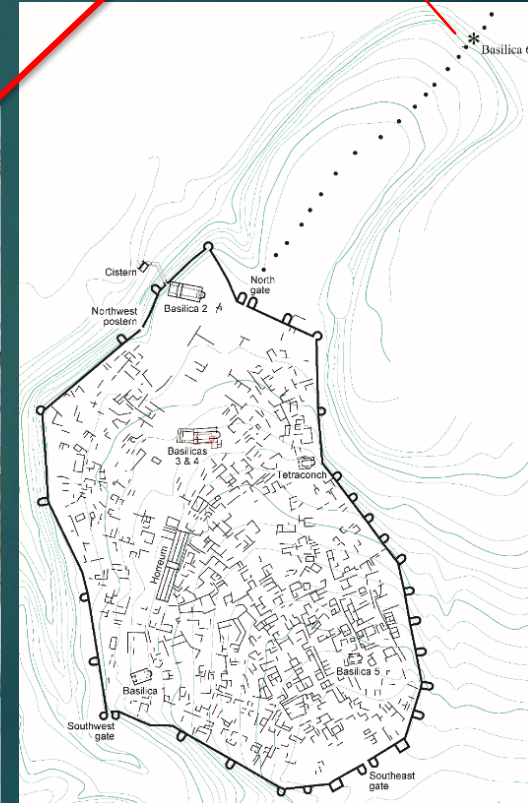


G. Atanasov. *Topographie liturgique et reconstitution d'une possible liturgie stationnale (στασιακή) dans la Zaldapa paléochrétienne au VI^e siècle*

G. Atanasov. *Liturgical topography and reconstruction of a possible stationnal liturgy (στασιακή) in the early Christian Zaldapa in the 6th century*



Zaldapa is the largest Romano-Byzantine city located within the provinces of Scythia and Moesia Secunda. Its fortified area covers approximately twenty-five hectares, and two districts outside the walls developed to the northeast and east of the fortress. Historical research, aerial photographs, satellite imagery, and LiDAR surveys reveal a densely built city with a well-organized road network.





History of archaeological excavations in Zaldapa

1906 – 1906 – K. Shkorpil, the pioneer of Bulgarian archaeology, explores **Christian Basilica No. 1**, the city basilica /the largest in the Bulgarian lands/ and the northern gate of the city

1938–1939 – Romanian archaeologists Scarlat Lambrino and Dorin Popescu re-examine Basilica No. 1 and the northern gate.

1953 - The director of the Varna Museum M. Mirchev explores a unique water-drawing facility under the fortress, connected to it by an underground tunnel.

2000 - Prof. S. Torbatov makes field observations presented in the book *The Late Antique City of Zaldapa*

2015 – 2019 – the team of Prof. D.Sc. Georgi Atanasov /Silistra/ Assoc. Prof. Dr. V. Yotov /Varna/ Dr. Y. Valeriev /Dobrich/ begin the study of the Episcopal Basilica No. 3 with the Episcopal Palace, further study Basilica No. 1 and buildings near the North Gate..

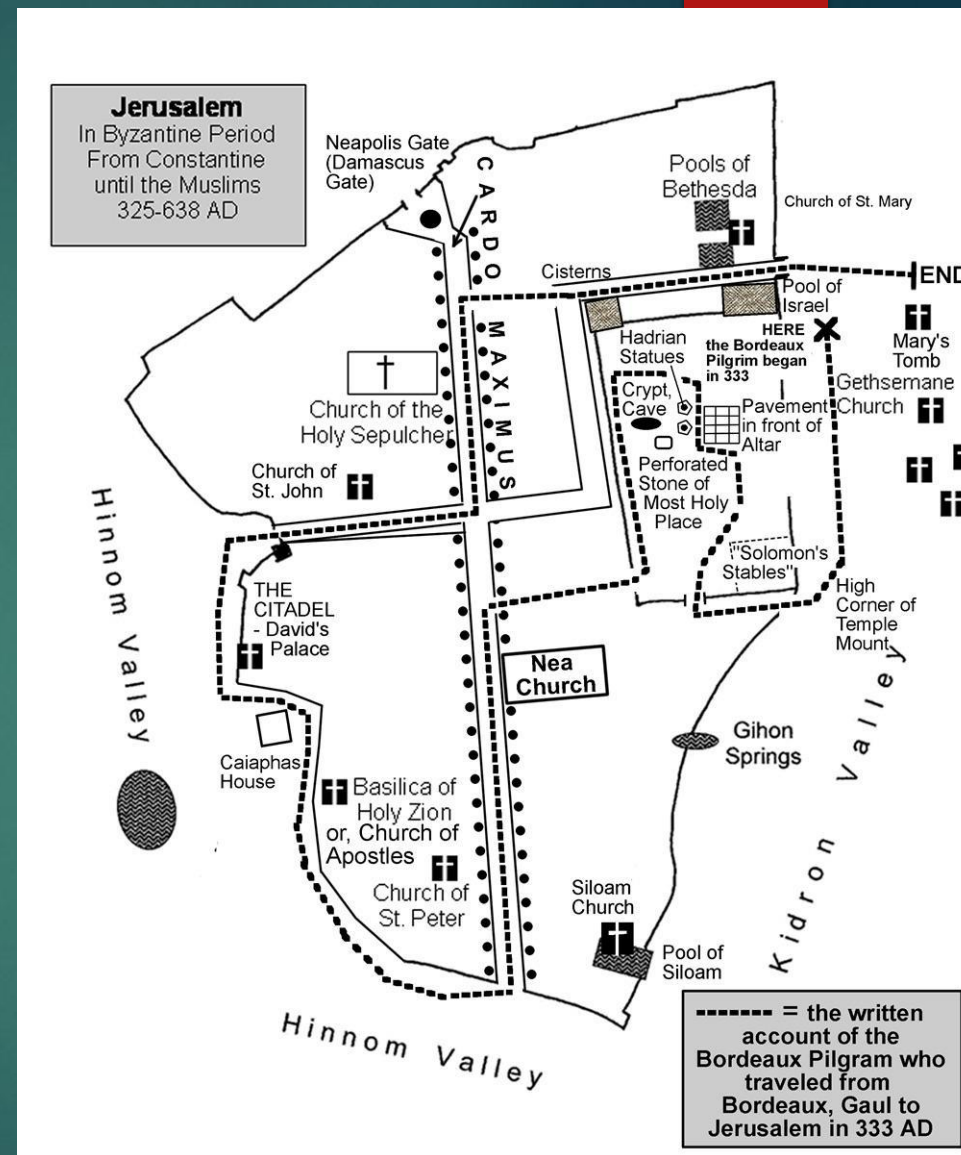
2018-2021 – An international team led by Prof. G. Atanasov, Prof. N. Baudry /Quebec – Canada/, Assoc. Prof. Al. Milanova /SU “St. Clement of Ohrid”/, Assoc. Prof. D. Moreau /Lille – France/ Dr. B. Barek /Strasbourg – France/, Dr. Y. Valeriev /Dobrich/, Arch. Dr. Elio Hobdari begin the study of the Christian Basilica No. 2, the North Gate and the approach to the Water Reservoir.

2019-2026- the team of Prof. G. Atanasov, Dr. Al. Harizanov from NAIM- BAN, Assoc. Prof. Al. Milanova from the SU “St. Kliment Ohridski” and D-r El. Hobdari and are studying the tetraconchal church with mosaic panels, unique for the provinces north of Hemus.

The stational liturgy was one of the most important forms of liturgical life in major Christian cities between the 4th and 7th centuries. It did not consist of separate services celebrated in different churches, but rather a single celebration that unfolded progressively in several sanctuaries throughout the city. The bishop, accompanied by clergy, monks, and the faithful, led a procession linking various churches, martyria, relic sites, and sometimes sacred springs. Each stop constituted a statio, where prayers, Scripture readings, psalms, and hymns were celebrated. In this way, the entire city became a single liturgical space.

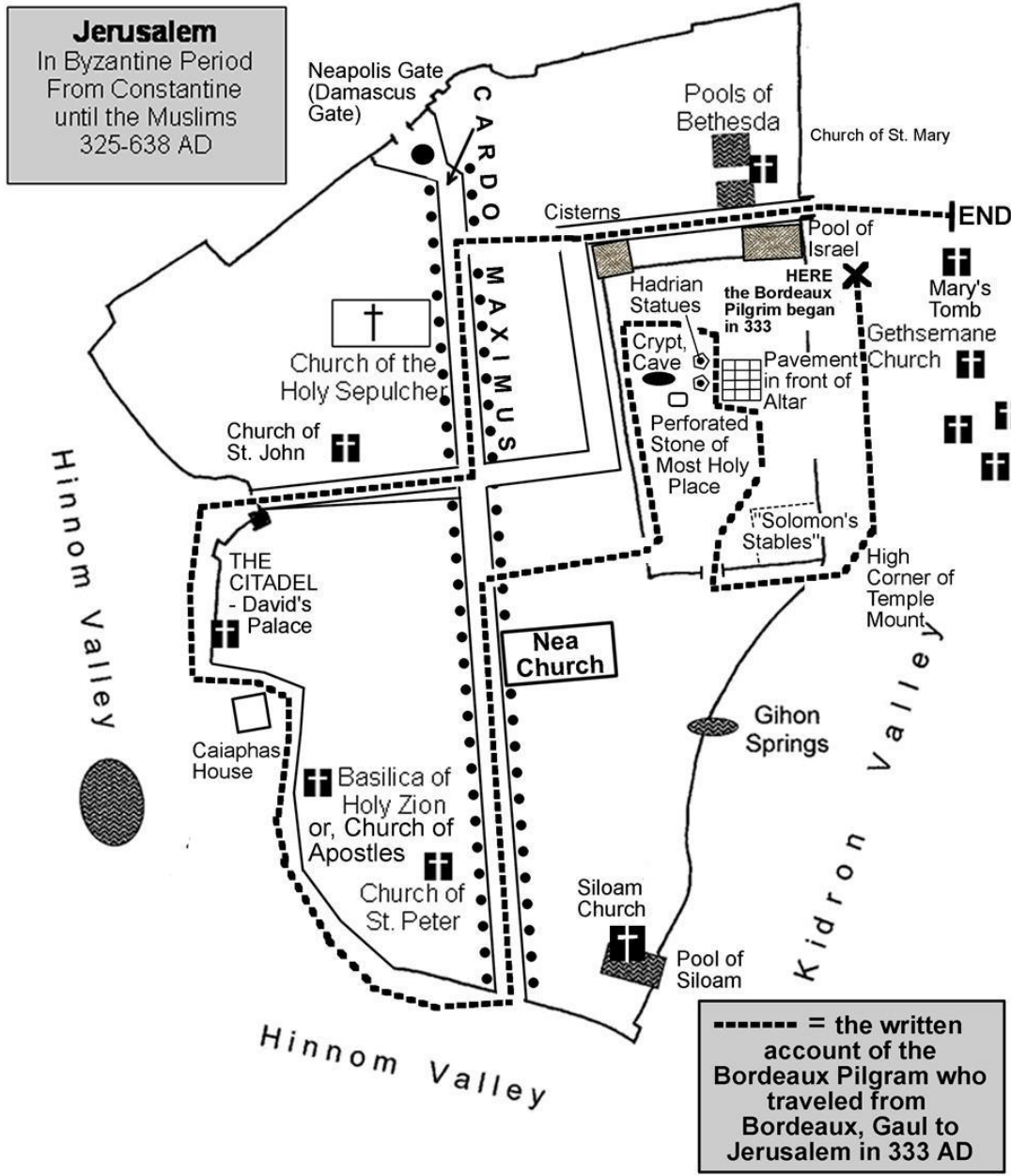
La liturgie stationnale est l'une des formes les plus importantes de la vie liturgique dans les grandes villes chrétiennes entre le IV^e et le VII^e siècle. Elle ne consistait pas en des offices séparés célébrés dans différentes églises, mais en une seule célébration qui se déroulait progressivement dans plusieurs sanctuaires de la ville. L'évêque, accompagné du clergé, des moines et des fidèles, conduisait une procession reliant plusieurs églises, martyria, lieux de reliques et parfois des sources sacrées. Chaque arrêt constituait une statio, où étaient célébrés des prières, des lectures de l'Écriture, des psaumes et des hymnes. Ainsi, toute la ville devenait un espace liturgique unique.

The main information concerning this practice comes from Jerusalem and Constantinople. In Jerusalem, the most valuable testimony is that of the pilgrim Egeria, who describes the processions between the Anastasis, Golgotha, the Mount of Olives, Gethsemane, Bethlehem, and other sanctuaries. Her account shows that by the end of the fourth century, the stational liturgy was already perfectly organized. Later, the Jerusalem Lectionary established the order of the celebrations and processions.



Exemple d'itinéraire pour la liturgie stationnaire à Jérusalem

Sample itinerary of the stationary liturgy in Jerusalem



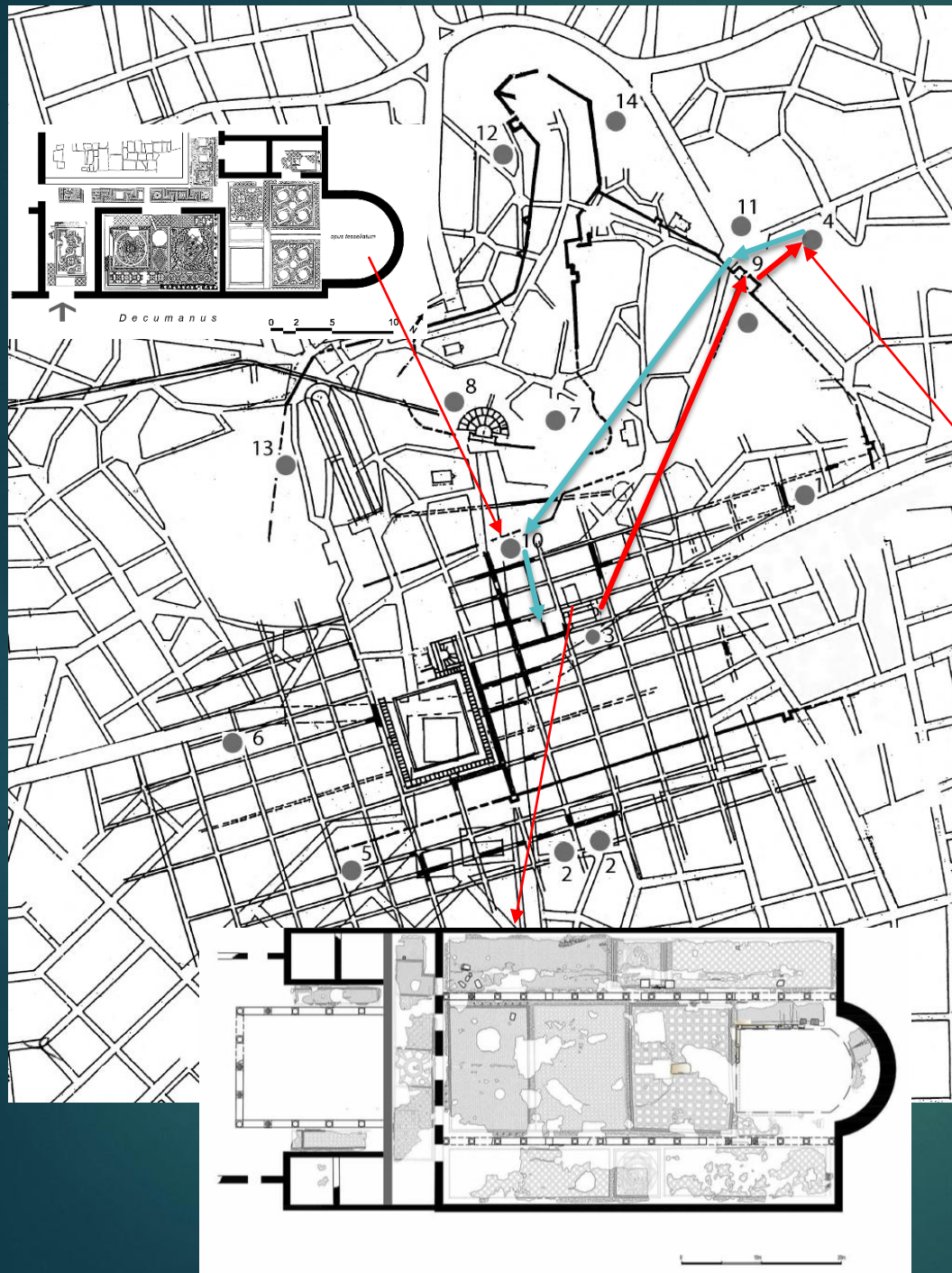
№	Станция
1	Hagia Sophia (Μεγάλη Ἐκκλησία)
2	St Euphemia at the Hippodrome
3	Theotokos at Chalkoprateia
4	St Mamas (Sykai/Galata)
5	Monastery of Evergetis
6	Cistern of Aspar (районът около цистерната)
7	Convent of Chysobalanton
8	Monastery of Manuel (на картата е пропуснат номерът; маршрутът преминава покрай него)
9	Monastery of Kokorobion
10	Monastery of St Mokios
11	Convent of St Andrew in Krisei
12	Monastery of Ta Gastria (или районът между Andreas en Krisei и Peges)
13	Monastery of Psamathia
14	Monastery of the Theotokos tes Peges
	Monastery of Stoudios (на картата по

Exemple d'itinéraire de la liturgie stationnaire à Constantinople

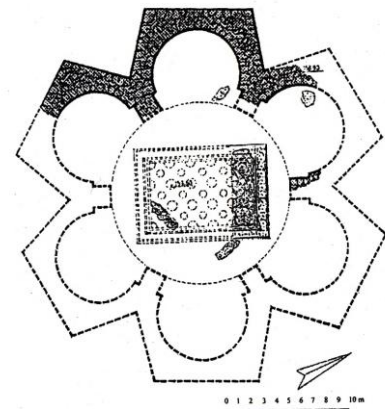
Sample itinerary of the stationary liturgy in Constantinople

1	Hagia Sophia (Μεγάλη Ἐκκλησία)
2	St Euphemia at the Hippodrome
3	Theotokos at Chalkoprataia
4	St Mamas (Sykai/Galata)
5	Monastery of Evergetis
6	Cistern of Aspar (районът около цистерната)
7	Convent of Chysobalanton
8	Monastery of Manuel (на картата е пропуснат номерът; маршрутът преминава покрай него)
9	Monastery of Kokorobion
10	Monastery of St Mokios
11	Convent of St Andrew in Krisei
12	Monastery of Ta Gastria (или районът между Andreas en Krisei и Peges)
13	Monastery of Psamathia
14	Monastery of the Theotokos tes Peges
15	Monastery of Stoudios (на картата по невнимание е означено отново с №14 вместо №15)
16	Monastery of Chora (St Saviour in Chora)

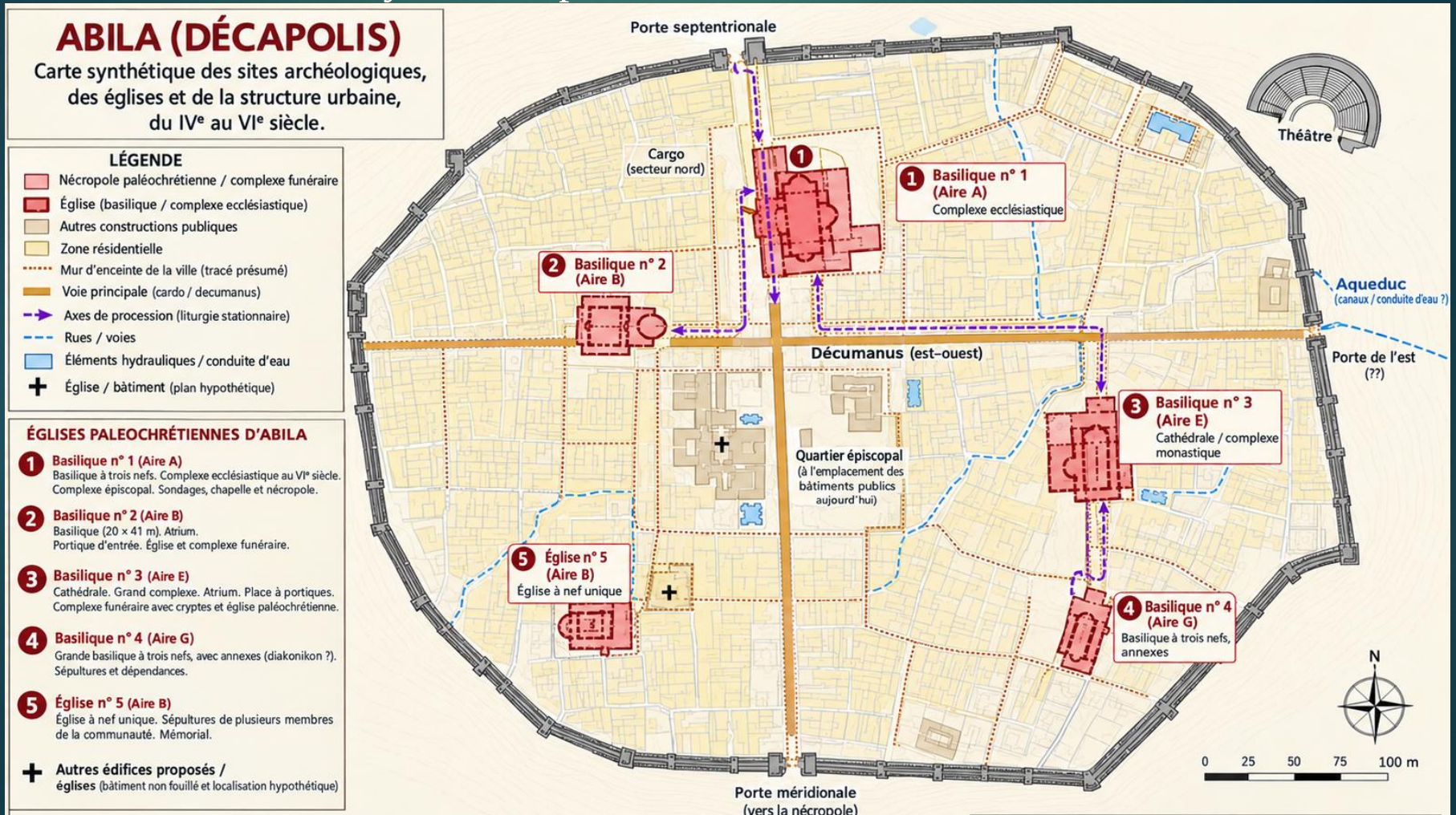




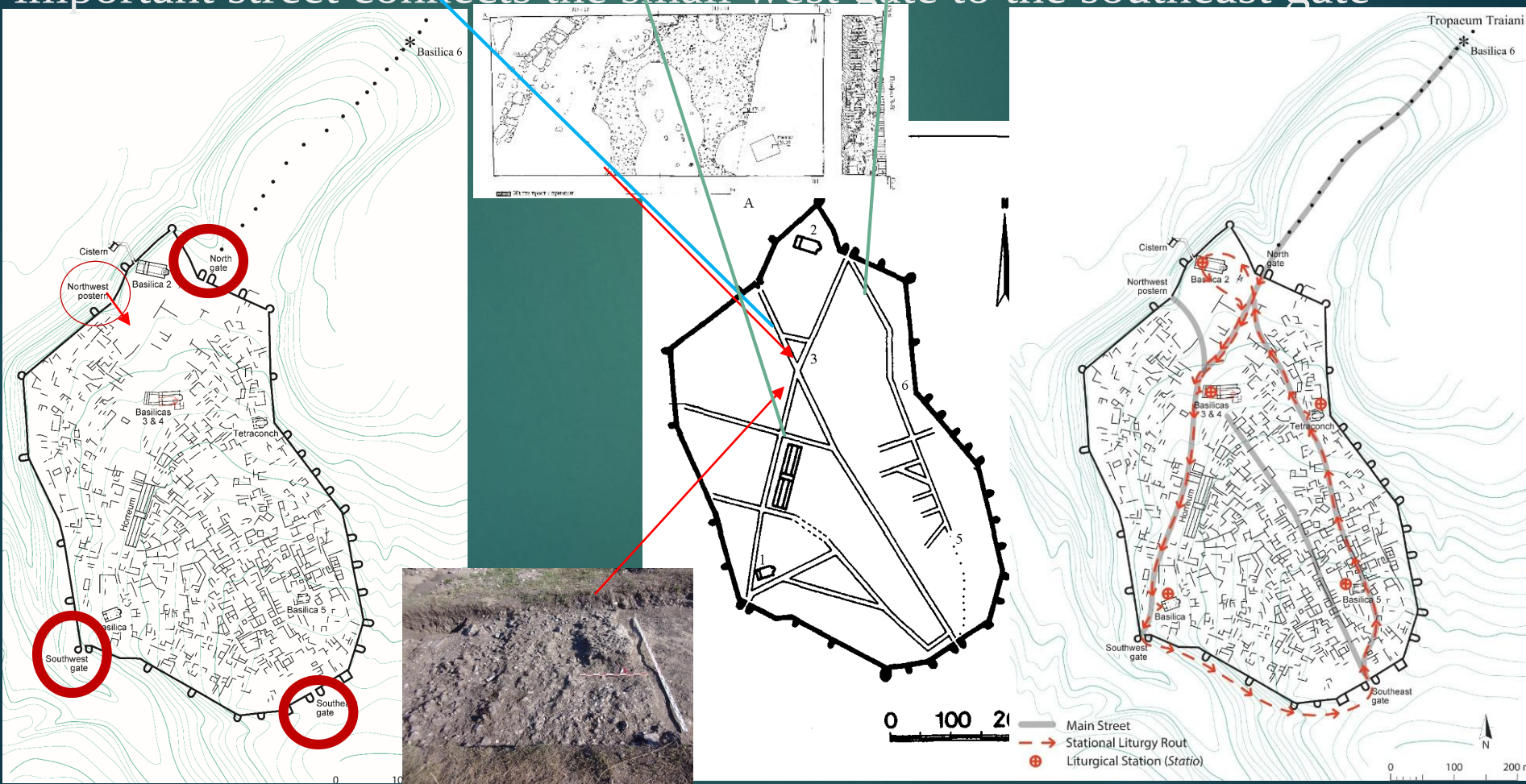
Ivo Topalilov, in a few sentences, proposes a two-way sacionary liturgy in **Philippopolis**. The procession starts from the cathedral /№3/, passes through the eastern gate /№9/ and reaches the martyrium of the 38 martyrs /№4/. In my opinion, it is logical that the return route should be the same, including the bishop's residence /?/ - *domus Eirene*/№ 10/



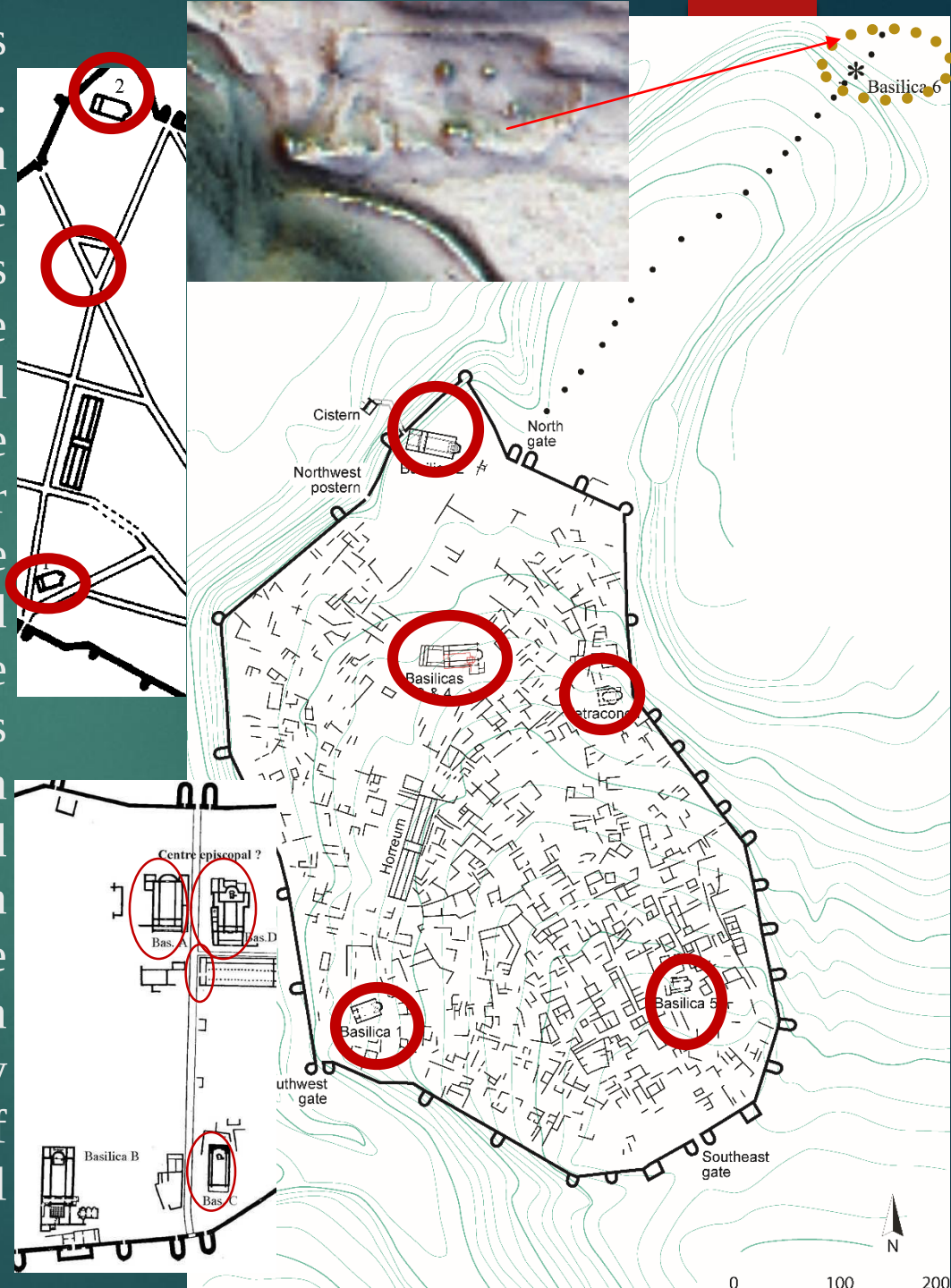
Sample itinerary of the stationary liturgy in **Abila, Jordan**. This method is **not** entirely new. Cheryl Eaton has already used it for the city of Abila in Jordan. Relying **solely** on the archaeological remains—the street network, several churches, an episcopal complex, reliquaries, and liturgical spaces—she offered a convincing reconstruction of a stationary liturgy, despite the absence of written sources. This approach provides a useful model for the study of Zaldapa.



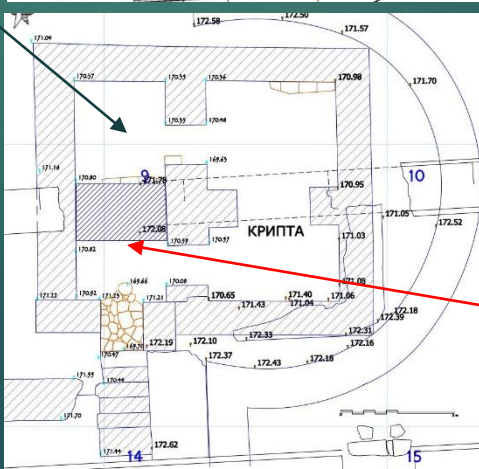
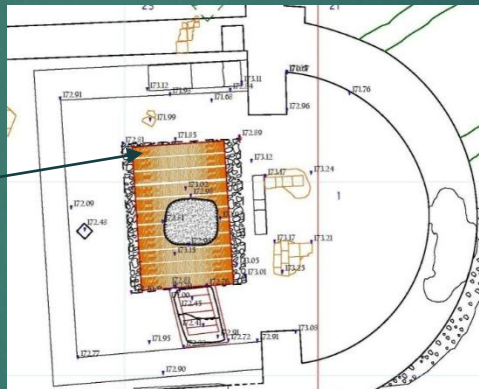
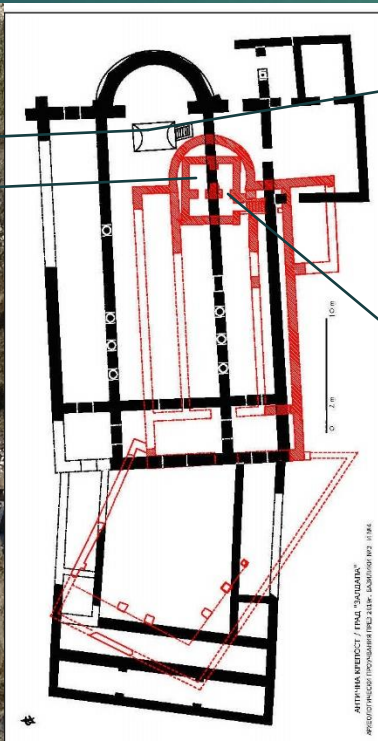
The Zaldapa fortress has three main entrances and one additional one. A wide, paved street leads from the north gate, runs through the entire town, and connects to the southwest gate. This street is the town's main thoroughfare. A second main street also connects the north gate to the southeast gate. These two axes structure the urban space. A third important street connects the small west gate to the southeast gate



What immediately catches the eye is the distribution of the main churches. The three most important sanctuaries in Zaldapa are located directly along the main street. Near the north gate stands the monumental Basilica No. 2. In the center of the city is the cathedral basilica No. 3. Near the southwest gate rises Basilica No. 1. The two other large churches—Basilica No. 5 and the tetraconch—are situated on the second road connecting the north gate to the southeast gate. Such an arrangement is remarkable. In most early Christian cities of Scythia, basilicas are scattered throughout different districts. In Zaldapa, on the contrary, they are aligned along the two main thoroughfares. This layout naturally facilitates the organization of processions connecting several sanctuaries.

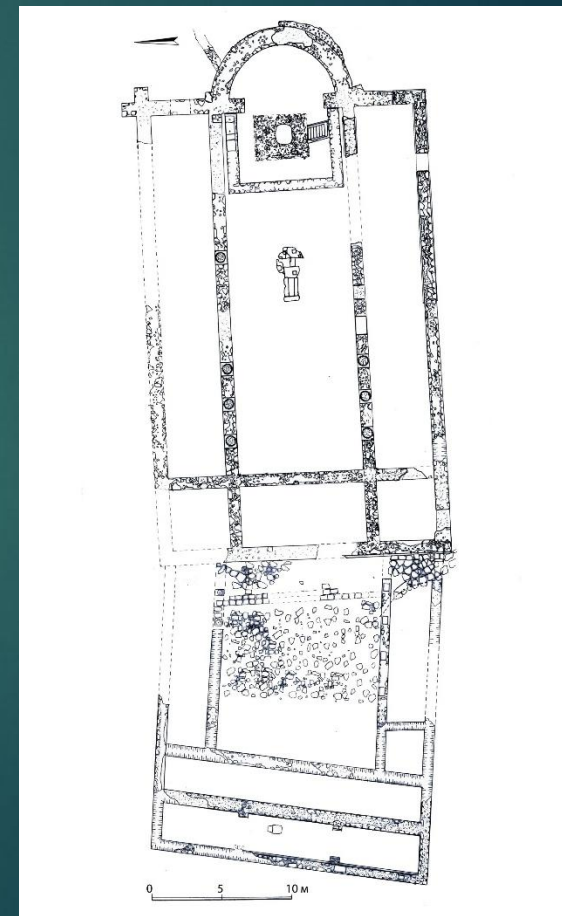


Cathedral Basilica No. 3 /61x21 m/ occupies a central place in this system. Built in the 6th century on the ruins of an older church, it likely became the cathedral when Zaldapa is mentioned as an episcopal see. It has a large atrium opening onto the main street, an episcopal residence, and, most importantly. The crypt of the former church No. 4 from the end of the 4th century with an area of 30 m² and 3 sections is the largest in Bulgaria. The crypt of the basilica No. 3 - 3.80 × 2.50 × 2.46 m. is the best preserved

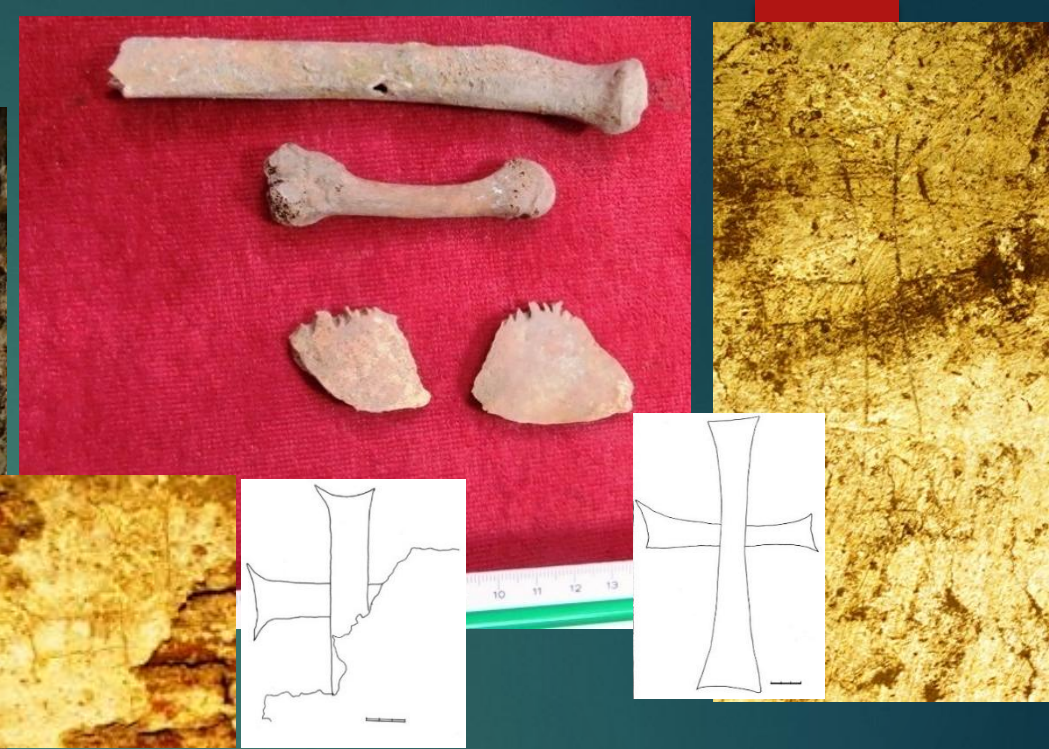
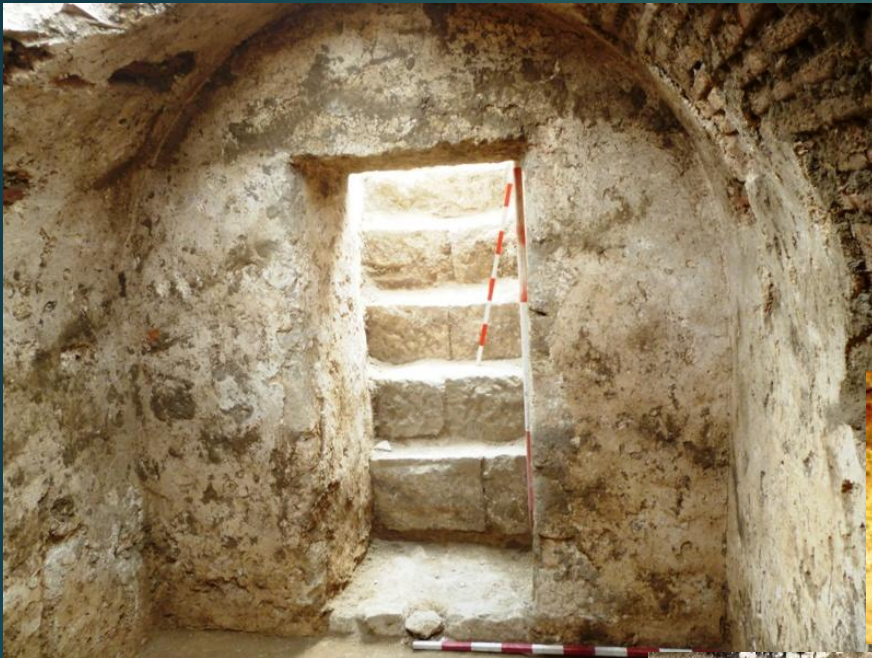




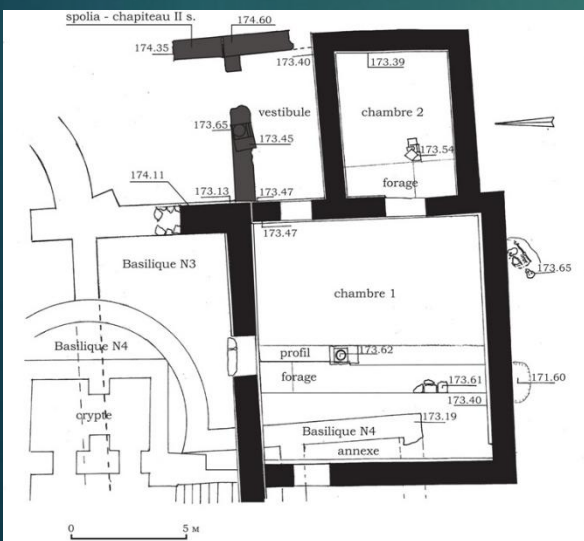
- ▶ Basilica № 3 was studied from 2014 to 2019 by the Prof. G. Atanasov's team.
- ▶ It's one of the largest and the most representative early Christian churches in Bulgaria and the Balkans with a total length of 61 m and a width of 21 m.

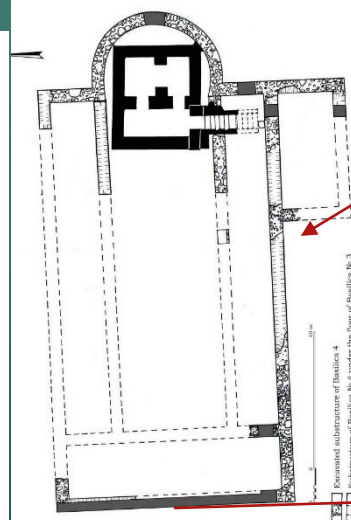
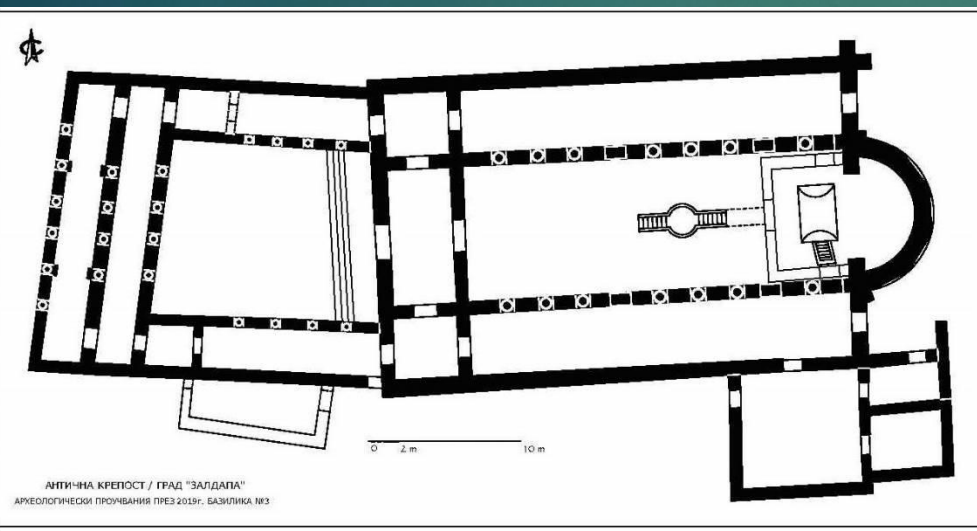
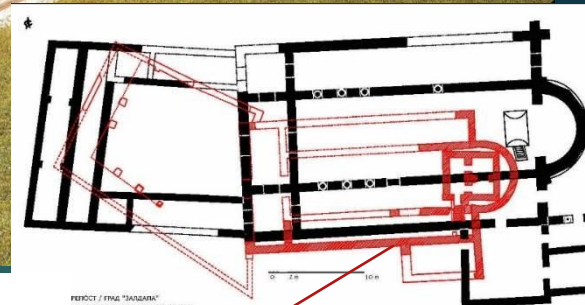
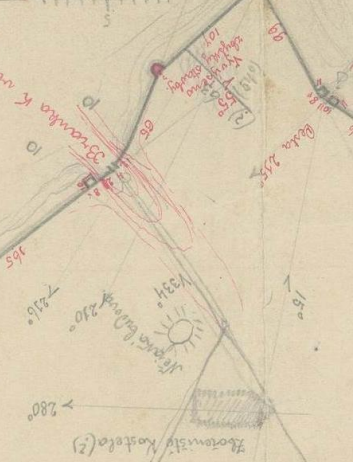


the crypt of Basilica No. 3



THE EPISCOPAL RESIDENCE

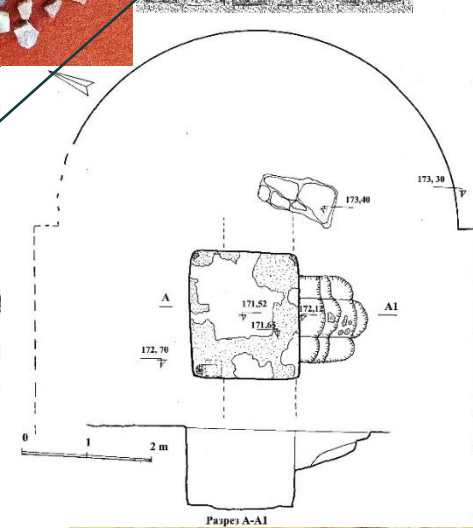
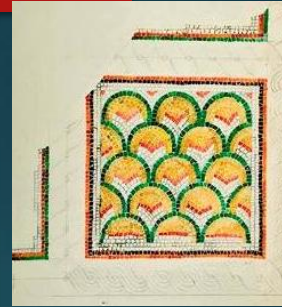
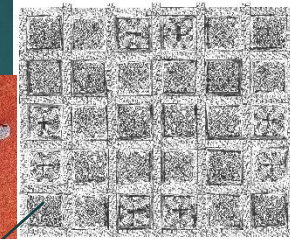
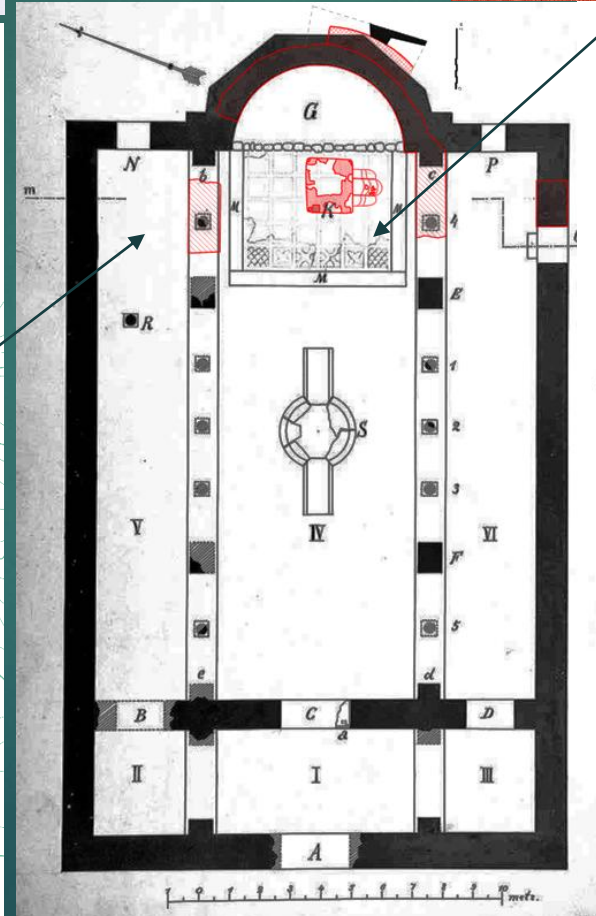
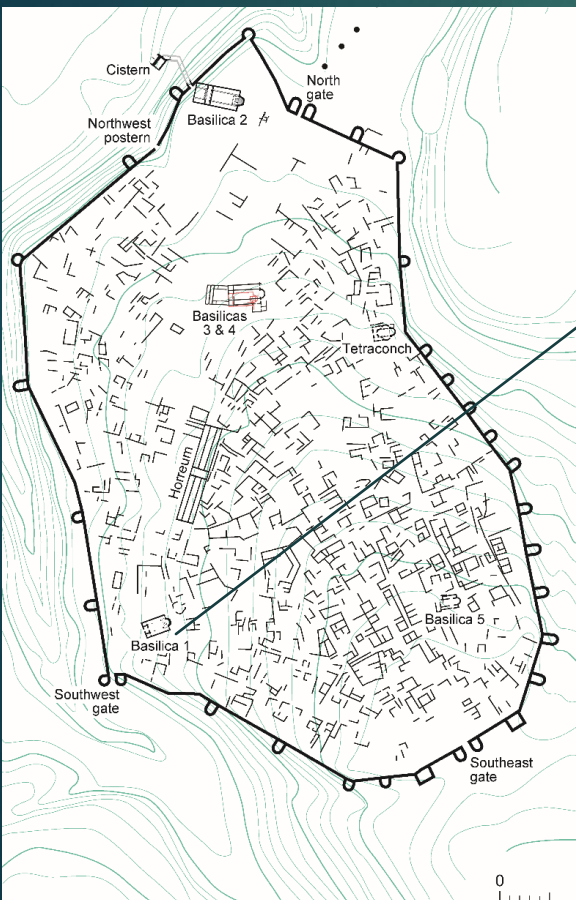
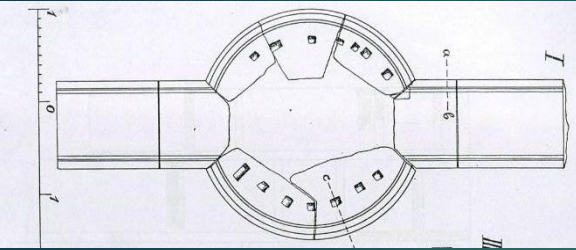




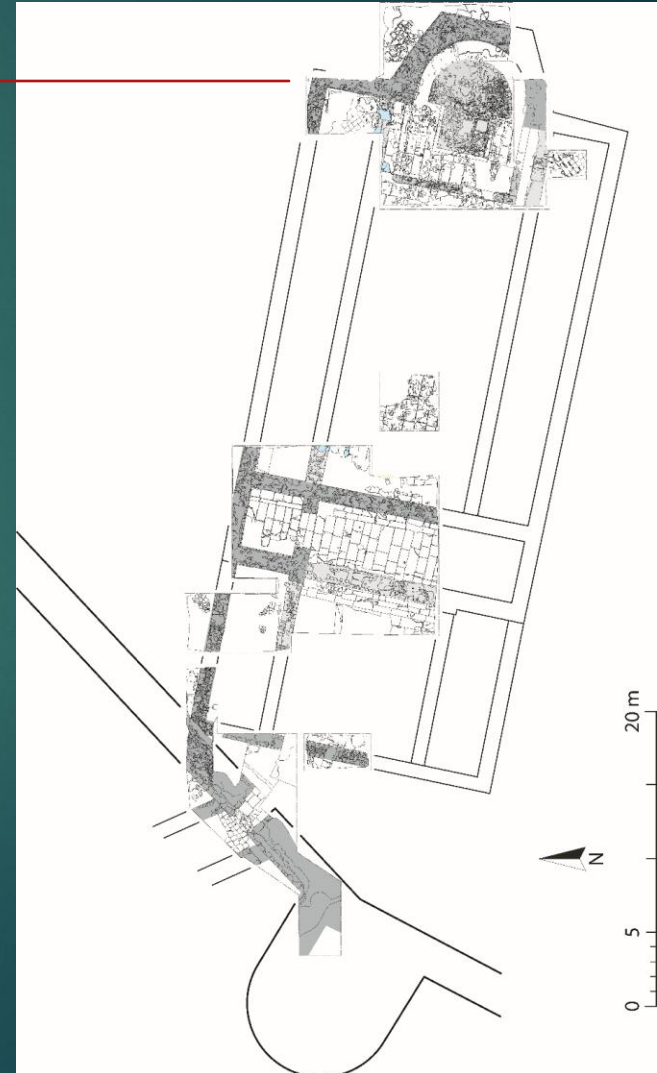
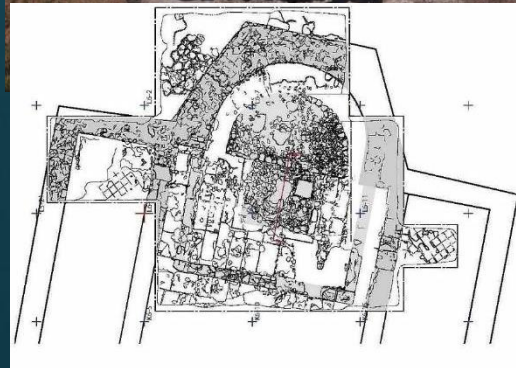
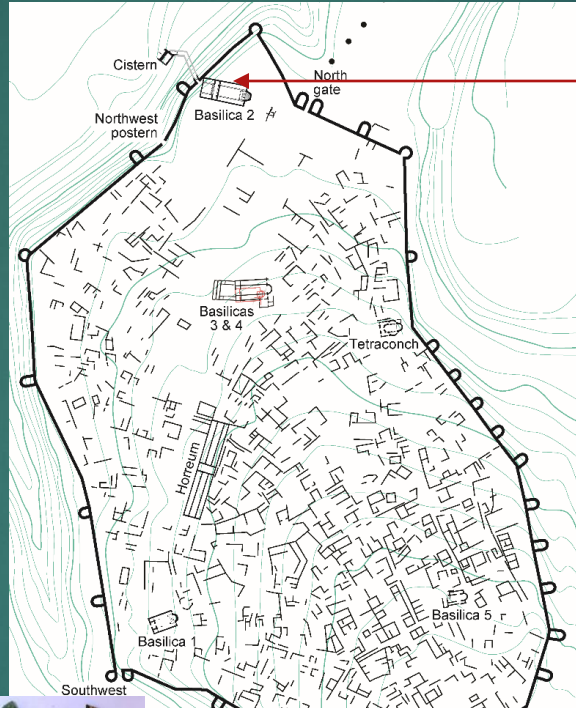
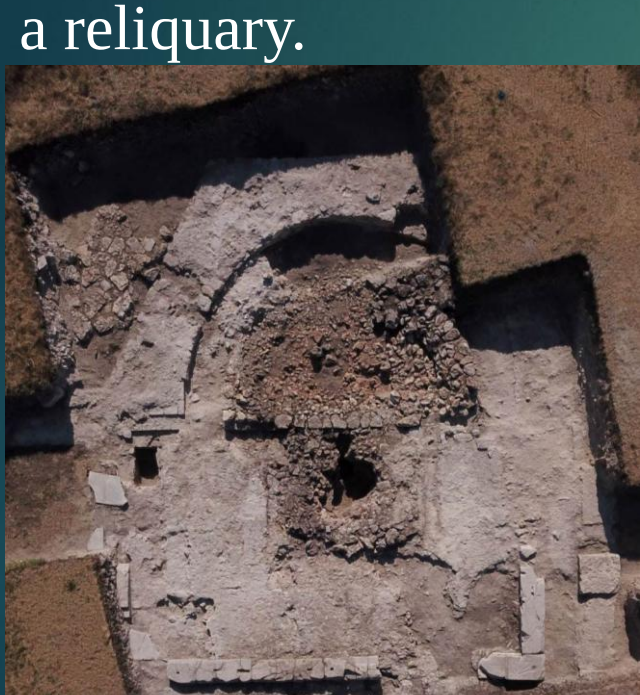
Basilica No. 4 - the end of the 4th - 1/2 of the 5th c.



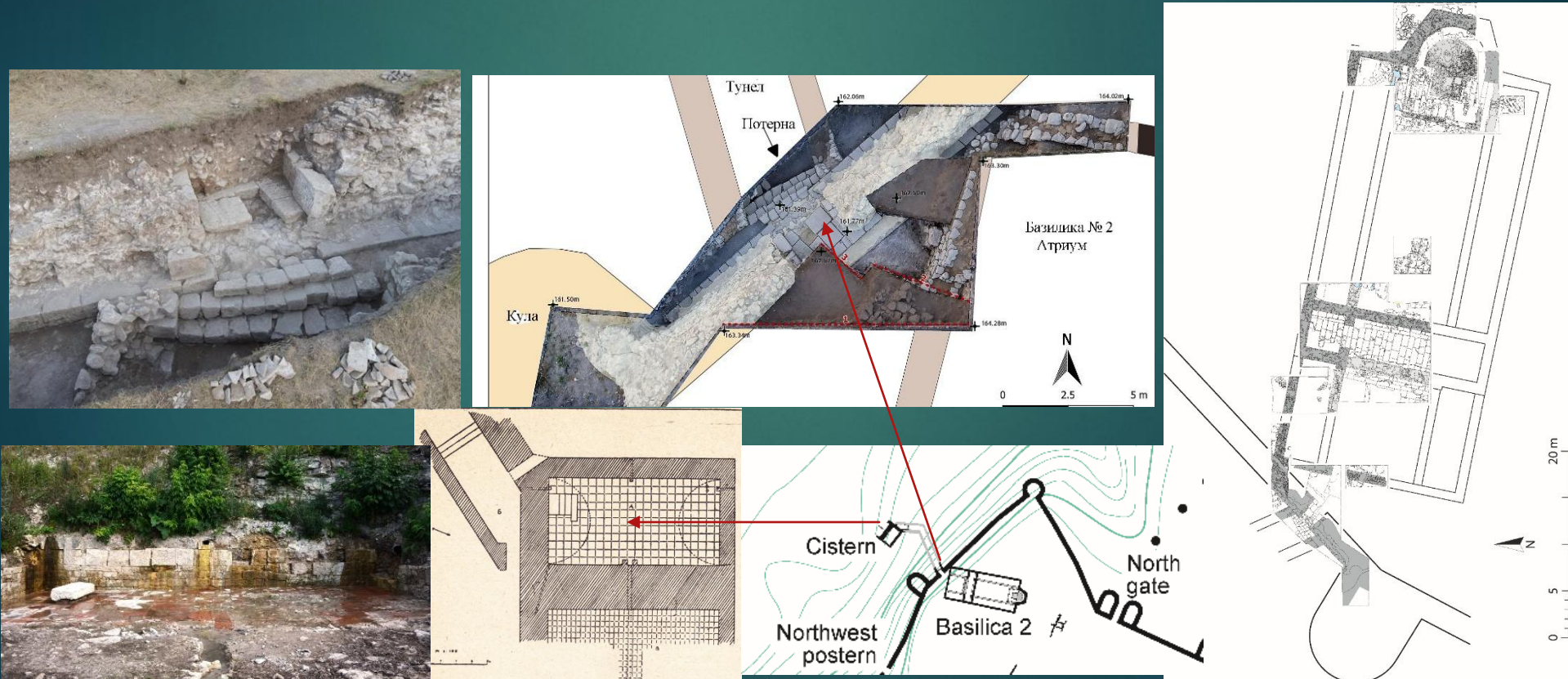
Basilica No. 1 /28x17 m/, located near the southwest gate, also has a crypt beneath the altar. A mosaic panel is located on the bema above the crypt. There is also an ambo of the Constantinopolitan type. These features suggest that this church may also have played an important role in liturgical celebrations.



Basilica No. 2 (55x21m) is probably the most prestigious building in the entire city. Its architecture is exceptional: it has a synthronon, an ambulatory, a vast atrium, rich decoration of marble and mosaics, as well as a structure located under the altar which could correspond to a crypt or a reliquary.



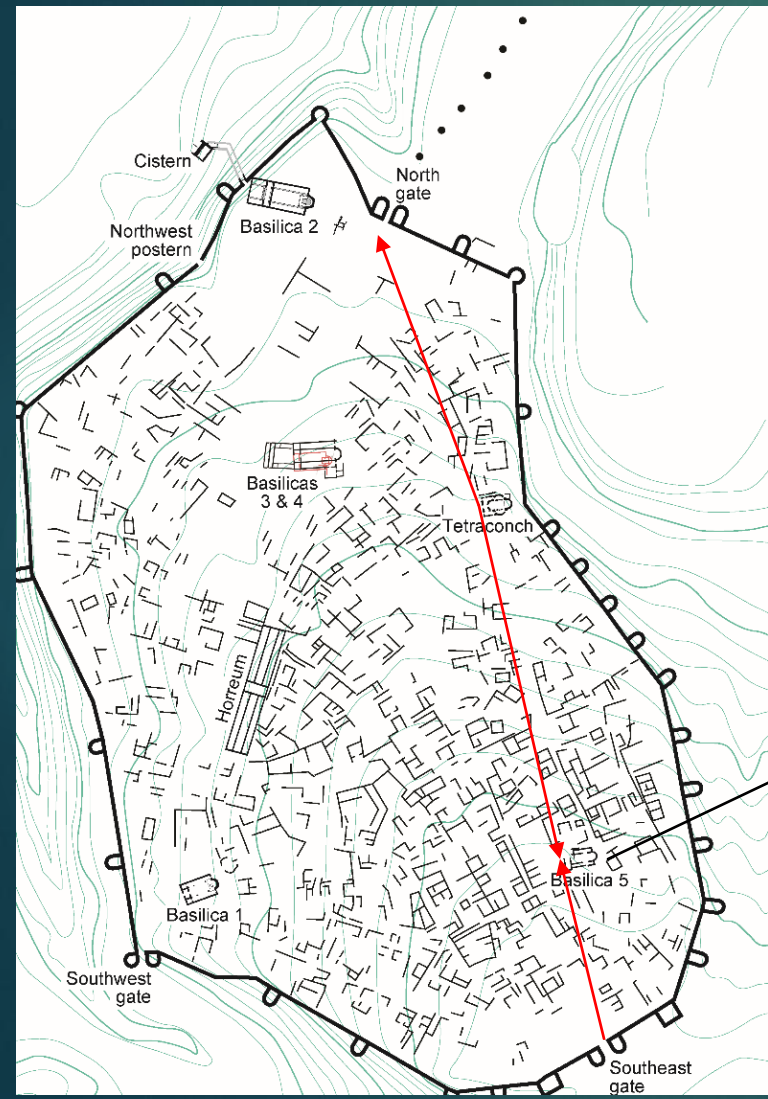
The tunnel relying directly on its atrium au grand réservoir constitutes a particularly interesting element. Dans plusieurs régions du monde byzantin, des sources ou des bassins furent transformés en hagiasmata, c'est-à-dire en lieux associés à une eau considérés comme bénite ou miraculeuse. Il n'est donc pas impossible que le réservoir de Zaldapa ait reçu une fonction comparable au VI^e siècle. Si cette hypothèse est exacte, la basilica n° 2 aurait constitué une étape importante lors des processions religieuses.



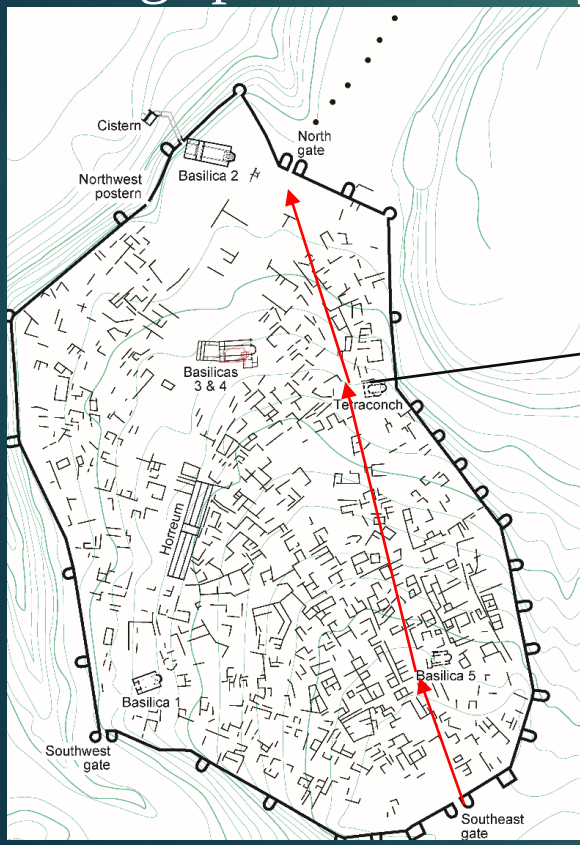
The city's two other churches complete this arrangement.

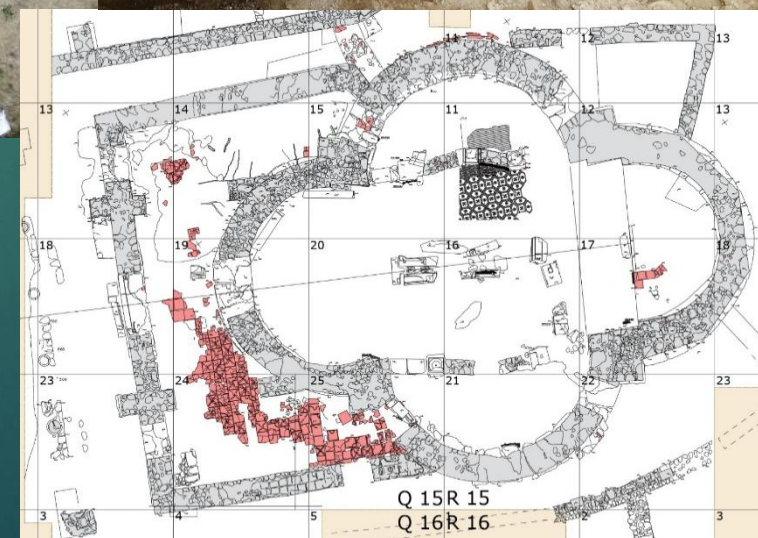
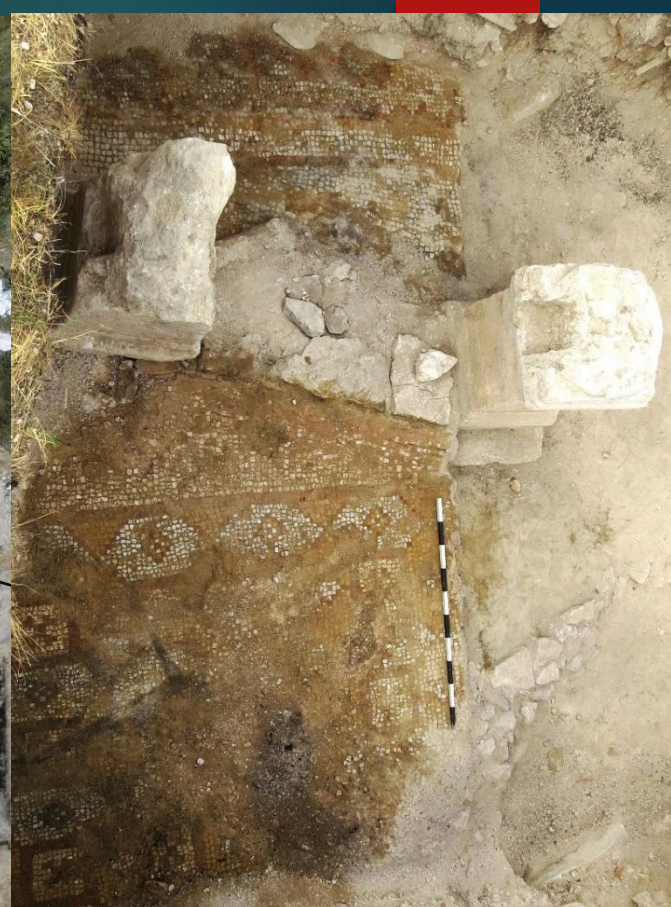
Basilica № 5 The city's two other churches complete this arrangement.

Basilica No. 5 is located near the southeast gate, on the second **main** thoroughfare.

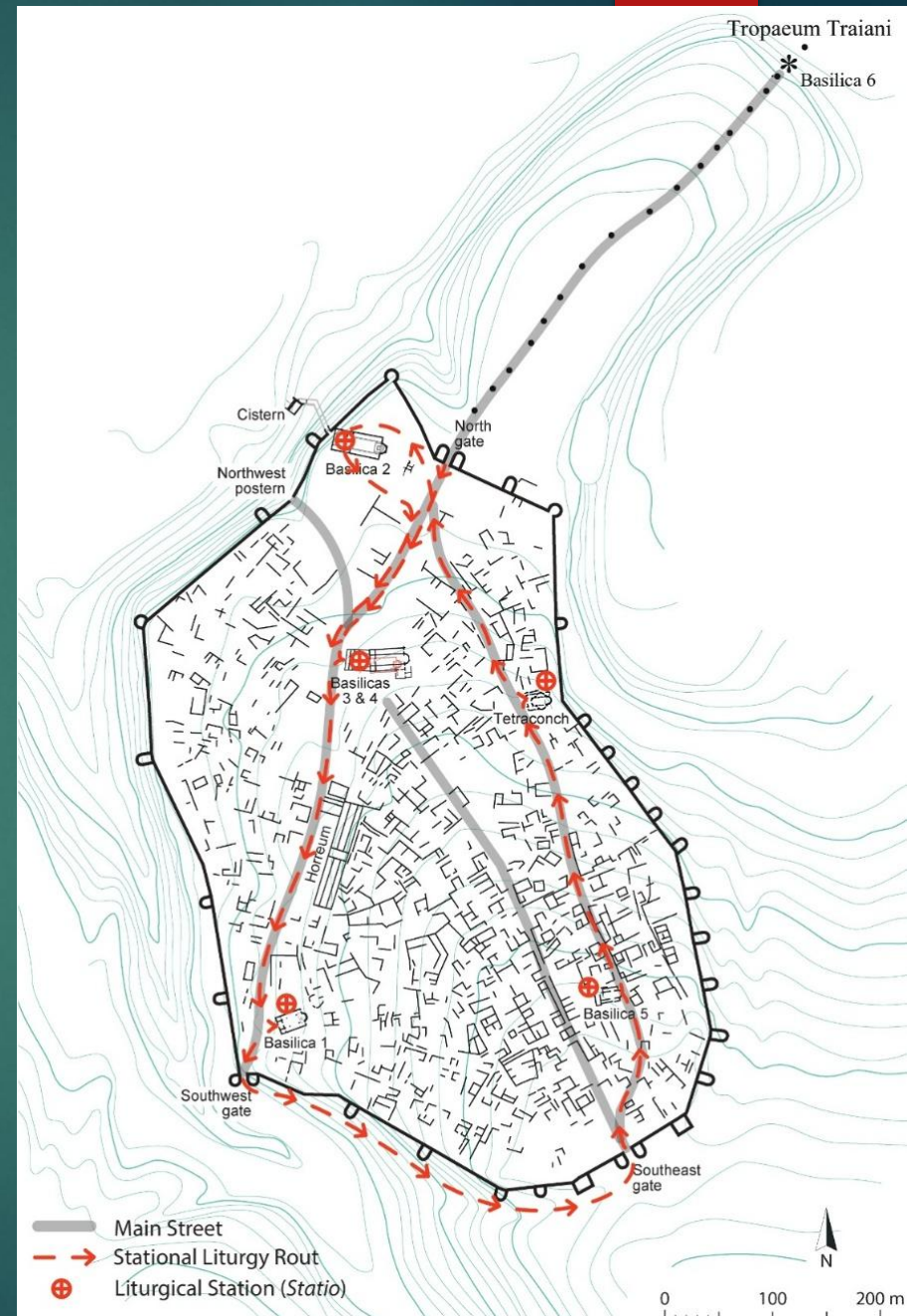


The city's two other churches complete this arrangement. Basilica No. 5 is located near the southeast gate, on the second main thoroughfare. Tetraconch. lies slightly further north. Both also date from the 6th century and are directly connected by the main eastern street. Although smaller in size, they could easily be incorporated into certain liturgical celebrations, particularly during special feast days.

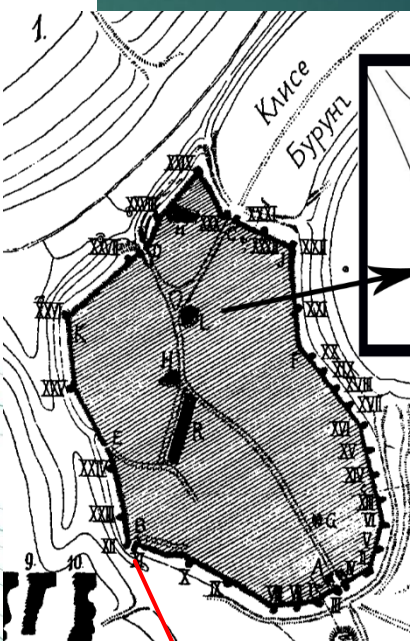




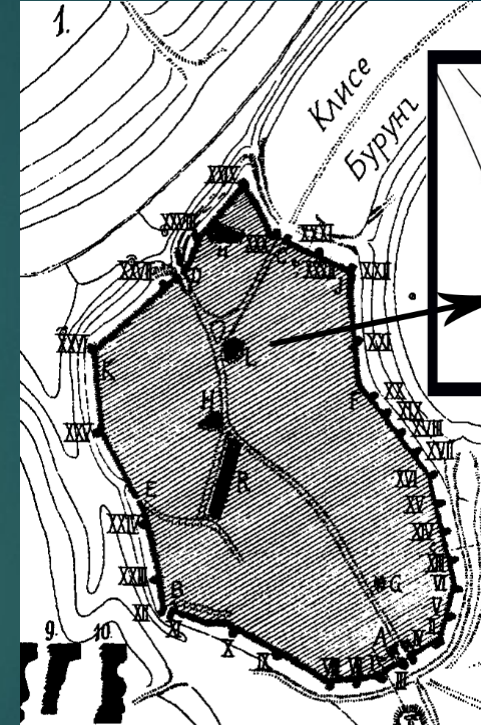
Based on archaeological data, several routes can be proposed. The first seems the most likely. Participants in the procession could gather at the main north gate. Christians from the surrounding area, neighboring districts, monks from the rock-hewn monasteries, and guests of the Tropeum Trajani could go there. Then, all together, along the main street, they would gather in the square in front of Basilica No. 3, the cathedral. The bishop would celebrate the main Eucharistic liturgy there, as well as the veneration of the relics kept in the crypt. Afterward, the procession would continue to Basilica No. 1, near the southwest gate. This was also an important stop, where the veneration of the relics in the large crypt took place. It is possible that the procession would continue through the southwest gate, outside the fortress, along the southern wall



steep slope of the
front of the
reaches the
the ditch and the



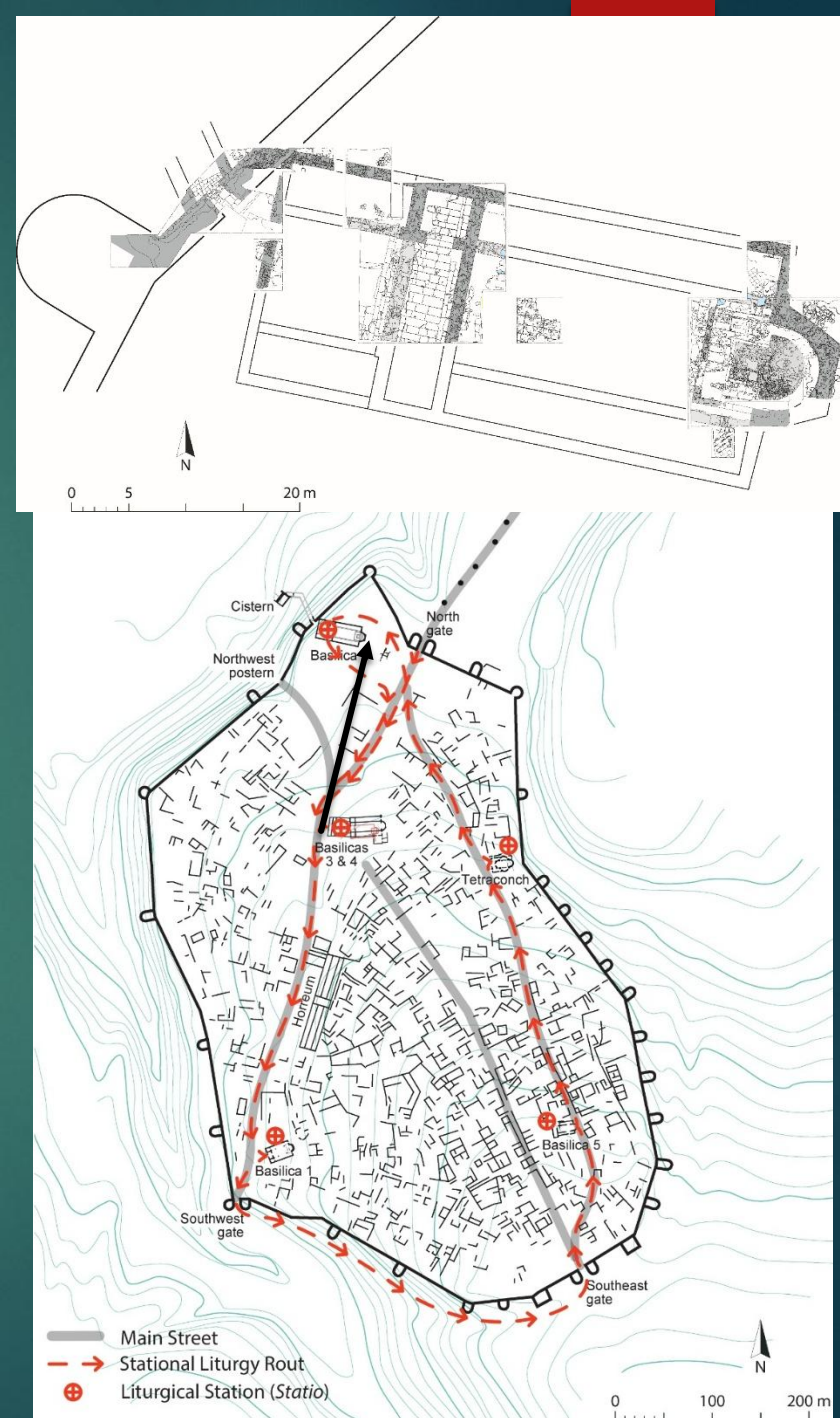
ep slope
in front
n reaches
e ditch a





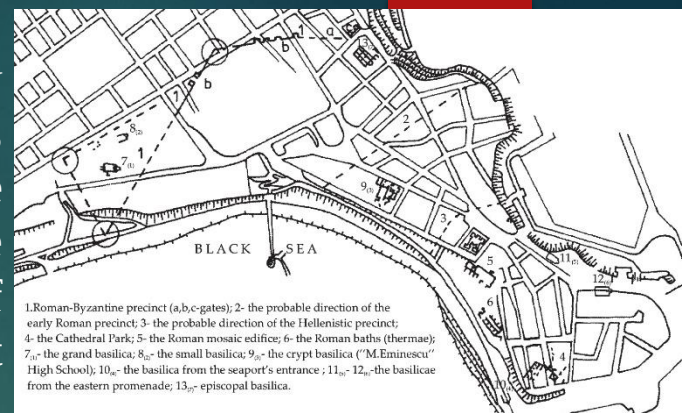
Of course, we shouldn't assume that all churches were visited during every celebration. The examples of Jerusalem and Constantinople show that routes varied according to the major feasts of the year, the commemorations of martyrs, or special circumstances. It is therefore likely that several liturgical routes existed in Zaldapa.

For example, a round-trip route for Epiphany is possible. This fixed, two-way route could also have connected the two largest churches in the city: the central basilica No. 3 and the basilica No. 2, known as the "luxurious" basilica. If the tunnel leading to the basin in front of the atrium was interpreted as a source of holy water—the *hagiasma*—it is possible that it served a similar purpose. Other round-trip routes are also possible. For example, for the patronal feast of Basilica No. 1, where the feast of the martyr resting in the crypt is also celebrated, the route could be as follows: episcopal complex → basilica → crypt → return to the cathedral. This could also correspond to the order of the liturgies dedicated to the patron saints of the various churches of Zaldapa, by analogy with practices attested in Jerusalem, Thessaloniki, and other early Christian centers.

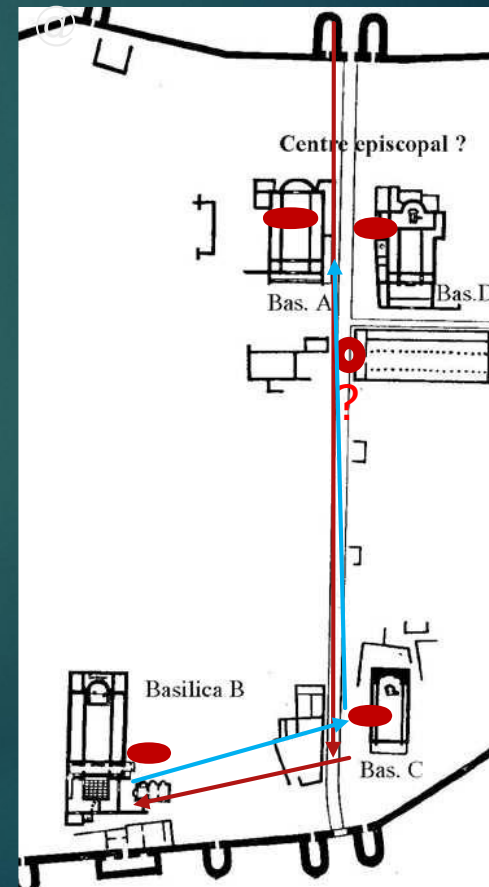


However, a degree of caution is warranted. No ancient text directly describes a liturgical procession in Zaldapa. Our reconstruction is based solely on currently available archaeological data: the organization of the road network, the location of the basilicas, the presence of crypts, the relics, the open spaces discovered in front of the churches, and the presumed *hagiasma*. These elements do not constitute definitive proof, but they form a coherent and logical whole that allows us to propose this hypothesis. In conclusion, Zaldapa now appears as one of the most interesting examples in the Balkans for the study of liturgical topography. The urban organization, the large number of churches, their arrangement along the main thoroughfares, the presence of crypts intended for relics, the probable existence of a *hagiasma*, and the role of the cathedral form an exceptional whole. Although they do not yet allow us to definitively affirm the existence of a stational liturgy, these elements make this hypothesis highly plausible.

Thus, Zaldapa could constitute the first example in Bulgaria and the provinces of Scythia and Moesia Secunda where archaeological data allow for a comprehensive reconstruction of an urban liturgical topography, inspired by the great models of Jerusalem and Constantinople. If a stationary liturgy existed in Zaldapa, probably also in Tropeum Traiani and Istria, in the 6th century, then it was obligatory in the capitals of Tomis, Marcianopol, and Odessos, which boasted more than 8-10 churches, cathedrals, martyria, and episcopal residences.



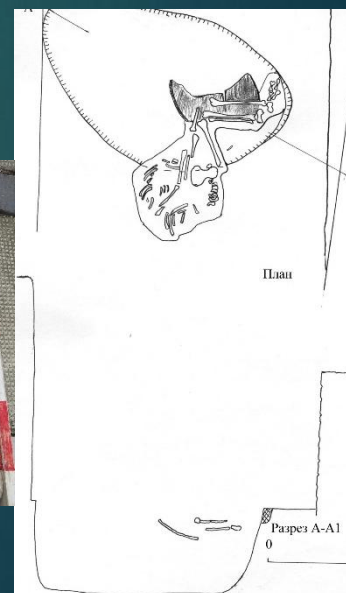
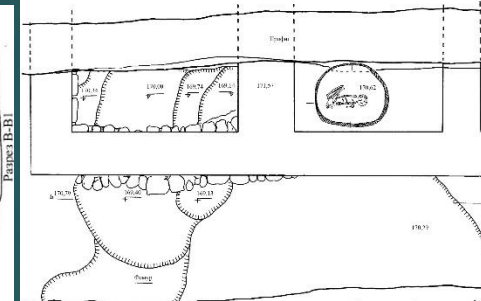
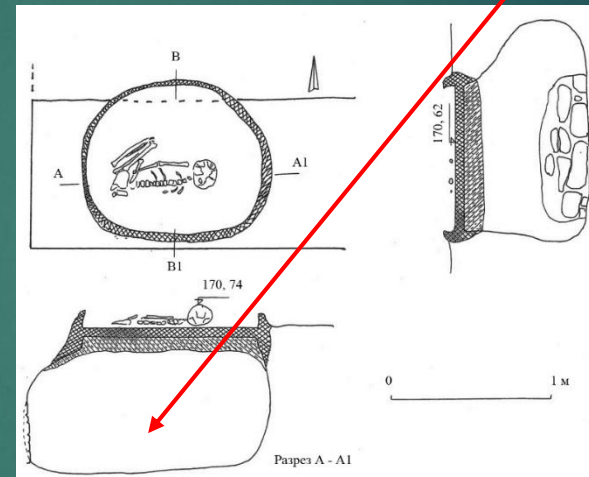
TOMIS Tropeum Traiani ?



And as an *addendum*, a question for my colleagues!

1. In the atrium of Basilica No. 3, I discovered a child's burial in a contracted position (*hocker*), placed on a well-fired slab. Beneath it was a pit containing several pottery fragments. I have consulted colleagues here and in Romania, but dating has proven impossible, with proposed dates ranging from the Late Bronze Age to the 5th–6th centuries AD.

2. South of the basilica's atrium, there is a second burial in a contracted position—albeit at a higher level—of a young woman whose knees rest upon a fragment of a broken amphora, which I subsequently reassembled! Does anyone have any idea about the dating of the pottery from the pit beneath the child's burial, or about the date of the **amphora**—specifically, what would be the earliest and latest possible dates? I hope you can help me?!



- 1. G. Atanasov, Y. Valeriev, Y. Yotov.** The crypt in the Sanctuary of the Basilica No 3 at the Ancient City of Zaldapa (Province of Scythia). – Ниш и Византија, 15, 2016
- 2. G. Atanasov, Y. Valeriev.** La résidence épiscopale à proximité de la cathédrale de la ville romano-byzantine de Zaldapa dans la province de Scythie- Archaeologia Bulgarica, 1 (2020), 33-58.
- 3. V. Popova, G. Atanasov.** New data on the apse mosaic of basilica No 1 in Zaldapa. – Ниш и Византија 18, 2020, с. 23-3
- 4. D. Moreau, G. Atanasov, N. Beaudry.** The Archaeology of the Late Roman City of Zaldapa: The Status Quaestionis in 2016 (with an Appendix on Seasons 2017-2019). – In: Archaeology of a World of Changes. Selected Papers from the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies (Belgrade, 22-27 August 2016) – In memoriam Claudia Barsanti, Oxford («BAR International Series» 2973, 2020, 35-55.
- 5. Г. Атанасов.** Крипти для святых мощей в базилика христианского города Залдапа и практики в Черноморских епархиях Скифия, Вторая Мезия и Херсонес IV-VII вв. – В. Изучение и сохранение древних сакральных пространств Симферопол, 2020, 11-16.
- 6. G. Atanasov, Y. Valeriev.** Basilica Nr 1 with a Newly Discovered Crypt from the Roman/Early Byzantine City of Zaldapa. Addenda et Corrigenda. - Archaeologia Bulgarica, 2 (2021), 45 – 80.
- 7. G. Atanasov.** L'exception scythe d'après *Sozomène* et les exceptions scythes d'après l'histoire et l'archéologie paléochrétiennes. Pontica, 56, 2023
- 8. G. Atanasov, Al. Milanova,** Les cryptes des basiliques de Zaldapa au regard des autres exemples en Scythie, Mésie Seconde et Chersonèse (IV^e-VII^e siècles), dans. Actes du colloque international du projet DANUBIUS – The Christianisation of North-Western Black Sea during Late Antiquity. Proceedings of the International Symposium of the DANUBIUS Project (Villeneuve d'Ascq, Lille and Bavay, 24-27.11.2021), Turnhout : *Brepols (coll. Rome and After in Central and Eastern Europe), sous presse (2024).*
- 9. G. Atanasov.** On the Liturgy and the Liturgical Practices in Basilicas No 3 and No 1 of the Early Christian Zaldapa STUDIA ACADEMICA ŠUMENENSIA, 9, 2022, 261-285
- 10. G. Atanasov, Al. Milanova, E. Hobdari.** L'église tétraconque récemment découverte à Zaldapa (province de Scythie) au regard des autres tétraconques en Bulgarie actuelle. - Les églises tétraconques dans l'Antiquité tardive. Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana. Roma, 2026 (sous presse)
- 11. G. Atanasov,** Specifics of the churches of the second half of the 4th and the first half of the 5th century in Scythia and Second Moesia. In: Life in Transition on the Roman Border in the 4th-6th Century. – Yearbook of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. Center for Slavic-Byzantine Studies “Ivan Dyuhev”, Volume 104 (23), 2066, 29–59.
- 12. G. Atanasov,** “And the Relics Travel!” In Search of Relics in Early Christian Zaldapa for the Consecration of Churches during the First Bulgarian Kingdom. In: Veliko Tarnovo University “St. Cyril and Methodius” and Bulgarian Archaeology, Dedicated to the 30th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Archaeology Major and the 25th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Archaeology Department at the Faculty of History, 2026
- 13. G. Atanasov, Al. Milanova,** Les cryptes des basiliques de Zaldapa au regard des autres exemples en Scythie, Mésie Seconde et Chersonèse (IV^e–VII^e siècles). In: *A Danubio ad Gothiam*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2025, 117–138.

Zaldapa - Thank you for your attention!
Zaldapa - Merci de votre attention!

