

# The Economy, the Countryside, Forts and Towns: The Early Byzantine Period on the Lower Danube during the 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> Centuries AD

Until recently, our knowledge of what actually happened in the period of crisis between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD on the Lower Danube has been limited to historical sources, most of which provide little more than anecdotal comments upon the state of military and civilian affairs after the disaster at Adrianople in 378 AD and the departure of Theodoric for Italy in 488 (fig. 1). Although ancient sources allow for a reconstruction of a political narrative, notably in charting the complex relations between the Goths and the Empire during the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, very little is understood about the fate of the cities, agricultural productivity and military organization in this period. Implicit in the sources is the belief that the eastern Balkans suffered disastrously in the wake of the initial Gothic »take over« of the region, a situation worsened still more by the invasion of the Huns in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>. The image usually presented in the sources is one of the widespread destruction of villas, depopulation and a fundamental and catastrophic change in the region's fortunes. Extending the time frame, this period forms the backdrop to the refortification of the province of Scythia under Anastasius I. (491-518) and the rebuilding of cities further up the Danube; notably the new fortifications provided for the city of Ratiaria (obl. Widin/BG)<sup>2</sup>. The credit attributed to Justinian I. (527-565) for restoring stability on the lower Danube rests upon the belief that Procopius' narrative account<sup>3</sup> is a faithful record of the works carried out by the emperor, whereas, at least for the lower Danube, it can be demonstrated that it is compiled from a variety of disparate sources, certainly not from a single document; its reliability is consequently suspect if not totally undermined<sup>4</sup>. As for the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, there is no agreement as to the fate of the region; views range from a general confidence that the Danube frontier was maintained and its settlements – notably hill-top sites – survived at least down to the reign of the emperor Maurice (602-602), whereas the opposing view holds that the provinces of Moesia II and Scythia were already

on the verge of collapse much earlier in the 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>5</sup>. The only consensus lies in the certainty that, under Phocas (602-610) and Heraclius (610-641), the lower Danube was lost to the empire, leaving both provinces to the Slavs who filled the vacuum left by the collapse of the Danubian frontier. Of central importance is the need to provide the evidence to flesh out – or refute – the framework created by our inadequate ancient sources and to determine if there was a clear break between the relative calm which existed for much of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the problems which undoubtedly impacted upon the region in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>6</sup>. More specifically, it is the urban network, the frontier defences and the state of the countryside which can be reconstructed through archaeology, even though it cannot answer broader questions and lacks the focus to always place discoveries into a strictly historical sequence. Here, the discussion is restricted to the central area of what was the province of Moesia II. Though this may provide information of general relevance to the region, caution is required; circumstances in the Dobrogea (Scythia) and on the middle Danube may have been very different. One crucial hole in any argument is the lack of research into the rural, non-villa landscape which must be a key factor in understanding – and calculating – the rate of change. Through the application of modern archaeological methods and thanks to the excellent collaboration with our Bulgarian colleagues, we had the opportunity to contribute to the debate. Whether or not the limited evidence upon which the following discussion is based is acceptable in advancing our understanding of the past, that is for the reader to judge.

## The city

The first of our programmes was to carry out research on the site of a remarkably well-preserved ancient city: Nicopolis ad Istrum in north central Bulgaria (obl. Veliko Tarnovo). The

1 Whitby, *Balkans 702-711*; including the justified frustration with so little help provided by archaeological research, 703.

2 Velkov, *Frühbyzantinische Inschriften*.

3 Prok. *de aed.* IV.

4 Poulter, *Transition to Late Antiquity 8-11*.

5 Whitby, *Late Roman Army and, contra, Liebeschuetz, Lower Danube*.

6 The following argument is based upon the excavations at Nicopolis (Poulter, *Nicopolis; Pottery and Glass; Biological remains*), and also upon the excavations on the fort of Dichin (Poulter, *City*). (The full publication of the report will appear towards the end of 2017). Also included is another excavated Late Roman and Early Byzantine fort (Poulter, *Dobri Dyal*). Of particular relevance are the well-published and long term excavations within the fort of Iatrus on the Danube frontier, ZIAGA, Iatrus.



Fig. 1 Map of the region. – (A. G. Poulter).

British excavations were carried out on the adjacent fortified enclosure which proved to have been the site of the Early Byzantine city. By good fortune, the excavations also uncovered substantial remains of activity during the 4<sup>th</sup> century and during the high-point of the city's prosperity in the Antonine and Severan periods<sup>7</sup>. During the High Empire, the research area of 5.7 ha was situated immediately to the south of the Roman city – the plan of which demonstrated its clearly classical layout with a regular street grid, public buildings and

private houses (fig. 2)<sup>8</sup>. What is remarkable is the absence of smaller houses or workshops, with the exception of the west/east road immediately north of the agora where there existed smaller buildings, possibly shops<sup>9</sup>. What is striking is that most of the city was taken up with public buildings or private town houses which suggests that the total number of intramural inhabitants was remarkably low and, although it included conspicuously large houses, sometimes occupying an area equivalent to two insulae, the city could not have

7 Poulter, Nicopolis 22-28.

8 For the long-lasting and successful excavations, concentrated upon the civic heart of the urban area see Vladkova, Late Roman Agora. The remarkably complete plan of the city is not based upon standing remains but on the robbing of walls during the post-medieval period, an activity which was so comprehensive that the still existing robber trenches provide a unique view of the layout of the Roman city as it must have existed in the 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> c. AD. It is here assumed that

this plan is largely a reflection of the layout of the city from c. 300 down to c. 450 when the city would seem to have been destroyed and abandoned until after the construction of the Early Byzantine fortifications, probably in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century. See, also, Poulter, Anatomy.

9 The city was founded on the Greek model by Trajan, c. AD 108. The language of administration within the city was Greek although it is notable that many of the inscriptions, no doubt set up on private estates, are in Latin, Poulter, Anatomy.

accommodated more than a limited number of elite families upon whose generosity the upkeep and construction of the city's public buildings depended – and by implication, supports the notion that Nicopolis possessed the normal administrative and social facilities expected to exist in all cities of the Empire. The provision of hypocaust heating in both public and private buildings suggests that the wealthy citizens lived in the city during the cold winters. On the contrary, few heated rooms are found in the country villas. The most reasonable explanation is that the elite lived on their rural estates during the summer months but returned to the city for the winter. This would also explain the comparatively humble provisions for rural villas; few had mosaics whereas the towns of Thrace (such as Philippopolis [obl. Plowdiw/BG] and Augusta Traiana [obl. Stara Sagora/BG]) were lavishly decorated in the Late Roman period; entertaining and boastful display were urban phenomena, not extended to the countryside<sup>10</sup>.

Environmental evidence recovered during the excavation of Roman levels, provide a glimpse into the economy of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. Within a generation after the founding of the city, high-quality fine wares were being produced and supplies of a wide range of agricultural products must have been produced locally and sent to the city: millet, bread wheat, barley, rye as well as lentil bitter vetch, various pulse species, grape, blackberry and peas<sup>11</sup>. In the Severan period, new town houses were built outside the city, suggesting an increase in the numbers of city dwellers<sup>12</sup>.

However, there is reason to suggest that changes were not quite so disastrous as the ancient sources would have us believe. Change there certainly was, but perhaps it was not as catastrophic as has been widely believed. The effects of the Gothic uprising and the consequent collapse of imperial control following the destruction of Valens' army in 378, down to at least the »treaty« between the Goths and Theodosius in 382, can be most clearly seen in the countryside. None of the excavated villas in the south Danubian plain and Thrace would seem to have continued to function after the 380s<sup>13</sup>. The development of a new method of intensive survey, appropriate to the very special conditions in the rich agricultural farmland to the North of the Haemus, produced valuable results<sup>14</sup>. All sites examined were high status, the majority of which were villas.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the extramural town houses were demolished and replaced by simple structures, made, not with mortar and tile, but of rough stone blocks, bonded with soil and with a mudbrick superstructure. There were numerous simple structures, some used for habitation, others probably

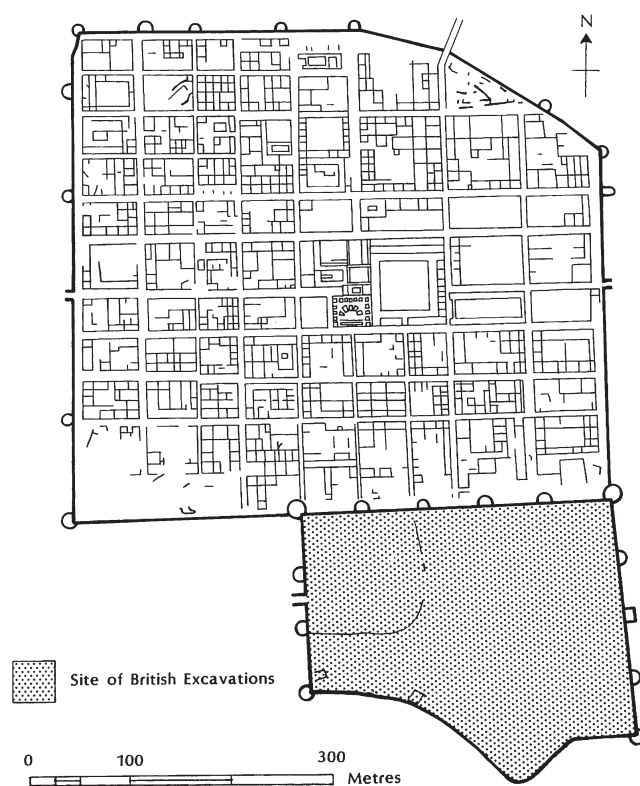


Fig. 2 Plan of Nicopolis. – (A. G. Poulter).

for animals. During the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the agricultural economy would seem to have recovered; in addition to the same range of crops, a wide variety of fish, no doubt caught locally, was included in the diet of the inhabitants: barbel, roach, carp, pike and trout were on the menu. There were few imports, the exceptions being catfish, no doubt from the Danube, as well as mussels and some trout which must have been luxury imports from the Black Sea. Although the earlier contexts produced cattle bones, their importance as a source of food may have declined in the 4<sup>th</sup> century when pig, followed by sheep/goat were more regularly consumed<sup>15</sup>. Whereas all the amphorae dating to the Antonine and Severan periods were local, there was a slight increase of imports from Africa and the Aegean at this time. By the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the extramural settlement had been largely abandoned; it seems likely that this thriving activity – by occupants of lower status than those living within the city – declined towards the end of the century. It is impossible to determine who these new people were. Pottery is traditionally Roman, all small-finds of metal and bone are of Roman type. Only the appearance of new wares, the so-called »foederati ceramic«, hints at the

10 It is quite clear that there were significant differences between East and West in the Late Roman period. In Britain and Gaul mosaics existed in towns but villas were commonly decorated with elaborate floors whereas in Asia Minor – and, surprisingly in North Africa – mosaics concentrate in towns and not, it would seem, in the countryside. One explanation may be that the east had a more »urbanized« form of living which did not exist in the west. As a Greek city and with its elite coming from cities in western Turkey, it would not be surprising Nicopolis shared the eastern way of living, in marked contrast with the western provinces.

11 Poulter, Pottery and Glass 7; Nicopolis 7.

12 Poulter, Nicopolis 25-27. 187-198.

13 Poulter, Town and Country. – Dinchev, Vili.

14 Poulter, Cataclysm.

15 Poulter, Nicopolis 27. – See, for detailed reports: Poulter, Nicopolis; Pottery and Glass. – For animal bones, see the contributions by M. J. Beech, S. A. Parfitt, B. Irving and Z. Boev in Poulter, Biological remains.

introduction of some new non-Roman forms from about the middle of the century but, although it is tempting to believe that this extramural community represented the settlement of the Goths of Ulfila, there is no way of proving that this was the case.

Quite what happened in the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> century remains uncertain but the abandonment of the extramural area points to a possible decline in prosperity of the city and perhaps its population. Unlike many other cities in the region, Nicopolis remained protected only by its less than impressive 2<sup>nd</sup> century fortifications; at least an indication that the city was not an important centre of administration and one meriting imperial investment, for its protection. Nicopolis was finally destroyed by fire and, significantly, was never rebuilt. The latest coins of Theodosius II suggest that Nicopolis came to a violent end somewhere about 450<sup>16</sup>.

## The countryside

Since the foundations of the city's prosperity must have been based upon the exploitation of its rich agricultural lands, it seemed appropriate to continue the investigation into the fate of the city by exploring the high status sites (*villae*) within its territory. An extensive survey of all such sites was undertaken by Ivan Turov and provided an ideal basis for selecting »type sites« for more detailed investigation. A new method of intensive survey was developed and was used to recover the maximum amount of information about each site. In particular, by carrying out click surveys in the spring, immediately after ploughing, it was possible to quantify the amount of pottery, building stone and tile/brick over an area of c. 1 km radius around a known high concentration of building and ceramic remains which invariably could be interpreted as *villas*<sup>17</sup>. The large, open fields provided ideal conditions for carrying out survey – not in the summer, as is generally the case – but in the early spring, immediately after ploughing<sup>18</sup>. Only fields where there was 100% visibility were surveyed<sup>19</sup>. One of the most striking results was that there was no evidence for off-site scatters of material; all pottery and building materials were only found in or immediately around buildings. The plan of structures was obtained by carrying out a geophysical survey within a 30m square which often encompassed the total area of the building<sup>20</sup>. Then, a total pickup of material within that square was carried out, quantifying by weight the presence of brick/tile and rough building stone; all the pottery was bagged and kept for further analysis. By this means, it was possible to identify the status – and probable function – of all buildings found across the landscape and which could

be attributed to the central concentration of material which regularly proved to be the site of a villa. Buildings which did not have any roof tiles were presumably thatched outbuildings, probably for stock or storage, whereas those which yielded substantial quantities of tile were normally limited to the main villa and also, regularly, to an additional structure, separate from, but close by the main house: quite possibly the site of a bath building. Since pottery was not found across the landscape, but was only concentrated around buildings, it is reasonable to suppose that those producing ceramic finds had been used for habitation. Some of the simple buildings, without or with very limited quantities of pottery, were probably outbuildings and tile was generally absent, another indication that the building was only used for storage or animals and not for human occupation. Even so, some of these simple buildings did produce ceramics which suggests that they had been inhabited, if by people of lesser status and wealth than those who lived in the villa. All associated structures, even at some distance from the main villa building, were identified. Not only did many sites have associated buildings away from the main house but the character of the site changed from region to region. In the case of Lesicheri I (obl. Veliko Tarnovo), there was a significant concentration of pottery and tile, several metres west of a standing Roman column, associated, as it was proved, with a shrine dedicated to the Thracian Horseman and perhaps connected with an unusually large burial mound on the southern side of the complex (fig. 3). Geophysical survey over the main concentration discovered the clear outline of a square peristyle villa (fig. 4). Within 1 km of the villa there were also three other buildings, all simple structures, producing very little pottery and no tile. One lay to the west of a spring, two to the east, no doubt for agricultural storage or animals. No other concentrations of material were found, except for a concentration of kiln waste south-west of the villa. It is likely that we are here dealing with a single family dwelling, its occupants farming a small plot within the exceptionally fertile valley of the Rositsa which flows east to the city of Nicopolis (fig. 5). Similar sites were found, roughly at 2 km intervals, along the entire length of the valley, so regularly spaced that it is possible that we are dealing with an official allocation of land, perhaps carried out when the city was founded. Elsewhere, further from Nicopolis and the Rositsa, villas were more widely spaced and do not conform to any standard pattern. A key site was Mramora (Obl. Veliko Tarnovo) (fig. 6). Within the geophysical survey over the primary site, there is the clear plan of another peristyle villa but apparently developed into a much larger complex with a courtyard to the east. It was here that the decision was taken to have walkers not clicking all material but allocating pottery,

16 This is not to say that the ancient city was totally abandoned; 6<sup>th</sup> c. coins have been found in the central area but there is no sign of any reconstruction of the city, Vladkova, Late Roman Agora.

17 There were only two exceptions. One site (Rousalia I) may have been a shrine and another (Radanovo) was a pottery production centre, possibly attached to a villa, although, in the limited area for survey, one was not identified.

18 For the methodology, see Poulter, *Site-Specific Survey*.

19 Where a crop was already sprouting at the time of the survey, thanks to crop rotation, it was usually possible to return and complete the survey in the following spring.

20 For the geophysical surveys, see Boyd, *Geophysical Survey*.

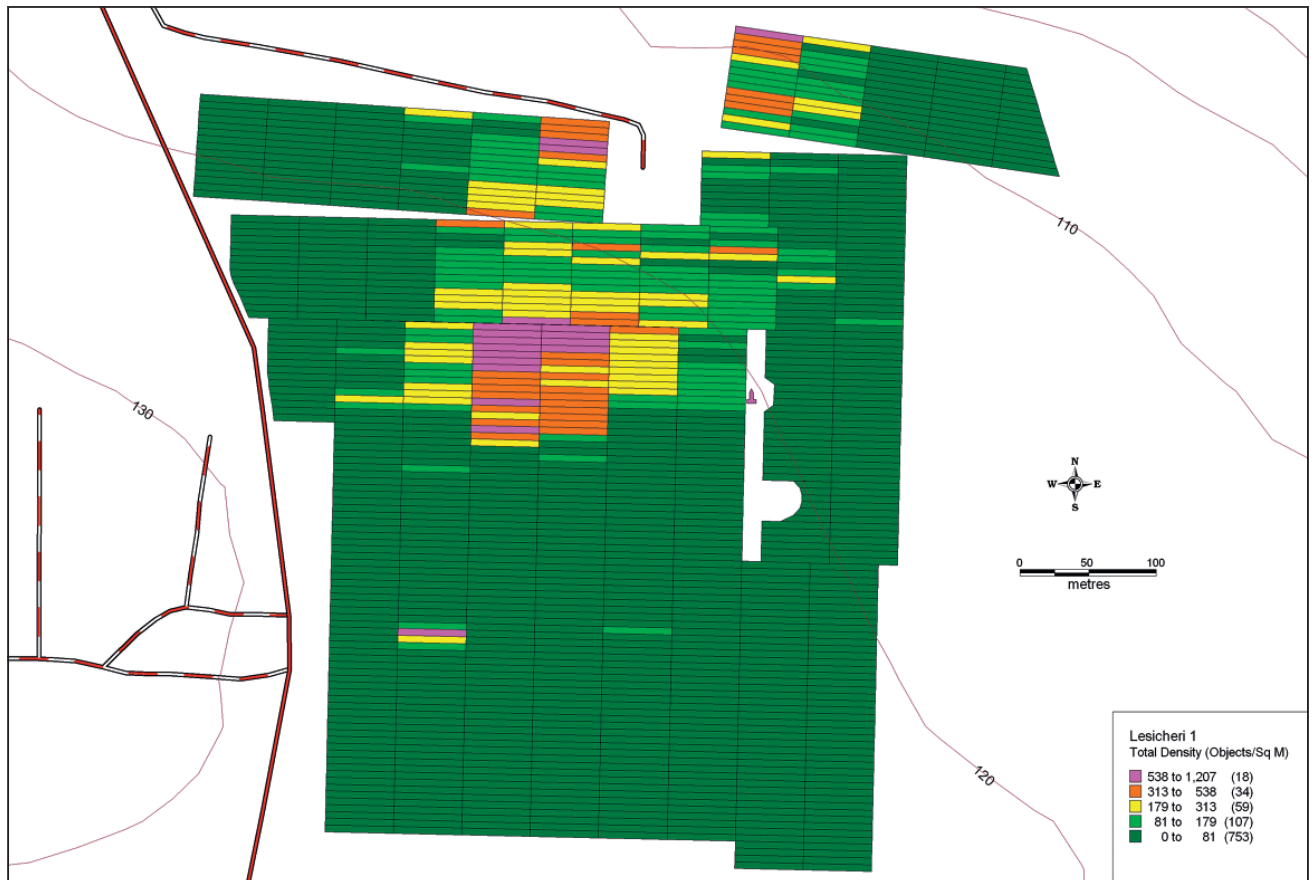


Fig. 3 Lesicheri I survey. – (A. G. Poulter).

brick/tile and building stone to three separate walkers, quantifying, not just the concentration of surface debris, but also the different amounts of each category of find. The western field demonstrated the presence of a high status building at its north-eastern corner and a further cluster of buildings on the eastern side, extending south for an appreciable distance, producing plenty of pottery, indicating the existence of a small village or hamlet. This interpretation was supported by the discovery of partly ploughed-out tumuli in a line immediately south of the main concentration of building materials and pottery; probably the cemetery used by the population living in the »hamlet«. Where the new approach to the quantification of surface debris was carried out, in the eastern field, the distribution of buildings could be defined and a relative status applied to each (fig. 7). One notable feature was that, in the plot of ceramics, the main concentration was not over the site of the villa itself but c. 30m to the east; surely the location of the rubbish dump for the main house (fig. 8). Here the villa is larger and very different (in its final stage of development) from the simple family villas in the Rositsa valley (fig. 7). Possibly, this is not just a distinction of wealth but

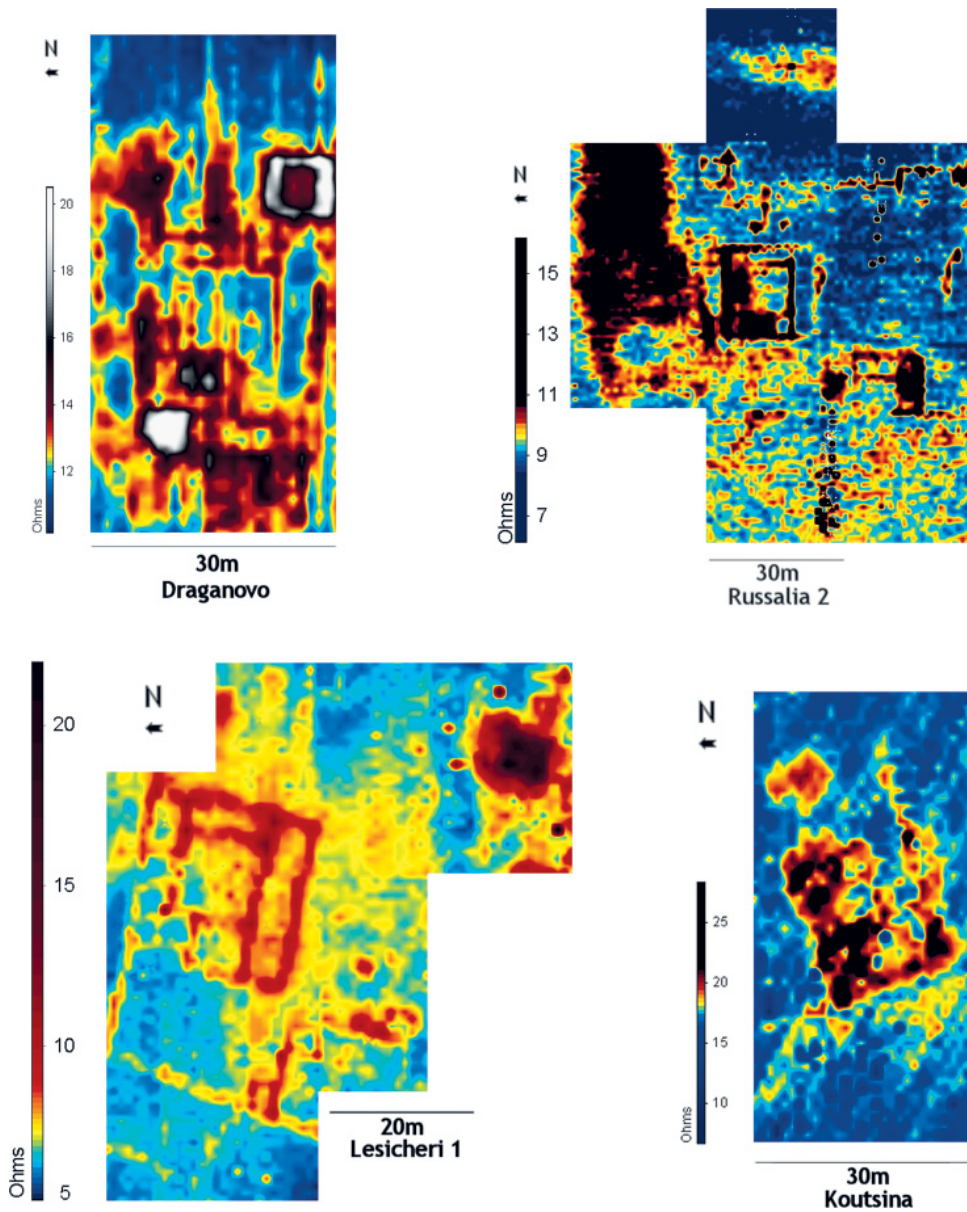
reflects the existence of a different social structure: the local magnate controlling an extensive tract of land and employing labour, settled close to the villa; a Thracian, not immigrant landowner, perhaps still in control of a local peasant community which served the agricultural needs of the estate. Here, the interpretation moves from evidence to speculation but what is evident is that the two types of villa represent very different forms of social organisation<sup>21</sup>. What is remarkable is the fact that every one of the sites ended in destruction by fire. In one case (thanks to the recent ransacking of the site by metal-detectorists) a collection of complete scythes, sickles, a hoe, reaping hook, axes and even an iron bar, complete with rings, part of a Roman vehicle were found<sup>22</sup>. It does not seem likely that these destruction deposits were accidental. Dating is not possible with any precision (at least not without excavation). However, stray finds of early imperial coinage and issues dating the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century suggest the villas were destroyed – and never reoccupied – certainly before 400 and most probably in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>23</sup>. Despite the dangers noted above about linking archaeological evidence with events described in historical sources, it is likely that

21 Few Thracian names appear on inscriptions. Only one, described as Bouloutes (member of the city assembly) has been found, perhaps significantly at some distance from the city, close to the southern limit of the city's territory, Poulter, Anatomy.

22 Dichin and the field survey will be published by Oxbow (Oxford) towards the end of 2017.

23 The local fine red wares are not precisely dated in this century. However, by 400 they were certainly no longer used and were replaced by reduced black pottery, supplemented by small quantities of imported fine ware.

**Fig. 4** Geophysical plots of villa plans, note especially Lesicheri 1. – (M. Boyd; A. G. Poulter).



we are dealing with a single event, or several events, within a relatively short period of time; the most likely is that this destruction of the villas was a result of the Gothic success at Adrianople in 378 AD when imperial control, until perhaps 382, was not strong enough to prevent the Goths from devastating the countryside.

But what happened after the destruction of the villa economy? Safe to say, it must have had a profound effect on the city, which could no longer rely upon the supply of agricultural goods from villa-owning families settled in its territory, as had been the case in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and even during the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Even so, after the departure of Alaric I. for Italy in 401, there is reason to believe that imperial authority was restored shortly after 407.

A law, issued to Herculius, praetorian prefect of Illyricum in 408, required that supplies be collected and dispatched to the Illyricani (the army and imperial administrators?) and also ordered the construction of fortifications, involving compulsory service (*munera*) from which nobody was exempt<sup>24</sup>. In 412 orders were issued to repair and upgrade the military rivercraft in Scythia and Moesia<sup>25</sup>. In 443, there was further legislation when the effectiveness of the military rivercraft in Illyricum and Thrace had to be maintained<sup>26</sup>. It may well be that an official building inscription from Berkovitsa (obl. Montana/BG) in Dacia Ripensis attests compliance on the part of the praetorian prefect; it dates to 408/423<sup>27</sup>. An even more direct indication that the regular military food supply had been restored comes from Novae (obl. Veliko Tarnovo), a legionary fortress,

24 Cod. Theod. 11, 17, 4.  
25 Cod. Theod. 7, 17, 1.

26 Cod. Theod. 24, 5.  
27 Velkov, Frühbyzantinische Inschriften.

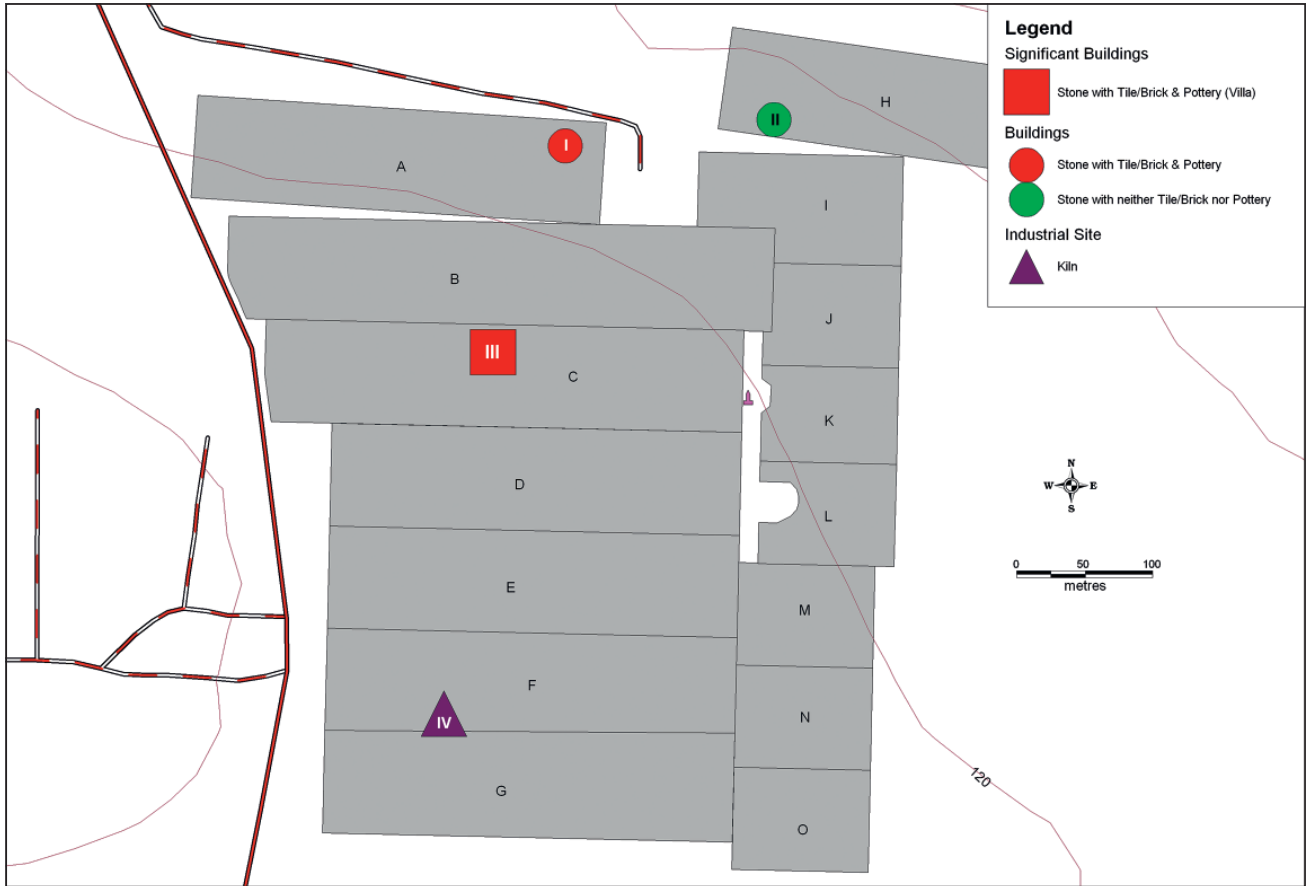


Fig. 5 LesicHERI 1: interpretation. – (A. G. Poulter).

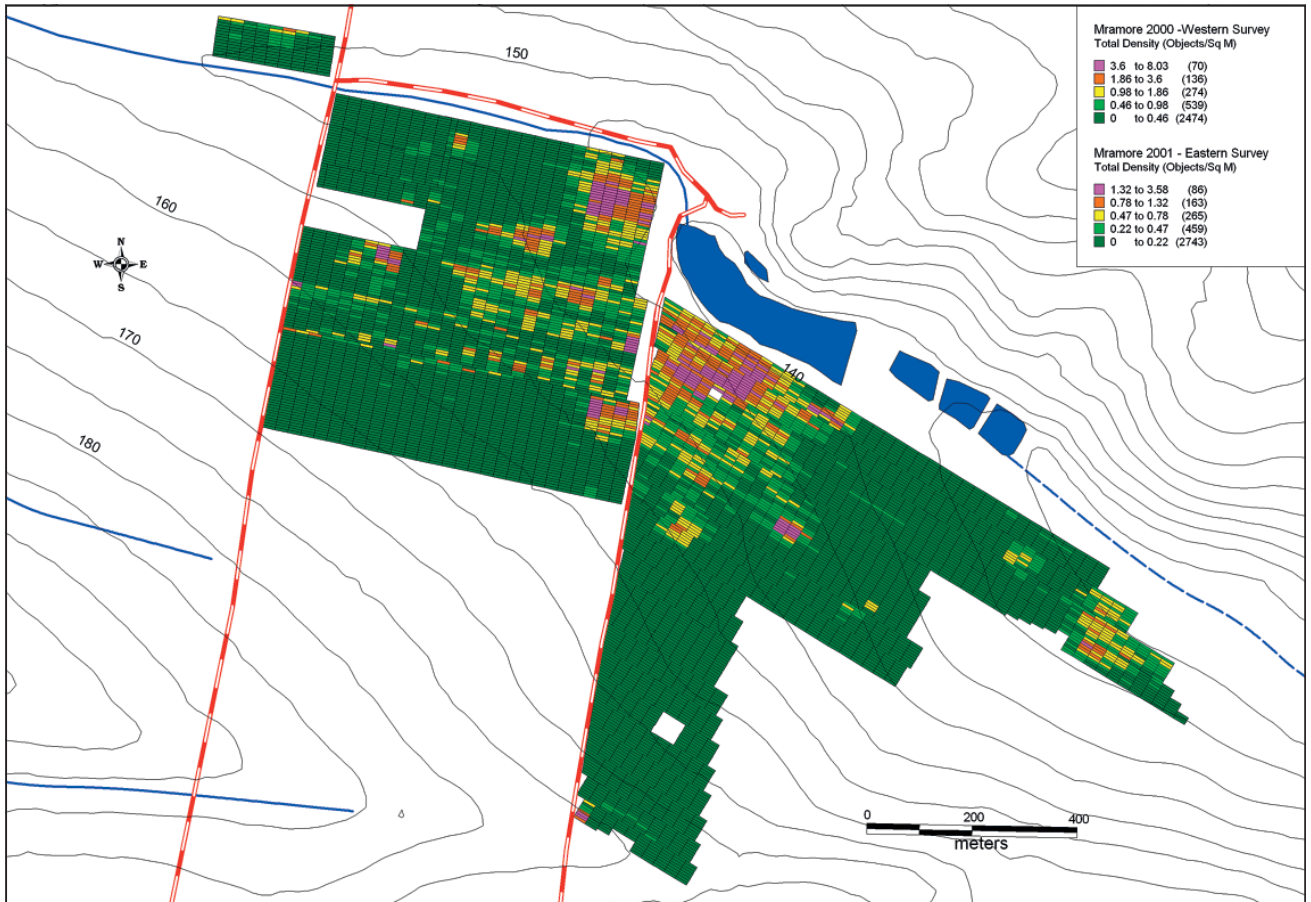


Fig. 6 Mramora: total survey. – (A. G. Poulter).

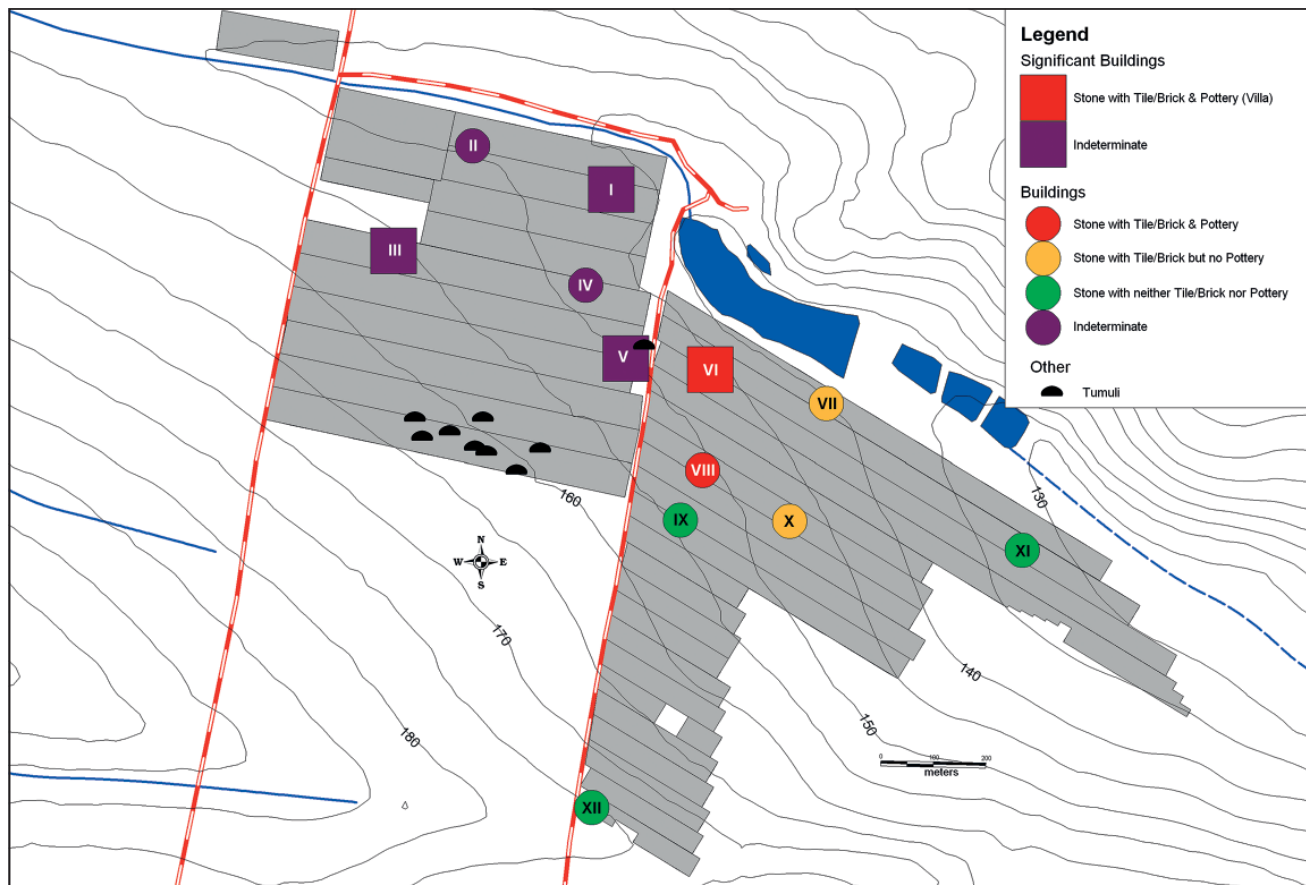


Fig. 7 Mramora: interpretation. – (A. G. Poulter).

where three statue bases were erected in the principia in 430, 431 and 432 by pairs of *primpilarii*, officers responsible for the transportation of military supplies (the *annona*) from provinces in the heart of the empire, unaffected by the recent turmoil on the frontier. In this case two of the inscriptions record the origin of supplies as Hellespontus and the other *Insulania*<sup>28</sup>. What is clear is that military organization had been restored and with it the supply system which was again functioning as it had done before the Gothic War. The principia of *Novae* was still in use, as coin finds indicate, down to the 440s<sup>29</sup>. At the Danube fort of *Iatrus* (obl. *Veliko Tarnovo*), the most fully excavated fort in the region, occupation continued at least until the mid 5<sup>th</sup> century although there were significant changes during the first half of the century; the principia no longer served its primary official function; it was used instead for metal-working. The traditional barracks of mortared tile and stone, which had accommodated a military unit during the 4<sup>th</sup> century, were replaced c. 400 by earth and stone built structures, some of which had internal blocks of mudbrick which were assumed to have been workbenches<sup>30</sup>.

The fort of *Dichin* (obl. *Veliko Tarnovo*) occupies an unusual location; it is not on, or very close to, a known Roman

road but occupies a slight prominence: a residual portion of an upper river terrace on the south bank of the *Rositsa* (fig. 9). Today, it is surrounded by low lying land, created by two dried-up oxbow lakes, one to the west, the other to the east. Today the area is unaffected by flood water but there is reason to believe that, in Antiquity, the *Rositsa* was wider and probably meandered across the floodplain as far south as the river terrace immediately south of the oxbow lakes. This supposition is supported by the bird bones found in the fort; they included wetland species, notably pelicans, the great crested grebe, coot, and cormorant which prefer open shallow waters. Unlike *Nicopolis*, where a wide variety of fish species was consumed, the remains from *Dichin* were predominantly pike; a species which prefers slow moving water and reed beds. Although the fort commands a clay mound only 10m high, it would seem likely that it was naturally well-protected with water on all three sides, leaving a narrow causeway heading south of the fort on the higher land between the oxbow lakes. The date of the fort's construction must have been either late in the 4<sup>th</sup> or very early in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, as the coin finds suggest<sup>31</sup>. The restoration of Roman control over the region by 400, as described above, is a likely context

28 Sarnowski, *Drei spätkaiserzeitliche Statuenbasen*.

29 Sarnowski, *Principia*.

30 ZIAGA, *Iatrus* 468. 39.

31 Guest, *Coin Circulation*.





Fig. 8 Mramora, separate finds distribution, the east field. – (A. G. Poulter).

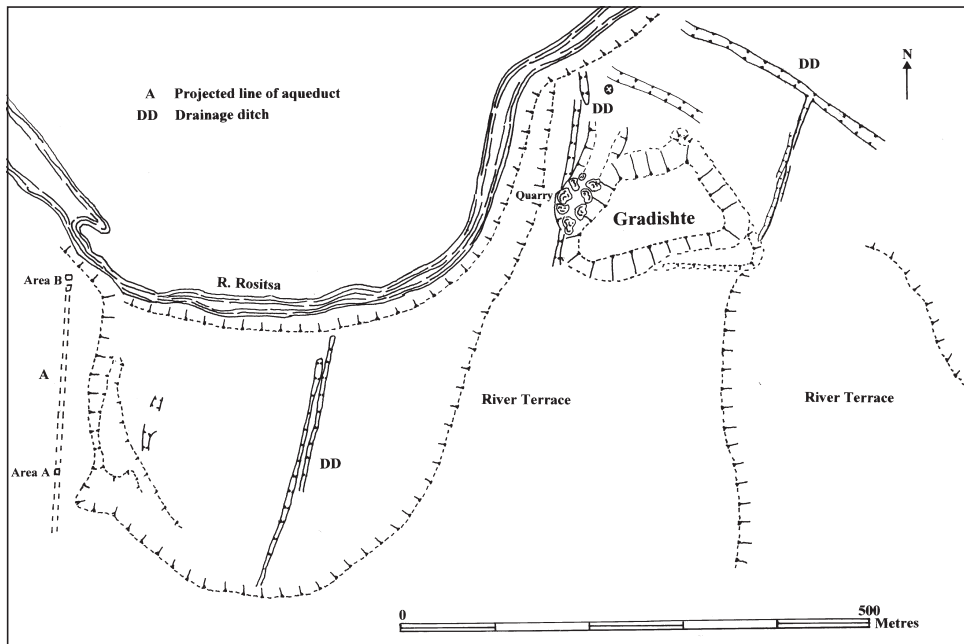


Fig. 9 The location of Dichin. – (A. G. Poulter).

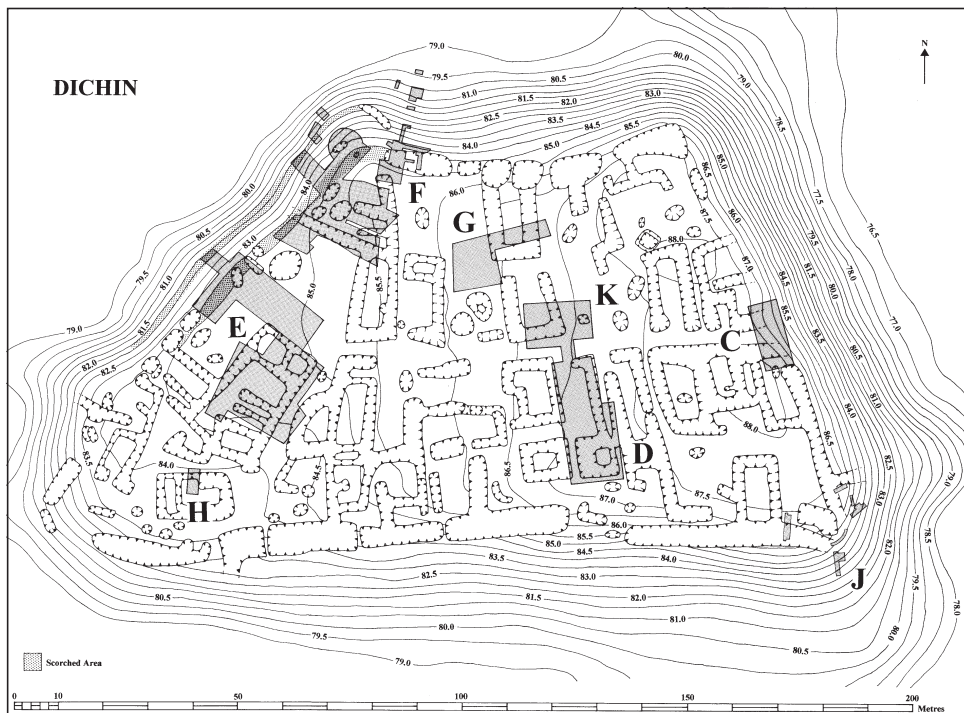


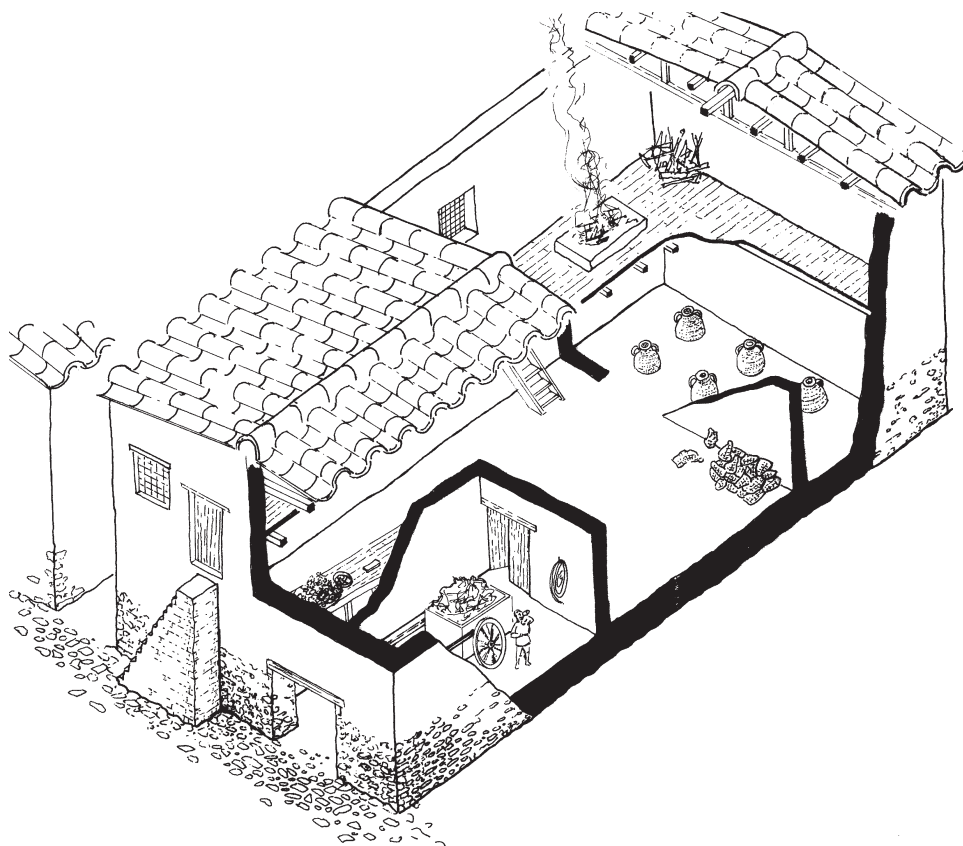
Fig. 10 Plan of Dichin. Note the robber-trenches follow the walls of internal buildings. – (A. G. Poulter).

for the construction of Dichin, that is the first quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (fig. 10). The defences were notably impressive and tactically well-suited to the site. Tile-courses, alternating with mortared limestone blocks, were used to construct the curtain-wall. The main gate, with its protecting tower, overlooked the approach up the steep track towards the gate and created a strongly defensive position. Round corner towers and medial towers which projected both out from the line of the curtain wall and also extending back within the defences and were spaced out along the wall, the height of

which must have been c. 10 m. Immediately outside the main curtain-wall, on the western and southern sides, where the slope was least steep and the approach to the curtain-wall easiest, there was a proteichisma, an outwork which provided a primary line of defence and perhaps some protection for domestic animals<sup>32</sup>. There is no doubt that military engineers must have designed and supervised the fort's construction. However, the same care was not afforded to the internal buildings. As in the extramural settlement at Nicopolis in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, walls were built from earth and stone, with a

32 Prok. de aed. 2, 13. 16-18.

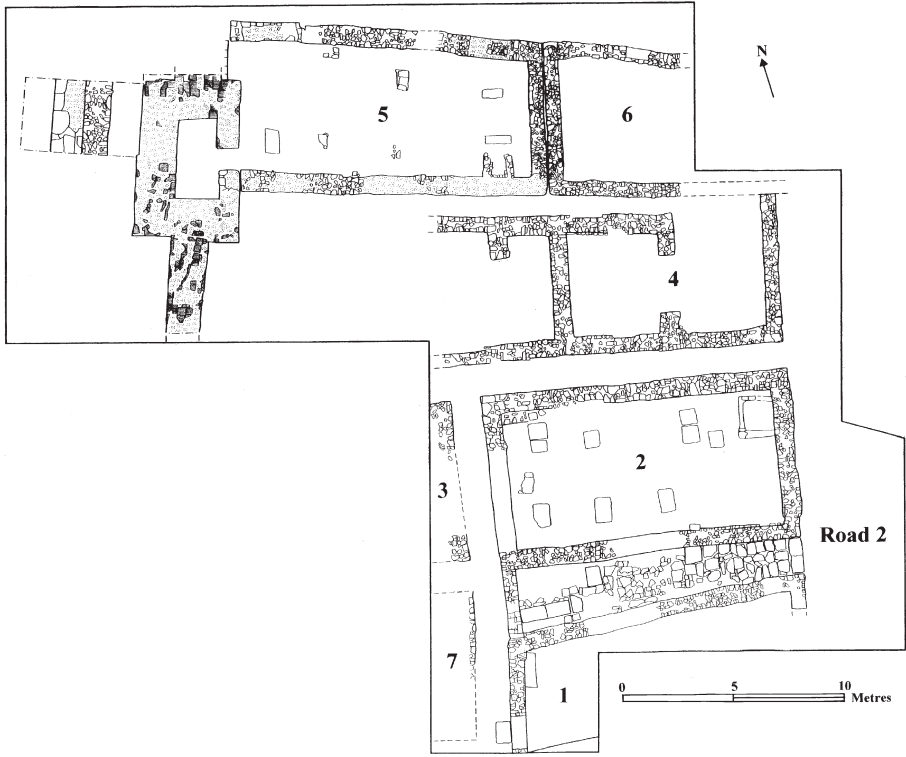
**Fig. 11** Dichin: reconstruction of a »barrack«. – (A. G. Poulter).



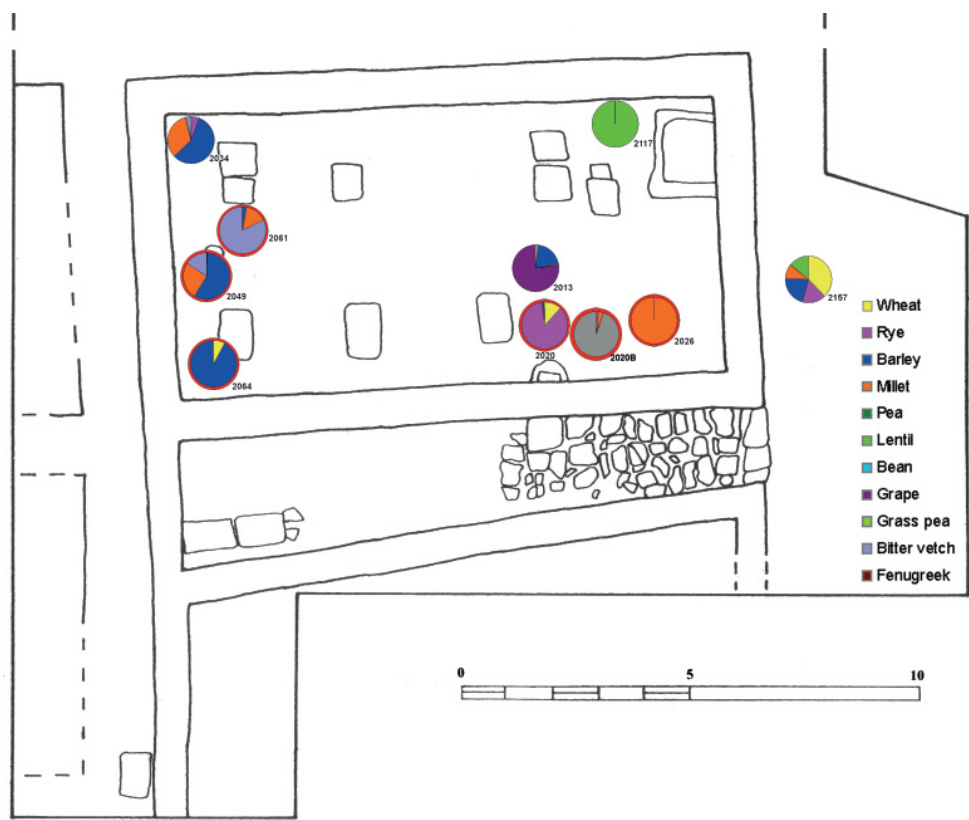
mudbrick superstructure supporting tiled roofs. Occasionally mortar was employed, if infrequently: for example, in sealing the hole for a drain which passed through an earth and stone wall. These were all primary structures, not replacements for more typical mortared 4<sup>th</sup> century barracks such as existed at Iatrus. Even so, from its foundation, there was a more or less regular arrangement of large buildings, either side of the main street. They were substantial structures, measuring c. 25 m × 13 m, with storage on the ground floor where amphorae had been set into the clay surface and living quarters were confined to the upper floor, reached by steps from the street (fig. 11). The western quarter was totally different. Within area E and F (fig. 10), five similarly large buildings, each c. 14 m × 8 m, aligned west/east, extended from the inner face of the curtain as far as a north/south street (fig. 12). Substantial quantities of carbonized grain, including a variety of crops, were found within all the structures, following a destruction c. AD 500 (fig. 13). One notable find was a discrete concentration of fenugreek seeds, presumably collected to flavour the meat, creating a meal which would have resembled curry. The entrance into at least three of the buildings was up steps from the street – which must mean that the floor was suspended and that the buildings must have been houses. Inside four of the buildings, there were, not mortared pilae, as one might expect, but blocks of mudbrick supported upon a stone foundation. Since the height

of these structures exactly matched the preserved top of the stepped entrances, it is clear that these were used to support a raised floor. Again, the failure to use mortar and stone, but simply mudbrick, is notable (fig. 14). It is not surprising that there are no similar cases of using mudbrick in this way from other sites of the period since the preservation of the mudbrick blocks was exceptional; they were encased in the demolition level which immediately followed the destruction at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, thereby protecting them from the effects of rainwater which would have quickly removed any trace of their existence if they had been left exposed. There is one parallel. At Iatrus, as noted above, mudbrick »worktops« were located in rows, just as at Dichin and all were found in rooms which had raised thresholds: a clear indication that the internal floors of these structures must also have been above ground level. It seems certain that these structures at Iatrus also used mudbrick bases to support the suspended floors of granaries, the blocks surviving since they were encased within the mudbrick demolition level, as was the case at Dichin<sup>33</sup>. However, for whatever reason, the granaries at Dichin, at the time of their destruction, were not full of grain. The distribution of different types of grain are closely spaced, suggesting that there were only limited quantities of the same produce, perhaps a few sacks, not bulk storage at the time of the destruction (fig. 13). Instead, the relatively empty granary contained a shield and a row of six amphorae (Late Roman [LR] 1

33 Poulter, Gradishte 215.



**Fig. 12** Dichin: area E, west side of fort. – (A. G. Poulter).



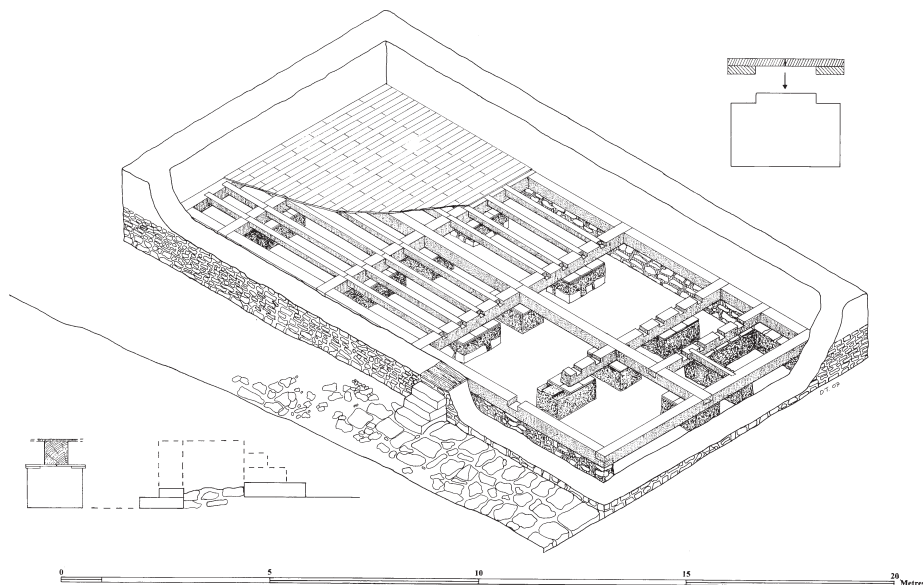
**Fig. 13** Dichin: The distribution of grain, building 2, area E. – (A. G. Poulter).

and Late Roman [LR 2] (fig. 15). The LR1 vessels were broken into large pieces but the LR2 forms had exploded during the fire although it proved possible to reconstruct them from a myriad of fragments; all of them must have been laid on the floor or had been supported in racking. The fragmented LR2 must have contained oil at the time of the destruction but

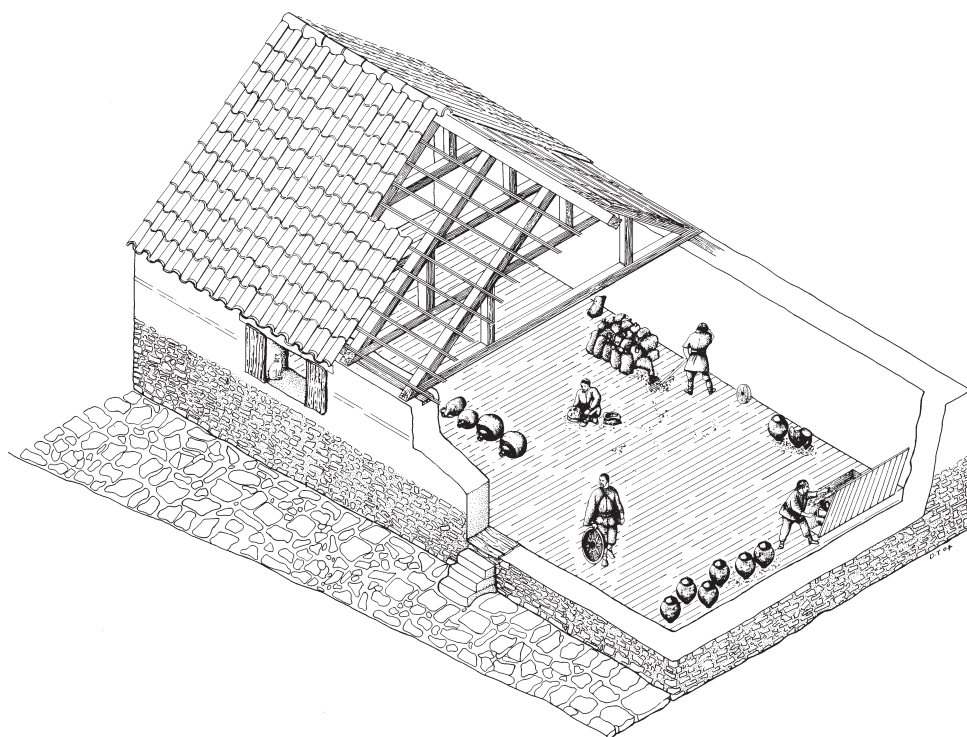
the LR1 did not; presumably because they contained other products which were not flammable, probably wine.

During the course of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, some modifications and the addition of at least one more granary indicated minor changes but, in general terms, the layout – and presumably the function of the site – remained much the same through-

**Fig. 14** Dichin: The structure of the granary, building 2. – (A. G. Poulter).



**Fig. 15** Dichin: the reconstruction of the granary, building 2, shortly before the destruction c. 500. – (A. G. Poulter).



out the 5<sup>th</sup> century. All ended in disaster; a fire burnt down all the buildings c. 500. That this was not accidental is suggested by the finds. Not only were numerous complete iron and copper alloy objects recovered from the destruction level, but there were also human bones. The most remarkable find was that of a woman; the lower parts of the skeleton came from the destruction level, whereas the upper part was found in the overlying demolition level, here c. 2m high; she had not been removed for burial which strongly suggests that those who demolished the buildings and rebuilt the site did

not consider it necessary to give the deceased a Christian burial. She had evidently been left for only a short period of time since she had not been totally dismembered, although her lower limbs bore the distinct signs of bite marks which prove that either dogs, left unfed after the destruction, or wolves had been scavenging amongst the debris after the conflagration<sup>34</sup>.

Since there was no substantial change in the internal buildings, it seems likely that its function had remained the same from its construction c. 400 until its destruction ca. 500.

34 There were no traces of dissolved mudbrick within or around the buildings and this would certainly have been found if the burnt remains had been left exposed to the elements.

The two storey buildings along the main street could not have housed more than a small garrison, especially if, as the finds suggest, they were for family occupancy, not just for soldiers. An explanation is therefore required to account for the extraordinary number of granaries, far more than would have been needed for such a small garrison. Since there is no evidence for a Roman road on the south bank of the Rositsa, the choice of location must have been determined by the proximity of the river which flows east to join the Yantra, a right bank tributary of the Danube. Upstream, the Rositsa traverses the length of its fertile valley. A plausible explanation is that the river was used for the transportation of foodstuffs and materials required by the army; Dichin could have served as a depot to which agricultural products were taken before shipment downstream to the Danubian garrisons on the frontier or even as far as the Black Sea. In addition to the *annona*, bringing luxury foodstuffs to the garrisons (in amphorae largely from the eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea) it must still have been necessary to exploit the rich agricultural hinterland for livestock and grain. Forts like Dichin were probably the mechanism by which the supply system was maintained after the destruction of the villa economy.

The destruction level of c. 500 produced the most abundant evidence for the function of the fort and the character of its occupants. Given the lack of changes within the fort during the 5<sup>th</sup> century, it seems reasonable to believe that the fort, as established, maintained its function at least until the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Military equipment came from the destruction level and subsequent demolition deposit; a plumbatum, arrow heads, numerous large bolt heads, scale armour and three shield bosses. Although horse bones were not numerous, horse bits as well as a bridle bit prove that the soldiers were at least part mounted<sup>35</sup>.

However, there were other finds in the destruction level. Apart from wood and metal working instruments, a significant number of complete agricultural tools were recovered; two plough shares, a plough coulter, a hoe and three other hoes or coulters, seven billhooks, a reaping hook, four sickles and eight scythes. The occupants of the fort must have not only engaged in military activities but were also farming the land<sup>36</sup>. During the 5<sup>th</sup> century, beef was a particularly important part of the diet, followed by pig and sheep/goats. The frequent discovery of hook-damaged cattle scapulae suggests that beef had been brought to the fort as joints, and from some distance away. Even so, the destruction level produced 15 cow bells which must mean that, at least c. 500, cattle were kept at the site or very close by. Bones from neo-natal and juvenile individuals also suggest that some cattle were bred at the fort. Wild animals were also killed

but in significantly less quantity than domestic species; fallow deer and roe deer, rabbits and hares as well as wild boar. Of all the bird bones from the site, however, chicken is the most abundant.

The discovery of ballistae bolts, one of which had been bent upon impact, suggests that those who attacked the fort were proficient in the use of military machinery, not that this would be surprising: not only imperial forces but the Goths as well had access to the military warehouses and stores of the army so it is not possible to determine who had been responsible for the destruction nor precisely when it took place. The coins help little in giving any precision; the latest coins found in the destruction level were issued under Leo II. (474) but this does not mean that the end came in that year or even soon after; the absence of coins of Anastasius I. (491-518) and Zeno (474-476; 476-491) is also no proof that the fort did not survive into the 6<sup>th</sup> century; coins of both emperors, especially those of Zeno, rarely appear in the region. The battle could have occurred at any date from the late 470s down to perhaps the 520s<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, there are numerous historical contexts for such fighting and no doubt many more events which escaped any mention in the historical sources; by 476 the Goths of Theoderic the Amal occupied Novae, the legionary fortress on the Danube north of Dichin; this arrival could have been accompanied by revolt and then the suppression of local garrisons. The fort may have fallen then or in the ensuing fighting between Theoderic the Amal and Theodorich Strabo or in the course of Bulgar invasions between 493 and 502. But the dating is so insecure that another context cannot be excluded; the struggle between Anastasius I. and the Gothic troops of Vitalian (513-518) is another, particularly as the rebel controlled the north Danubian plain, including Dichin. The trigger for the revolt was the failure of the emperor to supply the *annona*, in consequence of which Vitalian attracted federate troops to support his attempts to capture the imperial capital. In general terms, a date of ca. 500 remains the only reasonable guess.

The combination of an agricultural and military function is strongly reminiscent of the settlement of the Goths to guard the frontier, the first evidence for which are the Gothic followers of Athaneric, who, after their leaders' death in 381, »went to watch over the Danube«<sup>38</sup>. The newly settled soldiers were also engaged in farming<sup>39</sup> – which fits with the evidence from Dichin. Despite their relatively primitive buildings, the quality of the fortifications proves that the occupants had a military function. In addition, the occupants were in receipt of supplies, no doubt provided as part of their *annona*; notably in the arrival of eastern amphorae. Although »Pontic amphorae« constitute a significant pro-

35 Four bridle bits and a cheek-piece of a bridle bit came from the demolition level which immediately followed the destruction.

36 Alternatively, it is just possible that these objects arrived with local farmers, seeking refuge for themselves and their most precious belongings shortly before the fort was destroyed. However, this is speculative and the ownership

of these implements by the »garrison« would seem to be the more plausible explanation.

37 Guest, *Coin Circulation*.

38 *Zos. Hist.* 4, 34, 5.

39 *Synes., De Regno* 21. – *Pacatus Pan. lat.* 12(2). 22. 3. – *Them. Or.* 16.

portion of the amphora assemblage in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the bulk of the amphorae coming to Dichin in this period are Levantine in origin, with some LR2 coming from Greece, in particular from the Argolid. Only small quantities of North African amphorae were found, indicating that most of the supplies must have been coming from the eastern Mediterranean. Despite this, the curious failure to construct Roman style buildings, built with mortar and brick, suggests a lack of concern on the part of the imperial authorities to provide the garrison with the traditional range of facilities which would be expected in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The traditional command structure for a fort garrison appears to be absent; there was no principia occupying a central location at the western end of the central street, as would be expected in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and the similarity in size of all the buildings along the main street is striking; there is no evidence for the existence of a prominent building which could have served as the headquarters of a commanding officer. At Iatrus, where there was a principia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, by the 5<sup>th</sup> it no longer performed an official or military role; the building was partly dismantled and used for metal-working<sup>40</sup>. The absence of a headquarters building does not prove that there was no military command structure. If it existed, then it was not expressed along traditional military lines. Moreover, it would seem that the occupants were not able to profit from their military role and obtain sufficient building materials to erect more substantial structures. The problem is exemplified with the supply of mortar. There is quite enough limestone in the region to provide the raw material. However, if the authority for the soldier/farmers was restricted to the valley of the Rositsa then it may have been impossible to requisition or buy mortar, a resource available a few kilometres to the South. At any event, there was no central authority which took on the role of supplying the raw material once the fortifications had been completed.

Even so, identifying the origin of the occupants is less than straight forward. Local pottery comprised a range of black wares in stark contrast to the red wares so popular and widely distributed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. The finer end of the spectrum had burnished surfaces and diagonal striations on the sides of vessels and has been termed »foederati ware«<sup>41</sup>. This cannot be taken as evidence for newcomers – not only fort sites but the entire region was dominated by black wares in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. There are new forms but the majority followed traditional Roman types. It is impossible to assume that the indigenous population had been exterminated; native inhabitants as well as settled Goths must have been using the same wares. Possibly, some of the pottery was provided by the military; very similar vessels of the late 4<sup>th</sup> century are attested as far upstream as Pannonia.

Nor do any of the items of metalwork indicate an alien or »barbarian« origin; all are of standard Roman form and decoration – as they were in the extramural settlement at Nicopolis<sup>42</sup>. In short, there is no proof that the inhabitants of Dichin were Goths or Huns or indigenous Getae or Thracians. However, there is a possibility that the occupants, whoever they were, may not have been Christian. A church was built on low ground close to the southern curtain-wall during the second period of occupation in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. But beneath the small basilica, there was no earlier 5<sup>th</sup> century church; instead, there was a building with two successive fireplaces and the surrounding area was covered with ash; finds which suggest that the building was a smithy, used presumably to make or repair weapons and agricultural implements. The absence of a church is surprising: by the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, basilicas were regularly constructed, not only in the capital of Constantinople, but also widely throughout the region. It would be unusual if all forts did not have churches. Although it could be argued that a 5<sup>th</sup> century church might have existed elsewhere within the fort where no excavations have taken place, this would seem quite unlikely. Whenever excavation has penetrated below the latest church on an Early Byzantine site – conventionally and probably correctly – attributed to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, earlier churches are regularly found; these must have been demolished and the successor built on precisely the same spot. At first glance, this would seem to be a curious practice; building a church takes time and it would surely have been more convenient to replace an existing basilica with another built perhaps close to, but away from the earlier church so that the older structure could continue in use until its replacement was completed. However, this practical procedure would seem not to have been followed. The nearest and best known case was the fort of Iatrus where there were three successive basilicas, all built on the same site. Although the first was assigned to the first quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the latest to the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the dating is less than convincing<sup>43</sup>. What is certain is that the site was reused for three successive churches. The sanctity of the land within and immediately around a church was enshrined in law: by the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, those seeking sanctuary were able to do so provided they reached a church where the sanctity of the church and its immediate surroundings was recognized<sup>44</sup>. More precisely, the Digest of Justinian includes a law<sup>45</sup> which decrees that even when a church has been destroyed by lightning, the land upon which it had been built could not be sold, so that it could not be used for any other purpose, except for the building of another church. The law most probably was already in force from the late 4<sup>th</sup> century when it became customary to build churches and subsequently to replace them with larger and

40 ZIAGA, Iatrus 466.

41 Vagaliniski, Burnished Pottery.

42 For the difficulty of identifying Goths from their material culture, see Poulter, Goths.

43 Ivanov, Dritte Basilika.

44 Cod. Theod. 9, 45, 4. – Caseau, Case Study 66-68.

45 Dig. 18, 1, 73.

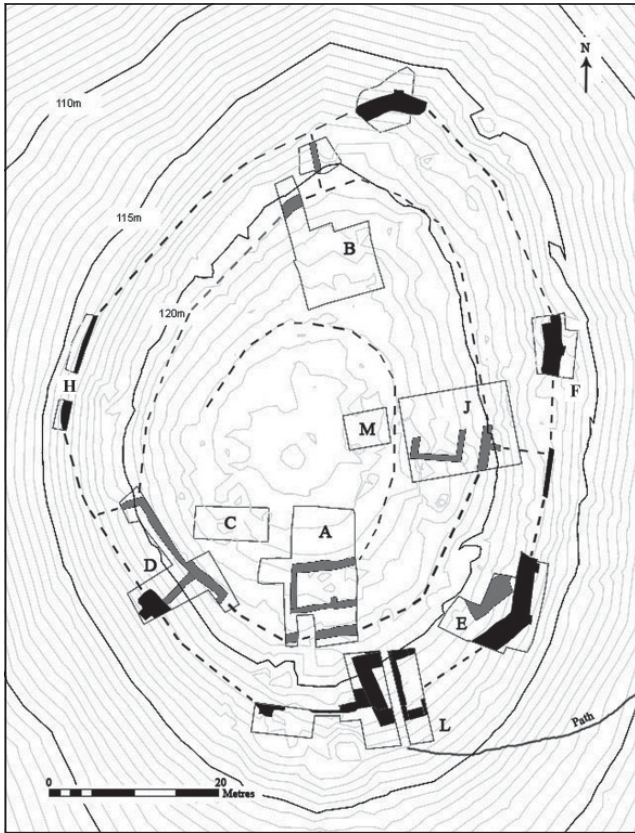


Fig. 16 Plan of Dobri Dyal. – (A. G. Poulter).

more elaborate structures<sup>46</sup>. It is therefore probable that this structure explains why so often a new church was positioned on the »sacred land« upon which the earlier church had stood; the land could not be used for any other purpose and, particularly in a fort where space was limited, a new basilica would not be built elsewhere since the original location of a church could not itself be converted to military use. In the reconstruction of Dichin c. 500, most of the buildings were rebuilt on exactly the same lines as in the 5<sup>th</sup> century; the new structures reused the walls of the earlier buildings as foundations, both in the central and western parts of the site. If there had been a 5<sup>th</sup> century church, its location would surely have been used for the new 6<sup>th</sup> century basilica. One alternative explanation is that, since it is generally believed that the Goths converted to Arianism once they were within the empire, they were strictly forbidden to build churches; Laws of 381<sup>47</sup>, reiterated in 383<sup>48</sup> and 384<sup>49</sup> all stipulate that Arians were not permitted to build churches. Of course, laws continue to be made against specific groups of heretics and pagans in general but Arians are not mentioned in the

Theodosian code after 384. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that, although the precise terms are unknown, Theodosius I. (379-395) reached an agreement with the Goths in 382; although the details of the agreement are unknown, Theodosius would seem not to have taken any action against the Goths for their heresy; there were sound military reasons for this toleration; the Goths had taken on the role of protecting the frontiers<sup>50</sup>. On the limes, far from Constantinople, it seems improbable that the laws against Arians would ever have been enforced. The absence of a 5<sup>th</sup> century church could, however, be explained if the settled Goths were not Christian at all, but still pagan<sup>51</sup>. Even so, if they were pagans and not Christians in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the same was probably true of the indigenous population. Essentially, we are no further down the road in identifying who had been recruited to serve at Dichin and, given the impossibility of acquiring that information from the archaeological record, we shall probably never know.

Another fort, recently excavated, that of Dobri Dyal (obl. Veliko Tarnovo), provides additional evidence for the character of military sites in the interior during the 5<sup>th</sup> century<sup>52</sup>. Like Dichin, the defences were built c. 400, probably in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century. Perched on top of a steep-sided hill, it had a much greater level of natural defence than Dichin and so steep was the slope that, apart from its gatehouse, on the most approachable route to the summit, it did not have any towers, no doubt because it had no need of them. Even so, the fort was massively protected by a mortared wall c. 2.50 m in width. In addition, the military function of the site is confirmed by the discovery of weapons and scale armour. A solitary cow bell from the gatehouse points to at least some cattle being kept close to the fort during its final period of occupation<sup>53</sup>. Preliminary analysis of the zooarchaeological material suggests that sheep/goat and cattle were included in the diet although young pig would seem to have been the most common source of meat and galliform bones prove that chicken/pheasant were also consumed. Essentially, the range of foodstuffs replicates the assemblages from Dichin. Imported amphorae also indicate that this site, too, was supplied with the annona<sup>54</sup>. The presence of horse may mean that the garrison, like Dichin, included cavalry.

However, the internal planning of the site was totally unlike that at Dichin (fig. 16). To counter the lack of level ground within the interior, a series of earth and stone supporting walls were built around the top of the hill, providing level platforms for buildings. On the east side of the hilltop there was a row of large rectangular structures, resembling

46 In the Digest, Ulpian quotes Papinian as the author of this pronouncement. Although the law dates to the Severan age, when the law must have been applied to pagan temples, its inclusion in the Justinianic code must mean that it still applied in a Christian context, i.e. to churches.

47 Cod. Theod. 16, 5, 6; 16, 5, 8.

48 Cod. Theod. 16, 5, 11; 16, 5, 12.

49 Cod. Theod. 16, 5, 13; 16, 5, 14.

50 Heather, Goths 182-183.

51 Here, it is inappropriate to pursue this argument, although there is reason to suppose that the majority of the Goths, excepting their leaders, were not compelled to accept Christianity. For pagan beliefs, see Poulter, Goths.

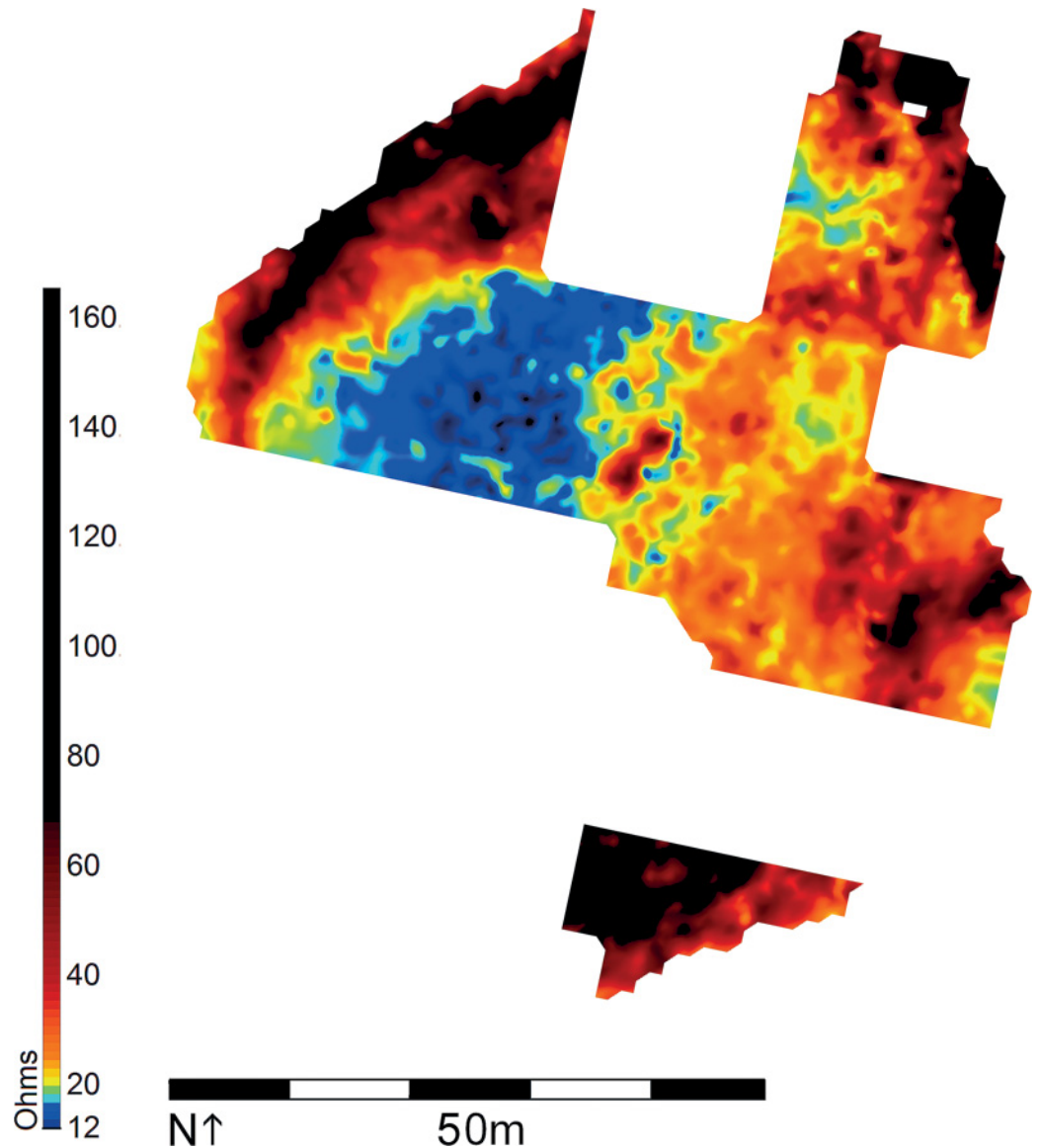
52 Poulter, Dobri Dyal.

53 Poulter, Dobri Dyal.

54 The full analysis of the amphora and seeds from Dobri Dyal has not yet been completed.



**Fig. 17** The geophysical survey of the hill-top, Dobri Dyal. – (A. G. Poulter).



those found at Dichin, built with stone and earth-bonded lower sections for the walls, surviving to as much as 2 m in height. They must have been completed in mudbrick as at Dichin. However, on the western side of the interior, the situation was very different. As the geophysical survey suggested and the excavations (especially in areas A and B, **fig. 16**) proved, there were no large structures, producing high resistance readings, but it did contain other buildings: *grubenhäuser*. One example was fully excavated in area C and its internal fireplace proves that it had been inhabited and was not used as a workshop or outbuilding. Three other truncated examples were found on the west side of area B. Further excavation is required, but it seems possible that these simpler structures were confined to the western side of the site. *Grubenhäuser* are not unusual on Late Roman sites but, usually, they can be dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries and are associated with distinctive Slav pottery of that period.

Nothing but Roman and Late Roman pottery has been found; this may be significant. Most compelling is the apparent division of the site with its *grubenhäuser* on the west side and very different buildings on the east side, where typical Late Roman buildings, such as those found at Dichin, showed up clearly as high anomaly features (**fig. 17**). This regularity in layout strongly suggests that the *grubenhäuser* were contemporary with the larger structures. Whether we are dealing with occupation by two different kinds of inhabitants, each maintaining its own building traditions, it is impossible to say; *grubenhäuser*, though associated by the local population with the Goths, nevertheless indicate simply a lower status and lack of the resources (large timbers and roof tiles) needed to construct Roman style structures<sup>55</sup>.

The time at which the fort was abandoned is uncertain; the coins suggest a cessation of occupation towards the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century although amphorae and fine ware argue

55 See the Column of Arcadius in Poulter, Goths.

for a continued existence and a final abandonment c. 500; an event close to the first destruction at Dichin, although, given the imprecision in dating, any connection remains speculative. The end of the site is rather different from Dichin. No signs of destruction were found and one of the large buildings on the east side (area K) had been carefully demolished, leaving the interior full of stone blocks, representing the remains of the superstructure. There were relatively few finds from the excavated interior. The buildings had been systematically dismantled and the occupying force had vacated the site without a fight.

## The 6<sup>th</sup> century AD

Although Dobri Dyal was abandoned, perhaps c. 500, Dichin and the fort of Iatrus were rebuilt and occupied until at least the 580s.

At Dichin, the site was almost immediately rebuilt after its destruction c. 500. The walls of the 5<sup>th</sup> century were largely reused and the new buildings for the most part replicate the plan of the earlier period. Along the central roadway, the large buildings to the north and south were essentially the same dimensions as their 5<sup>th</sup> century predecessors. But whether, as in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the buildings were two-storied is uncertain. The discovery of hearths on the clay surface within the buildings would suggest that occupation was then at ground level, so perhaps there were no longer upper stories. The site was destroyed by fire c. 585 and was never again reoccupied. No roof tiles were recovered from the destruction level which was overlain by a thick band of light grey ash containing fragments of silica; probably the remains of thatch – or reeds, given the site's topography and local environment. Finds from the final destruction level were exceedingly rare, certainly in comparison with the profusion of finds from the 5<sup>th</sup> century destruction. Rather, it seems probable that the site was cleared and abandoned before the conflagration – perhaps purposefully burnt to the ground by its inhabitants and not the result of an attack as had certainly been the case c. 500.

Whoever the new occupants of Dichin were – and again this is impossible to establish – the generally faithful reconstruction of the site along traditional lines and its use throughout the 6<sup>th</sup> century suggests that its function had not substantially changed from that which existed in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Imported amphorae were still reaching the site, so it seems that the occupants were still supplied with the annona. The arrival of agricultural goods and the continued consumption of beef, if perhaps of slightly lesser quality than before, suggests farming continued without interruption. There was no obvious sign of differences in crops being grown compared to the previous century. Notably, as in the 5<sup>th</sup> century,

the bone assemblage suggests that, in order of quantity, pig dominated, followed by cattle but sheep/goat are, perhaps significantly, less well-represented. It is notable that there is no evidence that cattle were bred locally in this period; the animals were generally older and smaller in stature: it may be that the garrison was no longer dependent upon resources in the immediate vicinity of the fort; instead cattle may have been acquired from further afield and the garrison had to rely upon beasts of inferior quality to those of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. There is reason to believe that the occupants still performed a military role; since the annona was evidently still operating, it appears that the fort was still supported by the imperial government in Constantinople.

Iatrus is less clear. Occupation certainly continued down towards the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century before the site was finally abandoned. The remains of walls were found although it is difficult to reconstruct the plans of individual buildings. It is suggested that this was because buildings were less substantial than their predecessors<sup>56</sup>. It may be rather because the later Slav settlement, which immediately overlay the Early Byzantine occupation level, has destroyed much of the evidence.

## Conclusion

Much remains uncertain but some broad conclusions can identify elements of change and continuity. The wealth of the city of Nicopolis was founded essentially upon the exploitation of its agricultural resources, especially those estates of the elite which had rapidly developed a villa economy, not only close to the city but at some remove, towards the edges of its territory. That Nicopolis reached its peak in prosperity during the Antonine and Severan periods is reflected in the construction of impressive public buildings, as also by the expansion of the site, beyond the walls where new town houses suggest an increase in population and the construction of wealthy establishments for the elite. However, this extramural area was abandoned and its buildings demolished about the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, perhaps because of increasing insecurity with the onset of the Gothic invasions by c. 250. Even so, during the 4<sup>th</sup> century, a substantial extramural settlement was established with modest houses and plenty of agricultural activity, although the identity of these new citizens remains uncertain.

The destruction of the villa system towards the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century must have impacted upon the wealth of the city although, surprisingly, there is no sign that agricultural products were no longer reaching it during the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The land was still being farmed but not, apparently, by wealthy villa owners. Some indications of decline are suggested, first by the failure to rebuild the ancient city walls and then by the hasty construction of a *proteichisma* in mudbrick

<sup>56</sup> See ZIAGA, Iatrus 472.

which was burnt when the city was sacked, probably towards the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

However, a new form of settlement makes its appearance at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The forts of Dobri Dyal and Dichin were both established by the army; both were provided with impressive defences. What is more, the evidence from Dichin in particular proves that the exploitation of the countryside was still being carried out but, not by villa owners, but by soldier/farmers, despite the depredations the region had suffered at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, presumably exacerbated by the arrival of the Huns c. 450. The occupants of Dichin and Dobri Dyal received the annona and were, if nominally, under Roman control. It is particularly significant that, after the sack of Novae around the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, presumably ending its role in supplying other military garrisons, the provisioning of the forts in the interior continued without interruption during the brief but supposedly devastating occupation of the region by the Huns of Attila. After the abandonment of Dobri Dyal and the major destruction at Dichin, locally grown produce was still supplying the forts and, perhaps to a reduced extent, the annona carried in amphorae still reached the forts in the interior during the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Remarkably, the same range of agricultural goods were reaching the fort as before; despite the invasions and, frequently, the loss of military control in the region. It

is remarkable that this does not seem to have affected agricultural productivity and there is no sign that there was a significant decline in the range of produce which reached Dichin from the early 5<sup>th</sup> century down to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup>. In its buildings and its planning, the fort of Dichin more or less replicates the layout of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that it also continued to receive agricultural goods up to the time of its final destruction contradicts the impression, provided by the historical sources, that the region was in terminal decline in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. As to the occupants of the forts, we can accept that they were family groups, performing a military role and farming the land, even though their identity or ethnic origin cannot be determined; it would be unwise to conclude that they were Goths. What can be seen as conclusive is the final phase of occupation at Dichin which must have been c. 580, probably a few years later rather than earlier<sup>57</sup>. What is true is that now we have an historical construct and, if not entirely true, the results of the excavations – and especially the new environmental results – will help to reconstruct the agricultural and pastoral economy in the region, as well as providing a corpus of well-dated finds and ceramic assemblages which will remain a valuable resource for the period commencing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and ending with collapse of imperial control at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

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57 The dating here is more secure than the end of the first period of occupation. In Scythia, coins of Phocas (602-610) and Heraclius (610-641) were in circulation; their absence at Dichin is therefore significant; the site was almost certainly abandoned earlier, probably either late in the reign of the Emperor Tiberius II

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## Zusammenfassung / Summary

### Die Wirtschaft, das Land, Festungen und Städte: die frühbyzantinische Phase an der Unteren Donau im 4.-6. Jahrhundert

In diesem Beitrag werden die materiellen, baulichen und biologischen Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen in Nicopolis ad Istrum und seiner Siedlungskammer in Nordbulgarien besprochen. Neben dieser Stadt gehören auch zwei spätrömische Befestigungen auf dem Land zu den untersuchten Stätten, Dičin und Dobri Djal, sowie ein Areal, das über einen Feldsurvey erschlossen wurde, der zum Ziel hatte Erkenntnisse zur Gestalt von römischen Villenanlagen in der Region zu gewinnen. Es wird dargelegt, dass es einen grundlegenden Wandel der römischen Stadt gab, die ab dem späten 5. und dem 6. Jahrhundert nicht mehr die reichen ackerbaulichen Ressourcen ihres Umlandes ausschöpfte, sondern eine lokale »Gemüsegarten«-Wirtschaft etablierte, die von Importen aus dem Mittelmeerraum ergänzt wurde. Auf dem Lande fand die blühende Villenwirtschaft der hohen Kaiserzeit gegen Ende des 4. Jahrhunderts ihren Niedergang. Nichtsdestotrotz wurde die landwirtschaftliche Produktion fortgeführt, nun jedoch von einer Reihe neuer Befestigungen im Inneren aus, in denen die Erzeugnisse in großen *horrea* gespeichert wurden, zweifelsohne um sie nach Norden an die Donaugrenze zu verschiffen.

Die Bewohner Dičins besaßen sowohl landwirtschaftliche Geräte als auch Waffen und Rüstung. Auch wenn es verlockend sein mag, sie als gotische »foederati« zu identifizieren, lässt sich dies doch nicht mit dem Fundmaterial belegen: es ist durchweg römischen Typs und es findet sich nichts »germanisches«, das eine solche Interpretation stützen würde. Im Gegensatz zu dem radikalen Wandel im baulichen und wirtschaftlichen Charakter der Stadt, lassen sich für das Land im 6. Jahrhundert wenig Unterschiede feststellen. Weiterhin erreichte ein breites Spektrum an Nutzpflanzen die Festungen, selbst in der zweiten Hälfte des Jahrhunderts. Das Ende, als es dann kam, war ein Plötzliches; der letzte Zerstörungshorizont von Dičin datiert ca. in das Jahr 585. Was danach passierte ist noch ein Rätsel, das seiner Aufklärung harret.

### The Economy, the Countryside, Forts and Towns: The Early Byzantine Period on the Lower Danube during the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Centuries AD

This paper reviews the material, physical and environmental results from excavations on the site of Nicopolis ad Istrum in northern Bulgaria. The sites examined also include two late Roman forts (Dichin and Dobri Djal) as well as the deployment of a new form of field-survey which has provided an insight into the rural morphology of »high status« sites in the region. It is argued that there was a fundamental change in the Roman city which, by the late 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century, no longer exploited the rich agricultural resources of its territory but turned towards a local »market garden« economy, supplemented by imports from the Mediterranean. In the countryside, the flourishing villa system of the High Empire was destroyed towards the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. However, agricultural production was still carried on, but was based on a series of new forts in the interior, which stored produce in large *horrea*, no doubt then shipped north to the Danube frontier. The occupants of the fort of Dichin possessed agricultural tools as well as weapons and armour; tempting as it is to identify them as Gothic »foederati« this is not proved by the finds: all are of Roman type and there is nothing »Germanic« to support such an interpretation. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, apart from the radical change in the physical and economic character of the city, little difference can be observed in the countryside where a rich range of crops was reaching the fort, even in the last half of the century. The end, when it came, was sudden; the final destruction level at Dichin must date to c. 585. What happened afterwards, is a mystery which still awaits investigation.