

Dafina Gerasimovska

Between the East and the West, The Roman Urban Planning in the Republic of Macedonia

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Department of Art History and Archaeology
Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje
email: dafina@fzf.ukim.edu.mk

Cities were a key phenomena in the ancient world. Prehistoric and early historic societies organized their spaces as symbolic creations of cosmic order. In ancient cities, the organization of space was also a symbolic re-creation of the supposed cosmic order. Principles of social order were translated into settlement patterns by practices of everyday life relating to social homogeneity, housing styles, form and tenure, income levels, privacy and community (Parker Pearson and Richards 2003: 13).

Ancient Roman cities possessed an elaborate and geometrical structure. In early Roman towns, inhabited spaces were transformed into an *imago mundi*—a general world picture. The boundaries of Roman cities, traditionally marked by the ploughing of a furrow, were held to be sacred (Parker Pearson and Richards 2003a: 39) and were never drawn without reference to the order of the universe. The orthogonal city grid was based on the order of the universe with its four cardinal directions. The *decumani* (oriented east to west) are set in alignment with the course of the sun, while the *cardines* (oriented north to south) follow the axis of the sky (Bogdanović 1976: 86).

URBS QUADRATA

Urbs quadrata is a city in the form of a square like that which Romulus was believed to have founded on the Palatine hill according to Etruscan rites. There is no archaeological evidence to suggest that there were Etruscan or Roman square towns. Until the end of the Republic, therefore, cities would have been said to be *quadrata* in two ways: the urban territory was divided into four districts and the constitutional centres (not necessarily central in geometrical terms) of assembly were certainly consecrated and perhaps even geometrically regular.

The grid plan was a common tool of Roman city planning, based originally on its use in military camps known as *castra*. This Roman military camp was the closest in form to the *urbs quadrata* (Milić 1990: 184-185).

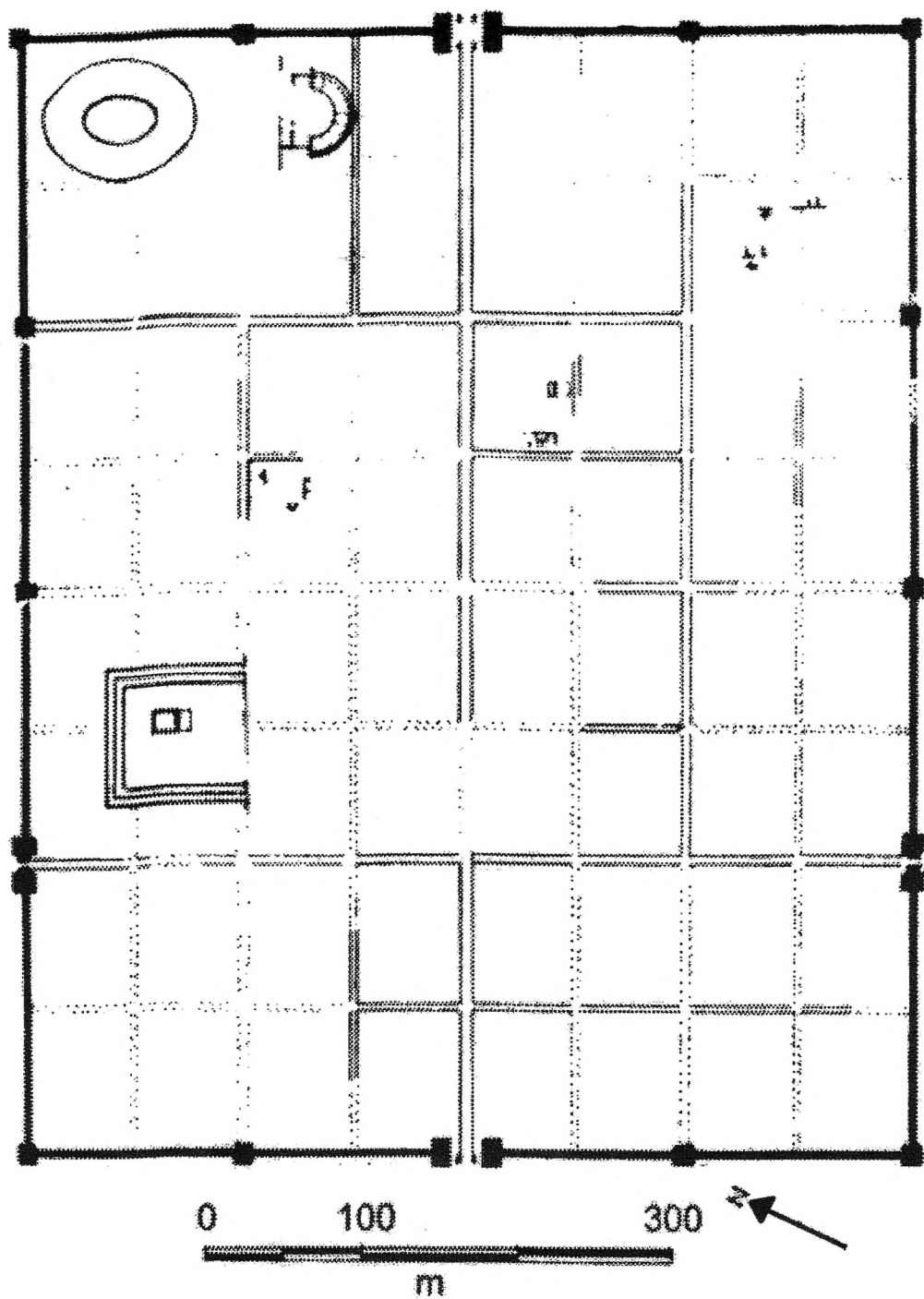


Fig.1 Aosta, a Roman city with a plan as a military camp (after M.E.Smith)

CITIES AS MILITARY CAMPS

Some Roman towns resembled more formal versions of a military camp. The Roman military camp was a diagrammatic evocation of the city of Rome, an *anamnesis* of imperium (Rykwert 1999: 68). Although notionally arranged on a cardinal grid, the orientation of camps and forts was flexible and often dictated by the contours of the

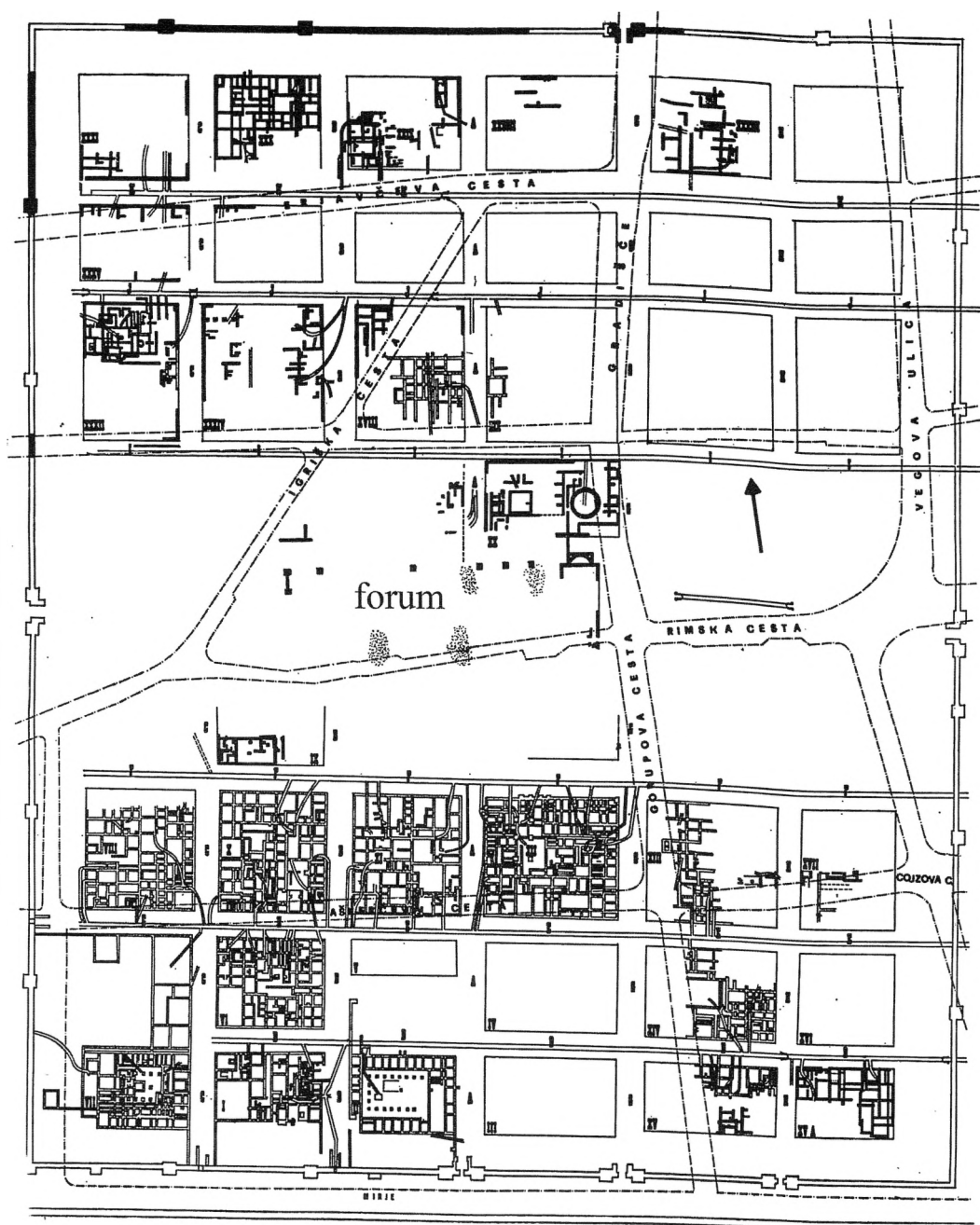


Fig.2 Emona, a Roman city with a plan as a military camp
(modified after Lj. Plesničar Gec)

land (Parker Pearson and Richards 2003a: 39). Military influence has been identified in the planning of many Roman cities such as Aosta (fig.1), Emona (fig.2), Singidunum, Sirmium, and Viminacium, as well as in the ruins of Timgad in North Africa (fig.3) where one of the most striking extant Roman grid patterns can be found.¹ In this sense, *colonies* seem simply to have been a development of the camp system, an aspect of the military discipline in which the veterans were trained (Grimal 1983: 11).

¹ Smith (2007: 16-17) describes Roman city planning, particularly of military camps in colonies, as following a 'modular orthogonal plan'.

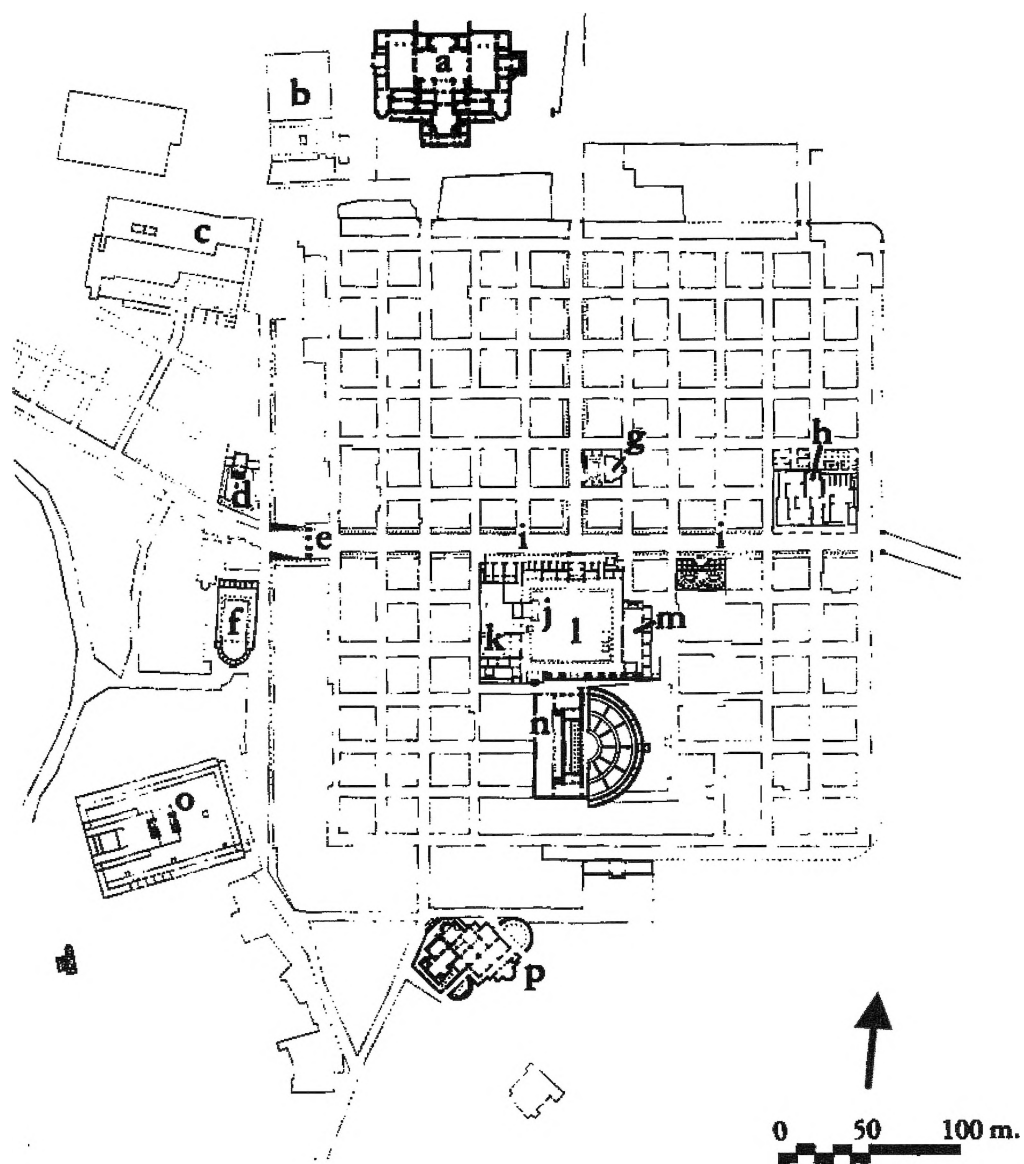


Fig.3 Timgad, a Roman city with a plan as a military camp (after W.L.MacDonald)

ORTHOGONAL GRID PLANNING

Orthogonal planning has been identified in many places. It is closely associated with Hippodamus of Miletus, who flourished around the middle of the fifth century as the originator and populariser of geometric city plans in the Greek world. Hippodamus was a practical urbanist, a planner, but also a theorist of city planning. He introduced the grid plan in Piraeus, the port of Athens, as well as in the colonies founded during that period, such as the Athenian colony of Thurii planted in southern Italy in 443 BC, and Rhodes, which was laid out in 408 BC. From that time onwards, the *Hippodamian plan*, as it was called, became usual for the foundation and modification of cities

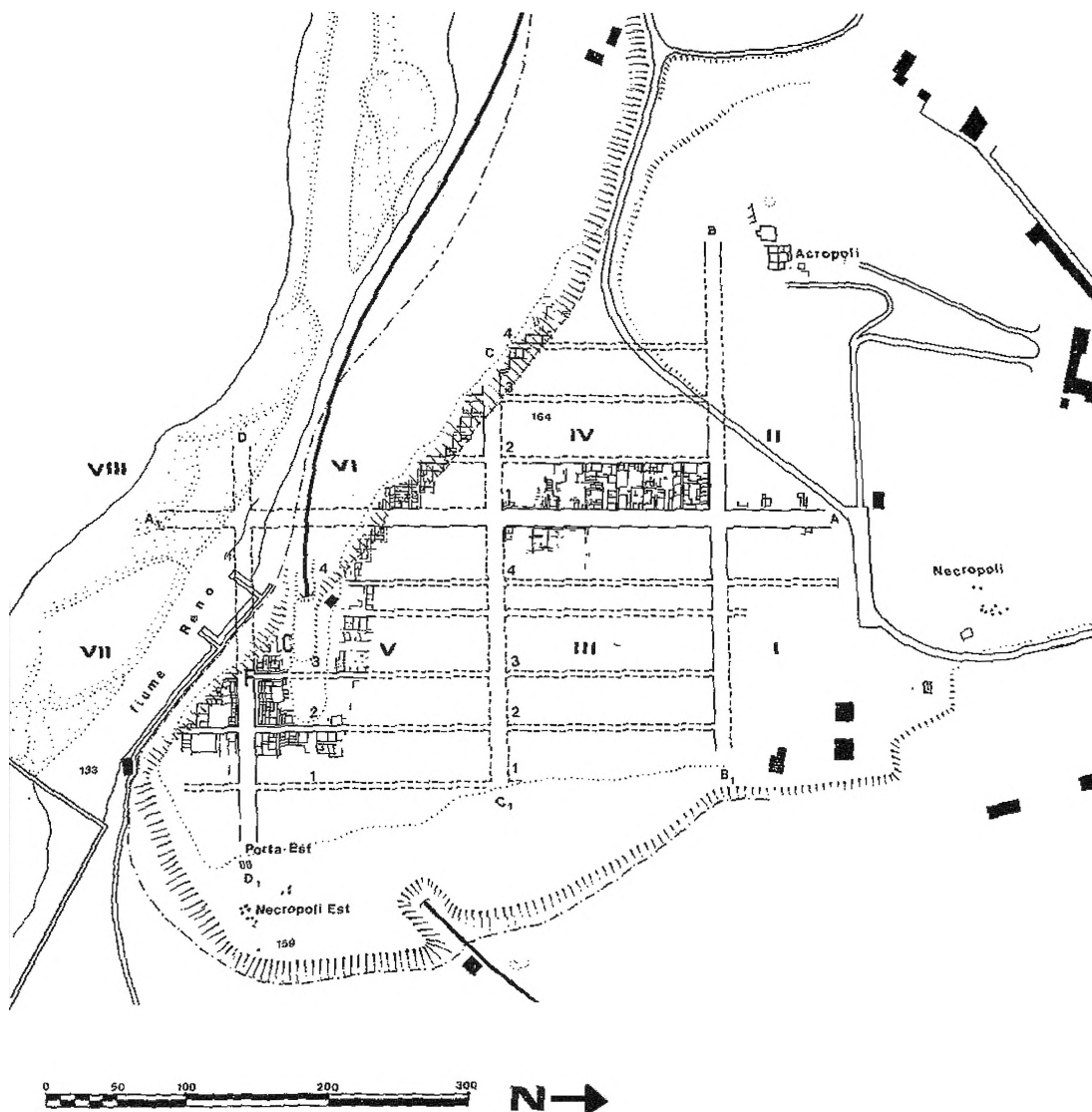


Fig.4 Marzabotto, an Etruscan city, plan (after G.A. Mansuelli)

(Grimal 1983: 22). There seem to be numerous orthogonal plans from all periods and in all geographical locations, such as Marzabotto in Etruria (fig. 4), Laodicea, Priene in Asia Minor, Paestum in Sicilia, Kasoppe in Greece, and in Late Imperial cities such as Arles, Trier (fig. 5), Turin, and Zara (Rykwert 1999: 42). Orthogonal planning is present also in Olynthus, Selinus, Cyrene (fig. 6), and Soluntum.

The introduction of orthogonal planning into Italy is often ascribed to Greek influence, though the evidence for this is not entirely conclusive. Such planning appears to have been practised in Italy with great sophistication and assurance by the end of the sixth century BC (Rykwert 1999: 72-76). The remains of an Etruscan town near the village of Marzabotto provide evidence for the Etruscan practice of orthogonal planning, and this town was laid no earlier than the beginning of the sixth century, perhaps the very end of the sixth. City layouts in long *insulae*, through most common in later Greek cities in Magna Graecia, are also found elsewhere on the Mediterranean seaboard.

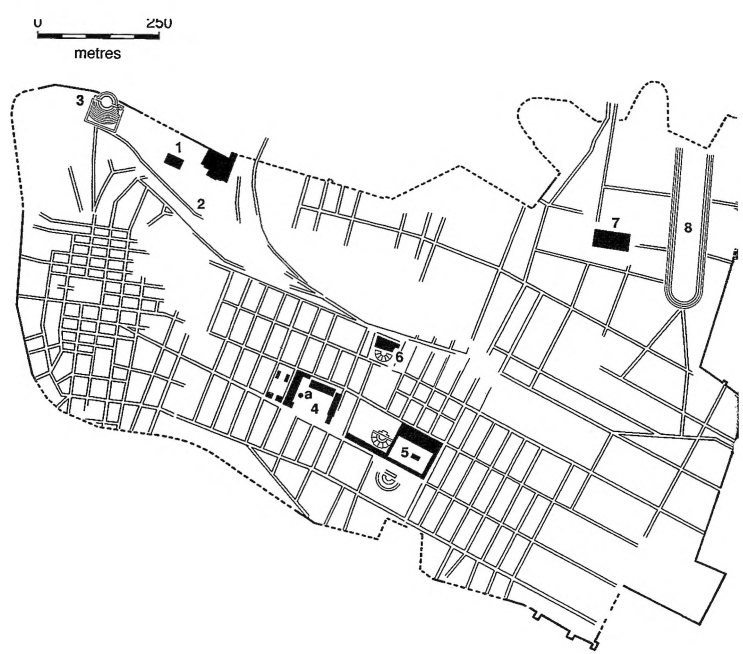


Fig.5 Trier, a Roman city with an orthogonal grid planning (after W.L.MacDonald)

Orthogonal layout is a technique which may have become isolated from its social religious context, spreading over decades through trade exchanges.

IRREGULAR CITIES

Cities were a defining aspect of Roman culture. Incorporation within the Roman Empire brought an unprecedented degree of urbanization to vast areas of territory (Wilson 2002: 231). In the provinces many new towns were established

in their entirety while others were rebuilt on the foundations of older towns; in both cases, these towns were laid out according to a Roman plan.

Examples of eclectic style with irregular planning are visible in the urban architecture of the eastern provinces. A combination of imported urban frameworks and traditional local architecture shaped the final character of the eastern Roman cities (Segal 1981). The Romans were confronted by a very definite cultural reality prominent in the cities, against which they did not struggle. They learned what they could from others and then applied that knowledge to their own needs and purposes (fig.7, 8).

Most of the ancient cities have been lost to us forever, but the remains of many Roman towns are still visible around the Mediterranean and have been intensively researched. Topographical studies show many similarities from one region to another in the Mediterranean region, but it is the differences between settlements that is the more striking feature.

The Imperial Roman state clearly favoured the building of cities on the Mediterranean Greco-Roman model. It established new cities as *colonies* to house retired soldiers from the legions, which were often intended as both examples to the local population and as bastions of loyalty in newly conquered provinces (Jones 1987: 48).

Lack of continuity in civilizational influences is characteristic of the Balkan Peninsula. In the nature and degree of its urbanization, the Balkan Peninsula was compartmentalized by relief, dotted with the *oppida* of the Thracians and Illyrians, of some attained considerable size and elaboration (Norman-Pounds 1969: 156).

This region functioned as a link between eastern and western Roman cultures.

Situated at the centre of the Peninsula on a crossroads between East and West and South and North, the territory of the present-day Republic of Macedonia is a place where we can find urban settlements with different planning systems—some closely adhering to Roman rules or to Hellenistic and local urban traditions. Previously existing civilizations in the Balkans had some effect on urban planning while Roman civilization left numerous traces in a large part of the Peninsula.

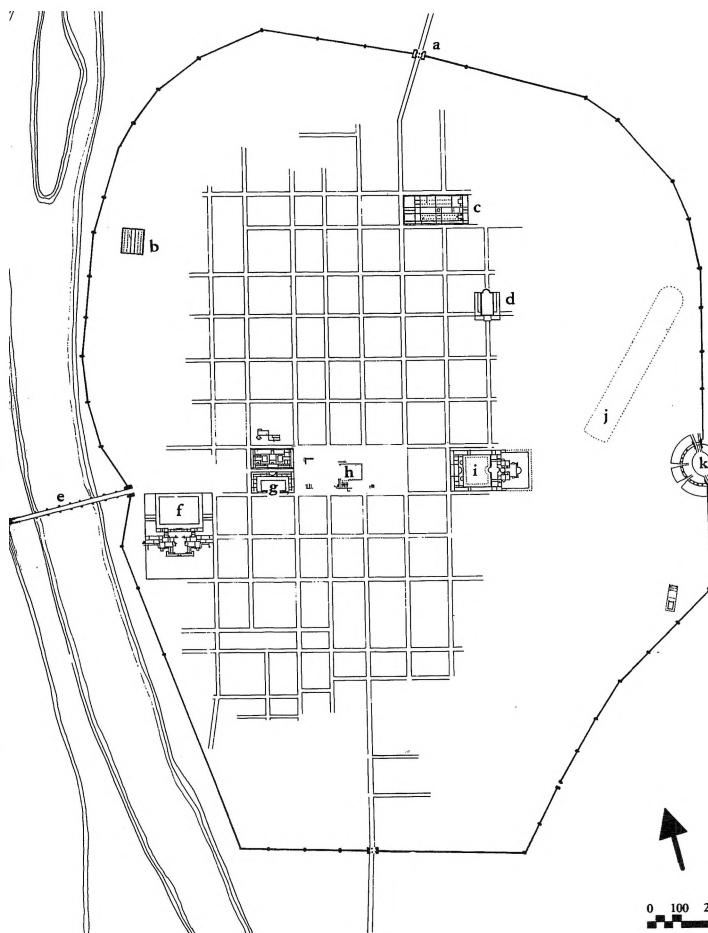


Fig.6 Cyrene, a Roman city with an orthogonal grid planning (after R.Tomlinson)

Scupi

It is probable that the settlement of Scupi, situated at the centre of the Skopje valley, was founded as a military camp after the Civil Wars at the end of the first century BC. At that time, two active legions remained in the territory of the Province of Macedonia: *V Macedonica* and *IV Scythica* were transferred to the newly-conquered Dardania. In the first century AD, as part of the Province of Moesia, Scupi grew up as Roman *colony*. Most of the settlers were veterans of the *VII Claudia*, *V Macedonica*, *V Alaudae* and *IV Macedonica* legions. The incoming colonists stamped their own identity on the city.

The city of Scupi (fig.9) was planned according to Roman principles of urban design. Its orientation was S/W-N/E. The city was organized as a *castrum*, forming a rectangle 738m long and 590m wide with intersections at angles on the North and East, enclosed within irregular rectilinear walls and covering an area of about 44 hectares. This Roman *colonia* from the first century AD had two main streets, *cardo maximus* running NW/SE, and *decumanus maximus* running SW/NE (Јованова 2008: 15-17). Parallel with these streets and with the walls was a network of secondary streets which divided the area into rectangular blocks called *insulae*. The dimensions of the city *insulae* changed over different historical periods. Many private, religious and public

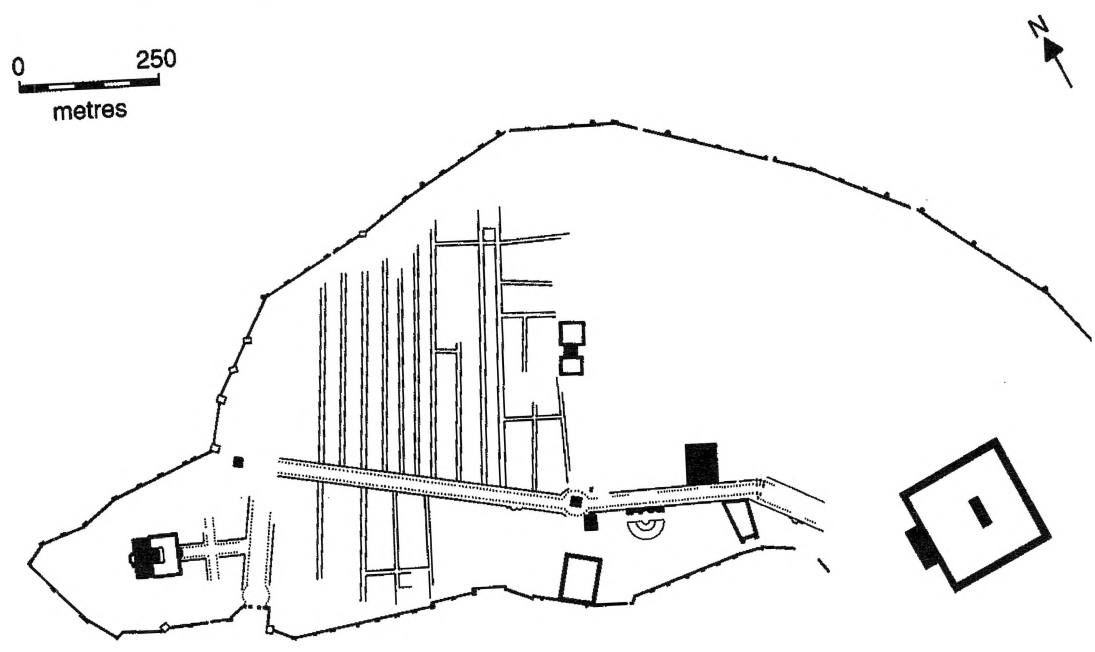


Fig.7 Palmyra, a Roman city with irregular plan (after R.Tomlinson)

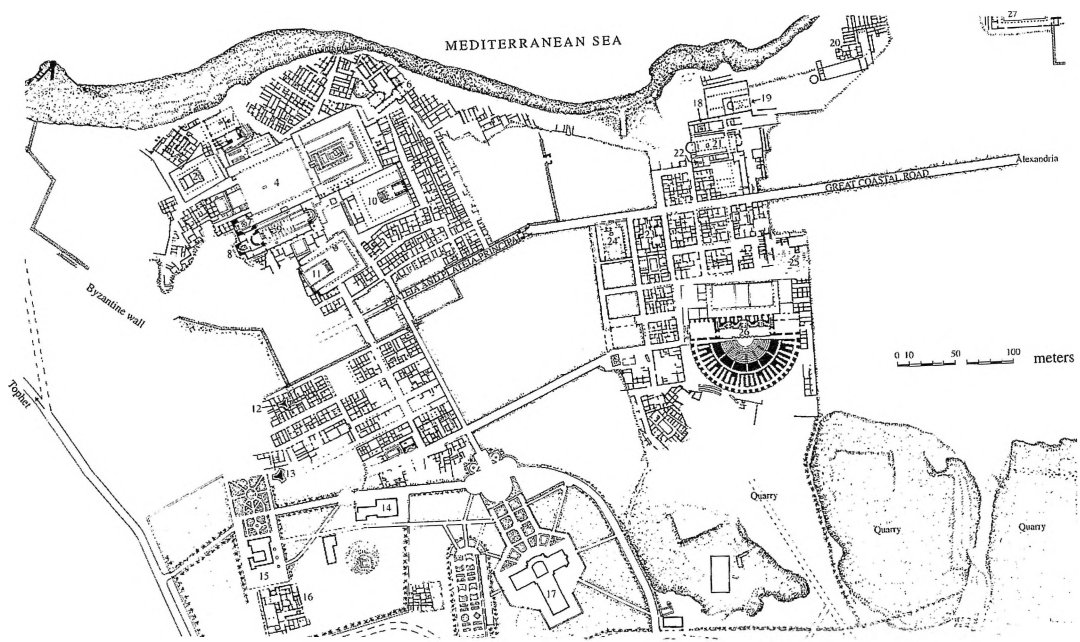


Fig.8 Sabratha, a Roman city with irregular plan (after, A.di Vita)

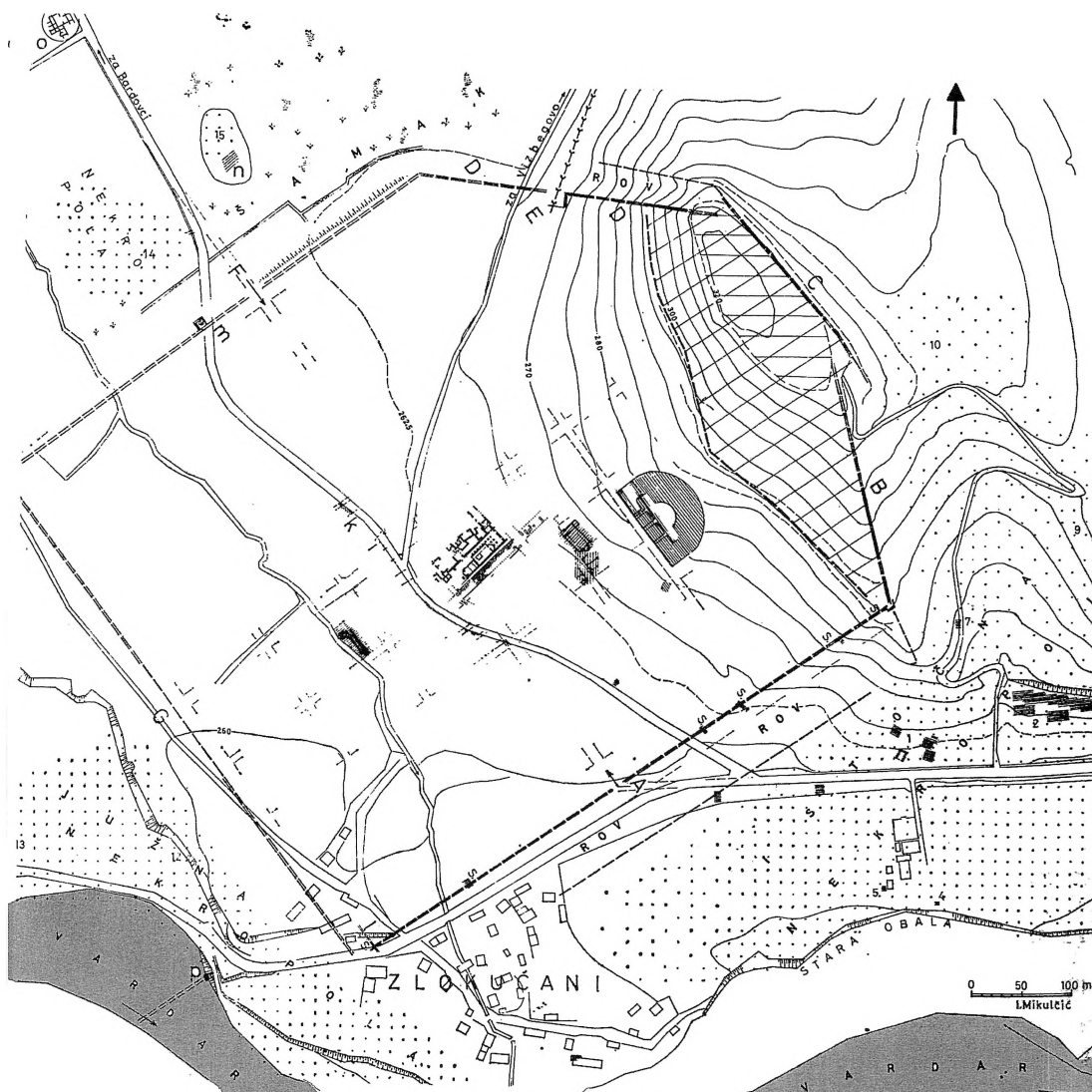


Fig.9 Scupi, a Roman city with a plan as a military camp (modified after I. Mikulčić and L. Jovanova)

buildings were built in these functional division quarters.

The civilian basilica was built in the southern part of the city. The city bathhouse was situated in the central zone, and the theatre on the south-western slope. Most of the Roman buildings are still lying under the ground.

Over subsequent periods, many structures and spaces in the area lost their original use and character.

Stobi

The ancient city of Stobi is situated in the Vardar valley at the angle formed by the rivers Vardar and Crna. This old Paenonian town was of major importance throughout the period of Roman domination (Wiseman 1984: 292-294). The two most important roads, Via Axia (the Vardar Road) and the Transversal Road (Heraclea-Stobi-Serdica), both crossed at Stobi.

The pre-Roman settlement, from the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC, occupied a small

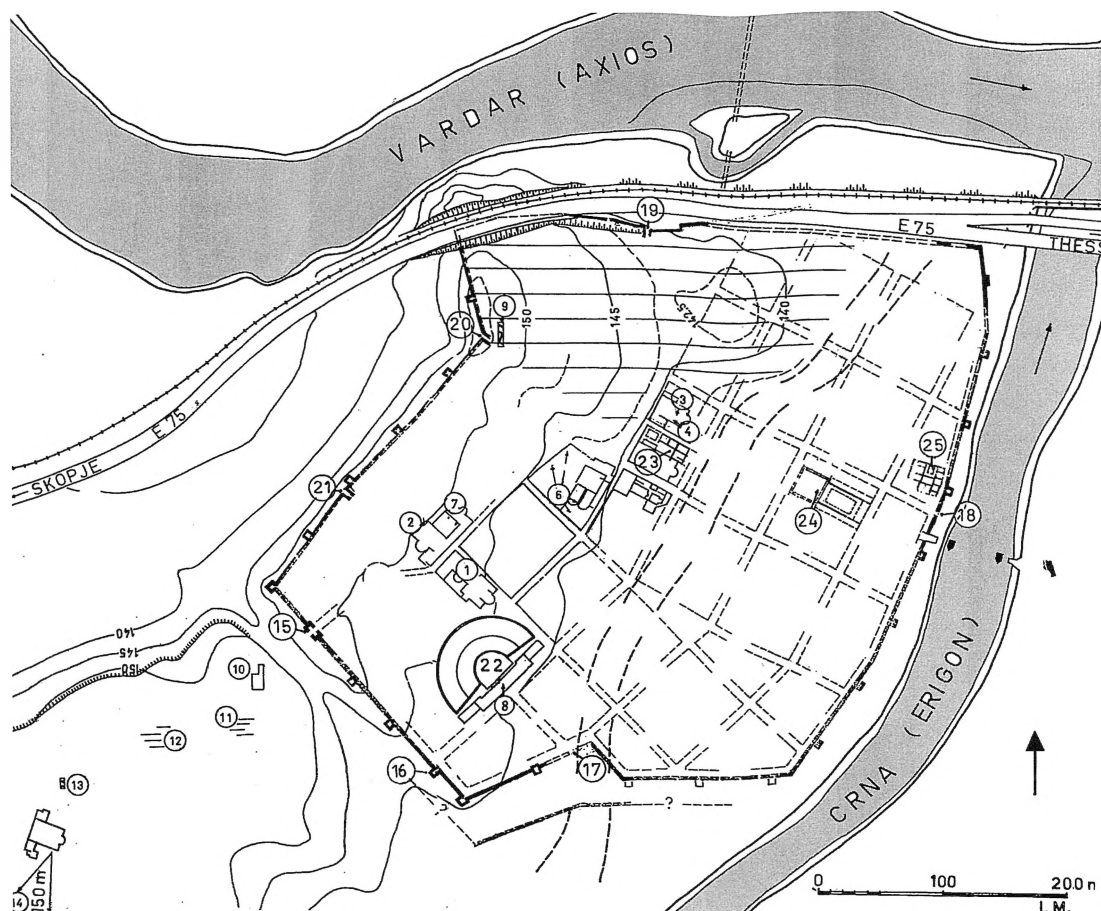


Fig.10 Stobi, Early Roman city with an orthogonal grid planning (after I.Mikulčič)

space of about 2, 5-3 hectares at the north end of the later Roman city (Микулчиќ 1974: 352-353). During the Civil Wars of the first century BC, many ancient cities in the Province of Macedonia were entirely abandoned. Some of these cities, such as Stobi, were later revived.

The city of Stobi was constructed next to the old cemetery spreading out to the south-west. The Roman city (fig.10), which was a *municipium* from the early years of the Empire, was planned and constructed on prepared grounds larger than the previous settlement. The Romans urbanized the lower terrace to the east which was not originally inhabited. The nucleus of the Roman city was built there and probably served as the administrative and commercial centre, containing many public and religious buildings amongst regular street layouts. The new Roman city, with its regular grid of streets, was planned in advance and probably populated in a single wave by a large number of new inhabitants. The early city walls formed an irregular pentagon fitting into the angle between the two rivers and covering an area of about 20 hectares (25,000 m²). Its length was about 500m in the north-east to south-west direction and its width was about 400m in the north-west to south-east direction (Микулчиќ 2003: 34-44). The main streets and the streets parallel with them divided the area into rectangular *insulae*, forming a grid city plan. Straight streets formed functional divisions of quarters.

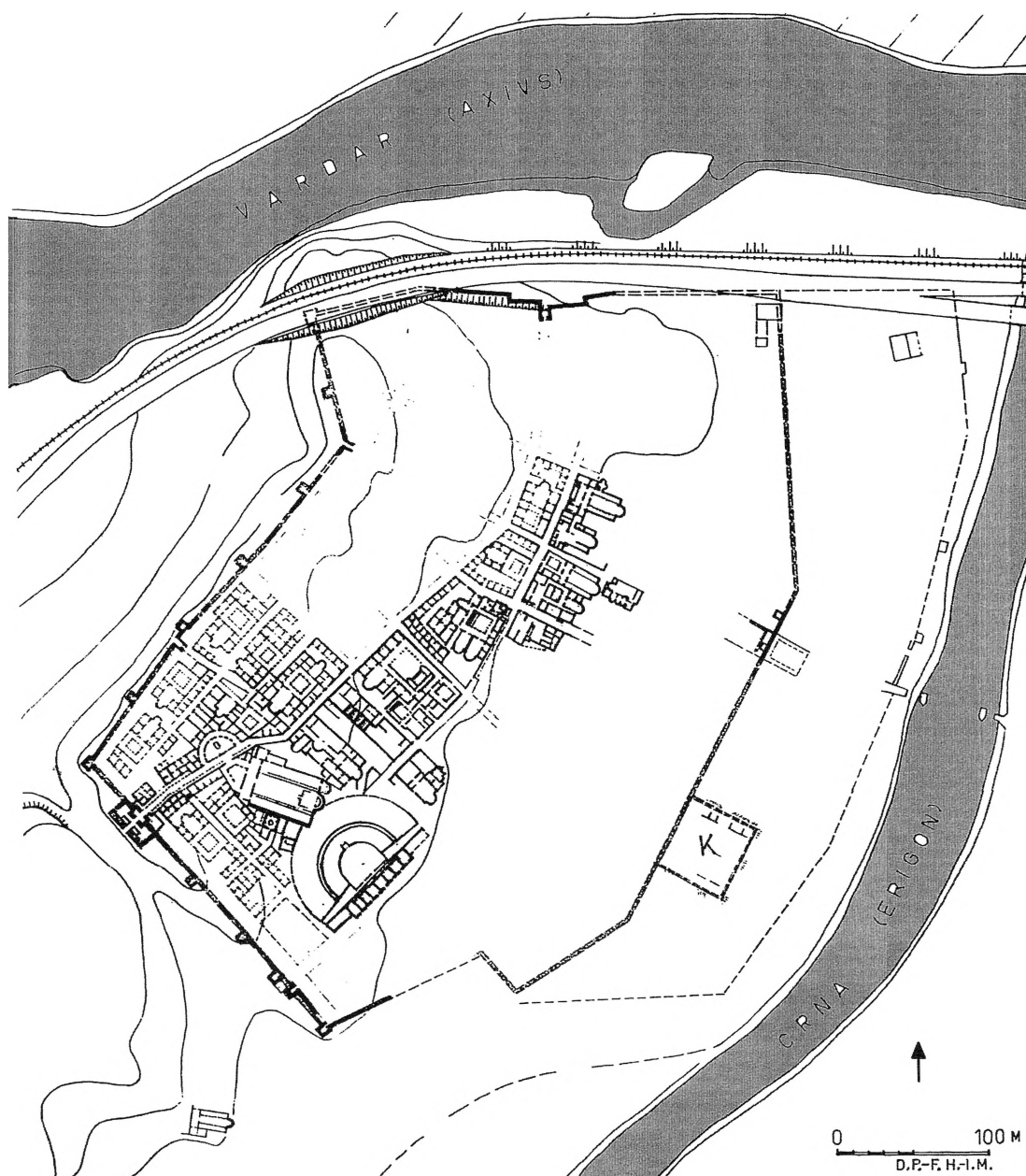


Fig.11 Stobi, Late Roman city with irregular plan (after I.Mikulčić)

On the left bank of the River Vardar spread the urbanized suburb of the city, with many buildings organized in a complex street network.

Stobi was completely destroyed in the 3rd century AD. The new Late Roman city was erected over the ruins of the old one on the basis of new urban concepts.

The Late Roman city (fig.11) encompassed an area of 14 hectares surrounded by renewed defensive walls forming an irregular square. A new wall was built on the east, parallel with the old one but far back from the bank of the River Crna. At that time a new urban space especially adjusted to the natural configuration of the ground and the needs of the development of the main city of the *Macedonia Salutaris* province and later *Macedonia Secunda* was planned. The urban plan, determined by the local

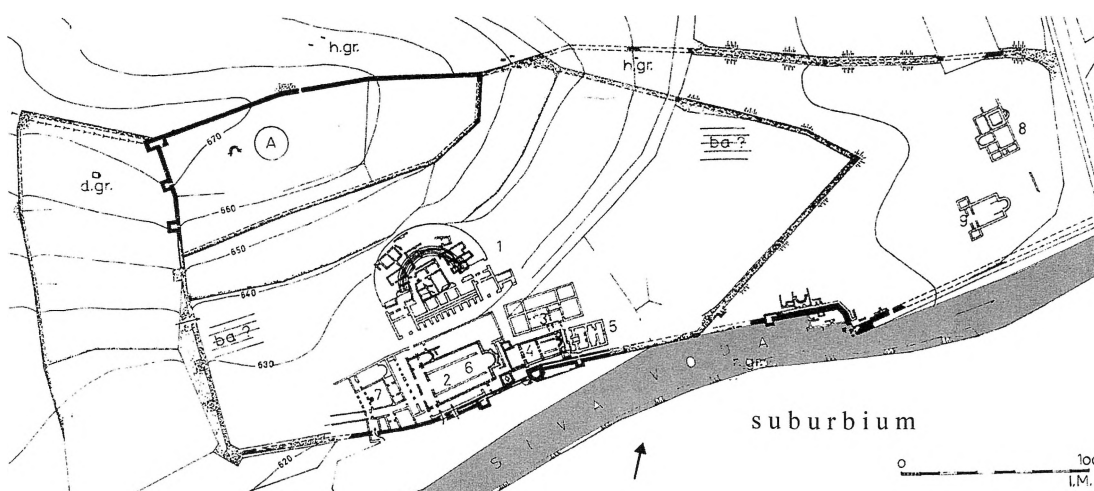


Fig.12 Heraclea Lyncestis, a Roman city with irregular plan (after I.Mikulčič)

topographical conditions, spread over three terraces descending from north-west to south-east. The highest terrace to the north-west was the residential quarter, occupied by large elite peristyle houses. The insulae with these houses had an irregular square shape. Some houses occupied the whole insula. The majority of wealthy town-dwellers owned substantial lands outside the city. The layout of the streets was changed and the layout of the whole city deviated from the strict Roman orthogonal city scheme. The sources of inspiration of the Late Roman city planning were Hellenistic, very similar to eastern cities with their narrow meandering streets. The Early Roman city with its geometrical refinement and regularity in the planning of its streets and *insulae* was superseded by an irregular plan in the Late Roman period.

Heraclea

The city of Heraclea Lyncestis (fig.12) was situated in the north-western region of the ancient kingdom of Macedonia. It was established by Philip V of Macedon in about 200 BC. On the top of the hill, on the western fringes of the Pelagonia valley, was situated the fortified acropolis of the Hellenistic settlement. The acropolis covered an area of about 1.5 hectares. Life in Heraclea was initially concentrated in this small area on the highest part of the hill. From this summit the settlement gradually spread down the eastern and southern slopes (Микулчиќ 2007: 18-19).

When Macedonia became a Roman province, Heraclea gained a Roman appearance. The city had an irregular urban form as a result of many factors. Topographic factors and the existence of a previous settlement in the area forced the planners to resort to unconventional solutions with a tendency to use an orthogonal plan when constructing this city. The city was adopted on the basis of its own system, a principle already firmly established in the urban planning of earlier cities in ancient Macedonia.

It cannot be said much on the early urban planning of the city from the archaeological evidence. In the first centuries AD, the city reached its greatest extent. The Roman fortification, with a nearly rectangular form, reached the banks of the river

Siva Voda, covering an area of 8 hectares (Микулчић 1999: 41-42). Richer families lived in the wealthy urban villas far from the central district, and some of the urban population may have owned small houses. In the central area, the Roman forum was located where the later Christian basilicas (A, B and C) would be built, and to the north on the slopes of the hill was situated the theatre. The suburbs of the Roman city spread over onto the right bank of the river. This suburb of about 5-8 hectares was without a compact urban structure.

Following its destruction at the end of the 3rd century AD, the city was rebuilt and transformed into an irregular Late Roman city. The later city walls lost their straight lines and in the Late Antique period the walled city area, with completely irregular planning, covered only about 5 hectares.

* * *

The Romans arrived on territory already influenced by local urban traditions in the southern parts of the Balkan Peninsula. The cities in this region were based much more on the Greek city model than the Roman. In the southern regions, the patterns of cities were created by the Romans using pre-existing urban sites. Too little is known of the cities on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. The only significant information about the urban planning of Roman cities in Macedonia comes from the excavations and analysis of Ivan Mikulčić (Микулчић 1974; 1984; 1999; 2003; 2007). In some regions of the Republic of Macedonia, the cities were already there when the Romans came and this is why there are contrasts between patterns of urbanization in the southern and northern regions of the Republic of Macedonia.

Early Roman town planning is not clearly visible in the cities in the Republic of Macedonia. Our knowledge of the area in this period is very scanty. Most of the remains found today were of settlements founded in the 4th centuries AD and later. Some of the earlier fortified settlements were transformed into cities by the Romans. The cities developed by a selective process from earlier settlements. In this way some of the primitive settlements grew into Roman cities. The Romans developed and enlarged existing settlements and rarely established any entirely new towns. The cities were given monumental forms and flourished under the easy conditions created by Roman rule. The new Roman cities in the Vardar valley followed regular grids of streets. The existence of a thriving local urban culture nourished by the population in this region and even Hellenistic influences inhibited the assimilation of Roman cultural traits in all but a handful of towns. The combination of both local and Roman culture was essential. Existing urban patterns determined the direction of some of the streets. The planners succeeded in creating an unusual and extremely interesting urban appearance. Concerning town planning itself, Roman influence appears to have been greatest in the Early Roman period. The Roman towns were enclosed by defensive walls, usually dignified with forums and public, religious, commercial and private buildings.

As Vitruvius says (Vitruvius I.IV.8.9), an ideal site for a Roman city would have needed to be fine and healthy. Yet, the choice was often made for commercial and military reasons. This is obvious in the location of the Roman cities in the Republic

of Macedonia. All these cities were situated on major Roman roads. Via Egnatia, the major road in the area, passed through Heraclea, connecting the Adriatic coast with Anatolia. Stobi was on the crossroads of the Vardar Road and the Road connecting Heraclea with Serdica. Scupi, in the northern region of the Vardar valley, was on the road connecting the Aegean coast with the Danube.

Urban planning in the southern region belongs to the Hellenistic tradition, as is obvious in the orthogonal city of Stobi. Local traditions are visible in the irregular city of Heraclea Lyncestis. In the northern territory of the Republic of Macedonia the Romans founded the *colonia* Scupi in a form most similar to the regular Roman city as a result of its origins in the military camp. During the centuries that followed, the conception of cities was entirely transformed, giving them a new appearance.

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Резиме:

ПОМЕЃУ ИСТОКОТ И ЗАПАДОТ, Римско урбано планирање во Република Македонија

Балканскиот Полуостров се наоѓа помеѓу западниот и источниот римски свет. Во јужните делови на полуостровот цветала хеленската, а подоцна хеленистичката култура како спој на културите коишто биле развиени на просторите што ги опфатила државата на Александар Велики. Овие влијанија се ширеле кон север по долината на реката Вардар на територијата којашто некогаш им припаѓала на Пајонците, а потоа на Македонците за да се судри со римските влијанија, посилно присутни на јадранскиот брег како резултат на експанзијата на римската култура. Овие влијанија далека се пробивале од запад и север, од просторите кадешто допирот со Римјаните бил првиот допир со подигањето на плани-рани урбани населби.

Република Македонија се наоѓа на крстопатот на влијанијата коишто струеле од југ кон север, а истовремено и од исток кон запад, на просторот којшто во текот на римскиот период им припаѓал на различни провинции. Благодарение на припадноста кон овие различни провинции кадешто културата се темелела на различни основи, во границите на Република Македонија можат да се забележат урбани населби од различен тип.

Развиената римска урбанизација, најраширена на Апенинскиот Полуостров, втемелена врз основа на етрурскиот, пред сè градски свет, а се заснова пред сè на космичкиот ред, ќе се почувствува во северните простори на Балканскиот Полуостров во Сирмиј, Емона, Виминакиј, Сингидун. Урбаните системи засновани врз „хиподамовите“ правила ќе бидат поприсутни во јужните делови на Полуостровот, обидувајќи се да ги модифицираат населбите на просторот на веќе постоечката, различна култура на македонските племиња но сепак под силни хеленски влијанија.

Урбаните населби се развиле на убави, внимателно одбрани позиции, сместени и прилагодени кон конфигурацијата на теренот. Најпознатите, иако само делумно, сепак засега најдобро истражени римски градови во Република Македонија Скупи, Стоби и Хераклеја се наоѓале на многу битните трговски и стратегиски патишта. Тоа се патиштата (Повардарскиот, Егнатискиот и Дијагоналниот) што ги поврзувале овие простори со културните влијанија коишто доаѓале од различни страни, а се рефлектирале и врз развитокот на урбанизирањето на населбите.

Во северниот дел на Република Македонија, кој и припаѓал на

провинцијата Дар-данија, а подоцна Мезија се наоѓа типично римскиот град, колонијата Скупи, произлезен од римски каструм. Во Средното Повардарие, на раскрсницата на Дијагоналниот и Вар-дарскиот пат е сместен римскиот град, муниципиј Стоби, со ортогонален план, подигнат над некогашната веќе постоечка хеленистичка населба. Во југозападниот дел од Република Македонија, на Егнатискиот пат, над хеленистичкиот град Хераклеја бил оформен римскиот град, со неправилна форма и тежнеење кон примена на ортогоналниот систем. И овие, засега најдолго ископувани римски градови во Република Македонија, се само делумно истражени и анализирани така што сосема прецизни информации за нивната урбана схема се невозможни. Најбитните информации за нивниот урбан лик ни доаѓаат од истражувањата и анализирањата на И.Микулчиќ. Овие сознанија се појдовна точка за проучување на раѓањето на римските урбани формации на просторите опфатени од Република Македонија.