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ABSTRACT

Dyrrachium's Turbulent Past

Evidence of Burning and Destruction in the Late 2nd Century C.E.

Eduard Shehi

This article delves into excavations conducted in Dyrrachium, uncovering evidence of burning, destruction, and reconstruction from the latter half of the 2nd century C.E. The author aims to identify the causes behind these events and scrutinizes Dyrrachium's socio-economic development during the Roman Imperial era. Despite a lack of literary descriptions for the documented urban destruction, the author considers causal links with contemporary historical events such as the Marcomannic Wars, the Costoboci raids and the Antonine plague. While anomalies are evident in Dyrrachium and possibly two other cities, conclusive proof for a singular event causing such destruction remains elusive. This article provides valuable insights into Dyrrachium's complex history, emphasizing the challenges in interpreting archaeological evidence. Through a comprehensive examination of economic, social, and historical factors, the author offers a nuanced understanding of the events shaping the city during the Roman Imperial period, shedding light on its socio-economic development and proposing explanations for recorded destruction sequences.

KEYWORDS

Dyrrachium, Roman Imperial period, socio-economic development, Marcomannic Wars, Costoboci raids, Antonine plague

Dyrrachium's Turbulent Past

Evidence of Burning and Destruction in the Late 2nd Century C.E.

¹ Our understanding of the ancient city of Dyrrachium (Fig. 1) derives primarily from a combination of ancient authors and archaeological research.¹ However, records from ancient authors are relatively scarce due to its location on the outskirts of centres of power.² Built on an island along the Adriatic coast, Dyrrachium was strategically positioned at the crossroads of terrestrial and maritime routes. These sea routes connected Dalmatia with the Ionian Sea to the south and Southern Italy to the east. The city was situated in a natural theatre of hills facing toward the east and southeast, providing shelter from the winds and allowing easy access to the sea.³

² Ancient authors paid attention to Dyrrachium only during significant military events of their time. The archaeological research, on the other hand, is continuously facing the challenge of modern development, making large-scale excavations difficult.⁴ Additionally, political isolation in Albania under the Enver Hoxha regime and the prolonged transition into a functional democracy has limited the growth of archaeological research, resulting in a fragmented framework of knowledge.⁵ Until 1991,⁶ the attention of Albanian scholars was not focused on issues related to daily life, chronological and

¹ I'm grateful to Philip Kenrick for the corrections of the English language.

² For a review of ancient authors on Dyrrachium see Cabanes – Drini 1995, 19–28. For a general history of Dyrrachium see Shehi 2022a.

³ For a general view on the topography of the site and the geomorphological evolution see Shehi 2022b, 18–29, 526–538.

⁴ Detailed discussions on various issues related to the city are not common. Examples to be mentioned: for urban development see Shehi 2007, 159–208; Shehi 2014, 407–424; Santoro 2010, 23–36; Santoro et al. 2010, 299–324; for specific monuments Gutteridge et al. 2001, 391–410; Beste et al. 2015, 45–75; Shkodra-Rrugia 2021, 742–763; Beste et al. 2023; for coins: Gjonecaj 2014; Meta 2015; for pottery: Shehi 2015; Shkodra-Rrugia 2019; for pottery kilns: Shehi 2008, 9–17; for physical anthropology: Kyle et al. 2020, 118–129; Reitsema et al. 2022.

⁵ Galaty – Watkinson 2004, 1–17; Quantin 2011, 183–204; see also Bejko 1998, 195–208, and Veseli 2006, 323–330 for an Albanian point of view.

⁶ Dyrrachium has received limited attention from foreign scholars. Few studies have been dedicated to the city, with most focusing on specific topics or including brief mentions in broader articles. For a quick review of studies related to Durrës see Santoro 2003, 149–208. For a detailed review of studies related to medieval Dyrrachium see Shehi 2022b, 126–145.

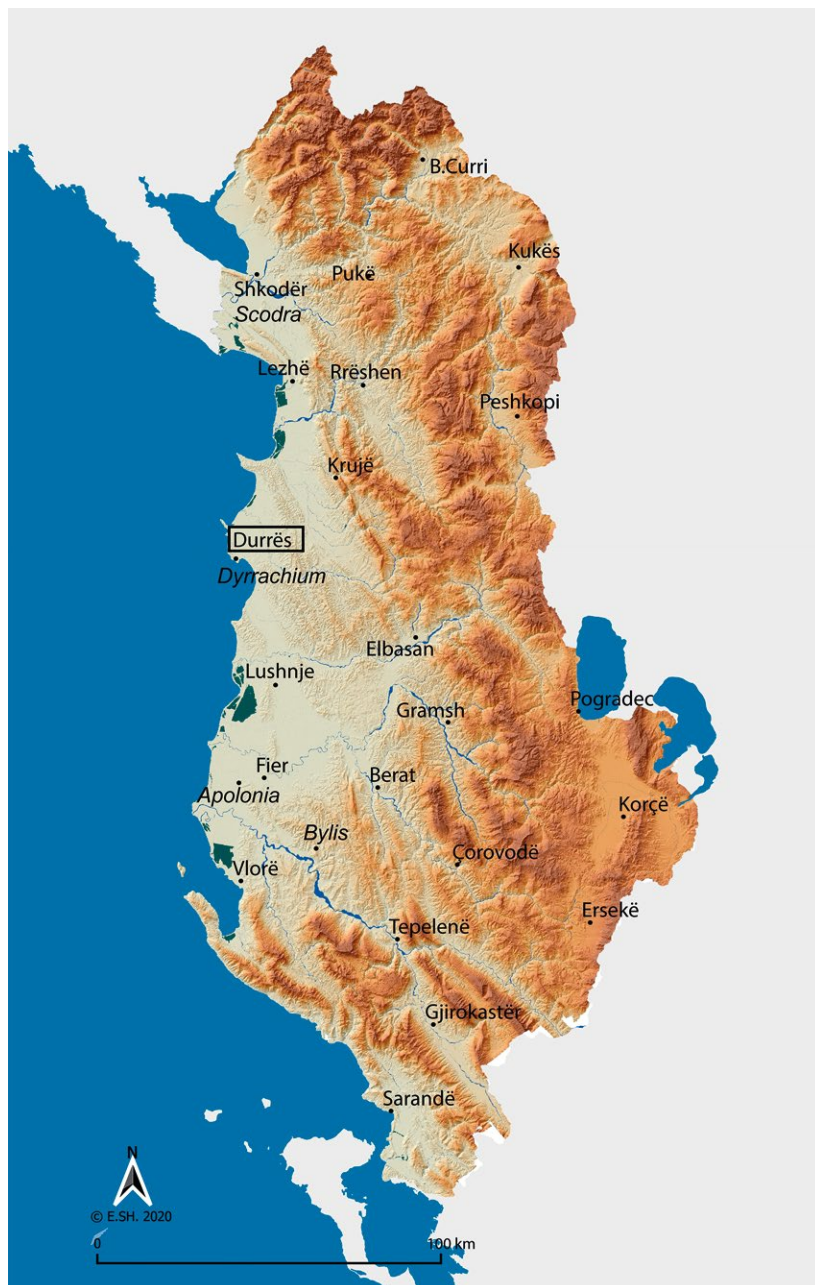


Fig. 1: The location of Dyrrachium and the ancient cities mentioned in the text

geographical evolution of urban development, or economic exchanges.⁷ History mostly revolved around wars and kingdoms and there used to be an attitude of establishing a more comprehensive historical development base for the city.

Consequently, it is urgent to address more specific issues dealing with the daily life of Dyrrachium. Since 2000, in my field work experience, I noticed the presence of burned layers and destructions in three distinct chronological periods: the 3rd–2nd century B.C.E., the second half of the 2nd century C.E., and the 3rd century C.E.⁸ The most widespread evidence relates to the second half of the 2nd century C.E. It is now the right time to share this information in an effort to highlight a moment of interest in the life of Roman Dyrrachium. The main objective of this article is to put together all available information and attempt to identify the reasons for such destruction. Therefore, it is necessary to review all excavations that have provided information on destruction and burnings and compare them with similar situations in other southern Illyrian cities.⁹

Review of Epidamnos-Dyrrachion-Dyrrachium

The city of Dyrrachium played a crucial role as a bridge connecting the Balkans with Italy throughout history.¹⁰ Its

economic relationships with neighbouring regions, such as Illyria and Macedonia, were well-established (Str. 6, 3, 8.). The discovery of ceramics dating back to the 9th–8th century B.C.E. suggests that the settlement of Epidamnos-Dyrrachium was originally inhabited by Illyrians.¹¹ Later, during the 38th Olympiad (between 628–624 B.C.E.), colonists

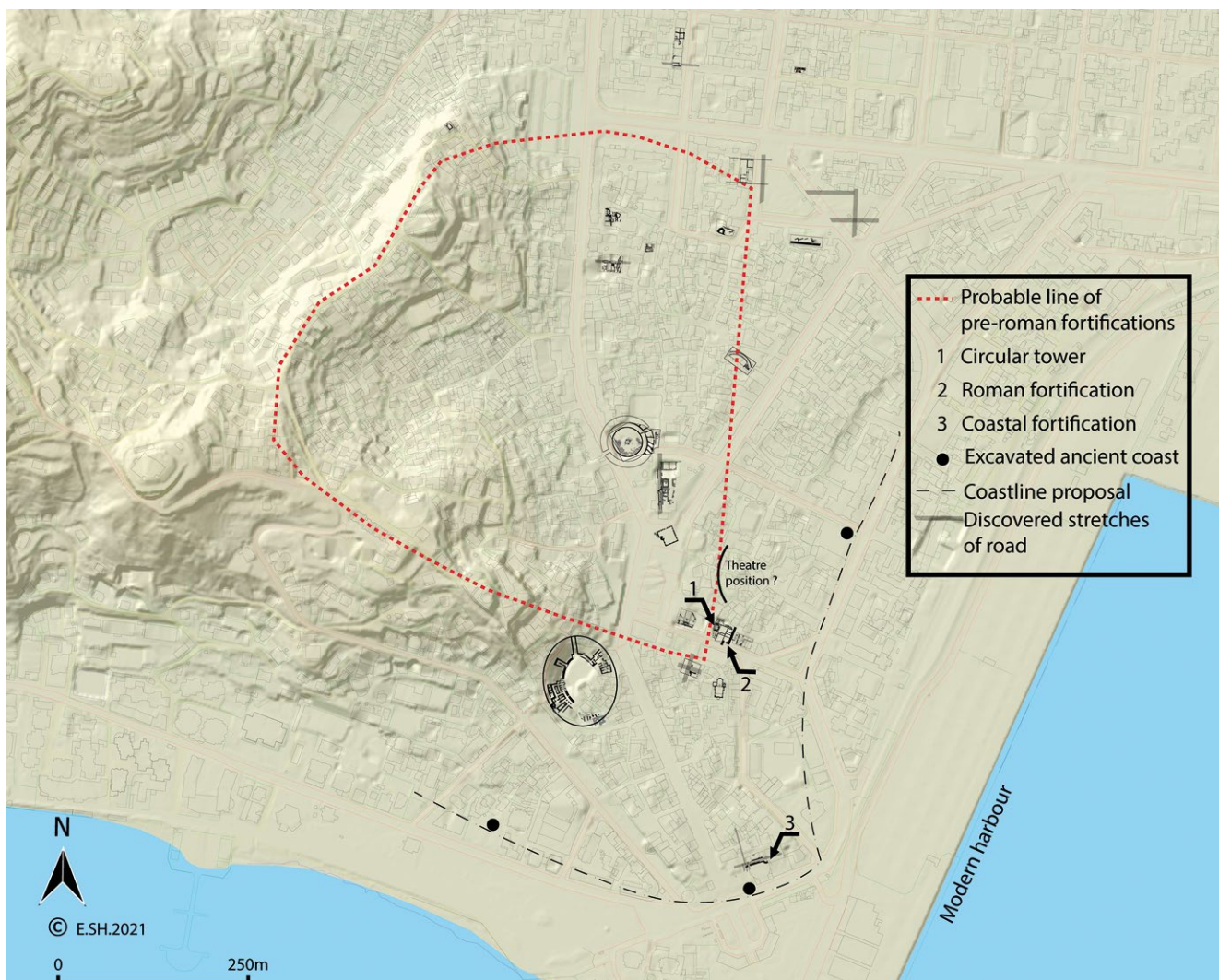
7 Some examples: Anamali 1956, 3–39; Toçi 1972, 103–111; Myrto 1986b, 129–146.

8 Shehi 2007, 159–208; Abadie-Reynal et al. 2019, 346.

9 For a more comprehensive analysis, we will include finds from Apollonia, the second most significant ancient city in the region, founded a few decades after Dyrrachium. Apollonia had comparable economic and political power to Dyrrachium and served as another departure point for the Via Egnatia. To get a broader perspective on various aspects of Apollonia, refer to Dimo et al. 2007. Additionally, we will briefly mention the city of Bylis in the southeast.

10 Some examples: during Rome's first war against the Illyrian kingdom (App. 10, 2, 7; Plb. 2, 9, 1–6); during the civil wars between Caesar and Pompey (Vell. Hist. Rom. 2, 49, 4; Caes. BC 3, 42), between Marc Antony and Brutus (Dio. Cass. 47, 21); during the wars of Vespasian against Vitellus in 69 C.E. (Tac. Hist. 2, 83). For a comprehensive view of the maritime and land routes see Shehi 2015, 278–289.

11 Zeqo 1986, 180; Zeqo 1989, 87; Tartari 2008, 468 f.



2

Fig. 2: The site of the ancient Dyrrachium and its monuments

from Corcyra and Corinth founded the colony of Epidamnus (Th. 1, 24), and 627 B.C.E. is widely accepted as the year of its establishment. From this point on, the city experienced continuous economic and cultural growth (Th. 2, 96).

5 Dyrrachium was founded on the southern tip of a small island, over a chain of hills forming a natural theatre opening towards the Bay of Durrës to the east (Fig. 2). The city's territory was bordered by several extra-urban sanctuaries,¹² and it had neighbourhoods outside the walls.¹³

6 During the classical and Hellenistic periods, Dyrrachium was a site of political and military conflicts. It drew the attention of Illyrian and Macedonian rulers, as well as the Roman Republic. In 312 B.C.E., the city was conquered by the Macedonian king Cassander. It later came under the control of the Illyrian king Glaukias, as recorded in Diodorus Siculus (19, 78, 1). The city remained under the control of Illyrian kings until the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd century B.C.E.¹⁴

7 In 229 B.C.E., the Illyrian queen Teuta attempted to conquer the city during preparations for war against Rome (Plb. 2, 9, 1–6). However, the city opened its gates to the legions of the consuls Cn. Fulvius and A. Postumius during the first Illyrian-Roman

12 For a recent general account of the extra-urban sanctuaries of Epidamnus-Dyrrachion see Shehi 2023.

13 Myrto 1984, 267; Myrto 1986a, 257; Myrto 1989, 78–108.

14 Islami 1993, 155–161. Against Picard 1986, 141; Cabanes – Drini 1995, 37 f.

war (Plb. 2, 11, 7–11). Dyrrachium became a Roman protectorate and a base for the republic's penetration into the Balkans.

8 Under the Roman protectorate, Dyrrachium thrived as a commercial centre, supporting Rome in conflicts against the Illyrians and Macedonians (Liv. 29, 12, 3; 31, 27, 1; 42, 48, 8; 45, 43). The city's economic and cultural growth during this time is evidenced by the numerous constructions both inside and outside the city, as well as the diverse range of material culture discovered.¹⁵

9 In 148 B.C.E., Dyrrachium became part of the Roman province of Macedonia (Const. Porph. De Them. 2, 9), but continued to enjoy a certain degree of administrative and economic autonomy, as indicated by the continuity of its coin minting and the production of tiles with the names of official magistrates.¹⁶ The construction of the Via Egnatia in 120 B.C.E. further solidified its position as a transit hub in the Balkans and beyond.¹⁷

10 In 48 B.C.E., during the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, the Roman Senate relocated to Dyrrachium, as mentioned by Velleius Paterculus (Hist. Rom. 2, 49, 4). The city became a battleground, with Pompey managing to defeat Caesar in the vicinity (Caes. BC 3, 62–71). In 40 B.C.E. it came under the control of Mark Antony as part of the Brindisi agreement. In 39 B.C.E., the city was involved in the military conflict between Brutus and Antony (Dio. Cass. 47, 21).

11 The many conflicts that swept through the region left their mark on Dyrrachium. The city lost its status as a protectorate and became a colony. The exact date of conversion into a colony is a matter of some debate, but most scholars believe it occurred in 30 B.C.E. under Octavian's rule (Dio. Cass. 51, 4, 6).¹⁸ Renamed Colonia Iulia Augusta Dyrrachinis¹⁹ the city underwent significant renovations, including reinforced defensive walls, urban reorganization, and infrastructure improvements.²⁰ During the Early Imperial period, Dyrrachium prospered, as evidenced by the construction of several important monuments. Among these were an amphitheatre,²¹ a library,²² and two aqueducts.²³ After the mid-2nd century C.E., public constructions declined noticeably, with emphasis on maintenance and reconstruction. Private constructions slowed, and existing buildings were repurposed, possibly due to economic challenges.²⁴

12 Following the administrative reform under Diocletian, Dyrrachium became the centre of the province of Epirus Nova (Malalas 13, 11–13; Procop. Vand., 3, 1, 14–18), stimulating its economy and fostering commercial relations across Mediterranean.²⁵ Despite economic prosperity, few architectural remains exist from this period. The restructuring of the Via Egnatia emphasized Dyrrachium's continued importance as a transit hub.²⁶

The Red-Slipped Fine Wares and Commercial Trends

13 For our purposes, the most reliable chronological information regarding variations in economic trends is found in the field of fine ware, particularly in the study of terra sigillata pottery.²⁷ The knowledge gained from analysing this category of pottery

15 Shehi 2003, 209–220.

16 Gjongecaj 2014, 323 f. For a list of stamps on tiles see Cabanes – Drini 1995, 159–163.

17 Fasolo 2005.

18 For the most recent and comprehensive review, see Destephen 2012, 287–298.

19 Stamped in the lead fistulae of the aqueduct, see Myrto – Miraj 1982, 133.

20 On the canalizations of this period Tartari 1981, 51–68; Shehi 2007, 179. 184.

21 Beste et al. 2023.

22 CIL III 607.

23 CIL III 709; Heuzey – Daumet 1876, 387; Myrto – Miraj 1982, 131–156; Hidri 1990, 260 f.

24 Shehi 2007, 186.

25 Shehi 2003, 209–220.

26 Miraj 1991, 252.

27 The following summary is based on Shehi 2015, updated with newer information.

provides us with valuable insights into the trends and changes in the local market, allowing us to understand them within a span of decades.

14 In the Southern Illyrian region, Eastern Sigillata A (ESA) pottery has been discovered in relatively small quantities. This was in production from the mid-2nd century B.C.E. to the early 2nd century C.E. Dyrrachium's ESA presence exhibited distinct phases, peaking during the Augustan period.

15 Contrastingly, Eastern Sigillata B (ESB) pottery, more abundant, peaked in the late 1st century C.E. Dyrrachium's ESB importation, occurring in four phases, started with minimal presence in the early 1st century C.E. and increasing during the second half of the 1st century C.E. and gradually diminishing until its disappearance in the 2nd century C.E.

16 Italian sigillata, present in Dyrrachium from the 40s B.C.E. to the mid-2nd century C.E., had varied importation phases. These imports reached their peak in the years 20–30 C.E.

17 Locally crafted Illyrian Red Slip ware (IRS) spanned from the 4th century B.C.E. to the 2nd century C.E., evolving over three distinctive periods. The final period, which is tentatively dated to the second half of the 2nd century C.E., is marked by a sharp decrease in the amount of local ceramic production, accompanied by a limited attempt to imitate the shapes of African Red Slip ware (ARSW). However, only two types of imitations are known, Hayes 8A and Hayes 9A, and their quality falls short of achieving that of ARSW. The quantities of these imitations are also quite limited, and the local production practically ceases to exist during this period.

18 African Red Slip Ware made its advent in Southern Illyrian cities in the 1st century C.E., with limited early imports. By the 2nd century, Dyrrachium witnessed a substantial upsurge in both quantity and diversity of African products. This large presence of African imports was maintained during the whole 2nd century and continued through the 3rd century, dominating the local market.

Features of Urban Development

19 During the Hellenistic period, Dyrrachium's urban layout was initially organized along a northwestern-southeastern axis. However, there is ongoing debate regarding the timing of this plan's implementation. In one instance, it is suggested to have occurred after the establishment of the province of Macedonia,²⁸ as structures from an earlier period indicate a probable north-south orientation.

20 In later years, substantial efforts were undertaken to revamp Dyrrachium's urban landscape, particularly focusing on enhancing the city's street system.²⁹ Although the precise timeline for these interventions remains uncertain, it is believed that they were executed in the third quarter of the 1st century C.E.³⁰ These changes not only brought about significant alterations to the city's overall layout but also improved functionality, streamlining transportation and communication within Dyrrachium.

21 Before the 1st century B.C.E., Dyrrachium was safeguarded by three fortifications, protecting the city, the southern coast and harbour, and a blocking wall over an eastern strip connecting the peninsula to the mainland (Fig. 2). The city fortification followed the ridges of hills terminating in front of the coast.³¹

22 Around the late 1st century B.C.E., notable changes occurred in the city's urban fabric, including the construction of a new line of city fortification. Excavations revealed

28 Abadie-Reynal et al. 2018c, 181.

29 Abadie-Reynal et al. 2019, 339 f.

30 Abadie-Reynal et al. 2018c, 182.

31 Abadie-Reynal et al. 2018b, 294; Shehi 2017, 86.

the replacement of the eastern perimeter of the previous fortification with a new wall made of brick-faced concrete, positioned approximately 25 m eastward.³²

23 Transitioning into the end of the 1st century B.C.E. and the start of the 1st century C.E., the fortified structure protecting the coast was repurposed (see **site no. 8**). A new wall, incorporating a monumental structure with three arched gates (likely a stoa), was constructed. This structure, approximately 42 m long, faced the sea to the south, with the central gate opening toward the city to the north.³³

24 From the late 1st century B.C.E. through most of the 1st century C.E., Dyrrachium witnessed a construction boom, encompassing private residences, public structures, and a sewerage network. The Early Imperial period showcased collaboration between Rome and local government, commissioning significant monuments, including an amphitheatre outside the fortifications, a library, and two aqueducts.³⁴

25 The first half of the 2nd century C.E. witnessed a decrease in construction activity, yet significant public constructions were still built. However, the latter half saw a more pronounced decline, with no new constructions identified.³⁵ The cause remains uncertain, whether influenced by changes in the real estate market or unknown internal issues within the city.

The Latin Inscriptions from Dyrrachium and Albania

26 The Latin inscriptions discovered in Durrës and across Albania offer valuable insights into the events in Dyrrachium during the latter half of the 2nd century C.E. Out of 346 inscriptions from Albania, 43 % (148 inscriptions) originated in Durrës,³⁶ falling into categories such as construction, funerary, honorific, and more (Tab. 1).

	Dyrr.	Byl.	But.	Oth.
Building	5–4 %	11–28 %	9–16 %	4–4 %
Decree		1–3 %		
Honorific	9–7 %	3–8 %	7–13 %	7–8 %
Funerary	105–77 %	19–49 %	25–45 %	58–64 %
Votive		2–5 %		1–1 %
Foundat.	2–1 %		2–4 %	1–1 %
Milestone				7–8 %
Border	1–1 %			
Dedicatory	6–4 %	3–8 %	7–13 %	12–13 %
Testament.	2–1 %			
Nonident.	7–5 %		5–9 %	1–1 %
Total	137	39	55	103

Tab. 1: Latin inscriptions discovered in Albania and their geographical, and topological division. Elaborated by the author, following all the publications mentioning inscriptions

27 The dating of Albanian inscriptions presents challenges, with classifications spanning long periods like the Roman Imperial period, Early Imperial period, or Late Imperial period.³⁷ Quantifying them on specific years is difficult, hindering the

32 Shehi 2007, no. 33, 184; Shehi 2017, 80 f.

33 Shehi et al. 2017, 227–260.

34 CIL III 607; Toçi 1971, 40; Hidri 1990, 260 f; Beste et al. 2023.

35 Shehi 2007, 180–186.

36 LIA; Anamali et al. 2009; Ceka – Muçaj 2009, 111–129; Shehi – Shpuza 2011, 207–226; Lajtar et al. 2014, 127–144; Beste et al. 2015, 48–50; Lajtar et al. 2015, 171–194; Haensch – Shehi 2016, 549–552; Shpuza 2018, 261 f.; Haensch – Shehi 2020, 425–431. To these are added 11 unpublished fragmentary inscriptions from Durrës.

37 LIA, nos. 31–148.

identification of chronological trends. Nonetheless, efforts have been made to analyse them on a broader scale.³⁸

28 Analysis of well-dated honorific inscriptions in Durrës suggests concentration primarily during the third quarter of the 1st century C.E.,³⁹ with only one inscription leaning towards the second half of the 2nd century C.E. Votive altars display more distributed dates, lacking concentration in any specific period, with only one reaching the second half of the 2nd century C.E.⁴⁰ Funerary inscriptions, generally spanning longer periods, witnessed a surge in the mid-1st century B.C.E., peaking during the 1st century C.E. transition, followed by stability in the 2nd century C.E., a slight decline around 125 C.E. and 175 C.E., and continued decrease in the 3rd century C.E.

29 An examination of non-funerary inscriptions from Dyrrachium reveals a pattern influenced by fluctuations in funerary inscriptions. No significant changes during the latter half of the 2nd century C.E. are evident in either category, suggesting overall continuity.

30 The comparative paucity of Latin inscriptions from other Albanian settlements limits comprehensive analysis. Separate scrutiny of construction, honorific, and dedicatory inscriptions for the entire territory of Albania indicates no notable trends during the second half of the 2nd century C.E. Construction inscriptions surged in 40–30 B.C.E. and throughout the 1st century C.E. Honorary inscriptions peaked in the first half of the 2nd century C.E., while dedicatory inscriptions were highest in the 1st century C.E. Noteworthy peaks occurred in the years 48–44 B.C.E., 28–14 B.C.E., 14 C.E., and 50–68 C.E., with a consistent pattern before and after 150–200 C.E., indicating no significant deviation during the latter half of the 2nd century C.E.

The Necropoleis

31 To comprehend the dynamics of Dyrrachium during the 1st–2nd century C.E., insights from the Roman-period necropolis play a pivotal role (Fig. 2). Despite limited studies, various findings from both rescue and planned excavations, notably led by Fatos Tartari, contribute to our understanding.⁴¹ A recent comprehensive study consolidated the outcomes of these excavations.⁴²

32 While a physical linkage between different cemetery sectors remains elusive, certain trends have been identified. The necropolis witnessed intensive use throughout the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E., with a gradual increase during the 2nd century C.E. and a subsequent decline in the 3rd century C.E. (Tab. 2). Cremation predominates as the burial typology over inhumation. Uncertainty shrouds the reasons behind this surge, whether attributed to population growth, health trends, or other factors. Anthropological studies in Dyrrachium have yet to unveil traces of epidemic diseases in excavated skeletons.⁴³

38 In order to quantify the inscriptions chronologically, the date expressions were translated into years and organized into a graph based on 25-year increments. The number of inscriptions for each quarter century was then tallied, creating a quantitative curve.

39 LIA 36, 44–45 C.E.; LIA 38, fourth quarter 2nd century – first quarter 3rd century C.E.; LIA 39, Imperial; LIA 40, Trajan; LIA 41, Neron, before 66 C.E. (?); LIA 42, Augustian; LIA 43, Early Imperial; LIA 44, Nerva or later; LIA 100, 1st – first half 2nd century C.E.

40 LIA 101, Early Imperial; LIA 144, after 312 C.E.; LIA 34, 50–150 C.E.; LIA 35, Imperial; LIA 32, late 2nd – first half of 3rd century C.E.; LIA 33, Late Republic – Imperial.

41 Some publications: Anamali – Budina 1960, 222–233; Toçi 1991, 1–3; Tartari 2004; Kule-Zoto – Përzhita 2018; Shehi et al. 2018, 15 fig. 5.

42 Shehi et al. 2020, 69–88.

43 Kyle et al. 2020, 118–129.

Nr.	Chronology	Qu	%	
1	3 rd –1 st century B.C.E.	1	0 %	22 %
2	1 st century B.C.E. – 1 st century C.E.	1	0 %	
3	1 st century C.E.	52	22 %	
4	1 st –2 nd century C.E.	64	27 %	49 %
5	2 nd century C.E.	34	14 %	
6	2 nd half 1 st – 1 st half 2 nd century C.E.	6	3 %	
7	1 st – 3 rd century C.E.	2	1 %	
8	2 nd – 3 rd century C.E.	7	3 %	
9	2 nd – 4 th century C.E.	3	1 %	
10	3 rd century C.E.	14	6 %	23 %
11	3 rd – 4 th century C.E.	32	13 %	
12	1 st – 4 th century C.E.	5	2 %	
13	4 th century C.E.	4	2 %	
14	Undefined	13	6 %	6 %

Tab. 2: Durrës. Chronological and quantitative table of 3rd century B.C.E. – 4th century C.E. graves. Elaborated by the author, following all the publications mentioning graves

33 In contrast, the exploration of Roman-period necropoleis in other Albanian sites is constrained. Apollonia, an exception with a few large-scale excavations, remains incompletely documented. A solitary article by A. Mano, based on 1962 excavations, provides insights into Apollonia's necropolis.⁴⁴ The findings, spanning from the late 1st century C.E. to the second half of the 3rd century C.E. (Tab. 3), indicate a notable increase in graves during the second half of the 2nd century C.E. Although not universally applicable, these data shed light on a heightened number of deceased during this period.

Nr.	Chronology	Qu	%	
1	Late 1 st – Early 2 nd	4	4 %	
2	First half 2 nd	1	1 %	3 %
3	Middle 2 nd	1	1 %	
4	2 nd	1	1 %	
5	Second half 2 nd	12	10 %	14 %
6	Late 2 nd	4	4 %	
7	Late 2 nd – Early 3 rd	8	7 %	
8	Early 3 rd	15	14 %	
9	First half 3 rd	4	4 %	
10	Middle 3 rd	3	3 %	
11	Second half 3 rd	3	3 %	
12	2 nd – 3 rd century C.E.	5	5 %	
13	Undefined	47	44 %	

Tab. 3: Apollonia. Chronological and quantitative table of 1st century C.E. – 3rd century C.E. graves. Elaborated by the author, following all the publications mentioning graves

Summary of Archaeological Finds Research

34 The following section offers a brief overview of eight archaeological excavations that were primarily conducted as rescue archaeology efforts. The excavations are arranged geographically from north to south for ease of reference (Fig. 3).

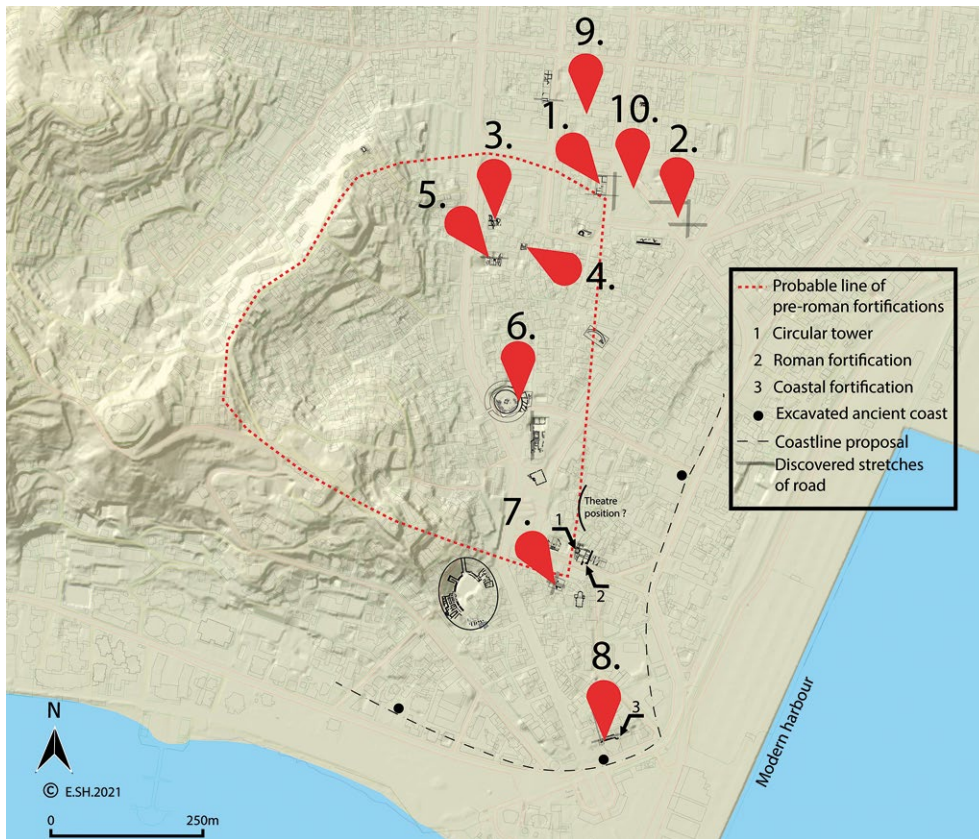


Fig. 3: Durrës. Sites and hoards findspots mentioned in the text

3

35 In 1988, a survey and controls were conducted at **site no. 1**, during the excavation of a residential building's foundations, covering a 44 m × 14 m area (Fig. 3, 1; Fig. 4).⁴⁵ Wall structures were unearthed from a depth of 0.60 m, revealing a complex arrangement with indeterminate functionality. Traces of walls were identified showcasing remnants from an earlier period, constructed meticulously with squared limestone blocks adorned with relief pattern carvings.

36 The building's layout, determined by two east-west conduits,⁴⁶ featured a well-documented southern drain with a double-layered brick vault. Perimeter walls, especially walls nos. 1 and 9, marked the building's boundaries. A central open space denoted as G, interpreted as a courtyard, was surrounded by walls nos. 5, 6, 7, and 11 forming an open corridor (D). Noteworthy rooms included B and C, with marble slab flooring and remnants of frescoes in room C.

37 The building probably spanned nearly 30 m, occupying an insula. Two east-west conduits indicated the presence of two roads. Destruction evidence in rooms B and C, including burned fragments and human bone remains, points to a catastrophic event. The identified fragments, including ESB, ARS, Çandarlı, Aegean, and African cooking ware, suggest a destruction period in the second half of the 2nd century C.E.

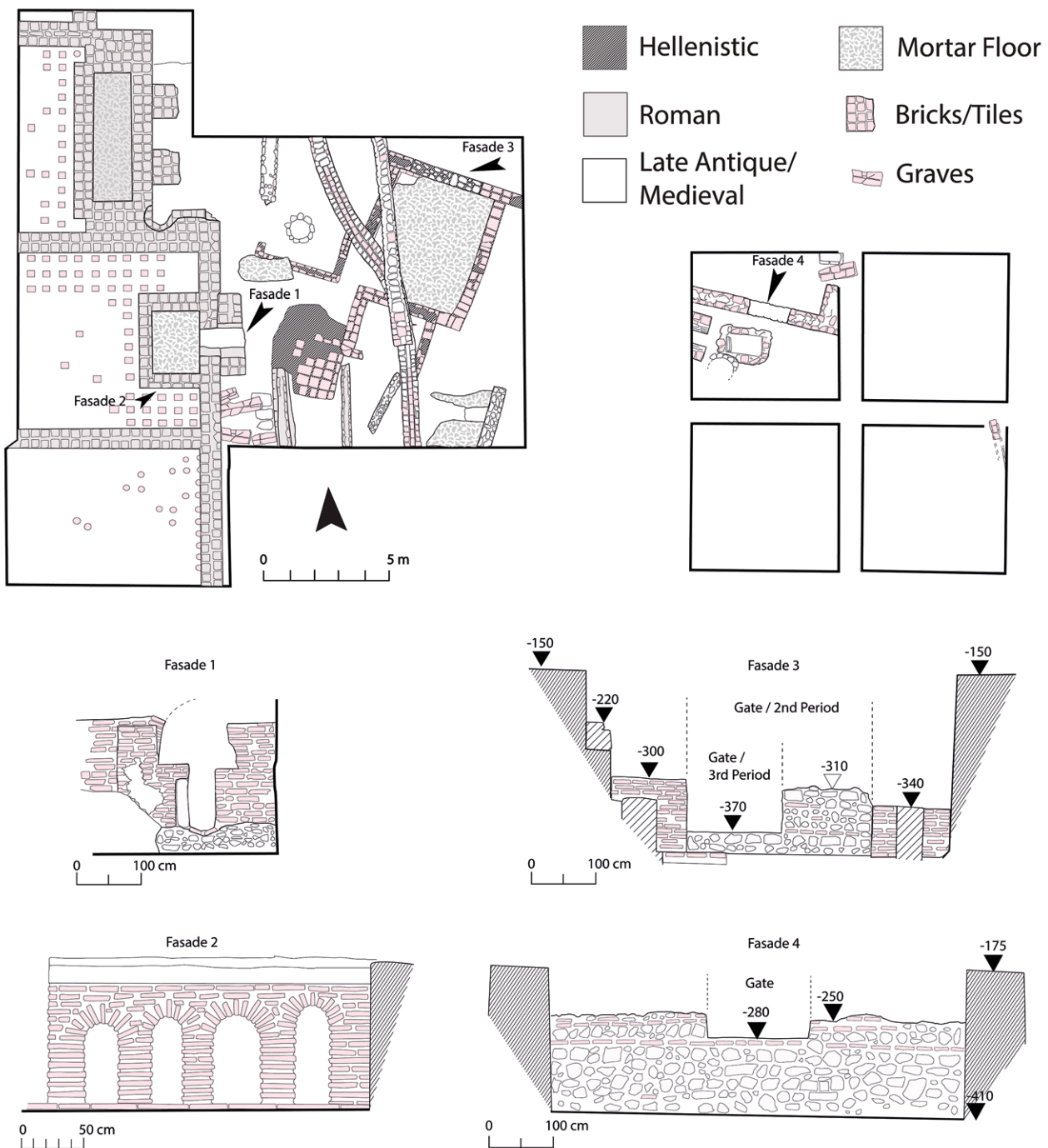
38 Following the destruction, repairs and renovations occurred, evidenced by reused stone blocks and closure of the entrance between room C and the northern area. The fourth period saw the site's abandonment and transformation into a funerary area.

39 The **site no. 2** was discovered in 2010, during a rescue excavation. Significant fire evidence was uncovered in buildings across four insulae (A–D) in the northern section of the ancient city (Fig. 3, 2).⁴⁷ These structures were continuously in use until the latter half

45 Tartari – Myrto 1988a, 260–262; Tartari – Myrto 1988b, 1–6.

46 On the presence of roads indicated by the discovery of conduits in Dyrrachium see Shehi 2014, 407–424.

47 Frashëri 2015, 275–284.



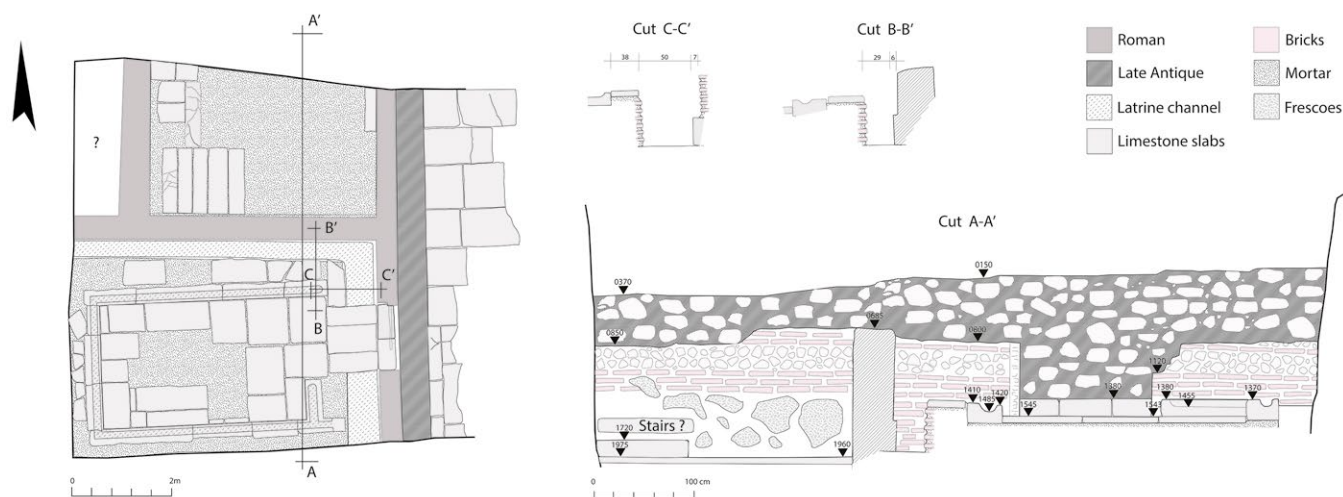
5

44 Significant repairs and alterations occurred in the second phase (late 2nd to early 3rd century C.E.), including closing the southern praefurnium and expanding the central praefurnium, which was covered with a vault. Signs of burning complicate understanding, possibly indicating either normal operation or external fire damage.

45 In the third phase, modifications included replacing circular pilae with rectangular bricks featuring Christian symbols, dated to the middle to end of the 4th century C.E., potentially associated with post-earthquake reconstruction (345 C.E.). The fourth period saw the abandonment and filling in of the baths, with limited new structures built on top, including a damaged mosaic.

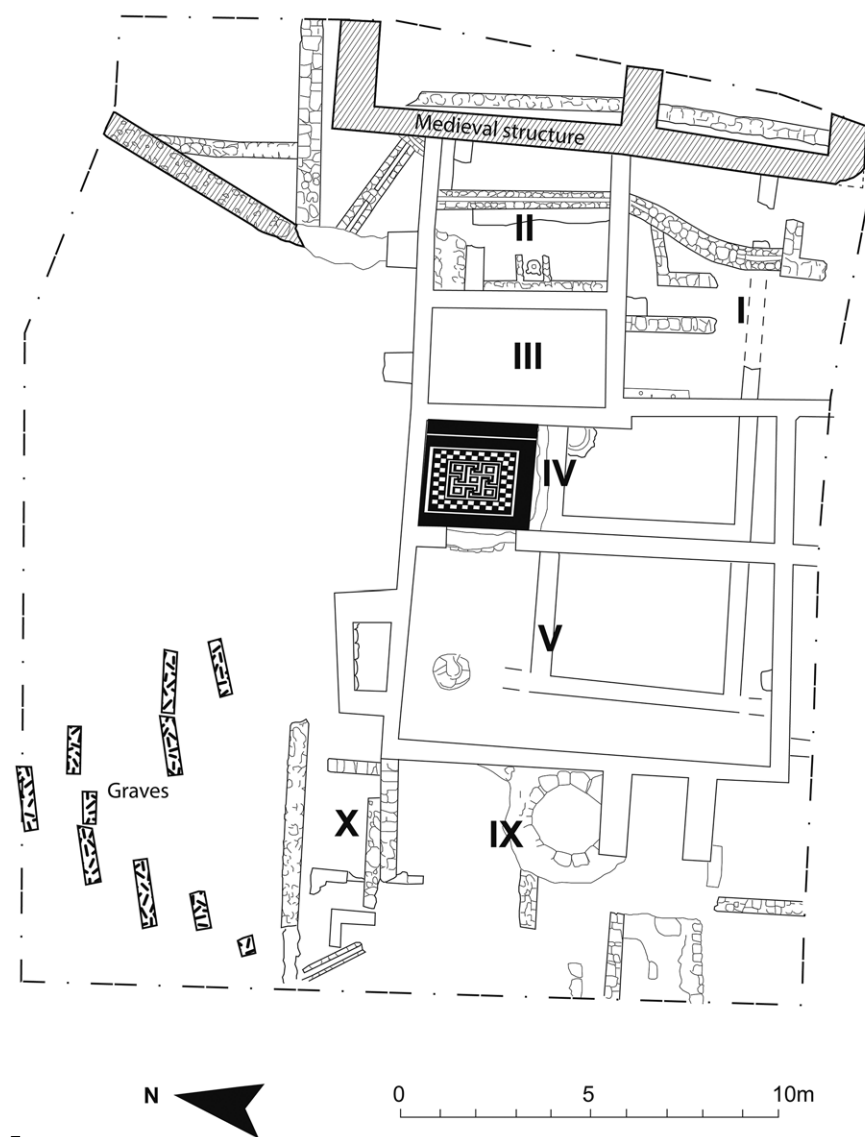
46 During a partial rescue excavation in 2001 at the **site no. 4**, three rooms of a Roman Imperial period edifice were discovered on the foundations of a multi-storey

Fig. 5: Durrës. Site 3 plan (scale 1 : 250; Fasade 1, 3 and 4: scale 1 : 100; Fasade 2: scale 1 : 50)



6

Fig. 6: Durrës. Site 4 plan
(scale 1 : 150 resp. 1 : 75)



7

Fig. 7: Durrës. Site 5 plan
(scale 1 : 200)

building (Fig. 3, 4; Fig. 6).⁴⁹ The first construction period consists of two rooms and a corridor built with opus latericium. The first room was rectangular (4.47 m × 3.10 m), and had a floor paved with sandstone slabs. The second room (5.90 m × 4.33 m) served



Fig. 8: Durrës. Site 5, excavated area, 2003

8

as a latrine and was surrounded by a wide canal. The entrance on the right side was equipped with a stone threshold, with a carved figure of a marine creature, possibly a dolphin. The construction is dated to the middle of the 1st century C.E.

47 At some point, the edifice appears to have been damaged or demolished. As a result, in a second phase, the weaker parts of the dividing wall between the latrine and the adjacent room were reinforced with a combination of layers that imitated opus reticulatum. Square stone blocks were then placed over the layers, connected by lots of mortar, followed by bricks bonded with mortar. The new constructions, along with the previous ones, were plastered and decorated with frescoes. Floral motifs such as lotus flowers and laurel, as well as geometric motifs such as circles and arcs, were painted against a white background.

48 The reasons for undertaking this significant reconstruction were unclear since no traces of destruction were visible afterward. However, ceramic finds allowed for a rough dating of these reconstructive interventions to the end of the 2nd century or the beginning of the 3rd century C.E.



9



10

Fig. 9, 10: Durrës. Site 5, detail of burned layers

49 During the third period, a stone and brick wall was built directly on the floor slabs, closing the entire northern facade of the existing rooms and removing the function of the latrines. Various categories of pottery were found datable to the 4th–5th centuries C.E. Afterwards the building was abandoned and the area was transformed into a funerary area.

50 The **site no. 5**, partially excavated in 2005, forms part of a Roman insula with structures evolving over at least three time periods and 12 rooms in the final stage (Fig. 3, 5; Fig. 7, 8).⁵⁰ The earliest structures from the 4th century B.C.E. (first phase of first period) featured stone foundations forming two parallel rooms, influencing later periods with a change only in size. During the second phase, room layouts expanded, and walls were built using clay-bonded bricks. The third phase, dated to the 4th to 3rd century B.C.E., featured poorly preserved walls with burn marks, indicating a violent event. Artefacts included locally produced black-slipped pottery, Greco-Italic amphorae, and bronze coins from Dyrrachium.

51 In the second period, structures underwent significant expansion with brick walls adorned with frescoes. Destruction, possibly in the mid-1st century B.C.E., is indicated by Lamboglia 2 amphorae in stratigraphic units.⁵¹ Most structures belonged to the second phase, revealing a plan with mortar-bonded bricks and features like hearths and praefurnia. The violent end of this phase involved burnt layers and destructions in 9 of the 12 rooms (Fig. 9, 10), with ESB sherds dating from the second quarter to the middle of the 2nd century C.E.

52 In the third period, damaged structures were reconstructed, and modifications included the addition of new walls, construction of an elliptical well, and closure of praefurnia. A flat roof replaced a damaged vaulted roof, and opus signinum floors with cocciopesto and marble pieces were preserved.

53 During 2004–2005, trial trenches next to the Circular Forum's podium (**site no. 6**) (Fig. 3, 6; Fig. 11) revealed destruction levels from the first structural period, succeeded

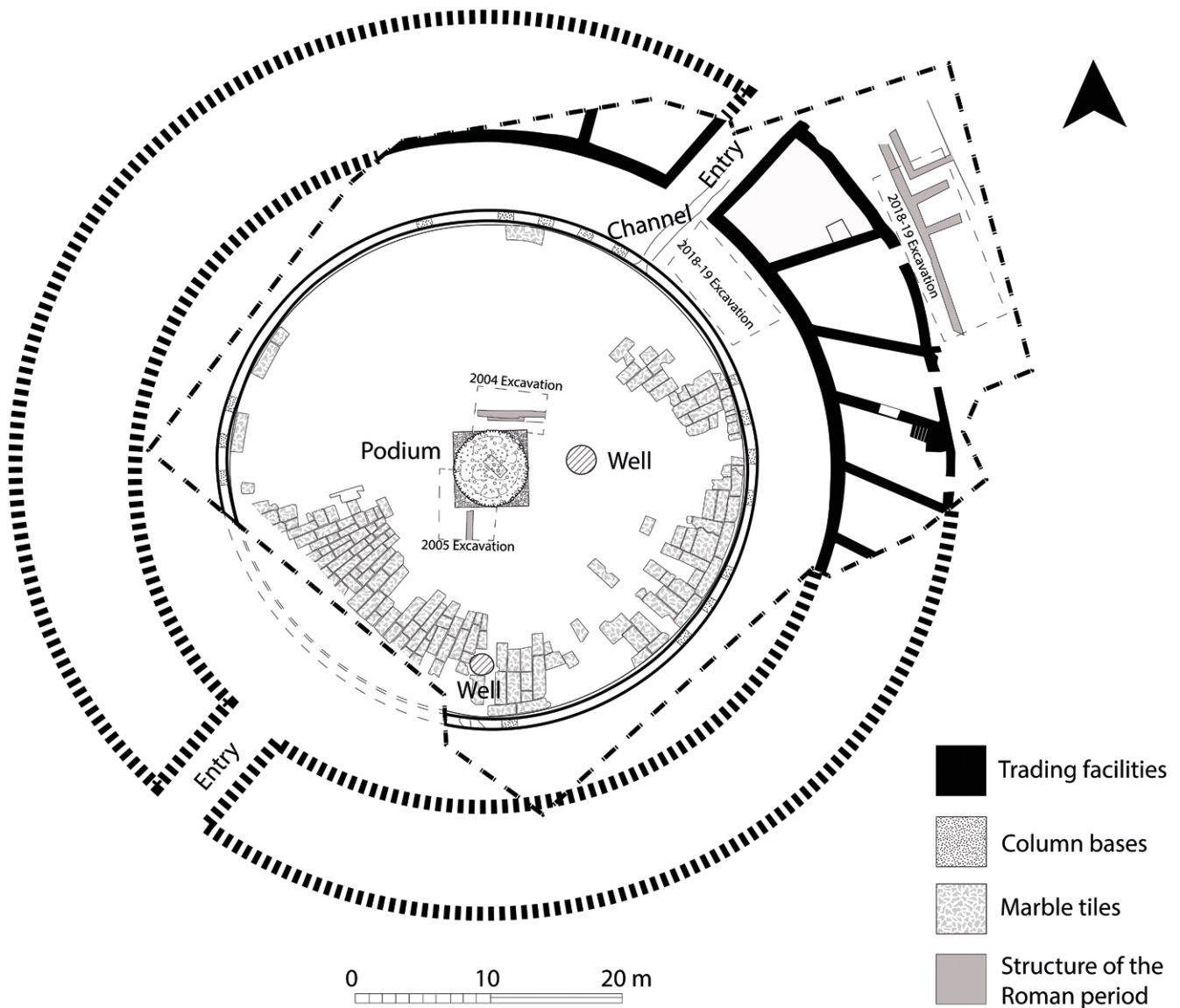
by dwelling construction.⁵² Burnt material in the destruction levels suggested a fire as the cause, with dated ceramic objects dominated by North African products like Culinare A and C/A cooking ware, ARS A1 types, and amphorae (Africaine IIB and Tripolitaine III) probably introduced in Durrës during the second half of the 2nd century C.E. Eastern Mediterranean products, including ESB (Atlante 80) and ESC (Hayes 2), were also identified. These objects date the unit in question to the second half of the 2nd century C.E., serving as the terminus post quem for the construction of the dwelling.⁵³

50 Shehi 2007, no. 4, 166–169.

51 Plutarch mentions an earthquake that coincided with Cicero's arrival in Dyrrachium in the spring of 58 B.C.E. Plut. Vitae, 32.

52 Hoti et al. 2008, 367–197; Shkodra-Rrugia 2019.

53 Shkodra-Rrugia 2019, 41 stratigraphic description, 278–280 chronological analysis.



11

54 In 2018–2019, excavations under the Forum corridor and east of the previous trenches revealed other structures.⁵⁴ The discovery of a wall with an east-west orientation helped date the new urban system in the eastern part of the Forum. The sector expanded with new north-south-oriented structures, ending in a fire (Fig. 12. 13), and was subject to rapid reuse, abandonment, and reconstruction, featuring modest-sized structures along a north-south road.

55 Moving west to sector 4600, Imperial period levels showcased mortar floors and the negative layers of a wall dividing two rooms. These rooms, possibly used for storage and living, experienced destruction by fire at the end of the 2nd century C.E. or the beginning of the 3rd century C.E. Artefacts related to female personal care suggested a hasty evacuation. After demolition, the area was filled, and new construction quickly followed, indicating a discontinuity between the Roman and Late Roman period reconstructions. In sector 4600, new construction was also interrupted by a smaller-scale fire tentatively dated between the second half of the 3rd century C.E. and the beginning of the 4th century C.E.

Fig. 11: Durrës. Site 6 plan with position of the excavations (scale 1 : 500)

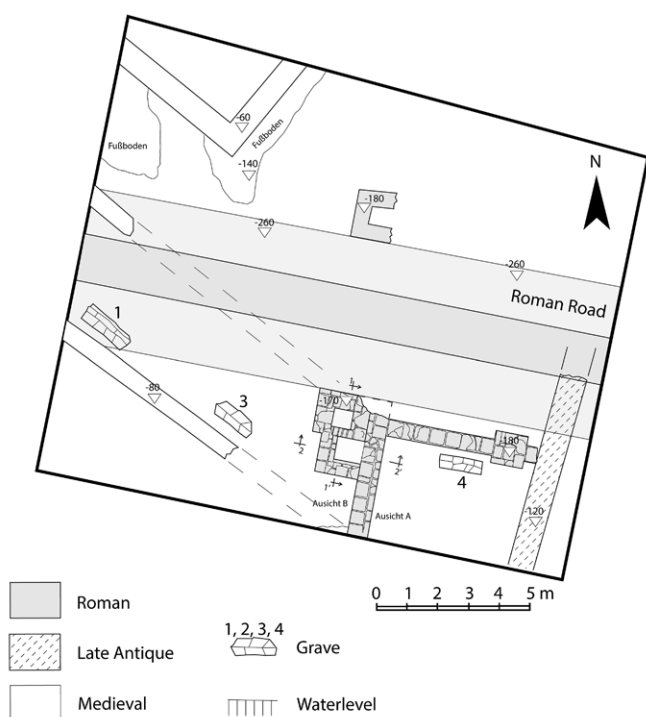
54 Abadie-Reynal et al. 2018a, 320–324; Abadie-Reynal et al. 2019, 336–347.



12



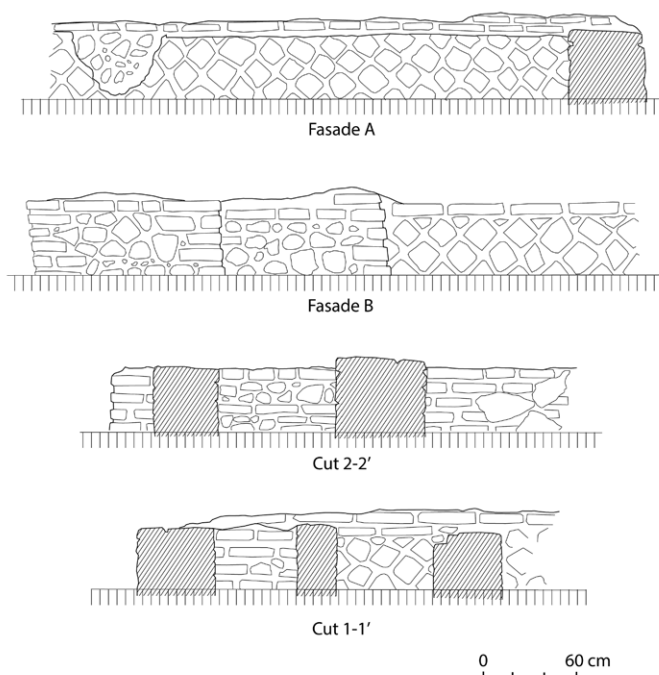
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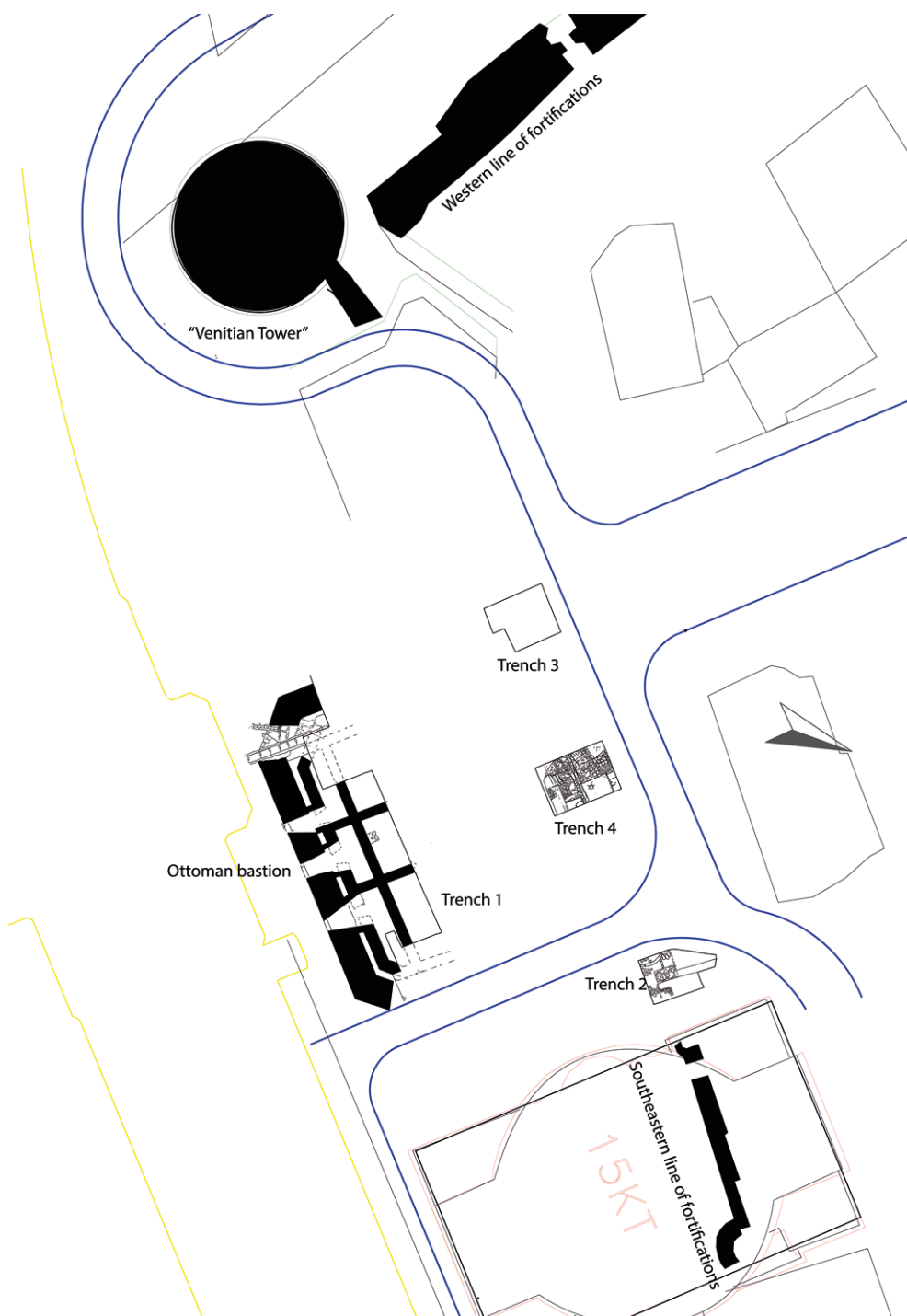
Fig. 12, 13: Durrës. Site 6, detail of burnt layers, 2019

Fig. 14: Durrës. Site 7 plan (scale 1 : 250 resp. 1 : 5)



56 In 2002, at the **site no. 7** a Roman Imperial dwelling (3.46 m × 4.98 m) near a road intersection was discovered (Fig. 3, 4; Fig. 14).⁵⁵ The initial structural phase featured opus reticulatum walls, with bricks on them bonded with mortar. A room's floor had a black and white mosaic, assumed to be from the 1st century C.E. On the western side, two water towers were attached to the wall, and a third tower 5.20 m to the north indicated the road's width. Demolition layers, bearing traces of burning, testified significant damage, correlating with pottery from the second half of 2nd century C.E. After demolition, reconstruction works were undertaken, evidenced by a deposit with ESB (Atlante 60), ARSW (Hayes 9A), dating the damage and reconstruction to post-150–160 or the third quarter of the 2nd century C.E. In late antiquity, the area had limited use, later on it was abandoned and transformed into burial plots.

57 Excavations at the **site no. 8**, in the square in front of the modern harbour of Durrës, revealed a Roman-period structure oriented east-west, featuring a massive



15

Fig. 15: Durrës. Site 8 plan

wall (4003) and a pilaster (Fig. 3, 8; Fig. 15. 16. 17).⁵⁶ The wall, 3.30 m wide, had a conglomerate and limestone block foundation, topped with a brick-faced concrete wall. The pilaster, constructed with mortar-bonded bricks, indicated a period from the end of the 1st century B.C.E. to the middle of the 1st century C.E., possibly serving as the base of a second entrance. An L-shaped wall (4007) on the western side of wall 4003, oriented almost east-west and with a width of 1.20 m, suggested a change in the function of the massive wall and hinted at urban remodeling.

58 On the south side of wall 4003, another wall structure, made of triangular bricks bound with mortar, featured a floor (4042) leaning on its upper level and a well

56 Shehi et al. 2017, 244 f. 248–250.

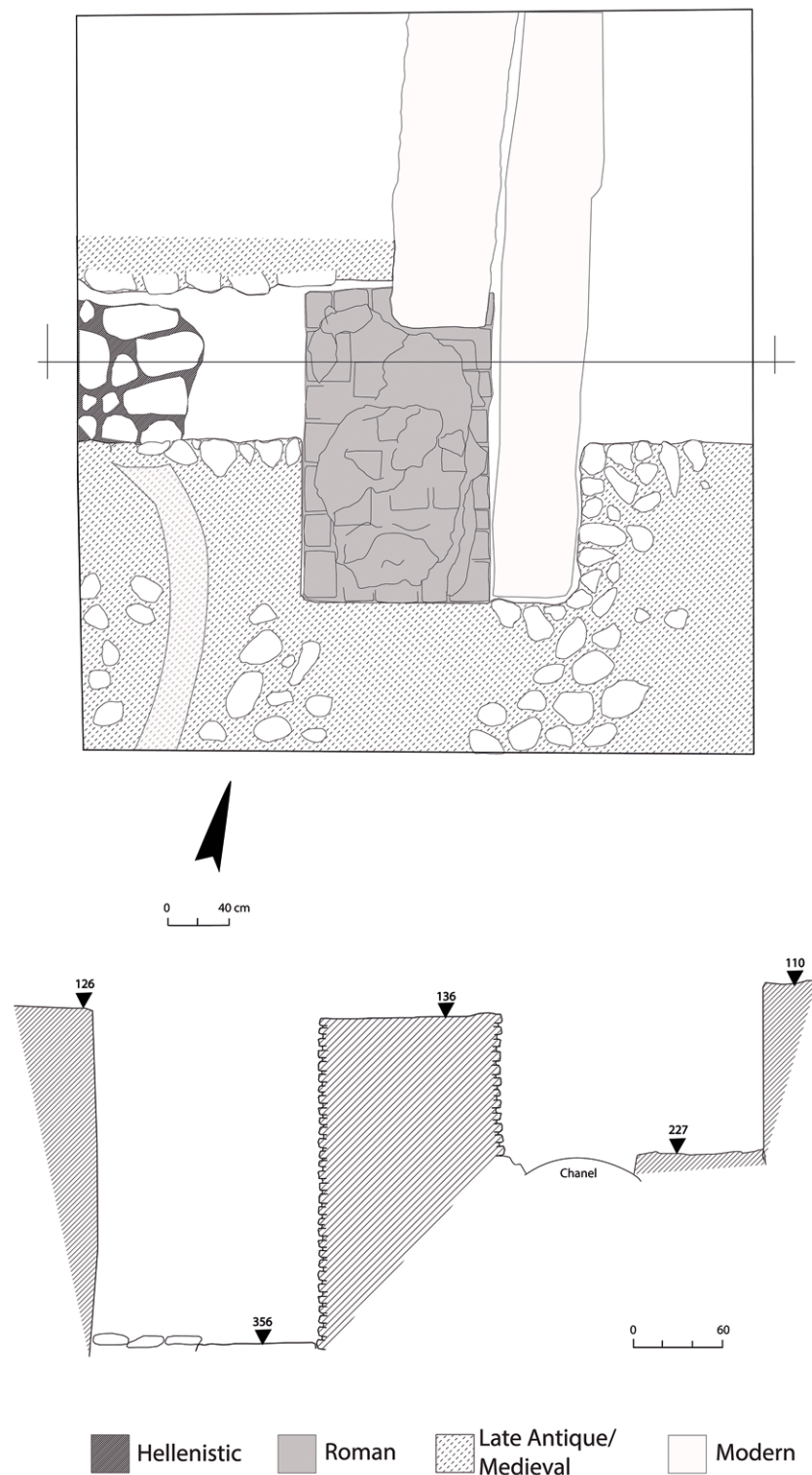
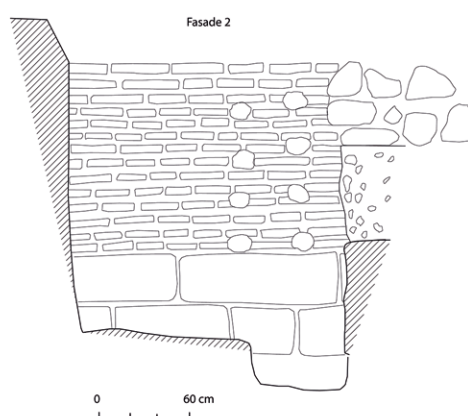
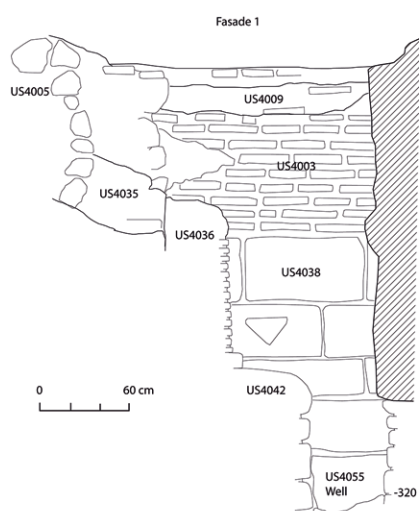


Fig. 16: Durrës. Site 8, trench 2
(scale 1 : 5)

16

(4053) with a diameter of about 0.70 m. Although the construction date of this wall was undetermined, its subsequent abandonment phase was identified.

59 Following this phase, the area became a landfill site for residential and artisanal waste, resulting in the abandonment of earlier facilities. Deposits in the area contained Roman pottery, including African fine wares. Excavations near wall 4003 focused on the upper part of the well filling (4055), revealing a complete, undamaged skull. The upper abandonment deposits, extending beyond the wellhead, contained construction material with traces of burning, probably from a nearby public bath, potentially the



17

one identified in 2003. Ceramic finds, including ESB and ARS fine wares, pointed to a destruction no later than the second half of the 2nd century C.E.

60 The findings indicate a cessation of use and the conversion of the area into a waste disposal site during the second half of the 2nd century C.E. Despite numerous construction interventions in subsequent periods, there is no clear evidence of deliberate destruction. The cause of the nearby baths' destruction, from which material was dumped in the well and surrounding areas, remains unclear, with burning evidence possibly related to bath operation or to a subsequent fire which destroyed the entire building.

Fig. 17: Durrës. Site 8, trench 4 (scale 1 : 5)

Additional Finds in Dyrrachium and Comparisons with Other Cities

⁶¹ Apart from the eight documented sites, additional evidence of fire damage has emerged from various excavations, including the »House with Rosette Mosaic« (Fig. 3, 9). Unfortunately, precise dating for the burning associated with the Roman Imperial period on top of the mosaic is unavailable due to insufficient excavation details.⁵⁷

⁶² In Albania, only two ancient cities show burned layers dating to the second half of the 2nd century C.E. Notably, Apollonia stands out, where a vast, luxurious house covering 2500 square metres was unearthed during joint Albanian-Soviet excavations (1958–1960). The house's destruction by fire is evidenced by burnt levels on some room floors, with underlying material culture dated to the 2nd–3rd centuries C.E.⁵⁸ However, uncertainties surround this discovery as it resulted from non-stratigraphic excavations, lacking detailed publication.

⁶³ In Apollonia's theatre, wall structures on the ruins of the stage building, potentially a dwelling, exhibit a thick layer of burning, resulting in wall deformation.⁵⁹ The excavator has tentatively dated this burning to the first half of the 3rd century C.E., relying on Roman Imperial coins. Nonetheless, the non-stratigraphic nature of the excavation and the unpublished coin findings contribute to dating uncertainties.

⁶⁴ The northern portico of the Hellenistic agora in Apollonia experienced documented destruction at the end of the 2nd or beginning of the 3rd century C.E. A tomb found in the area, containing juvenile remains, serves as a chronological indicator for the destruction time.⁶⁰ Additionally, sector G excavations unveiled a complex sewage system with a layer of bricks beneath a burnt layer, suggesting serious damage and subsequent in-filling of conduits in the lower town, possibly due to a large-scale earthquake. This destruction coincides with major urban changes and abandonment.⁶¹

⁶⁵ An enigmatic discovery in Apollonia involves two artistically significant busts from the Antonine period found in a conduit,⁶² dating to the 2nd–3rd century C.E.⁶³ Initially thought to be hidden to prevent theft,⁶⁴ the destruction layer's chronology (3rd century C.E.) and lack of barbaric invasions prompt reconsideration. The authors associated the demolition with earthquakes⁶⁵ and proposed an abandonment ritual,⁶⁶ aligning with traces of reconstruction in Apollonia dated to the 3rd century C.E. and the second half of the 2nd century C.E.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ However, scepticism arises regarding attributing structural changes in Apollonia to earthquakes, as suggested by the authors. The lack of evidence from previous excavations raises doubts about this explanation. Furthermore, inconsistencies

⁵⁷ Hoti et al. 2011, 595.

⁵⁸ Budina – Kastanjan 2003–2004, 243.

⁵⁹ Mano 1974a, 430; Mano 1999, 188 f.

⁶⁰ Shpuza et al. 2012, 405.

⁶¹ Lambolej – Drini 2014, 76. 91. 94. On p. 76, it is stated that the destruction of the northern portico occurred either in the second half of the 2nd century or the first half of the 3rd century C.E. On p. 81, it is mentioned that the earthquake is dated to the 4th century C.E. Skënderaj – Lambolej 2013, 314, also suggest that the portico was destroyed at the end of the 2nd century or at the beginning of the 3rd century C.E., in conjunction with the filling of conduits in the lower city as a result of a major earthquake.

⁶² The first bust, based on its style is dated to the second half of the 2nd century C.E. The second bust is dated to the Antonine period or probably to the beginning of the Severan period, as indicated in Lambolej 2012, 310 f. With gratitude for his personal communication, it is the opinion of Professor Hans Rupprecht Goette that the second bust could potentially be dated to 130–140 C.E.

⁶³ Barrière 2015, 28.

⁶⁴ Lambolej 2012, 314 f.

⁶⁵ Lambolej 2012, 315.

⁶⁶ Lambolej 2012, 315; Lambolej – Drini 2014, 86.

⁶⁷ Skënderaj – Lambolej 2014, 202.

in similar situations within Apollonia are not adequately considered, challenging the earthquake hypothesis.

67 C. P. Sestieri excavated a structure identified as a gymnasium, which was hypothesized to have been used as a dwelling during the 2nd–3rd century C.E. Of particular interest are the mentions of hearths (focolari), which were dated to the middle of the 2nd century C.E. until the beginning of the 3rd century C.E. based on ceramic finds and coins from Antoninus Pius and Geta.⁶⁸ We question whether this identification is accurate since the excavation techniques at that time may have mistaken burned layers for hearths.

68 In *Byllis*, a brief mention of a house in the western part of the city (1989–1990) reveals traces of burning and material culture from the 2nd century C.E.⁶⁹ In a second monument, the so-called Monument of Terentianus showcases a collapsed roof, dating to the years 150–170 C.E., with uncertain causes after abandonment.⁷⁰

Coin Hoards Dated to the Second Half of the 2nd Century C.E.

69 Of great interest for the topic under discussion are two coin hoards found in the northern part of the city (Fig. 2). These two finds have drawn our attention to the chronology given to them by numismatists. They belong to the same period as the demolition of the dwellings mentioned above.

The First Hoard

70 The first hoard (Fig. 3, 10) is the larger of the two. It was found in 1941 and published in 1958.⁷¹ The hoard was found by workers who were opening a trench during some public works. The coins were found inside three ceramic pots, together with silver coins and jewellery, with a total weight of 13.5 kg. Only a portion of the coins survived, as the jewellery was completely dispersed immediately after discovery. Due to corrosion, the preserved coins were initially considered as bronze issues, which accounted for their survival. Only after conservation did it become clear that they were all silver denominations, with the exception of two pieces. The hoard was composed of 3874 silver denarii and 2 sestertii. The coins belong to the imperial period from the reign of Nero up to that of Lucius Verus, with issues from all the emperors and members of the imperial family reigning during this period. The most recent coins in the hoard are those of Lucius Verus, establishing a terminus post quem for their burial around 170 C.E. As for the motive for the burial, it was suggested that it could have been connected with the Marcomannic Wars.⁷²

The Second Hoard

71 The second hoard (Fig. 3, 2) was found during rescue excavations, presented above as the second site. 64 pieces belonging to the hoard were discovered in a so-

68 Sestieri 1942a, 6; Sestieri 1942b, 29–50.

69 Ceka 1992, 93.

70 Xhyheri et al. 2013, 263; Muçaj et al. 2013, 183.

71 Ceka 1958, 145–202.

72 Meta 2021, 8 f.

called glass workshop. They were initially dated from 97 to 170/176 and later to around 180 C.E. when they were again put in connection with the Marcomannic Wars.⁷³

Comparative Data

⁷² The chronology of these two coin hoards is very similar. The first is dated around or after 170, while the second around 170/176 or 180. We must remember that the first find is incomplete, as many other objects disappeared at the time of discovery, which could have affected the evidence of the date. The second hoard comes from a rescue excavation, with various problems and difficulties related to the excavation methods.

⁷³ The two hoards may each have been a private stash of valuable objects that remained unrecovered after widespread urban destruction caused by a conflagration. However, there are two significant factors that contradict this possibility. Firstly, both hoards have a similar chronology, which would be an unusual coincidence. This coincidence would be considered normal if not for the second factor. The burial of both hoards was followed by fires and destructions in a similar chronology with them. These two coincidences compel us to consider another possibility. Could they be indications of a dangerous situation or several situations occurring within a short period?

⁷⁴ While we have not been able to identify other cases in the literature for hiding coins or other hoards in Durrës or the other ancient cities in Albania during the same period, there is an interesting case related to the city of Apollonia that bears mention. A trove of bronze objects was discovered during excavations in the city theatre. It consists of 27 bronze objects, such as little bells, rings, belt buckles, fibulae, and finger rings. The finds are chronologically dated within the late 2nd and the first two thirds of the 3rd century C.E. It cannot be said whether it was buried as a result of an external threat. It was suggested to belong to a non-ferrous metal smith or dealer.⁷⁴

⁷⁵ The bronze hoard appears to have been buried around the same time as the destruction of a brick structure discovered by A. Mano during excavations in 1974 in the same theatre. The burned brick structure was situated south of the skene building, while the hoard was found a few meters away at the north-western corner, within another space with brick walls. However, previous excavations by A. Mano had removed the burnt layers, making it impossible to identify them during the discovery of the bronze objects. It was another coincidence that I happened to make this discovery.

⁷⁶ Two hoards were discovered in Dyrrachium, both buried at around the same time as the city's conflagration and destruction across eight sites. Additionally, a collection of bronze objects was found in a structure that had been destroyed by fire during a similar period to the Dyrrachium hoards. Two busts were also discovered in Apollonia, under a destruction level that corresponds to a similar chronology. Further evidence of destruction during the same period was found in a site in Byllis, with another site likely destroyed by a conflagration. These numerous coincidences across the three different cities leave little room for doubt. Therefore, we conclude that the hoards buried in Dyrrachium and the bronze trove in Apollonia cannot be considered as coincidental private stashes of valuable objects.

⁷³ Meta 2021, 9, changes the final chronology from 170/176 published in Frashëri 2015, 280. 282 to ca. 180 C.E.

⁷⁴ Ortisi 2009, 131–141.

What Happened in Dyrrachium during the Second Half of the 2nd Century C.E.?

77 The archaeological findings in Dyrrachium unveil a distinct shift in its socio-economic landscape during the latter half of the 2nd century C.E. This transformative period is marked by a noteworthy interruption in local ceramic production, with subsequent struggles to regain its former prominence. In place of local products, North African imports dominate, gradually diminishing by the century's end.

78 This decline in local ceramic production coincides with a visible downturn in new construction projects. The archaeological data reveal a stark hiatus in constructing new buildings, pointing to a significant disruption in the city's development. While the occurrence of this interruption lacks a clear single cause, its repercussions are evident and multifaceted.

79 Simultaneously, records from Dyrrachium and Apollonia indicate a surge in burials during this period compared to previous epochs. Alone, this information might not be noteworthy, considering it as part of the city's natural life cycle. However, when viewed alongside the decline in local ceramic production and construction activities, doubts arise about potential interconnectedness.

80 In contrast, inscriptions fail to provide clear evidence correlating with the situation of ceramic production and construction. Unfortunately, the depth of knowledge about inscriptions has not reached a level to elucidate the city's real situation resulting from local historical events.

81 Two distinct historical phases emerge, before and after the second half of the 2nd century C.E. The former witnesses a steady rise in local ceramic production, a vital facet of the city's economic life. Interaction with imported goods reflects an active social class adapting to the Mediterranean market, while the construction sector experiences considerable growth, contributing significantly to the city's economic prosperity and expansion.

82 In the 3rd century C.E., local ceramic production dwindles, overshadowed by imports, and construction activities slow down, mainly comprising repairs. This comparative analysis reveals a crisis in the second half of the 2nd century, with destruction, demolition, and accidental fires occurring disproportionately compared to other chronological periods.

83 While occasional disasters in ancient cities are deemed normal, the concentration of destruction events during the second half of the 2nd century raises doubts. These doubts are amplified by the presence of hoards closely related in date, prompting questions about the unknown events that may have transpired. No known invasions or conflicts involving foreign powers or Roman armies are recorded in the city's history during this period.

84 To comprehend the events in Dyrrachium during the second half of the 2nd century, a combination of direct excavation data and indirect effects observed throughout the city is essential. These side effects may stem from specific events, and four main candidates, as potential explanations, are considered: societal unrest, economic upheaval, natural disasters, or a combination of these factors. Unravelling this historical mystery relies on a holistic analysis of the available archaeological evidence.

Accidental Fire/s

85 Accidental fires were common occurrences in ancient cities. They could start by chance and rapidly spread due to random causes. Evidence supporting this possibility of multiple fires occurring in close chronological proximity includes the discovery of burnt layers in several neighbourhoods, the lack of a unified chronology, and

the presence of similar material culture within those layers, albeit with variations in their percentage of origin. This explanation could account for the findings in other cities, where random fires may have occurred within a few decades.

86 Accidental fires could cause significant damage to people and the economy, resulting in considerable difficulties in returning to normal life. However, some elements of this scenario do not fit with our situation in Dyrrachium. The fires, no matter how strong and destructive, would not have had long-term consequences for the pace of construction, as evidenced by the excavations. Additionally, the know-how of local potters and their production, in terms of both amount and variety, would not have been damaged to the point that they could not recover. Furthermore, such fires would not justify the hiding of coin hoards by both wealthy and average citizens.

87 The presence of fire damage remains the primary indication of abnormal situations, but the inability to precisely determine their chronology presents a significant challenge. The situation of side effects in Dyrrachium, with the pace of urban development and the absence of local production, does not support this option.

A Destructive Earthquake

88 Another option would be a destructive earthquake that may have hit the region. Such an interpretation could fit with the (not very convincing) explanation given in the case of several destruction layers at Apollonia. This earthquake may even have been accompanied by a fire. If this was the case, it could explain the devastation throughout the city as well as the burnt layers. The loss of human lives, the economic damages and difficulties to restart all over again would have been considerable.

89 However, there are several elements that contradict this option. Firstly, if fires were the result of random events or natural disasters such as earthquakes, more traces should have been found in other settlements in the region, but this is not the case. Secondly, even if a powerful earthquake occurred, it would not have had long-term consequences on pottery production in the region or the urban activity in Dyrrachium. Finally, the levels of destruction are above the levels of the fires. Such a sequence does not correspond to the logic that it could have been an earthquake that caused the fires.

A Violent Raid

90 One plausible scenario that emerges is a violent, armed activity accompanied by arson, offering a coherent explanation for various identified elements. This event would support the hypothesis of concealment of the hoards due to fear, as both affluent and average individuals could have felt threatened. The armed raid could provide a compelling rationale for the widespread fires discovered in excavation sites, contributing to the presence of burnt layers. Furthermore, the aftermath of such an event would explain the significant human and economic losses, leading to a dearth of new constructions for several years. This event could provide answers to the situations discovered in Apollonia and Byllis.

91 While Dyrrachium lacks explicit historical records of war events or violent raids during this period, numismatists have linked the concealed treasures to the Marcomannic Wars (166–180 C.E.).⁷⁵ However, the main theatre of these wars was in the Noric-Pannonian region.⁷⁶ Northern Italy too had to endure the ravages of war: the pro-

75 Meta 2021, 8 f.

76 Komoróczy 2009, 114–125.

vincial town of Opitergum/Oderzo was destroyed by the Germanic tribes penetrating into the Empire and Aquileia was besieged.⁷⁷

92 Archaeological records list three kinds of data that can illustrate the repercussions of the Marcomannic Wars: well-documented destruction layers of the second half of the 2nd century C.E.; hoards dated into the second half of the 2nd century C.E.; and well-dated military camps.⁷⁸ Destruction layers are documented in several settlements along the front.⁷⁹ However, the front was located hundreds of miles away. The closest point to finding a coin treasure associated with these wars is Osijek⁸⁰, almost 465 km northeast of Dyrrachium. Such activities are not a sufficient reason for panic to break out in Dyrrachium.

93 To explore this further, one could consider the possibility of an incursion detached from the main war theatre and situated in the eastern section of the Danube limes. This might relate to the activity of the Costoboci tribes residing in the Carpathian Mountains,⁸¹ known for their incursion in 169–170 C.E. They attacked the Roman territories, traversing Moesia Inferior, Thrace, Macedonia and Achaia, leaving a trail of destruction. The route that the Costoboci took on their incursion into Greece is not known, but there are some hypotheses.⁸²

94 The events attributed to the Costoboci (Paus. 10, 34, 5; Ael. Arist. 23, 12; HA Marcus 22, 2) and archaeological traces include the burning of the Telesterion in Eleusis, attacks on Eleutea of Phocis, and endangerment of Athens itself (Ael. Arist. 23, 12).⁸³ An inscription in Eleusis, where the attack is mentioned,⁸⁴ is estimated to date to 170 or 171 C.E.⁸⁵ These cities were unwallled and ungarrisoned, and the general picture is described as one of pillage, burning, and slaughter.⁸⁶ To expel these plunderers, special troops were assigned to L. Iulius Vecilius Gratus in Macedonia and Achaia.⁸⁷ After being defeated, the invaders retreated back to their territory.

95 One of the most important aspects for which Dyrrachium was known was related to its being one of the two starting points on the Adriatic coast, together with Apollonia, of the Via Egnatia which traversed the interior of the peninsula, reaching first Thessaloniki and then Byzantium.⁸⁸ The Costoboci certainly crossed the Via Egnatia. From here the journey to Eleusis was longer than that to Dyrrachium.⁸⁹

96 The exact connection between the city's archaeological findings and the Costoboci incursion remains uncertain. The lack of direct historical evidence for a raid on Dyrrachium does not necessarily negate the possibility, considering the scarcity of ancient texts documenting such an event. Considering that very few sources mention the destruction of Eleusis (Paus. 10, 34, 5; Ael. Arist. 23, 12), a prestigious temple, enjoy-

77 Kehne 2009, 104.

78 Fischer 2009, 109–113; Fischer 2012, 31.

79 Fischer 1994, 341–154; Fischer 2012, 32–37.

80 Gabler 2002, map at page 71.

81 Russu 1959, 341–352; Popa 2007, 474–486.

82 Böhme 1975, 165 fig. 3; Zwikker 1941, 168; Gerov 1968, 335. 337. A series of treasures in Bulgarian territory, dating to approximately this period, is estimated to be related to the attacks of the Costoboci tribes (Böhme 1975, 177 fig. 8). The analysis of the inscriptions in Macedonia has dated the emergence of the Costoboci tribes there to the summer of 170, see Gerov 1968, 336, cit. 110.

83 Clinton 1989, 64; Scheidel 1990, 493. 496–498; Cortés 1995, 188; Clinton 2004, 55.

84 Follet 1976, no. 3411, 257–259.

85 Zwikker 1941, 172; Scheidel 1990, 498; Cortés 1995, 193 and Birley 2000b, 168, indicates the year 170 C.E.; Clinton 2004, 52.

86 Birley 2000b, 165.

87 CIL VI 4, 31856; Premierstein 1912, 139–167; Saxer 1967, 35–37; Böhme 1975, 164. 177–178; Popa 2007, 474–477.

88 Fasolo 2005.

89 From Thessaloniki to Eleusis it would take 15.3 days covering 459 km while to Dyrrachium 12.8 days, covering 384 km. Based on <https://orbis.stanford.edu>.

ing the favours of Roman emperors and Athenians,⁹⁰ illustrates that even significant events might be underrepresented in historical records. As W. Scheidel points out, the attack on Attica should be considered as the end point of their achievement, but the attack may have been a long process spanning two years, 170–171 C.E. and not just by one group, those who arrived in Attica.⁹¹

⁹⁷ Therefore, a violent raid remains a plausible explanation for some aspects of the archaeological record at Dyrrachium, Apollonia and Byllis. This territory is quite wide, but the position of the cities near the main roads of the region could justify it. It could explain even certain short-term effects, but it faces challenges in explaining the almost-extinction of local ceramic production or the replacement of Eastern production with African imports. Related to Apollonia, it can explain the hiding of a hoard composed of bronze objects, but not the presence of the grave within a public space.

Plague and Social Unrest

⁹⁸ The period under scrutiny aligns with the Antonine plague, a pivotal moment for the Roman Empire. The studies dedicated to it are grouped into two major divisions based on the approach to the effects that the epidemic had. One group sees it as an event with devastating effects,⁹² while other scholars greatly discount its negative impact on the life of the empire.⁹³ Practically, for every datapoint used to explain the damage that the plague may have caused, there are other scholars that use the same information from a different angle.⁹⁴ Rather, the most important fact is that it covered the entire empire (Marcell. 23, 6, 24), from 165 to ca 190–192 C.E.⁹⁵, with several rapid outbreaks followed by periods of inactivity, causing difficulties in the development of normal life, widely accepted by the researchers.

⁹⁹ From the first eruption recorded in 165 C.E. in the east,⁹⁶ there are several epidemic waves mentioned throughout the empire.⁹⁷ Estimates regarding loss of life go from 1–2 % of the population up to 30 %.⁹⁸ In the opinion of other scholars there is nothing that gives cause for suspecting a catastrophic upheaval.⁹⁹ While according to another assessment even if the empire was not dealt a mortal blow a host of social and economic problems were visible.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁰ Mylonas 1961, 155–186.

⁹¹ Scheidel 1990, 498.

⁹² The most famous proponent remains R. P. Duncan-Jones.

⁹³ In addition to the other cases mentioned in this text, we are highlighting one particular study as representative of this group, Haldon et al. 2018, 2–4.

⁹⁴ For a good summary presenting the contradictions among researchers in their assessments while using the same sources of information see Lo Cascio 2012, 5–13. Other important analyses: Bruun 2007, 202–204; Duncan-Jones 2018, 41–72.

⁹⁵ For later evidences of the plague until 192 C.E. see Duncan-Jones 1996, 116–120; Duncan-Jones 2018, 42 f. Until 194 C.E. by Little 2007, 4; Lo Cascio 2002, 102 f. The last mention by ancient authors is for the year 189 C.E. from Dio Cassius 72, 14, 3–4.

⁹⁶ Duncan-Jones 1996, 116.

⁹⁷ For a detailed list of events see Duncan-Jones 1996, 116–118. Other mentions in Birley 2000a, 165. In 165/166 C.E. it reached Rome through the armies returning from the campaigns to the east (HA Verus, 8, 1). In 168 C.E. it struck Rome again and many provinces, then the Roman army at Aquileia, fighting the Marcomanni (Epit. De Caes. 16, 5; Oros. 7, 15, 3). At the end of 170 C.E., the medical situation was considered dramatic (CIL II 6278). In 172 C.E., according to Jerome, the Roman army almost became extinct as a result of the plague (Helm 1956, 206). A letter from Marcus Aurelius to Athens in 174/175 C.E. mentions the declining population, as well as the distress of many other cities (Roxan 1985, 121–127). According to Dio Cassius, in 189 C.E. Rome experienced the worst outbreak of the plague, with a death toll of 2000 people every day (73, 14, 3–4). The famine that invaded Rome in 189–190 C.E. (Dio. Cass. 73, 13, 1–2) is thought to have been again a consequence of the epidemic (Lo Cascio 2002, 103).

⁹⁸ Littman – Littman 1973, 254 f.; Paine – Storey 2012, 188; Scheidel 2002, 99 f. 108, endorsing the model proposed in Yan Zelener's unpublished PhD dissertation. Zelner 2012, 175 f.; Gilliam 1961, 250.

⁹⁹ Bruun 2003, 429.

¹⁰⁰ Frier 2000, 816.

100 Contradictory viewpoints arise regarding the plague's effect on new constructions in Rome and provinces. Some propose a construction slowdown in Italy from 166 C.E. to 180 C.E., but not so evident in other provinces,¹⁰¹ while others challenge or dismiss these calculations.¹⁰²

101 Social unrest due to socio-economic disruption is suggested,¹⁰³ citing examples like the revolt of the »boukoloi« in Egypt,¹⁰⁴ the Rome famine in 189–190 C.E. (Herodian 1, 12, 3), and the rise of prices in parallel with the lack of merchandise.¹⁰⁵ Yet, dissenting opinions question the link between the Antonine plague and social upheaval.¹⁰⁶

102 A contraction of trade in the 2nd century C.E. is another topic that has attracted discussion.¹⁰⁷ In the same time African exports reached a peak in the second half of the 2nd century C.E. with the ARSW considered a partial index of these exports, led by grain.¹⁰⁸ The increase in African imports is attributed to the plague's uneven spread,¹⁰⁹ with Africa being less affected due to its unfavourable position towards the Mediterranean trade routes.¹¹⁰

103 Although Dyrrachium isn't explicitly mentioned in plague accounts, its geographical vulnerability as a crucial crossing point for military and civilian travels¹¹¹ raises the possibility of its exposure. The journey of Roman legions and Lucius Verus from Brindisi to Corinth and Athens (HA Verus 6, 7–9) to the Asian battlefield¹¹² could have involved a stop at Dyrrachium. A crossing from Brindisi would have the coast of Southern Illyria as a mandatory stop where the two main reception centres were Dyrrachium and Apollonia (Str. 6, 3, 8; Plin. NH 2, 244; 3, 129; Anton. Aug. 324. 329–332). A similar course on the return seems highly likely, while the legions that had been taken from the Danube and Rhine limes moved by land across the Balkans.¹¹³ Lucius Verus was accused of bringing the plague to all the provinces through which he passed on his way back to Rome (HA Verus 8, 1). Dyrrachium is therefore implicated due to its strategic location in the early stages. Moreover, the economic relationship that Dyrrachium had

101 Duncan-Jones 1996, 125–128 figs. 8. 9. 12; Duncan-Jones 1990, 59–67. 180–183 figs. 7. 13; Jouffroy 1986, 319–329; Duncan-Jones 2018, 63.

102 Greenberg 2003, 417 f.; Bruun 2003, 426 f. 429.

103 Scheidel 2001, 75. 100 f.

104 Lo Cascio 1991, 709. Other opinions not related just to this revolt but in general with the troubled situation of Egypt during the second half of the 2nd century C.E. have put considerable doubts on the effects of the plague, proposing other reasons, such as environmental ones and the deterioration of the Nile flood regime. For a review of different opinions see Wilson 2013, 265 f. Elliot 2016, 14, sees the ruining and deaths of villagers as the occasion for the attacks from semi-nomadic pastoralist band/s.

105 Lo Cascio 1980, 274; Rathbone 1996, 334; Rathbone 1997, 215. The emperor Commodus had to use as scapegoat Cleander to deflect public disapproval (Herodian 1, 12, 3; HA Comm. 7, 2).

106 Greenberg 2003, 424.

107 Harris 2000, 740, based on the lower number of shipwrecks found; the reasons are seen in the Antonine plague or the wars during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Harris 2012, 332, writes that the fall-off in the number of shipwrecks cannot any longer be cited as a proof that maritime trade declined as a consequence of the Antonine plague, since their number declines after 100 C.E. and declines little if at all between the second and third centuries.

108 Whittaker 2000, 536; Lo Cascio 2002, 103, on measures taken to regulate African wheat imports in case of shortage of Egyptian supplies. Duncan-Jones 2006, 31. 37 fig. 1. He used the results of Panella – Tchernia 1994, 150 f. graph. 1 which shows several declines in wine amphoras. But on the other hand, the non-wine amphoras do show an increase in quantity in the same period, Panella – Tchernia 1994, graph. 2.

109 Duncan-Jones 1996, 128 f. fig. 12; Duncan-Jones 2018, 63; Duncan-Jones 2006, 33–35 figs. 3. 4.

110 Duncan-Jones 1996, 128 f.

111 E.g. the movement of Sulla in 87 B.C.E. in the campaign against the kingdom of Pontus, Keaveney 2005, 106; in the war between Caesar and Pompey in 48 B.C.E., Caes. BC 3, 41–48; in the war between Brutus and Antony in 42 B.C.E., Plut. Brut. 24, 1, 6, Dio. Cass. 47, 21; Vespasian's legions controlled the city in 68 C.E. to put pressure on Italy and to maintain under control the eastern provinces, Tacit. 2, 83.

112 The same in Birley 2000a, 161.

113 Birley 2000a, 165.

with the Mediterranean regions made it more vulnerable. The city's exchanges with Aquileia,¹¹⁴ affected by the plague highlight such vulnerability.

104 A plague may explain the loss of a generation of potters, disrupting knowledge transfer and resulting in the decline of local pottery production and the need to increase imports. The mortality crisis, more than population reduction, impacts product and service levels.¹¹⁵ Economic hardships and disruption to normal life may well explain the lack of new constructions, emphasizing reconstruction.

105 Challenges arise in explaining the fires and hoards as consequences of plague. Scholars draw parallels with the Black Death's impact on medieval Europe¹¹⁶, citing price doubling up to 15 years post-epidemic.¹¹⁷ If famine linked to the Antonine plague affected Rome,¹¹⁸ cities like Dyrrachium faced greater exposure, potentially causing social discontent and riots¹¹⁹ that may explain the observed fires and hoards concealment.

106 However, acknowledging these ideas requires caution. First, conclusive evidence linking events to the Antonine plague is lacking. Second, social unrest cannot be exclusively tied to a plague. Lastly, widespread unrest from Dyrrachium to Apollonia and Byllis without clear historical records raises scepticism. While compelling, the theory of social unrest remains inconclusive at the current knowledge level.

Conclusions

107 It is clear that we have elements from excavations that indicate a problematic situation in Dyrrachium. The few comparisons we have found in the region for similar circumstances do show similarities, indicating similar problems, but do not help us to clearly interpret the archaeological data.

108 While accidental fires and an earthquake have to be eliminated from the discussion as the cause, the other two events do offer some explanation for our situation. But at the same time there are certain aspects that cannot be explained just by a violent raid or only by the plague. Social unrest could justify fires in different parts of the city, occurring at different moments that would explain finding material culture with few differences related to the percentage of origin. If the two coin hoards can be related to violent situations, we can understand an attack on wealthy individuals, or other economically powerful figures during famines, but not on artisans with modest wealth.

109 There are indications that at least in Apollonia, the other starting point of the Via Egnatia, there were tragic events that could fit in the second half of the 2nd century C.E. But the finding of fewer burnt layers than in Dyrrachium is a signal that whatever the event there, it did not have the same force and spread.

110 Given the date of the burning of one house in Byllis, and the destruction of a second one in a similar period of time with Dyrrachium's destructions, it still remains unclear whether it should be seen in relation to the situations we are describing or as an unfortunate coincidence. The lack of wide-scale excavations there make the interpretation even more difficult.

114 For the Eastern Sigillata A, Eastern Sigillata B and Italic sigillata see Shehi 2015, 69. 284 maps 126, 2; 127, 3; 135, 20; 138, 25. 26; 139, 27. 28; 141, 31. 32; 142, 34; 144, 37. 38; 145, 39. 40; 146, 42; 152, 53; for the Illyrian Cooking Ware, see Shehi 2016, 209–221; Shehi 2018, 637. A negotiator from Aquileia died in Dyrrachium, see Shpuza 2018, 260–267.

115 Scheidel 2001, 75.

116 For the Black Death see Herlihy 1997, 39–57. Taken as a model by Rathbone 1996, 334; Scheidel 2001, 75.

117 Villani 1846, 14.

118 Lo Cascio 1980, 274.

119 Erdkamp 2002, 83.

111 As for the above, with the available data, we can say that isolated and accidentally devastating events cannot justify such obvious and prolonged anomalies for several decades in the normal course of Dyrrachium's life. The consequences of a plague (the Antonine one?) and the social unrest remain a probable explanation for most of the archaeological finds and the prolonged effects on the city, as long as we do not have any indication for other events. At the same time, the possibility of looting and/or a destructive incursion against Dyrrachium in 170 or 171 C.E. cannot be ruled out. Such looting and destruction may have aggravated the dramatic situation of the epidemic-stricken city. In both cases, the events clearly seem to have engulfed Apollonia, some 72 km southward. If the destructions were a result of a violent raid, it would have been logical, as both were important cities connected with the Via Egnatia. The possibility that it could be related to the activities of the Costoboci is meagre, but not impossible. But in such a scenario, the fires in Byllis do not fit very well. It is impossible to believe that they managed to burn down three cities.

112 While each piece of evidence presented so far may be challenged individually, when considered together, they strongly suggest that catastrophic events occurred in Dyrrachium and possibly the surrounding region. The most plausible explanations for the archaeological findings in the ancient city of Dyrrachium during the second half of the 2nd century C.E., and the resulting impact on daily life and economic development, are either several epidemic waves or a destructive raid (or possibly both). These two options seem to be the most viable explanations based on the current available evidence.

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