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## DOMESTIC ALTARS FROM RESNIK

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**T**he author gives an analysis of stone altars found during the archeological excavations in 2007 at Resnik. The altars were found in situ during the exploration of the houses. They can be approximately dated to 2-1 century BC.

**Key words:** Resnik, miniature altar, house

During the entire year of 2007 the archeological department of the Municipal Museum of Kaštela was conducting rescue archaeological excavations at the antique site of Resnik.<sup>1</sup> On that occasion somewhat more than 1000 m<sup>2</sup> was explored, and a 200 m long trench in direction east – west, approximately 5 m wide and 2 m deep, was dug. A regular raster of houses and streets was discovered. The settlement has two phases: the first one, Hellenistic, from the 2-1 century BC and the second one, Roman, from the 1-5/6 century AD<sup>2</sup>. Five stone altars in total were found inside the remains of few Hellenistic houses.

### Catalog: 1.

material: stone, domestic

dimensions: height: 13,9 cm ; Ø (down): 10,4 cm; (up): 9,4 cm; focus (Ø /dept): 5,8 x 1,7 cm

description:

Massive column-like altar, decorated with shallow profiles, slightly narrowing towards the top. Crenellation is standing out and the focus is beaten, and there are visible traces of cracks which can be related to sacrificial burning. There is a square cavity (l x w: 1,7 x 1,7 cm, dept. 0,9 cm) at the bottom side of the circular base, and it can be assumed that it served to attach the



stone to the lathe wheel when the altar was being made. Along the entire height of the altar about 2 cm wide burning marks are visible. Greater part of the base is damaged, but it was reconstructed.

1 Kamenjarin I. - Šuta I. 2008, Kaštel Štafilić – Resnik, HAG 4/2007, p. 458-463, Zagreb

2 Z. Brusić: Resnik: hidroarheological research, Kaštela 2004; Kirigin B: Resnik-antičko nalazište pod morem i na kopnu u Kaštelanskom zaljevu, Obavijesti hrvatskog arheološkog društva 1/1989, Zagreb 1989, p. 24-28; Kamenjarin I. 2005: Resnik - zaštitna istraživanja i konzervatorski radovi, Hrvatski arheološki godišnjak 1/2004, p. 225-226, Zagreb; Kamenjarin I. 2006, Resnik - zaštitna iskopavanje, Hrvatski arheološki godišnjak 2/2005, 356-58, Zagreb



### Catalog 2.

material: stone, domestic

dimensions: height/length/width: 18,4 x 10,4 x 9,6cm;

focus (Ø/dept): 7,8 x 1,5 cm

description:

The altar has a trapezoid base. There is a trapezoid cavity (2,00 x 1,5 cm; dept. 1,2 - 1,4 cm) at the bottom side of the base, which was used to attach it to the lathe wheel. There is a double torus rising from the base (the upper one is narrower than the bottom one), as well as one column which has a prominent rib on the lower half, and is narrowing towards the top (down: Ø 6,2 cm, up: Ø 5,4 cm). At the top of the column there are two rings (anuli) with square abacus on top of them and a concave circular focus with double profile on top of the abacus. Burning marks are visible at one end of the focus. At one side there is a slight damage to the abacus and the corner of the base.



### Catalog 3.

material: limestone

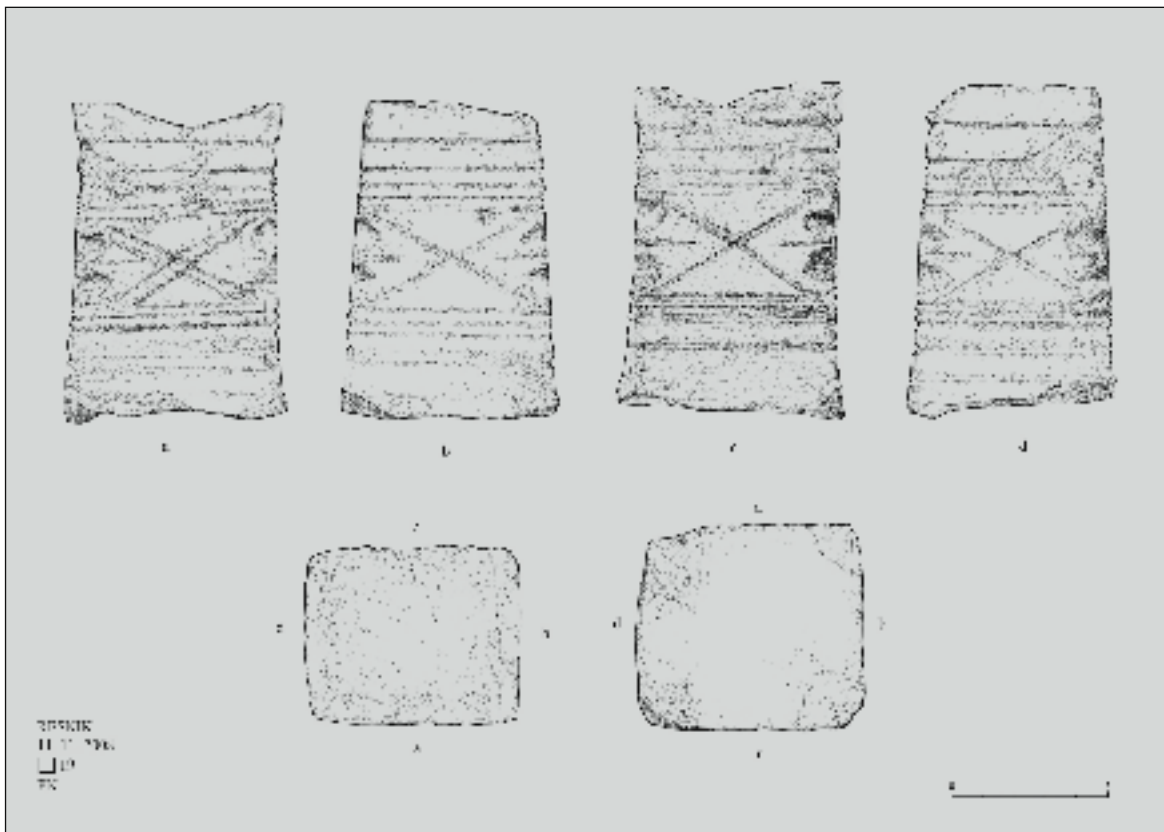
dimensions: height: 11 cm; length/width (down): 7,5 x

6,5 cm; (up): 6,9 x 5,4 cm; focus (length/width/dept):

4,9 x 3,6 x 0,5 cm

description:

The altar is shaped as a vertically aligned parallelepiped. The middle parts of the side surfaces are decorated with crossed lines which resemble the letter X. Only the front surface is decorated with crossed double lines. Besides that, horizontal lines were also carved at the height of the intersections of the lines. At the edges of the side surfaces, on their middle parts, there are pairs of shell-like cavities. Under and above the middle part horizontal lines with 0,5 cm wide space between them were carved along the entire width. Lower profile consists of a low plinth with a sporadically preserved edge, posted on four legs, one of which is partially preserved and visible; the rest are beaten. Upper part of the profile has a protruding abacus, and the focus is concave. The bottom and the upper surface is damaged. Front surface has traces of burning.



### Catalog 4.

material: stone, fine white marble

dimensions: height/ Ø (down): 11,5/ 8,3 cm; Ø column: 6,3 cm; focus (Ø /dept): 6,2/1,4 cm

description:

Column-like altar with a damaged base. Plinth is entirely beaten, while double torus (the upper one is narrower than the bottom one) is almost entirely preserved. An undecorated column rises from the torus. The upper profile is identical to the lower one, but with a reverse arrangement, and it is more preserved. A raised focus is placed on it and it is circular in shape and slightly concave; a larger part of it is damaged. This altar doesn't have traces of burning like the rest of them. Lower part of the base is concave.



### Catalog 5.

material: stone

dimension: height/ Ø (down): 14,4 cm / 9,3 cm; focus (Ø): 7,3 cm

description:

Column-like altar with a high circular base profiled with concentric circles. The column is smooth and undecorated. The upper profile is a double astragal, lower of which is wider. The focus is circular, concave, with 3 concentric circles on the edge. Parts of the astragal and the base are damaged. Burning marks can be seen starting from the focus all the way to the base.

### Conclusion

Greeks and Romans performed their religious rituals in multiple ways: in public, in temples and in private, usually in their houses. The center of every worshiping was sacrifice. Burnt offerings, libations and burning incense were offered to gods. Gifts were also being left at the altars. Non-blood sacrifices could have been first fruits (*primitiae*), salted emmer wheat grits (*mola salsa*), dishes (*dapes*), sacrificial pastries (*libam*, *placentae*), milk, wine, incense (*odores*). Sacrificial animals (*hostiae*, *victimae*) had to be without flaws and not used for labor previously. To each sacrifice a believer would add a spoken prayer, which had a certain pattern during festivities, and on smaller occasions it was inspired by need.<sup>3</sup> Sacrifices and worshiping could have had a public character as a part of the official, state act. Public ceremony was held in temples and at large altars in front of the temple. During the ritual individuals would privately ask gods for various favors or they would thank them for the ones previously granted. The private character of the appeal to gods usually took place at home. The Romans would start their day in their family circle, in front of *lararium*, seeking protection from their domestic Lares for their labor and events that were supposed to occur on that day. The *lararium* was more luxurious

with the wealthy and more modest with the poor, most probably only a domestic fireplace. The altars represent the most direct testimony of the cult and as a rule give various information of substantial, formal and contextual nature.<sup>4</sup>

Altars discovered at Resnik belong to domestic, so called miniature altars (up to 20 cm in height).<sup>5</sup> What they have in common is their affiliation to the first phase of the settlement (2-1 century BC) as well as the fact that they were discovered inside the houses. The excavations of 2007 covered a narrow, 5 m wide trench, which was not enough to determine the exact position of the domestic altars which were found inside the Resnik houses.

Although they all seem different at first glance, we can distinguish two different types. Only one specimen is of the first type, and it looks as a raised square. Four specimens are of the second type and they all have a column-like appearance in common.

### First type - square shaped altar

It is made of sandstone. All four sides are decorated with a crossed lines motive. It can be compared with five altars from the island of Vis, or respectively Issa. Unfortunately, the specimens from Vis were discovered

<sup>3</sup> Musić 1910, p. 79,155-160

<sup>4</sup> Pavić 2010, note 3

<sup>5</sup> Pavić 2010, p. 293

a long time ago and published sporadically, without the context of the findings. They were dealt with only recently by Izida Pavić<sup>6</sup> who tried to find out which gods the sacrifices were given to on those altars. She lays out the possibility that all of the specimens from Vis were dedicated to a Syrian goddess (one of them has an inscription dedicated to her). According to this thesis, the specimen from Resnik could also be connected to the same cult circle. However, the state of the exploration at Resnik, doesn't allow any conclusions about the presence of any cult, even that of a Syrian goddess, yet. But still, the fact that Resnik (antique name Siculi) was in fact a colony of Issa needs to be taken into consideration. A greater number of column-like altars found at Resnik show that its inhabitants preferred a different kind of domestic altars from the inhabitants of Issa. Approximate datation of the Vis specimens (2 century BC) matches the approximate datation of the Resnik specimen.

## Second type: column-like altars

There are four altars in this second group and their appearance resembles a column. Three are made of domestic stone and the fourth one is made of marble, unlike any other found at the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea so it can be assumed that it was imported. It also stands out from the other specimens because of the fact that it is the only one which doesn't have any burning marks on it. All of the altars in this group are very much alike to one another. All are more or less narrowing towards the top. The altar which is the most similar to the imported one is one at the catalog number 1, which

is lacking in finesse of its crafting, is wider in diameter (widest of them all) and gives the impression of a more robust piece. It can be assumed that it was made in Resnik as a copy of the altar at the catalog number 4 ('imported'). The altar number 5 has a more indented crenellation, it is more elegant, and it also resembles the altar number 4. Both originate from the same house, but not from the same room. Altar number 2 has a column on a square base. A silver Republican Denarius dating from the year 128 BC was found near it, so this is *terminus ante quem* for this altar, but it could also be for the other two (cat. number 4 and number 5) which belong to the same stratigraphic unit. All of them were found close to walls, together with fragments and lids of amphorae, loom weights, spikes and fragments of Hellenistic urn reliefs, and can be dated to the end of the 2 century BC.

Miniature altars didn't always need to be in use,<sup>7</sup> they could have also been votive gifts in temples. However, the burning marks on four out of five altars from Resnik speak to the fact that sacrifices were being offered at this altars. They are too small for blood sacrifices. Therefore they must have been used to give non-blood sacrifices (fruit, wheat, pastries and so on) or as censers and quite possibly for libations (oil, wine).

It is questionable if diversity of the altars from Resnik can be related to the chronology and cult diversity, or to the taste of merchants and clients.

In future, whole individual houses at Resnik should be specifically explored, and then it will be possible to tell more about the arrangement of the rooms within the houses as well as about domestic shrines with altars.

<sup>6</sup> Pavić 2010

<sup>7</sup> Pavić

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## IZVORI

- HAG - Hrvatski arheološki godišnjak, Zagreb  
 Izd. HAD-a - Izdanja Hrvatskog arheološkog društva, Zagreb  
 Obavijesti HAD-a - Obavijesti Hrvatskog arheološkog društva, Zagreb  
 Olynthus 8 - Excavations at Olynthus 8, Baltimore 1938  
 VAHD - Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku, Split

## SAŽETAK

## KUĆNI ŽRTVENICI IZ RESNIKA

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Među mnogim artefaktima koji su pronađeni tokom zaštitnih arheoloških istraživanja na lokalitetu Resnik koja su se odvijala 2007 godine izdvajaju se pet kamenih žrtvenika. Kućni žrtvenici iz Resnika pripadaju minijaturnim žrtvenicima koji su služili za libaciju, kađenje i primiošenje nekrvnih žrtvava (npr. kolača). Pronađeni primjerci su na prvi pogled različiti. Možemo ih podijeliti u dva tipa prema svom obliku. Prvi tip ima kvadratični oblik i samo jednog predstavnika (kataloški br. 3). To je uspravni kvadar ukrašen motivom ukriženih linija u srednjim bočnim plohama. Usporedba je moguća s isejskim primjercima te se datira u 2 st pr. Kr. Pronađen je unutar kuće ali zbog naravi istraživanja ne može se kazati gdje točno. Drugi tip žrtvenika ima 4 primjerka i zajedničko im je stupoliki oblik. Sužuju se prema vrhu više ili manje. Tragovi gareži vidljivi su ili na fokusu ili na stupovima. Kataloški br. 4 uvezen je – izrađen je od kamena kakvog nema na istočnoj obali Jadrana i jedini nema tragova gareži. Pronađeni su unutar kuća s unutrašnje strane zidova. Uz žrtvenike 4 i 5 pronađen je srebrni republikanski denar iz 128 g. pr. Kr. te uz svih ulomaka helenističke reljefne keramike, ulomaka amfora i poklopaca amfora što sve dozvoljava datiranje žrtvenika u 2. st pr. Kr.