

Aspects of Characterisation of Stone Monuments from Southern Pannonia

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CONTENT

PRESENTATION	15
NECROLOGY: NORMAN HERZ (1923-2013) by Susan Kane	17
1. APPLICATIONS TO SPECIFIC ARCHEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS – USE OF MARBLE	
Hermaphrodites and Sleeping or Reclining Maenads: Production Centres and Quarry Marks <i>Patrizio Pensabene</i>	25
First Remarks about the Pavement of the Newly Discovered Mithraeum of the Colored Marbles at Ostia and New Investigations on Roman and Late Roman White and Colored Marbles from Insula IV, IX <i>Massimiliano David, Stefano Succi and Marcello Turci</i>	33
Alabaster. Quarrying and Trade in the Roman World: Evidence from Pompeii and Herculaneum <i>Simon J. Barker and Simona Perna</i>	45
Recent Work on the Stone at the Villa Arianna and the Villa San Marco (Castellammare di Stabia) and Their Context within the Vesuvian Area <i>Simon J. Barker and J. Clayton Fant</i>	65
Marble Wall Decorations from the Imperial Mausoleum (4 th C.) and the Basilica of San Lorenzo (5 th C.) in Milan: an Update on Colored Marbles in Late Antique Milan <i>Elisabetta Neri, Roberto Bugini and Silvia Gazzoli</i>	79
Sarcophagus Lids Sawn from their Chests <i>Dorothy H. Abramitis and John J. Herrmann</i>	89
The Re-Use of Monolithic Columns in the Invention and Persistence of Roman Architecture <i>Peter D. De Staebler</i>	95
The Trade in Small-Size Statues in the Roman Mediterranean: a Case Study from Alexandria <i>Patrizio Pensabene and Eleonora Gasparini</i>	101
The Marble Dedication of Komon, Son of Asklepiades, from Egypt: Material, Provenance, and Reinforcement of Meaning <i>Patricia A. Butz</i>	109
Multiple Reuse of Imported Marble Pedestals at Caesarea Maritima in Israel <i>Barbara Burrell</i>	117
Iasos and Iasian Marble between the Late Antique and Early Byzantine Eras <i>Diego Peirano</i>	123

Thassos, Known Inscriptions with New Data <i>Tony Kozelj and Manuela Wurch-Kozelj</i>	131
The Value of Marble in Roman <i>Hispalis</i> : Contextual, Typological and Lithological Analysis of an Assemblage of Large Architectural Elements Recovered at N° 17 Goyeneta Street (Seville, Spain) <i>Ruth Taylor, Oliva Rodríguez, Esther Ontiveros, María Luisa Loza, José Beltrán and Araceli Rodríguez</i>	143
<i>Giallo Antico</i> in Context. Distribution, Use and Commercial Actors According to New Stratigraphic Data from the Western Mediterranean (2 nd C. Bc – Late 1 st C. Ad) <i>Stefan Ardeleanu</i>	155
<i>Amethystus</i> : Ancient Properties and Iconographic Selection <i>Luigi Pedroni</i>	167
2. PROVENANCE IDENTIFICATION I: (MARBLE)	
Unraveling the Carrara – Göktepe Entanglement <i>Walter Prochaska, Donato Attanasio and Matthias Bruno</i>	175
The Marble of Roman Imperial Portraits <i>Donato Attanasio, Matthias Bruno, Walter Prochaska and Ali Bahadir Yavuz</i>	185
Tracing Alabaster (Gypsum or Anhydrite) Artwork Using Trace Element Analysis and a Multi-Isotope Approach (Sr, S, O) <i>Lise Leroux, Wolfram Kloppmann, Philippe Bromblet, Catherine Guerrot, Anthony H. Cooper, Pierre-Yves Le Pogam, Dominique Vingtain and Noel Worley</i>	195
Roman Monolithic Fountains and Thasian Marble <i>Annewies van den Hoek, Donato Attanasio and John J. Herrmann</i>	207
Archaeometric Analysis of the Alabaster Thresholds of Villa A, Oplontis (Torre Annunziata, Italy) and New Sr and Pb Isotopic Data for <i>Alabastro Ghiaccione del Circeo</i> <i>Simon J. Barker, Simona Perna, J. Clayton Fant, Lorenzo Lazzarini and Igor M. Villa</i>	215
Roman Villas of Lake Garda and the Occurrence of Coloured Marbles in the Western Part of “Regio X Venetia et Histria” (Northern Italy) <i>Roberto Bugini, Luisa Folli and Elisabetta Roffia</i>	231
Calcitic Marble from Thasos in the North Adriatic Basin: Ravenna, Aquileia, and Milan <i>John J. Herrmann, Robert H. Tykot and Annewies van den Hoek</i>	239
Characterisation of White Marble Objects from the Temple of Apollo and the House of Augustus (Palatine Hill, Rome) <i>Francesca Giustini, Mauro Brilli, Enrico Gallochio and Patrizio Pensabene</i>	247
Study and Archeometric Analysis of the Marble Elements Found in the Roman Theater at Aeclanum (Mirabella Eclano, Avellino - Italy) <i>Antonio Mesisca, Lorenzo Lazzarini, Stefano Cancelliere and Monica Salvadori</i>	255

Two Imperial Monuments in Puteoli: Use of Proconnesian Marble in the Domitianic and Trajanic Periods in Campania <i>Irene Bald Romano, Hans Rupprecht Goette, Donato Attanasio and Walter Prochaska</i>	267
Coloured Marbles in the Neapolitan Pavements (16 th And 17 th Centuries): the Church of <i>Santi Severino e Sossio</i> <i>Roberto Bugini, Luisa Folli and Martino Solito</i>	275
Roman and Early Byzantine Sarcophagi of Calcitic Marble from Thasos in Italy: Ostia and Siracusa <i>Donato Attanasio, John J. Herrmann, Robert H. Tykot and Annewies van den Hoek</i>	281
Revisiting the Origin and Destination of the Late Antique Marzamemi 'Church Wreck' Cargo <i>Justin Leidwanger, Scott H. Pike and Andrew Donnelly</i>	291
The Marbles of the Sculptures of Felix Romuliana in Serbia <i>Walter Prochaska and Maja Živić</i>	301
Calcitic Marble from Thasos and Proconnesos in Nea Anchialos (Thessaly) and Thessaloniki (Macedonia) <i>Vincent Barbin, John J. Herrmann, Aristotle Mentzos and Annewies van den Hoek</i>	311
Architectural Decoration of the Imperial Agora's Porticoes at Iasos <i>Fulvia Bianchi, Donato Attanasio and Walter Prochaska</i>	321
The Winged Victory of Samothrace - New Data on the Different Marbles Used for the Monument from the Sanctuary of the Great Gods <i>Annie Blanc, Philippe Blanc and Ludovic Laugier</i>	331
Polychrome Marbles from the Theatre of the Sanctuary of Apollo Pythios in Gortyna (Crete) <i>Jacopo Bonetto, Nicolò Mareso and Michele Bueno</i>	337
Paul the Silentiary, Hagia Sophia, Onyx, Lydia, and Breccia Corallina <i>John J. Herrmann and Annewies van den Hoek</i>	345
Incrustations from Colonia Ulpia Traiana (Near Modern Xanten, Germany) <i>Vilma Ruppiniè and Ulrich Schüssler</i>	351
Stone Objects from Vindobona (Austria) – Petrological Characterization and Provenance of Local Stone in a Historico-Economical Setting <i>Andreas Rohatsch, Michaela Kronberger, Sophie Insulander, Martin Mosser and Barbara Hodits</i>	363
Marbles Discovered on the Site of the Forum of Vaison-la-Romaine (Vaucluse, France): Preliminary Results <i>Elsa Roux, Jean-Marc Mignon, Philippe Blanc and Annie Blanc</i>	373
Updated Characterisation of White Saint-Béat Marble. Discrimination Parameters from Classical Marbles <i>Hernando Royo Plumed, Pilar Lapeunte, José Antonio Cuchí, Mauro Brillì and Marie-Claire Savin</i>	379

Grey and Greyish Banded Marbles from the Estremoz Anticline in Lusitania <i>Pilar Lapuente, Trinidad Nogales-Basarrate, Hernando Royo Plumed, Mauro Brilli and Marie-Claire Savin</i>	391
New Data on Spanish Marbles: the Case of <i>Gallaecia</i> (NW Spain) <i>Anna Gutiérrez García-M., Hernando Royo Plumed and Silvia González Soutelo</i>	401
A New Roman Imperial Relief Said to Be from Southern Spain: Problems of Style, Iconography, and Marble Type in Determining Provenance <i>John Pollini, Pilar Lapuente, Trinidad Nogales-Basarrate and Jerry Podany</i>	413
Reuse of the <i>Marmorata</i> from the Late Roman Palatial Building at Carranque (Toledo, Spain) in the Visigothic Necropolis <i>Virginia García-Entero, Anna Gutiérrez García-M. and Sergio Vidal Álvarez</i>	427
Imperial Porphyry in Roman Britain <i>David F. Williams</i>	435
Recycling of Marble: Apollonia/Sozousa/Arsuf (Israel) as a Case Study <i>Moshe Fischer, Dimitris Tambakopoulos and Yannis Maniatis</i>	443
Thasian Connections Overseas: Sculpture in the Cyrene Museum (Libya) Made of Dolomitic Marble from Thasos <i>John J. Herrmann and Donato Attanasio</i>	457
Marble on Rome's Southwestern Frontier: Thamugadi and Lambaesis <i>Robert H. Tykot, Ouahiba Bouzidi, John J. Herrmann and Annewies van den Hoek</i>	467
Marble and Sculpture at Lepcis Magna (Tripolitania, Libya): a Preliminary Study Concerning Origin and Workshops <i>Luisa Musso, Laura Buccino, Matthias Bruno, Donato Attanasio and Walter Prochaska</i>	481
The Pentelic Marble in the Carnegie Museum of Art Hall of Sculpture, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania <i>Albert D. Kollar</i>	491
Analysis of Classical Marble Sculptures in the Michael C. Carlos Museum, Emory University, Atlanta <i>Robert H. Tykot, John J. Herrmann, Renée Stein, Jasper Gaunt, Susan Blevins and Anne R. Skinner</i>	501
3. PROVENANCE IDENTIFICATION II: (OTHER STONES)	
Aphrodisias and the Regional Marble Trade. The <i>Scaenae Frons</i> of the Theatre at Nysa <i>Natalia Toma</i>	513
The Stones of Felix Romuliana (Gamzigrad, Serbia) <i>Bojan Djurić, Divna Jovanović, Stefan Pop Lazić and Walter Prochaska</i>	523
Aspects of Characterisation of Stone Monuments from Southern Pannonia <i>Branka Migotti</i>	537

The Budakalász Travertine Production <i>Bojan Djurić, Sándor Kele and Igor Rižnar</i>	545
Stone Monuments from Carnuntum and Surrounding Areas (Austria) – Petrological Characterization and Quarry Location in a Historical Context <i>Gabrielle Kremer, Isabella Kitz, Beatrix Moshhammer, Maria Heinrich and Erich Draganits</i>	557
Espejón Limestone and Conglomerate (Soria, Spain): Archaeometric Characterization, Quarrying and Use in Roman Times <i>Virginia García-Entero, Anna Gutiérrez García-M, Sergio Vidal Álvarez, María J. Peréx Agorreta and Eva Zarco Martínez</i>	567
The Use of Alcover Stone in Roman Times (<i>Tarraco, Hispania Citerior</i>). Contributions to the <i>Officina Lapidaria Tarraconensis</i> <i>Diana Gorostidi Pi, Jordi López Vilar and Anna Gutiérrez García-M.</i>	577
4. ADVANCES IN PROVENANCE TECHNIQUES, METHODOLOGIES AND DATABASES	
Grainautline – a Supervised Grain Boundary Extraction Tool Supported by Image Processing and Pattern Recognition <i>Kristóf Csorba, Lilla Barancsuk, Balázs Székely and Judit Zöldföldi</i>	587
A Database and GIS Project about Quarrying, Circulation and Use of Stone During the Roman Age in <i>Regio X - Venetia et Histria</i> . The Case Study of the Euganean Trachyte <i>Caterine Previato and Arturo Zara</i>	597
5. QUARRIES AND GEOLOGY	
The Distribution of Troad Granite Columns as Evidence for Reconstructing the Management of Their Production <i>Patrizio Pensabene, Javier Á. Domingo and Isabel Rodà</i>	613
Ancient Quarries and Stonemasonry in Northern Choria Considiana <i>Hale Güney</i>	621
Polychromy in Larisaeon Quarries and its Relation to Architectural Conception <i>Gizem Mater and Ertunç Denктаş</i>	633
Euromos of Caria: the Origin of an Hitherto Unknown Grey Veined Stepped Marble of Roman Antiquity <i>Matthias Bruno, Donato Attanasio, Walter Prochaska and Ali Bahadır Yavuz</i>	639
Unknown Painted Quarry Inscriptions from Bacakale at <i>Docimium</i> (Turkey) <i>Matthias Bruno</i>	651
The Green Schist Marble Stone of Jebel El Hairech (North West of Tunisia): a Multi-Analytical Approach and its Uses in Antiquity <i>Ameur Younès, Mohamed Gaied and Wissem Gallala</i>	659
Building Materials and the Ancient Quarries at <i>Thamugadi</i> (East of Algeria), Case Study: Sandstone and Limestone <i>Younès Rezkallah and Ramdane Marmi</i>	673

The Local Quarries of the Ancient Roman City of <i>Valeria</i> (Cuenca, Spain) <i>Javier Atienza Fuente</i>	683
The Stone and Ancient Quarries of Montjuïc Mountain (Barcelona, Spain) <i>Aureli Álvarez</i>	693
<i>Notae Lapidinarum</i> : Preliminary Considerations about the Quarry Marks from the Provincial Forum of <i>Tarraco</i> <i>Maria Serena Vinci</i>	699
The Different Steps of the Rough-Hewing on a Monumental Sculpture at the Greek Archaic Period: the Unfinished Kouros of Thasos <i>Danièle Braunstein</i>	711
A Review of Copying Techniques in Greco-Roman Sculpture <i>Séverine Moureaud</i>	717
Labour Forces at Imperial Quarries <i>Ben Russell</i>	733
Social Position of Craftsmen inside the Stone and Marble Processing Trades in the Light of Diocletian's Edict on Prices <i>Krešimir Bosnić and Branko Matulić</i>	741
6. STONE PROPERTIES, WEATHERING EFFECTS AND RESTORATION, AS RELATED TO DIAGNOSIS PROBLEMS, MATCHING OF STONE FRAGMENTS AND AUTHENTICITY	
Methods of Consolidation and Protection of Pentelic Marble <i>Maria Apostolopoulou, Elissavet Drakopoulou, Maria Karoglou and Asterios Bakolas</i>	749
7. PIGMENTS AND PAINTINGS ON MARBLE	
Painting and Sculpture Conservation in Two Gallo-Roman Temples in Picardy (France): Champlieu and Pont-Sainte-Maxence <i>Véronique Brunet-Gaston and Christophe Gaston</i>	763
The Use of Colour on Roman Marble Sarcophagi <i>Eliana Siotto</i>	773
New Evidence for Ancient Gilding and Historic Restorations on a Portrait of Antinous in the San Antonio Museum of Art <i>Jessica Powers, Mark Abbe, Michelle Bushey and Scott H. Pike</i>	783
Schists and Pigments from Ancient Swat (Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Pakistan) <i>Francesco Mariottini, Gianluca Vignaroli, Maurizio Mariottini and Mauro Roma</i>	793
8. SPECIAL THEME SESSION: „THE USE OF MARBLE AND LIMESTONE IN THE ADRIATIC BASIN IN ANTIQUITY”	
Marble Sarcophagi of Roman Dalmatia Material – Provenance – Workmanship <i>Guntram Koch</i>	809

Funerary Monuments and Quarry Management in Middle Dalmatia <i>Nenad Cambi</i>	827
Marble Revetments of Diocletian's Palace <i>Katja Marasović and Vinka Marinković</i>	839
The Use of Limestones as Construction Materials for the Mosaics of Diocletian's Palace <i>Branko Matulić, Domagoj Mudronja and Krešimir Bosnić</i>	855
Restoration of the Peristyle of Diocletian's Palace in Split <i>Goran Nikšić</i>	863
Marble Slabs Used at the Archaeological Site of Sorna near Poreč Istria – Croatia <i>Đeni Gobić-Bravar</i>	871
Ancient Marbles from the Villa in Verige Bay, Brijuni Island, Croatia <i>Mira Pavletić and Đeni Gobić-Bravar</i>	879
Notes on Early Christian Ambos and Altars in the Light of some Fragments from the Islands of Pag and Rab <i>Mirja Jarak</i>	887
The Marbles in the Chapel of the Blessed John of Trogir in the Cathedral of St. Lawrence at Trogir <i>Đeni Gobić-Bravar and Daniela Matetić Poljak</i>	899
The Use of Limestone in the Roman Province of Dalmatia <i>Edisa Lozić and Igor Rižnar</i>	915
The Extraction and Use of Limestone in Istria in Antiquity <i>Klara Buršić-Matijašić and Robert Matijašić</i>	925
Aurisina Limestone in the Roman Age: from Karst Quarries to the Cities of the Adriatic Basin <i>Caterina Previato</i>	933
The Remains of Infrastructural Facilities of the Ancient Quarries on Zadar Islands (Croatia) <i>Mate Parica</i>	941
The Impact of Local Geomorphological and Geological Features of the Area for the Construction of the Burnum Amphitheatre <i>Miroslav Glavičić and Uroš Stepišnik</i>	951
Roman Quarry Klis Kosa near Salona <i>Ivan Alduk</i>	957
Marmore Lavdata Brattia <i>Miona Miliša and Vinka Marinković</i>	963
Quarries of the Lumbarda Archipelago <i>Ivka Lipanović and Vinka Marinković</i>	979

Island of Korčula – Importer and Exporter of Stone in Antiquity <i>Mate Parica and Igor Borzić</i>	985
Faux Marbling Motifs in Early Christian Frescoes in Central and South Dalmatia: Preliminary Report <i>Tonči Borovac, Antonija Gluhan and Nikola Radošević</i>	995
INDEX OF AUTHORS	1009

ASPECTS OF CHARACTERISATION OF STONE MONUMENTS FROM SOUTHERN PANNONIA

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Abstract

Characterisations of stone material have been made for the majority of north-Croatian Roman marble monuments, in addition to for those made of other stones kept in the Museum of Slavonia in Osijek. Such characterisations have not yet been conducted on Roman stones from other parts of northern Croatia (southern Pannonia). In advance of such research, in this paper six cases will be presented, which in a special way illustrate the need for archaeometric stone analyses and the search for the quarry origin of the stones. Unlike the trade in marble, with other stones a seemingly logical conclusion appears, i.e., that exclusively rocks from the nearest quarry would be used. However, the characterisations of north-Croatian Roman stones conducted so far have demonstrated that the logic of trading follows its own specific rules, and that the “rule of the smallest distance” cannot be safely taken as the only starting point in such research.

Keywords

southern Pannonia, stone characterisation

Characterisations of stone material for a great deal of north-Croatian Roman marble monuments, as well as for those made of other stones from the Museum of Slavonia in Osijek, have been carried out by Bojan Djurić and his team.¹ On the other hand, non-marble Roman funerary monuments from other north-Croatian museums, holding material from south-western Pannonia, have not yet been characterised. In advance of such research, scheduled for 2016,² in this paper several cases will be discussed that in a

special way illustrate the need for archaeometric analyses of stone and for the search for the quarry origin of stone monuments. The purpose of the discussion is to show that stone characterisations and tracing of the quarry origin not only contribute research into the trading aspect of the production and distribution of monuments, but can also be of use in their formal and iconographical contextualisation within regional and supra-regional production. In particular cases, such research can even contribute to a better insight into geopolitical issues, that is, the establishment of town territories and provincial borders. In areas lacking their own marble sources, such as Pannonia, marble monuments evidently travelled from more or less afar, in this case mostly from the quarries of Pohorje and various Norican towns.³ With other stones the most logical conclusion would imply the use of rocks from the nearest distance. However, the characterisations of north-Croatian Roman funerary stones conducted to date has demonstrated that in some cases trading follows its own specific rules, and that the “logic of the smallest distance” cannot be safely taken for granted, or considered as the only starting point in such research.⁴ This paper was mostly instigated by the recent research of Bojan Djurić and his interdisciplinary team, in which they established that stone monuments made of travertine travelled all the way from northern Pannonia via the Danube, to reach southern Pannonia, notably the area of *Mursa* / the modern town of Osijek in north-east

protocol of the project *Roman funerary monuments of south-western Pannonia in their material, social and religious context* (no. IP-2014-09-4632), funded by the Croatian Science Foundation.

1 DJURIĆ 2013; DJURIĆ, MÜLLER, FILIPOVIĆ 2010. Sampling of monuments made of stone other than marble in the Muzej Slavonije (Museum of Slavonia) in Osijek were conducted in 2015, but the results in terms of quarry origin have not yet been completed (B. Djurić, pers. comm.).

2 Characterisations of stone monuments from north-western Croatia have been anticipated as part of the

3 The Pohorje quarries were in the territory of *Poetovio*, situated close to the border between the provinces of Pannonia and Noricum. *Poetovio* was a Pannonian town until the beginning of the 4th century, when it became part of the province of Noricum (cf. HORVAT *et al.* 2003, 157).

4 The fact that neither ancient nor modern commerce always conforms to economic logic has also been duly observed in the literature discussing the trade in stone. cf. Pearson 2006, 92.



Fig. 1. Child sarcophagus from Sisak, AMZ
(Lupa 573, photo: O. Harl)

Croatia (Djurić *et al.*, in this volume). In view of this fact, the present paper addresses two travertine monuments that have already been characterised (a child's sarcophagus from *Siscia* / the modern town of Sisak in north-west Croatia, and a stela from the *ager* of *Mursa*), while the core of the discussion rests with the remaining four, not yet analysed, pieces (an ash chest and three stelae, all from Sisak). They will be discussed as cases in point to illustrate and preliminarily verify the importance of the characterisation of monuments made of stone other than marble.

1. A child's sarcophagus⁵ with a motif of peltae, probably dating from the 3rd century, stems from Sisak (Fig. 1). When I first discussed it, the stone had not yet been characterised. Therefore, on realising that the ash chest was made of limestone, and not yet knowing that it was a specific variant of limestone – travertine, I suggested, in spite of some hesitation, a local production for it, for a couple of reasons. While the peltate motif is ubiquitous in Roman art, surprisingly it turned out that the lid of the sarcophagus, with its specifically shaped *acroteria*, was the only one of its kind in southern Pannonia; the fact that the only true analogies to this piece stem from the area of Aquincum and Brigetio in north Hungary was even more unexpected. In spite of this, I still maintained that only the model for this piece came from northern Pannonia, discarding the possibility that it was brought to *Siscia* from a distance of some 400 km (Budapest – Osijek – Sisak) as the crow flies.⁶ Now that it has been established beyond doubt

5 The fact that a 9-cm-thick stone bolster at the right bottom of the chest was reported (now inaccessible for inspection because of the lid) suggests that the piece is a sarcophagus and not an ash chest. *cf.* MIGOTTI 2013, 181, 194.

6 MIGOTTI 2007, 16; MIGOTTI 2013, 194-195.



Fig. 2. Map of Pannonia (readjusted after MIGOTTI 2012, p. 2)

that this piece was imported and can be considered as the western-most travertine example in the south-Pannonian territory, it remains to wonder about the economic rationale behind such commerce.⁷ The question to be asked is why anyone would want to import a limestone piece from a large distance, and iconographically quite unassuming at that, when there was enough quality limestone closer to the place of purchase. Was river transport really that cheap, or was it an individual undertaking, making use of some unknown opportunity? As for the river transport, the piece intended for *Siscia* either needed to be transported from *Mursa* to *Siscia* without a direct water route, that is, by using a land transport between the Drava and Sava Rivers, or it needed to be taken all the way to *Singidunum* in *Moesia Superior* via the Danube, and then via the Sava to *Siscia* (Fig. 2). In the latter case, we should probably reckon with additional provincial customs duties.⁸ In any case, the commercial logic behind this purchase remains obscure.

7 Immediately before the ASMOSIA Conference in Split, I was kindly informed by Bojan Djurić that the stone from which the ash chest in question was made could be recognised as travertine even by the naked eye; the characterisation which has proved such identification was conducted in November of 2015.

8 Commentators are mostly vague about whether the *portorium* was due on crossing the border between any two provinces. Some of them agree with this presumption (e. g. WHITTAKER 1994, 112, *passim*; STARAC 1999, 99), while others claim that taxes were only levied on the borders between lands of different legal status, as claimed by legal sources (ØRSTED 1985, 251; TOMAS 2007, 35).



Fig. 3. Funerary stela from Aljmaš, AMZ
(Lupa 4308, photo: O. Harl)

2. A fragment of the funerary stela of the army veteran Tiberius Claudius Vindicianus from the 2nd century derives from the village of Aljmaš in the ager of *Mursa* (Fig. 3).⁹ As in the previous example, the stone (travertine) is discernible by visual examination, but was further corroborated by mesoscopic characterisation carried out within the same research as mentioned in fn. 7. Given the above-mentioned regular trade in stone monuments between *Aquincum* and *Mursa* along the Danube in the Roman period, the cost of transportation is not the issue here. The curiosity of this piece lies in its iconography, or, rather, in an incongruity between the distribution of this type of stela and the customary position of its main motif in Pannonian funerary iconography. The stela can be tentatively reconstructed as comprising four parts: a pedimental section, a main relief niche, an inscription field, and a socle, with possible variations in the presence (or absence) of decorative bands dividing the main relief panels, as well as the height of the base (cf. Lupa 685, 3105, 3330, 3401). The architectural relief niche of the fragment from Aljmaš features a tripod and the lower bodies of a male and a female servant, which is part of the so-called reduced meal scene, typical of Pannonian funerary iconography.¹⁰ The core area of the distribution of marble specimens of this type is Noricum and western Pannonia. It should be noted, however, that the main relief scene on such stelae is never the reduced meal; instead, portraits of the deceased are most often represented, and sometimes also mythological motifs, Erotes, and the like (cf. Lupa 685, 3105, 3330, 3401). On the other

9 DAUTOVA-RUŠEVLJAN 1983, 25. no. 148.

10 DJURIĆ 2015, 96-97; ŠKRGULJA, MIGOTTI 2015, 30-31.



Fig. 4. Funerary stela from Sisak, Gradski muzej Sisak
(photo: B. Suntešić)

hand, the motif of the reduced meal is very often depicted on Pannonian funerary stelae, but never as the main scene; it is always submitted to or even merged with the portrait of the deceased (cf. Lupa 691, 2750, 2756, etc.). On balance, the stela from Aljmaš was of the type designed in Norican marble workshops, but it was decorated in a way different from Norico-Pannonian marble pieces of the same type, as well as from north-Pannonian travertine stelae. Therefore, the stone material of the stela from Aljmaš proves its north-Pannonian origin, suggesting at the same time that stone monuments travelled from *Aquincum* to *Mursa* as half-products, to be decorated according to individual tastes, manifestly different from those typical of other Pannonian and Norican stonemasonry workshops.

3. The stela of Gaius Antonius Sentinus, veteran of the 14th legion, was found in 2009 in Sisak (Fig. 4). It should be dated to the Flavian period on account of the iconography, and yet its epigraphy and prosopography allow for a date at the turn of the 1st and 2nd centuries.¹¹ It was made of yellowish sandstone, which was by visual examination estimated to be of local origin. Much as this assumption sounds logical, the final conclusion should be postponed until a proper archaeometric analysis. This is additionally advisable on account of the stela's iconography, which is typical of the military tombstones of the army of *Germania Superior* and *Germania Inferior*,

11 ŠKRGULJA, MIGOTTI 2015.



Fig. 5. Ash chest from Sisak, AMZ
(photo: I. Krajcar)

produced mainly in the legionary stonemasons' workshop of *Mogontiacum* (Mainz) and *Colonia Agrippina* (Köln). In spite of a scanty remnant of the figural relief, the scene represented on the stela from Sisak can be restored as featuring the deceased in a half-reclining position on a couch a (*klinē*) and a servant turning towards him. Placed centrally in front of the *klinē* is a tripod with a kantharos and with large vessels by the side of it on the floor – a jug on the left and a bottle on the right side. This scene was typical of the *Mogontiacum* army workshops in the Flavian period, and was produced for a prolonged time in *Colonia Agrippina*. The chronological frame for the Siscian piece is given by the fact that the 14th legion was stationed in *Mogontiacum* probably till about the end of the 1st century, and this type of stela was used neither by the 14th legion after its relocation to *Carnuntum* in Pannonia, nor by the army units that came to *Mogontiacum* to relieve this legion.¹² The fact that this type of stela, except the example from Sisak, is not found west of the limes in the *Germaniae* and *Raetia*, raises a suspicion about the origin of the stone and the place of production. Either Sentinus came to *Siscia* as a veteran with the draft of his funerary stone on the paper or in his mind, to have it carved in *Siscia*, or he had it imported all the way from *Mogontiacum*, if by any chance he died before the legion moved to *Carnuntum*. Curiously, the nearest parallel to the Siscian stela, found in Klein-Winterheim, is made of sandstone (*Lupa* 15873); a forthcoming characterisation of the Siscian stela will show if this fact is a pure coincidence or not. Admittedly, a local origin for the stela is more probable in view of the distance between *Mogontiacum* and *Siscia* (some 800 km as the crow flies), and the lack of a direct water route, but the final conclusion should still be based on an archaeometric analysis.

4. The ash chest of a former *beneficiarius* Marcus Aurelius Glabrio and his wife, dated to the 3rd century,

stems from Sisak, and was in the earlier literature referred to as a marble piece (Fig. 5).¹³ Nevertheless, in 2003 the chest alone (the lid being a mismatch) was characterised microscopically, and two possibilities for the origin of the stone were suggested: a – the area of Kordun around the town of Slunj in the Dinara mountain range, some 100 km south of Sisak; b – the peninsula of Istria in the northern Adriatic. The characterisation was conducted for the need of a comprehensive reconsideration of the monument in question.¹⁴ As author of that study I readily accepted the first possibility for two reasons: the proximity of the Kordun area to *Siscia*, and the fact that the former was a well-known centre of Roman stonemasonry and a presumed source of stone for some of the Siscian monuments.¹⁵ On the other hand, Istria as a source of stone for Siscian stonemasonry did not sound convincing, especially not if compared to the Kordun. Therefore, before the fact of the trade in stone from Aquincum to *Siscia* has been established, I discarded without hesitation the possibility of Istria as a source of stone in this case.¹⁶ It was probably a correct assumption, supported on various grounds: the lack of direct waterways between Istria and *Siscia*, the customs duties to be paid on passing from Italy to the province of Pannonia,¹⁷ and, most importantly, the formal and iconographical congruencies between the Siscian ash chest and the Pannonian evidence of similar funerary receptacles. Nevertheless, in the light of new knowledge on the trade in stone in Pannonia, the theoretical possibility that the ash chest of Glabrio originated in Istria should still be allowed, and this should be finally verified through a supplementary chemical analysis of the stone.

5. The last but one case in the evidence is the most illustrative of the importance of typology in assessing the origin of stone monuments in some cases, although at first glance this argument sounds hardly decisive in the light of broadly uniform typological frames in Roman art. As a matter of fact, the stela of Titus Tullius Tertius from *Tergeste* (Fig. 6) was instrumental in spurring my suspicion of the initially established origin of the stone for the ash chest of M. Aurelius Glabrio (no. 4). The tombstone of Tertius, dating from the 1st half of the 1st century, derives from the immediate vicinity of Sisak, and is the earliest funerary stone known so far from *Siscia*.¹⁸ There

12 ŠKRGULJA, MIGOTTI 2015, 36.

13 HOFFILLER, SARIA 1938, 262-262, no. 566.

14 MIGOTTI 2005.

15 PERKIĆ 2012, 157-216.

16 MIGOTTI 2005, 371.

17 See fn. 8.

18 KLEMENC 1935.



Fig. 6. Stela from Sisak, AMZ
(*Lupa* 3807, photo: O. Harl)



Fig. 7. Stela from Sisak AMZ
(photo: I. Krajcar)

is no knowing exactly what kind of stone analysis was made at the time of its publishing, but the article says that the Directorate of the Museum of Mineralogy and Petrography in Zagreb informed the author (J. Klemenc) that the stela was made of a kind of limestone that originated from the quarry of Hrastovica nearby the town of Petrinja, some 10 km south-west of Sisak. For quite a time I did not doubt this claim, until I gave it another thought and found it suspicious on a couple of grounds. The first was the structural typology of the monument, which has no sound parallels in Norico-Pannonian evidence, while the opposite is true of northern Italy and Istria; both regions furnish evidence for this type of stela from the turn of the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD.¹⁹ Another reason for a suspicion about the provenance of the stone of Tertius' stela in the surroundings

19 PFLUG 1989, 31, 35, Typus I b; STARAC 2002, 63-66, tip 1c; *Lupa* 14483 (Aquileia). Further broad comparisons, grounded in the Greco-Hellenistic forms, are found in Dalmatia (CAMBI 2005, 11-12, figs. 5 and 6). Some tentative Norico-Pannonian parallels, rare as they are, differ from the Siscian piece in that they take a moulded inscription field (cf. *Lupa* 2708 – Aquincum, 2508 – Virunum).

of Siscia is topographical; the stela was found during reinforcement of the embankment of the River Sava, some 20 metres from the riverbank. For one thing, no traces of a Roman cemetery or any other Roman finds have been established in the surroundings, and for another, the stela was found broken and, most probably, unusable. Both facts suggest that the stela arrived via the river, cracked during the unloading, and was finally left there never to be used. However, Petrinja does not lie on the Sava River, and the nearest navigable river in its vicinity is the Kupa. Both rivers surround the town of Sisak, but no load would come to Sisak from the direction of Petrinja via the River Sava; it would travel via the Kupa. On the other hand, the Sava River makes an important link on the route from *Siscia* to northern Italy and Istra. Thus, it seems that a north-Italian or Istrian provenance of the stela of Titus Tullius Tertius is much more likely than local Pannonian provenance; this uncertainty will hopefully be resolved through a new archaeometric analysis.

6. The last example connects immediately to the previous one, as it implies the assessment of the origin on the basis of structural typology and iconography. A limestone stela of Lucius Egnatuleius Florentinus from the early 2nd century probably stems from the village of

Šćitarjevo, Roman *Andautonia*, 12 km south-east of Zagreb (Fig. 7).²⁰ No stone characterisation has been made for it, so its local origin can tentatively be questioned on the ground of the lack of Pannonian parallels for its structural type or, partly, for its decoration. The detail that makes it different from the rest of the Pannonian evidence is its columns which span the height of both the portrait niche and inscription panel. Contrary to this, in Norico-Pannonian stelae of the architectonic type two pairs of columns, divided by a decorative band or panel, are employed separately, that is, one for the portrait niche and another for the inscription panel; the portrait niche and the inscription panel are also individually framed when only one of them is architecturally designed.²¹ On the other hand, the arrangement of columns as in Florentinus' stela is typical of northern Italy, Istria, and Dalmatia.²² A slight tip of the balance towards Italy is suggested by the fact that the column decoration (longish scaled leaves tied with a ribbon) applied to the stela in question is found in Italy but is lacking in Dalmatia, at least as far as my knowledge goes.²³ Thus, only stone characterisation would show whether the design of Florentinus' stela results from an artistic influence of one of the mentioned three regions, or whether it was actually carved outside Pannonia.

To conclude: it is to be hoped that the above examples were illustrative enough of the necessity for proper characterisations not only for marble monuments, but equally for those made of other stone. This is because in some cases the latter turn out to be less predictable than expected, thus provoking the search for economic (or other) reasons for the import of stones other than marble in areas possessing their own resources.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMZ – The Archaeological Museum in Zagreb

Lupa = UBI ERAT LUPA – Roman Stone Monuments (Service provider: CHC – Archäometrie und Cultural Heritage Computing, Universität Salzburg). <http://www.ubi-erat-lupa.org> [last checked 2016-01-11].

20 HOFFILLER, SARIA 1938, 216, no. 481.

21 Eg. *Lupa* 674, 857, 2390, etc. (Noricum); *Lupa* 3096, 3104, 3106, 3334, 3337, 3770, 3812, 4305, 4308, 8816, etc. (Pannonia).

22 PFLUG 1989, Kat. 10 (Taf. 2: 3), ff; STARAC 2002, 68-69, IId1, IId3, Karta 11, Karta 13; CAMBI 2005, 38, fig. 45, 52, fig. 68.

23 The evidence for Istra available to me (STARAC 2002) remains inconclusive, as the stelae are illustrated only through very small drawings.

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