

Archaeology of a World of Changes

*Late Roman and Early Byzantine
Architecture, Sculpture and Landscapes*

In memoriam Claudiaie Barsanti

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Introduction

Since its very first conference in 1924, the International Congress of Byzantine Studies (ICBS) has been truly multidisciplinary, and has distinguished itself from other international scientific events of the same type by giving to Archaeology and Art History a place similar to those given to History and Philology.¹ It is not always recognised, but the first congresses were, together with the International Congresses of Christian Archaeology (since 1894), among the first world-class scientific meetings to focus on the Late Roman and Early Byzantine world as a whole, geographically and temporally, at a time when most Ancient History textbooks stopped abruptly at Constantine I, Theodosius I or, at best, Romulus Augustulus, without any actual presentation of the civilisation of that time, even from the Western point of view.²

With the development of Late Roman and Early Byzantine studies throughout the twentieth century, the participation in the ICBS of scholars focusing on the first centuries of the medieval phase of the Roman Empire has increased with each new meeting. The 22nd and 23rd conferences, held in Sofia (2011) and Belgrade (2016), which were the first to be organised in Bulgaria and Serbia in more than eighty years (respectively 1934 and 1927 for the previous ones), have without doubt offered the largest number of papers on the transition to the Middle Ages, especially in the Balkans, and in the field of Archaeology and Art History.³ Moreover, the number of participants has steadily increased over the years, so that a full publication of all the papers is no longer possible.

For all these reasons, but also to report on the richness and originality of communications in the field of the Archaeology and Art History of Late Antiquity presented within the ICBS, it seemed worthwhile after the Congress of Belgrade (entitled *Byzantium – A World of Changes*) to gather several papers from different sessions, in order to form a consistent volume on architecture, sculpture and landscapes, under a general theme linked to that of the meeting: *Archaeology of a World of Changes*, viz. the Late

Roman and Early Byzantine period. A call for papers was therefore sent to the participants of six thematic sessions of free communications:

- *Byzantine Archaeology*, chaired by Dominic Moreau and Mihailo Milinković;
- *Late Antique and Early Byzantine Art*, chaired by Alicia Walker and Ljubomir Milanović;
- *Late Antique and Early Byzantine Architecture*, chaired by Elizabeta Dimitrova and Skënder Muçaj;
- *Material Culture*, chaired by Orsolya Heinrich-Tamaska and Ivana Popović;
- *Studying Byzantine Sculpture in the 21st Century: New Perspectives and Approaches*, chaired by Claudia Barsanti and Alessandra Guiglia;
- *Varia Archaeologica*, chaired by Vesna Bikić and Özgü Çömezoğlu Uzbek;

and one round table:

- *The Episcopal Palace in Early Byzantium: Historical Development, Architectural Typologies, Domestic Spaces*, chaired by Isabella Baldini.

Given the number of sessions, the heterogeneous nature of the papers and the international character of the authors, it seemed important to bring together a plural editorial board, respecting as much as possible the chairs of the sessions (obviously, on a volunteer basis) and including representatives of all the languages chosen for the publication, which correspond to the four official Western European languages of the Congress: English, French, German and Italian. Therefore, the reader will find a summary of all the papers in each of these languages, although no author provided a main text in German.

This plural and international Editorial Committee is composed of:

- Dominic Moreau (Université de Lille / HALMA-UMR 8164 research centre, France);
- Carolyn S. Snively (Gettysburg College, USA);
- Alessandra Guiglia (Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy);
- Isabella Baldini (Università di Bologna, Italy);
- Ljubomir Milanović (Византолошки институт Српске академије наука и уметности / Institute for Byzantine Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Serbia);
- Ivana Popović (Археолошки институт, Београд / Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade, Serbia);
- Nicolas Beaudry (Université du Québec à Rimouski, Canada);

¹ See M. Marinescu (ed.), 1925. *Compte-rendu du Premier Congrès international des études byzantines, Bucarest, 1924*, Bucharest.

² Obviously, the then edition of *The Cambridge Ancient History* and *The Cambridge Medieval History* are not really included in this statement, but they are not just simple textbooks (although it should be noted that the first – first published in 1939 – ends in AD 324 and the second – first published in 1911 – begins with Constantine, the Christianisation of central power being considered as the event marking the passage from one period to another).

³ See I. Iliev (ed.), 2011. *Proceedings of the 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Sofia, 22–27 August 2011*, I–III, Sofia; and, online, the three volumes of *The Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies*: www.byzinst-sasa.rs/eng/archive/47/2017/11/30/the-proceedings-of-the-23rd-international-congress-of-byzantine-studies.html.

- Orsolya Heinrich-Tamáská (Leibniz-Institut für Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Europa–GWZO, Germany).

Every member of the Editorial Committee was also a member of the Scientific Committee, which was completed by:

- Claudia Barsanti (Università degli Studi di Roma ‘Tor Vergata’, Italy);
- Pascale Chevalier (Université Clermont Auvergne / ArTeHiS–UMR 6298 research centre, France);
- Elizabeta Dimitrova (Универзитет ‘Св. Кирил и Методиј’ / Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, North Macedonia);
- Skënder Muçaj (Instituti i Arkeologjisë / Institute of Archaeology, Albania).

In order to offer a quality publication, each paper was peer-reviewed first by two members of the Editorial/Scientific Committee, then by three anonymous reviewers appointed by the publishing house. The result is particularly interesting, as it brings together older research, mainly through *status quaestionis*, with new projects and discoveries. The arrangement of the material was not easy, given that it was impossible to find real guidelines for most of them – apart from the papers from the round table on episcopal palaces – but five sections have finally emerged:

- Archaeology, Landscape and Topography;
- Episcopal Residences;
- Architectural Sculpture;
- Decoration and Small Objects;
- Restoration and Conservation.

The editing work took longer than expected, in particular because a large number of authors were not writing in their mother tongues. The Editorial Committee wishes to thank them all, together with BAR Publishing, for their patience. We would also like to thank Jane Burkowski, Ruth Fisher and Lisa Eaton for their editing work on the manuscript, which helped us to bring everything up to the standard of the BAR International Series, as well as the Organising Committee of the 23rd ICBS, especially Prof. Ljubomir Maksimović, who has believed in this project from the very beginning. Our thanks are also due: to Thomas Nicq, the scientific imaging photographer of the HALMA-UMR 8164 research centre (Lille, France), for his magnificent work on the images; to the same research centre and the I-SITE ULNE Foundation, through the DANUBIUS Project (<https://danubius.huma-num.fr>), for financing the publication of the book; and to Ivan Stanić (Музеј науке и технике / Museum of Science and Technology, Serbia) for the beautiful picture on the cover, of the famous *Jonah sarcophagus* from the Народни музеј Србије / National Museum of Serbia.

Finally, we dedicate our book to Claudia Barsanti, because she sincerely believed in it and she had repeatedly expressed her intention to become fully involved in the

publication process, beyond her participation in the Scientific Committee, a wish that was a special honour for us. She unfortunately left us too early, before the editing work had really begun. We sincerely hope that our contribution to Late Roman and Early Byzantine Archaeology and Art History is worthy of the tribute we all want to pay her.

*Dominic Moreau, Carolyn S. Snively and
Alessandra Guiglia
(on behalf of the Editorial Committee)
19 August 2019*

**The Archaeology of the Late Roman City of Zaldapa:
The *Status Questionis* in 2016
(with an Appendix on Seasons 2017–2019)***

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(with the collaboration of Ioto Valeriev, Albena Milanova, Brahim M' Berek,
Elio Hobdari and Irina Achim)**

The site currently identified as Zaldapa is the largest fortified Romano-Byzantine city – 25 ha *intra muros* – in the hinterland of present-day Dobrudja and North-eastern Bulgaria. Considering the size of Zaldapa, it is curious that it appears in only seven written sources, all from the sixth to eleventh centuries AD. Moreover, the site has been little explored in the last hundred years. Since 2014, however, a Bulgarian team has decided to resume field-work, which has led to the discovery of a new Christian basilica, larger than those previously known. Following that important discovery, the Bulgarian team invited French and Canadian scholars to visit them on the site, in order to evaluate its overall potential and to set up an international mission. During the summer of 2015, excavations in the sanctuary of Basilica ‘N° 3’ allowed the release of a crypt and other interesting unknown structures. This paper describes the state of the art up to the end of the 2016 field season, as presented at the International Congress of Byzantine Studies by the above-mentioned French and Canadian scholars, together with the Bulgarian teams, as their first joint contribution. An appendix is added to this work, with the goal of briefly reporting the explorations up to 2019, as well as the beginning of the International Archaeological Mission at Zaldapa.

Le site actuellement identifié comme Zaldapa est la plus grande ville romano-byzantine fortifiée – 25 ha *intra-muros* – de l’arrière-pays des actuelles Dobroudja et Bulgarie du Nord-Est. Compte tenu de la taille de Zaldapa, il est curieux qu’elle ne soit mentionnée que dans sept sources écrites, qui sont toutes des VI^e-XI^e siècles. De plus, le site a été peu exploré dans les cent dernières années. Depuis 2014, une équipe bulgare a, toutefois, décidé de reprendre le travail sur le terrain, ce qui a mené à la découverte d’une nouvelle basilique chrétienne, plus grande que celles connues jusqu’alors. À la suite de cette découverte importante, l’équipe bulgare a invité des chercheurs français et canadiens à venir leur rendre visite sur le site, afin de mettre en place une mission internationale. Pendant l’été 2015, des fouilles dans le chœur de la basilique « N° 3 » ont permis le dégagement d’une crypte et d’autres structures intéressantes. Cet article propose l’état de la

*This chapter is based both on the paper ‘La forteresse romaine tardive de Zaldapa (Dobroudja du Sud) et la crypte de sa basilique paléochrétienne “No 3”’ (D. Moreau, with the collaboration of G. Atanasov, V. Yotov, I. Valeriev, P. Chevalier and N. Beaudry), and on the poster ‘Zaldapa (South Dobrudja) and the surrounding Late Antique landscape: A preliminary study to fieldwork’ (D. Moreau and B. M’Barek), presented at the 23rd ICBS.

** Respectively: Регионален исторически музей – Бургас / Burgas Regional History Museum (Bulgaria); Софийски университет ‘Свети Климент Охридски’ / Sofia University ‘St. Kliment Ohridski’ (Bulgaria); Éveha (France); Institut i Arkeologjisë, Tiranë / Institute of Archaeology, Tirana (Albania); and Institutul de arheologie ‘Vasile Pârvan’ / Institute of Archaeology ‘Vasile Pârvan’ of the Academia Română / Romanian Academy (Romania).

Dominic Moreau, Georgi Atanasov & Nicolas Beaudry

question jusqu'à la fin de la campagne de 2016, présenté au Congrès international des études byzantines, par lesdits chercheurs français et canadiens, avec l'équipe bulgare, comme première contribution conjointe. Un appendice est ajouté à ce travail, avec pour objectif de rendre compte brièvement des explorations jusqu'en 2019, de même que du début de la Mission archéologique internationale à Zaldapa.

Der Fundplatz, der als Zaldapa identifiziert wird, ist mit 25 ha intra muros die größte befestigte römisch-byzantinische Stadt auf dem Gebiet der heutigen Dobrudscha und des nordöstlichen Bulgarien. Bei der Größe von Zaldapa ist es verwunderlich, dass die Stadt nur sieben Mal in den Schriftquellen Erwähnung findet, die alle aus dem 6.-11. Jh. stammen. Außerdem wurde der Platz während der letzten hundert Jahre wenig erforscht. Ab 2014 entschied sich ein bulgarisches Team die Feldarbeiten wieder aufzunehmen. Diese Arbeiten führten zu der Entdeckung einer frühchristlichen Basilika, größer als die beiden bis dahin bekannten Kirchen. Infolge dieser wichtigen Entdeckung lud das bulgarische Team französische und kanadische Wissenschaftler ein, um das allgemeine Potenzial des Ortes zu prüfen und eine internationale Zusammenarbeit einzuleiten. Während des Sommers 2015 brachten Ausgrabungen im Chor der Basilika drei Überreste einer Krypta und andere bis dahin unbekannte Strukturen zur Tage. Dieser Beitrag stellt den Stand der Ergebnisse bis zum Ende der 2016er Kampagne vor, die beim Internationalen Kongress für Byzantinische Studien durch französische und kanadische Wissenschaftler zusammen mit den bulgarischen Kollegen vorgestellt worden war, als ihr erster gemeinsamer Beitrag. Der Aufsatz ist durch einen Anhang ergänzt, mit dem Ziel einen kurzen Bericht der Forschungen bis 2019 zu geben und über den Beginn der internationalen archäologischen Kooperation in Zaldapa zu informieren.

Il sito attualmente identificato come Zaldapa è la più grande città fortificata romano-bizantina – 25 ettari entro le mura – dell'entroterra dell'attuale Dobrugia e della Bulgaria nord-orientale. Date le dimensioni di Zaldapa, è curioso che il sito sia menzionato solo in sette fonti scritte, tutte risalenti al VI-XI secolo. Inoltre, esso è stato poco esplorato negli ultimi cento anni. Dal 2014, una squadra bulgara ha tuttavia deciso di riprendere il lavoro sul campo, che ha portato alla scoperta di una nuova basilica cristiana, più grande di quelle conosciute fino ad allora. Dopo questa importante scoperta, il team bulgaro ha invitato ricercatori francesi e canadesi a visitare il sito per creare una missione internazionale. Durante l'estate del 2015, gli scavi nel presbiterio della basilica «No. 3» hanno permesso il rinvenimento di una cripta e di altre interessanti strutture. Questo articolo propone lo stato dell'arte fino alla fine della campagna del 2016, presentata al Congresso Internazionale di Studi Bizantini dai citati ricercatori francesi e canadesi, con il team bulgaro, come primo contributo congiunto. A questo lavoro si aggiunge un'appendice, con l'obiettivo di rendere note brevemente le esplorazioni fino al 2019, così come l'inizio della Missione Archeologica Internazionale a Zaldapa.

Introduction

As a border region conquered and Romanised fairly late, the Lower Danubian world is not as well represented in the written sources as other areas of the later Roman Empire. While the texts inform us about major military, political and religious issues involving the provinces on the Lower Danube, these sources tell us little about the fate of the cities or countryside.¹ Over the past two decades, the publication of major archaeological works has, however, contributed to a better understanding of the important changes in these provinces during Late Antiquity, of the militarisation of landscapes and cities, but also of the effects of Christianity on urban forms and functions,² particularly in settlements with an episcopal see. The impact of the Christian religion was very important, in that the episcopacy was the most

stable and lasting Roman institution, and the only one to survive the 'great invasions/migrations'.

It is therefore mainly through archaeology that we can understand life in the Lower Danube provinces during Late Antiquity, and one site is particularly relevant to this understanding: Zaldapa (near modern Abrit, Dobrich district, Bulgaria). Despite being the largest known Romano-Byzantine stronghold of the hinterland of the provinces of *Scythia* and *Moesia Secunda*, the site has remained hardly explored until recently. The site is even more interesting given that it is located in the Danubian hinterland, which is less explored than the riverbank. In order to present its remarkable archaeological potential, in view of the design of a new international project on its urban fabric, this chapter presents a comprehensive *status quaestionis* on Zaldapa, focusing on the history of excavations until 2016, by highlighting the impressive discoveries made by the Bulgarian team who took over the exploration of the site in 2014. Before coming to this

¹ Poulter 2007b.

² Cf. especially Petrović 1996; Zahariade 1998; von Bülow, Milčeva 1999; Slokoska et al. 2002; Poulter 2007a; Vagalinski 2007; Vagalinski et al. 2012.

point, however, it seems important to quickly historicise and locate it, by first looking at the written sources.

Reinsertion into time and space

The aforementioned paradox between our limited knowledge of the site and its imposing nature could also be emphasised in terms of its presence in written sources. No inscription mentioning Zaldapa has been found to this day, the site being mentioned only in seven literary sources.³ All of them are in Greek, at least under the known forms of the toponym. It must be understood that although the name 'Zaldapa' is now favoured by the scientific literature, there is no consensus among ancient authors. Moreover, there is no occurrence of the name prior to the sixth century, which is rather surprising, because it seems impossible that the settlement is an *ex nihilo* foundation from this period, given its size and its name.⁴

The oldest mention is found in the *Synekdemos* of Hierocles, generally dated to the first quarter of the sixth century, and certainly before 535. The site is listed under the spelling Ζέλδεπα/Ζελδέπα, as the seventh πόλις of the province of Scythia.⁵ The following mention, in chronological order, is found in the *Buildings* of Procopius of Caesarea, probably written in the 550s, where the site is referred to under the name of Ζάλδαπα, without further details.⁶ It is only a very dry evocation, in one of the many lists of fortifications supposedly restored by Justinian in the Balkans.

At the beginning of the following century, John of Antioch, in a fragment of his universal chronicle that reached us through Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *De insidiis* (first half/middle of the tenth century), presents Ζάλδαβα as the birthplace of one of the greatest enemies of Emperor Anastasius I, the famous Flavius Vitalianus.⁷ His revolt against Constantinople is a most important event as it contributed to the rise to power of the Justinianic dynasty.⁸

Zaldapa may even have been the headquarters of the Lower Danube rebellion against Constantinople in the years 513–518. Given the known details of this story, it would be surprising if the rehabilitation of its wall were reassigned to Anastasius, as could be done for many other cities of the Danubian regions, unless such works are dated before 513.⁹

At about the same time as John of Antioch, namely in the first half of Heraclius I's reign, Theophylact Simocatta evokes Ζαλδαπά (oxytone according to Carl de Boor [1848–1923]) on four occasions. Two of them recall the sack of the city, first by the Avars in the autumn of 586 and, later, by the Slavs in the autumn of 593.¹⁰ The other two occurrences mention the recovery of the city by the Romans, as a result of these events, by the *magistri utriusque militiae* Castus and Petrus, in 587 and 593 respectively.¹¹ This demonstrates without a doubt the strategic importance of the place at that moment.

Zaldapa is then mentioned as Ζελδίπας in the third *Notitia episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, according to the numbering of the *notitiae* established by Jean Darrouzès (1912–1990).¹² This occurrence is very problematic, since the hypotheses about the date and the object of this *notitia* do not really constitute an exact science. Generally dated between 750 and 869 (rather between 750 and 800, and more precisely around 787), the third *notitia* is clearly inspired by the *Synekdemos* of Hierocles.¹³ Thus, it does not represent the actual situation at the end of the eighth century, but rather a patchwork of information, some going back to the sixth century, corresponding most probably to an ideal Byzantine ecclesiastical hierarchy in a context of territorial claims after the violation in 756 of the Bulgarian-Byzantine peace treaty signed fifty years earlier.

The links with the *Synekdemos* has led some researchers to consider Zaldapa as an actual episcopal see, claiming that Hierocles' work would, in fact, be a picture of a reform of the ecclesiastical administration wanted by Justinian on the eve of the reconquest of the West.¹⁴ Despite the high probability of this most interesting and stimulating

³The absence of inscriptions clearly mentioning Zaldapa obviously does not imply the absence of such documents coming from this site or the surroundings. To this day, most of them are *spolia* from the sanctuary of Heros Hephaistos Dabatopios, near modern Telerig (Dobrich district). For a more or less complete list (not all equivalences are given), cf. Kalinka 1906, nos. 23, 119 (= *AE* 1895, 55), 274, 306 (= *IGBulg*, II, 872), 416 and 422; *IGBulg*, II, 868–873; *CMRED*, I, 90; *CCET*, II/1, 186–188 (= *IGBulg*, II, 868–869 and 867bis) and 189; Torbatov 2000, pp. 33–34, 42–43, 63–64, 94, 96 and 100; *AE*, 2004, 1275. Thanks to Dan Dana (CNRS, ANHIMA-UMR 8210 research centre, France) who has helped in completing this list. For recent developments, cf. *infra*, n. 79. On the sanctuary of Telerig, cf. Torbatov 2001; 2005.

⁴'Zaldapa' would be a Thracian toponym, meaning 'yellow water' or 'cold water'. Cf. Tomaschek 1894, p. 77. A milestone discovered in the nearby village of Aleksandria (Kapaklii before 1882; cf. Michev 2005, p. 28) – now lost? – could be read: *Fines terrae vici*. Is this a reference to Zaldapa's original status? Cf. *AE* 1895, 55 = Kalinka 1906, no. 119 = Popa-Lisseanu 1921, p. 83, no. 14. Cf. also Pärvan 1912, p. 21.

⁵Hierocles, *Synekdemos* 637.7 (ed. Honigmann 1939, p. 13). On the date of composition, see *ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

⁶Procopius of Caesarea, *De aedificiis* 4.11 (ed. and transl. Veh 1977, pp. 244–245).

⁷John of Antioch, *Fragmenta ex Historia chronica* 311.3 (ed. and transl. Roberto 2006, pp. 534–535) / 242.1 (ed. and transl. Mariev 2008, pp. 452–453) = Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De insidiis, Excerpta ex Ioanne Antiocheno*, 103 (ed. de Boor, p. 143).

⁸On Vitalian's revolt against Anastasius, cf. now Moreau 2017, pp. 191–194.

⁹On the attribution to Justinian of the reconstructions and repairs of Anastasius in the Lower Danube, cf. in particular the discussion and the bibliography in Cameron 1985, pp. 219–220.

¹⁰Theophylact Simocatta, *Historia* 1.8.10 and 7.2.2 (ed. de Boor 1972, pp. 55 and 247).

¹¹Theophylact Simocatta, *Historia* 2.10.10 and 7.2.16 (ed. de Boor 1972, pp. 90 and 249). On the generals Castus and Petrus, cf. *PLRE*, III, pp. 274–275 (Castus) and 1009–1010 (Petrus 55). Although Theophylact speaks of the recovery of Zaldapa by Roman troops, it is generally considered in the historiography that the site was destroyed by the successive invasions of Avars and Slavs, just before being finally abandoned. This, however, remains to be fully proven, and some elements could demonstrate a possible medieval occupation of these places (not necessarily in the same form as in Antiquity). See, for example, Valeriev 2015.

¹²*Notitiae episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, 3.652 (ed. Darrouzès 1981, p. 242).

¹³See Darrouzès 1981, p. 20–33.

¹⁴It was Emilian Popescu who offered the most developed version of this hypothesis, originally issued by Vasile Pärvan (1882–1927). Cf. Pärvan 1924; Popescu 1988 (which is the definitive version of this study, previously published in French and Romanian).

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proposal, it still remains a hypothesis among others, as the assumed Justinianic reform is not clearly documented by the sources and none of the arguments put forward are decisive.¹⁵ Vasile Pârvan was perhaps right, when he asserted that the fourteen new episcopal sees emanating from the so-called reform should eventually be considered “*come possibilità autorizzata e non come realtà attiva*” (Pârvan 1924, p. 135).

In any case, some decades after the very difficult-to-interpret mention in the third *notitia*, Theophanes the Confessor evokes Ζάρδαπα (with a rho) twice in his *Chronographia*, composed between 810 and 815.¹⁶ These two occurrences are, however, only paraphrases of Theophylact Simocatta’s passages on the events of 586–587. The last known mention of Zaldapa is from the continuation of Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ *De thematibus*, which was composed shortly after 998, perhaps by Joseph Genesius.¹⁷ Ζέλλα is mentioned in the seventh place among the πόλεις of the province of Moesia Secunda (here, not Scythia), in a list of cities which is more an idealised situation than the reality of the ground, written on the eve of the Byzantine recovery of the northern Balkans by Basil II’s troops in the first quarter of

¹⁵ The main arguments raised by the defenders of this hypothesis are as follows (cf. Popescu 1988, pp. 84–91 [repr. pp. 131–136]): (1) there would be a change in the titulare of the bishop of Tomis between the middle of the fifth century – *episcopus Tomitanus/episcopus Tomitanae civitatis (provinciae Scythiae)* – and the first quarter of the sixth century – *episcopus provinciae Scythiae metropolitanus (Collectio Avellana, 234.13 [ed. Günther 1898, p. 714])* –, which would testify to a change in the civic organisation of the province of Scythia; (2) in 519, a letter from papal ambassadors mentions accusations against the *episcopi* of a specific *provincia*, among which Paternus of Tomis (*Collectio Avellana, 217.6 [ed. Günther 1898, p. 678]*); (3) the phrase *sed et universos ad tuam pertinentes ordinationem commoneas*, which can be read in a letter of 550 from Pope Vigilius to Valentinianus of Tomis (*Concilium oecumenicum Constantinopolitanum (II) anni 553, actiones, 7.9.5 [ed. ACO, IV/1, p. 196]*), would testify to an episcopal hierarchy under the latter’s orders; (4) an inscription mentioning bishops, among which one is named Stefanus/Stefanos, on a sixth-century cross found in Callatis-Mangalia (Popescu 1976, no 91) would, at least, attest the existence of an episcopal see in this city; (5) the ruins of the late fifth- or sixth-century basilicas in each of the πόλεις of Scythia mentioned in Hierocles’ *Synekdemos* and the third *notitia* would be an additional argument for the existence of an episcopal see in each of them at that time. Counter arguments were presented by Dominic Moreau in a paper entitled “To Baptise: An Episcopal Prerogative in Late Antiquity?”, at the symposium *Cleric in Church and Society up to 700*, held in Warsaw on the 26th and 27th of April 2019 (<http://clericsconference.ihuw.pl>). The publication of this paper is currently in preparation, but we can already say that the last known bishop of Tomis in the sixth century, Valentinianus, is mentioned at the Council of Constantinople II in 553 as the *episcopus Scythiae*, together with the *episcopus Arelati*, Aurelianus. We can thus see that the Fathers of Constantinople did not even consider it necessary to specify the city of Valentinianus, and mention only his province, where the city of another bishop, who is also a *metropolitanus*, is clearly specified. Cf. *Concilium oecumenicum Constantinopolitanum (II) anni 553, actiones, 1.7.12, 7.4.4, and 7.9.1 (ed. ACO, IV/1, pp. 12, 186 and 195)*. Moreover, if the so-called Justinianic reform of the ecclesiastical administration seems to work for Scythia, this is not the case at all for other provinces, among them Dacia Ripensis, for which neither Hierocles nor the third *notitia* are describing the episcopal organisation of the time of Justinian. See Gargano, Moreau, in press; meanwhile, see the first doubts about this hypothesis expressed in Moreau 2018, pp. 959–960.

¹⁶ Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*, A.M. 6079 (ed. de Boor 1883, p. 257).

¹⁷ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De thematibus* 2.1.59 (ed. Pertusi 1952, p. 86). On the date of the continuation of the *De thematibus*, traditionally considered as its second book, see *ibid.*, pp. 39–49.

the eleventh century. This list is actually a copy-and-paste of the *Synekdemos* of Hierocles.

The number of occurrences of Zaldapa in the literature is thus not negligible. Nevertheless, the details given about the site itself are very thin. In particular, there is nothing to locate it on a map, except that it was located in the province of Scythia (its placement in Moesia Secunda being a hapax). Actually, the association between Zaldapa and the site which is presented here is recent. Karel Škorpil (1859–1944) was the first to link that site to an ancient city name: Abrit(t)us.¹⁸ We do not know all the reasons for this choice, but the monumental character of the ruins of the Late Roman settlement currently known as Zaldapa, together with their location on strategic roads (fig. 1), and that its immediate environment was swampy, certainly contributed to its identification as the place of death of Emperor Decius.

In 1954, a first inscription allowing the relocation of Abrit(t)us to Razgrad was found by Teofil Ivanov (1918–1999).¹⁹ News of the find was immediately disseminated in Bulgaria and Romania. Radu Vulpe (1899–1982) presented, as soon as 1955, a first paper at the Academia Republicii Populare Române (Romanian People’s Republic Academy) reporting the discovery and trying to find a solution for the site studied here, by proposing an association with Zaldapa.²⁰ One had to wait until 1962, however, for the publication of an actual demonstration supporting this hypothesis, in a study by Veselin Beshevliev (1900–1992).²¹ Their hypothesis, which is today the most widely accepted – even if no ancient text proving it has been discovered to this day – took some years to be recognised as conclusive. For example, in 1967, the *Pauly–Wissowa* was still presenting all the proposals about its location as potential solutions (except for the identification with Abrit(t)us).²²

The site that is now associated with Zaldapa, and previously with Abrit(t)us – but which was traditionally called ‘Abtaatsko kale’, ‘Kaz kale’, ‘Dorbi(n) kale’, ‘Abtakalesi’ or, more commonly in the scientific literature, ‘Hisar kale’²³ – is located slightly south-east of the village of Abrit (Aptaat [from Abdul Ehat] before 1942),²⁴ currently part of the Municipality of Krushari (Armutlii before 1942),²⁵ in the district of Dobrich (Bulgaria). During Antiquity, if the current location is correct, Zaldapa was therefore at the crossing of roads

¹⁸ Cf. *infra*, n. 30.

¹⁹ Details and full bibliography are given in Moreau, Carrié 2016, pp. 239–241 and 247. Cf. also Carrié, Moreau 2015, p. 602.

²⁰ Vulpe 1955. Before that, Zaldapa was located in various places by scholars, among others near the current Dobrich in Bulgaria. Cf. Popa-Lisseanu 1921, pp. 86–93.

²¹ Beshevliev 1962, pp. 2–4 (German translation: Beševliev 1962, pp. 59–60). As for R. Vulpe, it was only in 1970 that he published an extensive and complete version of his own demonstration. Cf. Vulpe 1970 (Romanian updated translation: 1972).

²² Danoff 1967.

²³ Torbatov 2000, pp. 5 and 89; 2003, p. 87.

²⁴ Michev 2005, p. 25.

²⁵ Michev 2005, p. 209.

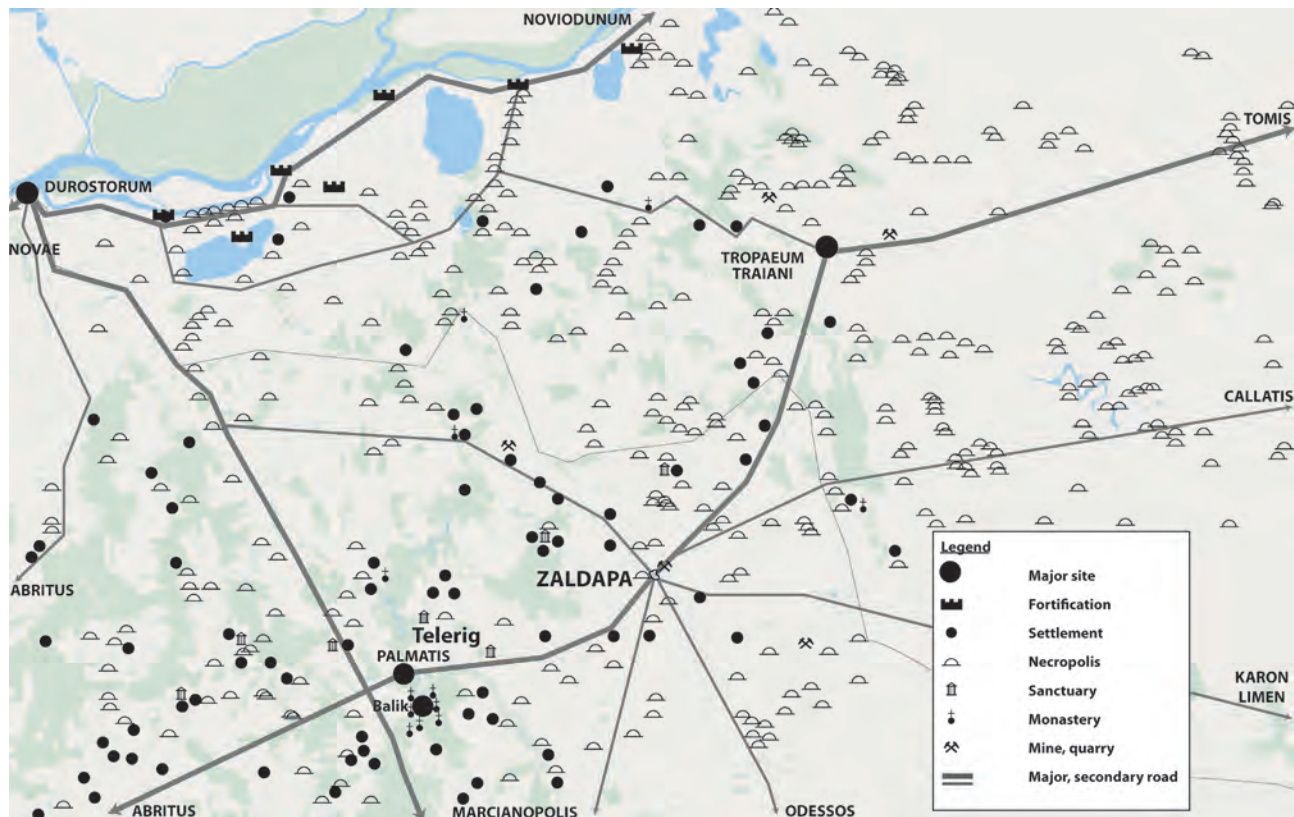


Fig. 1. The region of Zaldapa in Roman times according to archaeological maps (B. M'Barek, with D. Moreau).

leading from Durostorum to Marcianopolis and Odessos, in the north–south direction, and from Abrit(t)us to Tropaeum Traiani, Tomis and Callatis, in the east–west direction (fig. 1).

The site itself is a fortress situated on a promontory, which is about 1200 m long and 500 m wide.²⁶ Some 2050 m of walls surround an area of about 25 hectares and exclude the whole north-eastern part of the plateau, which forms a kind of *extra muros* peninsula.²⁷ The fortification numbers 32 towers and has three main gates, as well as up to five posterns according to Karel Škorpil's observations, although only one is detectable today.²⁸ Zaldapa is nothing less than the largest Roman-Byzantine fortified town in the hinterland of the provinces of Scythia and Moesia Secunda. As for the *intra muros* part, it is so densely built according to the satellite photographs (fig. 2 a–c) that it was dubbed the 'Bulgarian Pompeii' by the Bulgarian media.²⁹

The history of excavations and publications until 2014

Today, the ruins of the site are less visible than at the time of the first scientific explorations by the father of Bulgarian archaeology, Karel Škorpil. He investigated Zaldapa, with

the help of his brother Hermann (1858–1923), between the late 1880s and the very beginning of the 1910s, but with greater regularity between 1897 and 1906.³⁰ They collected new information with increased precision again in 1918, which, however, remained unpublished until recently, so we do not know the exact conditions of their access to the field.³¹ Their research was then part of wider research on the Late Roman and Early Byzantine fortifications in north-eastern Bulgaria. On the site then identified with Abrit(t)us, their work focused initially on the entire fortification, and

²⁶ Torbatov 2000, pp. 5 and 89; 2003, p. 87.
²⁷ Torbatov 2000, pp. 5, 10, 89 and 91; 2003, pp. 87 and 89.
²⁸ Torbatov 2000, pp. 15–16 and 92; 2003, pp. 91–92. On the defensive system of Zaldapa, see Torbatov 2000, pp. 8–34 and 90–94; 2003, pp. 89–95.
²⁹ See, for example, <https://www.novinite.com/articles/163300/Ancient+Episcopal+Basilica+Found+in+Bulgaria%27s+Zaldapa+Excavations>.

³⁰ The results of the Škorpil brothers' investigations in 'Abrit(t)us'/Zaldapa were only partly published in studies about other sites. By far their most detailed published accounts can be read in: Škorpil 1905, pp. 493–499 (together with Uspenskij 1905, pl. CIX,b and CXI,c). Cf. also Kalinka 1906, cols. 349–358. The Научен архив на Българска академия на науките / Scientific Archives of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences hosts most of K. Škorpil's archives, among which is an important file entitled *Abrittus* (ф. 165 к, оп. 1, а. е. 493), which contains most of the notes and plates he had composed for the publication of a monograph on our site. Part – but not all – of this material was used for the composition of: Torbatov 2000; 2003. Other elements can be found in the Варненски археологически музей / Varna Archaeological Museum (unfinished manuscript on the Christian monuments in Northern Bulgaria, most probably the same that is mentioned in Netzhammer 2005a, p. 107, n. 137) and in the Музей в Националния историко-археологически резерват „Плиска“ / Museum of Pliska National Historical-Archaeological Reserve (excavation notebooks – thanks to Slavi Kirov [Postdoctoral Fellow, ERC project Patrimonium, France / Research Fellow, Център по тракология „Проф. Александър Фол“ / Centre of Thracology 'Prof. Aleksandar Fol', Bulgaria] for this information), but they cannot be consulted without special permission. For recently published archives and history of the excavations in Zaldapa, cf. Valchev 2017; Valeriev 2017, pp. 161–166.

³¹ Most likely in the context of the temporary recovery of Southern Dobrudja by Bulgaria (1916–1918) during World War I. See Torbatov 2000, pp. 22–24 and 91; 2003, p. 93.

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Fig. 2 a. Satellite image of Zaldapa in 2013 (Google Earth).

Fig. 2 b. Satellite image of the south part of Zaldapa in 2013 (Google Earth).

Fig. 2 c. Site plan of Zaldapa in 2019, drawn from earlier plans, recent satellite images and observations on the field (B. M'Barek, with contributions from D. Moreau, M. Valchev, E. Hobdari and N. Beaudry).

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later on the surrounding landscape. They also studied the urban fabric, as well as the road network and the buildings.

They identified up to six structures,³² but studied – partly at least – only three of them. Of these three buildings, the two which were first discovered are identified, according to the traditional nomenclature, as the Civic Basilica and Christian Basilica No. 2. The first of these, which is located in the centre of the *intra muros* area, measures approximately 101 × 18 m (fig. 3).³³ It was identified sometime before 1905, but was not actually excavated

until 1906. Relying only on the plan of the building, some scholars argue that it is most probably a granary from the tetrarchic/Constantinian period, and more precisely a double *horreum* or two joint *horrea*, rather than a *basilica civilis/forensis*.³⁴

As for Christian Basilica No. 2, it is located in the northern part of the fortress (fig. 4).³⁵ This building was also discovered before 1905, and it is currently even less well known than the previous one. The only details that have been published to date are that: (1) it would have been, in

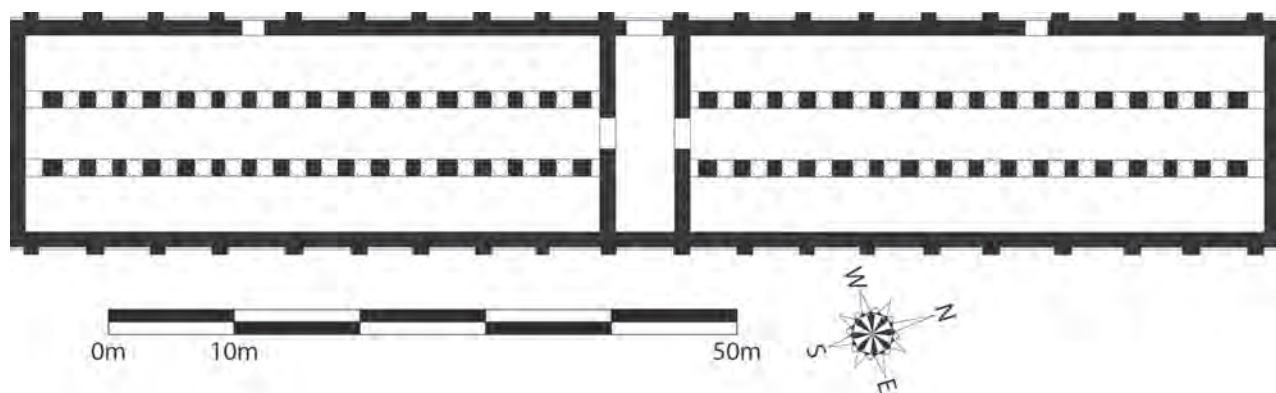


Fig. 3. Plan of the “Civic Basilica”/horreum (B. M’Barek, adapted from K. Skorpil and S. Torbatov).

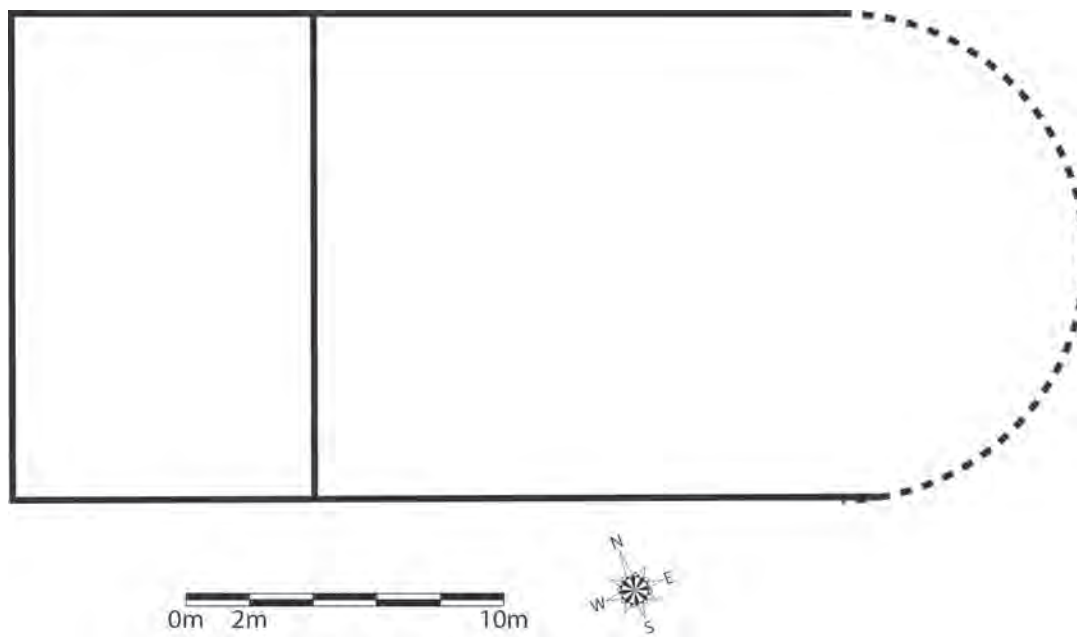


Fig. 4. Sketch plan of Christian Basilica No. 2 before 2016 (B. M’Barek, adapted from K. Skorpil and S. Torbatov).

³² Letters G, H, L (= Christian Basilica No. 3?), M (= Christian Basilica No. 2), R (= the so-called Civic Basilica) in Uspenskij 1905, pl. CXI, c (reprinted in: Torbatov 2000, p. 9, fig. 1; 2003, p. 89, fig. 1), to which we must add Christian Basilica No. 1, discovered near the south-west gate in 1906. Cf. *infra*.

³³ For a full description, see Torbatov 2000, pp. 37–47 and 95–97; 2003, pp. 96–98.

³⁴ Dinchev 2005, pp. 282–284; Rizos 2013, pp. 673–674. A solution to this question will require the resumption of fieldwork and would benefit from comparison with similar sites, such as Tropaeum Traiani (which is a kind of smaller version of Zaldapa), where a building identified for a long time as a *basilica civilis/forensis* could also be a *horreum*. Cf. Dinchev 2005, pp. 283; Rizos 2013, pp. 672–673.

³⁵ Torbatov 2000, pp. 58–59 and 99; 2003, p. 102.

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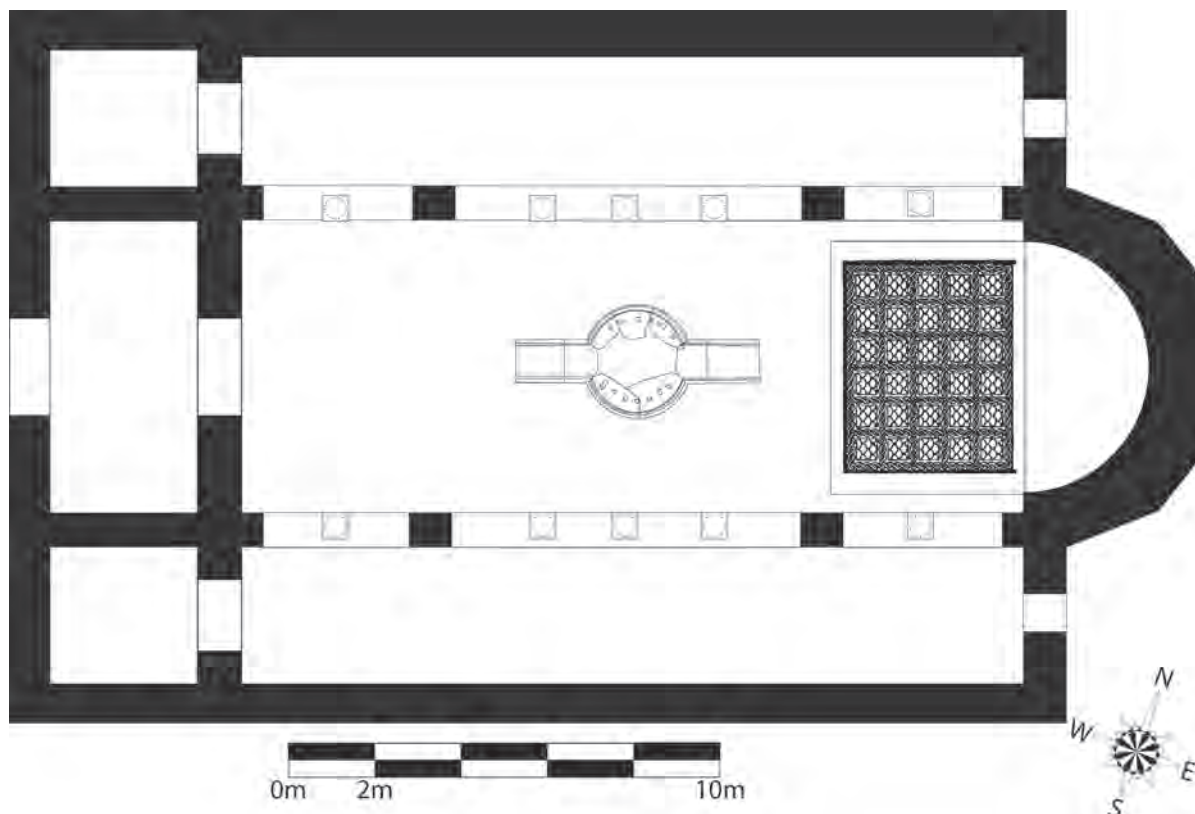


Fig. 5. Plan of Christian Basilica No. 1 before 2016 (B. M'Barek, adapted from K. Škorpil and S. Torbatov).

some way, connected directly to the north-eastern wall;³⁶ (2) the church itself would be 25 paces (крачки) away from this wall, and would include a 10-pace-long court or room at its entrance – an atrium, or a narthex? – while the northern and southern walls of its nave would be 37 paces long;³⁷ (3) its ground plan would be basilical. Karel Škorpil's sketch plan of the structure even implies a circus-like basilica, which would be highly unlikely considering the region, but it should be noted that this is only a sketch plan, and that he has not conducted excavations in the apse.³⁸

The third structure explored by the Škorpils, which is located in the south-western part of Zaldapa, is also a church, commonly known as Christian Basilica No. 1 (fig. 5).³⁹ This early sixth-century three-apsed church, with a projecting apse and an inner narthex, was uncovered and excavated in 1906. It measures 27.75 × 16.50 m. The study of that building has yielded a number of elements of architectural sculpture, the base of the ambo, as well as a mosaic that has since disappeared. The looting of all visible elements of the church was already observed in 1922 by Raymund Netzhammer (1862-1945) – who at the time blamed the villagers⁴⁰ – and was documented again in 2016,

when the Bulgarian mission at Zaldapa uncovered part of the church to assess its state of conservation (fig. 6).⁴¹ This new study of the building led to the discovery of a crypt or altar pit, completely looted at the time of discovery.

Following the annexation of Southern Dobruja by Romania in 1913, field investigations were conducted by Romanian archaeologists, but they remain unpublished and their history is difficult to reconstruct.⁴² Relying on a vague assertion by Radu Vulpe, Serguey Torbatov has suggested that a team led by George G. Mateescu (1892–1929) explored the fortification between 1913 and 1915.⁴³ However, the *Anuarul Comisiunii monumentelor istorice*

³⁶ Škorpil 1905, p. 497.

³⁷ Torbatov 2000, pp. 58–59 and 99; 2003, p. 102.

³⁸ Torbatov 2000, p. 59, fig. 34; 2003, p. 102, fig. 14.

³⁹ For a full description, cf. Torbatov 2000, pp. 47–58 and 97–98; 2003, p. 99–101.

⁴⁰ Netzhammer 2005a, p. 107, n. 137. For the complete account of his visit on the site on the 15th of May 1922, see Netzhammer 2005b, pp. 1116–1117; for his previous visit on the 6th of May 1914, while the walls of Basilica No. 1 were still standing, see pp. 500–501.

⁴¹ Atanasov *et al.* 2017b.

⁴² Irina Achim from the Institutul de arheologie 'Vasile Pârvan' of the Academia Română in Bucharest is currently working, with the collaboration of Florian Matei-Popescu (from the same institution), on Romanian excavation archives, in order to clarify the situation. Some results are given here, but the details of this investigation will be published extensively in another study. We must note that the fate of Dobruja's ancient heritage during the various conflicts for its possession between Bulgaria and Romania is an extremely complex and delicate topic, which still affects national sensitivities. Even today, the 'occupation' of the territory by one party or the other is perceived differently on both sides of the border, and there is very little study of this topic. For an example of recent work, see Boroneanț 2007.

⁴³ Torbatov 2000, pp. 8 and 90; 2003, p. 89; which rely on Vulpe 1938, p. 336: 'À *Abrittus*, G. G. Mateescu commença des fouilles systématiques pour la recherche des murs de la cité; on ne les a pas terminées à cause de la guerre.' The archives of the Muzeul Național de Antichități (MNA) in Bucharest, the precursor of the Institutul de arheologie 'Vasile Pârvan', tell us that V. Pârvan had officially requested 10,000 lei from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, for excavations at 'Kaliakra/Abrit(t)us', as early as 1914, but there is no trace of any excavation for this same year. Cf. IAVP Archives, MNA Fonds, Volume D20/1914, Folder 2.



Fig. 6. Apse and crypt of Christian Basilica No. 1 in 2016, looking east (N. Beaudry).

and *Buletinul Comisiei monumentelor istorice* do not report any activities by G. G. Mateescu in ‘Abrit(t)us’/Zaldapa during these years (but these publications are not necessarily exhaustive), while V. Pârvan mentions a presence in the field in 1916 instead.⁴⁴ According to some official papers of the Romanian archaeological authorities of the 1920s, the Germans and their allies looted artefacts in ‘Abrit(t)us’/Zaldapa between 1916 and 1918.⁴⁵ We also know from published material that some equipment for excavation was stored by the Romanian archaeologists in 1918 – the year the Škorpils returned for the last time to the field – in the nearby village of Dobrin (called ‘Devedji koy’ or Călimaru before 1942⁴⁶), but we do not know whether fieldwork actually took place.⁴⁷ From this point onwards, everything is even less clear. According to

Dinu Adameșteanu (1913–2004), fieldwork was conducted in 1938 on Christian Basilica No. 1 (already dismantled)⁴⁸ and on the Western Gate (*porta decumana*), but it seems rather that the missions of this period were organised in 1939–1940.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, not much is known of the results of this last phase of the Romanian exploration of Zaldapa.

The year 1940 was marked by the recovery of Southern Dobruđa by Bulgaria, but World War II stopped the exploration on the site. Actually, the last excavations prior to 2014 that we know of took place in 1949, prior to the construction of an artificial lake at the western edge of the site. They were led by Milko Mirchev as a rescue mission of the structures of the north-western flank of the hill.⁵⁰ They revealed a cistern (fig. 7), which had most probably

⁴⁴ Pârvan 1924, p. 129, n. 90. Cf. also Vulpe 1928, p. 136; 1935, p. 191; Micu 1938, p. 781; 1939, p. 65; Valeriev 2017, p. 166–167. The archive of the MNA confirms V. Pârvan’s statements. These documents even present him as the main organiser, especially for intercession with local public authorities, while the then Deputy Director of the Museum, Dimitrie M. Teodorescu (1881–1947), and his assistant, George G. Mateescu, were put in charge of the field. However, G. G. Mateescu was the true supervisor of these excavations, D. M. Teodorescu being occupied with other tasks in July 1916. In his team, we find in particular Paul Nicorescu (1890–1946). V. Pârvan had also planned the participation of Scarlat Lambrino (1891–1964), but there seems to be no trace of his presence on the field. The entry of Romania into the First World War was certainly the cause of the interruption of the mission in August 1916. Cf. IAVP Archives, MNA Fonds, Volume D22/1916, Folder 1916, and Folder *Acțiunea intentată de Luigi Sinigallia MNA-ului. 1916–1927*.

⁴⁵ Boroneanț 2007, p. 263.

⁴⁶ Michev 2005, p. 126.

⁴⁷ Boroneanț 2007, p. 247. The above-mentioned archives of the MNA also report that some equipment had been stored in Koriten (called Hardalii before 1942; cf. Michev 2005, p. 201) 1916, but it must have disappeared during the War.

⁴⁸ Cf. *supra*, n. 40.

⁴⁹ Adameșteanu 1958; to be read in the light of Micu 1939, and Valeriev 2017, pp. 167–168. The archives of the MNA contain a lot of details about expenses incurred for the resumption of fieldwork in Abrit(t)us/Zaldapa, at S. Lambrino’s initiative and under the patronage of the Museum, during the summer of 1939. His team consisted of Bucur Mitrea (1909–1995) and Dorin Popescu (1904–1987), and, again, the village of ‘Devedji koy’/Dobrin, known then as Călimaru, was used for the archaeological base. Cf. IAVP Archives, MNA Fonds, Volume D37/1939A, Folder *No II – Fonduri, subvenții, acte justificative*; and Volume D37/1939B, with Folder *Acesta borderou cuprinde 88 (optzeci și opt) de file. S. Lambrino*. The event was announced with great fanfare in the national newspapers (see for example several articles published between July and August 1939 in the journal *Universul*). We also learn from these archives that S. Lambrino did not get all the funding requested in 1940 and that he tried, nevertheless, to organize the mission with the local authorities. Cf. IAVP Archives, MNA Fonds, Volume D38/1940, Folder *MNA 1940 – V. Săpături, cercetări, descoperiri. Colecțiuni particulare, Com. Mon. Ist., Muzeu regional*.

⁵⁰ Mirchev 1951.

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been seen, at least in part, by K. Škorpil, who locates a spring or a well on his 1905 plan at the very place where the building was found.⁵¹ The cistern was composed of two basins, one of which measures approximately 10.80×5.30 m (according to recent measurements) and is connected by a tunnel to the fortification. The same basin

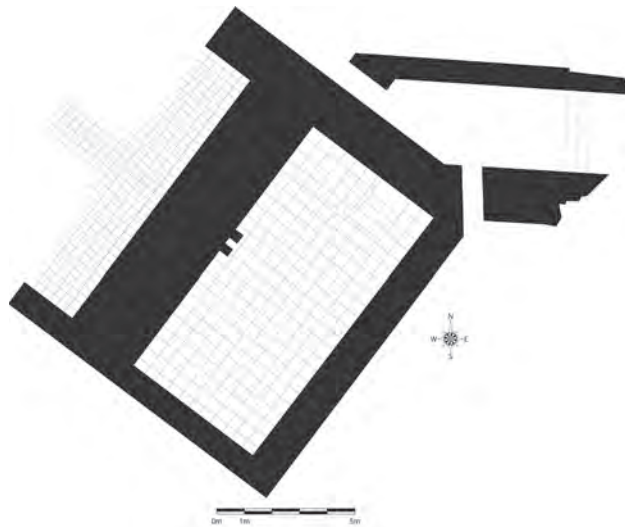


Fig. 7. Plan of the cistern before 2016 (B. M'Barek, adapted from M. Mirchev and S. Torbatov).

was unearthed again by the Регионален исторически музей – Добрич (Regional Historical Museum of Dobrich) in the spring of 2016 to make it visible to visitors, but unfortunately no conservation plan has yet been established (fig. 8).

After R. Vulpe and V. Beshevliev's proposals to identify the site with Zaldapa, it was not really mentioned in publications until the very end of the twentieth century, as if the loss of its association with Abrit(t)us had deprived it of all archaeological interest. The situation changed in 2000, when Sergey Torbatov published the first complete monograph on Zaldapa, a work that is currently the most complete reference on the site.⁵² The idea of this work, based on the earlier publications, on the records of Karel Škorpil, on surface surveys and on aerial photography, had come to him as he was preparing his work on the late Roman defensive system of the province of Scythia, published two years later.⁵³ This important book on Zaldapa placed the site back in the corpus of Bulgarian sites cited as examples in the literature on Roman cities.⁵⁴

It took fourteen more years, however, for an archaeological team to return to the site. Excavations resumed in Zaldapa in 2014 under the direction of Georgi Atanasov (Регионален исторически музей – Силистра/Silistra) and Valeri Yotov (Археологически музей – Варна/



Fig. 8. The cistern in 2016, looking north (N. Beaudry).

⁵¹ Uspenskij 1905, pl. CXI,c (reprinted in: Torbatov 2000, p. 9, fig. 1; 2003, p. 89, fig. 1). More dotted circles on the plan may indicate other springs or wells.

⁵² Torbatov 2000.

⁵³ Torbatov 2002.

⁵⁴ Torbatov 2003.

Varna), in collaboration with Ioto Valeriev (then Регионален исторически музей – Добрич/Dobrich, but now Регионален исторически музей – Бургас/Burgas). Their team was completed recently by Albena Milanova (Софийски университет ‘Свети Климент Охридски’ / Sofia University ‘St. Kliment Ohridski’). The results of the 2014 campaign were important, including the discovery of a new Christian basilica.⁵⁵

Christian Basilicas Nos. 3 and 4

By looking at their plan of the site published in 1905, we can understand that the Škorpil brothers had already detected a structure where the new basilica was discovered, without, however, documenting it.⁵⁶ Also, a sketch plan prepared from satellite imagery by Brahim M'Barek (Éveha and HALMA-UMR 8164 research centre, France) and Dominic Moreau (Université de Lille, HALMA-UMR 8164 research centre, France) for the Bulgarian mission of 2014 showed that there was indeed an important building in that area (fig. 2 c). For all these reasons, and because it was being targeted by looters, the decision was made to conduct excavation in this area, even though the mission was originally intended for the study of Christian Basilica No. 2 and a Late Antique domestic structure located close by (fig. 9).⁵⁷

Standing by V. Pârvan's and R. Vulpe's interpretation of Zaldapa as an episcopal see⁵⁸, the Bulgarian team

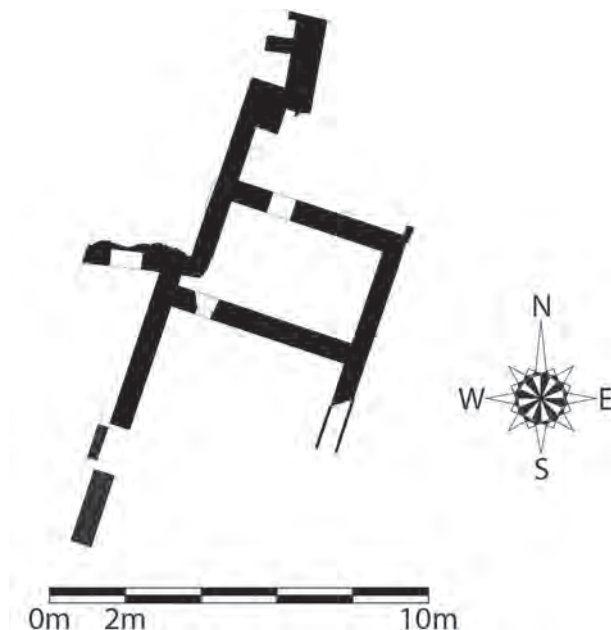


Fig. 9. Plan of the domestic structure between the north-eastern gate and Christian Basilica No. 2, 2016 (B. M'Barek).

⁵⁵ Atanasov *et al.* 2015.

⁵⁶ Uspenskij 1905, pl. CXI,c (reprinted in: Torbatov 2000, p. 9, fig. 1; 2003, p. 89, fig. 1). Some recently published plans and pictures from K. Škorpil's archives show that he knew it was a Christian basilica: see Valchev 2017; Valeriev 2017.

⁵⁷ Atanasov *et al.* 2015, pp. 422–423.

⁵⁸ *Cf. supra*, n. 14.

identified the newly found basilica as its cathedral and dated it from the end of fifth to the middle of the sixth century.⁵⁹ After three campaigns, it is now known that it was a richly decorated⁶⁰ church with a basilical plan, composed of three naves, a semicircular apse in continuity with the central nave, a tripartite narthex and an atrium (fig. 10). Without considering the atrium – as it had not yet been well delimited in 2016 – the church measures 30/34 × 21/22 m.⁶¹ The basilica was part of a complex that included a number of structures annexed to or articulated with the accesses to the church; the one to the south-east was identified as the episcopal residence or part of it.⁶²

The brick pavement of the central nave was highly damaged, but still shows evidence of decorative patterns (fig. 11). Excavation also yielded some column bases, the base of an ambo (fig. 11-12) and the remains of a chancel (fig. 13), most of them preserved *in situ*. The chancel screen was carried by a strong foundation, 0.65 m to 0.70 m wide by 0.75 m to 0.80 m high; the marble screen itself was an openwork lattice of foliage featuring acanthus leaves and birds (fig. 14), very similar to the chancel screen of the episcopal church of Histria, in present-day Romania.⁶³

The excavation of the sanctuary in 2015 brought to light a rectangular, transversal arrangement of small stones joined by yellow clay (4.00 × 3.10 m), under which a crypt was discovered.⁶⁴ Its walls, made of small and medium stones held together by a light pink mortar mixed with crushed brick, are approximately 0.40 m to 0.47 m thick and rise up to 1.40 m. This rectangular space is surmounted by a vault made of square bricks, held together by a red mortar. The external dimensions of the structure are 3.80 × 2.50 × 2.40 m (L × W × H); its interior dimensions are 2.80 × 1.95 × 2.04 m (fig. 15). The vault is pierced in its center by a pit about 1.40 m in diameter, possibly where the altar stood.

The crypt is accessible from the south, from a small staircase of seven steps. The staircase was discovered sealed by an imposing rectangular stone (0.95 × 1.39 × 0.12 m). The interior of the crypt is covered with a pale yellow mortar. A cross is inscribed in the centre of the northern wall and another, similar, but in a poorer condition, is in the centre of the eastern wall. The floor is paved with bricks.

The interior space was discovered filled with soil and numerous pieces of marble, including four column bases, complete or broken Corinthian and Ionic capitals, several fragments of marble or limestone columns, as well as

⁵⁹ Atanasov *et al.* 2015, pp. 422–423; 2016, p. 460; 2017a, p. 124.

⁶⁰ In particular, by the use of architectural elements taken from earlier monuments. See, for example, Dimitrov 2017.

⁶¹ Earlier reports give 34 × 22 m. *Cf.* Atanasov *et al.* 2015, p. 422. More recent ones give 51 × 21 m, taking into account the atrium – delimited in 2017 – which measures 21 × 22.5/27 m. *Cf.* Atanasov *et al.* 2017a, p. 123; 2017b, p. 296; 2018, pp. 246 and 248.

⁶² Atanasov *et al.* 2016, pp. 460 and 463; 2017a, p. 124.

⁶³ Bounegru, Iațu 2007, pp. 57–66 (together with Suceveanu 2007, pl. XXXI–XLII); Atanasov *et al.* 2017a, pp. 124–125.

⁶⁴ Atanasov *et al.* 2016; 2017a, pp. 125–126.

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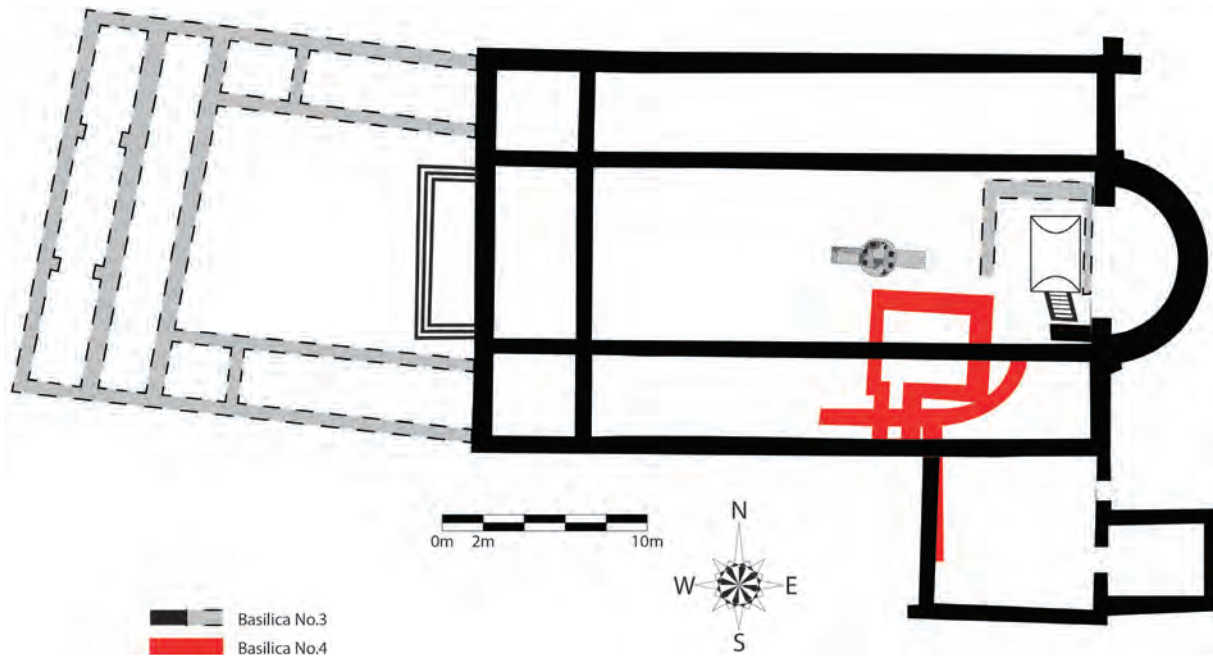


Fig. 10. Plan of Christian Basilica No. 3, 2016 (B. M'Barek, adapted from G. Atanasov, V. Yotov and I. Valeriev).

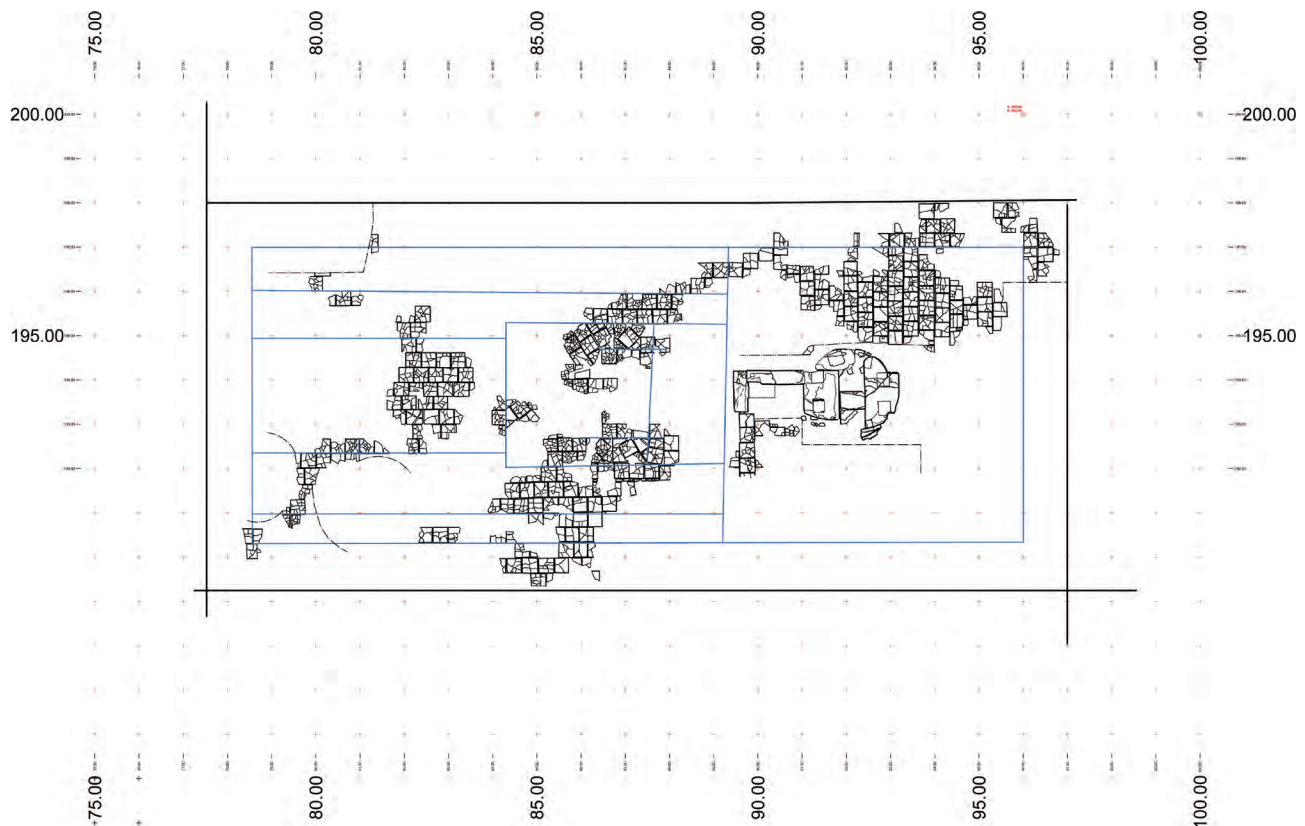


Fig. 11. Plan of the ambo and brick pavement of Christian Basilica No. 3, 2016 (E. Hobdari).

pieces of the chancel, altar table, and ambo. This space is thought to have been filled by devotees to avoid the desecration of the crypt and sacred furniture after the destruction of the church, probably in the early seventh century.⁶⁵ The relics would have been moved to another

location, but three carpal bones of a human hand were found in the debris.

Comparing this crypt to the known crypts and monumental tombs of the Lower Danube and beyond, the archaeologists concluded that its architecture is closer to that of a number of fourth- and fifth-century vaulted tombs, like those in

⁶⁵ Atanasov et al. 2017a, pp. 126–127.



Fig. 12. Base of the ambo of Christian Basilica No. 3, 2015 (N. Beaudry).



Fig. 13. Base of the chancel of Christian Basilica No. 3, 2016, detail (N. Beaudry).

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Fig. 14. Fragments of the openwork chancel screen of Christian Basilica No. 3, 2015 (D. Moreau).

Axiopolis and Durostorum (fig. 16 a–b), than to that of crypts⁶⁶.

In 2016, the study of the structure and foundations of the crypt led to the discovery of the apse of an earlier Christian basilica, located under Basilica No. 3 (fig. 17)⁶⁷ and tentatively dated to the fourth century.⁶⁸ The work then focused on this new building, named Christian Basilica No. 4, and led to the discovery of its own, even larger crypt, composed of two rooms (south room 2.80 × 1.35 m; north room 2.80 × 2.40 m; external dimensions 6.60 × 4.60 m).

The 2016 season also allowed the discovery of a necropolis south-west of the fortress. Informed by the villagers of massive looting at its location, the Bulgarian team informed the regional archaeological authorities, who organised rescue excavations. The necropolis was dated from the mid-sixth to the early seventh century and may point to an Alan presence.⁶⁹

Conclusion: archaeological perspectives

In the light of the short assessment drawn up here, one can see that Zaldapa offers an exceptional archaeological

potential. It can certainly shed light on the processes of militarisation and of Christianisation of the cities of the Lower Danube. The issue of Christianisation is particularly complex in the province of Scythia, where the Christian communities may have been organised along different lines than those of the traditional model in which a city necessarily corresponded to an episcopal see.

This potential of Zaldapa is clearly perceptible in the results obtained by Georgi Atanasov, Valeri Yotov and Ioto Valeriev since 2014. In 2015 and in 2016, they invited an foreign team directed by Dominic Moreau and Nicolas Beaudry (UQAR, Canada) with the objective of putting together an international project on Zaldapa.⁷⁰ Thus far, the contributions of the foreign team included an updated plan of the city and of its defensive system based on satellite imagery and field walking, as well as drawn and photographic records of Christian Basilica No. 1, Christian Basilica No. 3 and the cistern. Above all, its visits to Zaldapa allowed an assessment of the archaeological interest and potential of the site, and the design of a joint project to investigate the city's urban fabric.

An international research project at Zaldapa opens new and exciting perspectives on the changing urban landscape of a Late Roman fortress that otherwise remains barely explored. The imposing character of its defensive structures suggests a strong military presence which has yet to be studied; it is even possible that Flavius Vitalianus himself took refuge in his home town, which was one of the main strongholds of the hinterland of the Lower Danube, when he withdrew to northern Thrace after a failed attempt to lay siege to Constantinople in 515 (*cf. supra*). The religious importance of Zaldapa is suggested by the density, size and decor of its Christian monuments; it is also suggested by sources that link Vitalianus' revolt to a Christological formula that was central to sixth-century theological debates.⁷¹ The historical significance of the army and of the Church in Zaldapa give a measure of the archaeological potential of their material footprints, and the site offers excellent conditions for investigating their interrelated effects on the urban fabric.

The joint archaeological project will thus seek to deliver a dynamic portrait of Zaldapa's urban landscape, of its economy, and of its religious and military environments during Late Antiquity. The exceptional preservation of the site, which is thought to have been completely deserted after Antiquity, is expected to yield a rich archaeological

⁶⁶ Atanasov *et al.* 2017a, pp. 127–131.

⁶⁷ Atanasov *et al.* 2017b.

⁶⁸ Atanasov, Valeriev 2018.

⁶⁹ Ivanov *et al.* 2017.

⁷⁰ In addition to their directors, the visiting foreign team included: Pascale Chevalier (lecturer, Université Clermont Auvergne / ArTeHiS–UMR 6298 research centre, France – 2015-2016); Elio Hobdari (Instituti i Arkeologjisë, Albania –2016); Adrien Leblond (doctoral student, Université de Lille, France – 2015-2016); Brahim M'Barek (*cf. supra* – 2016); Julia Reveret (doctoral student, Université Clermont Auvergne and Université de Fribourg, France and Switzerland – 2015-2016); Nadia Saint-Luc (lecturer, Lycée Claude Fauriel and École nationale d'architecture de Clermont-Ferrand, France – 2015-2016).

⁷¹ Moreau 2017.



Fig. 15. The crypt of Christian Basilica No. 3, 2015, looking north (G. Atanasov and I. Yotov).

archive in an area where well-documented sites remain rare. The project will allow an assessment of the combined effects of militarisation and Christianisation on the urban forms and functions of a city of the Danubian hinterland, which has been less explored than the front line; it will also allow a critical assessment of models in which the army would have been the main vehicle of Christianity along the *limes*. The study of this fortified, possible episcopal see of the hinterland will thus offer an original parallel to that of the great forts of the Danube and usefully complement the documented sites of the hinterland.

Appendix on seasons 2017 to 2019

Since this paper was read at the 23rd ICBS in Belgrade in September 2016, research in Zaldapa has developed to such an extent that it was thought useful to briefly report on the work of the Bulgarian team and of what has become the Zaldapa International Archaeological Project.

The Bulgarian mission has carried on its study of Christian Basilicas Nos. 3 and 4 in 2017 and 2018, and a new campaign was scheduled for September 2019. The 2017 campaign was marked by the end of the excavation and documentation of the atrium of Basilica No. 3, and of the crypt of Basilica No. 4.⁷² A burial was found under the atrium of Basilica 3 and traces of wall painting were found

on the north wall of the crypt of Basilica 4. In 2018, the exploration focused on the walls and floor of Basilica No. 4, as well as on the decor and passageways of Basilica No. 3, specifically around its exterior walls.⁷³

In parallel with the work of the Bulgarian mission, a new international project was launched in the wake of the exploratory missions of 2015 and 2016. Cooperation agreements were signed to this end in 2017 and 2018 between the Université de Lille (France), the Université du Québec à Rimouski (Canada), Софийски университет ‘Свети Климент Охридски’ (Sofia University ‘St Kliment Ohridski’, Bulgaria) and the Регионален исторически музей – Добрич (Regional Historical Museum of Dobrich, Bulgaria). The Zaldapa International Archaeological Project is codirected by G. Atanasov and N. Beaudry, with the collaboration of D. Moreau, A. Milanova and I. Valeriev.⁷⁴ It is funded mainly by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Danubius Project of the

⁷² Atanasov, Valeriev 2018.

⁷³ Atanasov, Valeriev 2019.

⁷⁴ Other participants (excluding external service providers) were: Anthony Carneaux (Master’s student, Université de Lille, France – 2019); Jérémy Gribaut (Master’s student, Université de Lille, France / Master’s student, UQAR, Canada – 2018-2019); Elio Hobdari (*cf. supra*, n. 70 – 2018); Slavi Kirov (*cf. supra*, n. 30 – 2018-2019); Lyubomir Malinov (Master’s student, Université de Montpellier, France – 2019); Brahim M’Barek (*cf. supra* – 2018-2019); Aleksandar Ivanov (PhD student, Софийски университет ‘Свети Климент Охридски’ / Sofia University ‘St. Kliment Ohridski’, Bulgaria – 2018-2019); David L. Tremblay (undergraduate student, UQAR, Canada – 2018).

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Fig. 16a. Vaulted tomb in Axiopolis (archives of the Muzeul de istorie națională și arheologie Constanța, printed with permission).



Fig. 16b. Vaulted tomb in Durostorum (R. Dimitrov ; Atanasov 2014).



Fig. 17. The crypt of Christian Basilica No. 4, 2017, looking east (N. Beaudry).

Université de Lille,⁷⁵ with contributions from the HALMA–UMR 8164 research centre. The International Project focuses, in its first phase, on the north end of the site, where the city wall forms a salient. A test trench opened in 2014 by the Bulgarian team suggests a dense habitat (*cf. supra*) but since looters' trenches do not show on satellite imagery, this area could not be planned unlike most of the *intra muros* city. In July 2018 and 2019, excavations were simultaneously conducted on Christian Basilica No. 2 and on the north-eastern gate. The 2018 season allowed the completion of the sketch plans drawn by K. Škorpiľ of both structures: Basilica No. 2 proved to be a three-naved basilica with a polygonal apse, while the west, U-shaped of the gate (Tower No. 2) is attached to the rampart at a different angle than was previously thought (fig. 18).⁷⁶ More of the plan of the basilica was exposed in 2019 (fig. 19): its narthex and a possible atrium were identified and the exploration of its sanctuary continued, while different phases of the north-eastern gate and its passageway were identified.

In addition, the International Project has contributed over the last three years to the publication outside Bulgaria of the site and of ongoing fieldwork at Zaldapa. The

⁷⁵ The DANUBIUS Project intends to study the Christianisation of the Lower Danube, between the third and the eight centuries AD. It is mainly co-funded for 2018–2021 by the Agence nationale de la Recherche (ANR) and the I-SITE ULNE Foundation. For more information see <https://danubius.huma-num.fr>.
⁷⁶ Atanasov *et al.* 2018.

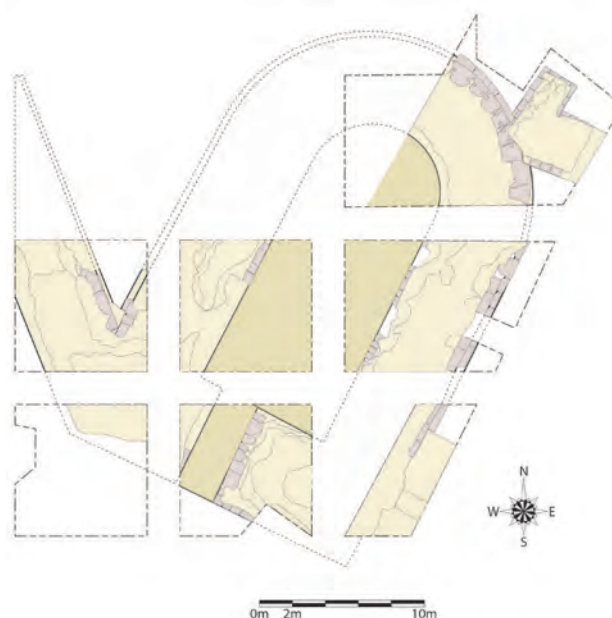


Fig. 18. Plan of Tower 2, 2018 (B. M'Barek).

collaboration of the Bulgarian and foreign teams has also led to a joint publication of inscriptions found during the excavations of Christian Basilicas Nos. 3 and 4.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Dana *et al.* 2017 (*erratum*: p. 158 – ...Abritus (relocalisée à Razgrad depuis 1954)...); 2019 (*erratum*: p. 74 – ...in 2015, among the *spolia*,...).

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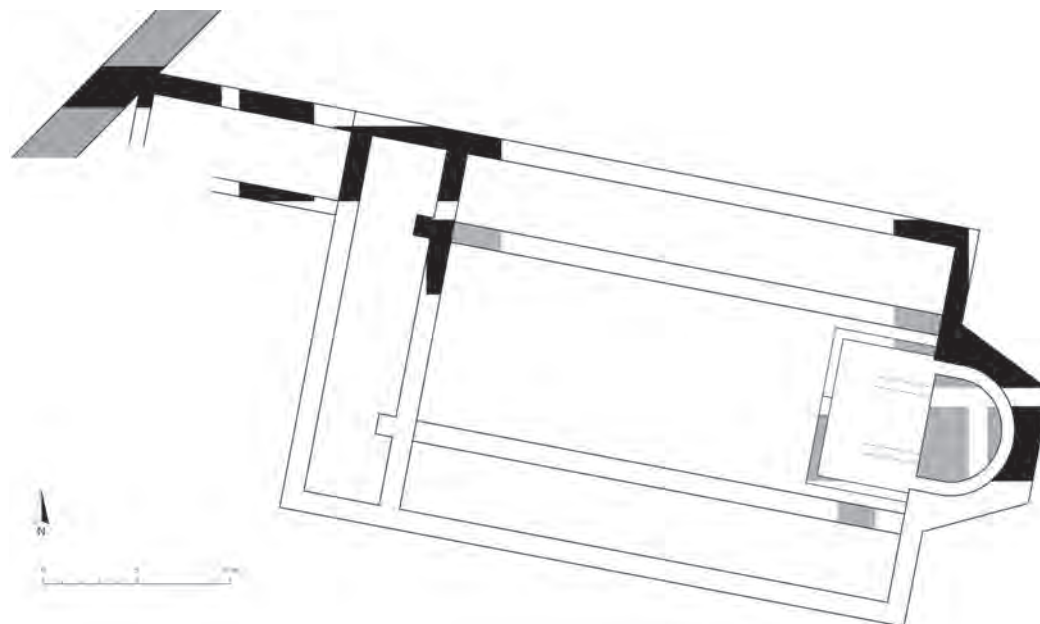


Fig. 19. Plan of Christian Basilica No. 2, 2019 (N. Beaudry).

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Abbreviations

ACO = Schwartz E., Straub J., Schieffer R., Riedinger R., 1914–84, *Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum* [1st series], Strasbourg/Berlin/Leipzig.

AD = *Analele Dobrogei*.

AE = *Année épigraphique*.

CCET = Gočeva Z., Oppermann M., Hampartumian N., Cermanović-Kuzmanović A. (ed.), 1979–84. *Corpus cultus equitis Thracii (CCET)*, Leiden (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain, 74).

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IGBulg = Mihaylov G. (ed.), 1958–97. *Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae – Гръцките надписи намерени в България*, Sofia.

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