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THE LOWER DANUBE IN LATE ANTIQUITY: THE CASE OF HISTRIA

A Master's Thesis

by

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August 2023

To my family

THE LOWER DANUBE IN LATE ANTIQUITY: THE CASE OF HISTRIA

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
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by

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by Sercan Batum

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Archaeology.

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ABSTRACT

THE LOWER DANUBE IN LATE ANTIQUITY:

THE CASE OF HISTRIA

Batum, Sercan

M.A., Department of Archaeology

Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Julian Bennett

August 2023

This thesis analyses the nature of Histria in Late Antiquity between the 3rd and the 7th century AD. Histria is chosen as a case study as it is the most comprehensively studied city in Scythia Minor for the period. The thesis has two focal points. Firstly, it investigates the evolution of the site in Late Antiquity. Secondly, it re-assesses the nature of Histria in terms of the divergent claims as proposed by Constantin Scorpan in 1980 and by Andrew Poulter in 1992 regarding the nature of the place and other cities in the region in Late Antiquity.

To achieve both aims, the thesis examines Histria in terms of its urban change and the transformation of both ecclesiastical and civic buildings and street networks in

Late Antiquity. This is done within a chronological framework to assess the possible reasons for such change, such as Christianity, invasion, and urban reconstruction. In particular, the thesis concentrates on the Christianization of urban topography, and the inter-relationship between the extra- and intra-mural basilica churches there and Histria's residential areas, in the context of the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire during Late Antiquity. By examining the effect of Christianity on the development of urbanism in the region, the thesis will favour the idea that the classical urban amenities lost their function of earlier periods as Christianity transformed the urban areas with significant landmarks, most especially the basilicas.

Keywords: Histria, topography, basilica, urbanism, Christianity

ÖZET

GEÇ ANTİK ÇAĞ'DA AŞAĞI TUNA: HİSTRİA ÖRNEĞİ

Batum, Sercan

Yüksek Lisans, Arkeoloji Bölümü

Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Julian Bennett

Ağustos 2023

Bu tez, 3. ve 7. yüzyıllarda Geç Antik Çağ'da Histria kentini inceler. Scythia Minor'ın en kapsamlı araştırılan şehri olan Histria önemli bir vaka çalışması olarak seçilmiştir. Bu tez iki temel araştırma noktasından oluşur. İlk olarak, bu tez Geç Antik Çağ'da Histria şehrinin topoğrafik dönüşümünü inceler. İkinci olarak, bu tez, 1980'de Constantin Scorpan'ın topoğrafya ve Andrew Poulter'ın 1992'de şehirleşme üzerine çalışmalarını Histria özelinde yeniden değerlendirir. Bu iki uzmanın bölge üzerindeki çalışmaları ve araştırma sonuçları daha güncel çalışmalar ışığında değerlendirilecektir.

Bu çalışma, Geç Antik Çağ'da Histria'da dinsel ve sivil binaların dönüşümü ve sokak ağının değişimini kronolojik bir zeminde Hristiyanlık, istilalar ve şehrin yeniden inşası gibi olası nedenleri ele alarak inceler. Özellikle bu tez, Roma

İmparatorluğu'nda Hristiyanlığın yükselişi sonucu şehir topoğrafyasının Hristiyanlaşması ile bazilikalar ve yerleşim yerleri arasındaki ilşkiye yoğunlaşır. Hristiyanlığın şehrin gelişimindeki etkisini inceleyen bu tez, şehirde erken döneme ait yapıların işlevlerini kaybederken, Hristiyanlığın bazilika gibi önemli yapılarla şehri kapsadığı fikrini savunur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Histria, topoğrafya, bazilika, şehirlilik, Hristiyanlık

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF MAPS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Dawn of Late Antiquity

Late antiquity, the background to this thesis, is a period roughly corresponding to the late 3rd century to the late 8th century AD[1], marking the end of the Roman Imperial Period and the transition from that era to the one generally known as the Byzantine period. The Roman Imperial period began in 28 BC when Octavian, the undisputed ruler of Rome after the Second Triumviral War, completely reformed the Roman Republic after its six centuries of growth. In that time Rome developed a mighty Empire encapsulating the entire Mediterranean world. Under Augustus, Rome entered the period called *Pax Romana,* identified as the beginning of a golden age of the Empire with peace, stability, dominant power, and prosperity. In his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* the Enlightenment historian Edward Gibbon noted the so-

[1] Different but interrelated terms are used depending on the topic emphasized in this long period: A. H. M. Jones' major study, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social Economic and Administrative Survey,* dealt with the Empire during last centuries of antiquity.
Following Jones, Peter Brown's work, *The World of Late Antiquity*, covering the period from Marcus Aurelius to Mohammad defined the period as Late Antiquity, and changed the scholarly views on the Later Roman period. The early Byzantine period is another term the scholars consult. The early Medieval period is used to associate chronology with the Medieval Ages. Teodor (2005) proposed the migration period, a part of Völkerwanderungszeit, in his work instead of the Late Antiquity or Middle Ages.

called *Period of the Five Good Emperors*; Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius (Gibbon, 1771: 96):

> If a man were called upon to fix the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was the most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus.

However, this bright picture full of Rome's glory began to crumble, and it began to deteriorate after the death of Marcus Aurelius. His son Commodus was not as good as his predecessors in terms of ruling the Empire, the historian Cassius Dio commenting within 40 years of that emperor's death that his reign saw the Roman Empire descend "from a kingdom of gold to one of iron and rust" (72.36.4). After Commodus, the Empire came a time of civil wars and threats from Parthia, but the Severan dynasty kept the Empire relatively stable until the murder of Alexander Severus in the early 3rd century triggered an empire-wide crisis. The Empire was engulfed in catastrophic turbulence consisting of civil wars, foreign invasions, socio-economic problems, and plague. Soldier emperors such as Claudius II, Aurelian, and Probus reversed the crisis and restored the Empire at bay. The accession of Diocletian marked the end of the crisis. His reign heralded a new period for the Roman Empire, Late Antiquity (Clark, 2011: 10).

1.2 Late Antiquity and the Lower Danube Region

A wide range of events occurred, and they shaped the Roman Empire and Mediterranean world irreversibly throughout Late Antiquity. The Empire's political, administrative, social, economic, and cultural domains underwent a transformation.

These changes and developments meant a clear break in the nature of the Roman Empire from its earlier stages; in consequence, the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity was no longer the Empire of Augustus, or of the Five Good Emperors. Of relevance to the scope of this thesis are the provincial reorganization and defensive works which began under the Tetrarchy in the late 3rd century AD because they are interrelated with urbanism and urban development in the region during Late Antiquity. This is especially so because it was one of the areas that saw the greatest impact of urban change in Late Antiquity. This urban change needs to be discussed to understand the size, chronology, nature, and changing patterns of the cities and fortifications in the lower Danube.

First, the cities acquired defensive characteristics. During the period of civil wars and barbarian invasions, we term the 'Third-century crisis', increasing Germanic pressure along the northern frontier and the Sassanid threat from the eastern frontier compelled the Empire to initiate a new era of urban fortifications across the Roman Empire. As others have noted, the building of urban defences was one of the characteristics of both the Late Roman and Late Antique periods (300-600 AD) across both the east and west halves of the Empire (Intagliata et al., 2020: 1). With regard to Scythia Minor, the new defensive systems of fortifications with projecting towers left a distinct mark in the region under Diocletian, with newly built systems at Dinogetia and Istrus and in a rebuilt form such as Sacidava (Scorpan, 1980: 120). There were many unfortified urban centres throughout the Roman Empire before the Late Antique period, but we see a different picture between the 3rd and 6th centuries, with defensive walls of various types and designs erected at many such settlements. Also, new fortified settlements were founded on the hilltops, which provided more

defensible position than the lowlands. Surveying the early Byzantine fortresses[2] in the dioceses of Thrace and Dacia, Dinchev states that most of the fortified settlements took highly defensible positions though they often seem to have been unsuitable for the occupants (2007: 483).

There were further changes in urban administration. Traditional urban administration with civic (or *polis*) autonomy began to disappear by the late fourth century AD (Dinchev, 2018: 362). The curial class, consisting of wealthy urban elites, lost their economic and social functioned in the cities. Cities and their councils were deprived of key positions held previously during the early empire. Administrative duties of the cities were increasingly burdensome, and this resulted in the so-called *flight of the curiales,* which refers to the elites' abandonment of duties and responsibilities in urban administration. The imperial authorities executed more direct administration over the provinces and cities (Liebeschuetz, 2001: 104-109; Jones, 1986: 737-757). Old structures in traditional Greco-Roman cities, such as temples, thermae, curia, and forums, began to disappear or at least lost their function. On the other hand, ecclesiastical buildings began to appear, and gradually dominated the urban landscape.

In addition to the urban transformation, the emperor Diocletian undertook a provincial reorganization that encapsulated the entire Empire. One of particular relevance to lower Danubian provinces was the administrative division of the Empire known as the Tetrarchy, a system of shared rule between two senior and two junior

[2] From Dinchev's perspective, the early Byzantine period covers 395-610 AD (2018: 357).

emperors. Renovated by Tetrarchic reforms, the Empire was divided into four main districts, prefectures (Bury, 1967: 29). This reform in the system of government was accompanied by a provincial reform across the Empire, and the provincial boundaries of the Balkans were changed as new provinces were formed (Map 1). For example, the existing province of Moesia Inferior, roughly modern Bulgaria, was now divided into two parts, Moesia Secunda and Scythia Minor. The present study focuses on Scythia Minor, which covered 16.700 sq. km between the Danube and the Black Sea with Tomis as the provincial capital (Zahariade, 2006: 2; Dumanov, 2015: 91; Donev, 2019: 29). Once Constantinople was established as the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, and after it became the imperial residence of emperors, the lower Danube attained a strategic role in the Empire's defence. Both Moesia Secunda and Scythia Minor became the hinterland of the capital.

1.3 The Focus of This Thesis

This thesis aims to investigates topographical transformation of Late Antique cities in lower Danube region, with an emphasis on impact of Christianity in the urban areas. It also discusses whether there was a decline in traditional civic character of the cities in the region. Being a fortified city in Scythia Minor along the Black Sea coastline, Histria is chosen as the case study of the subject in this thesis. Scholarship has a common interest in the defensive works and towns of Late Antiquity regarding the history and archaeology of the Late Roman Empire, and especially so with regard to the Lower Danube, one of the two areas most under threat (Scorpan, 1980: 3). Studies on defensive works and resulting knowledge are important for understanding the political, administrative, and architectural development of the cities and regions. In a regional context, the fortified settlements in the Lower Danube are significant in

understanding socio-political, economic, architectural, and environmental features and their development across the region. The Roman fortifications in Scythia Minor have attracted interest since the first half of the 19th century when Prussian army officers began inspecting the existing defences of the Ottoman Balkans (Bennett, 2020: 236). The French Emperor Napoleon III sponsored an archaeological expedition to the Roman fortress Troesmis in 1865 (Alexandrescu & Gugl, 2015: 252). The early 20th century marked a breakthrough in research with the first excavations and archaeological campaigns on several ancient sites. For example, the Capidava fortress was identified by Vasile Pârvan on his archaeological field trip in 1912 (Opriș, 2019: 102). He also supervised the first archaeological research at Histria in 1914 (Iliescu & Botiș, 2018: 193). Since then, archaeological studies conducted by different disciplines have consistently and fruitfully continued throughout the 20th century, most notably in the works of Constantin Scorpan and Andrew Poulter providing the inspiration for this study on the fortified cities in Lower Danube. This thesis initially introduces the works by Scorpan and Poulter, then their approach is to be correlated with the evidence discussed in order to analyse and evaluate how valid their conclusions are in today's context that has emerged years after their works.

Both Scorpan and Poulter dealt with fortified settlements in the lower Danube region during Late Antiquity. Their work is complementary as they reveal a decline in urban life on the lower Danube during late antiquity. However, their way of investigating this process is different. Scorpan emphasized the negative impact of barbarian invasions on the cities in the region until the 7th century, whereas Poulter pointed to a decline in civic character in the cities and a disappearance of the urban elites'

benefaction. Furthermore, they concentrated on different aspects of the cities. Scorpan's work is mainly based on the stratigraphy of Late Antique towns and fortifications in the region, besides a limited interest in settlement topography. Poulter, by contrast, analyses the role of geography and economic conditions in urban development. This thesis is interested in the Christianization of urban topography and the decline in urban life in view of socioeconomic and political disorder in the Roman Empire. The fact that the Christian religion dominated the urban areas as well as urban decline during the process of *ruralization* phase has prompted this thesis. A viable test case to review their interpretations of the region when set against the available evidence is Histria, the most comprehensively excavated site of the region.

To pursue the focus of this thesis, it will be necessary to put on record the views of these two scholars. Thus, Chapter 2 introduces their works before we turn to examining the site of Histria. This begins with Chapter 3, which is an overview of its location and history before Late Antiquity. In Chapters 4 and 5, we examine Late Antique Histria and the evidence it has provided for developments within and outside the urban area. Finally, in Chapter 6, the present study offers our conclusions on Histria in the wider context of the Scorpan and Poulter approach in order to discuss how valid their conclusions are in today's context and the most recent analysis and discoveries, some years after their works were first set forth.

CHAPTER 2

CONSTANTIN SCORPAN & ANDREW POULTER IN RETROSPECT

2.1 Constantin Scorpan

Constantin Scorpan was a Romanian scholar who first systemically assessed our knowledge of the Roman fortifications in the Lower Danube. In his *Limes Scythiae* the seminal publication on the subject, he analysed the stratigraphy and topography of the Late Antique fortifications in this region (1980). According to Scorpan, stratigraphy is the principal element in almost all archaeological research and only it can provide a reliable chronology compared to topography, architecture, and historical sources (1980: 2). His approach was to establish the stratigraphy of the fortifications. By means of stratigraphy, he worked to date defensive works, trying to give their accurate chronology. When he dealt with layers of the fortifications and public buildings like baths, basilicas and dwellings, he interpreted the layers to determine the chronology of repairs, reconstructions, and collapse of the structures. His research includes a great number of sites along the Lower Danube region. On the one hand, he emphasized some of them like Noviodunum, Dinogetia, Sacidava, and

Histria, giving as much detail as he could. On the other hand, he barely mentioned some of them, like Beroe, Carsium, and Axiopolis. The main reason is that his analysis depended on what available data offered him as he alterted the reader that some of the excavations had not yielded sufficient data from certain sites.

His narrative generally follows a similar pattern of organization for each site. At first, he provided the location of the site, presenting its geographical and natural landscape conditions. This was followed by a discussion on the site's stratigraphy and topography. In addition, his discussions also include buildings, forms, and architectural aspects of the fortifications. For example, in the case of Sacidava Scorpan was deeply involved in investigating the architecture and stratigraphy of the defensive works like precinct walls and towers. His emphasis was the uniqueness of the fortifications, which differentiated Sacidava from other sites. Scorpan perceived a distinct reconstruction technique in that additional walls merged with the original walls so that a new defensive wall was constructed. None of its towers had a rounded front, even though rounded towers were widespread during the late Roman period. On the contrary, this is a model for Greek fortresses (1980: 51-57). Moreover, the towers were constructed in massive blocks. This prevented collapsing at the front and corners. Another example is the regular spacing of the towers. A double wall was added behind all towers to strengthen them in the second half of the 6th century. For Scorpan that makes Sacidava's architecture original in southeastern Europe (1980: 57-60).

As a result of his detailed analysis of the sites he was concerned with, Scorpan came to key conclusions in that the defensive works had irregular plans dictated by natural topography in the Lower Danube. The result was a great variety of fortifications together with the placement and shapes of the towers and gates (1980: 105). Scorpan admitted that discerning specific aspects of the fortifications in the lower Danube is quite challenging in terms of topography and town planning. He was not in favour of classification of the fortifications in the Lower Danube. Nor did he think of any specific typology in the very same region. For Scorpan, there was a uniformity between military fortresses and civilian fortified settlements in the Late Roman period when one takes into account their walls and interior plans (1980: 109). In Late Antiquity, the 5th and 6th centuries in particular, whether civilian or military, the fortified sites in the Lower Danube region lacked any systematic internal organization. For example, they had no planned layout nor organization with numerous, narrow and winding streets, buildings with irregular rooms that were frequently rebuilt, with basilica-form churches variously located in different parts of the sites.

There were shortcomings in the data available to Scorpan. He lacked accurate data and information on the internal organization of the fortresses of these sites due to a lack of intensive excavations that provided him with adequate information. Stratigraphy itself cannot be only solution to observe the urban transformation during Late Antiquity. As it mainly deals with the occupation layers, it can't discern the spatial relationship and interactions between the urban structures in the settlement area. Rather than stratigraphy, topography seems a better way to understand urban transformation in Late Antiquity. However, the limited information he had could not

allow him to indicate precise results concerning to the fortified settlements in his analysis of urban development along the frontier from the 4th century to the 6th century. For Scorpan, initially, the reconstruction of Roman camps with novel concepts took place and was followed by developments under Constantine the Great and his successors. Gothic and Hunnic invasions interrupted settlement at and then caused the abandonment of fortifications in the 5th century (1980: 123-125). Only with the reign of Anastasius and Justinian there was a renewed imperial interest in rebuilding all fortresses or erecting new ones along with the extension of fortified areas. He provided an outline for the main periods in the history of the Lower Danube in Late Antiquity with an emphasis on the chronology of the barbaric and nomadic invasions (1980: 117-136). He mainly described the events such as invasions, wars, and rebellions. Because he concentrated on the fortifications with a special interest in the stratigraphy, he would not interpret related elements of the sites such as socio-political and economic characteristics of the fortresses and cities. Briefly, he seemed to lack a great interest in them with regard to his research.

2.2 Andrew Poulter

Andrew Poulter has contributed to scholarly research on the Late Antique Balkans, focusing on the transformation of the cities in the Danube region in the 4th and 6th centuries. The excavations he directed at Nicopolis ad Istrum in northern Bulgaria between 1985 and 1992 yielded considerable scientific results and several volumes on the research there were published as part of a British Academy project on the city in Late Antiquity and its transformation in that period (Poulter & Blagg, 1995; Poulter, 2007). Although the project provided much evidence for the transformation of Nicopolis throughout the Late Antique period, Poulter's research is not restricted

to the city itself. Rather, he deals with a wide spectrum of topics related to urbanism in the Balkans. He scrutinizes the issue of continuity or collapse of the Danubian cities at this time, a matter which has been debated among scholars. His approach and ways of seeing urbanism in the same region are tailored by the idea "period of transition" embraced by both archaeologists and historians of the era. This proposition sidelined the '*Decline and Fall*' phenomenon, which was accepted widely by the historians and archaeologists of the 19th and first half of the 20th century, in addition to Edward Gibbon[3] (Poulter 2007: 2).

As it relates to the present thesis, Poulter concentrated on the urbanism in the Danubian provinces during Late Antiquity. Unlike Scorpan, who focused on the defensive works in the sites along the Lower Danube, Poulter with a wider perspective discussed Danubian cities in their entirety. His holistic approach enables him to observe some of key elements of the cities, such as fortifications, public works, administrative functions, and so forth. He sought to explanations the dramatic economic and physical transformations in the cities. His focal interest throughout the paper is whether the Late Antique city maintained the features of the Classical city, such as civic administration and its function in the maintenance of urban institutions and public buildings. He proposed that the 6th-century city was different from its classical predecessor because radical changes took place from the 4th century onwards (1992: 101). His approach also refutes the view of Velkov, who considered that the essential character of the classical city was kept in the 6th century Balkans

[3] Gibbon's long work *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* named the problem of researchers on Roman history, and it was to analyse and explain Rome's decline. It was so dominating work on the mentality of the scholarship that the Roman Empire has remained the main objective of the major studies after Gibbon (Mitchell, 2015: 6).

(Velkov, 1977: 77-82). Poulter's work looks at three provinces, Noricum, Central Illyricum, and Lower Danube (Map 2). He divides his analysis into two chronological phases, the 4th and 6th centuries, respectively. In the introduction, he remarks important role of local autonomy and curial administration in classical cities. In the early Roman period, the initiative and responsibility of civic communities were advantageous to the Roman imperial administration, whose interests contributed to urban development during the 1st and 2nd centuries.

From Poulter's point of view, cities can be classified in four different groups. Riverside cities are the ones who suffered the most. In the interior, a general decline is observed, but provincial capitals are exceptions since they benefited from the provision of new buildings, and they enjoyed wealthy inhabitants as attested in their cemeteries. The last group is the cities located on the Black Sea shore. They were prosperous. He gives details of his analysis that derives from the existing urban amenities such as churches, private and public buildings, baths, colonnades, and streets as well as forums that served as a city centre. Inscriptions are his main reference point to detect whether imperial or civic initiatives supported building projects. He argues that the provision of public buildings through wealth and investment of the curial class in the cities is not seen during the 4th century, unlike the previous centuries. For Poulter, this reflects urban elites no longer had enough economic power to sponsor public works, so traditional civic administration was in decay. He referred to the lack of inscriptions or buildings for the use of public and civic authorities. However, existing inscriptions do record imperial authorities. The urban design seemed degenerated as the internal plan did not seem to follow the

classical tradition. Urban administration ceased to exist everywhere, despite relative prosperity in the Black Sea coast.

There follows his analysis of urban life in the 6th-century Byzantine city. His main focus here is the lower Danube region. He comments that in terms of defence, all cities benefitted from the nature, that is, their topographical setting. There is no clear evidence of purposely-designed urban planning. Churches are the one class of structure that receive most of the investments. Very few wealthy families could build houses along the main streets or on the periphery of the city. Similar to his analysis of the region in the 4th century, he differentiates what happens in the cities according to their setting: Cities in the interior did have evidence of economic activity as for example in receiving North African fine wares as with the cities in the Black Sea coast had. They had trade and industrial ties with Asia Minor and East Mediterranean. Inland cities relied on surplus by agriculture, but could be disrupted in times of invasions and lack of security. Neither is there any evidence for civic autonomy nor municipal administration. No inscription attests civic organization. As an example, he discusses Justinia Prima, founded by Justinian as the center of provincial and religious administration of the northern part of Illyricum (Procop. *Build*. 4.1.17-27; Novellae, 11.136). The city, situated on a defensible hilltop, was furnished with ecclesiastical basilicas, square, streets, and private buildings, but the city did not enjoy a building dedicated to civic administration or any public facilities (1992: 124-125).

In conclusion, he admits that more studies are needed on urbanism regarding the lower Danubian provinces in Late Antiquity (1992: 131). He admits that research on

the 5th-century lower Danube is challenging due to the scanty material evidence available. Except for the cities on the Black Sea shore, it seems that no towns served as commercial or industrial centre by the 6th century. While cities in the coastline were resilient to invading events, other cities faced outcomes of the invasions. By the 5th century, the church seemed to function like a local government to some degree. For Poulter, the evidence was that cities in Noricum and Central Illyricum collapsed in the first half of the 5th century, while cities in the Lower Danube reappeared due to Byzantine revival. Yet, the *poleis* of the 6th century have little or no similarity to those of the 4th century. Ecclesiastical buildings had a growing prominence in urban areas. The Church probably undertook a form of local government in the cities where imperial authority was not present. The local population was dependent on the church and imperial administration. They did not have autonomy and even it can be claimed that they did not understand the concept of self-government of the Early Empire (1992: 132).

CHAPTER 3

HISTRIA: AN OVERVIEW

3.1 The Region

The thesis is based on the geographical region corresponding roughly to what is generally known today as the Dobrudja, a locality now split between Bulgaria and Romania to the south (Map 3). In antiquity, from the early Greek to the Late Roman period, much of this region went by the name of Scythia Minor. This particular toponym first appears in the Greek-language *Geographia* compiled at the turn of the 1st century BC by the Greco-Roman writer Strabo (7.4.5). In Late Antiquity, the specific period we are concerned with here, the region was defined topographically to the north by the Danube River and on the east by the Black Sea, and politically on the west by Moesia Inferior province and on the south by Thracia.

In this chapter, we present the principal elements of Dobrudjan geography. It is essentially formed of three geographical units: the Southern plateau, the northern highlands, and the Danube delta (Jelavich, 1983: 1). The latter is Europe's second largest, covering 2.530 sq km. It consists of three main and four secondary fluvial

arms, among which the southernmost arm appears the most significant as it formed the northern frontier during the Roman era (Zahariade, 2006: 10). Carrying huge amount of water with a significant flow rate, the Danube often floods meadows along its banks, and used to supply lakes and pools numbering more than 1300 (Ardeleanu, 2016: 309). In antiquity, like today, the environmental milieu in the Danube Delta was prime mover in geomorphological changes over time, the southern arm initially, part of the open bay of Halmyris.

It is the role of the Danube as a major political boundary throughout history that lies at the heart of this thesis, and in particular, its role in this regard between the mid-5th and 7th centuries AD, serving as the northern boundary of the Scythia Minor. The Danube River and its associated basin were and remain central to this region's economic, social, and cultural systems throughout history. Thoughts on the Danube's role in the region and beyond varied depending on the conditions of the time. East (1932: 321) expressed a cliché due to the widespread expression of archaeologists, historians, and geographers that the river Danube was a great European corridor or natural route for all human movements in the past. Mirković (2015: 3-4) notes that this interface of the Black Sea and the Danube region saw the movement of peoples and races, including their interactions and mixture of different cultures such as Scythians, Greeks, Thracians and Germanic peoples, from prehistory to the medieval period and even afterward. It has also served throughout history as a main feature in European geography as a territorial boundary, defining the northern edge of the Balkans (Jelavich, 1983: 1).

While it forms a physical boundary, the Danube Basin itself is a region of overlapping political, cultural, and economic zones and a prime factor in trade in the region. In the Early Modern period, its delta was considered an ethnic and religious melting pot as well as a buffer between major empires like the Ottoman, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian (Tănăsescu & Constantinescu, 2020: 2). In the 19th century, these empires had a different interest in the navigation, aimed to control navigation and trade and political influence in the region (Hardi, 2012: 270). Also, the river remained a great deal of interest in European politics in the modern period. As the importance of navigation and shipping increased, the European Commission of the Danube (ECD) was founded in 1856 and remained an international administration until the Second World War (Gâștescu, 1993: 57). The river Danube today is the most international river of the world as it collects its waters from 19 different countries (Tănăsescu & Constantinescu, 2020: 2). The river's importance was summarized concisely by Napoleon Bonaparte, who led campaigns along the rivers Rhine, Danube, and Nile, naming the Danube "the King of the Rivers" (East, 1932: 321).

3.2 The Dobrudja in Pre- and Protohistory

The archaeological evidence is that the Dobrudja was important in prehistory as part of an extensive trade and settlement network in the lower Danube region. The area achieved greater prominence in protohistory when it was chosen as an area for colonization by Greek speakers in the first millennium BC (Map 4). Greek colonists established numerous *poleis* and *emporia* on the Western Black Sea shorelines, today the Romanian coastline. One of the first settlements established in this process was by colonists from Miletus in the first half of the 7th century BC at Histria (Hdt. 2.33).

Eusebius gave the year 657 BC as the date of foundation (Chr. 95b). On the other hand, the oldest archaeological remains at the site, such as monumental cult buildings in the sacred zone, give a later chronology as they were built around the middle of the 6th century BC (Zimmermann, 2021: 161).

The Milesians also established other new settlements dispersed throughout the modern Romanian littoral and around the Danube Delta (Map 5). Indeed, most of the cities in Black Sea originated as settlements by colonists from Miletus and Megara (Avram et al., 2004: 924). These included colonies at Odessos and Tomis, on the Western Black Sea coast during the 6th century BC, becoming their principal trading outpost (Mirković, 2015: 5; Panaite, 2014: 45; Ferjančić, 2015: 223). However, the Greek colonists did not penetrate the littoral's hinterland, inhabited by indigenous tribal communities. For example, the Getae, who lived on both sides of the river Danube (Dan, 2015: 135; Hdt. 4. 93). Dan (2015: 135) argues that the Danube was a boundary between the mountainous Thracian peoples and the Scythian nomad, and the evidence is that colonies had trade contacts with Geto-Dacian people in the delta (Gâștescu, 1993: 60).

These colonies, made wealthy through trade, were provided with the standard elements of Hellenic architectural urbanism such as temples, sanctuaries, *agorae* and domestic dwellings. Biernacka-Lubańska claims that between the 6th and 5th centuries BC, large urban centers with fertile agricultural lands and crafts centers emerged in the Dobrudja, becoming centers of trade both by land and sea and so were concentrated on the roads that followed the coastline (1982: 68). Their distance

was relatively equal to one another as it is believed the colonists positioned the colonies from a geo-strategic perspective (Romanescu, 2014: 325). This implies that prior positioning allowed the coastline to be managed and defended. Aside from their mercantile affairs, these Greek colonies also had specific defensive characteristics, which resulted in the erection of defensive masonry walls that enclosed the settlements (Biernacka-Lubańska, 1982: 68).

It is thought that the favorable physical and geographical conditions present in the Dobrudja and its coastline were what initially attracted Greek settlements closer to the Danube (Panaite, 2014: 45-50). For example, Histria enjoyed a large semi-enclosed bay providing a safe anchorage and harbour, at a place with adequate access inland to good arable land and raw materials, and provided with a permanent water supply. That aside, the location of Histria gave access to one of the most significant international fishing stations in the Black Sea for almost a millennium (Ardeleanu, 2016: 313). In terms of raw materials, iron, copper and stone resources were abundant all around Scythia. Clayish soil was plentiful and found in many places in the region, for building purposes, and an abundance of locally produced pottery, as recent studies have confirmed (Zahariade, 2006: 14).

On the other hand, as far as the climate of the region is concerned, it does not seem as favorable as might be expected. Indeed, the climate of the Dobrudja and the adjacent regions was notorious according to ancient and modern authors who did not have anything good to describe the climate of the Black Sea basin. Herodotus described the long and harsh winters in the land of the Scythians, especially around

the Cimmerian Bosporus (4.28.1-2). Much later, Virgilius described the terrible winters in the very same region (Georg. 3.39-383). Information, particularly about the climate in Dobrudja, comes from Ovid, who spent much of his life in exile in Tomis, and he infamously described the windy and cold climate on the western shore of the Black Sea (Trist. 3.13-16). Indeed, accounts of the freezing winters of Scythia remain unchanged for centuries to come. The fact that the Danube River, and even part of the Black Sea, was frozen in the winters of the years 383, 391, 400, 462, and 559 was recorded by the writers of Late Antiquity (Zahariade, 2006: 10-11)[4]. It is remarkable in retrospect to note that the Greeks had established their colonies in a region whose climate is quite arduous and different from that of Mediterranean, with the longer, very windy and unpleasant winters of the Western Black Sea coastline (Andrews, 2010: 14).

3.3 History of the Dobrudja from the Late Iron Age to the Roman Period

This section consists of two integral narratives; the history of Dobrudja from the Greek to the Early Roman period and the urban history of Histria. To understand the earlier stages of urban development after the Greek colonization campaign, a knowledge of the historical background of the Dobrudja is essential because events there impacted on the Greek colonies in the region, including Histria. The Dobrudja itself is a bridge connecting the Balkan peninsula with the steppes of the highly fertile northern Pontic region, and the region consequently witnessed continuous movements of peoples, invasions, and wars. Its political history in the textual record

[4] The cold climate of Scythia is mentioned by later authors: Themistius, *Orations* IX.121; Ammianus Marcellinus, *History* XXII. 8.48; Theophanes the Confessor *Chronicle*, 6255 (763). Late sources also mentioned freezing of the Danube river: Claudian, *Panegyricus de tertio Consulatu Honorii Augusti* VII. 50. 391; Agathias, *Histories* V.11.5.(559); Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicle* 401.2(401).

goes back as early as the campaign of the Persian king Darius in 513 BC, who campaigned in the region against the Scythians in order to stop their expansion into the Balkans (Hdt. 4.83-143). The repercussions of the Persian campaign are observed at Histria, with evidence indicating it destroyed violently between the end of the 6th and beginning of the 5th century. Histria's Archaic-Period walls, the acropolis area, and residential quarters were affected by the destruction. It is not, however, certain whether the Persians or Scythians wrought this havoc (Alexandrescu, 1999: 67-68). The devastation can perhaps best be attributed to Scythians more than Persians, because if we rely on Herodotus, some of the Ionian Greeks who populated the colonies in the region were allied with Darius (4.137-38). So, it has been suggested that the Scythians punished the cities for siding in favor of the Persians, taking their revenge after the Persians retreated (Dumitriu, 1964: 133-144).

The cities then entered the sphere of influence of the Macedonian Kingdom.when King Philip II (382-336 BC) contacted the Greek colonies during his expedition against the Scythians. A Macedonian presence is suggested by the coins of Phillip II found in archaeological research in Histria and elsewhere in the region (Preda, 1998: 52). This Hellenistic influence continued until the death of the *Diadochos* Lysimachus (Andrews, 2010: 45), but also saw conflict and turmoil in the region as hostilities erupted between the various Greek cities. For example, Histria was involved in a war between Tomis with Callatis and Byzantion in *circa* 260 BC over the control of trade (Andrews, 2010: 10).

The Pontic Kingdom also had an interest in expanding its rule over the Greek cities in Western Black Sea entered the hegemony of Mithridates Eupator between 114-107 BC when he waged war against Rome (Hind, 1992: 129-164). Mithridates also attempted to make an alliance with the local tribes from the region against the Romans (Justin. Ep. 38.3.6), and there was a Pontic garrison at Histria (Avram & Bounegru, 1997: 155-65). By the second half of the 1st century BC, Rome itself had expanded its dominion as far as the Dobrudja (Bottez, 2017: 225), and after the death of Mithridates Eupator, Teretius Varro Lucullus, proconsul of Macedonia, campaigned in the region (*ISM* III. 1; Eutropius 6. 10). The evidence is that until this time, the inner regions of the Dobrudja continued to be inhabited by the tribal communities in villages, the Greek colonists forming a chain of cities along the coastline. In other words, the situation and relation between the two communities had remained unchanged since the early stages of the colonization period. Thus, the inland areas remained essentially rural until the arrival of the Romans, following on from Roman expansion along the Adriatic coasts in the 3rd century BC, which culminated by the end of Augustus' reign with the acquisition of most of the areas south of the Danube River (Donev, 2019: 29). In his *Res Gestae*, Augustus explained this expansion of Rome's control towards the south bank of the river as defeating Dacians trespassing into Roman lands (*RG* 30). By the time of Claudius, *circa* 45/46, the entire region from the river Danube to the Aegean coast was under Roman provincial administration (Lozanov, 2015: 76). The Roman occupation of the Danube basin meant that the river was fully explored from its source to the Black Sea Delta and the Lower Danube region unified under one political system (East, 1932: 330).

Not only did the Romans incorporate the existing Greek urban legacy in the region but also, they improved settlement culture in the lower Danube region through additional developments of Roman inspirations, such as public baths. The settlements of the local peoples and Greeks were also transformed. For example, a native (Getae) by origin at Halmyris became a timber-fort during the reign of Vespasian (Romanescu et al., 2018: 26; Zahariade & Karavas, 2015: 580), to be later rebuilt as a stone fort during the 2nd century AD (Zahariade, 1986: 173–76). Around 100 AD, a fort was founded on a high hill on the northern bank of the River Danube taking the Getic name of Sacidava, suggesting this also occupied the site of or was adjacent to an existing Getic settlement (Colesniuc et al., 2020: 376). More intriguingly, in the 2nd century AD a new 'Romanised' settlement developed on an existing occupied site on the Urluiei plateau near what is today the village of Adamclisi, taking the name *Tropaeum Traiani* from a monument erected to celebrate a Roman victory in Trajan's Dacian wars (Matei-Popescu, 2014: 205).

3.4 Histria: From its Origins to the Late 3rd Century AD

Archaeologically speaking, Histria is the best-known Classical period settlement of the Western Black sea coastline. Located near the present-day village of Istria in Constanta County, Romania, systematic archaeological research has been conducted here since 1914, when the Romanian archaeologist Vasile Pârvan began to uncover the ruins of the city[5]. Over the following near 100 years research has yielded substantial information about the place, encapsulating all the periods of its existence:

[5] The name of the settlement appears as Ἰστρίη in Herodotus II. 33.4, Histria in *Historia Augusta.* XVI 3, Histros in *Roman History* by Ammianus. Marcellinus. XXII 8,43, and even Histriopolis in Pliny, *Natural History.* IV 44, 78-79. In Romanian scholarship the name Histria is normally used although some scholars use Istria as well.

Colonial Greek, Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine (Vulpe, 2014: 8). The site is located on the southern margin of the Danube Delta, as due to local coastal changes what was in antiquity a maritime city is now an inland site around 8-10 km away from the present shoreline, separated from it by the Chituc beach ridge (Vespremeanu-Stroe et al., 2013: 246). Once facing an open bay, it is now on the banks of Lake Sinoe, a part of the Sinoe-Razelm lagoon system. which today surrounds the city with lakes (Romanescu, 2014: 320-327). Little is known of the earliest settlement here but by the end of the 7th century, Histria covered a 35-ha urban area. It encapsulated two nuclei, the western plateau, and the acropolis. At the beginning of the following century, the city acquired its first defensive walls, necropolis, urban dwellings, and religious architecture. Though the city in the Archaic period covered a large urban space, the archaeological evidence for this is slight. For example, a 450 m long area between the Archaic and the Classical period defences does not have any archaeological features (Bivolaru et al., 2021: 303). Despite the limited remains, we can present an overview of the urban development at Histria in chronological order, from the Archaic to the Early Roman period. Unfortunately, written sources are lacking for the Archaic period settlement and provide little information about the settlement at that time, so most of our information derives from excavation, which has uncovered structural remains such as houses and religious buildings in Western Plateau, acropolis, and the so-called sacred area, which hosts the sacred *temenos* of the city (Avram et al., 2010-2011: 39-40).

Histria in the Archaic period had dwellings made of wattle and daub, and they are the earliest examples of domestic architecture dating to the turn of the 7th century BC. Such buildings are spread over a wide area, e.g., on the acropolis and Western

Plateau. Research in the Western plateau in the second half of the 1950s identified dense habitation and discovered 54 dwellings from different layers of this period. While standing houses were the main form of housing in early Archaic Histria, the mid-6th century BC saw the appearance of another type of domestic architecture, namely pit houses such as dugouts and semi-dugouts (Timofan, 2010: 355-57). As it is, these subterranean dwellings were the predominant types of domestic architecture in other colonies in the Black Sea during the Archaic period, as in the northern Black Sea region, where they were the main type of housing (Timofan, 2010: 358; Tsetskhladze, 2004: 226). In form, whether standing structures or of dug-out form, both of these dwelling types are circular or rectangular shaped buildings, made of wattle and mud bricks and rarely stone (Tsetskhladze, 2004: 230). Mud bricks, wattle, daub, local green shale, and white Turonian limestone were used to construct various structures at Histria throughout the Archaic period. Indeed, mudbrick was primarily preferred in the constructions among the Western Pontic cities at the time. While stone was rarely used architecturally in Archaic Histria, its use increased in the Classical period.

The so-called sacred zone was Histria's sanctuary area on the acropolis, where several temples were erected. It is assumed that wooden temples were initially built in the sacred zone though the only evidence for this is the discovery of some limited deposits representing such buildings and terracotta fragments (Avram, 2003: 319-20; Avram, 2007: 241-42). In later time, stone was the preferred architectural medium there. It is generally accepted that there is usually some form of connection between the appearance of the first sacred sites and the foundation of an urban settlement. According to ancient custom, it is required to have places of worship when the city is

founded, so Histria needed such places during its foundation (Zimmermann, 2021: 161). The temple of Apollo Iatros would seem to be the first temple to be constructed after the mid-6th century BC since it was patron deity of the city. However, this structure is only known from inscriptions. At a somewhat later date the temples of Aphrodite and Zeus were constructed.

These building activities in the sacred zone chronologically overlapped with the construction of the first defensive wall for Histria, and the first burials in a necropolis (Krebs, 1997: 59). These masonry defences, enclosing an area of some 60 ha (Avram et al., 2004, 933), date to about 575 BC., but were destroyed during the expedition of Darius in 513 BC when the settlement was damaged (Suceveanu, 2005: 21). Traces of burning were detected in some houses and temples, which partially collapsed (Florescu & Miclea, 1989: 19-20). Urban development at Histria in the Classical (the 5th and 4th centuries BC) is briefly characterized by the construction of a new occupational area on the Western Plateau and of a defensive wall that enclosed a smaller area than the Archaic wall (Angelescu, 2003-2005: 65-71)[6]. In the Hellenistic period (4th century-1st century BC), Histria witnessed local conflicts between Scythians and Thracians as well as wars between the Hellenistic kingdoms (Pippidi, 1967). A new defensive wall was erected by the early 4th century BC, and it mainly protected the acropolis, covering a 10-ha area (Preda & Doicescu, 1966: 295-336). However, the entire sacred zone was destroyed by Lysimachus, and when restored it was provided with a temple dedicated to Theos Megas (Avram et al., 2010-2011: 63). Afterwards, the sacred zone underwent further renovations along with the

[6] Archaic wall enclosed 60 ha area (Avram et al., 2004, 933).

introduction of new cults. A marble temple dedicated to Theos Megas was erected in the first half of the 3rd century (*ISM* I. 11, 19, 58).

Histria became part of the Roman Empire in the early 1st century AD, and new features were added to the existing urban socio-politico-religious structure of the community. For example, we see the dedication of a temple and statue of Augustus by Papas during Augustus' life time (*ISM* I. 146, Bottez, 2018: 258; Bottez 2015, 55-56). Soon after its incorporation into the Empire, however, during the mid-1st century, Histria suffered enormously when the Getae under Burebista raided the place. The temple dedicated to Theos Megas was destroyed, and the area around it become desacralized, with a residential quarter later established here. Moreover, a new defensive wall was constructed west of the Hellenistic wall (Map 6). Yet despite this calamity, Histria prospered and began to show more evidence of its 'Romanisation'. For example, it received the civic rights of a *civitas libera et immunis* (Bottez, 2017: 225), and an inscription concerning the foundation of a Mithraeum indicates the presence of both the cult and a dedicated place of celebration (*ISM* I. 137, Bottez, 2018: 259). This was a cult especially favoured by the military but also by traders, and was especially popular in the Lower Danube, being represented at places such as Carisum, Tropeaum Traiani, Nicopolis ad Istrum, Novae, and Tomis (Bottez, 2018: 243-262). We also see the development of artisanal areas, where blacksmiths and bone-crafting workshops were found (Rusu-Bolindeț & Bădescu, 2003-05: 125-27). We can surely conclude that there was significant urban building activity in Histria, even though firm evidence is lacking except in the form of inscriptions. These attest to the existence of several structures, such as temples, gymnasium (*ISM* I. 59), theater (*ISM* I. 8, 25), and an agora (*ISM* I. 1, 3, 8, 19, 54).

The first and biggest thermal complex was built under Trajan (Bottez, 2014: 291). Furthermore, early Roman wall, the second thermal building were constructed at the time of Hadrian (Suceveanu, 1982: 30). A second-century list of benefactors from *Gerusia* confirms existence of the institution in public life. The *Gerusia* and imperial cult have a connection that the *Gerusia* gave financial support for feasts where gods, benefactors, emperors were honored (Bottez, 2017: 233). For example, Histria's largest inscription describes religious ceremony in which imperial busts took part (*ISM* I. 193; Bottez, 2014: 9). Overall, they show city's elites willingness to accept Roman rule, and their association with the new rulers. Cult and ceremonies are means by which the local community found a way to adhere itself to Roman rule, which underlies Romanization. In brief, the Roman conquest of Dobrudja is a vital cornerstone as far as the urban development at Histria is concerned. The Roman rule improved and raised new buildings at Histria, so the early Roman period is called the second foundation of the city (*ISM* I. 191-3).

3.5 Histria in 3rd Century and the "Excidium Histriae"

Rome's expansion of its reaches the Lower Danube River resulted in the formation of its northern frontier across lower Danube region, covering Scythia Minor and Moesia Inferior. The river was boundary which separated the Roman Empire from the *barbaricum*, the land inhabited by the barbarians, and opposite character of the civilization which was equivalent of the Roman Empire (Kulikowski, 2007: 34). This frontier was a demarcation line between two polarized worlds with binary oppositions. The Danube was considered by the scholars a moral barrier separating the civilization from the barbarians (Alföldi, 1952: 15-16; with Curta, 2006: 2). This acknowledges existence and intersection of different worldviews, cultures and

morals on both sides of the Roman frontier. Across the river there was omnipresent threat to Roman rule. This was always a region where Rome and later Constantinople struggled with Germanic and nomadic peoples from the 1st century to 7th century AD. Being part of Limes Scythia, Dobrudja was next to the border, and so is Histria together with other cities there. Roman Histria was also involved in an imperial wide military network. At the time of Marcus Aurelius and Septimus Severus, Roman garrisons were stationed at the city (Bottez, 2017: 225). It was possible for Histria to be targeted by the barbarians, in case of a military conflict or barbarian inroads. The region's security and prosperity maintained under the Roman regime were disrupted repeatedly by foreign invasions in search of wealth or migrations resulting from. The first recorded major invasion of Scythia Minor was in 170 AD when the Costoboci invaded the lower Danube territories, Thrace, Macedonia and penetrated as far south as Greece, bringing destruction these regions (Lozanov, 2015: 87; Heather, 1996: 32-33). Scorpan claimed that their destruction was observed only in coastal areas of the region, and the invasion proved the necessity to adopt defensive measures that led to establishment of first limes in Scythia (1980: 135). This imperial response was a protective defensive measure against another invasion and so to maintain peace in the Roman territories. Until the middle of the 3rd century, the general situation seems to have been well in hand in Scythia Minor as in other Lower Danubian regions.

However, relative peace and stability ended after some 70 years when the Empire struggled with the 'Third Century crisis'. This period was characterized by foreign invasions, civil wars, socio-economic and financial turbulence. All of the Danube provinces became the target of barbarian raids and Scythia Minor experienced the most catastrophic attacks since it came under Roman rule. In 238 the Goths attacked

Olbia and Tyras, and sacked Histria (Ferjančić, 2015: 224; Heather, 1996: 40; Heather & Matthews, 1991: 2). This was followed by other barbarian attacks in 246-248 when a large-scale invasion ravaged Dobrudja and Moesia (Scorpan, 1980: 117; Heather & Matthews, 1991: 3). The whole Danubian region became the victim of successive organized raids, which lead to the destruction and collapse of the fortifications in several settlements and disruption of urban life in a period that extended into the next decades (Heather & Matthews, 1991: 2). The impact of these invasions on the cities of Scythia Minor remains uncertain, and their chronology is controversial. Some believe that Histria at least was destroyed about this time. On the other hand, others argue that Histria remained unscathed until 267 when the Goths and Heruli invaded the Danube Delta and Dobrudja (Scorpan, 1980: 118-19; Kulikowski, 2007: 19). *Historia Augusta* recorded that the sack of Histria, *excidium Histriae*, took place earlier, in 238 (Historia Augusta, XVI. 2)[7]. Despite the controversial chronology, it is straightforward that Histria was destroyed in mid-3rd century when the crisis was deepened by the invaders. The turbulent years continued until the third quarter of the third century when the soldier emperors like Claudius II and Aurelian reversed the crisis and restored the empire. The restoration of the lower Danube region began when the Empire reclaimed its control there. Unlike the invasions, renovation projects are by contrast more obscure. Histria is one of the cities restored under Aurelian and Probus (Scorpan, 1980: 120). Let us now see what Histria looked like in Late Antiquity, discussing in Chapter 4 the extramural settlement and in Chapter 5 the intramural area.

[7] Sub his pugnatum est a Carpis contra Moesos. Fuit et Scythici belli principium, fuit et Histriae excidium eo tempore, ut autem dexippus dicit, Histriae civitatis (HA, XVI, 2).

CHAPTER 4

THE EXTRAMURAL AREA OF HISTRIA IN LATE ANTIQUITY

4.1 Late Roman Histria

The previous chapter briefly lays the foundation for the genesis, development, and transformation of the fortified cities in Scythia Minor in order to place Histria in its overall context. In this and the next chapter we focus on a detailed analysis of the site of Histria after its reconstruction under Probus (276-82) to see what the evidence tells us about the topography of the site during Late Antiquity. Being the best-preserved site along the Romanian coast, Histria is one of the well-documented sites in the province and also the most comprehensively excavated (Vespremeanu-Stroe et al. 2013: 245; Poulter 1992: 128). It presents for study of abundant archaeological material and architectural monuments such as fortifications, public buildings, basilicae and residential dwellings. As it is, seemingly under Probus a new fortification wall was built over the city's ruins defining an area most Romanian scholars call the acropolis. This was clearly the main center of activity in Histria during Late Antiquity, but there is ample evidence for activity in the extramural area between the curtain wall and the western plateau (Map 7). In this chapter we focus on what we know about this extra-mural activity at Histria between the restoration

under Probus in the late 3rd century and the eventual abandonment of urban activity at the place in the 630s. The extramural area includes Thermae II, the Extramural Basilica, the *necropoleis*, and the harbour, the exact location of which is controversial though the presence of the harbour(s) is unanimously agreed upon.

4.2 The Extramural Basilica (*Basilica Extra Muros*)

The Extramural Basilica is one of four Christian monuments in Histria. It is located around 200 meters southwest of the Main Gate of the Late Roman wall between the Late Roman and Early Roman walls (Rusu-Bolindeț et al., 2014: 200; Crețu et al., 2020: 139). This makes it the only Basilica outside the late Roman city. In the form visible today, the Basilica measures 21 x 14 m, the annex from the northeast corner measuring about 7m (Figure 1). From east to west axis, the main body of the building consists of an atrium, a nave with three aisles, and a large apse, within which a semicircular *synthronon*[8] is outlined (Figure 2). Long-lasting archaeological research makes it possible to determine the chronology of these monuments, including building phases so that this would help us observe the transformation of the building from the late 5th century to the 7th century AD.

The entire lifespan of the monument is divided into three phases: The first phase covers the late 5th century until the first half of the 6th century. In this phase the Basilica had three apses. The foundations of the northern and southern apsis were found *in situ*. A part of the foundation wall in the north was partially overlapped by the next phase walling. Also, the central apse wall was used as the foundation for the

[8] A semicircular structure that contains seats for the clergy with the bishop's seat in the center.

next phase. The second phase is dated to the second half of the 6th century. This phase is represented by the construction of a semicircular central apsis and three naves. Each of three naves is divided by four rows of columns on each side (Rusu-Bolindeț & Bădescu, 2003-2005: 107). One nave is on the northeastern corner. This northeastern annex was in rectangular form. Stratigraphy in the western half of the northeastern annex was damaged; consequently, this prevents determination of the exact relation between the rectangular stage of the annex and northern apsidiole of the Basilica. Despite this, it is stated that this annex existed in this and next phase of the Basilica. and other two naves, considered *Room 1* and *Room 2*, are on the southern side of the basilica. The third phase, late 6th and early 7th centuries, includes additions and changes in the monument. An apse was constructed in the northeastern annex. An annex, so-called *Room 3*, was added in the southwest corner of the basilica. Because the construction of Room 3 is in a less exact technique, it is assumed that it had a single phase of use. This differs from the other annexes in the south which served during the second and third phases of the Basilica. *Room 3* is larger than the other annexes in south, and its northeastern corner corresponds to the southwestern corner of the Basilica's main nave. It may be evidence for the construction in the final stage (Rusu-Bolindeț et al., 2014: 202).

Numismatic findings are instructive to establish a chronology for the Basilica. Fifty-two bronze coins were found in excavations in the Basilica area. They are scattered inside and outside the Basilica include examples from levels predating both the Basilica and the adjacent *necropolis* (Rusu-Bolindeț et al., 2014: 205-206). The chronological variety of the coins is considerable, ranging from the 2nd century BC to the reign of Maurice (582-602). Many of the coins date to the Roman period, the

majority from the Principate to the 3rd century AD. Coins belonging to the Late Antique period were also found, e.g. coins of Justinian the Great (527-565), and of Justin II (565-578). Issues of Tiberius II (574-582) and Maurice (582-602) are the latest coins. According to Rusu-Bolindeț and Bădescu (2003-2005: 107-108), the earliest coins discovered on the floor of the Basilica come from the reign of Anastasius (491-518). Not only does this provide a *terminus post quem* for the Basilica, but also date the first phase of the monument. Coins of Justinian were discovered on the first ground level outside the basilica and inside *Room 1* and *Room 2*. They help determine the chronology of the second phase. Discovery of a *follis* of Tiberius II and 10 *numma* of Maurice in the second ground level outside the Basilica and debris layer document final phase of the monument (Rusu-Bolindeț et al., 2014: 206).

4.2.1 Extramural Residential Occupation

Excavations around the Basilica revealed a residential quarter in the area between it and the Hellenistic wall remains. It was made of well-structured buildings (Rusu-Bolindeț et al., 2014: 207). More recent work has amplified the picture. The area's function changed from a dwelling area to a burial place in the late 4th century. However, a part of it kept its original function as a dwelling place (Crețu et al., 2020: 147). In addition to this residential area small houses made of mud-brick covered most of the western plateau, an area as large as 25 ha., while Curta (2001: 125) mentions small extramural dwellings with walls of stone and clay close to precinct wall (see also Ştefan, 1976: 48-50). This discovery leads to the matter of the Basilica's character. Perhaps, instead of being a funerary chapel associated with the adjacent necropolis (see below) it was a parish church that served the community

inhabiting the extra-mural area. If so there was a settlement habitation centered around the basilica.

4.3 The *Necropoleis*

After the extra-mural area was effectively abandoned following the 3rd century destruction of Histria by the Getae and the reconstruction under Probus, the area west of the new Late Roman precinct wall became a major burial location (Ştefan, 1976: 45-51). Two *necropoleis* appeared there in successive periods, *Necropolis I* and *Necropolis II* (Map 8). The first of these is dated to the 4-5th centuries AD, and was established before the construction of the Extramural Basilica. The second is contemporary with the basilica and its successive phases, that is to say, the late 5th – early 7th centuries. Graves related to the two *necropoleis* were distributed over a large area, including the ruins of the Early Roman extra-mural bath complex, the concentration of graves decreasing towards the south (Rusu-Bolindeț et al., 2014: 207). As a result of long-lasting archaeological campaigns in the large area between the Early Roman and Late Roman walls, archaeologists have successfully identified the overall distribution of the graves, the patterns of the internments, the various funerary inventories, and most significantly of all, in many respects, a wide variety of anthropological data (gender, age, and burial practices).

4.3.1 The First Necropolis:

The evidence is that the first necropolis was originally begun to the north of the area and gradually extended southwest over time, to eventually cover the area of the Extra-mural bathhouse, abandoned in the early 4th century AD (Figure 3). This

necropolis contained more than 100 burials, many of which have grave goods accompanying the deceased. Most of the discovered artifacts are adornments such as bronze bracelets, brooches, beads, and earrings. Coins, blade fragments, a spearhead, and a stylus were other deposited items. Although female graves appear to predominate, there was no evidence of gender segregation with respect to the items found with the burials (Crețu et al., 2020: 143). Most of the deceased, around 70%, are adults, with roughly 55% of the burials being of females, while males constitute not less than 25%, the rest being of indeterminate sex (Figure 4) (Crețu et al., 2020: 143-147).

Grave orientation is variable in this *necropolis*, but the vast majority of the graves are buried on a west-east axis, including northwest-southeast and southwest-northeast variants. Single burials form the majority of the graves, and there are very few double burials (Crețu et al., 2020: 147). The presence of double burials opens up a question of re-inhumation, and it is contextualized here with examples like *Grave 18* (Figure 5). In this burial the presence of one adult skeleton and a skull is an example of re-inhumation because two bodies belonging to one adult and a subadult were buried in this grave (Crețu et al., 2020: 143). The graves show some diversity in terms of burial structures and practices with four different types. Inhumation tombs in simple pits, which Crețu et al. (2020:145) divides these further into simple pits without external features, and those with external features; burials in sarcophagi; niche graves; and ceramic vessels where infants are deposited (Rusu-Bolindeț et al., 2014: 203-204). The niche was made by digging a grave below the ground where the dead was deposited and then covered with tiles or stones. The niche grave had side

openings either on the left or right side (Crețu et al., 2020: 145-47; Rusu-Bolindeț et al., 2014: 204).

The more interesting of these types are the 24 niche graves. This type of burial is associated with peoples living outside the Roman Empire, mainly north of the Danube. Between the second half of the 2nd century and 4th century AD, niche graves became dominant in some areas between Don and Danube rivers (Barca, 2012: 144). The types of items found in many niche graves might point out possible Sarmatian or Gothic influences. With respect to their influence on burial practices, the deposition of animal bodies in burials was common in many cemeteries belonging to *Sântana de Mureș - Chernyakhov* culture, which flourished between the 2nd and 5th centuries AD in a wide area of East Eastern Europe, specifically in what is now Ukraine, Romania, Moldova and parts of Belarus (Crețu et al., 2020: 146).

4.3.2 The Second Necropolis

The second necropolis was much more concentrated and was formed in a much closer vicinity to the Extra-mural Basilica after its construction, most of the graves along its sides (Figure 6) (Hampartumian, 1971a: 199-215). The graves are all oriented on the West-East axis and can be divided into two categories: graves in a simple pit, forming the majority, and those with roof tiles placed at the head and feet, of which ten were found. Within this group, eight have been identified by their gender: seven are male and one only is female. As far as the grave inventory is considered, only three graves are with grave goods. *Grave 33* has beads, bronze objects, while *Grave 43* produced a *Syracuse-type* belt buckle, fashionable across the

lower Danube as well as Crimea, and a type that probably originated in the Crimea, then under Avar influence (Crețu et al, 2020: 148, with Gandila 2018, 99, for the buckle type). The last of these three graves with grave goods is *Grave 58*, which contained several golden items (Figures 7). These included a set of gold footwear with two strap ends, two buckles, and two rectangular fittings (Crețu et al., 2020. 149). Hampartumian (1971b: 339-341) has argued that the deceased is a female of Gothic-Alanic origin based on the anthropological analysis of the bones in the grave, while the animal heads of the buckles suggest they are of Germanic origin, and dateable to the second quarter of the 6th century. Thus, this grave, and perhaps *Grave 43*, attests to the presence of non-Romans in Histria, and they can be related to the historically-referenced migration of barbarian peoples into the in the lower Danube provinces of the Roman Empire during Late Antiquity.

What is more, though, is that *Grave 58* is located 1.2 m. east of the central apse of the Extra-mural Basilica, and follows its longitudinal axis (Figure 8). Its position reminds us of the Christian burial custom that the dead were in many cases buried near the tombs of saints and other holy sites so that their souls would acquire spiritual benefits from their physical proximity (Crețu et al., 2020: 149; Duval, 1988: 53). Born (2012: 83) argues that the existence of the annex north of the Basilica and privileged tombs in the Basilica is evidence for the presence of high-status Christian relics inside the Basilica, but this is mere speculation as there is nothing to support his hypothesis except the Basilica's architecture and the burials' specific location. That said, if he is correct, it might suggest that the veneration of saints or martyrs and other related religious activities were performed inside and outside the basilica, which perhaps explains the function of the basilica there, and the existence of the

necropolis focused on this building. Here we are reminded of the fact that a church is primarily a place where people meet for some form of ritual behaviour (Brown, 1981: 3). From an anthropological perspective, the inhabitants of Histria could have used the Basilica as a congregation place where basic religious duties are performed. This leads to the assumption that Christian topography in this extramural area attained practical means. This phenomenon stimulates further argument about the status and role of the dead in society. The community who lived in the vicinity of the area in the residential area alongside the tombs' permanent presence jointly combined the burials with the Basilica and surrounding landscape.

4.4.1 The Function and Role of the Extra-mural Area in Late Antiquity

In conclusion, the *necropoleis* and the Extra-mural Basilica are pillars of Christian topography outside the city. However, there is no dramatic settlement expansion and dense occupation in the extramural area. Instead, there must have been a sporadic occupation. In this case in the wider context Caričin Grad (Justiniana Prima) seems an exceptional case among the Lower Danubina centres in Late Antiquity as it had an extramural bathhouse and two churches: it is presumed that a population was living outside the walls, defended by a ditch and palisades (Bavant, 2007: 337-72). Insecurity in the lower Danubian provinces and closer proximity to the frontier would be a determinant factor that discouraged expansion the settlement beyond the walls in Histria. Goths, Huns, Slavs, and Avars threatened the frontier. Raids and their destruction are well-known cases in the region, and the Slavs were depicted as quite infamous for taking captives on Roman soil in exchange for ransom. It would have been quite dangerous for citizens to dwell outside the walls when the invaders roamed the region. At the same time, there were attempts to respond to the raids such

as defensive ditches beyond the precinct walls (Poulter, 1981: 198-204; Madgearu, 2001: 207-14).

Looking at the latest coins from the extra-mural area, dating to the reign of Maurice, Poulter (1981: 202) assumes that occupation abruptly terminated in the extramural area. However, that should not be taken for granted because there might have been settlement life without the use of coins in daily economic transactions. During the final phase of occupation, there were countermeasures to invasions beyond the defensive walls, and earthen ramparts and moats were built in front of the western defensive wall (Poulter, 1981: 202-203; Scorpan, 1972: 365), dated to the early 7th century with reference to a coin of Phocas, and two of his coins overstruck by Heraclius (612/3 and 613/4). This might hint that refortification and occupation took place in the extramural area, even if the threat of invasion might seem to be a serious obstacle for settlement outside the walls. Yet, the fortified area was extended through three earthen walls between the end of the 6th and beginning of the 7th century (Alexandrescu, 1963: 325-26; Suceveanu, 1982: 92).

Population growth by migration and birth would be a stimulus for expansion and building activities inside and outside the settlements. However, Late Antique Histria had by no means had a dense population, and population increase was an improbable factor for settlement expansion on a major scale. Undoubtedly, in Antiquity, lower life expectancy is one of the reasons. During Justinian's reign, the empire became a victim of the infamous bubonic plague, which decimated a great number of the population all around the empire. Histria was by no means an exception, but rather it

could have been hit by the plague. Moreover, because it was a littoral settlement, there must have been malaria, as was the case at Ostia, the port city of Rome, in the later 4th century (Confessions 9.27, with Sallares, 2002: 86-87).

4.5 The Harbour Question

As far as the entire extramural area is concerned it is establishing the location of the harbour of Histria that is the most difficult issue. There can be no doubt as to its former existence. For example, coins of Elagabalus (218-222) and Severus Alexander (222-235) minted at Histria depict a lighthouse attributed to port with a river god Danubius (Figure 9) (Zahariade, 2013: 203; Severeanu, 1930-1931: 16-17; Bivolaru et al., 2021: 304). Furthermore, twelve inscriptions dating from the 3rd century BC to the 2nd century AD mention the harbour. Some even attest to an Istrian fleet in the 2nd and 3rd centuries BC (Bivolaru et al., 2021: 304). Inscriptions from the Hellenistic period refer to the presence of the cult of Aphrodite Pontia, whose temples and sanctuaries are located closer to the harbours, as seen at Epidaros, Limera, Patras and so forth (Bivolaru et al., 2021: 304). Two inscriptions of the 2nd century AD testify to the remaking of the harbour under the supervision of a *Pontarch*, the commander of the port, a project initiated perhaps to ensure better access to the harbour or its relocation as a result of silting (Pippidi, 1983: 314). Numismatic and epigraphic data do not, however, provide its location, and since the early 20th century onwards, a great variety of hypotheses have been proposed for his by archeologists, geographers, and geomorphologists, none of them are unanimously accepted.

It is unanimously accepted that Histria was founded on a peninsula, and the sea surrounded its northern, western, and southern coasts. Alluvial deposits gradually led to the peninsula's southward expansion. The basic problem is that geomorphological transformation of the coastline since antiquity presents a serious challenge for researchers trying to determine the exact location of the harbour(s) in the Late Roman period. A combination of sedimentation, soil erosion, and land use create further difficulties in identifying its location (Bivolaru et al., 2021: 313). An additional obstacle is cultural and natural changes in city throughout its 13 centuries-long existence, in addition to the intense occupation of the city. Nevertheless, most agree with Panaite (2014: 45) to the existence of the port facilities, stating that Histria had a marine bay that offered perfect conditions for a harbour, and four main possibilties have been advanced: it was located to the north of Histria; it was in the southern part of the city; there were two harbours; and different harbours existed in different locations in different historical periods.

Vasile Pârvan was the one of the first scholars to claim that the harbour was in the north of the site, the natural depression at the center of the site. In the rainy season, it turned into a shallow and marshy area having access from the north, but when dried, a layer of salt appeared, and so is named *Saratura*, the ‘salted area’ (1915: 117-121). However, his failure to provide precise geographical indications makes it difficult to discern it precisely (Bivolaru et al., 2021: 305; Dabica, 2010: 382-383). Vasile Canarache, who initiated the underwater research at Histria, supported for a northern location. He identified the 200 m long submerged wall in Lake Sinoe, oriented southwest-northeastern axe and circa 300 m distant from the shore, as part of the harbour (Canarache, 1956: 289-317).

Theodorescu (1970: 29-48) suggested the harbour was south of the peninsula, an area covered by sand, so once a rocky promontory in ancient times (Map 9). He linked his idea to the geophysical research conducted by Merkler in the mid-60s, who documented the steep fall of the bedrock south of the peninsula, in the area between Early and Late Roman walls, later infilled by sedimentation. Theodorescu also noted the concentration of urban buildings in the area, notable the two bath complexes, the Parvan Basilica, and the economic district in the Late Roman settlement, pointing to a port facility next to the southern limit of the city, where the area of strategic interest appeared. Theodorescu's argument finds some support in the use of aerial photography as a method to locate the harbour (Ştefan 1986: 27, and 1987: 201). Using this evidence, an analysis of the street network it was observed that the southeastern part of the Western Plateau was the junction point of many streets, which suggests that there was an area of major interest, in other words, the harbour (Ştefan 1987: 201). It also suggested that the rise of the sand level in the same area led to the movement of harbour installations in the southeastern direction, and the harbour was in between the Early and Late Roman fortifications (Map 10) (Ştefan 1986: 27).

In 1996, a German team conducted a geophysical investigation in the search for the harbour location in the western part of the city, between the Late Roman fortification and the Greek dwelling area (Höckmann et al., 1997: 209-214). This located a gully in the greenschist bedrock between Acropolis Hill and Western Plateau, and the surface of the bedrock created a basin, what was then termed as the Gully harbour (Höckmann, 2001: 171), a natural depression up to 12 m deep in green shale bedrock

indicating a small gulf of the Black Sea in ancient times (Dabica, 2010: 385). It was concluded that a natural canal in the local green shale bedrock existed, and this connected sea and this gulf may represent the entrance of the city's harbour. It was also noted that if this was the case, the natural harbour at Histria is similar to that at the Lion's Gate at Miletus (Höckmann, 2001: 171). On the other hand, even in identifying a probable location south of Histria, the work did not reject the same possibility in the north, following other geophysical works there in 1998 (Höckmann, 1999: 37-45). However, we should note that without excavation, not only can these suggestions be accepted definitively, but these findings could date to anywhere within the period from the 7th century BC until the late 2nd century AD, and need not be related directly to the topography of Late Antique Histria.

O. Bounegru offered another perspective in the discussions. He evaluated the possibility of the north and southern parts of the city both serving as harbours. Accepting Canarache's ideas, he analyzes that the southern fall of bedrock in the south of city suggests the existence of natural Gulf, providing natural conditions for harbour facilities. He comments that the *Saele Levee* today was a gulf shoreline in the past and harbour's location in the south of the city, but sand covered there over time (Bounegru, 2003: 84-104). To a certain extent his ideas fit with the hypothesis offered by Marcu Botzan, who advocates that each historical period had its own peculiar topographic conditions (Map 11). From his point of view, Histria might have had successive harbours in different historical periods throughout its 13 centuries-long existence, and embraces the possible idea that two harbours were used simultaneously (1989: 144-150). Botzan's proposal is a "race to the sea" in a nutshell. That is the relocation of the harbour in response to the coastal progradation.

His theory is based on a series of fluctuations of the sea level from the 9th century BC to the 7th century AD (1989: 144-150). He investigates changes in sea level for possible harbour facilities, relying on palaeohydrographic data. He observes that there was a regression from +5 m (9th century BC) to -2.5 m (2nd century AD). The next four centuries, the sea level kept its present-day transgression. He is important because he is the first scholar to contemplate the possibility that Histria's harbour was in different locations in different periods in history, which Dabica (2010: 385) suggests is the closest to the historical reality.

Indeed, Dabica shares his opinion about the controversial topic, and he advocates that Histria's port was located in the south of the city. For him, an approximately 350 m long area between the Late and Early roman precinct is suitable for the development of the harbour basin. Furthermore, he also referred to discoveries in excavations in 2006-2010 in the southern sector. A man-made stone paved beach was identified, resembling the stone-coated beaches used in ports to pull ships aground for maintenance. Some support for the idea might be found in the way that the Early Roman fortification wall ends in an organized way in the south and does not disappear in the sand, the wall ending where the sea begins at the edge of the harbour (Dabica, 2010: 386).

In summary, among diverse hypotheses considering the harbour facilities of Histria, both north and south of the site are the most possible locations in the late Roman period. West of the site where the cemeteries and the basilica lay is very unlikely. Even if one postulates a harbour location west of the site, it might have been a

harbour basin at the settlement's first stages, e.g., the 7th-6th centuries BC. It looks very improbable to seek a harbour facility in an acropolis where the core of the Late Antique city was centered. All public buildings and dwellings were clustered there, and it was not a suitable place to build harbour installations. It would be plausible to combine the hypotheses of Botzan, Theodorescu and Ştefan and reconstruct harbour structure(s) in the late Roman Histria. Compared to the north of the city, the south would be the best candidate for the harbour facility because the south of the city was an economic zone in the late Roman period, and the vicinity could have facilitated communication and transportation between the economic zone and the harbour. That said and done, we must also remember that none of the research on the matter so far has specifically concentrated on the location of the harbour in the Late Antique period, the period with which this thesis is concerned.

CHAPTER 5

THE INTRAMURAL TOPOGRAPHY OF HISTRIA IN LATE ANTIQUITY

5.1 Introduction

Following the discussion on extramural topography, this section aims to examine the intramural topography of Histria. This is where most of the evidence for Late Antique Histria comes from. The beginning of this section details the urban layout of Histria and its topographic configuration, including public buildings and districts, and continues with the detailed investigation of the intramural topography. It also describes the function of buildings with their relation to neighbouring structures. It shows the integration of the structures and districts through the street network in the course of the transformation of the settlement topography in late antiquity. Histria clearly underwent a radical transformation through its reconstruction in the late 3rd century following on from the Gothic invasions which brought destruction to the city. A roughly a 7-ha area, including the extramural basilica and cemeteries was occupied in the 5th and 6th centuries (Born, 2012: 77; Bajenaru, 2010: 40). This enclosed area, sometimes referred to in the literature as the acropolis or citadel,

represents the smallest urban area at Histria in its entire recorded history, and reveals a dramatic decrease in urban area. From once enclosing an area of some 60 ha, the defences had enclosed an area of about 30 ha in the 2nd century AD, and now not even half of that (Olaru, 2012: 224).

The reason for this reduction in urban area may surely be associated with the political situation of the late Roman Empire which maintained existing defences or built new ones that enclosed a smaller area (Map 12). However, in terms of the area enclosed, this is not independent of both the wider specific conditions of the empire and the more local concerns of its regions. City walls were often rebuilt on a smaller scale than older circuits because of the fact that older walls were excessively large and difficult to man (Jones, 1966: 249). This was perhaps the case at Histria with the enclosed urban area being reduced to more than half of its original size. A similar urban phenomenon is visible at places like Athens, Miletus, and Thessalonica (Frantz, 1988: 5-6; Dunn, 1994: 62-64). It may be that the size of the walled settlements might reflect, the number of inhabitants, and the economical, military and administrative conditions of a place (Curta, 2001: 202-203). Certainly, it would be natural to correlate the area enclosed by the fortifications of a place as indicating a small number of inhabitants but this does not need to be the case, as it may have served as a central area of defence *in extremis* for a wider populated area.
Concerning the urban configuration of Histria, habitation was concentrated in the city centre and southwards because existing structures were conglomerated in these sections. There is a dense occupation and various kinds of structures in the centre and south sectors of the city with the construction of the Episcopal Basilica and *Domus* Sector (residential complex) at the city centre, on the Acropolis. There is also the

Parvan Basilica, Cetate Sector and Acropolis Centre-South located south of these. In the area between the main gate and the economic quarter, closer to the western wall, there are *horrea*, and the *Thermae I* complex. By contrast, it is quite noticeable that there is no such intense occupation in the centre-north sector: Only a few masonry buildings north of the Episcopal Basilica were in this area, although perhaps the Florescu Basilica can be included. Therefore, the north of the Acropolis is not included in this research.

Our topographical examination here follows a certain order according to the spatial position of the buildings inside the city. Firstly, religious buildings will be described in the following order: Episcopal Basilica, Crypt Basilica, and Parvan Basilica respectively. Secondly, residential districts, *Domus* Sector, Cetate Sector and Acropolis Centre-South will be investigated. Thirdly, the rest of the structures and areas such as *horrea*, square, *Thermae I*, and the economic district will be mentioned. Finally, in the light of information given, the transformation of the urban topography during the last phase of urban occupation is analysed.

5.2 Religious Buildings

5.2.1 Episcopal Basilica

The Episcopal Basilica, the largest building of Late Antique Histria, replaced Basilica C, the oldest Christian structure at Histria, which is dated to the end of the 4th century (Bottez et al., 2019: 126; Achim et al., 2021: 480). It is located at the city center, so its location and the grandeur of this construction demonstrated the dominance and prestige of the Christian religion in the Late Antique Histria (Map

13). As seen today, the Episcopal Basilica is aligned with Street 15, which runs alongside it to the west, and which replaces an earlier Street on a slightly different alignment (Figure 10). The Episcopal Basilica is 58 meters in length; its transept is 28 m long, and its atrium is 18 m (Sucevanu, 2005: 86-89). Referring to the numismatic discoveries, Suceveanu (2005: 86) suggested that the basilica was built during the reign of Justinian, and he even postulated that the basilica's model derives from that of the basilica of Saint John in Ephesus. It was renovated probably after the destruction resulting from a raid on Histria in 559 by the Kutrigurs, a Turkic nomadic people who inhabited the northern shores of the Black Sea in the 6th century AD, and remained in a good state until the end of the 6th century. The nave ends in the transept, in the middle of which is a podium enclosed within a pentagonal apse on the outside. The eastern and western corners of the Basilica had annexes, which were later enlarged during the renovation.

A portico was added on the Basilica's façade giving access to the atrium, providing a decorative aspect to the building. It signifies the civic importance of the Episcopal Basilica, an importance possibly emphasised by the evidence that the street in front of this showed no signs of wheel-ruts indicating it was not generally used by heavy wheeled traffic (Achim et al., 2021: 480-81). However, a mould used for manufacturing metal crosses was discovered near the basilica, which may question that conclusion, suggesting that Christian items were produced in the vicinity. Referring to the deposits of glass lamps in the vicinity Cliante has stated that a glass lamp workshop could have been closer to the basilica (2014: 198). Workshops could have operated near the basilica complex for producing both items, lead crosses, and glass lamps, but there is no clear provable evidence for their existence. Even so, it

seems there was craftsmanship activity near the basilica, creating a commercial milieu, allowing for the existence of workshop centres away from the identified economic and commercial district.

5.2.2 Crypt Basilica (*Basilica Florescu*)

The Crypt Basilica, dated to the 5th -6th centuries AD, is located east of the main gate and a public square and west of the Episcopal Basilica. It is set within an area bounded by the adjacent streets, of which Street B goes back to as early as the Early Roman period (Map 14). This originally followed an east-west direction to the main gate, but during the Severan period, it deviated northwards, forming a path to the main gate of the Late Roman city (Achim et al., 2021: 479). In the 6th century, its course was re-aligned to the east towards the main square, so this established a continuous pathway from the entrance to the public square and Episcopal Basilica. The Crypt Basilica itself measures 25 x 37m, and is formed of three naves, two aisles, a semicircular apse corresponding to the central nave to the east, and a narthex (Figure 11). Besides it has an uncompartmentalized narthex porch on its western side (Barnea, 1958: 331; Achim, 2005: 66-68). It is the only basilica in Histria to be provided with a crypt, a subterranean room or chamber under the church floor where the dead are buried. The crypt is under the altar, and it is in rectangular form with an access staircase on the south side (Figure 12). It is made of dressed blocks of limestone and brick in *opus mixtum* style (Barnea, 1958: 331; Achim, 2005: 68). Given the small space inside the crypt, it could only contain a part of the relics of a martyr or saint, not his entire body (1958: 332).

5.2.3 Parvan Basilica

The Parvan Basilica is named for its excavator, Vasile Pârvan, who uncovered it between 1914-16 and 1921, with later work there in the interwar period (Angelescu et al., 2017: 108; Bottez, 2014: 243). It is located in the southern-east part of the city, a Roman building, *RB05*, located near the west of the pavement of the Basilica, was removed to open the area for the western part of the basilica, where it has three entrances. The Basilica dominates this area, and is defined on the north by Street D, and by the late Roman wall on the north. The Basilica has a sequence of structures, Basilica no. I and Basilica no. II, and it has been proposed from the stratigraphy that the first monument was erected during Anastasius' reign (491-517), whereas the second one was built in the first half of the 6th century (Angelescu et al., 2017: 149). Both of these buildings occupied the same space in the sector. They had an irregular, trapezoidal form with a west-east alignment. This was determined by the prior existence of the fortification wall to the south and Street D to the north, both of which pre-existed in this perimeter (Map 15). All that survives today of Basilica I is its apse; this probably stems from the bad preservation during earlier excavations. Only the northern segment of the apse is preserved in a straight line (Angelescu et al., 2017: 121, 147). Better preserved is Basilica II, with its asymmetric form, the north wall at 18.2 m., the west wall at 12.3, with three entrances, the south wall 21.20, and the east wall 10.94 m (Angelescu, 2003-2005: 83). The southern wall is badly preserved, and determining its trajectory is challenging in view of the position of Basilica close to the defensive wall, which Angelescu and Bottez dislay four phases: Phase A - Probus; phase B - Diocletian/Constantine; phase C - Theodosius I; and phase D - Anastasius (2009: 196).

Vasile Parvan believed that the Basilica was built over the defensive walls (1923: 9), and recent excavations discovered that the apse of Basilica no. II was built on the part of the wall, which was thicker than the rest of the wall (Achim, 2021: 483). However, this poses a problem because if so it means the city wall in disrepair and made it vulnerable to raids. Briefly, this would have been the Achilles' heel of the city in view of the enemy attacks. A solid fortification wall was indispensable for the city's defence. Its main purpose must have been protection of Parvan Sector. The apse covers the northeast and eastern part of the basilica, but its southern part is missing (Barnea, 1958: 333). The *synthronon* follows a close trajectory to the apse. The *presbyterium* is on the northeastern part of the Basilica. There is a *cancelli* north of the *presbyterium* (Figure 13). The *naos* has two rows of columns into a nave and two aisles. The northern row consists of four columns; in the southern row, there are three columns (Barnea, 1958: 334; Angelescu et al., 2017: 133). At some unknown date the northern part of the eastern wall was dismantled, and an annex was added. The purpose of this change seems to be to enlarge the Basilica.

Street D to the north of the Basilica, is also of interest in understanding the development of this part of Histria in Late Antiquity. Originally it was thought that it delimited the Basilica to the west and east and it was considered that the street provided limited access to only those who lived there, and/or is blocked to protect the wall next to the Basilica and gate that allowed access here (Achim et al., 2021: 481). However, recent excavations allow a different interpretation, that the street was in existence in the 5th century at the earliest and the beginning of the 6th century (Bottez, 2014: 245). Despite the absence of evidence, Bottez argues that this street must have connected the acropolis and small gate in the southern wall in the 4th and

5th centuries (2014: 248-49). However, by the mid-6th century, the street was blocked by a structure, named *CR08*. Though this structure is in bad condition, it is on the Streed D. For Bottez, the gate in the western defensive wall and Basilica was no longer connected by the street (2014: 247-49). In this case, we may ask if there were alternative streets and pathways.

5.3 Residential Districts

5.3.1 *Domus* Sector

East of the Episcopal Basilica, there is a *Domus* Sector which composed of five substantial patrician residences (Angelescu et al., 2017: 107). It was a residential quarter for a wealthy upper-class (Figure 14). This quarter is located at the privileged landscape of Histria because it was located at higher ground of the acropolis next to the Episcopal Basilica at the city center. Also, it is close to the Black Sea bay, which is Lake Razelm today. Inside the quarter, they are several large buildings contemporary with the Episcopal Basilica (Bottez et al. 2019, 126), and streets connected the residences to one another. For example, *Domus I* consists of two floors and eight rooms, organized around a central courtyard in interior, in addition two porticoes and *vestibulum* (Bounegru & Lungu, 2005: 92-93). On the other side of the street, there is *Domus II* having a courtyard and an apsed dining hall. *Domus V* had a bath (Curta, 2001: 126).

Domus III is the more interesting of the structures, with 12 rooms, an interior courtyard, small *impluvium*, a *vestibulum*, a peristyle with porticoes, and a chapel (Talmațchi, 2021: 507). There are various interpretations about the edifice (Figure

15). It has been argued that this building could have been bishop's residence (*Episkopeion*). Based on the discovery of rectangular hall with the apse in the eastern wall, Barnea interprets it as a private basilica (1958: 336). Similarly, discoveries such as some fragments from a marble slab that constituted the altar table of the chapel (mensa sacra) are evidence of the episcopal residence (Bounegru & Lungu, 2005: 95). On the other hand, it may have been a large dining hall, *triclinium* (Bottez et al. 2019, 126). For Curta (2001), considering this apsidal triclinium a private church would be misleading to interpret the building as the bishop's residence (125). Despite this counterargument, it is still reasonable to think of it as such because there is an ensemble of upper-class dwellings where bishop could have lived. Atanasov pinpoints the apses of the bishop's halls in Novae, Abritus, and Histria. Considering his analogy, he states that this type of building combined two functions, the bishop's chapel and the representative hall of his palace (2012: 366-67). Furthermore, both Atanasov and Dintchev indicate many straightforward instances that bishops' residences were built close to these cathedral basilicas, as proven in several sites like Novae, Tropaeum Traiani, Troesmis and Abritus (2012: 366; 2018:365). The ecclesiastical councils of the 4th and 5th centuries regulated the location of the *episkopion*. It is advised that bishops should not live far away from the church - *Ut episcopus non longe ab ecclesia hospitiolum habeat* (Mansi 1960, III, 952). However, these episcopal residences in Durostorum and Histria were not very close to the cathedral basilica (about 60 m distance).

5.3.2 Acropolis Centre-South Sector

The ‘Acropolis Centre-South’ sector, or ‘ACS’ for short, is the name given to the area set between the Episcopal Basilica to the north, the ‘Parvan Basilica’ to the south, the Cetate Sector to the west, and the Domus Sector to the north-east. It is stressed that the ACS Sector enjoyed the most civic significance of the city throughout its existence (Bottez et al., 2015: 158) because this area is bounded by a series of distinct structures, e.g., streets, its northern boundary for example being marked by Street C, which separates it-from the Episcopal Basilica, while Street 1 flanks the sector on the east and Street 10 on the Late roman defensive wall forming its southern limit (Figure 16) (Iliescu & Bottez, 2021: 571). Excavations provided us with interesting results about the evolution of the ACS. Street 01 continues its orientation southwards, and it probably connected the southern defensive wall. Street 02 had two phases. At the beginning, it was perpendicular to Street C. It later was deviated to Street C that leads to Parvan and Episcopal Basilicas through ACS Sector. It probably reached as far as the southern wall. Therefore, the streets were modified to connect the ecclesiastical buildings, from Basilica Florescu to Parvan Basilica (Map 16).

The sector’s core is a residential complex conventionally referred to as insula α, divided into two parts, northern and southern nuclei, each of which consists of several rooms. With at least one large 6th-century building with a large, paved, inner court (Bădescu & Iliescu, 2016: 141; Iliescu et al., 2017: 47). Despite several excavation campaigns their function has not been revealed yet (Iliescu & Bottez, 2021: 571), but this Insula had two main periods of use, the first dating to the first half of the 6th century when many buildings were erected in Histria, including the

Episcopal Basilica (Iliescu & Bottez, 2018: 155). The second period of use probably corresponds to the second half of the same century, the period of renovation following the destruction by the Kutrigur raid of 559. Blocked entrances and a new sidewalk access are associated with the event. The second period is attributed to the reign of Justin II with a *follis* issued during his reign (Iliescu & Bottez, 2018: 155). These changes imply the reorganization of these areas in an effort to increase their local importance. We may claim that these areas were initially independent areas of interests which did not share any connection to one another. The reorientation of the streets and their connection infer that the main target of interest is ecclesiastical buildings, Parvan and Episcopal Basilicas. Being civic and religious centers of Histria, they should be considered one of the most significant landmarks of Late Antique Histria. Because the general street layout now linked the basilicas to the entrance to the city; they acquired a privileged position in the urban landscape (Map 17). Considering the distribution and function of these buildings at Histria, we can envisage a growing importance of Christian architecture across the acropolis suggesting the rising prominence of local church authorities (e.g., Achim, 2021: 386). If we take into account the rising prominence of the clergy in the Late Antique world, it could have taken initiative in erecting the massive Episcopal Basilica at the city centre and connecting all the local ecclesiastical buildings in a uniform itinerary, namely with the Episcopal Basilica at the centre of these perhaps in a dedicated programmed processional itinerary.

5.3.3 Cetate Sector

What is conventionally called *Cetate Sector* was a residential district in the city's southern part. *Thermae I* surrounded it to the west, the economic district to the

southwest, and Parvan Basilica to the southeast. This residential district consists of many dwellings. Excavations established the stratigraphy of this district, and established it was developed in the early 6th century AD, and functioned until the beginning of the next century. Two construction phases of the buildings were identified in this sector. With reference to the numismatic material, the first phase is dated to between the reigns of Anastasius (491–518 AD) and Justin II (565–576 AD) (Map 18 & 19). The second phase would fall between the reigns of Justin II and Phocas (602–610 BC) (Munteanu, 2011: 34). The final phase demonstrates a deterioration in the conditions of the buildings., and Munteanu has argued that elements of unfinished architecture clearly indicate a last attempt at restoration of the buildings towards the end of the 6th century AD (2011: 30). It is very interesting for the same author that the buildings of the second phase perfectly followed the alignment of the buildings of the first phase and the general plan of the district (2011: 43). Among all the edifices of this district, one attracted the attention of the researchers. It is located at the fork of the main street north of the economic district. Its construction model differs from the others in this district. It is a large dwelling, so it has been interpreted as a domus-type building (Munteanu, 2011: 41).

5.4 Other Structures: Public Square, *Horrea*, *Thermae* I, and Economic District

There are several structures located between the main gate and southern part of the city. These are the public square, horrea, and the Thermae I along with the so-called economic district.

5.4.1 Public Square

The square is next to the main gate of the city, and it is in trapezoidal form, and the Romanian sources indicate that it measures 25x14.50 m, although Poulter claimed it is 22x7m (1992, 128). It is bordered to the south by a series of buildings and a street with a north route that leads to some *horrea* and *Thermae I*. It is paved with limestone slabs, some of which are *in situ* (Achim, 2005: 65). It was probably built at the time of Anastasius (IGL 112-13). Poulter (1992: 128) suggests this space did not have any political and economic function, but was a forecourt to the Crypt Basilica.

5.4.2 Horrea

Horrea in are public warehouses, and although this term is often used to refer to granaries, Roman horrea were used to store many other types of consumables. For example, the giant *Horrea Galbae* in Rome were used not only to store grain but also olive oil, wine, foodstuffs, clothing and even marble (Richardson, 1992: 193). In Histria, four rectangular buildings of a 4th-century date near the western wall have been identified as *horrea*, and their position close to the main gate supports this approach, although at first, the buildings were regarded as a civil basilica of the 6th century (Map 20)! However, their stratigraphy confirms that they are 4th-century buildings (Rizos, 2013: 673-74). Whether they continued to be in use in the 5th and 6th centuries is the main problem that needs to be answered. Being a port city, Histria may have attained an important role and position in the military supply and provision chain along the lower Danube and it has been postulated that Histria was probably a centre where the *annona* from the Mediterranean was delivered, and foodstuffs and like supplies produced close to Histria were gathered prior to re-distribution to the military (Rizos 2013: 674). The number of *horrea* of the 5th and

6th centuries is much less in the region than those of the 4th century. However, the *horrea* of Histria may have preserved their function during the 5th and 6th centuries. This may be so because Histria lay within the 6th century administrative district known as the *Quaestura Exercitus*. Established by the Emperor Justinian I (r. 527–565) on May 18, 536 (Velkov, 1977:62), and incorporating the lower Danubian provinces plus Cyprus, Caria, and Cycladic Islands, it connected these provinces to the wealthier provinces of the Mediterranean in order that the Empire could transport supplies there via the Black Sea. With a capital in Odessus (present-day Varna), this was created to provide supplies to the lower Danubian provinces and the soldiers stationed there. Thus, in this respect, the *horrea* at Histria may have been part of the supply network integrated into this organisation.

5.4.3 Thermae I

A 4th-century thermal complex lies in the southwest of the city (Figure 17). It was originally built during the reign of Trajan, and its surface was later enlarged, to cover an area of about 1300 m^2, in the 2nd century AD. This was decreased to around 800 m^2 due to the construction of the Late Roman wall. It was used until the end of the century 4th century when it was abandoned (Suceveanu, 2005: 78; Angelescu et al., 2017: 107). It consists of a big vaulted hall. To the left, there are five rooms serving as a *scholae* (resting and entertainment places) or *functoriales* (massage rooms). To the right, the central room was connected to three other rooms with hypocaust installations. To the west, from the large hall, one could access a service room, which had two water basins (Zahariade, 2006: 104). To the south, there are four bathing rooms which can be interpreted from west to east direction: the warm water chamber, *tepidarium*, the *caldarium*, another *tepidarium*, and the steam bath, *laconicum*,

(Suceveanu, 2005: 78). A *palaestra* occupies the east of the *thermae* structure, and it is bordered by a street which separates it from the economic sector.

5.4.4 Economic Sector

The economic sector occupied the southwestern edge of the Late Roman city. It was built in the early 4th century, and it was active until the late 6th century. This was the city's economic centre, and it displays multifunctional character, as the buildings were used as workshops (*tabernae*), and as residential dwellings. Many houses were interpreted as storage facilities, but two of them served as smithy and a bakery, respectively (Curta, 2001: 125). To illustrate this further, a bakery was discovered in Room 21, a butcher's shop in Rooms 34-35, and a pottery shop in Room 36. An assemblage of golden objects near Room 40 suggests that the room is part of a wealthy private residence (Munteanu, 2011: 42).

5.5 Conclusions

To conclude, Late Antique Histria had a much reduced urban size compared to the earlier urban stages. The city enclosed by the Late Antique walled circuits excluded what had been previously part of the urban area, and Histria at that time was essentially restricted to the core of the settlement area, the acropolis. Despite its small size, it displayed dense urban habitation with diverse urban amenities, e.g., basilicas, residential areas, *horrea*, workshops, and residential dwellings in specific districts. It fully advertised its Christian character, the inevitable outcome of the Christianization of the Roman Empire. The construction of religious buildings in the Late Antique cities illustrates the spread of Christianity in urban areas, gaining

religious and social influence in public life. Histria itself had three *intra-mural* basilicas, and their position and size give some insights into understanding their role at Histria. For example, the Episcopal Basilica, located in the city centre with its great size, may have been the centre of prestige and urban core. It probably had an administrative function as the public square behind the main gate gradually lost its original importance.

Therefore, we can comment that Histria underwent a significant transformation in its governance and social organization with Christianity becoming a dominant feature in the city. Thus the deviation of the original urban arteries to connect directly the Basilicas across the city. Briefly, the streets and the basilicas would mirror the Christianization of Histria. We should note also how these Basilicas were associated with the residential complexes. Near to the Episcopal Basilica was the 'Domus Sector', a wealthy residential district, while the 'Parvan Basilica' in the southeastern corner of Histria would seem to have served as a parish church, set as it was between two residential quarters of the city, the 'Cetate' and 'ACS Sectors'.

The evidence in general thus attests to a spirit of urban regeneration in Late Antique Histria following on from the 'Third Century Crisis'. It also announces how by the 5th and 6th centuries the place had become effectively fully Christianised. What is noticeable above all is how by this later phase in Late Antiquity, Histria maintained the semblance of a wealthy and prosperous community, complete with some excellent basilicas and urban housing, and a functioning economic zone located at the southwestern edge of Histria.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: LATE ANTIQUE HISTRIA IN WIDER CONTEXT

6.1 Discussion: Fresh Thoughts on Histria

As discussed in chapter two, both Constantine Scorpan and Andrew Poulter have analysed the nature of the Late Antique fortified towns in the lower Danube region. While Scorpan mainly focused on the stratigraphy and topography of the towns with their fortifications, Poulter tackled the decline in civic character of the cities in the period of transition. This chapter examines how valid their conclusions are compared with the context of contemporary research on Histria in the light of more recent evidence from the place. We assess their work by means of a critical evaluation, starting with Scorpan and then examining Poulter's ideas, before offering a final conclusion.

6.1.1 Constantin Scorpan

Despite having been published more than 40 years ago, Scorpan's work is still used as an important reference source, especially in works dealing with urban stratigraphy

in and outside the region. It is only natural, though, that in those 40 years, more evidence has appeared, and some of his claims and the information he put forward has been challenged or even refuted by more recent scholarship (e.g., Vagalinski, 2012: 319). Scorpan had limited information compared to contemporary scholarship, so his analysis on Histria was as restricted as the information was. In consequence, he could not encapsulate the entire urban development and nature of the buildings at Histria during Late Antiquity. His analysis only assessed specific structures, such as the temple area (Sector T), *Thermae II*, and the main gate. Because the extramural area north of Histria has only inspired scholarly interest, except for the so-called 'House with Columns', the only extramural structure he was able to assess was *Thermae II*. For that structure he only presented its stratigraphy, made of four different layers from the 2nd century to the mid-4th century AD (1980: 77). Neither did he give an architectural plan nor its relation with other structures outside the wall. Furthermore, he never mentioned anything about a harbour basin or structure at Histria, even though it was a maritime city in Antiquity. This is rather odd as he must have been aware of the scientific research concerning the harbour of Histria ever since the first archaeological excavations began at the site.

It is also quite interesting to observe that he said nothing about the fortification walls of the city other than the main gate, for which he only gave its chronology, 4th-6th centuries AD. Indeed, it is extremely odd, given the late Antique fortifications of the region are the main subject of his work. While he was deeply involved in investigating the architecture and stratigraphy of the fortifications as at Sacidava, and elsewhere, a region especially examined because of the great variety of Late Antique tower forms in the region, e.g. semi-circular, pentagonal, triangular or U-shaped

(Crow, 2013: 413; Dinchev, 2007: 485), yet we cannot see any evidence for such an effort by Scorpan regarding Histria. Yet these defences and their towers cannot be ignored, the irregular trapezoidal form of the enclosure being dictated by the natural topography, the enclosed area rebuilt on the acropolis, the highest place in the area, and the straight line of the western sector, with its ten rectangular towers of different sizes, two positioned on the corners. Also notable at Histria is the building style, with big stone blocks on the exterior and smaller sized blocks on the interior part of the wall, with much *spolia*, such as capitals, inscriptions, and sculpture fragments. The main gate is also of great interest, with two successive entrances, and wide enough (3.20m) for vehicle circulation, with a smaller gate on the south (Figure 19) (Domăneanţu, 2005: 59; Zahariade, 2006: 100). Yet despite these features of interest, clearly visible, Scorpan's approach to the defensive works at Histria was most elementary *vis a vis* the remains and contemporary scholarship on the function of these Late Antique fortifications. This is a matter of debate amongst scholars, with some viewing fortifications as something more than a practical response to military threats. Dey, for example, considers the city walls of Late Antiquity to display imperial symbolism, and in his study on the Polychrome Walls in Late Antique Gaul, claims that the aesthetics and decoration of the walls were deliberate attempts to promote the legitimacy of the emperors (2010: 3-37). In contrast to this study, their relative plain and functional appearance suggests that Histria's walls were designed mainly for defensive purposes rather decoration.

Scorpan offered some specific conclusions regarding the Late Antique defences of the Lower Danube, one of which was the fact that the Romans paid attention to conditions of the landscape when constructing defensive works. Fortifications and

towns occupied higher and tactically better locations and alignments for defence, unlike in the earlier periods, when external attacks by large bands of raiders, never mind armies, were non-existent. In Late Roman Histria, the town centre was concentrated mainly on the Acropolis, which is the highest place in the area, and the most defensible position. Scorpan also noted how the Late Antique cities in the Lower Danube had no planned layout nor organization, with numerous narrow and winding streets, and buildings with irregular rooms that were frequently rebuilt, with basilica-form churches variously located in different parts of the sites. This conclusion is partially true because the dramatic reduction of the urban size became an obstacle to organized urban development.

In the case of Histria, it partially maintained the street grid inherited from the classical period (Figure 20). However, some of the street arteries changed their alignments during Late Antiquity, although the main streets ran parallel to the defensive walls (Zahariade, 2006: 103). Such irregular street patterns were common in the Late Antique settlements in Thrace and Dacia because they were so densely occupied with limited and irregular open ground, so they could not enjoy a regular street grid (Dinchev, 2007: 494). This also meant that asymmetrical forms of buildings were common, as seen at Histria in the 'Parvan Basilica'. One may clearly see that residential nuclei crowded the southern and south-eastern parts of Histria, distributed in a pattern corresponding to wealth and/or social status. Thus, upper-class residences were located at the city centre in the '*Domus* Sector', while the 'ACS' and 'Cetate Sectors' of lower-class housing were in the southeastern corner of the city, closer to the economic zone. On the other hand, it is notable how buildings

appeared around basilicas, so these could serve as parish churches, suggesting a urban plan oriented towards these basilicas.

Scorpan believed that Histria witnessed an urban renewal during the Anastasian-Justinianic era in the early 6th century, with building activities and public buildings moving east of the town centre, but he did not give specific proof. However, while he could not give any specific evidence, today it is known that three basilicas, and the 'ACS', '*Domus*', and economic sectors, had appeared by the later 5th century, supporting his idea that the Anastasian-Justinianic era saw urban renewal with building activities. Scorpan did, on the other hand, note the late 6th-century evidence for Histria is for buildings with poor conditions and other evidence of urban decay (1980: 78). This decline in urban conditions at Histria can be linked to the ruralization process in Scythia Minor, more recent scholarship prompting Alexander Madgearu (2001: 210) to propose a transition from town life to life in the town for the settlements, that is to say, there was gradual ruralization of the urban settlements in Scythia Minor. He dates this to the late 6th century to the 7th century, with a gradual dissolution of earlier organised town life to effectively village settlements, with huts and houses built with earthen walls becoming increasingly widespread in the former urbanised settlements by the second half of the 6th century, as rural life-styles replaced urban ones.

As it is, this process is clearly observed at Histria, and can be assigned to the period after the Kutrigur attack in 593 which destroyed the Episcopal Basilica. Yet deposits in the *diaconicon* prove that it continued to at least partly function after the raid, and continued to be used until 614 when another destruction occurred (Madgearu, 2010:

149). Subsequently, the ruined complex served as a shelter in which people lived in huts. Similarly, after the 'Parvan Basilica' was destroyed, probably in the late 6th century, the location became a dwelling place, with a stone wall and a fireplace discovered (Angelescu & Panaite, 2002: 164). Munteanu has stated that the last phase of the 'Cetate Sector' shows evidence for a transition from town life to life in town the houses were still occupied, as all the contemporary evidence is for a cessation of urban life inside Histria died out though dwellings were still in function, as shown by the unfinished restoration of the Episcopal Basilica (2011: 42). Zahariade has also viewed the last phase of occupation at Histria as 'ruralization' with reference to poor construction techniques in the buildings (2006: 103). In short, we note in general that the religious buildings, so important in the life of a Christianised city, lost their function and sacral nature after destruction, or were never rebuilt, and their locations transformed into dwellings. The most likely explanation is a complete collapse of the concept of urban life, along with an increasing population of refugees from other towns and the countryside, creating a demand for housing within what was essentially still a defensible location.

We may conclude that Scorpan's view on urban topography in Late Antique Histria is very basic but this is mainly because he wrote long before more extensive archaeological research on the site. His analysis could not take into account what are now seen as basilicas, and residential areas, the main landmarks of Histria in Late Antiquity. Nevertheless, he did notice the urban renovation in the 6th century and also the urban decline from the end of the 6th century onwards. His view on urban decay can be associated with the ruralization process in lower Danubian cities. The invasions and political crises in the region starting in the late 6th century were not

only the reason that triggered the urban decline, but accelerated this process, and the eventual ruralisation of the cities in the region, including Histria.

6.1.2 Andrew Poulter

If one recalls Poulter's analysis of urbanism in the Lower Danube region, cities were categorized according to their economic and geographical conditions. Though there was a general economic decline in the cities, cities along the Black Sea coastline were more resilient to this process compared to those in inland areas. Histria was a coastal city that benefitted from lucrative trade connections with cities in Asia Minor and Mediterranean. Recent scholarship has proven the trade network that linked the Black Sea and the Mediterranean in this period, with, as Gandila (2016: 129-188) observed, the circulation of coins from Carthage, Alexandria, and Rome to Thrace and Dobruja, and by the findings of a wide variety of imported pottery at Histria (Opriş, 2022: 287-316). Indeed, the ceramic materials discovered at Histria, particularly in the 'ACS Sector', are the most telling evidence in this regard, providing concrete evidence for its commercial contacts with the Mediterranean from the 4th to the 7th centuries. For example, between 2013 and 2016, not less than 500 pottery sherds were found in the ACS Sector, of which approximately 70% belong to Phocaean Red Slip Ware, 10% to African Red Slip Ware, and 5% to Pontic Red Slip Ware (Iliescu & Bottez, 2021: 574; Iliescu & Bottez, 2018: 155). In addition to Histria's imports, Minchev draws a broader picture that littoral towns were not only customers of imported wares, but also reimported them to inland areas (1983: 197-98). It is natural to think that the evidence from Histria would reflect its wealth and wealthy inhabitants through the maintenance of the public buildings and benefactions by the elites, and its is likely that the central administration undertook large-scale

building activities at Histria as with the basilicas. However, the only possible evidence for such wealth are the houses in the 'Domus Sector', the residential structures in the 'ACS' and 'Cetate Sector' being relatively modest.

It so happens that Histria has produced at least two examples of epigraphic evidence that confirm some of imperial initiative at the city in the early 6th century (IGL 112-113): Tile stamps of Anastasius (Figure 21) and a building inscription possibly from the wall (Figure 22). Somewhat surprisingly given the epigraphic evidence available for other sites in the region, Histria lacks inscriptions or buildings for the public and civic use. As such this supports Poulter's statement that civic administration in its wider and pre-Late Antiquity sense had lost its function in the lower Danubian cities at this time. Although Poulter's main references come from the urban amenities such as religious buildings, residences, public buildings, baths, streets and colonnades, he could not specifically identify such structures in Histria, or at least none of a great elaborate form. He did, it is true, implicitly refer to some urban amenities at Histria, such as the *Thermae II*, the 'Crypt Basilica', and the residences in the '*Domus* Sector', but barely noted the economic zone and public square next to the main entrance, which he claimed was the forum of the city. Thus, he could not include much of the evidence available for Late Antique Histria, including the 'Parvan Basilica' and the 'Episcopal Basilica', as well as the buildings in the 'ACS Secor'.

The three basilicas that occupied the urban area of Histria in fact are a clear exception to the concept of an early decline in the urban nature of the place. This may suggest the growing importance of Christianity in the urban landscape and bishops' participation in civic life. The so-called 'flight of the curiales' and the

decline in the curia in Late Antique cities created a power vacuum in the cities; consequently, bishops appeared as the new urban functionary, and they began involving in matters of civic administration. The so-called rise of the bishop happened at the expense of civic self-government (Rapp, 2005: 279-280). Indeed, the great size of the Episcopal Basilica at Histria might reflect its administrative role. As it is, the abandonment of *Thermae II* is a concrete example of the deterioration of civic life at Histria, although whether the abandonment of this resulted from indifference to urban heritage or lack of maintenance is unknown. We might assume that it was no longer needed for personal hygiene and the social gatherings as the *thermae* did in the Imperial period. By contrast, however, in Anatolia during the Late Antique period, the practice of communal bathing was preserved, and at least a small bath complex called *balnea* served in several cities such as Miletus, Ephesus, and Amorium (Niewöhner, 2017: 45).

Poulter clearly believes in an urban decay process in the lower Danube region, but he could not elaborate the reasons of this development, although the ruralization process seems a reasonable explanation for this. The problem is that although he mentioned socio-economic problems across the region, he does not discuss them in detail. For example, he wrote nothing about the negative impact of Avar-Slav invasions on the cities in the 6th century, even though he explained how Gothic and Hunnic invasions adversely affected the urban development in lower Danube region in the 5th century. Quite why he did not seek similar explanations for the urban conditions in the Lower Danube region by the late 6th century is inexplicable.

There again, recent environmental and geological research on Histria has provided alternative explanations for its decline and abandonment. It has been proposed that Histria became decoupled from the Black Sea due to sedimentation and coastal progradation in the 7th century AD. Becoming a landlocked site, Histria lost its maritime vocation, and seafaring activity ceased, eventually leading to the complete abandonment of the place (Vespremeanu-Stroe et al., 2013: 245-256; Bony et al., 2015: 200; Preoteasa et al., 2013: 564-69). Though this situation seems to be teleological as the long-termed environmental transformation coincided with the end of habitation at Histria in the early 7th century, at least coastal transformation explains that the city no longer benefitted from sea trade, so the city could not generate wealth for the maintenance of buildings. Thus we can see how the intensive ridge development (Romanescu, 2014: 320-27) at Histria coast contributed to the city's abandonment in the 7th century AD.

In sum, Poulter discerned a decline in the civic character of Histria but did not manage to provide explanations for the decline. If we consult other scholarly works dealing with the urban development in Late Antique cities in the lower Danube region, the rise of Christianity and political-economic decline are the main reasons for the urban decay. On the one hand, the erection of basilicas across the city confirms the Christianization of the urban landscape in Histria, and this might suggest that they acquired administrative function. On the other hand, other public amenities, such as forum, baths, and public buildings, lost their function. Poulter correctly observed the maritime character of Histria, that the city made use of seafaring activities across the Black Sea and beyond. However, Histria’s coastal

nature may have sealed its fate towards the 7th century because the city lost its connection to the Black Sea due to geomorphological evolution.

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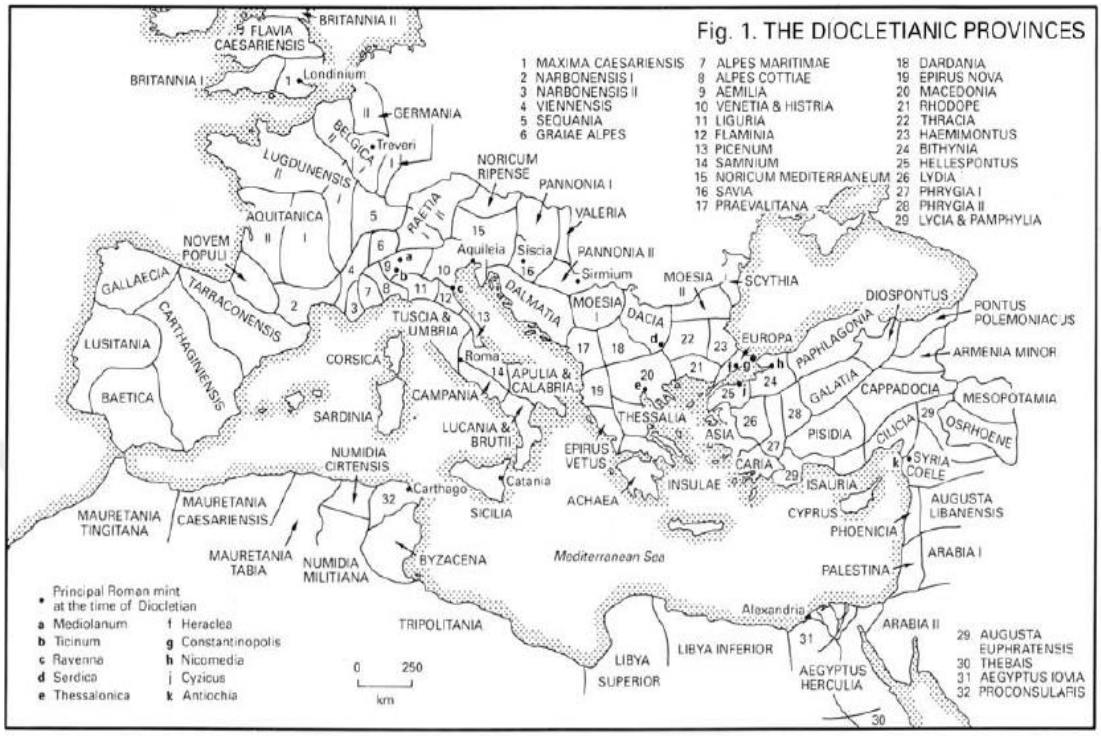
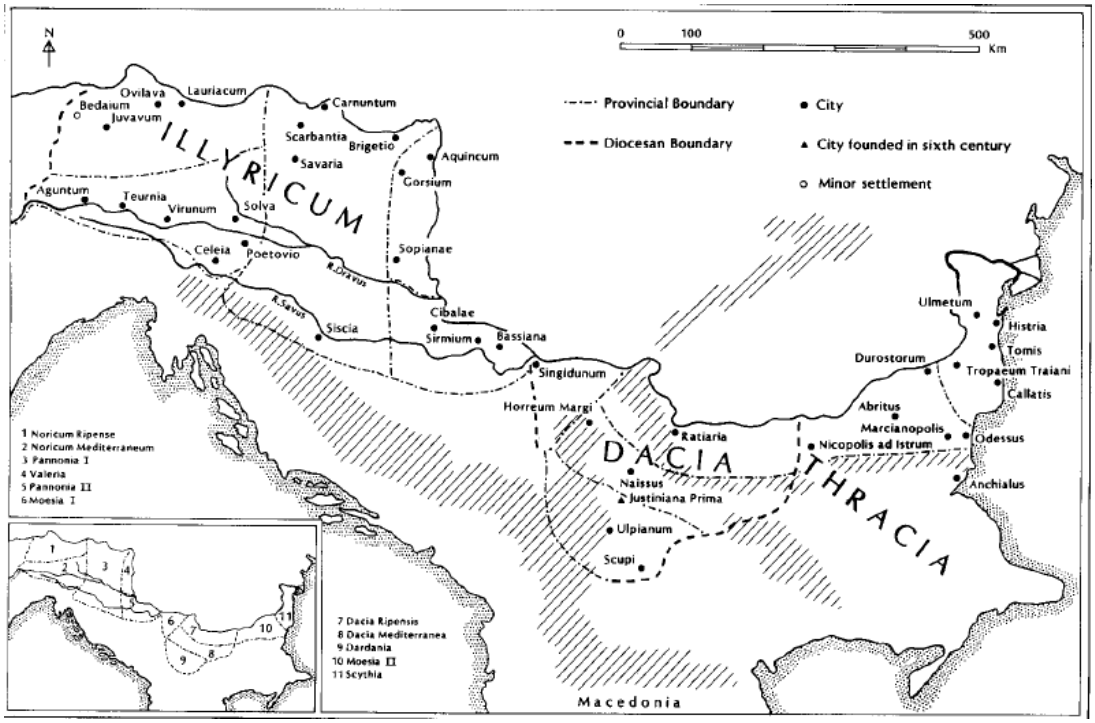
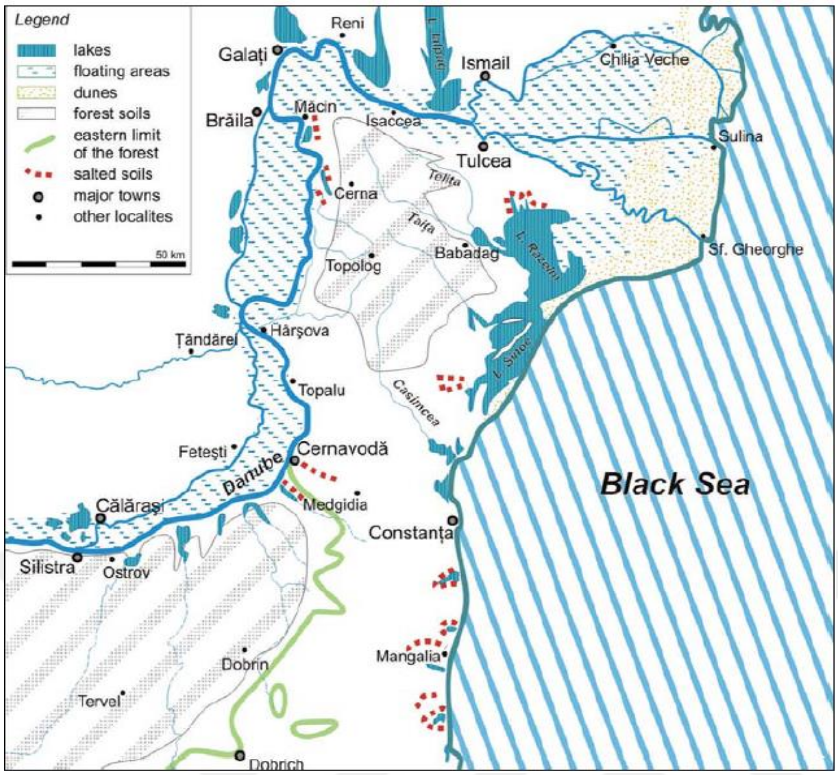
MAPS



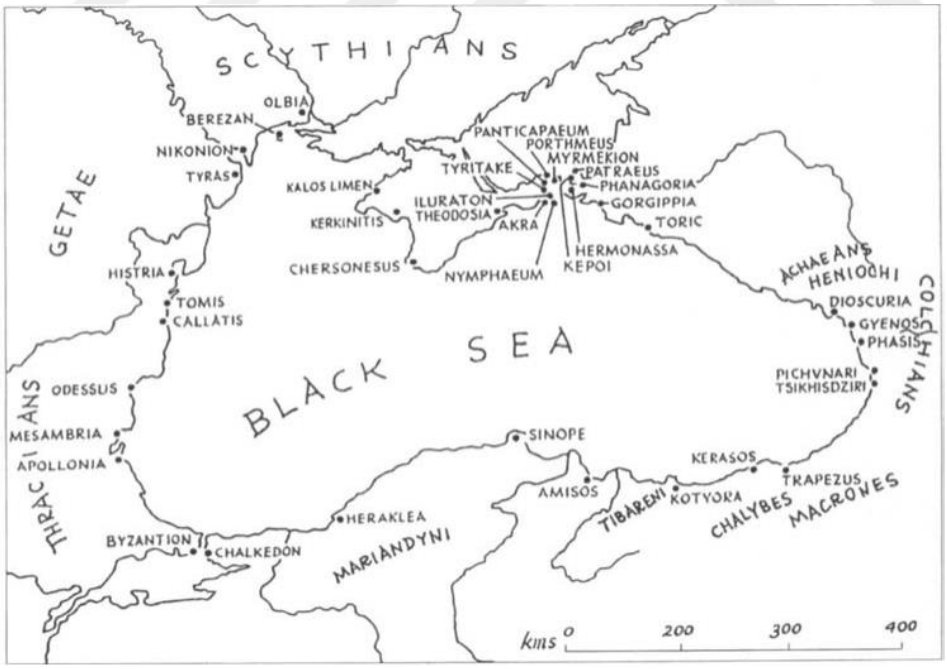
Map 1 Diocletianic Provinces of the Late Roman Empire (Cameron, 1993: fig. 1)



Map 2 The Danubian Provinces during the Late Roman Empire (Poulter, 1992)

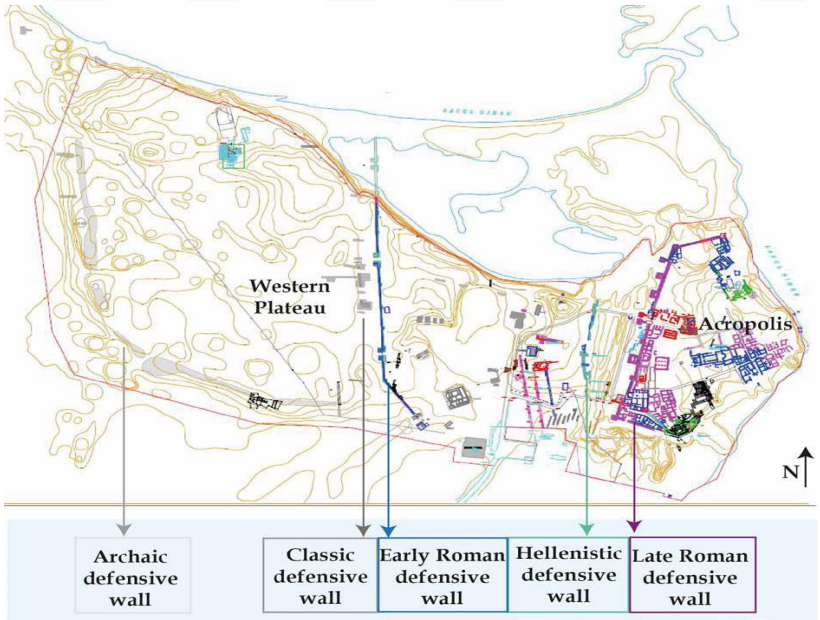


Map 3 Map of Dobrudja (Torbatov, 2010: fig. 2)

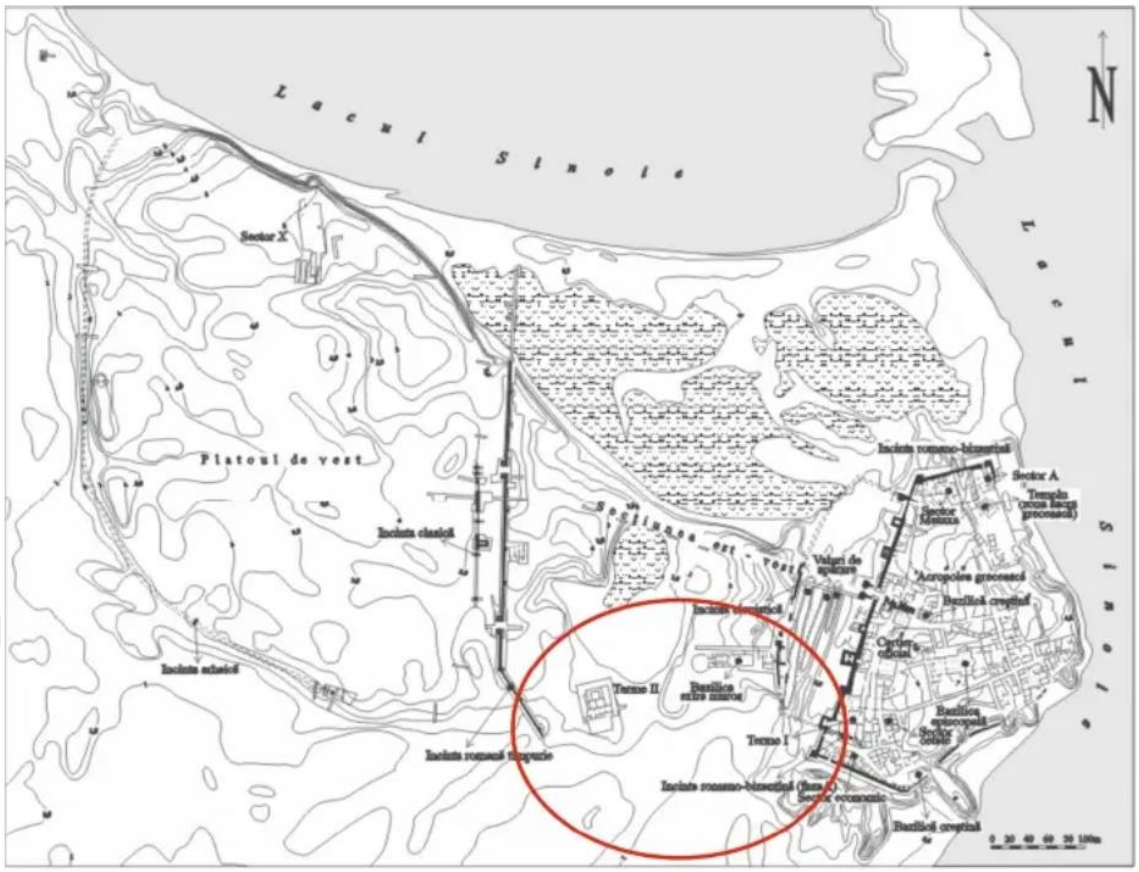


Map 4 Major Greek colonies and local peoples in the Black Sea (Tsetskhladze, 2004: fig. 1)

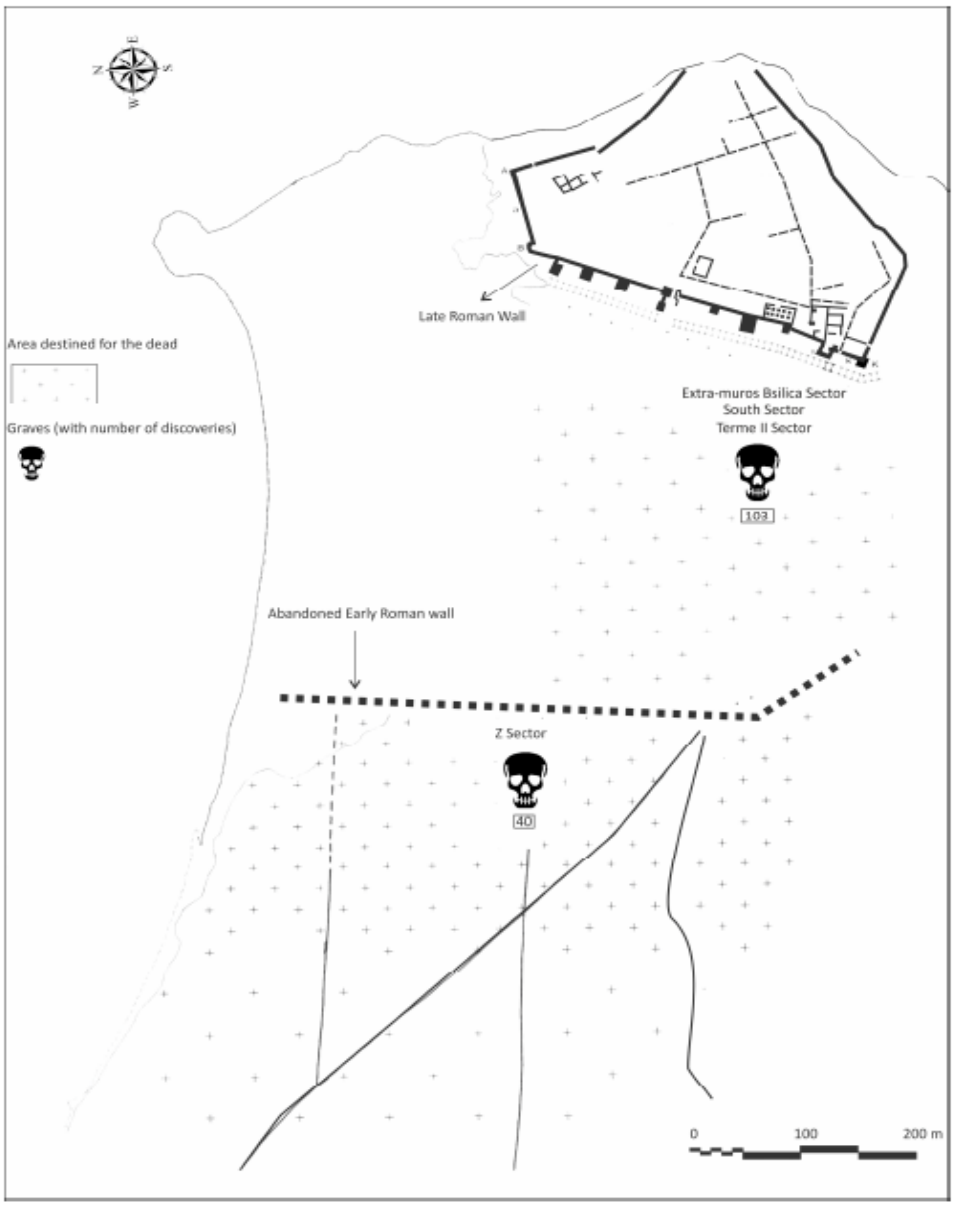
Map 5 Greek colonies and local peoples along the Western Black Sea coastline (Hind, 1983: fig. 2)



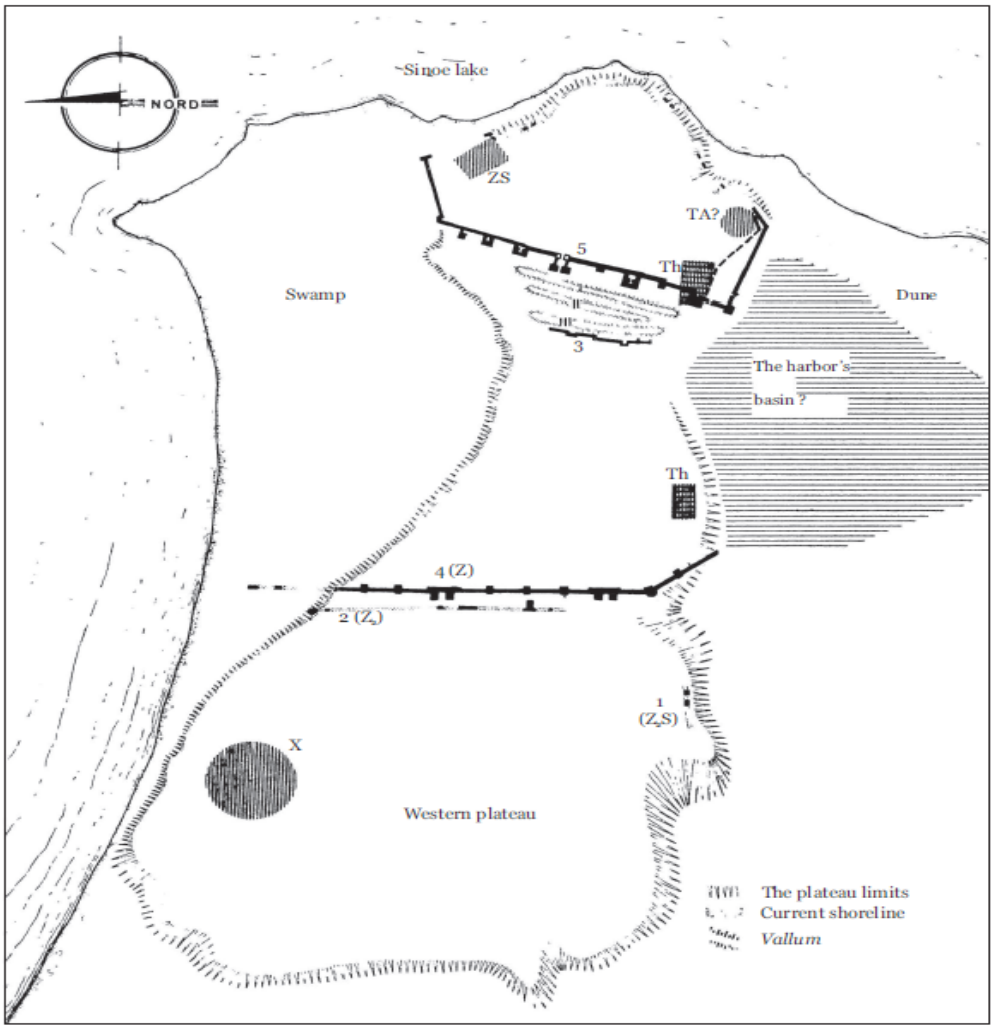
Map 6 Histria: Five occupational phases with their defensive walls (Bivolaru et al., 2021: fig. 4)



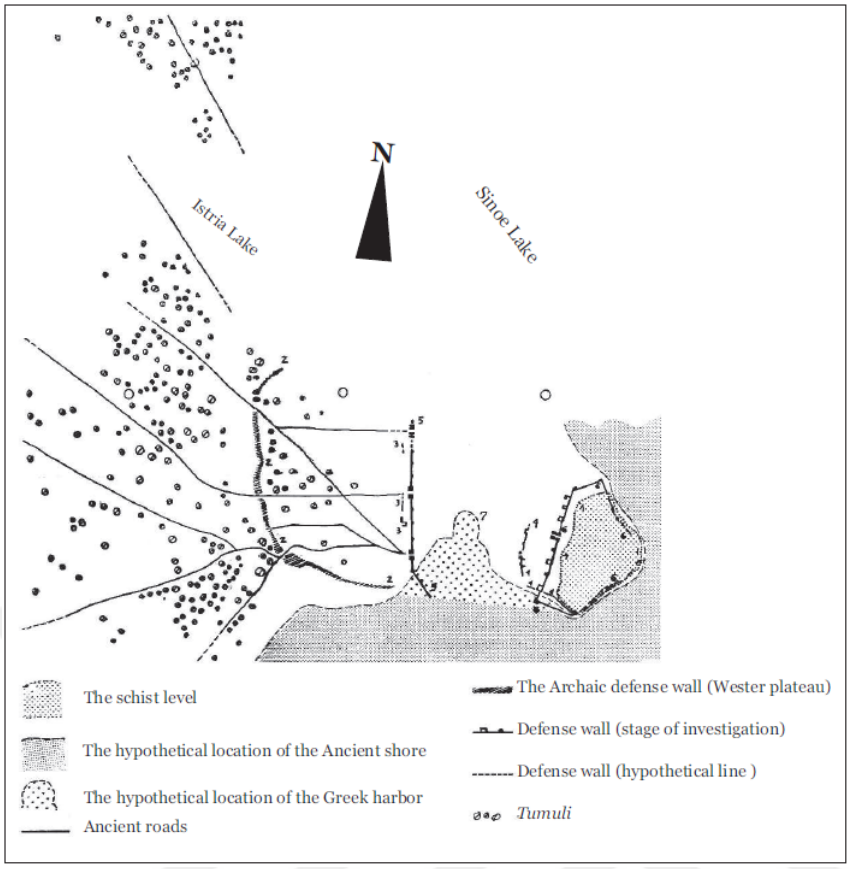
Map 7 General plan of Histria in Late Antiquity (Dabica et al., 2021)



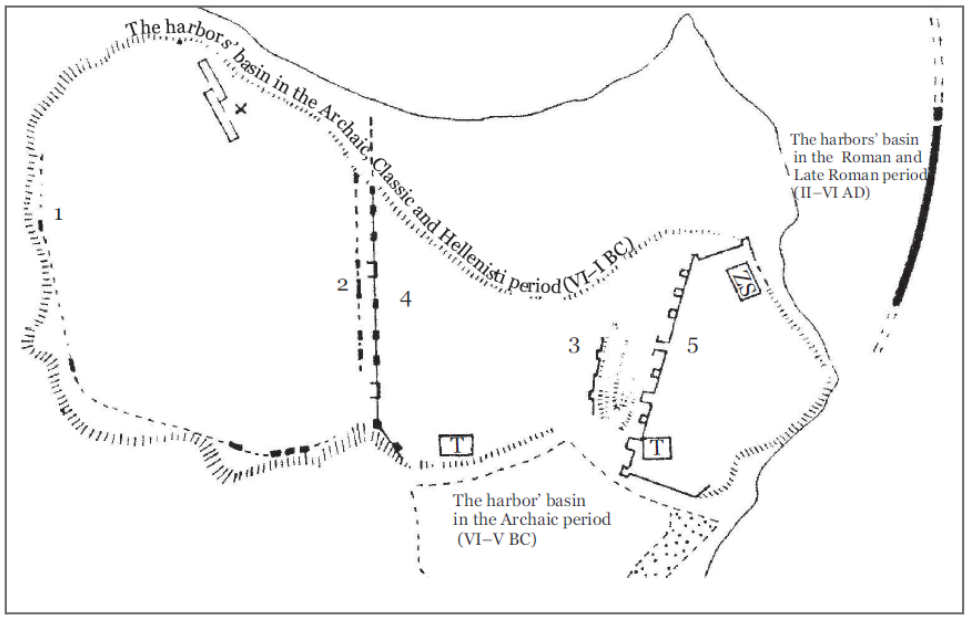
Map 8 Necropoleis of Histria in Early Roman and Late Antique periods (Cretu et al., 2020)



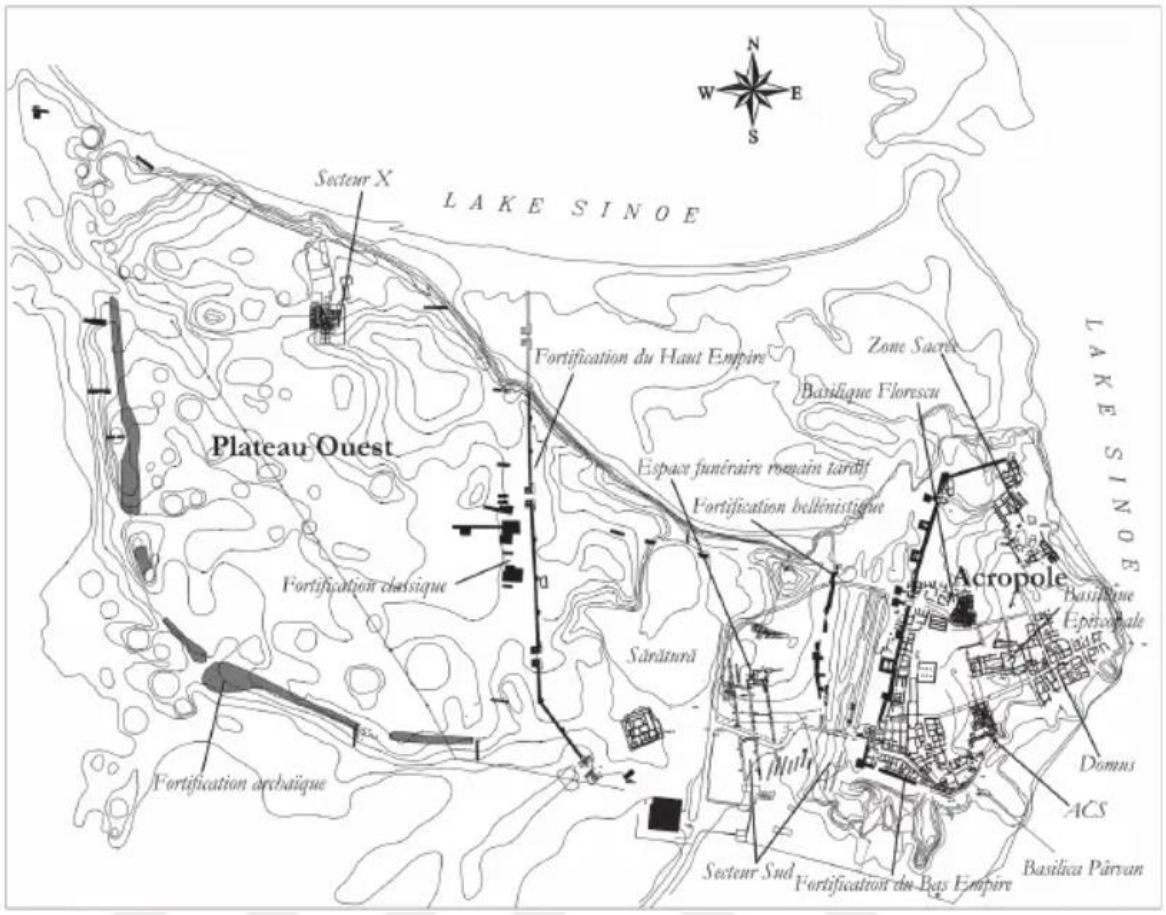
Map 9 Location of Histria's harbour by Theodorescu (Dabica, 2010)



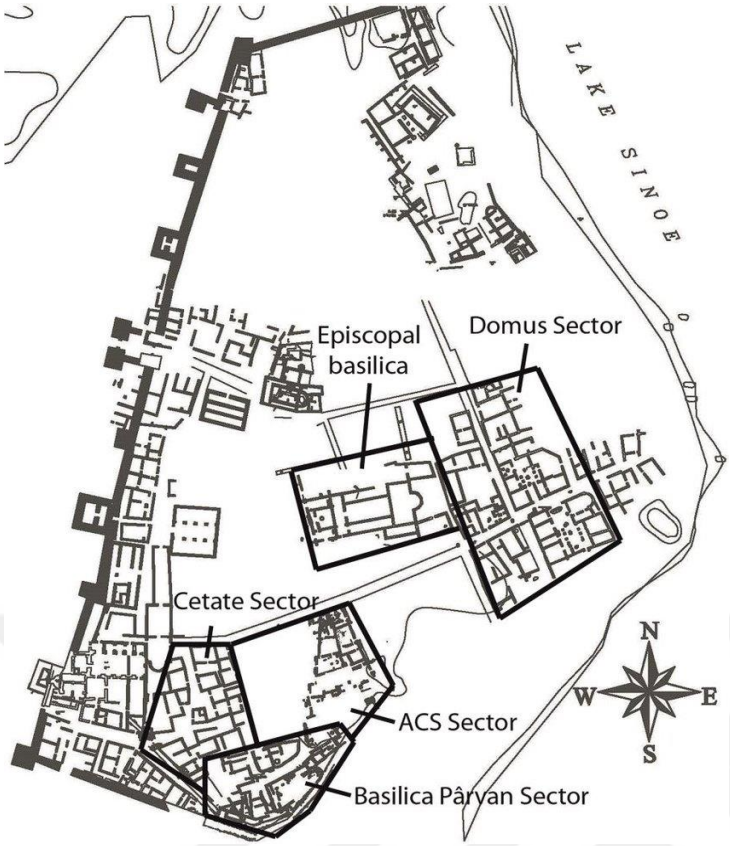
Map 10 Location of Histria's harbour by Ştefan (Dabica, 2010)



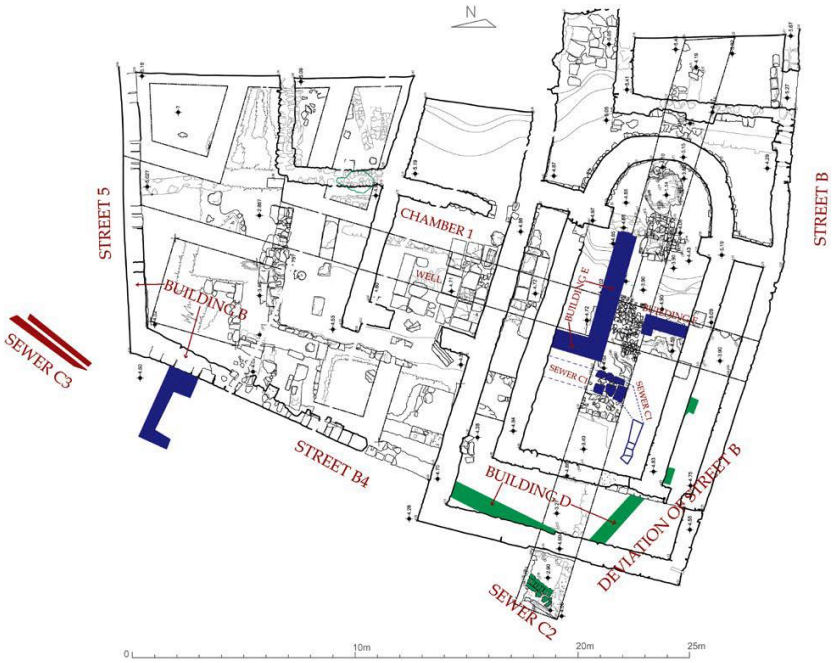
Map 11 Botzan's hypothesis of the harbour locations (Dabica, 2010)



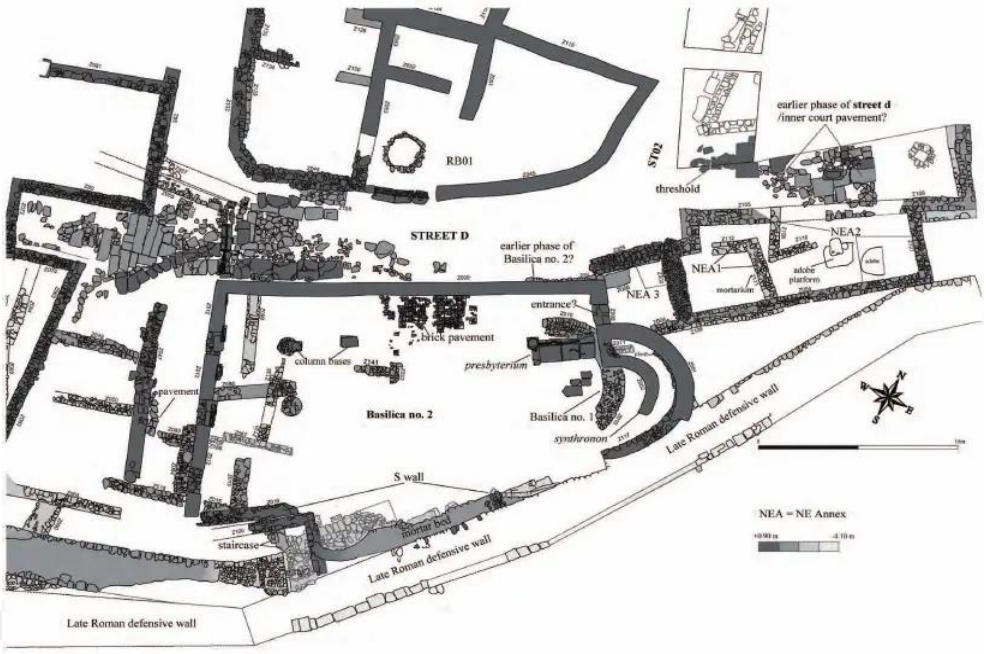
Map 12 General plan of Histria with location of main sectors (Bottez, 2022: fig. 1)



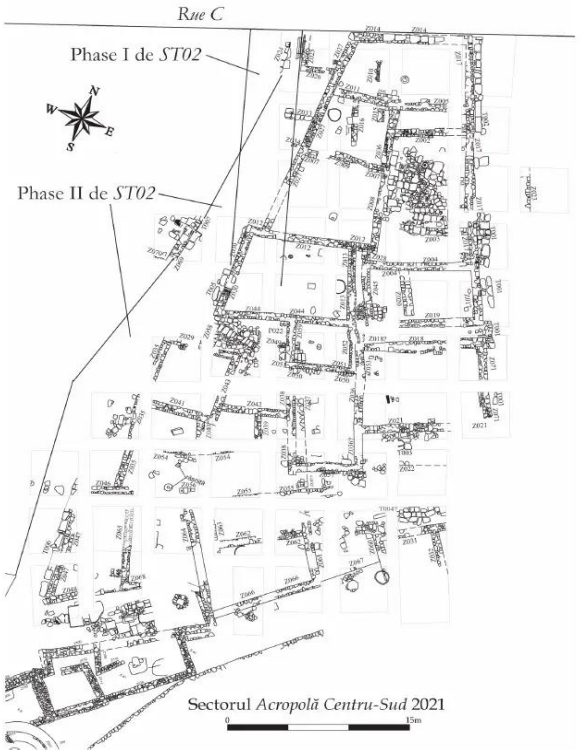
Map 13 Location of the Episcopal Basilica with other sectors of Histria (Iliescu & Bottez, 2021: fig. 1)



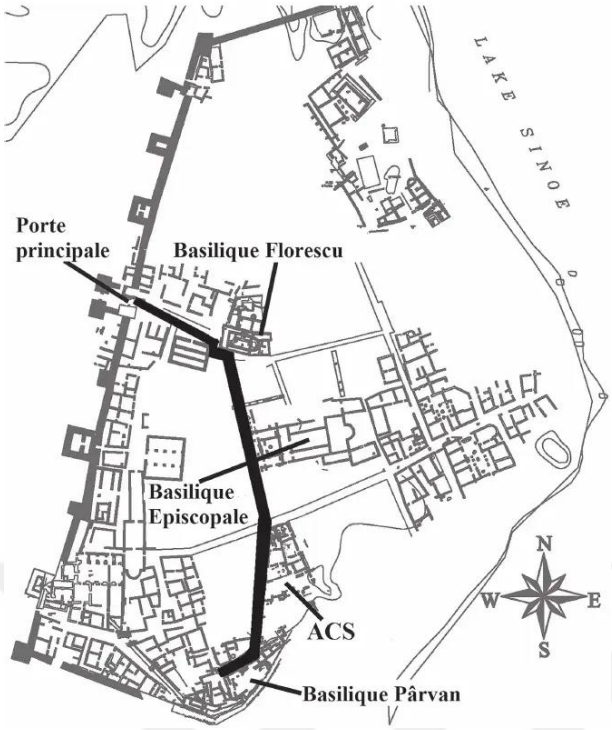
Map 14 Plan of the Crypt Basilica and the streets (Achim et al., 2021)



Map 15 General plan of Parvan Basilica and the sector (Angelescu et al., 2017)



Map 16 Plan of the Acropolis Center-South Sector, with the two phases of ST02 (Bottez, 2022: fig. 2)



Map 17 The route linking three Christian basilicas (Bottez, 2022: fig. 3)

Map 18 The Cetate Sector, phase I (Munteanu, 2011: fig. 3)

Map 19 The Cetate Sector, phase II (Munteanu, 2011: fig. 4)

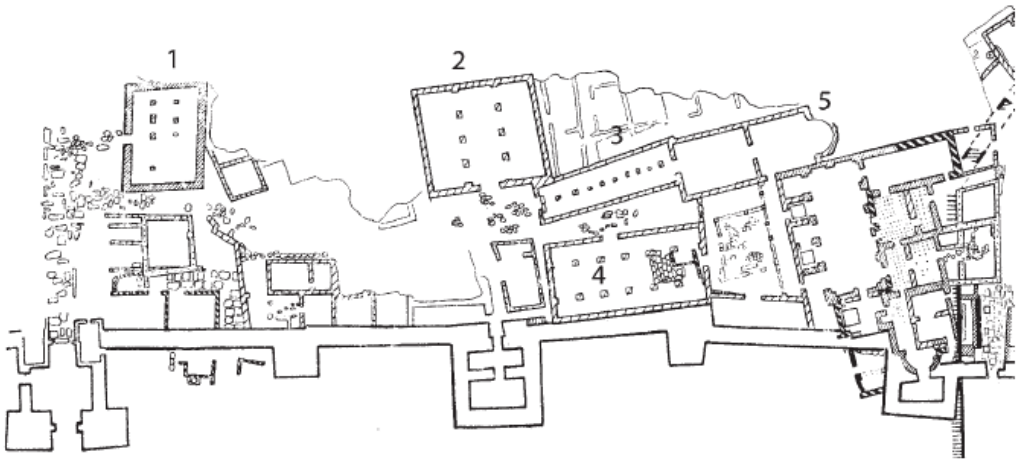


Fig. 16 Istrus (Histria/Istria; jud. Constanța/RO). The late Roman warehouses sector: **1-4** *horrea*. – **5** apsidal building. – (After Histria I, 1954).

Map 20 Horrea in Late Antique Histria (Rizos, 2013: fig. 16)

FIGURES

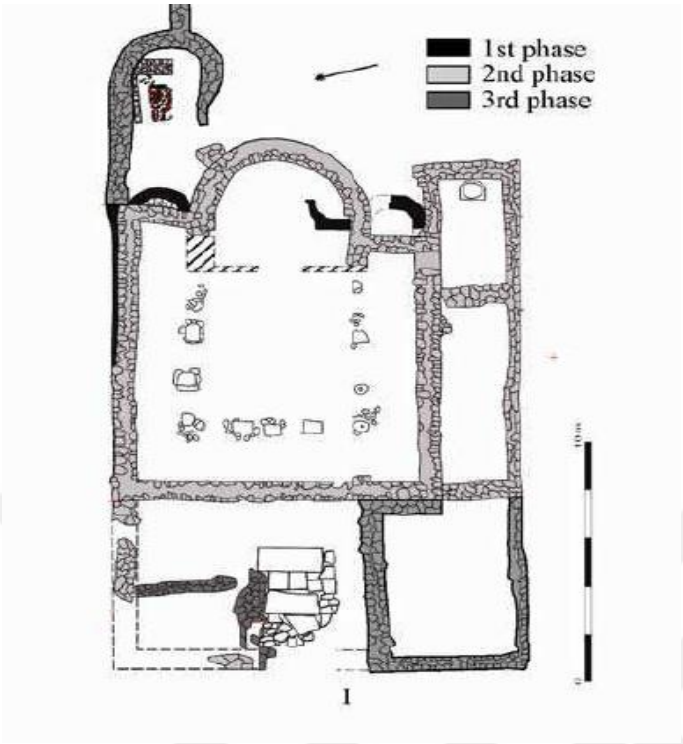


Figure 1 General plan of the Extramural Basilica (Rusu-Bolindet et al., 2014: Pl. 2.1)

Figure 2 General view of the Extramural Basilica (from the north-east) (Rusu-Bolindet et al., 2014: Pl. III. 1).

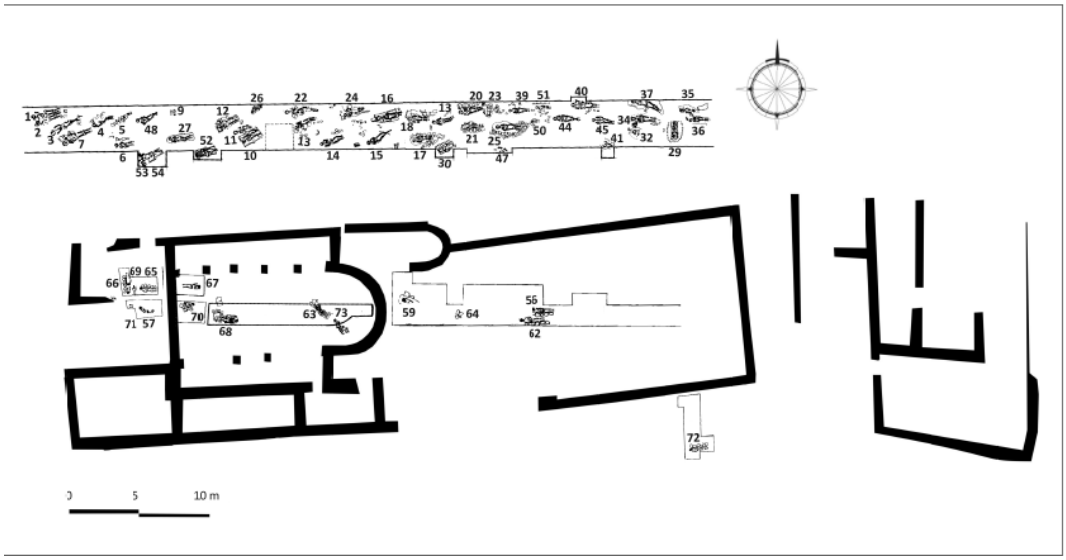


Figure 3 Burials belonging to the first cemetery 4th–5th century AD (Cretu et al., 2020)

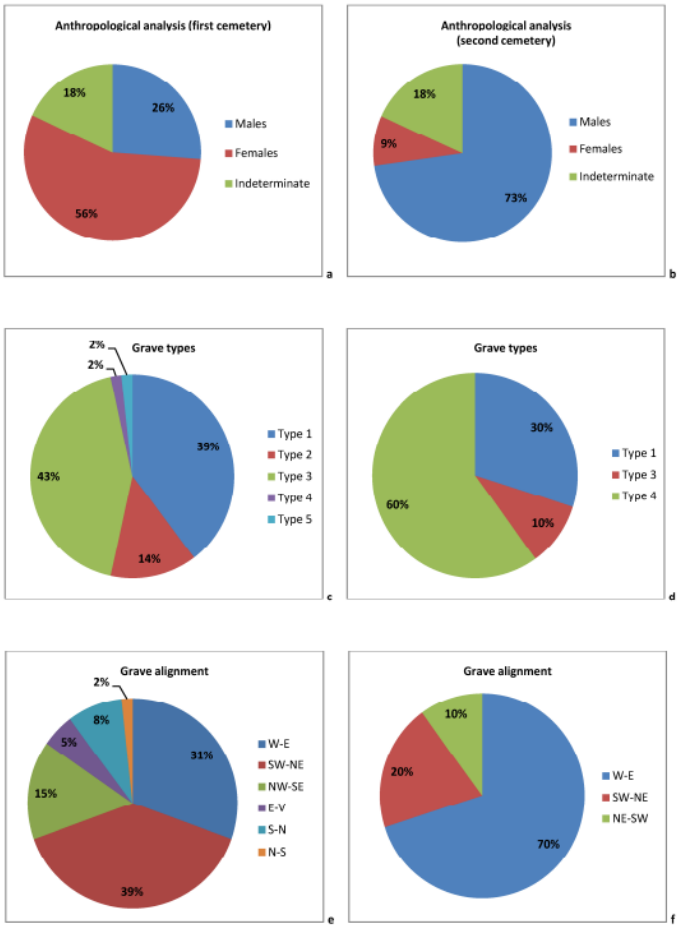


Figure 4 Analysis of first and second cemetery, including anthropology, graves types and grave alignment (Cretu et al., 2020)

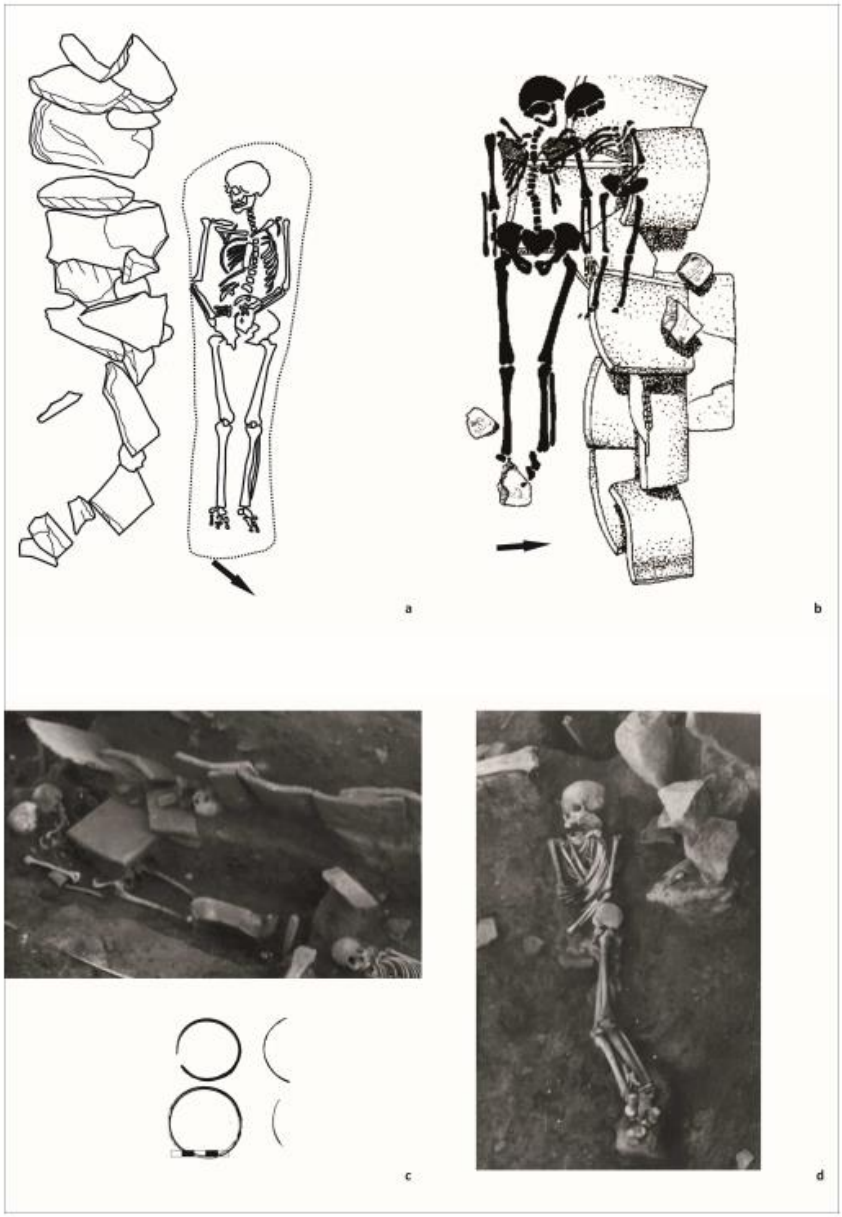


Figure 5 Burials from the first cemetery: a. Grave 17; b–c. Grave 18; d. Grave 19 (Cretu et al., 2020)

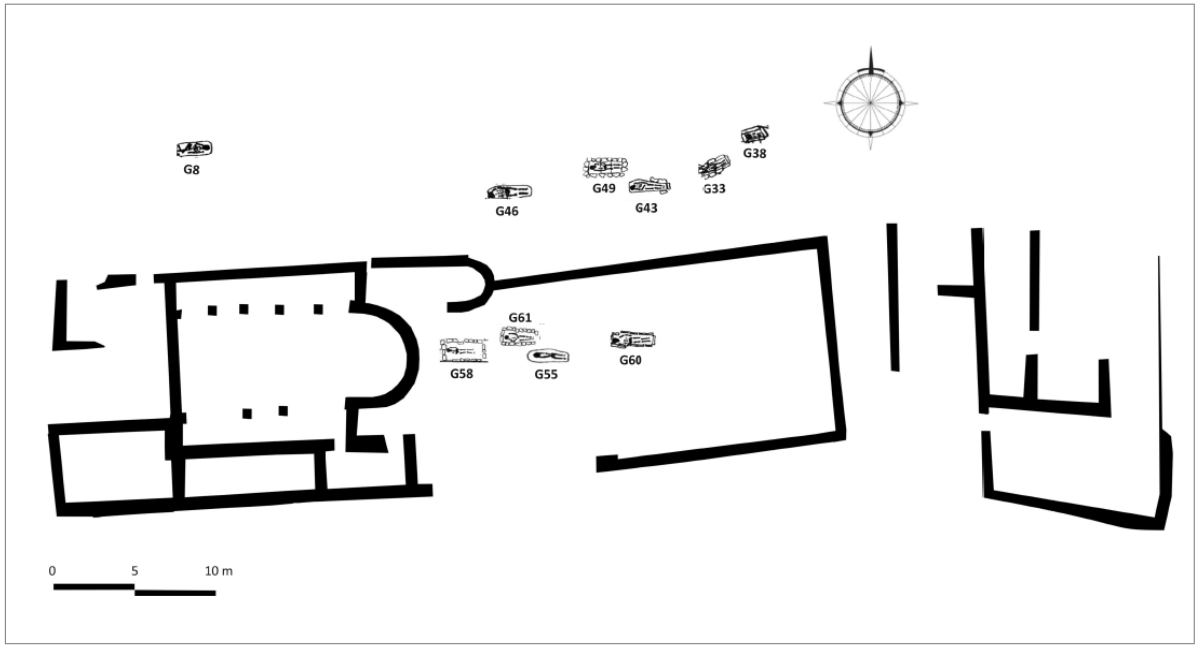


Figure 6 Extramural Basilica and burials from the 6th and 7th century AD (Cretu et al., 2020)

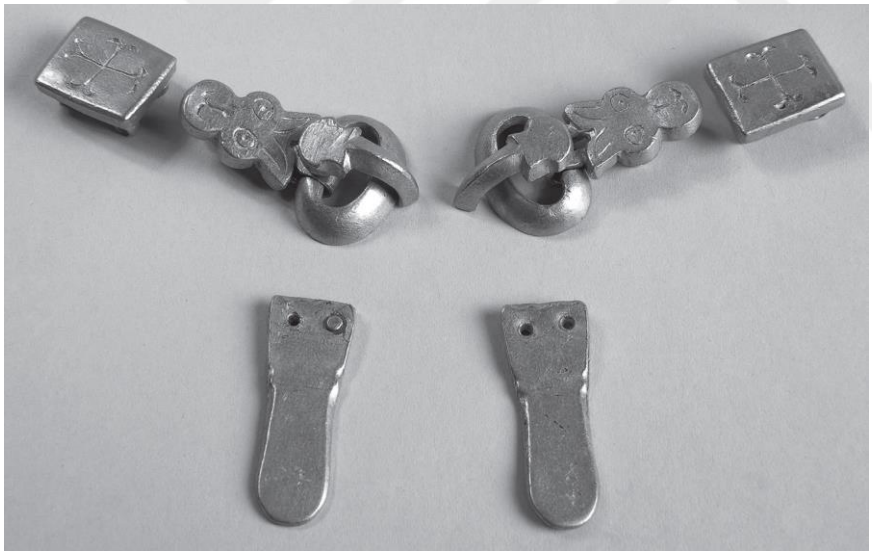


Figure 7 Gold objects from the inventory of Grave 58 (Achim, 2015)

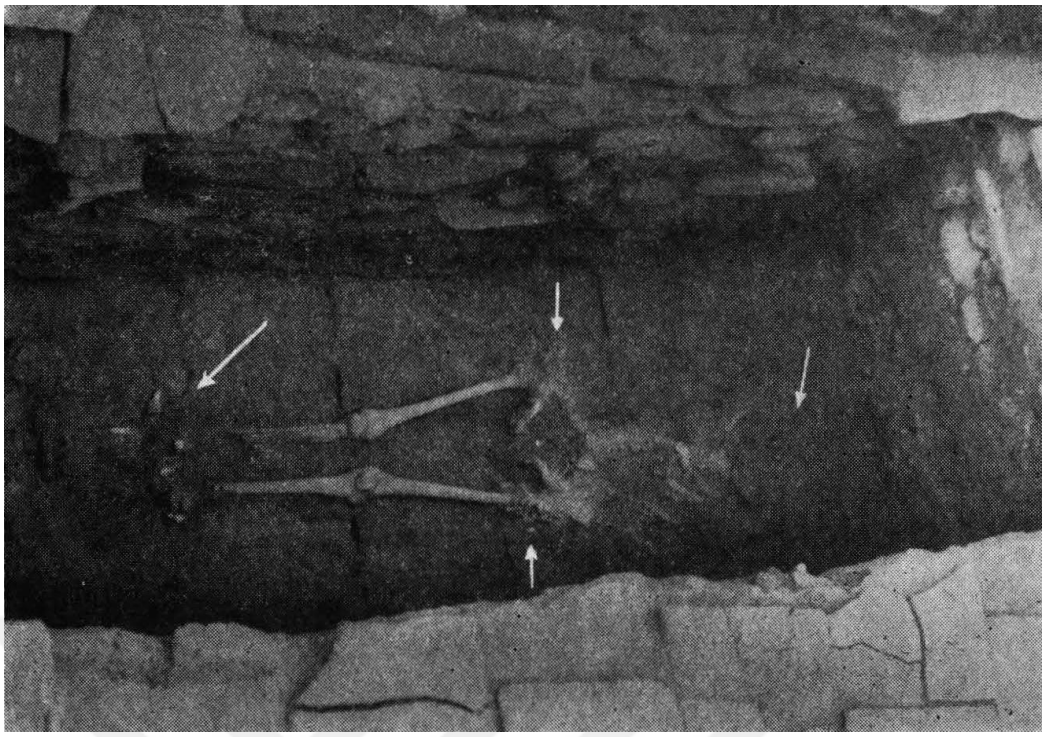


Figure 8 Skeleton in Grave 58 and gold footwear on the feet (Hampartumian, 1971)

Figure 9 Roman coin depicting Alexander Severus on the obverse, and the god Danubius with a possible lighthouse on the reverse (Bivolaru et al., 2021: fig. 5)

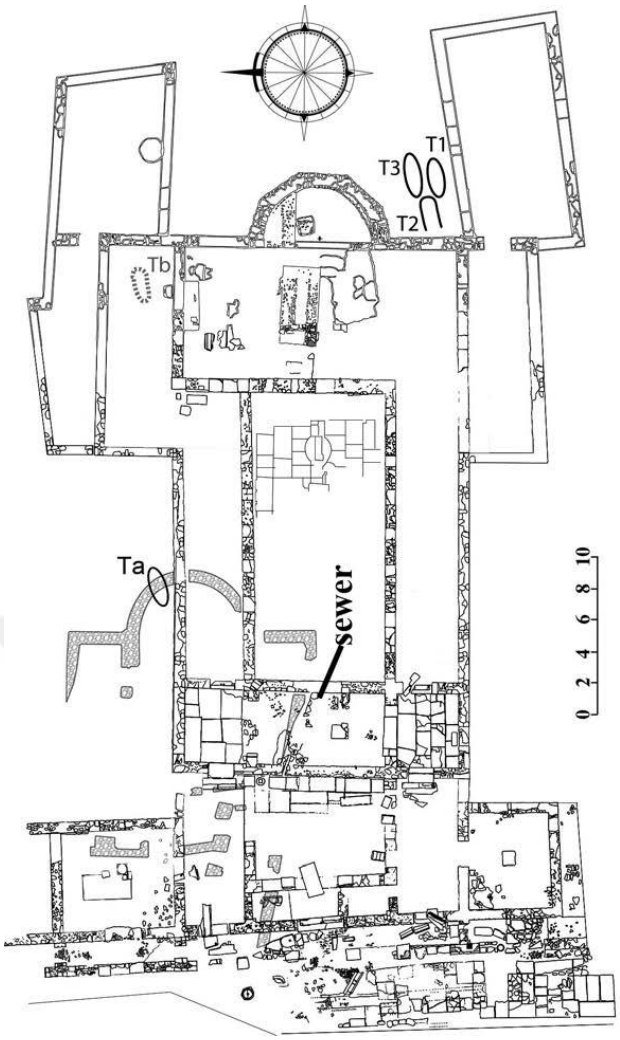


Figure 10 Plan of the Episcopal Basilica and Basilica C (Achim et al., 2021)

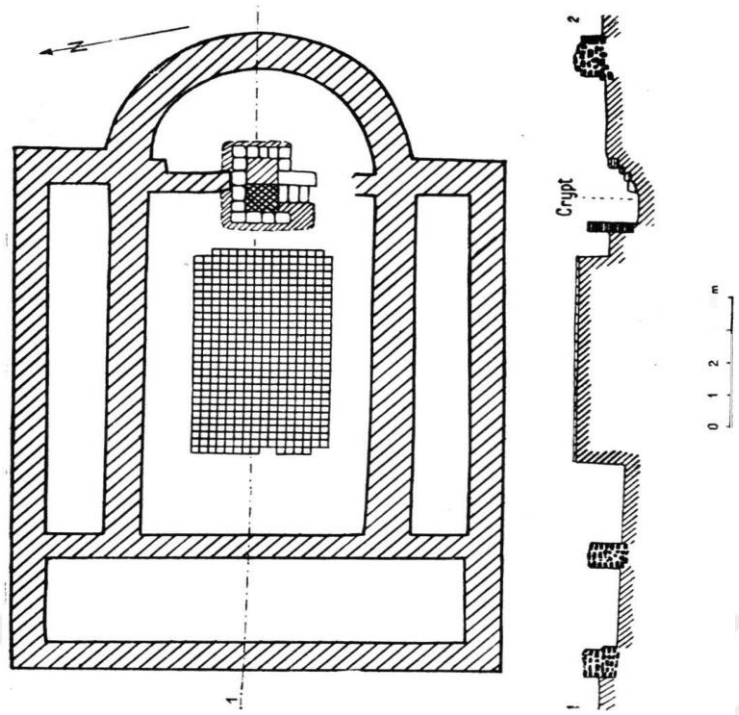


Figure 11 Plan of Crypt Basilica (5th-6th century) (Barnea, 1958)

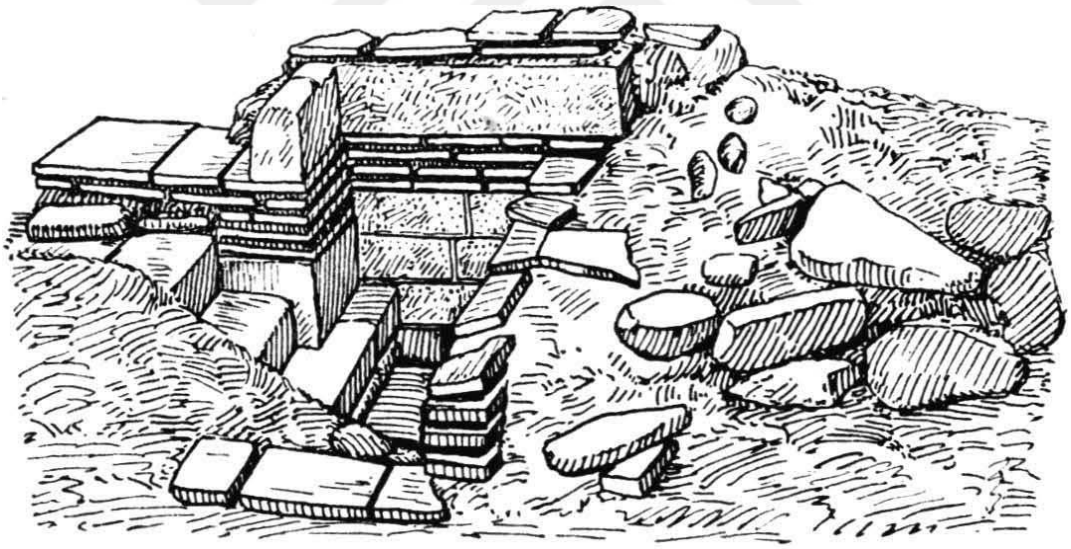


Figure 12 The crypt of the Basilica (Barnea, 1958)

Figure 13 Basilica no. II: Apse, synthronon and presbyterium (Angelescu et al., 2017)

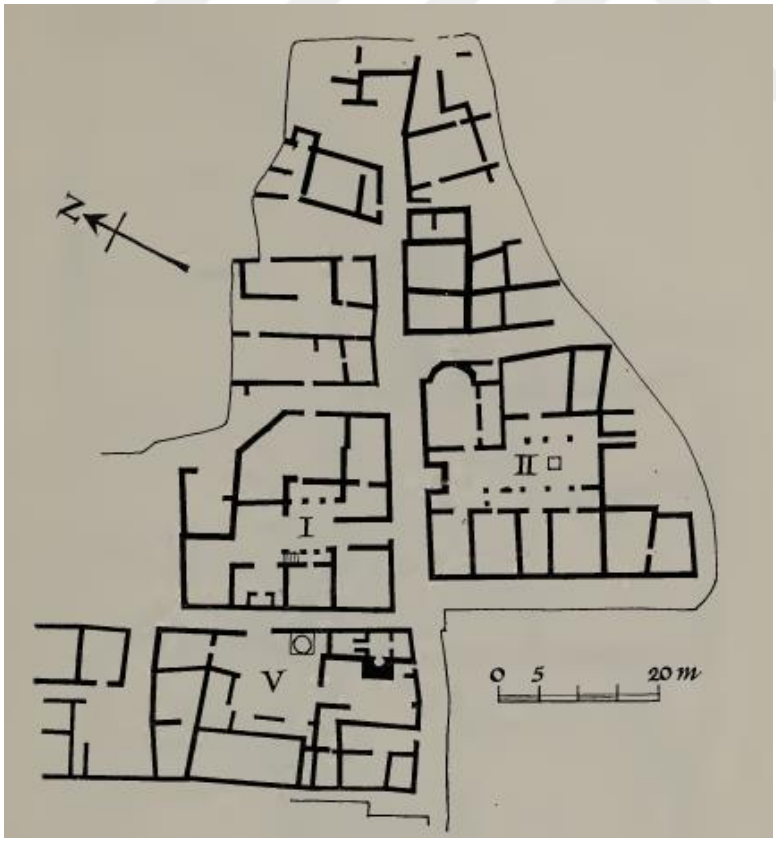


Figure 14 Plan of Domus Sector (Robertson & Henderson,1975: fig. 2)

Figure 15 Plan of the building with basilica in Domus Sector (Talmațchi, 2021)

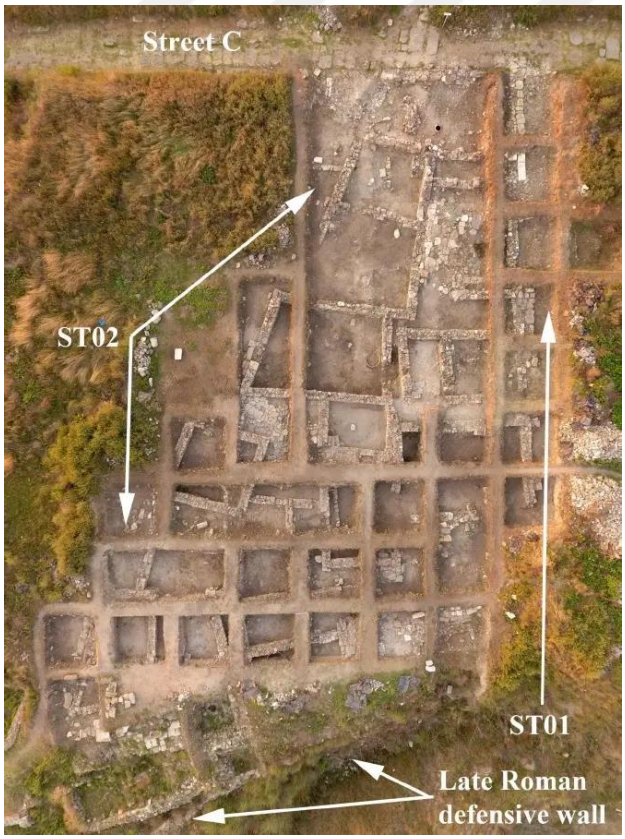


Figure 16 Aerial view of the ACS Sector (Bottez et al., 2019)

Figure 17 Thermae I (Suceveanu & Angelescu, 2005)

Figure 18 A late Roman wall in Histria (Suceveanu & Angelescu, 2005)

Figure 19 The main gate of the late Roman wall, view from outside (Suceveanu & Angelescu, 2005)

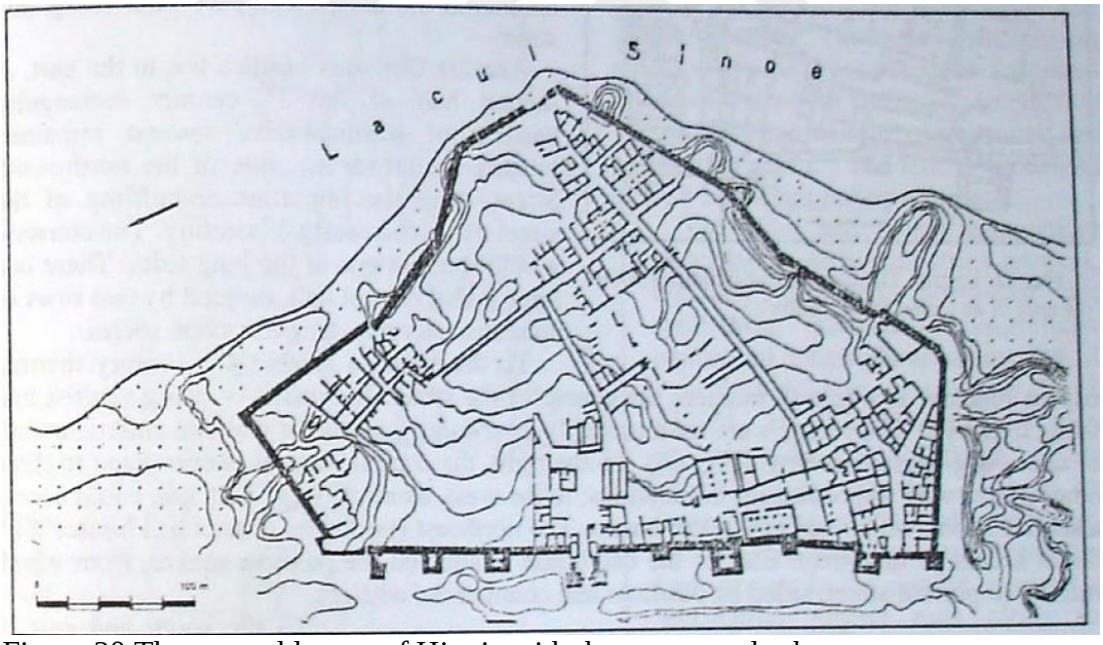
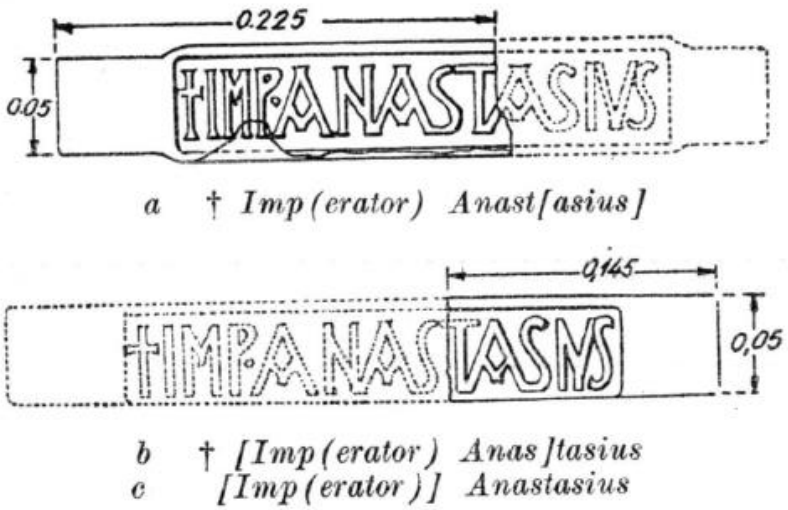


Figure 20 The general layout of Histria with the streets and urban structures (Zahariade, 2006: fig. 61)



a † Imp(erator) Anast[asius]

b † [Imp(erator) Anas]tasius
c [Imp(erator)] Anastasius

Figure 21 Tile stamps of Anastasius (Popescu, 1976)

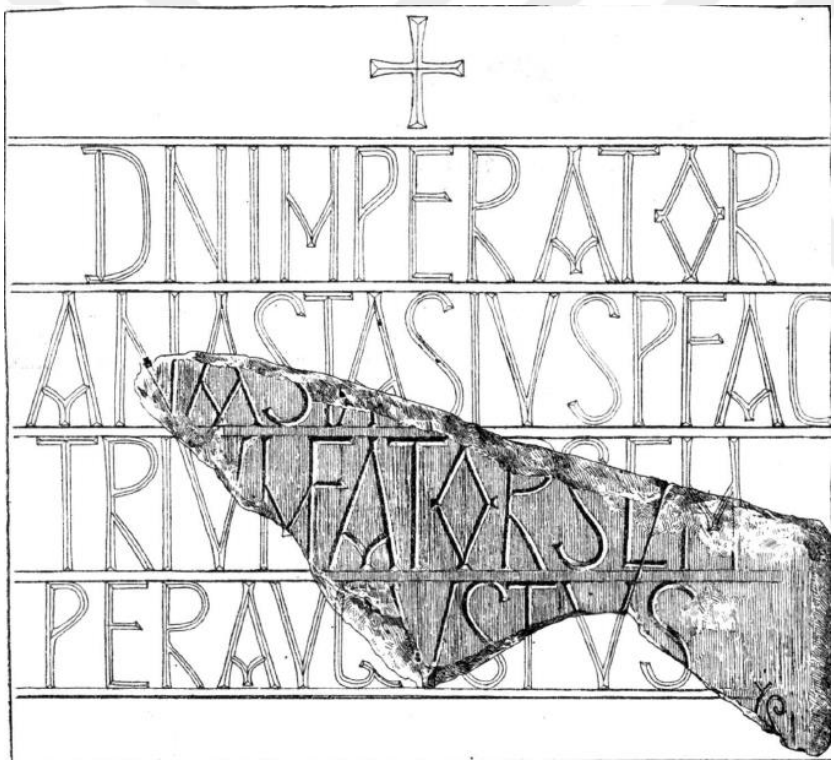


Figure 22 A building inscription of Anastasius (Popescu, 1976)