The barbarians and the city: comparative study of the impact of the barbarian invasions in 376-378 and 442-447 on the urbanism of Philippopolis, Thrace

Introduction
The decision of Constantine to rename Byzantion as a new capital Constantinopolis in 330 had an immense effect on the Balkan provinces, particularly Thrace. This province and its capital Philippopolis were in close proximity to the new city; in fact we can say that they were the hinterland of Constantinopolis, which was a good ground for flourishing life in all aspects. It is even possible to argue that the cities in this province, part of the diocese of Thracia, faced their second period of growth, after that of the Antonines and Severi almost a century earlier. In the time of Constantine and afterwards, most of the cities reached their former limits of urban space, and some of them even expanded and become bigger than before. It is not by accident that this period was also called the ‘Constantine Renaissance’. A typical example of this period is Serdica (modern Sofia), the capital of Dacia Mediterranea, whose urban area of almost 84 hectares was as much as twice bigger than the area of Roman Serdica from earlier centuries.1 Among these cities was the capital of the province of Thracia – Philippopolis (modern Plovdiv) which slowly recovered from middle of the third century, when the Goths plundered the city and took away more than 100,000 citizens.2 It seems that in the time of Licinius (308-324), Constantine (307-337) and his successors, Philippopolis not only recovered and populated the area of the old Roman city, but at some point its urban area even exceeded the earlier urban space,3 which is estimated at about 80 hectares.4

The new situation increased the importance of the Thracian region. The new status quo, however, had a double effect on this region since it became a buffer zone between the Constantine’s city and the chaotic world of the barbarians that settled in the Lower Danube area from the second half of the fourth century onwards.5 From this time on, Thrace suffered frequently after the barbarian invasions headed to the capital of the Empire, or its rich

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1 Dinchev 2001, 224.
2 Iord. Get. 18.101-03; Dexipp. Frg. 20; Zossimi 1.23; Amm. Marc. 31.5.15
3 Topalilov 2012b, 415 ff.
4 Mateev 1993, 91; Dinchev 2001, 224.
vicinity. Large masses of barbarians in some periods, as for example 375-425/450, the second half of sixth century and a first half of seventh century, regularly plundered Thracian cities and villages. Yet, in the end it was the barbarian invasions of the first half of seventh century, more precisely the Avaro-Slavs, who put an end to the civic life in Thrace. Various aspects of the impact of these invasions on the civic life in the Balkans and the diocese of Thracia in particular have been discussed in earlier literature. The study of the latter is mostly linked to the names of V. Velkov, V. Dintchev, K. Stanev, and A. Poulter. Velkov’s attention was concentrated on ancient urbanization in the territory of modern Bulgaria, focusing on written and epigraphic sources, and monuments. His study was completed by Dintchev’s dealing with the terminology, and the immediate effect of urbanization on the cities as revealed by the archaeological excavations. The next step in research should be seen in the studies of K. Stanev. Major problems of this transitional period have also been discussed by Poulter, whose recent studies have concentrated on society in the regions north of the Balkan mountain range.

Philippopolis (Plovdiv) and the archaeological evidence
It is not surprising that one of most important and largest cities in the Balkans, Philippopolis and its vicinity was the target of many barbarian actions, some of which are mentioned in the written sources. As one of the main strongholds, however, its importance prevailed throughout the centuries and it was abandoned by the Romans only when the very existence of the Empire was in question, in the times of Heraclius (r. 610-641). Until that time the city was well-maintained and well fortified. The existing walls were repaired in the times of Julian (r. 361-363), and the building of the new walls is dated in the reign of Justinian I (r. 527-567) and later. In the period when almost all of the cities in Thrace were in decline, Philippopolis was able to host the whole western imperial army as shown in the case of the winter of 601.

The Late Antique Philippopolis and the problems of its development and urbanization have been studied many times. Despite its importance, however, no study has been made on the impact of the Barbarian invasions on the civic life in Philippopolis, in particular those prior to the Avaro-Slav

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7 For the literature in Bulgarian see recently K. Stanev 2012.
8 See the studies cited in Velkov 1988.
9 K. Stanev 2012.
10 Poulter 2007a, 174-75; 2007b, 164.
11 See Velkov 1959, 31-55 with comments
12 Amm. Marcell. 22.7.7.
13 Proc. De aedif. 4.11.
14 Theoph. Sam. 8.4.3-8.
15 See for instance Kesjakova 2001, 165-72 and literature cited in this article