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THE EARLY BYZANTINE URBAN APPEARANCE OF LYCHNID IN THE 5TH AND 6TH CENTURIES

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Abstract: *In the beginning general issues are addressed pertaining to the appearance and function of the Early Byzantine city. The crucial issue is then analyzed of the continuity or discontinuity of the Byzantine city. According to the offered sources and arguments, a predominant thesis is that of the discontinuity of the Byzantine city and in that context of the city of Lychnid, too. The phenomenon of discontinuity is largely recognized in the shrinking and narrowing of the city's populated area coupled with the disintegration and neglect of the profane and sacral buildings, the culmination of which was the partial or in many cases full abandonment of the city. For this collapse of the cities in the Balkans, crucial was the Slavs and the Avars' successful invasion, which was also true for the city of Lychnid. According to Malchus, a historian of the late 5th century, the city of Lychnid was a stronghold with its own springs of water, which was an extremely important characteristic for an Early Byzantine city. The city of Lychnid is surprisingly not mentioned in Procopius of Caesarea's work "On Buildings". However, in another work by the same author, Lychnid is mentioned as one of the cities that have been densely populated since ancient times. It is also said that it was hit by an earthquake the epicenter of which was in Epirus (the province of New Epirus) during the reign of Emperor Justinian I (527-565) or his predecessor, Emperor Justin I (518-527). It is assumed that as a consequence of the earthquake and the plague that broke out in its aftermath, the population of the city was decimated. In the end, we take a close appearance at the material remains (archeological findings) of sacral and profane nature as the best evidence of the intense urban development of Lychnid in the 5th and 6th centuries and its appearance.*

Key words: Lychnid, Ohrid, Epirus Nova, Procopius of Caesareas, Malchus of Philadelphia, Basilicas.

The Byzantine city in general in the period from the 4th to the 6th century can roughly be defined as a large settlement with a non-agricultural function and with a population engaged in the performance of various functions. It is a compact, often already fortified settlement, with a high density of buildings. The city was an administrative, economic and cultural center for the surrounding area, which could be of different sizes. In some cases, the city could have the function of a subcenter, within a wider territory with one or more subcenters and one main center. Finally, the city could act as an intermediary between larger urban centers. The defensive character is much less pronounced than it is the case with the cities after the end of the 6th century.¹

In some Roman provinces in the Balkans, such as *Macedonia*, *Achaia*, etc., where in the first centuries AD there existed a larger number of cities, their number was significantly reduced already by the 5th century. In contrast to them, the provinces, within whose borders only a few cities functioned, their number remained almost the same even in the 5th century.²

The second rule applies precisely to the territory that in the 5th century constituted the province of *Epirus Nova*, and which in the first centuries AD was part of the province of *Macedonia*. Among the relatively small number of urban settlements in that area (parts of today's Western Macedonia) that survived until the 5th century and later, the city of Lychnid is included.

The problem of the development of the Byzantine city was almost not perceived by the researchers until the 1950s. It was generally assumed and accepted that the life and character of the city in the Byzantine medieval period was a natural and uninterrupted extension of the city of Late Antiquity.³

According to the research of J. Russell, the first who in scholarship presented the thesis of a discontinuity of the Byzantine city was A. P. Kazhdan, according to whom the *polis* in its classical form disappeared in the 7th century, and when the Byzantine city began to revive from the middle of the 9th century, it took on a radically different form. Since the thesis is mainly based on archaeological and numismatic findings, it has caused an understandable controversy in scholarship due to the fact that it contradicts in certain parts the already very scarce written sources from that period. Although the discussion on this issue in scholarship is not over, a significant part of scholars accept for

¹ J. Koder, *The Urban Character of the Early Byzantine Empire: Some Reflections on a Settlement Geographical Approach to the Topic*. The 17th International Byzantine Congress Major Papers (Washington D. C. August 3-8, 1986), Dumbarton Oaks/Georgetown University 1986, 157.

² *Ibidem*, 156.

³ Cf. A. Dunn, *The Transition from Polis to *Kastron* in the Balkans (III-VII cc.): General and Regional Perspectives*. *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 18, Birmingham 1994, 60-80, where a theoretical discussion is offered about the methodological approaches in the attempts to define the changes that took place in the urban settlements. How to contrast two methodological propositions "the fate of the city" versus "the transition of the *polis* to a *kastron*".

the time being the proposed thesis of a sharp break in continuity, that is, the appearance of discontinuity in the development of the Byzantine city.⁴

This phenomenon is mainly recognized in the narrowing and reduction of the inhabited space in the city, accompanied by the collapse and neglect of the profane and sacred buildings and finally culminating in the partial or in many cases with the complete abandonment and emigration of the city. This collapse of the cities in the Balkans was explained by the invasion of the Slavs and Avars, and in the Eastern Mediterranean it was first considered to be the result of the Arab conquests, and later it was determined that in fact the decisive influence in the collapse of the cities, especially in Asia Minor, had the Persian conquests of the second decade of the VII century. According to the supporters of the thesis about the interruption of the continuity of the Byzantine city, the cities were gradually abandoned during the 7th century, and the population moved to rural areas, where in the imminent case of danger they could find shelter in buildings in the form of *kastra* (fortresses) on the hills/elevations and in the fortress-citadels of the cities that had already been abandoned.⁵ It may be assumed that the city of Lychnid suffered a similar fate, as a direct consequence of the Slavic incursions, and then their presence. However, many details remain unknown about the time and circumstances under which the discontinuity in the development of the city in question occurred.⁶

In the voluminous work “*De Aedificiis*” (“On the Buildings”) by the Early Byzantine author Procopius of Caesarea, we come across incomplete data when describing and enumerating the newly built and restored cities and fortresses in Byzantium during the reign of Emperor Justinian I (527-565). As a matter of fact, Procopius himself in one passage in his work in some way hedges, pointing out that Justinian I did so many things, which are not easy to count or simply to describe.⁷ Considering that the city of Lychnid belonged to the province of *Epirus Nova*, we will focus in the following on exactly that part of the mentioned work. Apart from a list specifying newly built and rebuilt fortresses

⁴ J. Russell, *Transformations in the Early Byzantine Urban Life: The Contribution and Limitations of Archaeological Evidence*. The 17th International Byzantine Congress Major Papers (Washington D. C. August 3-8, 1986), Dumbarton Oaks/Georgetown University 1986, 137 and especially the extensive bibliography of papers dealing with the question of continuity or discontinuity of the Byzantine city.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 137-138.

⁶ Ѓ. Бошковик (О неким проблемима развојика мајеријалне и духовне културе и ликовних уметносћи средњеј века у Македонији. Зборник посветен на Димче Коцо VI-VII /1967-1974/, Скопје 1975, 81 и footnote 2), although he believes that there is an evident discontinuity in urban development, i.e. deurbanisation (from the end of the 6th to the 9th centuries) in Macedonia caused by devastation and depopulation, for unknown reasons he singles out Lychnid and Scupi as old towns, where he assumes that the thin thread of urban life was not completely interrupted.

⁷ *Procopii Caesariensis Opera Omnia* (recognovit: Iacobus Haury), Volumen III/2, VI Libri ΠΕΡΙΚΤΙΣΜΑΤΟΣ sive De aedificiis cum duibus indicibus et appendice, Lipsiae in aedibus B. G. Teubneri 1913, 102-103 (*Procopii De aedificiis*).

in the province of *Epirus Nova*,⁸ there is no earlier source-based textual description of the building activity of Justinian I for that province, which usually describes the strengthening and rebuilding of cities, as there is for the provincial cities of *Epirus Vetus*, *Macedonia* (*Macedonia Prima* and *Macedonia Secunda*), Thessaly and others.⁹

Therefore, it seems easier to understand that the work does not only mention Lychnid, but also other provincial cities like *Dyrrhachion* (Drač, Durrës), *Scampa* (Elbasan), *Apollonia*, *Bilis*, *Pulcheriopolis* and *Aulon*. However, their non-mentioning in the work of Procopius does not constitute a sufficient argument to claim that there were no renovations in these cities, especially of the walls during the time of Justinian I. It should simply be assumed that Procopius either did not have specific information or failed to report on the construction efforts that seem to have been performed in the cities of the province of *Epirus Nova*.

Although we have pointed out that Lychnid is not directly mentioned in the work of Procopius, “*De Aedificiis*”, there is still a very interesting general fact that refers to the province of *Epirus Nova*. Describing how the defense system, which was built and rebuilt with increased intensity during the time of Justinian I, worked, Procopius especially dwells on the Danube border. According to him, numerous fortresses were built along the banks of the river Danube and military garrisons were placed everywhere with the aim of establishing strict supervision and control of the barbarian incursions. It was supposed to be the first line of defense, but the lack of human resources appeared as a problem. After the eventual breakthrough of that line, the plains would remain undefended, if there was not a second defensive line. In order to ensure individual and permanent protection, the landed properties in the border area or certain buildings were converted into fortresses or used the fortress of the neighboring land property.¹⁰ That is, a fortress was built or renovated within a landed property, which could also be used by the neighboring landed property, if there was no fortress on its own territory. This hint would not be so significant, if it was not further pointed out that in addition to the plains along the border, this measure of individual and permanent protection was also taken “in *Epirus Nova*, as it is called” as well as in *Epirus Vetus*.¹¹

At first, the reasons for singling out only these two provinces seem really unclear. As a matter of fact, it is known that all the Balkan provinces were occupied to a greater or lesser extent by the building and restoring of fortresses. Perhaps the emphasis on the provinces of *Epirus Nova* and *Epirus Vetus* should not be interpreted as accidental, but as an indication that this measure of defense of all the Balkan provinces was most consistently applied precisely

⁸ Ibidem, 116-117.

⁹ Ibidem, 107-108; 112-116.

¹⁰ Ibidem, 106-107.

¹¹ Ibidem.

in these two provinces. The quite large number of erected and restored fortresses as well as other building projects that were undertaken precisely in these two provinces, speaks in support of that.¹²

The written sources about the appearance and in general about the history of the city of Ohrid until the 6th century are very scarce.¹³ In the last quarter of the 5th century (from 474 to 476) Theodoric, leading his Ostrogothic army, marched probably along the road *Via Egnatia* from Heraclea Lyncestis to Lychnid (Ohrid), but he was not able to conquer the city because it was well fortified, i.e. it was located in a well-fortified place, and inside it had rich sources of water and food reserves (cereals) (καὶ πρὸς μὲν τὴν Λυχνιδὸν ἐπελθὼν ἀπεκρούσθη ἐπὶ ὄχυροῦ κειμένῃν καὶ πηγῶν ἔνδον πλήρη, καὶ σίτου προενόντος).¹⁴

The aforesaid characteristics mentioned by Malchus of Philadelphia, i.e. the good fortification and the supply of water and food reserves, were undoubtedly the primary factors that enabled a Late Antique and, later, medieval

¹² Ibidem, 106-108; 116-118. In the province of *Epirus Nova*, according to Procopius, as many as 32 new fortresses were built and 26 were renovated, or a total of 58 fortresses are enumerated in the list. Considering the population, size and terrain configuration of the province of *Epirus Nova*, this number of newly erected and renovated fortresses is truly impressive. In comparison, in the area of Macedonia, which is far more populated, larger and with a more favorable terrain configuration than the province of *Epirus Nova*, a total of 46 fortresses were erected and restored (*Procopii De aedificiis*, 118-119).

¹³ Saint Erazmo of Antioch (240-303), also known as Saint Erazmo Lihnidski or Ohridski, spent a significant part of his life in the region of Ohrid (*Lucrido*) in the second half of the 3rd century (*Acta Sanctorum Junii*, Tomus Primus, 210. Cf.: J. Мариa Весели, *Свеѳи Еразмо од Формија (свеѳи Еразмо Формиски или Охридски)*. Зборник на трудови Лихнид, 6 /1988/, Охрид 1988, 53-67; X. Мелоски, *Две жиѳија на свеѳи Еразмо Лихнидски*. Зборник на трудови Лихнид, 6 /1988/, Охрид 1988, 69-86; Angelike Delekare, *Н епископѳ Лυχνιδου (-ων) мѳχρι τον 10ο αἰωνα. I. Απο την ιδρυση της εως τις αρχες του βου αιωνα*. Κληρονομια 35/1-2 /2003; published 2005/, 74-78; G. Podskalsky, *Theologische Literatur des Mittelalters in Bulgarien und Serbien 865-1459*, Munchen 2000, 23, footnote 83). The bishop Zosim of Ohrid took part, among other bishops from the province of *Macedonia*, at the church council of Serdica (today Sofija in Bulgaria) in 342/43 (*Zosimus a Macedonia de Lignedo*) (J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, Florenz 1769ff., reprinted Graz 1960-1962, III, 49). On the famous *Tabula Peutingeriana* the city of Lychnid/Ohrid appears in the Latin form of *Lignido* (*Tabula Peutingeriana. Codex Vindobonensis 324, Vollständige Faksimile - Ausgabe im Originalformat*, ed. E. Weber, Graz 1976, Segment VI; cf. on the identification: И. Микулчик, *Анѳиички ѳрагови во Македонија*. Прилози за истражувањето на историјата на културата на почвата на Македонија кн. 8, Скопје 1999, 101-106; K. Miller, *Itineraria Romana. Römische Reisewege an der Hand der Tabula Peutingeriana dargestellt. Mit 317 Kartenskizzen und Textbildern*, Stuttgart 1916, reprinted Roma 1964, 520; Ф. Папазоглу, *Македонски ѳрагови у римско доба*, Жи-ва Антика-Посебна издања, Књига 1, Скопје 1957, 226-230; Monumenta cartographica Jugoslaviae, I. Античке карте, Одабрао и приредило: Г. А. Шкриванић, Историјски институт-Посебна издања, Књ. 17, Београд 1974, 53).

¹⁴ *Malco di Filadelfia. Frammenti*. Testo critico, introduzione, traduzione e commentario, ed. Lia Raffaella Cresci (Byzantina et Neo-Hellenica Neapolitana IX), Napoli 1982, 106 (Fragment 18). Also see: *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire (Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus, II)*, (Text, Translation and Historiographical Notes: R. C. Blockley), The Fragmentary Malchos, II, Liverpool 1983, fr. 20, 440-445.

city not only to survive, but to thrive.¹⁵ That is why it is not surprising at all that the city of Lychnid according to Procopius of Caesarea in his work “*Anecdota*” (“Secret History”) was among the cities in the time of Emperor Justinian I or probably even in the time of his predecessor Emperor Justin I (518-527), which were densely populated since ancient times. In the following it is reported that the most densely populated cities, along with Lychnid in Epirus (actually in the province of *Epirus Nova*), were affected by an (undated) earthquake.¹⁶ Namely, the author Procopius of Caesarea, a contemporary of Emperor Justinian I, still found it necessary to mention the city of Lychnid together with the incomplete name of the province to which it belonged.

It is assumed that as a result of the earthquake and the subsequent outbreak of the plague the population of the city was drastically reduced. The question arises whether Lychnid was restored during the reign of Justinian I and/or later and if so to what extent? The only thing that is certain is that the name of the city of Lychnid disappeared forever from the historical sources.¹⁷

In spite of the absence of data in the work “*De Aedificiis*”, which would testify to possible construction activities in Lychnid after the destruction by an earthquake, it still seems that during the time of Emperor Justinian I certain construction activities were undertaken in the city. Such a conclusion follows directly from the results of archaeological research so far. Therefore, the remains of the material culture (5th-6th century) found in Ohrid are the subject of our scholarly interest in the following.

The last written source from the 6th century, which we would like to mention, is called the “Synecdemus” of Hierocles. In it, the city of Ohrid is named as *polis Lychnidos* (Λυχνιδός; also in a variant: *Αύλινδος μητρόπολις*) in *Epirus Nova*,¹⁸ certainly referring to the province of that name.

The Remains of Material Culture

The urban appearance and development of Lychnid in the 5th and 6th centuries can be mainly reconstructed from the remains of the material culture.

¹⁵ From the reports of Malchus of Philadelphia we learn that apart from the fact that the city stretched on the shores of Lake Ohrid, it had rich sources of water inside the city itself. The data on the supply of the city with food reserves (cereals) indirectly points to the knowledge that agriculture was significantly developed in the vicinity of the city.

¹⁶ Procopije iz Cezareje, *Tajna istorija* (prevod: A. Vihar; predgovor i komentar: Dr. R. Radić), Beograd 2004, 103. F. Papazoglu (Ф. Папазоглу, *Лихнид во доцноцарскиот њериод. Охрид и Охридско низ историјата*, I, Скопје 1985, 120, footnote 28) points out that there is no way to determine in which year Lychnid was destroyed by an earthquake. However, since it is considered that a large part of the cities listed by Procopius, such as Scupi, Corinth, Anazarbos, Dyrrhachion and Antioch, suffered from an earthquake during the reign of Emperor Justin I, it can be assumed that Lychnid was also affected by the same a natural element at that time.

¹⁷ Ф. Папазоглу, *Лихнид во доцноцарскиот њериод*, 118.

¹⁸ *Le Synekdemus d'Hiérokès*, ed. E. Honigmann (Corpus Bruxellense Historiae Byzantinae, Forma Imperii Byzantini – Fasciculus I), Bruxelles 1939, 20.

As a matter of fact, it has been established for that period in general that changes occurred in the technique of construction in a quantitative and especially in a qualitative sense. In other words, much more was built than before, plaster and other more durable building materials began to be used, and new techniques were used during construction. Because of that, the buildings *in situ* are better preserved, which makes it easier to discover and classify them. In this respect, the remains of fortification and church buildings stand out.¹⁹

Based on the conducted archaeological research of the area of today's Ohrid, it can be concluded that the city is not an exception, that is, the general assumptions are confirmed. The most numerous, the most common and the best preserved are the archaeological finds from the period of the 5th and 6th centuries.

The Late Antique urban structure of Lychnid, i.e. the "old" part of the city, called Varoš, was, according to V. Bitrakova-Grozdanova, completely surrounded and protected by walls for the first time after the significant expansion of the city to the South and East precisely in the 4th to 5th centuries. The fortress walls that are visible today are mostly just an extension of the foundations that were laid in Antiquity. In fact, it is common for ancient cities with a long continuity to build new ones over the foundations of the oldest walls or to cover and coat the existing ones with new masonry techniques. On the Eastern side of the wall were at that time two entrance gates: the *Čelna porta* and the *Dolna porta*.²⁰

With the upsurge in urban development that marked Lychnid in the Late Imperial period and in the time of the Early Christianisation, the construction of Christian basilicas during the 4th, 5th to the beginning of the 6th century becomes evident. Initially, *seven* basilicas were identified within the fortified city.²¹ The following *five* basilicas should be added to the aforesaid basilicas: *one*

¹⁹ И. Микулчиќ, *Античкиот ѓрадови во Македонија*, 190.

²⁰ В. Битракова-Грозданова, *Топографијата и урбаниот развој на Лихнидос. Историја*, XXII/II, Скопје 1986, 258-262; Eadem, *Лихнид во ранохристијанскиот период и неговото урбано јадро*. Јубилеен зборник-25 години митрополит Тимотеј, Охрид 2006, 259-260. Сп: В. Маленко, *Раносредновековната материјална култура во Охрид и Охридско*. Охрид и Охридско низ историјата, I, Скопје 1985, 280-281.

²¹ Two basilicas in the area of *Imaret (Plaošnik)*; one in the street *Ilindenska*; one beneath the church *Sv. Sofija*; one near *Gorni Saraj-Čobanovi*; one above the *Ancient Theatre* and one in the area of *Devoj* (В. Битракова-Грозданова, *Топографијата и урбаниот развој*, 258).

The first of the two spacious Early Christian buildings in *Imaret (Plaošnik)* is known under the name polyconchal church. Since the church was located in the centre of Lychnid, it is possible that it was the cathedral church of the bishops of Lychnid. It has been asserted that the final stage in the erection of this great church took place in the second half of the 5th century (В. Битракова-Грозданова, *Споменициот од предисториски и антички период*. Охрид и Охридско низ историјата, I, Скопје 1985, 152-153. Поопширно за поликонхалната црква види: В. Битракова-Грозданова, *Ранохристијански споменици во охридскиот регион*, Охрид 1975, 22-66; Eadem, *Споменициот од предисториски и антички период*, 145-153).

in the area between the streets Boro Šain, Hristo Uzunov and Ilindenska as well as strong indications for the existence of *four* others in the immediate vicinity of the churches *Sv. Nikola Čelnički*, *Sv. Jovan Arbanasčki*, *Sv. Nikola Pandonos* and *Sv. Nikola Gerakomija*.²²

In the immediate surroundings of the inner city core of Ohrid it is necessary to mention the basilica at *Studenčišta* and the one at *Sv. Erazmo*, as particularly important and valuable early Christian basilicas.²³

Based on the archaeological research so far, apart from sacral ones, rarer remains of buildings with a profane character have been found. Parts of four rooms, which belonged to some kind of monumental building, were discovered on the street Ilindenska. It is supposed to be a profane building from the Early Christian period, probably a bishop's residence.²⁴

During the systematic excavation of the *Ancient Theatre* in the area of the enclosing walls and to the North of them, remains of Late Antique, probably profane buildings were found.²⁵ Necropolises from the 4th to 5th centuries and later were discovered at the following sites: *Deboj*; the Northern parts of the *Starata čaršija* and others.²⁶

The place and role of Lychnid in the Late Antiquity and Early Christian periods as a spiritual and cultural center, expressed by the presence of twenty remains of primarily monumental Early Christian basilicas and other profane

In large archaeological endeavours in 2001, aiming for the excavation of the Church of Saint Panteleimon, originally built by Saint Kliment of Ohrid, the remains of a large three-nave Early Christian church were discovered, already located in earlier excavations. The floors of the basilica are covered with mosaics, which are partially preserved. The mosaic in the baptistry is best preserved. It is assumed that the Early Christian church was built at the end of the 5th or the beginning of the 6th century in the context of the remake of the Late Antique square of *Plaošnik* (В. Битракова-Грозданова, *Лихнид во ранохристијанскиот период*, 261-263, 266. With renewed archaeological research since 2008 there are strong indications that the remains of a third Early Christian basilica have been discovered in *Imaret* (*Plaošnik*). However, to confirm such indications further research is desperately needed).

Remains of another three-nave basilica were discovered in the area of *Deboj*. The building was significantly damaged during the Ottoman period. At the same time, two construction phases of the building with two horizons of mosaics are to be clearly differentiated. In fact, most of the space was covered with mosaics. It is assumed that the first phase of the construction dates from the end of the 4th century and/or the first decades of the 5th century and that it belongs to the group of so-called *burial basilicas*. For the second phase, the transition from the 5th to the 6th century is proposed (В. Битракова-Грозданова, *Сјоменицијте од предисториски и антички период*, 156; В. Маленко, *Ранохристијански објекти во Охрид и Охридско*. Зборник на трудови Лихнид 7, Охрид 1989, 7-8).

²² В. Маленко, *Ранохристијански објекти*, 3 и footnote 4; 9.

²³ В. Битракова-Грозданова, *Сјоменицијте од предисториски и антички период*, 153-157; В. Маленко, *Раносредновековнаџа маџеријална кулџура*, 288; В. Маленко-П. Кузман, *Хермелеја*. Зборник на трудови Лихнид 6, Охрид 1988, 94-96; В. Маленко, *Ранохристијански објекти*, 6-7.

²⁴ В. Маленко, *Ранохристијански објекти*, 10-11.

²⁵ В. Маленко, *Раносредновековнаџа маџеријална кулџура*, 279.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 281; 285-286.

buildings, as well as the power of the bishopric of Lychnid are certainly not narrowed within its regional borders, but extend well beyond them.²⁷ It seems that the period from the middle of the 5th to the beginning of the 6th century was the most intense regarding the cultural and artistic activities in the city of Lychnid.²⁸ However, it seems that the general trend of urban development in Lychnid was maintained until the end of the first half of the 6th century, especially during the time of Emperor Justinian I.

²⁷ В. Маленко, *Раносредновековна̄а ма̄еријална кул̄ура*, 305.

²⁸ В. Битракова-Грозданова, *С̄оменицӣе од̄ ѓредист̄ориски и античкӣ ѓериод*, 159.