

THE BALKANS AND THE DANUBE LIMES DURING THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH CENTURIES

No discussion of the early Slavs can avoid the very controversial issue of their role in the transformation of the Roman world that led to the “fall of the old order” and the rise of the new Empire, which historians call Byzantium.¹ The withdrawal of the Roman administration and armies from the Balkans in the early seventh century is viewed by many as a result of the Slavic *Landnahme*. More often than not, accounts of the early Slavic history focus on the destruction brought by the invading hordes to the flourishing cities of the Balkans. The classical urban culture was unable to survive the strain of the barbarian invasions. As with the Germans in the West, the Slavic “obscure progression” led to the slow dissolution of the Roman frontier and the Empire finally succumbed to the growth of forces beyond its control.

The existing evidence, written or archaeological, does not confirm this over-simplified picture. Long before the first Slavic raid attested by historical sources, the urban landscape in the Balkans began to change. It is clear, however, that some change was also taking place in the Balkans at the time of Slavic and Avar raids. The remaining question is whether or not the Slavs can be made responsible. Emphasizing almost exclusively the Roman side of the story, historians also neglected the equally important question of the Roman influence on the “invading” barbarians. The archaeological evidence of late fourth- and early fifth-century barbarian graves between the Rhine and the Loire suggests that a process of small-scale cultural and demographic change took place on both sides of the Roman frontier.² Can we envisage Roman-Slavic relations in a similar way? This chapter will focus on issues of urban change, with the purpose of showing that the Roman world, as Slavic warriors saw it in the 500s, was very different from the classical civilization many historians have in mind when describing their inroads. Using primarily archaeological evi-

¹ Whittow 1996:69–95. ² See Young 1992.

dence, I will focus on internal mechanisms of change. I will argue that Justinian’s building program drastically altered both the network of settlements in the Balkans and the relations with barbarians, specifically with the Slavs. The idea that the implementation of the fortified frontier in the mid-500s had a profound effect on the making of the Slavs will be further developed in the last chapter.

URBAN CHANGE IN THE BALKANS

More often than not, modern studies of Late Antique cities narrowly focus upon textual evidence of public institutional change within civic urban communities, ignoring the archaeological evidence. On the other hand, archaeologists inspired by the culture-historical approach strive to link archaeological phenomena with historical narratives, with particular barbarian raids or earthquakes, and ignore the historical implication of their research.³ Proponents of both approaches attempt to answer the controversial issue of what happened to the ancient city, the polis, during the fourth to sixth centuries.

Procopius seems to have been aware of a hierarchy of settlements in the Balkans.⁴ In his *Buildings*, he carefully distinguished between three major categories: large cities, called πόλεις (such as Diocletianopolis in Thessaly and Euroia in Epirus), and new foundations such as Justiniana Prima; cities ranked lower, presumably because of their size, and called πολίχνια, such as Photike and Phoinike in Epirus Vetus; and fortified sites in the countryside, such as the forts along the Danube, or the *refugia*-type settlements in Thessaly, all known as φρούρια. A comparison between Procopius and the archaeological evidence yields no clear parallels. The city described by Procopius as Justiniana Prima has been tentatively located at Caričin Grad. The identification is most likely correct, but the entire area of the site at Caričin Grad is no larger than 4.55 ha, slightly smaller than the size of Nicopolis (5.74 ha), which Procopius calls a φρούριον (Table 5). Diana, a πολίχνιον, is even smaller (1.87 ha), while Novae, a φρούριον, covers about 32.5 ha. The only observable pattern is that settlements which Procopius lists as φρούρια tend to be rather small, between one and three hectares.

Another relevant body of evidence is that of the contemporary legislation. The urban administration during the sixth century was gradually shifting from decurions, a social group on the verge of disappearing, to a clique of local notables headed by the local bishop. Emperor Anastasius granted to the committee of local landowners, chaired by the bishop, the

³ Dunn 1994:72–3. ⁴ See Dagron 1984:7–8.

Table 5 *Sixth- to seventh-century sources and Balkan settlements*

Name	Procopius	Menander	Theophylact Simocatta	Area	Churches	Other
Tropaeum Traiani	—	—	—	—	—	—
Troesmis	φρούριον (<i>Buildings</i> IV 11.20)	—	πόλις (I 8.10)	c. 12.5 ha c. 2 ha	4 3	HP —
Noviodunum	φρούριον (<i>Buildings</i> IV 11.20)	—	—	—	1	—
Ulmethum	ὄχυρωμα (<i>Buildings</i> IV 7.17)	—	—	c. 2.1 ha	1?	—
Novae	φρούριον (<i>Buildings</i> IV 11.20)	—	πόλισμα (VII 2.19)	c. 32.5 ha	2	HP?
Iatrus	φρούριον (<i>Buildings</i> IV 7.6)	—	πόλις (VII 2.16; VII 13.9)	c. 2.8 ha	1	ER W
Nicopolis	φρούριον (<i>Buildings</i> IV 11.20)	—	—	5.74 ha	2	W?
Abritus	φρούριον (<i>Buildings</i> IV 11.20)	—	(VII 13.8)	c. 14.9 ha	2	W?
Diocletianopolis	—	—	πόλις (II 17.1)	c. 30 ha	1	HP
Philippopolis	—	—	πόλισμα (II 17.2)	c. 81.6 ha	1	—
Iustiniana Prima	πόλις (<i>Buildings</i> IV 1.20)	—	—	4.55 ha	8	HP ER W,T
Serdica	πόλις (<i>Wars</i> VII.40.1; <i>Buildings</i> IV 4.3)	—	—	—	3	—
Sucidava	φρούριον (<i>Buildings</i> IV 11.20)	—	—	c. 2.1 ha	1	—
Ratiaria	πόλις (<i>Buildings</i> IV 6.24)	—	πόλις (I 8.10)	—	—	—
Castra Martis	χωρίον (<i>Buildings</i> IV 6.34)	—	—	1.25 ha	—	—
Diana	πολίχνιον (<i>Buildings</i> IV 6.6)	—	—	1.87 ha	—	—
Novae	ὄχυρωμα (<i>Buildings</i> IV 6.1)	—	—	1.8 ha	1	—
Smorna	φρούριον (<i>Buildings</i> IV 6.5)	—	—	0.2 ha	1	—
Campsä	φρούριον (<i>Buildings</i> IV 6.5)	—	—	0.1 ha	—	—
Taliata	φρούριον (<i>Buildings</i> IV 6.5)	—	—	1.8 ha	1	—
Sirmium	πόλις (<i>Wars</i> VII 33.8)	πόλις (fr. 12, 5.24; 12, 6.24; 12, 7.3; 25, 1.11, etc.)	πόλισμα, ἄστυ	—	—	W?

Notes: HP – house with peristyled courtyard; W – workshop; ER – episcopal residence; T – *thermae* (bath)

task of procuring grain for the city. The process continued under Emperor Justinian. Novel 8, of 535, prevented provincial governors from appointing their representatives in cities, while novel 65 of 538 concerning cities in Moesia allowed local committees of notables headed by bishops to replace the *curiales* in the urban administration. Novel 128 of 545 gave the final blow to the city councils by granting bishops, together with committees of notables, the right to assume the fiscal responsibilities of the decurions. The most important consequence of this series of decrees issued in a relatively short period of time is that they gave bishops considerable powers and enabled them not only to organize the civilian life of the cities, but also to take even larger responsibilities in the organization of the defense of both the city and the surrounding countryside. It is therefore no surprise that provinces as administrative units tend to be replaced by important ecclesiastical centers with their surrounding forts and *πολίχνια*. There is no Dacia Mediterranea and no Dacia Ripensis in Procopius' *Buildings*. Both provinces have been replaced by regions centered on important cities, such as Serdica, Pautalia, Naissus, Remesiana, and Aquis.⁵

CITIES: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE (FIGURE 1)

Sixth-century cities on the Black Sea coast display signs of prosperity and economic activity. The presence of merchants from the East is attested by inscriptions found at Tomis and Callatis. This economic activity seems to have caused the growth of a middle class of craftsmen and merchants, who undertook most of the traditional tasks of the decurions. An inscription found in the wall at Tomis attests that *munera* on behalf of the city were carried out in the 500s by *collegia*: the *pedatura* of the city wall was erected by the city's butchers. Scythia Minor, on the other hand, was a highly militarized province. The social group most frequently referred to in fourth- to sixth-century inscriptions is the military, while great landowners seem to have been completely absent. The active economic life in coastal cities provided the means for remarkably wealthy individuals. At Histria, excavations carried since 1949 revealed a building boom and a prosperous city. Near the city's western wall a bazaar (*tabernae*) was erected in the middle of what Romanian archaeologists called the "Commercial Sector." This area has three building phases, the second of which is dated to the second third of the sixth century. Besides two large

⁵ Maksimović 1984:156–7; Dagron 1984:10. Anastasius' legislation: *Codex Iustinianus* 1.4.17 (505); Velkov 1977:79. Justinian's novel 11 of 535 specifically deals with the power of the bishop of Aquis not only over the city, but also over its territory, forts (*castella*), and parishes (*ecclesiae*) (*Corpus Iuris Civilis* III: 94). It has been argued that the change from poleis to centers for ecclesiastical and military administration cannot be dated as late as the reign of Justinian. See Poulter 1992:131. While it is true that the origins of this process may be traced back to the third century, its effects became fully visible in the Balkans during the sixth century, particularly during Justinian's reign.

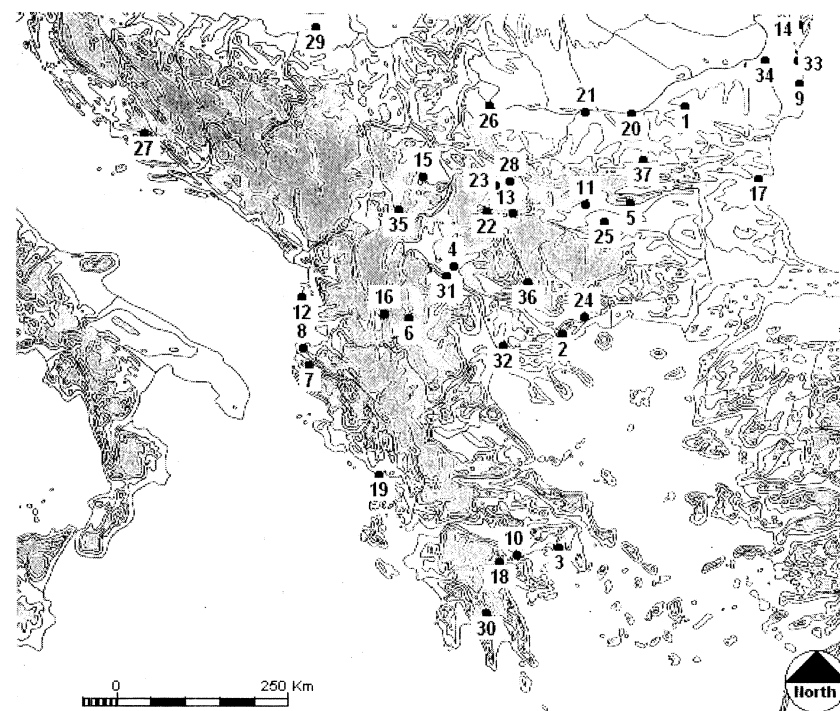


Figure 1 Location map of the principal cities mentioned in the text

- 1 – Razgrad (Abritus); 2 – Amphipolis; 3 – Athens; 4 – Bargala; 5 – Beroe; 6 – Bitola (Heraclea Lyncestis); 7 – Butrint; 8 – Bylis; 9 – Mangalia (Callatis); 10 – Corinth; 11 – Hissar (Diocletianopolis); 12 – Durrës (Dyrachium); 13 – Germania; 14 – Histria; 15 – Caričin Grad (Justiniana Prima); 16 – Ohrid (Lychnidos); 17 – Mesembria; 18 – Nemea; 19 – Nicopolis; 20 – Svishtov (Novae); 21 – Gigen (Oescus); 22 – Kyustendil (Pautalia); 23 – Pernik; 24 – Philippi; 25 – Plovdiv (Philippopolis); 26 – Ratiaria; 27 – Salona; 28 – Sofia (Serdica); 29 – Sirmium; 30 – Sparta; 31 – Stobi; 32 – Thessalonica; 33 – Constanța (Tomis); 34 – Adamclisi (Tropaeum Traiani); 35 – Ulpiana; 36 – Sandanski (Zapara?); 37 – Carevec (Zikideva?).

basilicas, it included a large number of small houses with walls of stone and clay, each room with three to seven *dolia*. Many were interpreted as storage facilities, but two of them served as smithy and bakery, respectively. Small dwellings with walls of stone and clay were also found close to the western curtain, outside the city wall.⁶

⁶ Inscriptions attesting merchants: Popescu 1976:23, 44, and 92–3. In Odessos, the preparation of hides, presumably for export, was an important local industry. Wine seems to have been a major import: a trader from Alexandria supplied large quantities on the local market at Tomis. See Beshevliev 1964:99–100, 102–4, and 126; Popescu 1976:28. See also Velkov 1983:183; Poulter 1992:127. Walls of Tomis: Popescu 1967:170. Presence of the military in Scythia Minor: Barnea 1990:402. Histria: Condurachi 1957:243, 251, and 255, and 1967:167–8; Barnea and Vulpe 1968:473.

A wealthy residential area was unearthed in the northeastern sector of the city. "Domus I," with two building phases, was a two-floored *villa urbana* with eight rooms. Its latest phase is dated by a coin struck for Tiberius II. "Domus II," across the street from "Domus I," had a large, central courtyard and an apsed *triclinium*. A third building, "Domus V," had a bath with *caldarium* and *suspensurae* found *in situ*. In this case, the central courtyard seems to have been used for the needs of the household: an oven was built in its south eastern corner. All three houses produced the only evidence of sixth-century glass windows at Histria.⁷

"Aristocratic" houses were also found on other sites. At Adamclisi (Tropaeum Traiani), excavations carried out after 1968 near the city's eastern gate revealed three buildings, one of which, built on top of older ruins of a fourth-century house, had a central courtyard and a portico. Judging from the evidence found in this house (a stone mold and a small anvil), at least one of its rooms may have served as a workshop.⁸

The urban landscape was drastically modified by new buildings, first of all by churches. No other public buildings were found in any city of Dobrudja. At Slava Rusă (Ibida), the only monumental building erected was the three-aisled basilica with mosaic pavement. Three churches existed at Histria during the sixth century. Three new basilicas were also built at Adamclisi during the period between Anastasius' and Justinian's reigns. At Constanța (Tomis), two basilicas were erected in the late 400s and the 500s in the western part of the city. At Iglița (Troesmis), older excavations carried out in 1865 by Ambroise Baudry and Gustave Boissière in the eastern settlement revealed the existence of three basilicas, though it remains unclear whether or not they could all be dated to the sixth century. Salvage excavations at Isaccea (Noviodunum) revealed a basilica built next to the city's northern wall. At Mangalia (Callatis), a fifth-century basilica of Syrian plan, built against the city's northern rampart, was twice renewed during the sixth century, when it probably became an episcopal church. After 600, walls of stone bonded with clay were erected in the interior, the basilica being already abandoned.⁹

⁷ Barnea and Vulpe 1968:427; Condurachi 1957:259 and 254 fig. 3; Pippidi, Bordenache, and Eftimie 1961:238; Condurachi et al. 1970:187-8; Condurachi 1975:174-9, 176 fig. 3, and 179 fig. 4. The apsed *triclinium* was usually interpreted as a private chapel, which led to the wrong conclusion that the house belonged to the local bishop. See, more recently, Sâmpetru 1994:62. For apsed *triclinia*, see Sadini 1993:148-9.

⁸ Barnea et al. 1979:106; Bogdan-Cătăniciu 1979:185; Sâmpetru 1994:33-53.

⁹ Slava Rusă: Ștefan 1977:457-8. Histria: Barnea 1958:287-9 and 291-2 and 1960a:205. Adamclisi: Barnea and Vulpe 1968:470-1; Barnea et al. 1979:229. Constanța: Barnea and Vulpe 1968:466. Two lead seals were found in Constanța (Tomis), one belonging to a bishop, the other to a deacon. They must have been members of the local clergy, for ecclesiastical seals rarely moved beyond the area of their production. See Barnea 1984:97 and 99; Morrisson and Cheynet 1990:110. Iglița and Isaccea: Barnea and Vulpe 1968:425 and 477. Mangalia: Theodorescu 1963; Pillinger 1992:97-8.

A similar picture emerges from Moesia Inferior. The late sixth-century source (the *Feldzugsjournal*) used by Theophylact Simocatta for his account of Maurice's campaigns against the Slavs and the Avars in the 590s lists thirty towns in Dacia and Moesia with a cluster of cities between Novae and Iatrus. Theophylact called them πόλεις. At Svishtov (Novae), the excavations carried out since 1960 by a joint Bulgarian-Polish team showed that in its last phase of existence, tentatively dated to the fifth or sixth century, the fourth-century building with peristyled courtyard located in the northwestern corner of the city was subdivided into smaller rooms by walls of stone bonded with clay, while its northern portico was blocked. Between 470 and 480, Novae was ruled by Theoderic the Great and it may be during this period that the episcopal basilica was built on top of the city's abandoned *thermae* (bath). With its long and wide nave, the three-aisled basilica is the largest of all early Christian churches currently known in Bulgaria. Three other basilicas were built in the eastern part of the city, north of the forum, and outside the city's walls, to the west. Around 500 the first intramural burials appeared near the episcopal basilica, probably of some wealthy sponsors. During Justinian's reign, both the basilica and the episcopal residence located on its northern side underwent substantial restoration. To the northeast, some small houses and workshops were built in stone and clay.¹⁰

An important city existed not far from the abandoned site at Nicopolis, on top of the Carevec hill near modern Veliko Tărnovo. It has been tentatively identified with Zikideva mentioned by Procopius. The city was built entirely during the period between Anastasius and Justinian. As a sixth-century foundation, the city plan is characterized by the absence of the forum and of any orthogonal street grid. The main orientation of the street leading to the gates does not coincide with the longitudinal axis. In addition, there is no *intervallum* (i.e., a ringroad all along the city ramparts). The city was dominated by a three-aisled basilica, which was superposed by the late medieval church of the patriarch of Tărnovo. A sixth-century burial, presumably of some high-rank clergyman or of a wealthy donor, was found outside the church, next to the apse. A single-naved church existed north of the three-aisled basilica, which was later connected with a group of houses built in stone and adobe. A reconstruction phase of the mid-sixth century transformed the small church into another three-aisled basilica, while a large, two-storied building was added to the southeast. The building included a cistern and its ground

¹⁰ Theophylact's account and cities in Moesia Inferior: Schreiner 1985:62-4. For Svishtov, see Press et al. 1973:103-24; Chichikova 1983:15-6; Parnicki-Pudelko 1983:242 and 268-9 and 1984:271 and 301-2; Press and Sarnowski 1990:242-3; Kalinowski 1999.

rooms were vaulted. The church and the two-storied building were interpreted as a "monastery compound," but the existing evidence suggests that the building functioned as a hostel, rather than as cells for monks. Finally, a single-naved church to the north was attached to a cruciform building with a common portico, arguably a sixth-century martyrion. A two-storied, "aristocratic" house with peristyled courtyard and vaulted ground rooms was found nearby. Rooms built in stone and adobe were later added to the north and to the south. Other similar rooms, some equipped with cisterns, were excavated in the northern and south-eastern parts of the city. The remains of a second "aristocratic" house with an apsed *triclinium* were found in the northern region. During the second habitation phase, dated to the mid-sixth century, this building was divided into three rooms, and a new *triclinium* added on its eastern side. A three-aisled church was built in front of the main city gate. The current interpretation of this odd location is that the basilica secured divine protection of that key point in the city defense. The last coin found on site was minted for Constantine IV and Tiberius (659–81), but the site seems to have been already abandoned by the beginning of Heraclius' reign.¹¹

At Razgrad (Abritus), the excavations led by Teofil Ivanov focused more on the city's defenses and very little is known about its internal organization. We only know that walls of stone and brick were erected within the defenses during the fifth and sixth century. A three-aisled basilica existed east of the west gate, but its dating to the sixth century is not certain. Building VII with peristyled courtyard (also known as the "town house") produced a large number of iron implements (plowshares, sickles, pruning knife, woodcarving tools, etc.). However, their dating to the sixth century is doubtful. A wall of stone bonded with clay was erected during this period inside the abandoned *horreum*, and other similar structures appeared north and south of the *horreum*. Other buildings of similar fabric were built along the walls during the fifth and sixth century. At Gigen (Oescus), where no basilica was found so far, the portico and the courtyard's vestibule of the temple dedicated to Fortuna were subdivided during the fifth and sixth centuries and rooms were built with walls of stone bonded with clay.¹²

Some cities in Thrace, such as Philippopolis, continued to erect statues of emperors and army commanders as late as the end of the fifth century, which suggests that municipal life may have survived longer than in any other place. But even in Philippopolis, the ancient urban street grid seems

¹¹ Angelov 1962:23–5 and 1986:50–55; Hoddinott 1975:251; Tuleskov 1988:21–2; Pisarev 1990; Dinchev 1997b.

¹² Razgrad: Ivanov 1980:77; Ivanov and Stoianov 1985:27, 31, and 33. Early Byzantine tools and implements: Popović 1994:5. Gigen: Ivanov 1974:64; Ivanov 1993:42.

to have been drastically altered. Salvage excavations in the downtown area of modern Plovdiv unearthed a considerable portion of the ancient city's forum. During the first half of the fifth century, a large three-aisled basilica was built on top of two *insulae*, thus blocking the *decumanus* and the *cardo* between them. By the end of the following century, the basilica itself was abandoned and turned into a cemetery. But the baths of the city remained in use until the late 500s. At Hissar (Diocletianopolis), an "aristocratic" house was accidentally discovered by bulldozers, which destroyed half the remains of the building. The plan was reconstructed from what was left of the foundations plus a partial excavation of the western half. The western part of this multi-roomed building was occupied by a spacious peristyled courtyard, the vestibule of which was paved with brick. It led to a large room, no doubt the *triclinium*. There is significant evidence of glass windows. Most likely, the building had two phases, the first of which could be dated to the early 400s. Beroe/Augusta Traiana also underwent major transformations during the sixth century. A house by the south gate, excavated in 1962, overlaid an older building. Two rooms produced *dolia* and probably served for storage. Another fourth-century house built at the corner of the *cardo* and the *decumanus* retained its original floor and exterior walls, but the interior was radically altered. A series of rooms were located on the southern side, with a small court with a pool faced with marble slabs, a big stone mortar, and five or six *dolia*.¹³

Little is known about cities in Haemimons and Europe, except Mesembria, the only city in the entire diocese of Thrace with five basilicas, only one of which, the church near the city's northern tower, was explored. Nothing is known about cities in the immediate vicinity of the capital, in the region of the modern frontier between Turkey and Bulgaria, except Annie Pralong's description of the early Byzantine walls at Çorlu (Tzurullum) and Kiyiköy.¹⁴

Before Justinian's reign, Serdica was an urban center of the foremost importance in northern Illyricum, i.e., the diocese of Dacia. The city was an important bishopric, whose last bishop, Felix, was mentioned in 594. It was a local bishop, Leontius, who, according to an inscription found in 1953, and dated to 580, sponsored the restoration of the city's aqueduct. The main cemetery of early Byzantine Serdica was located along the road to Philippopolis. The St Sophia church probably functioned as

¹³ Plovdiv: Hoddinott 1975:291; Velkov 1977:153; Kessiakova 1989. Hissar: Hoddinott 1975:310–13 and 314 fig. 19; Gorbanov 1987; Madzharov 1989.

¹⁴ Nesebăr: Hoddinott 1975:323; Velkov 1992:19–20. It is not without interest that Mesembria, together with Serdica, was the only city in the Balkans with a church dedicated to St Sophia. Çorlu and Kiyiköy: Pralong 1988:185–6 and 192. For other sixth-century finds in Thrace, see Bakirtzis 1989b:46.

basilica coemeterialis. Nothing is known about the city's internal organization. At Kyustendil (Pautalia), the site in the plain coexisted with a fort built some 150 meters above it, on the Hissarlyk hill. In the plain, a three-aisled, single-apsed basilica was found, with fine mosaic floor, dated to the fifth century. At Germania, Belisarius' hometown, the defenses were restored under Justinian, but nothing is known about the internal organization of the city. The same is true about Ulpiana, in Dardania. Vladislav Popović suggested that after 545 Justiniana Prima replaced Ulpiana, now rebaptized Justiniana Secunda, as metropolis of Dardania. This, he argued, was meant to eliminate any possible competition between the bishoprics of Serdica and Justiniana Prima.¹⁵

A similar picture emerges from the Bulgarian excavations on the Krakra hill near Pernik. Despite claims to the contrary, there is enough evidence to suspect that walls built later were erected on top of earlier, presumably sixth-century ramparts. Within the settled area, archaeologists found houses with walls of stone, mortar, and adobe, sometimes equipped with brick ovens. The settlement had two basilicas, one of which was destroyed during the second half of the sixth century. A few *exagia* indicate that at Pernik gold coins were common enough to require control. The presence of gold coins may bear witness to the presence of the military.¹⁶

The most important city in the region was, however, Justiniana Prima, identified with the site at Caričin Grad. The city had been built shortly before 535, as Justinian's novel 11 established an archbishopric there. The novel announced the imminent transfer of the Illyrian prefecture to Justiniana Prima, but it is unlikely that it was ever moved from Thessalonica. This may further explain the specific design of this imperial foundation in the Balkans. Excavations at Caričin Grad, which started in 1912, revealed that at first the acropolis, no larger than 1 ha, was occupied by a large episcopal church with a baptistery and a residential area to the north, perhaps an episcopal residence. The upper city is divided into four unequal parts by two main colonnaded streets meeting in a large, circular plaza surrounded by porticoes. The lower city, measuring 2.25 ha in area, was built only later, after c. 550. The north-south colonnaded street, which was curved to protect a large basilica with transept, continued to the south gate as a simple street without porticoes.¹⁷

¹⁵ Sofia: Stancheva 1978:217; Velkov 1991:94. Bishop Leontius: Beshevliev 1964:2. Theuprepus, whose epitaph was found in Sofia, may have also been bishop of Serdica (see Beshevliev 1964:10). For the St Sofia church, see Sotiroff 1972; Hoddinott 1975:269; Kousoupov 1984; Chaneva-Dechevska 1984:619; Krautheimer 1986:256. Kyustendil: Hoddinott 1975:285. Germania: Bavant 1984:247. Ulpiana: Popović 1989–1990:279–80.

¹⁶ Changova 1963; Liubenova 1981:112 and 195. *Exagia* and gold coins: Vladimirova 1985.

¹⁷ Justiniana Prima and novel 11: Maksimović 1984:145 and 149; Döpmann 1987. For Caričin Grad, see Duval and Popović 1984:549; Bavant 1984:273; Duval 1984:407–14; Krautheimer 1986:274. Episcopal residence: Müller-Wiener 1989; *contra*: Duval 1984:417.

The upper city provided evidence for significant economic activities. Workshops and a bakery, as well as store-rooms with *dolia*, were found north of the west-east colonnaded street. An "aristocratic" house (*villa urbana*) with central courtyard and apsed *triclinium* was located just south of the three-aisled basilica in the eastern part of the upper city. Just as in Histria, the vestibule of the house had a baking oven, arguably used for the needs of the entire household. Later, some workshops, including a jeweller's shop, were built in the area between the *villa urbana* and the city's southern wall. At that time, the basilica with transept was already abandoned and a few houses with simple hearths and a baking oven were built in its ruins. Other houses with walls built in stone bonded with earth were found north of the basilica. In addition, two structures, one outside the walls, close to the south gate of the upper city, the other close to the east gate of the lower city, were interpreted as *thermae*. Soon after being built, they were abandoned and the latter's ruins were reused by houses with walls of stone bonded with clay.¹⁸

At Caričin Grad, as many as eight churches have come to light, all different in plan from each other, but going back to prototypes of an earlier date, drawn from Constantinople or Thessalonica and merged with local elements. The nave and the atrium of the cathedral had mosaic floors. The eastern portico of the atrium of the basilica B with cruciform plan produced three burials, a clear indication that shortly after the city's foundation, burials had already appeared in intramural contexts. Except for a capital of Proconnesian marble from the tribelon of the basilica with transept (basilica D), which bears Justinian's monogram, there are no dedicatory inscriptions of donors. All extant mosaic floors (the cathedral's baptistery, the basilica with transept, basilica E, basilica B, the cathedral, and the atrium of the upper city *thermae*) display a remarkable unity of style, which may indicate the same "workshop" of local, provincial taste. The building program at Caričin Grad seems to have been extremely ambitious and very expensive, but the actual building was left to local craftsmen working with local techniques.¹⁹

Like Carevec, Caričin Grad was a sixth-century foundation, with no significant building traditions. It is not without interest that when describing Justiniana Prima, though referring to administrative buildings, Procopius mentioned no civic administration, and no structures of that sort have been found. Bernard Bavant argued that the building of the city

¹⁸ Mano-Zisi 1969:210 and 212; Bavant 1984:276 and 279–81.

¹⁹ Krautheimer 1986:273; Duval 1984:410, 421–2, 432, and 480. For Proconnesian marble capitals as indications of imperial munificence, see Barsanti 1989:211. There is no indication of any Constantinopolitan work at Caričin Grad, though carvers from the Capital may have worked elsewhere in Illyricum, as well as in Crimea or on the eastern Black Sea coast. See Sodini 1984b:256; Bortoli-Kazanski 1981:63; Khrushkova 1979:134. Intramural burials at Caričin Grad: Jeremić 1994–5:183–6.

started shortly before 535 on the acropolis and in the upper city area. This building phase included the basilica with transept, the lower city *thermae*, and the basilica with triconch, located some 350 meters away from the lower city's rampart. The rampart itself was built only later, during the second half of Justinian's reign, together with the upper city *thermae*, the two-aisled basilica, and the lower city cistern. Bavant suggested that this second building phase also included some drastic alteration of the initial building program. Its main purpose seems to have been to include as many churches and public buildings as possible within the city's walls. Soon, however, many public buildings and churches (such as the basilica with transept) were abandoned and an encroachment phase seems to have taken place. This third building phase, dated after c. 565 until about 615, is characterized by houses with walls built in stone bonded with clay and a significant quantity of agricultural implements, which indicate that the status of the new inhabitants was now defined by agricultural occupations, rather than crafts. This phase has been traditionally attributed to a Slavic settlement following the invasions of the late sixth and early seventh centuries, but Bavant rightly pointed out that the stone-cum-clay building technique has nothing to do with sunken buildings found on contemporary sites north of the Danube river (see Chapter 6).²⁰

That this building phase predates the abandonment of the city and the settlement of the Slavs in the Balkans is clearly indicated by a house found in the western portico of the once colonnaded street running from the circular plaza to the upper city's south gate. The house was built with walls of stone and clay and had a small hearth. Three *dolia* were found inside the house, all filled with grain. Two other, smaller, vessels contained dried pears and nuts. Domestic animal bones were scattered around the hearth, together with three arrow heads, an earring with basket-shaped pendant, two fibulae, and two belt-buckles. One of the two buckles has good parallels in the destruction debris of the abandoned houses of the palaestra in Anemurium, on the Cilician coast. The other buckle belongs to a type with shield-shaped end, derived from the so-called Salona-Histria class with belt-strap. Such buckles, also found at Anemurium, are especially frequent on several early Byzantine sites in the Balkans and in Crimea. Clear chronological indications are also provided by one of the two brooches, a cast fibula with bent stem. Such fibulae were produced in and associated with military sites on the Danube frontier, as evidenced by the workshop found at Turnu Severin (Drobeta). A date from Justin II's reign is secured by two hoards found at Bracigovo and Koprivec, respectively, both including such fibulae and concluding

²⁰ Procopius, *Buildings* IV 1. See Bavant 1984:282–5.

with coins struck for that emperor. A date from the late sixth century for the house in the western portico is also suggested by the bow fibula, a variant of Werner's class II C, as well as by the earring with basket-shaped pendant. Such earrings, derived from Late Roman specimens with à-jour pendant welded to the ring, were found in late sixth- or seventh-century cemeteries north of the Alps and in Pannonia, but no such finds are known from contemporary sites north of the Danube river.²¹

The evidence cited shows that the house cannot be interpreted as "Slavic infiltration into the Byzantine urban design," primarily because it predates the earliest evidence of Slavic settlements in the Balkans, known from historical sources. Instead, it seems to indicate the presence of the military (arrow heads, cast fibula with bent stem) and the shift from a purely urban to a ruralized environment. The excavations at Caričin Grad certainly bear out Procopius' description of the city's amenities, according to which it boasted churches, fountains, an aqueduct, baths, paved streets, private buildings, and colonnades. But they also show that less than fifty years after the city's foundation, Caričin Grad witnessed the same process of subdivision and encroachment visible on other, less representative, sites.²²

At Sirmium, this process had started long before the sixth century. In the late 300s or early 400s, the city's walls had been leveled and a three-aisled basilica erected on top of them. A group of houses built with *spolia* bonded with earth surrounded the church. By the second half of the fifth century and during the sixth century, the basilica was abandoned and, on top of its ruins, new houses were built with brick fragments bonded with clay. The remains of the *villa urbana* located to the north of the hippodrome and the "aristocratic" house near the city's southern gate (probably a fourth-century imperial residence) were drastically altered to accommodate a few structures built in the stone-cum-clay technique. In both cases, this new occupation also included isolated burials, some cutting through the mosaic floor of the *villa urbana*. As the city was occupied by the Ostrogoths and then by the Gepids, most of the public buildings were abandoned, while the city itself disintegrated into small hamlets emerging in urban areas not used before.²³

Except Sirmium, no other city on the northern frontier was systematically excavated and studied. A joint Bulgarian-Italian team began

²¹ Mano-Zisi 1958:312–13. Buckles: Russell 1982:142–3 fig. 6/7–8 and 7/21; Uenze 1966:166; Varsik 1992:80. Cast fibula with bent stem: Bejan 1976; Uenze 1974 and 1992:156; Janković 1980:173; Curta 1992:84. See also Kharalambieva and Ivanov 1986:16; Kharalambieva and Atanasov 1991:57. Bow fibulae: Werner 1950; see also Chapter 6. Earrings with basket-shaped pendants: Kastelić 1956:127; Slabe 1986:201; Bierbrauer 1987:147; Riemer 1992:126.

²² Mano-Zisi 1958:312. Procopius' description of Justiniana Prima: *Buildings* IV 1; Poulter 1992:125.

²³ Popović 1982:550–4.

working at Archar (Ratiaria) in 1978, but no relevant sixth-century material is known from the site. We only know that under Justinian those parts of the city were restored which had been severely damaged by the Hunnic raids of the mid-400s. An inscription ("Anastasiana Ratiaria semper floreat"), found in 1983 in the wall of the city's main gate, was initially interpreted as evidence of an earlier phase of reconstruction under Anastasius. This interpretation, however, was recently challenged by Vladislav Popović on philological grounds.²⁴

Evidence of an early phase of subdivision and encroachment also comes from several Macedonian cities. At Stobi, large palatial residences with elaborate courtyards with decorated fountains, floors with pavements of mosaic or *opus sectile*, and walls covered with frescoes and, occasionally, mosaics, were still in use in the early 500s. At that time, however, the theater was only a quarry for building material. Small houses with walls of stone and clay were built in its ruins. Similar houses were found on the eastern slope of the acropolis, to the west from the theater. Stobi had five basilicas. After the early sixth-century earthquake, the episcopal church was modified to accommodate galleries built above the aisles and a large terrace was built between the church and the baptistery. Sidewalks were added beneath arcades along the eastern side of the Via Sacra and in front of the basilica's main entrance. The walls of the church were covered with marble revetment, colored stucco, and fresco. The narthex and the south aisle were repaved with fine mosaics. The care and expense needed to restore the episcopal basilica so lavishly are in sharp contrast to the refurbishment of other buildings in the city. In the aftermath of the Hunnic invasion of the mid-400s, the House of the Fuller (the name is derived from the quantity of murex-shells found to the north of the apsidal hall), built in the early 300s, was divided by rough walls of brick bonded with clay into a storehouse and a workshop. Both produced a considerable quantity of spindle whorls and loom weights. Sometime after 570, the city was abandoned before the Avars and the Slavs began raiding the area. The uniform presence of powdery grey silt, several feet deep all over the site, suggests that during the sixth century Stobi experienced extremes of cold and dry weather followed by wind-blown dust storms which aggravated the existing problem of soil erosion.²⁵

At Bitola (Heraclea Lyncestis), the theater was also abandoned in the fifth century. Just as in Stobi, it became a quarry for building material and at some point after 562, a group of houses with walls of stone bonded

²⁴ Susini 1982:239; Giorgetti 1980 and 1983:19 and 33. Inscription: Velkov 1985:886; Popović 1989-90:283.

²⁵ Mikulčić 1974:200 and 1982:536-7; Neppi Modona 1974:112; Popović 1982:561-2; Wiseman 1984:310; Hattersley-Smith 1988:85, 106-9, and 123.

with clay was built in its ruins. One of them produced no less than six querns. Around the middle of the sixth century, the colonnade in front of the small basilica's baptistery was dismantled and the whole area enlarged to include a second mosaic floor, which is strikingly similar in composition to the narthex mosaic in the basilica with transept at Caričin Grad, dating from the second or third quarter of the century. When the narthex of the small basilica was later in need of repair, the large worn areas between the entrance doors on the west side of the narthex and the central door into the nave were simply patched up with bricks and mortar. Both basilicas at Heraclea Lyncestis seem to have been built with money donated by private individuals, as suggested by the nave mosaic of the large basilica and the Corinthian capital with monogram found in the small basilica. One of these donors may have owned the *villa urbana* built in the late third century in the eastern part of the city and rebuilt in the fifth and sixth century. By contrast, at Sandanski (tentatively identified with Zapara, mentioned as bishopric in 553), the inscription of the floor mosaic in the three-aisled basilica partially excavated in 1960 indicates Bishop John as the main donor. The city had three other basilicas, two of which had mosaic floors.²⁶

At Ohrid (Lychnidos), although seven churches were found inside the ancient city's defenses, very little is known about its internal organization. Sometime during the fifth or sixth century, the acropolis was fortified with strong walls, but nothing is known about the lower city's street grid. The same is true for Bargala, where a large episcopal basilica was remodeled in the late 400s or early 500s. Its orientation is entirely different from all other, earlier, buildings, which suggests that the old street grid was abandoned after c. 500. After the destruction of the episcopal basilica, a smaller, single-naved church was built on top of its ruins, reusing many of the architectural fragments of the former building. Coins struck for Emperor Phocas indicate that this church was still in use in the early seventh century.²⁷

An entirely different picture results from the examination of three Macedonian towns located on the coast: Philippi, Amphipolis (near modern Iraklitsa), and Thessalonica. At Philippi, despite numerous alterations to the structures within the *insulae* and the partial covering up of two streets, the initial grid system dominates the urban plan until the early

²⁶ Bitola: Neppi Modona 1974:112; Popović 1982:560 fig. 16; Hattersley-Smith 1988:184, 186, and 190; Mikulčić 1986a:237. The date 562 is that of an inscription mentioning Emperor Justinian as the sponsor for the restoration of the city's aqueduct. See Dzhidrova 1999:282. For the extramural *basilica coemeterialis* with mosaic floor, see Maneva 1981-2. Sandanski: Ivanov, Serafimova, and Nikolov 1969; Plakov 1973:177-80. Bishop John: Pillinger 1985:298.

²⁷ Ohrid: Mikulčić 1974:194 and 1986a:238. Bargala: Aleksova 1969:110, 1975-78:77-9, and 1986:24.

600s. New alterations were brought to the Octagon in the first quarter of the sixth century and though small buildings obstructed the southwest street sometime after *c.* 600, the Commercial Road remained open to traffic until the ninth century. Basilica C, restored in the second quarter of the sixth century, yielded a considerable quantity of colored fragments of glass, many of which were carefully cut into different shapes and have been found in association with strips of lead. This seems to be the earliest known example of stained-glass. Pieces of colored glass were also found in the second phase of the extramural basilica, reconstructed and remodeled under Justinian. That Philippi had its own glass-making industry is suggested by a glass and metal workshop built on top of a Roman building in the southern range of the city. Basilica B (Direkler) had a cross-domed unit in addition to the vaults over the aisles, galleries, nave, and transept wings. The combination of a transept and a cross dome reminds one of the Justinianic buildings of Constantinople, in particular of St Sophia and SS. Sergius and Bacchus. Not long after the building's erection in *c.* 540, the dome collapsed and the main part of the basilica was never rebuilt, but structures on the northern and southern sides of the transept continued to be used as baptistery and small chapel, respectively. Nothing is known about further changes during the seventh century, the next piece of evidence being coin-dated to the 800s.²⁸

Amphipolis had several basilicas, four of which (including a hexagonal church) were built at different times during the sixth century. By the end of that century, the acropolis was surrounded by a new wall, the west side of which was built across the narthex of basilica A of the first half of the sixth century. A fifth basilica (C) was thus left outside the encircled area. Its lavish decoration seems to have been paid for by a group of donors, as evidenced by the mosaic inscription. A small, single-naved chapel was erected in the late 500s or slightly later on the basilica's eastern side.²⁹

Still more interesting is the evidence from Thessalonica. In his *Secret History*, Procopius refers to the grandfather and father of Antonina, Belisarius' wife, who had demonstrated their skills as charioteers in Thessalonica, an indication that the city's hippodrome was still in operation during the early sixth century. Archbishop John, the author of the first book of the *Miracles of St Demetrius*, mentions both the city's stadium and the theater. During the plague, shortly before the siege of 586, the sick who had taken refuge in the church of St Demetrius were making their way every morning to the baths. We are also told that Marianos, the praetorian prefect, descended from the church of St Demetrius to the

²⁸ Hattersley-Smith 1988:133, 149, 155, and 158–9.

²⁹ Hattersley-Smith 1988:202 and 207–8.

praetorium, which was probably located in the lower, southern, part of the city. Marianos was also depicted as donor on one of the basilica's exterior walls. Two other wealthy citizens, Menas and John, donated money for the reconstruction of the wooden roof and the *ciborium* of the basilica of St Demetrius.³⁰

In addition to the episcopal basilica, several other churches were built in Thessalonica between 400 and 600: St Demetrius, Acheiropoietos, and the octagonal church near the Vardar Gate. The Rotunda was also converted into a church, now known as St George's. In the Acheiropoietos, two inscriptions surviving on the soffits in the south arcade and the central arch of the tribelon refer to private donors. St Demetrius, on the other hand, was the beneficiary of imperial patronage, as evidenced by a mutilated inscription found on the ground, near the basilica's north wall. The inscription may have been an edict issued by Justinian I. More than a century later, Justinian II granted all profits from the city's salt-pans to the same church, as evidenced by another inscription, now lost. While becoming the main focus of local patronage and occasional imperial donations, Thessalonica's new churches coexisted for a time with elements of the ancient city, such as the agora, which retained its commercial significance, as suggested by the association of the Megalophoros' western side with the copper trade from Late Antiquity through the present day. Unfortunately, none of the three Macedonian cities discussed above produced any evidence of urban habitat, since research has typically focused on either city walls or Christian monuments. The only *villa urbana* known from southern Macedonia is that explored at Tocatlis, on the island of Thasos, and dated to the fifth or sixth century. It was a two-storied building, with a large atrium and a fountain.³¹

The evidence of the *Miracles of St Demetrius* may help explain how Thessalonica survived as a major urban center in the Balkans. On at least two occasions, the Slavs launched attacks against the city while its citizens were busy harvesting their crops on their estates and small holdings outside the city walls. But at the same time, Thessalonica relied heavily on its rations of public grain (*annona*), as evidenced by the eighth homily of Book 1. Preventing corn supplies from reaching the city must have been one of the main reasons behind the attempt of the Slavs to block

³⁰ Procopius, *Secret History* 1. 11; *Miracles of St Demetrius* 1. 14.132 (theater), 1. 1.23 (*praetorium*), 1. 1.24 (stadium, Marianos as donor), 1. 3.39 (baths), 1. 6.60–1 (Menas and John as donors). For the stadium, see also Vickers 1971. See also Spieser 1984a:319; Hattersley-Smith 1988:63, 66, and 236. Another praetorian prefect, Hormisdas, may have been responsible for the city's impregnable walls. See Vickers 1974:251 and 254.

³¹ Churches and inscriptions in Thessalonica: Popović 1982:561; Hattersley-Smith 1988:269, 304, 310, and 319; Spieser 1984a:319. Tocatlis: Sodini 1984a:357.

the port with their fleet of canoes and to attack Thessalonica by sea. This further suggests that a crucial factor in the city's survival was its role as a harbor which remained open to outside shipping. As long as Egypt was under Byzantine control, Thessalonica continued to receive regular supplies of corn to supplement the foods its population cultivated locally. With the Persian conquest of Egypt in 619, the Empire's main source of grain was lost, and the city could no longer expect shipments of public corn. Thessalonica was thus forced to depend on the products of its own hinterland and on those brought from the neighboring regions. In 677, an embassy was sent to the Belegezites of Thessaly to purchase food. One could further speculate that the survival of urban centers and regular supplies of public corn were intimately connected and that this relation may explain the collapse of Byzantine authority in the Balkans during the seventh century.³²

Evidence for a later survival of coastal cities also comes from the western Balkans. The early Byzantine walls at Nicopolis in Epirus Vetus enclosed an area of 30 ha in the northeastern sector of the early Roman city. The towers at the west gate were similar in size to those of the large wall at Constantinople and to the larger towers at Resafa. This suggests that the building was entrusted to an imperial architect, being sponsored by the urban community and by the provincial authorities, with some imperial assistance. Nothing is known, however, about the city's internal organization, except three churches, dating to the sixth century: the "Alkison basilica" (also known as basilica B), built at some point before 518; the basilica D, perhaps contemporary; and the "Dumetior basilica" (basilica A), dated to the second quarter of the century. All show the layout of tripartite basilicas with transepts. At Butrint, the early Roman walls were still in use during the sixth century. A three-aisled basilica with mosaic floor was erected during this period on top of an earlier, large, cistern on the acropolis. A second church existed in the lower city, beside the so-called "tower gate." A considerable quantity of *spolia*, including Roman columns with Corinthian capitals, was used for this building. During Justinian's reign a circular baptistery was built inside a quadrangular structure, which is reminiscent of the great baptisteries of Italy. A splendid mosaic, one of the largest known so far from Late Antiquity, decorated the floor of the baptistery. Several details, such as red flowers on waving black stalks, suggest the work of local craftsmen, since very similar patterns were found in the small chapel attached to the narthex of the "Dumetior basilica" at Nicopolis. But the most impressive building is the triconch palace, located next to the lower city southern rampart.

³² *Miracles of St Demetrius* I 13.127 and II 2.199, II 1.180, II 4.254. See also Durliat 1990:389–99.

The tri-apsidal *tricladium* opening into a large peristyle is dated to the early sixth century, but the palace seems never to have been completed. Despite the presence of small niches for statuary in the interior of the northern and eastern apses, no traces of decoration were found, while the primary occupation appears to be industrial or agricultural. Soon after the abandonment of the building project, some rooms were subdivided by walls of earth-bonded construction. By the late sixth century, the first burials appeared within the triconch or cut through the former peristyle. A midden deposit in the northern part of the building produced fragments of sixth- and early seventh-century amphoras and glassware, showing that the last phase of habitation within the ruins of formerly finer buildings was still associated with long-distance trade across the Mediterranean. Moreover, it has been suggested that the acropolis continued to be occupied after c. 600, although on a considerably reduced scale.³³

At Durrës (Dyrrachium), Emperor Anastasius' hometown, the city walls were rebuilt at his order, as evidenced by brick stamps. They were still in use during the early medieval period. The same seems to be true for some of the city's public buildings and churches, as recently shown by excavations at the extramural triconch church at Arapaj. Bylis also witnessed a period of economic prosperity during the sixth century, as Viktorinos, Justinian's architect, rebuilt the city walls. Two churches, both with mosaic floors, were built during this period. The city, however, was abandoned after 600 and a rural settlement grew around a sixth-century extramural basilica at Ballshi, at a short distance from the town. A sixth-century building phase was also identified at Sarda, but the dating to this period of six houses built in stone bonded with clay remains controversial.³⁴

Unfortunately, little is known about the sixth-century habitat at Salona, despite extensive excavations since the late nineteenth century. We know that in c. 530, the sanctuaries dedicated to Nemesis in the city's amphitheater were turned into churches, while *Porta postica* was blocked. Judging from the existing evidence, out of eight churches so far identified in Salona, only one, the Gradina, was built after 500. After partial destruction, probably in the early seventh century, the transept and the apse of the basilica at Manastirine, not far from the city, were turned into a smaller church, which Rudolf Egger called a *Notkirche*. He suggested

³³ Nicopolis: Gregory 1987a:260; Hellenkemper 1987:250; Krautheimer 1986:131. Butrint: Karaickaj 1984:161; Koch 1988:124; Hodges and Saraçi 1994–5:217–23, 226–7, and 231–2.

³⁴ Durrës: Zheku 1972:42; Miraj 1980; Koch 1988:124 and 136; Anamali 1989:2618. Arapaj: Anamali 1993a:462–4. Bylis: Feissel 1988; Anamali 1989:2632; Muçaj 1993; Korkuti and Petruso 1993:738. Ballshi: Anamali 1988. Sarda: Spahiu 1976:154–5; Karaickaj 1989:2647.

that this new church became the focus of religious life after the presumed destruction of Salona by the invading Slavs. But similar evidence was later found at Kapljuč and comparable alterations were identified at the basilica at Marusinac. They all confirm that the city was still inhabited by Christians during the first half of the seventh century.³⁵

The *Synekdemos* of Hierocles lists about eighty cities (all called πόλεις) in the province of Achaia, apparently making Greece one of the most highly urbanized regions of the eastern Mediterranean. At Athens, the post-Herulian wall included the Acropolis, but excluded the Agora, for by that time the city's government offices and commercial center had already shifted eastward from the Agora to the less-damaged Library of Hadrian and the Roman Market. Statues of high-ranking officials were still erected in the fifth century, as evidenced by one found in the northeastern corner of the so-called Gymnasium of the Giants (in the middle of the ancient Agora). In the early 500s, a bath was built on top of an older fountain, on the southern side of a Late Roman house on the Areopagus. A collection of antique marble sculptures was found in a courtyard north of the bath. Given their specific location, which suggests they were hidden, the sculptures have been interpreted as evidence for Justinian's anti-pagan legislation of 529. Similar evidence has been recently found at Antioch and Carthage. A mosaic floor in the room south of the baths was replaced with *opus sectile* in a cruciform pattern. Another *villa urbana* was found in the southern corner of the Acropolis and has been attributed to Proclus. A large *triclinium*, a relief representing the goddess Cybele, and an altar, are viewed as sufficient evidence for this attribution. A third *villa* comes from the eastern area of the Library of Pantainos. The earlier stoa was converted into an elegant suite of small rooms belonging to a two-storied building. On the first floor, there was a large peristyled courtyard and an apsed *triclinium*. Room B on the first floor had a barrel vault and the walls of rooms A, B, and C had niches for statues. The house was included in the Late Roman fortification and was used, with alterations, until the eighth century. On the northern slope of the Acropolis, houses with inner courtyards, built in the fifth century BC, were rebuilt at some point during the fifth century AD and were still in use during the sixth century. After 600, the old colonnade of the Stoa lost its original architectural integrity and was subdivided into small rooms. In room 6, hundreds of terracotta roof tiles recovered from

³⁵ Neppi Modona 1974:115–16; Nikolajević 1975:92 and 94; Marin 1989:1127. See also Duval 1990:438–9. A sixth-century papyrus, now lost, attests that churches and *castella* in the hinterland of Salona were supplied with revenue from medium-sized estates on the island of Mljet, on the Adriatic coast. See Nikolajević 1971:286.

the fallen debris of the house destroyed sometime in the 630s were piled in neat rows for possible reuse. These later alterations are dated by coins of Constans II.³⁶

During the sixth century, two industrial establishments were set up on either side of the Panathenaic Way, near the southeast corner of the Agora: a flour mill driven by a water wheel, which was active between c. 450 and c. 580 (the water coming from the newly restored Hadrianic Aqueduct), and a small olive mill. In contrast, the Christian reuse of buildings inside the city walls is dated comparatively later. At some point during the late 400s or the early 500s, a three-aisled basilica was erected on the foundations of the Asklepieion. The Gymnasium of the Giants was abandoned and the Olympeion and the Temple of Kronos and Rhea were converted into churches. After c. 580, both the Parthenon and the Erechtheion followed suit, and a three-aisled basilica was built over the ruins of the quatrefoil building of Hadrian's Library. Shortly after 500, burials were introduced within the urban area, on the south side of the Acropolis, as well as between the Odeion of Pericles and the Theater of Dionysos.³⁷

The situation at Corinth was slightly different. With the questionable exception of a statue allegedly erected in honor of Constans II, no honorific inscriptions dated after c. 400 have been found in the forum area. Any use of the forum as a public square or for private housing ceased by 500. The corridors along the eastern and northern sides of the peristyled courtyard known as the Peribolos of Apollon were transformed in the early 500s into small rooms. A house was built in the northern half of the Great Bath on the Lechaion Road. It has been dated to the first half of the sixth century. The walls were partially built with reused material. A coin struck for Justin II gives a *terminus post quem* for the hearth in the southeast corner of the house.³⁸

Corinth was twice hit by earthquakes (522 and 551) and was devastated by the plague (542). One of the buildings severely damaged by the earthquake of 551 was the H. Leonidas basilica at Lechaion, built in the mid-fifth century. Shortly after the mid-sixth century, a group of houses was built in the basilica's *atrium* and the immediate vicinity. All had water

³⁶ Shear 1973:393–4 and 397; Gregory 1984a:273; Hattersley-Smith 1988:367 and 374. Urban villas in Athens: Sodini 1984a:348–52 and 359.

³⁷ Hattersley-Smith 1988:377, 381, 383, and 386; Gregory 1984a:273.

³⁸ Biers 1985:12; Hattersley-Smith 1988:403; Ivison 1996:104. Statue: Kent 1950. The inscription is a dedication to "Flavius Constans," which could stand for Constantine, Constantius, or Constans. Kent's attribution to Constans II was disputed by Peter Charanis (1952) and defended by Kenneth Setton (1952). The attribution has been decisively rejected by Feissel and Philippidis-Braat 1985:271.

wells or cisterns in the middle of small, inner, courtyards. Some were also provided with reduced versions of *triclinia* with earthen semicircular benches. Baking ovens, querns, and *dolia* bespeak the agricultural character of this settlement. The effects of the plague are illustrated by a mass burial of over 100 adults and children, which was found in Reservoir IV at Lerna. Toward the end of the century, there is evidence of a sudden abandonment and subsequent pillaging and dismantling of buildings. A late sixth-century or early seventh-century church was erected on the hill north of the Agora. Its narthex was richly decorated in *opus sectile* pavement and colored marble revetment. A modest chapel was built on the spring house near the Asklepion sometime after c. 665/6. By the mid-sixth century, burial activity was well established in the forum area, with tombs in the ruins of the fourth-century shops and baths to the rear of the South Stoa. Two sixth-century burial vaults were found in the court of the Sacred Spring of Pierene. Whether or not these burials were intramural remains an object of dispute, for it is not yet clear what exactly constituted the city of Corinth during the 500s.³⁹

The evidence from other cities in Greece remains scarce. At Nemea, a sixth-century building extended over the Bath and post-fourth-century cist burials with tiles were found in the area south of the Temple of Zeus. The ruins of two churches have been identified within the Late Roman walls at Sparta. One of them, St Nikon, was probably built in the sixth century. If true, this would make Sparta the only early Byzantine city in Greece with ecclesiastical representation within its walls. Elsewhere, the archaeological evidence points to the existence of *villae urbanae*. At Mantinea, a second-century double-room building was restored during the 500s, as a bath and a large *triclinium* were added. On the other hand, smaller dwellings, often interpreted as squatter-houses, were installed in the ruins of earlier residences, as in Aixone, Argos, or Castelli Kisamos, in Crete.⁴⁰

CHANGING CITIES, RURAL SETTLEMENTS, AND MONASTERIES

How far is it possible to generalize from this rich archaeological evidence? Despite some variation a pattern of change is easily recognizable. In most

³⁹ Lechaion: Krautheimer 1986:132–3; Sodini 1984a:372. Churches and burials: Gregory 1982a:53 and 1984a:273; Snively 1984:121; Hattersley-Smith 1988:407, 411, and 413; Ivison 1996:104 and 112. Earthquakes: Avramea 1997:45–6.

⁴⁰ Nemea: Miller 1977:3 and fig. 5; Birge, Kraynak, and Miller 1992:239. Sparta: Gregory 1982a:55; Avramea 1997:114 and 185. Mantinea, Aixone, Argos, and Castelli Kisamos: Sodini 1984a:364 and 370.

cases, ancient cities contracted and regrouped around a defensible acropolis, usually dominated by the church. The process of disintegration of the urban nucleus into small settlement areas was accompanied by subdivision into smaller rooms of formerly finer buildings, by reuse of various architectural elements, and by new buildings with mud and brick walls. Large *civitates* were replaced by comparatively smaller forts, or coexisted with them, as in the case of Pautalia. The urban population of the Balkans concentrated primarily in coastal cities, such as Dyrrachium, Mesembria, Thessalonica, or Salona, and in Constantinople.

Subdivision and encroachment on the sites of former grand buildings were not restricted to the sixth-century Balkans. Similar phenomena have been observed at Carthage (“Michigan sector”), Anemorium, and Sbeitla.⁴¹ The same is true for the presence of burials within urban areas. At Constantinople, Justinian’s legislation had already allowed intramural interments between the old and the new precincts, as well as in Blachernae and Sykai.⁴² The difference, if any, between the Balkans and the rest of the Roman world is one of degree rather than quality. In any case, the process of encroachment and change of use, though different in rhythm in various parts of the Empire, seems to indicate an urban change which cannot be attributed to particular local causes, such as plague or invasion, but must have been connected to economic and administrative factors, above all to the relation of these new urban centers to the central administration. It is important to note, for example, that cities in the interior of the Balkans lack the signs of long-distance trade so evident in those of the Black Sea coast or in Greece. Phocaean Red Slip Wares (also known as Late Roman C), produced at Phocaea in western Anatolia, began to appear in significant quantities on the western Black Sea coast after 470 and remained relatively frequent until about 580. They are also abundant at Argos during the first half of the sixth century. Around 600, such wares were still in use on the site of Diocletian’s palace in Split. Extensive excavations on sites in the interior, such as Ratiaria, Iatrus, Sacidava, Bregovina, and Karanovo, yielded only small quantities. All sites

⁴¹ Cameron 1993:161. Like Thessalonica, sixth-century Chersonesus seems to have preserved the Hellenistic street grid, though some secondary streets were blocked by new religious buildings, such as the basilica “1935.” The city expanded westward to the expense of an earlier cemetery. The theater in the southern part of the city was abandoned before 500. A cruciform church was erected in its ruins, either during or after Justinian’s reign. Two-storied buildings were still erected during this period, such as the “Wine-dresser’s House.” See Bortoli-Kazanski and Kazanski 1987:448–50. Between 500 and 600, the city had at least ten churches. See Beliaev 1989:173. For the Uvarov basilica, see Kosciushko-Valiuzhinich 1902. Other churches were built during Justinian’s reign at Mangup, Eski-Kermen, and Partenitae. See Zubar’ and Pavlenko 1988:70.

⁴² Dagron 1991:167.

in the interior, however, produced a large quantity of amphora sherds, which suggests that the relative absence of Phocaean Red Slip Ware is not an accident.⁴³

This picture is confirmed by finds of lead seals. Among eighty-two sixth- to seventh-century specimens known from the northern Balkans, forty-six (56 percent) have only the name of the owner, without office or title.⁴⁴ They were most likely commercial seals.⁴⁵ The largest number were found at Constanța (Tomis). The westernmost specimen found is that from Călărași, on the left bank of the Danube, just across from the important city of Silistra (Durostorum). In addition, two lead seals of clear Aegean provenance (one from Pergamon, the other from Ephesus) were found in Dobruja. No such seal was found in the rest of the Balkans, an indication that commodities traded by seal owners did not reach the interior. The commercial circuit signaled by lead seals included but a small area easily accessible by sea. Disruption of commercial links between coastal trade centers and settlements in the interior illustrates the degree of autonomy of the northern Balkan cities, which Procopius listed by regions, rather than by provinces.

That this phenomenon was also associated with significant social changes is shown by the quality of buildings now erected within the urban area. To be sure, many buildings seem to have been abandoned, but the existence of a derelict and useless temple or gymnasium in the heart of an ancient city is no guide to the prosperity or otherwise of that city as a whole. Nor can mud and brick walls be described *ipso facto* as “barbarian.” The inhabitants of early Byzantine cities displayed their wealth and status by building churches and paying for their lavish decoration with mosaic floors. Except in Thessalonica, there is no evidence for any other public buildings erected at that time. Caričin Grad (Justiniana Prima) was dominated by the acropolis on which the episcopal church was located. This further suggests that the power granted to local bishops

⁴³ Phocaean Red Slip Wares: Minchev 1983:197; Mackensen 1987:235; Poulter 1992:130; Opaît 1996:137. Argos: Abadie-Reynal 1989b:155. Split: Dvoržak Schrunk 1989:94. Phocaean Red Slip Wares also appear at Shkodër, in Albania; see Hoxha 1993:565. For sites in the interior, see Kuzmanov 1987:112; Böttger 1979:62; Scorpan 1978:160–1; Borisov 1988a:106; Jeremić and Milinković 1995:223. At Sadovec, there are no Phocaean Red Slip Wares. See Mackensen 1992:235.

⁴⁴ Barnea 1960b:323–4, 1966:279–81, and 1969; Nubar 1964; Culică 1975:246; Barnea 1975:159–61; Schultz 1978:100; Gaj-Popović 1980; Barnea 1981, 1982:202, 1984, 1985b:239–42, 1987a:203–4, 1987b:77–9, and 1990:316; Gerasimova-Tomova 1992:70. There is a wide variety of names, sometimes represented by more than one seal (e.g., Damianos, George Theodoulos, Leontius, and Peter). There are also cases of namesakes (four different individuals named John, three named Peter, and three named Theodore).

⁴⁵ Some may have been belonged to local merchants, as indicated by Thracian names, such as Boutzios, Bassos, or Moldozos. See Barnea 1987a.

by Justinian’s legislation drastically altered the urban landscape. Newly built churches, such as that of Plovdiv (Philippopolis), often obstructed or even obliterated the old street grid. With few exceptions (e.g., Thessalonica), the forum ceased to represent the focus of building activity and was abandoned. Ancient baths were converted into churches, though *thermae* were still built anew during the 500s, as in Justiniana Prima. In some cases (Histria, Tropaeum Traiani, Diocletianopolis, Justiniana Prima, Butrint, Tocatlis, Athens, and Mantinea), archaeological excavations revealed the existence of houses with peristyled courtyards and apsed *triclinia*, used as main representative rooms. They were most likely residences of the rich, though attempts to identify their inhabitants with the new urban elite (e.g., bishops) should be treated with extreme caution. They are in sharp contrast with houses built in stone bonded with clay, which archaeologists often associate with the last building phase. That such buildings cannot be attributed to the invading Slavs, allegedly establishing themselves in the conquered and destroyed cities, is suggested by the house at Caričin Grad. Since, in some cases, such buildings encroached into earlier *villae urbanae*, they might indicate that the place of the rich was taken by the less well-off. The last decades of the Balkan cities may thus have witnessed a rise in the number of poorer citizens. Querns, spindle whorls, baking ovens, and smithies may illustrate a process of ruralization, which immediately preceded and was encouraged by the Slavic invasions. But the existing archaeological evidence suggests a much more complex picture. It is certainly difficult, if not impossible, to assess in each case the relative importance of the stone-cum-clay buildings. The absence of any agricultural tools which could be safely dated to the sixth or early seventh century is in itself significant. There is no reason to believe that these new houses or rooms built in stone bonded with clay were a hasty, if provisory, solution to the problem of countless refugees from the countryside, now savagely raided by the Slavs. Moreover, the goods found in the house at Caričin Grad suggest a military occupation which is otherwise comparable to that of contemporary forts.⁴⁶

This trend is also recognizable in the disappearance, after c. 450, of medium-sized villa estates in the urban hinterland, which had provided the majority of decurions. To be sure, archaeologists identified significant numbers of *villae rusticae* and rural settlements dated to the first four centuries AD. After the middle of the fifth century, however, medium-sized estates seem to have completely disappeared. By 450, the last *villae*

⁴⁶ Hattersley-Smith 1988:169 and 299; Whittow 1990:18–19. Refugees from the countryside: Barnea et al. 1979:107.

rusticae, which had survived until then in the sheltered areas of Dalmatia and northeast Bosnia, were completely abandoned. The only evidence of rural *villae* comes from Akra Sophia, near Corinth, where a systematic archaeological exploration yielded a sumptuous villa with mosaic floor in room VII, probably a *triclinium*. A single fragment of hypocaust brick suggests the presence of a small bath which is otherwise unattested in the surviving architectural remains. The walls were built of rubble set in lime mortar mixed with large pebbles. A fragment of a late sixth- or early seventh-century amphora (Late Roman 2) was found embedded in the mortar of the foundations of the north wall of room VII. The owner of the villa may have been an imperial military official in charge with the defense of the near-by Hexamilion. Another *villa* was found in 1949 at Polače, on the island of Mljet in the Adriatic. It has been dated to the fifth or sixth century.⁴⁷

On the other hand, some evidence exists that there were still large estates in the Balkans during the 500s. An inscription found near Sliven, in Bulgaria, refers to an ἐπίσπεψις, a state or church estate. By the time Procopius wrote his *Wars* there were still large herds of horses near Apri, in Thrace, probably belonging to a *domus divina*. A law of 535 shows that the St Sophia cathedral in Constantinople owned large estates and had a *scribinium* with cartularies located somewhere in Thrace. But the evidence of peasant settlements is very scarce. According to Procopius, Justinian "made the defenses so continuous in the estates (χωρία), that each farm (ἀγρός) either had been converted into a stronghold (φρούριον) or lies adjacent to one which is fortified." This has been interpreted as an indication of an important rural population in the sixth-century Balkans. Indeed, Procopius even provided an example of a village entirely transformed into a stronghold, due to Justinian's munificence. But he also described peasants becoming "makeshift soldiers for the occasion," thus suggesting that agricultural occupations were now abandoned. The only evidence for the survival of a significant peasant population comes from the immediate vicinity of the Capital. Theophylact Simocatta refers to a χωρίον some fifteen miles away from Heracleia, in Europe. The village had a large population and was a food supplier for the imperial armies. Two inscriptions found at Selymbria and Şarköy, in Thrace, refer to the estates of a certain Zemocarthos.

⁴⁷ Kurz 1969:99; Poulter 1983:86; Henning 1987:22–35 and figs. 7–11 (with a complete list of sites). Akra Sophia: Gregory 1985. Two other early Byzantine *villae* may have existed near Corinth and Sparta, but their date is uncertain. See Avramea 1997:127, 159, and 185. Polače: Nikolajević 1971:281; Duval 1971:109–18. A building complex found in 1930 at Breza, near Sarajevo, was interpreted as *aula* of an Ostrogothic high official, perhaps a *comes* (Basler 1993:28–9). The building is more likely a basilica.

Elsewhere the existence of open settlements with exclusively agricultural functions remains doubtful.⁴⁸

Despite the evident bias of early Byzantine archaeology in the Balkans toward urban centers, the evidence for rural settlements is remarkably scanty. Recent excavations at Kurt Baiâr, near Slava Cercheză, in Dobrudja, not far from the presumed monastic site at Slava Rusă, unearthed a rectangular, single-roomed house built in stones bonded with clay and mud bricks. The building has two phases, dated to the fifth and sixth centuries, respectively. Salvage excavations near Novgrad, not far from the ancient site of Iatrus, have also revealed two similar structures, one of which is dated by a coin issued by Justin II. Altogether, this is all the evidence we have so far from the Balkans. There is nothing comparable to the village at Qasrin, in the Golan highlands, nothing similar to the two-storied peasant houses found in the hinterland of the city of Kyaneai, in Lycia, or to those found in the Silifke region of Cilicia. The rarity of rural settlements could be explained in reference to contemporary legislation. In 505, Emperor Anastasius was compelled to acknowledge the impossibility of collecting the *annona* in Thrace and to introduce the *coemptio*. Thirty years later, Justinian issued the novel 32, which attempted to stop an ever-accelerating decline of the peasant population in Haemimons and Moesia Inferior. Because of high-interest loan rates, peasants were compelled to forfeit their lands; some fled and some died of starvation, the general situation being described as worse than after a barbarian invasion. In that same year, Justinian's novel 33 extended the stipulation of novel 32 to Illyricum, because creditors there were taking the lands (*terrulae*) of the peasants. No improvement occurred and, ten years later, Justinian's novel 128 introduced the *epibole* to the fiscal law, in order to cope with the demographic instability of the countryside upsetting the process of tax collection. Every farmer was now burdened with liability for taxes from the abandoned land of his next-door neighbor. Justinian's successor, Justin II, twice granted tax exemptions for peasants in Moesia and Scythia Minor (novels 148 and 162). In both cases, at stake were food supplies for troops stationed in these two provinces. Whether or not barbarian invasions contributed to the rapid deterioration of the economic situation in the Balkans, the evidence cited suggests that in this region the rural class was on the verge

⁴⁸ *Codex Iustinianus* 1.2.24; Procopius, *Buildings* IV 1–2, 4, and 10. Inscriptions: Velkov 1962: 60 (with n. 164) and 62. According to Agathias (v 11), the Cutrigur chieftain Zabergan, who led the invasion of 558/9, quickly reached Thrace after crossing many *deserted* villages in Moesia and Scythia Minor. For the rural population of the northern Balkans, see also Patoura 1985:206. There is no evidence to support Michel Kaplan's idea that burials found at Porto Cheli (lower town at Halieis) were those of slaves working on *villa* estates. See Rudolph 1979:297–8; Kaplan 1992:159.

of disappearing. This is substantiated by recruitment shortages, which were already visible during Justinian's reign.⁴⁹

The rarity of rural settlements may explain the rarity of monasteries. The association between the two is strongly advocated by cases of monasteries established in densely populated regions with numerous rural communities. But the evidence for monasteries in the Balkans is very scarce. To be sure, literary sources indicate the existence of monks. During Justinian's reign, the "Scythian monks" were zealous supporters of a formula attempting to reconcile adherents of the council of Chalcedon with the Monophysites. A few decades later, at the time of Tiberius and Maurice, John Moschus wrote about hermitages around Thessalonica in his biographies of Abbot Palladius and David the Ascetic. In 592, Emperor Maurice, on the eve of his campaigns against the Sclavenes and the Avars, forbade soldiers or civil servants from becoming clerics or monks until their period of service has been completed. His edict brought a reprimand by Pope Gregory the Great, who argued that the emperor had no right to interfere with religious vocations. In response, Maurice agreed to limit the law to soldiers who had not yet served for three years. It has been argued that Maurice's edict referred to the male population of Thrace, an indirect indication of monasteries there. Though the edict was issued in connection with the Slav and Avar invasions into the Balkans, there is no evidence to support the idea that Maurice's edict referred to recruitment in Thrace. Soldiers and civil servants could have joined monasteries located anywhere else in the Empire.⁵⁰

The archaeological evidence for monasteries is also very meager. From written sources we know that by 536 there were sixty-seven male monasteries in Constantinople and its vicinity, but archaeological investigations in the Balkans have yielded no comparable result. There is some evidence of monasteries on the Adriatic coast. A fifth-century monastic site was found on the island of Majsan, near Korčula. It was organized around two porticoed courtyards and included a small church with *memoria* containing St Maximus' relics. The site was still occupied during the second half of the sixth century, for it has also produced a Byzantine coin hoard closed under Justin II. At Isprikhovo, near Plovdiv, an early

⁴⁹ Kurt Baiâr: Opaît and Bănică 1992:105–6. Novgrad: Stefanov 1974:291–2. For other settlements, see Hood 1970; Gregory 1984b. Peasant houses in the Golan highlands, Lycia, and Cilicia: Sodini 1993:152. *Coemptio: Codex Iustinianus* 10.27.2; Kaplan 1992:378; Gorecki 1989:225. Recruitment shortages: Fotiou 1988.

⁵⁰ Monasteries and rural communities: Trombley 1985. "Scythian monks": Zeiller 1918:383–4; Barnea and Vulpe 1968:458–9; Moorhead 1994:125–8. Hermitages around Thessalonica: Rose 1887:15–6; Moutsopoulos 1987:129. Maurice's edict 110 of 592: Dölger 1924:13–14. See also Frazee 1982:276. Pope Gregory's reaction: *cpp.* III 61, III 64, and VIII 10.

Byzantine monastery incorporated a small single-naved church with a baptistery on the southern side and another annex containing a font later added on the northwestern side. The rest of the complex consisted of a series of rooms, some roughly mortared with mud. They included a cattle shed and a baking oven. Tools for woodwork and agriculture and household pots show that soon after the church was built a group of monks settled here and cultivated the land. The complex was surrounded by a wall sometime during the sixth century. At Anevo, in the same area of Thrace, Bulgarian archaeologists recently explored another monastic complex, dated to Justinian's reign. East of the basilica at Palikura, near Stobi, in Macedonia, there was a courtyard and beyond this an octagonal baptistery and numerous other annexes. On the basis of this evidence, some believe Palikura was a monastic site. A cave monastery may have existed not far from the modern monastery Aladzha, near Varna. Its early dating to the fourth century is secured by fragments of glassware, but coins of Justinian indicate that the complex may have still been in use during the 500s. Finally, at Slava Rusă, in Dobrudja, recent excavations have unearthed a monastic complex with two single-naved churches and three building phases dated to the late fifth, early sixth, and late sixth centuries, respectively. Sometime in the last decades of the sixth century a wall was built around the complex.⁵¹

With this rarity of monasteries and rural settlements, the problem of urban change in the Balkans can be rephrased in new terms. It is now clear that during the sixth century, the region witnessed a serious contraction, but the complex readjustments taking place almost everywhere do not seem to have involved any rural sites. What was the role, if any, of the rural environment in the survival and, in some cases, the prosperity of sixth-century Balkan cities? There seems to be no simple answer to this question, but from the existing evidence it appears that urban life in the Balkans was not based on a thriving rural economy. All textual evidence indicates a sharp decline of the rural areas and archaeologists have not been able to identify any significant number of villages in the hinterland of the great cities. Moreover, the Church itself seems to have been rather resistant to the idea of implementing monastic communities in a region devoid of substantial rural population. If so, who fed the remaining urban population? There is no indication of agricultural work inside any of the sixth-century Balkan cities. The *Miracles of St Demetrius* suggest

⁵¹ Monasteries in and around Constantinople: Gerostergios 1974:435; Frazee 1982:271. Majsan: Fisković 1981:146; Mirnik 1982; Cambi 1989:2420. Isprikhovo: Dzhambov 1956; Hoddinott 1975:297. Anevo: Dzhambov 1989:2519. Palikura: Hoddinott 1963:185; Mikulčić 1986a:233 and 246. Aladzha: Atanasov 1991:34–5. Slava Rusă: Opaît, Bănică 1992:113–17. For the problematic identification of churches associated with monastic sites, see Migotti 1995:125–6.

that a large city, such as Thessalonica, relied heavily on supplies of public corn, but it is dangerous to extrapolate this evidence to other Balkan cases. The explanation may lie at a more structural level, in the military and building programs implemented in the Balkans, in particular on the Danube frontier under Emperor Justinian.

THE LIMES AND THE SIXTH-CENTURY BALKANS

The idea of making the Lower Danube the frontier of the Roman state was an old one. It dates back to Julius Caesar. The natural and the military borders complemented each other and formed an intricate matrix of Roman imperial self-definition. In the mid-500s, Procopius of Caesarea still viewed the Danube as the barrier against barbarians, πρόβολον ἰσχυρότατον. Procopius was also a witness to the increasing differentiation between political and administrative frontiers, on one hand, and cultural boundaries, on the other. Long before the sixth century, the *limes* had ceased to be a purely military zone and had become an area of contact and exchange with populations living on the left bank of the Danube. Some argued that its main purpose was now that of a buffer zone, specifically designed to divert and to slow down, if not to stop, the invasions of the Slavs. Others believe that the Roman frontier was never intended to be a preclusive perimeter defense, but a deep zone that included the *limes* itself, the supporting provinces, and, in some cases, even the territories across the frontier. Denys Pringle's research on the African *limes* revealed a hierarchy of forts with various functions, operating on different levels in a sophisticated system of in-depth defense. The situation in the Balkans is equally instructive. According to Procopius, Justinian built or renewed more than 600 forts in the Balkans, eight times more than in the entire Asian part of the Empire. Moreover, recent excavations reveal that a number of then modern and sophisticated building techniques, such as the use of hexagonal bastions, so dear to the author of the *De Re Strategica*, were widely prevalent in the building of defenses on the Danube *limes* or in the interior.⁵²

There is still a tendency among scholars to downplay the significance of this major building program or to treat Procopius' evidence with extreme suspicion. More recently, an inscription found at Ballshi (near Bylis), in Albania, clearly attests that the forts in Moesia, Scythia Minor,

⁵² Procopius, *Buildings* IV 1.33; *De Re Strategica* 12, ed. G. T. Dennis (Washington, 1985), p. 35. For Africa, see Pringle 1981. See also Zanini 1988; Shuvalov 1991:40; Miller 1996:162. Justinian's reign coincided with the introduction of *proteichismata*; some walls were thickened and elevated and triangular or pentangular bastions were retained. Bastions were also blocked and converted into bastides. See Ovcharov 1973:14–16 and 18–19, and 1977:469; Biernacka-Lubańska 1982:219–20.

Illyricum, and Thrace were built for Justinian by his architect, Viktorinos. The evidence of this inscription suggests that Procopius should be given some credit for veracity.⁵³

PROCOPIUS AND THE LIMES

It has been long shown that Procopius' *Buildings* has three main themes: church building, fortifications, and water supply. Part of an imperial propaganda effort, all that Procopius describes under these topics is attributed to Justinian alone, as though the emperor personally initiated and carried it through. It is not without interest that Procopius sees a certain continuity between Justinian and his predecessors, particularly Constantine the Great. But Justinian does not follow Constantine's program in all details. "As if seeking to excuse his imperial predecessor's want of propriety," he builds an aqueduct and a public bath, churches, and a palace and stoas in Helenopolis (the native city of Constantine's mother). Not even Trajan is spared for Procopius' fault-finding approach. Unlike Justinian, the *Optimus Princeps* was "of an impetuous and active temperament and filled with resentment that his realm was not unlimited, but was bounded by the Ister River." Procopius' attitude toward Justinian's closer predecessors is also critical. The Long Walls illustrate an ill-applied strategic concept and Anastasius is blamed for the consequences of hastily erecting a fortress at Dara. He did not raise the walls of Theodosiopolis to an adequate height, in spite of rebaptizing the city after his imperial name. He relinquished Martyropolis to the Persians, "understanding that it was not possible to defend [the city] from hostile assault, since it had no defences," and died before the completion of the work at Melitene. In all those cases, Justinian is presented as having remedied the errors of his predecessors and, at least in the case of Martyropolis, as a more aggressive leader.⁵⁴

But the tendency to exaggerate Justinian's achievements, particularly in comparison to those of his predecessors, was a feature built into the genre. The overall impression is that a sudden and overwhelming effect was brought about by Justinian's building policies. Procopius' narration is set in a timeless atmosphere, which may have been intended to suggest the permanence of the emperor's achievements. That the *Buildings* may be viewed as a panegyric is also shown by a comparison of Procopius'

⁵³ Feissel 1988; Avramea 1997:65–6. Skepticism toward Procopius' *Buildings* goes back to Edward Gibbon, who maintained that the forts mentioned by Procopius were simple towers surrounded by moats. See Evans 1996:222–3.

⁵⁴ Procopius, *Buildings* III 2.9–14, III 4.19, III 5.4–12, IV 5–7 and 9, V 2.1–5. See also Evans 1970:223; Cameron 1985:86–7.

portrait of Justinian with other contemporary propaganda media. In the *Buildings*, Justinian is “the founder of the civilized world,” a builder *par excellence*. This reminds one of an inscription from Callatis and of brick stamps from Mesembria, both of which call Justinian φιλοκτίστης.⁵⁵

On the other hand, with his *Buildings*, Procopius may be reflecting a contemporary taste for the cataloguing of buildings, which is also recognizable in sixth-century chronicles and in special works about the physical history of cities. Book iv, which deals with the Balkans, looks, however, like an annotated itinerary of the network of roads. The Thracian list begins with the forts along the Via Egnatia. In his description of Scythia Minor, Procopius follows the old imperial road from Tropaeum Traiani to the north.⁵⁶

Is the *Buildings* then a purely rhetorical exercise? Some have argued that Procopius’ work is not a factual record, despite its appearance of documentary authenticity. Others believe that the *Buildings* has been undervalued as a work of strategic insight and point to many links between Book iv and the renaissance of military treatises in the sixth century, from the Anonymus Byzantinus to the author of the *Strategikon*. In order to assess Procopius’ reliability, however, it is first necessary to identify his sources. Noticing that Procopius’ information is accurate and detailed, some have argued that he found it all in the imperial archives. Others, observing that the description in Book iv follows the network of roads, concluded that Procopius used an official map. This may also explain why most fort names are rendered in ablative or accusative plural (-is), as on Roman *itineraria picta*. Lists of forts in Book iv are given by provinces, which also suggests that Procopius’ source may have been some sort of administrative document. It is not without interest that when Procopius introduced his own narrative, he had a completely different set of terms, indicating not administrative boundaries, but the traditional ethnic geography of the Balkans, which is also identifiable in Viktorinos’ inscription from Ballshi.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Procopius, *Buildings* iv 1.17 (ὁ τῆς οἰκουμένης οἰκιστής). Inscription: Popescu 1967:170. Brick stamps: Ogenova-Marinoва 1969:109 and 111. *Buildings* as panegyric: Cameron 1985:90 and 109; Whitby 1985a:141. *Contra*: Rousseau 1998.

⁵⁶ Cameron 1985:90; Adshead 1990:108; Aricescu 1977:170.

⁵⁷ Procopius acknowledges the existence of a strategy underpinning Justinian’s buildings in the Balkans: “he made the defenses so continuous in the estates that each farm either has been converted into a stronghold or lies adjacent to one which is fortified” (Procopius, *Buildings* iv 1.35). See Cameron 1985:110; Adshead 1990:107 and 113; Evans 1972:77 and 81. For fort names in the *Buildings*, see Beshevliev 1967b:278. Viktorinos’ inscription: Feissel 1988:143. In his description, Procopius starts in Illyricum with Justiniana Prima (Dardania), then moves to Dacia Mediterranea (without naming it), then to Epirus Vetus, Hellas, Thessaly, Euboea, and Macedonia. In the lists at iv 4, the order is different: Epirus Nova, Epirus Vetus, Macedonia, Thessaly, Dardania, Dacia Mediterranea, and Dacia Ripensis (the latter two not being mentioned by name). Thrace is

The description of the road from Strongylum to Rhegium, which was probably the first segment of the Via Egnatia, seems to be based on personal experience. Procopius may indeed have seen that road and its exceptionally coarse paving stones, giving the appearance “not simply of being laid together at the joints,” but of having actually grown together. But the description of Justiniana Prima, despite the significance of the city for the purpose of the *Buildings*, is vague and lacking in detail. In contrast to other Books, Book iv lists no churches, and the lack of coherence in the direction of the account may reflect lack of personal experience in the area. There is also some contradictory information. In his *Secret History*, Procopius claims that no buildings were restored and nothing else was done in the whole of Greece, including Athens. In the *Buildings*, we are told that all cities south of Thermopylae were made safe and their walls renewed, and Procopius cites Corinth, Athens, and Plataea. There is extensive repetition of fort names in Book iv, usually of two forts in two neighboring provinces. This suggests that Procopius’ source listed a particular fort only under a particular province. Unfamiliar with Balkan geography, in particular with provincial boundaries, Procopius may have ascribed a fort to more than one province.⁵⁸

Despite all this, however, he seems to have been well aware of what he was trying to do in Book iv. To Procopius, the Danube, when getting “close to Dacia, for the first time clearly forms the boundary between the barbarians, who hold its left bank, and the territory of the Romans, which is on the right.” His emphasis on the Danube is meant to help explain that the entire strategy underlying the building program in the Balkans was centered upon the Danube. The forts built by Justinian, according to Procopius, were designed as a response to a particular kind of warfare, namely sudden attacks coming from the north. Justinian “reflected that if it should ever be possible for the enemy to break through somehow, they would fall upon fields which would be entirely unguarded, would enslave the whole population, from the youths upwards, and would plunder all their property.” The defense system was therefore designed to protect the estates (χωρία) and to turn each farm

described in the following order: Moesia Inferior, Scythia (Minor), Europe, Rhodope. Between Scythia (Minor) and Europe, there is a section in which we are told that “all the building that was done by the emperor Justinian in Dardania, Epirus, Macedonia, and the other parts of Illyricum, also in Greece and along the river Ister has already been described by me” (*Buildings* iv 8). Procopius then resumes the description of Thrace in the following order: Europe, Rhodope, Thrace, Moesia, and ἐν τῇ μεσογαίᾳ. Since Moesia includes cities that were actually located in Scythia (Minor), it is possible that ἐν τῇ μεσογαίᾳ refers to the newly created *quaestura exercitus*.

⁵⁸ *Buildings* iv 2 and 8; *Secret History* 23.33. See Cameron 1985:94; Adshead 1990:108. To Procopius, “the spurs of the Caucasus range extend in one direction to the north and west and continue into Illyricum and Thrace” (*Wars* viii 3.3).

(ἀγρὸς ἕκαστος) into a stronghold (φρούριον). Procopius thus suggests that barbarian raids were targeted not on large cities, but on “fields” in the countryside. In any case, he implies that Justinian’s building program was a direct response to the impact and direction of these attacks. Some went as far as to claim that the *Buildings* may be interpreted as a “codified” map of the barbarian invasions into the Balkans, of their direction and impact.⁵⁹

Justinian’s strategy, according to Procopius, was based on three successive lines, one along the Danube, the other along the Balkans, and a third one along the Istranca Dağlar range. But a closer examination of only one sector of the defense system (the region between the Iskär and the Ogost rivers in northern Bulgaria) reveals that during Justinian’s reign, another line of defense was added between the one along the Danube and the one along the Balkans. A simple reckoning of the forts listed in Book IV (Table 6) shows that northern Illyricum received the largest number of forts in the Balkans. The highest density was that of northern Dacia Ripensis, especially in the area of the Timok valley. Many forts were in fact restored, not built anew. This may relate to the fact that Illyrian armies were often involved in wars in Italy or Pannonia and Illyricum lacked large cities on which the defense network could be centered. The solution in Illyricum seems to have been decentralization, as suggested by the absence from Procopius’ account of both Dacia Ripensis and Dacia Mediterranea. Both were replaced as administrative units by regions centered on major urban centers. By contrast, Thrace had large cities in the plains, such as Diocletianopolis, Philippopolis or Beroe. Moreover, Procopius’ description of Thrace lacks the division into “new” and “restored” forts. Topeiros is referred to in the lists as “new,” but elsewhere we are told that Justinian only “added a great deal to the height of the wall.” In Thrace, Justinian’s approach was based more on administrative measures. Novel 26 gave civilian and military power to the praetorian prefect, while novel 34 extended the power of the governor of Haemimons to Moesia Inferior. Finally, the creation of the *quaestura exercitus* in 536 radically altered the old administrative structure of the

⁵⁹ *Buildings* IV 1 and 5. Procopius used the plural Δακίαις, which referred to both Dacia Ripensis and Dacia Mediterranea, none of which was mentioned in the text. For the Danube and the strategy of the building program, see *Buildings* IV 1: “For these works have been executed with due regard for the nearness of the Ister river and for the consequent necessity imposed by the barbarians who threaten the land.” For Justinian’s forts and attacks from the north, see *ibid.*: “Indeed it was the custom of these peoples [barbarians] to rise and make war upon their enemies for no particular cause, and open hostilities without sending an embassy, and they did not bring their struggle to an end through any treaty, or cease operations for any specified period, but they made their attacks without provocation and reached a decision by the sword alone.” For the *Buildings* as a “codified map” of barbarian invasions, see Ivanov 1984.

region. That Justinian’s strategy described in Book IV *was* realized in practice is confirmed by the inscription of Ballshi, dedicated to Viktorinos, the imperial architect. Procopius’ description may thus be viewed, in its essence, as sound. The archaeological evidence substantiates this conclusion.⁶⁰

THE LIMES AND THE BALKANS: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY (FIGURE 2)

The archaeological evidence from Scythia Minor and the neighboring regions on the Black Sea coast reveals a variety of forts. At Ovidiu, ten kilometers to the north of the modern city of Constanța, Romanian archaeologists explored a *quadriburgium* destroyed in the mid-sixth century. At Cape Kaliakra (Acrae), there were three successive defense lines across the promontory, at 1.2 km distance from the sea. New buildings with walls of stone bound with mortar were erected at Capidava as late as the last quarter of the sixth century. At Garvăn (Dinogetia), recent excavations by Alexandru Barnea confirmed that after a destruction coincided to 559, occupation of the fort ceased, though traces of a non-military habitation were found, which were dated sometime after 559. The three-aisled basilica built at some point during the fourth or the fifth century near the city’s southern tower was restored first under Anastasius, then under Justinian. Small houses with walls of stone and adobe bonded with clay are in sharp contrast to the “aristocratic” houses of Histria. Similar buildings were also found at Musait (Sacidava), and have been dated to the late sixth and early seventh centuries. The large fort at Pantelimonu de Sus (Ulmetum) excavated before World War I by Vasile Pârvan was rebuilt by the *lanciarîi iuniorii* of the imperial palace in Constantinople, as evidenced by the inscription found in one of the towers. The most interesting site, however, is Topraichioi, in central

⁶⁰ *Buildings* IV 11. According to Procopius, all forts along the Danube received garrisons of troops (IV 1). By contrast, the defense of Greece before Justinian’s building program relied only on “some peasants from the neighborhood, [who,] when the enemy came down, would suddenly change their mode of life, and becoming makeshift soldiers for the occasion, would keep guard there in turn” (IV 2). It is not without interest that when describing the rebuilding of forts, Procopius refers to small settlements. When speaking of big cities, he describes only repairing of walls or minor works of fortification. Note that Book IV contains a rare reference to an imperial architect, Theodore, who built the fortress Episkopeia (IV 8). For the defense system between the Iskär and the Ogost rivers in northern Bulgaria, see Poutiers 1975:61–3. Density of forts in northern Dacia Ripensis: Ivanov 1983:42–3 and 1984:49. Procopius lists names of forts under the name of the city, preceded by ὑπὸ, an indication that forts were under the direct administration of that city. In Dacia Mediterranea, forts are listed by regions (χώραι) belonging to various cities. Serdica had two such χώραι, one in Cabetus, the other around an unknown city. The average distance between cities along the Danube is 50 km, that between forts, 12 km (Poutiers 1975:61). Administrative measures in Thrace: Ivanov 1984:50.