

## INSIGHTS FROM THE SOUTH SECTOR AT HISTRIA. NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL DATA

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**Abstract:** Excavations conducted from 2012 to 2021 at the South Sector uncovered 34 graves, adding valuable new information to the mortuary record of the extramural cemetery of the settlement during the Late Roman and Early Byzantine periods (4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD). In addition to presenting and discussing the graves with their specific attributes such as the arrangement of diverse funerary structures, as well as body orientation and positioning, the skeletal remains were subjected to anthropological analysis for the first time to estimate the sex and age-at-death of the individuals and assess their health status while recording the documented pathological conditions. By constructing some individual profiles, we sought to briefly focus on detailing the challenges faced by individuals with particular and to offer insights into their lived experiences and difficulties when faced with such diseases. The diversity of funerary practices was evident, including reburials and cenotaphs. The high prevalence of graves with double-sloped roof made of tiles in the South Sector contrasts markedly with the lower occurrence observed in the Basilica extra muros Sector, suggesting the possibility of a clustered group in the area of the former. By mapping graves based on chronological, sex, and age categories a comprehensive mortuary dossier is provided for the first time, integrating both older findings and these recent discoveries.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Scythia, epoca romană târzie și bizantină timpurie, arheologie funerară, bioarheologie, paleopatologie

**Rezumat:** Săpăturile efectuate în perioada 2012–2021 în Sectorul Sud din cadrul sitului Histria au scos la iveală 34 de morminte, aducând noi informații referitoare la utilizarea acestei zone ca cimitir în perioadele romană târzie și bizantină timpurie (secolele IV–VI p.Chr.). Pe lângă prezentarea caracteristicilor mormintelor (sub forma unui catalog al descoperirilor), cum sunt diversele amenajări funerare, precum și orientarea și poziția corpului, materialul osteologic a fost analizat antropologic pentru prima dată, atât în vederea estimării sexului și vârstei la deces a indivizilor, cât și pentru a evalua starea de sănătate a acestora și a documenta condițiile patologice existente. Prin realizarea câtorva profiluri individuale am încercat să schițăm un tablou al provocărilor cu care se confruntă persoanele cu diverse patologii și să oferim o perspectivă asupra experiențelor și dificultăților întâlnite ca urmare a acestor afecțiuni. Diversitatea practicilor funerare este vizibilă, fiind documentate inclusiv cazuri de reînhumări și morminte simbolice (cenotafuri). Frecvența ridicată a mormintelor cu acoperiș în două ape construit din țigle descoperite în Sector Sud contrastează cu raritate acestora observată în sectoarele învecinate, sugerând posibilitatea existenței unui grup concentrat de morminte în această zonă. Cartografierea mormintelor pe baza categoriilor cronologice, de sex și de vârstă oferă o imagine de ansamblu care integrează atât descoperirile funerare mai vechi, cât și pe cele de dată recentă.

### INTRODUCTION. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

During the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, populations of Germanic origin from the north of Europe began to constantly migrate towards the west and south in the area of the Black Sea, causing major disturbances in the peripheral areas of the Roman Empire. Roman dominance over a wide area, both in Dacia and Moesia, as well as throughout the Balkan Peninsula, was significantly affected by these recurrent invasions within a prolonged conflict known as the Scythian War<sup>1</sup>. The initial incursion of the large coalition of East Germanic tribes into the Roman Empire probably occurred in 238. It was during this time that the Goths launched a destructive assault on Histria<sup>2</sup>. According to Historia Augusta, during the rule of Maximus

and Balbinus: *the Carpi waged war with the Moesians. The Scythian War began, and the destruction of Istria [...] took place at the same time*<sup>3</sup>. The Roman authorities provide the Goths with annual payments, and in exchange, the Goths release captives and return to their territories, on the condition that the Roman army withdrew and prisoners were set free. Lambrino delays the occurrence of Histria's destruction by twenty years, viewing it as part of the larger crisis on the Danubian frontier, placing it somewhere between the years 248–251<sup>4</sup>.

The significant decrease in monetary circulation between 249–253 AD, as indicated by the numismatic study, can be correlated with the crisis marked by confrontations with the Goths along the Lower Danube. The scarcity of

<sup>1</sup> Watson 1999, p. 215–225; Wolfram 1988, p. 42–49; Zahariade 2010, p. 168–169.

<sup>2</sup> Heather, Matthews 1991, p. 2; Iliescu 1982; Kulikowski 2007, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> *Hist. Aug., Maximus et Balbinus*, 21, 16, 3; see also Doruțiu 1964; Doruțiu-Boilă 1985; Poenaru-Bordea 1971a and 1971b; Vulpe 1969.

<sup>4</sup> Lambrino 1933, p. 462; for an overview of the historical context related to the Histria settlement and the changes in its funerary topography see Crețu 2022, p. 44–97.