

## WHEN WAS ASEMUS (MOESIA SECUNDA) ELEVATED TO THE STATUS OF POLIS/CIVITAS AND ESTABLISHED AS AN EPISCOPAL SEE?

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### ABSTRACT

*This study expands upon the author's previous research concerning the identification of the Roman emperor mentioned in Theophylact Simocatta's History (VII.3.4). The author analyzes the information provided by the Byzantine historian, along with the terminology used throughout his work. He also examines data from the Notitiae episcopatum (Παλαιά Τακτικά) of the Church of Constantinople and Hierocles's Synecdemos. Based on this analysis, he concludes that the Roman emperor referenced in the passage is Justin II (r. 565–578).*

**Keywords:** Asemus (Moesia Secunda); Theophylact Simocatta; Emperor Justin I; Emperor Justin II; ecclesiastical organization;

### INTRODUCTION

Describing the military campaign of the Byzantine General Peter against the Avars in 594, Theophylact Simocatta recounts events that took place at Asemus, a settlement in the Roman province of Moesia Secunda. In this account, he mentions that the inhabitants showed the general a document issued for their settlement by Emperor Justin, granting them the right to maintain their own military garrison. Simocatta, however, does not specify which of the two homonymous emperors from the 6th century he refers to—Justin I (r. 518–527) or Justin II (r. 565–578). This study is dedicated to identifying the emperor in question.

S. Torbatov identified the city of Asemus with the fortification known today as Osŭmsko Kale, near the modern village of Cherkovitsa in Pleven Province, Bulgaria. It was located on the Danube frontier of the empire, in the northwestern part of Moesia Secunda, near the mouth of the Osŭm River (see the Map). During its peak development in the second half of the 6th century, the settlement was defended by three concentric fortified lines, the largest of which enclosed an area of just over 1.15 ha.<sup>1</sup> From this evidence, it can be deduced that Asemus belonged to the category of small towns along the Danubian *limes*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sergey Torbatov, “Anasamus/Ansamus/Ἀσημοῦς/Ἀσήμος (antichnite selishtni i fortifikatsionni ostanki kraj ustieto na r. Osŭm)” [Anasamus/Ansamus/Ἀσημοῦς/Ἀσήμος (The Roman, Late Roman, and Early Byzantine Settlement and Fortification Remains near the Osam River's Mouth)], in: *Bulgarian e-Journal of Archaeology*, 6 (2016), pp. 29–64.

<sup>2</sup> On other similarly sized cities in the Lower Danube regions, see Ionuț Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia—Ecclesiastical Organization and Monasticism (4th to 7th Centuries)*, coll. *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450*, vol. 90, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2024, pp. 93.

## 1. THE EVENTS AT ASEMUS

In his *History*, Theophylact Simocatta recounts that during the Danube campaign of 594, General Peter, the brother of Emperor Maurice (r. 582–602), established his quarters near Asemus on one of the days. Upon hearing of his arrival, the inhabitants of the settlement gave him an impressive reception. The town's garrison, fully equipped in military gear and carrying the standards (*banda*), came out to meet him and greeted him with military honors.

The situation, however, quickly deteriorated. Impressed by the garrison, the general sought to integrate it into his army. Both the civilians and soldiers of the settlement resisted this initiative. In response, Peter attempted to use force, leading the soldiers of Asemus to take refuge in the town's church. When the bishop refused to surrender them, the general sent some of his soldiers to seize them by force. This attempt also failed, as the soldiers inside the church armed themselves and barricaded the doors. The next day, Peter sent a bodyguard to arrest the bishop, but the townspeople defended him. Ultimately, the inhabitants shut the town gates, forcing the general to withdraw amid their insults.<sup>3</sup>

In his account, Simocatta also noted that when Peter first attempted to bring the soldiers from Asemus under his command, the residents and garrison members presented him with an imperial decree that entitled the town to maintain its own garrison:

οἱ μὲν οὖν ἄστοι τό τε περὶ τὴν πόλιν ὀπλιτικὸν Ἰουστίνου τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ὑπεδείκνυσαν νόμον χαριζόμενον τῇ πόλει τὴν ἔνοπλον ταύτην διάδοχον πρόνοιαν. (And so the citizens and the city's garrison produced a decree of the emperor Justin which granted the city this successive armed protection).<sup>4</sup>

Sergey Torbatov identifies this decree ('νόμος') as a '*lex civitatis*,' referring to a legislative act regulating matters related to the administrative self-governance of a newly founded city ('πόλις'/'*civitas*').<sup>5</sup> This interpretation is also supported by the terminology used by Theophylact Simocatta when referring to Asemus: 'πόλις' (city),<sup>6</sup> 'ἄστυ' (town),<sup>7</sup> 'πόλισμα' (town),<sup>8</sup> and 'πολίχνη' (a diminutive of πόλις).<sup>9</sup> Only when describing the Byzantine army's campaign in 602 does Theophylact Simocatta classify Asemus as a

<sup>3</sup> Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* VII.3.1–10, Carl de Boor (ed.), Teubner, Leipzig, 1887, pp. 249<sup>20</sup>–251<sup>8</sup>; *The History of Theophylact Simocatta* (hereafter cited as *History*), trans. and notes Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, 1986, pp. 182–183.

<sup>4</sup> Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* VII.3.4, p. 250<sup>6</sup>; *History*, p. 182.

<sup>5</sup> S. Torbatov, "Anasamus," p. 28. The status of '*civitas*/πόλις' of Asemus at that time is also accepted by Peter Schreiner ["Städte und Wegenetz in Moesien, Dakien und Thrakien nach dem Zeugnis des Theophylaktos Simokates," in: *Spätantike und frühbyzantinische Kultur Bulgariens zwischen Orient und Okzident*, Renate Pillinger (ed.), Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien, 1986, p. 29].

<sup>6</sup> Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* VII.3.1, p. 249<sup>20</sup>; VII.3.2, p. 249<sup>26</sup> (twice); VII.3.3, pp. 249<sup>28</sup> and 250<sup>1</sup>; VII.3.4, pp. 250<sup>3-4, 6-7</sup> (four times); VII.3.5, p. 250<sup>11</sup> (twice); VII.3.8, p. 250<sup>28</sup>; VII.3.9, pp. 250<sup>29</sup> and 251<sup>2</sup>; VII.3.10, p. 251<sup>5, 8</sup> (twice); Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Henry Stuart Jones et al. (rev. and augm.), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 1434.

<sup>7</sup> Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* VII.3.1, p. 249<sup>21-23</sup> (three times); H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 263.

<sup>8</sup> Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* VII.3.2, p. 249<sup>24</sup>; VII.3.10, p. 251<sup>7</sup>; H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 1434.

<sup>9</sup> Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* VII.3.5, p. 250<sup>9</sup>; H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 1435.

‘φοῦριον’ (fort).<sup>10</sup> S. Torbatov suggests that in this latter instance, the Byzantine historian used a different source from the one concerning the events of 594. However, from Torbatov’s perspective, the term ‘φοῦριον’ does not imply the decline or depopulation of the settlement between the two military campaigns.<sup>11</sup>

Another argument supporting the settlement’s status as a city in 594 is the presence of a local bishop. Several researchers propose that this bishop was a refugee from another city in the Danube region, which had been destroyed by barbarians, suggesting that Asemus was not an episcopal center.<sup>12</sup> However, the majority of scholars consider him to have been the bishop of the settlement itself.<sup>13</sup> General Peter’s attitude toward the bishop supports this latter interpretation. The general’s blaming of the bishop for the events that transpired, along with the attempt to punish him, suggests that the bishop was one of the key officials in Asemus.<sup>14</sup>

It is most likely that the bishopric was established based on a law issued by Emperor Zeno (r. 474–491) between 474 and 484. This law mandated the existence of a bishopric in all settlements with the rank of a city (‘πόλις’/‘civitas’).<sup>15</sup> Zeno’s law was republished in November 534 in the *Codex repetitae praelectionis* (i.e., the second edition of the *Codex of Justinian*), demonstrating the continued application of its provisions at least until the end of the 6th century.<sup>16</sup> Under these circumstances, the status of Asemus as an episcopal center becomes a supporting argument for its designation as a city.

<sup>10</sup> Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* VIII.6.7, p. 294<sup>22–23</sup>; H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, pp. 1957–1958.

<sup>11</sup> S. Torbatov, “Anasamus,” p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> M. Whitby and M. Whitby, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, p. 183, n. 14; Alexandru Madgearu, “The Church in the Final Period of the Late Roman Danubian Provinces,” in: *Antiquitas Istro-Pontica. Mélanges d’archéologie et d’histoire ancienne offerts à Alexandru Suceveanu*, Mircea Victor Angelescu et al. (eds.), Mega Éditions, Cluj-Napoca, 2010, p. 148.

<sup>13</sup> Petăr Mutafchiev, *Bulgares et Roumains dans l’histoire des pays danubiens*, Danov, Sofia, 1932, pp. 122–123 and 126–127; Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *Privileges et franchises municipales dans l’Empire Byzantin*, Geuthner, Paris, 1936, pp. 60–61; John Bagnell Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 2, Dover Publications, New York, 1958, p. 133; Armin Hohlweg, “Bischof und stadtherr im frühen Byzanz,” in: *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 20 (1971), p. 58; Velizar Velkov, *Cities in Thrace and Dacia in Late Antiquity (Studies and Materials)*, Hakert, Amsterdam, 1977, p. 247; Gilbert Dagron, “Le Christianisme dans la ville byzantine,” in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 31 (1977), p. 21; Haralambie Mihăescu, “Indice și note” [Index and Notes], in: Teofilact Simocata, *Istorie bizantină* [The History of Theophylact Simocatta], Editura Academiei Române, București, 1985, p. 195; P. Schreiner, “Städte und Wegenetz,” p. 29; Peter Schreiner, “Das Christentum in Bulgarien vor 864,” in: *Miscellanea Bulgarica*, 5 (1987), p. 52; S. Torbatov, “Anasamus,” p. 28, n. 22; Michel Pilon, “Armée et défense de l’Illyricum byzantin de Justinien à Héraclius (527–641). De la réorganisation justinienne à l’émergence des « armées de cité »,” in: *Erytheia* 26 (2005), pp. 39–40.

<sup>14</sup> See also S. Torbatov, “Anasamus,” p. 28. On the role of the bishops in the Roman cities during the 6th century, see Arnold Hugh Martin Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284–602. A Social Economic and Administrative Survey*, vol. 2, Blackwell, Oxford, 1964, pp. 758–60; G. Dagron, “Le Christianisme,” pp. 19–21; Gilbert Dagron, “Les villes dans l’Illyricum protobyzantin,” in: *Villes et peuplement dans l’Illyricum protobyzantin. Actes du colloque organisé par l’École française de Rome (Rome, 12–14 mai 1982)*, coll. *Collection de l’École française de Rome*, vol. 77, École française de Rome, Rome, 1984, pp. 14–18; Alain Ducellier, “Le problème des autonomismes urbains dans les Balkans: origines, continuités et ruptures (VI<sup>e</sup>–XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles),” in: *Les origines des libertés urbaines (Actes des congrès de la Société des historiens médiévistes de l’enseignement supérieur public, 16<sup>e</sup> congrès, Rouen, 1985)*, Université de Rouen, Rouen, 1990, pp. 126–127; M. Pilon, “Armée et défense,” pp. 40–41.

<sup>15</sup> *The Codex of Justinian* I.3.35.pr., in: *The Codex of Justinian. A New Annotated Translation, with Parallel Latin and Greek Text*, vol. 1, Bruce W. Frier et al. (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016, pp. 98–99.

<sup>16</sup> See I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, pp. 79–81.

## 2. JUSTIN I (r. 518–527) OR JUSTIN II (r. 565–574)?

Identifying the emperor during whose reign Asemus was elevated to the rank of ‘πόλις’/‘civitas’ enhances the understanding of the evolution of the administrative organization in the Danubian regions in general, and specifically in the Roman province of Moesia Secunda. Additionally, it provides a foundation for dating the establishment of the local episcopal see and, consequently, offers better insight into the ecclesiastical organization in the Lower Danube territories.

The opinions of researchers are divided on this identification. P. Mutafčiev, G. I. Brătianu, and H. Mihăescu advocate for Justin II, while P. Schreiner, G. G. Litavrin, and S. Torbatov support Justin I.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, Michael and Mary Whitby consider that both Justin I and Justin II might have been responsible for the decree concerning Asemus,<sup>18</sup> while J. B. Bury and W. Pohl have not expressed an opinion on this topic.<sup>19</sup>

Among the researchers who support the first identification (Justin II), only P. Mutafchiev substantiates his point of view. He claims that the issuance of the law concerning the city of Asemus occurred 20 years earlier, which would place it in the year 575, during the reign of Justin II.<sup>20</sup> The researcher’s explanation suggests that this time span (20 years) was mentioned by Theophylact Simocatta himself. However, in the critical edition of Simocatta’s work, which P. Mutafchiev also utilized, no such mention appears. Therefore, the argument invoked by the Bulgarian researcher to support his identification is without merit.

Two arguments substantiate the identification of the emperor as Justin I. The first is based on an observation made by G. G. Litavrin. According to him, Theophylact Simocatta used the epithet ‘the younger’ (‘ὁ νεώτερος,’ ‘ὁ νέος’) whenever he mentioned Justin II. However, in the passage describing the events at Asemus, this epithet is not used. Based on this observation, G. G. Litavrin, followed by S. Torbatov, concludes that the passage in question refers to Emperor Justin I.<sup>21</sup>

To support his claims, G. G. Litavrin mentions five instances from the work of Theophylact Simocatta (III.5.4, 9.3, 11.3, 8.10;<sup>22</sup> VI.10.9) in which he allegedly used the appellation “the younger” for Emperor Justin II. Of these five references, only four [III.5.4, 9.3, 18.10 (the correct reference), and VI.10.9] validate the assertions of the Russian scholar. In these instances, Simocatta indeed employed the appellation ‘ὁ νεώτερος’ or ‘ὁ νέος.’<sup>23</sup> However, one reference (III.11.3) contradicts his claims, as it mentions the emperor’s name

<sup>17</sup> Justin II: P. Mutafchiev, *Bulgares et Roumains*, p. 127, n. 2; G. I. Brătianu, *Privilèges et franchises*, pp. 58, 60, 65; H. Mihăescu, “Indice și note,” p. 137, n. 8. Justin I: P. Schreiner, “Städte und Wegenetz,” p. 29, n. 26; Gennadii G. Litavrin, “Feofilakt Simokatta—Kommentarii,” in: *Svod drevneishikh pis'mennykh izvestii o slavianakh*, coll. *Corpus testimoniorum vetustissimorum ad historiam slavica pertinentium*, Sergei A. Ivanov et al. (eds.), vol. 2, Vostochnaia literatura, Moscow, 1995, p. 58; S. Torbatov, “Anasamus,” p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> M. Whitby and M. Whitby, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, pp. 182 (n. 13) and 252.

<sup>19</sup> J. B. Bury, *A History*, p. 133; Walter Pohl, *Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa 567–822 n.Chr.*, Beck, Munich, 1988, p. 142.

<sup>20</sup> P. Mutafchiev, *Bulgares et Roumains*, p. 127, n. 2: “Dans le contexte il est expressément dit qu’il s’agissait d’un privilège spécial, qui avait été accordé deux décades plus tôt.”

<sup>21</sup> G. G. Litavrin, “Feofilakt Simokatta,” p. 58; S. Torbatov, “Anasamus,” p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> This reference (III.8.10) is incorrect; the correct citation is III.18.10. It is likely a typographical error that does not fundamentally affect the analysis of the Russian researcher.

<sup>23</sup> ‘ὁ νεώτερος’: Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* III.5.4, p. 117<sup>26–27</sup>; III.18.10, p. 148<sup>19</sup>; VI.10.9, p. 240<sup>18</sup>. ‘ὁ νέος’: Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* III.9.3, p. 128<sup>11</sup>.



as “ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ [...] Ἰουστῖνος” (“the emperor Justin”), similar to the appellation in the paragraph regarding the city of Asemus, which states “Ἰουστίνου τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος.”<sup>24</sup>

In fact, throughout his work, Theophylact Simocatta mentioned the name of Emperor Justin II on ten occasions. In five of these instances, he employed the appellation ‘ὁ νεώτερος’ or ‘ὁ νέος.’<sup>25</sup> In another four instances, the Byzantine historian referred only to the imperial title, namely ‘ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ’ or ‘ὁ βασιλεύς.’<sup>26</sup> In the tenth instance, he used both the appellation ‘ὁ νεώτερος’ and the imperial title ‘ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ.’<sup>27</sup>

The description used in the passage concerning the city of Asemus (“Ἰουστῖνος ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ”) is identical to those found in III.10.4 and III.11.3, and similar to those in III.10.1 and III.16.3. Therefore, the omission of the appellative ‘ὁ νεώτερος’/‘ὁ νέος’ does not preclude identifying the emperor in the passage about Asemus as Justin II.

It should also be noted that Theophylact Simocatta never mentioned the name of Emperor Justin I in his work. Moreover, up until the passage concerning the city of Asemus, he had referred to Justin II ten times. Under these circumstances, if he had intended to refer to Justin I in VII.3.4, it would have been expected that Simocatta would alert his readers to the fact that the person in question should not be confused with the homonymous emperor he had already repeatedly mentioned. Such an alert could have been made either by using another appellative, such as ‘ὁ μέγας’ (“the great/the elder”), which Theophanes the Confessor used for Justin I in his *Chronicle* (“Ἰουστῖνος ὁ μέγας”), or by providing some additional explanations.<sup>28</sup>

As such, the manner in which Theophylact Simocatta refers to Justin II in his work cannot be used as an argument for identifying the emperor in the passage concerning the city of Asemus as Justin I; in fact, it contradicts such a conclusion.

S. Torbatov presents the second argument in support of the identification with Justin I.<sup>29</sup> He considers the collocation “πρεσβυτέρων χρόνων” (“bygone times”) used by Theophylact Simocatta to refer to the time elapsed between the establishment of the military garrison in Asemus and the events of 594:

ἐν τῷ πολίσματι τούτῳ ἀπὸ πρεσβυτέρων χρόνων τινῶν ὀπλιτικὸν συνετέτακτο ἐπὶ διαφρουρᾷ τῶν τῆς πόλεως (From bygone times a garrison had been organized in this city for the protection of the citizens).<sup>30</sup>

From the perspective of the Bulgarian researcher, this indicates a significant interval of time, which aligns more closely with the reign of Justin I than with that of Justin II.

The chronological significance of ‘πρεσβύτερος’ in Simocatta’s expression, however, does not justify such a conclusion. In another instance, the Byzantine historian employed the

<sup>24</sup> Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* III.11.3, p. 132<sup>6</sup>, and VII.3.4, p. 250<sup>6</sup>, respectively.

<sup>25</sup> ‘ὁ νεώτερος:’ Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* III.5.4, p. 117<sup>26-27</sup>; III.9.1, p. 128<sup>3</sup>; III.18.10, p. 148<sup>19</sup>. ‘ὁ νέος:’ Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* III.9.3, p. 128<sup>11</sup>; III.9.4, p. 128<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> ‘ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ:’ Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* III.10.4, p. 130<sup>5-6</sup>; III.11.3, p. 132<sup>6</sup>. ‘ὁ βασιλεύς:’ Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* III.10.1, p. 129<sup>22-23</sup>; III.16.3, p. 143<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* VI.10.9, p. 240<sup>18</sup>: “πρὸς τὸν νεώτερον Ἰουστῖνον τὸν αὐτοκράτορα.”

<sup>28</sup> Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia* A.M. 6011, vol. 1, Carl de Boor (ed.), Teubner, Leipzig, 1883, p. 165<sup>4</sup>; *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor. Byzantine and Near Eastern History AD 284–813*, transl., introd. and comm. Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997, p. 249.

<sup>29</sup> S. Torbatov, “Anasamus,” p. 28.

<sup>30</sup> Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae* VII.3.2, p. 249<sup>24-26</sup>; *History*, p. 182.

same adjective to indicate a period of just 30 years. In that paragraph, he referred to a war, which he categorized as “πρεσβύτερα πράγματα” (“ancient events”), occurring in the second year of Justin II’s reign (566) and reported thirty years later (596):

ἐπεὶ τοίνυν πρεσβυτέρων πραγμάτων ἔκθεσις ἦν, τριάκοντά τε ἔτεσι προτερεῦειν τὴν ἱστορίαν διέγνωστο. (Then, since it was an exposition of quite ancient events, it was recognized that the story had occurred thirty years previously).<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, the use of ‘πρεσβύτερος’ does not preclude the identification of the emperor who elevated the city of Asemus to the status of ‘πόλις’/‘civitas’ as Justin II.

Based on the above analysis, the following initial conclusions can be put forth: 1. The arguments supporting the identification of the emperor mentioned by Theophylact Simocatta in the passage about the events at Asemus as Justin I are not sustainable; 2. A careful analysis of the Byzantine historian’s text supports identifying the emperor as Justin II.

### 3. NOTITIAE EPISCOPATUUM AND HIEROCLES’S SYNECDEMUS

It should be noted from the outset that there was a close connection between the civil administrative organization and the ecclesiastical one in the 6th century. As previously shown, between the years 474 and 484, Emperor Zeno issued a law mandating the presence of an episcopal see in all settlements holding the rank of ‘πόλις’/‘civitas’ within the empire. This law was republished in 534 in the *Codex of Justinian*, certifying the implementation of these legal provisions from the time of the original publication until at least the end of the 6th century. It is highly probable that the see of Asemus was also established based on this law, occurring when the settlement was elevated to the rank of ‘πόλις’/‘civitas’.<sup>32</sup> In fact, documents (*Encyclia*) concerning the religious investigation initiated by Emperor Leo I (r. 457–474) during the years 457 and 458 do not attest to Asemus being an episcopal center in Moesia Secunda before the issue of Zeno’s law. In those documents, the only sees attested within the province were Marcianopolis (now Devnya, Bulgaria) (as a metropolis), Abritus (now Razgrad, Bulgaria), Appiaria (now Riahovo, Bulgaria), Durostorum (now Silistra, Bulgaria), Nicopolis ad Istrum (now Nikiup, Bulgaria), Novae (now Svishtov, Bulgaria), and Odessos (now Varna, Bulgaria), the latter being under the jurisdiction of the metropolis of Tomi (now Constanța, Romania), within the ecclesiastical province of Scythia (see the Map).<sup>33</sup>

The information contained in the *Notitiae episcopatum* (Παλαιά Τακτικά) of the Church of Constantinople and in Hierocles’s *Synecdemus* does not contradict the conclusions stated at the end of the previous section. The *Notitiae* are lists of the sees under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In the oldest of these lists, numbers 1–4 (according to the numbering in J. Darrouzès’s edition),<sup>34</sup> the suffragan bishoprics in Moesia

<sup>31</sup> Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, VI, 10, 16, p. 241<sup>20–22</sup>; *History*, p. 175.

<sup>32</sup> See above, the end of the section ‘The events at Asemus.’

<sup>33</sup> See Ionuț Holubeanu, “The Ecclesiastical Province of Moesia Secunda in the Mid-5th Century AD,” in: *Icoana Credinței*, 10 (2024), 20, pp. 33–51; Ionuț Holubeanu, “A Critical Analysis of the Bishops’ Signature Sequence in the Letter of Moesia Secunda in *Encyclia*, AD 457–458,” in: *Icoana Credinței*, 10 (2024), 20, pp. 52–64. On the see of Odessos, see I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, pp. 128–147.

<sup>34</sup> Jean Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae: Texte critique, introduction et notes*, coll. *Géographie ecclésiastique de l’empire Byzantin*, vol. 1, Institut français d’études byzantines, Paris, 1981, pp. 203–261.

Secunda are also mentioned. These documents date between the first half of the 7th century and the second half of the 9th century.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, they are subsequent to the Avar invasions that occurred at the end of the 6th century and the beginning of the 7th century. However, the information in them regarding the Roman provinces at the Lower Danube (Moesia Secunda and Scythia) was gathered from now-lost episcopal lists compiled in the second quarter of the 6th century.<sup>36</sup>

The data concerning the suffragan bishoprics in Moesia Secunda, as presented in *Notitiae* 1–2 and 4 and in the rubric of the metropolis of Marcianopolis in *Notitia* 3, originate from an old (now-lost) *Notitia*, compiled under Patriarch Epiphanius of Constantinople (r. 520–535) during the first decade of the reign of Justinian I (between c.527 and c.535).<sup>37</sup>

In *Notitiae* 1–2 and 4, the bishoprics of Marcianopolis (as a metropolis), Durostorum, Transmarisca (now Tutrakan, Bulgaria), Novae, Zekedepa (now Tsarevets, Bulgaria), and Skaria (as suffragan bishoprics) are mentioned (see the Map).<sup>38</sup> The name of the bishopric of Asemus does not appear, indicating its nonexistence at that time. However, its absence from these documents might also be attributed to an omission by the compiler or copyist. In fact, the bishoprics of Nicopolis ad Istrum, Abritus, and possibly Appiaria, which certainly existed between c.527 and c.535, are also omitted from these lists. Notably, two or even three new sees in Moesia Secunda appear: Transmarisca, Zekedepa, and possibly Skaria, assuming the latter name is not an altered form of Appiaria. Odessos is not mentioned because it belonged to the ecclesiastical province of Scythia until May 536.<sup>39</sup>

Regarding the paragraph about the metropolis of Marcianopolis in *Notitia* 3, it presents an even more altered form compared to those in *Notitiae* 1–2 and 4. Only Marcianopolis (as the metropolis), Transmarisca, Novae, Zekedepa, and Skaria (as suffragan bishoprics) are mentioned.<sup>40</sup> Once again, the sees of Nicopolis ad Istrum, Abritus, and possibly Appiaria, as well as Durostorum, are omitted. The name of the see of Asemus is also absent.

The information presented in the paragraph about the metropolis of Odessos in *Notitia* 3 originates from another now-lost *Notitia*, written around the year 536 under Patriarch Menas of Constantinople (r. 536–552).<sup>41</sup> It mentions Odessos (as the metropolis), Novae, Appiaria, Durostorum, Marcianopolis, Abritus, Nicopolis ad Istrum, and Palaistene.<sup>42</sup> The last of these, identified with Palmatae (now Onogur, Bulgaria), is a newly established

<sup>35</sup> See J. Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum*, pp. 3–45; Emilian Popescu, *Christianitas Daco-Romana. Florilegium studiorum*, Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest, 1994, pp. 143–151.

<sup>36</sup> For an interpretation of the information regarding Moesia Secunda and Scythia in *Notitiae* 1–5, see Ionuț Holubeanu, *Organizarea bisericească în Scythia și Moesia Secunda în secolele IV–VII* [The Ecclesiastical Organization in Scythia and Moesia Secunda in the 4th–7th Centuries], Basilica, Bucharest, 2018, pp. 143–181; Ionuț Holubeanu, “Interpreting *Notitiae Episcopatum*,” in: *4th International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conferences on Social Sciences and Arts SGEM 2017. Conference Proceedings*, vol. 2/II, Aleksander Bursche et al. (eds.), STEF92, Sofia, 2017, pp. 279–284.

<sup>37</sup> I. Holubeanu, “Interpreting *Notitiae Episcopatum*,” pp. 279–284; I. Holubeanu, *Organizarea bisericească în Scythia*, pp. 143–171.

<sup>38</sup> J. Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum* 1.32.444–449, p. 213; 2.32.512–517, p. 227; 4.31.462–467, p. 260.

<sup>39</sup> I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, pp. 129–130 and 139–146.

<sup>40</sup> J. Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum* 3.44.727–731, p. 244.

<sup>41</sup> I. Holubeanu, *Organizarea bisericească în Scythia*, pp. 172–178; I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, pp. 129–130 and 139–146.

<sup>42</sup> J. Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum* 3.36.603–610, p. 241.

episcopal center (see the Map).<sup>43</sup> Transmarisca, Zekedepa, and possibly Skaria (if distinct from Appiaria) are absent from this paragraph. The name of the see of Asemus is also missing, indicating its non-existence at that time.

As can be observed, although these *Notitiae* have been preserved in an altered form, they reflect the process of establishing new bishoprics in Moesia Secunda (Transmarisca, Zekedepa, Palaistene/Palmatae, and possibly Scaria) during the first decade of the reign of Justinian I. They were likely organized based on the provisions of Zeno's law, following the elevation of their settlements to the status of 'πόλις'/'civitas.' Furthermore, the combined information from *Notitiae* 1–4 presents the names of all the sees in the province documented before the reign of Justinian I, specifically Marcianopolis, Novae, Appiaria, Durostorum, Abritus, Nicopolis ad Istrum, and Odessos. However, Asemus is absent from these documents.

A similar situation regarding Asemus also exists in Hierocles's *Synecdemus*. The document mentions the names of settlements with the status of 'πόλις'/'civitas' from the beginning of Justinian I's reign (c.527), a dating accepted by the majority of researchers studying the history of Moesia Secunda.<sup>44</sup> In the paragraph on the province, the cities mentioned include Marcianopolis (as the administrative metropolis), Odessos, Durostorum, Nicopolis ad Istrum, Novae, Appiaria, and Abritus.<sup>45</sup> Considering the provisions of Zeno's law, these cities were also episcopal centers. As previously demonstrated, the names of their sees appear in at least one of *Notitiae* 1–4. Additionally, prior to the year 527, they are mentioned in documents (*Encyclia*) related to Emperor Leo I's investigation from the years 457–458 (see above).

Asemus is not mentioned in the *Synecdemus*. Furthermore, Transmarisca, Zekedepa, Palaistene/Palmatae, and Scaria are also not referenced in the document, which confirms that these settlements were elevated to the status of cities after the year 527.

S. Torbatov considered the possibility that, in the case of Moesia Secunda, Hierocles may have relied on older sources that predate the reign of Justin I. Through this consideration, the Bulgarian researcher sought to explain Hierocles's omission of Asemus in his work.<sup>46</sup> Torbatov's hypothesis is supported by the fact that even if Hierocles attempted to update the information from the old travel guide he used as a source, errors and inconsistencies were still identified in certain paragraphs.<sup>47</sup>

The antiquity of the data from the *Synecdemus* can be verified based on three categories of written sources: George of Cyprus's *Description of the Roman World*, Justinian I's *Novellae*, and the *Notitiae Episcopatum*. In the case of Moesia Secunda, George of

<sup>43</sup> I. Holubeanu, *Organizarea bisericească în Scythia*, pp. 178–181, followed by Georgi Atanasov, "L'exception scythe d'après Sozomène et les exceptions scythes d'après l'histoire et l'archéologie paléochrétiennes," in: *Pontica*, 56 (2023), p. 104, n. 11.

<sup>44</sup> See I. Holubeanu, *Organizarea bisericească în Scythia*, pp. 134–136.

<sup>45</sup> Hierocles, *Synecdemus* 636.2–8, in: Ernst Honigmann, *Le Synekdemus d'Hieroklès et l'opuscule géographique de Georges de Chypre: texte, introduction, commentaire et cartes*, coll. *Corpus Bruxellense historiae Byzantinae. Forma imperii Byzantini*, vol. 1, Éditions de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves, Brussels, 1939, p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> S. Torbatov, "Anasamus," pp. 27–28.

<sup>47</sup> See Arnold Hugh Martin Jones, *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 2nd ed., Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, pp. 514–521; Cyril Mango and Ihor Ševčenko, "Three Inscriptions of the Reigns of Anastasius I and Constantine V," in: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 65 (1972), pp. 379–382.



Cyprus's work is not useful because it does not cover the situation in the Balkan provinces.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, no *Novella* from the time of Justinian I has been preserved that presents the civil or ecclesiastical situation in Moesia Secunda. Regarding the *Notitiae Episcopatum*, the case is more complex. If the data from the *Synecdemus* regarding Moesia Secunda reflects the situation in the province around the year 500, rather than 527,<sup>49</sup> then only the dating of the paragraph on Odessos in *Notitia* 3 to around 536 can be considered certain. As for the information from *Notitiae* 1-2, 4, and 3 (the paragraph on Marcianopolis), it should be attributed to the interval c.500–c.536, and not c.527–c.536.<sup>50</sup> If it predates the reign of Justin I, then the establishment of the new bishoprics at Transmarisca, Zekedepa, and possibly Skaria, which are recorded in these documents, likely took place during the reign of Anastasius I (r. 491–518). This could explain why the bishopric of Asemus is not mentioned in their content. However, the latter should have been mentioned in *Notitia* 3 (the paragraph on Odessos), alongside the newly established Palaistene/Palmatae.

Currently, dating the information in the *Synecdemus* regarding Moesia Secunda to c.500 remains a mere hypothesis, unsupported by any documentary evidence. It seems more probable to attribute the Moesian paragraph in Hierocles's work to c.527, which would be consistent with the majority of other provinces in the *Synecdemus*. Future archaeological research on the territory of the former Roman province of Moesia Secunda may provide new evidence on this issue.

Therefore, the data from the *Notitiae episcopatum* and the *Synecdemus* do not contradict the conclusion reached at the end of the previous section of this study. Moreover, the absence of Asemus in these documents can be interpreted as an *argumentum ex silentio*, suggesting that the settlement did not attain the status of 'πόλις'/'civitas' or become an episcopal see during the reign of Justin I.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis presented above, the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. The emperor referenced in Theophylact Simocatta's *History* (VII.3.4) should be identified as Justin II. Arguments supporting this identification include internal evidence and an *argumentum ex silentio*, based on data preserved in the *Notitiae episcopatum* (Παλαιά Τακτικά) of the Church of Constantinople, as well as in Hierocles's *Synecdemus*;
2. With its elevation to the status of 'πόλις'/'civitas,' Asemus also became an episcopal see. This development occurred during the reign of Justin II, in accordance with the provisions of Zeno's law enacted between 474 and 484.

<sup>48</sup> On George of Cyprus's *Description of the Roman World*, see Ernst Honigmann, *Le Synekdemus d'Hiérokles et l'opuscule géographique de Georges de Chypre: texte, introduction, commentaire et cartes*, coll. *Corpus Bruxellense historiae Byzantinae. Forma imperii Byzantini*, vol. 1, Éditions de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves, Brussels, 1939, pp. 49–70; A. H. M. Jones, *Cities*, pp. 514–521; Alexander P. Kazhdan, "George of Cyprus," in: *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, Alexander P. Kazhdan et al. (eds.), Oxford University Press, New York/Oxford, 1991, pp. 837–838.

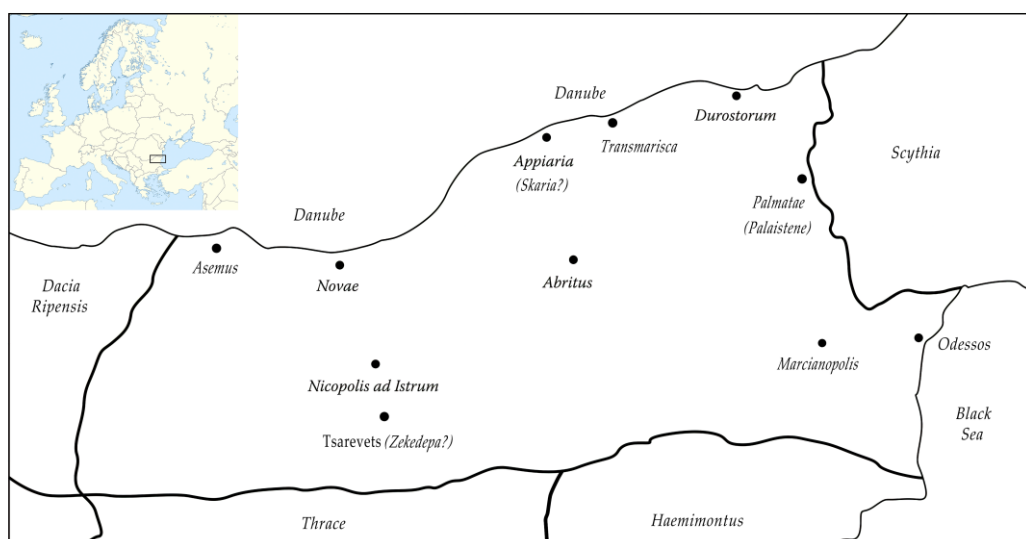
<sup>49</sup> Benet Salway ["Putting the World in Order," in: *Ancient Perspectives. Maps and Their Place in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece and Rome*, Richard John Alexander Talbert (ed.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago/London, 2012, p. 228] posited that the *Synecdemus* describes the administrative organization of the empire c.500. However, he acknowledged that the information within the work was updated haphazardly during the reign of Justinian I.

<sup>50</sup> See I. Holubeanu, *Organizarea bisericească în Scythia*, pp. 196–200.

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Map of the Roman province of Moesia Secunda