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Cuprins/ Contents

Studii/ Studies

A. Papers of the International Colloquium on “Epistolography, knowledge, and the Ancient World”, Bucharest, October 3-4, 2025

Carlos HEREDIA CHIMENO – Letters from a Broken Republic: Cicero’s Correspondence and Constitutional Transgression (91–79 BCE)	5-17
Florentina NICOLAE – The Silence of Men, reflected in “Heroides”, the imaginary letters of love written by Publius Ovidius Naso.....	18-25
Lorenzo MONACO – L’immagine delle campagne daciche traianee e di Decebalo in Plinio il Giovane, <i>Ep.</i> , 8. 4. 2.....	26-38
Jörg VON ALVENSLEBEN – Fronto’s letter <i>De nepote amisso</i> as lament, self-consolation and self-reflection.....	39-49
Giovanni TAGLIALATELA – Die Verwirklichung des quintilianischen Lehrideals in Fronto Pädagogische Tugenden und Lehren durch Briefe.....	50-68
Mariana BODNARUK – Inscribing Senatorial Authority: Epigraphic Epistles and Senatorial Legislation from Constantine I to Theodosius I.....	69-89
Ethan CHILCOTT – <i>Varietas</i> in the <i>Variae</i> : Erudition and Audience in Cassiodorus’ <i>Epistles</i> ...90-113	
Lorenzo MONACO – <i>Licet interdum confabulationis tale conuiuium doctrinae quoque sale conditur</i> : Jerome’s letters to Marcella, and biblical exegesis in epistolary form.....	114-127
Titus SARKAR, Letters of Obligation: Debt, Trust and Moral Economy in the Lekhapaddhati.....	128-140

B. Papers of the 13th annual session of CICSA, “Circulația persoanelor, a bunurilor și a ideilor (din Preistorie în Antichitatea Târzie)”/ ‘Movement of persons, goods, and ideas (from Prehistory to the Late Antiquity)’, Bucharest, April 25-26, 2025

Ioana-Teodora STAN – The Panathenaic amphorae: an instrument for the propagation of Athens’ discourse and a subject of symbolic conflict.....	141-150
Ana-Maria BALȚĂ – When distance is not an obstacle. Several preliminary considerations on <i>Liberalitas</i> coin types of <i>Nikopolis ad Istrum</i> and <i>Marcianopolis</i>	151-166

Aurelia PARASCHIV, Alexandra-Clara ȚÂRLEA – Roman glass vessels in funerary contexts from Tomis and Callatis. A reassessment of older publications.....167-194

C. Interpretări și analize/ Interpretations and Analyses

Darius COVACIU – The ecclesiastic status of the see of Tomis between the 4th and 6th centuries. Reading notes on Ionuț Holubeanu’s research.....195-211

D. Recenzii și prezentări de carte / Reviews and Book Presentations

Sergiu Popovici, *Cultura Usatovo. Arheologia funerară a unei societăți din epoca bronzului*, Târgoviște, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2023, 475 pag., ISBN 978-606-537-623-6 – Elena FERARU.....212-214

Anthony A. Barrett și John C. Yardley, *The Emperor Caligula in the Ancient Sources*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023, 203 pag., ISBN 978-0-19-885457-9 – Andreea Luisa MIHAL.....215-218

Eckart Frahm, *Assyria. The Rise and Fall of the World’s First Empire*, New York, Basic Books, 2023, 528 pag., ISBN: 9781541674400 – George Cătălin ROBESCU219-221

Daniel Unruh, *Talking to Tyrants in Classical Greek Thought*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2023, VIII+272 pag., ISBN 978-1-78962-123-5, ISBNe 978-1-78962-426-7 – Ioana-Teodora STAN....
.....222-224

Daniela Zaharia, Vladimir Crețulescu (coords), *Sensibilități, obsesii, fobii și istoriile lor neașteptate / Sensitivities, Obsessions, Phobias, and Their Intriguing Histories*, 2024, Editura Universității din București, 282 pag., ISBN: 978-606-16-1499-8 – Cristina POPESCU.....225-227

Plutarh, *Vorbele de duh ale spartanilor*, traducere din greaca veche, studiu introductiv și note de Liviu Mihail Iancu, ilustrații de Mihail Coșulețu, București, Editura Humanitas, 2024, 200 pag., ISBN 978-973-50-8647-3 – Florica (BOHÎLȚEA) MIHUȚ.....228-231

E. Rezumate teze de licență și disertație/ Abstracts of Bachelor and Master Theses

Maria-Irina SOCOLAN – *A Comparative Analysis of Mithraic Imagery: The Regional Adaptation of the Tauroctony in Dacia*, (abstract of the Bachelor’s Thesis, 2025).....232-245

Cronica activității CICSA, anul 2025, Florica (BOHÎLȚEA) MIHUȚ.....246-247

The ecclesiastic status of the see of Tomis between the 4th and 6th centuries.

Reading notes on Ionuț Holubeanu's research

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Abstract: The ecclesiastical structure of Roman Scythia was widely discussed among the specialists since the end of the 19th century. Ionuț Holubeanu's contribution, especially his volume discussing the ecclesiastical organisation of both Scythia and Moesia Secunda shed a new light on the issue, especially regarding the status held by the see of Tomis between the fourth and sixth centuries. Although remarkable in its analysis of the primary sources, his work lacks an extended archaeological review, problem that faults the reliability of a part of his conclusions. This paper, presented in a reading notes format, engages with his study, aiming at a critical reassessment of the methodology used by Holubeanu in the particular topic regarding the status of the Tomitan see through the 4th-6th centuries. His work is confronted both with primary sources and secondary literature aiming to help with the understanding of the complex issue of Christian developments in the ancient Dobrudja.

Keywords: Scythia, see of Tomis, early Christianity, suffragan bishopric, metropolitan bishop.

Introduction

Knowledge of the ecclesiastical organization in the Dobrudjan area (the province of Scythia, part of the diocese of Thrace, as we know this region at the beginning of the 4th century) is a key stage in truly understanding the manifestations of early Christianity on the territory of present-day Romania. Unlike the regions north of the Danube, Scythia – being part of the empire – benefits from richer attention in the written sources, the local hierarchy being attested in episcopal correspondence as well as in the context of the Ecumenical Councils. Nevertheless, the rather fragmentary and, in some cases, contradictory data have given rise to long debates among specialists concerning the Church's organization in Scythia, as well as the status of the see of Tomis, the province's main episcopal centre.

The debate dates to the end of the 19th century (with the publication of *Notitia episcopatum* no. 3,¹ also known as Carl de Boor's *Notitia*, in 1891²) and continues to this day, the

¹ Darrouzès, 1981.

² Boor, 1891.

interpretations of the sources being complemented by the results of archaeological research. In this context, a key element is to understand the evolution of the status of the bishopric of Tomis during Late Antiquity, evolution that influences and is influenced by the province's overall ecclesiastical structure. Recent studies by Ionuț Holbeanu have shed new light on the issue, producing a welcome paradigm shift within the academic community. Although based particularly on already known sources and on the extensive specialised literature that over the last century has repeatedly addressed the matter, his interpretations have led to conclusions completely different from those of previous scholars.

This paper is intended as a discussion of Ionuț Holbeanu's main book on this issue, *Organizarea bisericească în Scythia și Moesia Secunda în secolele IV–VII*,³ emphasizing the evolution of the status of the Tomitan see in the 4th–7th centuries, a period that begins with the legalization of Christianity and ends with the reorganization of the structure of the Eparchy of Scythia that established the fourteen suffragan bishoprics of Tomis. These reading notes aim to offer a critical assessment of the conclusions reached by Ionuț Holbeanu, by repeatedly checking his information both against the primary sources he cites and against the views expressed by specialists in the field.

The general framework of early Christianity in Thrace during the IV-V centuries

To better understand the issues surrounding the evolution of the see of Tomis in Late Antiquity, it is useful to examine the development of Christianity across the entire diocese of Thrace. This broader perspective provides a contextual background for analysing smaller regions, such as the province of Scythia or the city of Tomis.

Starting with the fourth century, the whole territory of the Roman Empire entered a stage of Christianisation (especially after Theodosius' reign), the urban landscape being marked by Christian architecture.⁴ The end of the fifth and beginning of the sixth centuries were characterised by great building efforts during the reigns of Anastasius and Justinian.⁵ Together with defensive structures, the building campaigns also focused on the areas surrounding Christian monuments:

³ Holbeanu, 2018.

⁴ Ruscu, 2020; Zugravu, 1997.

⁵ Dumanov, 2015.

churches, monasteries,⁶ baptisteries, episcopal complexes.⁷ In a time when the affluent class preferred to build private residences rather than public edifices, the monumental structures were, in most cases, churches and other ecclesiastical edifices. This situation reflected the formation of new elites, of clergymen, military commanders and landlords, with the bishop as the leader of his community. The prominent role of the bishop in his local community is the natural consequence of the Church becoming an “one of the important organs of the Empire”.⁸

Also, during Late Antiquity, the structure of the Church in Thrace suffered various changes over time. The main changes are related to the increasing number of bishoprics, phenomenon explained by the periods of flourishing of the provinces, despite the number of barbarian attacks from the North of Danube. According to G. Atanasov in the diocese of Thrace, during the fifth century, the following situation was recorded:

*« (...) seule la province de Scythie est dotée d'un seul évêque-celui de sa capitale Tomis [...] Effectivement, d'après ces premières notices épiscopales, le métropolitain de Marcianopolis dans la province voisine de Mésie seconde a un archevêque et cinq évêques suffragants. Dans la province d'Hémimont, le métropolitain d'Héraclée a également un archevêque et cinq évêques suffragants. Le métropolitain de Philippopolis dans la province de Thrace a un archevêque et trois évêques suffragants, etc. ».*⁹

Further, Atanasov insists upon the special situation of Scythia (identifying about seven kinds of so-called *Scythian exceptions*). Two aspects observed by him need to be reminded here: first, the importance of martyrial cults in the province (given the remarkable number of Scythian martyrs) that resulted in a flourishing Christian life, with a large number of Christian basilicas (some of them of an extraordinary monumental size¹⁰); second, his observations regarded the unusually great number of bishoprics (fourteen), contrasting with the situation in other provinces in this diocese, as shown above.

Also, the Scythian space was known by the monastic presence attested here, both in the works of the Church fathers and, more recently, archaeologically proven at (L)Ibida¹¹ (modern day

⁶ Curta, 2001.

⁷ Dumanov, 2015.

⁸ Lemerle, 1998.

⁹ Atanasov, 2023.

¹⁰ Suceveanu, 2002; Suceveanu, 2007.

¹¹ Curta, 2001.

Slava Rusă). The presence of a monastic complex in this area is unusual, the monastic cenobitic communities being, if not non-existent, very rare in the Balkans.

Primary sources

The Christian activity in this province in the discussed period is covered by a variety of sources, varying from correspondence and mentions in Councils' canons, to Church histories (like the one of Sozomen). The amount of preserved written sources allows Holubeanu to base the conclusions of his volume on interpretations and criticism of the sources, analysing the existing sources almost exhaustively. It is undoubted that Scythia had a flourishing Christian life, due to the mentioned "abundance" of Christian martyrs venerated in the region and, of course, relics associated with them. Also, the economic growth and the development of this province starting with the Constantinian¹² period and the reconstruction efforts and age of prosperity brought by the reigns of emperors Anastasius and Justinian¹³ attracted the attention of the period's authors to Scythia. In order to shortly present the sources about the early Christian life in the province, they will be split into two main categories: ecclesiastical documents (mentions in the Church canons, letters of the bishops, imperial laws) and literary sources (writings of authors of that period). Since the size of this paper doesn't allow an extensive review of the existing sources, only a few will be mentioned, specifically those who are the main basis of Holubeanu's conclusions.

Ecclesiastical documents

We know about the presence and activity of the Scythian hierarchs, and especially the bishop of Tomis, from the great number of ecclesiastical documents preserved, regarding the period of interest. First, we know that the hierarch of Tomis attended various Church councils, the most important being, of course, the Ecumenical ones. The name of the bishop of Tomis appears between the attendees of each Ecumenical Council¹⁴ assembled in the first two centuries after the legalisation of Christianity in the empire. The presence of Scythian bishops is also attested at other

¹²The reconstruction efforts started during the reign of Constantine the Great, following an age of relative stability after the disaster of the Third Century Crisis. An example, from modern-day Dobrudja is the reconstruction of *a fundamentis* of the Tropaeum Traiani city during the time of Constantine and Licinius

¹³ Curta, 2001; Dumanov, 2015; Procopius, *De aedificiis*, IV., 1.1.33.

¹⁴ Honigmann, 1939; Dură, 2024.

various Church councils, for instance the one held in Constantinople in 449 and the Home Synod of 440.¹⁵

Besides the mentions of the presence of the Tomitan hierarchs at the Church councils of the 4th-6th centuries, information about them can be obtained from the episcopal or imperial correspondence¹⁶ involving or regarding them. The hierarchs of Tomis appear among the receivers of multiple letters and encyclicals of the Roman emperors, also among the signatories of episcopal letters regarding Church matters addressed to the emperors. The Tomitan hierarchs are also receivers of personal letters from important Church leaders and even from the emperor himself,¹⁷ the content of these letters (and, especially, the form of addressing) giving us insights about the ecclesiastical matters in the province.

Information regarding the Church organisation and Christian life in Scythia appear also in *corpora* of Roman law. We note here the known *Scythian exception* from Zeno's law (enacted between 474-484 and republished in the time of Justinian in *Codex Justinianus*). The exception refers to the exemption of this province from the obligation of having a bishop in every city recognised as such "by imperial benefaction".¹⁸ The reasons invoked are mainly related to the poor state of province, its churches being "damaged by continuous barbarian incursions or otherwise afflicted by want".¹⁹ It is to be noted that Scythia isn't the only place exempted from the previous rule, but also the city of Leontopolis, although due to different reasons.²⁰

Also, the various lists of episcopal centres, known as *Notitiae episcopatum*, provide a great amount of information, even if their reliability can be debated and their interpretation requires a much larger degree of complexity.²¹ Here will be briefly presented the first three *Notitiae* (according to the indexation made by Darrouzes²²) that constitutes our object of interest. The first

¹⁵ Palladius, *The Dialogue of Palladius concerning the Life of Chrysostom*, XIII; Holubeanu, 2018; Holubeanu, 2024a.

¹⁶ Holubeanu, 2017.

¹⁷ For instance, the *Encyclia* of Emperor Leo I, discussed by Holubeanu (2018, 2024) and Dură, 2024.

¹⁸ *CJC*, I.3.35.

¹⁹ Fragment also from the source cited above.

²⁰ The exception in their case isn't clear at all, the source saying that "for many have hotly debated whether it should receive a bishop of its own or be subject to the supervision and care of the most reverend bishop of Isauropolis; yet, although it has been granted city status and shall enjoy the rights of cities permanently and fully, it shall remain under the supervision of the aforementioned bishop".

²¹ As shown by the debates regarding the dating and the civil or ecclesiastic character of the original documents copied and compiled in *Notitia*, Holubeanu, 2019, Duchesne, 1895.

²² Darrouzès, 1981.

two lists show the see of Tomis as the only bishopric of Scythia²³, according to the data we know from Zeno's law, mentioned above. However, the third *Notitia* (also known as Carl de Boor's *Notitia*) mentions a wholly different situation, the Tomitan see having about fourteen suffragan bishoprics.²⁴

Literary sources

The subject of Christian organisation of the Scythia province (and the status of the see of Tomis) was also referred to by the authors of the period. Of great interest is especially the work of Sozomen, his *Church history*,²⁵ that discusses the ecclesiastical issues of this province in a few instances. First of all, Sozomen provides one of the earliest accounts about the already discussed *Scythian exception* (at about 440 AD²⁶). Also, from his work we know an important part of information related to the life of bishop Theotimus of Tomis, nicknamed *the Philosopher*, and also about his close relationship with John Chrysostomos. Of great interest are the attributes with which the Scythian hierarchs are referred, that can provide us clues about the status of the Tomitan see in their period.

Even if the subject doesn't refer particularly to Christian life and organisation, it is important to cite here Procopius' work, *De aedificiis*, from which we can deduce the development of Scythian cities during Justinian's reign²⁷ (development that started with Anastasius' large campaign of reconstructions in the region, including the religious edifices²⁸). Knowing that the poor state of the province caused mainly by barbarian attacks was the main reason of the exemption of Scythia from Zeno's law, the development of this province's cities and the short period of flourishing in the 5th-6th centuries could possibly explain the changes in the traditional organisation of the Church in the region.

Archaeological data

²³ Information also supported by the geographical work of Hierocles, *Synecdemus* – in fact a summa of tables with geographical and administrative data, Hierocles *Synecdemus* 637.

²⁴ Boor, 1891.

²⁵ Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica*, VI, 21.

²⁶ The year when Sozomen's work was presumably written, in which he specifies that these Scythian customs dates to more ancient times.

²⁷ Procopius, *De aedificiis*, IV, 7.15; IV, 11.14.

²⁸ Barnea, 1979; Dumanov, 2015.

The results of over 140 years of archaeological excavations conducted in modern-day Dobruja help us fill a substantial information gap in the history of this region in Late Antiquity. Even though Holubeanu's work is focused only to a small extent on archaeological data (basing its conclusions mainly from the preserved written sources), their importance to this matter requires a more extensive discussion. It is important to note that the main scholars²⁹ who discussed the topic of the status of the Tomitan see or the organisation of the Scythian Church (and their works being the base of Holubeanu's own volume) had an archaeological background and that their interpretations were supported mainly by the archaeological remains they found.

One of the first discoveries that drew attention to the problem, as supporting the data provided by Carl de Boor's *Notitia* and contradicting the known situation with the bishop of Tomis as the only hierarch of the province, was the discovery of an early Christian baptistery³⁰ related to the *marble basilica* (Basilica B) in the city of Tropaeum Traiani (mentioned in de Boor's *Notitia* with the Greek name *Tropaion*)³¹, a sign of episcopal presence in the city. The significance of this discovery started a debate among the specialists that will be presented subsequently.

Baptisteries, structures closely associated during Late Antiquity with the presence of a bishop³², are among the best indicators of the existence of an episcopal see in a late Roman city. This kind of structures were found also at Callatis³³, Axiopolis³⁴, Halmyris³⁵ (cities that figures among the fourteen suffragan bishoprics mentioned by the *Notitia* no. 3³⁶), also at Argamum³⁷, with the possible existence of one at Histria³⁸ (although not discovered yet) and (L)Ibida³⁹ (in a possible monastic complex and not in an episcopal cathedral).

At Histria, the extraordinary dimensions of the Great Basilica⁴⁰ and its proximity to the *Domus* complex, interpreted as an *episkopion*⁴¹ – episcopal palace – indicate also an episcopal

²⁹ Vasile Pârvan, J. Weiss, Emilian Popescu, Ion and Alexandru Barnea, Alexandru Suceveanu, Nelu Zugravu to cite only a few of the specialists involved in the debate, Holubeanu, 2024a.

³⁰ Pârvan, 1912.

³¹ Boor, 1891; Atanasov, 2023.

³² Brandt, 2011. Also, criticizing the validity of baptisteries as proofs for episcopal presence: Moreau, 2022.

³³ Holubeanu, 2024b.

³⁴ Opriș, 2024.

³⁵ Achim, 2003.

³⁶ Boor, 1891; Atanasov, 2023; Holubeanu, 2024a.

³⁷ Achim, 2003.

³⁸ Suceveanu, 2002.

³⁹ Curta, 2001.

⁴⁰ Suceveanu, 2007.

⁴¹ Bounegru, 2012.

presence. Octavian Bounegru's identification of the apse-like structure in the Domus complex as a chapel (upon which was based the identification of the *episkopion*) was contested by Sodini, who, instead, considered the "chapel" as a *triclinium*⁴².

These findings are proofs of the changes in the Scythian church organization, the province where the hierarch of Tomis governed as the only bishop gaining at some later point, suffragan bishoprics inside the province. Chronologically, most of the unveiled structures can be traced back to the 6th century.⁴³ There is a possible debate regarding the Basilica B at *Tropaeum Traiani*, dated by I. Bogdan-Cătăniciu in the fourth century,⁴⁴ dating that we find problematic,⁴⁵ as in that period Tomis is attested as the only bishopric.

Also, besides the aforementioned structures, epigraphical information is provided by the inscription discovered in 1960 at Callatis,⁴⁶ that mentions two suffragan bishops, Stefanus and an anonymous one, in this city.

Main scholarly views regarding the evolution of the status of the see of Tomis

Debates of the previous century regarding the status of the Tomitan see

The dispute regarding the status of the episcopal see of Tomis in the 4th-6th centuries started after the publication by Carl de Boor of an inedited *Notitia episcopatum* in 1891,⁴⁷ that contradicted the known information about the Ecclesiastical structure in the province. One year later, de Boor's *Notitia* was discussed by Heinrich Gelzer,⁴⁸ who showed a special interest with the Ecclesiastical organisation of the Greek space, and dated the document in the iconoclastic period, without making any mention of Scythia. Later, Louis Duchesne⁴⁹ stated that parts of the document (including the one regarding Scythia) were copied from a civil document, rather than an ecclesiastical one, thus rejecting the possibility of the existence of fourteen suffragan bishoprics to the Tomitan hierarch.

⁴² Sodini, 1997.

⁴³ Holubeanu, 2018.

⁴⁴ Bogdan Cătăniciu, 2006.

⁴⁵ However, Pârvan dated the construction of this basilica in the sixth century, after 530, during the reign of Justinian, Pârvan, 1912.

⁴⁶ Holubeanu, 2024b.

⁴⁷ Boor, 1891; Holubeanu, 2019.

⁴⁸ Gelzer, 1892.

⁴⁹ Duchesne, 1895; Holubeanu, 2019.

In Romania, the Catholic archbishop R. Netzhammer⁵⁰ rejected also the possibility of existence of other bishoprics beside the Tomitan see in the province, agreeing with Duchesne about the copying of information from civil lists in de Boors's *Notitia*. However, after the excavation of the *marble basilica* (Basilica B) and its baptistery at Tropaeum Traiani in 1906, Netzhammer accepted the existence of a bishopric in this city. According to his theory, after the destruction of Tomis the episcopal see was moved at *Tropaeum*, theory rejected by Pârvan. Vasile Parvan, at first, believed that the construction of the *marble basilica* was never finished, thus the city never functioning as a bishopric. After more research was carried-out, Pârvan reviewed his first conclusions, accepting the possible existence of more than one Episcopal see in the province. Supporting the data from *Notitia* no. 3/de Boor's *Notitia*, Jakob Weiss, in a volume dedicated to ancient Dobrudja,⁵¹ considered the elevation of the Tomitan see to the rank of metropolis some time before the Avaro-Slavic invasion. In a later study, Pârvan also supported the information provided by the *Notitia*, asserting that the suffragan bishoprics in the province were created somewhere between the reigns of Anastasius and Justinian.

After World War II, the contributions of Emilian Popescu brought a new understanding of the issue. Supported by archaeological discoveries (the identification of several baptisteries⁵²) and the finding of the Callatis inscriptions about the two local bishops⁵³) Popescu created the following chronology of the evolution of the Tomitan see, structured in three main stages.⁵⁴ First, during the 4th century, the Tomitan see was subordinated to the metropolitan see of Heraclea as a suffragan, later (at the end of the 4th or beginning of the 5th century) Tomis gaining autonomy as an autocephalous archbishopric (term with the same meaning as a titular metropolis⁵⁵), without having any suffragans. The third stage is the one reflected by *Notitia* no. 3, following the creation of fourteen suffragans inside the province and elevation of Tomis to a metropolitan rank, most probably during the reign of Anastasius (491-518).

Nelu Zugravu⁵⁶ adopted Emilian Popescu's conclusions about the chronological evolution of the Tomitan see, also supporting its elevation to a metropolitan rank at the beginning of 6th

⁵⁰ Holubeanu, 2019; Holubeanu, 2018.

⁵¹ Weiss, 1911.

⁵² Achim, 2003; Curta, 2001; Holubeanu, 2024a.

⁵³ Popescu, 1969.

⁵⁴ Holubeanu, 2024b.

⁵⁵ Holubeanu, 2024a.

⁵⁶ Zugravu, 1997.

century by the mentions during this period of the metropolitan bishop Paternus as overseeing Scythia. Zugravu⁵⁷ mentions a fourth possible stage, during Justinian, when the see of Tomis becomes (again?) an autocephalous archbishopric.

Ionuț Holubeanu's view

In his book⁵⁸ Ionuț Holubeanu, based mainly on a hermeneutical reapproach of the early Christian sources regarding Scythia and a re-evaluation of the interpretation of the various scholars that discussed this topic, has obtained completely different results. Admitting the existence of the fourteen bishoprics in the province (thus deeming as correct the information provided by the third *Notitia episcopatum*), he argues about the status of the Tomitan bishop as either a suffragan bishop or titular metropolitan bishop (autocephalous archbishop). Based on the information provided by the lists of attendees of various Church councils and mentions by ancient authors (especially the already-discussed Sozomen and Palladius of Galatia⁵⁹) he made substantial corrections to the chronology presented by Emilian Popescu. His better understanding and interpretation of the early Christian sources, due to a theological, rather than archaeological, background allowed much more accurate conclusions related to this issue.

According to his opinion, the Tomitan bishop was already elevated to the rank of metropolitan by 381, as the see of Chersones features as under Scythian jurisdiction in the attendance list of the first Ecumenical Council of Constantinople. Also, the mentions of Palladius of Galatia⁶⁰ regarding the Home Synod of 400 (where Theotimus I is referred to as a metropolitan bishop) is harmonized with the known *Scythian exception* of having the entire province oversaw by a single bishop, in Tomis. Proving also the jurisdiction of the Tomitan see over the bishoprics of Bosporus and Odessos, Holubeanu gave us a new perspective, with a metropolitan bishop existing in Tomis already at the end of the fourth century, overseeing over cities situated outside of his province and (in the case of Odessos) even outside the Roman Empire frontiers.

The situation was preserved in the next century, the ecclesiastical organisation of this region suffering changes only during the first half of the sixth century, during the beginning of Justinian's reign. The reorganisation of the province (indicated by a few measures, like the transfer

⁵⁷ Zugravu, 2008.

⁵⁸ Holubeanu, 2018.

⁵⁹ Palladius, *The Dialogue of Palladius concerning the Life of Chrysostom* XIII.

⁶⁰ Palladius, *The Dialogue of Palladius concerning the Life of Chrysostom* XIII.

of the old suffragans of Tomis from its authority between 518-536 and the organisation of *quaestura exercitus Justiniani* in May 536⁶¹) resulted in changes at a provincial level (the apparition of suffragan bishoprics inside the province), but the city preserved its status as a metropolitan see. Changes in its rank have been performed later, in the early seventh century, Tomis becoming an autocephalous archbishopric due to the decaying state of the Scythian cities, as a result of increased frequency of barbarian attacks in the region⁶², but this matter exceeds the timespan discussed here.

Holubeanu also criticises the interpretation given by Nelu Zugravu⁶³ regarding the presumed status of an autocephalous archbishopric received by the city during Justinian's reign, as this rank was specific to the cities with a metropolitan rank that weren't the capital of a province and couldn't have any suffragans. This interpretation is dismissed as Tomis had suffragans starting from the end of the fourth century to the beginning (?) of the seventh.

What can Holubeanu be criticised for is the small extent of interpretation of the archaeological data (basing his information mainly on the conclusions of previous scholars, without questioning their interpretation). Emilian Popescu's arguments are adopted without an extensive critique. The archaeological sources are, generally, only mentioned without an extensive analysis in Holubeanu's volume. Regarding archaeological data, it is pretty much clear that the Romanian scholars tried to obtain as much archaeological data as possible supporting the existence of other episcopal seats in the province. However, a significant part of these interpretations needs a new critical approach, especially regarding the identification of a surprisingly large number of baptisteries inside the province. Also, regarding the number of the suffragan bishoprics of Scythia, he tends to accept the list given by *Notitia episcopatum* no. 3 without mentioning that only a part of the cities mentioned in the document are archaeologically proven as episcopal sees and without providing significant proofs of their existence. Furthermore, despite the fact that he mentions the existence of a possible bishopric at Argamum, he doesn't further explain the fact that this city doesn't appear among the suffragan bishoprics of this province.

Criticism of Holubeanu's contributions

⁶¹ Mărculeț, 2017.

⁶² *CJC*, I.3.35, Holubeanu, 2018 and 2024a.

⁶³ Zugravu, 2008.

The paradigms proposed by Holubeanu received attention by the specialists of the field. Georgi Atanasov rejected his interpretation of the Tomitan see as being granted the metropolitan status in the late fourth century, proving his critique by the way the Tomitan bishops signed themselves at the beginning of the fourth century (only as bishops).⁶⁴ However, in his later book, Holubeanu demonstrated that this way of addressing was common between the hierarchs of that time, who usually referred to their status by the general rank of bishop, without mentioning their exact position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy as suffragans, archbishops or metropolitans.⁶⁵

Dominic Moreau also rejected Holubeanu's conclusions, first in a review of his book,⁶⁶ criticising the lack of archaeological analysis and the reliability of a research based almost exclusively on the insufficient number of primary sources. In a later study,⁶⁷ Moreau further criticised the interpretation of the discussed archaeological proofs regarding the existence of suffragan bishoprics in the sixth century. He contested the value of the elements specific to the baptismal rites (baptismal fonts and baptisteries) as proofs for the existence of a local bishop. Also, his study pointed out the inconsistencies between the archaeological realities and Holubeanu's interpretation (including Argamum's case). In his later book,⁶⁸ Holubeanu addressed only in part these issues, his covering of the archaeological data remaining unsatisfactory.

In spite of these flaws, a great part of the conclusions pointed out by the 2018 book, and especially those regarding the Tomitan see, still remain one of the best interpretations given in the scholarly debate.

The hierarchs of Tomis after *Pax Christiana* and before 534

Summarizing the much more extensive analysis of the topic made by Holubeanu and correlating it with the opinions of other specialists, it is possible to retrace the main stages of evolution of the Tomitan see, basing it on the interpretation of the previously discussed early Christian sources. The earliest mention appears in the *Acta Sanctorum Julii*,⁶⁹ specifically, in the passions of the

⁶⁴ Atanasov, 2023.

⁶⁵ Holubeanu, 2024a.

⁶⁶ Moreau, 2020.

⁶⁷ Moreau, 2022.

⁶⁸ *Christianity in Roman Scythia. Ecclesiastical Organization and Monasticism (4th-7th centuries)*, published in 2024.

⁶⁹ *De SS. Epicteto presbytero et Astione monacho, martyribus Almiridensibus in Scythia*, 1721.

martyrs Epictet and Astion, during their martyrization the Church in Scythia being led by Evangelicus of Tomis as *pontifex et praepositus* (high priest and chief).⁷⁰

After the *Edict of Mediolanum*, although unmentioned by Holubeanu, in the list of the attendees at the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325) in the section designated to the Eparchy of Dacia (*επαρχία της Δακίας*) *Μάρκον Τόμεον* (Marchos Tomeon/Mark of Tomis) is mentioned,⁷¹ without any other epithet or any reference to his function or status.

The next known bishop is Vetrano, half a century later, mentioned by Sozomen in an episode related to the visit of Emperor Valens (364-375) in the city of Tomis.⁷² In this context, the author also mentions the Scythian custom (later consecrated by imperial law) that the whole province was under the sway of one bishop.

The next bishop, Terentius, appears between the signatories of the canons of the third Ecumenical Council (in 381 at Constantinople).⁷³ However, under the heading of the ecclesiastical province of Scythia are listed not only one, but three bishops: *Terentius Tomeun* (Terentius of Tomis), *Aetherius Cersonissi* (Aetherius of Chersones) and *Sebastianus Anchialis* (Sebastian of Anchialus).⁷⁴ Later interpretation, although suggesting that the insertion of the third bishop may have been an error (Anchialus being a city of Haemimontus, a heading that can be found in the list), accepted the bishopric of Chersones as being under the jurisdiction of the eparchy of Scythia, proof used by Holubeanu to suggest an elevation in the rank of the Tomitan bishop to a metropolitan status. Also, in the beginning of the fifth century, at the *Home Synod* in 400, the first three hierarchs mentioned by Palladius of Galatia (Theotimus I of Scythia, Ammon of Thrace and Arabianus of Galatia) are described as *πάντων μητροπολίτην γεγ επακωτών* /*metropolitans advanced in years*⁷⁵.

Later in the fifth century the Tomitan see is recorded as having another suffragan bishopric, at Odessos⁷⁶, information based upon Holubeanu's interpretation (aligned with the opinion of the Polish specialist Kazimierz Ilski⁷⁷) of the formula "Dizza episcopus civitatis Odissae Scythiae

⁷⁰ Holubeanu, 2018; *De SS. Epicteto presbytero et Astione monacho, martyribus Almiridensibus in Scythia*, 1721.

⁷¹ Honigmann, 1939.

⁷² Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* VI.21.

⁷³ Dură, 2024

⁷⁴ Holubeanu, 2018; Holubeanu, 2024a.

⁷⁵ Palladius, *The Dialogue of Palladius concerning the Life of Chrysostom* XIII.

⁷⁶ Ilski, 1994 ; Holubeanu, 2024a.

⁷⁷ Ilski, 1994.

similiter”⁷⁸ found in the answer of the bishops of Moesia Secunda to Emperor Leo I *Encyclia*. The bishopric of Odessos was, however, transferred under the authority of Marcianopolis after 458, as the data from *Notitiae episcopatum* suggest. Also, under the Tomitan authority was placed its third suffragan bishopric, the one of Bosporus, situated in modern-day Sevastopol, Crimea. So, with suffragans in Chersones, Odessos and Bosporus, the frontiers of the ecclesiastical province of Scythia do not match with the civil one, the Tomitan bishop extending his authority over the limits of the province and of the empire.⁷⁹

At the end of the century, under Emperor Zeno, the law that required every recognized city to have its own bishopric was enacted, law that exempted the civil province of Scythia and the city of Leontopolis from its application. According to the Zeno’s law and the information discussed above regarding the status of the Tomitan see, the whole province of Scythia was under the direct jurisdiction of the metropolitan bishop of Tomis, up until at least 536 (the year of the second publication of the *Codex Justinianus*).

The year 536 was also marked by two important changes, which both took place during May: the see of Bosporus was granted the rank of *metropolis* and Justinian created *quaestura exercitus Justiniani*, containing Scythia, Moesia Secunda, Caria, Cyprus and the Cycladic islands, under the authority of *praefectum Scythiae*⁸⁰. Also, by this year, the bishoprics of Chersones and Odessos were transferred from the authority of the Tomitan hierarch (Odessos somewhere between 518 and 536, Chersones most probably in 536).⁸¹ These are markers of what could possibly be a reorganization of the ecclesiastical structure of the province, leading to the situation that can be found in the *Notitia* nr. 3, with Scythia Minor having (most probably by the end of the sixth century) fourteen suffragan bishops to the metropolitan one of Tomis.

Conclusions

Reviewing the secondary literature on this topic and confronting it to the primary sources used, we can conclude that Holubeanu’s work brings one of the best interpretations of the issue discussed, managing to harmonize the conflicting information given by the ancient and early medieval texts. Thus, based upon his 2018 book regarding the ecclesiastical organization in both

⁷⁸ From the answers of Moesian bishops to Emperor Leo’s *Encyclia*, cited by Holubeanu, 2024a.

⁷⁹ Also pointed out by Holubeanu.

⁸⁰ Mărculeț, 2017.

⁸¹ Holubeanu, 2018.

Scythia and Moesia Secunda, the Tomitan see went through three stages between the beginning of the 4th and the half of the 6th centuries:

1. Possibly (given the very few information) an ordinary bishopric overseeing the whole Scythian province between the beginning of the 4th century and 381 (as a *terminus ante quem*).
2. Metropolitan see overseeing Chersones, Bosphorus and Odessos from 381 until 536.
3. Metropolitan see overseeing suffragan bishops in Scythia from 536 until the beginning of the seventh century (although we do not agree with Holubeanu's opinion regarding the existence of fourteen bishoprics, only eight being archaeologically proven, and only three being certain).

This interpretation isn't yet harmonized with the archaeological data, problem pointed out by the later critique of Holubeanu's volume, but despite this issue, his contribution brought new and valuable understanding to the topic of Christianity in Scythia. Holubeanu's various works regarding Scythian Christianity do not only bring a theologian in a field dominated by archaeologists and classicists, but also prove that even in spite of centuries of analysis, the study of primary sources still plays an important role in the historical research.

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