

## EPIGRAPHY *IN SITU* IN ANCIENT LIBURNIA AND IAPODIA

### Contextualizing Epigraphic Formulae in the Northwestern Territories of Roman Dalmatia

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The STTL (*Sit Tibi Terra Levis*) project investigates recurring epigraphic formulae in Roman funerary inscriptions from ancient Liburnia and Iapodia—territories that embody a fragmented yet rich epigraphic record within Roman Dalmatia (fig. 1). Within this framework, the present research—funded by the Croatian Science Foundation (HRZZ) through the MOBDOL Mobility Programme (Inbound Mobility of Senior Research Assistants)—focuses on exploring the relationship between epigraphic evidence and its archaeological context.

While it is widely acknowledged that inscriptions—like other small archaeological artifacts—can often "travel" far from their original contexts, with only a few discovered within primary archaeological deposits, this research places particular emphasis on out-of-context epigraphy. It aims to identify indicators that enable us to reconnect inscriptions to their original settings. Such indicators can be derived directly from the material characteristics of the inscriptions (their forms, dimensions, and material) and/or from their present context, which reflects well-documented practices such as *spolia* reuse or the formation of small, local collections with varying degrees of archaeological and historical documentation. This approach provides a nuanced understanding of how inscriptions, even when removed from their original funerary contexts, serve as crucial markers for reconstructing historical landscapes that are otherwise fragmented or lost. In doing so, these inscriptions help bridge gaps in the archaeological and historical record, allowing for a more integrated and contextualized interpretation of sites and practices that might otherwise remain isolated.

#### Study Objectives

- **Reevaluate Excavation Records:** Systematically update and integrate disparate data from necropolis excavations to refine our understanding of the original contexts in which inscriptions were discovered.
- **Examine Funerary Typologies:** Analyze various burial forms and practices to trace the evolution and complexity of the funerary landscape.
- **Contextualize Epigraphic Formulae:** Reinterpret epigraphic texts by correlating them with available archaeological and regional data to detect patterns that may reveal local funerary practices and cultural traditions.

#### Methodology

An interdisciplinary approach is adopted, integrating archaeology, landscape studies, epigraphy, and the history of epigraphic collections to address the challenges posed by fragmented and incomplete data. This involves:

- **Comprehensive Data Revision:** Reviewing all extant excavation records from necropolises in ancient Liburnia and Iapodia. This process incorporates both classical sources and recent fieldwork to reconstruct the original contexts of the inscriptions with maximum accuracy.
- **Typological Analysis of Funerary Practices:** Given the rarity of well-documented *in situ* inscriptions, a detailed study of burial typologies is essential. This analysis helps trace the evolving dynamics of funerary customs and identify regional variations.
- **Contextual Correlation:** By integrating inscriptions with ancillary contextual data—such as their spatial relationships with known burial sites or architectural features—this study proposes parameters for identifying previously unrecognized archaeological sites and funerary areas. Although interpretative, this approach serves as a valuable proxy for reconstructing historical landscapes in the absence of comprehensive stratigraphic data.
- **Interdisciplinary Synthesis:** By combining epigraphic analysis with archaeological data, a long-term landscape perspective, and the study of reuse and collection practices, this approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the cultural environment of Roman Dalmatia, underscoring the role of inscriptions as key indicators for reconstructing the various regional settings within the Roman province.

#### Case Study: In situ / Out-of-Context Epigraphy on the Island of Pag

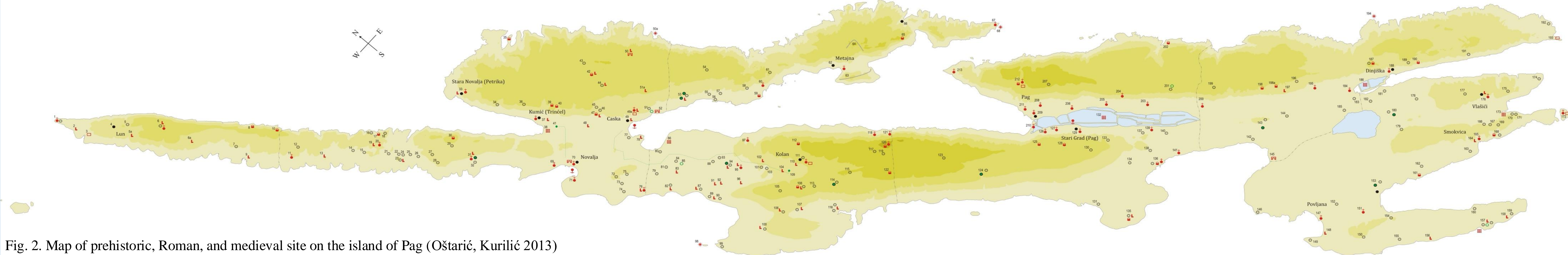


Fig. 2. Map of prehistoric, Roman, and medieval site on the island of Pag (Oštarić, Kurilić 2013)

The island of Pag, located in the northern Adriatic Sea, serves as an ideal case study and testing ground for this research (fig. 2). Its strategic position and rich, multi-layered historical record render it pivotal for understanding Roman Liburnia.

Pag is abundant in archaeological remains spanning from prehistory to the medieval period, with numerous sites cataloged in recent studies (Oštarić, Kurilić 2013). A focal point is the site of Caska Bay, where a substantial Roman necropolis has been identified (figs. 3-5). Its stratigraphic excavation provides nuanced insights into local funerary practices and their evolution over time (Kurilić, Serventi 2018). These findings, which include inscriptions discovered *in situ* (fig. 6), illuminate the broader epigraphic habits of Roman Liburnia, offering a valuable comparative framework for assessing regional patterns of commemoration and social identity.

In contrast, within the nearby settlement of Novalja, the *Stomorica* collection offers an alternative perspective. Established through the efforts of local historian J. Kunkera (1914–1983) (<https://hbl.lzmk.hr/clanak/kunkera-josip>), this collection features inscriptions that have been displaced from their original contexts, collectively embodying the challenges inherent in reconstructing the historical landscape from such material. The diversity of the preserved inscriptions, their extensive chronological span, and the sheer volume of material together hint at the richness and complexity of the island's epigraphic heritage (fig. 7).



Figs. 3-5. Archaeological excavations at the necropolis of Caska. Stratigraphic phases of the excavation of tomb 4 (© Caska Necropolis)

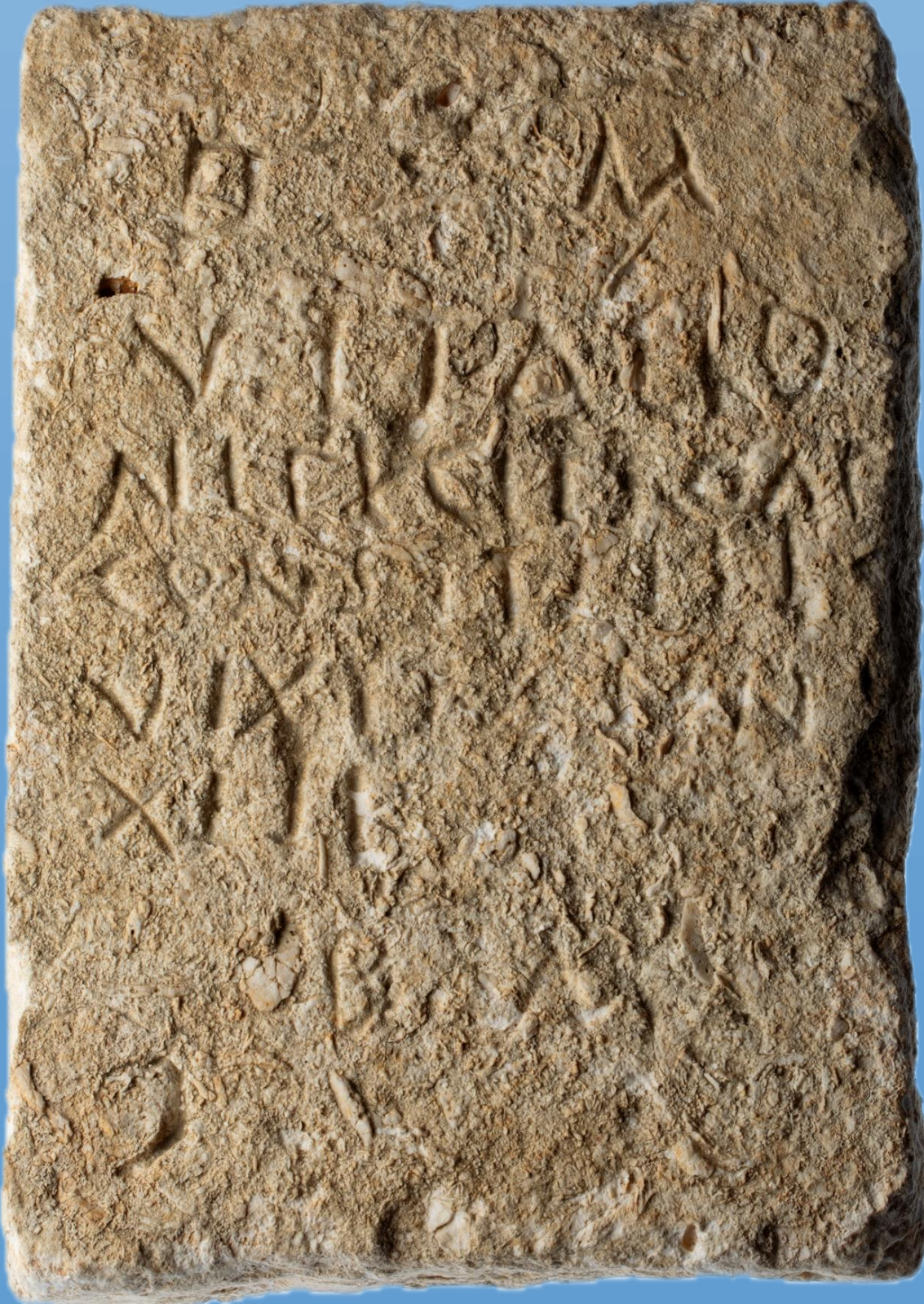


Fig. 6. Inscription of Vitalio, from tomb 4 at the necropolis of Caska (© Caska Necropolis)

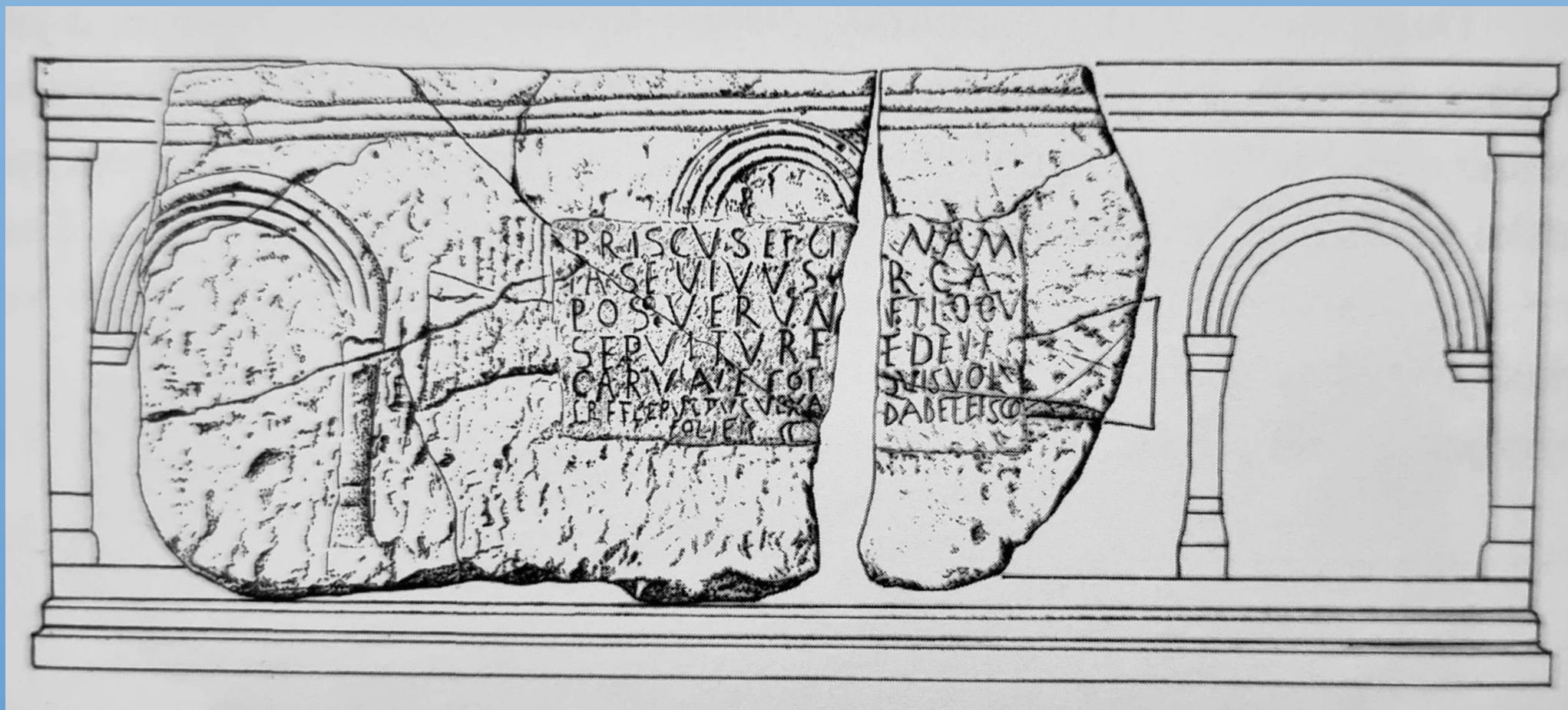


Fig. 7. Graphic reconstruction of the sarcophagus of Priscus and Cinnamia, housed in the *Stomorica* collection of Novalja (Kurilić 2007)

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