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The relics of the Gothic martyrs Inna, Rema, and Pinna

By David Woods, Belfast

According to the sole surviving notice of the Gothic martyrs Inna, Rema, and Pinna their relics were finally transported by the bishop Goddas to a port by the name of *Haliscus*: Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα δι' ἀποκαλύψεως οἱ ἅγιοι ἔπεισαν τὸν αὐτὸν Γοδδᾶν τὸν ἐπίσκοπον μετενέγκαι αὐτοὺς εἰς χωρίον λεγόμενον Ἄλισκον, λιμένα ὄντα. This port was not identified by the Bollandist H. Delehay in his original publication of this notice¹. Shortly afterwards, though, J. Mansion attempted an identification: "Ceci rappelle Alisca, poste de la Pannonie inférieure, sur la rive droite du Danube, près de Tolna, en Hongrie actuelle. En supposant, chose fort douteuse, que le port en question ait été une ville située sur les bords d'un fleuve, et que cette ville soit l'Alisca pannonienne, nous n'en demeurons pas moins dans le vague quant à l'identification tant de la patrie que de la communion des martyrs."² However this identification does not seem to have gained any wider support. Many years later E. A. Thompson could still say of Goddas' translation of these relics: "He took them to the harbour Haliscus, a place which has never been identified."³ This opinion is apparently still shared by the authors of a recent work on the Goths in the 4th century who, concerning the deposition of these relics, state: "Unfortunately, the harbour town of Haliscus, where this is said to have happened, is not otherwise known."⁴

I would merely like to point out here that the Greek Ἄλισκον is not necessarily incorrupt. There is an obvious resemblance to the name of a port in the Roman province of Scythia, *ad Salices*⁵. This identification would seem to me much more probable than that proposed by J. Mansion for simple geographical reasons. Firstly, it is a much less strained interpretation of λιμένα that it should refer to a proper seaport on the Black Sea rather than to a harbour hundreds of miles inland on the middle Danube. Indeed the most notable characteristic of *Alisca* may have been that it was the headquarters of a legion rather than that it was a port⁶. Secondly, *Alisca* was situated far too

1 H. Delehay, *Saints de Thrace et de Mésie*, *Analecta Bollandiana* 31 (1912) 161–291, esp. pp. 215–216. 287–288.

2 J. Mansion, *Les origines du Christianisme chez les Gots*, *Analecta Bollandiana* 33 (1914) 5–30, esp. p. 11.

3 E. A. Thompson, *The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila* (Oxford 1966) 161. Elsewhere, p. 29, he curiously identifies *Haliscus* as a native Gothic village north of the Danube.

4 P. Heather/J. Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool 1991) 130.

5 Still inhabited by 377, at least, when the armies of the Roman generals Profuturus and Traianus encamped near it, *Amm.* XXXI 7, 5.

6 *Not. Dig. Oc.* XXXIII 52.

much to the West for it to have had the close and familiar contact with the Goths which the notice in question would seem to imply. Lastly, we must consider the general historical circumstances. The remains of another Gothic martyr, Sabas (martyred 12 April 372) had been recovered from Gothic territory by Iunius Soranus, dux Scythiae⁷. Thus we know for certain that the Gothic persecution of christians did take place in the territories opposite the Roman province of Scythia, which is preferable to a simple assumption that this persecution occurred equally throughout the whole of the vast territories controlled by the Goths, and that is therefore of little import where we locate *Haliscus*. Here the evidence itself ends. However recent speculation that bishop Betranion of Tomi was responsible for the transport of the remains of Sabas to Cappadocia raises the interesting possibility that the port of *ad Salices* had been trying to emulate the success of its southerly neighbour in the acquisition of relics⁸. It is not at all unlikely that Betranion of Tomi, if it really was he who was responsible for the transport of the remains of Sabas, retained some small portion of them also for the glorification of his own see. We may be witnessing, therefore, the competition between two provincial ports in the enhancement of their dignity by the acquisition of the relics of martyrs.

7 Heather/Matthews, op. cit. 109–117.

8 On which speculation, Heather/Matthews, op. cit. 118–121.