This article sets to describe and introduce in scholarly debate the numismatic data generated during the 1985-1988 archaeological excavations at one of the necropoleis situated in the locality "Metlata" near the village of Rupite. The necropolis belongs to the long-known "urban settlement" situated on the southern slopes of Kozhuh hill, at the confluence of the Strumeshnitsa and Struma Rivers, and now identified with Heraclea Sintica. The archaeological excavations were conducted by Yulia Bozhinova from the Regional Museum of History, Blagoevgrad.

The graves number 167 and are located within an area of 750 m². Coins were found in 52 graves, both Hellenistic and Roman, and 10 coins originate from areas (squares) in-between. The numismatic data makes it possible to determine fairly accurately the chronology of the necropolis, which was not excavated in its entirety. The earliest coins belong to the last decade of the 4th century BC, and the latest date to the mid 4th century AD, with no interruptions.

The coins are exclusively made of bronze and copper, with the exception of a gold exonumia (Pl. 2, 21). In addition to being an important chronological marker, coins provide an idea of the social status of the population and the nature of coin circulation in the town associated with the necropolis. The practice of a funerary rite known as Charon’s fee was registered through the findspots of the coins on the skeleton; specifically, these coins were found near the head, the pelvis, the left arm and the legs. In cremations in situ, coins were placed either inside the grave or in urns made of stone or clay, as well as in bowls placed next to them. It is noteworthy that out of 167 graves, coins were registered only in 52, thus accounting for less than 50%. The absence of coins in some graves can probably be attributed to the fact that “in Greek society, there was no established dogma about the way in which the souls of the dead travelled to the realm of Hades” (Зубарь 1982, 108). According to written sources, mainly Euripides, it is clear that the deceased may be accompanied to the underworld not only by Charon, but also by Hermes or Thanatos.

This exemplifies the absence of fast rules and regulations in the Greek world in terms of the Charon’s fee (Зубарь 1982, 108). It is important to note, however, that its practice continued during the process of Christianization through the 4th to the end of 5th century AD (Кацарова, Хаджиангелов 2002, 229-230). This can be seen in the necropolis "Metlata," as evident from coins found in graves dated to the middle of 4th century AD.

The majority of the coins found in the necropolis belong to medium and small denominations (19/20 mm-10 mm). This fact, along with the metal from which they were made, points to the idea that they were used as a local
The earliest specimen of the group of Hellenistic coins is a bronze issue of Philip II of Macedonia (359-336 BC) of the type “Head of Apollo/horseman” (Pl. 1, 3). This coin does not fix the foundation date of the town, but rather confirms the opinion, already expressed, that the coins of Philip II and his successor, Alexander III, remain in circulation until the very end of the 4th century BC, at which point they were superseded by the issues of Cassander and Lysimachus. This is the case not just in Macedonia, but also in inner Thrace, where such coins make up a significant portion of the non-Thracian currencies. A salient example of this is the early Hellenistic town of Seuthopolis, where the Macedonian bronzes, primarily coins of Cassander and Lysimachus, boost the urban economy and prompt the introduction of the Thracian bronze coins by the Thracian dynast Soteles II (Димитров, Пенчев 1984, 41-42). Foreign researchers have long commented on the similarity between the design and construction of the fortification system of Seuthopolis, with the so-called “tetragonal plan” demonstrated in Macedonian towns founded, or restored, by Cassander, including Cassandria, Thessaloniki, Pella, Vergina, Lete, and Dion. These parallels enrich our understanding of Seuthopolis’ architectural planning and, “provide an opportunity of perceiving Seuthopolis not only as a Hellenized Thracian city but also as a ‘petrified’ fortified camp following Macedonian inspiration” (Nankov 2008, 46).

To the reign of the Macedonian ruler Cassander are attributed the largest group of Hellenistic coins, which, in my view, are crucial for the establishment of the foundation date of the town at the foothills of Kozhuh hill. All coins of Cassander belong to the popular type “Head of Heracles/horseman,” struck in 305-297 BC—that is, after 305 BC, when many of the Diadochoi assumed the title basileus (Pl. 1, 2-2). Of importance in this particular case is the fact that out of the total of 31 Hellenistic coins, 15 (50%) are of this type of Cassander’s issues. Because of this, I am inclined to think that the coins mark an important point in the Hellenistic history of the town. The date of these coins bring up the often quoted passage in Diodorus, according to which, in 310 BC, “in Macedonia Cassander helped Audoleon, king of the Paeonians, who was fighting against the Autaritae, freeing the king from danger, but the Autaritae with the children and women who were following them, numbering in all twenty thousand, he settled beside the mountain called Orbela” (Diod. 20.19.1).

Two large coin hoards, one from Rezhtanski (IGCH 411) and one from Skopje (IGCH 410), include Macedonian and Paeonian coins, and could be mentioned in support of Diodorus’ description of the union between Cassander and the Paeonian king Audoleon against the invasion of the Autaritae. Both hoards consist of several thousand coins, suggestive of a military-administrative origin (Димитров 1990, 27). The Rezhtanski hoard was recovered not far from the Pernik fortress, which, according to some scholars, is Macedonian, perhaps a border fort founded at the time of Philip II (Домар人社局 1982, 48). Thus it is plausible that Cassander also made use of this fortress during the expatriation of the Autaritae. At the same time, archaeological data confirms beyond doubt the presence of the Tribaloi in the Pernik and Breznik regions, raising the question of their involvement in the union between the Macedonians and the Paeonians. The volume and type of coins included in yet another hoard at Vlasatinitsa (IGCH 424), found not far from Vratsa and resembling the Rezhtanski and Skopje hoards, also supports such a joint venture. It is possible that the hoard reflects a Triballian–Paeonian alliance for common action against the Autaritae. It is documented that in 298 BC Cassander clashed with the Celts on the Triballian territory, reaching even Mt. Haemus; this could only have been possible if there was a “friendly neutrality or an alliance with the Tribaloi” (Димитров 1990, 27).

According to Prof. Margarita Tacheva, during the second half of the 4th century BC, the Celts attacked the Tribalian territories of the Autaritae situated along the Middle and Lower Iskar River, and from there created troubles for the Paeonians, who turned to Cassander for protection. She dates the joint Macedonian–Paeonian actions against the Autaritae to 293/292 BC (Тачева 2007, 28, 42-43). As an upshot of Cassander’s victory over the Autaritae, which written sources, in conjunction with the coins recovered from the necropolis “Metlata” put in the last decade of the 4th century BC near Mount Orbela, a new Hellenistic polis was founded on Macedonian territory. This was a common practice among the Diadochi, who saw the establishment of fortified centers within their territories as a means to secure their claims for supremacy in Alexander’s empire (Nankov 2008, 56).

Cassander’s dynasty, discontinued in 294 BC, was followed by that of the Antigonids, founded by Antigonus I Monophthalmus, who assumed the title basileus in 306 BC along with his son Demetrius I Poliorcetes, after Demetrius’ formidable victory over the fleet of Ptolemaeus I near Salamis. In his biography of Demetrius, Plutarch recounts that after they learned of his victory, the friends of Antigonus crowned him with a diadem and sent to his son a wreath and a message that named him a king. About a year later, sometime around 305/304 BC, Lysimachus and Cassander also claimed the title (Иорданов 2000, 190). In 323 BC Lysimachus had received Thrace as his domain; the most strategic part of his territories included the southern fringes of Thrace, along the Aegean and Propontic coast, from the Thracian Chersonessos to the Strandzha Mountain’s Black Sea coast in the north-east. The primary goal of the newly appointed satrap was to secure control over the strategic route connecting Macedonia and Asia with the coastal Greek colonies (Денев 2004, 148-149). The bronze coin of Lysimachus found in the “Metlata” necropolis is of the type “Head of Heracles/resting lion” from his basileus period, and chronologically falls within the group of Cassander’s coins, thereby defining the foundation date of the town on Kozhuh hill.

At necropolis “Metlata” the coinage of Demetrius I Poliorcetes is represented by two coins minted in 294-287 BC. In 294 BC Demetrius took advantage of the dynastic quarrels between Cassander’s sons (Antipater II and Alexander IV) and almost without a fight, backed by the troops, he was pronounced a king of Macedonia (Иорданов 2001, 79). His rule lasted until 287 BC, when, pressured by the troops of Pyrrhus and Lysimachus, Demetrius was forced to give up the Macedonian throne to his son Antigonus II Gonatas, who was appointed governor of the remaining Greek estates of Demetrius. Despite the instability at the time of his assumption of power, the subsequent crucial political changes in the Hellenistic world made it possible for Antigonus II Gonatas to “ride the wave” (Иорданов 2001, 84). In 281 BC, following the death of Lysimachus near Kouroupedion, Thrace and Macedonia were briefly under the rule of Seleucus I and Ptolemaeus Keraunus. In 279 BC, invading Celts defeated and killed the latter. At this first stage Antigonus Gonatas did not engage the Celts, as he was forced to defend the Macedonian throne from Antiochus I, son of Seleucus I, through diplomatic maneuvering. The favorable outcome of those negotiations, however, allowed Antigonus Gonatas to disembark on the shores of Thrace, somewhere near Lysimachia, and in 277 BC, he won a decisive victory over the Celts (Θρακικα 2001, 85).

There are six Antigonus II Gonatas’ bronze coins found in the necropolis “Metlata.” One belongs to the series’ “Head of Athena/ Pan raising a trophy” — a “clear reference to the famous battle of Antigonus Gonatas with the Celts near Lysimachia” (Иорданов 2001, 91). The remaining five coins belong to the “Head of Heracles/horseman” type, but only a monogram of his name is discernible. Since it is impossible to recognize other symbols, the coins could also be assigned to the bronze series of Antigonus III Doson, who issued the same type between 229 and 221 BC (Иорданов 2001, 98). (Pl. 1, 6).

From the end of 3rd century BC onwards, political life in the Balkans is informed by the three major wars fought between Rome and the Greek/Macedonian settlers of the town.
last rulers of Macedonia and Greece, which led to the establishment of the Roman hegemony over the greater part of the Balkans (Таяева 1987, 49-57). The first Roman involvement in the complex interactions between the Hellenistic states dates to the second decade of the 3rd century BC, the time of the so-called First and Second Illyrian wars. The Roman victories along the Adriatic coast directly threatened the interests of Macedonia, and inevitably resulted in a clash between the two powers, concluding with the defeat of Macedonia (Машкин 1949, 148). In 167 BC, the last of the Antigonid dynasty was deposed, and the lands of the Macedonian kingdom were divided between four regions with limited communications. Although the decisive war in these regions belonged to special officials appointed by Rome, in reality the regions themselves were still not considered part of Rome and enjoyed certain autonomy. This administrative status of the Macedonian regions was maintained until 148 BC when, following the Andricus uprising, Macedonia was declared a Roman province, and as such it remained in existence until AD 284. The province’s boundaries followed the Struma/Mesta watershed – i.e. the territories colonized during the reign of Philip II and Alexander III (Драганов 2001, 121; Митрев 2003, 7-9). Roman dominance over the region during the Late Hellenistic period is confirmed by the two Roman republican asses of the "Head of Yanus/prow" type, issued around the mid-2nd century BC, found in the necropolis "Metlata." This date coincides with the date of the battle of Pydna in 168 BC, where the Macedonian troops were defeated and the Antigonid dynasty was deposed. The flap of one of the Republican asses is indented in the middle, a consequence of the inflation processes of the 1st century BC when heavier bronze nominations were indented to save the inflation processes of the 1st century BC when asses were defeated and the Antigonid dynasty was confirmed by the two Roman republican over the region during the Late Hellenistic period watershed – i.e. the territories colonized during the reign of Philip II and Alexander III (AD 238-244). Presently, all available sources – numismatic and epigraphic – are in favor of the statement that the earliest possible date for the Macedonian Koinon should be placed during the reign of Domitian (AD 81-96), (Митрев 2003, 28). The earliest data from the time of the establishment of the Koinon call the polis of Beroea a μητροπολις (metropolis), the town of greatest import in the province, where the sessions of the synedrion (the council) were held. The town also held the right νεωκορος – an honor bestowed on towns by the Roman Senate, which granted permission to build a temple for the Emperors. That is, a neokoros town was "considered keeper of the cult to the Emperor, and consequently, the Emperors – patrons of those polities" (Митрев 2003, 34). On the whole, during the Roman imperial period the Macedonian commonwealth reduced its political functions and became an association, directly involved in the practice of the cult to the Emperors (Митрев 2003, 25). During the reign of Elagabalus (AD 218-222), Beroea received the right neokoros for the second time, since Alexander Severus had suspended the privilege, and subsequently, Gordian III permanently restored the status (Митрев 2003, 35). Some of the religious celebrations at Beroea from the first half of the 3rd century AD were in fact international competitions, called Alexandrian games (άγων άλεξανδρείους). The existence of cult dedicated to Alexander III in the Roman province of Macedonia is also demonstrated in inscriptions and representations on a coin series of the Koinon dated to the Roman period, represented by the three coins found in the necropolis "Metlata".

Noteworthy is the small number of coins in the necropolis that are dated to the 2nd–3rd century AD. To this period are assigned two second-century coins, one of which cannot be securely identified due to the severely weathered relief. Possibly the reason for this was the frequent barbarian invasions, which started in the early 270s along the entire stretch of the Danubian limes, causing instability and devastations. The Costoboci passed through Thrace and Moesia Inferior in AD 170. Some crossed Mt. Haemus and found themselves in the vicinity of Serdica, and they reached as far as Achaia in the south. In AD 250, during a Gothic invasion, Philippopolis was captured and the city suffered serious destructions. In AD 254-255, Goths, accompanied by Carpi and Burgundians, attacked the Balkan territories and reached Thessalonica; the Struma Valley took a serious hit. The substantial third-century "barbarian" ravages of Thrace, Moesia Inferior and Macedonia ended with the battle of Naissos in AD 269, when the Emperor Claudius II crushed the Goths (История на България 1979, 296-299). In Roman history, the time from the mid-third century until the beginning of the reign of Constantine the Great in AD 324 is usually termed a “Crisis of the Imperial system,” and is believed to have affected all facets of life – politics, military, administration, economy, demography. The key military and political events outlining the future of Rome during this period take place in the Balkans, in the dioceses of Illyria or Aurelian Dacia, with capital city Serdica (AD 271-285) (Вачкова 2011, 84-85). This period of Balkan influence included the so-called “Illyrian” or “Dacian” emperors of Balkan descent at the head of Roman administration; because of their appreciation for the importance of the region, they strove to protect this territory and to preserve the integrity of the Empire (История на България 1979, 299). Lucius Domicius Aurelianus is one of the Illyrian emperors of northwestern Balkan...
During his lifetime, the emperor was named "Restorer of Universe", and one of the most important acts of this "restoration" was his administrative reform: Rome withdrew its legions from trans-Danubian Dacia and relocated them south of the Danube, instituting two new provinces. The capital of one of those provinces, Dacia Ripensis, was Ratiaria; Serdica was capital city of Dacia Mediterranea (Вачкова 2011, 96). Starting in the 270s, the ceremonial celebrations of the emperors, which had usually occurred in Rome, were held in other cities – first Milano and Ticinum, and later Sirmium, Sisica, and Serdica. It is perhaps in this context that Serdica is called "Aurelian Rome" for the first time. The city mint's coins characteristic of a capital city. Serdica's emissions from AD 274-275 introduce a new way of presenting and titling the emperor, who has as his personal patron the Invincible Sun (Sol invictus/Oriens) and who himself is a god and born ruler (dominus et dues natus), a god and born ruler (dominus et dues natus), a god and born ruler (dominus et dues natus) (Гарчева 2009, 38). To the series also belong the two emissions from AD 274-275 introduce a new way of presenting and titling the emperor, who has as his personal patron the Invincible Sun (Sol invictus/Oriens) and who himself is a god and born ruler (dominus et dues natus), a god and born ruler (dominus et dues natus), a god and born ruler (dominus et dues natus). The coins of Constans date to the decade of the 4th century BC, the Macedonian territories and Southwestern Thrace, perceived as an Early Roman period of the 3rd century BC, the Macedonian territories and Southwestern Thrace, perceived as an Early Roman period of the 3rd century BC. The final chronological group includes four coins – one of Constantine the Great and three of his youngest son, Constans. The coin of Constantine is struck after AD 310 and is of the GLORIA EXERCITVS type: two armed soldiers standing on both sides of battle flags (Pl. 2, 22). The coins of Constans date to the time he served as an Augustus, AD 337-350. In 346/348 Constantius II and Constans instigated a monetary reform attempting to stabilize the bronze coinage by increasing their weight. They introduce three new denominations – majorina, centenionalis, and numus (AE1, AE3 and AE4) (Филипова 2004, 160). The coins of Constans found in the necropolis "Metlata" belong to the centenionalis and AE4 denomination.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from the numismatic data is that in the last decade of the 4th century BC, the Macedonian ruler Cassander, following a victory over the Antirratae in alliance with the Paeonians, founded a new Hellenistic town in Macedonian territory, at the foothills of Belasitsa Mountain. Since the archaeological excavations have not investigated the entire necropolis, it is impossible to establish the upper chronological limit of the existence of the polis beyond the mid 4th century AD. No traces of Thracian presence on the territory of the town are documented. In the 4th-3rd centuries BC, the Sinti, in whose tribal territory the city was founded, were likely pushed by the Greek and Hellenized population to the north and northwest, along the Struma Valley and to the slopes of Ograzhdene, Vlahina, and Malashevska Mountains. During the Late Hellenistic period, when the Sinti disappear from the written sources, they were gradually assimilated to the Maedi, neighboring Thracians, who occupied the border with the province of Macedonia (Мърпен 2012, 108-109). In addition, the discovered coins allow for other conclusions, already formulated in the scholarly articles focusing on the region: The time between the second half of the 2nd and the 1st century BC, should properly be perceived as an Early Roman period of the Macedonian territories and Southwestern Thrace, as this is the time of the early history of the Roman province of Macedonia (Мърпен, Иванов 2012, 19-20; Манева 1979, 9-10).

After 148 BC, the issues of bronze coinage in the Roman province of Macedonia drop considerably due to instability and the closing of most mints. This created a deficit of bronzes on the market and many old issues were reintroduced into circulation. In addition, some coins show traces of indentation for the metal. Only Augustus achieved market balance when the mints reopened (Пипонов 1987; 19).