ÖAW

Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut

This conference is the latest in a series dedicated to the study of the so-called "Oriental cults" – religious traditions of Egyptian, Anatolian, Syrian, and Iranian origin – in the Danubian and Balkan provinces during the Roman imperial period (Skopje 2013; Zagreb/Ptuj 2022).

Building on these foundations, the 2026 conference brings together archaeologists, historians, and specialists in ancient religion to examine how these cults were transmitted, adopted, and reshaped across diverse communities between the Danube and the Adriatic. Rather than viewing them as fixed or uniform phenomena, the conference approaches them as dynamic traditions whose meanings, practices, and material expressions were continuously negotiated through interaction with local cultural, social, and political contexts.

Drawing on case studies ranging from new archaeological discoveries and fresh methodological approaches to broader comparative perspectives, participants will address a range of questions: Why did certain cults flourish in some provinces while leaving little or no trace in others? How were global religious traditions reshaped to reflect local needs, identities, and practices? And what can the material remains of sanctuaries and votive objects reveal about the communities that adopted and sustained them?

ORGANIZERS

Nirvana Silnović, Austrian Archaelogical Institute at the OeAW

Eduard Pollhammer, Office of the Lower Austrian Provincial Government, Department of Art and Culture, Archaeological Park Carnuntum

Inga Vilogorac Brčić, Department of History, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb

Aleksandra Nikoloska, Research Centre for Cultural Heritage "Cvetan Grozdanov," Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts

CONTACT

Nirvana Silnović
nirvana.silnovic@oeaw.ac.at

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ÖAW Austrian Academy of Sciences

Austrian Archaeological Institute

International Conference

Global Gods in Local Contexts

»Oriental Cults« between the Danube and the Adriatic

KULTURLAND NIEDERÖSTERREICH

LANDESSAMMLUNGEN NIEDERÖSTERREICH

28–30 September 2026

Otto Wagner-Postsparkasse
Kulturfabrik Hainburg

Programme

MON, 28.09.2026

Otto Wagner Postsparkasse,
Georg-Coch-Platz 2, 1010 Wien,
Seminarraum 2-3, 3. Stock

12:00–12:30

Arrival & Registration

12:30–13:00

Welcome

Session 1: *Approaches to religious glocalization in the Danubian provinces*

Chair: Inga Vilogorac Brčić

13:00–14:30

Csaba Szabó (University of Szeged)
Glocalising Mithras in Roman Dacia: case studies and methodological challenges

Anja Klöckner (Goethe-University Frankfurt a.M.), Mareike Chudaska (Archaeological Museum Frankfurt a.M.)
"Oriental" gods in Nida-Heddernheim (Germania superior) – local cults in a transregional perspective

Tünde Vágási (Semmelweis University)
Divine communication and local religious practice in the "Oriental cults" of Roman Pannonia

14:30–15:00

Coffee Break

Session 2: *"Oriental cults" and their provincial contexts*

Chair: Laurent Bricault

15:00–16:30

Nadežda Gavrilović Vitas (Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade)
Inter Oriens et Occidens: cults of "Oriental" origin in Roman Central Balkans' provinces in regard to other Danubian provinces

Nirvana Silnović (Austrian Archaeological Institute)
Double-sided Mithraic reliefs from Roman Dalmatia: iconography, ritual, and communities

Szilvia Bíró (Iseum Savariense – Savaria Múzeum), Bianka Horváth (Iseum Savariense – Savaria Múzeum), Ottó Sosztarits (Iseum Savariense – Savaria Múzeum)
Connecting communities – the local and global role of the Isis sanctuary in Savaria

16:30–17:00

Coffee Break

Session 3: *Diffusion of Egyptian Cults in the Balkan Provinces*

Chair: Aleš Chalupa

17:00–18:00

Vessela Atanassova (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)
River god Nile in Nicopolis ad Istrum

Laurent Bricault (Université de Toulouse Jean Jaurès)
Tutu, an Egyptian daimon in Roman Macedonia

18:15–19:15

Keynote Lecture
Lucinda Dirven (Radboud University)
From the local to the global and back: the Dura-Europos mithraeum as a paradigm for local Mithraic studies

19:30

Dinner for speakers

TUE, 29.09.2026

Kulturfabrik Hainburg,
Kulturplatz 1, 2410 Hainburg an der Donau

08:30

Departure for Kulturfabrik Hainburg from Schwedenplatz

Session 4: *Iuppiter Dolichenus across provincial settings*

Chair: Anja Klöckner

10:00–11:30

Gabrielle Kremer (Austrian Archaeological Institute)
In and around Carnuntum – the cult of IOM Dolichenus

Peter Scherrer (Universität Graz), Heimo Dolenz (Kärnten Museum)
Iuppiter Dolichenus in Noricum: sanctuaries, attendants and deposits

Michael Blömer (Universität Münster)
A question of standards: the iconography and meaning of cult standards in the religion of Iuppiter Dolichenus

11:00–11:30

Coffee Break

Session 5: *Inside the mithraeum: space, ritual, and religious experience*

Chair: Gabrielle Kremer

12:00–13:30

Tamás Milbich (Budapest History Museum)
The excavation of the sixth mithraeum in Aquincum

Matthew M. McCarty (University of British Columbia)
Materializing mithraea: affordances, sociality, and the unspectacular in Mithraic built environments

Şehitkamil Municipality
Faith, Identity, and Memory in Doliche: The Mithras Temple and the Erikçe Mithras Sanctuary

13:30–13:45

Exhibition Announcement
Nirvana Silnović (ÖAI), Adisa Lepić (The National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo): A new exhibition on the cult of Mithras in Bosnia and Herzegovina

13:45–15:00

Lunch Break (Buffet)

15:15

Departure for the Roman City of Carnuntum

15:30–17:00

Guided tour at the Roman City of Carnuntum

17:15–18:30

Guided tour at the Archaeological Museum Carnuntinum (Reception)

19:00

Return to Vienna (Schwedenplatz)

WED, 30.09.2026

Otto Wagner Postsparkasse,
Georg-Coch-Platz 2, 1010 Wien,
Seminarraum 2-3, 3. Stock

Session 6: *People, objects, gods: social and material dimensions of cult practices*

Chair: Aleksandra Nikoloska

09:00–11:00

Inga Vilogorac Brčić (University of Zagreb)
Tabulae ansatae in the sanctuaries of "Oriental" gods

Slavica Babamova (National Archaeological Museum, Skopje)
Local appearances of "Oriental cults" in North Macedonia – epigraphic traces

Aleš Chalupa (Masaryk University), Tomáš Glomb (Masaryk University)
Tracing cult diffusion in the Roman Empire: a spatial proximity analysis approach

Eleni Tsatsou (American College of Thessaloniki)
Alexander the magician: receptions of Alexander the Great in the Roman provinces of Southeast Europe: The testimony of amulets and inscriptions

11:00–11:30

Coffee Break

Session 7: *Sacred spaces revisited: new evidence, new interpretations*

Chair: Csaba Szabó

11:30–13:00

Annareta Touloumtzidou (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), Perikles Christodoulou (House of European History, Brussels)
New light on old finds: untangling the history of the so-called Sarapieion of Thessaloniki

Aleksandra Nikoloska (Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts)
The statuary of Cybele from Isar Marvinci: context, reinterpretations, and new perspectives

Lorena Pérez Yarza (Uniwersytet Warszawski)
Solar polysemy and the historiographical phantom of Sol Invictus in the Danubian provinces

13:00–13:30

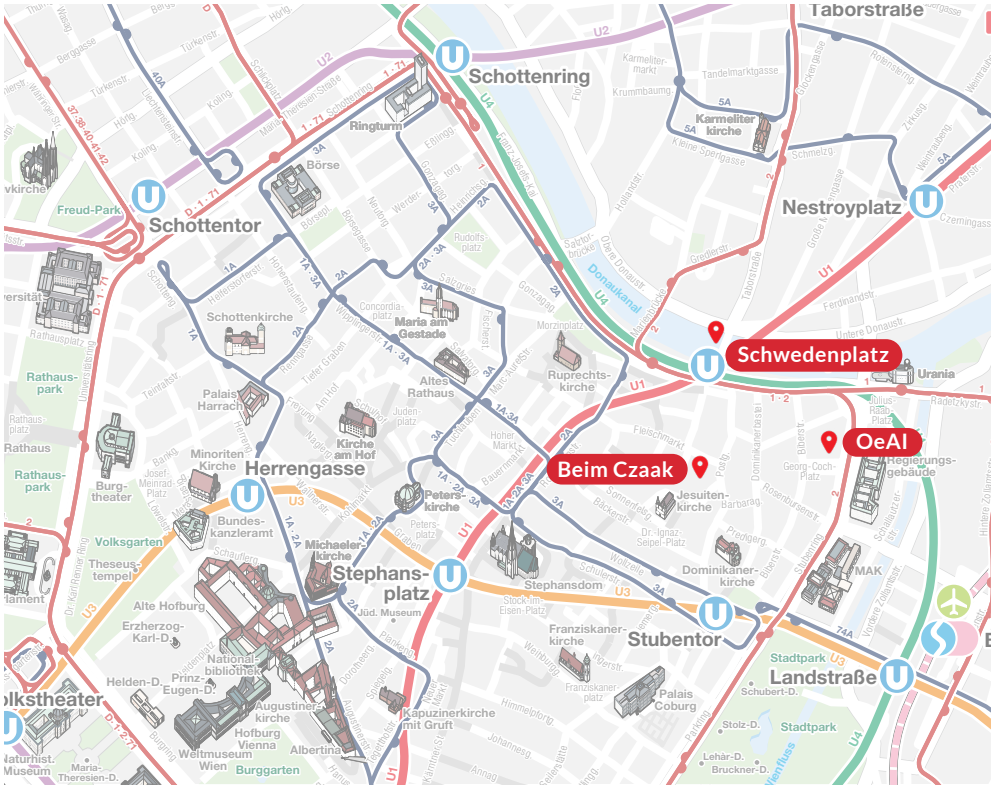
Closing Remarks

Venue

Day 1 and 3
Austrian Archaeological Institute (OeAI) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW)

Postsparkasse Building
Dominikanerbastei 16, 1010 Vienna
3rd Floor, Seminar Room 2 and 3

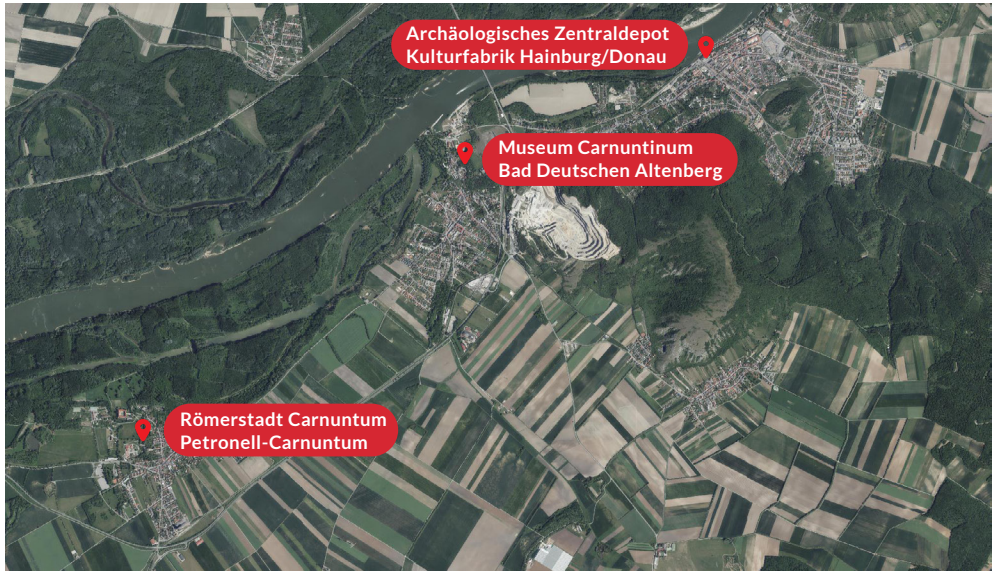
Restaurant (conference dinner)
Beim Czaak
Postgasse 15, 1010 Wien



Base image: © Wiener Linien

Venue

Day 2
Kulturfabrik Hainburg
Kulturplatz 1, 2410 Hainburg an der Donau



Abstracts

Vessela Atanassova | Institute of Balkan Studies and Centre of Thracology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

River god Nile in Nicopolis ad Istrum

A well-preserved relief fragment discovered in the village of Nikyup, Veliko Tarnovo region, on the site of the Roman city of Nicopolis ad Istrum, depicts a reclining male figure accompanied by a crocodile, a palm branch, a flowing vessel, and a female hybrid figure with serpentine and ichthyomorphic features. The iconography leaves little doubt that the male figure represents the river god Nile, a personification of the Nile whose origins lie in ancient Egyptian religious tradition. The paper examines the date of the relief and the purpose of its production, combining stylistic analysis with iconographic and contextual evidence. Recent archaeological and comparative material allows for a more precise chronological attribution and sheds new light on the function of the relief within the urban and religious landscape of Nicopolis ad Istrum. Particular attention is given to the diffusion of Egyptian cults in the Balkan provinces and to the role of the Nile within the broader cultic framework of Isis, Sarapis, and related deities.

Slavica Babamova | National Archaeological Museum, Skopje

Local appearance of “Oriental cults” in North Macedonia – epigraphic traces

In the northern part of the Roman province of Macedonia, traces of “Oriental cults” have been confirmed through inscriptions discovered both in urban centers and in rural areas within their city territories. Thus, the cults of Isis and Serapis are attested in Stobi; that of Zeus Hypsistos in the vicinity of Stobi and in Idomene; of Zbelthurdos in Astibo; and of Sabazios in Doberos and in modern-day Vinica. Particular attention will be paid to the relationship between the epigraphic material and the archaeological contexts. One illustrative example is the temple of Isis and Serapis in Stobi, where the imperial cult was also practiced, as evidenced by epigraphic testimonies extending until the beginning of the fourth century. Additionally, a fragmented inscription from the Roman bath in the ancient city of Doberos, dedicated to Sabazios, will be examined in the context of other finds at the site. Attempts will also be made to identify sanctuaries that have not yet been archaeologically confirmed. These will be analyzed within a broader context, based on other epigraphic monuments from each site, aiming also for more precise dating of the monuments. The paper will further examine the social strata of the individuals who made dedications to the deities, their origins, the familial dimension of cult practice, as well as the distribution of these cults and their connections to specific urban centers, which helps to trace the routes through which particular cults spread.

Szilvia Bíró, Bianka Horváth, Ottó Sosztarits | Iseum Savariense, Savaria Múzeum
Connecting communities – The local and global role of the Isis sanctuary in Savaria

Due to its monumental dimensions (42 x 74 m), the Iseum of Savaria was presumably a regional centre for the Isiac cult. Based on the analysis of the recovered artifacts, the paper examines the interaction networks of the cult in and outside the town. First of all, we would like to present why the cult of Isis became so popular in Savaria. Located along the Amber Road, the town of Savaria had a central administrative role in the province's life for c. 50 years, for it was the capital of Pannonia after its foundation. This also established the sacral central role of the settlement. Parallel with the wider output, the sanctuary operated every day in the local community. Its location, its space distribution, and the find material all refer to an intensive community for the cult in Savaria itself. How can we outline this religious community and the connection to other cults? Investigating the sacral influence of the Isis sanctuary, we can also trace its impact to a wider area. How can we trace it, and what kind of archaeological evidence refers to it? The Isis-sanctuary in Savaria is one of the Roman sanctuaries, where the everyday life of a cult can be archaeologically investigated (modern excavations with building remains and find material stratigraphically dated). By asking the above-mentioned methodological question, we may get closer to some possible approaches to defining and outlining the Isiac cults in a provincial environment.

Michael Blömer | Universität Münster
A question of standards: the iconography and meaning of cult standards in the religion of Iuppiter Dolichenus

Among the most distinctive monuments associated with the cult of Iuppiter Dolichenus are triangular bronze panels decorated in relief with the god himself as well as a range of related figures and symbols. Mounted on poles, these objects functioned as cult standards. While such standards have a long tradition in Near Eastern religious contexts and remain well attested in Syria and Mesopotamia into the Roman Imperial period, their appearance in the western provinces is so far confined to the cult of Iuppiter Dolichenus. The growing corpus of these objects over the past two decades calls for a reassessment of their iconography and function. This paper examines the visual repertoire of the standards with a view to two interrelated questions. First, to what extent do they preserve or evoke Near Eastern traditions, and what does this imply for the mechanisms of transmission underlying the spread of the cult? Second, how far can we identify a standardized iconographic programme, and where do we instead observe adaptation to local contexts?
By situating the standards within both their eastern and western contexts, the paper argues that they constitute a particularly revealing medium through which processes of continuity, transformation, and localization within the cult of Iuppiter Dolichenus can be traced.

Laurent Bricault | Université de Toulouse Jean Jaurès
Tutu, an Egyptian daimon in Roman Macedonia

In the early 19th century, among the many ancient materials reused in the church of Jenikoï (now Neochori in Macedonia), there was a rather intriguing and original bas-relief of Thasian marble, depicting a hybrid animal accompanied by a six-line Greek inscription. Between 1831, when Esprit Marie Cousinéry first brought it to the attention of scholars, and 1950, when it entered the

collections of the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts, this unique relief has had a remarkable history, which has been reconstructed using numerous archival documents. But beyond its modern tribulations and cultural biography, it is the relief itself that deserves our full attention. Long misunderstood and poorly described, the relief and the inscription that frames it now deserve to be reanalyzed and (re)placed in the context of the widespread diffusion of Egyptian cults in the Greco-Roman world.

Aleš Chalupa | Department for the Study of Religions, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University,
Tomáš Glomb | Center for the Digital Research of Religion (CEDRR), Department for the Study of Religions, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University
Tracing cult diffusion in the Roman Empire: a spatial proximity analysis approach

Spatial proximity analysis (SPA) is a quantitative method rooted in geographic information science that measures and interprets the spatial relationships between georeferenced phenomena. Although well established in epidemiology and historical geography, its application to the study of ancient religion remains limited. This paper argues that SPA offers a rigorous and reproducible framework for identifying the structural conditions underlying the spread of religious cults in the Roman Empire, complementing narrative accounts with spatially grounded hypothesis testing. The paper presents three case studies, each drawing on epigraphic corpora, archaeological site databases, and Roman administrative and socioeconomic datasets. First, it investigates the co-occurrence of healing cults–particularly those of Asclepius and Apollo–with regions of documented or modelled endemic malaria, combining environmental proxies and ancient literary sources with attested votive evidence. Second, it examines the spatial relationship between known Mithraic cult sites and the network of portorium publicum stations, testing whether toll-collection points served as nodes for the cult's spread along commercial routes. Third, it analyses the distribution of Mithraic evidence in the Roman province of Dacia in relation to salt-mining sites and salt trade routes, exploring whether communities engaged in extractive industries played a distinctive role in transmitting the Mithraic cult. Taken together, these case studies demonstrate both the analytical potential and the inherent limitations of applying spatial proximity analysis to the study of religion in the ancient world.

Lucinda Dirven | Radboud University
From the local to the global and back: the Dura-Europos mithraeum as a paradigm for local Mithraic studies

Of the numerous mithraea discovered within the Roman Empire, the sanctuary of Mithras in Dura-Europos (Syria) provides a distinctive opportunity to comprehend the cult within its local context. Not only was the decorative programme of the cult niche found virtually intact, but the development of the sanctuary could also be traced during its 80 years of existence. Furthermore, the finds can be interpreted in the context of the extraordinarily rich site of Dura-Europos. However, this is not sufficient. To understand the unique make-up of this sanctuary, it is also necessary to compare it with material from outside Dura. While a global approach was the norm for Franz Cumont and his followers, the current emphasis on the autonomy of individual religious groups has made this less self-evident. But although a local approach is valuable, it also has its limits, not least because Mithras' cult travelled with its worshippers over the Roman Empire. Taking recent research into the military mithraeum at Dura as a starting point, this

lecture will focus on how researchers of this cult should strike a balance between the local and the global and the manner in which a correctly applied comparative method can improve our understanding of the cult in both its local and global contexts.

Nadežda Gavrilović Vitas | Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade

Inter Oriens et Occidens: cults of "Oriental" origin in Roman Central Balkans' provinces in regard to other Danubian provinces

Situated between provinces with stronger Roman cultural influence, such as Pannonia Inferior and Dacia, and a province with a long Greek cultural hold before Roman conquest, like Moesia Inferior, the territory of the Roman Central Balkans' provinces accepted the cults of "Oriental" origin differently from other Danubian Roman provinces. The differences can be observed and followed not only in the existence, absence, and popularity of different Egyptian, Asia Minor, Syrian cults and the cult of Persian god Mithras, but also in syncretised traits of certain "Oriental cults" where the indigenous traditions merged with original functions and iconography of particular cults from the Near East. Although often linked to the military personnel and merchants, thus being widely spread in Roman Central Balkans' provinces, certain cults of "Oriental" origin never gained the popularity they had in neighbouring Danubian provinces. This paper examines, through votive and funerary monuments, iconography, and other kinds of archaeological evidence, the reasons why certain "Oriental cults" were popular in the mentioned territory, why particular cults from the Near East known in other Danubian provinces were never adopted in the Central Balkans, and what role indigenous traditions had in that process. The results of this study will clearly define different cultural influences that contributed to the acceptance or absence of particular cults of "Oriental" origin and the significance of these cults in the Roman Central Balkans' provinces.

Anja Klöckner | Goethe-University Frankfurt a.M.,
Mareike Chudaska | Archaeological Museum Frankfurt a.M.

"Oriental" gods in Nida-Heddernheim (Germania Superior) – local cults in a transregional perspective

Nida, the capital of the civitas Taunensium, emerged from a military hub at the beginning of the second century CE. It occupied a prominent position in the northern Limes region and was characterised by an extraordinary cultural and religious diversity. Despite 200 years of research on Roman Nida, central questions about the sacral topography and the significance of religious institutions and practices for the settlement remain unanswered. The newly excavated sanctuary (2016–2018 and 2022) right in the centre of Nida will therefore grant new insights into the cult practices for the so-called "Oriental" gods as well as the setting and the structure of their sanctuaries in the city of Nida. Following a transregional perspective, we will contextualise our results with the archaeological evidence near the Rhine and Danube. In our paper, we will focus on the role of the cults of Mithras and Iuppiter Dolichenus. We will take a first step to evaluate the excavations in the central sanctuary of Nida, as well as the various mithraea of this settlement, with special consideration of the ritual practices that took place in these sanctuaries. This includes a preliminary analysis of the spatial design and depositions aiming to classify these practices within the sacred landscape of Roman provinces, with a strong focus on the connections with the Danubian region.

Gabrielle Kremer | Austrian Archaeological Institute, Austrian Academy of Sciences, associated

In and around Carnuntum – the cult of IOM Dolichenus

Since the excavations conducted by Hauser in 1875 and Dell in 1891, the cult of Iuppiter Dolichenus has been archaeologically confirmed in Carnuntum. In addition to the documented sanctuary at Pfaffenbrunnwiese in Petronell-Carnuntum, several other sites within the settlement area and the hinterland of the Limes are being discussed as potential locations for this worship. A recent survey of stone monuments in the north-western part of the Roman province of Pannonia Superior has provided new insights into the spread and organisation of the cult. This contribution presents an overview of the existing archaeological sources and considers them in the context of the current state of research. The significance of the Dolichenus cult is examined in comparison with other cults of "Oriental" origin, as is its role within the broader religious landscape of the study area.

Matthew M. McCarty | University of British Columbia

Materializing mithraea: affordance, sociality, and the unspectacular in Mithraic built environments

How did the built environments of Mithraic sanctuaries shape the practices and experiences of the communities that gathered within them? And how did these spaces differ from other Roman contexts where similar activities – especially communal dining – took place? If past approaches to Mithraic sanctuaries have stressed their representational/symbolic dimensions or treated them as neutral containers for preconceived forms of ritual activity, I argue that – particularly for a cult where modern understandings are predicated upon material remains – we ought to start not from these ideals, but from the material itself. The built environments of mithraea actively structured variable forms of social interaction and rather different forms of practice than often assumed: few afforded space or the focus of attention for complex pageantry and initiatory "rites of terror." Drawing on affordance theory and Henri Lefebvre's model of conceived, perceived, and lived space, the paper analyzes the physical features of Mithraic sanctuaries – especially benches and naves – across a dataset of 88 excavated mithraea with measurable plans (with a focus on those from the Danubian and Balkan provinces), set against a comparative backdrop of domestic and collegial dining-halls. The analysis demonstrates that these architectural elements shaped bodily postures, access to space, and patterns of interaction among participants. Bench widths, heights, and access points encouraged reclining dining and individualized table service, while the spatial separation created by wide naves limited shared dining surfaces and fostered differentiated experiences among participants. The paper also highlights a much greater variability in Mithraic spaces than has often been acknowledged. Differences in bench size, layout, and subdivision across sanctuaries produced distinctive social configurations, from unified dining groups to spatially segmented sub-communities. These variations suggest that Mithraic worship was not structured around a single, standardized ritual program, but instead emerged through locally produced arrangements of space, bodies, and materials. By foregrounding the affordances of built environments, the paper argues that mithraea were not simply settings for Mithraic religion – they were active participants in its production. Understanding Mithraic practice, therefore, requires attending not only to symbols and texts, but to the material infrastructures that shaped how worshippers gathered, interacted, and experienced cult.

Tamás Milbich | Budapest History Museum

The excavation of the sixth mithraeum in Aquincum

In late 2023, a small mithraeum was discovered during an excavation in the northeastern part of the military town of Aquincum. The new sanctuary could be identified by its characteristic layout and the finds associated with the cult. Thus, the architectural remains of altogether six mithraea are now known within the Aquincum settlement complex today.
As the leader of the excavations between 2023 and 2025, I intend to present the process of the sanctuary's discovery and to showcase the associated finds assemblages, including four stone altars, Mithraic-themed fresco fragments recovered from the building's interior, as well as several votive objects. In my presentation, I will describe the layout of the newly uncovered mithraeum, its walls and their construction phases, and I will also summarize the new data uncovered by the excavations of the past few years, regarding the religious history of Aquincum. I will also discuss in detail the methods for preserving the mithraeum and its planned exhibition. Unusually, the monument will not be displayed in situ: it was removed in several parts and is expected to be reassembled and exhibited later. The shelter, which will provide protection for the sanctuary and the details of its display, is still being planned, but hopefully by next year, these will also be fully presentable.

Aleksandra Nikoloska | Research Centre for Cultural Heritage "Cvetan Grozdanov," Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts

The statuary of Cybele from Isar Marvinci: context, reinterpretations, and new perspectives

Excavations at the ancient settlement of Isar Marvinci, located in the Macedonian region of Amphaxitida, have yielded a substantial corpus of statuary representing the goddess Cybele, predominantly dating to the Hellenistic period. Thus far, the material includes two marble sculptures in the round, several terracotta representations, an Attic double naiskos, and newly identified finds such as a sculpted head of the goddess. The quantity and variety of Cybele statuary from Isar Marvinci suggest an organized cult presence, likely indicating the existence of a local sanctuary or temple dedicated to the goddess. This study presents a reinterpretation of existing material alongside a comparative analysis of the iconography, highlighting the development of local elements.

Lorena Pérez Yarza | Uniwersytet Warszawski

Solar polysemy and the historiographical phantom of Sol Invictus in the Danubian provinces

Over the last decade, renewed scholarship on solar cults in the Roman world has challenged several long-standing interpretations, particularly those based on homogenizing or overly schematic readings of the evidence. This paper builds on these advances by reassessing solar worship in the Danubian Balkans through a contextual epigraphic approach, with a focus on the provinces of Pannonia and Moesia. The epigraphic record reveals a markedly polyhedral and polysemic phenomenon, in which a shared Greco-Roman nominal and iconographic repertoire interacted with diverse local religious traditions, especially those of Levantine origin conventionally grouped under the category of "Oriental cults." In sites such as Aquincum and Intercissa, inscriptions attest to the coexistence of multiple religious expressions attached to the theonym Sol, pointing to a high degree of functional flexibility rather than to a single, clearly delimited cult entity. Particularly revealing is the occasional use of the unusual epithet socius,

seemingly employed by dedicants to distinguish between overlapping solar referents within the same local religious landscape. Extending this analysis along the Danubian frontier, the paper reassesses a set of historiographical assumptions through three interrelated case studies. It first examines the local adaptation of Sol Elagabal, often subsumed in modern scholarship under the category of Sol Invictus despite the absence of such a designation in the local evidence. It then addresses the enduring "phantom" of Sol Invictus as a supposedly coherent and autonomous divinity, frequently interpreted through Mithraic models or through the lens of Aurelian solar ideology, thereby imposing homogenizing readings onto heterogeneous provincial material. Finally, the paper revisits the temple of Sol at Novae, often classified as a place of imperial worship or a syncretic mithraeum with peculiarities, yet lacking consistent Mithraic epigraphic testimony, and argues for a more cautious, context-sensitive interpretation grounded in epigraphic and comparative evidence. Taken together, these cases highlight how solar religious "idioms" were continuously reshaped through local practices, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of new religious dynamics emerging in specific glocal contexts since the second century CE.

Peter Scherrer | Universität Graz, Heimo Dolenz | Kärnten Museum

Iuppiter Dolichenus in Noricum: sanctuaries, attendants and deposits

The province of Noricum shows two focal areas according to the cult of Iuppiter Dolichenus, one in Virunum, the province's first city, and the other along the Danube in the Limes region. While in Virunum a collegium cultorum is shown in the epigraphic and archaeological record, in Mauer near Amstetten (formerly named Mauer an der Url) a rich and monographic published deposit of a shrine has been unearthed, giving lots of names of cult attendants, among them an astonishing amount of women, but also soldiers, slaves, and other social groups. The lecture wants to re-examine the whole residues of the cult in Noricum and give a modern analysis and interpretation, setting Noricum in relation, especially with Pannonia and the Roman Empire in general. Especially the club house for Dolichenus in Virunum, but also other cult places, will be newly interpreted, especially the deposit of Mauer near Amstetten.

Şehitkamil Municipality

Faith, Identity, and Memory in Doliche: The Mithras Temple and the Erikçe Mithras Sanctuary

This study examines the Mithras temples at Doliche and Erikçe within the framework of faith, identity, and memory. Located in the ancient region of Commagene in southeastern Anatolia, Doliche constitutes a significant cultural landscape in which different religious traditions and cultural identities interacted throughout antiquity. In this context, the cult of Mithras offers important evidence for understanding the processes through which religious traditions were adopted, transformed, and locally contextualized within the Roman world. The study focuses on the archaeological and spatial characteristics of the two sacred areas and evaluates their relationship with the surrounding cultural landscape. Archaeological remains, architectural features, and available epigraphic evidence are considered together to explore how Mithraic practices were expressed within the local context of Doliche and Erikçe. Rather than approaching Mithraism solely as an imported religious tradition, this study considers the sanctuaries as spaces where religious practices, local identities, and collective memories intersected. Particular attention is given to the role of sacred spaces in shaping and maintaining communal identities

and in creating connections between people, place, and memory. Through the examples of Doliche and Erikçe, the study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how a religious tradition with a transregional character acquired distinctive local meanings and became embedded within the cultural landscape of the Roman East.

Nirvana Silnović | Austrian Archaeological Institute, Austrian Academy of Sciences

The double-sided Mithraic reliefs from Roman Dalmatia: iconography, ritual, and communities

Double-sided Mithraic reliefs, usually depicting the tauroctony on one face and the communal banquet on the other, represent a uniquely Mithraic ritual invention. Besides the well-known examples from northern and central Italy (Castello di Turno, two from Rome, Fiano Romano), and Germania superior (Nida-Heddernheim, Rückingen, Dieburg, Stockstadt), the majority were found in Roman Dalmatia: Zadar, Banjevci, Gardun, Proložac Donji, and Konjic. While they have already received scholarly attention, several aspects remain underexplored. Most notably, with the exception of Konjic, all Dalmatian examples cluster along a narrow coastal belt following the Roman road between ancient Iader (Zadar) and Narona (Vid near Metković). Such a pattern is unlikely to be coincidental and raises questions about the character of the communities involved and the nature of their interaction. The presentation further brings new insights into the iconographical and compositional specificities of the group, identifying local variations and situating them within the broader corpus of double-sided reliefs and the regional Mithraic iconographic tradition. Finally, the relief from Konjic – isolated from the coastal group and unique in its iconography – will be examined in detail, with particular consideration of what its distinctive features reveal about the local Mithraic community to which it belonged.

Csaba Szabó | Department of Religious Studies, University of Szeged; MTA-SZTE Momentum Mithras Research Group

Glocalizing Mithras in Roman Dacia: case studies and methodological challenges

The material heritage of the Roman cult of Mithras constitutes nearly one-third of the entire religious material of the province of Dacia. With more than 300 figurative and epigraphic sources, as well as four archaeologically identified and ten presumed sanctuaries, it represents one of the most significant corpora of Mithraic material in the Roman Empire. In my paper, I examine the local iconographic, epigraphic, and sociological features of the cult within the theoretical framework of religious glocalization. The iconographic features – long described in scholarship as Danubian–Rhenish reliefs – can be understood against a much more intricate religious and historical background. The theoretical framework of religious glocalization provides the basis for this approach. By analyzing the large, panelled reliefs, the local, small and portable figurative monuments and some of the unique inscriptions from Apulum and Sarmizegetusa, as well as additional case studies from rural Dacia, the paper will highlight the local specificities of glocalization and the challenges inherent in its theoretical application.

Annareta Touloumtzidou | Aristotle University of Thessaloniki,
Perikles Christodoulou | House of European History, European Parliament, Brussels; CReA-Patrimoine, Université libre de Bruxelles

New light on old finds: untangling the history of the so-called Sarapieion of Thessaloniki

The movable finds (sculpture and inscriptions) from the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki – widely known as the Sarapieion, a designation introduced by its first excavator – occupy a prominent place in the archaeology of the city, as well as in Isiac studies and in the history of ancient Greek religion more broadly. However, the plan of the sanctuary remains elusive. Although more than a century has passed since the initial discoveries in 1921, and several decades since subsequent excavations conducted up to 1960, neither the excavation results nor the excavation diaries have been published or preserved. Knowledge of these campaigns has therefore remained limited to extremely brief reports issued by the excavators themselves. Our project, which aims to produce as complete a publication of the sanctuary as possible, is premised on reconstructing the history of the excavations carried out in the area of the sanctuary between 1921 and 1960, and even later, when further remarkable finds came to light. This paper presents a brief reconstruction of the excavations based on archival research in the Historical Archives of the Archaeological Service, as well as on contemporary reports in the daily press. By establishing, where possible, the year and location of discovery of several finds, we are able to reassess the archaeological evidence and to identify the architectural remains with greater confidence. Additionally, the paper addresses the question of the sanctuary's boundaries and considers the possibility that some of the excavated material may in fact derive from neighbouring cult places.

Eleni Tsatsou | American College of Thessaloniki

Alexander the magician: receptions of Alexander the Great in the Roman provinces of Southeast Europe. The testimony of amulets and inscriptions

The belief in Alexander's divine origin seems to have been firmly established already during his lifetime. In the decades following his death, traditions concerning his divine – and particularly serpentine – ancestry circulated widely throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Ancient biographical traditions not only celebrated Alexander's military achievements but also emphasized his extraordinary healing abilities, understood either as inherited from his mother or as deriving from his divine status. These accounts attribute to Alexander knowledge of herbal remedies, cures received through revelatory dreams, and the transmission of medical expertise to physicians accompanying his campaigns.
Narratives surrounding Alexander's healing and protective powers significantly enhanced his religious prestige across the Greco-Roman world. Until at least the early fourth century CE, individuals wore coins bearing his image as protective amulets, installed apotropaic representations of Alexander in domestic contexts, and dedicated inscriptions in his honor. This paper explores the ways in which Alexander's perceived therapeutic and apotropaic potency became embedded within the use of amuletic objects in the Roman provinces of Southeast Europe. Examining Alexander as an active protective presence within daily healing and ritual practices, this study gives particular attention to his visual and conceptual assimilation with protective, serpent-associated deities frequently represented on these objects, specifically Agathodaemon and Chnoubis, in order to shed light on the diverse roles that Alexander's memory played within the domestic and ritual settings of these provinces.

Tünde Vágási | Institute of Languages for Specific Purposes, Semmelweis University, MTA-SZTE Momentum Mithras Research Group

Divine communication and local religious practice in the "Oriental cults" of Roman Pannonia

This paper examines votive inscriptions of the second and third centuries CE associated with the "Oriental cults" (Iuppiter Dolichenus, Iuppiter Heliopolitanus, etc.) of Roman Pannonia. The focus lies on inscriptions employing formulas of divine communication (ex visu/viso, iussu, ex monitu, etc.), which epigraphically signal that a dedication was made in response to a divine vision, dream, or command, preserving the linguistic imprint of personal religious experience. Such formulas occur relatively rarely in the Pannonian epigraphic corpus compared to other provinces of the Roman Empire. The paper interprets this phenomenon from an interprovincial comparative perspective, with special attention to the local adaptation of supra-regional religious traditions, highlighting the local character of "Oriental cult" practices in Pannonia. In the Pannonian material, dedications motivated by divine inspiration are predominantly embedded in military contexts and appear in both state and "Oriental cults." The analysis shows that while these inscriptions employ the standard formulaic repertoire of Roman votive epigraphy, they also display regionally specific emphases, reflecting local social and institutional conditions within the wider imperial religious framework.embedded in military contexts and appear in both state and "Oriental cults." The analysis shows that while these inscriptions employ the standard formulaic repertoire of Roman votive epigraphy, they also display regionally specific emphases, reflecting local social and institutional conditions within the wider imperial religious framework.

Inga Vilogorac Brčić | Department of History, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb

Tabulae ansatae in the sanctuaries of "Oriental" gods

Tabulae ansatae, rectangular bronze tablets with attached triangular ansae (handles), were found in Roman sanctuaries dedicated to Isis and Serapis, Mithras, Mater Magna, Iuppiter Dolichenus, and Iuppiter Heliopolitanus. These plaques bore inscriptions honoring "Oriental" deities, providing valuable information about the gods themselves, their devotees, and the motivations behind the dedications. In this paper, I will present an overview of these monuments found across the Roman Empire, analyze and interpret their inscriptions, and examine their frequency within each cult. I will also discuss the insights they offer, and I will attempt to identify the specific sacred spaces where they were placed and the objects they were attached to. Finally, I will compare the data derived from the study of tabulae ansatae related to various "Oriental cults," with the aim of identifying similarities in their distribution, terminology, dedicants, and the purposes of their dedications.