

the martyrs' cult is well-recorded, as seen in multiple archaeological sites in the Thracian provinces;⁴ and since the very beginning of 5th century a large number of parish churches were erected.⁵ Monasticism, on the other hand, is one aspect of Early Christianity, which still remains vague. The written sources provide only scarce information concerning monastic communities, referring mainly to specific limited territorial areas in Thrace. According to the words of *Paulinus*, bishop of Nola, in the beginning of 5th century monks were dwelling in monasteries along the slopes of the Rhodope Mountains.⁶ A theological group grown famous as the 'Scythian monks' in the 6th century is presumably originating from a monastic organization somewhere in the northernmost province of the diocese.⁷ Archaeology still has to uncover evidence to support this information.

The recognition of monastery sites is the basic problem in the matters concerning early monasticism. There is no structural scheme that would facilitate the distinction of monastic complexes. The huge organized monasteries in the deserts of Syria and North Africa like the monastery of Simeon Stylites⁸ or the monastery at Tebessa⁹ are not applicable to the Balkan area. Still some features of a monastic complex are the basis, where the recognition of a monastery begins. Such are the enclosed areas of the monastery premise, the chain disposition of the monastic cells, large buildings for common activities (a kitchen or a refectory). A *katholikon* is indispensable in such a complex.¹⁰

There are a couple of sites in the Balkans which evidently fulfill these spatial prescriptions. The first is the site at Zitomislici in *Dalmatia* (fig. 2a). It consists of a temple, a funerary chapel, a few premises, recognized as dwelling cells, all of these surrounded by a continuous wall. Outside that area a self-contained building is situated, which is considered a hospice.¹¹

The second one is the monastery in Orlandovtsi, near Serdica, in the province of *Dacia Mediterranea* (fig. 2b). The regular square complex here comprises a small temple and multiple secular buildings surrounded by a fortification wall with four towers.¹²

⁴ Commentary on martyr buildings in this region can be found in Doncheva 2006.

⁵ A catalogue of Early Christian buildings in Thrace is available in Chaneva-Dechevska 1999.

⁶ Migne 1847.

⁷ Barnea 1979, 15-16.

⁸ Krautheimer 1992, 153-160, fig. 101; Tuleshkov 1988, 15, fig. 7.

⁹ Krautheimer 1992, 204-205, fig. 156; Tuleshkov 1988, 15, fig. 8.

¹⁰ On the role of the *katholikon* in monasteries see Torp 1978, 555-559, and Schroeder 2004.

¹¹ Andjelic 1978, 636-640; Basler 1993, 83-84; Chevalier 1995, 415-418; Popovic 1998, 137-139.

¹² The initial researcher ascribes the complex to the group of private foundations of *villae rusticae*, Velkov 1938. The excavation was carried out in a rushed manner, within