

From Network to Field: Five Years of *HAEMUS*

When the first volume of *The Chronicles of Haemus (CoH)* appeared, it marked a significant milestone in the development of the [HAEMUS International Research Network](#). Yet the journal was never intended as an endpoint. It is one expression of a broader collective undertaking that has been taking shape since the official inauguration of HAEMUS on 18 June 2021. Five years on, it is now possible to assess what this undertaking has achieved: the gradual construction of an international scholarly space devoted to the archaeology and history of the Balkans in Late Antiquity. From the outset, the network has brought together researchers working on the Balkan Peninsula and its neighbouring regions during the Late Roman and Early Byzantine periods, while fostering sustained exchange across national, disciplinary, and institutional boundaries.

This collective dimension stands as *HAEMUS*'s most significant achievement to date. For too long, the study of the Late Antique Balkans has developed within historiographical traditions that were rich and productive, yet divided by language barriers, unequal access to publications, and the enduring weight of modern political frameworks. *HAEMUS* set out to change this situation by creating a space in which specialists from across the region—and beyond—could engage directly with one another. By connecting scholars from the eleven Balkan countries, together with Hungary and Turkey, the network advances a framework that is genuinely regional and transnational. It does not erase local specificities; it makes them more intelligible through comparison.

Over the past five years, this ambition has taken increasingly concrete form. The most visible expression of this development has been the [Online Guest Lecture Series](#), now a regular forum for presenting new research, discussing methods, and circulating knowledge to an international audience. By early 2026, the series had reached its thirty-fourth lecture, with topics ranging from Justinianic fortifications in Epirus Nova to archaeogenetic research in Slovenia and the Late Antique city of Golemo Gradište in North Macedonia, to cite only the most recent examples. More important than the diversity of subjects, however, is the continuity the series has created: rather than a sequence of isolated events, it has fostered an ongoing conversation, helping to give intellectual coherence to a geographically dispersed field. The lecture programme has also established lasting connections with university teaching, notably through its integration, over two consecutive years, into the Master's programme in archaeology at the Université Marie et Louis Pasteur and the Université de Bourgogne-Europe (France).

A second major contribution lies in the structuring of the network's scientific agenda. The *HAEMUS programme* relies on eight Work Packages and two Transversal Work Packages, structured around themes that span the major dimensions of the Late Antique Balkans —historiography, political and social structures, urban and rural transformations, religious developments, economic and environmental processes, and the spatial organisation of territories and frontiers— while also embedding priorities such as training, mobility, and the development of shared instruments, practices, and scholarly standards. This structure is not simply administrative; it is intellectual in intent. It reflects the conviction that the Late Antique Balkans can no longer be approached through isolated *corpora*, national traditions, or site-based expertise alone. What is required are shared conceptual tools, broader syntheses, and sustained methodological dialogue. In this respect, *HAEMUS* has already moved beyond a network of contacts: it operates as a laboratory for rethinking the historical dynamics of the region.

The network has also invested in formats that foster deeper collective reflection. Its [first international workshop](#), held at the Université de Lille in November 2021, on Late Antique villae in the Balkans, brought together specialists from several European institutions. Beyond its specific theme, the workshop established a key principle: *HAEMUS* should regularly create spaces for concentrated discussion around major historiographical questions. Workshops operate at a different rhythm from lecture series. They enable comparison, disagreement, and conceptual refinement, and in doing so help transform a network into a research community. The second international workshop, to be held in Belgrade in November 2026, continues this effort by focusing on the long-term transformations of settlement in the Late Roman Balkans. The first workshop has already resulted in a collective volume, [forthcoming with Brepols Publishers in the series “Rome and After in Central and Eastern Europe”](#), bringing together and further developing the research first presented in Lille.

Attention to scholarly transmission has been equally central. From the outset, *HAEMUS* has committed itself to supporting early-career researchers. This commitment has taken concrete form in the [Young Scholars Circle](#), which facilitates the integration of doctoral and postdoctoral researchers into the network, encourages collaboration among them, and supports the development of new research projects. In recent years, this initiative has become an active component of the network's intellectual life. Its seminars, held online in 2023, 2024, and 2025, have explored the meanings, concepts, historiographies, and case studies of Late Antiquity in the Balkans. These activities do more than support younger scholars: they actively renew the field by introducing new questions, methods, and scholarly connections. A further seminar is planned for late 2026, continuing this dynamic.

Seen from the perspective of these first five years, *HAEMUS* appears not simply as a set of initiatives, but as the gradual construction of a shared research infrastructure. The network has developed a range of scholarly instruments rather than relying on a single flagship activity. Alongside lectures and workshops, it has opened new directions, including the planned development of registers of archaeological missions and projects, as well as the expansion of its range of events, resources, and publications connected with its scientific programme. The special issue of *Dossiers d'archéologie on Dacia and the Danubian frontier*, published in September 2021, already pointed in this direction, and further collective volumes—for example, one arising from the workshops of the *MASLAP* project, to which the *HAEMUS* network has been closely associated—are currently in preparation. The launch of *CoH* in 2025 marks a further step: the journal forms part of a broader infrastructure of exchange, visibility, and synthesis. Taken together, these elements provide the foundations of a shared research infrastructure.

HAEMUS thus stands at a moment of transition. The first phase was one of connection: identifying interlocutors, building trust, and creating formats for exchange in a field that remained fragmented in practice. The next phase will be one of consolidation. This also entails securing more durable forms of funding and institutional support, in order to ensure the long-term development of the network and reduce its dependence on external frameworks. The challenge is no longer simply to connect scholars, but to deepen comparison, sharpen analytical categories, and promote forms of publication that transform discussion into cumulative knowledge. Here, the journal plays a decisive role. It provides a space in which ongoing conversations can be reworked into articles, thematic dossiers, and critical reviews that remain accessible over time and across borders. It stabilises debates that might otherwise remain fleeting. This role is already evident in the present issue, whose opening article—devoted to the Late Antique church of Saint Demetrius in Sirmium—exemplifies the kind of precise, source-based, and methodologically rigorous research that the journal aims to foster.

The history of *HAEMUS* over these five years is therefore more than an institutional success. It signals the emergence of a shared field of inquiry. The Late Antique Balkans are not a marginal appendix to Roman, Byzantine, or early medieval history; they constitute a central laboratory for analysing political transformation, settlement change, religious developments, frontier dynamics, and the circulation of people, goods, and ideas across South-Eastern Europe and beyond.

HAEMUS has helped make this more visible by providing the conditions—human, intellectual, and increasingly editorial—for sustained collaborative work. As *CoH* continues to grow, this broader context deserves emphasis. A journal derives its full meaning not only from the articles it publishes, but from the scholarly environment that

sustains them. Over its first five years, *HAEMUS* has shown that such an environment can indeed be built: patiently, collaboratively, and across borders. The work is far from complete, but the foundations are now firmly in place. With *CoH*, this dynamic has now found a durable editorial form.

HAEMUS was created to connect scholars; it is now shaping a field!

Dominic MOREAU
(on behalf of the Editorial Committee)
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