

EMILIAN POPESCU'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECCLESIASTICAL ORGANIZATION IN THE ROMAN PROVINCE OF SCYTHIA BETWEEN THE 4TH AND 7TH CENTURIES AD

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ABSTRACT

Clarifying the evolution of ecclesiastical organization in the Roman province of Scythia from the 4th to the 7th centuries AD has posed considerable interpretative challenges. To date, no scholarly consensus has emerged concerning any facets of this complex topic. Most researchers recognize the elevation of the see of Tomi to the metropolitan rank with dependent suffragan bishoprics, yet some dispute this hypothesis. Among the proponents, there is no consensus regarding the exact timeframe of Tomi's rise in status, nor is there agreement on its suffragan sees. Likewise, scholarly debate surrounds the precise moment when Tomi became an autocephalous archbishopric. Additionally, interpretations vary about whether the information in Notitia episcopatum No. 3 of the Church of Constantinople (according to the numbering by J. Darrouzès—known also as De Boor's Notitia) reflects civil or ecclesiastical realities. Within the present study, the contributions of the late Professor Emilian Popescu in clarifying certain aspects related to this topic are presented. Throughout his scientific career, Popescu dedicated extensive efforts to this issue. His main contribution consisted of substantiating the thesis about the establishment of suffragan bishoprics in the territory of Roman Scythia and, implicitly, the elevation of the see of Tomi to the metropolitan rank.

Keywords: ecclesiastical organization; the Roman province of Scythia; Tomi (now Constanța, Romania); De Boor's Notitia; Emilian Popescu;

INTRODUCTION

Determining the structure of ecclesiastical organization in the Roman province of Scythia during Late Antiquity has posed significant challenges for researchers due to inconsistencies in the preserved historical records. On the one hand, some sources—Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* VI.21.3 and VII.26.6; *Codex Iustinianus* I.3.35.2; *Encyclia* (457–458); *Notitiae episcopatum*—describe an unconventional structure with only one hierarch—that of Tomi (now Constanța, Romania)—overseeing the entire province. On the other hand, archaeological findings in Dobruja and data from *Notitia episcopatum* No. 3 of the Church in Constantinople (according to the numbering by J. Darrouzès, the so-called ‘De Boor's Notitia’) depict Tomi as a metropolitan see with subordinate bishoprics.

The complexity of the issue is also revealed by the absence of scholarly consensus on the various aspects under discussion. Whereas most researchers accept the elevation of the see of Tomi to the rank of a great metropolis (i.e., a metropolitan see with suffragan

bishoprics), several others oppose this view. Moreover, among those who affirm the see's elevation, there is a discordance about the precise date of this event. Similarly, the specific moment at which Tomi was elevated to the status of an autocephalous archbishopric is contested, as is the interpretation of whether the information provided in *Notitia 3* reflects civil or ecclesiastical realities. This enduring debate has unfolded despite nearly three centuries of focused scholarly inquiry, beginning with Michael Le Quien's publication of *Oriens Christianus* in 1740 and extending to the current day. Notably, the research community that has engaged with this topic includes a range of scholars, some of whom are widely recognized for their scientific rigor, such as H. Gelzer, L. Duchesne, V. Pârvan, J. Zeiller, R. Vulpe, J. Darrouzès, and E. Popescu.¹

The present study analyzes the contribution of the late Professor Emilian Popescu to certain aspects related to this issue. He is known as one of the main scholars preoccupied with identifying the situation of ecclesiastical organization on the territory of Romania, in general, and particularly in Dobruja, during Late Antiquity.

1. SCHOLARLY VIEWS ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL ORGANIZATION OF ROMAN SCYTHIA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE POST-WAR PERIOD

When E. Popescu started studying the ecclesiastical organization in Roman Scythia, two opinions prevailed in the academic milieu. H. Gelzer, L. Duchesne, R. Netzhammer, E. Gerland, J. Zeiller, and I. Barnea affirmed the presence of only one ecclesiastical see on the territory of Roman Scythia, namely that of Tomi, throughout the entire existence of the province.² K.G. Brandis, J. Weiss, V. Pârvan, C. Auner, G.I. Konidarēs, and R. Vulpe proposed the establishment in the province of other sees, suffragan of Tomi, at a certain moment.³ The last mentioned point of view was based on the information exposed in *Notitia 3* and on the archaeological discoveries made in Tropaeum Traiani (now Adamclisi, Romania), Axiopolis (now Cernavodă, Romania), and Callatis (now Mangalia, Romania). Its supporters were not in full consensus, however. C. Auner and R. Vulpe (his first opinion) accepted the elevation of only some of the cities in Scythia mentioned in *Notitia 3* to the rank of episcopal sees during the reign of Justinian I (527–565).⁴ In turn, V. Pârvan, followed also by R. Vulpe (as a second opinion),⁵ considered the possibility for all the cities mentioned in *Notitia 3* to have been episcopal centres. V. Pârvan assumed their organization between 430 and 527 and their official recognition by civil and ecclesiastical authorities in Constantinople later, during the reign of Justinian I.⁶ G.I. Konidarēs considered that all the cities in Scythia

¹ 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. 19–29.

² See I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, pp. 20–23; Ion Barnea, *Istoria României/ The History of Romania*, vol. 1, Constantin Daicoviciu et al. (eds.), Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest, 1960, p. 611.

³ See I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, pp. 21–25.

⁴ Carol Auner, “Dobrogea,” in *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de Liturgie*, vol. IV/1, Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq (eds.), Letouzey et Ané, Paris, 1920, col. 1253; Radu Vulpe, *Histoire ancienne de la Dobroudja*, Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest, 1938, pp. 340–344.

⁵ Radu Vulpe, “Dobrogea meridională în Antichitate”/ “Southern Dobruja in Antiquity,” in *Analele Dobrogei*, 19 (1938), no. 2, p. 44.

⁶ Vasile Pârvan, “Nuove considerazioni sul vescovato della Scizia Minore,” in *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia 3, Rendiconti 2* (1923–1924), pp. 117–135.

mentioned in *Notitia 3* had been episcopal residences, attributing the establishment of their sees to the reign of Justinian I.⁷

Concerning the dating of the elevation of Tomi to the rank of autocephalous archbishopric, E. Gerland, V. Laurent, C. Pârvu, H.G. Beck, and L. Stan considered that the event had taken place before the year 431.⁸ In contrast, H. Gelzer suggested it happened before 451, while M. Păcurariu dated the event to post-602.⁹

2. THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF PROFESSOR EMILIAN POPESCU

Young researcher E. Popescu's interest in the evolution of the ecclesiastical organization in the Roman Scythia was aroused by recent (at that time) epigraphic and archaeological discoveries in the province. He sensed their importance for the proper understanding of the information exposed in *Notitia Episcopatum* of Carl de Boor (*Notitia 3*), a document that was long discussed and differently valued at that time.¹⁰

The interpretation of historical data from this document was the main objective of his PhD thesis [*Contribuții la geografia istorică a spațiului balcanic-dunărean în secolele V-VIII (Contributions to the Historical Geography of the Balkan-Danubian Region in the 5th–8th Centuries)*], written under the guidance of Professor Dionisie M. Pippidi and defended on 10 June 1970 at the Faculty of History, University of Bucharest.

In 1962, eight years prior to the defense of his PhD thesis, E. Popescu showcased his initial findings concerning the ecclesiastical evolution in Scythia. This occurred during a lecture at the Romanian Academy's Institute of Archaeology and Ancient History on 2 July, entitled "Contribuții la geografia istorică a Imperiului Bizantin: I. Provincia Scythia" ("Contributions to the Historical Geography of the Byzantine Empire: I. The Province of Scythia"). The text of the presentation was published in 2020 (in Romanian), mere months before his death (†25 August), within a collection that republished

⁷ Gerasimos Iōannou Konidarēs, *Ai mētropoleis kai arhiepiskopai tou oikoumenikou patriarheiou kai ē «taxis» autōn/ The Metropoleis and Archbishoprics of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Their "Taxis,"* vol. 1/1, coll. *Texte und Forschungen zur byzantinischneugriechischen Philologie*, vol. 13, Chronika, Athens, 1934, p. 50.

⁸ Ernst Gerland, *Corpus notitiarum episcopatum ecclesiae orientalis Graecae. I. Die Genesis der Notitia episcopatum. I. Einleitung*, Socii Assumptionistae Chalcedonenses, Istanbul, 1931, p. 10; Ernst Gerland and Vitalien Laurent, *Corpus notitiarum episcopatum ecclesiae orientalis Graecae. I. Les listes conciliaires*, Socii Assumptionistae Chalcedonenses, Istanbul, 1936, pp. 32, 53, 56, and 65; Vitalien Laurent, "Note d'histoire ecclésiastique: La Scythie mineure fut-elle représentée au Concile de Chalcédoine?" in *Études byzantines*, 3 (1945), p. 120, n. 19; Constantin Pârvu, "Autocefalia Bisericii Ortodoxe Române"/ "The Autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church," in *Studii Teologice*, 6 (1954), nos. 9–10, p. 514; Hans-Georg Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich*, coll. *Byzantinisches Handbuch im Rahmen des Handbuchs de Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. II/1, Beck, Munich, 1959, pp. 68 and 175–176; Liviu Stan, "Obârșia autocefaliei și autonomiei. Teze noi"/ "The Origin of the Autocephaly and Ecclesiastical Autonomy. New Theses," in *Mitropolia Olteniei*, 13 (1961), nos. 1–4, pp. 88–89, n. 33.

⁹ Heinrich Gelzer, "Zur Zeitbestimmung der griechischen Notitiae Episcopatum," in *Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie*, 12 (1886), no. 3, pp. 342, 344–345, and 351; Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Române/ The History of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, vol. 1, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1980, p. 140.

¹⁰ See Emilian Popescu, "Contribuții la geografia istorică a spațiului balcano-dunărean în secolele V-VIII e.n."/ "Contributions to the Historical Geography of the Balkan-Danubian Region in the 5th–8th Centuries AD," (Summary of the PhD thesis), in Emilian Popescu, *Studii de istorie și de spiritualitate creștină* (hereafter cited as *SISC*), vol. 5, Mihai Hau (ed.), Basilica/Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest, 2020, p. 393.

various studies he authored throughout his career.¹¹ The delay in publication was initially due to his intention to corroborate the conclusions on Scythia with documentary evidence from a broader geographical scope of the former Eastern Roman Empire.¹²

In his inaugural public discourse on the subject, E. Popescu harmonized information from literary sources with corresponding archaeological and epigraphic evidence. Further, he scrutinized documents pertaining to ecclesiastical geography, particularly the *Notitiae Episcopatum* of the Church in Constantinople and, notably, *Notitia 3*, through the lens provided by historical geography sources such as Hierocles's *Synecdemus* and Procopius of Caesarea's *De Aedificiis*. This approach was rationalized by the premise that the delineation of ecclesiastical jurisdictions was intrinsically linked to the state and the development of civil administrations.

In addressing the ecclesiastical dynamics within the Roman province of Scythia, E. Popescu paid particular attention to the details enumerated in *Notitia 3*. This document records the see of Tomi with 14 suffragan bishoprics.¹³ Scholarly opinions on the historical importance of *Notitia 3* were divided. Scholars like J. Kulakovski, N.A. Bécs, A.A. Vasiliev, and G.I. Konidaris supported the notion that a thorough analysis of the document could offer substantial insight into the administrative organization of the Church in the Eastern Roman Empire. In contrast, authorities such as L. Duchesne, J. Zeiller, V. Laurent, L. Robert, and H. Gelzer, disputed the value of *Notitia 3* as a source for ecclesiastical geography.

In order to interpret correctly the data in *Notitia 3* regarding Scythia, E. Popescu pursued two directions. First, he conducted an overall critical assessment of the document. This enabled him to observe that the author included only certain provinces of the Eastern Roman Empire, omitting others, without adhering to a consistent criterion in this regard. The same lack of authorial consistency was evident in the relationship between the sections of the *Notitia*, resulting in discrepancies and even internal contradictions among its different parts.

His second research direction involved a comparison of data from *Notitia 3* about Scythia with historical accounts of the province from the 5th to 7th centuries, drawing on literary, archaeological, and epigraphic evidence. He determined that written sources, such as Sozomen, the 458 letter of Bishop Theotimus II of Tomi (c.457/458), and Emperor Zeno's law in 480, specifically confirm the presence solely of the bishopric of Tomi in the Danube-Black Sea region only during the 4th and 5th centuries.

Popescu paid special attention to Zeno's law, which mandated the establishment of a bishopric in every settlement with the rank of a city within the empire. However, Scythia was exempted due to the impoverishment caused by continuous barbarian invasions. Popescu highlighted that the province's situation was confirmed by archaeological findings from the latter half of the 4th and the 5th centuries. Furthermore, he emphasized that the justification for Scythia's exemption from the law's provisions left open the possibility of a change in the

¹¹ Emilian Popescu, "Contribuții la geografia istorică a Imperiului Bizantin: I. Provincia Scythia"/ "Contributions to the Historical Geography of the Byzantine Empire: I. The Province of Scythia," in *SISC* 5, pp. 365–391.

¹² See Emilian Popescu, "Contributions à la géographie historique de la Péninsule Balkanique aux V^e-VIII^e siècles," in *Dacia*, [N.S.], 13 (1969), p. 403, note *.

¹³ 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, 3.40.642–656, p. 242.

local ecclesiastical organization in the event of an improvement in the province's overall situation.

To verify the accuracy of the information concerning Scythia in *Notitia 3*, Popescu once again utilized available archaeological sources and literary information. He demonstrated that during the reign of Anastasius I (491–518), significant improvements occurred in Scythia, evidenced by the reconstruction of old fortifications and the reinforcement of the limes with new troops. In addition, he provided documentary evidence from the first half of the 6th century, which corroborated the information in *Notitia 3* regarding the elevation of Tomi to the metropolitan rank and the establishment of suffragan bishoprics in the province: 1. At the Home Synod in 520, Paternus of Tomi (498–c.520) signed the synodal letter in line with the metropolitans rather than the suffragan bishops, and he designated himself as ‘*episcopus metropolitanus*’ (‘metropolitan bishop’);¹⁴ 2. In a letter addressed to Pope Hormisdas (514–523) in the year 519, the papal legates in Constantinople referred to Paternus and the other bishops in the province of Scythia;¹⁵ 3. At Tropaeum Traiani, there is a basilica (‘B’) with a baptistery, considered by Popescu to be, most probably, an episcopal cathedral; 4. The text of an inscription on a stone cross dating to the 6th century, discovered in Mangalia (ancient Callatis, Romania) in the summer of 1960 (still unpublished at that time), mentions certain bishops (Stefanus and another anonymous), the first known in the province outside of Tomi. Popescu emphasized that this information is consistent with the designation of the city of Callatis as an episcopal centre in *Notitia 3*, confirming the documentary value of this source.

Based on this comprehensive analysis, the late scholar concluded that during the reign of Emperor Anastasius I, 14 episcopal sees were established in Scythia as suffragan to the metropolitan see of Tomi, as mentioned in the paragraph dedicated to the province in *Notitia 3*. From his perspective, the first metropolitan of Tomi was likely Paternus. Regarding *Notitia 3*, his conclusion was that although it was compiled in the 9th century, for some territories of the Balkan Peninsula (Hellas, Peloponnese, Moesia Secunda, and Scythia), it relied on older documents drafted between the reign of Anastasius I and the year 600.

To reinforce these conclusions, Popescu also analyzed in his exposition the information regarding Moesia Secunda in *Notitia 3*. He dated the establishment of the metropolitan see of Odessos (now Varna, Bulgaria), attested in the document, also to the 6th century.¹⁶ Additionally, he assumed the existence of the ecclesiastical province of Haemimontus Secundus (‘*ἐπαρχία Αἰμμώντου β*’) as credible. It is mentioned in *Notitia 3* with Marcianopolis (now Devnya, Bulgaria) as its metropolis and with suffragan bishoprics in the territory of the civil province of Moesia Secunda.¹⁷

Regarding the attestation of Tomi as an autocephalous archbishopric in Epiphanius’s *Notitia* (no. 1, according to the numbering by J. Darrouzès), E. Popescu concluded that this information pertains to a situation prior to the 6th century.¹⁸ From his perspective, it would

¹⁴ *Epistulae imperatorum pontificum aliorum inde ab a. CCCLXVII usque ad a. DLIII datae Avellana quae dicitur Collectio* (hereafter cited as *Avell. Coll.*), Otto Günther (ed.), coll. *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, vol. 35/2, F. Tempisky, Prague/Vienna; G. Freytag, Leipzig, 1898, pp. 710²⁶⁻²⁸ and 713¹⁹⁻⁷¹⁵².

¹⁵ *Avell. Coll.*, p. 678⁴⁻⁵.

¹⁶ J. Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum*, 3.36.603–610, p. 241.

¹⁷ J. Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum*, 3.44.727–731, p. 244.

¹⁸ J. Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum*, 1.43, p. 217.

be a case similar to that of the see of Odessos.¹⁹ This is also attested as an autocephalous archbishopric in Epiphanius's *Notitia*, but it is known that in 458 it held the status of an ordinary bishopric, and that of a great metropolis in the 6th century.

The presentation on 2 July 1962 represents the first comprehensive examination of the literary, archaeological, and epigraphic sources concerning the ecclesiastical organization in Scythia, and the initial attempt to reconcile this information. Within it, E. Popescu endeavored to demonstrate that the written sources do not contradict one another but rather complement and are corroborated by archaeological and epigraphic findings. Together, they allow for an understanding of the development of the ecclesiastical organization in the province within the political, economic, and social conditions of the 4th to 6th centuries.

The scientific merit of this approach was quickly confirmed by the positive response it received from the academic community. I. Barnea, who attended Popescu's presentation, was among the first to endorse the thesis, integrating its insights into the section about the Dominate period in the book *Din istoria Dobrogei (A History of Dobruja)*.²⁰ Regrettably, although Barnea reproduced Popescu's analyses and conclusions, he did not attribute their authorship.²¹ In the following year, 1969, N. Șerbănescu of the Theological Institute in Bucharest, specializing in the history of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and A.A. Bolșacov-Ghimpu, both accepted the thesis, referencing Barnea's work without acknowledgement of its primary source of inspiration.²²

On 29 August 1966, E. Popescu presented a new paper on the ecclesiastical organization in the Balkan Peninsula during the 5th–8th centuries: "Contributions à la géographie historique de la Péninsule Balkanique aux Ve–VIIIe siècles de notre ère" ("Contributions to the Historical Geography of the Balkan Peninsula in the 5th–8th Centuries AD"). It was presented at the *First International Congress of Balkan and South-Eastern European Studies* (Sofia, 26 August–1 September 1966) and published, in abbreviated form, in the volume containing the abstracts of the papers presented by the Romanian delegation members participating in the congress.²³ Three years later, in 1969, the full text of the paper was published in the journal *Dacia*.²⁴

In this presentation, E. Popescu attempted a more robust archaeological argument regarding the changes in the ecclesiastical organization in Scythia during the reign of Anastasius I. He referred to the structure with a basilica in the 'Domus' sector of Histria (now Istria, Romania), considered by him as an episcopal palace, and the religious building in

¹⁹ J. Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum*, 1.42, p. 217.

²⁰ Ion Barnea, "Perioada Dominatului," in Radu Vulpe and Ion Barnea, *Din istoria Dobrogei/ A History of Dobruja*, vol. 2, Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest, 1968, pp. 458–459.

²¹ See E. Popescu, "Contributions à la géographie historique," (1969), pp. 403 (n. *) and 411 (n. 51); Emilian Popescu, "Zur Geschichte der Stadt in Kleinskythien in der Spätantike. Ein epigraphischer Beitrag," in *Dacia*, [N.S.], 19 (1975), pp. 181–182, n. 64.

²² Șerbănescu, Niculae, "1600 de ani de la prima mărturie documentară despre existența Episcopiei Tomisului"/ "1600 Years since the First Documentary Attestation of the Bishopric of Tomi," in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, 87 (1969), nos. 9–10, pp. 1019–1021; Alexandru A. Bolșacov-Ghimpu, "Scythia Minor, prima mitropolie de pe teritoriul țării noastre"/ "Scythia Minor, the First Metropolitan See in the Territory of Romania," in *Glusul Bisericii*, 28 (1969), nos. 11–12, pp. 1224–1225.

²³ Emilian Popescu, "Contributions à la géographie historique de la Péninsule Balkanique aux V^e-VIII^e siècles de notre ère," in *Association internationale d'études du sud-est européen. Premier Congrès international d'études balkaniques et sud-est européennes: Sofia, 26 août–1 septembre 1966. Résumés des communications de la délégation roumaine. Archéologie–Histoire ancienne*, (s.n.), Bucharest, 1966, pp. 23–27.

²⁴ E. Popescu, "Contributions à la géographie historique," (1969), pp. 403–415.

Callatis (the ‘Syrian’ basilica), presumed to have also served as an episcopal palace.²⁵ Popescu also reinforced his previous observations regarding *Notitia 3* with several examples. He reaffirmed the heterogeneous nature of the document, arguing that it reflects realities from different periods of the provinces. Regarding Scythia and Greece, this concerns a situation that can be dated, approximately, between the late 5th and early 7th centuries.²⁶

In the case of Epiphanius’s *Notitia*, it is considered a work of heterogeneous composition, derived from various sources as *Notitia 3*. Concerning the ecclesiastical status of Tomi, which is listed in the document in the second position among autocephalous archbishoprics, Popescu concluded that it pertains to a period between 458—when the see is documented without suffragans (during the tenure of Bishop Theotimus II) —and the reign of Anastasius I—when it was elevated to metropolitan rank.

In 1970, E. Popescu attended the *Second International Congress of Southeast European Studies* in Athens, Greece (7–13 May), where he presented the paper titled “Une liste des cités grecques datant du VI^e siècle de notre ère” (“A List of Greek Cities Dating from the 6th Century AD”). The communication was later published in the congress proceedings.²⁷ In his presentation, he also examined the ecclesiastical organization in Scythia during the 6th century, although he did not introduce any new documentary information.

In the subsequent years, E. Popescu devoted himself to the discovery of new evidence supporting his thesis. This endeavor is evident in the papers and studies where he focused exclusively on or made references to the ecclesiastical structure in the province of Scythia. In the 1973 edition of the journal *Dacia*, he published “Zur Geschichte der Stadt in Kleinskythien in der Spätantike. Ein epigraphischer Beitrag” (“On the History of the City in Lesser Scythia in Late Antiquity. An Epigraphic Contribution”).²⁸ In the final part of this study, the inscription engraved on the stone cross from Callatis is presented, mentioning the name of Bishop Stephanus: “*Hic facta est oratio episcoporum Stefani ...*” (“Orisons have been raised here in remembrance of the bishops Stephen ...”). With this occasion, the thesis of establishing suffragan bishoprics in Scythia during the time of Anastasius I is mentioned. He regarded the inscription as the first epigraphic evidence of a suffragan bishop’s existence in a city of Roman Scythia, acknowledged as an episcopal centre in *Notitia 3*. Popescu’s interpretations of this evidence are reiterated in sections pertaining to the same inscription in his comprehensive work *Inscripțiile grecești și latine din secolele IV–XIII descoperite în România* (*The Greek and Latin Inscriptions from the 4th to 13th Centuries Discovered in Romania*), as well as in his lecture “*Praesides, duces et episcopatus provinciae Scythiae im Lichte einiger Inschriften aus dem 4. bis 6. Jh.*” (“*Praesides, duces et episcopatus provinciae Scythiae in the Light of Some Inscriptions from the 4th to 6th Centuries*”), presented at the *Seventh International Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy* (Constanța, 9–15 September 1977).²⁹

²⁵ E. Popescu, “Contributions à la géographie historique,” (1969), p. 412.

²⁶ E. Popescu, “Contributions à la géographie historique,” (1969), pp. 413–414.

²⁷ Emilian Popescu, “Une liste des cités grecques datant du VI^e siècle de notre ère,” in *Actes du IIe Congrès international des études du sud-est européen: Athènes, 7–13 mai 1970*, vol. 2, (s.n.), Athens, 1972, pp. 323–332.

²⁸ E. Popescu, “Zur Geschichte der Stadt,” pp. 173–182.

²⁹ Emilian Popescu, *Inscripțiile grecești și latine din secolele IV–XIII descoperite în România/ The Greek and Latin Inscriptions from the 4th to 13th Centuries Discovered in Romania*, Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest, 1976, p. 137; Emilian Popescu, “*Praesides, duces et episcopatus provinciae Scythiae im Lichte einiger Inschriften aus dem 4. bis 6. Jh.*,” in *Epigraphica. Travaux dédiés au VIIe Congrès d’épigraphie grecque*

These assessments are entirely justified. At that time, the inscription from Callatis constituted the most compelling evidence supporting the thesis that suffragan bishoprics were established in the Roman province of Scythia. The significance of this inscription was also recognized several years later by the French scholar N. Duval.³⁰

E. Popescu revisited the topic in another study titled “The Ecclesiastical Organization of the Province of Scythia Minor in the 4th–6th Centuries,” published in both Romanian and German.³¹ Within this study, the situation of the Church in Scythia was thoroughly analyzed. It presents the opinions of the main scholars who have addressed the topic, the literary sources related to it, the general situation of Scythia throughout the 4th–6th centuries, and significant epigraphic and archaeological findings. Concerning the latter, it is stated that the Syrian-type basilica with a baptistery at Callatis was part of a larger complex, considered episcopal, established during the reign of Emperor Anastasius I.³² Regarding the city of Tropaeum Traiani, reference is made to the bishop’s residence, recognized near the ‘B’ basilica (the so-called ‘marble basilica’).³³ The existence of a bishopric basilica with a baptistery is also assumed in Axiopolis.³⁴

Within the exposition, two new arguments are put forth in favor of the establishment of suffragan bishoprics in Scythia during the reign of Anastasius I. One is the letter of Pope Vigilius (537–555) addressed to the Metropolitan Valentinian of Tomi (c.550), in which those subject to the hierarchical authority of the Tomitan bishop are mentioned [*sed et universos ad tuam pertinentes ordinationem commoneas*] (“but that you should admonish all who are subject to your authority”).³⁵ E. Popescu interpreted these words as a reference to the suffragan bishops of Scythia, canonically subordinate to Valentinian.

The second argument concerns the intensity of religious life in the province during the 5th and 6th centuries, as evidenced in numerous discoveries of Christian artifacts: basilicas, architectural and sculptural fragments, vessels, household items, all adorned with Christian symbols. In his view, all these reflect a period of peace and prosperity conducive to the implementation in Scythia of Zeno’s law, which mandated the establishment of bishoprics in settlements with city status.

et latine (Constantza, 9–15 septembre 1977), Dionisie M. Pippidi and Emilian Popescu (eds.), Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest, 1977, pp. 274–284.

³⁰ Noël Duval, “L’archéologie chrétienne en Roumanie à propos de deux livres récents de I. Barnea,” in *Revue archeologique*, [N.S.], 2 (1980), p. 314.

³¹ In Romanian: Emilian Popescu, “Organizarea ecleziastică a provinciei Scythia Minor în secolele IV–VI”/ “The Ecclesiastical Organization of the Province of Scythia Minor in the 4th–6th Centuries,” in *Studii Teologice*, 23 (1980), nos. 7–10, pp. 590–605. In German: Emilian Popescu, “Die kirchliche Organisation der Provinz Scythia Minor vom vierten bis ins sechste Jahrhundert,” in *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik/ Journal of Byzantine Studies*, 38 (1988), pp. 74–94.

³² E. Popescu, “Die kirchliche Organisation,” p. 87; E. Popescu, “Organizarea ecleziastică,” pp. 599–600.

³³ E. Popescu, “Die kirchliche Organisation,” pp. 87–88; E. Popescu, “Organizarea ecleziastică,” p. 600; similarly Emilian Popescu, “Creștinismul pe teritoriul României până în secolul al VII-lea, în lumina noilor cercetări”/ “Christianity in the Territory of Romania up to the 7th Century, in Light of New Research,” in *Mitropolia Banatului*, 37 (1987), no. 4, p. 46.

³⁴ E. Popescu, “Die kirchliche Organisation,” p. 88; E. Popescu, “Organizarea ecleziastică,” p. 600.

³⁵ *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* (hereafter cited as *ACO*), vol. IV/1, Johannes Straub (ed.), De Gruyter, Berlin, 1971, p. 196^{30–31}; Richard Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553 with Related Texts on the Three Chapters Controversy*, vol. 2, coll. *Translated Texts for Historians*, vol. 51, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2009, p. 93.

Within the study, the leading position of the bishopric of Axiopolis in *Notitia 3* (the first see mentioned after the metropolitan center in the paragraph of Scythia) is also analyzed. It is interpreted, for the first time, as a possible indication that it was the most important suffragan see of the province (‘πρωτόθρονος’). Additionally, the possibility that the bishoprics along the coast, where military defense conditions were better, might have continued to exist even after the beginning of the 7th century was also considered.

These new arguments mentioned above, however, are not very strong. The overall flourishing of the province beginning with the reign of Anastasius I did not necessarily imply the simultaneous establishment of new bishoprics. Moreover, as will be shown below, a literary source not addressed by Popescu dismisses this dating.

Regarding the reference from Pope Vigilius’s letter, E. Popescu himself did not rule out the possibility that it may have referred to the ecclesiastical staff or Christian faithful within the jurisdiction of Tomi, rather than the other bishops in the province.³⁶ However, the new arguments highlight the scholar’s effort to find additional evidence in support of the thesis. Such evidence emerged later, through the discovery of the remains of the episcopal basilicas at Histria, Zaldapa, and Halmyris.

In 1985, on the occasion of the centennial celebration of the autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church, E. Popescu focused in detail on dating the rise of the see of Tomi to the rank of an autocephalous archbishopric. The study prepared for this occasion was published in both English and Romanian.³⁷

Following his scrupulous research style, Popescu presented the opinions of historians who preceded him on the subject. He then critically analyzed the information preserved in literary sources, especially the *Notitiae 1* and *3*, as well as those regarding the situation in Scythia and the see of Tomi. By correlating the data from all these documents, Popescu reached the following conclusions: 1. The elevation of Tomi to the rank of autocephalous archbishopric could have occurred towards the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 5th century, during the time of bishops Gerontius (Terentius) (c.381) or Theotimus I (c.390–c.407), or later; 2. During the reign of Anastasius I, the see of Tomi was elevated to the rank of metropolis.³⁸

These conclusions were subsequently reproduced in another study dedicated to the evolution of the ecclesiastical hierarchy on the territory of Romania up to the 7th century.³⁹

³⁶ See E. Popescu, “Die kirchliche Organisation,” p. 86, n. 51; E. Popescu, “Organizarea ecleziastică,” p. 598, n. 49; Popescu, Emilian, “L’Église de Tomis au temps du métropolitain Valentinien. L’ambassade (l’apocrisiariat) de Constantinople,” in *Dacia*, [N.S.], 51 (2007), p. 254, n. 10; Emilian Popescu, “Biserica Tomisului în vremea mitropolitului Valentinian. Ambasada (apocrisiarul) de la Constantinopol”/ “The Church of Tomi during the Time of Metropolitan Valentinian: The Embassy (Apocrisiarius) in Constantinople,” in *Pontica*, 40 (2007), p. 411, n. 10.

³⁷ In English: Emilian Popescu, “The City of Tomis as an autocephalous Archbishopric of Scythia Minor (Dobrudja). Remark on the Chronology of Epiphanius’ *Notitia*,” in *Byzantiaka*, 6 (1986), pp. 123–148. In Romanian: Popescu, Emilian, “Începuturile îndepărtate ale autocefaliei Bisericii Ortodoxe Române: Tomisul – arhiepiscopie autocefală”/ “The Early Origins of the Autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church: Tomi—Autocephalous Archbishopric,” in *Centenarul autocefaliei Bisericii Ortodoxe Române. 1885-1985*, Teoctist Arăpașu (ed.), EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1987, pp. 327–353.

³⁸ Emilian Popescu, “The City of Tomis,” pp. 144–148; E. Popescu, “Începuturile îndepărtate,” pp. 349–353.

³⁹ Emilian Popescu, “Ierarhia ecleziastică pe teritoriul României. Creșterea și structura ei până în secolul al VII-lea”/ “The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy in Romania: Its Growth and Structure until the 7th Century,” in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, 108 (1990), nos. 1–2, pp. 160–163; Emilian Popescu, “La hiérarchie ecclésiastique sur le territoire de la Roumanie. Sa structure et son évolution jusqu’au VII^e siècle,” in Emilian Popescu, *Christianitas*

In this context, E. Popescu also expressed his viewpoint regarding the status of the see of Tomi before its elevation to the rank of an autocephalous archbishopric, namely an ordinary bishopric, likely a suffragan of the metropolitan see of Heraclea in Thrace.⁴⁰

These are the main contributions of the late Professor Emilian Popescu regarding the ecclesiastical organization in the Roman province of Scythia. They are the result of nearly three decades of research (1960–1990) and can be summarized as follows:

1. Until the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 5th century, the see of Tomi had the status of an ordinary bishopric, subordinate to the metropolitan see of Heraclea in Thrace;
2. At the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 5th century, it was elevated to the rank of an autocephalous archbishopric;
3. During the reign of Anastasius I (491–518), the see of Tomi was raised to the rank of metropolis with 14 suffragan bishoprics located within the territory of the Roman province of Scythia. This situation persisted until the beginning of the 7th century.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

The thesis regarding the establishment of suffragan bishoprics in the territory of the Roman province of Scythia and, implicitly, the elevation of the see of Tomi to the rank of metropolis during the reign of Anastasius I has been accepted over time by the majority of scholars interested in this topic. Already mentioned in this regard are the names of I. Barnea, N. Șerbănescu, A.A. Bolșacov-Ghimpu, and N. Duval. They were followed by I. Rămureanu, A. Rădulescu, A. Barnea, M. Păcurariu, V. Georgescu, M. Ionescu, F. Duță, V. Lungu, V. Dintchev, O. Bounegru, D.I. Viezure, A. Suceveanu, N. Zugravu, M. Oppermann, A. Madgearu, R. Born, I. Iațcu, N. Alexandru, and D. Ruscu.⁴¹ The only reservations expressed by some of these scholars concern the actual number of the ordinary bishoprics established in the province (14, as stated in *Notitia 3*, or fewer). The existence of suffragan sees in Roman Scythia has also been acknowledged by G. Atanasov and I. Holubeanu, although each of them proposed a different date for their establishment.⁴²

In the studies dedicated to the subject, however, E. Popescu made three errors that affected the accuracy of the datings and the succession of stages through which the see of Tomi passed. The first of them concerns the overlooking of an important piece of information presented in the list of signatures at the First Council of Constantinople (381). From his studies dedicated to Gerontius of Tomi, the representative of the Church in Roman Scythia at this council, it is apparent that E. Popescu consulted two of the preserved versions of the signature list from 381, published in the Mansi collection.⁴³ He noted the different forms in which the Tomi hierarch's signature appears in these versions ('*Gerontius Tomensis*' and '*Terentius Tomeun*') and recalled the position of the signature within them ("towards the end

Daco-Romana. Florilegium studiorum (hereafter cited as *ChDR*), Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest, 1994, pp. 211–214.

⁴⁰ E. Popescu, "Ierarhia ecleziastică pe teritoriul României," p. 154; E. Popescu, "La hiérarchie ecclésiastique sur le territoire de la Roumanie," p. 204.

⁴¹ See I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, pp. 25–26, n. 31.

⁴² See I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, pp. 26–27 and 79–106.

⁴³ Gian Domenico Mansi (ed.), *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, vol. III, Expensis Antonii Zatta, Florence, 1759, col. 572; vol. VI, Expensis Antonii Zatta, Florence, 1761, col. 1181.

of the list”).⁴⁴ However, he overlooked the existence within the rubric of the province of Scythia of two other signatures following that of Gerontius, namely ‘*Aetherius Tersonitanus/Cersonissi*’ and ‘*Sebastianus Anchialensis/Sebastenus Anchialis.*’ The placement of Sebastian’s signature is evidently due to a copyist’s error. However, the presence of Aetherius of Cherson’s signature suggests that Tomi had already ascended to the metropolitan rank by 381 and that its suffragan bishoprics, such as the see of Cherson, were beyond the borders of the Roman province of Scythia.

In a discussion we had shortly before his passing, the late professor admitted that in his youth he made an error when he began researching the evolution of the ecclesiastical organization in Scythia: “I did not pay enough attention to the historical information regarding the First Council of Constantinople. That should have been the starting point for my research, as you have done.”

This error can be observed, moreover, both in his presentation at the Institute of Archaeology and Ancient History of the Romanian Academy on 2 July 1962 and in the summary of his PhD thesis. In the first case, he stated that “the research is limited to two centuries: the 5th and 6th,” and in the second, he specified that “the 5th century, more precisely the second half, marks the beginning of our research proper.”⁴⁵ Careful analysis of the list of signatures from the council of 381 would have allowed him to understand the major changes that occurred at that time in terms of the ecclesiastical organization in the territories on the western (including Scythia) and northern shores of the Black Sea.

The discussion in which he made the aforementioned admission was prompted by the publication of a work dedicated to the ecclesiastical organization in Scythia during Late Antiquity, which analyzed and highlighted data provided by the signatories’ list in 381.⁴⁶ We consider that by this admission, E. Popescu acknowledged the canonical dependence of the see of Cherson on that of Tomi in 381, and, implicitly, the metropolitan rank of the latter at that time. Therefore, the see of Tomi acquired the rank of metropolis with suffragan bishoprics long before the reign of Anastasius I.

Another error of E. Popescu consisted in overlooking the mention of Scythia in the signature of Bishop Dizza of Odessos (c.457/458), at the end of the letter addressed by the bishops of Moesia Secunda to Emperor Leo I (457–474), in 457/458: “*Dizza, episcopus ciuitatis Odissae Scythiae similiter*” [“Dizza bishop of the city of Odessos in Scythia, similarly (i.e., I have confirmed and subscribed)”].⁴⁷ Popescu referred to this signature in the presentation from 2 July 1962, but did not mention anything about the presence of the name

⁴⁴ Emilian Popescu, “The City of Tomis,” p. 144; E. Popescu, “Începuturile îndepărtate,” p. 349; Emilian Popescu, “Bretanion și Gerontius (Terentius). Două mari personalități ale Tomisului în secolul al IV-lea d.Hr.”/ “Bretanion and Gerontius (Terentius). Two Great Personalities of Tomi in the 4th Century AD.,” in *Studii Teologice*, 40 (1988), no. 2, p. 121, n. 19; E. Popescu, “Ierarhia ecleziastică pe teritoriul României,” p. 152, n. 13; E. Popescu, “La hiérarchie ecclésiastique sur le territoire de la Roumanie,” p. 203, n. 13; Emilian Popescu, “Bretanion, Géronte (Gerontius–Terentius) et Théotime I, trois grandes figures de Tomi aux IV^e-V^e siècles,” in *ChDR*, p. 116, n. 19)

⁴⁵ See E. Popescu, “Contribuții la geografia istorică a Imperiului Bizantin,” p. 366, and E. Popescu, “Contribuții la geografia istorică a spațiului balcano-dunărean,” p. 401, respectively.

⁴⁶ See Ionuț Holubeanu, *Organizarea bisericească în Scythia și Moesia Secunda în secolele IV–VII/ The Ecclesiastical Organization in Scythia and Moesia Secunda during the 4th–7th Centuries*, Basilica, Bucharest, 2018, pp. 29–67.

⁴⁷ *ACO*, vol. II/5, Eduard Schwartz (ed.), De Gruyter, Berlin/Leipzig, 1936, p. 32³¹.

Scythia in its content.⁴⁸ Based on this signature, he correctly deduced the ordinary bishopric status of the see of Odessos at that time, but did not consider the possibility that it might have been a suffragan of the metropolitan see of Tomi within the ecclesiastical province of Scythia.

The third error lies in the oversight of the provisions that Emperor Justinian I addressed to the two successive commissions of jurists tasked with drafting his legislative code (*Codex Justinianus*). This involved the request to omit all laws and legal paragraphs up to that point that had become obsolete. The republication of Zeno's law in the *Codex Repetitiae Praelectionis* (i.e., the second edition of the *Codex Justinianus*) in the year 534, including the paragraph regarding Scythia that stipulated the retention of only the see of Tomi there, precludes the possibility of the existence of any suffragan sees in the province at that time. If suffragan sees had already existed, the jurist commissions responsible for drafting the legislative code, in compliance with the emperor's request, would have eliminated this paragraph because it was no longer relevant.⁴⁹ Therefore, the dating of the establishment of suffragan sees in Scythia during the reign of Anastasius I, as concluded by E. Popescu, cannot be accepted. The event occurred after the year 534.

And in this case, E. Popescu had at his disposal an observation by L. Stan. In 1961, the latter published a study in which he argued that the reprinting of Zeno's law along with the paragraph regarding Scythia in the *Codex Justinianus* indicates the maintenance of the old situation in the province in terms of ecclesiastical organization at that time.⁵⁰ Popescu was familiar with and referenced Stan's study in one of his works, but he overlooked this observation.⁵¹

In another discussion I had the opportunity to have with him, the late scholar told me: "If the establishment of the suffragan bishoprics of Tomi mentioned in De Boor's *Notitia* is posterior to the year 534, then the papal legates in Constantinople, who wrote to Pope Hormisdas in 519, had in mind not some bishops from the territory of Scythia, but the suffragans of Paternus from outside the province."

Despite these errors, Professor Emilian Popescu merits recognition for demonstrating the establishment of new bishoprics in Roman Scythia at a time when most scholars either dismissed this thesis or approached it with skepticism. His meticulous analytical style stands as an exemplar for emerging scholars, while his errors—which are, after all, inevitable in any scientific endeavor—should motivate us to examine all documents with great care and rigorously evaluate the observations presented by our peers.

Αἰωνία ἡ μνήμη του!

What is missing from this professional training? We believe that the current formation of church painters lacks the spirit and the state of grace that ancient iconographers pursued with such fervour.

⁴⁸ See E. Popescu, "Contribuții la geografia istorică a Imperiului Bizantin," pp. 387–388.

⁴⁹ On this issue, see I. Holubeanu, *Christianity in Roman Scythia*, pp. 79–83.

⁵⁰ L. Stan, "Obârșia autocefaliei și autonomiei," pp. 88–89, n. 33.

⁵¹ See Emilian Popescu, "The City of Tomis," pp. 125 (n. 10 and 11) and 138 (n. 53); E. Popescu, "Începuturile îndepărtate," pp. 329 (n. 10 and 11) and 343 (n. 53).

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