

Iuliopolis: Religious, Commercial, and Social Life in the Byzantine Era

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Abstract

The ancient city of Iuliopolis, located in proximity to the Nallıhan district of Ankara and now largely submerged, has been subject to archaeological excavations between 2009 and 2025. Specifically, Church No. 1, the Eastern Necropolis, and the Larder structure have played a pivotal role in deciphering the multilayered structure of this era. The pithoi, a type of storage vessel, are indicative of the urban organisation of agricultural production, including viticulture and grain cultivation. Furthermore, the presence of African Red Slip Ware ceramics recovered from the fill layers provides further evidence for Iuliopolis's integration into the Mediterranean trade network, a phenomenon comparable to that observed in other major cities in and around Ankara. Collectively, these findings confirm that Iuliopolis was a developed city characterised by local production, extensive trade, and powerful religious authority, and that it was strategically located on an important transportation route.

Keywords: Iuliopolis, Church, Larder, Socio-Economics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Anatolia has hosted numerous civilizations throughout history, serving as a stage for the interaction of different cultures. The Late Antique and Early Byzantine Periods, represent a transitional phase marked by major political, religious, and economic transformations (French, 1981: 38-39). During the Byzantine era, the use of Roman roads and infrastructure was maintained in Iuliopolis, while the rise of Christianity led to the construction of new religious structures and the re-functioning of old pagan artifacts.

The ancient city of Iuliopolis presents a significant example of this transformation. Located in the Gülşehri locality near the Nallıhan district of Ankara, the city offers an opportunity to observe the fluidity between the Roman and Byzantine periods. Iuliopolis was one of the strategically important cities of this era, frequently mentioned in ancient sources due to its position at the intersection of critical transportation networks. However, the city was submerged under water in the 1950s following the construction of the Sarıyar Dam. Although this situation complicated archaeological research concerning the city, rescue excavations conducted by the Ankara Museum of Anatolian Civilizations since 1991 and 2009 have shed light on the history of Iuliopolis (Arslan et al., 2011: 271-304; Arslan et al., 2012: 169-188) (Map 1).



Map 1. The Location of Iuliopolis in the Byzantine Era (Price-Gaddis 2005: 231-232; Onur, 2014a: 80)

Rescue excavations at Iuliopolis have been carried out by the Ankara Museum of Anatolian Civilizations with a large team since 2009. Archaeological work from 2012 onwards concentrated on Church No. 1, while studies conducted after 2022 focused on the larder area and its surroundings. These investigations on the larder were concluded as of November 2025, with plans to resume in future years.

Within the scope of these ongoing efforts, orthophoto studies were conducted in areas encompassing the city's Eastern Necropolis, Church No. 1, and the city walls. In 2013, georadar surveys were performed in the Necropolis by Anadolu Yerbilimleri Ltd. Şti., and excavation work was subsequently carried out in line with the identified anomalies (Sağır et al., 2014: 154). It was determined that grave structures were constructed closely side-by-side in the Necropolis, leaving almost no empty space. Furthermore, as part of the "Safeguarding Iuliopolis–Initial Phase" project, implemented under the scientific consultancy of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ali Metin Büyükkara and supported by the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, 3D modeling and LiDAR scans of the existing city structures have been completed.

2. METHODOLOGY

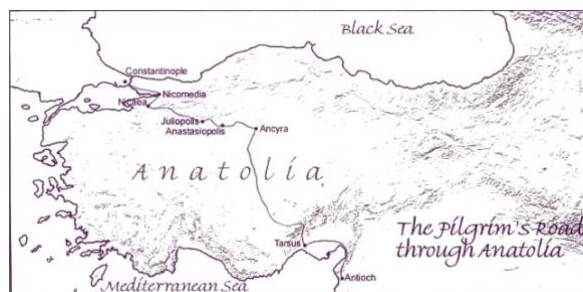
This research employs an interdisciplinary archaeological and comparative approach, synthesizing data from rescue excavations (2009–2025) at Iuliopolis. The study integrates stratigraphic analysis of key structures (Church No. 1, the larder, and the Eastern Necropolis) with typological and analogical examinations of material finds (e.g., storage *pithoi*, Roman-era *patera*, and North African Red Slip Ware). Furthermore, the methodology incorporates archaeobiological data (resveratrol and sulcatone analysis from hair samples) and remote sensing technologies to reconstruct the city's transition from a Roman pagan settlement to a complex Early Byzantine socio-economic and religious hub.

3. IULIOPOLIS IN THE EARLY BYZANTINE PERIOD

Archaeological evidence in the region suggests that the settlement has existed since prehistoric times. The city was initially known as Gordiokome/Gordiou Kome (the Village of Gordion) but was referred to as Iuliopolis during the Roman Period (Belke & Restle, 1984: 181; Arslan & Zoroğlu, 2011: 12). The name Iuliopolis/Iuliopolis was given to the city in the Early Roman Imperial Period, in dedication to the Julio-Claudians (Arslan & Zoroğlu, 2011: 12). Archaeological work carried out at Iuliopolis has identified extensive data spanning the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods.

Iuliopolis was cited as one of the twelve cities of Bithynia during the Roman Period, but it was subjected to boundary changes between Bithynia and Galatia over the course of history. Researchers have offered various suggestions regarding where its borders were situated (Perrot, et al., 1872: 94, 153-156, 219). One of the military roads connecting İznik (Nicaea) to Ankara (Ankyra) during the Roman Period passed through Iuliopolis. Furthermore, Pliny the Younger's official correspondence with Emperor Trajan, in which he suggested establishing a *centurio regionarius* in Iuliopolis due to its location, indicates that the city occupied a militarily and strategically important position (Marek, 2003: 58).

Iuliopolis was incorporated into the territory of Galatia with the advent of the Early Byzantine Period (late 3rd–4th century) (Ramsay, 1890: 195-196). The city is situated on the Pilgrim's Road route, which was used by emperors such as Macrinus, Arcadius, and Honorius. This route, upon which Iuliopolis is also located, was utilized for transport by emperors, pilgrims, soldiers, and the populace during both the Roman and Byzantine periods (French, 1981: 38-39, 51; Walker, 2003: 107, fig. 1) (Map 2).



Map 2. The Pilgrim's Road Between Constantinople and Antioch (Walker, 2003: 107, fig. 1)

Beginning in the 4th century, Iuliopolis is listed among the summer palace settlements of Ankara (Aydın, et al., 2005: 88). During this period, the city was one of the smaller urban centres near the main settlement of Ankara. Iuliopolis was represented by its clergy at synods and councils throughout the Early Byzantine Period. The name of Iuliopolis, which was one of the episcopal centres in the province of Galatia I, appears in church records starting from the 4th century (Price & Gaddis 2005: 231-232; Onur, 2014a: 80). The city was listed as an episcopal see within Galatia I, under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Pontica. Administratively, Iuliopolis witnessed several changes: it was incorporated into the Opsikion Theme starting from the 7th century, and subsequently into the borders of the Boukellarion Theme from the 8th century onwards (Belke & Restle, 1984: 62; Eyice, 1996: 255).

Iuliopolis, a city that maintained its clergy at the Synod of Ankyra (314) and the Council of Nicaea (325), was represented during these periods by Bishop Philadelphus as one of the five episcopal centres of Galatia (Belke & Restle, 1984: 181-182). At the Council of Chalcedon (451), the city was represented by Meliphthongus, who was referred to as "the bishop of the holy church of God in Iuliopolis" (Price & Gaddis 2005: 126, 146; Onur, 2014a: 69). Bishop Proclianus represented the city at the Synod of Galatia I (458), and Bishop Pantoleon represented Iuliopolis at the Synod of Constantinople (536) (Belke & Restle, 1984: 181-182; Onur, 2014a: 70).

Between the 4th and 6th centuries, Iuliopolis was recognized as a Byzantine city. By the 6th century, during the reign of Justinian I (AD 527–565), it is known that the city walls were reinforced and a church was constructed in the city (Kaya, 2020: 259; Gür, et al., 2025a: 54-55). The repair of the city walls in the 6th century was an effort to take permanent measures against flooding. The Emperor also commissioned the construction of a bridge and a church within the city (Prokopius, 1941: 331-333; Prokopius, VII/V). It is appropriate to associate this church with some of the contemporary religious figures of the time. Pantoleon, Martyrios, Ioannes, Theodoros,

and Theodotos are only some of the respected clergymen whose names are known in the city after the 6th century (Mitchell, 1982: 139; Belke & Restle, 1984: 181-182; Onur, 2014a: 70). Finally, the names of Bishop Martyrios are mentioned in the Third Council of Constantinople (680-681) and Bishop Ionnaes in the Quinisext Council (Penthekte Synod) (692) (Belke & Restle, 1984: 181-182).

The *Vita* of Saint Theodore of Sykeon, who was born during the reign of Justinian and died during the reign of Heraclius (613), mentions Iuliopolis. It was rumored among the public that Theodore had wasted church funds by giving large amounts of alms during his time as Bishop of Anastasioupolis (Lagania). Consequently, Theodore travelled to Ankyra (Ankara) to submit his resignation to the emperor. Following the Emperor's instructions, his resignation was accepted and reported to Patriarch Cyriacus. Upon the advice of Patriarch Cyriacus, Saint Theodore stayed away from the vicinity of Anastasioupolis (Lagania) and came to the Church of the Archangel Michael (a small church) in Acreina, located on the slopes of Iuliopolis. It is recounted that Solomon, a resident of Iuliopolis, and his wife, who visited Saint Theodore (believed to dispense healing), were cured by being freed from evil spirits (Onur, 2014a: 70).

The name of Iuliopolis was later changed to Basilaion, Basileon, or Basileion in honor of Emperor Basil I (867-886). The city's name first appears as *Basileion* in records from 869-870, although it is highly significant that the name *Iuliopolis* continued to appear in official records (Ramsay, 1890: 244-245; Belke & Restle, 1984: 181-182; Onur, 2014a: 70). The name *Basilium/Basileion*, used for Iuliopolis at the Fourth Council of Constantinople (869-870), is stated to have been dedicated in honor of Emperor Basil I (867-886). This information is also included in the *Notitiae Episcopatum* (Walker, 2003: 102; Onur, 2014a: 70, Dip. 30).

Although the latest dating of the existing finds detected during the work carried out in the Eastern Necropolis is the 9th century, which is thought-provoking for the historical process, written sources demonstrate the continuation of Byzantine political and religious dominance in the city (Dolmuş, et al., 2024: 56). The expression Bishop Theodotos in an inscription detected during research around Sarılar has been associated with Iuliopolis by researchers (Mitchell, 1982: 139). Furthermore, the edicts of Emperor Alexios Komnenos (1086) record that the church of *Basilaion* was subordinate to the Bishopric of Ankyra (Ankara) (Onur, 2014a: 70). This situation indicates that the church and religious building activity in the city were still active in the last quarter of the 11th century. On the other hand, some studies suggest that Ankara was incorporated into Seljuk rule in 1073 following the control of Kutalmışoğlu Mansur (Erdoğan, 2004: 101). However, the knowledge that Ankara remained politically subordinate to the Byzantines in the 11th century (Akyol, 2016: 757) and that the city was recorded as belonging to the Bishopric of Ankyra in 1086 raises doubts about the accuracy of this view (Onur, 2014a: 70; Akyol, 2016: 757). It is known that a clergyman named Symeon was born in *Basileion* (another name for Iuliopolis) in Galatia in 949 and lived until 1022 (Turner, 1990: 16-18). Symeon was temporarily elevated to the rank of Metropolitan to honour the acting bishop of Emperors Constantine X Doukas and Michael VII Doukas, but he is stated to have remained permanently in the position (Belke & Restle, 1984: 182). This demonstrates that clergymen were still influential in the city in the 11th century. It is noted that the city's name was completely erased from the stage of history at an unknown date after this period, a process clearly visible in literary texts (Walker, 2003: 102).

The detection of Seljuk Period ceramics during archaeological research in the city suggests the existence of commercial relations or the influence of Turkic rule in the city by the 12th century (Gür, et al., 2025a: 58). Ankara is stated to have been incorporated into Turkic territories in 1127 by the Danişmend ruler Emir Gazi (Özdemir, 1986: 21). Although Ankara was first besieged during the reign of Orhan Bey in 1354, it completely passed into Ottoman rule in 1362 during the reign of Murad I (1362-1363) (Oygür, 2020: 16-17). With the second half of the 14th century,

Byzantine control around Iuliopolis came to a complete end (Beyoğlu, 2023: 1). The official Byzantine records last shed light on the city in the 11th century; from this date until the 14th century, Dark Age is evident (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Areas of Concentration of Early Byzantine Structures and the Modern Settlement Area (2025)

Concrete architectural structures dating to the 14th–15th centuries around Nallıhan indicate the presence of Turkic construction in the city's later history (Toraman, 2012: 348; Çerkez, 2013: 319).

This article focuses on the previously unknown Early Byzantine Period structures—namely the necropolis, city walls, a religious building, a larder, architectural plastic works, and small finds—that were uncovered during the excavation campaigns conducted between 2009 and 2025. The study aims to examine the architectural and socioeconomic structure of Iuliopolis during this critical period (Figure 2).

Many new data, evaluated together with the finds obtained from Church No. 1, the city walls, the larder, and the graves in the necropolis area, offer important clues regarding the city's religious and socioeconomic life. This comprehensive study aims to provide an extensive overview of Iuliopolis's Byzantine Period socioeconomics, including the function of the aforementioned architectural structures, the typological and analogical evaluation of the recovered finds, and the city's religious, social, local production, and storage activities during the Early Byzantine Period.



Figure 2. The City Walls of Iuliopolis (2025)

4. RELIGIOUS, COMMERCIAL, AND SOCIAL LIFE

Iuliopolis was a highly active centre in terms of architecture and socioeconomics during the Late Roman and Early Byzantine periods. Church records and epigraphic data indicate that the city was an episcopal see and was represented repeatedly by its clergy at important councils (Onur,

2014a: 69). As of 2025, more than 800 graves have been identified in the necropolis, where excavations have been ongoing since 1991. These graves provide valuable information about the city's burial traditions and socioeconomic structure (Arslan, et al., 2013: 2-3).

The city's necropolis is situated on the eastern and western slopes of the Aladağ Stream. The deep valley between these two areas, particularly the settlement area from the Ottoman Period that lay within the valley, is currently submerged under the dam waters. Examinations carried out in the Eastern Necropolis have revealed numerous grave structures dating to the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods. The Byzantine Period grave structures comprise types such as simple earth graves, cist graves, sarcophagi, and chamber tombs.

The graves were primarily constructed through the re-functionalization of grave structures previously used during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, or by rebuilding them with *spolia* (reused architectural stones). In addition to this, it is worth noting that a small number of grave structures were entirely built by being carved directly into the bedrock (*ana kaya*). Particularly, the rock-cut grave structures from the Early Byzantine Period are clearly distinguishable from Roman structures by their location, architecture, material-technique, style, and iconographic features.

The transformation in belief systems accompanying the rise of Christianity in the region is directly reflected in burial practices and grave goods. The Abraxas ring recovered from Grave No. 148 in the Necropolis serves as a small but significant piece of evidence regarding the Christianization process in Anatolia. Although not definitive, this suggests that Iuliopolis was either Christianized or adapted to this religious change during the Late Antique–Early Byzantine Period (Arslan & Zoroğlu, 2011: 12-13). Furthermore, researchers stating that the earliest and first churches in Galatia were located in "Ancyra, Juliopolis, Tavium, and Pessinus" supports the early establishment of religious structures in Iuliopolis (Ramsay, 1893: 82; Serin, 2014: 66). While a large portion of the Roman Imperial Period graves in some cities were located outside the city walls, this situation fundamentally changed during the transition to the Byzantine Period. Burial practices were now shifted inside the city walls, particularly favouring areas surrounding churches and other sacred spaces (Steskal, 2011: 246; Dolmuş, et al., 2024: 42). In Iuliopolis, archaeological studies support that burials during the Byzantine Period were carried out inside the church, around its vicinity, and within the necropolis area (Dolmuş, et al., 2024: 42).

The chamber tomb belonging to Presbyter Paulos, discovered in the necropolis and dated to the 6th–7th centuries, points to the art sensibility of the period and the spread of Christianity within the elite and religious strata (Cinemre, 2014: 410; Gür, et al., 2024: 231-248). Furthermore, numerous graves dating to the Late Antique–Early Byzantine Period have been identified during the research conducted in the necropolis. Most of these graves dated between the 5th and 7th centuries. Aside from the chamber tombs, rectangular graves constructed along an east-west orientation feature reused lid stones (*spolia*). Some of the graves have plastered interiors, and *in situ* cist grave fragments have been identified. Notably, in grave JLP_M447, which had plastered walls and contained fragments of a wooden coffin, inscribed marble pieces and marble fragments with cross depictions were recovered. These finds are dated to the 5th–6th centuries.

Graves, which include types such as the chamber tomb and the cist grave, the inhumation burial rite was preferred, oriented east-west with the head placed towards the west. In the cist graves, which were carved into local limestone (Ulusoy et al., 2024: 82-83, Figures 2-3), the individuals were interred in an east-west orientation with their heads facing west. In the Byzantine Period graves, lid stones consisting of two to five pieces were utilized, and it has been determined that some of these lid stones were made of sedimentary rock types transported to the city from external sources (Ulusoy et al., 2024: 86). Grave goods recovered from some of the graves include:

JLP_M14: a bronze cross; JLP_M163: a gold hair ornament, a terracotta single-handled jug, a ring setting; JLP_M204: fragments of marble with a cross depiction and inscribed fragments; JLP_M211: a gold ring, a terracotta oil lamp, a terracotta plate fragment with a cross depiction; JLP_M215: a pair of gold earrings, a bronze coin, a terracotta bowl, a terracotta plate fragment with a cross depiction, two single-handled terracotta jugs, a bronze key, a bronze bell, and two glass beads; JLP_M262: bronze necklace fragments; JLP_M270: an inscribed stele; JLP_M275: an inscribed stele fragment with a cross; JLP_M321: an inscribed stele on the lid stone; JLP_M347: a bronze ring; JLP_M392: religious symbols and an inscription; JLP_M414: a terracotta bowl fragment with a cross depiction; JLP_M447: a fragmentary cross-depicting plaque along with an inscribed plaque fragment and wooden coffin pieces; JLP_M450: a bronze wire earring; JLP_M452: a marble lid stone with a cross depiction and a bronze ring; JLP_M461: an iron nail; JLP_M484: a broken iron ring; JLP_M524: a hair ornament; JLP_M541: a terracotta bowl, two bronze bracelets, a bronze earring; JLP_M608: terracotta bowl fragments; JLP_M610: a broken iron bracelet, a bronze ring, and terracotta ceramic fragments; JLP_M743: a bronze tintinnabulum and a bronze belt buckle were found as burial offerings (Figure 3).

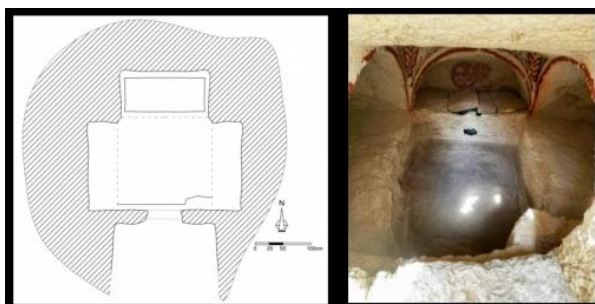


Figure 3. The Iuliopolis Necropolis, Chamber Tomb JLP_392 (Gür, et al., 2024: 231-248)



Figure 4. Tomb Stelae from the Eastern Necropolis, JLP_M270 (left) and JLP_M275 (right) (2011)

Fragments of inscriptions and stelae recovered from the graves offer insights into the religious beliefs and professions in Iuliopolis during the Early Byzantine Period (Onur, 2014b: 105-108, fig. 6-11) (Figure 4).

Church No. 1, one of the city's religious centers, began as a chapel dating to the 4th–5th centuries and is stated to have been converted into a large three-aisled basilica in the 6th–7th centuries (Sağır et al., 2014: 154). The examinations carried out confirm that the construction of this development was completed before the 7th century, specifically during the 5th–6th centuries. This architectural evolution parallels the official recognition and power gained by Christianity in the city. Procopius's accounts indicate that Emperor Justinian commissioned the construction of

a church and a bridge in the city (Procopius, *VIII/V*). The graves belonging to the clergy who served in the church, and the remains identified inside the structure, reinforce the thesis that Iuliopolis was situated on a religious pilgrimage route (Sağır et al., 2016: 668).

In the graves, which contain burials of one or more individuals, various grave goods belonging to women, men, and children have been recovered alongside skeletal remains. Finds such as terracotta, glass, metal, and coins exhibit coarser workmanship compared to Hellenistic and Roman finds.

Literary reviews and archaeological data suggest that Christian religious life in Iuliopolis continued until the 12th century (Figure 5). The small finds detected in the necropolis and literary texts are indicators of this continuation (Walker, 2003: 102-103). The presence of clergy in the city in the 11th century is further evidence (Belke & Restle, 1984: 182). Moreover, inspections carried out within the scope of the Tahirler Project (<https://courses.washington.edu/tahirler/reports.html>) indicated the Roman road was located south of the modern road between Iuliopolis and Anastasiopolis, thus proving the existence of Early and Middle Byzantine Period religious structures in the vicinity. The presence of churches and rock-cut structures in Karadağ, a storage *pithos* and a late 12th-century Seljuk coin in the Uyku settlement, ceramics from the Early and Middle Byzantine Periods in Pınarcık near Fasil Village north of the Kirmir River, an 11th–12th century column capital inscribed with "... Theod(ore-?), servant of God to thee," and the remains of a Middle Byzantine religious church with geometric and cross-depicting architectural fragments at Dikmen Höyük (Anastasiopolis) (Walker, 2003: 102-110), along with known settlements around Iuliopolis in the 6th–7th centuries (Barchard, 2003: 175-179; Akyol, 2023: 1033-1034; Akyol, 2024: 546), demonstrate that the religious construction in some of the *chorai* between Iuliopolis and Anastasiopolis persisted until the 12th century.



Figure 5. Necropolis, Bronze Cross Ring (Circa 1100) (Arslan et al., 2013: 29)

4.1. 1 Church No. 1

To fully comprehend the function and contextual significance of the larger structure in Iuliopolis, it is essential to define the spatial and chronological framework within which it is situated. Church No. 1, located south of the excavation area and previously identified, is one of the most crucial components of this framework. Positioned approximately 750 meters northeast of the larger structure and immediately south of the necropolis area, this church reveals both the religious and civil dimensions of the Early Byzantine urban fabric.

Church No. 1 is rectangular in form, oriented along an east-west axis, and consists of a single central apse on the east, a three-aisled naos, and a single rectangular narthex oriented north-south on the west. The original name and exact construction date of this basilical plan church, which is dated between the 5th and 6th centuries, remain unknown. The dating of Church No. 1 has not been definitively established by a direct inscription or concrete evidence. However, its relationship with the nearby graves and the recently discovered larger structure provides a crucial chronological context. The dating of the larger structure to the 5th–6th centuries through its finds (Latin cross, ceramics, etc.) supports the contemporaneity of Church No. 1 with this

period. The church, presumed to have been built during the Early Byzantine Period when the city's Christian population was at its densest, underscores its central role in religious life.

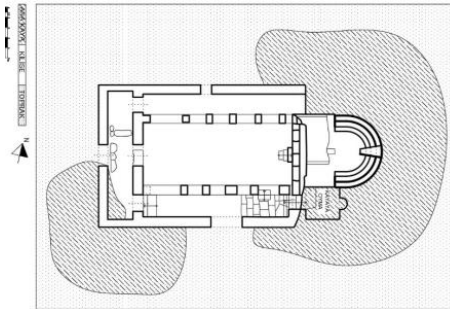
In summary, Church No. 1 is not merely a place of worship but also an indicator of the city's social and economic organization. The figure of the Latin cross on one of the *pithoi* and the larder's function for liquid food storage suggest that this church was likely part of a monastery complex and served as a religious center overseeing the city's agricultural economy. Thus, when considered alongside the larder, the church represents a holistic structure that catered to both the spiritual and temporal needs of Iuliopolis (Gür, et al., 2025: 118-121) (Figure 6-7, Drawing 1).



Figure 6. Southeast of Church No. 1, Rock-Cut Structure (2012)



Figure 7. Church No. 1, View from West to East (2025)



Drawing 1. Church No. 1, Measured Plan (D. Gür and V. Tokdemir, 2026)

Numerous fragments of imported red-slipped ceramics were identified in the floor fill of the church apse. On the surface of some of the terracotta fragments, which are dated between the 5th and 7th centuries, depictions of the Latin cross along with fragments of religious inscriptions are visible in the legends (Figure 8-9).



Figure 8. Imported Ceramic Fragments Identified from the Church No. 1, Apse Floor (2025)



Figure 9. Imported Ceramic Fragments Identified from the North Aisle Floor of the Church No. 1 (2025)

The data indicate that the religious structure constructed in the 5th–6th centuries continued to be utilized throughout the 7th century and beyond. Furthermore, the existence of a religious structure dating earlier than the one built during the reign of Justinian (Iustinianus) in the 6th century (Prokopius, 1941: 331-333; Procopius, VII/V) is known. Specifically, the fact that Meliphthongus, referred to at the Council of Chalcedon (451) as “the bishop of the holy church of God in Iuliopolis,” represented Iuliopolis (Price & Gaddis 2005: 126, 146; Onur, 2014a: 69), and that the religious structure he served was dedicated to God, is known.

The mention of the *Basilaion* church being subordinate to the Bishopric of Ankyra (Ankara) in the edicts of Emperor Alexios Komnenos (1086) (Onur, 2014a: 70) suggests that the religious structure in the city was in use between the 5th and 11th centuries, and that the Christian presence weakened or vanished religiously with the cessation of Byzantine rule in the city by the 12th century.

During the evaluation of small finds from the archaeological work between 2012 and 2025, wall painting fragments belonging to the church were identified. Apart from fragments assessed as brown and red borders, no other pictorial representations have survived to the present day. Upon examining the existing walls and the finds, it is posited that the structure was decorated with wall paintings in the 5th–6th centuries and was subsequently destroyed (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Church No. 1, Fragmentary Wall Paintings (2025)

5. THE LARDER

During the 2023–2025 excavation season, an investigation was carried out on a previously unknown Early Byzantine Period larder structure located south of the necropolis. Specifically, during the 2024 excavations, a rectangular-planned larder structure extending along an east-west axis was identified within a three-phased building complex belonging to the Late Antique and Early Byzantine Periods, situated south of the necropolis area. The structure consists of two connected/adjointing rooms (Rooms 1 and 2) and continues towards the east. This structure, determined to have been used for storage purposes, offers new and significant data regarding the city's socioeconomic life (Gür, et al., 2025: 811-814) (Figures 11-15).



Figure 11. The Larder, Aerial View (2025)



Figure 12. The Larder, Aerial View, and Pithoi Identified in the Larder (2024)



Figure 13. Pithoi Identified in the Larder (2024) and Patera (2024)

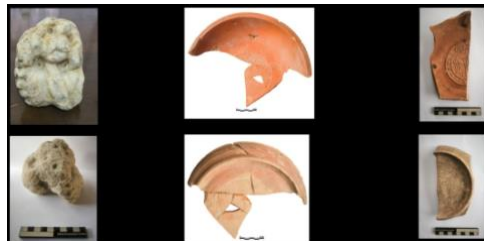


Figure 14. Small Finds Identified from the Larder (2024)



Figure 15. Imported Ceramic Fragment Identified from the West of the Larder, with the Legend ΕΥΛΟΓΙΑ ΚΥΡΙΟΥ (The Blessing of the Lord) (2025)

The most prominent architectural feature of the larder structure is the reuse of materials dating from the Roman period. Spolia elements such as a marble column drum, a column base, and an altar fragment were identified in the floor fill of Room 1. This reflects the Byzantine practice of utilizing former pagan structures, either by dismantling or transforming them, for new construction. Such use of material may have resulted both from economic necessity and from the desire to eliminate the remnants of the old belief system. In addition to spolia, the walls of the larder were constructed using mortar and rough-hewn stones, indicative of the practical construction techniques of the period.

The finds recovered from within and the filling of the larder structure are of great importance, both functionally and symbolically. Five *pithoi* (large storage jars) were identified side-by-side in the southwest corner of Room 2. These *pithoi* were carefully secured to the floor due to their large volume and to ensure their stability. *Pithoi* were vessels widely used during the Byzantine period for storing products such as wine, olive oil, grain, and water (Fidancı, 2016: 9). The most striking of these *pithoi* is the one bearing a depiction of a Latin cross, created using the punctate (dotting) technique on its shoulder. This symbol suggests that the larder was not merely a storage area but was also associated with a religious institution (likely a monastery). Such symbolic marks emphasize that the stored products served a sacred or religious purpose (Fidancı, 2016: 9). The plain appearance of the other *pithoi* suggests that the *pithos* with the cross may have been reserved for a specialized product.

The five baked clay *pithoi* lined up inside the larder were used for storing agricultural products such as grain, olive oil, or wine, providing direct evidence of the city's agricultural economy and local production capacity. The depiction of a Latin cross on one of the *pithoi* clearly demonstrates the structure's connection with Christianity. This situation suggests that the larder complex was either part of a monastery complex or belonged to a church wakf. A bronze patera found inside another *pithos* indicates that, in addition to storage and commercial activities, the structure may also have been connected to religious rituals. The terracotta, glass, stone, marble, and metal find recovered from the larder fill attest to the diversity of the city's craft and import networks (Avcu, 2020: 165-172). Typological and analogical studies conducted on these finds, along with stratigraphic examinations, have enabled the larder structure itself to be dated to the 6th–7th centuries. The discovery of the larder provides strong evidence that the city was not only a religious centre but also an economic hub where agricultural products were stored and traded. The storage of surplus products in the city supports the idea that Iuliopolis was in a strong economic position during the Late Roman–Early Byzantine Period (Arslan et al., 2011: 273).

The bronze patera recovered from inside Pithos No. 4 is the most striking find of the article. This vessel, which has a dolphin-figured handle, is typologically dated to the 3rd century. The discovery of a Roman-era artifact in a Byzantine structure approximately 2–3 centuries later indicate cultural continuity. While the *patera* was used in Roman rituals to make offerings to the gods, it gained a different function in Christianity, such as being used by priests for washing their hands during ceremonies (Öz, 2021: 159). This demonstrates how a pagan-era object was re-functionalized within a religious and practical context. The *patera's* discovery inside a storage jar suggests that it was used for a daily function, such as transferring liquids.

Tools such as a baked clay spindle whorl and an iron axe recovered from the larder fill provide information about the city's daily life and local craft activities. The spindle whorl indicates that textile production was carried out, while tools like the axe point to artisanal activities. Furthermore, the fragments of North African Red Slip Ware ceramics found in the larder prove that Iuliopolis was integrated into the Mediterranean commercial network and had access to imported luxury goods. These findings demonstrate that the city had both a self-sufficient local economy and established commercial relations with distant regions.

6. THE SOCIOECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF THE CITY

Considering the Byzantine Period, numerous finds dating between the 4th and 9th centuries have been identified in the city. Most of these were uncovered because of studies carried out in the Larder, Church No. 1, the city walls, and the Eastern Necropolis (Dolmuş, et al., 2024: 56). Additionally, it has been determined that the Byzantine Era graves in Iuliopolis, compared to previous periods, were concentrated southeast of Church No. 1 and were poor in terms of finds (Güteryüz & Sökmen-Adalı, 2024: 72-73).

Upon examining the existing archaeological finds in Iuliopolis, in addition to the riches submerged beneath the dam waters, the tomb finds from the Eastern Necropolis that have survived to the present day offer concrete data on the city's Byzantine-era socioeconomics. However, the validity of the idea that the richness in the graves directly reflects social status is debatable. This is because these finds can be misleading; they may have belonged to the deceased, or they may have been left as a gift for the afterlife by someone else or simply purchased for the funeral ceremony and placed in the grave (Güteryüz & Sökmen-Adalı, 2024: 74-75). From this perspective, it would be more accurate to assess the city's socioeconomics through tomb finds, the graves themselves, and other concrete data identified.

The larder and its finds in Iuliopolis reveal that the city had a strong socioeconomic structure during the Early Byzantine Period. Elements such as the transportation network and bridge, walls, necropolis, Church No. 1, and the larder structure prove that Iuliopolis was a vibrant centre both religiously and commercially. The use of *spolia* materials, the religious symbols on the *pithoi*, the bronze patera, and the re-functionalization of various architectural plastic works clearly show the city's transition from a Roman pagan heritage to a Christian identity. These findings prove that Iuliopolis was not just a settlement but also a city where agricultural production was organized, trade was actively conducted, and religious institutions played a decisive role in economic life.

The presence of a larder, in addition to the church and graves, indicates that the city's religious structure was at the centre of social and economic life. The control of agricultural production and storage by monasteries can be interpreted as a sign of social order and prosperity. The use of the *pithoi* for storing liquid foods suggests that the city was self-sufficient in viticulture and other agricultural products. The city's location on an important route like the "Pilgrim's Road" (French, 1981: 38-39; Walker, 2003: 102-102, 107, fig. 1) suggests that the stored products may have been part of a commercial activity aimed at external trade, not just local consumption.

It is known from texts related to the life of Theodore of Sykeon that viticulture was common in the settlements around Iuliopolis in the 6th–7th centuries. Viticulture was extremely important for social life as well as for the monasteries.

"Periodically during the vintage season, the people of Apukumeos (Απουκούμεως) village suffered from severe hailstorms. They applied to Theodore to be protected from this disaster, and through Theodore, they were saved from this disaster, and hail never struck their vineyards again. In return, they donated a vineyard to the monastery" (Akyol, 2023: 1036-1037).

This situation shows that the monasteries in the region also had their own vineyards and that naturally, surplus wines from the harvests might have been stored. The reuse of old Roman materials demonstrates that Byzantine society utilized resources efficiently and shaped the legacy of the ancient civilization according to new needs. This is a result of both economic practicality and cultural adaptation.

The city has been located on the route of military, civil, and religious transportation networks since the Roman Period. This made the city important politically, religiously, and strategically. Notably, the Iuliopolis-inscribed milestones detected by researchers on the Roman road connecting İznik to Ankara showed that the city was situated on the main road route (Belke & Restle, 1984: 181-182; French, 1981: 36-38, 41-47; French, 2012: 11, 20, 174, 182; French, 2016: 18-19, 79, 83-86). To ensure the strong defense of a city located on such an important route, during the reign of Justinian I, the military road going from Ankara to the border was repaired, a stone bridge was built over the Siberis River, and the walls of Iuliopolis were strengthened. It is also assumed that the pilgrim Theodosius used this road when travelling to Jerusalem around 530 AD (Foss, 1977: 55-56). This information sheds light on the city during the Late Antique–Early Byzantine period.

It is thought that the river route was actively used in Iuliopolis during the Byzantine Period. This suggests that the water level was high in the 6th century, possibly to the extent of causing floods, indicating a powerful and effective water source (Prokopius, 1941: 331-333; Procopius, VII/V). The Byzantine bridge (Sarılar Bridge, over the Skopas River), which currently divides the city into east and west and is submerged beneath the Sarıyar Dam waters, is now under water (Belke & Restle, 1984: 182). Remains belonging to water structures were identified within the city during the 2023–2025 period. The detection of wastewater channels associated with these structures suggests a connection to the city's sewerage or water systems. The Byzantine historian Michael Psellos mentions the presence of baths and natural thermal springs in or around Iuliopolis, which he refers to as Basileion (Belke & Restle, 1984: 182). This suggests that the city, located on the Pilgrim's Road and the route between Iznik and Ankara, may have served as a healing and rest center.

Historically, the economy of Ankara is known to have been based on agriculture and animal husbandry (Beyoğlu, 2023: 1, 11). Mohair goat breeding (tiftik) is particularly important for Ankara (Eyice, 1996: 243-244). The *sof* fabric produced from the wool of the mohair goat holds significant economic value (Beyoğlu, 2023: 1, 11). Animal husbandry around Iuliopolis today is known to be based on mohair and ordinary goat breeding (Aksoy & Tekkılıç, 2024: 250). Given the region's geography, it is believed that this production extends back to historical times.

Research on the *Vita* of Theodore of Sykeon has shown that agriculture and animal husbandry were influential in the region's economy. In the 6th–7th centuries, it is known that oxen were raised in the nearby settlements, peasants transported goods using ox-carts, oxen were used in agricultural activities, and whips used for punishment were made from ox-hide. The breeding of oxen and its agricultural impact on the region were determined to have continued until the 20th century. During this period, camels were also raised in the region, used for transportation, and even in entertainment and acrobatics (Akyol, 2022: 251; Akyol, 2024: 554). Furthermore, wild horses and mules were harnessed to carts and used for transportation, and some horses were used in horse race betting (Akyol, 2024: 554). All this data provide important information about the agricultural activities, leisure, and means of transport in the region.

Throughout history, a type of grain that was resistant to harsh and adverse weather conditions is known to have been cultivated in Iuliopolis. This grain was also cultivated in various parts of Bithynia; it was considered lower quality than naked wheat but superior to the rye grown in Thrace. Moreover, the bread made from this grain was said to be better than rye bread from Thrace and Macedonia but lower quality than wheat bread (Onur, 2014a: 67, 73).

Fishing is thought to have held an important place in the city, as the river stands out in historical sources for its fish diversity (Devecioğlu, 2024: 18). Five baked clay *pithoi* were identified in the area designated as the larder in the city during the 2023–2025 period. It is assumed that these *pithoi* constituted a storage area belonging to a monastery, church, or other structure. It is thought that water, wine, or various grain products were stored in these containers.

Research conducted on hair samples from graves in the city's necropolis detected resveratrol. The identification of resveratrol, a phytoalexin found in grapes and a component of red wine, is interpreted as evidence that the individual consumed red wine in daily life (Büyükkara, et al., 2024: 242). This suggests that the *pithoi* in the larder may have been used for storing wine consumed for religious or health purposes.

Examinations conducted on the existing hair samples of an individual from Grave No. JLP_M196 in the necropolis revealed that wine and lentils held an important place in their daily diet. Based on both the analysis of the hair samples and the skeletal remains, this individual was determined to have held a high social status, similar to other members of their community. The presence of

sulcatone in the hair samples indicates that the ancient individual consumed products like mint, ginger, or watermelon. Furthermore, findings related to chemical components supporting the consumption of rice and cloves suggest that the individual may have used medicinal plants during the last periods of their life (Büyükkara, et al., 2024: 245). This suggests that the populace of the city had a qualitative diet.

In Iuliopolis, as in the Roman Period, importance was attached to necropolis craftsmanship during the Early Byzantine Period, and the region's local material was used in the construction of the graves. The wooden coffin fragments and finds identified in Grave No. JLP_M447 are dated to the 5th–6th centuries. This indicates that the fragrant juniper wood used for coffin construction in Roman Period graves (Akkemik & Metin, 2011: 105-111) continued to be used during the Byzantine Period.

The bronze *patera* recovered from inside Pithos No. 4 in Room 2, manufactured in the 3rd century, is assumed to have been used for serving water and wine during religious ceremonies and evening meals that took place between the 6th and 7th centuries. This bronze *patera*, identified *in situ* inside the *pithos*, has existing parallels made from various materials, including terracotta, glass, clay, bronze, and silver. A large number many bronze *paterae* are known, particularly from the Roman and Byzantine periods. The fact that the bronze *patera* found in Iuliopolis was identified *in situ* inside the *pithos* suggests that it was used during the process of transferring or decanting water or wine from the container. A dolphin-figured *patera* handle (REDMG: 1981.40.59), dated to the 3rd century and housed in a museum collection (although its bowl has not survived), exhibits characteristics like the example found at Iuliopolis.

The larder's location, south of the necropolis and approximately 750 meters southwest of the Church, suggests that this wide area was used as a continuous settlement zone from the Early Byzantine Period onwards. The city's placement on the Pilgrim's Road route indicates that it was constantly engaged in commercial relations with other cities.

The depiction of the Latin cross along with geometric and floral decorations on one of the *pithoi* in the larder strengthens the possibility that the artifact may have been produced in a local workshop. Furthermore, the simple appearance, fabric structure, color, and similar wall characteristics of *pithoi* numbered 2 through 5 support the idea that these vessels belong to the same period. Should future research identify ceramic or amphora workshops in the city, these findings would provide definitive answers to questions concerning whether the existing amphorae were made within the city or at another production centre.

Animal husbandry and fish consumption are considered important in Iuliopolis. The riverbed was significant for both transportation/carriage and fishing. Ancient sources mention a rich variety of fish in the riverbed (Devecioğlu, 2024: 18). This suggests that the Sakarya River was utilized by the city for both transport and as a source for the food chain.

It is known that basic education in the villages, *chorai*, and settlement areas around Iuliopolis was provided in local schools (Akyol, 2024: 555). Considering that these basic trainings were carried out in monasteries and other educational institutions (Akyol, 2023: 1032), it is believed that religious education in Iuliopolis during the Early Byzantine Period was provided by the clergy at the church.

In the settlement areas around Ankara, it is known that some women, including the mother of Theodore of Sykeon, engaged in prostitution. Some of these women are documented to have later left the profession, sought God's forgiveness, and chose a life of piety (Akyol, 2024: 555). The region also included blacksmiths and cooks (Akyol, 2023: 1031-1032; Akyol, 2024: 555). Additionally, some inscriptions identified in Iuliopolis prove the existence of professionals such

as a coppersmith (Onur, 2014b: 105-106, fig. 6), priest (presbyter) (Onur, 2014b: 108, fig. 10-11), deacon/deaconess (Onur, 2014b: 106, fig. 7), and demarch (mayor/city administrator) (Onur, 2014b: 107, fig. 9) in the city.

7. CONCLUSION

Although Iuliopolis is described as a small and unremarkable city, its geographical location and its function on the main Roman road allowed it to maintain its significance throughout history. Similar to the general region of Ankara, Iuliopolis experienced its most prosperous years during the 2nd–3rd centuries. Available data confirms that the city experienced an economic decline starting from the 3rd century. It is known that Sasanian and Gothic raids affected Ankara during the 3rd century. The city, which never completely lost its significance, maintained its strategic position due to its location on the transportation network, its proximity to natural water sources, and its fertile land structure, ensuring that it remained an active settlement during both the Roman and Byzantine periods.

The archaeological studies carried out in the Ancient City of Iuliopolis between 2009 and 2025 have illuminated the city's multi-layered transformation and strategic importance during the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Periods (4th–9th centuries). Although the city experienced a relative economic weakening following its peak in the 2nd–3rd centuries, its geographical location and function on the main Roman road allowed it to preserve its strategic superiority and scope of activity.

The uncovered key structures—such as the city walls, the necropolis, Church No. 1, and the newly discovered Larder—have been decisive in understanding the complex religious, architectural, and socioeconomic dynamics of Iuliopolis during the Byzantine Period. Specifically, the city's identity as an episcopal center is confirmed by the size of Church No. 1 and church records; this spiritual authority is further substantiated as a concrete piece of evidence that it was also at the heart of economic life, as demonstrated by the function of the larder.

The larder structure and the *in situ* pithoi found within it indicate that the city's agricultural production (viticulture, grain, etc.) and storage activities were carried out in an organized manner. The Latin cross depiction on one of the *pithoi* suggests a strong link between this storage area and a religious institution such as a monastery or church endowment, supporting the view that religious centers controlled and directed economic activities. The combination of this organization with the city's location on the Pilgrim's Road, a major transportation and trade route, suggests that the stored products may have been involved in an active commercial cycle beyond local consumption.

The in-depth analysis of archaeological and epigraphic data supports the complex social and economic structure of Iuliopolis under three main headings:

1. Religious and Cultural Continuity The reuse of Roman materials (altar, column, column base) as spolia in the larder and the discovery of a dolphin-figured bronze patera from the Roman Period inside an Early Byzantine pithos clearly demonstrate the re-functionalization of the pagan heritage within the context of Christian belief in Byzantine society. This reflects both economic practicality and cultural adaptation.

2. Trade and Production Capacity North African Red Slip Ware ceramics recovered from Church No. 1 and the larder fill prove Iuliopolis's integration into the Mediterranean commercial network and its access to imported luxury goods. Conversely, the similar fabric structure of the pithoi, along with local craft tools such as the terracotta spindle whorl and iron axe, indicates that the city possessed a self-sufficient local economy and active artisanal activities. The use of juniper wood for coffins, and local and imported spolia stones in graves, are evidence of urban

production in Iuliopolis. Furthermore, the construction of various structures (public, civil, and social), including the church, bridge, city walls, larder, and graves, provide evidence of local construction activities. The finds identified in the graves offer crucial information regarding both locally manufactured products and imported goods.

3.Social Structure and Dietary Culture The detection of components such as resveratrol (wine) and sulcatone (mint, ginger, watermelon) in the hair samples of individuals from the necropolis supports the city's socioeconomic vitality with archaeobiological data. This points to the populace's qualitative diet, possible consumption of wine for religious or medicinal purposes, and the presence of individuals of high social status. Excavation work around the larder also identified sections interpreted as rooms and water channels. These remains, along with the city walls ensuring the social security of its citizens and the wastewater channels, support the notion of dedicated spaces for individual use in the city.

In conclusion, these comprehensive studies conducted in Iuliopolis definitively prove that during the Late Antique and Early Byzantine Periods, the city was not merely a military or transportation post, but rather an important centre where religious institutions organized economic life, local production and craftsmanship were active, commercial relations with distant regions were established, and a complex social structure sustained an advanced urban life. Future research is expected to uncover additional structures beneath the dam waters, offering more comprehensive details regarding Iuliopolis's flourishing period during the Byzantine Era.

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