

EVIDENCE OF THE REUSE OF ROMAN STONE FUNERARY URNS AT THE LATE ANTIQUE FORTIFIED SETTLEMENT ON LUKOVAC ISLET (RAB ISLAND, CROATIA)

**Dowody ponownego wykorzystania rzymskich kamiennych urn grobowych
w późnoantycznej ufortyfikowanej osadzie na wysepce Lukovac
(wyspa Rab, Chorwacja)**

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Abstract: Artykuł przedstawia zespół kamiennych pojemników i pokrywę odkryte podczas badań późnoantycznego ufortyfikowanego osiedla na wysepce Lukovac (wyspa Rab, Chorwacja). Na podstawie cech stylistycznych i technicznych oraz analogii z rzymskiej Dalmacji, doliny Padu i Regio X znaleziska zinterpretowano jako urny popielnicowe z okresu wczesnego cesarstwa. Ich pierwotny kontekst grobowy potwierdza także fragment silnie profilowanej fibuli typu prowincjonalnego. Wszystkie zabytki znaleziono w warstwach związanych z fazą osadniczą po VII w., co wskazuje na wtórne wykorzystanie. Materiał z Lukovaca omówiono w kontekście późnoantycznego i wczesnośredniowiecznego ponownego wykorzystywania rzymskich monumentów grobowych. Prawdopodobnego pochodzenia urn należy szukać na półwyspie Lopar. Paralele ze stanowiskiem Cickini na wyspie Krk wskazują na regionalny wzorec odzyskiwania i ponownego wykorzystywania zespołów grobowych. Zespół z Lukovaca stanowi pierwsze bezpośrednie świadectwo obecności kamiennych urn popielnicowych na wyspie Rab, potwierdzając stosowanie rzymskich praktyk kremacyjnych na wyspie w pierwszych wiekach n.e.

Słowa kluczowe: rzymskie urny na prochy, spolia i ponowne wykorzystanie, późna starożytność, wyspa Rab, Lukovac

Abstract: This paper presents and contextualises a set of stone receptacles and a lid recovered during recent excavations at the Late Antique fortified settlement on the islet of Lukovac (Rab Island, NE Adriatic, Croatia). On the basis of stylistic and technical features, supported by regional analogies from Roman Dalmatia, the Po Valley and the Italian *Regio X*, the finds are interpreted as Early Imperial cinerary urns. Their original sepulchral context is further suggested by the co-occurrence

of a fragmentary strongly profiled fibula of provincial type. All the objects appear in stratigraphic contexts associated with the post-7th-century phase of the site, characterised by dry-stone walls and wooden architecture, indicating their secondary deposition several centuries after manufacture. The Lukovac evidence is discussed within the wider phenomenon of Late Antique and Early Medieval reuse of Roman funerary monuments, with particular attention to the distinct legal and conceptual status of the burial itself (*res religiosa*) and to the practical dismantling of funerary architecture. The probable provenance of the urns is sought on the nearby Lopar peninsula, where Roman settlement is well attested but no necropolis has so far been securely located. Paralleled at Cickini on the island of Krk, the Lukovac assemblage points to a regionally significant pattern of recovery and reuse of grave assemblages, and provides the first direct testimony for stone cinerary urns from the island of Rab, confirming the adoption of Roman cremation practices on the island during the first centuries AD.

Keywords: Roman cinerary urns; spolia and reuse; Late Antiquity; Rab Island; Lukovac

1. Introduction

The island of Rab is a medium sized island of the Kvarner Gulf, in the northeastern Adriatic. In Roman times, that is from roughly the mid-1st century BC, the region of Rab was part of the province of Illyricum, and subsequently of the province of Dalmatia, more precisely of their northwesternmost region, Liburnia. On the island of Rab only one urban center developed in early Roman times, municipium Arba (today's town of Rab), while the rest of the island was occupied by villae, some probably opulent maritime establishments owned by the urban aristocracy, while in the internal part of the island mostly smaller, productive complexes have tentatively been ascertained.¹ In the mid-Roman and late antique period, the northernmost part of the region of Liburnia was integrated within the system of the Praetentura, and later Claustra Alpium Iuliarum, at some point perhaps functioning as a separate province (Provincia Liburnia).² During the late 5th-early 6th centuries, after the short reign of Julius Nepos (de facto viewed as emperor of the West), the region was invaded by Odoacer and was later (probably by the beginning of the 6th century) part of the Gothic kingdom.³ In that period historic sources mention a Provincia Liburnia Tarsaticensis, named after the town of Tarsatica (modern Rijeka), but it is unclear which area it encompassed, and if Rab Island was included in it.⁴ During the Greco-Gothic wars, in 537 AD Dalmatia fell under Byzantine control, thus most of the islands and coastal towns of the eastern Adriatic, including Rab, were considered Byzantine possessions well into the Middle Ages.⁵

¹ A. Konestra, G. Lipovac Vrkljan, F. Welc, *Rural Landscapes of Roman (northern) Liburnia: Diachronic Development of Organisation and the Economy in Extra-Urban Territories in the Light of Recent Archaeological Research*, "Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu", 2022, vol. 54(3), pp. 195-234.

² T. Turković, I. Basić, *Nuove conoscenze sulla Liburnia Tarsaticensis nel contesto dello studio delle fonti geografiche*, "Atti", 2011, vol. 41, pp. 49-102.

³ J.J. Arnold, *Ostrogothic Provinces: Administration and Ideology*, in: *A companion to Ostrogothic Italy*, eds. J.J. Arnold, M.Sh. Björnlie, K. Sessa, Leiden-Boston, 2016, pp. 73-97. Doi: 10.1163/9789004315938_005.

⁴ T. Turković, I. Basić, op. cit.

⁵ N. Budak, *Hrvatska povijest od 550. do 1100.*, Zagreb 2018, „Povijest hrvatskih zemalja u srednjem vijeku”, vol. 1.

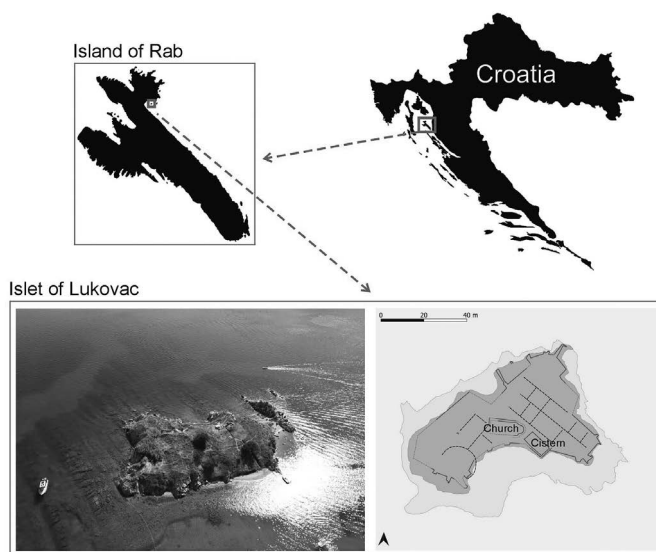


Fig. 1. Location of the island of Rab and the islet of Lukovac with plan of discovered archeological features. Author: F. Welc

Just off the western coast of Lopar peninsula, in Crnika Bay, in the northern part of the island of Rab, the small island of Lukovac is located (fig. 1). The whole area of the islet, amounting to ca. 5000 m², is occupied by the remains of a late antique fortified settlement comprising an enceinte wall, a church, a cistern and other buildings of yet undefined character.⁶ The first research at Lukovac started in 2013 with the documentation of visible structures and trial trenches.⁷ These allowed to place the dating of the church, and consequently of the fortification, within the 6th century.⁸ Subsequently, research was resumed in 2022 and is still in progress. Excavations at several locations on the islet and the recovered metal and pottery finds⁹ confirmed the late antique date of the structures and evidenced the existence of a subsequent phase of use of the site, characterized by dry-stone walls and

⁶ M. Čaušević-Bully, S. Bully, *Kvarner (Croatie). Prospection-inventaire des sites ecclésiastiques et monastiques: campagne 2013*, "Chronique des activités archéologiques de l'École française de Rome. Balkans", 2014, <https://journals.openedition.org/cefr/1059#tocto1n3>; F. Welc, A. Konestra, K. Rabięga, M. Čaušević-Bully, S. Bully, P. Androić Gračanin, B. Nowacki, A. Kukela, M. Zaremba, A. Han, *Between Sacrum and Profanum: Preliminary Remarks on the Late Antique Fortified Settlement on Lukovac Islet (Rab Island, NE Adriatic, Croatia)*, "Saeculum Christianum", 31/2024, vol. 2, pp. 5-28.

⁷ M. Čaušević-Bully, S. Bully, op. cit.

⁸ F. Welc, A. Konestra, K. Rabięga, M. Čaušević-Bully, S. Bully, P. Androić Gračanin, B. Nowacki, A. Kukela, M. Zaremba, A. Han, op. cit. with earlier bibliography.

⁹ B. Nowacki, A. Konestra, F. Welc, *Spotting the difference: comparing two late antique coarse ware assemblages from the island of Rab (NE Adriatic, Croatia) through their repertoire, function, and chronology*, in: *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Mediaeval Archaeology of the Institute of Archaeology Zagreb, 6th–7th June 2024*, red. T. Tkalcęc, T. Sekelj Ivančan, J. Belaj, S. Krznar, Zagreb 2025, "Serta Instituti Archaeologici", vol. 23, pp. 111-137.

wooden architecture.¹⁰ Similarly, at present no earlier structures or layers were detected. During the analyses of the visible walls of the fortification, transport of allochthonous stone to the islet was ascertained,¹¹ which along with a few fragments of worked porphyry, indicates a widespread practice of reuse of older building materials which must have originated from an earlier Roman site on the island, in all likelihood located on the Lopar peninsula. Nevertheless, on first inspection no monumental *spolia*¹² were recorded within the walls, while dresses, often trapezoidal blocks of limestone have been recorded both in the walls and in the recently identified ramp which secured access to the summit of the islet. On the other hand, during excavations, a series of objects were recovered that indicate that some of the stone materials reused at the site were salvaged not only from defunctionalized ancient architecture, but from other types of sites as well. Several such objects will be presented and interpreted within the widespread practice of reuse in late antiquity.

2. The stone receptacles from Lukovac

The stone receptacle from Trench S2

To the southwest of the centrally located church,¹³ an elliptically shaped drystone structure was evidenced during pedestrian and aerial survey and its shape was better defined by geophysical measurements. In the northern part of the structure, a trench (S2) was excavated with the aim of clarifying the character of this structure and its relationship with the rest of the complex. The elliptical structure, formed by a heap of loose stones, comprised both local sandstone and limestone brought from a different location,¹⁴ perhaps indicating recovery of construction materials from both Lukovac and possibly another site or sites.

Underneath the stone structure, a series of layers rich in organic material (charcoal, seeds) and layers with traces of burning were explored, alongside a section of a drystone wall which continued towards west in an unexcavated area, and a series of postholes. Within the lowest layers of the elliptical drystone structure and above a layer with traces of burning (reddened soil) an almost complete stone receptacle was found (Object 1) (fig. 2).

The object is roughly square, slightly trapezoidal in shape, with the sides amounting to ca. 30 cm and the height to ca. 20 cm, though one side is lower than the other (fig. 3). It is carved from a limestone block, with the outer surfaces smoothed with a claw-chisel, which left regular, thickly spaced stroke marks. The rim is flattened. The inner part of the vessel is levigated until a few centimeters under the rim, while the rest of the surface was carved with the use of a narrow chisel which left deeper, rounded marks. The shaping of the inner part of the vessel is overall hasty, thus its shape is oblique, with rounded edges, as opposed to the straight edges of the outer corners. The bottom is flattened, though the surface is not perfectly smoothed. Just below the rim, on the inside of the vessel, a grayish marking is

¹⁰ Idem.

¹¹ Idem.

¹² For *spolia* see e.g. L.V. Geymonat, *The syntax of spolia in Byzantine Thessalonike*, in: *Approaches to Byzantine Architecture and its Decoration: Studies in Honor of Slobodan Curcic*, ed. R. Ousterhout, London 2016, pp. 47-56, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315262307-10>.

¹³ F. Welc, A. Konestra, K. Rabiega, M. Čaušević-Bully, S. Bully, P. Androić Gračanin, B. Nowacki, A. Kukela, M. Zaremba, A. Han, op. cit.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 13.

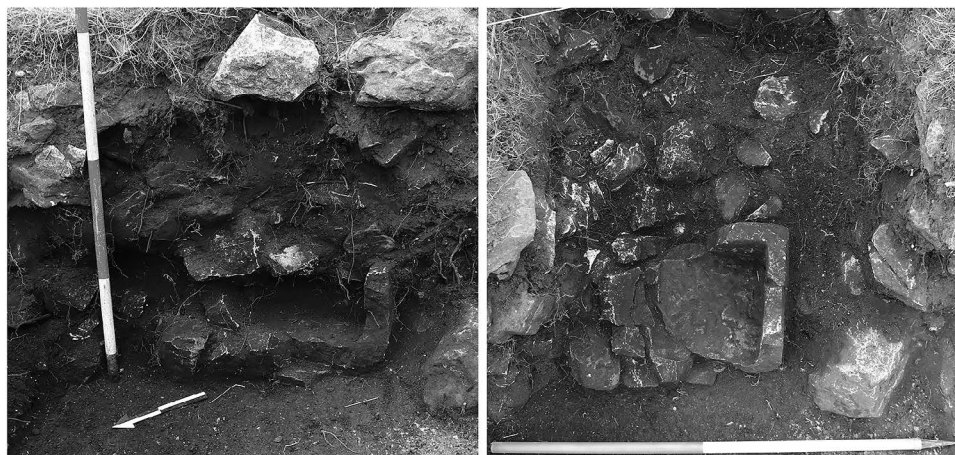


Fig. 2. Object 1 within the eastern profile of trench S2 and seen from above. Photos: K. Rabiega

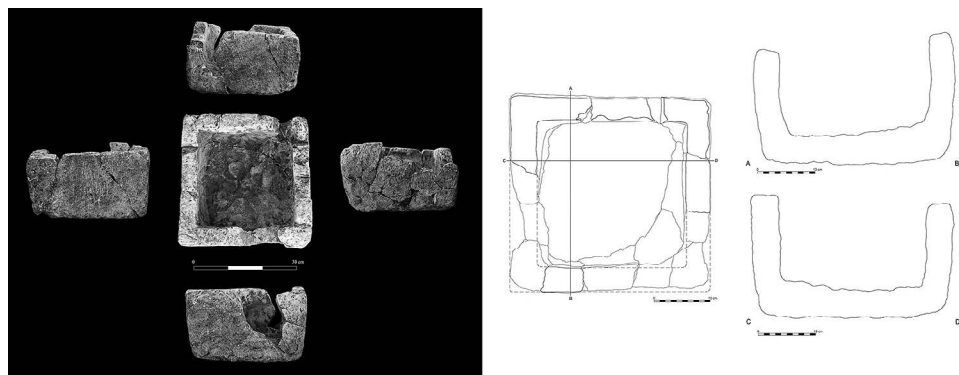


Fig. 3. Pictures and drawings of Object 1. Photos and drawings: B. Nowacki; Image: A. Konestra

present, and discoloration of the whole inner surface below it can be noticed. Due to the flat rim, the original presence of a lid could be proposed.

Initially, the function of the object was interpreted in relation to the buildings present on the islet, i.e., it was deemed to be a reliquary,¹⁵ salvaged and reused from the church building located just a few meters from the place of recovery of the receptacle. While this interpretation cannot be ruled out with certainty, due to the recovery of several other stone objects (see below) and the overall appearance of this receptacle, its original function might have been that of an urn. Such undecorated urns are known from sites on the eastern Adriatic and its

¹⁵ For stone reliquaries in the eastern Adriatic see lastly: N. Maraković, K. Kos, *Kasnoantički kameni relikvijari s područja istočnojadranskog priobalja – forma, smještaj i liturgijska uloga / Late Antique Stone Reliquaries from the Eastern Adriatic Coast: Their Form, Location, and Liturgical Role*, “Ars Adriatica”, 2020, vol. 10, pp. 23-46.

hinterland,¹⁶ although it seems that they were a more common feature of incineration graves of the western Pò valley area.¹⁷

The urn lid from Trench P

In an area just to the northeast of Trench S2, a segment of a stone object was noticed by chance, after superficial cleaning of a thin layer of sediment which covered it (fig. 4). Due to traces of dressing on its surface, a small trench was excavated at that position, and the object was documented and recovered (object 2). It is a relatively flat, rounded stone object of roughly 35 cm in diameter. The original upper side is shaped like a calotte, while the other (underside) is flattened, with an abutting rim. The calotte presents traces of chiseling with a thin chisel or perhaps a multipoint tool, and only the underside of the rim presents finer surface levigating with a claw-chisel. The underside of the object is more irregularly carved with a narrow chisel, which left characteristic rounded marks (fig. 4). The object can be interpreted as a lid pertaining to a rounded vessel, most probably an urn.

Such cylindrical urns are very common in all Roman necropolises of the coastal part of the province of Dalmatia and seem to be a common feature of the *Regio X* of Italy,¹⁸ from where the custom might have spread to the eastern Adriatic.¹⁹

Fragments of stone vessels from Trenches S1 and S2

Trench S1 was excavated to the northeast of the church and the cistern. Layers of occupation are characterized by substantial pottery finds and possible makeshift floors (or rather walking surfaces) obtained by filling in the cracks in the bedrock and sporadic use of mortar.

¹⁶ Square urns are well known from the territory of Roman Dalmatia, and while they are usually decorated or inscribed one group of square urns is undecorated, and obviously meant to remain invisible, that is it was used buried and not as part of an above ground funerary solution. Although much less attention was paid to undecorated urns if compared to their more elaborate counterparts, similar urns are known from several sites, see e.g. D. Perkić, *Antičke kamene urne kao spolije u crkvi sv. Jurja u Mateškom Selu*, in: *Studia honoraria archaeologica Zbornik radova u prigodi 65. rođendana prof. dr. sc. Mirjane Sanader*, eds. D. Tončinić, I. Kaić, V. Matijević, M. Vukov, Zagreb, 2020, pp. 305-318, <https://www.doi.org/10.17234/9789533790343.31>; V. Paškvalin, *Antički sepulkralni spomenici s područja Bosne i Hercegovine*, Sarajevo 2012, "Centar za balkanološka ispitivanja", vol. 9, p. 400, cat. num. 42; A. Busuladžić, *Tipologija rimskih urni iz antičke zbirke Zemaljskog muzeja Bosne i Hercegovine / The Typology of Roman Urns in the Antiquities Collection of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, "Godišnjak Centra za balkanološka ispitivanja", 2016, vol. 45, pp. 63-104; I. Pedišić, *Skradin – Maragusa. Novija istraživanja*, Šibenik–Skradin 1998, pp. 11-13; M. Nikolanci, *Novi antikni nalazi u Visu i Splitu*, "VAHD", 1952, vol. 54, pp. 189-196; M. Plohl, *Burial typology at the „Vrt Relja“ necropolis in Zadar*, "MHM", 2018, vol. 5, pp. 65-97 (p. 89, fig. 11); Personal communication by dr. M. Ugarković on rectangular stone urns from the Roman phases of the Vlaška njiva necropolis in Vis (Island of Vis), in the Naval and History Museum in Rijeka (PPMHP), a square urn from the excavations of the western urban necropolis of Tarsatica is kept, being the closest analogy to the object from Lukovac (we thank R. Starac, curator of the PPMHP in Rijeka for this insight).

¹⁷ G. Cavalieri Manasse, M. Bolla, *Osservazioni sulle necropoli veronesi*, in: *Bestattungssitte und kulturelle Identität. Grabanlagen und Grabbeigaben der frühen römischen Kaiserzeit in Italien und den Nordwest-Provinzen. Kolloquium in Xanten vom 16. bis 18. Februar 1995: "Römische Gräber des 1. Jhs. n. Chr. in Italien und in den Nordwestprovinzen"*, Köln 1998, "Xantener Berichte", vol. 7, pp. 116-139, p. 133.

¹⁸ Ibidem; G. Brusin, *Gli scavi di Aquileia, Un quadriennio di attività dell'associazione nazionale per Aquileia*, Udine 1934, p. 200. For Istria see: R. Matijašić, *Campus Martius. Antička nekropola između Premanturske i Medulinske ulice u Puli (Istraživanja 1985-1986. godine) / Roman necropolis between Premanturska and Medulinska street in Pula*, Pula 1991.

¹⁹ E.g. M. Plohl, op. cit., p. 88, fig. 12; A. Busuladžić, op. cit; personal communication by dr. M. Ugarković on cylindrical stone urns from the Roman phases of the Vlaška njiva necropolis in Vis (Island of Vis). Cylindrical urns were likewise used at the necropolis of Tarsatica, and are kept at the PPMHP in Rijeka, while this typology if urns was also used on Krk island (see *infra*) (we thank R. Starac, curator of the PPMHP in Rijeka for these insights).



Fig. 4. Location of find and pictures of Object 2. Photos: A. Orlowska; Image: A. Konestra

Structures pertaining to this phase of use include a drystone wall and several postholes located in the northernmost part of the trench. As lining of one of the postholes and within the infills of the cracks in the bedrock, fragments of at least one additional stone receptacle were discovered (object 3). They belonged to a rectangular stone vessel, seemingly better dressed than the more complete one from Trench S1 (fig. 5).

Within the heap of stones created by the dismantling of the stone structure in Trench S2, a fragment of the rim of a rounded stone vessel was discovered during backfilling of the trench (object 4). It might be a fragment of a cylindrical cinerary urn (fig. 6), of the type associated with the aforementioned lid.

3. Discussion

The objects here described, while in a few cases their original use might be further discussed, have been interpreted as Roman cinerary urns. This interpretation is certain for the circular lid, while the caskets might have served other purposes as well, though comparison with similar objects discovered in more secure context (i.e. within graves), leaves few doubts about their original purpose. Another indication of their provenance from a sepulchral context is a fragment of an early Roman fibula discovered within Trench S1, in the vicinity of the stone vessel fragments (object 3) (fig. 7).²⁰ The fibula, although fragmentary, most probably belongs to the strongly profiled type (*Kräftigprofilierterfibel*) of provincial origin²¹ (south Pannonian?).²² This type's chronology does not surpass the 2nd century, perhaps not

²⁰ The fibula fragment was subsequently found attached to a stone, which certainly stems from the area close to the posthole and bedrock crack infill.

²¹ We would like to extend our gratitude to dr. Martina Blečić Kavur (University of Primorska, Koper) for a first tentative identification of the fibula.

²² R. Košćević, *Antičke fibule s područja Siska*, Zagreb 1980, pp. 20-23, especially cat. n. 97-98; M. Blečić Kavur, *Inside fashion fusion: Fibulae from Crikvenica*, in *Roman pottery and Glass Manufactures. Production and trade*

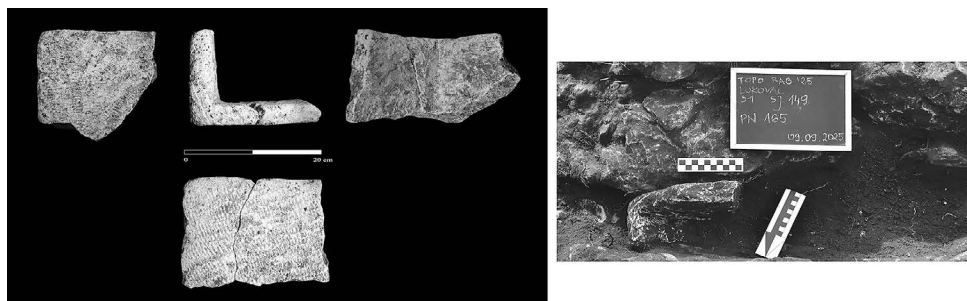


Fig. 5. Photos of Object 3 and the findspot of one of the fragments. Photos: A. Orlowska, A. Konestra; Image: A. Konestra

extending into its second half, while its use in the context of necropolises has been ascertained elsewhere.²³ These fibulae are not particularly common in the Kvarner area, though two examples come from Stinica, located on the coast in front of Rab Island.²⁴ The dating of the fibula confirms it was in secondary deposition within a late antique context at Lukovac, therefore it is not improbable to propose that this object too might have been recovered from the same site from which the urns were brought. This brings us to the dating of the stone receptacles themselves. While their simple workmanship and lack of decoration preclude more precise dating, the very fact that they are cinerary caskets leads to a dating within the 1st and 2nd centuries, or at the latest within the early 3rd, when inhumation became widespread in the region, almost totally replacing incineration burials.²⁵

Reuse and recycling were a widespread phenomenon in Roman times,²⁶ which continued in a more substantial manner from the 3rd century onwards, throughout late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, in all areas of the Roman empire as well as in the city of Rome.²⁷

in the Adriatic region and beyond. Proceedings of the 4th International Archaeological Colloquium (Crikvenica, 8-9 November 2017), eds. G. Lipovac Vrkljan, A. Konestra, A. Eterović Borzić, Oxford 2022, pp. 11-13.

²³ M. Blečić Kavur, *Inside fashion fusion: Fibulae from Crikvenica*, in: *Roman pottery and Glass Manufactures. Production and trade in the Adriatic region and beyond. Proceedings of the 4th International Archaeological Colloquium (Crikvenica, 8-9 November 2017)*, eds. G. Lipovac Vrkljan, A. Konestra, A. Eterović Borzić, Oxford 2022, pp. 11-13.

²⁴ R. Koščević, *Neobjavljene fibule iz rimske Dalmacije i Mezije*, "Prilozi Instituta za arheologiju u Zagrebu", 1999, vol. 15-16, pp. 29-39; M. Blečić Kavur, op. cit., pp. 11-13.

²⁵ N. Cambi, *Sarkofazi lokalne produkcije u rimskoj Dalmaciji (od II do IV stoljeća)*, Split 2010, p. 11; R. Matijašić, *Campus Martius. Antička nekropola između Premanturske i Medulinske ulice u Puli (Istraživanja 1985-1986. godine) / Roman necropolis between Premanturska and Medulinska street in Pula*, Pula 1991.

²⁶ S. Baker, Y.A. Marano, *Demolition Laws in an Archaeological Context. Legislation and Architectural Re-Use in the Roman Building Industry*, in: *Decor. Decorazione e architettura nel mondo romano*, eds. P. Pensabene, M. Milella, F. Caprioli, Thiasos Roma 2017, "Thiasos Monografie", vol. 9, pp. 833-850; B. Munro, *The Organized Recycling of Roman Villa Sites*, in: *Recycling and Reuse in the Roman Economy*, eds. C.N. Duckworth, A. Wilson, Oxford 2020, pp. 383-401, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198860846.001.0001>; R. Fleming, *Old Buildings, Building Material, and the Death of Recycling in Post-Roman Britain*, in *Recycling and Reuse in the Roman Economy*, eds. C.N. Duckworth, A. Wilson, Oxford 2020, pp. 403-424, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198860846.003.0013>.

²⁷ C. Murer, *From the tombs into the city: grave robbing and the re-use of roman funerary material in late antique Italy*, "Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia", 2018, vol. 30, pp. 115-137; Y.A. Marano, *Teoria e pratica del reimpiego in età romana. Fonti scritte ed evidenza archeologica*, in: *La seconda vita delle iscrizioni*.

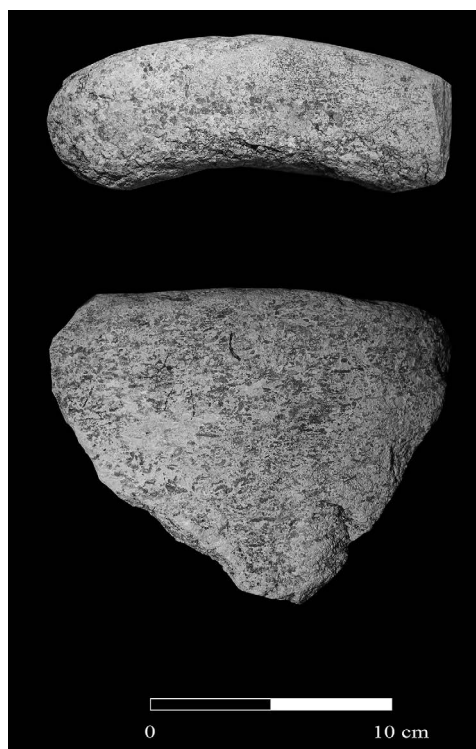


Fig. 6. Photos of Object 4. Photos and image: A. Konestra

Although the practice of construction material reuse is often linked to the latter periods, the practice was well known since Republican times, as a means to recycle destruction debris or reuse parts of derelict building, and is well attested by legal documents.²⁸ From at least the 4th century a sequence of constitutions and edicts mention the spoliations of graves,²⁹ which is then still seen as an unlawful doing, and although the practice had become common, preservation of the underground features of the grave, that is the burial itself, was treated separately.³⁰ In fact, the grave or rather the place where the dead was buried (according to a proper ritual) was considered *res religiosa*, and as such its status was distinguished from that of the funerary monument (*monumentum*) and the possible *hortus* within which burial

E molte altre ancora, ed. E. Culasso-Gastaldi, Alessandria 2020, p. 115; S.J. Barker, *Reuse of Statuary and the Recycling Habit of Late Antiquity: An Economic Perspective*, in: *Recycling and Reuse in the Roman Economy*, eds. C.N. Duckworth, A. Wilson, Oxford 2020, pp. 105-190, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198860846.001.0001>, especially p. 143.

²⁸ See e.g. Y.A. Marano, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-132.

²⁹ S. Lafferty, *Ad sanctitatem mortuorum: tomb raiders, body snatchers and relic hunters in late antiquity*, “Early Medieval Europe”, 2014, vol. 22/3, pp. 249-279; C. Murer, *From the tombs into the city*.

³⁰ Y.A. Marano, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

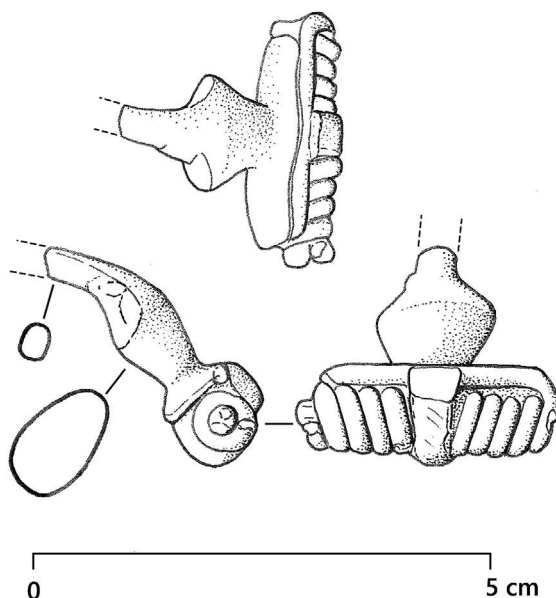


Fig. 7. Fibula from trench S1. Drawing: A. Dugonjić

was performed.³¹ This fundamental distinction of the separate status of the various parts of a grave helps explain, along with the practicality of ready-made dressed stone blocks, the widespread phenomenon of reuse of Roman funerary monuments in construction projects of a later date, even in public buildings, such as fortification walls or other infrastructural projects.³² It also distinguishes plundering and grave robbing from more organized, and often quasi-legally sanctioned forms of grave deconstruction.³³

This distinction is also useful in our case, as it helps to understand the scale and ways of interaction with ancient graves from which the objects brought to Lukovac came, but also the modes of their reuse. Firstly, large scale reuse of funerary monuments is often linked with times of distress (natural disasters, general instability), when these materials were chosen for their availability and lower logistical, and thus economic demands.³⁴ This is well demonstrated by the somewhat contrasting provisions expressed by Theoderich in his

³¹ M. Bolla, *Sepultura non perpetua: la riapertura delle tombe e il caso concordiese*, in: *Le necropoli della media e tarda età imperiale (III-IV secolo d.C.) a Iulia Concordia e nell'Alto Adriatico*, Atti convegno (Concordia, 2014), eds. F. Rinaldi, A. Vigoni, Rubano 2015, pp. 357-377; Y.A. Marano, op. cit., p. 121.

³² E.g. C. Murer, *From the tombs into the city*; D. Demicheli, *Recikliranje antičkih epigrafskih spomenika na širem splitskom području*, in: *Recikliraj, ideje iz prošlosti*, eds. I. Miloglav, A. Kudelić, J. Balen, Zagreb 2019, pp. 181-207, <https://doi.org/10.17234/9789531757232-12>; Y.A. Marano, op. cit.; G. Kremer, I. Kitz, *Use and Re-Use of Roman Stone Monuments in Carnuntum and its Surrounding Area*, in: *Roman Ornamental Stones In North-Western Europe. Natural Resources, Manufacturing, Supply, Life & After-Life*, eds. C. Coquelet, G. Creemers, R. Dreesen, É. Goemaere, Namur 2018, "Études et Documents – Archéologie", vol. 38, pp. 361-372.

³³ S. Lafferty, op. cit., p. 253; M. Bolla, op. cit.

³⁴ Cf. bibliography in n. 19.

Edictum and recorded in the *Variae*, and which best illustrate how the relationship towards the *res religiosa* could be skewed and was changing over time, but it also shows a stable concern of the rulers to maintain the sanctity of graves (unless under very specific, negative circumstances).³⁵ Secondly, thus far the sepulchral implements recovered on Lukovac seem to indicate that all of them were originally placed underground, that is, were not part of the *monumentum*, but rather of the burial itself. This is indicated by the overall poor finishing of external surfaces as well as by analogies with *in situ* recovered urns of the same types.³⁶ It must be stressed that not all funerary monuments or reused building materials ended up as stone implements, as many lithologically suitable objects and dressed stones were probably recycled within limekilns,³⁷ thus our picture on the scales of reuse is most probably biased. In any case, it would seem that at least one of the recovered objects was reused as a functional vessel (object 1), and that all the objects or fragments are pertinent to the second phase of the site, characterized by wooden architecture. This phase could be dated to a timeframe after the 7th century when the defunctionalized cistern was starting to be reused as a rubbish dump.³⁸ Therefore, we might propose that in a timeframe after the 7th century an early Roman necropolis located with all probability in the area of Lopar was being plundered not (only) as a quarry of dressed stones, a practice that in fact at present cannot be confirmed, but as a source of different materials, i.e. grave goods, that could have been recycled or reused on Lukovac. During these activities the Roman stone urns were recovered to be reused as dressed stones or receptacles within various areas of the settlement.

Another aspect that merits some consideration is the location of the possible necropolis/es from where these objects originated. Thus far, no such site was securely located on Lopar, and in fact securely identified necropolis locations on the island are scanty.³⁹ Mostly, data on ancient burials stems from passing records pertaining to the recovery of monumental *spolia*, usually found walled in much later structures, or from the testimonies collected in the *Great Chronicle of Kampor* composed by the friar Odoriko Badurina in the first half of the 20th century.⁴⁰ The only mention of possible earlier Roman graves in the area of Lopar recorded by it are related to a mention of “graves with coin finds” in the northern part of Podšilo bay.⁴¹ Subsequently, within the bay a Roman rural settlement (villa?) was discovered, and its later phases of use have been thoroughly investigated. This research evidenced activities of spoliation and recycling at the site, connected with the erection of wooden structures possibly related to seasonal or in any case short lived occupation.⁴² Due to intense erosional

³⁵ T. Nótári, *The state of facts of robbing of a grave in early medieval German laws*, “Acta Juridica Hungarica”, 2012, vol. 53(3), pp. 236-254, <https://doi.org/10.1556/AJur.53.2012.3.5>.

³⁶ E.g. R. Matijašić, op. cit.; M. Plohl, op. cit.

³⁷ C. Murer, op. cit.

³⁸ Within the cistern objects datable to the 7th century onwards were recovered.

³⁹ A. Konestra, P. Androić Gračanin, F. Welc, *Burialscape of Rab Island (North East Adriatic): The Role of Sepulchral Evidence in the Reconstruction of Roman and Late Antique Rural Settlement Pattern*, “Annales: Anali za Istrske in Mediteranske Studije. Series Historia et Sociologia”, 2021, vol. 31(3), pp. 391-412.

⁴⁰ O. Badurina, *Velika kronika Kampora* [*Great Chronicle of Kampor*] (vol. I-VI), manuscript. Rab, Archive and library of the Franciscan Monastery of saint Bernardin from Siena in Kampor.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 136.

⁴² F. Welc, A. Konestra, A. Dugonjić, P. Androić Gračanin, K. Rabiega, B. Nowacki, *Multidisciplinary insight into late Roman rural settlement on the northeastern Adriatic coast of Croatia: island of Rab case study*, “Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean”, 2019, vol. 28(2), pp. 435-454; A. Konestra, F. Welc, P. Androić Gračanin,

processes within the bay it is possible that the location of the necropolis was severely damaged, thus today all evidence of it might be lost. In fact, repeated surveys of the slopes of the bay failed to provide indicative evidence.

As for other sepulchral evidence on Lopar, a burial in sarcophagus is said to stem from Lukovac (furnished with a coin and containing bones) and other finds of sarcophagi are reported around the parish church of St. John the Baptist.⁴³ Nevertheless, none of these objects is today preserved. If we extend the analyses to rest of the island, early Roman stone urns are not known either as preserved finds or mentions within the sources. A few other sites on Lopar might also be considered, although burials have not been reported there. Foremost, the rural settlement at cape Zidine should be mentioned, as evidence from surface finds confirm an early Roman phase of use and probably setup of this complex.⁴⁴ Other evidence, mostly stemming from stray finds from various parts of modern Lopar settlement could indicate the existence of further settlement areas and possible accompanying necropolises.

While the practice of reuse of funerary materials is usually recognized through the spoliation of the monumental parts of the graves and subsequent use of the stone materials, be it stelae, reliefs or simply dressed stones,⁴⁵ the reuse of parts of the burial assemblage is less prominently identifiable. Possibly, since such materials were functionally reused within other activities or were recycled. In the area of Roman Dalmatia the first phenomenon has been widely identified and somewhat better studied, especially in the provincial capital, Salona.⁴⁶ Related to the second, data is much scantier, as it is in other areas as well. Early Medieval grave reopening and all associated activities are, on the other hand, somewhat better studied, but in this case the practice usually dates to just a few decades after interment, that is, when the grave was a part of collective memory or its above ground markers were still visible.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, reuse of Roman funerary vessels has been ascertained in the area of the Kvarner. More specifically, in the late antique residential complex located close to a 6th century church at the Cickini site on the island of Krk, reused cylindrical urns were discovered, one still *in situ* in one corner of a room, clearly reused as a functional vessel.⁴⁸ At this site

W. Weker, *An insight into craft activities in rural areas of Dalmatia Province – First data on iron working at the Roman settlement in Lopar (Island of Rab)*, in: *Secrets of iron – from raw material to an iron object. Proceedings of the 7th International Conference of Mediaeval Archaeology of the Institute of Archaeology, Zagreb, 10th–11th September 2020*, eds. T. Sekelj Ivančan, T. Karavidović, T. Tkalčec, S. Krznar, J. Belaj, Zagreb 2022, pp. 159–169.

⁴³ A. Konestra, P. Androić Gračanin, F. Welc, *Burialscapes of Rab Island*, op. cit., Tab. 1.

⁴⁴ A. Konestra, F. Welc, P. Androić Gračanin, *Lokalitet na rtu Zidine u Loparu u kontekstu obalnih rezidencijalno-gospodarskih kompleksa otoka Raba*, “*Annales Instituti archaeologici*”, 2021, vol. 17(1), pp. 152–170.

⁴⁵ C. Murer, *Recycling Roman Funerary Sculpture in Italy and the Late Roman West*, in: *Recycling and Reuse of Sculpture in Roman and Late Antique Times: Panel 6.8*, ed. C. Parigi, (Archaeology and Economy in the Ancient World: Proceedings of the 19th International Congress of Classical Archaeology, Cologne/Bonn 2018, Band 37), Heidelberg 2022, pp. 49–57. <https://doi.org/10.11588/propylaeum.928.c12254>.

⁴⁶ D. Demicheli, op. cit.

⁴⁷ E.g. S. Lafferty, op. cit., pp. 271–272; A. Klevnäs, E. Aspöck, A.A. Noterman, M.C. van Haperen, S. Zintl, *Reopening graves in the early Middle Ages: from local practice to European phenomenon*, “*Antiquity*”, 2021, 95/382, pp. 1005–1026, <https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2020.217>.

⁴⁸ R. Starac, *Early Christian church in „Cickini“ forest near Sršići on the island of Krk (report on the first phase of excavations)*, “*Hortus Artium Medievalium*”, 2004, vol. 10, p. 219; idem, *Examples of ceramic building materials of Roman and late antique date from Cickini near Malinska on the island of Krk (NE Adriatic, Croatia)*, in: *Roman Pottery and Glass Manufactures. Production and trade in the Adriatic region and beyond. Proceedings of the 4th International Archaeological Colloquium (Crikvenica, 8–9 November 2017)*, eds. G. Lipovac Vrkljan, A. Konestra, A. Eterović Borzić, Oxford 2022, pp. 140–148, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2x8v66p.15>.

other Roman worked stone objects were reused as building materials, indicating systematic spoliation of a nearby site of earlier date.⁴⁹

4. Conclusions

The finds described above opened a set of interpretational possibilities related to the original use of these objects, their later acquisition, reuse and final deposition on the islet of Lukovac. Although we can only speculate on the place of original deposition of these objects, they shed unexpected light on Roman funerary practices, as they are the first finds of stone cinerary urns from the island of Rab. Fitting within regionally known types, and observed along with other more monumental funerary elements, they indicate appropriation of regionally typical sepulchral practices by the inhabitants of the island in the first centuries AD.

The “new” life of these objects on the islet of Lukovac in a much later timeframe, where they were reused as functional objects or building material, testifies to a total negation of the role they had within the former, funerary context. We can only speculate under which circumstances these objects were unearthed and collected, i.e. was the location of the necropolis still known more than five centuries after its use, and therefore specifically targeted? Did looting initially start to salvage funerary monuments, later encompassing the burials as well? Was it found accidentally? Were the excavators, as members of a society that practiced inhumation, even aware of the nature of these objects? Was the looting of the necropolis an organized endeavor initiated to collect more valuable and recyclable materials (metals, glass)?

Finally, the identification of reused Roman cinerary urns on Lukovac and a similar practice identified at Cickini on the nearby island of Krk might be indicative of a more widespread phenomenon that finds few regional analogies (if any) and merits further exploration. What these finds do confirm is the relationship of the fortification on Lukovac with earlier sites located on Lopar or elsewhere on the island, as it would seem that the widespread transformations and the end of habitation observed at sites such as that in Podšilo bay, do not coincide with the end of their frequentation or with a caesura in occupation of their wider landscapes. In fact, they continued to be used as a source of various materials, just as their landed properties were probably still used to cultivate crops or as pastures by a society that chose new and sometimes radically different places to settle.

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⁴⁹ A. Konestra, R. Starac, G. Lipovac Vrkljan, *Rimska ara s Cickina na otoku Krku u kontekstu štovanja božice Dijane u ruralnim predjelima (sjeverne) Liburnije*, “Radovi Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Zadru”, 2024, vol. 66, pp. 5-38.

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