

## **DE SPECTACULIS: THE ORGANIZERS OF THE *PHILOTIMIAI* IN THE PONTIC REGIONS**

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**Cuvinte cheie:** *gladiatori, organizatori, Marea Neagră, preoți, lupte, venationes.*

**Abstract:** *This article aims to analyse the aspect pertaining to the people in charge of organizing gladiator fights in the Roman provinces at the Black Sea. Information on this topic are only epigraphic and are spread across the territories of four Roman provinces around the Black Sea: Moesia Inferior, Thrace, Bithynia et Pontus and Cappadocia.*

**Rezumat:** *Prin acest articol intenționăm să facem o analiză referitoare la persoanele implicate în organizarea luptelor de gladiatori în provinciile romane de la Marea Neagră. Informațiile cu privire la acest subiect sunt în totalitate epigrafice și sunt răspândite pe teritoriile a patru provincii romane: Moesia Inferior, Thracia, Bithynia et Pontus și Cappadocia.*

The organization of the first gladiator fights in the Greek area is recorded in the context of major military events during the history of this territory. In 168 BC, after the conquest of Macedonia, *consul* Lucius Aemilius Paullus organized great games at Amphipolis during which *uictimis et quidquid aliud deorum hominumque*<sup>1</sup> were also held.

The first records of gladiator fights in the Greek world, organized by the Greeks, occur in the works of Polybius and later Livy.<sup>2</sup> Polybius mentions the festivities dedicated to the celebration of Apollo Archegetes at Daphne, in 166 BC, organized by Antiochus IV Epiphanes during which gladiator fights were held as well.<sup>3</sup> It is truly extraordinary that the gladiator fights organized on this occasion were the first to be mentioned other than in funeral context and the first ones associated with wild animals.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Livy, XLV.32; Futrell 2006, p. 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Polybius XXX, 25; Livy, XLV, 30-33.

<sup>3</sup> Polybius XXX, 25-26; Golvin, Landes 1990, p. 26; Carter 1999, p. 57; Wiedemann 1992, p. 42; Futrell 2006, p. 10; Erskine 2013, p. 51; Streinu 2018, p. 357.

<sup>4</sup> Ville 1981, p. 51; Carter 1999, p. 58; Streinu 2018, p. 357.

It is assumed that at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, the Italic community at Delos would have organized gladiator fights, but this hypothesis has not yet been proven.<sup>5</sup> It is certain, however, that during the winter of 71-70 BC, the Roman general L. Licinius Lucullus presented gladiator fights at Ephesus.<sup>6</sup>

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The number of gladiator fights increased during the transition from the Republic to the Empire, when they were organized by Greek magistrates during certain events.<sup>7</sup>

Organizing a *munus* in the Roman provincial Western cities was the assignment of the local magistrates and the wealthy members of the elite who were able to undertake such a financial effort and could take advantage of their increasing popularity.<sup>8</sup> In the urban areas of the Eastern Roman provinces, the Greek cities and their adjacent territories preserved their cultural customs. Nevertheless, this new Roman tradition managed to penetrate. The organization of these events is similar, uniform and wholesome by comparison with its evolution in the Western provinces of the Empire and Rome, but with some slight variations. The evolution of gladiator fights in the Pontic areas is closely related to the institution of the imperial cult, present in all Roman territories in the Balkans, in the Danubian and Pontic provinces, in fact, in all of the Greek Orient, through the priests of this cult.<sup>9</sup>

The information about the organizers of gladiator combats in the Pontic area are entirely epigraphic.<sup>10</sup> We will discuss these inscriptions found across the territories of the four Roman provinces around the Pontus Euxinus: Moesia Inferior, Thrace, Bithynia et Pontus and Cappadocia.

The inscriptions mentioning the organizers of gladiator and wild animal fights are divided according to their contents into two categories. The first category consists of poster-type inscriptions, *invitatio ad munera*, whose purpose was twofold, both to announce an event and to honor the entire administrative apparatus of the Empire and of the provinces. The second category comprises honorary inscriptions of individuals while holding the service, the achievements and benefits of the organizer; this last category of inscriptions has as authors both the organizer and a second person, most likely a relative or a close friend of his, as we will see.<sup>11</sup>

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In the province of **Moesia Inferior**, the inscriptions referring to the organizers of the gladiator fights are found in three cities: Tomis, Odessos and Nicopolis ad Istrum, summing up a total of seven monuments.

At **Tomis**, three such honorary inscriptions were discovered. The Pontic *metropolis* honors provincial personalities who organized gladiator and wild animal fights. These high ranking members of the elite held the office of pontarchs, the leaders

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<sup>5</sup> Robert 1940, p. 264; Carter 1999, p. 61, Streinu 2018, p. 357.

<sup>6</sup> Robert 1940, p. 264; Carter 1999, p. 62, Streinu 2018, p. 358.

<sup>7</sup> Robert 1940, p. 264; Carter 1999, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> Robert 1940, p. 240; Carter 1999, p. 64; Streinu 2018, p. 358.

<sup>9</sup> Bouley 2001, p. 77; Streinu 2018, p. 358.

<sup>10</sup> Streinu 2018, p. 358.

<sup>11</sup> Carter 1999, p. 145.

of the West-Pontic community with the role of administering the Imperial cult.<sup>12</sup> Two of them also held the dignity of archiereus, during which time they organized gladiator fights. One of these pontarchs, Aurelius Priscus Isidorus, along with his wife Ulpia Matriona, were honored by the citizens of the Tomis metropolis through gladiator, and wild animals fights during the exercise of his office as archiereus<sup>13</sup>:

ἀρχιερασάμενον, τὴν δι' ὄπλων  
καὶ κυνηγεσίων φιλοδόξως φιλοτειμίαν  
ἐφεξῆς ἡμερῶν ἕξ μὴ διαλιπόντα<sup>14</sup>

The second pontarch who organized gladiator and wild animal fights during the exercise of his office as archiereus is Aurelius Priscus Annianus (together with his wife, Iulia Apolauste)<sup>15</sup>:

ἀρχιερασά-  
μενον, τὴν δι' ὄπλων καὶ κυνηγεσίων ἐνδόξως  
φιλοτειμίαν μὴ διαλιπόντα<sup>16</sup>

Particularly interesting is the epigram of the last of the pontarchs. He was an anonymous individual from Samaria Flavia Neapolis, to whom the citizens of Tomis granted the dignity of pontarch twice, on which occasions he offered the population "Ares fights"<sup>17</sup> and gladiator fights.<sup>18</sup> Also he had been appointed *archontes* three times:

δὶς γὰρ ἐποντάρχησα  
καὶ Ἄραως ἄθλα ἐτέλεσα

.....  
Ἄρεως ἀθλητῆρες οἱ ἐμοὶ  
σταδίοισι δαμέντες  
μνήμην κἀν θανάτῳ  
τοῦτο φέρουσι γέρας.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike the two pontarchs we discussed earlier, this particular one offered gladiator fights to the masses during the time he held the position of pontarch, meaning that the fights were offered on two occasions, one for each mandate. This position was the most prestigious office and could have included, according to some hypothesis, priesthood.<sup>20</sup> There are specialists who believe that the office of pontarch is adjacent to

<sup>12</sup> Sonoc 2003, p. 142; Buzoianu, Bărbulescu 2012, p. 42-43.

<sup>13</sup> ISM II, no. 96 (62); Robert 1940, p. 27, 103-104, no. 43; Stoian 1962, p. 101, no. 2; Bouley 2001, p. 81; Carter 1999.

<sup>14</sup> ISM II, no. 96 (62).

<sup>15</sup> ISM II, no. 97 (63); Feraru 2006, 174, 181; Dana 2011, p. 120; Bottez 2015, p. 62; Streinu 2015, p. 263; Robert 1940, p. 103, 271, no. 42; Pippidi 1967, p. 426; Bouley 2001, p. 81; Carter 1999, p. 299, no. 9.

<sup>16</sup> ISM II, no. 97 (63).

<sup>17</sup> Robert 1940, p. 101-103, 271, no. 41; Stoian 1962, p. 161-162; Carter 1999, p. 299-300, no. 10.

<sup>18</sup> Robert 1940, p. 103-104; Stoian 1962, p. 162; Bouley 2001, p. 81; Carter 1999, p. 189; Feraru 2006, p. 173; Dana 2011, p. 120; Streinu 2015, p.263.

<sup>19</sup> Robert 1940, 101-103, 271, no. 41.

<sup>20</sup> Bottez 2009, p. 127-129.

priesthood<sup>21</sup>, others state that such positions were held simultaneously by the same person, they remained distinct, with the sacerdotal function subordinated to the other<sup>22</sup>.

Four other inscriptions were found at **Odessos**, and, unlike those at Tomis, belong to the first category. These inscriptions announce the presentation of the *monomachiai* and *kunegesai*. Of the four inscriptions, only one offers more data, due to the precarious conservation status of the other three stone monuments.

The inscription with the best state of preservation preserves most information: it reports that the *philotimia* was given in honor of Emperor Severus Alexander, his mother, Iulia Mamaea, the Senate and the Roman People's Army, Lucius Mantenius Sabinus, *legatus Augusti propretore* of the province, the People's Council of Odessos by the city's ἀρχιερεῖς, City Councilor Marcus Aurelis Simon, son of Simon, and M. Aurelius Io<sup>23</sup>.

It is possible that in this case we are dealing with two priests who exercised their functions in the same city and at the same time, a very interesting situation, and to our knowledge unique<sup>24</sup>:

--- ἀρχιερεὺς] τῆς πόλεως Μ(ἄρκος) Αὐρ(ήλιος) Σίμων Σίμωνος βουλευ[υτῆς] καὶ  
Μ(ἄρκος) Αὐρ(ήλιος) Ιο[---]  
[------] γδιά τε κυνηγεσίων καὶ  
μονομαχιῶν τ[ῆ]  
πρὸ ---]---<sup>25</sup>

As mentioned, the preservation state of the other three inscriptions is precarious, but one can still be read: it mentioned a priest who would organize μονομαχίαι.<sup>26</sup>

The last inscription in the province of Moesia Inferior brings to our attention the existence of an organizer of gladiator and wild animal fights who came from **Nicopolis ad Istrum**. Before continuing the discussion, it is worth mentioning that the city founded by Emperor Trajan passed administratively from the province of Thrace to the province of Moesia Inferior after March 193 AD<sup>27</sup>, after which time we have a φιλότειμος δι' ὅπλων attested here. The inscription in question is given by a certain Titus Aelius Festus, in honor of his fellow citizen Titus Aelius Oclantius, who, in his capacity as φιλότειμος δι' ὅπλων, organized gladiator and wild animals fights:<sup>28</sup>

τὸν φιλότειμον δ[ι' ὅ]-  
πλων καὶ γερουσ[ιάρ]-  
χην Τ(ίτον) Αἰλ(ιον) Ὀκλάτιο[ν ἄρξαν]-  
τα ---<sup>29</sup>

<sup>21</sup> For a further detailed discussion about the imperial cult and the relation between the high priest and the pontarch see Bottez 2009, p. 127-131.

<sup>22</sup> Pippidi 1988, p. 178 - 179; Carter 1999, p. 189.

<sup>23</sup> IGBulgI, no. 70 bis; Mirtschew 1968, p. 181; Bouley 1994, p. 35-36; Bouley 2001, p. 81; Carter 1999, p. 302, no.22; Streinu 2015, p. 263.

<sup>24</sup> Carter 1999, p.190.

<sup>25</sup> IGBulgI, no. 70 bis.

<sup>26</sup> IGBulg I, no.71; Vagalinski 2009, p.174, no. 44.

<sup>27</sup> Boteva 1997, p. 37 - 38.

<sup>28</sup> IGBulg V, no. 5217; Ivanov 1987, p. 291; Carter 1999, p. 187; Bottez 2009, p. 194; Streinu 2018, p. 361.

<sup>29</sup> IGBulg V, no. 5217.

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As in the case of the Moesia Inferior province, in **Thrace**, the monuments referring to the *philotimoi*, mostly ἀρχιερεὺς δι' ὅπλων, are found at Nicopolis ad Istrum (before 193 AD), Augusta Traiana, Philippopolis, Serdica and Byzie, summing a total of 13 inscriptions. There are some cases when the honored individuals were simple *philotimoi*. The inscriptions in the province of Thrace contain information on both the public and the private aspects of the participation of these *philotimoi* in the organization of the *munera*.<sup>30</sup>

In this respect, an *invitatio ad munera* dating from 161-163 AD was discovered at **Nicopolis ad Istrum**, when the city was still part of the territory of Thrace.<sup>31</sup> Gladiator fights and hunts were organized in honor of the good omen, safety and eternity of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, the wife of Marcus Aurelius Faustina, their children, the Senate and the Roman people, Governor of the province Appius Claudius Martialis, and the council and the people of Nicopolis ad Istrum.<sup>32</sup> This event was organized by the great local priest Minicius O --- and his daughter, the great priestess Minicia Firmina, in order to celebrate the imperial cult<sup>33</sup>.

ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς τῆς πόλεως [Μιν]ίκιος Ο[----- καὶ]  
Μινικία Φιρμεῖνα θυγάτηρ αὐτοῦ φιλότ[ε]μιος [ἀρχι]ερεία  
ἐπιτε[λέσουσιν]  
κυνήγια καὶ μονομαχίας - - -<sup>34</sup>

Six honorary inscriptions were discovered at **Augusta Traiana**, mentioning the title of ἀρχιερεὺς δι' ὅπλων, but to our knowledge, there have been no invitations discovered yet. Instead, two inscriptions honor Aurelius Theres who held the office of *neokoros* and ἀρχιερεὺς δι' ὅπλων<sup>35</sup> while the third one honors both Theres (with the title of ἀρχιερέως δι' ὅπλων), and his wife Aurelia Marcella, as an ἀρχιέρια δι' ὅπλων<sup>36</sup>. Two other inscriptions tell us that Marcus Aurelius Asiaticus was the first *archon* and ἀρχιερεὺς δι' ὅπλων<sup>37</sup>, while Marcus Aurelius Apollodor, the son of Demosthenes, held the position of φιλότειμος ἀρχιερεὺς δι' ὅπλων<sup>38</sup>:

- - - φιλότειμον  
ἀρχιερέα  
δι' ὅπλων  
Μ(ἄρκον) Αὐρ(ήλιον)

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<sup>30</sup> Bouley 2001, p. 78.

<sup>31</sup> Boteva 1997, p. 37-38.

<sup>32</sup> IGBulg II no. 660; Bouley 2001, p. 82; Carter 1999, p. 303, no. 25; Sonoc 2003, p. 145; Bottez 2009, p. 194; Streinu 2018, p. 359.

<sup>33</sup> Robert 1940, p. 100, 271, no. 39; Bouley 2001, p. 82; Carter 1999, p. 184; Streinu 2015, p. 264, Streinu 2018, p. 359.

<sup>34</sup> IGBulg II no. 660.

<sup>35</sup> IGBulg III, 2, no. 1572 = IGBulg V, no. 5560; IGBulg V, no. 5565; Gočeva 1981, p. 500; Bouley 2001, p. 128; Carter 1999, p. 305, no. 35; Vagalinski 2009, p. 146-147, no. 2-3.

<sup>36</sup> Robert 1940, 93, 275, no. 31; Carter 1999, p. 305, no.36; Vagalinski 2009, p. 147, no. 4; Streinu 2018, p. 360.

<sup>37</sup> Vagalinski 1999, p. 148, no. 7.

<sup>38</sup> IGBulg. III, no. 1571; Robert 1940, p. 93, no. 31; Gočeva 1981, p. 500; Bouley 2001, p. 128; Vagalinski 2009, p. 146, no. 1; Streinu 2018, p. 360.

Ἀπολλόδωρον  
Δημοσθένους  
τειμήσασα  
ἢ πατρίς.<sup>39</sup>

The last inscription is, to our knowledge, the only example of this kind. In our opinion, the merge of the two offices is due to the fact that our subject, Marcus Aurelius Apollodor, offered gladiator fights both as a private person, becoming a φιλότειμος, as well as an official of the imperial cult, called ἀρχιερεύς.<sup>40</sup>

At the end of the last century yet another inscription was discovered here, particularly interesting for the subject under discussion. It is an honorary inscription dedicated by the high priest Aurelius Demophilos, who honored his mother-in-law, ἀρχιέρεια δι' ὅπλων, Septimia Seite<sup>41</sup>. Aurelius Demophilos seems just a simple ἀρχιερεύς without any link to the gladiator fights; furthermore it is the only recorded situation mentioning a woman who had been great priestess of the imperial cult by herself and who has organized gladiator fights:

- - - ἀρχιέρειαν δι' ὅπλων  
Σεπτ(υμίαν) Σειτην Αὐρ(ήλιος) Δημόφιλος Χρήστου ὁ ἀρχ[ιε] -  
ρεὺς τὴν πενθέραν.<sup>42</sup>

The series of information on the status of gladiator fights is completed with other honorary inscriptions in Thrace. Although **Philippopolis** was the capital of the Thracian *koinon* and held a superior position in all respects, however, compared to the other cities, inscriptions mentioning the organizers are few. There is only one inscription that honors an ἀρχιερεύς δι' ὅπλων and a single fragmentary invitation, which mentions a ἱερεὺς who organized gladiator fights.

The first of these is a dedication probably made by a high priest of the *koinon*, Titus Flavius Priscinanus, who also held the positions of *tracarh* and *pontarch* during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander Augustus<sup>43</sup>. He certainly offered gladiator fights, because the text of the inscription also mentioned the function of ἀρχιερεύς δι' ὅπλων.

The second is also a dedication written in Greek, as we have encountered in the first case, on a statue's pedestal (?), but this time addressed to the governor of the province, Quintus Sicinius Clarus, the devotee being Publius Adrianus Sallustius, ἀρχιερεύς δι' ὅπλων.<sup>44</sup> Bouley assumes that the devotee would have built the monument out of gratitude, although there is no mention of it in the text, because he would have also contributed financially to the cost of the fights, which seems very likely<sup>45</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> IGBulg. III, no. 1571.

<sup>40</sup> Streinu 2018, p. 360.

<sup>41</sup> Vagalinski 2009, 148, no. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Vagalinski 2009, 148, no. 8.

<sup>43</sup> IGBulg V, no. 5408; Gočeva 1981, p. 496-497; Bouley 2001, p. 126; Carter 1999, 185, 306, no. 40; Vagalinski 2009, p. 193, no. 88; Streinu 2018, p. 60.

<sup>44</sup> IGBulg V, no. 5407; Gočeva 1981, p. 497; Carter 1999, p. 306, no. 41; Vagalinski 2009, p. 192-193, no. 87; Streinu 2018, p. 361.

<sup>45</sup> Bouley 2001, p. 126.

The third inscription is a fragmentary *invitatio ad munera*, but clear about mentioning a ἱερεὺς named Cae - and his wife Egialida, who organized gladiator fights on the 10<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> day before the *calendae* of a certain month.<sup>46</sup>

At Serdica, three fragmentary inscriptions were discovered that announced the *philotimiai*, in two cases mentioning priests of both sexes. First invitation calls the citizens of Serdica to fights between gladiators and wild animals in honor of Emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus<sup>47</sup>, while the second is offered in honor of Emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus<sup>48</sup>. Those who organized the gladiator fights were ἀρχιερεὺς and ἀρχιέρεια, without any mention of the δι' ὅπλων, but this may be due to the poor preservation of the inscription, making it impossible to infer the text that follows the words ἀρχιερεὺς and ἀρχιέρεια<sup>49</sup>. The third *invitatio ad munera* is also fragmentary, it does not preserve information about the organizer - most likely, an ἀρχιερεὺς, instead it states the event would be organized on the 5<sup>th</sup> day ahead of the November's *calendae*, an animal hunt where the hunter will be armed with spears<sup>50</sup>.

The only inscription *invitio ad munera* in Latin from the Pontic area was found in Thrace and refers to a *munerarius*. It originates from the Deultum colony where *leg. Augg. pr. pr.* Q. Egnatius Proculus organized *venatio* and *taurocathapsia*<sup>51</sup>:

--- Q. Eg] –

[nati P]roculi leg. Augg. pr. [pr. edet]

[vena]tionem et taurocath[apsia].<sup>52</sup>

An invitation to gladiator fights organized in honor of Emperor Severus Alexander and his family was discovered at Sandanski, southwestern Bulgaria; it is still unpublished but mentioned in the inscriptions catalog of Vagalinski's work.<sup>53</sup>

New aspects are highlighted by another honorary inscription discovered at Bizye, today, Visas, in the European part of Turkey. Here, Marcus Aurelius Calandio is honored as ὁ ἱερεὺς καὶ ταλαντάρχης ὅπλων<sup>54</sup>. He organized gladiator fights and *taurokathapsia* as can be seen on the basis of the statue discovered. The conserved relief depicts a struggle between a gladiator of the *retiaris* type and a one of the *secutor* type, the *ursarii*, as well as a character riding a bull and holding it by its horns while the latter is throwing the rider in all directions to escape from his grip.<sup>55</sup>

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**In Bythinia et Pontus**, references to *philotimoi* are fewer than in the provinces of the Moesia Inferior and Thrace. This is not because these types of events were less

<sup>46</sup> Vagalinski 2009, p. 194, no. 90; Streinu 2018, p. 360.

<sup>47</sup> IGBulg IV, no. 1919 (=IGBulg V 5671); Bouley 2001, p. 82; Carter 1999, p. 304, no. 30; Vagalinski 2009, p. 187, no. 72; Streinu 2018, p. 359.

<sup>48</sup> IGBulg IV, no. 1918; Robert 1940, p. 97, no. 38; Bouley 1999, p. 82; Carter 1999, p. 304, no. 29; Vagalinski 2009, p.186-187, no. 71.

<sup>49</sup> Robert suggests the formula“ὁ δι' ὅπλων ἀρχιερεὺς ”, while Carter believes that the interpretation is doubtful because all inscriptions with such priests have the standard formula“ἀρχιερεὺς ὁ δι' ὅπλων”.

<sup>50</sup> IGBulg IV no. 1920; Vagalinski 2009, p. 187, no. 73; Streinu 2018, p. 359.

<sup>51</sup> Vagalinski 2009, p. 153, no. 15; Streinu 2018, p. 360.

<sup>52</sup> Vagalinski 2009, p. 153, no. 15.

<sup>53</sup> Vagalinski 2009, p. 201, no. 104.

<sup>54</sup> Sayar 1983, p. 144-146; Carter 1999, p. 187.

<sup>55</sup> Streinu 2018, p. 361.

frequent, but either because the archaeological excavations in northern Turkey are not as advanced and frequent as in the southwest of the country, or the discovered inscriptions attesting this phenomenon have not yet been published. From what is known in Bithynia et Pontus, we have at present a certified number of four *philotimoi* who have organized fights between gladiators, and wild animal hunts.

At Nicaea we have an interesting inscription from which we find that Severianus Asclepiades is honored for organizing fights between gladiators and wild animal hunts<sup>56</sup>. The inscription lists his career, in fact a *cursus honorum*, from which we find that he had held several local offices, but what is truly exceptional is that he accompanied Emperor Caracalla when he probably spent the winter of 214-215 AD at Nicomedia<sup>57</sup>. Moreover, he also accompanied Emperor Elagabalus in the winter of 218 - 219 AD when he stayed at Nicomedia, being honored by the emperor with the priesthood of Rome, and he received the right to wear the purple mantle<sup>58</sup>.

Although the inscription does not provide details about the reason, the number of days reserved for the gladiator fights etc., we can assume that this event was either organized before Emperor Caracalla arrived at Nicomedia, or, most likely, during his stay in the city.

The Nicaea inscription is not the only special inscription in the province of Bithynia et Pontus. A funerary stele was discovered at **Claudiopolis** in the shape of a rectangular shield and *umbo*, curved inward and a gladiator helmet belonging to a *secutor*. The inscription is on both sides of the shield, telling of a leader named Secundus, who had organized three days of games with a considerable number of gladiators<sup>59</sup>.

A **Sinopean** pontarch, whose name has not been preserved, is acknowledged to have the merits of his compatriots because he offered gladiator fights, *taurokathapsia*, and wild animal hunts.<sup>60</sup> Nearby, at **Amisos**, an honorary inscription commemorates a *φραμλία* of gladiators, whose members fought in a *philotimia* organized by pontarch Marcus Iulianus and his wife, Sesstulia Cyrille, sometime in 209 or 210 AD.<sup>61</sup>

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Information on gladiator fights organizers in the province of **Cappadocia** is summed up by a single inscription discovered at **Sebastopolis** and, like the one from Amisos, honors a pontarch, Marcus Antonius Rufus who held this office in Neocaesarea, serving as a great priest for life for emperor Hadrian, together with his wife Antonia Stratonice, with whom he offered gladiator fights and animal hunts<sup>62</sup>.

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It is unquestionable that the gladiator fights were part of the ceremony of the imperial cult and that their organization and funding was the attribute of a *klerikós* -

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<sup>56</sup> Carter 1999, p. 331, no. 166.

<sup>57</sup> Cassius Dio in book no. LXXVII. 18, describes Caracalla's stay in Nicomedia.

<sup>58</sup> Carter 1999, p. 192-193.

<sup>59</sup> SEG XXXIX, no. 1399; Ündemiş, French, 1989, 91-97; Carter 1999, 165-166, 193, no. 174; Marek 2003, 100.

<sup>60</sup> Robert 1940, p. 131-132, no. 80; Carter 1999, p. 194, no. 176.

<sup>61</sup> Robert 1940, p. 130, no. 78; Carter 1999, p. 193, no. 177.

<sup>62</sup> Robert 1940, p. 128-129, no. 75; Carter 1999, p. 194, no. 182.



priest of the imperial cult, as demonstrated by Louis Robert and Michael J. D. Carter.<sup>63</sup> But we cannot say for certain that the gladiatorial performances - defined by the Greek term *philotimiai* - were an exclusive privilege of the priests of the imperial cult, taking into account the two inscriptions; the one from Nicopolis ad Istrum which mentions a φιλότιμιον δι' ὅπλων and the other from Augusta Traiana which names a φιλότιμιος ἀρχιερεὺς δι' ὅπλων, both as organizers. Could they have also been the artisans of certain *munera assiforana*<sup>64</sup> - a small scale entrepreneurial spectacles for profit?

Therefore, gladiator fights were organized in the Pontic area by the official priest - ἱερεὺς -, or the great priest - ἀρχιερεὺς -, and private persons who did not have an official function in the local or provincial administrative service, *philotimoi*. There is still room for discussing on the issue of subordination of the office of high priest to the office of pontarch, on whether they constituted a single authority. This theory is hard to demonstrate if we also take into account that the priesthood was highly valued as to be mentioned separately in inscriptions and following V, Bottez's argumentation, that the priesthood was an attribute of the pontarchy<sup>65</sup>. The issue is also reflected on the logistics of organizing gladiatorial combats. Could the pontarch organize such events without also holding the office of high priest, as understood from the inscription of the anonymous pontarch from Tomis? If that was indeed the case, this constitutes a unique instance in the oriental provinces. Since there is no clear path to solving this issue, it is still open for discussions.

Truly amazing is the case of Septimia Seite, a woman who had been great priestess of the imperial cult and organized gladiator's fights by herself. To our knowledge, it is the only recorded case in this regard, making it a unique situation that suggests that the office of high priest of the imperial cult could have been held by a woman on her own.

The invitation discovered at Deultum, settlement founded by the Romans, show us, among others, the lack of cohesion between the local communities, Greek and Latin, regarding basic aspects of organizing such events related to the celebration of the imperial cult. In the cities with a Greek tradition it was the priest of the imperial cult who was in charge of the organization and sometimes even private individuals. In the Roman founded cities it was the governor of the province who was responsible of organizing the festivities. Thus, the issue of gladiator combats in the Roman provinces from the Black Sea region is multi-layered. We are dealing with an area marked by diversity, where the oriental culture meets the occidental, making it sometimes difficult to establish what were the norms imposed and what were the common practices that survived after the Roman conquest and became particular for certain regions.

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<sup>63</sup> Robert 1940, p. 267-307; Bouley 2001, p. 77-78; Carter 1999, p. 168-217.

<sup>64</sup> An extensive discussion on this type of events will be published in the proceedings of AIAC 2018.

<sup>65</sup> Bottez 2009, p. 130-131.

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