

STUDI DI ANTICITÀ CRISTIANA

PUBBLICATI A CURA DEL

PONTIFICIO ISTITUTO DI ARCHEOLOGIA CRISTIANA

LXVI

**ACTA
XVI CONGRESSVS INTERNATIONALIS
ARCHAEOLOGIAE CHRISTIANAE**

Romae
(22-28.9.2013)

**COSTANTINO E I COSTANTINIDI
L'INNOVAZIONE COSTANTINIANA,
LE SUE RADICI E I SUOI SVILUPPI**

Pars II

Curatela scientifica
Olof BRANDT, Vincenzo FIOCCHI NICOLAI

Cura editoriale
Olof BRANDT, Gabriele CASTIGLIA



2016
CITTÀ DEL VATICANO

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Oltre i curatori, hanno collaborato alla cura editoriale Sarah Berraho,
Chiara Cecalupo, Stefan Heid, Ivana Kvetanova, Philippe Pergola e Alessia Poggiani.

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I-00185 Roma, Via Napoleone III, 1

Tel 064465574 – Fax 064469197

E-mail: piac.editrice@piac.it

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Gordana JEREMIĆ, Aleksandra FILIPOVIĆ

TRACES OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN *NAISSUS*

The antique Niš (*Naissus*, *Νάισσος*, *Ναισσός*, *Naessus*, *urbs Naisitana*, *civitas Naisat(um)*, *Navissus*, *Navissum*, *Ναισσούπολις*), in today's Republic of Serbia, was developed in the fertile valley of the Nišava river (*Navisos*), near its confluence into Južna Morava river (*Margum*) (fig. 1).¹ The city was surrounded by gentle slopes from north and south, mountain chain on the eastern side, and on the western side it is open towards the wide valley of the river Nišava. It belonged to the group of the largest cities in the region of Dardania (*[Nai]ssus Darda[niae]*), in the province of *Moesia superior*, and, after administrative reforms in the tetrarchy period, it became part of a newly founded province of *Dacia mediterranea*. Being an important strategic point, the city was developed on the crossroad of important trans-Balkan routes. Main routes connected large cities and capitals: *Viminacium* - *Horreum Margi* - *Naissus* - *Remesiana* - *Serdica* - *Constantinopolis*, *Lissus* - *Ulpiana* - *Naissus* - *Ratiaria* and *Naissus* - *Scupi* - *Thessaloniki*. These viaducts ensured the connection between river flows of the Danube, Morava, Nišava and Vardar rivers, and they connected the inner Balkan Peninsula region with coasts of the Adriatic, Ionic, Aegean and the Black sea.²

The main economic activities in all periods of the Roman domination were agricultural production, trade and crafts (the manufacture of precious and base metals, glass, leather, wood and baked clay), exploitation of ores, stones, etc. The presence of an *officina* for making artefacts from precious metals in the city in the Late Antiquity period was confirmed,³ and in the written document *Notitia dignitatum Naissus* was mentioned as one of the weapons' producing centres for the Roman army (*Not. dig. or. X*, 37).

The conquering of the Ponišavlje region and the installing of a Roman garrison in *Naissus* is dated into the second half of the I century AD, based on the data from the epigraphic monuments,⁴ although archaeological traces from this period are missing. The present autochthonous population, of Dardanian, Illyrian, Celtic, Dacian and Thracian origin, was gradually romanised, and over time the city became a meeting point and a living place for numerous inhabitants from diverse regions of the Roman Empire.⁵ During the II century, most likely in the time of the emperor Hadrian (117-138) or at the latest during the reign of *Antoninus Pius* (138-161), the city got the status of a *municipium*.⁶ A Roman fortress, whose shape and size are unknown up to today, was erected in the late I century AD, for the auxiliary troops of *cohors I Cilicum*, which was stationed in *Naissus* until 134 AD; from the second half of the II century AD *cohors I Aurelia Dardanorum* was residing there, and its presence was confirmed until the Late Antique pe-

¹ PETROVIĆ 1979, p. 36, pp. 134-135, no.132.

² PETROVIĆ 1979, p. 20.

³ POPOVIĆ 1997, pp. 134-138.

⁴ PETROVIĆ 1979, 31, nos. 33-34.

⁵ PAPAZOGLU 1969, pp. 137-143, 241.

⁶ PETROVIĆ 1976, p. 49.

riod.⁷ The fortress was erected on the elevated plateau on the right river bank, and the civilian settlement developed around it, on the neighbouring hills, as well as on the left river bank. The remains of the fortification were examined partially, on three limited locations, in the east, south and west.⁸

The city went through economic, political and demographic flourishing since the end of the III century, and especially throughout the IV century, up to middle of the V century, when the city was severely destroyed by Huns in 441 AD, and never fully recovered. *Naissus* especially reached the peak of its urbanistic and artistic flourishing during the reign of Constantine I (306-337), born in *Naissus*, who *magnifice ornavit* his birth place. Another testimony on the city's importance are numerous visits, longer or shorter staying of the most important rulers of the IV century: *Licinius*, Constantine I, Constantine II, *Constans*, *Constantius II*, Iulian Apostate, *Valens*, Valentinian and *Theodosius I*, as well as usurper *Vetranion*, who placed the imperial insignia in *Naissus* in 350 AD.⁹

The earliest mention of the Christian communities in *Naissus* originates from the IV century. From this period the first Christian monuments begin to appear on the city territory. *Basilicae*, graveyard churches, family grave tombs are being erected, and among small objects appear those with clear Christian symbolism (*cf. infra*). From the IV century, *Naissus* is confirmed as an episcopal place, and in the period IV-VI century names of six bishops, participants of Ecumenical councils, were noted: *Cyriacus a Naiso* (before 343),¹⁰ *Gaudentius ab Achaia (!) de Naiso* (343),¹¹ *Bonosus* (before 391),¹² *Martianus episcopus Naissitanus* (409-414),¹³ *Gaianus Naisitanus*¹⁴ (516) and *Proiectus, reverendissimum episcopum Naisitanum*¹⁵ (553).¹⁶ From written sources it is also known that the Easter liturgy in 344 AD was performed by Athanasios of Alexandria in *Naissus*,¹⁷ who was a guest of a friend and like-minded episcopo *Gaudentius*.¹⁸

This is the beginning of an analytical and synthetical study of late Antique *Naissus*. It is our intention to represent all the results available up-to-day, that will be the foundation for a contemporary interpretation, based on the scientific results from several scientific disciplines and the starting point for new, interdisciplinary interpretations, from the viewpoint of archaeology and history of architecture.¹⁹

HISTORY OF RESEARCH

The Antique *Naissus* was investigated in a very modest extent. Archaeological researches were chiefly restricted to sondage excavations and were mainly conducted on

⁷ PETROVIĆ 1979, p. 31.

⁸ VASIĆ 2013, p. 92, fig. 28.

⁹ PETROVIĆ 1976, pp. 35-41; VASIĆ 2008, pp. 9-23.

¹⁰ Hil., *Coll. Antiar. Par.* A 4, 1, 3, 4; 1, 27, 4 (CSEL 65, 51, 18; 66, 10).

¹¹ Hil., *Coll. Antiar. Par.* A 4, 1, 27, 2; 4; B 2, 4 (CSEL 65, 66, 1, 9); Ath., *Ad Mareoticas ecclesias epistola* (PL 56, 851, A).

¹² ZEILLER 1918, p. 159; SCHÄFERDIEK 1985, pp. 162-178.

¹³ Inn., *Ep.* 16 et 17 (PL 20, 519-521; 527).

¹⁴ Marc., *Chron., ad ann.* 516.

¹⁵ *Vigilius, Constitutum de tribus capitulis* (CSEL 35, 319, 5).

¹⁶ ZEILLER 1918, pp. 158-159; PETROVIĆ 1979, p. 43; BRATOZ 2011, p. 245.

¹⁷ Ath., *Epist. fest cum chronico*, a. 344 (PG 26, 1355-1356).

¹⁸ ZEILLER 1918, p. 261.

¹⁹ The surrounding estates and settlements will not be included, although they may have extraordinary historical importance, such as *Mediana*, whose neighbouring position is very compromising for the research itself (the lack of information on the city topography may lead to the error of considering *Mediana* to be a part of the city).

the area of the fortress on the right bank of Nišava. Researches were, with large interruptions, mainly conducted in the period from 1950s to 1990s. These researches encompassed segments of the southern and eastern walls, as well as parts of the early Byzantine western fortress wall – on the route of the antique one, discovered during the building of the modern bus station.²⁰ In the middle part of the fortress the *via decumana* was registered and a part of a forum with a civilian basilica.²¹ To the southwest from this point, remains of an early Byzantine building and parts of the street were noted. Remains of one Late Antique building with metallurgical oven, and finds of moulds and raw material were registered in the southern part of the fortification.²²

In the north-western corner of the fortress a part of a representative building with octagonal room was discovered by chance and later partially examined, which was decorated by mosaics, fresco-painting and rich architectonical decorations.²³ This building was erected in the beginning of the IV century, judging from the findings of money of Maximin Daia from 309-310 AD, found in the plaster wall of the building;²⁴ the researchers also believe that the building may be identified as a part of the imperial palace of Constantinian period.²⁵

In the *extra muros* part the city *thermae* were systematically investigated, as well as one building with numerous aligned rooms that may have represented *tabernae*.²⁶ In the vicinity of the Late Antique city, the remains of a luxurious villa with floor mosaics were partially examined, on the slopes of Vinik, approximately 1 km north from the fortress.²⁷ The investigations on the left river bank were mainly sondage excavations until now. During the works connected with the making of the subterranean passage and the building of the hotel “Ambassador” in the central part of the modern city, segments of necropolises with incinerations (II-III century) and with graves and grave tombs with inhumations (IV-V century) were noted, along the supposed route of the road for Ulpiana.

From the Late Antique period, from research results available up-to-day, the best known is the eastern city necropolis, which was situated on the right bank of Nišava along the road for Ratiaria, in the modern city quarter of Jagodin mala (fig. 2). The excavations, which are being conducted with larger interruptions for over eight decades, revealed only smaller part of this necropolis.²⁸ Thanks to the recent large-scale rescue excavations, conducted in 2010 and 2012 on the route of new Boulevard of Vojvoda Mišić and within the area of the “Benetton” factory, new data were obtained on the organization and looks of this part of the necropolis, cemetery architecture and inventory discovered near the deceased.²⁹

EARLY CHRISTIANITY MONUMENTS

The early Christian monuments that we know from *Naissus* are relatively few, which is the consequence of insufficient exploration of the city and its territory. These are ec-

²⁰ ZOTOVIĆ 1975, pp. 73-77.

²¹ PETROVIĆ 1993, pp. 63-69; VASIĆ 2013, p. 93.

²² GABRIČEVIĆ 1974, pp. 42-43.

²³ JEREMIĆ 2007, p. 89, with previous references.

²⁴ JEREMIĆ 2007, p. 95.

²⁵ PETROVIĆ 1993, p. 68; VASIĆ 2013, p. 93, note 116.

²⁶ JEREMIĆ 2013A, p. 127, note 7.

²⁷ GUŠIĆ 1977, pp. 91-95.

²⁸ ORŠIĆ SLAVETIĆ 1934, pp. 303-305, fig. 1; ZOTOVIĆ, PETROVIĆ-SPREMO 1968, *passim*.

²⁹ JEREMIĆ 2013A, pp. 127-128; JEREMIĆ 2013B, pp. 274-276; JEREMIĆ 2013C, pp. 14-17.

clesial buildings, monumental tombs with fresco-painted Christian motives, architectural plastic decorations and small number of diverse portable artefacts. Ecclesial buildings are mainly preserved in the level of their foundations, but the tombs mainly kept their original architectural shape, and, in some cases, they were even discovered with inner grave equipment intact.

The largest number of early Christian monuments registered so far was discovered and explored on the territory of the eastern city necropolis in the modern city quarter of Jagodin mala. Until the II World War, archaeological research discovered five ecclesial buildings in this area, and one of them had a vaulted crypt. The information we have on their appearance are based on short reports and drawings published in 1934 (fig. 3).³⁰ The only one fully researched was the church with one nave, no. 8, according to Oršić Slavetić, a longitudinal building with semi-circular apse turned towards east, whose overall dimensions are 24.3 x 10.4 m.³¹ Regarding the church architecture, it may only be assumed that the apse was covered with semi-calotte, since the walls are somewhat thicker, 1 m comparing to the 0.65 m on the remaining part.³² The report also mentions the existence of the altar table whose base was reinforced by building, however, the articulation of the altar area is unknown, and the position of the barrier is not marked on the plan. We do know, however, that the floor in the apse area was covered by limestone slabs and that the entrance at the western facade was surrounded by two columns, and the marble base of one of them was preserved *in situ*.³³ It was not possible to determine the precise period of use of this building because the portable finds were lacking.

The oldest building, dated after the finds of the money of the emperor Constantine in the debris, is identified as the Church no. 42³⁴. The church is partially excavated and a segment of a circular wall may be identified (apse?), oriented towards the western side, and incorporated into the rectangular room with wall up to 1.79 m thick. Somewhat larger thickness of walls, more than the usual 60 cm encountered in other churches of the necropolis, suggests the possibility of the presence of increased pushing forces, as a result of a domed ceiling. It is assumed that the extraordinary dimensions of a discovered part, 22.20 m long, as well as the position of this building within the necropolis, were the reason to interpret this building as a church. Concise drawings leave space for different hypotheses, and one of them suggests the possibility of a more complexly articulated architecture of centralised type, which is not rare in the mausoleum architecture. In accordance with this hypothesis, it is not difficult to imagine a situation similar to the one on the western exedra on the eastern side as well (and, quite possibly, on northern and southern one too), with the role of absorbing the pushing forces of a hypothetical central dome.³⁵

The Church no. 20, a triple-nave basilica, from which only a part of the eastern apse segment was registered and only the central part researched, was dated on the basis of the findings of the emperor Valens money as *terminus post quem* into the third quarter of the IV century.³⁶ Other portable material that may be used for dating this building

³⁰ ORŠIĆ SLAVETIĆ 1934, pp. 303-305.

³¹ Apse base was 6.50 m wide, the slightly lowered arch was 3.00 m deep.

³² As usual, the remaining part of the longitudinal area was covered by gabled roof with *capriatae*.

³³ The type of the marble was not mentioned.

³⁴ ORŠIĆ SLAVETIĆ 1934, fig. 4.

³⁵ We believe that it is pointless to cite other examples of other mausoleums to create analogies, due to the fact that we do not have basic elements to identify the origin of this building. It was our intention only to draw attention to the unusual thickness of walls that must have been used to absorb considerable pushing forces.

³⁶ ORŠIĆ SLAVETIĆ 1934, p. 304, fig. 3.

did not yield. Along the southern wall built tombs were discovered. These four ecclesial buildings were most likely covered with soil after the research and their exact position today is unknown.

The only ecclesial building that is available for the public today and whose major part was examined, is the one situated in the western part of the necropolis.³⁷ This is a triple-nave basilica, built, judging from the data available from the drawings, on the foundations of some earlier building, respecting the longitudinal orientation of its walls (fig. 4).³⁸ Its outer dimensions are approximately 23.2 x 17 m, and on excavated segments there may be visible the articulation of this basilica with one apse (with semi-circular extrados) turned towards east, and with endonarthex, exonarthex and probably also subsidiary rooms from the southern and northern side.³⁹ The presence of atrium was not confirmed. From the endonarthex, the stairs led through exonarthex into a subterranean crypt, placed centrally from the western, entrance side. The longitudinal walls of the basilica, somewhat thicker than 70 cm were rhythmically articulated by *lesenae* from inner and outer sides. The walls in the interior were decorated – as suggested by discovered fragments – with marble revetment, stucco-decoration and fresco-painting, and also one marble Ionic capital with monograms of Constantine.⁴⁰ The floor was made from the combination of limestone slabs and mosaic carpet, completely destroyed today.⁴¹ The basilica was evidently of a funerary type, and 55 graves alone were discovered in its interior. Out of them, over 35 graves were in the shape of sarcophagus and of the *chamosorion* type (built from stone slabs and simple grave pit).⁴² The crypt was organised into two levels, and the central rectangular vaulted area was preserved almost completely, with two *arcosolia* placed at both sides; a small niche was placed between them and the exedra was on the western wall, also surrounded by two smaller niches (fig. 5). Above *arcosolium*, in the same level as the impost of the vault, remains of the side rooms are preserved; their entrance was probably from the outside.⁴³ It may be also supposed that above the central vaulted part of the crypt additional rooms existed; however, both the crypt and the basilica were not researched completely. The researchers assumed that the crypt was built over the remains of an older memorial building of the same orientation, that it is contemporary with the basilica, dated roughly into V century, after its architectural elements, including the finding of the capital, as well as grave shapes discovered within basilica and outside it.⁴⁴

Preliminary research of the necropolises of *Naissus* have demonstrated, after sepulchral equipment, that the burial were continuous from IV until the end of VI and beginning of the VII century, with greatest intensity from mid-IV until mid-V century, i.e.

³⁷ The most detailed study on this basilica cf. MILOŠEVIĆ 2004, 121-140 with earlier references.

³⁸ This may be seen the best after the direction of the southern stylobate, which is slightly inclined, to follow the direction of the walls of the previous building.

³⁹ From the outer side, outer walls that continue towards the southern and northern side are visible.

⁴⁰ For stylistical analogies Ionic capital imposts from Stobi and Prilep in Republic of Macedonia were considered (cf. MILOŠEVIĆ 2004, pp. 128-129). From the inventory of the National museum in Niš: "Capital made from white marble with pattern [is this Proconnesian marble?], two crosses from one side, pigeon in the middle, and from the other side cross and ivy sprigs. Height 0.85, width 0.54 and thickness 0.20; middle part for the column 0.42 wide, 0.45 long, and 0.13 thick, diameter of the circular part 0.38 m" (inv 79, NM Niš).

⁴¹ Different types of floors, as well as their uneven nivelation suggest several chronological phases of the basilica; however, the available documentation did not give enough information for a detailed study.

⁴² On the origin of the term *Camovsorion* see SCHNEIDER EQUINI 1972, p. 105.

⁴³ The constructive role of the *arcosolium* is completely clear, it was to absorb the side pressure forces of the semi-circular vault, where the upper rooms had additional function to prevent the cracking in the vault with their weight.

⁴⁴ MILOŠEVIĆ 2004, pp. 129-130.

441 AD, when *Naissus* experienced severe destructions and reduction of the number of its inhabitants, caused by Hun invasion. The total number of 300 graves was examined (burials of the *χαμόσορον* type, in plain grave pits, in wooden coffins, and in constructions built from bricks in the shape of sarcophagus) and over sixty monumental graves (semi-circularly vaulted and with one or two domes), some of them painted with frescoes.

When it comes to grave shapes, common burials in plain pits, often shallow, occur, and sometimes the deceased was placed into the pit in a wooden coffin. In the grave inventory, especially those from mid-IV – mid-V century, a presence of golden, silver or bronze jewellery is noted (bracelets, earrings, rings), bronze belt buckles and other personal items, and often a glass *balsamarium* was placed near the head.⁴⁵ Among the most significant are the finds of graves in the south-eastern place of the necropolis, where the “Benetton” factory is; in them, thanks to the fact that they were not robbed, a rich funerary inventory was discovered. After its richness, one grave of a deceased women should be outlined; she was buried in a shallow grave pit immediately outside the entrance of the barrel vaulted tomb, and she had a pair of golden earrings, necklace made from golden and glass beads, a golden and a silver ring and two massive silver bracelets, dated into the second half – end of the IV century (fig. 6).⁴⁶

The rarest tomb shape are pits bordered by stone. In these graves no offerings were registered, however, judging by their depth and relations with other graves, it is clearly visible that they belong to the latest horizon on the necropolis. This type of the tomb construction was not registered during the latest excavations in years 2010 and 2012 in the south-eastern part of the necropolis. After known parallels from Pannonian necropolises, these burials are dated into the period of the Keszthely culture VI - early VII century.⁴⁷

Among the numerous constructions there were registered graves with vertically placed bricks that imitate the coffin shape, with revetment and covering from bricks.⁴⁸ The graves where the deceased were placed directly on the ground or on a wooden base represent the reduced form of this type; they have coverings from bricks arranged into a gabled roof or from arched *tegulae* that imitate the vault.⁴⁹

Graves, as well as the bodies of deceased, were most often oriented towards west-east. However, in four cases the orientation north-south was noted. These are: one simply buried deceased (head towards south), in the south-eastern part of the necropolis, without offerings, that matches the level of burials from the IV century,⁵⁰ two built tombs (so-called tomb of the architect-craftsman)⁵¹ and the grave of a child, at mutual distance of approximately 17 m, and the fourth example is one tomb monument with barrel vault (III A/1-1957), of considerable dimensions (4,30 x 6,10 x 2,65 m), with burials in the wall chambers, one led sarcophagus and wooden coffins. The tomb was plundered, but in the debris near the entrance money of emperor Valentinian I dated into 364-367 AD was discovered, and it may belong to this burial unit.⁵²

⁴⁵ JEREMIĆ 2013c, pp. 23-25

⁴⁶ JEREMIĆ 2013b, p. 281, fig. 10.

⁴⁷ MÜLLER 2010, pp. 242-246.

⁴⁸ ZOTOVIĆ, PETROVIĆ-SPREMO 1968, p. 7.

⁴⁹ JEREMIĆ 2013c, p. 27, fig. 14.

⁵⁰ The research from 2010 on the place of the new Boulevard of Vojvoda Mišić, grave G-39.

⁵¹ In the left hand of the deceased there was a bronze calliper with rich ornaments in relief, with representations of Latin cross, cross-cut lines and masons and stonemason's tools. Cf. JEREMIĆ 2013, in press.

⁵² CRNOGLAVAC 2013, p. 162, cat. 185.

The built tombs of the *chamosorion* type are relatively numerous at the *Naissus* necropolis. They were made from bricks and plaster, rarely with broken stones. From the inner and outer side they had a covering with hydrostatic. They were built for single burials and they generally had a covering from rectangular bricks, of larger dimensions (56x55x6-7 cm) in the shape of a gabled roof. The second variation are large tombs made for burials of two or three, sometimes even four deceased. The coverings were not noted during excavations, but they must have been convenient for removal for subsequent burials. The inventory discovered in them consists of glass balsamarii, silver, bronze or iron jewellery, and sometimes money dated into the IV century.⁵³

From all the tombs of the Late Antique period registered on the *Naissus* territory, only few of them were identified as Christian after their fresco-painting, and all of those were discovered at the eastern city necropolis of Jagodin mala. These are four tombs of the *a camera* type – with a rectangular base and longitudinal barrel vault, dug into the soil up to the vault impost, with the entrance on the western side in the form of stairs. Today, only two of them are conserved and available to the public.⁵⁴ The other two tombs, destroyed by modern buildings, had walls painted with red colour on the white background: one had the representation of the cross, without more precise chronology, and the other, dated into the period of the reign of Iustinian, had unusual symbolic vegetable representations in the lower zone of the western wall, and in the upper zone the representations of seven arches (probably vaults), with crosses, chrismons and one star⁵⁵.

One tomb with barrel vault also had a polychromous fresco-painted interior, discovered by chance in 2006, dated roughly into the end of the IV century after the findings of the money of *Theodosius* (fig. 7).⁵⁶ Its western wall was decorated by panels that imitate marble and pebbles, the side walls had, up to the impost level, representations of simple bands and braids, and a Christogram in the wreath of laurel branches was on the vault. One tomb with more complex figural representations was explored in 1953⁵⁷ in the English house. Similar representations were found on the eastern and western wall, that placed the tomb into the end IV and the first half of the V century: one male figure, surrounded by paradise vegetation, was placed on each side, left and right, of the Christogram in a wreath. Based on their looks and attributes in their hands, the researchers assumed that apostles St. Peter and Paul were represented on the eastern wall, and there are two still unidentified persons on the western wall, most likely some of the apostles, martyrs or saints.

The chance find from 2012 of 14 monumental tomb graves, two of them of a more complex architecture, covered with domes, and the others of *a camera* type, demonstrate not only the archaeological potential that *Naissus* territory may offer, but also the status of the deceased.⁵⁸ Tombs with barrel vault correspond by their architecture to the other of the same type already discovered in the city, tombs with domes represent completely new forms, although in both cases they follow the models of clas-

⁵³ JEREMIĆ 2013c, pp. 28-29.

⁵⁴ This type of monumental tombs is the most widespread in the Christian world (Necropoli di Porto all'Isola Sacra in Rome, Necropolis of *Anemurium* in Isauria, Necropolis of isles of Gemile and Karacaören in Lycia). Variations of this type depend mainly from the used building material on different locations.

⁵⁵ These are representations of trees, one of them without leaves, heder, and one arch - representation of the entrance?

⁵⁶ ČERŠKOV, ALEKSIĆ 2006, pp. 102-104.

⁵⁷ MIRKOVIĆ 1956a, pp. 85-100; MIRKOVIĆ 1956b, pp. 53-72.

⁵⁸ FILIPOVIĆ 2012b, pp. 463-466.

sical examples, which is not unusual in the early Christian world.⁵⁹

The first, cross-shaped tomb (*domed tomb 1*, fig. 8), had a central chamber of a rectangular base covered with domical vault, three prongs with barrel vault – thus forming *arcosolia* in which the deceased were placed – while the fourth, the eastern one, had the entrance with stairs, without a covering construction. On the remains of the side walls on the entrance it may be visible that the tomb had the main facade that was surpassing the domical vault and side vaults. The entrance was closed by a monolith stone slab, as is the case for all the tombs. The other cross-shaped tomb (*domed tomb 2*, fig. 9) had somewhat more complex spatial organization, although the general constructive and organizational concept is analogous. This tomb also has three *arcosolia* that form the three prongs or the so-called Greek cross and a dome that covers the central chamber. Unlike the previous one, in this case the entrance stairs are not placed on the opposite to the central *arcosolium*, but on that place was a somewhat wider area with semi-circular niches into which it was possible to enter through one side corridor, covered with barrel vault, accessed by stairs. On the corners of this building four square rooms of unknown function were added, thus forming the spatial ground-base in a shape of the enclosed cross. Up-to-day researches have revealed a total number of six tombs with a dome that are different from one another.

The principles of adopted techniques for constructing the tombs are analogous, and Roman by their logics. The side walls were mainly in the technique of *caementicium*, with rich use of plaster; the *opus incertum* was generally applied with broken stones and river pebbles. Sometimes the *opus mixtum* was present where the rows of *latericium* were placed into high layers of plaster. All the vaults were made in the *latericium* technique, radially positioned (fig. 10). The plaster was smoothed and on the edges of the *latericium* incisions were made by trowel. It may be observed that on the surfaces of *opus incertum* walls that the incisions had sinusoidal shapes, following roughly the shape of the stone, which is usually done when the base for fresco-plaster is being prepared. However, some cases are noted where such treatment was the final one.⁶⁰ Architectural plastic occurred in just one case, when “pseudo-capitals” dated into the IV century were found, which occur in Roman architecture among tombs and temples that had facades rhythmically articulated with *lesenae*.⁶¹ Vaults and facades were covered with hydraulic plaster.

Other monuments of clearly Christian marks are few on the territory of *Naissus*. This a heterogeneous group of material, originating from different archaeological units. Among the most important ones are the fragments of three tombstones from white marble, coming from the debris of one of the cemetery basilicas in Jagodin mala, and one slab from dark-grey marble, from an unknown location in *Naissus*, engraved with Greek

⁵⁹ One analogous situation is encountered in Christian necropolises from the VI century, spread on the islands of Gemile and Karacaören, in former Lycia (southwest coast of Turkey). The quantity of monumental graves, which are almost completely preserved, is astonishing. As in Niš, the type of barrel vaulted tombs prevails, but other types that have models in classical monumental architecture occur as well (with exedras, with vaults, which imitate lycian sarcophagus) and several with the dome. The main difference between these two sites is not just in the raw material (limestone, opposed to *latericium*) but in the first case there is also no urban continuity that might have destroyed the original architecture (not just sepulchral) and there is the fact that these sites, built on limestone rocks, remained on surface (cf. FILIPOVIĆ 2012a, pp. 149-177 e ID. 2012b, pp. 439-466).

⁶⁰ It is not clear whether the lack of fresco-plaster is connected with short economic resources, unfinished work or it was a matter of deliberate choice, which may be the mode of work of a certain group of constructors.

⁶¹ MILOŠEVIĆ 2004, p. 127.

⁶² PETROVIĆ 1979, pp. 91-93, nos. 50-53.

alphabet. All the monuments were dated on the basis of palaeographic characteristics into the period of the V-VI century.⁶²

One famous find of a child led sarcophagus, discovered at the southern part of the basilica with a crypt, belongs to the end of the IV or early V century.⁶³ On the lid, as well as on narrow side surfaces, there were plastic representations of the cross, groups with three busts with imperial diadems and two standing figures. After the analysis of the represented busts, the researchers supposed that they represent the heirs of the emperor Valentinian I – Gratian II, Valentinian II and *Theodosius I*. The objects of personal religiousness were not registered on the necropolis. The only exception in this sense may represent the find of a bronze cylindrical capsule in the grave of a child (grave II B-21), discovered in 1958. The object was made from tin bronze sheet, 2,4 cm long and of a diameter of 1,0 cm, with two circular lids and two parallel ring-shaped holes for hanging. In the inventory book it was noted that its interior was filled with “whitish friable compound”. The capsule was kept in the National museum in Niš, in the Byzantine collection, inv. 237/V; however, it is discarded today.

By all these archaeological discoveries and chance finds, the traces of early Christianity were registered in the antique *Naissus* starting from IV century. Most data on the development of Christian sacral and funerary architecture were yielded by researches on the eastern necropolis of *Naissus* in the modern city quarter of Jagodin mala, where very diverse types of tomb constructions from late Antiquity may be observed. These investigations have confirmed that the largest number of luxurious tomb chambers was erected in the period from mid- IV and in the first half of the V century, as demonstrated by portable finds. Luxurious and firmly built graves and tombs represent the best the desire of living descendants to preserve the body of the deceased for eternity⁶⁴. The richness of grave offerings and inventory from the necropolis suggest that the population lived in socially and economically prosperous times.

Archaeological excavations of the fortress, city quarters and necropolises are not sufficient for a complete overview of the city's appearance in its grandest periods. The main problem to which future research should pay special attention is the question of a geological-hydrological base on which the city emerged. This is an important factor because of swampy areas which existed in late Medieval and post-Medieval period, that might have limited the settlement of certain parts of the territory for antique inhabitants. Other research questions include the exact look of the antique and late antique fortification, sequences of building and reparations, the question of the disposition and function of the buildings within the fortress, whether there was an original military fortification that became a reinforced city; the relations with surrounding settlements, exact traces of magistral and vicinal roads, city water supply.

In the context of early Christianity, the basic question is the exact ubication of the cathedral church. The limited space of the *Naissus* fortress did not allow for the building of a large number of churches in this area. They were most likely outside the city walls. Therefore, the finding of five basilicas from the period of IV-VI century on the area of Jagodin mala is not surprising. The late Antique *Naissus* was a city of heterogenic social, economic, religious and political structure and only with new discoveries in archaeology, history of architecture and art, anthropology and related disciplines, it will be possible to make a more complete picture on complex times and achievements that the inhabitants of *Naissus* left on the city territory, in which the shaping of an early Christian church and her adherent members also made part.

⁶² PETROVIĆ 1979, pp. 91-93, nos. 50-53.

⁶³ JEREMIĆ 2013c, pp. 35-36, with earlier references.

⁶⁴ ZOTOVIĆ 1986, p. 54.

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Fig. 1 - Late Antique provinces in the central Balkans with the location of Naissus (Niš, Serbia) (after: Jeremić 2013b and Stamenković 2012, fig. 2).



Fig. 2 - Necropolis in Jagodin mala, Naissus – situational plan (after: Jeremić 2013b, fig. 3).

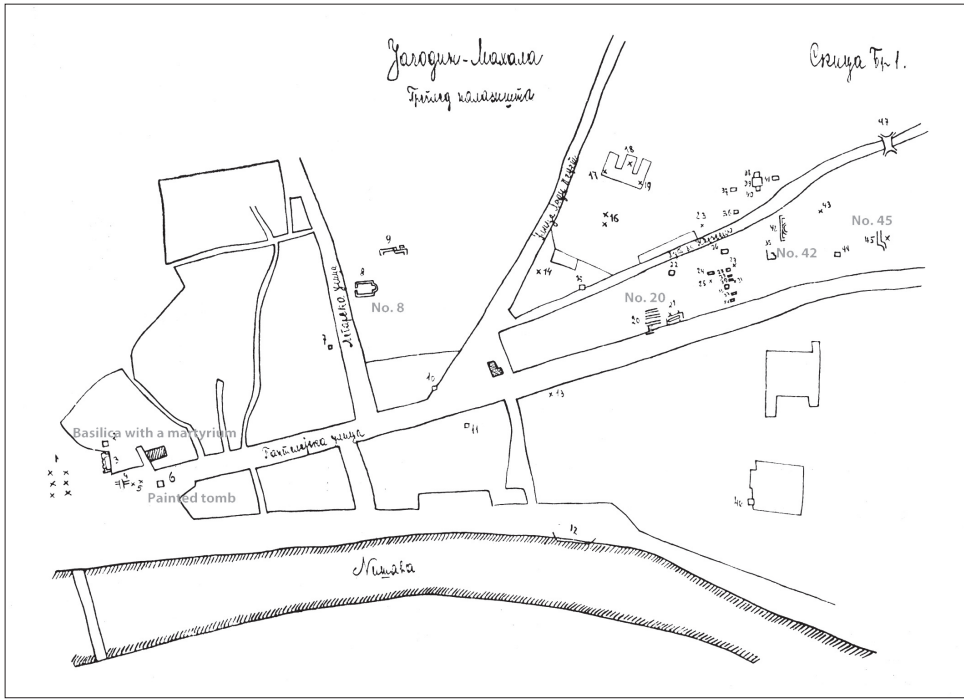


Fig. 3 - Situational plan of Jagodin mala necropolis after excavation 1932-1933 (after: Oršić Slavetić 1934, fig. 1).

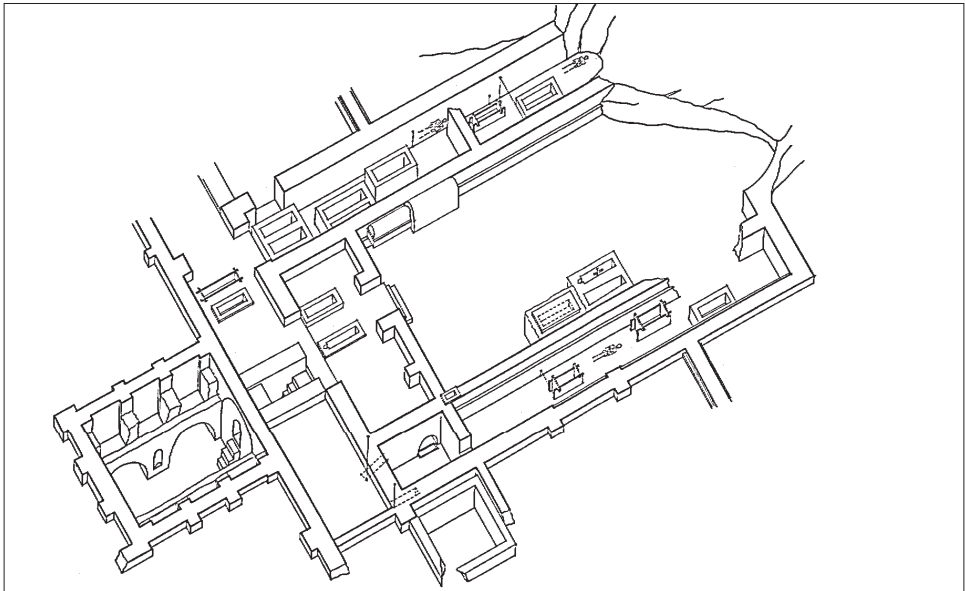


Fig. 4 - Basilica with the crypt. Axonometry (drawing Vera Tomašević, documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade).



Fig. 5 - Basilica with the crypt. View of the crypt from the exonartex (photo Zoran Radosavljević-Kiki, Institute for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Niš).



Fig. 6 - Jewellery from the tomb G-66 discovered in 2012 (photo Zoran Radosavljević-Kiki, Institute for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Niš).



Fig. 7 - A Christogram from the tomb discovered in 2006 (photo Zoran Radosavljević-Kiki, Institute for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Niš).



Fig. 8 - Domed tomb 1 discovered in 2012. View from the nord-east. Benetton Serbia (photo Zoran Radosavljević-Kiki, Institute for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Niš).



Fig. 9 - Domed tomb 2 discovered in 2012. View from the nord-east. Benetton Serbia (photo Zoran Radosavljević-Kiki, Institute for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Niš).



Fig. 10 - Domed tomb 2 discovered in 2012. Details of the masonry. Benetton Serbia (photo Zoran Radosavljević-Kiki, Institute for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Niš).