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ZALDAPA'S BASILICA 2 AND THE CHRISTIAN FABRIC OF A CONSTANTINIAN CITY³

Abstract: Zaldapa (Krushari, Bulgaria) is the largest known Late Roman stronghold of the hinterland of the Lower Danubian provinces, established in the context of an in-depth fortification campaign launched by Constantine I. This article discusses the Christian landscape of Zaldapa and its evolution in the sixth century by focusing on one of its churches, Basilica 2, remarkable for its size, decor, and footprint in the urban fabric. It was built in the first half of the sixth century, close to the northern gate of the fortress. Like the basilicas located near the other gates, it served both the intramural city and its suburbs while a large central church, Basilica 3, stood at the intersection of the main thoroughfares, erected at the turn of sixth century to replace the fortress' first known Christian temple and its martyrial crypt. Basilica 3 was erected as the city's main temple, but Basilica 2 was of comparable size, its sumptuous decor eclipsed that of the other churches of Zaldapa and, unlike them, it encroached on the public space of its neighborhood. Overall, it seems less to gravitate around the central church, like the other basilicas, than to define a new Christian pole in the urban fabric of Zaldapa, distinct from the central pole founded on the presence of martyrs, and shows the increasing impact of the Church in the city's landscape.

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Fig. 1. Location map (Tz. Yotov)

Сл. 1. Мапа локације (Цв. Јотов)

Keywords: Zaldapa, Lower Danube, Roman frontier, Christianisation, church architecture, urban landscape

In the second quarter of the fourth century, a network of new fortresses emerged along the Lower Danubian *limes* and in its hinterland, in the context of an ambitious large-scale, in-depth fortification campaign launched by Constantine and continued by its successors⁴. In this part of the Empire, until then little urbanized outside the coastal line, therefore relatively little Romanized and still deeply attached to the old cults, urbanization took place in parallel with the intensive militarization of the provinces and the Christianization of both local and new communities. In Scythia Minor, the easternmost province along the

⁴ The fortification of the south bank of the Danube had become a major issue after the Roman withdrawal of Dacia in 271, and even more so under the Tetrarchy. The new construction program launched by Constantine I continued the efforts of his predecessors, but displayed a vigorous and more ambitious character: S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans from Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent*, New Haven-London 2010, 45-50. On the regional landscape see I. Achim, D. Moreau, *Le réseau des fortifications dans l'arrière-pays bas-danubien tardo-antique : la Moesia Secunda et la Scythia*, *Perchement et réalités fortifiées en Méditerranée et en Europe, Vème-Xème siècles / Fortified hilltop settlements in the Mediterranean and in Europe (5th-10th centuries)*, ed. P. Pergola *et al.*, Oxford 2023, 382-393.



Fig. 2. Zaldapa seen from the northwest (N. Beaudry)

Сл. 2.
Залдапа из северозападног угла (Н. Бодри)

Danube, two of these strongholds stood out as the largest and became central in the regional defensive network: Ibida, in the northern part of the province, and Zaldapa in the south (Fig. 1)⁵. This article discusses the evolution of the Christian fabric of Zaldapa by focusing on a sixth-century church notable for its location, its scale, and its decor.

Zaldapa

The site now identified as Zaldapa is located on a hilltop plateau in what is today southern Dobrudja (municipality of Krushari, province of Dobrič, Bulgaria; Fig. 2). With its 2.05km-long rampart, 32 towers and *suburbia*, it is the largest known Roman fortress of the hinterland of the Lower Danubian provinces. It was built at the intersection of two strategic roads, one connecting Durostorum, on the Danube, to Callatis and Dionysopolis on the Black Sea coast, the other connecting Marcianopolis to Ibida and the northernmost outposts on the Danube and serving the rear of the frontier as the river flows northward (Fig. 1)⁶.

The first known mention of Zaldapa is in Hierokles' *Synekdemos* (ca. 530), where it was listed among the cities of the province of Scythia⁷. It was also

⁵ В. Динчев, *Новите късноримски центрове на Scythia и Moesia Secunda*, Сборник в памет на професор Велизар Велков, ed. Д. Аладжова *et al.*, София 2009, 414-448.

⁶ К.В. Шкорпил, Някотория изъ дорогъ восточной Болгаріи, *Известія Русскаго Археологическаго Института въ Константинополь* – *Bulletin de l'Institut archéologique russe de Constantinople* 10 (София 1905), 492-502.

⁷ Hierokles, *Synekdemos* 637.7, ed. E. Honigmann, Brussels 1939, 13. Written sources are presented and discussed in В. Велков, *Градът в Тракия и Дакия през късната античност (IV-VI в.)*. Проучвания и материали, София 1959, 91, бел. 4; С. Торбатов, *Късноантичният град Залдапа / The late antique city of Zaldapa*, Sofia 2000, 6-7; *id.*, *Залдапа (Zaldapa)*, Римски и ранновизантийски селища в България, т. II, ed. Р. Иванов, София 2003, 87; D. Moreau, G. Atanasov, N. Beaudry, *The archaeology of the Late Roman city of Zaldapa: the status quaestionis in 2016 (with an appendix on seasons 2017-2019)*,

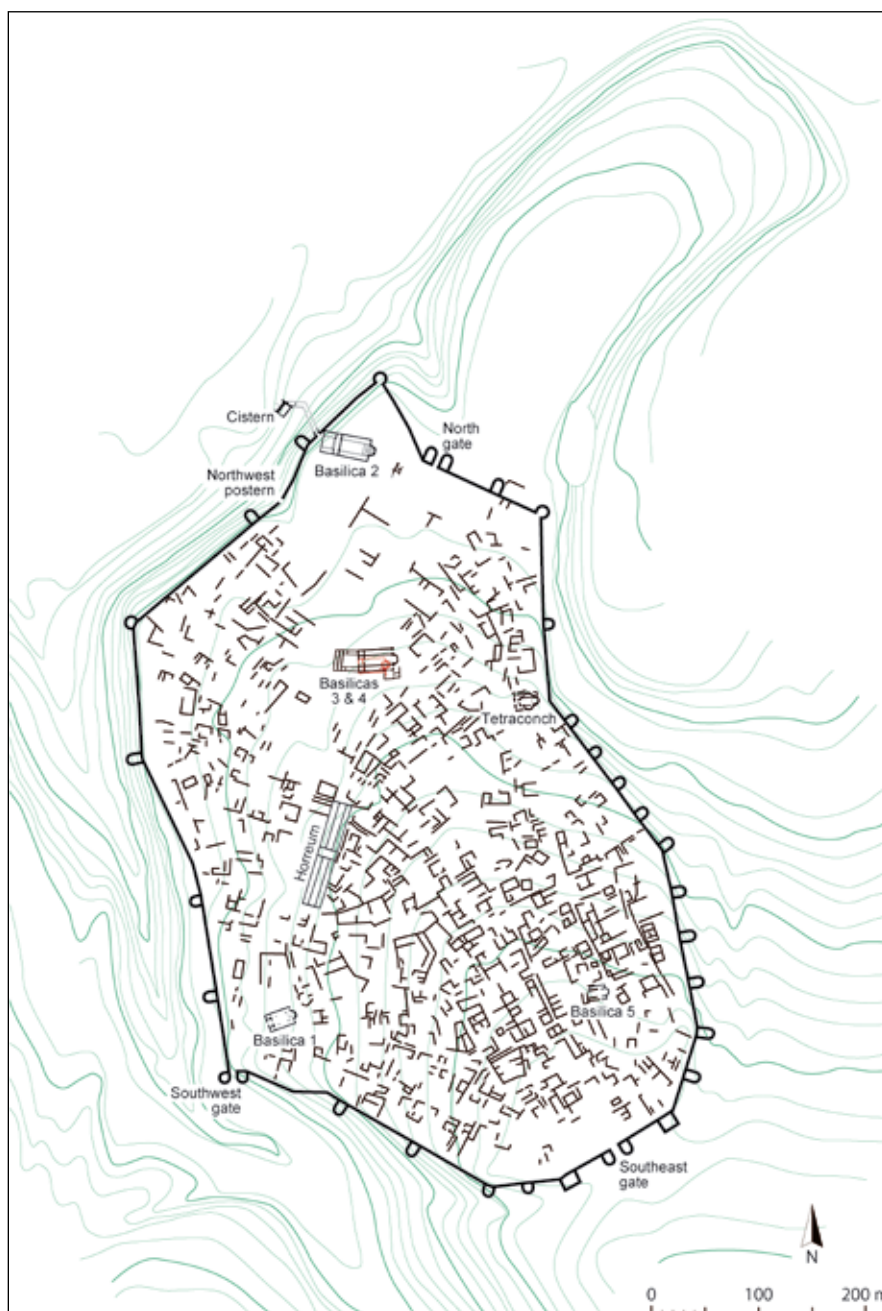


Fig. 3. Site plan in 2023, based on LiDAR survey, satellite imagery and field survey (adapted from B. M'Barek).

Сл. 3. План локације из 2023. на основу LiDAR истраживања, сателитских снимака и теренских истраживања (адаптирано од Б. М'Барека).

known as the homeland of general Flavius Vitalianus (†520), who led a revolt against Emperor Anastasius and thus contributed to the rise of the Justinianic dynasty⁸. Around the mid-sixth century, Procopius mentions its fortifications among those whose restoration he attributes to Justinian⁹. The city was sacked by the Avars in 586, recovered by Roman troops in 587, then sacked again by the Sclaveni and recovered again in 593¹⁰: these changes of hand bear witness of the strategic significance of this stronghold in the defensive system of the frontier. The city is thought to have been abandoned shortly afterwards and never reoccupied, thus the excellent preservation of its remains.

The interest of the site did not escape the attention of the “Fathers of Bulgarian archaeology”, Karel and Hermann Škorpil, who visited it several times between 1889 and 1910¹¹. They described and planned the fortifications, which they dated to the second quarter of the fourth century, and identified the city’s main thoroughfares determined by gates to the north, southwest and southeast, and by a postern to the northwest (Fig. 3). They located and planned a large building bordering one of these axes, probably a *horreum* whose dimensions (101×18m) suggest the importance of the city in regional military logistics. They also excavated a sixth-century church (Basilica 1) and identified a second one (Basilica 2), while their archives show that they also identified other structures *intra-muros*¹². Romanian archaeologists carried out occasional excavations between 1913 and 1940 while Dobrudja was under Romanian jurisdiction, but their work remains unpublished¹³. In 1949, shortly before the creation of an artificial lake to the west, Milko Mirchev exposed the first compartment

Archaeology of a world of changes: late Roman and Early Byzantine architecture, sculpture and landscapes – In memoriam Claudia Barsanti, BAR 2973, ed. D. Moreau *et al.*, Oxford 2020, 37-38.

⁸ D. Moreau, *Les moines scythes néo-chalcédoniens (de Zaldapa ?). Étude préliminaire à une prosopographie chrétienne du Diocèse des Thraces*, Добруджа 32 (Силистра 2017), 191-194. Some scholars, however, express doubt about the identification of the fortress with the small town (πόλις) of Ζάλδαβα mentioned by John of Antioch: Торбаров, *Късноантичният град*, 7.

⁹ Procopius of Caesarea, *De Aedificiis* 4.xi, ed. H.B. Dewing, Cambridge, MA 1954, 308-315.

¹⁰ Theophilact Simocatta, *Historia* 2.10.10 and 7.2.16, ed. de Boor, Stuttgart 1972, 90 and 249.

¹¹ Шкорпил, *op. cit.*, who first identified the site as Abrittus. Its identification as Zaldapa was first proposed in 1955 after the discovery of an inscription locating *Abrittus* at Razgrad (Bulgaria): Т. Иванов, *Два надписа от античния град при Разград*, Известия на Археологическия институт 19 (София 1955); R. Vulpe, *Granița de sud a provinciei Scythia și localizarea orașelor Abrittus și Zaldapa*, Studii și cercetări de istorie veche și arheologie 6.3-4 (Bucharest 1955), 939; В. Бешевлиев, *Из късноантичната и средновековна география на Североизточна България*, Известия на Археологическия институт 25 (София 1962), 2-4; *id.*, *Zur Geographie Nordost-Bulgariens in der Spätantike und im Mittelalter*, Linguistique balkanique 4 (Sofia 1962), 59-60.

¹² М. Вълчев, *Първите планове на Залдапа в архива на Карел Шкорпил*, Добруджа 32 (Силистра 2017), 187-202; Й. Валериев, *От архивите – за античния град Залдапа (тогава все още “Абтаат кале/Абритус*, Добруджа 32 (Силистра 2017), 161-166; Moreau *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 39.

¹³ *Ibid*, 42-43.



Fig. 4. The north end of the intramural city, looking east (N. Beaudry).

Сл. 4. Северни крај унутрашњег града, поглед са истока (Н. Боудри)

(10.80×5.30m) of a large extra-mural cistern at the foot of the promontory; leaning against the slope and fed by a spring, it was accessible to the north by a covered corridor descending from the rampart¹⁴. The first synthesis on the site was published in 2000 by Sergey Torbatov, who built on his own field surveys but still essentially relied on the work of Karel Škorpi¹⁵.

Recent excavations

Despite its potential, Zaldapa remained hardly explored until 2014, when Georgi Atanasov and Valeri Yotov undertook the excavation of a large church and its crypt (Basilica 3), followed by the excavation of an earlier church and crypt lying underneath (Basilica 4)¹⁶. Following several exploratory missions,

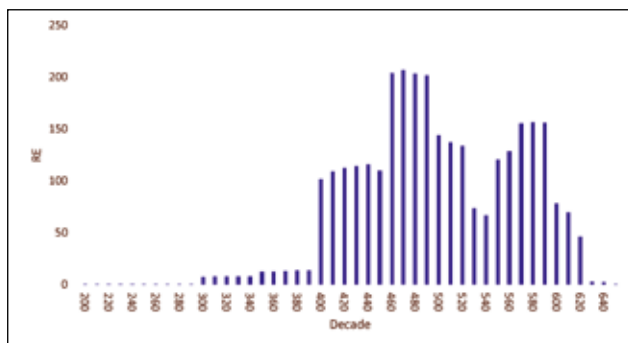
¹⁴ М. Мирчев, Водният резервоар и каптаж при крепостта Абрит, *Известия на Варненското археологическо дружество / Bulletin de la Société archéologique à Varna* 8 (Варна 1951), 99-103.

¹⁵ Торбатов, *Късноантичният град*.

¹⁶ Г. Атанасов, В. Йотов, Й. Валериев, *Античен град Залдапа, община Крушиари, област Добрич. Раннохристиянска базилика*, Археологически открития и разкопки [АОР] през 2014 г. (София 2015), 421-423; *ead.*, *Античен град Залдапа, община Крушиари*,

Fig. 5. Chronological spread by rim-equivalent of the pottery finds at the northern end of the site, 2018-2023 (Ph. Mills).

Сл. 5. Хронолошки распоређени налази грнчарије на северном крају локалитета, 2018-2023 (Ф. Милс)



an International Archaeological Project was launched in 2018 to draw a dynamic portrait of the city's urban landscape, of its economy and of its military and religious environment during Late Antiquity¹⁷. The international team focused on the northern end of the site, where the rampart forms a salient projecting to the north between a tower overlooking the cistern and the north gate (Fig. 4). It first explored Basilica 2 and the north gate¹⁸; after the covid pandemic, it also explored, west of Basilica 2, the postern giving access to the cistern below, and joined the Bulgarian team in excavating and documenting a tetraconch church discovered to the east of Basilica 3¹⁹.

област Добрич. Раннохристиянска базилика, АОР през 2015 (София 2016), 460-463; ead., Античен град Залдапа, община Крушари, област Добрич. Раннохристиянска базилика, АОР през 2016 (София 2017), 296-297; Г. Атанасов, Й. Валериев, *Археологическо проучване на базилики № 3 и 4 в Залдапа, община Крушари, област Добрич*, АОР през 2017 (София 2018), 246-248; ead., *Раннохристиянски базилики № 3 и 4 в Залдапа*, АОР през 2018 (София 2019), 262-264; ead., *Антична крепост Залдапа – квартали северно и южно от базилика № 3*, АОР през 2019 (София 2020), т. II, 729-732. G. Atanasov also explored the sanctuary of Basilica 1 in 2016: G. Atanasov, Y. Valeriev, *Basilica # 1 with a newly discovered crypt from the Roman / early Byzantine city of Zaldapa. Addenda et corrigenda*, *Archaeologica Bulgarica* 25.2 (Sofia 2021), 45-80.

¹⁷ The Zaldapa International Archaeological Project was co-directed by Georgi Atanasov and Nicolas Beaudry, with the collaboration of Albena Milanova and Dominic Moreau. It was funded for the most part by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada with a substantial contribution from the Danubius project (Agence nationale de la recherche, France). Fieldwork has also been supported by HALMA, the Université de Lille and the Université du Québec à Rimouski, and received material support from the municipality of Krushari. The work of the Bulgarian team was also funded by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Bulgaria.

¹⁸ Г. Атанасов, N. Beaudry, A. Миланова, Й. Валериев, D. Moreau, *Базилика № 2 и централна северна порта на Залдапа*, АОР през 2018 (София 2019), 260-262; ead., *Антична крепост Залдапа – сектор „северозапад” и Базилика № 2*, АОР през 2019 (София 2020), т. II, 732-737; D. Moreau, N. Beaudry, *La forteresse tardo-antique de Zaldapa (Bulgarie). Histoire du site et bilan des deux premières saisons de la Mission archéologique internationale*, *Revue archéologique* 73.1 (Paris 2022), 174-178; N. Beaudry, B. M'Barek, D. Moreau, G. Atanasov, *La forteresse de Zaldapa: un projet archéologique international*, *Dossiers d'archéologie h.-s.* 40 (Dijon 2021), 66-69.

¹⁹ Г. Атанасов, N. Beaudry, A. Миланова, D. Moreau, Й. Валериев, B. M'Barek, E. Hobdari, *Антична крепост Залдапа – Северна порта, тунелът към атриума на Базилика № 2 и тетраконхална църква № 6*, АОР през 2021 (София, in press);

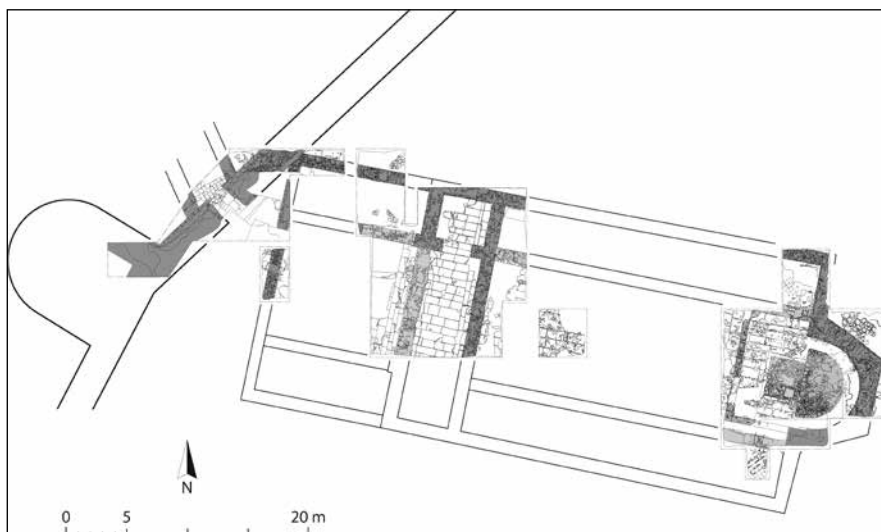


Fig. 6. Plan of Basilica 2, 2023 (N. Beaudry).

Сл. 6. План базилике 2, 2023 (Н. Бодри)

While excavation in this part of the site yielded a few pre-Roman sherds, the supply of ceramics at the northern end of the site only really began in the first decades of the fourth century (Fig. 5). This fits well the dating of the fortifications by Škorpil²⁰ and the earliest coins found in the excavated tower of the north gate, which are Constantinian. The dating of the fortifications to the second quarter of the fourth century is also supported by *spolia* taken from a Thracian temple at Telerig which is known to have been destroyed shortly after 324²¹. The collapse of the supply of ceramics after the sixth century would confirm the abandonment of the site.

Г. Атанасов, N. Beaudry, А. Миланова, D. Moreau, В. М'Варек, Е. Хобдари, М. Родé, *Античен град Залдапа – Северна порта, Базилика № 2 и тетраконхална църква*, АОР през 2022 (София, in press); Г. Атанасов, N. Beaudry, А. Миланова, Е. Хобдари, *Античен град Залдапа – обект „Базилика № 2“ в землището с. Добрин, общ. Крушари, обл. Добрич*, АОР през 2023 (София, in press).

²⁰ See also P. J. E. Mills, N. Beaudry, D. Moreau, *The coarse wares from the excavations at Zaldapa, Bulgaria*, LRCW 7. The end of late Roman pottery: the last centuries at the crossroads, ed. M. A. Cau Ontiveros, J. M. Macias i Solé, A. Ribera i Lacomba, Oxford, in press.

²¹ Торбатов, *Късноантичният град*, 85-86; *id.*, *Укрепителната система на провинция Скития (края на III-VII в.)*, София 2002, 56-58; *id.*, *Πρωτὸς Ἡφαίστος (предварителни данни за античния култов център край Телериг, Южна Добруджа)*, *Ἡeros Ἡφαίστος. Studia in honorem Liubae Ogdenova-Marinova*, ed. Т. Стоянов, Велико Търново 2005, 80-91.



Fig. 7. Aerial photograph of Basilica 2, 2023 (N. Beaudry).

Сл. 7. Аерофотографија базилике 2, 2023 (Н. Бодри)

The Christian landscape of Zaldapa

Our knowledge of the Christian landscape of Zaldapa has been profoundly renewed since excavation resumed in 2014, allowing a better understanding of the growing footprint of Christianity in its urban fabric. Six intramural churches are now known, all discovered or re-explored in the last decade (Fig. 3).

The earliest known Christian temple in Zaldapa is Basilica 4 (28×14m), erected in the late fourth or early fifth century at the intersection of the city's main thoroughfares. It is a three-naved basilica with a projecting apse, built on a large rectangular crypt comprising two vaulted rooms and a corridor accessed by a staircase from the south aisle. Such crypts are a common feature in the province of Scythia, where fierce persecutions left about 150 martyrs, but this one is particularly large and would have comfortably accommodated the remains of several saints²².

Basilica 4 was destroyed around the mid-fifth century and replaced around the turn of the sixth by a much larger church on the same site, Basilica 3 (38×21m). It is also a three-nave basilica with a projecting apse, preceded by a tripartite narthex and a large atrium opening by a colonnade onto one of the main streets. Its sanctuary was built on a crypt, like that of Basilica 4, but of more modest dimensions and accessible from inside the sanctuary²³: this may indicate a change in the relationship with the martyrs, despite a continuity in the

²² I. Barnea, *Les monuments paléochrétiens de Roumanie*, Vatican 1977, 11-13, 150; *id.*, *Le cripte delle basiliche paleocristiane della Scizia Minore*, *Revue des études sud-est européennes* 19.3 (Bucharest 1981), 489-505; G. Atanasov, A. Milanova, *Les cryptes des basiliques de Zaldapa au regard des autres exemples en Scythie, Mésie Seconde et Chersonèse (IV^e-VII^e siècle)*, *A Danubio ad Gothiam : La christianisation du nord-ouest de la Mer Noire dans l'Antiquité tardive*, in press.

²³ G. Atanasov, I. Valeriev, V. Yotov. *The crypt in the sanctuary of the Basilica No. 3 at the ancient city of Zaldapa (Province of Scythia)*, *Ниш и Византија / Niš and Byzantium* 14 (Niš 2017), 123-132.

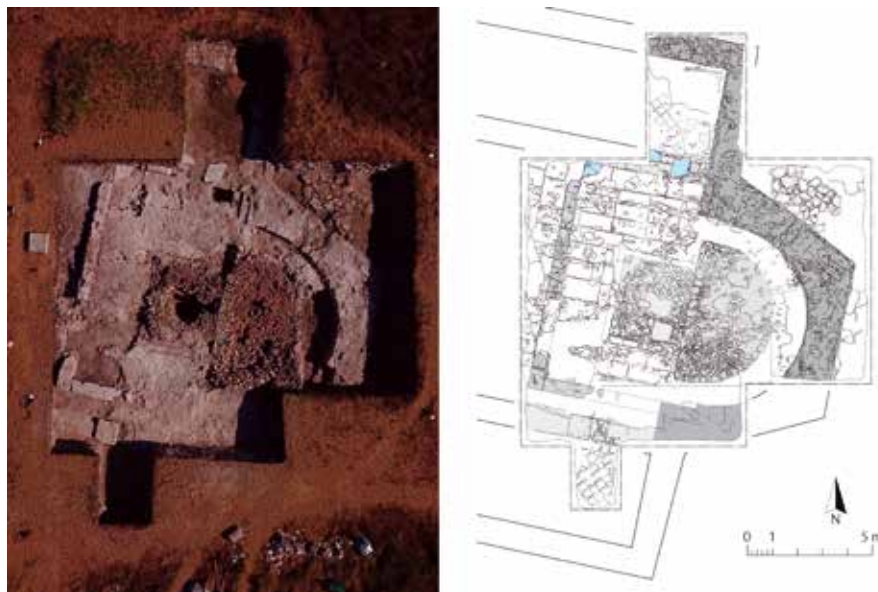


Fig. 8. Aerial photograph and plan of the sanctuary of Basilica 2, 2022 (N. Beaudry).

Сл. 8. Аерофотографија и план светилишта базилике 2, 2022 (Н. Бодри)



Fig. 9. Fragment of a reddish conglomerate column (A. Milanova).

Сл. 9. Фрагмент стуба црвенкастог конгломерата (А. Миланова)

martyrial character of the central church of the city. Whether Zaldapa has been an episcopal see is still debated, but even if it was not built as a cathedral, Basilica 3 was certainly intended as Zaldapa's main Christian temple²⁴.

Three other intramural basilicas are known today in Zaldapa, all three-nave churches with a projecting apse and each close to one of the city's main gates. Contemporary with Basilica 3, with which it shares many features, Basilica 1 (27,75×16,50m), whose sanctuary was partly paved with mosaic, stood close to the southwestern gate. Basilica 2 (39,50×21,70m) was built later, in the first

²⁴ Whether, or when Zaldapa became an episcopal see depends on the interpretation of medieval sources: see Moreau *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 37-38; Moreau, Beaudry, *op. cit.*, 73. The erection of an episcopal see would have required the erection of a new cathedral or an evolution in the functions of an existing church. According to G. Atanasov, a first bishop was appointed for Zaldapa after the mid-sixth century, Basilica 3 became a cathedral and a later annex, at the south-east corner, should be interpreted as its *episkopeion*: G. Atanasov, Y. Valeriev, *La résidence épiscopale à proximité de la cathédrale de la ville romano-byzantine de Zaldapa dans la province de Scythie*, *Archaeologia Bulgarica* 24.1 (Sofia 2020), 51-52.



Fig. 10. Sample of glass tesserae found in the sanctuary (Ph. Mills).

Сл. 10. Узорак стаклених тессера пронађених у светилишту (Ф. Милс).

half of the sixth century, between the north gate and the northwestern postern. Close to the southeastern gate, Basilica 5 (21×17,50m) was identified and partly excavated in 2019 and 2020 by Ioto Valeriev, who dates it to the mid-sixth century²⁵.

²⁵ Й. Валериев, *Залдапа – Раннохристиянска базилика № 5*, АОР през 2019 (София 2020), т. II, 739-741; *id.*, *Залдапа – Раннохристиянска базилика № 5*, АОР през 2020 (София 2021), т. II, 665-667; *id.*, *Раннохристиянската базилика № 5 в югоизточната част на късноантичния град Залдапа (предварително съобщение)*, Граница, периферия,



Fig. 11. Impost and capital (N. Beaudry).

Сл. 11. Импост и капител (Н. Бодри).



Fig. 12. Imprint of a marble slab on the south stylobate, 2018 (N. Beaudry).

Сл. 12. Отисак мермерне плоче на јужном стилобату, 2018 (Н. Бодри).

The sixth intramural Christian temple is an original tetraconch church (24.60x16.60m) with mosaic floors, close to the eastern rampart, whose excavation began in 2019. It was built over buildings in use until the mid-fifth century but the widespread use of *spolia*, including elements of ambo that probably came from other local churches, indicates a construction in the mid-sixth century or later²⁶.

Basilica 2

Basilica 2 stood at the northern end of the site, where the defended perimeter juts out to the north, between the north gate and a tower overlooking the extramural cistern (Fig. 4). It is a three-naved basilica with a projecting three-sided apse, a tripartite narthex and an atrium, all in *opus mixtum*, comparable in size to Basilica 3 (Fig. 6,7). Despite several phases of looting that systematically targeted its masonries, pavements, marble furnishing and decor, excavation delivered the outlines of the plan and liturgical system of the church, as well as elements of its architectural sculpture.

Its sanctuary includes a semi-circular apse raised by a platform of compacted stones, bordered by a narrow ambulatory which may have been cov-

военна зона: пространствени и културни измерения, ed. A. Миланова, София 2023, 57-60.

²⁶ G. Atanasov, A. Milanova, E. Hobdari, *Une nouvelle église tétraconque à Zaldapa au regard des autres tétraconques de Bulgarie*, Tetraconch churches in Late Antiquity, ed. D. Moreau, I. Achim, G. Castiglia, N. Beaudry, Rome, forth.



Fig. 13. The western façade and the narthex, looking east, 2023 (A. Ivanov).

Сл. 13. Западна фасада и нартекс, поглед ка истоку, 2023 (А. Иванов).

ered by a *synthronon*²⁷ (Fig. 8). The platform of the apse was extended into the first bay of the nave by a rectangular space paved with thick limestone slabs. This is certainly the base of a ciborium that was robbed but of which traces remain in the mortar of the pavement. Fragments of a reddish conglomerate column would belong to this structure (Fig. 9)²⁸.

The sanctuary was undivided, following a Constantinopolitan model that remained in use until the end of the sixth century. It was delimited by a marble chancel on a stylobate made of *spolia*; its Π-shape was the most common in the diocese of Thrace, particularly in the Justinianic period (Fig. 8). Numerous small fragments of marble fence, both single and double-sided, belong to the chancel screen but perhaps also to a parapet. They show common motifs, such as lozenges and discs inscribed with crosses and rosettes, set in a variety of molded frames. Fragments of pillars and columns with integrated capitals suggest a high structure, as was common in the diocese of Thrace after the mid-fifth century²⁹. No remains of an ambo have yet been identified, but the nave remains to be fully explored.

Unlike Basilicas 4 and 3, Basilica 2 did not host a crypt and thus did not have the obvious martyrial functions of the central churches³⁰. Looter pits in the apse and in the base of the ciborium left no trace of the reliquary expected

²⁷ Other possible *synthronoi* have been identified in the cemeterial basilica at Istria and in Tropaeum Traiani's "transept basilica", but they remain rare in Scythia: I. Barnea, *op. cit.*, 140-141, 168.

²⁸ This material, probably of Phrygian origin, was also found in Basilicas 3 and 1.

²⁹ И. Досева, *Ранновизантийските олтарни прегради в Тракия и Дакия*, Проблеми на изкуството 35.3 (София 2002), 10.

³⁰ A small crypt or altar pit was also found in Basilica 1: Атанасов *et al.*, АОР през 2016, *op. cit.*.



Fig. 14. Fragment of parapet found in the atrium (A. Milanova).

Сл. 14. Фрагмент парапета пронађен у атријуму (А. Миланова).



Fig. 15. Fragments of transenna found in the western part of the building (A. Milanova).

Сл. 15. Фрагменти транзене пронађени у западном делу зграде (А. Миланова)



Fig. 16: Holy water font carved in a limestone pilaster (A. Milanova).

Сл. 16. Крстионица уклесана у кречњачки пиластар (А. Миланова).

under an altar. At least two rectangular tables completed the furnishing, one of which bore a poorly preserved painted inscription; they were made of a whiter and finer-grained marble than the other elements of liturgical furnishing. Excavation of the sanctuary also yielded fragments of marble wall veneer and several thousand glass tesserae from a gilded apse mosaic, a very rare example of such decor in Scythia (Fig. 10).

Strong foundations resting on the bedrock, 4.25 m deep at the west end of the naves, suggest that the church had galleries³¹. An Ionic impost adorned with a cross (half preserved), a Corinthian capital (almost complete) and a probable fragment of double-zone basket capital suggest the arrangement of different orders in the architectural decor (Fig. 11). The type and style of the numerous surviving fragments of acanthus associate them with the type of thorny acanthus capitals produced intensively in Proconnesian workshops from the late fifth to the mid-sixth century, and widely distributed

³¹ S. Ćurčić (*op. cit.*, 160) suggested that in the fifth-century Balkans, galleries would generally be associated with a direct jurisdiction of Constantinople.

along the Pontic and Mediterranean coasts. Fragments of echinus and basket and the protome of a ram from a double-zone basket capital allow the decor to be dated to the first half of the sixth century.

The spatial articulation of the church interior is further underlined by a differentiated treatment of the floors. The central nave and the stylobates were paved with large marble slabs laid on a bed of mortar, of which some fragments and imprints remain; some of these slabs were *spolia*, as evidenced by the imprint of a tomb door (Fig. 12). In the side aisles, clay beddings kept traces of brick pavements. As for the narthex, one step down from the nave, it was paved with large limestone slabs (Fig. 7, 13). This treatment of the floors is exceptional in Scythia, where churches are more commonly paved with bricks, like Basilica 3, or limestone slabs³².

From the west, three steps led into the narthex through a colonnade that added to the monumentality of a plastered façade (Fig. 13). The steps bear traces of fire; to the west, a layer of ash mixed with mortar yielded one of the columns of the façade, fragments of parapet (Fig. 14), as well as numerous fragments of window glass. Fragments of openwork marble *transennae* in *opus pavonaceum* could also belong to windows (Fig. 15). A holy water font, carved in a limestone pedestal, was found in front of the southern entrance to the narthex (Fig. 16)³³.

To the west, the masonry of an atrium abuts that of the façade, but the similar mortars of their *opus mixtum* suggest that the atrium was contemporary or only slightly later (Fig. 6). Like the narthex, it was paved with large limestone slabs, which is not a common feature of Scythian churches³⁴, while its northern portico was paved with bricks like the side aisles of the basilica. The north portico was accessible through a door in its northern wall, while the south portico remains to be explored. A stone slab protruding from the western wall of the atrium suggests an opening in the axis of the church.

The access to the atrium, to the narthex and to the naos were thus aligned on the axis of the church. This linear continuity through different liturgical spaces from west to east suggests an axial procession of the clergy, known as the Great Entry in the churches of Constantinople, unlike other forms observed in the Balkans such as in the basilicas of St. Demetrius and Acheiropoietos in Thessaloniki.

³² Barnea, *op. cit.*, 182. Dirt floors were also frequent.

³³ The known specimen of such vessels in the diocese of Thrace were often found *in situ* near the entrance to the nave and were first identified as holy water fonts by A. Minchev, *A lost rite in the Eastern Church II: Early Christian marble fonts with inscriptions of 5th-6th c. AD found in Bulgaria and their function*, Titulum Nostrum Perlege. Miscellanea in onore by Danilo Mazzoleni, SAC 18, ed. C. dell'Osso, P. Pergola, Rome 2021, 728-739. These vessels usually take the form of a cantharos or a mortar, but the Zaldapa specimen does not belong to either of these types.

³⁴ The stone pavement of the atrium finds a parallel at the Marble Basilica of Tropeum Traiani (Barnea, *op. cit.*, 173-174).

Discussion

In their final state, the churches of Zaldapa form a network centered on Basilica 3, which succeeds the first known Christian temple of the city and ensures the continuity of its martyrial character. The three other basilicas seem to gravitate around this pole, each near one of the gates. Although other churches can still be discovered, both inside the city walls and outside, they seem to complement each other well in serving both the intramural city and its suburbs to the north, southwest and southeast.

Basilicas 3 and 1 were both inserted into the urban fabric without affecting its street network; the axis of the atrium of Basilica 3 was even diverted to adapt it to the direction of a thoroughfare. The implantation of the tetraconch church did not interfere with the street network either. On the contrary, the implantation of Basilica 2 in the urban fabric seems to have been more intrusive since it partially closes access to the northern tip of the intramural city (Fig. 3). To the east, a pavement around the apse could be a street on which it would have encroached. To the west, its western façade dominated by almost 2.5m the *via sagularis* and the postern which opened onto the corridor to the extramural cistern. The northwest corner of the narthex leaned against the rampart (Fig. 3,6), still allowing passage to the postern but closing the access from the west to the northern end of the city. This temple would thus have taken control of its neighborhood, including part of the rampart and access to a strategic water reserve: its footprint would thus have given precedence to the Church, at least locally, in the defense and communications of this part of the city.

Basilica 2 also stands out as the most sumptuous monument of Zaldapa, outshining even the city's central church, Basilica 3, built to house martyrs and be the city's main temple. It would even be one of the most sumptuous in the entire province of Scythia, its decor finding no equivalent in its neighbor Palmatis, nor in the old urban center of Tropaeum Trajani, nor even in the provincial capital, Tomis. Everything therefore seems to indicate that Basilica 2 held an important place in the city's affairs. Comparable in its dimensions to the large central basilica, it seems less to gravitate around it, like Basilicas 1 and 5, than to define a new pole in the urban landscape of Zaldapa, distinct from the central pole founded on the presence of martyrs.

On a provincial scale, Zaldapa itself stands out in the sixth century for its concentration of Christian temples, the large size of some, the original plan of its tetraconch church, and their sumptuous decoration and liturgical furnishings. Four of them display a combination of decorative elements including marble floors and veneer, mosaics, openwork slabs with complex interlace patterns, and imported architectural sculpture, both Proconnesian and of other provenance. Together, these churches testify to a close cultural connection between Zaldapa and Constantinople at the turn of the sixth century. If the flow of sculpture and architectural ideas is an indicator of the capital's interest in Zaldapa, the city's churches and the sumptuousness of Basilica 2 may reflect the importance of the stronghold in the Lower Danube defensive system and its links with the capital, as well as the strengthening of imperial authority over the region.

The construction of monumental and richly decorated churches also testifies to a growth in the provincial economy between the end of the fifth and the mid-sixth century. The abolition of the *chrysargyron* tax freed urban economies from a heavy burden. The settlement of craftsmen and merchants from the eastern provinces, particularly from Syria, contributed to the economic dynamism of the coastal cities³⁵. New networks of communication, supply and resource management, set up within the framework of the *quaestura exercitus* created in 536 and centered at Odessos, allowed more intensive exchanges with the capital, also facilitating the supply of marble and the mobility of craftsmen³⁶. If the archaeological material currently available allows the construction of Basilica 2 to be dated to the first half of Justinian's century, the evolution of the regional economic context suggests that it should be attributed to the second quarter of the century.

Zaldapa housed up to five churches at one time, as many as Tomis and Tropaeum Traiani. They demonstrate the Church's growing footprint on the urban fabric and an influence that extended beyond the city walls, through basilicas located close to the gates. In its final state, Basilica 2 even controlled parts of the urban and suburban space, of its defensive system, and of its strategic water reserves. The status of the clergy of this church is further expressed in the faunal remains and ceramics collected in material dumped between the atrium and the postern, which testify to a privileged consumption different from that of the military personnel of the northern gate. It is likely that the large-scale investment in the Christianization of the urban landscape of Zaldapa reflects the importance of its role in the Christian Lower Danube.

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БАЗИЛИКА 2 У ЗАЛДАПИ И ХРИШЋАНСКИ РАЗВОЈ ЈЕДНОГ
КОНСТАНТИНОВОГ ГРАДА

Са бедемом дугим 2,05 км који штити 25 хектара унутар зидина, Залдапа (Крушари, Бугарска) је највеће познато касноримско утврђење у унутрашњости провинција Доњег дунавског региона (сл. 1, 2). Основана је у оквиру утврђења дунавске границе коју је установио Константин I. Регион је до тада био слабо урбанизован, осим обалне линије, али ће његова урбанизација дугорочно ићи паралелно са милитаризацијом и

³⁵ М. Тачева, *Ролята на преселниците от Мала Азия, Сирия и Египет в икономическия и културен живот на западнопонтийските градове (I-III вв.)*, Известия на Народния музей – Варна, 8.23 (Варна 1972), 17-43.

³⁶ S. Torbatov, *Quaestura exercitus: Moesia Secunda and Scythia under Justinian*, *Archaeologia Bulgarica* 1.3 (Sofia 1997), 78-87. Funeral inscriptions include that of a marble trader: В. Бешевлиев, *Старохристиянските надписи от Варна като исторически извор*, Известия на Народния музей – Варна 19.34 (Варна 1983), 26-27.

христијанизацијом града. Овај рад се бави развојем хришћанске структуре Залдапе фокусирајући се на једну од њених цркава из VI века, базилику 2, која је изузетна због своје величине, декорације и улоге у урбаној структури.

Први познати хришћански храм у Залдапи је базилика 4, подигнута крајем IV или почетком V века у центру града, на раскрсници главних саобраћајница. Изграђена је изнад крипте мученика довољно простране да прими остатке неколико светитеља. Разорена око средине V века, замењена је на прелазу у VI век већом црквом, Базиликом 3, изграђеном на истом месту и са својом криптом. Базилика 2 је саграђена касније, у првој половини VI века, на северном крају локалитета, где бедем излази на север између северних врата и куле која је усмерена према екстрамуралној цистерни (сл. 3, 4). То је тробродна базилика са тространом апсидом и нартексом, којем је у каснијој фази додат атријум (сл. 6, 7). Њено светилиште, постављено унутар П-обликоване преграде, укључивало је циборијум и можда синтронон са уским амбулаторијумом (сл. 8). Није имала крипту за разлику од централне цркве у Залдапи. Приликом ископавања светилишта откривени су фрагменти мермерних украса и неколико хиљада позлаћених тесера мозаика (сл. 10).

Снажни темељи и фрагменти парапета сугеришу да је црква имала галерије (сл. 14). Фрагменти различитих типова капитела и импоста, указују на постојање различитих типова стубова (сл. 11). Са запада, три степеника су водила у нартекс кроз колонаду која је додавала монументалности (сл. 7, 13).

Просторна организација ентеријера додатно је наглашена различитим третманом подова. Централни брод и стилобати били су поплочани великим мермерним плочама, од којих су неке биле сполије (сл. 12), док су бочни пролази били поплочани опекама, а нартекс великим плочама од кречњака. Његов каснији атријум такође је био поплочан великим кречњачким плочама, док је северни трем био поплочан опекама (сл. 13). Овај третман подова је коришћен у Скитији сасвим изузетно.

Као и базилике 1 и 5, које су се налазиле у близини друге капије (сл. 3), базилика 2 је служила и унутрашњем граду и његовим предграђима. Међутим, по величини је била упоредива са главним храмом града, њен раскошни декор је засенио друге цркве у Залдапи и, за разлику од њих, заузела је јавни простор своје четврти. У целини, изгледа да је мање гравитирала око централне цркве, попут других базилика, него што је дефинисала нову, хришћанску оријентацију у урбаном плану Залдапе.

У свом коначном стању, њен атријум је затварао *via sagularis*. Овај снажан утицај на урбанизацију и пејзаж града свакако одражава важност базилике 2 у хришћанској прошлости Залдапе; такође, велика улагања града у своје цркве одражавала би његову улогу у хришћанском доњем Подунављу.