

# THE BYZANTINE MONACHISM IN SCYTHIA MINOR-DOBRUJA IN THE IVth–XVth CENTURIES

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The beginning of the monastic life dates back to the first century of existence of the Church. During that time, there were only simple forms of ascetical life, as they were recommended in the New Testament, and practised by some of the Christians from the primary communities – Matthew 19, 12; Acts 4, 32–37; I Corinthians 7, 7–9. Yet, the separation of monachism as a particular religious society within the Church, took place later, in the first half of the IVth century. From that moment on, it played an active role in the life of the Church, becoming, moreover, a true barometer of the religious and even social life of the territories inhabited by the Christians.

Taking into account these aspects, we believe that the presentation of the existence and development stages of the monastic life from a frontier province of the Byzantine Empire – Scythia Minor (map 1) – is useful. On the one hand, it contributes to complete the description of the general situation on this territory, and, on the another hand, to a better understanding of the way in which the political and social changes influenced the religious and social life of the region.

Features of the Danubian-Pontic monachism will be presented and analyzed, from the beginning of the IVth century, untill the XVth century, when the Byzantine Empire declined.

## **The ascetical pre-monastic movement on the territory of Scythia Minor**

The recent<sup>1</sup> investigations concerning the beginning of Christianity between the Danube and the Sea point out the preachment, in this area, of 2 of the Apostles of the Saviour Christ: the saints Andrew and Philip. The apostolic age of the local

<sup>1</sup> Emilian Popescu, *Izvoarele apostolice ale creștinismului românesc, Sfântul Apostol Andrei și Tomisul*, in “Studii Teologice” (=ST), XLVI (1994), 1–3, p. 80–88; idem, *Creștinismul timpuriu pe teritoriul României. 1. Originile apostolice. 2. Bizanțul sau Roma?*, in the vol. “Priveghind și lucrând pentru mântuire. Volum editat la aniversarea a 10 ani de arhipăstorire a Înalț Prea Sfințitului Mitropolit Daniel al Moldovei și Bucovinei”, Jassy, 2000, p. 169–189; idem, *Sfântul Apostol Filip – misionar pe pământul românesc*, in “Glasul Bisericii” (=GB), LVII (2001), 5–8, p. 59–76 and in the vol. “Logos Arhiiepiscopului Bartolomeu al Clujului, la împlinirea vârstei de 80 de ani”, Cluj-Napoca, 2001, p. 386–398.

Church is precisely the reason for the great number of Christians who lived in Scythia Minor at the beginning of the IVth century. They were, at that moment, under the rule of the bishop of Tomis, the unique hierarch of the province<sup>2</sup>. Only at the end of the Vth century and the beginning of the VIth century, when the See of Tomis was raised at the rank of Metropolitan Seat, other 14 bishoprics were set up in Scythia Minor, all of them depending on Tomis<sup>3</sup>.

In spite of the apostolic beginnings of the local Church, up to the present, there hasn't been any written information concerning the life of these Christians during the first centuries of Christianity<sup>4</sup>. Under these circumstances, it's impossible to specify the evolution of the local forms of asceticism that had preceded the strictly speaking monastic groups. One must not exclude the possibility of the existence, in Scythia Minor, of advocates of the ascetical Christian life, just like in the other Eastern<sup>5</sup> church communities of apostolic origin. Their presence is required by the historical logic of the appearance and development of the Christian ascetical tendency.

Possibly, the representatives of the local ascetical pre-monastic tendency were martyrs: Zoticos, Attalos, Kamasis and Philippos – whose Saint Relics were discovered at Niculițel. The anthropological expert examination of their bones didn't exclude the possibility that they could have had “an ascetical life style”<sup>6</sup>. However, the truth about their affiliation to this tendency is conditioned by their

<sup>2</sup> Old habit, typical of Scythia Minor according to Sozomenos, *Istoria bisericeasca (Historia ecclesiastica)*, VI, 21, 3 in “Fontes Historiae Daco-Romane” (=FHDR), vol. II, (from the year 300 till the year 1000), Bucharest, 1970, p. 224, 225.

<sup>3</sup> Em. Popescu, *Contributions à la géographie historique de la Péninsule Balkanique aux I<sup>er</sup>-VIII<sup>e</sup> siècles de notre ère*, in “Dacia”, N.S., 13, 1969, p. 403–415; idem, *Organizarea ecleziastică a provinciei Scythia Minor în secolele IV–VI*, in “ST”, XXXII (1980), 7–10, p. 590–605 (=Die kirchliche Organisation der Provinz Scythia Minor vom vierten bis ins sechste Jahrhundert, in “Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik”, 38, 1988, p. 75–94 and in the vol. “Christianitas daco-romana”, Florilegium studiorum, Bucharest, p. 124–138); idem, *Începuturile îndepărtate ale autocefaliei Bisericii Ortodoxe Române: Tomis-ul. Arhiepiscopie autocefală*, in vol. “Centenarul Autocefaliei Bisericii Ortodoxe Române”, Bucharest, 1987, p. 326–353 (=The City of Tomis as an autocephalous Archbishopric of Scythia Minor, in “Byzantiaka”, 6, 1986, p. 123–148 and in the vol. “Christianitas daco-romana”, p. 139–156); A. A. Bolsacov-Ghimpu, *Organizarea Bisericii din Scythia Minor în secolul al VI-lea*, in “GB”, XXIX (1970), 9–10, p. 971–977.

<sup>4</sup> As regards the archaeological level, the oldest paleo-Christian element in Scythia Minor seems to be a suet lamp recently discovered at Tomis and dated in the IIth century-the first half of the IIIth century according to Constantin Băjenaru, *Un opaiț cu simboluri paleocreștine descoperit la Tomis*, in “Pontica”, XXXV–XXXVI, 2002–2003, p. 217–223.

<sup>5</sup> According to Antoine Guillaumont, *Originile vieții monahale*, translated into Romanian by Constantin Jinga, Bucharest, 1998, p. 290, 291 (= A. Guillaumont, *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien. Pour une phénoménologie du monachisme*, coll. “Spiritualité orientale”, no. 30, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1979).

<sup>6</sup> The anthropological expert examination was made in that place by Doc. Dardu Nicolaescu-Plopsor and Wanda Wolski, according to Victor Heinrich Baumann, *Bazilica cu “martyrion” din epoca romanității târzii, descoperită la Niculițel (jud. Tulcea)*, in “Buletinul monumentelor istorice”, XLI, 1972, no. 2, p. 26 and idem, *Sângele martirilor*, Constanța, 2004, p. 104.

suffering in Scythia Minor, during the persecutions against Christians from the first half of the IVth century – under the rule of Diocletian (303–304) or Liciniu (319–324)<sup>7</sup>.

The information is, however, less important, because in the absence of their Martyr Document, the exact features of their ascetical life can't be specified.

On the other hand, documentary information certifies the presence, in Scythia Minor, of some Christian ascetics, coming from other Byzantine provinces. We are talking about the saint martyrs Epictet and Astion, martyred around the year 303 in Halmyris (today's Murighiol). They were natives of Asia Minor, maybe from Frigia<sup>8</sup>, it is believed, or maybe from Bithynia<sup>9</sup>. They took refuge in Asia Minor in the last quarter of the IVth century, during the rule of Diocletian.

Interesting, in their case, is the use in the Martyr Document, of the appellation “monk”, in five places<sup>10</sup>, related to young Astion's name – “Astione monacho”. This is the first document where the appellation “monk” appears related to Scythia Minor. Although the antiquity of this word in the Martyr Document was

<sup>7</sup> The hypothesis of Petre S. Nasturel, *Quatre martyrs de Noviodunum (Scythie Mineure)*, in “Analecta Bollandiana”, 91, 1973, 1–2, p. 5–8; Ion Barnea, *Un martyrium descoperit la Niculițel, jud. Tulcea*, in “SCIV”, XXIV, 1973, 1, p. 125; idem, *Martyrion-ul de la Niculițel*, in “Biserica Ortodoxa Romana” (=BOR), XCL (1973), 1–2, p. 221; Ioan Rămureanu, *Martirii creștini de la Niculițel, descoperiți în anul 1971*, in “BOR”, XCI (1973), 3–5, p. 466; idem, *Actele Martirice*, second edition, Bucharest, 1997, p. 325–326; Constantin C. Giurescu, Dinu C. Giurescu, *Istoria Românilor*, vol. I, Bucharest, 1974, p. 145–146; Ene Braniște, *Martiri Sfinți pe pământul Dobrogei de azi*, in the vol. “De la Dunăre la Mare. Mărturiile Istorice și monumente de artă creștină”, second edition, Galați, 1979, p. 45; idem, *Sfinții mărturisitori și Martiri cinstiți de strămoșii noștri pe pământul românesc dintre Dunăre și Mare, în lumina mărturiilor istorice, epigrafice și arheologice*, in the vol. “Arhiepiscopia Tomisului și Dunării de Jos în trecut și astăzi”, Galați, 1981, p. 12–17; Ioan G. Coman, *Scriitori bisericești din epoca străromână*, Bucharest, 1979, p. 296; Em. Popescu, *Martiri și Sfinți în Dobrogea (II)*, in “ST”, XLI (1989), 4, p. 72. Some of the researchers don't exclude the possibility that they could have died during the heathen emperor Julian the Apostate (361–363) – V. H. Baumann, *Nouveaux témoignages chrétiens sur le limes nord-scythique: la basilique à martyrium de basse époque romaine découverte à Niculițel (dép. de Tulcea)*, in “Dacia”. N.S., 16, 1972, p. 198, n. 42; I. Barnea, BOR, XCI (1973), 1–2, p. 222, n. 18; Em. Popescu, *La plus importante découverte archéologique concernant le christianisme primitif en Roumanie: les martyrs de Niculițel*, in “Christianitas daco-romana”, p. 106. Unlike these, Petre Diaconu, *Despre data pătimirii lui Zotikos, Attalos, Kamasis și Philippos*, in “Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche” (=SCIV), 1973, 24,4 p. 633–641 and idem, *Capadochia, Dobrogea și goții*, in “Tomis”, XXVII, 1993, 1–2 (274–275), p. 13, consider that the 4 martyrs had been martyred in the north of the Danube, in the second half of the IVth century, during the persecutions against Christians, started by the heathen rulers of the Goths. In this case, it is possible that, this 4 martyrs to be monks in accordance with the present meaning of the word, thing that was also observed by P. Diaconu.

<sup>8</sup> I. Rămureanu, *Sfinți și martiri la Tomis – Constanța*, in “BOR”, XCII (1974), 7–8, p. 979; V. H. Baumann, *Sângele martirilor*, p. 48.

<sup>9</sup> Nestor Vornicescu, *Una dintre primele scrieri ale literaturii române stravechi: “Pătimirea Sfinților Epictet și Astion” (de la cumpăna secolelor III IV)*, in “Mitropolia Olteniei” (=MO), XLI (1989), 1, p. 48.

<sup>10</sup> \*\*\* *Despre Sfinții Epictet Preotul și Astion Monahul, martiri almirindensi în Scythia (De SS. Epicteto presbytero et Astione monacho, martyribus almiridensibus in Scythia)*, the title; III, 20, 23; IV, 34,49, translated into Romanian by David Popescu, in “MO”, XLV (1989), 1, p. 75, 93, 95, 105, 117.

placed, by some investigators, under the sign of doubt<sup>11</sup>, the important fact is the meaning of this word in the document, and the way it reflects the historical truth. This thing can be found out by analysing the characteristics of the way of life of the two martyrs.

From the Martyr Document we find out that both of them were not married<sup>12</sup>, that they gave up fortune, taking up poverty voluntarily<sup>13</sup>, and that, furthermore, saint Astion was following a type of submission to his spiritual guide, priest Epictet<sup>14</sup>. So, they were defending the three votes that every monk nowadays needs to complete – chastity, poverty and obedience.

Concerning their daily activities, these were subordinated to prayer and mission. They had a daily prayer programme, and, as for the night, they used to spend it, “as usual (*solito*), in psalms and prayers”<sup>15</sup>.

The main thing is that, in spite of their ascetical life style, the two saints didn't entirely abandon the people. Their shelter, even if it was called “*cella,-ae*” (cell)<sup>16</sup>, was situated into town, or, more precisely, on the outskirts. As soon as they reached Halmyris, the two saints “...found a proper shelter”, suitable for their life style<sup>17</sup>. This fact, corroborated by their ascetical features – chastity, poverty, obedience and living in prayer – previously mentioned, determines us to subscribe the saint martyrs Epictet and Astion to the category of ascetics who lived in the neighbourhood of human settlements<sup>18</sup>.

Consequently, Saints Epictet and Astion could be the first ascetics, ancestors of the future monks, undoubtedly documentarily mentioned in Scythia Minor, in

<sup>11</sup> N. Vornicescu, *op.cit.*, p. 61. Neither Em. Popescu, *Saints Epictète et Astion, martyrs à Halmyris*, in “Christianitas daco-romana”, p. 98, excludes the possibility that the term “monk” from the Martyr Document could be an addition.

<sup>12</sup> Nowhere in the Martyr Document is mentioned any woman that may had lived with them or who they could have had a close relationship with. In exchange, is praised the untainted life that young Astion had, in spite of his youth, \*\*\**Despre Sfinții...*, I, 1, p. 75.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, I, 5, 6, 8; IV, 45, 46, p. 79, 80, 82, 114, 115, 116.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, II, 17; III, 31, p. 90, 91, 102.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, III, 19, p. 92.

<sup>16</sup> The term “*cella,-ea*”, translated “cell”, is used in the hagiographic text, three times. The first time it refers to the shelter of saint Epictet in Asia Minor, *Despre Sfinții...*, I, 1, 2, p. 75; in the other two cases, the term indicates the shelter from Halmyris of the two saints, *ibidem*, II, 17; IV, 37, p. 90, 107. The utilization of this term needs to be related with the ascetical features of the lives of the saints Epictet and Astion, not only with the reduced size of a shelter; instead of the term “*cella, -ae*”, is preferable the circumlocution *parvissimus domicilium* (=very small room), *ibidem*, IV, 32, p. 103.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, II, 12, p. 86. N. Vornicescu, *op.cit.*, p. 63, considers that this excerpt belongs to the original text of the Martyr Document, which is important for this demonstration.

<sup>18</sup> From among these ascetics, that lived their lives close to the settlements of Egypt, rose Saint Antonie the Great. He retired himself afterwards in the “far-off wilderness”, becoming an example of entirely taking refuge from the world, according to \*\*\**Viața cuviosului părintelui nostru Antonie, scrisă și trimisă monahilor din străinătate de către cel întru sfinți Părintele nostru Atanasie, episcopul Alexandriei* (The Life of St. Antony the Great), III, VIII, XI, translated into Romanian by Dumitru Stăniloae, in the coll. “Părinți și scriitori bisericești” (=PSB), vol. 16, Bucharest, 1988, p 193 198, 199.

the years 286–303. Their life style could be an example for other Christians from the province. Otherwise, the preach and the example of their life and sufferings had a very big impact on their contemporaries, as results from their Martyr Document.

### **The institutionalized monachism on the territory between the Danube and the Black Sea**

After monachism organized itself as a separate religious society within the Christian Church, the monastic institution was certified for the first time on the territory of Scythia Minor, in the middle part of the IVth century. The information is related to the name of the Mesopotamian monk Audius and his advocates, exiled on the Danubian-Pontic territory by Emperor Constantius II (337–361). The advocates of Audius were heretics, their main doctrine being anthropomorphism. However, they guarded unchanged the teaching about the Trinity dogma<sup>19</sup>.

Saint Epiphanius from Salamina left us a brief description of the life style of the advocates of Audius. The excerpt is important because it mediates the cognition of the way the first documentarily certified monks in Scythia Minor were organized and lived. He states the following: “they, [the advocates of Audius], lived in **monasteries**, retired from the society of other men, with their settlements in the wilderness or next to the towns, or on the outskirts, or in other places where they used to build their enclosed shelters or settlements ... in their monasteries, flourished the **monastic rule**, the adoption of chastity and of a very strict asceticism.”<sup>20</sup>

So, we can talk about a real monastic direction, about a “caste” according to Saint Epiphanius’s term. Its members, organized in coenobitic communities had left the other people behind, living in “enclosed” settlements, monasteries, according to the present meaning of the word<sup>21</sup>. Their community life had clear

<sup>19</sup> Besides the anthropomorphous faith, the advocates of Audius celebrated Easter at 14 Nisan, maintaining however the saint meaning of the holiday, had some defamatory practices in the Secret Sins’ Avowal, and used in the creed, different apocryphous texts, according to Epiphanius, *KATA AIPESSEON OΓΔOΗKONTA* – *Panarion*, LXX, 14, in “FHDR”, II, p. 172–173; Theodoretus, *AIPETIKHΣ KAKOMYΘIAS EΠITOMH*, IV, X, PG, LXXXIII, 429 A.B. Also according to I. Ramureanu’s research, *Mișcarea audienilor în Dacia Pontică și nord-dunăreană (sec. IV–V)*, in “BOR”, XCVI (1978), 9–10, p. 1053–1070.

<sup>20</sup> Epiphanius, *op.cit.*, LXX, 1, in “FHDR”, II, p. 172–173.

<sup>21</sup> At the beginning, the term “monastery” had double meaning. On the one side, the building where some monks live together – the way we understand it today – and, on the other side, the shelter (cell) of a single monk, according to saint John Cassian, *Convorbiri duhovnicești (Conlationes)*, (= *Convorbiri*), XVIII, X, translated into Romanian by David Popescu, in the col. “PSB”, vol. 57, Bucharest, 1990, p. 633, and Dumitru Stăniloae, commentaries to *Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare – Viața Cuviosului Părintelui nostru Antonie*, in the coll. “PSB”, vol. 16, p. 223, note 37. The explanatory note “enclosed”, concerning the inhabitats of the advocates of Audius, is a clue that the term “monastery” is utilized here with its today’s meaning. Concerning the pahomian enclosing wall and its function, according to Karl Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, Tübingen, 1936, p. 127–128 and D. Stăniloae, *Temeiuri dogmatice și duhovnicești pentru viața monahală de obște*, in “ST”, IV (1952), 7–8, p. 377.

“monastic rules”, accepted by all of them. From the votes they casted for, Saint Epiphanius observes chastity and poverty, the last one deduced from their “strongly severe” asceticism. However, obedience is hushed, but that doesn’t exclude complying with it. Life in their monasteries was, otherwise, very similar to the one in the orthodox monastic places. This thing results from the remarks Saint Epiphanius makes about the monastic life of the advocates of Audius: “Without a doubt the life style of their communities is **entirely admirable**. And every single action that takes place in their monasteries is a nice one.”<sup>22</sup> The value of these remarks is greater taking into account that they come from a good expert in the orthodox monastic life, he himself a founder and ruler of a monastery in Palestine and visitor of those of Egypt<sup>23</sup>.

Audius’ stay in Scythia lasted several years: “I can’t figure exactly – Saint Epiphanius writes – how many years (*χρόνον ἐτῶν οὐκ ἔχω λέγειν*) Audius spent in Scythia.”<sup>24</sup> After this moment, he crossed to the north of the Danube, to the Goths, where he founded other monasteries.

A very probable fact is that the advocates of Audius had set up at least one monastery on the territory of Scythia Minor, while they had lived there. Its foundation was required by their ascetical life style, which they had kept unchanged, also during the exile period. So, at the middle of the IVth century, in Scythia Minor there were coenobitic monasteries, guided by strict rules, where a severe ascetical life was lived<sup>25</sup>.

Yet, they didn’t seem to have been the unique monastic centres of the province. In the cave from Cassian, situated in the central part of Scythia Minor, exactly on the territory of that *Vicus Cassiani* where saint Cassian had left from, ceramic fragments from the IVth century were discovered. The crosses scratched then on the cave’s walls are a testimony that those who had found their refuge here, were Christians. Their taking refuge is related to the persecutions against Christians from the first half of the IVth century<sup>26</sup>. They had continued living in the cave even after the persecutions ended, during the biggest part of the IVth century. In this

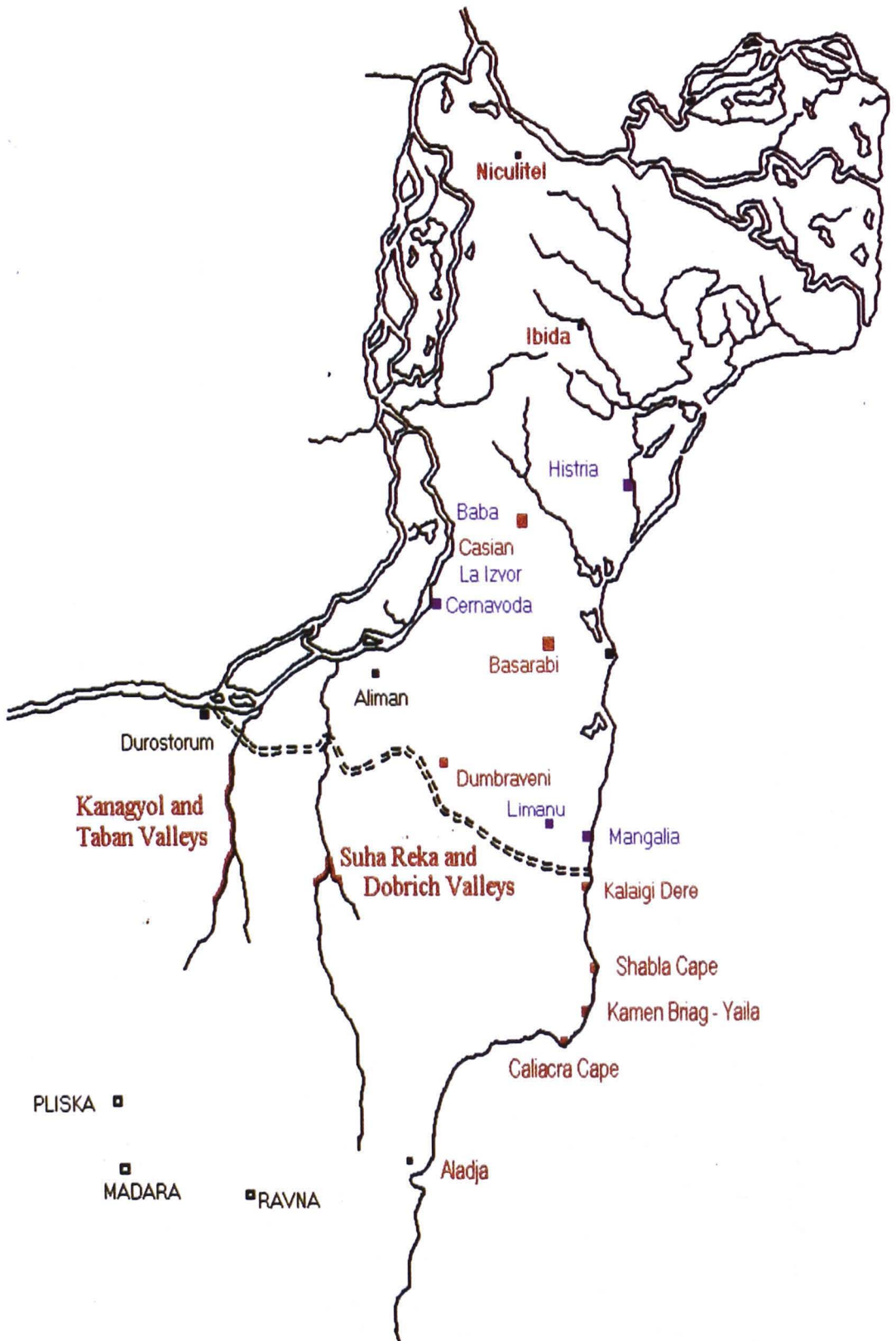
<sup>22</sup> Epiphanius, *op. cit.*, LXX, 14, in “FHDR”, II, p. 172–173.

<sup>23</sup> I. G. Coman, *Patrologie*, Bucharest, 1956, p. 161–163.

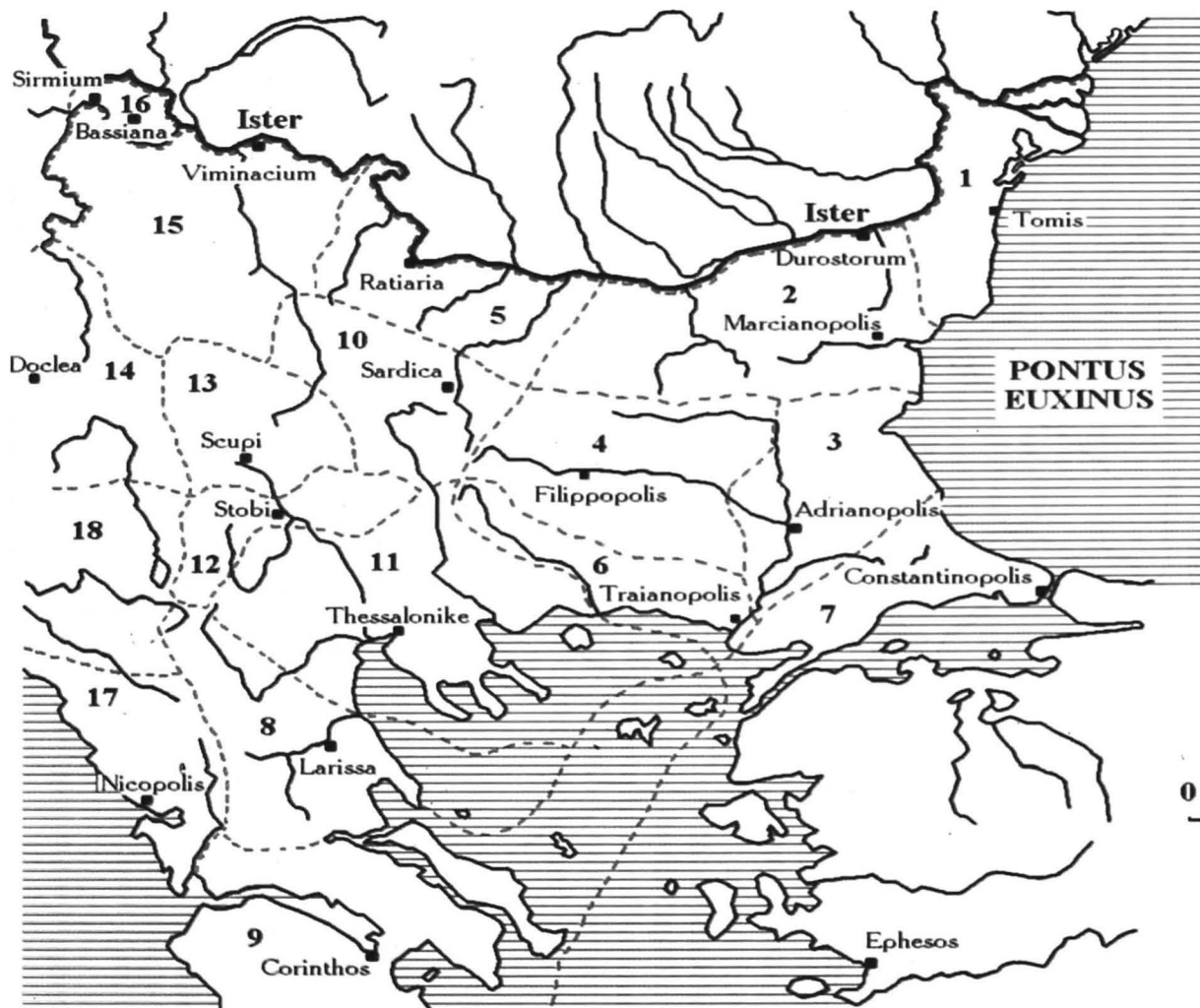
<sup>24</sup> Epiphanius, *op. cit.*, LXX, 14, in “FHDR”, II, p. 172–173.

<sup>25</sup> The possibility of the foundation of some monasteries in Scythia Minor by Audius and his advocates is also accepted by I.G. Coman, *Scriitori bisericești...*, p. 80 and idem, *Contribuția scriitorilor patristici din Scythia Minor-Dobrogea la Patrimoniul ecumenismului creștin în secolele al IV-lea – al V-lea*, in “Ortodoxia”, XX (1968), 1, p. 7, 16, 25 (= *Contribution des Pères et des écrivains «scythes» à l’œcuménisme chrétien des IV<sup>e</sup>–V<sup>e</sup> siècles*, “Contacts”, Paris, XXII, 1970, 69, p. 61–85); Em. Popescu, *Monahismul timpuriu pe teritoriul României*, in “Analele Științifice ale Universității <Al. I. Cuza>” – Jassy, 1994, p. 98 (= *Frühes Mönchtum in Rumänien*, in vol. “Christianitas daco-romana”, p. 217–234); Idem, *Sfântul Ioan Casian, părinte al monahismului românesc și teolog al asceticii patristice*, in the vol. “Sfântul Ioan Casian. Viața și învățătura lui”, Jassy, 2002, p. 8; Nicolae Chițescu, *Introducere generală*, la Sfântul Ioan Casian, *Scrieri alese*, in “PSB”, vol. 57, p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> Lucrețiu Mihăilescu-Bârliba, Marius Diaconescu, *Cercetări arheologice recente în peștera de la Casian*, in “Pontica”, XXIV, 1991, p. 431.

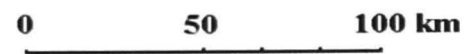


Map 2: Monasteries and possible Danubian-Pontic monastic places (IV<sup>th</sup> – XIV<sup>th</sup> centuries).



**MAP 1:**  
**The North of the Balkans**  
 (V-th - VI-th cent.)

1. Scythia Minor
2. Moesia Secunda
3. Haemimontus
4. Thracia
5. Dacia Ripensis
6. Rhodope
7. Europa
8. Thessalia
9. Hellas
10. Dacia Mediterranea
11. Macedonia Prima
12. Macedonia Secunda
13. Dardania
14. Praevalitana
15. Moesia Prima
16. Pannonia
17. Epirus Vetus
18. Epirus Nova



case, it seems obvious that, at least after the proclamation of the freedom of Christian faith, the cave was used as a shelter for some of the ascetic Christians. Its isolated position is an extra argument for this.

During the second half of the IVth century, that is in a subsequent period to the presence of the advocates of Audius in Scythia Minor, other monasteries were founded between the Danube and the Sea. One of them was situated in the central part of the province, 3 km from the Ibida citadel (today's Slava Rusă) (map 2). During this first living stage, the monastery consisted of a small church of basilical plan, which had annexed to the southern side, a rectangular room (picture 1). Subsequently, around the monastery an enclosing wall<sup>27</sup> was built, typical of the coenobitic settlements. It's difficult to say if the principles of coenobitic life had been followed as early as the second half of the IVth century, or they had been introduced in a subsequent stage of development<sup>28</sup>.

Among the ruins of the monastery, some coins were also discovered. They are the testimony of the economic life developed by the monks within the monastery and also of the links they had with the citadel of Ibida<sup>29</sup>.

Another monastic centre founded in the second half of the IVth century is situated in the south of the province, on the territory of the present village of Dumbrăveni (map 2)<sup>30</sup>. It is a cave monastery situated in an isolated zone. Its building was carved on two levels, in the rocky slopes of a valley. On the superior floor there were a prayer room of a basilical plan and a funeral semi-circular west-oriented apse<sup>31</sup>, and a corridor-gallery (picture 2 a). On the ground-floor there were some other rooms. One of them, of funeral destination, sheltered three tombs.

In two of the tombs from the ground-floor human remains were discovered. The result of the anthropological expert examination of the bones, demonstrated

<sup>27</sup> According to Andrei Opaïț, Cristina Opaïț, Teodor Bănică, *Complexul monastic paleocreștin de la Slava Rusă*, in "Revista Monumentelor Istorice", 59, 1990, 1, p. 18–28.

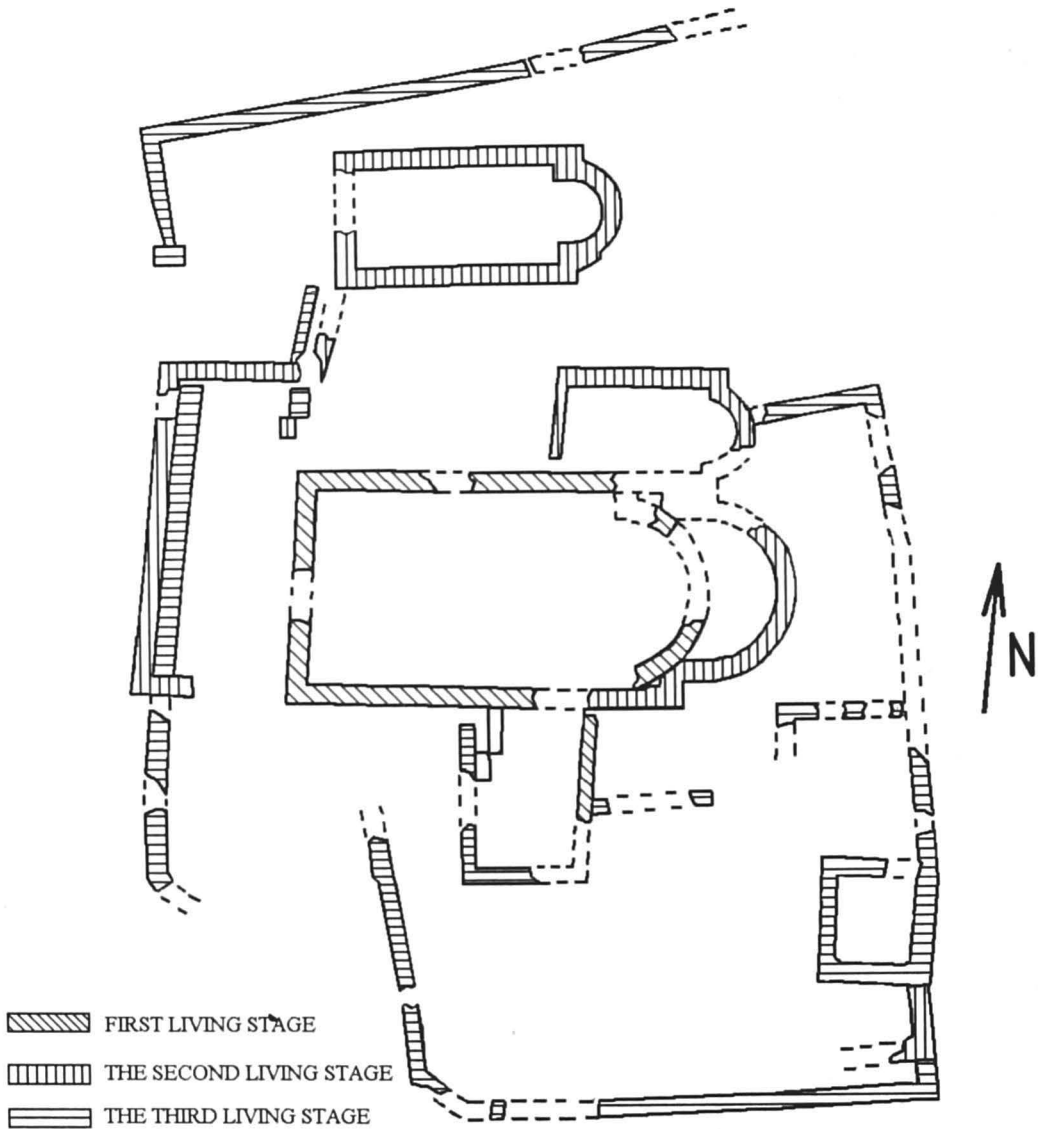
<sup>28</sup> After Adrian Radulescu – in *Istoria Dobrogei*, work written in colaboration with Ion Bitoleanu, second edition, Constanța, 1998, p. 161 – and Cristian Moisescu – *Arhitectura românească veche*, vol. I, Bucharest, 2001, p. 12 – the settlement had been a coenobitic monastery. The archaeologists A. Opaïț, C. Opaïț, T. Bănică, *op. cit.*, p. 25 and V. Baumann, *op. cit.*, p. 73, have a different opinion. They think that we could talk about a spread-out monastery (*laura*), at Slava Rusă.

<sup>29</sup> A. Opaïț, C. Opaïț, T. Bănică, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> According to C. Chiriac, *Un monument inedit: complexul rupestru de la Dumbrăveni (jud. Constanța)*, in "Pontica", XXI–XXII, 1988–1989, p. 249–268; T. Papisima, C. Chiriac, *Monede romane de la Dumbrăveni (judetul Constanța)*, in "Pontica", XXVIII–XXIX, 1995–1996, p. 267–269; idem, *Un străvechi așezământ creștin dobrogean – complexul monastic de la Dumbrăveni (jud. Constanța)*, in the vol. "Priveghind și lucrând pentru mântuire" (1 iulie 1990 – 1 iulie 2000), Jassy, 2000, p. 197–204; T. Papisima, *Cruciulițe medievale inedite din Dobrogea*, in "Pontica", XXXII, 1999, p. 299; T. Papisima, C. Chera, *Sgraffiti feudale timpurii la Aliman (jud. Constanța)*, in "Pontica", XXXII, 1999, p. 291; S. Haimovici, *Studiul resturilor animaliere, datate în secolele IX–X, descoperite în ruinele unui așezământ monahal paleocreștin de la Dumbrăveni, jud. Constanța*, in "Acta Moldaviae Septentrionalis", I, Botoshani, 1999, p. 291–309.

<sup>31</sup> Close to it, two tombs were carved.

that those were two sedentary men, who did easy physical work. At least one of them had a vegetarian food diet<sup>32</sup>.

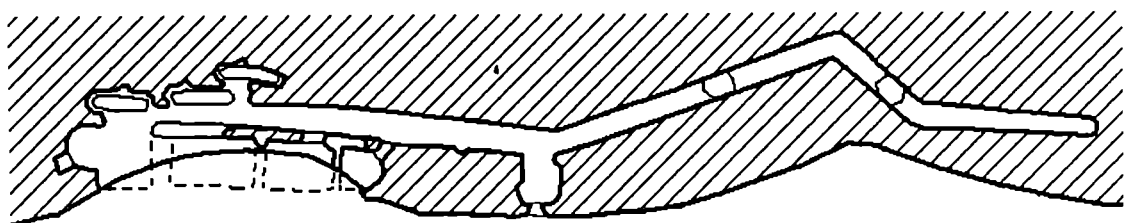


Picture 1: Slava Rusă – The plan of the Monastery.

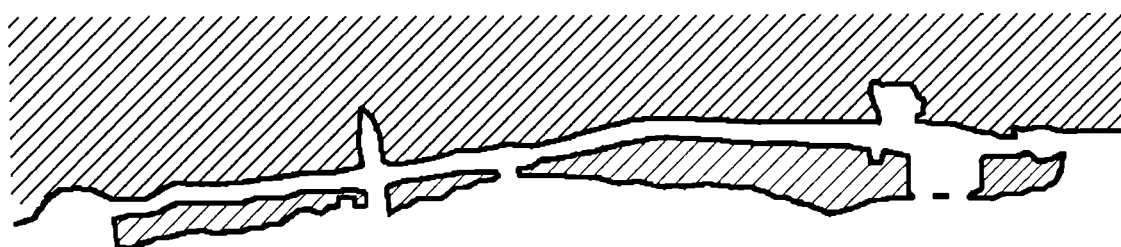
This last piece of information suggests that the monastery of Dumbrăveni, the inhabitants of which were monks, was a centre of asceticism and meditation. The main preoccupation of the monks may have been the prayer. For their daily maintenance, they did only work that was compatible with their life style, that

<sup>32</sup> C. Chiriac, T. Papisima, *op. cit.*, p. 201–202.

didn't imply exiting the refuge or strong physical effort<sup>33</sup>. It isn't out of the question that a coenobitic community, numerically reduced, could also have existed here<sup>34</sup>.



a.



b.

Picture 2: The plans of the Cave Complexes from:

a. Dumbrăveni;

b. Shayan Kaia.

Cave monasteries were also identified in the north-east of Bulgaria, on the sea coast of the Black Sea (map 2)<sup>35</sup>. We refer to the monastic settlements from Kamen Briag and Shabla Cape, which in the Roman-Byzantine period were found on the territory of Scythia Minor<sup>36</sup>. The cave complex from Kamen Briag is arranged exactly in the rocky cliff of the sea coast. It is a coenobitic monastery that consists of a small church and a few cells placed in succession<sup>37</sup>. Close to the

<sup>33</sup> Regarding the work the monks from Egypt did, who, in the silence of their own cell prayed and worked, according to Lucien Regnault, *Viața cotidiană a Părinților deșertului în Egiptul secolului IV*, translated into Romanian by Ioan I. Ica jr., Sibiu, 1997, p. 120–122 (=L. Regnault, *La Vie quotidienne des Pères du désert en Égypte au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Hachette, 1990).

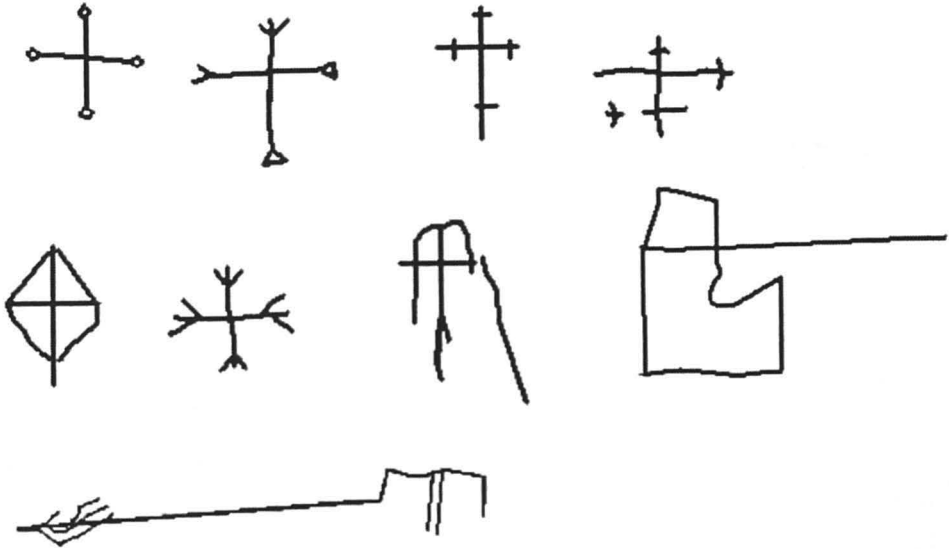
<sup>34</sup> The researchers C. Chiriac and T. Papasima, *op. cit.*, p. 198, 228, observe that the number of monks from there “couldn't have surpassed the number of 12”. However, they consider that the one in Dumbrăveni was a spread out monastic community (*laura*).

<sup>35</sup> According to Karel Škorpil, Hermin Škorpil, *Североизточна България в географическо и археологическо отношение*, in “Сборник за Народни Умотворения, наука и книжнина” (=СБНУ), Sofia, VII, 1892, p. 49–83 and Gh. Atanasov, *Няколко скални манастира в южна Добруджа*, in “Izvestija-Varna”, 25 (40), 1989, p. 57–61.

<sup>36</sup> For the southern boundary of Scythia Minor see the research of Radu Vulpe, *Limita meridională a provinciei romane Scythia*, in “Pontica”, V, 1972, p. 205–221.

<sup>37</sup> At present, there are just 13 cells. Their number was bigger, but almost  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the cave complex had been shattered because of the degradation of the crust of the land and the earthquakes, according to Gh. Atanasov, *op. cit.*, p. 57–61.

monastery, an isolated cave cell was also identified, probably the shelter of one of the monks that had left the monastery<sup>38</sup>.



Picture 3: The Dyalanata Peshtera Hermitage – Graffiti.

Other cave cells were identified at about 80 metres from the coenobitic monastery, in the western direction, in the point called Yaila. These are groups of natural caves arranged for living in some rocky cliffs<sup>39</sup>.

As regards the cave complex situated in the southern direction from Shabla Cape<sup>40</sup>, it consists of a few caves arranged for living. All of them are situated in the rocky and steep cliff of the sea. They seem to be cave cloisters and a few hermit cells (picture 4).

It isn't out of the question that at least a part of these monastic cave complexes from the sea coast of the Black Sea, might have been arranged in the second half of the IVth century<sup>41</sup>.

In the southern part of the Danubian-Pontic territory, in the steep slopes of Suha Reka and Dobrich valleys, on the same territory of Bulgaria (maps 2 and 3), the ruins of other cave monasteries were also identified<sup>42</sup>. The largest of these, was

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61.

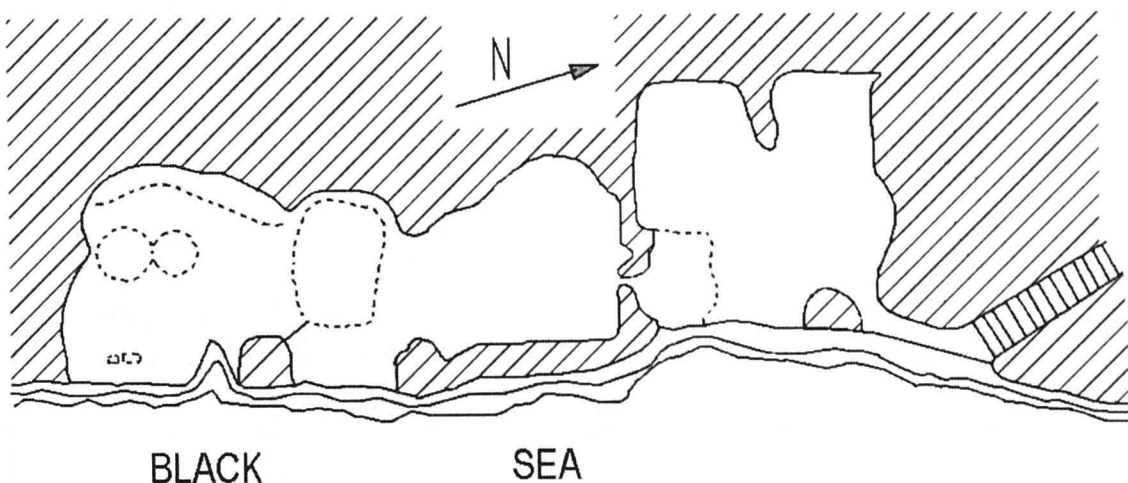
<sup>39</sup> In G. Atanasov's opinion, in the *op. cit.*, p. 58, a part of the cells from the Yaila point – those grouped in the rocky central massif – formed a small cave cloister.

<sup>40</sup> K. Škorpil and H. Škorpil, *op. cit.*, p. 51 and next.

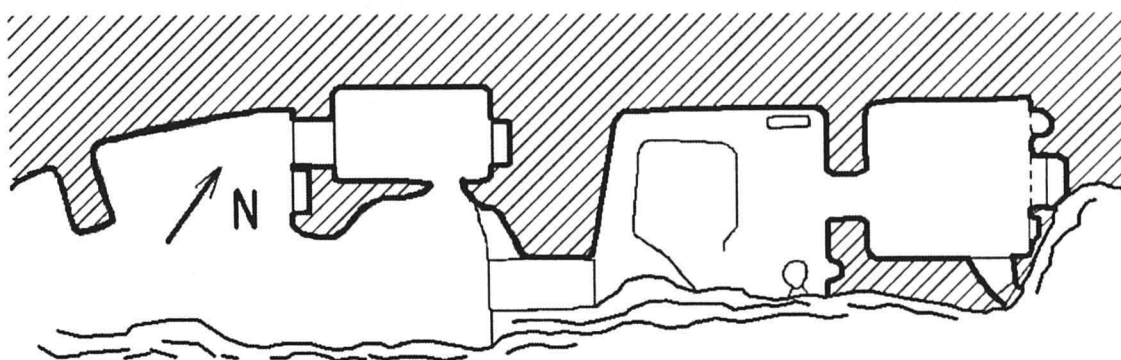
<sup>41</sup> We don't know exactly when these cave monastic complexes date from. G. Atanasov, in *Cave ritual sites of Dobruja. Shrines, temples and monasteries*, Silista, 2004, p. 19, attributes their first living level to the IVth–VIth centuries.

<sup>42</sup> According to Karel Škorpil, Hermin Škorpil, *Североизточна България в географическо и археологическо отношение*, in "СБНУ", VIII, 1892, p. 5–20; Ara Margos, *Средновековни скални манастири по Суха Река*, in "Izvestija-Varna", 19 (34), 1983, p. 125–129; Gh. Atanasov, *Няколко скални ...*, p. 54–55; *idem*, *Cave...*, p. 12–17.

the coenobitic monastery Gyaur Evleri, arranged on three levels in the right slope of Dobrich valley (picture 5). It consisted of a church, a chapel, the refectory and the cells of the monks. Close to it there were two cells for hermits and a funeral chapel – Sandaklar Maara.



Picture 4: The Shabla Cape – The plan of the Cave Complex Merdevenli Maara.



Picture 5: The Dobrich Valley –  
The plan of the second floor of the Cave Monastery Gyaur Evleri.

Tarapanata Monastery is situated at the confluence of the Dobrich and Suha Reka valleys, also on the right slope. It was built on two levels and it consisted of a chapel, one cell and a funeral room. The chapel and the cell were situated on the first floor of the complex.

The coenobitic cave monastery Asar Evleri was situated on the left slope of the Suha valley. It consisted of a small church (picture 8), a funeral chapel and the common cell of the monks. Close to it, there were a few other cells.

Closer to Asar Evleri, on the same slope of the Suha Reka valley, there is a natural crack – Shayan Kaia – where they craved rooms, niches and windows. By its shape, it resembles to the corridor-gallery of Dumbrăveni (picture 2 b).



Picture 6: Basarabi (E3)

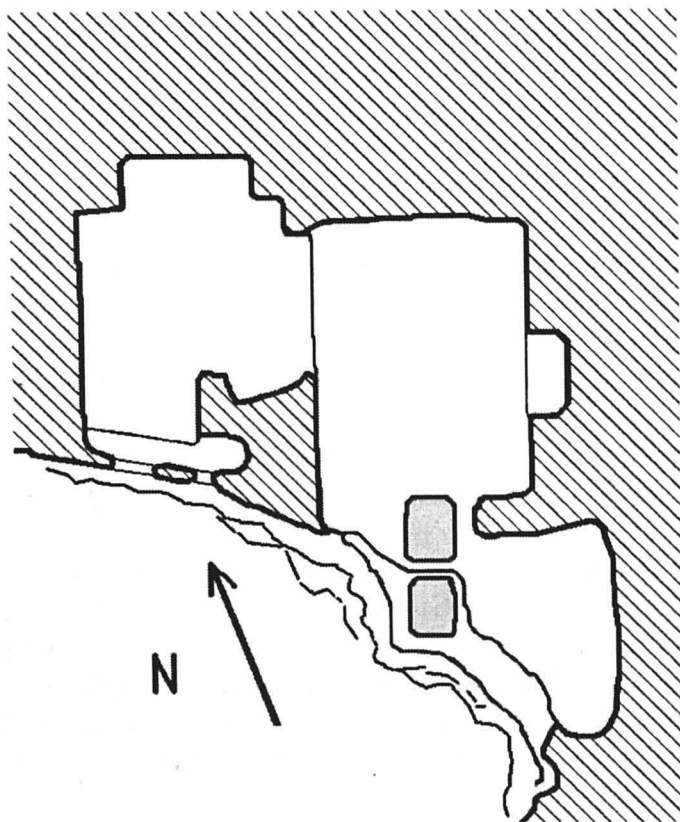
– The Scene of the Nativity of our Lord.

Picture 7: Basarabi (B4)

– A Holy Priest in *Orans* Attitude.

Also in the Suha Reka valley, in the neighborhood of the present villages of Brestnitsa and Golesh, there are other two cave settlements: Valchanova Staya and Haidushkite Kashti. The first one had a small church and a cell. The second one, built on two levels, consisted of a small church – on the ground-floor – and two cells – on the first floor.

The most southern monastic cave settlement known at present in the Suha Reka valley is the one in the neighborhood of the present village of Hitovo. It was situated on the left slope of the valley, and had a small church arranged in a natural cave, two cells and a funeral room.



Picture 8: Asar Evleri  
– The plan of the Cave Monastery.

In the Bulgarian researcher's Gh. Atanasov opinion, these are coenobitic cave monasteries from the Vth–VIth centuries<sup>43</sup>. However, it isn't out of the question that, at least a part of them might have been founded even in the second half of the IVth century, like the one in Dumbrăveni<sup>44</sup>. However, between this last one and those in the Suha Reka and Dobrich valleys, there are obvious architectural similarities<sup>45</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12–19. Initially, G. Atanasov, in *Няколко скални ...*, p. 61, observed that all these cave monastic complexes worked just in the early Middle Ages – IXth–XIth centuries.

<sup>44</sup> Neither A. Margos, in the *op. cit.*, p. 128–129, doesn't exclude the possibility that the cave settlement Asar Evleri might have functioned for the first time in the IVth–Vth centuries.

<sup>45</sup> It isn't out of the question that also in Basarabi, where there is another cave monastic complex lived for the last time in the early Middle Ages, could have existed a first living level in the IVth–VIth centuries. To this living level could be subscribed, at least theoreticaly, the small church E3. It is situated on the highest terrace of the complex, that could have been used even before the working of the quarry, in the early Middle Ages. Also, its architectonic plan – in the shape of a paleo-Christian basilica with a funeral semi-circular west-oriented apse, like the one in Dumbrăveni –, the parapet (*cancelli*) that separates the altar from the rest of the builbing and other images from its walls – the fish, the tree etc. – are typical of the primar Christianity. It's possible that, in the same period – IVth–VIth centuries – could have also existed in Basarabi other rooms, destroyed during the work of

We have to say that the cave settlements from the Suha Reka and Dobrich valleys were situated outside the borders of Scythia Minor, on the territory of the province Second Moesia. Yet, this hadn't been an impediment in the way of the relationship between Dumbrăveni and Suha Reka – Dobrich, at least till the Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon 451)<sup>46</sup>.

Beginning with the second half of the IVth century there is also documentary information referring to the life of the monks from the monasteries of Scythia Minor. Some of the information is lightly offered by Saint John Cassian, in his writings. Other is related to the name of Saint Theotim I who ruled in Tomis between about 390–407.

The information offered by Saint John Cassian is about the situation of the Danubian-Pontic monachism during his adolescence period – approximately the years 370–380. Later, he irrevocably left his native province<sup>47</sup>, travelling to the east – Palestine, Egypt, Constantinople –, but also to the west – Rome and Massilia (Marsilia).

According to his own confession, it was in his childhood when he first had his connections with the monastic life: "...from early childhood I found myself surrounded by monks, and after I had estranged myself for so many years from their **community** (*consortio, -onis*) and from the example of their life, I could hardly entirely remember now all the things I tried to commit under the impulse of their daily urge, or of their good examples, all the things I've learned or seen with my eyes."<sup>48</sup>

The term "community" (*consortio, -onis*) used in this excerpt praises the organizing way of the monks Saint John Cassian met in Scythia Minor. They had a community life, being grouped in coenobitic communities. The high estimation of their life style – "the example of their life" –, worthy of praise, suggests the compliance with very strict rules within this communities, similar to those John Cassian had found in the East.

the quarry. in the early Middle Ages. We refer to the thing that the exterior wall of the small church B1 still keeps the rests of a possible gallery, older than the church. The most probable fact is that the main criterion for the conservation of some of the paleo-Christian buildings and the destruction of others from Basarabi by the stone hewers of the early Middle Age was their degradation stage. Those that could still be used in that period – like E3 – have been kept, the others destroyed. Placing the beginnings of the cave complex of Basarabi in the IVth century is also supported by Al. Stănculescu, *Contribuții la descifrarea inscripțiilor de la Murfatlar*, in "BOR", XCV (1977), 9–12, p. 1024–1034.

<sup>46</sup> The Canon 4 of the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon ordered the submission of the monachism to the jurisdiction of church hierarchy – according to *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe*, notes and commentaries by Ioan N. Floca, second edition, Sibiu, 1993, p. 80, 81.

<sup>47</sup> We can be sure that saint John Cassian had never come back to Scythia Minor. In his writings, he openly recommends the monk to detach of the life he had before joining monachism and to interrupt every single link with his native place, with his relatives and friends, acc. to Ioan Casian (John Cassian), *Despre așezămintele mănăstirești de obște și despre tămăduirile celor opt păcate principale (De institutione coenobiorum)*, (=Asezaminte), V, 32, translated into Romanian by David Popescu, in "PSB", vol. 57, p. 181, idem, *Convorbiri*, XXIV, IX, 1–3, X–XIV, p. 729–733.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, Preface, 4, p. 110.

Obviously, these coenobitic communities were orthodox, not of the advocates of Audius. We deduce this, from the critical tune that John Cassian embraces when he describes the anthropomorphist heresy – also embraced by the advocates of Audius –, totally contrasting with the appreciations and praises from the excerpt above: “the stupid heresy of the anthropomorphits ...[that had been caused by] ignorance, backwardness and wrong interpretation ...[may cause] the eternal death” and “...the one that had been grown up **in the spirit of the dogmas of the true faith**, will reject the heresy [of the anthropomorphists], as a heathen blasphemy...”<sup>49</sup>

Other information about the monastic life in Scythia Minor can be found in the XXIVth book of the the *Conversations (Conlationes)*. It completes the image of the type of renunciation practised mostly between the Danube and the Sea. Talking with priest Avraam about mortification, saints John Cassian and Gherman observe: “We believe that, besides any doubt, this thing [the disturbance of meditation by the friars who visited them] won’t happen **in our province, where no person, or maybe few like us can be met.**”<sup>50</sup>

It needs to be specified that this conversation – the XXIVth – is addressed, firstly, to the hermits<sup>51</sup>. Abba Avraam himself, his collocutor, was a famous hermit who lived in an almost uninhabited place in the north of Egypt, in the wilderness of the Scitium. Moreover, in that period, saints John Cassian and Gherman were putting their efforts together to obtain an as chaste as possible hermit life, being anxious – the way it results from the conversation with priest Avraam – to keep, as much as possible, the peace of meditating in solitude. But their efforts were baffled precisely because of the visits of the other hermits: “...visited from time to time by friars, we can’t keep ourselves in an entire seclusion and in a long silence, the way we would have liked it.”<sup>52</sup> Or maybe, they thought that they could keep this “long silence” undisturbed in their native province, where they hadn’t met such hermit-friars preoccupied by the ascetical life style. Therefore, the text certified the weak representation of the Egyptian hermit life in Scythia Minor in the years 370–380<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, X, IV, 1, 2; V, 2, 3, IV, 1, p. 478, 479. The baffle of every personal effort by falling into heresy is shown by saint John Cassian in the same work, acc. to *ibidem*, X, IV, 1, p. 478.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIV, XVIII, p. 736. Acc. to I. G. Coman, *Scritori bisericești...*, p. 219, Antonie Plămădeală, *Sfântul Gherman din Dacia Pontică, un străromân ignorat*, in “Mitropolia Ardealului” (=MA), XXXIV (1989), 5, p. 5 and Columba Andrew Stewart, *Cassian monahul. Învățătura asceticomistică*, translated into Romanian by Ioan I. Ica jr. and Cristian Pop, Sibiu, 2000, p. 33 (= C. A. Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, New York-Oxford, 1998), this excerpt would justify the weak representation of Christian monachism in Scythia Minor at that time. This interpretation would contradict not only the assertions of Saint John Cassian from the previously commented excerpt, but also the results of the archaeological discoveries.

<sup>51</sup> John Cassian, *op. cit.*, “Introduction” to *Conversations XVIII–XXIV*, 3, p. 625.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIV, XVIII, p. 736.

<sup>53</sup> The words “maybe no person” suggest that John Cassian and Gherman hadn’t met personally in their native province any representative person for this type of living. Yet, they don’t entirely exclude the possibility of existence of such people through the words “... a few”.

The interpretation above is also upheld by other statements from Saint Cassian's work. The most categorical of them ends the XVIIIth *Conversation*, he had in Diolcos, in the north-eastern part of the Nile Delta, soon after his arrival in Egypt: "Through this conversation, Piamun had made our initial will of going from the first monastic community life schools to the second stage of hermitage, even stronger. For, under his influence we have gathered **the first ideas about the hermit way of life**, whose knowledge we had entirely got afterwards, in Scitium [wilderness]." <sup>54</sup> Then, he completes the assertions above, writing: "by completing the first renunciation [= the vow of poverty, giving up material goods], a fact that we do our best to complete with all the virtue, we believe that we are close to reach our self-fulfilment, but now [after discussing with Abba Pafnutie] we realize that we haven't started yet to dream about what the highest meaning of the monastic life is, because, **less informed** within the monasteries about the second renunciation [=giving up vices], **not even from hearsay had we found out** [till then] **a single thing** about the third renunciation [=turning back the mind from all the present and perceptible things and contemplating the future ones]" <sup>55</sup>, especially typical of the hermit life <sup>56</sup>. These excerpts confirm that, until the arrival in Egypt, John Cassian and Gherman hadn't been acquainted with the hermit way of life <sup>57</sup>.

So, in the VIIth and VIIIth decades of the IVth century, in the province of Scythia Minor prevailed the orthodox coenobitic monasteries, the inhabitants of which organized themselves after clear monastic rules, had an admirable life. <sup>58</sup>

Saint Theotim I is the second great monastic personality of Scythia Minor from the end of the IVth and the beginning of the Vth century. About him, it is known that he was a "Scythian" <sup>59</sup>, so a native, advocate of the monastic life: "a man who had his mind improved in philosophy (*ἀνὴρ ἐν φιλοσοφία τραφεῖς*);... [about who] it is said that he continued long-haired, the way he was when he started dealing with philosophy. His living was modest and his dinner time wasn't at the same hour, but when he was hungry or thirsty. It was, in my opinion, a philosopher deed to succumb to these because of necessity, and not by his will" <sup>60</sup>. It is also known about him that he had been a missionary, and author of short theological researches <sup>61</sup> and that he had been given by God the gift of doing miracles <sup>62</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIII, XVI, p. 642.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, III, XXII, 4, p. 362.

<sup>56</sup> This fact – the contemplation seen as a feature of the hermit life – is openly affirmed by Saint John Cassian in *Asezaminte*, VII, 18, p. 219.

<sup>57</sup> About the absence of the hermit way of life in the second half of the IVth century also in other eastern provinces, acc. to saint John Cassian, *Convorbiri*, XVIII, VII, 8, p. 632–633.

<sup>58</sup> It's possible, in this case, that those isolated cells found close to the coenobitic monasteries, from the south part of the Danubian-Pontic territory rightly attributed to some hermits, might have been arranged in a subsequent historical stage.

<sup>59</sup> Sozomenos, *op. cit.*, VII, 26, in "FHDR", II, p. 228 and Nicephori Callisti, *Ecclesiastica Historia*, XII, 45, in "PG", CXLVI, col. 908.

<sup>60</sup> Sozomenos, *op. cit.*, VII, 26, 9, in "FHDR" II, p. 228–229.

<sup>61</sup> Hieronymus, *Despre barbati ilustri (De viris illustribus)*, CXXXI, translated into Romanian by Dan Negrescu, Bucharest, 1996, p. 79.

<sup>62</sup> Sozomenos, *op. cit.*, 26, in "FHDR", II, p. 228–229.

“The philosophy”, whose advocate was the bishop Theotim I is *monastica filosofia*<sup>63</sup>. He’s the first hierarch of Tomis about who it is doubtless known that he had taken up the monastic life. His joining monachism took place, most probably, before his election for the Episcopal See<sup>64</sup>. The syntagm “improved in philosophy” (ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ τραπεύεις) suggests this supposition. Moreover, precisely his chaste life and his gift of doing miracles seem to have been the decisive elements that contributed to his election in the Episcopal See of Tomis.

The ascetical preoccupations of Saint Theotim I didn’t come to their end not even after he was elected bishop. As a testimony are his writings about spiritual peace<sup>65</sup>. A very probable thing is that the main addressees of these writings had been the monks of the province, because achieving spiritual peace is the purpose of the coenobitic monk<sup>66</sup>. Therefore, Theotim I remained close to his former monastery friars, whose spiritual preoccupations he felt that he had to guide<sup>67</sup>.

Another episode from the bishop’s life indirectly points out the theological preoccupations of the monks from the coenobitic monasteries of Scythia Minor at the end of the IVth century. Being in Constantinople during the disorders related to the origenism, during a synod, St. Theotim I affirms that: “there is no wrong teaching in the writings of Origen, and, bringing one of his books, he started to read and showed them that Origen’s teachings are those of the Church.”<sup>68</sup>

<sup>63</sup> This syntagm can be found precisely in the text of the translated in Latin of Sozomen’s *Hist. Eccles.*, VII, 26, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus*, series graeca (=P.G.), LXVII, coll. 1499B. The interpretation is accepted by the majority of the historians: I. G. Coman, *op.cit.*, p. 183; idem, *Contribuția scriitorilor...*, p. 13; I. Rămureanu, *Sfinți și Martiri la...*, p. 1008; idem, *Actele martirice*, p. 341; N. Șerbanescu, *1600 de ani de la prima atestare mărturie documentară despre existența Episcopiei Tomisului*, in “BOR”, LXXXVII (1969), 9–10, p. 1009; Em. Popescu, *Sfântul Teotim, episcopul Tomisului*, in the vol. “Sfinți români...”, p. 167; idem, *Martiri și Sfinți... (II)*, p. 61–62. According to Fr. Dölger, *Zur Bedeutung von ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΟΣ und ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ in byzantinischer Zeit*, in the vol. “Byzanz und die europäische Staatenwelt”, Darmstadt, 1976, p. 197–208.

<sup>64</sup> Acc. to I. Rămureanu, *Sfinți și Martiri la...*, p. 1007. The custom of the election of a bishop in an episcopal See wasn’t, in the first half of the IVth century an isolated practice. Saint Basil the Great in “Scrisoarea (Letter) 218”, translated into Romanian by Teodor Bodogae, in “PSB”, vol. 12, Bucharest, 1988, p. 451, talks about Alexandre, “...a bishop proceeded from the monks...”. Moreover, Saint Basil had been raised to the rank of bishop from the monastic life, acc. to I. G. Coman, *Patrologie*, p. 163–164. Anyway, the religious people were moved by such persons and they wanted them in the van of the community. A proof for these is the bishop Narcisus of Jerusalem, about who Eusebiu of Caesarea, *Hist. eccles.*, VII, X, translated into Romanian by Teodor Bodogae, in the coll. “PSB”, vol. 13, Bucharest, 1987, p. 234, observes: “...Narcisus [from the wilderness] appeared again and had been asked by everybody to take back the first place between the brothers [the bishopric], because after his leaving and his [philosophical -ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑ] way of life ...everybody honoured him even more than before”. Also, Pafnutie, bishop of Upper Tebaida, who had been “raised from his early childhood in the monastery, and made himself admired there, through his notable chastity”, had been enhanced to the rank of bishop, Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, I, XI, in P.G., LXVII, col. 104B.

<sup>65</sup> Acc. to St. Ioan Damaschin, *op. cit.*, XXI, Lit. S, Tit. XIX, in P.G., XCVI, col. 364AB.

<sup>66</sup> St. John Casian, *op. cit.*, XIX, VIII, 3, p. 648, 649.

<sup>67</sup> Also acc. to I. G. Coman, *Scriitori bisericești...*, p. 193.

<sup>68</sup> Socrates, *op.cit.*, VI, 12 in P.G., LXVII, col. 701B and Cassiodorus, *Istoria bisericească tripartită (Historia Tripartita)*, X, 11, translated into Romanian by Liana Manolache and Anca Manolache, in the col. “PSB”, vol. 75, Bucharest, 1998, p. 403.

The excerpt he quoted, in absolute harmony with the teaching of the Church, was dedicated, most probably, to the problems of “the monastic philosophy”, which St. Theotim I was entirely interested in. It isn’t out of the question that St. Theotim I could have had then a copy of the *Philocalia* created by the saints Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus<sup>69</sup>. It included, otherwise, only orthodox excerpts from the Alexandrine theologian’s writings, in the middle of which the spiritual progress could be found. A very probable fact is that, at that time, in Scythia Minor, besides the *Philocalia*, the *Monastic Rules* created by the same St. Basil were also known<sup>70</sup>.

The election of one of the local monks for the episcopal See of the province is the proof of the entire maturation and affirmation of the monastic life, in the Danubian-Pontic religious life. Furthermore, it is the confirmation and the result of the commendable life and of the high organization – following the example of the ones in the East – which the Danubian-Pontic coenobitic communities benefited from.

The fame of Bishop Theotim I was still strong even almost half a century after his death. At the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451) an archimandrite from Constantinople named Carossos, in his attempt at exculpating of the charge that he was a Monophysite heretic, he took advantage of the name of the Tomitan hierarch upholding that: “I know the faith of the three hundred eighteen priests brought together in Nicaea, in whose name I was christened, for I don’t know other faith. They are bishops. They have the authority to anathematize me, to defrock me, they have the authority to do whatever they want. Besides this faith, I don’t know other. **When hallowed Theotim christened me in Tomis, he ordered me never to have other faiths.**”<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> *Philocalia* was created by the saints Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus in the years 358–359. Afterwards, in 383, st. Gregory asked the bishop Theodore of Tiana to copy the collection elaborated then in the shape of a book, acc. to Teodor Bodogae, *Studiu introductiv* in Origen, *Philocalia*, in the col. “PSB”, vol. 7, Bucharest, 1982, p. 298. The possibility that St. Theotim could have known the *Philocalia* of Origen is also upheld by I. G. Coman, *op. cit.*, p. 189–190.

<sup>70</sup> Em. Popescu, *Monahismul...*, p. 102. The same point of view is also shared by I. G. Coman, *op.cit.*, p. 333; Mihai Coliba, *Regulile monahale ale Sfântului Vasile cel Mare în istoria vieții religioase monahale și a cultului creștin*, in “ST”, XVII (1965), 3–4, p. 253; Teoctist Arăpașu, *Opera Sfântului Vasile cel Mare în evlavia credincioșilor ortodocși români*, in the vol. “Sfântul Vasile cel Mare. 1600 de ani de la săvârșirea sa”, Bucharest, 1980, p. 15–20; Vasile Muntean, *Organizarea mănăstirilor românești în comparație cu cele bizantine (până la 1600)*, teză de doctorat, în „ST”, XXXVI (1984), 1–2, p. 34; 34; Iorgu D. Ivan, *Studiu introductiv*, la Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, *Asceticele*, in the col. “PSB”, vol. 18, Bucharest, 1989, p. 49. Otherwise, between Scythia Minor and Cappadocia existed a tight relationship beginning with the past. We mention, for this, the correspondence st. Basil had with st. Bretanion, the bishop of Tomis (367–374), but also with the governor of Scythia Minor, Iunius Soranus, both of them from Cappadocia, acc. To St. Basil the Great, *Correspondenta (Letters)*, 155, 164, 165, in “PSB”, vol. 12, p. 341–342, 355–358. In the letter 164 St. Basil the Great also mentions Eutyches, a cappadocian missionary, who had left to preach the Christian faith in the zone of the Low Danube.

<sup>71</sup> André-Jean Festugière, *Actes du Concile de Chalcédoine*. Session. (La Définition de la Foi). Traduction française, Genève, 1983, (Cahiers d’ Orientalisme, IV), p. 53 *apud* I. Dură, *Sfântul Teotim I, episcopul Tomisului, invocat drept autoritate a dreptei credințe în cadrul lucrărilor Sinodului IV ecumenic (451)*, in “BOR”, CVI (1988), 5–6, p. 93.

For the subject we deal with, what matters is the relation between Carossos and Saint Theotim I and the Danubian-Pontic monachism. From the quoted excerpt, it clearly results that the first one had been christened in Tomis, precisely by Bishop Theotim I, some day between the years 290 and 407. However, there is no specification of either the age when he received the christening, or if he was or not a native of Scythia. The sure thing is that, when he received the christening, Carossos was mature enough to be defrocked. Estimating his age in 451 around 60 years<sup>72</sup>, and the last year of pastorship of Bishop Theotim I, 407, it results that during the period he had been a catechumen, he was around 16 years old. An enough early age, that demonstrates he was a native. In this case, Carossos may have been a member of one of the Greek communities from the harbours of the Black Sea, probably of Tomis<sup>73</sup>.

As regards the conversion to monachism of young Carossos, it took place, most probably, in Scythia Minor. Furthermore, the decision of young Carossos to join the monastic life must be related to the admiration he felt for the monk bishop. Subsequently, probably attracted by the capital's monastic life, Carossos had left Scythia Minor and settled in Constantinople. Here he became an archimandrite and, under this authority, ruler of a monastery. The rank of archimandrite he had in 451, is a clue that he had moved to his monastery from the capital long time before. Moreover, it seems that after this moment Carossos had ceased his relationship with Scythia Minor. A clue for this, is represented by his doctrinaire convictions, entirely different from those of the Scythian theologians. During the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451), he was entirely fond of the Monophysite patriarch Dioscor and his teachings, while the Tomitan hierarchs – bishops John I (448) and Alexandre (449–452) – and the monks of the province – the Scythian monks of the VIth century, made themselves famous by defending the orthodox faith. Otherwise, Carossos had been exiled because of his heretical convictions.<sup>74</sup>

The place of the archimandrite Carossos in the history of the Danubian-Pontic monachism is a secondary one. An important thing to mention is just that a monk who joined monastic community life in Scythia Minor became an archimandrite and abbot of a monastery in the Byzantine Empire's capital. Moreover, even more important is that the episode related to the name of the archimandrite Carossos reveals another aspect of the past of the Danubian-Pontic monachism. This is linked to the great fame that the monastic life acquired between the Danube and the Black Sea, thanks to the personality of Saint Theotim I. Like Carossos, there might have been other Christians who had then joined the monastic life, influenced by the exemplary life experience of the Tomitan bishop.

<sup>72</sup> Em. Popescu, *op. cit.*, p. 110, note 66.

<sup>73</sup> I. Dură has a different opinion, *op. cit.*, p. 94, 95 and note 11, according to which Carossos was for sure, “an inhabitant and citizen of the New Rome”.

<sup>74</sup> Léon I<sup>er</sup>, *Epist.*, CXXXVI, n. 4; CXLI, n. 2, in Saint Leon, *Opera*, édit. Ballerini, t. 1, I, the col. 1281, 1296, 1297, apud Ch.-J. Hefele, Dom H. Leclercq, *Histoire des conciles*, Researches and texts, t. II, deuxième partie, livre XI, Paris, 1908, p. 712–713.

Another monk from Scythia Minor who had left the province is pious Dionysius Exiguus (+ 540–555). He had been born in the VIIth decade of the Vth century. He followed his monastic apprenticeship in his native province, after which he travelled to the East, and in the year 496, to Rome. He spent his last years in Calabria, in the south of Italy.

We have the spiritual and intellectual portrait of this Scythian monk from Cassiodorus: “an honest Catholic man, entirely, constantly connected to the traditional orders”, “unobtrusive and wise”, good connoisseur of the Holy Scriptures, unsurpassed in the manipulation of Greek and Latin; “entirely devoted to God, ... of a rare chastity, ... kind” and very well-balanced – “he ate little and especially ordinary food”<sup>75</sup>. Words full of admiration, that prove that Dionysius was an exemplary monk.

Unlike Carossos, Dionysius Exiguus hadn't interrupted his relationship with the province of Scythia Minor. During his stay in Rome, he had translated for some of his fellow countrymen, some doctrinaire writings. The *Prefaces* that accompany some of the translations have a high value because of the subject they deal with, as they contain information concerning the monastic life between the Danube and the Black Sea from the period of his youth: “in Scythia ... we became able to see **since early youth** the way of heavenly life of the all-happy priests who, in a way, that region boasts of, through its spiritual fecundity. Their faith, consolidated by their actions, offered **everybody** examples of life and faith. ... [And for them, who are] free of every human worry ... the dogmas of the right faith have always had an untouched power; because even if they have been common people judging by their words, they surely haven't been powerless through their knowledge.”<sup>76</sup>

The excerpt reveals the image of a coenobitic community the members of which, with a chaste life and orthodox faith, were examples for all the members of the Church of Scythia. The remarks are similar to those that had been stated a century before, by Saint John Cassian. This is a clue which shows that the power of the religious feel from the Danubian-Pontic monastic centres didn't diminish with the passing of the time.

The second *Preface* of pious Dionysius brings additional information. Its addressee is the Bishop Peter of Tomis, the one who had demanded him the translation: “I can't forget your blessings, Holy Priest [bishop Peter], ... and the holy efforts you bore with me, **for guiding me when I was young** – which I will nowhere and never forget – [and] I really want, in my turn, to bring you my thanks, even though I know I'm not able to make their count ... [That is why] I don't stop

<sup>75</sup> Cassiodorus, *Instituțiile literaturii divine și umane* (Institutiones divinarum et saecularium litterarum), chapter XXIII, translated into Romanian by St. Alexe in *Introducere la...*, p. 12–14.

<sup>76</sup> Dionysius, *Prefața la traducerea în latinește a celor două epistole ale Sfântului Chiril, episcop de Alexandria, adresate episcopului Successus* (The Preface of the Translation into Latin of the Two Epistles of Saint Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, Addressed to the Bishop Successus), 1, 2 translated from Latin into Romanian by David Popescu, in “MO”, XXXVIII (1986), 2, p. 116, 117 (in Latin in J. P. Migne, *op.cit.*, series latina (=P.L.), Supplementum, vol. IV, col. 20–21).

showing, with all the ardour, the longing I always keep in my heart for your Holiness”<sup>77</sup>.

From this, it results that Peter, who, at that time was bishop of Tomis, had been a member of one of the monastic communities of Scythia Minor. He is the second Tomitan bishop – after St. Theotim I – known by his name, about who it is known for sure that he rose from among the local monks. Moreover, the submission he had completed within the monastery, the guidance of the young people, reveals his experience and the appreciation he enjoyed among the other monks of the community<sup>78</sup>. Otherwise, this remark seems to have surpassed the walls of his coenobitic monastery, if we judge by his subsequent election precisely in the Episcopal See of the province.

The election of monk Peter as the hierarch of Scythia proves, furthermore, the important place that the local monachism continued to occupy in the religious life of the province, and, implicitly, its appreciation, and the powerful impact it had on the Christians from here.

Moreover, the demand of the Scythian monks – inclusively Peter’s, monk-bishop with a good education – to have translated into Latin some of the writings of the Greek Fathers, demonstrates that, almost a century after the pastorate of St. Theotim I, the Latin language developed more than the Greek one, at least in some of the monasteries of Scythia Minor<sup>79</sup>.

At present, there is no other written information concerning the situation of the monachism in Scythia Minor in the Vth century. The results of the archaeological researches from Slava Rusă and Dumbrăveni haven’t registered, however, any type of destruction or interruption of the living levels in that period. Furthermore, in the second half of this century, the paleo-Christian monastery of Slava Rusă passed through a new stage of development. The old basilica was

<sup>77</sup> Idem, *Prefața la traducerea latinească a “epistolei sinodale” a episcopului Chiril* (The Preface of the Latin Translation of the “Synodical Epistle” of Bishop Cyril), 1, translated by David Popescu, in “MO”, XXXVIII (1986), 2, p. 117–118 (in Latin in P.L., vol. 67, col. 9D–12B).

<sup>78</sup> St. Basil the Great, who agreed with accepting children within the monastery, recommends: “over them [the children] must come an older and more experienced one [a monk], and famous for his patience, who to rectify with parental kindness and with wise words the errors of the young ones, applying the right cure for every error, ...” – *Regulile mari* (The Longer Monastic Rules), 15, translated into Romanian by Iorgu D. Ivan, in “PSB”, vol. 18, p. 244–246. Receiving children within the monastery and the existence of a kind monk who dealt with their education, according to st. Basil’s suggestion, is another proof that the Basilian Monastic Rules were being respected within the monasteries of Scythia Minor.

<sup>79</sup> Another important thing is that, also on the disc renovated by the metropolitan bishop Paternus (498–520), the inscription engraved in this occasion is also in Latin: “Ex antiquis renovatum est per Paternum reverentiss[imum] episc[opus] nostrum, Amen (= [This patten] was wrought again out of old [pieces] through the care of Paternus, our most reverend bishop. Amen!), – acc. to Em Popescu, *Inscripțiile grecești și latine din secolele IV–XIII descoperite în România*, Bucharest, 1976, no. 64a, p. 97. This is another clew about the development of Latin language compared to Greek, in Scythia Minor, in that time.

extended and other two chapels were built from their foundations, and also the wall that surrounded the monastic complex (picture 1)<sup>80</sup>. This extension reveals the way in which the monastery joins, from the liturgical and architectural points of view, the rest of the monastic settlements from the Empire, but also a small numerical increase of this monastic community.

“The silence” of the Scythian monks during the entire Vth century, can be explained by the fact that they faced no doctrinaire contrast locally. The absolute theological concord between them and the superior church authorities ended, however, in the first half of the VIth century. In the attempt of promoting a new theological statement – “One of the Trinity suffered in the flesh” –, which excluded both the Nestorian and the Monophysite interpretations, the Scythian monks came up against the opposition of the hierarchs from the province<sup>81</sup>. Without losing courage, their representatives travelled to Constantinople and even to Rome, where they militated for the official acknowledgement of the theanthropopaschite formula. Beginning with the year 521, after the acceptance of this formula, the information about them, ceases again<sup>82</sup>.

The correspondence and the theological writings caused by this theological dispute mediate the cognition of the names and of the clerical rank that some of the monks having left Scythia Minor had. The most active of them was John Maxentius (*Joannes Maxentius*), ruler, “as an *abbas* of a congregation”<sup>83</sup> and author of a short theological treatise<sup>84</sup>. But, the highest clerical rank was owned by

<sup>80</sup> Andrei Opaș, Cristina Opaș, Teodor Bănică, *op.cit.*, p. 19–22, 24.

<sup>81</sup> *Raportul episcopilor Germanus și Iohannes, a diaconilor Felix și Dioscorus și a preotului Blandus din 29 iunie 519 (Suggestio Germani et Iohannis episcoporum Felicis et Dioscori diaconorum et Blandi presbyteri)*, II, in “FHDR”, vol. II, p. 330–331. At that time, the church hierarchical See from Tomis had the rank of Metropolitan Seat with 14 affiliated Sees.

<sup>82</sup> For the Scythian monks and the dispute related to their theological formula, acc. to Vasile Sibiescu, *Călugării sciți*, in “RT”, XXVI (1936), 5–6, p. 182–205; D. Stăniloae, *Contribuția “călugărilor sciți” la precizarea hristologiei la începutul secolului al VI-lea - Studiu introductiv la “Scrieri ale <călugărilor sciți> daco-romani din secolul al VI-lea*, in “MO”, XXXVII (1985), 3–4, p. 199–244; McGuckin, J. A., “Mărturisirea theopashită” (*Textul și contextul istoric: un studiu despre reinterpretarea chiriliană a Calcedonului*), translated from English into Romanian by Teodor Baconsky, in “BOR”, CVI (1988), 3–4, p. 108–123 (in English in “Journal of Ecclesiastical History”, 2, 1984). Florea Duță, *Les théologiens scythes de 440 à 553. La formule théoanthropopaschite (théosarkopaschite)*, thèse pour obtenir le grade de docteur de l’Université des sciences humaines de Strasbourg, 1998, unpublished, *passim*.

<sup>83</sup> *Tot un Raport al diaconului Dioscorus (Item suggestio Dioscori Diaconi)*, (224), 11, in “FHDR”, II, p. 332–333.

<sup>84</sup> *Mărturisire de credință (Avowal of Faith)* (in “Corpus Christianorum”, Series latina (=CCSL), LXXXV A, Turnholt, 1978, p. 5–28), *Capitole contra nestorienilor și pelagianilor spre bucuria fraților* (Chapters against the Nestorians and the Pelagians for the Joy of the Friars) (in “CCSL”, LXXXV A, p. 29–30), *Foarte scurtă mărturisire de credință a Bisericii universale* (A Very Brief Avowal of Faith of the Universal Church) (in “CCSL”, LXXXV A, p. 33–36), *Răspuns contra acefalilor* (Treatise against the Acephali-Monophysites) (in “CCSL”, LXXXV A, p. 33–36), *Învățătură foarte scurtă cu privire la unirea Cuvântului lui Dumnezeu cu propriul Său trup* (Very Brief Teaching Regarding the Union of the Word of God with His Own Body) (in “CCSL”, LXXXV A, p. 39–40), *Dialoguri contra nestorienilor* (Dialogues against the Nestorians) (in “CCSL”, LXXXV

the presbyter and archimandrite John (*Joannes*). His rank of archimandrite proves that he was the ruler of a monastery. The other monks known by their names are the deacons Peter (*Petrus*), John (*Joannes*) and Venerius, the monks John (*Joannes*), Leontius, Achilles and Maurice (*Mauritius*) and lecturer John (*Joannes*). Besides them, there had come, for sure, other monks from Scythia Minor, whose names and clerical ranks remained unknown<sup>85</sup>.

These monks came from at least two different monasteries. The proof is the presence of two abbots among them – abba John Maxentius and the presbyter and archimandrite John. They are also the first abbots from Scythia Minor, for sure known by their names today. Another remarkable thing is then, the variety of functions and clerical ranks that the Scythian monks had: from the common monks or lecturers, to deacons, priests, or even archimandrites. This thing confirms the good and advanced internal organization of the Danubian-Pontic monasteries from that period of time, similar to the one in the rest of the Empire. Moreover, the frenzy they defended the orthodox faith with, and the great appreciation they felt for the right faith, as also resulted from the older documents, is a real one<sup>86</sup>.

The support of the theological theoanthropopaschite formula by the members of at least two Danubian-Pontic monastic communities is also a proof of the tight links that existed at that time between some of the monasteries of the province<sup>87</sup>. What seems to be interesting is the attitude of the metropolitan bishop Paternus and of the other bishops from the province. Their refusal to approve the theoanthropopaschite formula is a clue that, at least part of them, didn't proceed from the Scythian

A, p. 49–100), *Răspuns la epistola care, zic ereticii, a fost adresată de către episcopul Romei (Hormisdas) către Possessor* (Reply to the Epistle Which, the Heretics Say, Was Addressed by the Bishop of Rome (Hormisdas) to Possessor) (in “CCSL”, LXXXV A, p. 101–154). They had been translated from Latin into Romanian by Nicolae Petrescu and published in “MO” magazine, XXXVII, (1985), 3–4, p. 244–254; 5–6, p. 391–440; 9–10, p. 680–698.

<sup>85</sup> Ionuț Holubeanu, *Dionysius Exiguus și monahismul dobrogean*, in the vol. “Studia Historica et Theologica. Omagiu profesorului Emilian Popescu”, Jassy, 2003, p. 241–246.

<sup>86</sup> Yet, it must be specified that in the dogmatic issue of the relationship between grace and freedom, the Scythian monks were tributary to St. Augustine. Acc. to *Epistola monahilor sciți către episcopi. Despre Harul lui Dumnezeu* (The Epistle of the Scythian Monks to the Bishops. About the Grace of God), VI and epilogue, translated into Romanian by N. Petrescu, in “MO”, XXXVII (1985), 9–10, p. 707 (in Latin in “CCSL”, LXXXV A, p. 155–172). Ioan Maxentiu (Joannes Maxentius), *Mărturie de credință*, in “MO”, XXXVII (1985), 3–4, p. 252–254; idem, *Capitole scrise contra nestorienilor și pelagienilor*, 12, in “MO”, XXXVII (1985), 5–6, p. 392; idem, *Răspuns la...*, in “MO”, XXXVII (1985), 9–10, p. 697, 698; *Cartea Diaconului Petru și a altora care au fost trimiși la Roma din partea grecilor pentru apărarea credinței despre întruparea și harul Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos, către Fulgentius și către alți episcopi ai Africii* (The Book of the Deacon Peter and of Others Who Were Sent to Rome on the Behalf of the Greeks in the Defence of the Faith about the Embodiment and the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to Fulgentius and to Other Bishops of Africa), chap. VI–VIII, translated into Romanian by N. Petrescu, in “MO”, XXXVII (1985), 11–12, p. 788–792 (a Greek version in P.G., LXV, col. 442–451). About this subject, acc. to J. A. McGuckin, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>87</sup> Acc. to this issue St. Basil the Great, *Regulile mari (The Longer Monastic Rules)*, 43, in the “PSB”, vol. 18, p. 287–288.

monks<sup>88</sup>. Anyway, the Scythian monks had got out victorious of the theological dispute also locally. This is proved by the election for the Metropolitan See, as a successor of Paternus, of John (around 530–550), one of the Scythian monks<sup>89</sup>. This seems to be the moment of maximum authority that the local monachism acquired within the Church of Scythia Minor.

As regards the theological knowledge of the Scythian monks involved in the dispute around the theanthropopaschite formula, it was superior to the one that many of their contemporaries had. The arguments and explanations from their dogmatic writings show that they were good theologues<sup>90</sup>, able to observe and analyse the theological finenesses of the heretics of other times. The theological theanthropopaschite formula which they promoted, in fact, the orthodox answer to the heretic interpretation of the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils since then, is the most precise testimony for these<sup>91</sup>.

Very probably, the Scythian monks had a constant relationship with the theological centres of that time<sup>92</sup>. We deduct this, on the one hand from the fact that they were well-informed about the last heretical interpretations spread in the rest of the Empire<sup>93</sup> and, on the other hand, from the numerous theological writings they used<sup>94</sup>. Through this fact, they prove to have been monks concerned with, and

<sup>88</sup> Could Paternus have been the first metropolitan bishop of Scythia Minor from outside the borders of the province? It's possible if we judge that the raising of the church See of Tomis to the rank of Metropolitan Seat and the election of Paternus in the van of it had been done during the rule of the emperor Anastasius (498–518), advocate of the Monophysite heresy. In addition, the hesitation of Paternus in accepting the formula of the Scythian monks seems to show the attraction of this hierarch, at least at the beginning, to the Monophysite heresy.

<sup>89</sup> Acc. to Fl. Duta's discussing that problem, *op. cit.*, p. 48–68.

<sup>90</sup> Even the Roman legates from Constantinople indirectly admit the superior theological knowledge of the Scythian monks: "... we have revealed these, [the presentation and the control of the theological ideas of the Scythian monks], one by one, for not to happen that **their fineness** to praise compared to our modesty", *Raportul episcopilor...*, (217), 11, in "FHDR", II, p. 330–331. Also acc. to D. Stăniloae, *op. cit.*, p. 212, then, "A more tenacious research of the christology of Leontius [of Byzantium], would indicate, we believe, its entire dependence on the christology of John Maxentius", acc. to Em. Popescu, *op. cit.*, p. 105; Fl. Duta, *op. cit.*, p. 121–122.

<sup>91</sup> They payed attention, firstly, to the Nestorian interpretation of the dogmatic decisions of the Council of Chalcedon (451), acc. to Ioan Maxentiu, *Mărturisire de credință*, p. 245 and next.; idem, *Răspunsul ...*, in "MO", XXXVII (1985), 9–10, p. 685, 686, 689, 691.

<sup>92</sup> Part of these links could have been mediated precisely by the Scythian monks that had left the province. An example for this is pious Dionysius Exiguul, who kept in touch with the theologues of his native province.

<sup>93</sup> About these, Ioan Maxentiu, *Mărturisire de credință*, Prologue, p. 245, writes: "... we bring to light excerpts of the books of Holy Fathers, against the **new inventions** of the heretics" and idem, *Răspunsul...*, p. 693, "... the [Scythian] monks ... have sent notices **in time** to the Western Churches, regarding some follies [arised] about faith".

<sup>94</sup> In their writings, there are quotations from the Sts. Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus and Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, the patriarchs Proclus and Flavian of Constantinople, the bishops of Rome Innocent, Celestine and Leo the Great, the Antiochian priest Malkion and a letter created by the participants in some of the Councils of Africa. Then, they mention the names of different heretics:

accustomed to the theological study. In addition, in the monasteries they proceeded from, they probably had auspicious working conditions – the peace and the books they needed.

It isn't out of the question that, after this moment, being aware of the necessity of having a good report about the theological debates from the Empire, the Scythian monks might have founded a monastery of their own in Constantinople<sup>95</sup>.

After this moment of maximum fame of the monks of Scythia Minor, the information about them ceases again. Probably, content with their theological success, they retired to the peace of the monasteries they came from. Otherwise, until the end of the VIth century, both at Dumbrăveni and at Slava Rusă, the living levels didn't register important transformations or destructions. Only at Slava Rusă the archaeological excavations revealed the performance under the rule of the Emperor Maurice (582–602) of Byzantium of some renovation works and the raising of other auxiliary buildings<sup>96</sup>. A certain diversification and increase of the administrative internal needs within the monastery is revealed.

It is also worthy mentioning the possible organization in the VIth century of an *intra muros* coenobitic monastery at Histria<sup>97</sup>. It would be the first and, up to the present, the unique urban monastery discovered in Scythia Minor. The beginnings of this monastery seem to be related to the foundation of the Episcopal See of Histria. Otherwise, it functioned within the private basilica pile – *domus 3* –, where the residence of the bishop of the citadel was. Of its organizing, one of the Histrian hierarchs might have taken care<sup>98</sup>.

The golden period of the Danubian-Pontic monachism ended at the beginning of the VIIth century, during the big Avaro-Slavic tribes' invasion. A brutal end, also confirmed by the disappearance of all the monastic communities identified since then between the Danube and the Black Sea. Some of them – Slava Rusă and Histria – were irrevocably shattered and abandoned. Others – Dumbrăveni, the ones in the Suha Reka and Dobrich valleys, and the ones from the sea coast of the

Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius, Sabelius, Eutyches, Dioscurus of Antioch, Timotheus Aelurus of Alexandria, Peter Fullo of Alexandria, Peter of Antioch, Acacius of Constantinople, and Paul of Samosata. Of course, they had been acquainted with some of these writings in the period they had been in Constantinople or Rome.

<sup>95</sup> Acc. to Em. Popescu, *op. cit.*, p. 109, note 58; I. Holubeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 251–253.

<sup>96</sup> Acc. to Andrei Opaïț, Cristina Opaïț, Teodor Bănică, *op. cit.*, p. 19–22, 24.

<sup>97</sup> Em. Popescu, *Les antiquités paléochrétiennes d'Histria*, in the vol. "Christianitas dacoromana", p. 323–324; Virgil Lungu, *Creștinismul în Scythia Minor în contextul vest-pontic*, Sibiu – Constanța, 2000, p. 71 and Octavian Bounegru, V. Lungu, *Cartierul "Domus"*, in the vol. "Histria", coord. Al. Suceveanu, Mircea V. Angelescu, in press, p. 89–104. The possibility of organizing the monasteries like fortresses is mentioned and accepted by the 4th Canon of the IVth ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451): "And those who live their monastic life in a **fortress** or maybe in the countryside, must submit to the bishop of that place", *Canoanele...*, p. 80.

<sup>98</sup> It isn't out of the question that such urban coenobitic monasteries might have functioned in Scythia Minor in the VIth century and also in the neighbourhood of other episcopal centers of the province.

Black Sea – were repopulated, but after a long period of time. In the absence of any clear piece of information, it's difficult to say what happened with the monks from these monastic centres. It's possible that some of them might have died during the invasions. Others might have continued living isolated, in the safe places of the province. Yet, the desertion of the traditional monastic centres for more than two centuries, and the absence of any other vestiges of monastical destination in Scythia Minor, uphold the hypothesis that the majority of the Scythian monks, wanting, in that time, the peace required by their way of life, had left the province. Otherwise, also at the beginning of the VIIth century, many Eastern monks left the provinces of the Byzantine Empire, rummaged by the barbarians, taking refuge in the West. They preferred the half-isle of Italy, where they found the auspicious conditions for their way of life<sup>99</sup>. Under these circumstances, the desertion of Scythia Minor by the monks, hadn't been something exceptional, but subscribed to the general tendency of those times.

For almost two centuries and a half the Danubian-Pontic territory didn't offer any more favourable conditions for the development of the monastic life. The big Avaro-Slavic tribes' invasion caused great trouble and disorder. Subsequently, in 681, the Proto-Bulgarians settled in the south of the Danube. The permanent wars between the state they founded and Byzantium had increased even more the tension in the region.

Notable changes appeared starting with the second half of the IXth century. In the year 864, the Slav-Bulgarians received officially the Christian faith. Then in the year 971, the eastern part of Bulgaria and the entire Danubian-Pontic territory got again under the rule of Byzantium. The territories were entirely integrated to the Byzantine administrative system, being organized like a new Byzantine *thema* – Paristrion.

As a consequence of these transformations, monachism faced a new sudden change. Monastic cave and semi-cave centres functioned then at Casian, Basarabi (Murfatlar), Dumbrăveni, in the Suha Reka-Dobrich, Kanagyol-Taban and Senebir valleys, and also on the sea coast of the Black Sea, at Kamen Briag, Yaila and at the Caliacra cape. Christian monks might have lived then in the caves of La Izvor and Baba from the region of Casian, at Histria, Cernavodă, Mangalia and in the cave of Limanu (see map 2).

At Dumbrăveni, on the ground-floor of the former monastic complex, a small semi-cave church of mononaval basilical plan and an annexed room had been arranged. A stone wall that delimited some kind of precincts of the monastery had also been built. On one of the walls of the pile some Runic characters are incised. The food rests identified here – seeds and bones of tame and wild animals, fish and

<sup>99</sup> The immediate result of this massive exode had been the increase of the churches and of the Greek monastic communities in Italy, in which they employed the Greek language for the divine service, and had been respected the *Monastic Rules* of St. Basil the Great, acc. to Viktor Lazarev, *Istoria picturii bizantine*, vol. I, translated into Romanian by Florin Chirișescu, Bucharest, 1980, p. 153, 154, 156 (= *Istoria vizantiinskoj jivopisi*, 2 vol., Moscow, 1947, 1948).



Photo 1. Basarabi (B4): view from the nave.

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Photo 2. Basarabi (B4): the iconostasis.

birds – reveal the household occupations – tillage of the land, breeding of the animals and, possibly, hunting<sup>100</sup> – and the permissive food diet of the monks<sup>101</sup>. Most probably, this is a coenobitic monastery which consisted of 10–15 monks.

This living level was dated in the IXth–Xth centuries. It seems that the settlement ended somewhere in the Xth century, in a violent way<sup>102</sup>.

The most famous Danubian-Pontic monastic complex is the one at Basarabi<sup>103</sup>. In a stone quarry of the early Middle Ages, six small churches, annexed rooms, funeral rooms and galleries placed on a few levels were identified. One of the small churches – B2 – has a *cancelli* instead of the iconostasis. Another one, B4, the largest, is the unique with two entrances in the iconostasis (photos 1, 2). The small church E3 has a funeral semir-circular west-oriented apse, like the ancient place of prayer from Dumbrăveni.

It is believed that the small churches were successively used, for short periods, beginning with those from the superior levels<sup>104</sup>. On the walls of each room, numerous graffiti and Runic (picture 14), Cyrillic, Glagolitic and Greek inscriptions are incised. Most frequently appears the cross, and close to it, images of saints (picture 7) and other human images – pedestrians or riders. There are also animal images – horses, hares, wolves, dogs, foxes, birds – the peacock and the pigeon –, fantastic images – dragons –, and other images – the pentagram, the labyrinth, the axe, the bow with the arrow, or only the arrow, the nine men's morris, the feet (the boots), the square or rectangle with diagonals, the ship, the tree, and others. In the small church E3 is also incised the scene of the Nativity of our Lord (picture 6). The majority of the images are considered ancient Greco-Roman or Christian symbols<sup>105</sup>.

<sup>100</sup> L. Regnault, *op. cit.*, p. 121, states, without giving any example for it, that also in the Egyptian desert, hunting was one of the occupations of the monks.

<sup>101</sup> There, have been identified millet seeds and the remains of a grinder for the horned cattle bones, pigs, sheep, she-goats, wild-boar, stag, hare, roebuck, the sterlet, the pike, the carp, the pike perch, the hen, the goose, the pigeon, the donkey, the dog, the horse, C. Chiriac, T. Papisima, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 200–202; T. Papisima, C. Chera, *op. cit.*, p. 291. The violent ending of the complex is certified by the fire traces. A worth thing to mention is that initially, C. Chiriac, *op. cit.*, p. 264–268, dated the functioning of the semi-cave complex of Dumbrăveni, in the X–XI centuries.

<sup>103</sup> Acc. to I. Barnea, Ștefan Ștefănescu, *Din istoria Dobrogei*, the vol. III, “Bizantini, români și bulgari la Dunărea de Jos”, Bucharest, 1971, p. 180–233; I. Barnea, *Biserițele rupestre de la Murfatlar*, in the vol. “De la Dunăre la Mare”, p. 134–140; idem, *Monumente creștine și viața bisericască în secolele VII–XIV*, in the vol. “Monumente istorice și izvoare creștine. Mărturii de străveche existență și de continuitate a românilor pe teritoriul Dunării de Jos și al Dobrogei”, Galați, 1987, p. 92–106; idem, *Arta creștină în România*, vol. II (VIIth–XIIIth centuries), Bucharest, 1981, p. 16–20; 46–90; idem, *Monumente de artă creștină descoperite pe teritoriul Republicii Populare Române*, in “ST”, XVII (1965), 3–4, p. 160–172; I. Barnea, V. Bilciurescu, *Șantierul arheologic Basarabi (reg. Constanța)*, in “Materiale și cercetări arheologice”, VI (1959), p. 541–566.

<sup>104</sup> I. Barnea, *Ceramica din cariera de cretă de la Basarabi*, in “SCIV”, XIII, 2, 1962, p. 365; idem, *Monumente...*, p. 105; I. Barnea, Șt. Ștefănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 225, 226.

<sup>105</sup> Acc. to idem, *Reprezentarea labirintului pe monumentele rupestre de la Basarabi*, in “SCIV”, XIV, 1963, 1, p. 193; I. Barnea, Șt. Ștefănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 191–228; P. Diaconu, *Istoria Dobrogei în unele lucrări străine recente (II)*, in “Revista de istorie”, 30, 1977, 10, p. 1899. Idem,

The majority of the researchers who dealt with the monastic complex of Basarabi, dated its existence around the end of the Xth century and the beginning of the XIth century<sup>106</sup>. As regards the mode of organization of the monks, the small number of cells carved in the rocky slope may be a clue that the monks from here had rules of an autonomous life – a *laura*<sup>107</sup>. In this case, the majority of them had their cells outside the quarry.

In the center of the Danubian-Pontic territory, the cave from Casian had also been reused. On its walls, in that period, a cross and some Cyrillic characters were incised. Its living was attributed to the Xth century<sup>108</sup>.

Also then the ancient monastic centres – Gyaur Evleri, Tarapanata, Asar Evleri, Shayan Kaia, Valchanova Staya, Haidushkite Kashti and Hitovo – from the Suha Reka and Dobrich valleys, had been reused. The proof of their repopulation is the existence of some ceramic remains, the images – the cross, the arrow, etc. – and the Cyrillic or Runic inscriptions, incised on their walls. This living level was dated in the Xth century<sup>109</sup>.

“Marca de olar” având ca reprezentare un cal, in “SCIVA”, 34, 983, 3, p. 290–292, note 13; idem, *Tradiții daco-romane în monumentul rupestru de la Basarabi (jud. Constanța)*, in “Symposia Tracologica”, 7, Tulcea, 1989, p. 431; idem, *Caii Sfântului Teodor*, in the vol. “Cultură și civilizație la Dunărea de Jos”, 13–14, Călărași, 1995, p. 325; Adrian Rădulescu, Ion Bitoleanu, *op.cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>106</sup> I. Barnea, Șt. Ștefănescu, *op.cit.*, p. 113, 114, 181; I. Barnea, *Aria...*, p. 17; G. Mihăilă, *Inscripții slave vechi de la Murfatlar (Basarabi)*, in “Studii și cercetări lingvistice”, Bucharest, XV, 1964, p. 56; Razvan Theodorescu, *Bizanț, Balcani, Occident la începuturile culturii medievale românești (sec. X–XIV)*, Bucharest, 1974, p. 87; Em. Popescu, *Inscripțiile grecești și latine din secolele IV–XIII descoperite în România*, Bucharest, 1976, p. 210; A. Rădulescu, I. Bitoleanu, *op.cit.*, p. 117; C. Moisescu, *op.cit.*, p. 17; Similar points of view, have also N. A. Oikonomidès, *Recherches sur l'histoire du Bas-Danube aux X<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècles: la Mésopotamie de l'Occident*, in “Revue des Etudes Sud-Est Européennes”, III, 1965, 1–2, p. 63, 64, note 28, acc. to these the small cave church B4 had been inaugurated in the year 982, and researchers P. Diaconu and P. Ș. Năsturel, *Câteva informații în legătură cu complexul arheologic de la Murfatlar (Basarabi)*, in “MO”, XX (1968), 11–12, p. 443, who dated the existence of the complex in the last quarter of the Xth century. In exchange, Maria Comșa, *La civilisation balkano-danubienne (IX<sup>e</sup>–XI<sup>e</sup> siècles) sur le territoire de la R. P. Roumaine*, in “Dacia”, N. S. VII, 1963, p. 423–424, dates the complex in the Xth century, before the year 971. Damian P. Bogdan, *Grafițele de la Basarabi*, in “Analele Universității București. Seria Științe Sociale-Istorice”, 16, IX, 1960, p. 40–41, sustains that the Slavonic inscriptions incised on the walls of the complex belong to the end of the IXth century and the beginning of the Xth century. The same opinion is also shared by R. Harhoiu, *Câteva observații asupra necropolei birituale de la Canlia, județul Constanța*, in “Pontica” V, 1972, p. 569.

<sup>107</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria Bisericii Ortodoxe Romane*, vol. I, second edition, Bucharest, 1991, p. 169; Gh. Atanasov, *Cave...*, p. 29. A similar point of view also has Victor Brătuțescu, in *Sfântul Nicodim*, in “MO”, XXII (1970), 5–6, p. 594.

<sup>108</sup> Em. Alexandrescu, Al. Avram, Oct. Bounegru and C. Chiriac, *Cercetări perieghetice în teritoriul histrian (II)*, in “Pontica”, XIX, 1986, p. 246, note 8; L. Mihăilescu-Bârliba, M. Diaconescu, *quoted work*, p. 430, 431.

<sup>109</sup> The Bulgarian researcher's Gh. Atanasov opinion has evolved with the passing of time. Firstly, he dated them vaster, in the IXth–XIth centuries. Subsequently, he limited their dating only to the Xth century, *op. cit.*, p. 14–17. Also in this last work, in the conventional signs of the map from p. 9, appears a little different dating: centuries X–XI.

Eastern from Suha Reka, in an approximately parallel valley, Kanagyol, other new monastic cave complexes were founded in the early Middle Ages (map 4)<sup>110</sup>. They cover a distance of approximately 50 km on the middle course of the valley. We are talking about coenobitic monasteries, spread out monasteries (*laurae*) or simple hermit cells. The most southern cave monastery is the one in the neighborhood of the present village of Skala, on the right slope of the Kanagyol valley. The small church of the coenobitic monastery, shattered in its largest part, could be found on the first-floor of the complex. Upside it, there were 4 monastic cells. To the northern part, there was the tomb of the complex. On the walls of the tomb lots of representations are incised – numerous crosses, the ship, images of monks and saints – and Runic characters.

To the north, in the neighborhood of the present village Varbino, there were other coenobitic monasteries: Haidushkite Kashti and Varbinskite Peshteri. The first, situated on the left cliff of the valley, consists of a small church, a refectory, 4 cells and a household annex, disposed on two levels. A little to the south, there is a funeral room. On the walls of the cells there are crosses and Cyrillic and Runic inscriptions. The second coenobitic monastery, Varbinskite Peshteri, situated on the right slope of the valley, consists of a small church of mononaval basilical plan, 4 cells and a funeral room. On the walls of the church and of the corridor which links the rooms of the complex, crosses and images of saints are incised. To the northern part of the coenobitic monastery, there are other three groups of cells. It is supposed that they belonged to some retired monks from the monastery.

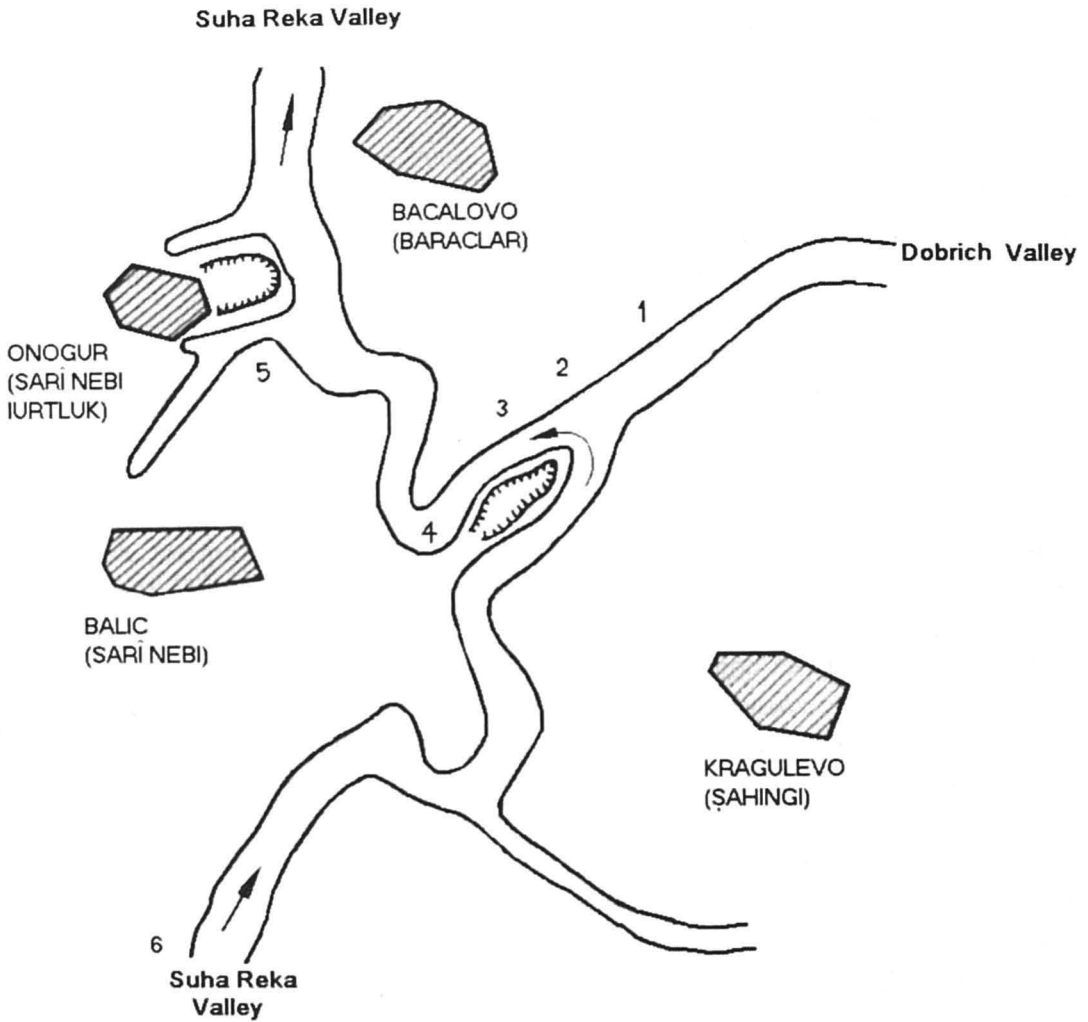
Close to the present settlement Tsar Asen there is the hermit colony – a *laura* – Kokardja. It is disposed on both slopes of the Kanagyol valley, and consisted of 3 small churches and 8 cells. These last ones are spread on a distance of 2–3 km. On the walls of some of the buildings different inscriptions and images – crosses, rhomboidal signs, etc. – are incised.

Other three monastic cave settlements are situated close to the locality Alfatar. The first of them, Gargeshkata Tserkva, situated on the right slope of the valley, has its church of mononaval basilical plan. Next to it there are two cells. On the walls of one of them, there are two crosses incised<sup>111</sup>.

At 800 metres to the north, on the left slope of the valley, there is the cave cloister Dyalanata Peshtera. It consists of a small church and an adjacent cell. On their walls, are incised more than 30 crosses, different representations – mounted warriors, hourglasses, the pentagram, the nine men's morris, the axe, the arrow (picture 3) –, Runic characters and the remains of a Cyrillic inscription.

<sup>110</sup> About the cave monastic complexes from the Kanagyol and Taban valleys, acc. to Gh. Atanasov, *Средновековни скални църкви в силистренски окръг*, in "Izvestija-Varna", t. 20 (35), 1984, p. 91–97; idem, *Няколко ...*, p. 55–57, idem, *Cave...*, p. 19–27.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24, 25.



**MAP 3: The Cave Settlements from the Suha Reka and Dobrich Valleys**

1. Gyaur Evleri
2. Sandaklar Maara
3. Tarapanata
4. Asar Evleri
5. Shayan Kaia
6. Hitovo



Map 4: The Cave Monasteries from the Kanagyol and Taban Valleys.

The last centre, Penchov Pat, is a coenobitic monastery that consists of a small church and 11 adjacent rooms, united among them.

Also on the Kanagyol valley, between the localities of Alfatar and Vasil Levski, on top of the right slope, there are two natural columns of stone, on top of which, it is believed<sup>112</sup>, hermits-Stylites had lived. At the base of the largest column, there is a cave arranged as a chapel of ease. On one of its walls a ship superposed by a cross is represented. Another arranged cave is situated close to the second column. Upside its entrance there is a cross incised.

Another cave cell exists in the Taban valley, which intersects the Kanagyol valley. Another monastic settlement, which doesn't exist today, could be found in the place where the two valleys met. It consisted of a small church and a few individual cave cells<sup>113</sup>.

The most eastern monastic cave centre, Ayazmo, is situated on the left rocky slope of the Senebir valley, where the present locality of Ruino lies. This is a coenobitic monastery that consisted of a small church, 4 cells and a funeral room<sup>114</sup>.

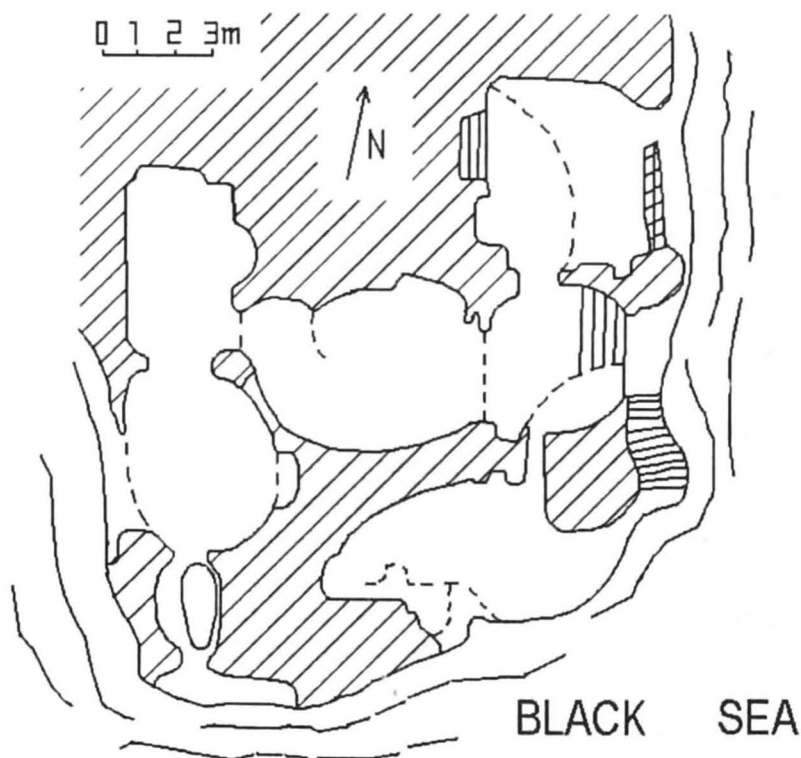
<sup>112</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 26, 27.

<sup>113</sup> This centre had been shattered at the beginning of the XXth century, when the working of the local stone quarry started, *idem, Няколко...*, p. 57.

<sup>114</sup> *Idem, Cave...*, p. 27, 28.

The monastic cave complexes from the Kanagyol, Taban and Senebir valleys, were attributed to the end of the Xth century (after 971) – and the first half of the XIth century. It is considered that they ended their existence during the big invasion of the Petchenegs in the year 1036<sup>115</sup>.

On the seaside of the Black Sea, the ancient cave buildings from Yaila and Kamen Briag had been reused. A testimony for this, are the crosses, the inscriptions in Greek and Runic characters, and the graffitti incised on their walls<sup>116</sup>. Yet, other new had been founded. We refer to the coenobitic monastery arranged in the extreme southern part of the rocky mountain from Caliacra Cape<sup>117</sup>. It consisted of a small church, a funeral chapel of ease, 5 cells and a funeral room, all of them densely grouped (picture 9). They were dated in the Xth–XIth centuries<sup>118</sup>.



Picture 9: The Caliacra Cape  
– The plan of the Cave Complex.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20. Initially, Gh. Atanasov, *Средновековни...*, p. 92, 97 and idem, *Няколко...*, p. 56, 47, 61, and other Bulgarian researchers – R. Rasev, *Старобългарски укрепления по Долни Дунав*, Varna, 1982, p. 104–105 and Liudmila Dončeva-Petkova, *Българска битова керамика през ранното средновековие*, Sofia, 1977, p. 33–98 – dated them vaster, in the IXth–XIth centuries.

<sup>116</sup> Gh. Atanasov, in the *op. cit.*, p. 60, 61 and next.

<sup>117</sup> Karel Škorpil, Hermin Škorpil, *Североисточна...*, in “СБНУ”, VII, 1892, p. 75 and next.

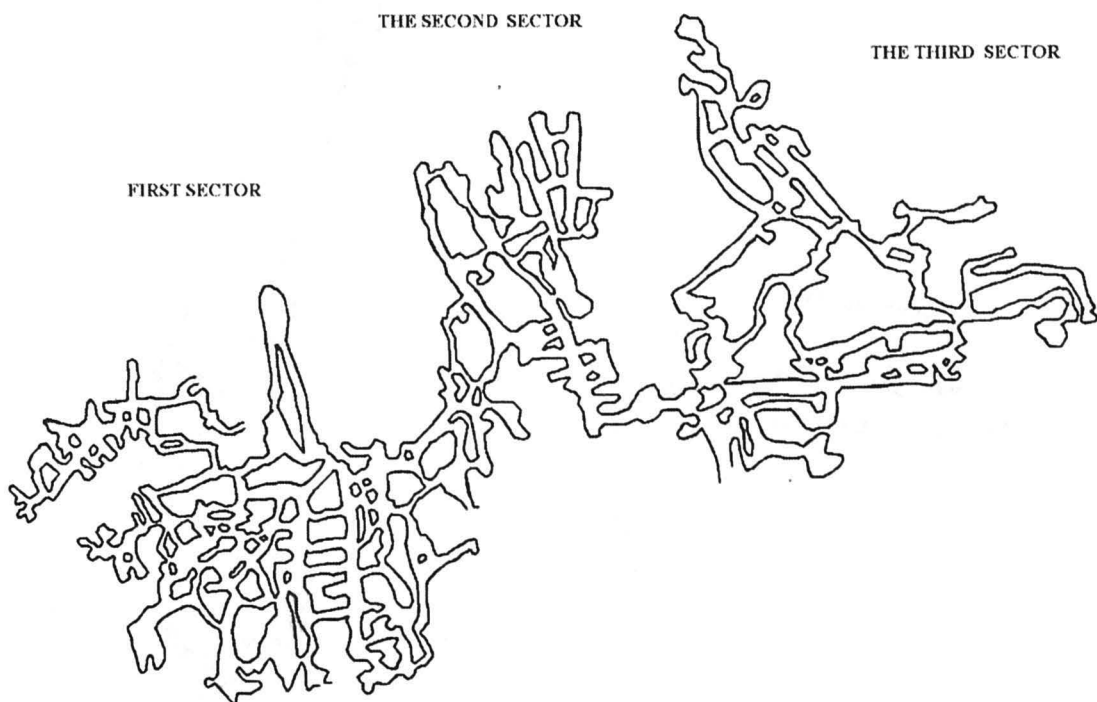
<sup>118</sup> Gh. Atanasov, *Cave...*, p. 1, the map. Also in their case, they were initially dated by Gh. Atanasov, *Няколко...*, p. 60, 61, in the IXth–XIth centuries.



Photo 3. Basarabi (B4): the image of Saint Theodore.



Photo 4. Basarabi (B4): fragment of the Altar and Piscine of liturgical destination.



Picture 10: Limanu – The plan of the Cave.

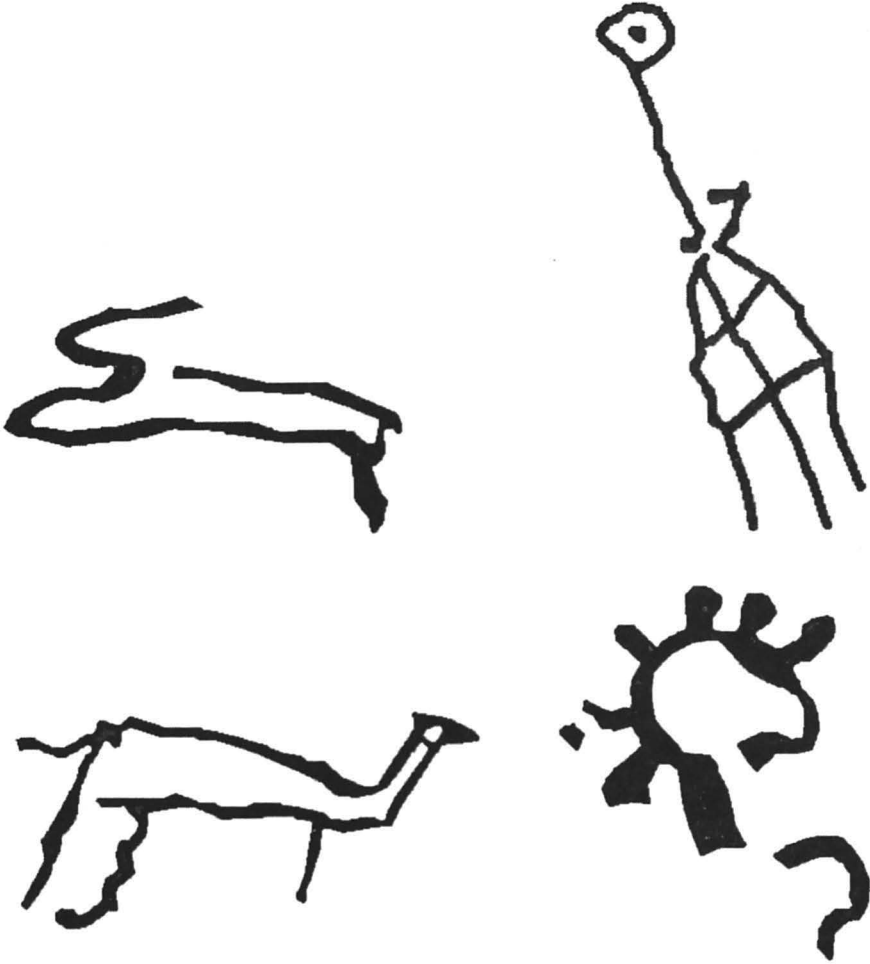
It's possible that other two monastic cave settlements might have existed close to Mangalia. One of them is the cave from Limanu (picture 10), arranged after the plan of a labyrinth – with rooms for living, access corridors and ventilation system<sup>119</sup>. Two of the rooms arranged here – “the rooms with altars” – seem to have been utilized as chapels of ease<sup>120</sup>. On the cave's walls graffitti were also identified – crosses, images of riders, horses, stags, beavers, hares, birds, the labyrinth, the solar motif (picture 11), etc. – and Cyrillic inscriptions plotted with black paint or incised. The animal remains – bones of wild and tamed animals – and the grinder discovered in the cave, are a clue that the inhabitants of Limanu, like those of Dumbrăveni, had a permissive food diet.

The living level from the early Middle Ages from the cave of Limanu were attributed to the Xth–XIth centuries<sup>121</sup>.

<sup>119</sup> About the cave from Limanu, acc. to Margareta Dumitrescu, Tr. Orghidan, Joana Tănăsachi, M. Grigorescu, *Contribuții la studiul monografic al peșterii de la Limanu*, the writings of the Speleology Institute “Emil Racoviță”, 4, 1965, p. 21–58; Vasile Boroneanț, Radu Ciuceanu, *Cercetările arheologice din peștera de la Limanu, județul Constanța*, in “Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor”, the series “Monumente istorice și de artă”, 46, no. 2, 1977, p. 49–57; Vasile Boroneanț, *Un original monument arheologic european – Labirintul subteran de la Limanu*, in “Magazin Istoric”, 13, may 1979, 5 (146), p. 10–12, 61.

<sup>120</sup> V. Boroneanț, R. Ciuceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 56, 57; T. Papasima, C. Chera, *op. cit.*, p. 291.



Picture 11: Limanu – drawings on the walls of the Cave.

Near Mangalia, a Hellenistic tomb was also identified with a funeral room and *dromos*, reused in the early Middle Ages<sup>122</sup>. Behind the building, there is another one, of a rectangular plan, in the shape of a tower filled with stones<sup>123</sup>. On the walls of the ancient tomb different graffiti are incised: pedestrian and mounted standard bearers, animals – she-goats, stags, canidae, a wild boar, a beheaded animal –, ships and different symbols – a rhombus with a cross sign in it, two pentagrams, a picture of a monogrammatic aspect, triangles. This living level was attributed to the Xth–XIth centuries<sup>124</sup>.

<sup>122</sup> Acc. to T. Papasima, V. Georgescu, *Însemnări pe marginea sgraffiti-lor din mormântul elenistic de la Mangalia*, in “Pontica”, XXVII, 1994, p. 223–228; T. Papasima, C. Chera, *op.cit.*, p. 292.

<sup>123</sup> It is supposed that the the interior space had been filled with stones simultaneously with the raising of the building’s walls, acc. to T. Papasima, V. Georgescu, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 223; T. Papasima, C. Chera, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

If the ancient tomb had had, in that stage, a monastic destination, it's possible that the adjacent tower-annex might have been utilized as a column for the insulation of a stylite<sup>125</sup>.

An isolated catacomb was also identified in the tumular necropolis of the fortress of Histria<sup>126</sup>. It is digged in the loess and it consists of a central room and two galleries. On the walls of the main gallery a few signs are incised: an epigraphic, well-drawn “K”, a “K” in a recumbent position which is thought to be a double pentagram<sup>127</sup>. The catacomb was attributed to the feudal period<sup>128</sup>. Its destination was related, with a few limitations, to the rest of the Danubian-Pontic cave complexes<sup>129</sup>.

A distinct case is represented by the stone quarry from Axiopolis, from the early Middle Ages<sup>130</sup>. There, the ruins of a possible vaulted dwelling have been identified. The archaeologist Petre Diaconu considers that those are the ruins of a chapel similar to those from the Basarabi quarry<sup>131</sup>. A bas-relief that represents Hercules Saxanus in an unskilful manner was also discovered. The representation was attributed to the Xth century<sup>132</sup>.

We strongly believe that these are only part of the monastic communities from the early Middle Ages. Some of them, like the one from the crossing point of the Taban and Kanagyol valleys, were shattered by earthquakes or by people's interventions during the modern period. Others have not been discovered yet. It's possible that similar monastic cave centres might have also existed in the region of

<sup>125</sup> In that period, the second half of the Xth century, in the neighbourhood of Constantinople, lived Luca (+ 979), one of the most famous stylites from the history of the Church, acc. to Tomáš Špidlík, *Spiritualitatea răsăritului creștin*, vol. III, “Monahismul”, translated into Romanian by Ioan I. Ica jr., Ed. Deisis, Sibiu, 2000, p. 193, 194 (= Tomáš Špidlík, Michelina Tenace, Richard Čemus, *Questions monastiques en Orient*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 259, Roma, 1999). It had been established that this vertical insulation mode wasn't unknown, not even by the monks from the Danubian-Pontic region, also met on the Kanagyol valley.

<sup>126</sup> Acc. to Petre Alexandrescu, *Histria, 2. Necropola tumulară. Săpături 1955–1961*, Bucharest, 1966, p. 233–235.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 235.

<sup>128</sup> P. Alexandrescu, in the *op. cit.*, p. 233, calls it, because of this, the “feudal catacomb”. Also acc. to T. Papisima, C. Chera, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

<sup>129</sup> P. Alexandrescu, *op. cit.*, p. 235; T. Papisima and C. Chera, in the *op. cit.*, p. 292.

<sup>130</sup> The quarry had initially been attributed to the Roman Age, acc. to Gr. Florescu, *Cariera romană de la Cernavodă*, in “Analele Dobrogei”, XVII, 1936, p. 33–46; A. Rădulescu, *Aspecte privind exploatarea pietrei în Dobrogea romană*, in “Pontica”, V, 1971, p. 187–194. Subsequently, P. Diaconu, in *Cariera de piatră din secolul al X lea de la Cernavodă*, in “Pontica”, XIII, 1980, p. 191, 192, had dated it, in the second half of the Xth century. His point of view hadn't been rejected neither by T. Papisima, nor by C. Chera, in the *op. cit.*, p. 294.

<sup>131</sup> P. Diaconu, in the *op. cit.*, p. 193, had established a relationship between the archaeological complex of Cernavodă and the monuments from Basarabi. The similarities between the two quarries refer to the chronological classification, the system of the working of the stone and the nature of the ceramic used by the workers.

<sup>132</sup> Acc. to *ibidem*, p. 194.

the present monastery of St. Andrew from the southwestern Dobruja, maybe even in the cave from the precincts of the present monastery<sup>133</sup>.

As can be noticed, the Danubian-Pontic monastic settlements from the early Middle Ages belong to each of the monastic organizations: coenobitic monasteries, spread out monasteries (*laurae*) or simple isolated hermit cells. Also diverse seems to have been the life of the monks who populated them. At Dumbrăveni or Limanu it had been, it seems, very permissive, similar to the one that the rest of the local population had. To the opposite pole, there might have existed hermits who had detached from the coenobitic communities, who might have followed a much more restrictive food diet. Regarding the ethnical affiliation of the monks, this was a varied one: grand-Romanians, Slav-Bulgarians, Varangians, Petchenegs, Greeks – in fact, a mirror of the local, ethnical mosaic from that time. Otherwise, the majority of the monks from here seem to have proceeded from among the local population. Clues to this are the popular aspect – schematic representations with naive features – and the themes of the pictures – elements of paleo-Christian art<sup>134</sup> and also of the Greek-Roman one<sup>135</sup> –, typical for this geographical region.

The beginnings of the Danubian-Pontic monastic cave centres seem to be related with the presence of the Byzantine monks in the region. Their arrival had been occasioned, firstly, by the cristianization of the Bulgarians<sup>136</sup> and then, by the Christian mission within the Petchenegs. It seems very probable that precisely the Byzantine monks, proceeded from the cave centres of Cappadocia, or of Cappadocian formation, or advocates of the Cappadocian way of life, might have been the ones who had influenced for the organization of the Danubian-Pontic cave centres<sup>137</sup>. We refer not only to the architectural similitudes (pictures 12, 13) that

<sup>133</sup> It has to be specified that similare graffitti to those from the cave monastic communities, had also been identified in the neighbourhood of the village Aliman, from the south-west of Dobruja, acc. to T. Papisima, C. Chera, *op. cit.*, p. 289–295. Moreover, processed caves there are also on the territory of the former village Kalaigi Dere, northern from the Shabla Cape, on the seaside of the Black Sea, acc. to K. Škorpil and H. Škorpil, in the *op. cit.*, p. 55 and next.

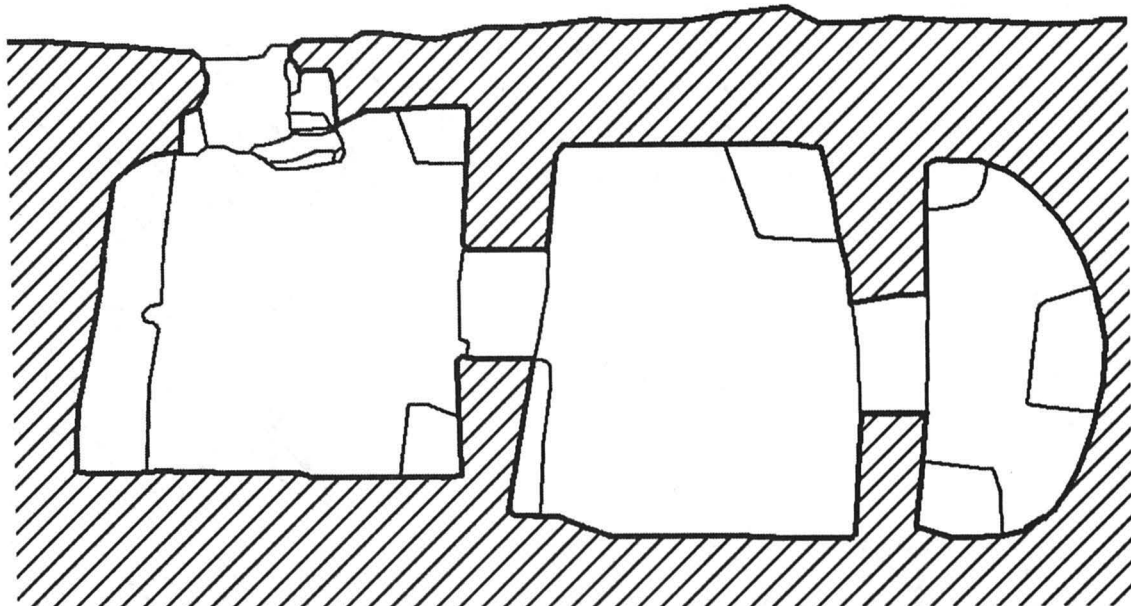
<sup>134</sup> This is about the compound *crux gammata*, *orans*, the images of joined edge to edge peacocks, the fish, the ship, the pigeon etc..

<sup>135</sup> Such as the pentagram, the labyrinth, the horses, the wolves and the dogs, the hares, the foxes, the hunter riders, the square or the rectangle with diagonals, the fascis with axes, the nine men's morrises, the feet, Hercules Saxanus. At least some of these – ex. the labyrinth – had acquired a Christian significance.

<sup>136</sup> On the left shore of the Danube, where the urban centre Durostorum is, had been discovered the seal of a Byzantine monk called Gavriil Monoamartolos – “+ΓΑΒΡΗΛ ΤΩ ΜΟΝΟΑΜΑΡΤΩΛΩ” – dated in the IXth century, acc. to I. Barnea, *Noi sigilii bizantine la Dunărea de Jos*, in „SCIV”, 2, 17, 1966, p. 286.

<sup>137</sup> About the Byzantine mission of christianizing the Bulgarians, Theophanus the Successor wrote: “the monks had been asked to come from the mountains and from the caves and have been sent there (in Bulgaria) by the emperor” *apud* Gh. Atanasov, *Cave...*, p. 6. We have to specify that the event took place short time after the reestablishment of the creed of the icons, in the year 843. In that time, the fame of the Cappadocian monachism, that had more to endure during the iconoclast crisis, increased in the Byzantine Empire. These, also reflect in the artistic plan, meaning that the

exist between the Danubian-Pontic cave centres and the Cappadocian ones<sup>138</sup>, but also to the fact that none of them is previous to the Byzantine monastic mission at the Lower Danube<sup>139</sup>.



Picture 12: Basarabi – The plan of the Cave Church B1.

Although, gradually, the Byzantine monks yielded the initiative to the monks that proceeded from the local population, the faith confessed within these centres seems to have remained the orthodox one. A clue to this is represented by some inscriptions and images incised on the walls of the complexes. In an inscription at Basarabi – the church B4<sup>140</sup> – the name of the Holy Trinity is invoked: “In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ...”. It is a clue that the monks

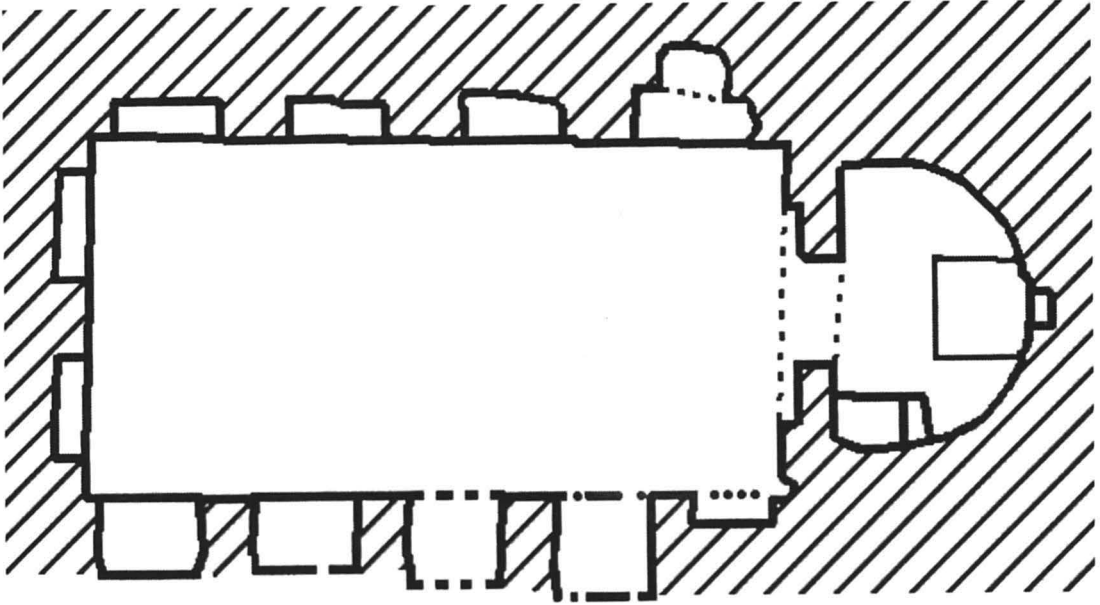
iconographic Cappadocian art had influenced the iconography of the urban centres, especially Constantinople’s – acc. to G. de Jerphanion, *Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce et la place de leurs peintures dans le développement de l’iconographie chrétienne*, in “Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice”, 24, 1934, p. 145–184; V. Lazarev, *op.cit.*, p. 238, 239, 288, 292 and next.

<sup>138</sup> Circular excessively large apses, related with the rest of the group of the small churches, and the funeral semi-circular west-oriented apse placed to their western side, narrow entrances to the altar, naves which had their breadth larger than their length., the existence of the altars with quadrilateral plan, and of the pools for ritual washing (picture 4), acc. to Gh. Atanasov, in “Arheologia”, 1991, p. 43; P. Diaconu, *Capadocia, Dobrogea și goții (I și II)*, in “Tomis”, 1993, 1–2 (274–275), XXVII, p. 13 and 1993, 3 (276), XXVIII, p. 13 and 15.

<sup>139</sup> It seems that the initiative of organizing Danubian-Pontic cave monastic centres had belonged to the Byzantine monks. In their organizing, also contributed the local population. It was the unique that knew the location of the ancient cave settlements – placed in isolated and not very inaccessible regions – repopulated now. With the passing of the time, the initiative had been continued by the monks who proceeded from the local population, who were more numerous.

<sup>140</sup> The small church B4 from Basarabi, placed on one of the final living levels of the complex, corresponds with the moment of maximum development of the community of Basarabi.

from here confessed the Trinity dogma. Then, the iconographic images – the faces of saints with auras – and the mention of “the Holy Fathers” in this small church – “...And God give alms to you, together with the Holy Fathers. Amen! ...” – prove the honouring of the creed of the saints.

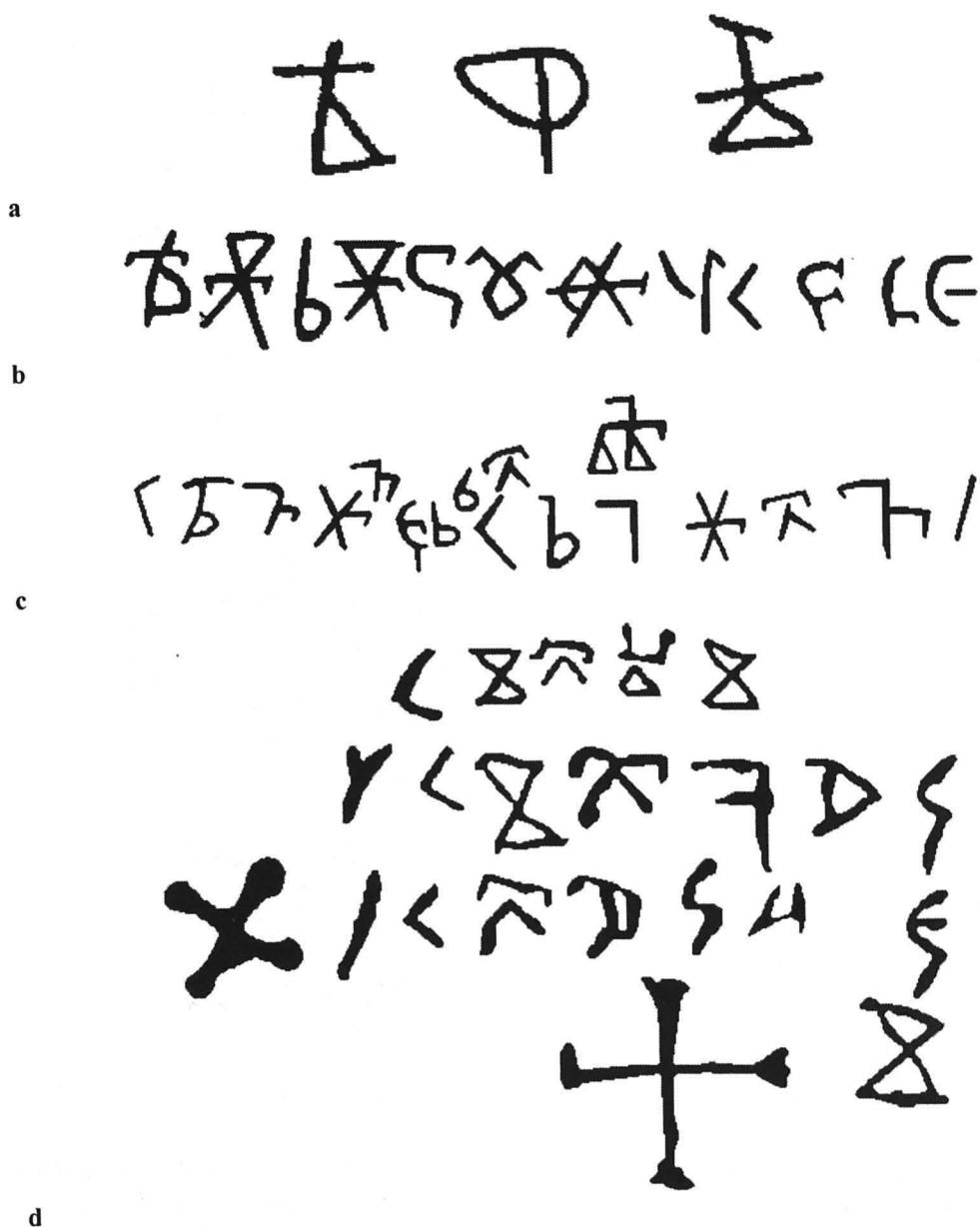


Picture 13: Cappadocia  
– The plan of the northern Cave Chapel from Toqale Kilise (Guerem).

Another testimony is represented by the relationship of the monks from here with the rest of the Orthodox Church. Some of the saints incised are represented in Byzantine liturgical vestments (picture 7). Evidence is the stylized icon of Saint Theodore (photo 3), incised on the iconostasis of the small church B4 from Basarabi, in a period of time when the veneration of this saint took proportions within the Byzantine Church. There are indications of the communion between the monks and the rest of the Eastern Church. It's difficult to believe that a heretic community<sup>141</sup> would have kept up such relationships, and, even more, that it would have allowed being influenced by the example of the Byzantine Church<sup>142</sup>.

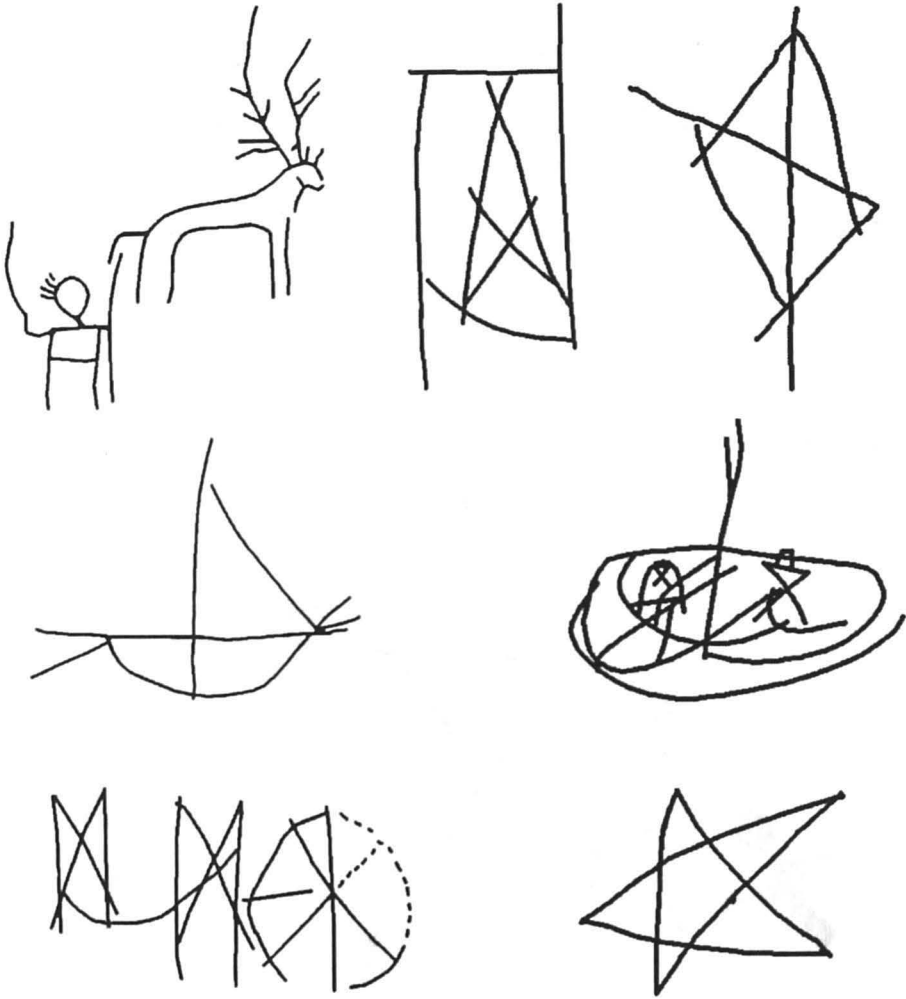
<sup>141</sup> In the second half of the Xth century, in the neighbourhood of the town Filipopole from the south-east of the Balkan half-isle, the Paulician heretics had been colonized. Yet, it is not very probable that the monks from the Danubian-Pontic cave settlements could have been followers of this heresy. The Paulicians rejected, between other things, the Trinity dogma, the honouring of the cross and of the saints, the clerical hierarchy, and even the monastic life, acc. to Ioan Rămureanu, Milan Șesan, Teodor Bodogae, *Istoria bisericească universală*, vol I (1–1054), second edition, Bucharest, 1987. Later, from the sect of the Paulicians arose the one of the Bogomils. They assumed, roughly speaking, the theologic ideas of their precursors, acc. to Dumitru Vasilescu, *Bogomilismul*, in “ST”, XV (1963), 7–8, p. 444–460.

<sup>142</sup> As regards the presence of the heathen elements of Greek-Roman art, some of them had acquired a new Christian meaning; others might have been tolerated by the superior church



Picture 14: Basarabi – Runic inscriptions.

authorities, because they didn't affect the basic substance of the faith. Such case can be found in Dumbrăveni, in the monastic complex from the Roman-Byzantine period. In one of the tombs from the second half of the IVth century, had been identified a coin whose presence was related to the ancient heathen faith of the mite of Charon, acc. to C. Chiriac, T. Papisima, *op. cit.*, p. 198. So, we can talk about the perpetuation of an ancient heathen practice precisely in a Christian monastery. Then, it's possible that some of those representations might have been incised by the pilgrims who visited the settlements, and who, in this way, couched their demands and hopes in front of the divinity. Such situation can be found in the monastery of Ravna from Bulgaria – acc. to Rossina Kostova, *Graffiti from the Monastery of Ravna, Bulgaria*, internet: <http://www.anisa.st/kostova.htm>, the chap. : "Communication".



Picture 15: Mangalia – Drawings on the walls of the Hellenic Tomb.

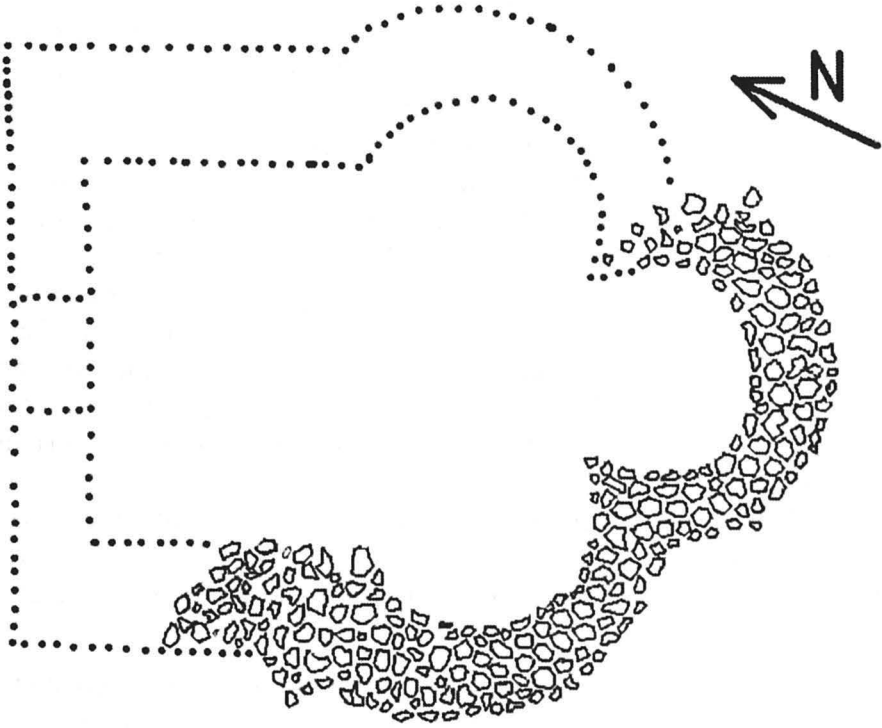
The inscriptions of Basarabi reveal, moreover, that these cave settlements were, like the contemporary monastery of Ravna (in northeastern Bulgaria), pilgrimage centres for the faithful people in this region. Some inscriptions incised in the same church B4 keep the name of a believer – Simeon<sup>143</sup> – and even the one of a priest – Aian [Dimian]<sup>144</sup> – who had visited the monastic settlement<sup>145</sup>. The

<sup>143</sup> “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, bowed down the undeserving thrall Simeon, for the first time in the church, in the month August, day 31...”

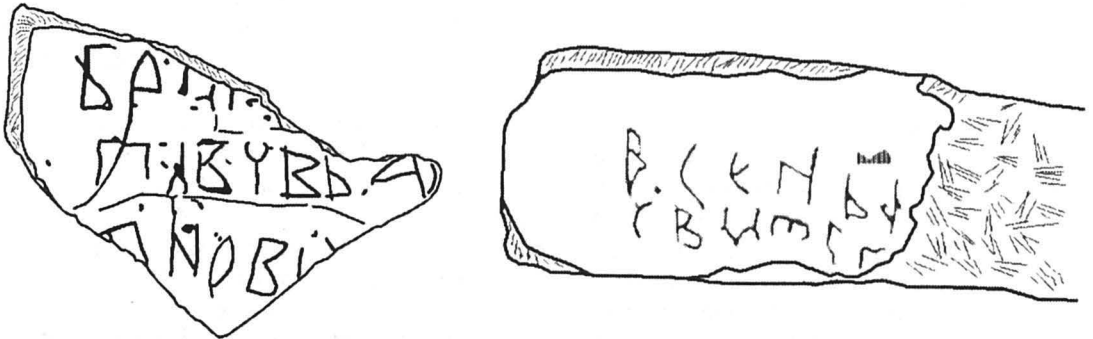
<sup>144</sup> “[I] Aian [Dimian?] the priest, walk on the road (=travel), light candles for my sins ... people, in this church. And God give alms to you, together with the Holy Fathers. Amen! Dimian [month] May”.

<sup>145</sup> Also after a pilgrimage or after the visit of a clerical, maybe a Hierarch, had been incised, as it seems, the inscription: “The priest came here, in this place ... in the month of October, day 4. He came with us ... I wrote ...in January” (BB4).

pilgrimage was determined, in both cases, by the consciousness of the sins that overwhelmed them, and by the desire of having these sins forgiven. They reveal, it seems, the perception of the contemporaries towards these settlements: holy places where the presence of God and His working were felt stronger than in other places.



Picture 16: The Cetățuia Hill (Niculițel).



Picture 17: The Cetățuia Hill (Niculițel)  
– inscription fragments.

The Danubian-Pontic monastic cave settlements, like those from the Roman-Byzantine period, suddenly stopped their existence in the first half of the XIth century. Their disappearance was related to the big invasion of the Petchenegs from the year

1036<sup>146</sup>. So, the reason that determined their abandonment is also represented by the disorder caused by the invasions of the barbarians.

These invasions, firstly that of the Petchenegs, then that of the Cumans, came in turn, during the whole XIth century<sup>147</sup>. After the Cuman invasion from 1095, even the hierarch of Axopolis had to leave the province, obtaining his transfer to Asia Minor<sup>148</sup>. Consequently, the absence of any other piece of information regarding the existence of the monastic centres between the Danube and the Black Sea is not astonishingly in these circumstances.

Yet, in the XIth–XIIth centuries are certified, at the Lower Danube, Byzantine monks involved in the mission of the christianization of the barbarians from the region. The Byzantine chronicler Georgios Kedrenos mentions that, for the christianization of the Petcheneg ruler Kegen and of his fellow countrymen, who took refuge in the Danubian-Pontic territory<sup>149</sup>, around the middle of the XIth century, a Christian-Byzantine mission was sent that consisted of monks. The leader of the mission was a certain monk called Eftimie<sup>150</sup>. About the same period – the second half of the XIth century –, another Byzantine monk, Saint Cyril Phileotes crossed the waters of the Ister (Danube), wishing to christianize the barbarian Pechenegs<sup>151</sup>.

Also to the Byzantine mission at the Lower Danube must be related the seal of the “Extense Spread out Monastery of Saint Evtimios” (“ΣΦΡΑΓΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΕΥΘΥΜΙΟΥ”), dated in the XIth–XIIth centuries,

<sup>146</sup> Gh. Atanasov. *Cave...*, p. 7 and 8. He points out the appearance, in the XIIth century, of other cave monastic settlements on the rivers Provadiiska and Rusenski Lom – the XIIth–XIVth centuries. So, it seems that Dobruja had been abandoned for the adjacent quieter regions.

<sup>147</sup> Acc. to A. Rădulescu, I. Bitoleanu, *op. cit.*, p. 191 and next.

<sup>148</sup> At the metropolitan church of Abidos and at the archbishopric of Apros, acc. to Em. Popescu, *Știri noi despre istoria Dobrogei în secolul al XI-lea: Episcopia de Axiopolis*, in the vol. “Monumente istorice și izvoare creștine”, p. 127–147 (= *Notes on the History of Dobroudja in the 11th Century: the Bishopric of Axiopolis*, in “Byzantina”, 15, 1989, p. 237–267 and in the vol. “Christianitas dacoromana”, p. 421–438).

<sup>149</sup> Acc. to Nicolae Banescu, *Istoria Imperiului bizantin [Imperiul Bizantin classic] (610–1081)*, ed. by T. Teoteoi, second vol., Bucharest, 2003, p. 606 and next. The taking refuge of the Petchenegs ruled by Kegen in the Danubian-Pontic territory took place around the year 1048. In the opinion of some historians, the fortresses from the Danube that they received under domination, from Byzantium, were in the northern part of the territory. For the issue of the localization of these fortresses, acc. to P. Diaconu, *Les Petchénègues au Bas-Danube*, Bucharest, 1970, p. 58.

<sup>150</sup> “... more important is the fact that he [Kegen] received as he [the emperor Constantine IX Monomachus (1042–1055)] promised, the Holy Christening, he and his men, being sent a certain Eftimie, a devout monk, to implement the divine plunging in the river Istru (=The Danube) and to make them all acolytes of the Holy Christening”, Georgios Kedrenos, *Compendiu de istorii (Compendium historiarum)*, 33, in the col. “FHDR”, vol. III, Scriitori Bizantini (sec. XI–XIV), Bucharest, 1975, p. 152, 153.

<sup>151</sup> Nikolaos Kataskepenos, *Viața și faptele și povestirea unor minuni ale Sfântului Părintelui nostru Chiril din Philea*, (ΒΙΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΡΙΚΗ ΘΑΥΜΑΤΩΝ ΔΙΗΓΗΣΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΟΣΙΟΥ ΠΑΤΡΟΣ ΗΜΩΝ ΚΥΡΙΑΛΛΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΦΙΛΕΩΤΟΥ ΣΥΓΓΡΑΦΕΙΣ ΠΑΡΑ ΤΟΥ ΟΣΙΟΥ ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΥ ΤΟΥ ΚΑΤΑΣΚΕΠΕΝΟΥ), 5, 9; 47, 7, in „FHDR”, vol. III, p. 158–161.

discovered where the town Durostorum is, on the left shore of the Danube. Another contemporary seal – the XIth–XIIth centuries –, discovered at Nufăru, to the northern side of the territory, has impregnated on it, the effigy of the monastery Kokinobaphos, near Constantinople<sup>152</sup>. They suggest the presence, in the region, of some monks from these Byzantine centres, involved in the process of christianization of the Pechenegs.

It's difficult to specify the influence of these Byzantine monks, in the evolution of the Danubian-Pontic monachism. It isn't out of the question that some of the natives, following their example, might have taken up the monastic life. It's possible that also they might have been directly involved in the preaching of the Christian faith among the barbarians or even to have retired to the Byzantine monasteries from the south<sup>153</sup>.

In the second half of the XIIth century, in the neighborhood of the present locality of Niculițel, another monastery was founded (map 2). It was placed on the Cetățuia hill in the middle of a defence wall from the XIth–XIIth centuries. The zone, afforested and isolated, suited perfectly the demands of a monastic community<sup>154</sup>.

The monastery consisted of a small church made of stone, of a trifolium simple plan (picture 16) and a few cells placed around it. In the ruins of the complex, a few brick fragments with crosses incised on them were also discovered. On other two fragments, the remains of some Paleoslavonic inscriptions were kept (picture 17). In the former defence wall that surrounded the monastery, a tomb was also identified.

The monastery from the hill Cetățuia was dated in the second half of the XIIth century – the first half of the XIIIth century<sup>155</sup>. It was a coenobitic monastery.

<sup>152</sup> I. Barnea, *Sceaux byzantins du Nord de la Dobroudja*, in "Revue des Etudes Sud-Est Européennes", XXIII, 1985, 1, p. 34, 35.

<sup>153</sup> Such case will be met later, during the guidance of the ecumenical Patriarch Theodosius (1179–1183). In a letter addressed to him, by a Greek monk, is mentioned the case of a monk "a Scythian came from the high mountains from the river Physon – Danube, called Istru", settled to a Byzantine "patriarchal monastery", acc. to J. Darrouzes, *Un recueil épistolaire du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Académie Roumaine, Cod, Gr, 508, in "Revue des Etudes Byzantines", 30, 1972, p. 199–230.

<sup>154</sup> The monastic destination of this complex is accepted by I. Barnea, Șt. Ștefănescu, *op.cit.*, p. 239; I. Barnea, *Monumente istorice...*, p. 111–112; idem, *Arta...*, p. 20, 96; P. Diaconu, *Despre datarea circumvalației și a "Bisericeții treflate" de la Niculițel*, in "SCIV", 23, 1972, 2, p. 310; idem, *Din nou despre încadrarea cronologică a valului și mănăstirii de la Niculițel*, in "SCIVA", 26, 1975, 1, p. 101; C. Moisescu, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>155</sup> P. Diaconu, *Despre datarea...*, p. 314; idem, *Din nou despre...*, p. 101. Other researchers, I. Barnea, *Monumente istorice...*, p. 111; idem, *Arta...*, p. 20, 96; C. Moisescu, *op.cit.*, p. 24; E. Oberländer-Târnoaveanu, *Pentru o nouă datare a bisericeții cu plan treflat de la Niculițel (jud. Tulcea)*, in "Peuce", 8, 1980, p. 452, 455, tend towards placing the beginnings of the monastery in the first half of the XIIIth century. In the same XIIth–XIIIth centuries had also been founded the cave coenobitic monastery Aladja, close to Varna (Bulgaria) (map 2). It was disposed on two levels, and consists of a church and a funeral chapel, six cells, two annexes and a burial vault. On the walls of the complex can be found graffiti – the cross, the ship – but also icons of painted saints, with its conventional signs in Greek. In the opinions of Gh. Atanasov and Dimo Cesmegiev, *Средновековният скален манастир до Варна (Аладжа манастир)*, in "Izvestia-Varna", 25 (40), 1989, p. 110–140.

For this opinion pleads, firstly, its architectural plan: the small church, placed in the center, surrounded by the annex buildings and by the cells of the monks. The creed language used by the monks seems to have been the Paleoslavonic. The remains of the inscriptions in Cyrillic characters discovered among the ruins, suggest this hypothesis. It's possible that starting with this moment, gradually, under the influence of the Slav culture centres from the south, the Paleoslavonic language might have competed more and more the Greek language, used by the church Byzantine hierarchy. Also the plan of the church – simple trifolium – is another clue for the Slav influence from the south. It is similar to other prayer places from the Balkans<sup>156</sup>, from among which, the closest is church no. 28 from Piliska – the XIth century<sup>157</sup>.

It may be supposed that also the monastery from the Cetățuia hill, like the forward cave ones, reflects, from the ethnical point of view, the situation from the region: Romanians, Slav-Bulgarians, and, maybe even Petchenegs or Cumans.

The destruction of the monastery, like the case of other monastic centres, is related either with one of the late invasions of the Cumans, or with the big Tartar invasion from the year 1241<sup>158</sup>.

After that moment, untill the occupation of the Danubian-Pontic territory by the Ottomans during the XVth century, there weren't other known monastic centres between the Danube and the Black Sea. Very probably, again the political-military disorder had an impact upon the religious life of the territory, especially upon the monastic life. Beginning with the second quarter of the XIVth century, even the situation of the Byzantine metropolitan seat from Vicina worsened so badly, because the permanent threats of the Tartars, so that the hierarchs avoided staying in their town of residence<sup>159</sup>.

In these circumstances, it may be supposed that the majority of the monks from here, either had taken refuge in the isolated places of the region – the Danube Delta, forests and marshes – or, more sure, like the last metropolitan bishop of Vicina, had found their peace in the north of the Danube, in the territories controled by the Romanian rulers.

As regards the monastic life from the left side of the Danube, there are two documentary pieces of information that regard also the territory between the

life in Aladja restarted in the XIIth–XIIIth centuries. The ending of the monastery is related with the occupation of the region by the Ottomans.

<sup>156</sup> We refer to the churches of the monasteries Saint Panteleemon and Saint Naum from Ohrida – R. Theodorescu, *Un mileniu de artă la Dunărea de Jos (400–1400)*, Bucharest, 1976, p. 128 –, to the church of the monastery Koubelidiki from Castoria – G. Milet, *L'école grecque dans l'architecture byzantine*, Paris, 1916, p. 92 and next; G. A. Sotiriou, *Χριστιανική και βυζαντινή Αρχαιολογία*, I, Athens, 1942, p. 463 –, to the church Saint Elias from Thessalonica – V. Vătășianu, *Istoria artei feudale din Țările Române*, I, Bucharest, 1959, p. 130.

<sup>157</sup> K. Miatev, *Arhitektura v srednovekovna Bălgaria*, Sofia, 1965, p. 103.

<sup>158</sup> E. Oberländer – Târnoveanu, *op. cit.*, p. 455.

<sup>159</sup> Acc. to I. Rămureanu, *Mitropolia Vicinei și rolul ei în păstrarea ortodoxiei în ținuturile românești*, in the vol. "De la Dunăre la Mare", p. 157–160.

Danube and the Sea. In the first case, we refer to a document issued in the first years of the XVth century – 1404–1406 –, in a period when Dobruja was under the rule of Wallachia, governed by Mircea the Ancient (1386–1408). By a document, the ruler exempted from taxes and damaged the swamps of the monastery Cozia, placed on the Danube “beginning from the Săpatu till the hydrant of Ialovnița (Ialomița)”<sup>160</sup>. As the order was addressed firstly to the *kephalia* of Durostor, it can be supposed that the properties, at least partially, were under its responsibility. Although the document orders that the swamps have to be administrated by a person who “will be liked by the abbot Sofronie and by all the monks”<sup>161</sup> from Cozia, it isn’t out of the question that some of the monks from the monastery might have been present, at least recurrently, for supervising the activities developed here.

The second document is a similar one. On the 15th of August 1471, the king Stephen the Great of Moldavia (1457–1504) exempted from custom duty the monks of the monastery Pobrata “because of the wheat and honey that they will sell to Kilia”<sup>162</sup>. It refers to the fortress Kilia Veche (Old Kilia), situated in the north of Dobruja, and governed, at that time, by the ruler of Moldavia. Also in this case, it isn’t out of the question that, in the fortress from the Danube, some monks from Probota might have been present.

Both pieces of information have a secondary value related to this subject. It’s difficult to believe that the monks from Cozia or Probota could have contributed in a way or another, to the development of the monastic life between the Danube and the Sea. Rather, out of the Dobrujan Christian faithful people who came into contact with them, those who wanted to join the monastic life, left Dobruja for the monasteries from the left side of the Danube.

In the end, it must be said that in the Middle Ages, between the Danube and the Black Sea, Franciscan monks also acted. The exact moment of their settling here, isn’t known. In a letter of a certain “friar Ladislau”, that has the date of 10 April 1287<sup>163</sup>, is mentioned the christening of a famous Mongolian, the son of a militar commander. The locality where the christening took place is considered by the researchers to have been the fortress Vicina from the north of the Danubian-Pontic territory. In that time, the Franciscans had already in the town from the Danube, a simple residence (*loca*)<sup>164</sup>. Those were permanent headquarters, not a monastery, but just a residence, probably a common house, where the members of

<sup>160</sup> \*\*\**Documenta Romaniae Historica. B. Țara Românească*, I (1247–1500), vol. edited by P. P. Panaitescu and Damaschin Mioc, Bucharest, 1966, p. 63–65.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>162</sup> I. Bogdan, *Documentele lui Ștefan cel Mare*, I (Hrisoave și cărți domnești, 1457–1492), published by, Bucharest, 1913, p. 158.

<sup>163</sup> This is also the first Franciscan document wrote in Qipčaq that remained, acc. to Șerban Turcuș, *Sfântul Scaun și românii în secolul al XIII-lea*, Bucharest, 2001, p. 311.

<sup>164</sup> Constantin Andreescu, *Așezări franciscane la Dunăre și Marea Neagră în secolele XIII–XIV*, in “Cercetări Istorice”, VII, 1932–1933, 2, p. 152–154; Ș. Turcuș, *op.cit.*, p. 311.

the order who were in town, took refuge. As can be noticed, they were developing missions within the heathen Tartars and proselytism within the orthodox believers from the region.

Subsequently, in the XIVth century, the presence of the Franciscans in the north of Dobruja intensified. The ancient *loca* from Vicina could be found around the years 1314–1315, with the rank of monastery<sup>165</sup>, and another second Franciscan monastery could be found in 1345 in Lycostomion, in the Danube Delta<sup>166</sup>.

We don't have other information about these Franciscan monastic centres. We don't know either how many monks lived here, or when they left the province. This must have happened in the moment Dobruja had been occupied by the Ottomans, during the XVth century.

### Conclusions

In accordance with the previous presentation, the monastic life between the Danube and the Black Sea hasn't any continuity during the IVth–XIVth centuries. As a matter of fact, there are two big development stages between the IVth–VIth and IXth–XIth centuries, whose existence ended brutally during the invasions of the barbarians.

During the IVth–VIth centuries, on the territory of Scythia Minor prevailed the coenobitic monasteries. The life of the monks was guided by the Basilian Rules, also utilized in the rest of the East. Together with the economic activities, necessary for the maintenance of their daily existence, the monks had now real theological preoccupations. The most obvious testimony for this is their active involvement, in the first half of the VIth century, in the theological disputes about the Nestorian and Monophysite heresies, spread within the Byzantine Empire. Also now, they had, as it seems, a prominent place in the religious life of the province. The most famous theologians of the province – St. John Cassian, St. Theotim I, Dionysius Exiguus, John Maxentius, etc. – rose from among them, as part of the hierarchs who governed now the province also proceeded from their monasteries – St. Theotim I, Peter and John II.

In the second big flourishing stage of the Danubian-Pontic monachism the common feature of the new monastic centres was the cave architecture. Most probably, the impulse of their founding came from the Byzantine monks of Cappadocian formation who came from the Lower Danube to preach the Christian

<sup>165</sup> This is what results from a list of the Minorite monasteries from the office of locum tenens *Tartaria Aquilonaris* that regards the situation of this order in the years 1314–1330, C. Andreescu, *op.cit.*, p. 152–154.

<sup>166</sup> Gheorghe I. Moisescu, *Catolicismul în Moldova până la sfârșitul secolului al XIV-lea*, Bucharest, 1942, p. 87.

faith. Subsequently, gradually, the initiative was assumed within these monasteries by the monks proceeded from among the local Christian population.

From the organizational point of view, the monastic cave centres from the early Middle Ages, were much more diverse: coenobitic monasteries, spread-out monasteries (*laurae*) or simple isolated hermit cells. Also now, the faith confessed was the orthodox one. From the ethnical point of view, the monks built a true ethnical mosaic: grand-Romanians, Slav-Bulgarians, Varangians, Greeks, Petchenegs –, a mirror of the local ethnical diversity.

An attempt at reorganizing the monastic life between the Danube and the Black Sea was carried on, from the end of the XIIth century until the beginning of the XIIIth century. Then, the monastery at Cetățuia, in the north of the Danube, also functioned. Like in the case of the other two stages of development of the monastic life, it ended its existence during the barbarian invasions from the first half of the XIIIth century.

After this moment, until its occupation by the Ottomans, the Danubian-Pontic territory did not represent any more a point of attraction for the monks. Very probably, they preferred the adjacent territories – at the beginning from the south, then from the north of the Danube – where there were better conditions for living in seclusion and peace.