

DIGGING UP THE ARCHIVES: A REASSESSMENT OF BURIAL PRACTICES IN THE CEMETERIES FROM THE *EXTRA MUROS BASILICA* SECTOR AT HISTRIA

In memoriam Nubar Hamparțumian

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Abstract: *The article is based on the recovery and reinterpretation of archaeological data from the Nubar Hamparțumian archival fonds found at the "Vasile Pârvan" Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest. The documents contain information about 74 burials discovered by the archaeologist during the 1961–1964 excavations at the "Extra muros basilica" sector from Histria. By gathering information on each grave, a more systematic and detailed analysis was possible. All osteological material was anthropologically analysed in order to increase the amount of meaningful information on which our analysis is based. A necessary historical narrative was provided in an attempt to discuss the changes that took place in the topography of the city and the way in which the funerary space is organized. Based on our observations, a grave typology comprising five types was constructed. Different possible relationships between variables were explored (e.g. between funerary structures and grave goods, sex, age and grave goods) as a means to gain knowledge about burial practices during Late Antiquity (from the 4th to the 7th century AD) at the ancient city of Histria.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *arheologie funerară, Scythia Minor, Antichitate târzie, documente de arhivă*

Rezumat: *Articolul de față se bazează pe redescoperirea și reinterpretarea informațiilor din fondul de arhivă Nubar Hamparțumian aflat la Institutul de Arheologie „Vasile Pârvan” al Academiei Române din București. Documentele de arhivă conțin informații cu privire la 74 de morminte descoperite în campaniile de cercetare arheologică desfășurate în intervalul 1961–1964 în Sectorul „Basilica extra muros” de la Histria. Prin colectarea și organizarea informațiilor referitoare la fiecare mormânt în parte a fost posibilă o analiză sistematică și detaliată. Urmărind același scop, toate scheletele au fost analizate antropologic. În prima parte a articolului este construită o narațiune istorică pentru a surprinde schimbările ce au loc la nivelul topografiei cetății și modul în care acestea determină organizarea spațiului funerar. În urma analizei descoperirilor este elaborată o tipologie a mormintelor, care cuprinde cinci tipuri. Sunt discutate și interpretate diferitele relații între seturi de variabile (între amenajări funerare și inventare, între sexul sau vârsta indivizilor și inventare funerare etc.) în încercarea de a contura un discurs cât mai complex cu privire la practicile funerare identificate în necropolele histriene în intervalul cuprins între secolul al IV-lea și secolul al VII-lea p.Chr.*

INTRODUCTION

The year 1961 marked the beginning of one of the most important archaeological excavations from the ancient site at Histria (Constanța County, Romania) in terms of discoveries concerning burial practices in the Late Roman period. Between 1961 and 1964, under the coordination of Nubar Hamparțumian¹, archaeological research was carried on the so-called *Basilica extra muros*

sector². This area is located ca. 200 m south-west of the Main Gate of the Late Roman precinct (see Pl. 2). Archaeological excavations carried out on this sector led to the discovery of 74 graves³, spanning from the end of the 3rd century to the beginning of the 7th century⁴. However, only 69 graves (further number of reference) were considered in the database, given the absence of any information concerning the other five discoveries in either published material or the archival fond. Out of the total

¹ Nubar Hamparțumian (1927–2013). Even though the surname of the Romanian archaeologist (of Armenian origin) was Hamparțumian he signed all his major contributions using his first name and only the initial of his family name (Nubar H.) This situation has to be understood within the context of the Communist regime repression in Romania, as an attempt to mask the foreign origin of the author's family name. In light of these circumstances we find appropriate to cite his work using the name with which the authorship was indicated – Nubar H.

² The *extra muros basilica* had been identified at the beginning of the 20th

century by Vasile Pârvan, who managed to publish only brief information about it, given the circumstances surrounding the outbreak of the First World War (see Pârvan 1915a, p. 118–119; Pârvan 1915b, p. 258–269; Pârvan 1924, p. 152). Research in this area would be resumed at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century (in 1955–1956) by Emilian Popescu (see Condurachi *et alii* 1957, p. 16–24; Pippidi *et alii* 1959, p. 291–296; Popescu 1994, p. 308–313).

³ Nubar 1971a, p. 200.

⁴ All dates and years are AD, unless specified otherwise.