

## Λαμπροτάτη πόλις: The Festivals in the Roman Province of Thrace as Evidence for Inter-city Rivalry

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*The paper aims to present the way in which the municipal festivals became a reflection of open political competition between the cities of the Roman province of Thrace, drawing parallels with cities in other eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. The inter-city rivalry in the province of Thrace is analyzed in the context of the agonistic culture embedded in it as a Roman province under the strong influence of the Hellenistic heritage. Despite the presence of the agonistic programme, the cult worship remains the core of the festival. The process of agonistic festivals merging with the worship of the imperial cult in the Roman Empire was two-folded. On the one hand it was a way for the provincial cities to worship the Roman emperor, hoping thereby to gain his favor. On the other hand, the festivals themselves became an essential part of the propaganda of the central Roman authorities, which being in a position to establish new provincial and municipal festivals, displayed clear preference for some cities and ignored others. This policy inevitably gave rise to rivalry and inter-city competition in the provinces. The role of the agonistic festivals as a political tool to sow the seeds of discord between the cities can also be seen in the Roman province of Thrace. The epigraphic and numismatic evidence from the province of Thrace testifying for changes in the festival names and the dates of the festival editions makes it possible to trace the stages of this peculiar bilateral dialogue between the cities and the central Roman authorities. The epigraphic and numismatic evidence for festivals in Thrace should not be dated, grosso modo, to the late 2nd – first half of the 3rd c. AD. The connection between them, the official worship of the imperial cult and the policy of granting the title neokoros, allows us to trace their diachronic development. Thus, the dates of different festival editions could be refined and certain regularities in their holding valid for the specific historical period could be noticed.*

Many of the political, economic, social and cultural processes in the Roman provinces cannot be explained simply as a consequence of a series of decisions taken by the central Roman power and drawn to the attention of the residents. A specific type of "dialogue" set up between the Roman authorities and the provinces throws some light on them, insofar as the available data permit. The provincial cities, seeking to gain favour with the Roman emperors and to receive certain benefits were on the one side, while the Roman emperors responding to these attempts by bestowing a plenty of pompous titles were on the other. Thus, city titles, such as πρώτη, λαμπροτάτη, μητρόπολις, νεωκόρος, granted or taken away as a result of an imperial decision were clear signs of winning or losing the Roman favour. This flexible Roman policy was successfully implemented in the eastern provinces of the Empire, where epigraphic and numismatic data, as well as written sources justify the existing

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conditions of competition between the provincial cities to be endowed with prestigious and lofty titles as "signs" of their position in the provincial "hierarchy".

The present paper discusses the involvement of the province of Thrace in this "dialogue" with the Roman authorities through the prism of the available evidence for municipal festivals held in the two largest cities of the province: Perinthos, the headquarters of the Roman provincial governor, and Philippopolis, the metropolis of the Thracian *koinon*.

These two cities were the only cities in the province of Thrace adorned with the title *neokoros*, serving as a sign for bringing forwards the imperial favour and the right to build a temple of the imperial cult.<sup>1</sup> These temples were related to the cities' festivals. Perinthos was the first city in the province of Thrace designated as *neokoros*. The title was given by the Emperor Septimius Severus and was associated with the *Severeia* festival organized in AD 195. The city began to claim itself *νεωκόρος* in official inscriptions and did not omit to include the title and the image of the *neokoros* temple in its mint repertoire.<sup>2</sup> Several pieces of epigraphic evidence and a large number of coins might be adduced that, later on, the city acquired the title for the second time.<sup>3</sup> There remain two hypotheses for the date of this event. According to some researchers who take the occurrence of the title *δις νεωκόρος* in official documents by Perinthos as main evidence, the second *neokoria* was bestowed on the city by the Emperor Elagabalus probably as a reward for the decision of the city not to recognize the legitimacy of Macrinus refusing to mint coins for him.<sup>4</sup> Another viewpoint<sup>5</sup> states that Perinthos was claimed twice *neokoros* by the Emperor Septimius Severus which referred to the second edition of the *Aktia Pythia Philadelphieia* festival in AD 211. Although Perinthos was not designated as *δις νεωκόρος* in written form prior to Elagabalus' reign, the appearance of an image of two *neokoros* temples on the city coins of Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Geta could be considered clear indication of second *neokoria* acquired during their reign. I tend to assume that the Emperor Elagabalus granted permission to the city to be officially claimed twice

1. For the inclusion of the title *neokoros* in the city's titulature pointing out to the presence of a temple of the imperial cult, see D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century after Christ* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1950), 1432.

2. M. Sayar, *Perinthos-Herakleia (Marmara Ereğlisi) und Umgebung. Geschichte, Testimonien, griechische und lateinische Inschriften [Perinthos-Herakleia (Marmara Ereğlisi) and surroundings. History, testimony, Greek and Latin inscriptions]* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998), 195, No. 10, 196, No. 11, 223, No. 40, 235-236, No. 56, 421, No. 307; E. Schönert-Geiss, *Die Münzprägung von Perinthos (Griechisches Münzwerk. Schriften der Sektion für Altertumswissenschaft. Band 45) [The Coinage of Perinthos (Greek Coinage - Writings of the Section for Classical Studies - Volume 45)]* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1965), 19-21, 171-214.

3. M. Sayar, *Perinthos-Herakleia (Marmara Ereğlisi) und Umgebung. Geschichte, Testimonien, griechische und lateinische Inschriften*, 1998, 196-197, Nos. 12, 13; E. Schönert-Geiss, *Die Münzprägung von Perinthos*, 1965, 21-22, 215-270.

4. Д. Ботева, *Долна Мизия и Тракия в римската имперска система (193-217/218 г. сл. Хр.) [Lower Moesia and Thrace in the Roman Imperial System (AD 192-217/218)]* (Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 1997), 317.

5. П. Андреева, *Празници в римската провинция Тракия (I-III век) [Festivals in the Roman Province of Thrace (1st-3rd c. AD)]* (Sofia: Kota Print, 2014), 89-95.

neokoros due to the two imperial temples built in the city at an earlier date. The agonistic coins of Perinthos issued on the occasion of the Aktia Pythia festival held under the Emperor Elagabalus in AD 219 celebrated the imperial approval.<sup>6</sup> In general, the provincial cities flauntingly listed all prestigious titles they possessed, thereby increasing their popularity. The explanation of the occurrence of the second neokoria of Perinthos in official inscriptions of a later date could also be sought in the competition between Perinthos and the other large and prosperous city Philippopolis for more influence in the province. The latter, being metropolis of the Thracian koinon, was the main rival of Perinthos in gaining more popularity and prestige in the province of Thrace. There is indirect evidence supporting this contention that could be found in an inscription celebrating a homonoia relationship between the two cities.<sup>7</sup> According to the second hypothesis<sup>8</sup>, Perinthos began to designate itself officially as δις νεοκόρος because of the fact that in AD 219 Philippopolis was endowed with its first title neokoros by the Emperor Elagabalus, which was celebrated with the Kendreiseia Pythia festival, held in the same year. It could be argued that the emperor did not grant the honorary title to the two cities, keeping his strict policy of giving neokoria to no more than one city in a province<sup>9</sup>. In the province of Thrace the chosen city was not Perinthos, but Philippopolis, which began to announce the precious acquisition in its coins and official inscriptions, where the city is claimed to be ἡ λαμπροτάτη Θρακῶν μητρόπολις Φιλιππόπολις νεοκόρος (sic).<sup>10</sup>

The Kendreiseia Games in Philippopolis were named after Kendrisos, the patron deity of the city, associated with the worship of Apollo, as the ex-voto inscriptions make it clear. The festival was isopythian, which means that the sporting events, the competition schedule and the rules were modelled after the Pythian Games at Delphi. It is assumed that the city council of Philippopolis called the festival Kendreiseia Pythia in order to flatter the Emperor Elagabalus who was a priest of the eastern cult of the sun. As S. Price has properly put it, "imperial festivals, despite their failure to conform to our expectations of piety, formed the essential framework of the imperial cult".<sup>11</sup> In return, the emperor did not stay indifferent to the generous initiative and bestowed the title

6. E. Schönert-Geiss, *Die Münzprägung von Perinthos* (Griechisches Münzwerk. Schriften der Sektion für Altertumswissenschaft. Band 45) *Griechisches Münzwerk. Schriften der Sektion für Altertumswissenschaft. Band 45* [*The Coinage of Perinthos (Greek Coinage, writings of the Section for Classical Studies, Volume 45)*] (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1965), 216-217, 226.

7. N. Sharankov, "Statue Bases with Honorific Inscriptions from Philippopolis," *Archaeologia Bulgarica* 9 no. 2 (2005): 58-59; N. Sharankov, "The Thracian κοινόν: New Epigraphic Evidence," in *Proceeding of the 10<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Thracology*, Komotini – Alexandroupolis 18-23 October 2005, ed. Athena Iakovidou (Athens: Ethniko Idryma Erevnon, 2007), 520-522.

8. B. Burrell, *Neokoroi: Greek cities and Roman emperors* (Cincinnati Classical Studies, New Series, Vol. IX) (Boston: Brill, 2004), 345.

9. *Ibid.*, 295.

10. Л. Ботушарова, "АРХИΕΡΕΥΣ ΔΙΟΠΑΩΝ ВЪВ ФИЛИПОПОЛ" ["АРХИΕΡΕΥΣ ΔΙΟΠΑΩΝ in Philippopolis"]. *Известия на Археологическия институт* 33, 1972, 162.

11. S. Price, *Rituals and Power. The Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 102.

neokoros on the city.<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that the neokoros temple of Philippopolis was not only a temple of the imperial cult but a temple of the main deity of the city Apollo Kendrisos, in which the emperor was worshipped as his σύνναος. Among the cities in the eastern provinces designated neokoros by the Emperor Elagabalus, only the temples of the patron deities in Nicomedia (province of Bithynia-Pontus) and Philippopolis (province of Thrace) also became temples of the imperial cult. In Nicomedia the cult of Elagabalus was worshipped in the temple of Demeter, depicted as a hexastyle building on the city coins, while in Philippopolis it was adopted in the temple of Apollo Kendrisos, portrayed as a Corinthian temple with eight columns on the front side, often with a shield and spear along the diagonal in the pediment. And if the favour of Elagabalus to Nicomedia can be found in the events occurred during the journey from his native city Emesa in Syria to Rome, the province of Thrace, and Philippopolis in particular, was only one of the stops on his route. According to Z. Gočeva, the games of Philippopolis were related to the main deity not only in terms of the religious tastes of the emperor, but also in terms of the policy of the city, which "alone among all other cities of Thrace" imposed its patron deity in the official religion.<sup>13</sup> The hypothesis that the neokoria of Philippopolis was granted because the city flattered the emperor by renaming the games after deity projecting the Thracians "solar religion notions"<sup>14</sup> focuses on the relationship between the title neokoros and the games, but suggests the idea that the games gave rise to the title. Is it possible to assume, however, that the chronology of events was exactly the opposite, i.e. the games of Philippopolis received their name after the neokoros temple had been granted to the city? In other words, can we argue that the news about the title neokoros first came to Philippopolis and then the epithet Kendreiseia was added to the name of the games in order to demonstrate the close connection between them and the received neokoria? Most likely the epithet was intended to demonstrate the close relationship between the city and the emperor, because the imperial cult was worshipped in the temple of Apollo Kendrisos. That is why we have every reason to believe that the name of the city's festival was chosen after the neokoria had been granted, as the festival itself contributed to the promotion of the new prestigious title of the city.

It is interesting to note that the epithet *πρῶτα* is used in connection with the Kendreiseia Pythia festival in an inscription from Philippopolis.<sup>15</sup> It can be interpreted in two ways: 1) as a numeral indicating the sequence of games held in the city (this, in turn, means that the citizens of Philippopolis expected future editions of the festival) or 2) as an honorary epithet of the festival itself, indicating its prestigious status. The fact that Philippopolis was the only city in

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12. З. Гочева, "Религиозният живот във Филипопол през римската епоха" ["Religious life of Philippopolis in the Roman Period"]. *100 години Народен археологически музей в Пловдив* (Юбилеен сборник, 2), 1985, 106; К. Колев, "Два новопостъпили медалиона в Пловдивския музей" ["Two newly acquired medallions in the Plovdiv Museum"]. *Археология* 9/3, 1967, 43-44.

13. З. Гочева, "Религиозният живот във Филипопол през римската епоха", 1985, 106.

14. Ibid.

15. П. Андреева, *Празници в римската провинция Тракия (I-III век)*, 2014, 425.

the province endowed with neokoria by the Emperor Elagabalus could explain why the festival referred to this special event was the "first". In this particular case, the attempt of the city to highlight the importance of the festival organized on such a significant occasion becomes evident. The Κοινὰ Ἀσίας festival in Smyrna can be pointed out in comparison to the Kendreiseia Games in Philippopolis.<sup>16</sup> An inscription set up in honour of L. Egnatius Victor Lollianus, proconsul of the province of Asia<sup>17</sup>, says that he was also appointed agonothetes τῶν πρώτων κοινῶν τῆς Ἀσίας. His statue was erected by Quintilius Eumenes, who was asiarch and συναγωνοθέτης of L. Egnatius Victor Lollianus. Quintilius Eumenes raised another statue in honour of his personal benefactor (ἴδιος εὐεργέτης) Appius Alexander, governor of the province of Gallia Lugdunensis. It is expressly stated in the inscription, that he erected the statue after the promise made when he was agonothetes of πρώτα Κοινὰ Ἀσίας for the fifth time (καθὰ ἀγωνοθετῶν τῶν πρώτων κοινῶν τῆς Ἀσίας ἀγώνων τ. πέμπτον)<sup>18</sup>. It seems that the epithet πρώτων (in the genitive case plural) does not correspond to the serial number of the games. Moreover the city authorities of Smyrna emphasized in official documents that it was the first city to hold the Κοινὰ Ἀσίας festival.<sup>19</sup> We could assume that the reason to use the epithet πρώτα along with the name of the Kendreiseia Pythia festival in the Philippopolis inscription was quite the same. It was probably intended to point out that Philippopolis was the first city to organize such games in honour of the Emperor Elagabalus. Moreover, attention should also be paid to the fact that these games had a "sacred" and "iselastic" status which increased participation of many foreign contestants – professional athletes and artists, as evidenced by epigraphic data. The games became very popular and the victory in them was considered prestigious, which probably also influenced the attempt of the city authorities to emphasize the connection of the games with the city's neokoros temple by adding the epithet Kendreiseia to their name.

What the available evidence suggests about the neokoros cities in the province of Thrace under the reign of Elagabalus, is that the emperor made decision not to grant neokoria to Perinthos, which was twice neokoros at that time, i.e. it had two temples of the imperial cult, but to Philippopolis, which was formally titled only metropolis, although it also had two temples of the imperial cult from the time of Septimius Severus and his sons onwards. The hypothesis that Philippopolis acquired the title μητρόπολις by the Emperor Septimius Severus is based on the local city coinage with inscriptions where the title is missing before his reign. According to D. Boteva, it was at the time of the provincial governor Statilius Barbarus that "a new element in the name of the city – 'metropolis' that is not present in the earlier coins" appeared on the

16. It is well-known that the Κοινὰ Ἀσίας festival were held in eight cities: Pergamum, Smyrna, Ephesus, Kyzikos, Philadelphia, Laodikeia, Sardis, and Tralles. For more festival details, see Friesen 1993, 114-116.

17. P. Herrmann and H. Malay, "Statue Bases of the Mid Third Century A.D. from Smyrna," *Epigraphica Anatolica* 36(2003), 1.

18. *Ibid.*, 4.

19. See IGRR IV 824; I. Smyrna 2,1 635.

reverse of the coins issued by the mint of Philippopolis.<sup>20</sup> In her view, the fact that there are coins inscribed with the name of Barbarus and with and without the title "metropolis", gives ground for the hypothesis that his mandate as Roman provincial governor of Thrace marked the dividing line in the acquirement of the title of Philippopolis "most likely because of the city's earlier support of Septimius Severus during the war against Pescennius Niger"<sup>21</sup>. Moreover, the coins bearing the title "metropolis" and the names of Statilius Barbarus were minted in limited quantities, which, according to D. Boteva, indicate that shortly afterwards the mint ceased striking coins, most probably immediately after Philippopolis was claimed "metropolis". Therefore, the coin issues inscribed with the title are dated after the middle of AD 195 until the early AD 196.<sup>22</sup> After October/November AD 210, when the mint of Philippopolis began to strike coins in the name of Geta Augustus, coins without the title "metropolis" were put into circulation. The same "coinage picture" remained true under the reign of Caracalla and the early years of the reign of Elagabalus. It is therefore concluded that the city mint began to work actively again in AD 210, and first put into circulation coins with the title "metropolis" on the reverse but "very soon afterwards, perhaps only a month later, certainly before 4 February AD 211, for reasons so far unknown, Philippopolis was deprived of the honorary title – a fact that was immediately reflected in the city coinage"<sup>23</sup>. D. Boteva tends to assume based on numismatic data that "in AD 210, Philippopolis was still claimed as ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ but in the year ending AD 210 the city lost the honorary title"<sup>24</sup>. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the coins minted in the names of Septimius Severus and Caracalla on the occasion of the imperial visit to the city of Philippopolis are dated between October/November AD 210 and January/February AD 211.<sup>25</sup> This visit is supposed to have been connected with dropping the title of Philippopolis.<sup>26</sup> However, the epigraphic evidence makes it clear that Philippopolis was proclaimed "metropolis" as early as the late 1<sup>st</sup> – early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD, under the reign of the Emperor Domitian.<sup>27</sup> The written sources could permit further precision of the date. Pliny the Elder mentioned the city of Philippopolis as oppidum in his "Natural History" which provides a terminus post quem of AD 77. N. Sharankov notes that the city coins bearing the title μητρόπολις refer to two different types: 1) Φιλίπποπολειτῶν (i.e. of the citizens of Philippopolis) – a coin inscription used prior to the reign of Septimius Severus; it did not appear along with the title "metropolis" which could be proved by the

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20. Д. Ботева, "Монетосеченето на Филипополис при управлението на Северите" ["The Coinage of Philippopolis in the Severan Age"] *Минало* 2(1995), 27.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., 28.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., 31.

25. D. Boteva, "Historical Development of the Roman Provinces of Moesia Inferior and Thracia during the Period A.D. 193-217/218," *Bulgarian Historical Review*, 4(1994): 13-14.

26. Д. Ботева, "Монетосеченето на Филипополис при управлението на Северите" ["The Coinage of Philippopolis in the Severan Age"], *Минало* 2(1995): 31.

27. N. Sharankov, "Unknown Governors of Provincia Thracia late I - early II century AD," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 151(2005), 235-237, 242.

synchronous minting for city coins inscribed with Φιλippoπολειτῶν / μητροπόλεως Φιλippoπόλεως or Φιλippoπολειτῶν νεωκόρων / μητροπόλεως Φιλippoπόλεως νεωκόρου; 2) Φιλippoπόλεως (i.e. of the city of Philippopolis) – the coin inscription was not used before the time of Septimius Severus, however, there are coins issued in his name and the names of his successors inscribed with Φιλippoπόλεως and not with μητροπόλεως Φιλippoπόλεως. There are no known coin inscriptions reading Φιλippoπόλεως (with or without μητροπόλεως) dated prior to the reign of the Emperor Septimius Severus. Furthermore, all coins inscribed with Φιλippoπολειτῶν do not mention the title "metropolis", which leads to the conclusion that the coin inscriptions could not be reliable evidence to determine the precise date when the city was endowed with this title.<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that the autonomous coinage of Philippopolis began under the emperor Domitian in AD 88 or shortly before.<sup>29</sup> This means that the presence or absence of the title depended on the formula used for the coin reverses which was defined by the specific relationship with the central Roman power.

The decision of Elagabalus to give the title neokoros to Philippopolis was also probably dictated by the fact that the worship of the imperial cult in the city meant worship at the center of the Thracian koinon, which was crucial factor in maintaining and strengthening Roman authority in the province. Therefore, the title neokoros of Philippopolis could be ascribed not only to religious, but also to political reasons. Following this policy, at least in the early years of his reign, the Emperor Elagabalus granted neokoria to Beroia, the center of the Macedonian koinon, thus making it twice neokoros. It is no coincidence that the coins issued in the city mint of Beroia on the occasion of the second title neokoros were struck on behalf of the Macedonian koinon. B. Burrell assumes that the Macedonian koinon and/or Beroia received neokoria when the emperor passed through Thrace on his way to Rome.<sup>30</sup>

The constant inter-city rivalry for obtaining neokoria made the title more municipal. Therefore, the title itself cannot be strictly defined as "provincial" or "municipal". It is important to note that it was the city of Philippopolis and not the Thracian koinon which was designated as neokoros. The title and the name of the Kendreiseia Pythia festival are inscribed on coin reverses, while the Thracian koinon is not mentioned. This gives grounds for concluding that the koinon was not involved in holding the festival. It seems that the organization of the games was done solely on the initiative of the city council of Philippopolis, which could be explained by their great importance to the city and the obtained neokoria. A comparison can be made with the agonistic coins issued by the mint of Philippopolis on the occasion of the Alexandria Pythia festival, held in AD 215, i.e. four years before the Kendreiseia Games. In this case, the Thracian koinon is inscribed on the coin reverses, while the coins was struck in the mint of Philippopolis, which can be explained by the fact that

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28. Ibid., 241.

29. Ibid., 242.

30. B. Burrell, *Neokoroi: Greek cities and Roman emperors* (Cincinnati Classical Studies, New Series, Vol. IX) (Boston: Brill, 2004), 192-193.

Philippopolis was the main city of the *koinon*, and thus it was the unifying unit of organization the games.

Nevertheless, the promotion of the title *neokoros* of Philippopolis did not last a very long time. The balance of prestigious city titles in the province was breached again during the reign of the Emperor Severus Alexander. The decision of *damnatio memoriae* of Elagabalus reflected on the *neokoria* of Philippopolis and it was lost. The name of the *Kendreiseia* Games associated with the *neokoros* temple of the city became unpopular, and since the name of the emperor who granted the title had to be forgotten, the epithet *Kendreiseia* had to be erased as well. The epigraphic monuments testify to the fact that later on, the city of Philippopolis continued to hold the games, but named only *Pythia*.<sup>31</sup>

It is noteworthy that the title *neokoros* of Philippopolis does not appear to have been removed from the titulature of the city in the early years of the reign of the Emperor Severus Alexander (222-235). Five inscriptions of a later date, four of them certainly assigned to that time, acclaim the city of Philippopolis as *neokoros*. Three of them are inscribed milestones set up during the mandate of Rutilius Pudens Crispinus as a Roman provincial governor of Thrace, which is referred to AD 222-232.<sup>32</sup> Some later studies have argued<sup>33</sup> that Rutilius Crispinus was provincial governor of Lusitania between AD 225 and AD 227 and provincial governor of Thrace between AD 227 and AD 229, respectively. His political career continued to flourish, and he was subsequently posted to the province of Syria Phoenice as *legatus Augusti pro praetore* (229-233). Then, he was appointed governor of the province of Achaia. The chronology of his *cursus honorum* gives an opportunity to make an attempt at narrowing the chronological limits for the inscriptions bearing the name of Rutilius Pudens Crispinus. It is important to point out that three of the above-mentioned inscriptions record the title *neokoros* of Philippopolis, while in fourth inscription mentioning the name of the same provincial governor of Thrace<sup>34</sup>, the title is missing. There are no known inscriptions of a later date referring to Philippopolis as *neokoros*. The foregoing gives grounds for assuming that significant political changes occurred during the mandate of Rutilius Crispinus as a provincial governor of Thrace and the delay in removing the title *neokoros* of the city finally ended up. The above-mentioned inscriptions give an argument for a proposition that the city of Philippopolis lost the *neokoria* between AD 227 and AD 229.

The mandate of Titus Flavius Priscianus as the first archon of Philippopolis is to be dated to the same time period. It is epigraphically attested that he was

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31. L. Moretti, *Iscrizione Agonistiche Greche* (Roma, 1953), 263; П. Андреева, *Празници в римската провинция Тракия (I-III век)* [*Festivals in the Roman Province of Thrace (1st-3rd c. AD)*] (Sofia: Kota Print, 2014), 121-123.

32. A. Stein, *Die Römische Reichsbeamten der Provinz Thracia* [*The Roman imperial officials of the province of Thracia*] (Sarajevo: Zemaljska Stamparija, 1920), 56.

33. M. Š. Kos, *Historical outline of the region between Aquileia, the Adriatic, and Sirmium in Cassius Dio and Herodian* (Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 1986), 428.

34. See IGRR I 720, milestone inscription.

the first archon when the city lost the title neokoros. An official inscription<sup>35</sup> set up in honour of the Emperor Severus Alexander by the city authorities of Philippopolis makes it clear that the first archon Titus Flavius Priscianus arranged (ἐπιμελουμένου) the erection of the emperor's statue. The inscription records three stages of his cursus honorum: thrakarch, first archon of the city and ἀρχιερεὺς δι' ὅπλων. The priestly title related to the worship of the imperial cult by organizing gladiatorial games, as well as the office of thrakarch, supports the conclusion that Titus Priscianus was responsible for organizing the imperial celebrations on behalf of the whole Thracian koinon. Z. Gocheva points out that the above-mentioned inscription is the earliest epigraphic evidence for gladiatorial games in Philippopolis, confirming their relation with the worship of the imperial cult. Philippopolis was the main city of the Thracian koinon and the gladiatorial spectacles conducted in the city were of importance for the entire province. Moreover, such a great privilege was not granted to many cities.<sup>36</sup> Another inscription<sup>37</sup> reads that the city authorities of Philippopolis erected an honorary statue of Titus Flavius Priscianus, probably because of his special merits to the city<sup>38</sup>. According to the text, he was archiereus and thrakarch. It is important to note that both inscriptions were set up when Priscianus was πρῶτος ἄρχων, but while in the former<sup>39</sup> he is titled thrakarch and ἀρχιερεὺς δι' ὅπλων, i.e. he organized gladiatorial fights in his capacity of munerarius, in the latter he is mentioned only as thrakarch and archiereus.<sup>40</sup> It could be assumed that both inscriptions may be very close in date, since Priscianus is titled πρῶτος ἄρχων in both texts. However, the honorary inscription of Priscianus is probably a little earlier in date than the honorary inscription of the Emperor Severus Alexander.<sup>41</sup> Nowadays, most researchers are unanimous that Priscianus became ἀρχιερεὺς δι' ὅπλων, having already been ἀρχιερεύς. Since gladiatorial games organized by the first priest of the imperial cult was an additional obligation associated with the performance of the priestly office, it could be expected that Priscianus was initially appointed as ἀρχιερεύς and then as ἀρχιερεὺς δι' ὅπλων. Both monuments were erected over a very short time period, as evidenced by the office of πρῶτος ἄρχων performed by Priscianus when the inscriptions were set up. However, the chronological sequence in which both monuments were made could not be determined only by the priestly offices ἀρχιερεύς and ἀρχιερεὺς δι' ὅπλων. There are good grounds to assume that the chronological order was just the opposite. Both texts differ from each other not only in the priestly title of

35. Л. Ботушарова, "АРХИΕΡΕΥΣ ΔΙΟΠΛΩΝ ВЪВ ФИЛИПОПОЛ," 1972, 162.

36. Z. Gočeva, "Gladiatorenkämpfe in Thrakien" ["Gladiatorial battles in Thrace"], *Klio* 63 no2(1981): 497.

37. N. Sharankov, "The Thracian κοινόν: New Epigraphic Evidence," in *Proceeding of the 10th International Congress of Thracology*, Komotini – Alexandroupolis 18-23 October 2005, ed. Athena Iakovidou (Athens: Ethniko Idryma Erevnon, 2007), 530-531.

38. For more on the hypothesis, see В. Герасимова, "Гръцки надписи от Форум-Север на Филипопол" ["Greek Inscriptions from the Forum-North in Philippopolis"] in *Нумизматика, сфрагистика и епиграфика* 3 no2 (2007), 86.

39. Л. Ботушарова, "АРХИΕΡΕΥΣ ΔΙΟΠΛΩΝ ВЪВ ФИЛИПОПОЛ" (1972), 162.

40. N. Sharankov, "The Thracian κοινόν: New Epigraphic Evidence", 2007, 530-531.

41. Ibid.; В. Герасимова, "Гръцки надписи от Форум-Север на Филипопол", 2007, 86.

Priscianus, but also in the city titlature. The honorary inscription of Severus Alexander records the title neokoros of Philippopolis, while in the other text the city is claimed only as μητρόπολις. Therefore, both inscriptions should be listed in reverse chronological order: the date of the text dedicated to the Emperor Severus Alexander is earlier than the inscription set up in honour of the thrakarch Titus Flavius Priscianus, which was erected shortly afterwards. The proposed chronological order is based on the official city's titlature, which should be the most decisive evidence in determining the date of the inscriptions, even more than the offices held by Priscianus. The city is called ἡ λαμπροτάτη Θρακῶν μητρόπολις Φιλιππόπολις νεοκόρος (sic) in the honorary inscription of the Emperor Severus Alexander, while in the inscription of Priscianus the city bears only the title μητρόπολις. As pointed out previously, Priscianus was the first archon of Philippopolis under the reign of the Emperor Severus Alexander. This is an important point to remember regarding the precise time period when Philippopolis lost the neokoria. It could be argued that the presence of the title neokoros in one of the inscriptions and its absence in the other probably indicates the point in time when the title was withdrawn by the emperor's decision. The supposition that the city's honorary title was only omitted in the second inscription should be excluded in view of the fact that the city authorities of Philippopolis did not forget to include the prestigious title in all official documents. In this case, it comes to inscribed statue base set up in honour of the first archon Titus Flavius Priscianus by the city authorities. The fact that he was a high-ranking office-holder in Philippopolis means that he belonged to the local urban elite.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the correct spelling of the city titlature in the inscription is rather expected. The short time period between both monuments makes it possible to define the time point when the title neokoros of Philippopolis was officially withdrawn more precisely. In brief, Philippopolis lost the neokoria during the mandate of the city's first archon Titus Flavius Priscianus.

Since the Emperor Severus Alexander was honoured by the city of Philippopolis, titled ἡ λαμπροτάτη Θρακῶν μητρόπολις Φιλιππόπολις νεοκόρος (sic!), Z. Gocheva assumes that Priscianus was not appointed high priest of the city but of the entire province of Thrace. Therefore, the gladiatorial spectacles organized by him were related to the entire province. The city of Philippopolis itself, being a center of the Thracian koinon, present an argument for that conclusion.<sup>43</sup> Other researchers also emphasize that Priscianus was rather high priest of the province of Thrace and not only of Philippopolis, whence comes the conclusion that he was in charge of the organization of the gladiatorial games for the entire province.<sup>44</sup> Titus Flavius Priscianus was rather high priest of the imperial cult worshipped within the Thracian koinon, since his duty to take care of the cult also included gladiatorial fights that were arranged not only for the citizens of Philippopolis, but also for all the residents

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42. Л. Ботушарова, "ΑΡΧΙΕΡΕΥΣ ΔΙΟΠΑΩΝ ВЪВ ФИЛИПОПОЛ," 1972, 163.

43. Z. Gocheva, "Gladiatorenkämpfe in Thrakien," 1981, 498.

44. Л. Вагалински, *Кръв и зрелища. Спортни и гладиаторски игри в еллинистическа и римска Тракия* [*Blood and Entertainments. Sports and Gladiatorial Games in Hellenistic and Roman Thrace*] (Sofia: NOUS, 2009), 83.

in the koinon. This hypothesis is based on the position of the city of Philippopolis as a center of the koinon, but also on the office of thrakarch mentioned in the cursus honorum of Titus Flavius Priscianus. It could be further assumed that Priscianus organized gladiatorial combats in honour of the Emperor Severus Alexander. This kind of spectacle was quite costly and thus, it may be also viewed as an attempt to gain favour with the emperor in order to keep the title neokoros of Philippopolis. However, the above-mentioned inscription erected in honour of Priscianus makes it clear that the goal was not achieved and the city failed to win favour with the emperor. Thereupon, Philippopolis shared the fate of all other cities which were awarded the honour of neokoria under Elagabalus and lost the title neokoros, retaining only μητρόπολις.

Perinthos did not suffer the same sanctions as Philippopolis, because it became twice neokoros prior to the reign of Elagabalus. The city organized the Aktia Pythia festival under the reign of Severus Alexander and continued to claim itself "twice neokoros". Since Philippopolis has been deprived of its neokoria, Perinthos had no more serious rivals in the competition for popularity and prestige in the province of Thrace. Its title δις νεοκόρος is encountered even in inscriptions dated to the third quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD.

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