

# RECENT RESEARCH AT THE *BASILICA EXTRA MUROS* IN HISTRIA AT 100 YEARS SINCE THE INITIATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON THE SITE

VIORICA RUSU-BOLINDEȚ\*, ALEXANDRU BĂDESCU\*\*, VLAD-ANDREI LĂZĂRESCU\*\*\*, MIHAI DIMA\*\*\*\*, CLAUDIA RADU\*\*\*\*\*, NORBERT SZEREDAI\*\*\*\*\*, BEATRICE KELEMEN\*\*\*\*\*

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**Abstract:** The *Basilica extra muros* is among the first monuments in Histria that started to be excavated right after Vasile Pârvan discovered the site in 1914. The uncovering of the only Early Christian basilica outside the precinct walls of Histria continued during several campaigns (1917 – under the leadership of the the German architect J. Jacobs; 1955–1956 – Em. Popescu; 1961–1964 – N. Hamparțumian), leading to the almost entire uncovering of the monument and the identification of two necropolises in the area – one earlier than the basilica (4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century AD) and the other contemporary to it (end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century – first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD).

At the initiative of Alexandru Suceveanu, the research of the *Basilica extra muros* was resumed again in 2001 by a team initially consisting of Viorica Rusu-Bolindeț (MNIT), Karl von de Lohe (“Ludwig Maximilian” University in München – the 2001 campaign), Alexandru Bădescu (MNIR), and since 2008 Vlad-Andrei Lăzărescu (IAIAC). The following goals have been reached during the five campaigns (2001, 2006, 2008–2010, 2013): the creation of an up-to-date survey of the basilica (2001) and archaeological research of both the annex on the north-eastern side (2006) and the area south of the three annex buildings of the Christian monument (2008–2010, 2013).

The present article aims at providing a synthesis overview of the results of the archaeological research performed during the previously mentioned campaigns. On the basis of the stratigraphy and the archaeological material we shall present both the new data obtained, aimed at contributing to a more detailed chronology, building and functioning stages of the *Basilica extra muros*, and at providing new information on the development of the *extra muros* area in Histria. Thus, it has been noted that the Late Roman habitation (end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century – first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD) was present both north and south of the *Basilica extra muros*, as building elements discovered in the area south of the three annex

buildings of the Christian monument, to the south, confirmed the observations we were able to make during previous research north of the basilica (2001–2012). We have also obtained new data on the necropolises in that area – 23 more inhumation tombs were discovered on the southern side of the basilica (out of which 10 have been excavated so far), mainly belonging to a necropolis in use before the construction of the basilica (4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century AD), but also some were part of the necropolis that was contemporary to the building (end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century – first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD). The presentation of these tombs, together with their inventory, typology and chronological setting, as well as the anthropologic analysis<sup>1</sup> of the skeletons are a significant part of the results obtained by the team excavating the *Basilica extra muros* sector during the last years. We hope that the continuation of the archaeological research in that area, combined with those performed in the Histria South sector by colleague Mircea Dabîca (IAB), will bring more information on the possible boundaries between the habitation area and the necropolises and on the location of the harbor of the Greek-Roman city of Histria.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Histria, *Basilica extra muros*, anexele de pe latura de sud, necropole de inhumație, sfârșitul secolului al V-lea – prima jumătate a secolului al VII-lea p. Chr.

**Rezumat:** *Basilica extra muros* este unul dintre primele monumente de la Histria a cărui cercetare a început odată cu descoperirea sitului de către Vasile Pârvan în anul 1914.

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<sup>1</sup> The anthropological analyses were performed through the project “Genetic Evolution: New Evidence in the Study of Certain Interconnected Structures. A Bio-molecular Incursion around the Carpathians from Antiquity until the Middle Ages”, National Authority for Scientific Research, CNCS-UEFISCDI, project no. PCCA-1153/2011-P2 (Dr. Octavian Popescu-PI & Dr. Simona Beatrice Kelemen-co-PI).

\* The National History Museum of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, e-mail: viorusu1@yahoo.com.

\*\* The National History Museum of Romania, Bucharest, e-mail: alex\_bades@yahoo.com.

\*\*\* Institute of Archaeology and History of Art, Cluj-Napoca, e-mail: lazarescu\_vlad@yahoo.com.

\*\*\*\* National Bank of Romania, Bucharest, e-mail: Mihai.Dima@bnro.ro.

\*\*\*\*\* Molecular Biology Center, Interdisciplinary Research Institute on Bio-Nano-Sciences, “Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, e-mail: claudia.radu20@gmail.com; szeredai.norbert@gmail.com; bea.kelemen@gmail.com.

Dezvelirea singurei basilici creștine timpurii din zona extramurană a Histriei a continuat de-a lungul timpului în câteva campanii (1917 – arhitectul german J. Jacobs; 1955–1956 – Em. Popescu; 1961–1964 – N. Hamparțumian), ducând la descoperirea aproape exhaustivă a monumentului, precum și la atestarea a două necropole în zonă – una anterioară basilicii (secolele IV–V p. Chr.) și alta contemporană cu aceasta (sfârșitul secolului al V-lea – prima jumătate a secolului al VII-lea p. Chr.).

Din inițiativa lui Alexandru Suceveanu, cercetarea Basilicii *extra muros* a fost reluată în anul 2001 de către un colectiv constituit inițial din Viorica Rusu-Bolindeț (MNIT), Karl von de Lohe (Universitatea „Ludwig Maximilian” din München – campania 2001) și Alexandru Bădescu (MNIR), căruia i s-a adăugat din anul 2008 Vlad-Andrei Lăzărescu (IAIAC). În cele cinci campanii derulate până în prezent (2001, 2006, 2008–2010, 2013) s-au realizat: un relevu actualizat al basilicii (2001), respectiv cercetări arheologice la anexa de pe latura de nord-est (2006) și în zona aflată la sud de cele trei construcții anexă ale monumentului creștin (2008–2010, 2013).

Articolul de față va încerca să ofere o sinteză a rezultatelor cercetărilor arheologice din campaniile menționate. Pe baza stratigrafiei și a materialelor arheologice vor fi prezentate atât noile informații obținute, menite să contribuie la rafinarea cronologiei, a etapelor de construcție și de funcționare ale Basilicii *extra muros*, cât și datele noi privind evoluția zonei extramurane a Histriei. Astfel, s-a constatat că locuirea romană târzie (sfârșitul secolului al V-lea – prima jumătate a secolului al VII-lea p. Chr.) este prezentă atât la nord, cât și la sud de *Basilica extra muros*, elementele constructive descoperite în zona aflată la sud de cele trei clădiri anexă ale monumentului creștin, spre sud, confirmând cele constatate în cercetările făcute până acum de noi la nord de basilică (2001–2012). Totodată, s-au obținut noi date referitoare la necropolele existente în zonă – au fost descoperite alte 23 de morminte de inhumație pe latura sudică a basilicii (din care au fost cercetate deocamdată 10), aparținând în principal unei necropole anterioare basilicii (secolele IV–V p. Chr.), dar și celei contemporane cu aceasta (sfârșitul secolului al V-lea – prima jumătate a secolului al VII-lea). Prezentarea acestor morminte, împreună cu inventarul aferent, tipologia și încadrarea lor cronologică, precum și analiza antropologică<sup>2</sup> făcută scheletelor, reprezintă o parte însemnată a rezultatelor obținute în cercetările arheologice întreprinse de echipa sectorului *Basilica extra muros* în ultimii ani. Continuarea săpăturilor arheologice în această zonă, combinate cu cele efectuate în sectorul Histria Sud de către colegul Mircea Dabîca (IAB), sperăm să aducă un plus de informație legată de posibilele limite dintre aria de locuire și necropolele din zonă și amplasamentul portului orașului greco-roman Histria.

## 1. SITE LOCATION<sup>3</sup>

Out of the four Early Christian buildings attested in Histria, the monument under discussion is the only basilica located outside the walls of the Late Roman fortification. It is located ca. 200 m south-west of the Main Gate of the Late Roman

<sup>3</sup> The present article is a synthesis of the results of the excavations in the *Basilica extra muros* sector in the last years. Due to the limited editorial space in the present volume, an extended article, with all detailed analyses (anthropological, numismatic, small finds etc.) will be published in another publication/journal.

fortification, in the close proximity of the southern side of the Pârvan House (Pl. I).

## 2. HISTORY OF RESEARCH

Vasile Pârvan discovered the *Basilica extra muros* in 1914 and also gave it its name. Unfortunately, due to the onset of the First World War, he only managed to publish preliminary data on the monument<sup>4</sup>. R. Netzhammer, the Roman-Catholic archbishop of Bucharest, published the first ground plan of the edifice in his work focusing on the Christian antiquities from Dobrudja<sup>5</sup>, on the basis of data (ground plan and drawings of sculptures) provided by the German architect J. Jacobs who performed archaeological excavations on the site in 1917<sup>6</sup>.

Archaeological excavations were resumed in the area between the Hellenistic precinct and the *Basilica extra muros* between 1955 and 1956. On that occasion, specialists have uncovered the courtyard of the basilica and the eastern end of the apse of its north-eastern annex<sup>7</sup>. Later on, between 1955 and 1956, Em. Popescu uncovered the rest of the basilica – of which only the ground plan of the central nave had been known – i.e. the three annexes on the southern side and the annex on the north-eastern side<sup>8</sup>. The north-south transversal section opened by the same archaeologist along the width of the edifice yielded twelve inhumation tombs, among which most were dated earlier than the monument<sup>9</sup>. A thirteenth tomb was uncovered

<sup>4</sup> Pârvan 1915, p. 118–119; Pârvan 1915a, col. 256–257, p. 268–269; Pârvan 1924, p. 125.

<sup>5</sup> Netzhammer 1918, p. 159–161, fig. 59; Netzhammer 2005, 143–145, fig. 59. On the relations between V. Pârvan and R. Netzhammer, and especially on Pârvan's dissatisfaction with Netzhammer's publication of some results of his excavations in Dobrudja, among which the *Basilica extra muros* in Histria, see Pârvan 1924, p. 125 and footnote 47. On R. Netzhammer's activity related to the antiquities in Dobrudja, see more recently Alexandrescu 2007, *passim*. The same author discusses the relations between V. Pârvan and R. Netzhammer on p. 219–222, with special reference to the *Basilica extra muros* in Histria on p. 219–220 and footnote 45.

<sup>6</sup> Published in *Dobrudscha Bote*, nos. 64–65, 1918.

<sup>7</sup> Condurachi *et alii* 1957, 21–24, pl. IV, fig. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Em. Popescu published the preliminary results of the archaeological excavations in the site's excavation reports – see Condurachi *et alii* 1957, p. 16–24; Pippidi *et alii* 1959, p. 291–296. The same author provided a synthesis presentation of the results of archaeological research on the edifice in question in a study dedicated to Early Christian antiquities in Histria – see Popescu 1994, p. 308–313.

<sup>9</sup> Out of the 13 identified tombs, only 8 have been excavated, the majority belonging to the necropolis used during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD – see Pippidi *et alii* 1959, p. 293–295, fig. 4 (Em. Popescu).