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# Hadrianopolis (Sofratikë, Albania): Monumental and Economic Evolution

Roberto Perna  
(Università di Macerata)

## Abstract

*From 2006, in six successive excavation and remote sensing campaigns, the University of Macerata and the Archaeological Institute of Albania has uncovered sectors of the Roman town and the Roman necropolis of Hadrianopolis, and, at the same time, conducted an extensive field-survey of the surrounding area in the valley of the river Drin.*

*The investigations have allowed us to uncover buildings of monumental character and outline elements to delineate the economic and social history of the city and the territory, between the 4th century BC and 7th century AD.*

## Keywords

Epirus, Chaonia, Hadrianopolis, Excavation, Topography

## Introduction

The archaeological site of *Hadrianopolis* (Paci 2007, 30-32; Perna 2012, 111-129; Perna and Çondi 2010b, 365-386) lies in the valley of the river Drin, in the region of modern Gjirokaster, near the village of Sofratikë (**Figure 1**). The area corresponds to the region of ancient Epirus. The site has been identified with that of ancient *Hadrianopolis* on the basis of the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (VII, 3), which places the town on the road from *Apollonia* to *Nikopolis*. The latter constituted one of the main routes off the *via Egnatia*, and allowed a direct link from the Greek mainland to the Adriatic coast through the valley of the Drin.

Some ancient remains, including a Roman theatre, were already known from the reports of 19th century travellers, but Albanian excavations on the site started only in the 70s (Baçe 1983, 255-256; Baçe 2007, 33-35).

From 2006, in six successive excavations and remote sensing campaigns, the University of Macerata and the Archaeological Institute of Albania have defined the limits of the ancient settlement and uncovered sectors of the Roman town and the Roman necropolis; at the same time an extensive field-survey of the surrounding areas has been carried out, aimed at the completion of an archaeological map of the entire valley of the Drin.

## The Drinus valley in Hellenistic time

The researches carried out in the area so far have allowed the identification (*Hadrianopolis II*; Perna 2012, 111-129; Perna and Çondi 2010b, 365-386), for the oldest stages datable from the 4th century BC, of several small, fortified settlements like *Paleospiti* (**Figure 2**) or *Terihat*

(Marziali *et al. forthcoming*), characterized by a total lack of strategic function in relation to the road network and control of cultivable land. Each of them is located on a rise at the opening of a deep, narrow valley in the rock, close to the mountain pastures and the lower slopes of the hills. It is possible that they may constitute the proto-urban/urban development of a well-documented older system of settlements, arranged as seasonal villages associated with the transhumance patterns that tended to stabilize during this stage.

*Antigonea* (Baçe, Ceka, and Korkuti M. 2008, 118-124) was certainly not the only town in the Drinus valley although it acted as a hub for the people who inhabited it at least from the 3rd century BC.

Alongside these, we also know of a complex defensive system, largely from the 3rd century BC onwards, characterized by simple fortifications, arranged to control the access routes to the Drinus valley: *Labova* (Baçe, Ceka and Korkuti 2008, 127-128), *Selcka* (Qirjaqi 2007, 73), *Ktismata* (Baçe 1972, 73), *Paleokastro* (Baçe 1981, 211-218), *Kardhiq* (Baçe 1972; Baçe 1977; Budina 1974, n. 16; Hammond 1967) and *Selo* (**Figure 3**) (Budina 1974 n. 2, 346; Hammond 1967, 206). It is a coherent and organized system that recognizes the need to control the entire valley and can only be attributed to a strong political power, such as the *Aeacid* dynasty.

Further definition of this model of urban geography is offered by a series of settlements that, again from the 3rd century BC, started to appear on flatter ground. They were small scattered villages associated with their burial areas, as in *Bodrishtë* (Budina 1974, 348-349; Hammond 1967, 204), *Peshkëpi* and *Poshtme* (Budina 1974, 367-368, n. 33), *Terihat* (Budina 1974, 352; n. 8), *Libohovë* (Budina 1974, n. 28; Hammond 1967, 207) and *Arshi Lengo* (Perna 2012, 114; Perna and Çondi 2010b, 368), or possibly fortified farms like those in *Dervişan* (Sopoti; Marziali *et al. forthcoming*; Qirjaqi 2007, 75) and *Dholani* (Budina 1974, 354-355, n. 12). Consequently, it seems that during the final stages of Hellenism the region had developed new rural centres, generally situated in lowland areas.

It is within the framework of this process that we can place the birth of a settlement near Sofratikë. Indeed, the stratigraphic surveys currently underway have allowed the identification of several archaeological levels that document frequentation and significant structural work as early as the 3rd century BC.

The transition between the 4th and 3rd centuries BC thus appears to have represented a turning point for the entire Drinus valley. In Sofratikë, the earlier materials (Cingolani *forthcoming a*; Perna 2012, 116; Perna and Çondi 2010b, 369-370) of the 4th century directly refer to Attic productions and suggest a structured relationship with regional markets, particularly in the coastal areas. The significant presence of Attic and Corinthian products

in *Apollonia* and *Epidamnos* (**Figure 4**) confirms the vitality of the eastern Adriatic route and leads us to conjecture direct relations between the main towns via the inland road network.

However, most of the materials date from the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC, when production became more fluid due to the reception and reworking of foreign technologies and models, thus revealing the full integration of these areas in the sphere of Adriatic and Mediterranean trade and cultural dynamics.

The process of abandonment of the most protected areas had thus already commenced in Hellenistic times and cannot be entirely associated with the Roman age, which was instead characterized by continuity as documented, for example, by the finds made at Çin (Perna 2012, 113-114; Perna and Çondi 2010b, 368-369) and Kardhiq.

### A Roman settlement in the Drinus valley

Several structural works in Sofratikë can be dated from the Flavian period. However, the most significant monumental construction was erected at the end of the 1st century AD. During this time a building (**Figure 5**) in *opus quadratum* was constructed, or its entrance stairway on the southern front (5.2m wide) was simply restored. A length of 5,6 metres of the building has been excavated on the east and west sides. It is paved with slabs of limestone. As excavations have not yet been completed, it is impossible to provide either a full plan or a certain functional hypothesis, but the building's architectural features, location and continued use until at least the 6th century AD contribute to placing it in the public sphere.

The area occupied by the theatre has yielded traces of the foundations of a circular structure that may be related to the same stage (**Figure 6**).

The study of the *instrumentum domesticum* also contributes to forming a picture of a Chaonia that was anything but experiencing a crisis, and perhaps even progressively expanding, from the 2nd century BC and throughout the Imperial age (Perna 2008, 63-70; Perna, Capponi and Tubaldi 2010, 731-739; Perna *et al. forthcoming a*; Perna *et al. forthcoming b*). Around the middle of the 1st century AD, Italian Sigillata (**Figure 7**; Capponi *forthcoming*. Absent is the Eastern Sigillata A: Ciccarelli *forthcoming a*) had replaced the black-glazed productions, with direct imports from the central and northern areas of the peninsula. The emergence of these trade flows is also attested by the importation of thin-walled ware. More generally, relations with Italy are also confirmed by several isolated but important piece of evidence, such as the funerary stele of G. Caesius Anconites (Cabanes 1995, 73, n. 20; Paci 2003, 286-296), or an amphora with the stamp of C.IVL.POLY from *Phoinike* (Giannotti 2005, 85).

These trade relations are undoubtedly associated with the arrival, initially in the coastal areas, of rich Roman landowners and a type of economy based on more intensive agriculture (Deniaux 1993, 263-270; Karatzeni 2001, 171). The example of Glina (Hadrianopolis II; Muçai and Hobdari 2005, 75-76.), an agricultural site that developed from the end of the Republican age to the Imperial age, can help us to trace these transformations.

The Roman production system along with the strong ties, initially practically exclusively, with the Italian peninsula determined growth and a surplus that, between the end of the 1st and the beginning of the 2nd centuries AD, allowed a change of outlook, not only in terms of monumental architecture, but also trade and economy. The later productions of thin-walled ware attested in the 2nd-century document a shift in trade focused more towards the eastern Mediterranean, as can also be inferred from the glassware and the Eastern Sigillata B (Hadrianopolis II).

It would appear that the monumental and economic development of the settlement – dated to the end of the 1st century AD – cannot be separated from the detachment of the new province of Epirus from the province of Achaëa, which occurred during Trajan's rule (Cabanes 1998, 305-306.). The establishment of the province and the subsequent foundation of an urban hub to serve the area, are thus simultaneously the result of the inevitable need to control the far-reaching changes and the precondition for future development.

### Hadrian: birth and growth of a city

The first monumental development of the settlement occurred during Hadrian's rule.

The excavation of the Urban Site brought to light a monumental building the first phase of which dates from the 2nd century AD. A big rectangular building was constructed and fixed the topographic and functional features of the urban centre. The only structural element remaining is the wall 2077 (**Figure 8**), on which a long buttress (1,17m) leans east and west from which developed the building, and a channel for water drainage. Probably the building has public functions; the topographic and planimetric continuity and the continuous use of the channel suggest that even at this stage the building had served as bath. In the same period was constructed the theatre (Baçe 2007, 33-35; Perna 2007a, 40-45; **Figure 9**), built following a very simple scheme: concentric sub-structures starting from the orchestra and ending with the external wall of the building. The internal wall also defines the internal limit of the *praecintio* between the *media cavea*, leaned on the ground, and the *summa cavea*.

So far it seems that the dating of the theatre goes back to the end of the first half of the 2nd century AD, without excluding completely the hypothesis that its first building project started at the end of the Hadrianic period, because of some planimetric and functional elements.

In all likelihood, we can thus say that during Hadrian's rule the oldest Hellenistic-Roman village in Sofratikë developed in an urban form as Hadrianopolis, possibly following a proper founding moment.

The picture that can be constructed from the analysis of the material finds documents intense economic development during the time of Hadrian's rule, attested by both the number of finds and their diverse origins, a sign that the city was fully integrated at the centre of Mediterranean trade routes. In this respect, we can note not only imports of Eastern Sigillata B2, but also the

early arrival of African Red Slip ware (**Figure 10**). From the end of the 1st century AD, cooking ware and type-A amphorae were also imported from Africa. These latter also reveal relations with the Aegean area (Aegean and Cretan amphorae) as far as the Dodecanese archipelago (amphorae from Kos and Rhodes).

The presence of a large quantity of glass fragments is significant, for they replace earlier Italian items, once again highlighting the intensification of relations with the eastern world.

The same role is further documented by the testimony of bone-working production, probably local, which was particularly important between the 2nd and 4th centuries AD.

Remote sensing surveys have made it possible to propose the boundaries of the area occupied by the Roman city and delineate the characteristics of the urban topography, although as yet for a small area (Gualtieri and Venanzi 2007, 58-67; Martinelli *et al.* 2010; Perna 2007b, 68; Perna and Çondi 2010a, 402-415; **Figure 11**).

It is possible to conjecture that the city stretched 300–350 metres from east to west and 400 metres from north to south. The theatre and the baths appear to occupy a central position, slightly off the main axis, towards the south.

The regular plan was organized on a grid of streets that intersected at right angles and the central area was probably inhabited by the aristocracy, with huge houses organized around open spaces, like peristyles or atria.

The investigations also included the excavation of the necropolis (Baçe 1972, 135; Baçe 1983, 256; Budina 1974, 364-365; Cabanes 1986, 119. About the necropolis see also Perna 2007b, 69. About the inscriptions see also Anamali, Ceka and Deniaux 2009, 170, n. 228 e Paci 2007, 32.), where six burials have so far been discovered, with box graves formed by squared slabs of stone, with or without mortar, and double-sloping, winged lids.

The excavation of the necropolis has also allowed the identification of a funerary monument in the form of a temple *in antis*, which contained two tombs of the same type.

*Hadrianopolis* appears to have grown continuously between the 2nd and 3rd centuries with heavy and varied trade flows, which still tended towards the eastern Mediterranean. Contact with the African world continued, although progressively diminishing during the 3rd and 4th centuries, as documented, for example, by the production of cooking ware, and was possibly mediated by the Aegean world, as testified by the significant presence of Aegean cooking ware (Perna *et al.* 2010, 731-739; Perna *et al. forthcoming b*; **Figure 12**).

Consequently, in this area too, there is evidence of relations with a wider Adriatic koine comprising not only regional markets, but also the island of Corfu just off the coast; north-western Greece, as far as the north-west Peloponnese and Puglia.

Nonetheless, trades with the Italian and western world continued. These probably were mediated by Apollonia and Durrës, as documented by the presence of Dressel 2–

4, Forlimpopoli and Gaulish-type amphorae (Lahi and Shkodra Rrugia *forthcoming*; Perna *et al.* 2010, 732-733; Perna *et al. forthcoming b*). The numerous Corinthian pyxes found in *Hadrianopolis* hailed from the same colonies between the 2nd and 4th centuries AD (Cingolani *forthcoming b*; Perna 2012, 118-119; Perna and Çondi 2010b, 371-372).

Epirus's integration into the framework of provinces, tying it to the same destiny as the rest of the Roman world, appears to have promoted significant economic growth.

During the reorganization of the provincial system ordered by Diocletian, the city of *Hadrianopolis* was assigned to *Epirus Vetus* (The Assignment is confirmed in the 6th century: Hieroclis, *Synecdemus* 651, 8). This reorganization undoubtedly restored peace and prosperity to areas troubled by the barbarian invasions that had commenced during the second half of the 3rd century.

It was precisely during this period that a new baths complex was built on to the earlier baths (**Figure 13**): this was probably similar to its predecessor, but with a rearranged western front.

The building is organized on a large square room that measures 8,45 x 7,50m, highlighted with the superimposition of wall 2010 with 2077, which becomes the western front. The archaeological investigation brought to light some portions of wall of at least one room of quadrangular shape (8,45 x 3,10m) in the northern area.

Wall 2010, eventually going southwards, seems to be connected to another wall, which with east-west direction, seems to give a further definition two rectangular structures, one of which, having on its east half an apse, was a *tepidarium* and the other one a *calidarium*.

Future archaeological investigation will establish a more precise planimetry of the building for this phase.

At this stage it is likely that the big rectangular building faced westwards on a wide open space, a sort of square in front of the theatre with the function of a *porticus post scaenam*, and similarly did southwards, between the buildings themselves and the theatre.

During the 4th century the building has had many structural changes, mainly concerning the re-organization of its internal space with the construction of two walls.

The process of monumentalization of the city during this stage also involved the theatre in which the floor of the orchestra and the stairs leading to the *cavea* were rearranged

Consequently a certain prosperity appears to have continued uninterruptedly beyond the 3rd and throughout the entire 4th century AD: the presence of LRA1 amphorae, datable from the mid-4th century AD, documents the liveliness and persistence of relations with the eastern world, as does the early importation of Phocaean Red Slip ware (**Figure 14**) and Aegean Kapitani II amphorae (**Figure 15**) testify to the continuity of relations with Aegean markets, while African Red Slip ware reveals contact with African items (Cicarelli *forthcoming b*; Lahi Shkodra Rrugia *forthcoming*; Perna *et al.* 2010, 732-733; Perna *et al. forthcoming a*, fig. 5.3; Perna 2012, p.122; Perna *et al. forthcoming b*). While we

know that Epirus still featured on the Mediterranean and Adriatic trade routes during the 4th and 5th centuries, as testified by the presence of African products at sites located in favourable geographical positions, it appears evident that they also extended to more inland sites, connected to the main road network, such as that of *Hadrianopolis*.

The excavation work and layers relative to these phases have also yielded interesting glass finds such as a stemmed goblet and a fragment of base with shallow splayed footring (Cingolani *forthcoming* c; Perna 2012, 121; Perna *et al. forthcoming* a; Perna and Çondi 2010b, 379).

As early as the 4th century AD, *Hadrianopolis* thus displayed a certain dynamism, probably of the entire area, associated with its close link to the *Via Egnatia*, through the *Apollonia-Nikopolis* byway, which was protected by a fortification built at Paleokastro.

During the final stages of the 4th century AD, excavations have nonetheless already revealed the progressive disintegration of the monumental structures, characterized by the abandonment of the baths building and the reuse of its individual parts with limited work carried out to adapt them to craft purposes, phenomena marking the beginning of the end of the model of the classical *polis*. This was accompanied by a crisis in relations with the Mediterranean and regional markets underscored by a lack of imports and distribution of all goods, including the important productions of African Red Slip ware D, which is almost completely absent during these stages (Perna *et al. forthcoming* a; Tubaldi *forthcoming*). It is evident that the city was involved in a crisis that probably assumed regional dimensions during the 5th century.

### **The first Byzantine period and, later, the end of the urban system**

At the beginning of the 6th century AD a circular structure (**Figure 16**), possibly a small *laconicum*, was built in the centre of the main room of the baths building. In the area of the *tepidarium*, following the collapse of the floor, the undamaged space to the east was divided by the construction of a wall. The pool in the apse did not completely lose its function and thence acquired a new use, probably associated with a limestone base.

In the southern area, between the theatre and the baths that had hitherto remained empty, above the older building in *opus quadratum*, a series of walls was built, along with the remains of foundations that seem to define a large building organized into three naves (**Figure 17**) perfectly oriented east-west, which thus diverged from the orthogonal system of the city plan.

The particular layout of the structures, the rigid east-facing orientation, the occupation of a central space of the urban area and the destruction and reuse of the small temple may suggest a building designed for worship. This hypothesis appears to be supported by the discovery in the related layers of stemmed goblet with disc bases generally associated with these functions.

This marks a revival in construction, directed at the creation of buildings for worship (the religious building

to which the impost of the pier found inside the theatre must have belonged was probably built at the same time; Perna 2007a, 42). It is noteworthy that the restoration of the old buildings, abandoned during the 5th century AD, was carried out using extremely poor techniques and materials. New buildings occupy the empty spaces and their alignment and spatial arrangement is seemingly unrelated to the extant structures. This causes, evidently, the progressive loss of urban system functionality. They are thus signs of a partial revival that is also documented materially by the resumption of relations with the African world (**Figure 18**), as the importation of *spatheia* and Keay XXIV amphorae would seem to suggest.

The inner city can evidently be connected with fundamental wider Mediterranean circuits trading within the framework of a process of regionalization of the markets, also revealed by the presence of Epirote amphorae and glassware (Cingolani *forthcoming* c; Lahi and Shkodra Brikena *forthcoming*.) produced for small markets, dominated by local production.

It seems likely that the phenomenon was associated with two main causes: on the one hand the increased capacity of control over resources exercised by the authorities – by this time ecclesiastical – and on the other the change of name to *Ioustinianopolis* cited by Procopius (Proc., *de Aed* IV 1, 36), which may have been a sort of refounding that occurred during Justinian's rule.

At the end of the 6th century the area of the oldest public building was characterized by extensive abandonment and collapse, as was the area to the south between the building itself and the theatre.

A new structure, of which we have found the traces of several walls, made from reused materials bound with earth and forming rectangular rooms (**Figure 19**), was built on top of the aforementioned fill-ins using several of the walls of the Roman building as a base.

In the area to the west several buildings occupy the area that was previously partly empty. In-depth stratigraphic surveys have made it possible to identify a rectangular area that formed part of a sort of neighbourhood.

This crisis, which developed in a process of ruralization, appears to have been regional and the population started to seek refuge in the highlands in Kordhoca (Baçe 1972, 135; Isambert 1873, 868; Pouqueville 1827, vol. II, 11), Çaiup (Marziali *et al. forthcoming*) and Vlaho Goranxi (Hammond 1967, 208; Marziali *et al. forthcoming*; Muçai and Hobdari 2005, 74-75), often reoccupying settlements from the Hellenist period, such as Melan and Antigonea,

The causes should be sought in the fear of barbarian invasions and the crisis of the Imperial system. During the subsequent stages the formation of progressively abandoned levels is evident, as well as the frequentation of the area with buildings not associated with the old planimetric layout, sometimes rectangular or with apses (**Figure 20**).

The last phase of life documented in the area is associated with the construction of a series of walls, arranged at right angles to each other, which may have marked off vegetable gardens connected by a side street.

It is clear that the urban history of *Hadrianopolis* tended towards rapid ruralization after the Justinian period, possibly associated with the inability of Epirus's society and economy to maintain an efficient system of utilization of resources for long. This ruralization was followed by the Slavic invasions.

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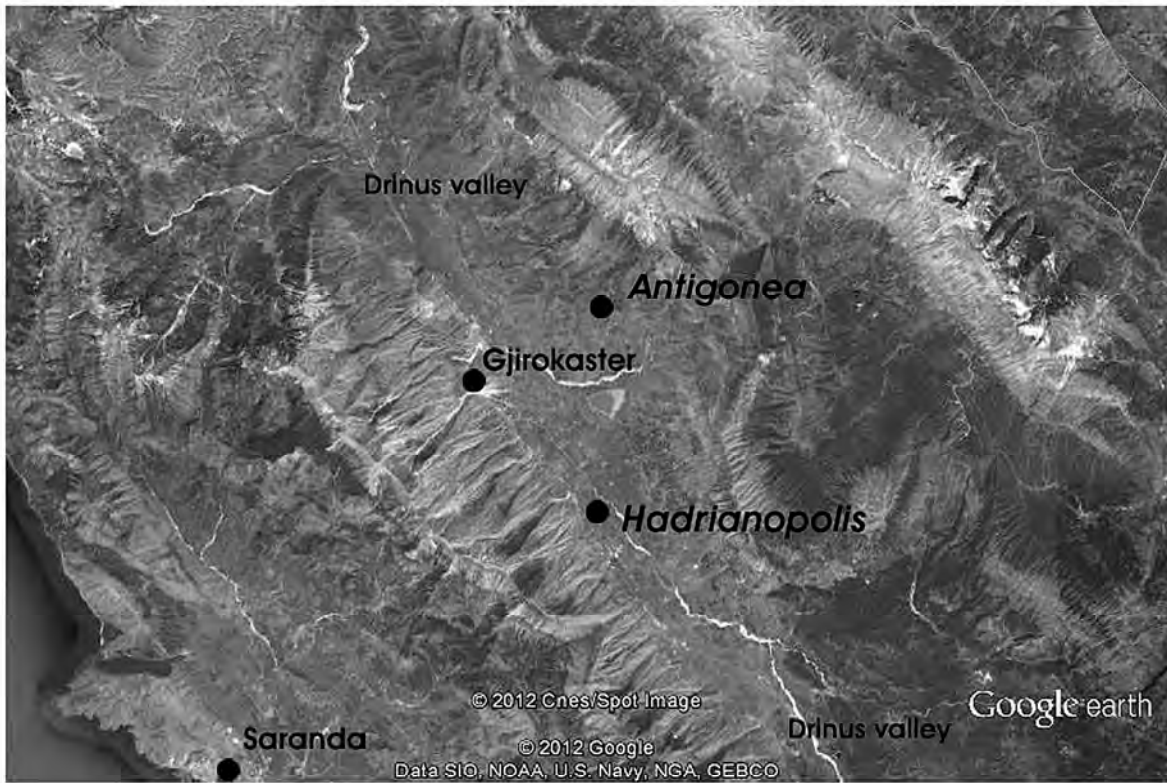


Figure 1: The site of Hadrianopolis in the Drinus valley.



Figure 2: Tower of the fortified Settlement of Paleospiti.



Figure 3: Fortress and village near Selo.



Figure 4: Hadrianopolis: fragment of attic Bowl (IV century BC).



Figure 5: Hadrianopolis: building made from opus quadratum.



Figure 7: Hadrianopolis: fragment of Italian sigillata ware: Pucci X, 18.



Figure 6: Hadrianopolis: circular structure under the theater of Hadrianopolis.



Figure 8: Hadrianopolis: particular of the Wall 2077.

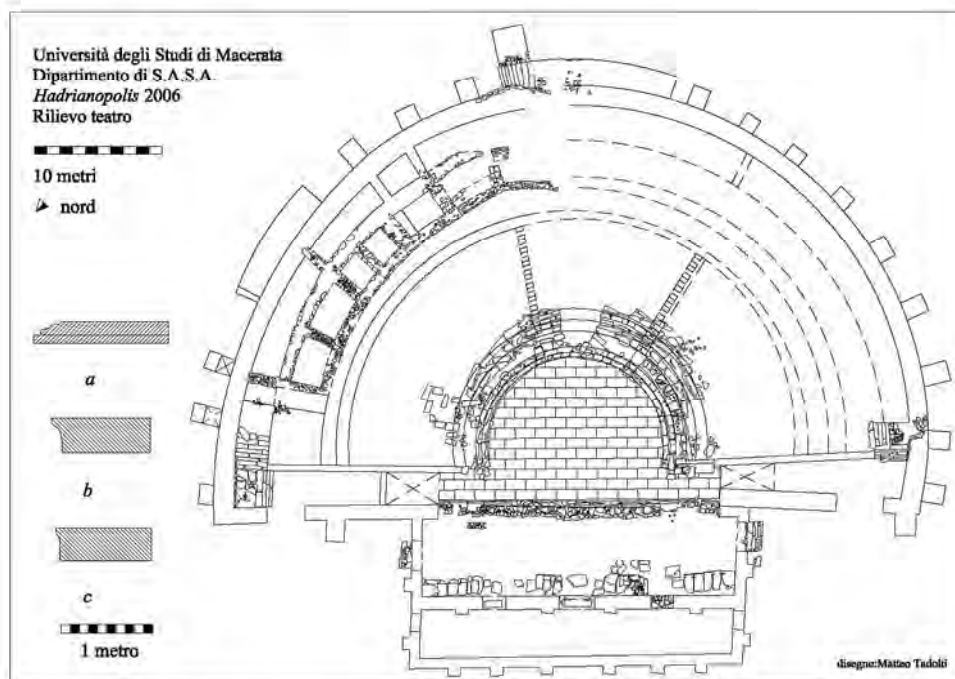


Figure 9: Hadrianopolis: schematic plan of the theater.



Figure 10: Hadrianopolis: fragment of African sigillata ware, A: Hayes 3 B.



Figure 12: Hadrianopolis: fragment of aegean kettle.

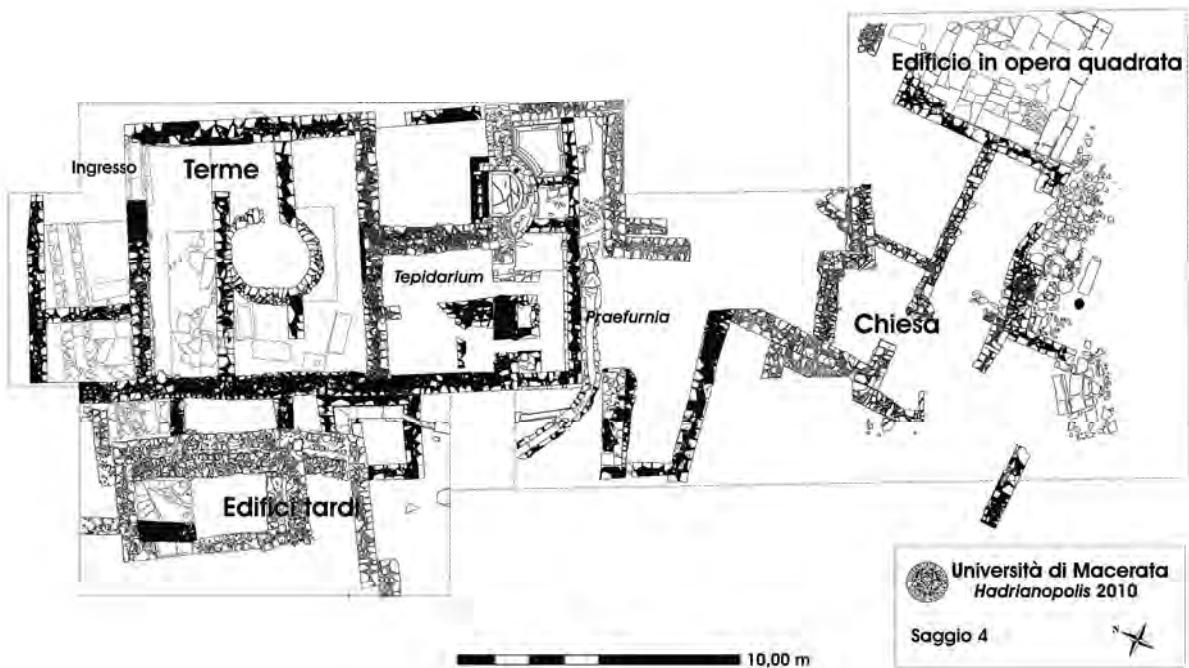
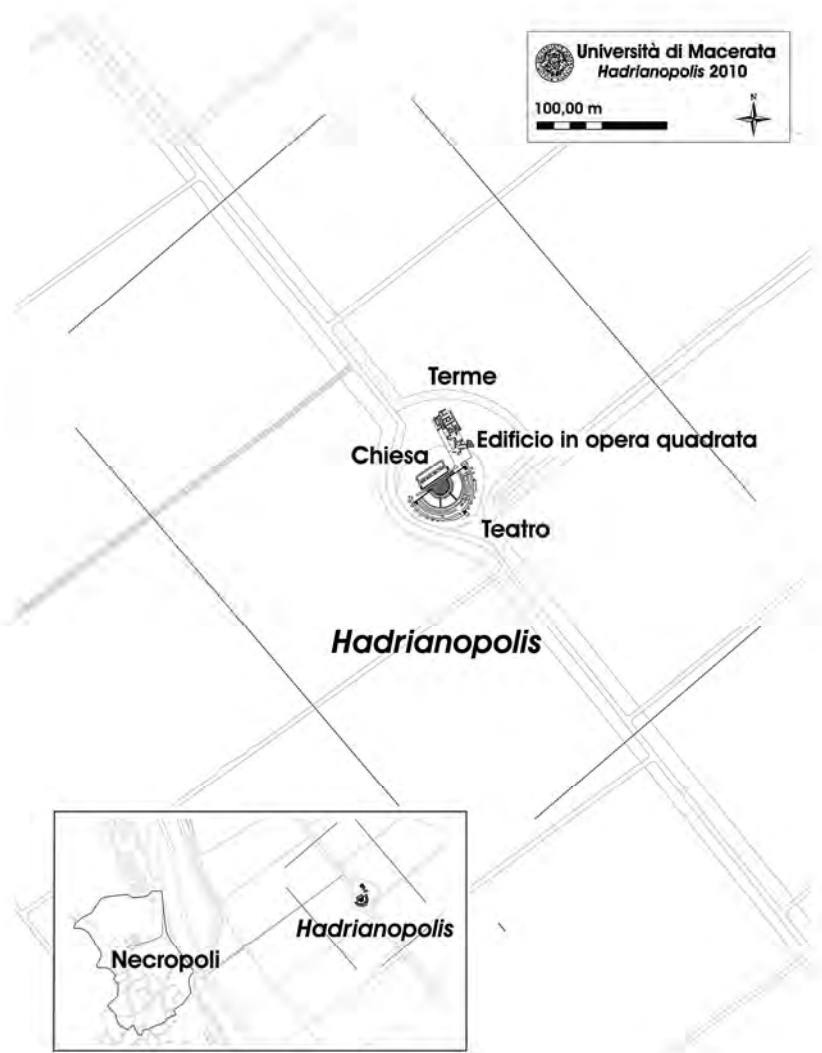


Figure 13: Hadrianopolis; schematic plan of the new bath complex



Figure 14: Hadrianopolis: fragment of Phocaean sigillata wares.

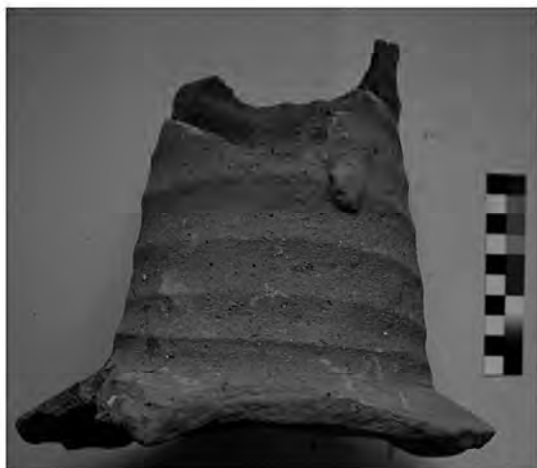


Figure 15: Hadrianopolis: fragment of amphora Kapitan II type.



Figure 18: Hadrianopolis: fragment of African sigillata ware, D2: plate Michigan I, fig. 3, VII, n.6.



Figure 19: Hadrianopolis: structure made from reused materials and forming rectangular Rooms.



Figure 16: Hadrianopolis: circular structure built in the centre of the main room of the bath.



Figure 17: Hadrianopolis: building organized into three naves.



Figure 20: Hadrianopolis: building with apses.