

SARCOPHAGUS OF PRISCVS AND CINNAMIA FROM NOVALJA, CROATIA (AE 1994, 1372): DABET FISCO AND NOT DABET EPISCOPO

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Approximately a half a century ago, two inscribed fragments — one smaller and the other much bigger — were found in Novalja, at the northern part of the island of Pag (Croatia; see Pl. 1). A smaller fragment was found near the church dedicated to Madonna (so-called “Small church”)¹, and immediately stirred scholar community: its first interpreter, late Rev Josip Kunkera, local priest and archaeological enthusiast, linked the fragment with some *episcopus* and considered it as a part of the church furnishings (a baptismal font). He read the remaining letters quite freely and imaginatively “*n(obis) & am(antibus) / r(egenerationis) ga(udium) / et & plo(ranti)bu(s) / p(acem) dei e(terni) / suis vol(umnib)u(s) / dabet episcopos*”². Other scholars were more cautious, yet, followed his line of thought. A. Šonje, though regarding Kunkera’s interpretation as problematic in some aspects, nevertheless regarded the fragment in question as a part of the church adornments or its building structures, and linked it with a local

bishop or some other church benefactor³. Professor M. Suič, great Croatian scholar, moved the discussion towards more plausible conclusions interpreting it as a Late Roman sepulchral monument⁴. Despite the fact that near it stood the other, much bigger fragment of the same monument, Kunkera, Šonje and Suič did not link the two together⁵.

It took another decade or two for the monument to be interpreted correctly: it is a sarcophagus, made of local limestone of poor quality and by some unskilled stone-carver⁶. Yet, in 1995 we

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1. The fragment was found in 1965, while excavating a channel for aqueduct pipes, at the southern end of the small square in front of the “Small Church”. While digging, the workers often found dressed stones, which they destroyed. They wanted to destroy this slab as well, but a villager Petar Župarič stopped them and rescued the slab. It remained in his possession until 1977, when he donated it to the local collection of church antiquities. In 1976, the slab fell and broke in three pieces. See KUNKERA, J., *Novaljska biskupija na otoku Pagu od 4. do 7. vijeka*, Novalja 1977, 17-18. Though the exact data on finding spot are unknown, nevertheless it seems plausible that all the above mentioned dressed stones came from eroded remnants of the old stone cairn that produced various architectural and ceramic fragments during its demolishing in 1952, or from another similar cairn nearby. Cf. ŠONJE, A., “Kasnoantički spomenici na otoku Pagu”, *Peristil* 24, 1981, 5-26, 14 ff. It is quite impossible to define the precise finding spot of the bigger fragment (it seems that it was found at the area of the nearby parish church of St Catherine).

2. KUNKERA, J., *Novaljska biskupija na otoku Pagu od 4. do 7. vijeka*, Novalja 1977, 129 and fig. 10.

3. ŠONJE, A., “L’ubicazione della sede del vescovo di Cessa, Vindemio”, *Atti del Centro di ricerche storiche di Rovigno* 11, 1980-1981, 85-130, 118 and n. 137 at p. 129, just repeats Kunkera’s reading, not offering one of his own; cf. ŠONJE, “Kasnoantički...”, *o.c.*, 5-26, 15-16.

4. SUIČ, M., “Cissa Pullaria - Baphium Cissense - Episcopus Cessensis”, *Arheološki radovi i rasprave* 10, 1987, 204, proposes the following reading: [... *si quis aliud corpus ponere voluerit*] (or similar) [*—ad hanc*] / *aram*, [*in hanc* / *a*] *rca*[*m item*] / *et locu*[*m*, *nis*] / *i de fa*[*miliaribus*] / *suis, volu*[*ntate*] / *dabit fisco* [...]. As observed by Prof. Suič, letters *FISCO* were altered by red colour in order to make *episco(po)* (*ibidem*); however, in 1993, when I examined it, red colouring was all gone.

5. SUIČ, *o.c.*; ŠONJE, A., “L’ubicazione...”, *o.c.*, 85-130, 118 and n. 137 at p. 129, knew of both fragments and was aware of their equally carved mouldings; however, considering their palaeographic traits as being too different, he regarded the fragments as parts of two separate monuments and linked them both to church benefactors (cf. ŠONJE, “Kasnoantički...”, *o.c.*, 5-26, 16). Kunkera, on the other hand, correctly recognised the larger fragment as a part of sarcophagus, and attributed it to a Christian married couple *Priscus* and *Claudia* (sic!), see KUNKERA, J., *Novalja kroz stoljeća*, Novalja 1982, 14 and 19. There he quotes his manuscript, entitled “Mausoleum of Priscus” that deals solely with this fragment (KUNKERA, J., *Priskov mauzolej*, Novalja 1980) but I could not find any copy of it.

6. KURILIĆ, A., “Latinski natpisi antičkog, kasnoantičkog i ranosrednjovjekovnog razdoblja na otoku Pagu i zadarsko-šibenskom otočju”, *Radovi Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Zadru* 36, 1994, 191-246 (Engl. summary: “Latin Inscriptions from Roman, Late Roman and Early Medieval Period from the Island of Pag and the Zadar and Šibenik Archipelagos”, 246).

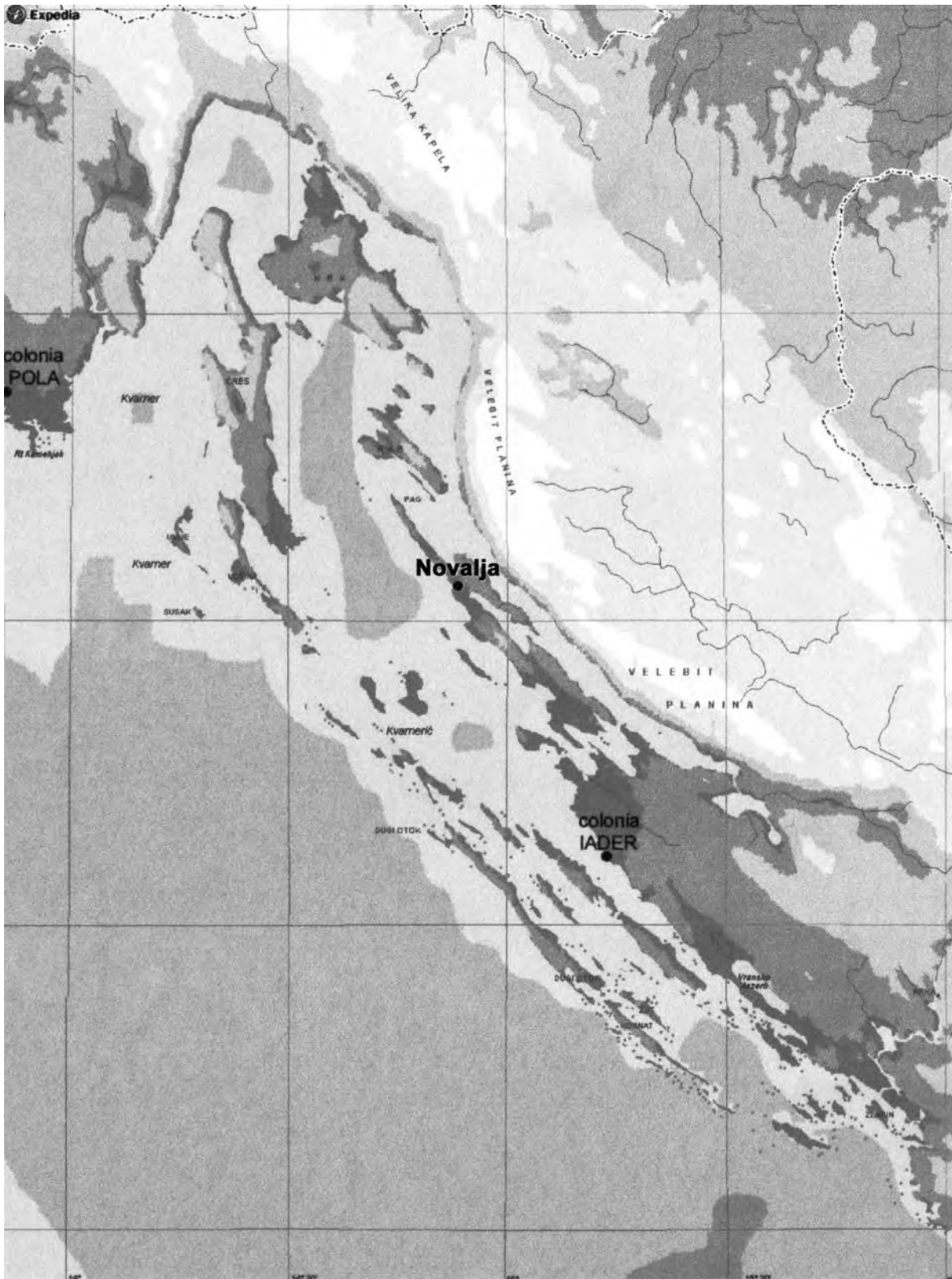


Plate 1: Location of Novalja (Croatia).

are still finding it to be a "... fragment de plaque de chancel ...", and the reading of the inscription to be the Kunkera's one, although, the author ends the paragraph in a sceptic tone "L'inscription dabet episcopo quelle qu'en soit la lecture ..."⁷. Nonetheless, she thus introduced this nonexistent episcopus to the international scholarly community.

SARCOPHAGUS (Pl. 2, 1-2; Pl. 3, 1; Pl. 4)

Presently, the sarcophagus is preserved with only few fragments: two of them definitely being parts of its front side (Pl. 2, 1-2)⁸, and one that may belong to either one of its lateral sides or to its rear side (Pl. 3, 1).

An inscription within tabula ansata occupies the central part of the front side. Tabula rises above the surrounding surface. On vertical ends, it has asymmetrically placed handles of irregular triangular shape. A moulded arch is carved above tabula.

A partly preserved arcade stands to the left of tabula. Preserved column is smooth, with high base and a capital. Capital is severely damaged by a break-line; therefore, its type and/or possible decoration remain unknown.

Atop of it all stands a moulded architrave of the coffin.

Decorative features of the sarcophagus front side determine it within the group of architectural type, more precisely of the Gabelmann's architectural type II ("Arkaden und Tabula")⁹. The characteristic feature of this type is tripartite vertical division of the front side: semi pillars (or semi columns) are at the corners, moulded square tabula in the centre, and an arch (or semi arch) on either side of the tabula. Novalja example enters into this type only by its general features; however,

195 ff, nr 5. Regarding the identification of the sarcophagus and some details of its production, I am deeply indebted to Prof. N. Cambi, who, having seen the fragments himself, has no doubts about its true nature.

7. CHEVALIER, P., *Salona II. Ecclesiae Dalmatiae. L'architecture paléochrétienne de la province romaine de Dalmatie (IVe-VIIe s.). (En dehors de la capitale, Salona). Early Christian Architecture in the Roman Province of Dalmatia (4th.-7th cc.), (Outside the Capital of Salona)*, (Recherches archéologiques franco-croates a Salone, Dirigés par DUVAL, N.; MARIN, N.), Roma - Split 1995, 67.

8. Both fragments are broken: larger in five and smaller in three pieces.

9. GABELMANN, H., *Die Werkstattgruppen der oberitalischen Sarkophage*, Berlin 1973, Table between pages 40 and 41; cf. REBECCHI, F., "I sarcofagi romani dell'Arco Adriatico", *AAAd XIII*, 1978, 201-258, 239, Tav. A.

minute examination of its decorative composition shows considerable deviation from the standard.

Architectural sarcophagi are most densely distributed throughout Northern Italy: there were several workshop centres, Aquileia and Ravenna being the most important and influential. Such



Plate 2: Sarcophagus of *Priscus et Cinnamia*, front side: (1) large fragment, (2) small fragment.



Plate 3: Sarcophagus of *Priscus et Cinnamia*: (1) fragment of lateral or rear side, (2) inscription (drawing by Željko Miletić).

sarcophagi are known from Histria and Dalmatia, as well. Salona, the provincial capital of Dalmatia, had its own workshop(s) of sarcophagi, which was (or were) able to create works of the highest artistic value, such as the Good Shepherd sarcophagus¹⁰.

Apart from these centres, which produced expensive examples made of Proconnessian marble, there were local workshops that often made simple copies in limestone¹¹. Production of archi-

tectural sarcophagi of the North Italian type in Dalmatia, which begun already in the early third century AD, displayed particular local features: as it seems, such sarcophagi were produced individually (and not “en masse”), having many similar traits that indicate production originating from one centre — Salona¹².

Novalja sarcophagus enters into neither Aquilea nor Ravenna productions. The closest analogies, that I am aware of, come from Vis

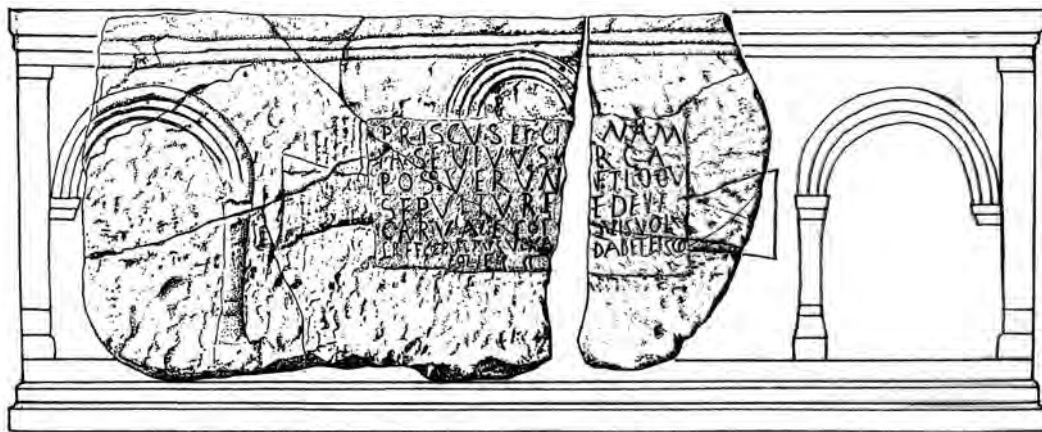


Plate 4: Sarcophagus of *Priscus et Cinnamia*: ideal reconstruction of the front side (drawing by Željko Miletić).

10. CAMBI, N., *Sarkofag Dobroga pastira iz Salone i njegova grupa / The Good Shepherd Sarcophagus and its Group*, Split 1994, 87 f; CAMBI, N., “Hans Gabelmann, *Die Werkstattgruppen der oberitalischen Sarkophage*, Beihefte der Bonner Jahrbücher, Band 34 (Rheinland Verlag GmbH), Bonn 1973”, *Vjesnik Arheološkog muzeja u Zagrebu*, 3. ser. 9, 1975, 175-183 (book review), 176 ff.

11. GABELMANN, H., *Die Werkstattgruppen der oberitalischen Sarkophage*, Berlin 1973, 79 ff.; REBECCHI, o.c., 205 ff.; cf. CAMBI, N., “Antički sarkofazi iz Like”, *Arheološka problematika Like, Znanstveni skup, Otočac*, 22-24. IX 1974. (Izdanja Hrvatskog arheološkog društva 1), Split 1975, 75-83 (French summary: *Sarcophages antiques de la Lika*, 82-83), 75; CAMBI, “Hans Gabel-

mann...”, o.c., 179; FRANZONI, C.; DOLCI, N., “Contributo allo studio dei sarcofagi pagani della bassa valle del Po”, *Felix Ravenna CXXI-CXXII*, 1981 (1983), 7-29, 27. Cf. marble sarcophagus from Poreč that was probably locally produced (GABELMANN, o.c., 80, nr. 22, T. 11,3).

12. Cf. CAMBI, *Sarkofag Dobroga pastira...*, o.c., 179, 35 f, 76 ff, 81.

(ancient Issa, see Pl. 5, 1)¹³ and Ravenna¹⁴. Both sarcophagi have — similar to Novalja sarcophagus — *tabula ansata* with triangular handles placed at the centre of the front side, but none has an arch above it. North Italian architectural sarcophagi of “Arkaden und Tabula” type usually have either simple square *tabulae* with no *ansae* or *tabulae ansatae* with handles usually shaped in some form of *volutae*¹⁵. *Tabula ansata* with triangular handles belongs to a typical scheme of Salonitan sar-

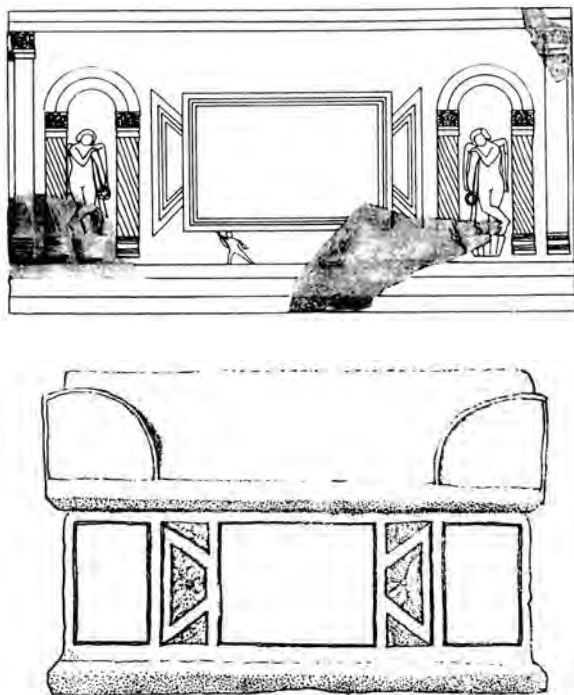


Plate 5: (1) Sarcophagus from Vis (after GABRIČEVIĆ, B., “Antički spomenici otoka Visa”, *Viški spomenici*, Split 1968, 42); (2) Typical scheme of Salonitan sarcophagi production (after CAMBI, N., “Antički sarkofazi iz Like”, *Arheološka problematika Like, Znanstveni skup, Otočac*, 22-24. IX 1974. (Izdavanja Hrvatskog arheološkog društva 1), Split 1975, 77, fig. 2).

13. Three fragments of marble sarcophagus with central *tabula ansata* between arched aediculae, from the early third century AD: CAMBI, *o.c.*, 77-78, 95, nr. 3, fig. 28; cf. GABRIČEVIĆ, B., “Antički spomenici otoka Visa”, *Viški spomenici*, Split 1968, 5-60 (Engl. summary: Monuments of Antiquity on the Island of Vis, pp. 59-60), 41 ff. GABRIČEVIĆ, *o.c.* suggested that the area above *tabula* might have been decorated with some garland (which would be quite similar to the arch above *tabula* at the Novalja sarcophagus!), but, unfortunately, this part of sarcophagus is not preserved. He dates the sarcophagus in the third century AD.

14. A pagan marble sarcophagus from the third quarter of the third century AD, having *tabula ansata* between arched aediculae: KOLLWITZ, J.; HERDEJÜRGEN, H., *Die Ravennatischen Sarkophage*, ASR VIII, 2, Berlin 1979, 42, A 49, Taf. 19, 1.

15. GABELMANN, *o.c.*, 53 ff and Table between pages 40 and 41; CAMBI, *o.c.*, 77.

cophagi production (see Pl. 5, 2)¹⁶. Salona production was great and exported throughout the province¹⁷. It is highly probable that Vis sarcophagus was produced in Salona and then transported to its destination on the island. Despite the fact that Issa was important centre during the third century, it is hardly possible that it could have produced such a sarcophagus¹⁸.

Structural characteristics of Vis sarcophagus (of its coffin, in particular) and figural style differ from standards of North Italian main production centres¹⁹, but have numerous analogies in Salona. It is made of marble and with good artistry²⁰. On the other hand, Novalja sarcophagus lacks figures and its style is rustic, but there is no doubt that the two sarcophagi share same structural pattern, most probably originating from Salona.

While it is plausible that Vis sarcophagus was produced in Salona, the same is hard to believe for Novalja sarcophagus, not just because of its poor quality, but also because Salona is much farther from Novalja than from Vis. In addition, Novalja sarcophagus is made of local limestone, and not of famous white limestone of high quality quarried at the island of Brač nearby Salona. If one should look for some export centre, Iader or Pola, even Ravenna, would be much closer.

Novalja had its own Roman quarries of local limestone “breccia”²¹. Calpurnia, daughter of *L. Calpurnius Piso augur* (cos. 1 BC), used stone from this quarry to set up a poetic dedication to *Bona Dea* and *Heia Augusta* in the nearby Caska (ancient Cissa)²². According to the local epigraphic corpus, it seems that Cissa, and its port in Novalja, had its own local stonecutting workshop. Some authors suppose that Late Roman, i.e. Early Christian monks, occupied themselves with stonecutting arts in monasteries in Novalja vicinity²³.

16. CAMBI, “Antički sarkofazi...”, *o.c.*, 76 and 77, fig. 2.

17. CAMBI, *Sarkofag Dobroga pastira...*, *o.c.*, 87-88.

18. CAMBI, *o.c.*

19. It is a local version of the North Italian type II (“Arkaden und Tabula”), which is the further proof of the authenticity of the Dalmatian production and its ability to use established schemes in a different way: CAMBI, *o.c.*, 77.

20. CAMBI, *o.c.*, 78, 84.

21. KURILIĆ, A., “Latinski natpisi antičkog, kasnoantičkog i ranosrednjovjekovnog razdoblja na otoku Pagu i zadarsko-šibenskom otočju”, *Radovi Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Zadru* 36, 1994, 207, nr. 17; for local quarry in Novalja, see ŠONJE, A., “Antički kamenolomi u Novalji”, *Domesti* 17/5, 1984, 54 f.

22. KURILIĆ *o.c.*; AE 1964, 270; *ILLug* 260.

23. KUNKERA, *Novalja...*, *o.c.*, 19.

Accordingly, Novalja sarcophagus is a locally made product, produced either in a workshop or by some individual local stonecutter. It is inspired by the North Italian marble architectural sarcophagi on the one hand and by Salonitan production on the other.

INSCRIPTION (Pl. 2, 1-2; Pl. 3, 2; Pl. 4)

Lettering is very poor, and letters are of irregular heights and execution. The worse of them all is composition of the text itself: it abounds both in grammatical and stylistic as well as in stonecutter's errors and omissions of letters, such as, *se vivus* instead of *se vivi*, or *[a]ed{e}if(i)ca(ve)runt*, and similar. It is evident that *ordinator* was not fluent in Latin, and that the stonecutter was no better in it, either. Thus, the text is quite difficult to read and interpret, and those difficulties get even worse due to the poor qualities of both the stone and the letter carving.

PRISCVS ET CI[.]NAM
IA SE VIVVS [.]RCA sic!
POSVERVN[.] ET LOCVS
SEPVLTVRE [-]EDEF sic!
5 CÆRVNT COI[—] QVIS VOLV
ERET [..]PV[.]TVS VEXA[-] DABET FISCO
[.]OLLE[.] CC

*Priscus et Ci[n]nam/ia se vivus(!) [a]rca(m) /
posuerun[t] et locu(m) / sepultur(a)e
[a]ed{e}if(i)ca(ve)runt COI [si] quis volu/eret
[se]pu[l]tus(?) vexa[re] dabet fisco / (denariorum)
[f]olle[s] (ducenti?).*

Lettering is of quite irregular scriptura rustica with some cursive traits (see Pl. 2, 1-2; Pl. 3, 2). Letters are elongated, and often vary in height up to 1.5 cm in individual lines. Some letters are especially difficult to identify, as for instance, C, E, I, F, S, T. In addition, last four lines of the text are severely damaged, making the reading quite difficult. However, in general, the sense is quite unambiguous: Two persons, *Priscus* and *Cinnamia* — whether a married couple or not, we do not know — made this sarcophagus (*arca*) during their lifetime and built a burial place (*locus sepulturae aedificaverunt*). The inscription ends with a phrase penalising anyone who would dare to desecrate the burial with a fine of two hundred folles payable to the Treasury (*dabet fisco denariorum folles ducenti*).

The last phrase helps establishing the period in which the inscription was carved and sarcophagus

made. *Follis* was a money bag, containing determined amount of coins. During the Emperor Diocletian's monetary reform in 294, *folles* became accounting unit corresponding to 10 *aurei*, or 250 *argentei*, but it was rapidly losing on value. From Emperor Anastasius's reform at the end of the fourth (or the beginning of the fifth century), *folles* was denomination for the largest bronze coin measuring 40 small bronze coins (*nummi*)²⁴. A law passed in 356-357 determined fixed amount of 10 gold *librae* as penalty for burial desecration²⁵. From the fourth century AD, all such fines in Salona were to be paid to the *Ecclesia Salonitana*²⁶.

Accordingly, it is very probable that sarcophagus was made at the beginning of the fourth century (or at the very end of the third century, after 294), since the fine was expressed in folles instead of *librae*, and it was payable to the Treasury, not to the Church. Although it seems that presently established chronology of the architectural sarcophagi from Dalmatia²⁷ forces us to date Novalja sarcophagus to the first half of the third century, its poor artistry (either epigraphic or stylistic), as well as the use of single personal names and a definition of fine in folles, strongly indicate that this particular sarcophagus should be dated in the later period — quite probably at the very end of the third or at the beginning of the fourth century.

The monument is clearly in line with the early third century pagan sarcophagi (such as the one from the island of Vis), both by its choice of structural and textual expressions. There are no obvious Christian *formulae* or symbols (such as *depositio*, *re/quiesscit in pacem*, *dabet ecclesiae*, or similar). The above proposed datation strongly suggests that this couple still haven't accepted Christian faith, so this sarcophagus would be one of the last pagan monuments of Dalmatia. Therefore, supporters of hypothesis that Novalja was an Early Christian diocese lost their main argument; however, there are still plenty of other Early Christian sites in the area to prove that Christianity early started to flourish in Novalja region²⁸. Novalja was

24. KOS, P., *Denarništvo v antiki na slovenskem*, Ljubljana 1991, 14; KOS, P., *Leksikon antičke numizmatike*, Zagreb 1998, 115f.

25. CAILLET, J.-P., "L'amende funéraire dans l'épigraphie chrétienne de Salone", *Vijestnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku* 81, 1988, 42.

26. CAILLET, o.c.

27. CAMBI, o.c., 76 ff, 84 ff.

28. For Early Christian monuments of Novalja region, cf. for instance, ŠONJE, "L'ubicazione...", o.c., 85-130; ŠONJE, "Kasnoantički...", o.c., 5-26; CHEVALIER, o.c., 64 ff.

not only the port of nearby Cissa, but also an important port along the East Adriatic maritime route that gave shelter and provisions.

APPENDIX

Basic measurements:

- Fragments of the sarcophagus front side:
 - a) large fragment: max. height 86 cm, max. length 115 cm, width 11 cm
 - b) small fragment: max. height 84 cm, max. length 43 cm, width 11 cm
 - c) fragments joint together: max. height 86 cm, max. length 158 cm, width 11 cm

- Fragment of the sarcophagus lateral side:
 - Max. height 59 cm, max. length 83 cm, width 13 cm
- Fragments of inscription field (*tabula ansata*):
 - a) large fragment: height 38 cm, max. length 48 cm
 - b) small fragment: height 38 cm, max. length 22 cm
 - c) fragments joint together: height 38 cm, length 70 cm
- Letter heights:
 - 1st-2nd lines: 4,5 cm; third line: 4-5 cm; 4th line: 5 cm; 5th line: 3,5-5 cm; 6th line: 3-4 cm (letters are of equal heights at both fragments)
 - 7th line (carved only on the large fragment): 2-3 cm.