

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITIES DURING THE TRANSITION FROM LATE ANTIQUITY TO THE EARLY CHRISTIAN ERA

In the long lasting life of the Byzantine empire, many were the circumstances that affected dramatically the development of the cities' character, form, organisation and even more their preservation. Either natural causes or human factors determined the survival or the destruction, the prosperity or the decline of the cities, becoming important landmarks in the course of the history. During the late antiquity, and more specifically between the 3rd and the 5th century, a number of changes that led to the transition from the ancient to the christian world were occurred¹.

Archaeological excavations conducted in ancient cities such as Thessaloniki, Aege, Pella, Amphipolis, Dion, Mieza and Veria, have brought into light a lot of architectural remains which testify that they flourished in the pre-christian era. Luxurious buildings, public and private, secular and religious, were incorporated in the city-planning, serving the various needs of the citizens and securing the financial prosperity, necessary not only for the function and preservation of those buildings, but for the completion of public services, as well.

The prosperity of the cities, however, seems to have been seriously threatened when the constant barbarian raids (of the Goths, the Heruls, and the Unns), who came from the north threatening the borders of the empire in the middle of the 3th century and on, were crucial for the survival and the development of

¹ There is a quite extended bibliography regarding the transition from the ancient to the christian world. Indicatively we record: J.P.Sodini, The Transformation of Cities in the Late Antiquity within the Provinces of Macedonia and Epirus, Proceedings of the British Academy: "*The Transition to Late Antiquity on the Danube and Beyond*", ed. A.G. Poulter, Oxford 2008, 311-336. A. Dunn, Stages in the transition from the Late Antique to the Middle Byzantine urban centre in S. Macedonia and S. Thrace, *Αφιέρωμα στον Ν. Γ. Λ. Hammond*, Thessaloniki 1997, 137-151. N. Duval, - V. Popović, Urbanisme et topographie Chrétien dans les provinces septentrionales de l'Illyricum, *Actes du Xe CIAC* (Thessaloniki 1980), Thessaloniki 1984, 541-579. J.M. Spieser, La ville en Grèce du IIIe au VIIe siècle, in: *Villes et peuplement dans l'Illyricum protobyzantin*, Rome 1984, 315-340.



Fig. 1. Thessaloniki. View of the late roman walls (Photo: Flora Karagianni)

Сл. 1. Солун. Поглед на касно-античке зидине (фотографија: Флора Карагиани)



Fig. 2. Veroia. View of the Late Roman walls (Photo: Flora Karagianni)

Сл. 2. Вероиа. Поглед на касно-античке зидине (фотографија: Флора Карагиани)

cities. In several cases, the destruction caused, was decisive for the normal flow of the cities' lives, while to the ones that survived, re-establishing peace led also to general efforts to reconstruct and reinforce their defensive walls.

The study of fortifications showed that in the late 3rd century, right after the destructions caused by the Goths to the urban centres of this era, a great effort was undertaken to repair the walls and strengthen the defensive structures of the cities². What is more, this constant threat of hostile invasions forced the emperors to take systematic care not only for the deployment of military forces,

² T. E. Gregory, *Fortification and urban design in Early Byzantine Greece*, in: *City, town and countryside in the Early Byzantine Era*, ed. R. L. Hohlfelder, New York 1982, 44.



Fig. 3. Dion. View of the Late Roman walls (Photo: Flora Karagianni)

Сл. 3. Дион. Поглед на касно-античке зидине (фотографија: Флора Карагиани)

but also for the maintenance of the walls and the reinforcement of the fortifications. Since new invasions were expected, more attention was paid to the strengthening of the lower parts of the enceinte of Thessaloniki³ (Fig. 1), which became the headquarters of all military operations against the Goths.

In Veria,⁴ during the forementioned repairs which aimed at rendering the city, fortified and safe against any new invasions, parts of walls were reconstructed, and marble parts of older building, - mostly funeral altars from the roman era - where used as building material in the walls (Fig. 2).

Dion,⁵ is another such case, where in the middle of the 3rd century, inscribed monuments, statues and funerary altars were used in the construction of the late-roman walls of city (Fig. 3).

The constant raids that took place during those centuries played an important role in the survival and development of the cities. Several were the cities in which the destruction caused, led to their abandonment or to the reduction of their outer limits to the stronger positions within the enceinte. Dion,⁶ belongs to the case of the cities whose limits started diminishing from the late Roman period. As a result, in the early Christian fortification of the mid 4th century, the area occupied by the city walls was reduced to half of the size that used to be in

³ G. Velenis, *Τα τείχη της Θεσσαλονίκης*, Thessaloniki 1998, 57 κ.εξ.

⁴ A. Petkos, *Τα τείχη της Βέροιας* (Προανασκαφική επισκόπηση), *Μνήμη Μανόλη Ανδρόνικου*, Thessaloniki 1997, 272-3.

⁵ Th. Tiveriou, *Ανασκαφή Δίου, τ.1. Η οχύρωση*, Thessaloniki 1998, 164-166. (henceforth: Tiveriou, *Dion*)

⁶ Tiveriou, *op.cit.*, 96, 159,199. A. Mentzos, A sketch of the history of Late Roman Dion, The International Conference, "The Roman and Late Roman city", (Veliko Turnovo, 26-30 July 2000), Sofia 2002, 333.

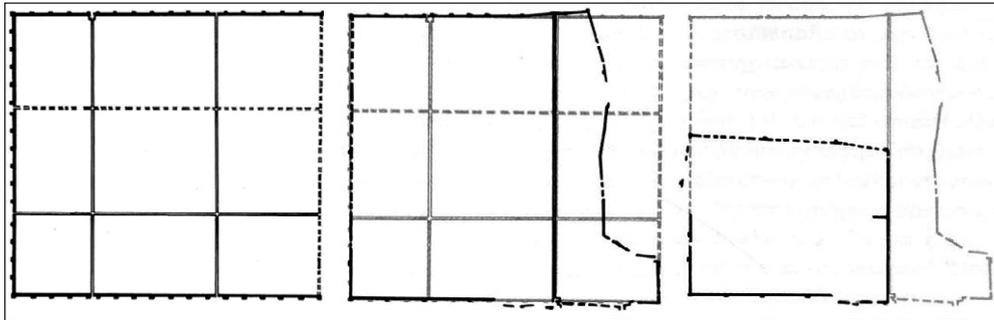


Fig. 4. Dion. Plan of the walls of the city during the: a. Early Hellenistic period b. Late Roman period and c. Early Christian period.

Сл. 4. Дион. План градских зидина за време: а. Рано хеленистичког периода б. Касно античког периода и ц. Рано хришћанског периода

the Roman period. Specifically, the city of Dion during the hellenistic period occupied an area of 43 hectares, 37 hectares in the roman period, and only 16 hectares in the early christian period (Fig. 4).

Pydna⁷ is another typical example of a city whose limits got reduced. After its abandonment for short period, due to the installation of Goths, life re-emerged in the ancient city in the 6th cent. This time, however, it was limited to a small fortified part of the city which included only a sixth of the area initially occupied by the ancient city, that is around 4 hectares (4,16). What is more, the city from this century and on, is called “Kitros” and Byzantine sources refer to it as a castle.

Diokletianoupolis⁸, on the other hand, belongs to the first category as, - after its total destruction by the Ostrogoth raids in the 5th cent., it was deserted. It came back to life, though, in a new place located in the peninsula of the lake of Castoria, where Justinian founded a new city.

All the pre-mentioned modifications that took place in the early christian period, were directly aiming at the cities’ defence and eventually affected them decisively in terms of form and character. Under the threat of hostile incursions, the cities of late antiquity transformed, from urban centres with financial, commercial, administrative and political activities, into well fortified settlements, in order to serve the defensive purposes of the Empire.

In the meantime, during the Justinian’s reign, a quite extended project of defensive works was realised, in an effort to reinforce the most important and vulnerable parts of the hinterland. This effort for the reconstruction of the state’s defence, included the designing and building of a great number of fortifications, citadels, towers and fortresses and the strengthening of the already existing defensive enceintes by building bulwarks or simply by repairing the destroyed

⁷ A. Chrysostomou, Η ρωμαϊκή αποικία της Πέλλας, *Πέλλα και η περιοχή της*, Thessaloniki 2003, 94-95.

⁸ Th. Papazotos, Ανασκαφή Διοκλητιανούπολεως. Οι πρώτες εκτιμήσεις, *Αρχαιολογικών Δελτίων* 43 (1988), Α’, 197-8. A. Petkos, *Diocletianoupolis – Guide of the archaeological site*, Veroia 2008, 8-9.

parts. (Aravessos) As a result of this extended activity, the cities acquired a new character, that of fortresses, which was acknowledged by Justinian himself, in Nouvella 12 (538), who mentioned their transformation into castles saying “εν ταις πόλεσιν, ητοι κάστροις”⁹ (meaning “in the cities, otherwise castles”).

In this era, when the survival of cities and the preservation of fortifications monopolized the state’s concern, at the expense of the rest of the public building, another factor was about to determine the transformation of the cities. Archaeological data prove that the image of prosperity and flourishing- existing while the cities were still prominent centres of the pagan world-, radically changed with the prevalence of Christianity. When Paul crossed Phillipoi, Thessaloniki and Veria¹⁰ in the mid 1st cent. A.D, he brought the air of change in this area; the decline of paganism was accelerated, and some cities turned into centres of initiation and communication of the new religion.

Excavational research conducted in great urban centres of this era, has proven that a lot of the cities founded in the ancient times, gradually changed their forms and character in order to adjust to the new social and religious needs of their citizens after Christianity prevailed. In this new reality, Christianity came to be a strong factor of religious and political power and emerged in the urban life with the erection of buildings necessary for the services and needs of this growing power¹¹. In almost all cities, new christian buildings of worship, the so-called “early christian basilicas” were constructed while the old pagan temples were led to decline and abandonment¹².

Archaeological data prove that the new places of worship were incorporated into the life of the already existent urban centres and became parts of the often already existent city planning. This however, does not mean that the new buildings were necessarily within the old city-blocks. In certain cases, depending on the needs of an area, the city-grid became obsolete. This conclusion is derived from observations of cities such as Thessaloniki and Philippi, which had an already existent, strict, urban planning. In both cases, the integration of the basilicas into the city planning, often diverges from the parallel planning of the existing street layout. These divergences frequently led to the cancellation of secondary streets, in order for the new huge buildings to “fit-in” without rendering useless the rest of the urban planning, as a whole.

⁹ T. Louggis, Η εξέλιξη της βυζαντινής πόλης από τον τέταρτο στο δωδέκατο αιώνα, *Βυζαντιακά* 16 (1996), 39 (henceforth: Longgis, Βυζαντινή πόλη).

¹⁰ R. Popović, *Le Christianisme sur le sol de l’ Illyricum oriental jusqu’à l’arrivée des Slaves*, Thessaloniki 1996, 36 κ.εξ. Chr. Μανροπούλου –Τσιουμι, **Τα βήματα του Αποστόλου Παύλου από τους Φιλίππους ως τη Βέροια**. Προφορική παράδοση και Αρχαιολογικές γνώσεις, Α’ Παύλεια. Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Επιστημονικού Συνεδρίου: “Ο Απόστολος Παύλος και η Βέροια” (Βέροια, 27-28 Ιουνίου 1995), Veria 1995, 225-231. S. N. Sakkos, Ο Παύλος στη Βέροια, Α’ Παύλεια , *op.cit.*, 203-222, G. Chionides, *Ιστορία της Βέροιας*, τ. Α, Veria 1960, 169-180.

¹¹ G. Lavvas, **Οι πόλεις των “χριστιανικών” βασιλικών: μια συμβολή στην πολεοδομία του Ανατολικού Ιλλυρικού**, *Εισηγήσεις του 10ου Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογίας* (Θεσσαλονίκη 1980), Citta del Vaticano - Thessaloniki 1984, 403-445 (henceforth: Λάββας, Πόλεις).

¹² Louggis, Βυζαντινή πόλη, 43.

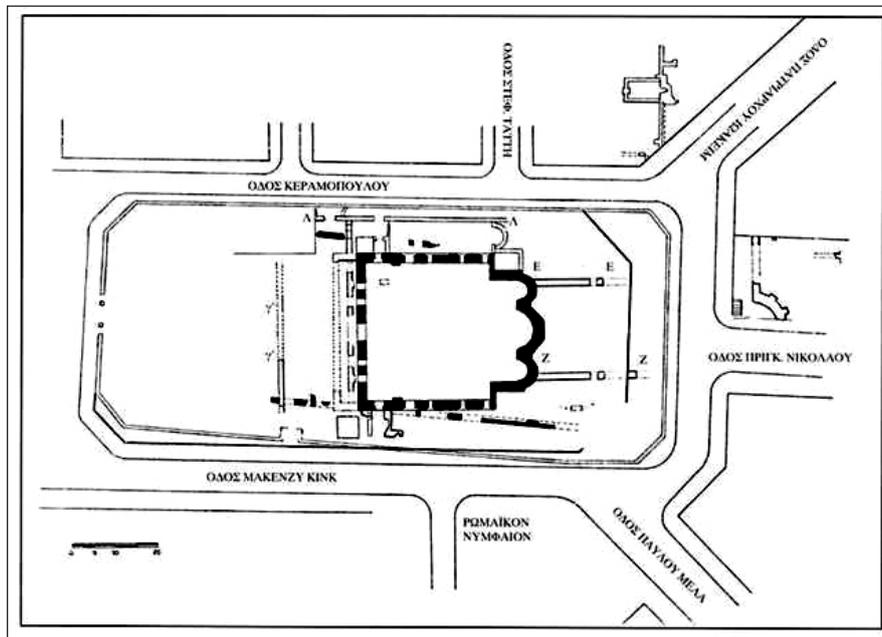


Fig. 5. Thessaloniki. Plan of Hagia Sophia (K. Theocharidou, *Η αρχιτεκτονική του ναού της Αγίας Σοφίας στην Θεσσαλονίκη*, Athens 1994, 33, Σχ. 1)

Сл. 5. Солун. План Свете Софије (К. Theocharidou, *Η αρχιτεκτονική του ναού της Αγίας Σοφίας στην Θεσσαλονίκη*, Athens 1994, 33, Σχ. 1)

In Thessaloniki, where the city-grid dates from the late Hellenistic period, subsequent Roman construction follows strictly the original system (examples of Ancient Agora, galerian complex). In the eastern part of the city, where the axis of the streets changes following the coast-line of the bay, during the constantinian period, a building was set strictly within the existing city-block¹³. Notably, the post-constantinian 5-aisled basilica of Hagia Sophia presents a different case¹⁴ (Fig. 5). Following the existing city-grid would have made impossible the proper orientation of the new church. As a result of this, the builders not only abandoned the axis of the Roman layout, but furthermore, made the basilica cut across 2 of the existing insulae and block a major street.

Also, at Philippi¹⁵, following the strict geometric layout of the Roman streets becomes less important than the erection and integration of the christian

¹³ For the change of the axis city' plan in this part of the city, see: M. Vickers, Towards reconstruction of the town planning of Roman Thessaloniki, *Αρχαία Μακεδονία Ι, Ανακοινώσεις κατά το πρώτον Διεθνές Συμπόσιον εν Θεσσαλονίκη* (26-29 Αυγούστου 1968), Thessaloniki 1970, 240. G. Velenis, P. Adam-Veleni, Ρωμαϊκό θέατρο στη Θεσσαλονίκη, *Το Αρχαιολογικό Έργο στη Μακεδονία και Θράκη* 3 (1989), 248.

¹⁴ A. Mentzos, Συμβολή στην έρευνα του αρχαιότερου ναού της Αγίας Σοφίας Θεσσαλονίκης, *Μακεδονικά* 21 (1981), 201-202.

¹⁵ St. Pelekanides, Συμπεράσματα από την ανασκαφή του Οκταγώνου των Φιλίππων σχετικά με τα μνημεία και την τοπογραφία της πόλης, Πρακτικά Α' τοπικού συμποσίου: "Η

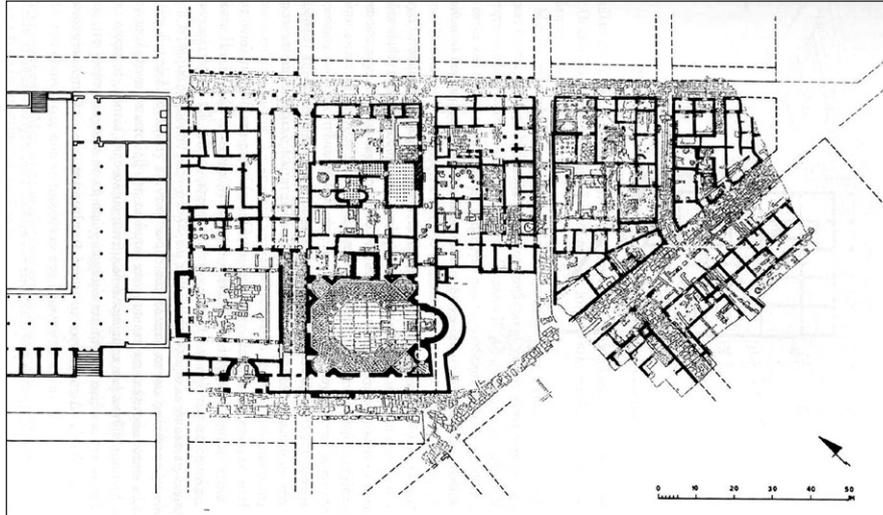


Fig. 6. Philippi. Plan of the area of the Octagon [St. Pelekanides, Συμπεράσματα από την ανασκαφή του Οκταγώνου των Φιλίππων σχετικά με τα μνημεία και την τοπογραφία της πόλης, Πρακτικά Α' τοπικού συμποσίου: *Η Καβάλα και η περιοχή της*, (Καβάλα, 18-20 Απριλίου 1977), Thessaloniki 1980, Πίν.1]

Сл. 6. Филипи. План области Октагон [St. Pelekanides, Συμπεράσματα από την ανασκαφή του Οκταγώνου των Φιλίππων σχετικά με τα μνημεία και την τοπογραφία της πόλης, Πρακτικά Α' τοπικού συμποσίου: *Η Καβάλα και η περιοχή της*, (Καβάλα, 18-20 Απριλίου 1977), Thessaloniki 1980, Πίν.1]

monuments in the city-layout, which meant that side-streets had to be blocked. A characteristic example is the one of the Octagon, whose arch was built on a side-street, thus destroying its straight line (Fig. 6).

Over the period of time, basilicas dominated in the urban space of the cities either with their size or with their large number and became the basic nucleus of social life, thus giving the old “paganistic” cities, the character of “Christian -ecclesiastical” centres¹⁶.

The whole attempt to promote and, in a lot of cases, impose the christian element on the life of ancient cities, became particularly prevalent in the days of Theodosious (409-450). The decrees that he issued were the beginning of the end for the vast majority of the buildings of a “gentile-character” which comprised the urban layout of the roman cities. This is the era when the ancient public buildings, the schools, the rings and the theatres were abandoned and the pagan temples were abolished. At the same time, places which previously hosted pagan activities, were now “purified” with the construction of christian churches.

In the examined area, the conversion of an ancient temple into a christian one, has not yet been proven through the excavational data. More frequent was the phenomenon of the construction of early christian basilicas in the wider ar-

Καβάλα και η περιοχή της”, (Καβάλα, 18-20 Απριλίου 1977), Thessaloniki 1980, 152-153.

¹⁶ Lavvas, *Poleis*, 424.



Fig. 7. Aigai. Base of a column in the Early Christian basilica (Aik. Loverdou- Tsigarida, Aigae, 289, Εικ.1)

Сл. 7. Аигаи. Основа стубова у рано хришћанској базилици (Аик. Loverdou- Tsigarida, Aigae, 289, Еικ.1)

eas near ancient temples or at some distance, closer or further from their ruins. This is the case of the basilica placed near the sanctuary of Ammon Zeus in Kallithea (Chalkidiki)¹⁷.

Other examples are the basilicas located in Limenas of Thassos, many of which were built over the ruins or very close to pagan temples, using building material from the pre-existing buildings (eg. the basilica in the area of ancient Heraklion in Limenas of Thassos)¹⁸.

In the same spirit, basilicas were built in spaces where roman baths pre-existed. This is something we can see in the great basilicas of Thessaloniki – Acheiropoitos, Ag. Dimitrios, and Ag. Sofia¹⁹, and in several other cases such as in the very recently excavated basilica in Veria.

At this undeniably very important stage of the transformation of the cities into “christian-ecclesiastical centres”, there were two parameters which played a decisive role. On the one hand, the rapid spread of the new religion, and on the other hand, the decline of the ancient world which took place silently, but steadily during this period. At the same time, as the number of gentiles who followed the new religion was constantly growing, the ancient temples were losing their splendour and remained unused until some natural disaster, earthquake or fire, caused their total abandonment along with irreparable damages. What followed this situation is that places which previously hosted pagan activities, were now “purified” with the construction of christian churches. Simultaneously, the increased needs of the new religion brought on the phenomenon of the removal and selection of architectural parts and building materials from the ancient buildings, in order to re-use them as structural material in the new christian temples.

¹⁷ E. Tsigaridas, Χριστιανικά αρχαιότητες εις τον χώρον του Ιερού του Άμμωνος Διός εις Καλλιθέαν Χαλκιδικής, *ΑΑΑ* V (1971), 37.

¹⁸ St. Dadaki, Πληροφορίες για την παλαιοχριστιανική και βυζαντινή Θάσο, *Το Αρχαιολογικό Έργο στη Μακεδονία και τη Θράκη* 8 (1994), 336-339.

¹⁹ K. Hattersley - Smith, *Byzantine public architecture between the fourth and early eleventh centuries AD with special reference to the towns of Byzantine Macedonia*, Thessaloniki 1996, 182.

Fig. 8. Nea Pella. Base of an altar in Prothesis of the Early Christian basilica (Photo: Flora Karagianni)

Сл. 8. Неа Пела. Основа олтара у Протесис-у рано хришћанске базилике (фотографија: Флора Карагиани)



Indicative is the case of the basilica excavated in Vergina (Aege), where important architectural parts and sculptures from the ancient city were used as building material. Characteristic is the use of an inscribed votive pedestal which comes from a monument, probably statue, dedicated to Eukleia, by Eurudika toy Syrra (she was the grandmother of Alexander the Great), as column base in the northern colonnade of the church²⁰(Fig. 7).

Something similar is observed in the basilica which has been recently excavated in the roman colony of Pella²¹. These excavations have revealed an extensive use of architectural parts from buildings of the hellenistic and roman city. Indicatively we report the use of a base of an ancient fountain as a base of a small side-altar in the Eastern part of the north aisle of the early christian basilica. Also we can find inscribed Roman plaques, built inside the walls of the church (Fig. 8).

This long stage of “christianization” of the cities was followed by a period which was characterized by profound changes in the structural organization of Macedonia, as natural causes, mostly earthquakes, in combination with the avaroslavic raids led many late- antiquity cities to become obsolete. The ones that survived were those that had strong fortifications, very often from the ancient period, or occupied strategic positions which allowed them to guard and control crossings and important passages.

This period, known as “Dark Ages”, extending generally from the early 7th to the mid 9th century, was decisive for the survival and the future form of the city in general. The changes that occurred in the structural layout of the urban space at that time were major, although the circumstances under which they took place, are not always easily recognizable. After this “dark” period of approximately 3 centuries when the historical sources as well as the archaeo-

²⁰ Aik. Loverdou – Tsigarida, Αιγαί: Παλαιοχριστιανικοί χρόνοι, *Αφιέρωμα στον Ν.Γ.Λ. Hammond*, Thessaloniki 1997, 288-289, εικ. 1.

²¹ F. G. Karagianni, Η Βέροια και η ευρύτερη περιοχή στην περίοδο μετάβασης από την αρχαιότητα στο χριστιανικό κόσμο, Πρακτικά Επιστημονικής Διημερίδας: “Γνωριμία με τη Γη του Αλεξάνδρου. Η περίπτωση του Νομού Ημαθίας. Ιστορία – Αρχαιολογία”, (Θεσσαλονίκη 7-8 Ιουνίου 2003), Thessaloniki 2004, 117.

logical data seem to be very scarce, an intense building activity is often testified. Most of the cities being ruined during the so-called Dark Ages, are reconstructed at the same time that new ones emerge in many other places within the borders of the empire.

Conclusively, all the characteristics which outline the form of the byzantine city, are not the result of a sudden change. The beginning of the byzantine era did not mean the immediate alteration of the cities' physiognomy. On the contrary, the ancient city was transformed at a very slow and imperceptible pace – in the beginning at least. During this slow progress, profound changes were brought on to the social, financial, and political structures of the cities. There were a lot of transformation stages that intervened between the era of the Early Christian ages, where the spirit of Antiquity was spread and depicted generally in the cities structures, and the era when the new religious and social-political structures radically altered the functions that ought to be performed by the new cities.

The archaeological works day by day, reveal more about these changes, and in the best way confirm the words of Cyril Mango, that “ if the Early Byzantine empire was an aggregate of cities, the middle byzantine empire may be described as an aggregate of *kastra*”²².

Флора Карагиани

РАЗВОЈ ГРАДОВА НА ПРЕЛАЗУ ИЗ КАСНО АНТИЧКОГ У РАНО ХРИШЋАНСКО РАЗДОБЉЕ

Овај рад бави се развојем градова у прелазном периоду из касно античког у рано хришћанско раздобље (од IV до VI века). Конкретније, разматраће се питања која се тичу промене карактера, облика и организације као и очувања живота у градовима. Читава студија засниваће се на испитивању археолошких података који су изашли на светлост дана у току ископавања спроведених у градовима и насељима, где су сачувани остаци који датирају из одређеног периода.

Такође, кроз испитивање археолошких података, презентираће се многа интересантна питања која се баве евалуацијом античких градова и њиховом трансформацијом у „хришћанске“ градове. Међу темама које ће се испитивати, могу се поменути улога природних узрока и људских фактора који су често одређивали преживљавање, уништавање, напредак или пропадање касно античких градова, обележавајући етапе у њиховом развоју.

²² C. Mango, *Βυζάντιο. Η αυτοκρατορία της Νέας Ρώμης*, Athens 1988, 92.