

The Barbarians and the Big Cities:

Destruction, Renewal and Transformation of the Urban Settlements in Macedonia during the Early Middle Ages

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1. Introduction

Due to its specific geographic position, good communication routes and natural resources, Macedonia and the Central Balkans in general, had highly developed urban life many centuries before the beginning of the Early Middle Ages. The trading, the cultural and religious life revolved around the big cities. They were administrative centres and were crucial for governing and controlling a province. Some of them were provincial sees, with their own coin mints.

Though these cities had many rises and declines in their respective histories, it is traditionally held the early medieval barbarian raids were strongest external factor for ending the urban life. They were a favoured target, for a conquered city meant both rich booty and control to the surrounding area. The raids indeed had a negative impact to the flourishing of the urban settlements, but that does not necessarily mean that every city, once attacked, was erased from the map. Layers of renewal followed the layers of destruction, although the newer layers are usually represented by humbler buildings. In most cases, the big cities were just transformed to smaller settlements.

This article is dedicated to a case study of five settlements that were heavily raided by barbarian parties between the 4th and the 7th century CE. All of them were situated in different provinces: Stobi (Macedonia Secunda), Heraklea Lynkestis (Macedonia Prima), Bargala (Dacia Mediterranea) and Scupi (Dardania). Scupi will be discussed together with the near-by for-

tified town of Markovi Kuli, which was also an urban settlement in Dardania, and for some time, had parallel existence with Scupi. These cities were prosperous in the political and ecclesiastical scene of Byzantium and that was reflected in its sacral and profane architecture. There were also stations of the main routes, which made them easily accessible (Via Axia and Via Egnatia) and had established trade with the furthestmost regions of the Empire.

Each city will be presented with short background history and the raiding activities documented in its stratification. The material analysed is quite miscellaneous – it ranges from the weapons to dress fittings and hoards of Byzantine coins. However, there is a very significant aspect for the interpretation of these finds: all these objects and coins were found in destruction layers of these sites and they can be taken as indication for military activity. The weapons and the dress fittings are identified and dated on base on stylistic analysis with similar finds coming from contemporary sites from neighbouring Balkan countries. Based on this evidence, here I will try to identify who were the people who raided the big cities and what followed after such raids. The layers of renewal that followed the layers of destruction introduce the possibility found a way to survive the great barbarian incursions. Thus, the interpretation of these finds and features can offer a new image on the decline or revival of these urban centres in the period of Early Middle Ages.

2. *The archaeological material*

The archaeological material found in the destruction layers of the big cities reflects the attackers, the defenders and the local population. These cities were raided by various barbarian groups, of both Asian and Indo-European origin. As response to the raids, these cities most probably had higher concentration of Byzantine army, which was also a conglomerate of people with different backgrounds – *Romaioi* and *foederati*. So, one cannot always be certain if a given artefact is connected to the attacking or the defending party, but these artefacts are certainly clear indicator of a military turmoil that culminated with severe impact on a city or part of it.

The reflex bows and the three-ribbed arrowheads are observed as connected, though not exclusively with the Asian nomadic horseman. These offensive weapons were created by different traditions and adjusted to a different way of making war. Nomadic horsemen attacked by surprise and

swiftly, shooting arrows from reflex bows while mounted on horseback. These bows were fashioned by using the elastic forces of wood when twisted in opposite directions. A bow was kept in a case tied to the belt when it was not in use. This type of bow was brought to Europe by the Huns, but it was also used by the Avars.¹ Plaques, made out of bone or antler, were used for stiffening the most fragile parts of the bow: the ends and the central part.² The archers were trained to use the reflex bow while mounted on horses since their youngest age. Special types of arrowheads were used with the reflex bows and they match the types found in the Eurasian steppes.³ One of the most common types was the three-ribbed arrowheads.⁴

The presence of stiffening plaques of reflex bows and three-ribbed arrowheads can be taken as an indicator of a nomadic raid. They were used by both the Huns and the Avars, so if they are not found together with coins or other chronologically more sensitive archaeological material, there will be no solid base for dating and connecting this finds with a certain raid. There is a possibility to distinguish a Hunnic reflex bow from an Avar one: the stiffening plaques of the Avar reflex bows are more curved, shorter and narrower than the Hunnic one. The Hunnic bows had dimension of 130-140 cm; the Avar ones 160-170.⁵ The difference in dimensions is more obvious if the earlier Hunnic bows are compared with the Avar ones.⁶ These observations cannot be taken as a solid rule, however, because there is difference in the size of stiffening plaques coming from the same bow.

As an answer to the raiding activity of the barbarians, the Byzantine army was stationed in the endangered areas. The loss of the cities meant the loss of imperial control over a given area and the resources within it. The border fortifications were the first line of defence, but not always fully efficient, so additional protection of the cities was necessary. The presence of the Byzantine army is visible through their personal equipment-buckles and fibulae, which also had the role of a military insignia.⁷ The artefacts are found in the destruction layers, though not as often as in the borderline for-

¹ МАНЕВА, 1985/86/87: 51

² КОВАЧЕВИЋ, 1977 :116

³ VIDA, 2003:305

⁴ МАНЕВА, 1985/86/87: 53

⁵ *Ibidem.* 52

⁶ НАЋ, 1959: 83, 87.

⁷ JARIĆ, 2010: 31-45.

tifications. Some of these finds are deposited as grave goods in the cities' necropolises, so that may imply that there were *foederati* living there, as protection that is more effective to the city than a garrison of Byzantine army stationed for a period of time.⁸ One of the most exclusive finds connected with the Byzantine army comes from a destruction layer of a city – the helmet with rivets from Heraclea Lynkestis, which will be discussed further below.

The numismatic material sets the other artefacts in more precise context and provides more defined dating and thus, the possibility to relate the finds with a certain raid previously known from the written sources. Coin hoards were deposited in the ground to preserve them from danger and they can speak as clearly about the military activity in a given area as finds of weapons and military insignia.

3. *The Big Cities*

Stobi was the largest city and the capital of Macedonia Secunda. It was a city built near the confluence of the Crna Reka and Vardar rivers, which made it easily accessible for both trading and the barbarian incursions through the Morava-Vardar route. *Stobi* was mentioned for the first time in the written sources in the 2nd century BCE.⁹ After the Roman conquest in 167 CE, the city had rapid development, became dominant in the salt trade and gained the status of *municipium*. *Stobi* was a rich city with several basilicas, a theatre, luxurious palaces, its own coin mint and other public and private buildings (See Plan 1). *Stobi* was also an important archbishopric; it was noted that the archbishop of *Stobi* was present at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE.¹⁰

Luxury and other displays of prestige were appreciated by the citizens of *Stobi*, but safety came first and the city was transformed to meet the needs of the turmoil periods. Some of the luxurious buildings were no longer in use; fortifications were built over buildings with mosaics. Such is the

⁸ The grave goods of the Eastern Necropolis in Scupi, found in male graves introduces the possibility that Germanic *foederati*, probably Ostrogoths lived there. The grave goods from the female and children tombs imply the same. For more information see МИКУЛЧИЌ, 1974: 109-134; МИКУЛЧИЌ, 1982: 50; and ОНЧЕВСКА-ТОДОРОВСКА, 2005: 275-282.

⁹ ПАΠΑЗОГЛУ, 1957: 235.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 237.

case of the building named *Casa romana*, a strong defensive wall was laid directly on the mosaic floor. Of the many coins found near the base of the wall, the latest was minted by Arcadius (383-393). This building project is probably connected with the Gothic invasion on the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries.¹¹ The coin-hoard found in the theatre is probably connected with the Gothic raids as well. It contained around 70 *siliquae* and 4 *solidi*, minted by the emperors Valentinian I, Valens, Gratian and Valentinian II. The coins of this hoard were issued in the period between 364 and 378.¹² Based on the short age-structure of the hoard, it can be suggested that it was more a number of coins withdrawn from circulation, deposited and never retrieved, than long-term savings. The Antioch mint was predominant; this hoard does not reflect the coin circulation of this area, otherwise the predominant coins would have been issues of the active mint of Thessalonica instead. This introduces the possibility that these coins have been brought to Stobi, probably from the Orient prefecture.¹³ Regardless of the provenance, this hoard speaks of the Gothic danger in the late fourth and the early fifth century in the Central Balkans. Furthermore, another hoard with fourth-century bronze coins was found in the theatre, chronologically similar to this Antioch hoard.¹⁴

After the Gothic danger, Stobi was probably attacked by Huns in the middle of the fifth century; the archaeological material witnesses a severe destruction by fire. The presence of nomadic barbarians in Stobi is indicated by the remnants of a reflex bow and a three-ribbed arrowhead found

¹¹ САНЕВ и САРЖОСКИ, 1981: 229-243.

¹² HADŽI-MANEVA, 2001: 69-70.

¹³ The mint of Antioch was meant to supply the Orient Prefecture with coins. Hoards with short age structure and well-preserved coins originated from non-local mints may indicate a military presence; a soldier's paycheck, brought by a soldier who came to Stobi from the Orient Prefecture. This is just my suggestion in interpreting such finds; nevertheless, Hadži-Maneva (HADŽI-MANEVA, 2001: 75 and HADŽI-MANEVA and IVANIŠEVIČ, 2003: 119-140) notes that *solidi* and *siliquae* are rare on the territory of the Byzantine Empire, except for the territory of today's Romania, where most of the hoards of *siliquae* were found. For more information on the hoards from present day Romania, see DUNCAN, 1993: 353-354. For more information on the circulation of Early Byzantine coins in the province of Macedonia Secunda, see КОТОВЧЕВСКА, 2006.

¹⁴ ВИНЧИЌ и ХАЏИ-МАНЕВА, 2000: 55-76.

in the *Domus Fullonica* building complex (Figs.1 and 2). The burned reflex bow was found in Ward 21, together with a dagger, and the arrowhead was found in Ward 28. The destruction layer contained an abundance of coins; the latest ones among them were of Theodosius II and Valentinian III. They were minted by 450 or 455, respectively. The renewal phase of the building complex is dated with the coins of Marcian (450-457) and Leo I (457-474), so the *terminus ante quem* of the destruction layer can be set at 450.¹⁵ Two other three-ribbed arrowheads were found in Stobi, also coming from layers with similar dating¹⁶. Weapons of the nomadic horsemen and the coin dating indicate the possibility that this destruction layer is due to Attila's attack in 447, when no less than 70 big urban centres in the Balkans were destroyed.

After the death of Attila in 453, a strong coalition lead by the Gepid king Ardarich abolished the Hunnic domination on the Balkans.¹⁷ As shown by the written sources, Stobi was raided by the Ostrogoths during their campaign on the prefecture Illyricum on two occasions- in 472 and 479.¹⁸ In 489, Theodoric' Ostrogoths moved to Italy and the Byzantine authority was reasserted in the Balkans, but not for long.

The beginning of the 6th century was denoted with rise of the Avar tribal federation and the severe Avaro-Slavic raids. Again, as to enhance protection, the Byzantine army had larger concentration in the cities. Several objects that were part of the personal equipment of the Byzantine soldiers were found in Stobi: two belt buckles of the "Sucidava" type and one fibula with plate-shaped leg. The latter was found in the *Domus Fullonica* building complex. The stratigraphic layer above contained a coin of Justin I (518-527).¹⁹ All these artefacts expanded their usage during the sixth century and they can offer some small indications for the possible presence of the Byzantine troops during the same century.

Besides the weapons and the military insignia, the coin hoards are also good as witnesses of military activity. In of the one of the northern wards of the *Casino Basilica*, a coin hoard was found; dated by the latest

¹⁵ МИКУЛЧИЌ, 1981:210.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 210.

¹⁷ КОВАЧЕВИЋ, 1977: 32.

¹⁸ ПАПАЗОГЛУ, 1957: 192-193.

¹⁹ For further elaboration, dating and illustration of such finds see JARIĆ, 2011: 35 (Table 1 and Figure 4) and 43 (Table 4 and Figure 4).

minted coins to 585.²⁰ This coin hoard is probably connected with the Avaro-Slavic plundering of the Balkan provinces before the siege of Constantinople in 586.

Heraclea Lynkestis was one of the biggest cities in the province of Macedonia Secunda and a station on the Via Egnatia route (See Plan 2). As shown by the archaeological excavation of the oldest layer of the city, it was founded c.200 BCE, during the ruling of Philip V.²¹ Just like Stobi, Heraclea had a rapid development after the Roman conquest. It was a city with luxurious private and public buildings, plaza, porticoes and theatre. The city became a bishopric in 4th century CE; one bishop of Heraclea Lynkestis can be found at the Council of Sardica in 347.²²

This city is one of the archaeological sites with the best evidence for barbarian raids, seen in an abundance of heterogeneous material: weapons, military insignia of the Byzantine army, and numismatic material. The written sources also document the burning of Heraclea by Theodoric and his Ostrogoths in 479 CE.²³ One artefact that can be attributed to a high-rank officer of the Byzantine army was found in a destruction layer of Heraclea Lynkestis. The helmet with rivets is quite a unique find for Macedonia and one of the rare finds of such piece of armour worldwide. (See Fig.3)

The helmets with rivets, known as well as *Spangenhelms*²⁴ were opulent items of personal equipment. Only 30 specimens of helmet with rivets are found so far and they have remarkable dispersion from Europe to Egypt and Libya. The dating also has a broad range, from the end of the 5th to the beginning of the 7th century. The helmets with rivets are probably Eastern, thought to originate in the Irano-Sassanid tradition. This type was introduced to Europe by the Goths, during their stay in the Black Sea region in the 3rd century.²⁵ Traditionally, this type of helmet is connected with the Germanic tribes, but the broad pattern of distribution indicates of usage by ot-

²⁰ АЛЕКСОВА, 1989: 68.

²¹ МИКУЛЧИК, 1999: 40.

²² ПАΠΑЗОГЛУ, 1957: 192.

²³ ПАΠΑЗОГЛУ, 1957: 192; МИКУЛЧИК, 1999: 328.

²⁴ Helmets with rivets are also known as Baldenhaim helmets or Narona/Baldenhaim helmets; these names derived from the eponymous sites where the first specimens were found.

²⁵ GRANACSAY, 1949: 274. See also JAMES, 1986: 107-134 and HACHMANN, 1971: 160-162.

hers, as well. Finds of helmets with rivets in Coptic Egypt are result of the Byzantine military presence in that region.²⁶ A helmet with rivets was fashioned with exacting techniques and expensive materials and denoted a higher rank in a military hierarchy. As such, it was a favourite among the barbarian chieftains and the Byzantine generals.

The main parts of a helmet with rivets are made of iron. The conical body of the helmet consists of four or six plates, bound together by bands made of copper or bronze. Some of the helmets have cheek pieces or a nose-piece. The rims of the headband can be perforated for applying a protective leather piece on the inside of the helmet or to attach a piece of mail to protect the neck. The helmets with rivets bore elaborate decoration; usually a thin sheet of gold or silver with stamped motifs was applied to the headband. The bands and the cheek pieces were decorated with motifs that imitated fish scales. These impressions were made by the technique of stamping.

One helmet with rivets was found in a destruction layer of the south annex on the Episcopal Basilica in Heraclea Lynkestis. It is coin-dated to 586.²⁷ The helmet follows the basic pattern as other finds of this type. The matter that makes it unique is the decoration of the headband²⁸, which was apparently inspired by images on Byzantine coins.²⁹ The main decoration is made of six representations, stamped with pseudo-coins. The representati-

²⁶ This opinion is based on pattern of distribution-the largest numbers of such finds comes from the burial of high-ranking Germanic warriors, as well as depictions of the Germanic rulers wearing *Spangenhelms*. See MAHEBA, 2001: 89.

²⁷ MAHEBA, 1986: 71. The latest coins found at Heraclea Lynkestis date to the 584/5 emission. As shown by the coin analysis of Vladimir Popović, the emission of 585/6 is not present in the Central Balkan region. See POPOVIĆ, 1980: 240-244. For more information on the numismatic evidence for the Avaro-Slavic raids on the Balkans, see METCALF, 1991: 140-148.

²⁸ Due to its unique decoration, Prof. Maneva suggests that this helmet may represent a special variant of helmets with rivets – the Heraclea variant

²⁹ MAHEBA, 1986: 71-77. Prof. Maneva has described and analyzed the decoration of this helmet in several of her articles, thus it is very well known to the scholarly public. Therefore, I will focus on one point only, the one that provides the dating of this helmet. For more information on the numismatic background of the decoration of this helmet, see MAHEBA, 2001: 86-89.

ons are accompanied by short sentences in Greek, which ask the help of the Lord for good health and safe return from the battlefield of the one who owned this helmet. The central representation is the most important because it is most indicative for the time this helmet was created.

The image represents Christ on a throne, with a chlamys and halo, blessing two frontally standing male figures. They are not marked as rulers, but the scene is reminiscent of a numismatic one where emperors got the right to rule by a blessing from a representative of the Celestial Kingdom – Christ or the Virgin. So, if the male figures can be considered as rulers, that the helmet was produced in a period when there was another ruler beside the Roman emperor. This ruler had to have ruled with an authorization from Constantinople, however, and that could be the Ostrogoth King Theodoric. The right to rule with Italy was acknowledged to Theodoric by Constantinople in 497 and this year can be taken as *terminus post quem* for the production of the helmet. The inscriptions in Greek,³⁰ the motif taken from Byzantine coins, and the high-quality craftsmanship speak of a Constantinopolitan workshop.³¹

The benevolence of Constantinople toward the Ostrogoth king ended in 523, when an edict was issued to prohibit pagans, Jews, and heretics from serving in the imperial or any other type of service. From this year onwards, the relations between the Ostrogoth Kingdom and the Byzantine Empire worsened and finally ended with the Gothic wars. Therefore, 523 can be taken as the *terminus ante quem* for the production of the helmet.³² This helmet was found in a destruction layer coin dated to 584/5; if the dating of the production is taken into consideration, that would mean that this helmet was in use for more than a half century and that it might have had more than one owner. Such a long usage speaks even more about the importance of this helmet as an insignia of power in the military hierarchy. The stylistic analysis of the helmet can also provide possible a provenance of the helmet. This changes the perspective of viewing helmets with rivets as exclusively worn by the Germanic warlords and rulers. This helmet was

³⁰ Combined with the stamped representations, this inscription was meant to have prophylactic and eschatological symbolism; they were believed to protect the owner the owner of this helmet. For more information on prophylactic and eschatological symbolism, see MAGUIRE, 1997: 1037-1054.

³¹ MAHEBA, 2001.

³² MAHEBA, 1986: 80-81.

made for and worn by a general or another high-ranking officer (*Romaion* or *foederatus*) in the Byzantine troops who had the task of defending the city during barbarian raids in the last decades of the 6th century.

As for the weapons, 2 stiffening bone plaques of a reflex bow and 2 specimens of three ribbed arrowheads were found in Heraclea Lynkestis (Figs. 4 and 5). The stiffening plaques and two of the arrowheads were found near the Episcopal Residence. Due to the location, they might indicate the same raid, though it is not certain. The third arrowhead was found near Basilica D.³³ These two objects were in use during the sixth century.³⁴

Although these finds did not come from an intact layer with clear marks of destruction, such as the finds of this type from Stobi, they indicate the presence of nomadic horsemen in Heraclea Lynkestis. The artefacts were found in locations without numismatic material, so they cannot be connected with a specific raid, known from the written sources or documented with material that is chronologically more sensitive. The stiffening plaques of the reflex bows were poorly preserved, with parts missing. This fragmentation makes the attribution even more difficult, but they probably belonged to an earlier form of a reflex bow.³⁵ If one takes in consideration the dating of the buildings near these artefacts were found, than they might be dated in the 6th century and thus attributed to a raid launched by the Avar tribal federation. The Empire responded to these raids by enhancing the military troops in the endangered areas. The Byzantine army suggests its presence in Heraclea Lynkestis via the finds of military insignia: Sucidava belt buckle, one fibula with a hinge (of Danubian provenance) and a “tongue” plate attached on the opposite of the buckle, made of silver plate were found in Heraklea Lynkestis³⁶. The last object is fashioned with elaborate technique and was probably part of a more costly belt garniture, worn by a higher-ranking officer. The dating of all these objects is in the sixth century.

Bargala was another important urban settlement in Macedonia. This city grew into a strong ecclesiastical and cultural centre during the 4th and the 5th century, though its beginnings are in the pre-Roman period³⁷ (See

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ For the mosaics of Heraclea Lynkestis, see DIMITROVA, 2006: 315; for the Basilica D see МАНЕВА, 1989: 175-186.

³⁵ МАНЕВА, 1985/86/87: 55.

³⁶ МИКУЛЧИК И ЛИЛЧИК, 1995: 270.

³⁷ АЛЕКСОВА, 1989: 41-42.

Plan 3). The big Episcopal Basilica was in usage during the 5th century and has traces of renewal from the 6th century. Later, in the High Middle Ages, Bargala will rise to the status of the leading ecclesiastical centres on the Balkans.

The development of Bargala was interrupted by barbarian incursions on at least two occasions: in 586 and 616-617.³⁸ In both cases, these attacks were part of broader raiding activity by Avaro-Slavic marauders, which ended with the siege of Thessalonica. The Avaro-Slavic army attacked Bargala in 585 and devastated a great part of the city. Great destruction by fire is confirmed near the western entrance of the city and the basilica, as well as serious damage to the fortifications. Three-ribbed arrowheads were found near the basilica and the main entrance of the city. A coin hoard was also found south of the basilica; the latest coins are semi-folles of Maurice, minted in Thessalonica in 584/5.³⁹ This coin hoard contained 13 golden coins, 270 bronze coins and one golden ring. It is supposed that it was deposited in ground by a tradesman shortly before the devastation of the city. Aleksova sees this group of finds (two silver earrings and two golden *solidi* of Phocas), hidden near the basilica, as indicating a raid that was part of the raiding pattern of the Avaro-Slavic army that ended with the siege of Thessalonica in 616-17.⁴⁰

At the beginning of the Early Middle Ages, two cities existed near today's Skopje. The first was Scupi, founded as Roman *castrum* and then developing into a large urban settlement in the valley of the Vardar River; the second was the fortified city of "Markovi Kuli" on the slopes of Vodno Mountain, founded around the sixth century. The two cities probably had a parallel existence for some time.

³⁸ *Ibidem*

³⁹ АЛЕКСОВА, 1989: 57. The author refers briefly to the destruction of the city in 585 without giving more detailed information about the archaeological material – e.g. the number of the found three-ribbed arrow heads or providing photographs or technical drawings of the same. Yet, she states that a part of the basilica was renewed after being damaged during this particular Avaro-Slavic raid. About the numismatic material connected with the barbarian raids, see АЛЕКСОВА, 2001: 96-97.

⁴⁰ АЛЕКСОВА, 1989: 65; МИКУЛЧИЌ, 1981: 342. Prof. Aleksova observed this group of finds (two silver earrings and two golden *solidi* of Phocas), hidden near the basilica, as indication of a raid that was part of the Avaro-Slavic raiding party that ended with the siege of Thessalonica in 616-617.

Scupi was one of the most important cities in the Balkans during the Roman period; that is confirmed by its status of *colonia* (See Plan 4). It became the capital of the province of Dardania and it was an archbishopric until 535, when the newly built Iustiniana Prima took on this role. The rich urban life in Scupi ceased to flourish by the end of the fourth century, however, in the two following centuries, Scupi's territory decreased and it became a small settlement with humble buildings. During the fourth century, a large necropolis was in use in the eastern part of the city, the so-called Eastern Necropolis (See Plan 5 and Fig.6). So far, approximately 300 graves have been excavated; among them,⁴¹ 106 belong to the period between the middle of the third and the fifth century. There is a great variety of grave constructions and evidence of burial rituals. Among these burials, a small group of around 10 graves⁴² contains grave goods that might indicate that Germanic *foederati* lived in Scupi for some time. It is known that the Goths became *foederati* of the empire after the battle of Adrianople; Theodosius settled the Ostrogoths in Illyricum and the Visigoths in Thrace⁴³, although Germanic people were present in the Byzantine army from the rule of Constantine the Great onwards.⁴⁴ This could be the explanation for the presence of these finds in Scupi – Germanic warriors fighting for the empire that settled and were buried in the city's necropolis together with their families.

Scupi was devastated in a great earthquake in 518, but this was not the end of urban life near today's city of Skopje. As the Vardar Valley proved unsafe for a city in a period with intensive barbarian invasions, a new fortified city was built on a plateau of Vodno Mountain, now the archaeological site *Markovi Kuli*. The fortified city was built on three levelled terra-

⁴¹ МИКУЛЧИК, 1974: 136.

⁴² These graves are male only, with finds that can be considered as military insignia. The grave goods found in these graves are several finds of onion-shaped fibulae, possibly of Danubian origin, belt buckles and buckles for fastening boots. The fibulae are dated to the second half of the 4th century (see МИКУЛЧИК, 1974: 136) and the belt buckles have similar dating. The buckle from grave No.200 has the closest analogies with the fibulae used during the 4th century (see see МИКУЛЧИК, 1974: 136 and HACHMANN, 1975: 155) and found on the *limes* of Danube and Rhine. The other specimens of buckles have an oval, "D"-shaped form.

⁴³ TREADGOLD, 1996: 11.

⁴⁴ FINE, 1991: 19.

ces with internal walls between them, but all surrounded by a strong fortification built with the technique of *emplekton* (See Plan 6). The fortification had 40 or more towers with triangular or pentagonal bases. The highest terrace was the acropolis of the town. The acropolis itself, as well as the middle and lower terrace, had its own ring of fortification wall with gates and towers (See Plan 5). The towers of the inner walls did not have such massive and strong construction as the ones with triangular or pentagonal base of the outer fortification. The fortification had a water supply system with two big water tanks.⁴⁵

This site has been excavated several times.⁴⁶ The excavations near the front tower of the acropolis revealed a destruction layer filled with cinders and charred wood. A strip-shaped fibula with a bent leg and coins of Justin II (569) were found. Later, a small workshop for jewellery, cloth fittings, and other smaller objects was found in the section of the middle terrace. Three fibulae of the same type as that from the destruction layer were found here.⁴⁷ A cheek piece of a helmet was found, again in a destruction layer of the acropolis, along with coins of Justinian I and Justin II. Ivan Mikulčić identifies this helmet as Avar, possibly originating in the Crimea area.⁴⁸

The last group of finds that is connected with barbarian raiding activity was found near one of the water tanks. It contained two pieces of golden jewellery, a Sucidava belt buckle and a strip-shaped fibula with a bent leg, decorated with golden applications.⁴⁹ All these finds have the same *terminus ante quem* – the end of the sixth century. Probably they are all related to the Avaro-Slavic raid in 586, yet, the city continued to exist during the seventh century.

Five settlements have been discussed in this article. Except for the fortification at Markovi Kuli, they all have long histories of existence centuries before the Early Middle Ages. These cities were built on excellent stra-

⁴⁵ МИКУЛЧИЌ, 1982: 50.

⁴⁶ This site was abandoned during the 7th century, but repopulated on the turn of the 10th century. The second settlement was known as the “city of Črnče”. For the excavations, see more in МИКУЛЧИЌ И НИКУЉСКА, 1979: 65-74, МИКУЛЧИЌ И НИКУЉСКА, 1983: 123-133; МИКУЛЧИЌ И БИЛБИЈА, 1987: 205-220.

⁴⁷ МИКУЛЧИЌ, 1982: 50-53.

⁴⁸ МИКУЛЧИЌ И НИКУЉСКА, 1979: 71-72.

⁴⁹ МИКУЛЧИЌ И БИЛБИЈА, 1987: 212-213.

tegic points, easily accessible by the major communication routes – the *Via Egnatia* or the Vardar-Morava route. These cities had flourishing urban lives due to the fact they were important administrative and ecclesiastical centres. Their development was interrupted by the raiding activity of various barbarian groups: Goths, Huns, Avars and Slavs.

As already mentioned in the introduction, the barbarian incursions are traditionally observed as the main external factor for obliterating of the urban life in Macedonia. Yet, the stratigraphy of Stobi, Scupi, Heraclea Lynkestis, Bargala and the fortification at Markovi Kuli tells a slightly different story. These cities or, at least, portions of them were destroyed by the barbarian raids. Yet, the layers of renewal, although with lower architectural quality and on a smaller area. It is of crucial importance to stress that the same cities were raided by different barbarian groups in different times. That is shown by observing various micro-locations in these cities.

One destruction layer in *Domus Fullonica* contained material that can be connected with the Hunnic raids, thus dated in the middle of the 5th century; another destruction layer contained finds of the Byzantine military insignia, dated from the middle of the 6th to the beginning of the 7th century. This shows continuity of c.150 years. Such is the case with the Episcopal Basilica in Heraclea Lynkestis: at least two destruction layers and two renewal phases can be observed from the material found there. The Basilica at Bargala also had three building phases, one of them denoted as renewal after the destruction caused by an Avaro-Slavic raid.

Scupi might be the city that went under most drastic changes. As implied by the grave good finds from its Eastern Necropolis, Germanic *foederati* lived there. They probably had the task to stop the advancing of the raids further more to the south of the Balkans. During the 5th century, the city diminished in size greatly.

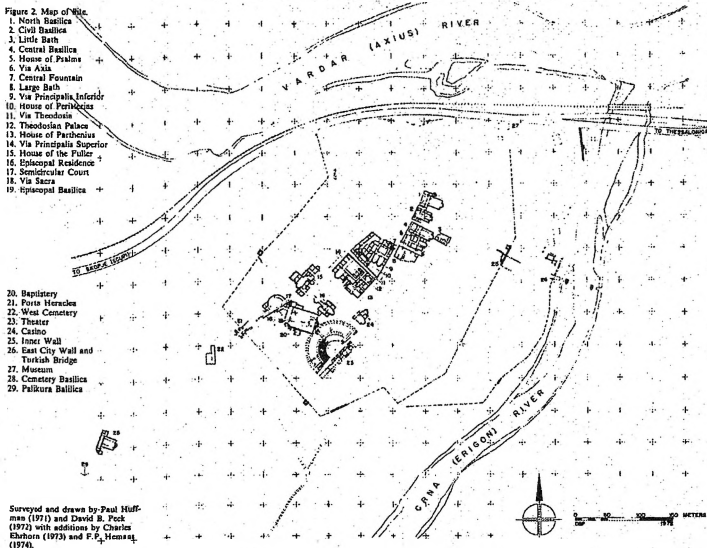
The devastating earthquake of 518 played as great a role in this relocation as the barbarian raids. It was the capital and bishopric of Dardania until 535, at least nominally, before that role was given to newly founded Iustiniana Prima. The centre of the urban life was shifted to the slopes of the nearby mountain. This fortification was built as a response to the contemporary threats; with an elaborate system of towers, inners and outer walls. It was abandoned sometime in the 7th century, but was repopulated again the late 10th century.

The big cities of the Late Antiquity had to change in terms to re-

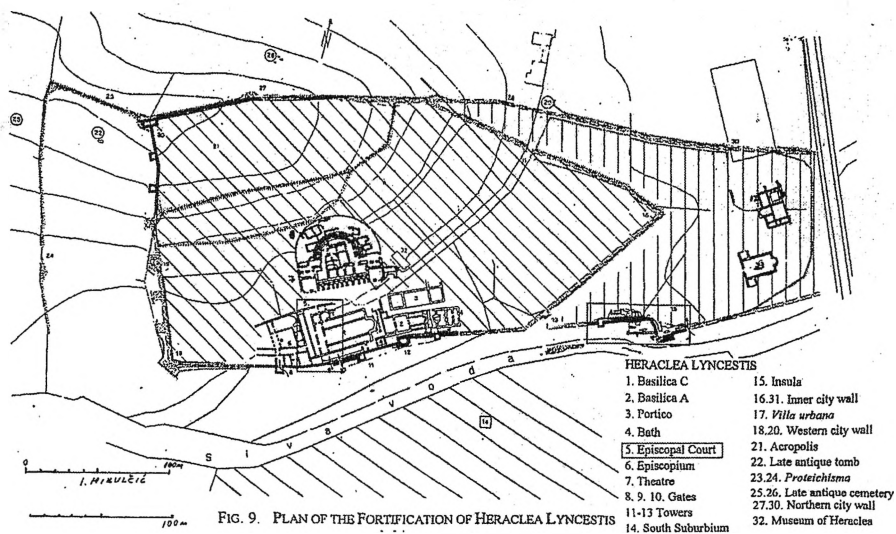
spond to the barbarian raids. It is a fact that the urban life was taken to a lower level, but that does not equal the end of it. The burned down palaces and basilicas were replaced with new ones, although sometimes with less lavish ones. Of course, measurements had to be taken as to make these cities more enduring. Safety replaced luxury as top-priority. Fortification walls cut through the beautiful mosaics, as show by the case of *Casa Romana* in Stobi. The big cities were re-shaped by the current needs; the diminished in size as to fit better in the newly built fortification rings.

The Early Middle Ages were indeed a period of great changes; it was a time of the collision of an Empire in rise and the barbarians of various origins. The constant danger of barbarian raids influenced the urban life. This is visible to the continuous layers of destruction and renewal. The very phases mirror the ability of the Empire to reconsolidate after every raid and attempt to prepare for the next one. This changes the traditional way of observing the barbarian raids as a terminal factor for the city life in the attacked areas. Instead, these raids should be observed as factor that alters the way the cities functioned and were defended.

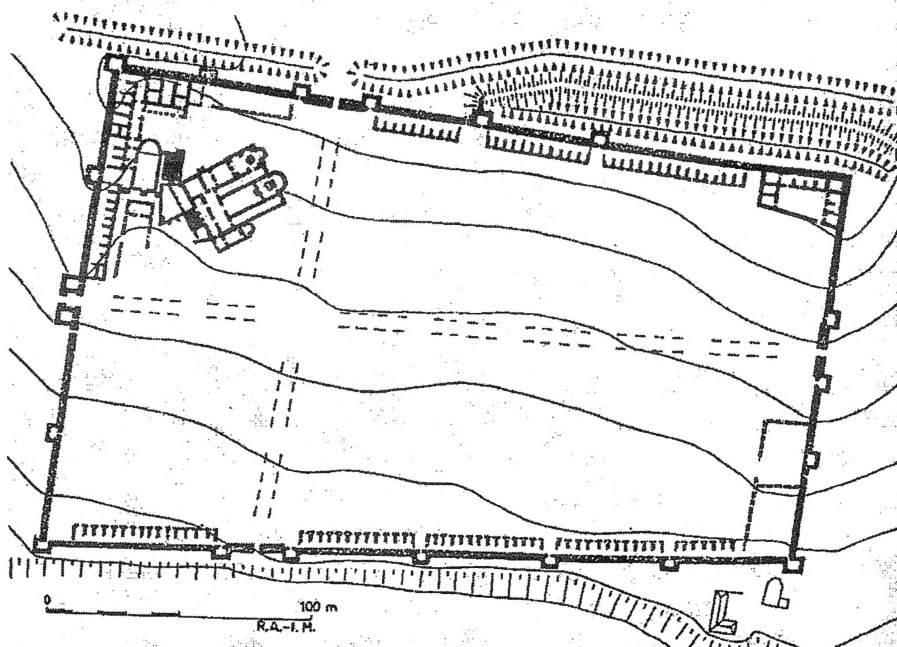
ILLUSTRATIONS



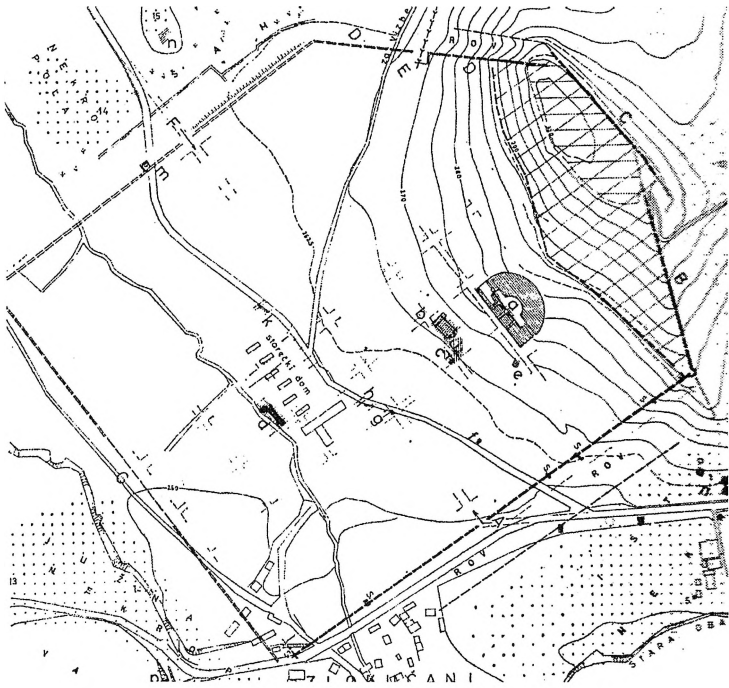
Plan 1: Stobi (Mirkovčič, 1981: 210)



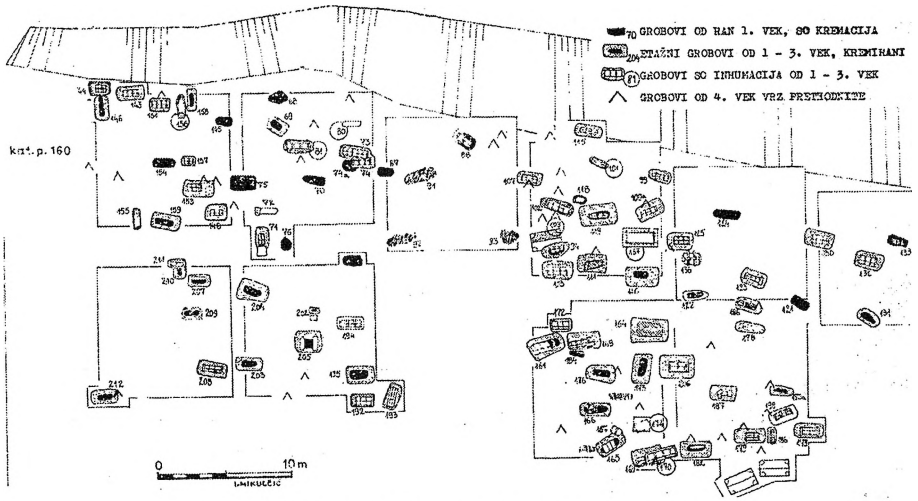
Plan 2: *Heraclea Lynkestis* (МИКУ.ИЧИК, 1974a:347)



Plan 3: *Bargala* (МИКУ.ИЧИК, 1999: 262)



Plan 4: Scupi (МИКВ. 1411К, 1982: 40)



Plan 5: The Eastern Necropolis (МИКВ. 1411К, 1982: 43)

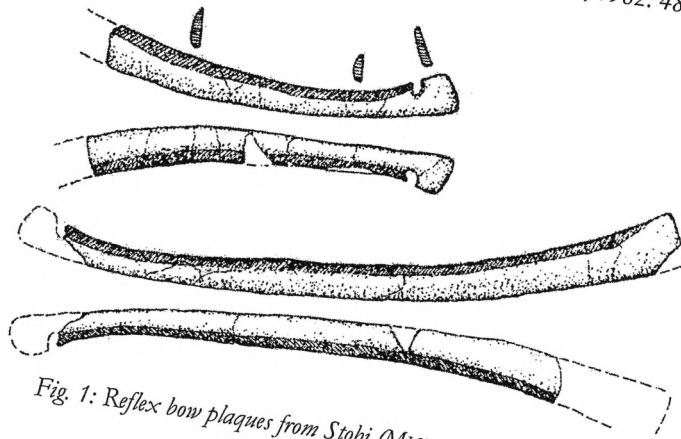
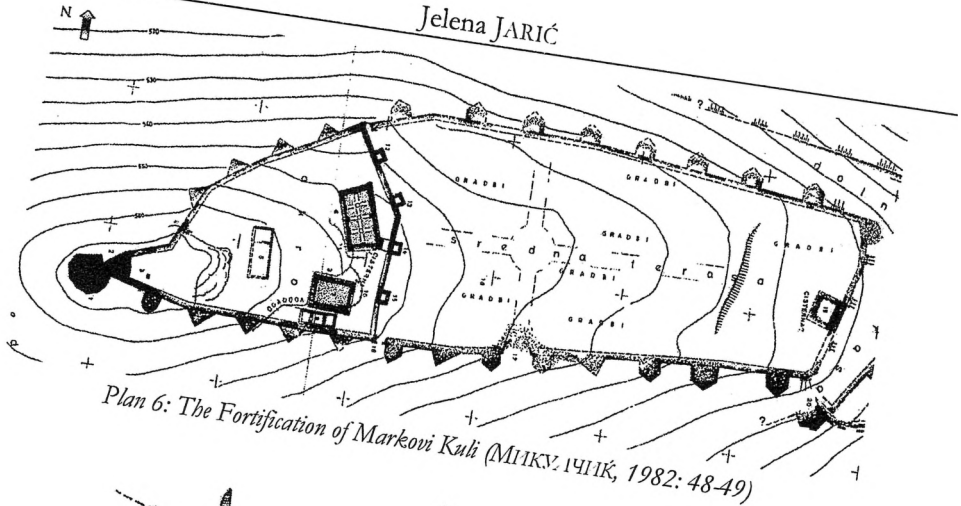


Fig. 1: Reflex bow plaques from Stobi (MIKVIČIĆ, 1987: 216)

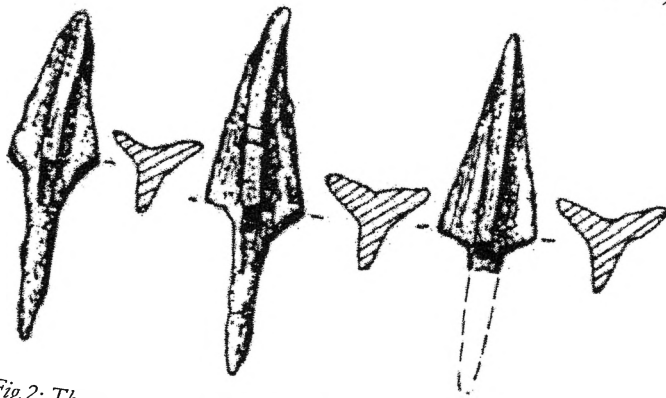


Fig. 2: Three-ribbed arrow heads from Stobi (MIKVIČIĆ, 1987: 216)

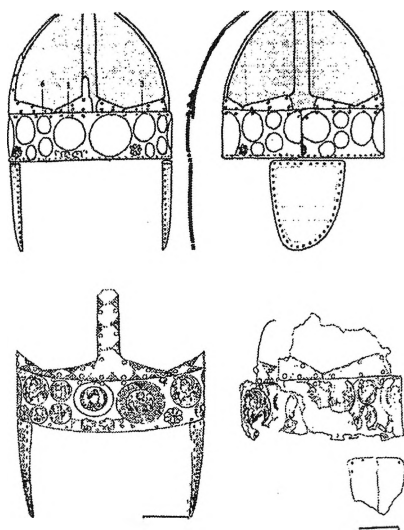


Fig.3: Reconstruction of the Baldenheim Helmet (МАНЕБА, 2001:90; МАНЕБА, 1986: 86)

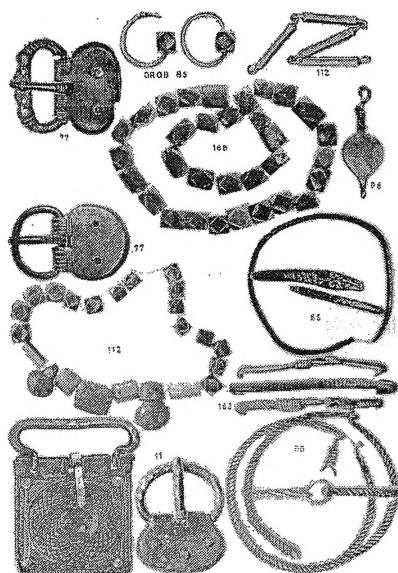


Fig.6: Some grave goods from the Eastern Necropolis (МІКУЧІІК, 1982: прилоси)

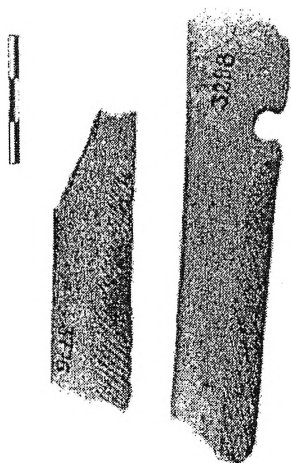


Fig. 4: Reflex bow plaques from Heraclea Lynkestis (МАНЕБА, 1985/86/87: 57)

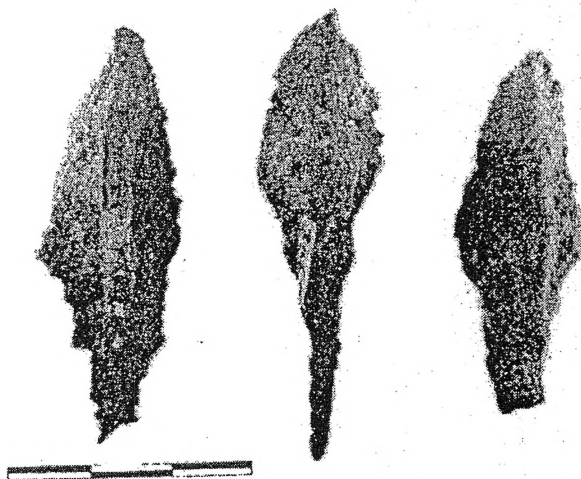


Fig.5: Three-ribbed arrow heads from Heraclea Lynkestis (МАНЕБА, 1985/86/87: 58)

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