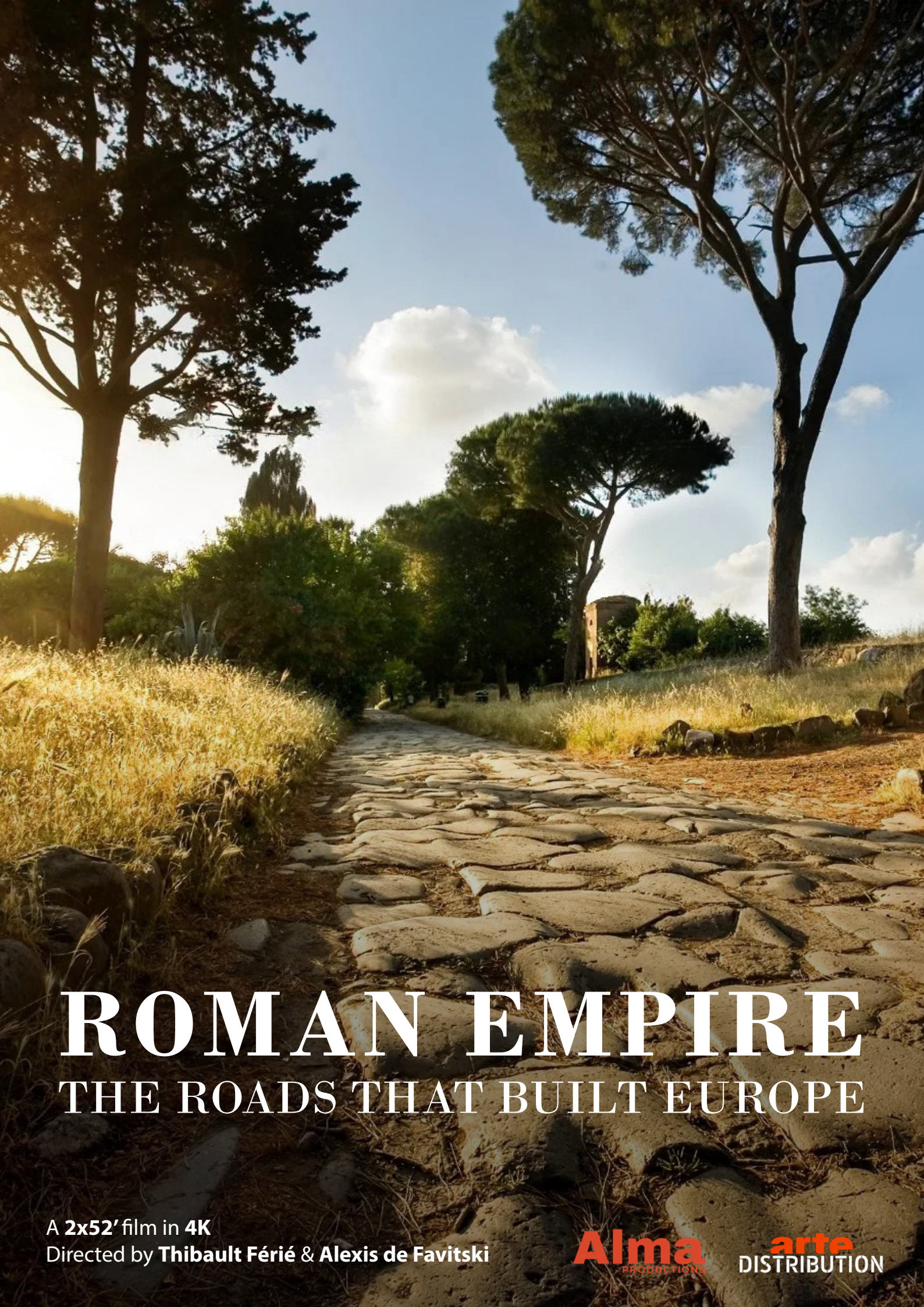




ROMAN EMPIRE

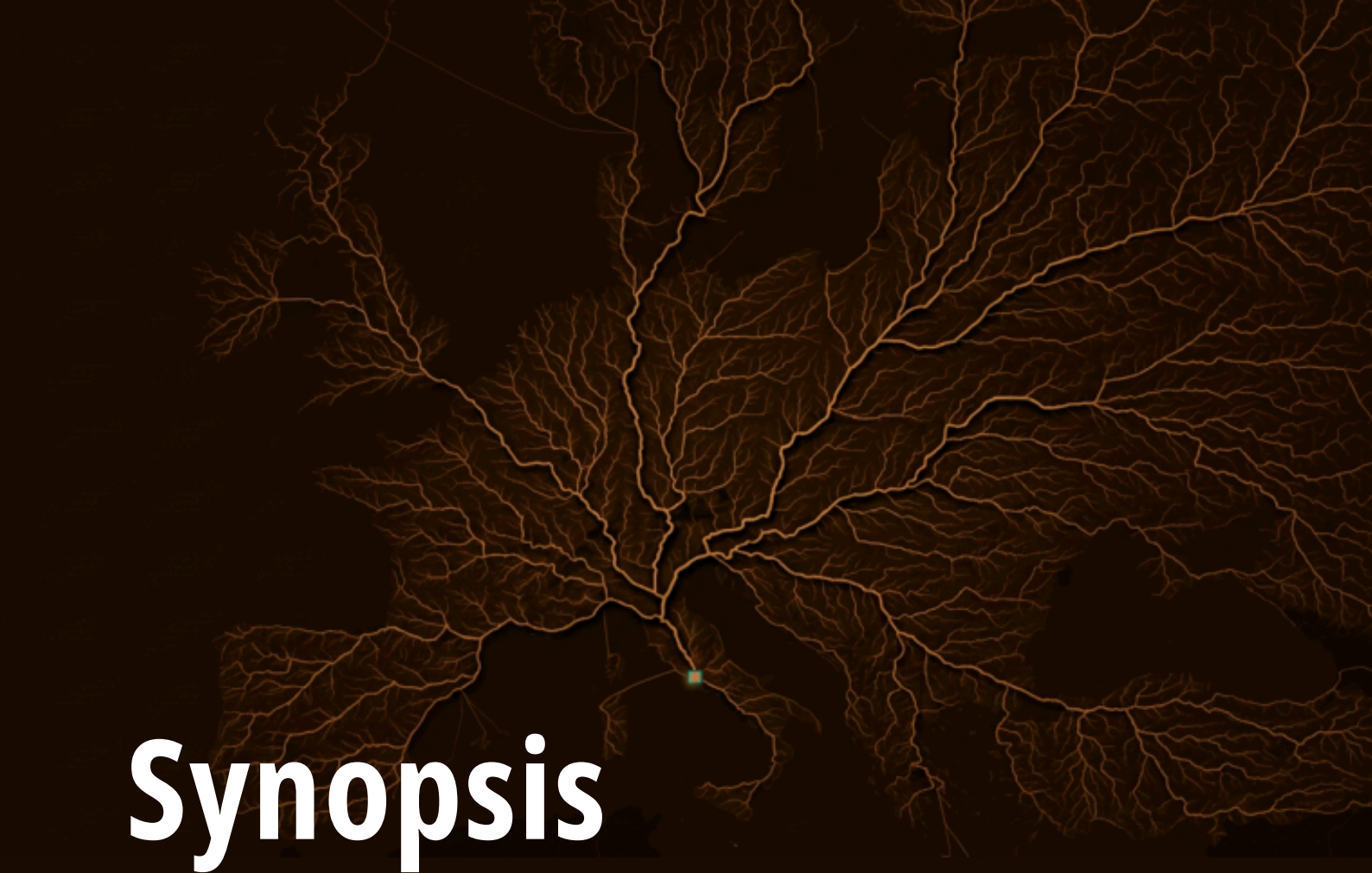
THE ROADS THAT BUILT EUROPE

A 2x52' film in 4K

Directed by **Thibault Férié & Alexis de Favitski**

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Synopsis

For more than four centuries, Rome paved the world. Close to **400,000 kilometres** of stone at the empire's height, ruled straight across marsh, mountain and desert, binding a single city to three continents. The legions built these roads to conquer, the merchants turned them into something Rome could not even have dreamt of: the **first connected world**. This series follows the archaeologists who are digging that network back out of the ground, from the remains of the very first road in Rome to a frozen fort on the edge of Scotland, and uses it to retrace the story of Europe itself.

These roads carried everything. Armies marching to the next frontier, imperial post racing letters across a continent, Spanish olive oil and fine pottery reaching provinces that had never seen a Mediterranean olive grove. They made distance cheap. For the first time, what bound two places was no longer how close they sat on a map but how well they were connected, and that single idea reshaped a whole world. Historians call it the first globalization, and we are still living inside it.

Because the roads never really went away. Rome fell in the fifth century, yet its network kept moving merchants, pilgrims and armies long after the last emperor was gone. Across Europe today, motorways still run on the lines the legions drew, and the ties those roads forged between regions can still be read in the modern map. Beneath the continent lies a hidden **geography**, and it is Roman.

Armed with 3D modelling, ground-penetrating radar and vast collaborative databases, the **archaeologists** in this series read paving stones, broken amphorae and wooden letters like clues in an investigation, raising from the dust the greatest network the ancient world ever built, and the empire that once moved upon it.



Episodes

Episode 1: The Roads of Conquest

Rome was barely a regional power when it laid its first great road. In 312 BC, Appius Claudius drives the Via Appia south out of Rome, the "**queen of roads**", the blueprint every later road will copy. In under fifty years it crosses the whole peninsula, and a middling city-state becomes the master of Italy. Then Rome steps beyond it: the port of Narbonne, the Via Domitia over the Alps, the long grinding war for Spain. When the western roads finally meet at the Col de Panissars in 71 BC, a single chain of Roman stone runs unbroken around the entire Mediterranean.

Episode 2: The Roads of Exchange

Under Augustus the roads change purpose. Milestones rise by the thousand, relay stations and a postal service spread, and the highways fill with trade. We follow Spanish olive oil and stamped pottery to the cold northern fort of Vindolanda, cross the Danube on Trajan's record-breaking bridge into Dacia, and watch the network reach its limit. Then the tide turns: under pressure on every frontier, Rome begins tearing up its own roads, and in 476 the last emperor is deposed. Yet the roads survive him, still moving people, goods and ideas **across the continent** they helped invent.



Note of Intent

This two-part series is a **journey across Europe**, where archaeology, history and new technology meet to uncover a hidden geography: the buried matrix that shaped our continent and our shared past. We want to film the Roman network not as a ruin but as a living work. These roads moved peoples, goods and ideas, and traced the outline of a world we still inhabit. Beneath our motorways, our borders and our cities, many of those lines survive, invisible or forgotten. It is that buried continent we want to make visible again.

This is not a history lesson told from a distance. It is an **archaeological adventure** in the present tense, a story carried by science as it happens, close to the trenches, the measurements, the surveys, the objects coming out of the ground. The knowledge is always embodied. In Italy, Spain, France, Britain and Serbia, we follow the researchers whose work, piece by piece, is rewriting the story of the roads. The viewer does not watch a demonstration. He follows women and men who search, compare, map and cross-check their sources, until a paving stone, a layer of soil, a potter's mark on the back of a cup suddenly tips the whole picture into focus.

What those researchers reveal is not a collection of relics but the invention of a new idea of space. With the roads, distance stops dictating relations between places: proximity gives way to connectivity, and a city in the far north of Britain is fed with oil pressed in Spain, while pottery from a single workshop in Gaul reaches the shores of the Black Sea. It is the first time the world works this way, and it is the **model we still live by**. That is why these roads feel so close to us, and why their story does not end with the empire. When Rome falls, the roads do not. They keep carrying people, trade and ideas, and the bonds they tied between regions still hold under the surface of modern Europe. The Roman road was never only a feat of engineering. It was an act of civilization, one whose lines we are still following today.



Director's statement

The camera stays in motion. It brings the artefacts to life and builds an emotion around each discovery. Words are caught in action, on the dig, before being completed by interviews filmed in the **real landscape**, without breaking the momentum of the field. Drones work inside the sequences rather than between them, letting landscape and argument resonate in a single movement. Because the story is built at the exact point where geography meets history: where relief, terrain and natural obstacles give way to a plan, a strategy, a way of making territory. We want to **seize the moment** Europe stops being a given topography and becomes an organized, connected, administered space, the moment the Roman road appears as an act of civilization.

Cartography drives the narrative. It is not a graphic backdrop but an **engine of story**, a series of small animated scenes that play with scale and movement and carry the viewer inside the map like the growth of a living organism. Our 3D cartography starts from one founding document, the Peutinger Table, a medieval copy of a Roman map drawn around 350 AD, when the network reaches its peak. Onto it we graft contemporary forms borrowed from the tools transforming archaeology today: Lidar, 3D modelling, augmented reality. Lines, scans and digital grids stretch across real landscapes filmed from the sky. The new world does not replace the old one. It lays over it, updates it, reveals it.

Where the great **Roman structures** have vanished or survive only in fragments, CGI gives them back their bodies: the bridge over the Danube, the relay stations of Gaul, the engineering feats that held an empire together. The palette stays sober, drawn from the original materials of stone, wood and metal, closer to an architect's drawing than to a video game. The aim is understanding, not spectacle: to make a building principle visible, to light up a strategy, to show a gesture of engineering. Across the series, a living system takes shape on screen, and the roads become again what they once were, a **dynamic infrastructure** built to last. That tension, between trace and movement, between parchment and scan, is the aesthetic of the film.



The Experts

Luigi Scaroina

Classical archaeologist and Ministry of Culture official, appointed director of the Appia Antica Archaeological Park in 2026. A specialist in preventive archaeology and the settlement history of pre-Roman Samnium, he has directed numerous excavations across Italy and is a longstanding contributor to the Cammino dell'Appia Antica, the walking route retracing the ancient road.

Prof. Stephan Mols

Professor of classical and Roman provincial archaeology at Radboud University, Nijmegen. Since 2009 he has directed the "Mapping the Via Appia" project in Rome, pioneering the use of 3D archaeology, after decades of excavation at Pompeii, Ostia and Herculaneum.

Dr. Pauline Ducret

Doctor in ancient history and post-doctoral researcher at the École française de Rome, specialising in the archaeology and economy of Roman construction. Crossing archaeological, literary and epigraphic sources, she studies the ancient building economy and the engineering behind Roman infrastructure.

Prof. Maria Luisa Marchi

Professor of ancient topography at the University of Foggia, where she directs the archaeological cartography laboratory. A pioneer in applying LIDAR remote sensing to archaeological topography, she currently leads a project reconstructing the route of the Via Appia in northern Apulia.

Prof. Giuseppe Ceraudo

Professor of ancient topography at the University of Salento and a specialist in non-invasive prospection. Using drones, remote sensing and ground-penetrating radar, he leads the "Via Traiana" project mapping the Roman road from Beneventum to Brundisium.

Dr. Corinne Sanchez

Research fellow at the CNRS, based in the Archaeology of Mediterranean Societies laboratory in Montpellier. Since 2010 she has directed the Collective Research Project on the ancient ports of Narbonne, studying trade dynamics and the antique fluvio-lagoonal port system.

Prof. Tom Brughmans

Associate professor of classical archaeology at Aarhus University and co-director of the Social Resilience Lab, specialising in computational methods and the Roman economy. He leads the MINERVA project and co-directs Itiner-e, the largest digital atlas of ancient roads, mapping nearly 300,000 km of the Roman network.

Dr. Andrew Birley

Director of excavations and CEO of the Vindolanda Trust, where he has worked for nearly thirty years. A specialist in Roman frontier archaeology, he is the third generation of his family to lead excavations on Hadrian's Wall and has involved more than 7,000 volunteers in fieldwork.

Dr. Allard Mees

Archaeologist and head of the scientific computing (Digital Humanities) department at the Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie (LEIZA) in Mainz. A Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, he specialises in Roman transport networks, semantic modelling and ancient economic history.

Dr. Katia Fersing

Ethnologist by training and director of the Museum of Millau and the Grands Causses, together with the archaeological site of La Graufesenque (MUMIG). Her work brings contemporary social issues into dialogue with the history and crafts of her territory.

Dr. Jelena Anđelković Grašar

Senior research fellow at the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade, specialising in the visual culture of Antiquity and early Byzantine art in the central Balkans. She leads the research programme on the visual culture of Viminacium, a major Roman city and legionary camp.

Florin-Gheorghe Fodorean

Senior lecturer in ancient history and archaeology at Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, and director of its Institute of Classical Studies. A specialist in Roman roads, archaeological topography and digital cartography, he leads the Romanian team of the international TIR-FOR project.

Filming locations

APPIA ANTICA REGIONAL PARK, ROME (ITALY)



South of Rome, the Appia Antica park follows the route of the oldest Roman road, begun in 312 BC: a straight line of basalt paving running between umbrella pines and ancient tombs. Near the Villa dei Quintili, a Dutch team led by archaeologist Stephan Mols has spent about fifteen years mapping the layers of building piled up here over the centuries, right down to the original road surface. In 2024 the road was added to the UNESCO World Heritage list.

ANCIENT CITY OF NARBONNE (FRANCE)



Narbonne, on the southern French coast, was the first Roman city founded outside Italy (118 BC) and the capital of the province of Gallia Narbonensis. It sat at the crossroads of two major roads and had a large, well-organised port linking sea, river and road. Excavations around the lagoons have brought up much of what is now shown at the Narbo Via museum (opened in 2021), and a stretch of the Roman road is still visible in the town centre.

AQUILEIA (ITALY)



Aquileia, in north-east Italy, was a major crossroads where several Roman roads met and where the route bringing amber down from the Baltic came to an end. In the film it is the turning point towards Dacia. Near the basilica, a team from the University of Verona led by Patrizia Basso has been digging since 2018. They have uncovered a huge ancient marketplace, a riverside wall with its quays, stretches of rutted road and warehouses, and even three gold coins found in 2025.

POTAISSA, TURDA (ROMANIA)



At Turda in Romania, in the former province of Dacia, Potaissa was a large legionary fort, home to a Roman legion from AD 166 to 274. Covering more than 23 hectares, it shows how Rome held on to its last great conquest, won by Trajan and tied to the rest of the Empire by road. Excavations have continued here since 1971, uncovering the barracks, granaries, the headquarters and the baths.

VINDOLANDA FORT, HADRIAN'S WALL (ENGLAND)



In northern England, just south of Hadrian's Wall, Vindolanda was a fort guarding the edge of the Empire. It is famous for its wooden writing tablets, more than 1,700 of them, the oldest handwritten letters found in Britain, kept intact by the waterlogged soil. The same family, the Birleys, has been digging here for three generations, and the excavations still go on every year. The finds (Spanish oil, pottery from southern France, mail and trade orders) show how far goods travelled across the Empire.



CONTACT



Joséphine LETANG
Head of International Distribution & Marketing
j-letang@arteFrance.fr



Alec HERRMANN
Head of Acquisitions
a-herrmann@arteFrance.fr



Audrey KAMGA
Sales Manager
a-kamga@arteFrance.fr
Canada, USA, South America & MENA Region



Alexandra MARGUERITE
Sales Manager
a-marguerite@arteFrance.fr
UK, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa
Language versions



Franka SCHWABE
Sales Manager
f-schwabe@arteFrance.fr
Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands, Scandinavia,
Iceland, Australia, New Zealand