asia Minor before being adopted by Thracian mints (**Table 2**).

Starting with the pseudo-autonomous coins of Philippopolis under Antoninus Pius, in terms of iconography and topics, they point to Roman *quadrantes*, a denomination that became more common in the late 1st century BC but whose production declined in the later periods.¹⁵ During the time of Antoninus Pius they were already sporadically produced, and it was also the time when pseudo-autonomous issues started to appear. In both groups the repertoire was gods or goddesses on the obverse and their symbol on the reverse. For the iconography of the pseudo-autonomous coins of Thracian mints, it now seems more clear that types came from Asia Minor to Thrace through Nicaea and Nicomedia, where those like the seated griffin placing its forepaw on a wheel were already depicted.¹⁶ Moreover, Demeter on a biga of winged serpents appears on the reverse of Plotinopolis under Antoninus Pius and Hadrianopolis under Gordian III (Tasaklaki 2020, 152–153; Tasaklaki 2025). It appears more systematically on Nicomedia's and Nicaea's coins from the rules of Domitian and Antoninus Pius, respectively.¹⁷ In Asia, several cities used the type. The widespread of the Demeter and Persephone types in Sardis and its region, according to Lindner (Lindner 1994, 131; de Hoz 2016, 192–94), could correlate to an imperial panegyric iconographic formula or to the iconography of a local myth in the self-representation of the city. Moreover, the probability that the Orphic hymns were formed in the region of Asia Minor — more specifically in Pergamon — reinforces the correlation. The iconography is naturally associated with the revival or recreation of festivals, such as the *Chrysanthina*, which is thought to have begun in the mid-2nd century and is definitely connected with the second sophistic and the school at Sardis (Evans 2017, 13).

In terms of coin iconography, winged serpents were first related with Demeter and Triptolemos and derive from the myth where Demeter gives a chariot to Triptolemos so that he could sow wheat throughout the earth, while the first examples were traced again in Bithynian mints.¹⁸ Next to them, another deity can be added. Asclepius first appeared on the reverse of coins of Pautalia under Lucius Verus.¹⁹ This is probably the only iconographic type until now that seems to be first depicted in Thrace and then in Bithynia, since in Nicaea, Asclepius appears with Caracalla's bust on the obverse and later with Alexander Severus.²⁰ However, we should reserve the possibility that a coin from the Antonine period may be discovered in a Bithynian mint in the future.

Similar is the depiction of the seated Athena with helmet and shield feeding a serpent. The type appears for the first time in Nicaea under Marcus Aurelius.²¹ A variation of this iconography is Athena standing and feeding a serpent. It is again found in Plotinopolis under Antoninus Pius and Serdica under the Severans, while examples from the cities in Bithynia are earlier.²² However, the most prevalent type is that of Apollo carrying a laurel wreath and seen from behind in three-quarters view walking towards the right (Tasaklaki 2020, 144–145). In Thrace, the earliest

¹⁵ The main characteristic of the *quadrantes* is, due to its small size, the absence of the imperial portrait on the obverse, just like the category of pseudo-autonomous issues. For pseudo-autonomous issues of Thrace, see Peter 2017; Tasaklaki 2021.

¹⁶ Nicaea: RPC online IV.1 3089 (Marcus Aurelius), 5900 (Antoninus Pius), 11775 (Commodus).

¹⁷ Nicomedia: RPC II, 656 (under Domitian); Nicaea: RPC online IV.1 5487 (under Antoninus Pius), 5916 (under Marcus Aurelius).

¹⁸ Nicaea: RPC online IV.1 5518 (under Marcus Aurelius), IV.1 5121 (under Commodus);

¹⁹ RPC online IV.1 8838 (under Lucius Verus).

²⁰ Alexander Severus RPC VI 3156; see also Grozdanova 2018, 190, n. 2; Grozdanova 2025.

²¹ RPC online IV.1 11768 (under Marcus Aurelius). For Thrace, see Tasaklaki 2020, 308 nr. T115 (Topeiros under Caracalla); Gorny & Mosch, Auction 126, 14.10.2003, 1692 (Pautalia); Classical Numismatic Group, Auction 88, 14.09.2011, 783 (Serdica).

²² For Thrace, see Tasaklaki 2020, 142–143 nr. П54–56 (Plotinopolis, under Antoninus Pius); Varbanov III 2012 (Serdica).

example of this type comes from Plotinopolis and bears resemblance to a coin from Nicomedia depicting Hermes holding a caduceus instead.

As one can observe, a common element among all these iconographic types is the serpent. Whether depicted instead of horses in a chariot or in connection with Triptolemos or Athena or Asclepius, the serpent holds significant symbolism. This imagery is intricately linked to Demeter and her mythological quest to find her daughter, Persephone, who was in the Underworld, Hades' kingdom. The serpent represents a chthonic perspective, emphasising themes of the earth, fertility, and the afterlife. This chthonic symbolism is powerfully conveyed through the depictions of serpents on the coins, illustrating a deeper mythological and cultural narrative.

In concluding this paper, some thoughts and preliminary conclusions regarding the potential reasons for the dissemination of coin types from Bithynia or Asia to Thrace should be briefly presented. With the onset of mass coin production by most cities in Thrace in the mid-2nd century AD, there emerged an immediate need for new iconographic types (Tasaklaci 2021). Until the time of Trajan, issuing authorities were limited, and the iconography, with the exception of Abdera, was largely derived from the city's religious heritage, as observed in Perinthos and Maroneia. Philippopolis, having no prior tradition of coinage, tended to adopt Roman types. Under Hadrian, four new mints became active, and during the reigns of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, a total of six new mints were established, with only sporadic cases thereafter. Consequently, the challenge for local magistrates and engravers lay in sourcing models and inspiration, which were found either in the imperial mint of Rome or in nearby cities with an established numismatic tradition.

Bithynian immigrants in Thrace			
Thasos	τὸν κόσμον προ[έ]ων Νευκομηδέων ὁ π[ρ]ο[φ]η[τ]ῆς /Ερμόδωρος κίμε τῆλ[ε] Θάσου σκοπιαῖς	SEG 27: 555	Roman Imperial
Topeiros	Αὐρο(η)λια Καλλιόπη ἰδίω συμβίω Κασσίω Ἀχιλλεῖ σειτευτῇ Νευκαεῖ τὸ μνημεῖον ἐποίη· ὅςδ' ἂν ἕτερον πτόμα ἐνθάδε θῆσει, δώσει τῇ πόλει	IThrAeg E89	3 rd c. AD
Nikopolis ad Istrum	ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ. Δι' Ὀλυμπίω κα[ί] "Ἡρα Ζυγεία Δι(—) Κλαύδειος Κλαύδειος Νευκαεὺς ὑμνωδοῖς ἱερο-νεῖκα<ς> καὶ φιλοσε-βάστοις ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων ἀνέστησ<α>ι	IGBulg II 668	
Nikopolis ad Istrum	ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ. Δι' Ὀλυμπίω καὶ "Ἡρα Ζυγία καὶ Ἀθηνᾶ Πολιάδι Λουκάς Ζένωνος Νευκαεὺς καὶ Νευκοπολεῖτης ὑμνωδοῖς φιλοσεβάστοις τὸν βωμὸν ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων ἀνέθηκεν.	IGBulg II 667	
Nikopolis ad Istrum	ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ [ι] θεῶ Ἡρακλεῖ Μάξιμος [...] οἶου κὲ Νεῖ[κ]ων Θεοδώρο[υ] ὑπ[ε]ρ[ε]ρ[ε] τῆς συνόδου Νευκομηδέων Λιθοξόων τὸν βωμὸν χαρ[ι]σ[τ]ήριον	IGBulg II 674	
Nikopolis ad Istrum	Θ(εοῖς) Κ(αταχθονίους). Γάιος Βιάνορος Νευκαεὺς δομοτέκτων πολεῖτης φυλῆς Καπιτωλείνης, ζήσας καλῶς ἔτη ἑβδομήκοντα, ζῶν κὲ φρο-νῶν κατεσκεύασεν].	IGBulg II 690	
Philippopolis	ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος. Νευκαεῖς ὀλυμπιασταί. Νευκομηδεῖς . ροποπῶλαι . βυρσεῖς . Φίλιππος Φιλίππου τῷ υἱῷ καὶ Παπίας Φιλίππου τῷ ἀδελ-Φιλίππου τῷ ἀδελ-ἔτη · λ · μνήμης χάριν	IGBulg V 5464	
Philippopolis	Χρυσίππου Ἡδύλου Νευκαεῖ ζήσαντι ἔτη λε' Ἡδύλος καὶ Αἰφους καὶ Χρήστος ἀδελφῶ μνήμης χάριν	IGBulg III.1 1521	
Serdica	Διλλης Τυράννου Νευκαεὺς ζήσας ἔτη τριάκοντα ἐνθάδε κεῖται τειμηθεὶς ὑπὸ Καλπουρνιας μνήμης χάριν	IGBulg IV 1955	
Serdica	Ἀριστοκρά[τ]ης Ἀριστοκράτους Νευκαεὺς ζήσας ἔτη ζε'	IGBulg IV 1956	
Varna	Ὀλόκαλος Ποντικῷ γένει Ἀμαστριανός βιώσας ἐνθάδε[κεῖται] { ²⁷ κεῖται}	IGBulg V 5068	

Table 3. Bithynian immigrants in Thrace.

In the provinces of Bithynia-Pontus and Asia, the necessary infrastructure for minting had been established since the early 1st century AD, including local mints and an imperial mint in Nicaea under Claudius and Nero (Bekker-Nielsen 2008, 41, 147–163). These regions had also developed a rich iconographic tradition, fostered by their renowned schools of sculpture. This led to the movement and migration of people towards Thrace, particularly craftsmen (Delchev, Raycheva 2018).²³ This phenomenon intensified in the 2nd century AD due to the foundation of new cities, which necessitated extensive construction and expansion works. The presence of associations of Bithynians in Thrace and vice versa attests to the migration of marble craftsmen and sculptors from Kyzikos, Nicaea, and other regions of Asia Minor such as Cappadocia. For instance, *Lucius Crispus Epagathos, torneutis*, was awarded citizenship for his contributions to Philippopolis (**Table 3**).²⁴ Additionally, traders like Achilles of Nicaea, a *siteitis*, and his wife lived in Topeiros, while

²³ The topic has been intensively discussed already back in the 1970s by Prof. Margarita Tacheva: see e.g. Tatscheva 1970; Tatscheva 1972; Tacheva 1978 (the different spelling of the family name is due to the different languages of the publications).

²⁴ SEG 52:708: Λούκιος Κρεισ-| πεῖνος Ἐπάγας-|θος τορνευ-| τῆς Καππάδοξ. See Sharankov, Cherneva-Tilkian 2002, 54-55.

Philippos from Nicomedia, a *ropopoles* or small-ware merchant, resided in Philippopolis.²⁵

We must also consider that trade routes by land and sea facilitated communication from Ionia to the north, even for Attic products. African slip ware or Chandarli ware from Pitane dominated in Aegean Thrace throughout the three centuries, indicating a persistence of close relations dating back to the era of colonisation. Similar, shared religious cults, such as that of Artemis Phosphorus around Propontis, likely influenced the adoption of specific iconographic types.

What initially began in the first century AD as indicative connections evolved into more formal relationships, exemplified by agreements like the Homonoia between Perinthos and Nicomedia under Gordian III.²⁶ During this time, soldiers passed through Thrace without establishing permanent residence, as their main goal was to reach and bolster Roman forces at the frontier. It is evident that the Via Egnatia was not used by soldiers during this period, extending until the mid-third century. Instead, traders and artisans traversed the area, carrying with them iconographic motifs, people, and ideas that followed these routes.

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²⁵ IThrAeg E 89 (inscription found in the *chora* of Topeiros); IGBulg V 5464 (Philippopolis).

²⁶ For Homonoia coins, see Classical Numismatic Group, Triton XV, 03.01.2012, 1380 (under Gordian III); Teutoburger Münzauktion A100, 25.02.2016, 1754.

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