

## A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE BISHOPS' SIGNATURE SEQUENCE IN THE LETTER OF MOESIA SECUNDA IN ENCYCLIA, AD 457–458

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the principle guiding the order in which the hierarchs of Moesia Secunda signed the response epistle addressed to Emperor Leo I (r. 457–474) during the religious investigation known as the Encyclia (AD 457–458). The analysis marks the first detailed examination of this topic since T. Schnitzler's initial inquiry, which suggested that the bishops' signatures were arranged in descending order of their tenure in the episcopate. The investigation undertaken here confirms the thesis of the German researcher. Furthermore, the correlation of the data from Encyclia with those from the signing lists of the First Council of Ephesus (431) and those from the Notitiae Episcopatum of the Church of Constantinople led to the conclusion that there was no hierarchy among the ordinary bishoprics of Moesia Secunda at least until AD 536. Until then, when the metropolitan see of Marcianopolis was vacant, the ecclesiastical leadership in the province was assumed by the bishop with the longest tenure in the episcopacy. It is possible that in AD 536, as part of the extensive ecclesiastical reorganization that took place in Moesia Secunda, the status of protothronos ('πρωτόθρονος,' the first-ranked ordinary bishopric) may have been introduced in the province. In such a case, the rank was most likely assigned to the see of Novae (now Svishtov, Bulgaria).*

**Keywords:** ecclesiastical organization; Moesia Secunda; Abritus (Razgrad); Durostorum (Silistra); Novae (Svishtov);

### INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of AD 457, Emperor Leo I (r. 457–474) initiated a comprehensive investigation into religious matters in most provinces of the Eastern Roman Empire. In specialized studies, this investigation and its outcome are known by the generic term of *Encyclia*.<sup>1</sup>

In his questionnaire epistle, the emperor asked every metropolitan to call the provincial synod in order to inform their suffragans about the issues he raised, analyze them together, and then write a common answer. At that time in Moesia Secunda, the see of Marcianopolis (now Devnya, Bulgaria) held the metropolitan rank, while those of Abritus (now Razgrad, Bulgaria), Appiaria (now Riakhovo, Bulgaria), Durostorum (now Silistra,

<sup>1</sup> On *Encyclia*, 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. 44–45 ff.

Bulgaria), Nicopolis ad Istrum (now Nikiup, Bulgaria), and Novae (now Svishtov, Bulgaria), held the rank of ordinary bishoprics.<sup>2</sup>

Metropolitan Valerian of Marcianopolis was the direct recipient of the imperial questionnaire in 457.<sup>3</sup> His name, however, does not appear in the content of the response epistle to the emperor drafted during the provincial synod. At the end of it, only the signatures of the other bishops from the province are listed.

This study examines the principle underlying the order in which the hierarchs of Moesia Secunda signed the response epistle addressed to Emperor Leo I during the religious investigation of 457–458.

## 1. SCHOLARLY VIEWS ON THE SUBJECT

To our knowledge, only two researchers—T. Schnitzler and G. Siebigs—have focused on this topic in their studies. The former, in a work dedicated to *Encyclia*, addressing the order of signatures in response epistles sent to Emperor Leo I, identified a certain hierarchy: 1. The metropolitan of each province took precedence by signing the document first; 2. The second signatory of the response epistle was the hierarch who enjoyed the greatest prestige within his province. This prestige could be due to the importance of the see he occupied, or his personal merits;<sup>4</sup> 3. The other bishops of the province signed in descending order of their seniority in the episcopate. T. Schnitzler noted that only in the case of epistles sent from Pamphylia and Achaëa was this order not followed. Instead, he argued that in the case of ten provinces, including Moesia Secunda, adherence to this hierarchy is fully evident.<sup>5</sup>

T. Schnitzler overlooked the fact that the metropolitan of Marcianopolis did not sign the document. Additionally, he failed to specify if, in the case of Moesia Secunda, the second rule was applied. More precisely, there is no clarification of whether the precedence of Marcian of Abrytus's signature on the document was attributed to the significance of his see or his personal prestige. Furthermore, regarding adherence to the principle of seniority within the episcopate, T. Schnitzler only generally noted that it can be verified through comparison with signature lists from previous synods, without offering concrete evidence.<sup>6</sup>

According to G. Siebigs, the city of Abritus temporarily served as the metropolis of Moesia Secunda from AD 447, following the Huns' conquest and destruction of Marcianopolis. After this event, the metropolitan of Marcianopolis sought refuge in Constantinople, continuing to reside there even in 457/8. Consequently, during that decade

<sup>2</sup> See Ionuț Holubeanu, "The Ecclesiastical Province of Moesia Secunda in the Mid-5th Century AD" (Submitted for Initial Review).

<sup>3</sup> *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* (hereafter cited as *ACO*), vol. II/5, Eduard Schwartz (ed.), De Gruyter, Berlin/Leipzig, 1936, p. 24<sup>15</sup> (no. 53).

<sup>4</sup> In this case, T. Schnitzler referred to Eustathius of Berytus in Phoenice Prima and Julian of Tavium in Galatia Prima, whom he classified as "Ehrenmetropolitens" ("honorary metropolitans")—see Theodor Schnitzler, *Im Kampfe um Chalcedon. Geschichte und Inhalt des Codex Encyclius von 458*, coll. *Analecta Gregoriana*, vol. 16, Apud aedes Universitatis Gregorianaë, Rome, 1938, p. 39. The placement of Eustathius's signature immediately after that of Metropolitan Dorotheus of Tyre in the response epistle from Phoenice Prima to the emperor can be attributed to his rank as a titular metropolitan. In contrast, Julian of Tavium, who held the rank of an ordinary bishop, had his signature following that of Metropolitan Anastasius of Ancyra in the response epistle from Galatia Prima due to his theological prestige. As a result, Julian was also a direct recipient of the questionnaire epistle sent by Emperor Leo I [see *ACO*, II/5, p. 23<sup>28</sup> (no. 34)], similarly to the metropolitans. On the matter, see I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> T. Schnitzler, *Im Kampfe um Chalcedon*, p. 39, n. 29.

<sup>6</sup> T. Schnitzler, *Im Kampfe um Chalcedon*, p. 39.

(447–457/8), the ecclesiastical leadership of the province was assumed by the bishop of Abritus. This would have been the reason why he was the first among the province's bishops to sign the response epistle addressed to the emperor.<sup>7</sup>

As far as the order of signatures of the other hierarchs of Moesia Secunda is concerned, G. Siebig did not express any particular viewpoint.

Documentary evidence, however, invalidates G. Siebig's hypothesis. In a study dedicated to the episcopal structure of the Church in Moesia Secunda in the mid-5th century, it was concluded that only Metropolitan Saturninus of Marcianopolis (431–c.449) was in refuge in Constantinople between the years 447 and 449. His successor, Valerian (c.449–457/8), left the imperial capital, residing in his province. As for his failure to sign the response epistle to the emperor during the religious events of 457–458, this was explained as a result of his death. It occurred shortly before the conducting of the provincial synod during which the epistle was drafted.<sup>8</sup> Another possible explanation for the order in which the bishops of Moesia Secunda signed their response epistle to the emperor could be that it reflected the existing hierarchy of the province's sees at that time. This hierarchy might have been influenced by factors such as the historical seniority of the bishoprics or the significance of their cities. The following lines offer an examination of the explanations put forward by T. Schnitzler and of the previously presented hypothesis.

## 2. ORDER OF SIGNATURES

In the response epistle of the hierarchs from Moesia Secunda addressed to Emperor Leo I, there are six signatures, presented in the following order:

*Marcianus episcopus ciuitatis Abryti confirmaui et subscripsi*

*Martialis episcopus ciuitatis Appiariensis similiter*

*Minofilos episcopus ciuitatis Durostori similiter*

*Marcellus episcopus ciuitatis Nicopoleos similiter*

*Petrus episcopus ciuitatis Nouensis similiter*

*Dizza episcopus ciuitatis Odissae Scythiae similiter.*<sup>9</sup>

(Marcian bishop of the city of Abritus, I have confirmed and subscribed

Martialis bishop of the city of Appiaria, similarly

Minofilus bishop of the city of Durostorum, similarly

Marcellus bishop of the city of Nicopolis, similarly

Peter bishop of the city of Novae, similarly

Dizza bishop of the city of Odessos in Scythia, similarly).<sup>10</sup>

As previously indicated, the first principle T. Schnitzler identifies concerns the signing of the document first by the metropolitan of the province. In the case of Moesia Secunda, this principle was not applied. Neither the name nor the signature of the metropolitan of Marcianopolis appear in the response epistle to the emperor.

<sup>7</sup> Gereon Siebig, *Kaiser Leo I. Das oströmische Reich in den ersten drei Jahren seiner Regierung (457–460 n. Chr.)*, De Gruyter, Berlin/New York, 2010, pp. 358 (n. 323) and 627.

<sup>8</sup> See I. Holubeanu, "The Ecclesiastical Province of Moesia Secunda."

<sup>9</sup> *ACO*, II/5, p. 32<sup>26–31</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> As can be observed from this signature of Bishop Dizza, the see of Odessos, although located on the territory of the Roman province of Moesia Secunda, was subordinated to the metropolitan see of Tomi within the ecclesiastical province of Scythia. On this matter, see also I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, pp. 46–51.

The second principle the German researcher highlighted concerns the signing of the document immediately after the metropolitan by the hierarch with the highest prestige in the province. In this case, it could be either a titular metropolitan or a theologian appreciated by contemporaries for his knowledge.

The first of these aspects is not applicable in the case of the see of Abritus. Titular metropolitans were direct addressees of the emperor's questionnaire epistle.<sup>11</sup> However, in the list of addressees preserved in the *Codex Encyclius*, the name of Bishop Marcian is not mentioned.<sup>12</sup> Based on this aspect, it can be deduced that his see held the rank of an ordinary bishopric, rather than a titular metropolitan see.

Regarding the theological prestige of Bishop Marcian, the available data argue against such a possibility. On the one hand, within the First Council of Ephesus (431), in which he participated, Marcian appears alongside the supporters of Nestorius of Constantinople (428–431). He signed the documents from the session of the Easterners (anti-Cyrellians) on 26 June 431, which decreed the deposition of St. Cyril of Alexandria and Memnon of Ephesus.<sup>13</sup> His signature also appears on the circular of Nestorian bishops addressed to the clergy and faithful of Hierapolis in Euphratensis dispatched after 17 July 431.<sup>14</sup> Finally, he also signed the memorandum of Nestorian bishops addressed to their representatives in Constantinople in September 431.<sup>15</sup> This is an indication that, at that time, he did not excel as an orthodox theologian.

On the other hand, considering that he was not a direct addressee of the questionnaire epistle dispatched by Emperor Leo I in October 457—like the ordinary bishops Julian of Tavium or Adelphius of Arabissus—it can be inferred that he was not renowned as a theologian in Constantinople at that time, either.<sup>16</sup>

It could only be considered a possibility that Marcian was appreciated as a theologian in his province in 457/8. However, this potential local prestige must have been generated precisely by his long service as a bishop and life experience acquired during the tumultuous events in which he participated. As such, it does not exclude the possibility that he was the hierarch with the longest episcopate in the province, but rather supports it.

### 3. PRINCIPLE OF SENIORITY IN THE EPISCOPACY IN THE EPISTLE OF MOESIA SECUNDA

In this section, the hypothesis of the bishops of Moesia Secunda applying the principle of their seniority in the episcopacy when signing the response letter to Emperor Leo I will be examined, based on the available documentary evidence.

The oldest information about Marcian of Abritus originates from the First Council of Ephesus in 431.<sup>17</sup> Based on these records, it can be deduced that by the year 458, he had served at least 27 years in his episcopal role.

<sup>11</sup> See I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> See *ACO*, II/5, pp. 22<sup>32</sup>–24<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> *ACO*, vol. I/1.5, Eduard Schwartz (ed.), De Gruyter, Berlin/Leipzig, 1927, p. 124<sup>1</sup> (no. 35); *ACO*, vol. I/4, Eduard Schwartz (ed.), De Gruyter, Berlin/Leipzig, 1922–1923, p. 38 (no. 38).

<sup>14</sup> *ACO*, I/4, p. 46 (no. 39).

<sup>15</sup> *ACO*, I/4, p. 67<sup>18</sup> (no. XX).

<sup>16</sup> On Julian of Tavium and Adelphius of Arabissus as direct addressees of the questionnaire letter dispatched by the Emperor Leo I, see *ACO*, II/5, p. 23<sup>28–29</sup> (nos. 34 and 35).

<sup>17</sup> See above, n. 13–15, and, in addition, Michael Le Quien, *Oriens christianus*, vol. 1, Ex typographia regia, Paris, 1740, col. 1219–1221; Vasile Pârvan, *Contribuții epigrafice la istoria creștinismului daco-roman/ Epigraphic Contributions to the History of Daco-Roman Christianity*, SOCEC & Co., Bucharest, 1911, pp. 67–

The approximation of the episcopal tenure of the second signer, Martialis of Appiaria, is not possible. According to one interpretation, this see was represented at the First Council of Constantinople (381) by Bishop Agrius.<sup>18</sup> However, the names of none of the hierarchs who served between Agrius and Martialis are known. The only information that can be considered in this case is that in the list of Nestorian bishops who lost their sees after the First Council of Ephesus, two hierarchs from Moesia Secunda are mentioned. They are Valerian and Eudocius, suffragans of Metropolitan Dorotheus of Marcianopolis. However, the names of their sees are not mentioned in the document: “*Valerianus et Eudocius Mysiae, qui sub eodem Dorotheo existentes, ultro ab ecclesiis recesserunt*” (“Valerian and Eudocius of Moesia, who were under the same Dorotheus, voluntarily withdrew from the Churches”).<sup>19</sup>

Considering, however, that at that time Marcian was serving at Abritus and Jacob at Durostorum, Valerian and Eudocius could only have been bishops at Appiaria, Nicopolis ad Istrum, or Novae. Their tenure in Odessos is excluded, as the hierarch there was a suffragan of the metropolitan of Tomi in ecclesiastical Scythia, not of Marcianopolis, at that time.<sup>20</sup> If Valerian and Eudocius held the sees of Appiaria and Nicopolis ad Istrum, then certainly Marcian of Abritus had the longest tenure as bishop in 457/8, since Peter of Novae could not have been bishop for more than eight to nine years.<sup>21</sup> But if either Valerian or Eudocius held the see of Novae, then there would remain one bishop—either Martialis of Appiaria or Marcellus of Nicopolis ad Istrum—who hypothetically could have had a longer tenure as bishop than Marcian of Abritus.<sup>22</sup>

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68; Siméon Vailhé, “Abrytus,” in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique*, vol. 1, Alfred Baudrillart, Albert Vogt, and Urbain Rouziès (eds.), Letouzey et Ané, Paris, 1912, col. 197; Jacques Zeiller, *Les origines chrétiennes dans les provinces danubiennes de l'empire romain*, E. de Boccard, Paris, 1918, pp. 168, 354, and 600; Henri Leclercq, “Mésie,” in *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de Liturgie*, vol. XI/1, Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq (eds.), Librairie Letouzey et Ané, Paris, 1933, col. 507; Giorgio Fedalto, *Hierarchia Ecclesiastica Orientalis*, vol. 1, Messaggero, Padova, 1988, p. 342; Kazimierz Ilski, “Korespondencja biskupów Mezyjskich”/ “The Correspondence of the Moesian Bishops,” in *Studia Moesiaca*, Leszek Mrozewicz and Kazimierz Ilski (eds.), VIS, Poznań, 1994, p. 134; Kazimierz Ilski, *Biskupi Mezji i Scytii IV–VI w./ The Bishops of Moesia and Scythia: 4th–6th Centuries*, coll. *Moesia II et Scythia Minor*, vol. 2, *Prosopographia Moesiaca*, vol. 5, VIS, Poznań, 1995, pp. 38–40; Nelu Zugravu, “Studiu introductiv, notițe bibliografice, note și comentarii”/ “Introductory Study, Biobibliographical Notes, Footnotes, and Comments,” in *Fontes Historiae Daco-Romanae Christianitatis*, Nelu Zugravu (ed.), Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza,” Iași, 2008, pp. 119, 121, and 361 (n. 9).

<sup>18</sup> Ernst Honigmann, “Recherches sur les listes des Pères de Nicée et de Constantinople,” in *Byzantion*, 11 (1936), pp. 440–449.

<sup>19</sup> *ACO*, I/4, p. 203<sup>33–34</sup>. See also J. Zeiller, *Les origines chrétiennes*, p. 169; H. Leclercq, “Mésie,” col. 508; Ernst Gerland and Vitalien Laurent, *Corpus notitiarum episcopatum ecclesiae orientalis Graecae. I. Les listes conciliaires*, Socii Assumptionistae Chalcedonenses, Istanbul, 1936, nos. 241–242, p. 91; K. Ilski, *Biskupi Mezji i Scytii*, pp. 29–30 and 65; N. Zugravu, “Studiu introductiv,” pp. 119–120.

<sup>20</sup> On this matter, see above, the reference from n. 10.

<sup>21</sup> See below, the paragraph with n. 24–25.

<sup>22</sup> Some researchers claim the presence at the First Council of Ephesus of the bishop Petronius of Novae from Moesia Secunda—see M. Le Quien, *Oriens christianus*, col. 1221; J. Zeiller, *Les origines chrétiennes*, pp. 353–354; H. Leclercq, “Mésie,” col. 507; Kazimierz Ilski, “Biskupstwo w Novae a zagadnienie chrystianizacji Mezji Dolnej”/ “The Bishopric of Novae and the Issue of the Christianization of Lower Moesia,” in *Balkanica Poznaniensia*, 1 (1984), p. 308 (his first opinion). In reality, this hierarch represented the see of Neves in Arabia—see Giorgio Fedalto, *Hierarchia Ecclesiastica Orientalis*, vol. 2, Messaggero, Padova, 1988, p. 752; K. Ilski, *Biskupi Mezji i Scytii*, pp. 30 and 65 (his second opinion). Evidence for this is the fact that in his place, Bishop Zosimus of Ebus in Arabia signed the documents from the session of the Easterners on 26 June 431:



Regarding the see of Durostorum, it was represented at the First Council of Ephesus by Bishop Jacob.<sup>23</sup> It is not known if there was any other bishop between him and Minofilus, the one mentioned in the *Encyclia*. However, Minofilus certainly had a shorter tenure as bishop than Marcian of Abritus. Nonetheless, the relationship between the tenure of Minofilus and that of Martialis of Appiaria, whose signature precedes his, cannot be determined.

No other information has been preserved about Marcellus of Nicopolis ad Istrum. Likewise, the names of none of his predecessors are known. Therefore, it is impossible to determine his tenure as a bishop. If either Valerian or Eudocius, the Nestorian bishops, occupied the see of Nicopolis ad Istrum, then Marcellus could not have had a longer tenure as a bishop than Marcian of Abritus. However, if they were bishops at Appiaria and Novae, then, as already mentioned, Marcellus could have surpassed Marcian in the episcopal service.

Finally, at Novae, preceding Peter, evidence of Secundinus exists. He is attested at the session of the Home Synod on 22 November 448, where the Constantinopolitan archimandrite Eutychius was judged and condemned.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, he is attested at the hearings of 8 and 13 April 449 in Constantinople.<sup>25</sup> Based on this information, it can be established that, in 457/8, Peter of Novae could not have held the see for more than eight to nine years.

In conclusion, during the religious investigation of 457–458, Marcian of Abritus (position 1) had at least 27 years of episcopacy, while Peter of Novae (position 5), the last signer from the ecclesiastical province of Moesia Secunda, had at most eight to nine years. Among the other bishops, Minofilus of Durostorum (position 3) certainly had a shorter tenure than the bishop of Abritus. Only Martialis of Appiaria (position 2) and Marcellus of Nicopolis ad Istrum (position 4) could have surpassed the tenure of the bishop of Abritus.

Therefore, although, based on the extant documentary information, the hierarchy of seniority among all these bishops cannot be precisely determined, T. Schnitzler's statement regarding their signing of the document according to the principle of seniority in the episcopacy appears to be correct. In fact, the extant documentary evidence does not directly contradict this point.

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“*Petronius episcopus Neuae per Zosim episcopum Esbuntos subscripsi*” (“Petronius bishop of Neve, I have subscribed through Bishop Zosimus of Esbus”), *ACO*, I/4, p. 38 (no. 53).

<sup>23</sup> *ACO*, I/1.5, p. 123<sup>38</sup> (no. 34); *ACO*, I/4, pp. 38 (no. 37), 45 (no. 31), 67<sup>26</sup> (no. XXVIII), and 28<sup>35</sup> (no. XXIII). See also M. Le Quien, *Oriens christianus*, col. 1227; V. Pârvan, *Contribuții epigrafice*, pp. 69–70; J. Zeiller, *Les origines chrétiennes*, pp. 166 and 600; H. Leclercq, “Mésie,” col. 507; G. Fedalto, *Hierarchia Ecclesiastica*, 1, pp. 343–344; K. Ilski, *Biskupi Mezji i Scytii*, pp. 32–33; N. Zugravu, “Studiu introductiv,” p. 119; Georgi Atanassov, “Christianity along the Lower Danube Limes in the Roman Provinces of Dacia Ripensis, Moesia Secunda and Scythia Minor (4th–6th c. AD),” in *The Lower Danube Roman Limes (1st–6th C. AD)*, Lyudmil Vagalinski, Nikolay Sharankov, and Sergey Torbatov (eds.), NIAM-BAS, Sofia, 2012, p. 358.

<sup>24</sup> *ACO*, vol. II/2.1, Eduard Schwartz (ed.), De Gruyter, Berlin/Leipzig, 1932, p. 20<sup>13</sup> (no. 28). On the presence of Secundinus at the Home Synod of 448, see also *ACO*, vol. II/1.1, Eduard Schwartz (ed.), De Gruyter, Berlin/Leipzig, 1933, p. 170<sup>1–2</sup>; *ACO*, vol. II/3.1, Eduard Schwartz (ed.), De Gruyter, Berlin/Leipzig, 1935, p. 157<sup>9–10</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> April 8, 449: *ACO*, II/1.1, p. 150<sup>23</sup> (no. 19); *ACO*, II/3.1, p. 134<sup>17</sup> (no. 19). April 13, 449: *ACO*, II/1.1, pp. 149<sup>4</sup> (no. 25) and 170<sup>1–2</sup>; *ACO*, II/3.1, pp. 133<sup>1</sup> (no. 25) and 157<sup>9–10</sup>. On Secundinus of Novae, see also M. Le Quien, *Oriens christianus*, col. 1221; V. Pârvan, *Contribuții epigrafice*, p. 70; J. Zeiller, *Les origines chrétiennes*, pp. 167 and 600; H. Leclercq, “Mésie,” col. 507; G. Fedalto, *Hierarchia Ecclesiastica*, 1, p. 348; K. Ilski, *Biskupi Mezji i Scytii*, pp. 49–50; I. Holubeanu, “The Ecclesiastical Province of Moesia Secunda.”

#### 4. PROTOTHRONOS OF MOESIA SECUNDA

The accuracy of the previous conclusion can be verified by clarifying two other aspects: 1. The possibility that the bishop of Abritus might have been the first to sign the response epistle to the emperor because his see held the status of protothronos (‘πρωτόθρονος,’ i.e., the first-ranked ordinary bishopric) within the Church of Moesia Secunda; and 2. The possibility that the order in which the bishops signed might have been determined by the hierarchy of their sees at that time.

Clarifying these issues can be achieved based on two sources: the conciliar lists and the *Notitiae episcopatum* of the Church of Constantinople. In the case of the former, the relevant lists are those of the councils where at least one other ordinary bishop from Moesia Secunda participated, alongside the hierarch of Abritus. The only situation of this kind is that of the signature lists from the First Council of Ephesus (431). In three of these lists, the names of Bishop Jacob of Durostorum and Bishop Marcian of Abritus appear. The most important is the signature list of the session of the Easterners on 26 June 431. It has been preserved in Greek and Latin. In both versions, the names of the two bishops from Moesia Secunda appear consecutively. This indicates that they jointly signed the document, Jacob of Durostorum being the first to sign: “... Ἰάκωβος Δοροστόλου, Μαρκιανὸς Ἀβρύτου, ...”<sup>26</sup> (“Jacob of Durostorum, Marcian of Abritus”) / “... *Iacobus episcopus Dorostoli subscripsi, Marcianus episcopus Abryti subscripsi ...*”<sup>27</sup> (“Jacob bishop of Durostorum, I have signed; Marcian bishop of Abritus, I have signed”).

The sequence of their signatures can be considered an indication that, at that time, the see of Abritus did not have precedence over that of Durostorum. Most likely, in this case as well, seniority in the episcopacy must have been the principle respected by the two hierarchs. In other words, Marcian of Abritus, who must have been young at the time, deferred to his colleague, Jacob, who likely had a longer tenure as a bishop.

In two other lists, their names appear separately. One of the lists is found at the end of the epistle addressed by the supporters of Nestorius to the priests and faithful of Hierapolis in Euphratensis, dispatched after 17 July 431. In this one, Jacob’s signature appears at position 31, while Marcian’s at 39.<sup>28</sup>

The second list accompanied a memorandum dispatched in September 431 by the Nestorian bishops to their eight representatives at Constantinople. This time, Marcian’s signature (position 20) precedes that of Jacob (position 28).<sup>29</sup> In this case, Jacob’s “delay” is hard to explain. However, it is not excluded that these last two documents were drafted by the hardcore of the Nestorian group and were subsequently signed, in the days that followed, by the other hierarchs of their party.

Regarding the *Notitiae episcopatum*, those of paramount importance for this investigation are the ones known as Epiphanius’s and De Boor’s (i.e., *Notitiae* nos. 1 and 3, respectively, according to the classification by J. Darrouzès). The former (Epiphanius’s) originates from a *Notitia* compiled in the 7th century.<sup>30</sup> However, the information it provides

<sup>26</sup> ACO, I/1.5, pp. 123<sup>38</sup>–124<sup>1</sup> (nos. 34 and 35).

<sup>27</sup> ACO, I/4, p. 38 (nos. 37 and 38).

<sup>28</sup> ACO, I/4, p. 45 (no. 31): “*Iacobus episcopus Dorostoli*” (“Jacob, bishop of Durostorum”). ACO, I/4, p. 46 (no. 39): “*Marcianus episcopus Abryti*” (“Marcian, bishop of Abritus”).

<sup>29</sup> ACO, I/4, p. 67<sup>18</sup> (no. XX): “*Marcianus episcopus Abryti*” (“Marcian, bishop of Abritus”). ACO, I/4, p. 67<sup>26</sup> (no. XXVIII): “*Iacobus episcopus Dorostoli*” (“Jacob, bishop of Durostorum”).

<sup>30</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. 7–9.

about the internal structure of the Church in Moesia Secunda reflects the situation in the first decade (c.527–535) of Emperor Justinian I's reign (527–565).<sup>31</sup>

The list of ordinary bishoprics of Moesia Secunda in *Notitia I* is not complete. It mentions, in the following order, Durostorum, Transmarisca (now Tutrakan, Bulgaria), Novae, Zekedepa (now Tsarevets?, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria), and Scaria (Appiaria?). The sees of Abritus, Nicopolis ad Istrum, and possibly Appiaria (in case Scaria is not an altered form of Appiaria) are not mentioned.<sup>32</sup>

Although the list is incomplete, it contributes to the understanding of the ecclesiastical organization in Moesia Secunda. As can be observed, the episcopal centers were enumerated based on geographical criteria: first the Danubian sees were listed from downstream to upstream (Durostorum, Transmarisca, and Novae), followed by inland ones (Zekedepa-Tsarevets and the enigmatic Scaria) (see the Map). It is noteworthy that even the mention of the see of Transmarisca, established shortly after AD 527, was based on geographical rather than chronological criteria.<sup>33</sup> In the latter case, it should have been mentioned at the end of the list, being one of the newest in the province at that time. This suggests that there was no hierarchy among the bishoprics of Moesia Secunda at that time (c.527–535), further implying that such a hierarchy likely did not exist prior to the year 527, either.

Based only on this incomplete list, however, it is difficult to establish whether the status of protothronos existed in the Church of Moesia Secunda between 527 and 535. In case of an affirmative answer, it cannot be asserted with certainty whether this status was held by Durostorum, which is the first ordinary bishopric mentioned in the extant form of the list. It would be possible that in its original form, any of the other three unmentioned sees (Abritus, Nicopolis ad Istrum, and possibly Appiaria) might have occupied the first position. In this case, one of them could have held the rank of protothronos.

Nevertheless, the likelihood of either Abritus or Nicopolis ad Istrum preceding Durostorum in the original form of the list is low, as both were inland centers. In such a case, considering the geographical criterion applied in compiling the list, it would have been natural for the other inland see, Zekedepa-Tsarevets, and possibly Scaria to be mentioned immediately after Abritus and Nicopolis ad Istrum, and before the bishoprics along the Danube (Durostorum, Transmarisca, and Novae). However, as observed, the latter precede Zekedepa-Tsarevets and Scaria in the list.

It is also possible that the rank of protothronos did not exist within the Church of Moesia Secunda during that period. In this case, the mention of Durostorum in the top position on the list does not signify any hierarchical importance. One plausible explanation for its prominent position might be that officials at the Ecumenical Patriarchate, who compiled the list at the outset of Justinian I's reign, referenced a civil document outlining the administrative structure of the empire. Within this document, Durostorum was noted in a leading position within the section dedicated to Moesia Secunda. This placement, devoid of ecclesiastical significance, was likely mirrored by the Patriarchate's officials in their

<sup>31</sup> See Ionuț Holubeanu, "Organizarea bisericească în Moesia Secunda în secolele V–VII p.Chr.?" "Ecclesiastical Organization in Moesia Secunda in the 5th–7th Centuries AD," in *Pontica*, 50 (2017), pp. 81–95; reprint in: 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 AD*, Basilica, Bucharest, 2018, pp. 143–165. The English version of this study is in progress.

<sup>32</sup> See J. Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum* 1.32.444–449, p. 213.

<sup>33</sup> On the establishment of the bishopric of Transmarisca, see I. Holubeanu, "Organizarea bisericească în Moesia Secunda," pp. 82–95; I. Holubeanu, *Organizarea bisericească în Scythia*, pp. 144–165.



compilation. Concerning the other bishoprics of the province, they may have been either arranged according to their geographical proximity to Durostorum or listed in the same order as their respective cities appeared in the civil document the ecclesiastical officials relied upon.

Such a civil document is Hierocles's *Synecdemus*. It contains information on Moesia Secunda that can be dated to AD 527.<sup>34</sup> Following the metropolis of Marcianopolis, the text lists six cities in sequence: Odessos, Durostorum, Nicopolis ad Istrum, Novae, Appiaria, and Abritus.<sup>35</sup> As already noted, during this period, the bishopric of Odessos was a suffragan to the metropolitan see of Tomi within the ecclesiastical province of Scythia. Consequently, in a procedure akin to the aforementioned, Durostorum would be the first bishopric listed in Moesia Secunda.

Data provided by *Notitia 3* (the so-called De Boor's) is also important for clarifying these aspects. The document dates between AD 787 and the end of the 9th century.<sup>36</sup> However, the information it contains regarding the ecclesiastical province of the metropolitan see of Odessos reflects an earlier situation in Moesia Secunda, around AD 536.<sup>37</sup> In that year, the bishopric of Odessos was transferred to the ecclesiastical province of Moesia Secunda, where it took over the metropolitan rank from the see of Marcianopolis.<sup>38</sup>

In the document, most of the ordinary bishoprics of the province are mentioned according to a geographical principle. The Danubian sees are first listed, organized from upstream to downstream (Novae, Appiaria, and Durostorum), followed by those inland, from east to west (Marcianopolis, Abritus, and Nicopolis ad Istrum).<sup>39</sup> Although some sees of the province are missing from the list, namely Transmarisca, Zekedepa-Tsarevets, and possibly Scaria, based on the arrangement of those mentioned, it can be deduced that there was no hierarchy among them at that time, as before. However, in the list, the see of Palaistene (i.e., Palmatae, now Onogur, Bulgaria), recently established, is not mentioned based on its geographical position (that is, before Marcianopolis), but at the end of the list (see the

<sup>34</sup> See I. Holubeanu, "Organizarea bisericească în Moesia Secunda," pp. 76–77; I. Holubeanu, *Organizarea bisericească în Scythia*, pp. 134–136; I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, pp. 88–89 (with bibliography).

<sup>35</sup> Hierocles, *Synecdemus* 636.1–8, in Ernst Honigmann, *Le Synecdèmos d'Hiérôklès 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>36</sup> J. Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum*, p. 32. More recently, I. Basić proposed dating this document during the patriarchate of Tarasios of Constantinople (784–806)—see Ivan Basić, "O dataciji "ikonoklastičkog" popisa biskupija Carigradske crkve (*Notitia episcopatum ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae 3*) s osobitim obzirom na Tračku dijecezu" / "On the Dating of the "Iconoclastic" Episcopal List of the Church of Constantinople (*Notitia Episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae 3*) with a Special Emphasis on the Diocese of Thrace," in *Na obzorju novega. Območje severnega Jadrana ter vzhodnoalpski in balkansko-podonavski prostor v obdobju pozne antike in zgodnjega srednjega veka: posvečeno Rajku Bratožu ob njegovi sedemdesetletnici*, Alenka Cedilnik and Milan Lovenjak (eds.), Založba Univerze v Ljubljani, Ljubljana, 2022, pp. 285–313.

<sup>37</sup> See I. Holubeanu, "Organizarea bisericească în Moesia Secunda," pp. 100–104; I. Holubeanu, *Organizarea bisericească în Scythia*, pp. 172–178 and 205–233; I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, pp. 128–147.

<sup>38</sup> On the transfer of the metropolitan rank to the see of Odessos within the ecclesiastical province of Moesia Secunda in 536, see I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, pp. 139–147, 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 (2013), p. 104; Alexander Minchev, *Odesos prez kŭsnata antichnost (IV–nachaloto na VII v.) / Odessos during Late Antiquity (4th to Early 7th Centuries AD)*, Izdatelstvo MS, Varna, 2023, pp. 162 and 368.

<sup>39</sup> J. Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum* 3.36.604–609, p. 241.

Map).<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it seems that a new criterion is being introduced in its case, namely the chronological one. It reflects the beginning of a hierarchy among the newly established sees of Moesia Secunda.

Regarding the issue of the status of protothronos, Durostorum no longer appears in the first position in the list, but in the third. Novae has taken its place, which in the list from *Notitia 1* appears in the third position. This change could be explained in at least three ways: 1. The see of Durostorum truly held the rank of protothronos before 536 and lost it in favor of the see of Novae in that year; 2. The status of protothronos was introduced in Moesia Secunda during the ecclesiastical reorganization of the province in 536, being attributed to the see of Novae; or 3. The status of protothronos did not exist within the province, and in this case, being mentioned in the first position on the list holds no significance.

Since in the first decade (527–536) of the reign of Justinian I there are no known events that would have significantly affected the situation of Durostorum and the decline in importance of its bishopric, the possibility of it losing the status of protothronos in 536 seems unlikely. Therefore, it is most likely that before 536, this rank did not exist within the Church of Moesia Secunda.

The second and the third hypotheses cannot be verified based on the extant documentary information. After the tenure of Peter of Novae, who signed the epistle to Emperor Leo I in 457/8, no bishop is known at Novae. Nor in the *Notitiae episcopatum* is there any information about the ordinary bishoprics of Moesia Secunda after the year 536. However, in favor of assigning the rank of protothronos to the see of Novae in 536 (i.e., the second hypothesis above), the replacement of Durostorum with Novae in the first position of the list in *Notitia 3* argues for it. Specifically, if this position had been devoid of any administrative significance, why did the officials in Constantinople not keep Durostorum in the first position on the list, as in *Notitia 1*? Therefore, it seems plausible that with the major reorganization that took place within the Church of Moesia Secunda in 536—by moving the metropolitan center from Marcianopolis to Odessos—the status of protothronos was introduced there as well. This was granted to the see of Novae, which, based on this aspect, was moved to the first position among the ordinary bishoprics in the province in the official *Notitia*. The other sees were mentioned, as already shown, based on their geographical position relative to the protothronos. The only exception in this regard was the see of Palmatae.

As for the see of Abritus, it is mentioned in the last part of the list (between Marcianopolis and Nicopolis ad Istrum) in *Notitia 3*, in accordance with its geographical location.

Therefore, the documentary information analyzed within this section provides no indication in favor of the possibility that the see of Abritus was ever the protothronos of Moesia Secunda. Also, the extant data excludes the existence of a hierarchy among the ordinary bishoprics in Moesia Secunda before 536. In this case, the only criterion that could have been the basis for the order in which the bishops of Moesia Secunda signed the epistle to the emperor in 457/8 was the seniority in their episcopal office.

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<sup>40</sup> J. Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum* 3.36.610, p. 241. Most likely, the establishment of the bishopric of Palmatae occurred in the second part or even towards the end of the period 527–536. On this matter, as well as on the identification of Palaistene with Palmatae, see I. Holubeanu, “Organizarea bisericească în Moesia Secunda,” pp. 105–106; I. Holubeanu, *Organizarea bisericească în Scythia*, pp. 178–181. The identification of Palaistene with Palmatae is accepted by G. Atanasov as well—see G. Atanasov, “L’exception scythe,” p. 104, n. 11.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the investigation discussed above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The bishops from Moesia Secunda who took part in the extraordinary provincial synod of 457/8 signed the epistle in response to Emperor Leo I, adhering to the principle of seniority in episcopacy. The first to notice and emphasize the adherence to this rule was the German researcher T. Schnitzler. The present analysis confirms his assertions;
- In AD 457/8, there was no hierarchy among the episcopal sees of Moesia Secunda. Moreover, the rank of protothronos did not exist within the local Church. Most likely, in the absence of the metropolitan, the hierarch with the longest tenure in the episcopacy assumed his responsibilities. During the religious investigation initiated by Emperor Leo I, this was Marcian of Abritus;
- It is possible that with the major ecclesiastical reorganization that took place in Moesia Secunda in AD 536, the rank of protothronos was introduced there. In such a case, it was most likely assigned to the see of Novae.

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**Anexes:** *Map of the Roman province of Moesia Secunda (□ first half of the 6th century AD)*

