

# Stone Monuments from Carnuntum and Surrounding Areas (Austria) - Petrological Characterization and Quarry Location in a Historical Context

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# ASMOSIA XI

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## CONTENT

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

# STONE MONUMENTS FROM CARNUNTUM AND SURROUNDING AREAS (AUSTRIA) – PETROLOGICAL CHARACTERIZATION AND QUARRY LOCATION IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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## Abstract

The currently ongoing project on *Stone Monuments and Stone Quarrying in the Carnuntum – Vindobona Area* (FWF 26368-G21) focuses on petrological and litho-stratigraphic investigations of well-dated Roman stone objects. The majority of the examined monuments are made from local Neogene limestone varieties, sedimentary breccias and sandstones – lithologies widespread in the surroundings of Carnuntum, the edge of the Vienna Basin and the western margin of the Pannonian Basin.

Analyses of historical maps and high resolution airborne laser scans (ALS) are used to detect potential ancient quarry areas, which are ground-checked by geological methods. So far, ancient quarrying areas in the immediate surroundings of Carnuntum and in the Leitha Mountains have been localized, providing deposits of different algal limestones and calcareous arenites.

This interdisciplinary approach promises to provide insight, not only into the provenance of stone material but also into matters of transportation, workshops and economic interaction between Carnuntum, Vindobona and the hinterland.

## Keywords

Pannonia, Roman quarries, Neogene

## Introduction

Carnuntum is situated on the right bank of the Danube River, on the northern border of the Roman Empire, some 40 kilometers east of Vienna (Roman Vindobona). Carnuntum was the capital of the Roman province of Pannonia Superior. In the middle of the first

century AD, a permanent legionary fortress was built, and step by step, Carnuntum became a flourishing metropolis, which existed until the 5<sup>th</sup> c. AD.<sup>1</sup>

The arrival of the Roman legions involved – among many other things – demand for construction material, including stone, which until then had not been used by the local population.<sup>2</sup> From Carnuntum we have a record of far more than 2000 stone artefacts from Roman times, and the collection is still increasing. This huge number only includes decorated monuments. Over 770 objects related to religion have been published recently in the new volume of *Corpus signorum imperii romani*, including monuments of different types, such as statues, altars, inscriptions or architectural decoration.<sup>3</sup>

About 10 to 16 % of these artefacts are carved in white marble, a material which had to be imported to Carnuntum, mainly from the south-eastern Alpine region, and even from Mediterranean countries.<sup>4</sup>

One of the objectives of our current interdisciplinary project<sup>5</sup> is to learn more about the properties and the provenance of local and regional limestones used in

1 STIGLITZ *et al.* 1977; JOBST 1983; KANDLER *et al.* 2004; HUMER (ed.) 2006; HUMER, KREMER (eds.) 2011; GUGL *et al.* 2015.

2 MOSSER 2003; KREMER 2013.

3 KREMER 2012.

4 KREMER *et al.* 2009; UNTERWURZACHER *et al.* 2010; UHLIR, UNTERWURZACHER in: KREMER 2012.

5 Austrian Science Fund (FWF) P 26368-21: “Stone Monuments and Stone Quarrying in the Carnuntum – Vindobona Area” (G. Kremer). KREMER 2016; KREMER, KITZ 2016.

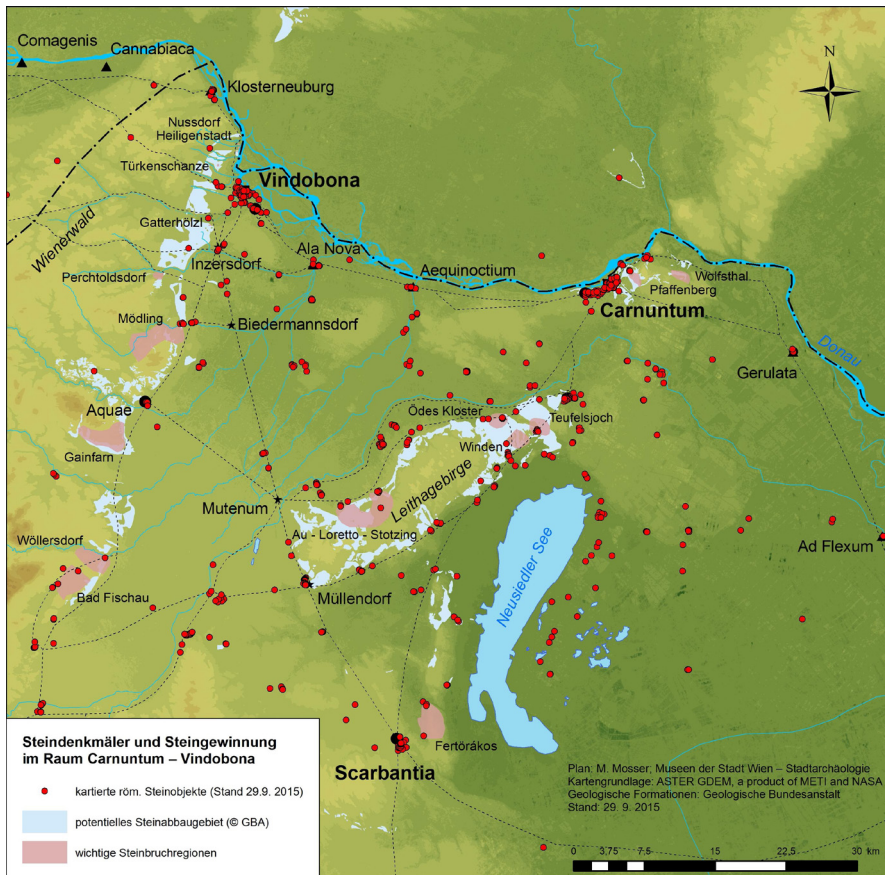


Fig. 1. Project area with find-spots of Roman stone artefacts and possible quarry areas (map: M. Mosser)

Roman times, quarried at a distance of less than 50 km from Carnuntum. The corresponding and complementary part of this project, dealing with the stone artefacts from the settlement and legionary fortress of Vindobona/Wien, is presented by Michaela Kronberger *et al.*<sup>6</sup>

The area under investigation is the hinterland of Carnuntum and Vindobona, up to the neighbouring town of Scarbantia (modern Sopron) south of Carnuntum, situated directly on the so-called Amber-Road<sup>7</sup>, which connected the North Sea with Italy. Quarry regions and potential quarrying sites are located both to the East and to the West of Carnuntum (Fig. 1). One of our research foci is to compare the materials used in the urban centers Carnuntum and Vindobona with those used in the rural hinterland, to assign the Roman monuments to their respective provenance regions, to possibly identify ancient quarries themselves and to draw historico-cultural conclusions from these data. For these goals we have combined geological and archaeological methods as well as approaches with constant exchange of information and data in progress, aiming for open-minded, interdisciplinary progress in this research.

6 See in this volume. KRONBERGER *et al.* 2010; KRONBERGER *et al.* 2016.

7 e.g. DRAGANITS *et al.* 2008a.

### Geological outline, Neogene sedimentary rocks and quarries

This study investigates Roman building and decorative stones in the northern part of the Roman province Upper Pannonia. The rock types covered by our research are mainly of Middle to Upper Miocene sedimentary rocks comprising fossiliferous red algae limestones, calcarenites of various kinds, different dolomite breccias, various conglomerates and some types of siliciclastic dominated sandstones. They crop out in certain areas on the rim of the southern Vienna Basin and on the former western margin of the Pannonian Basin. These lithologies are also found in several hills within this area (Leitha Mountains, Hainburg Mountains, Rust Hills). Especially on these former islands carbonate platforms developed, reaching maximum thicknesses of some tens of metres. The geological map of the research area in Figure 2 is based on published maps and shows the above-mentioned Neogene deposits. They are known as resources for the extraction of building stones and building material evident from quarries and pits. The localizations of the extraction sites are taken from the quarry archive and database of the Austrian Geological Survey, where information on mineral resources and quarry histories have been collected. This data stock is addressed for



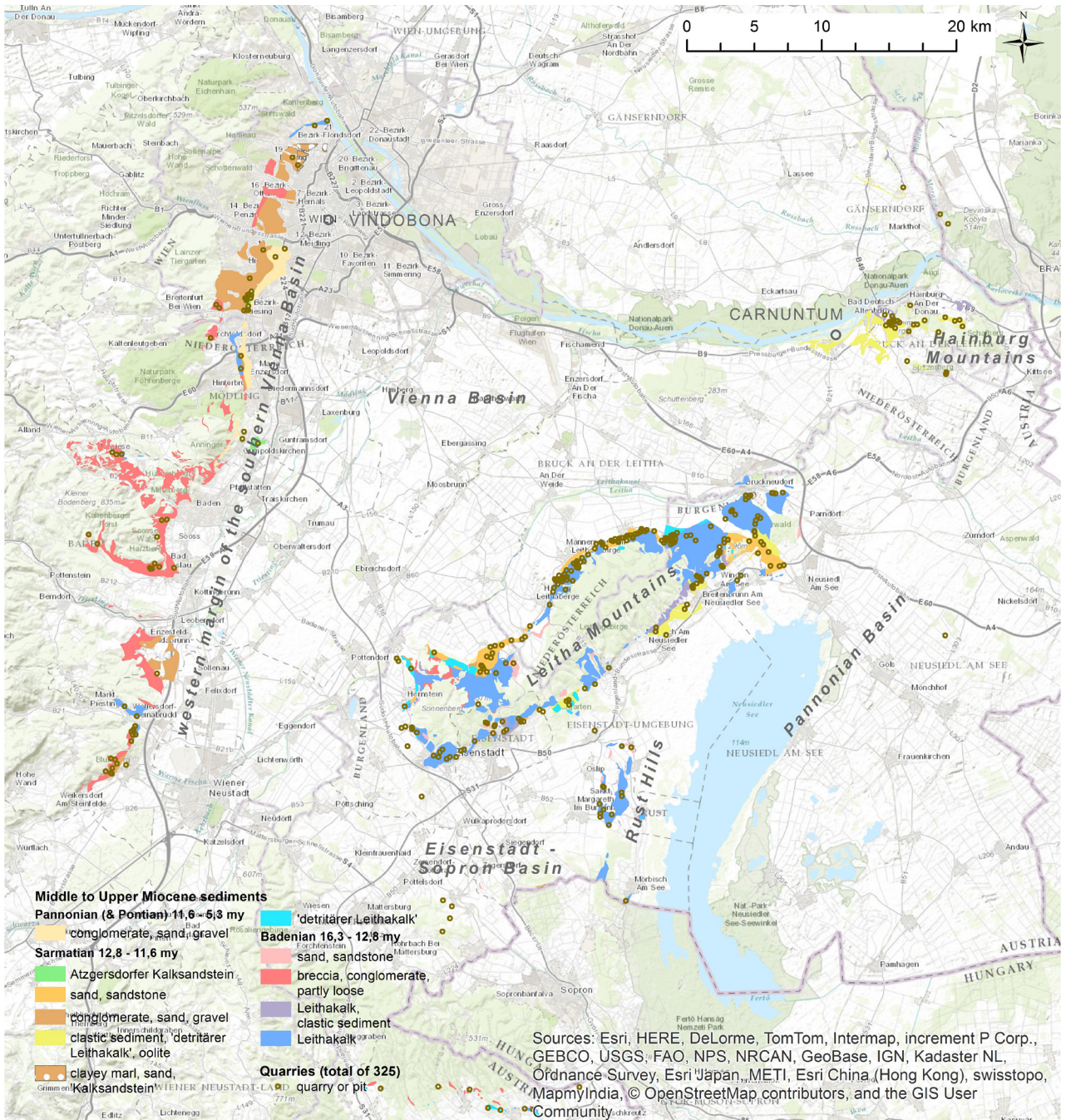


Fig. 2. Targeted geological units and distribution of pits and quarries within the outline of the project area bounded to the north by the Danube (map: B. Moshammer)

selecting quarries with respect to our detailed comparative petrographic analyses of rock types between the samples from the quarries and the investigated stone artefacts.

Among the given sedimentary rocks we are investigating the calcareous algae limestones, the Leitha limestones ('Leithakalk') and related calcarenites (detritärer Leithakalk') from the Middle to Upper Miocene of Central Paratethys named after their occurrences in the Leitha Mountains (compare Fig. 2). Leitha limestones have proved to be very important resources for building and sculpture stones, exploited since at least Roman

time<sup>8</sup>. Today there remains only one active production site for natural building and sculpture stone, which is the huge so-called 'Roman quarry' at St. Margarethen in the Rust Hills. A few other sites with active quarrying in Leitha limestone for other end uses are notable as they incorporated the sites of important historical quarries.<sup>9</sup> One is the large quarry for cement and previous lime

8 MOSHAMMER, ROHATSCH 2015.

9 MOSHAMMER 2013.

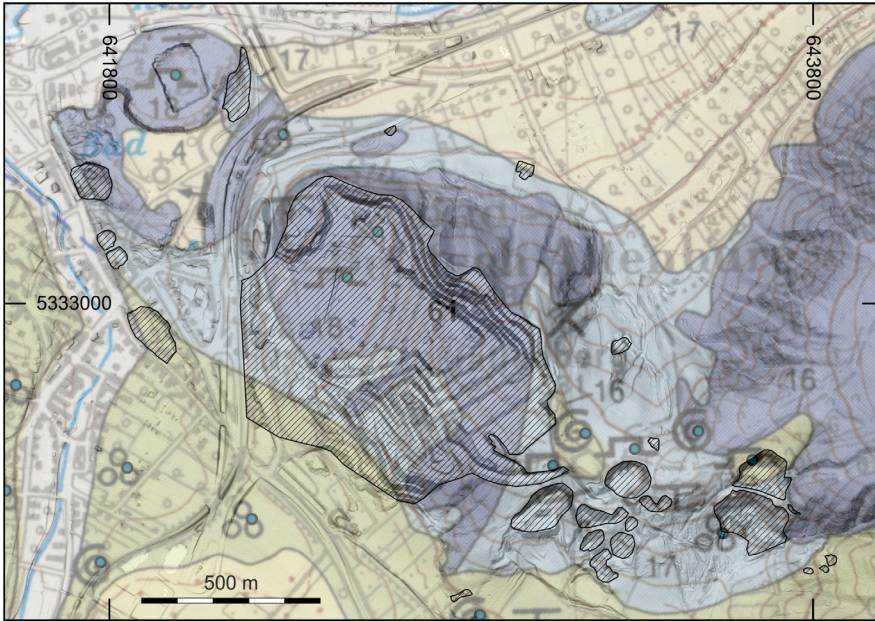


Fig. 3. Airborne laser scanning topography, and active and abandoned quarries in the area of the north-western part of the Hainburg Mountains (Pfaffenberg); the geological map is taken from FUCHS, WESSELY 1985



Fig. 4. Example of a weathered quarry face with rare tool marks in the quarry area from figure 3 that could be of possible Roman origin

manufacture at Mannersdorf. Other examples are the former lime, chalk and current filler production quarry at Müllendorf and the large quarry area in the northwestern part of the Hainburg Mountains, which completely removed former Neogene limestone quarries and at present produces dolomite aggregates from the underlying, slightly metamorphous Mesozoic carbonates. For these reasons it is essential to reconstruct the former quarriescapes from various sources. Therefore, airborne laser scanning topographic data, geological maps and historical documents are combined with historical maps and geological field work. Figure 3 shows one result of such a combination for the area of Bad Deutsch-Altenburg on the northwestern boundary of the Hainburg Mountains, near the important Roman army camp and city of Carnuntum. The outlines

of the active open mine and the remaining older quarries and spoil heaps are hatched. The Mesozoic meta-limestone and meta-dolomites are indicated in darker blue whereas the sedimentary rocks above are shown in light colours: blue for the Badenian sediments with 'Leithakalk' among others and green for the Sarmatian including 'detritärer Leithakalk'<sup>10</sup>. Field work observations suggest that quarrying started rather in the lower areas of the hills, which means that the older sites are mostly covered by spoil from the ongoing later extractions. In spite of this, traces of very old quarrying might still be preserved. The much weathered vertical tool marks on a rudimentary quarry face in

10 FUCHS, WESSELY 1985.

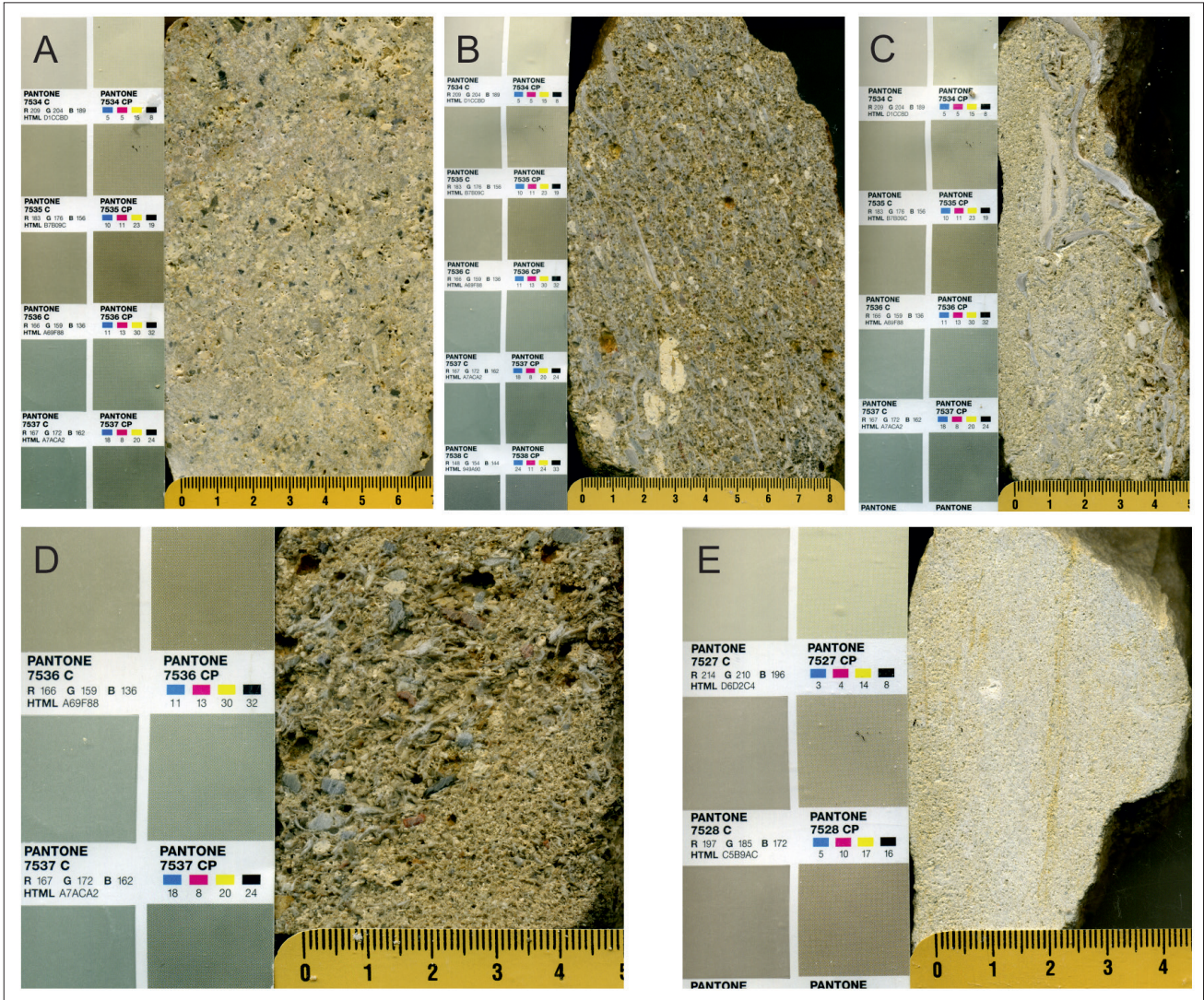


Fig. 5 A-E. Polished slabs of Leitha limestone samples from old quarries of Pfaffenberg area corresponding to stone monuments from Carnuntum; explanations are given in text

this area shown in Figure 4 are such an example. In addition, this outcrop consists of a type of Leitha limestone which is a good match for a couple of stone monuments from Carnuntum.

**Methods for stone provenancing, examples of Leitha limestone types near Carnuntum**

According to the determined rock types derived from the stone monument investigation, rock samples from relevant quarries are taken and prepared. In accordance with the example from the nearest possible stone resources of Carnuntum given in Figure 3 a choice of polished surfaces of Leitha limestone types sampled in the old quarries is presented in Figure 5. Both sample preparation and pictured scans are provided by team members Barbara Hodits and Andreas Rohatsch from

Vienna Technical University. We aim to describe the samples macroscopically as well as on the basis of thin section, geochemical and petrophysical analyses. Stone artefacts made of fine grained sedimentary rocks qualify for analysis with a portable XRF aiming at hints in their chemical compositions. Otherwise the investigation of the Roman stone objects is based mainly on the surficial macroscopic determination. If they show altered or contaminated surfaces the conclusions are limited. Thus it is important to discover distinguishing diagnostic characteristics of the different rock types. The range and definition of the lithotypes from the stone objects is still a work in progress.

The following lithological descriptions of the five samples pictured in Figure 5 give an impression of rock types that are essential as stone materials for the monuments in Carnuntum. Figures 5A–D serve as



Fig. 6.  
Building inscription of a *centuria* of the Legio XV Apollinaris, found in the legionary fortress of Carnuntum (CIL III, 13479; Arch. Museum Carnuntinum, Bad Deutsch-Altenburg)

examples of different kinds of Leitha limestone we refer to as 'local types of Leitha limestone' and are supposedly of Badenian age. Although the rock sample in Figure 5E also comes from the same area near Carnuntum, it is not very specific for this area as it crops out for example in the Leitha Mountains as well. The sample of Figure 5E represents a calcarenite supposedly of Sarmatian age.

Figure 5A: Cream to beige-coloured red algae biogenic limestone (rudstone) with prominent dark blue extraclasts (mainly meta-dolomite). The red algae are unattached or of rhodolithic growth forms. Further bioclasts reveal bryozoans, echinoderms, foraminifers and molluscs. The components vary in grain size from coarse sand to fine gravel. A groundmass of fine carbonate sand is present. Sorting and abrasion are weakly developed, stratification is poor. Open pores are particularly related to the coralline algae.

Figure 5B: Cream to beige-coloured oyster bioclastic limestone (rudstone) / coarse coquina. Well aligned elongated oyster shells as well as shells hashed up to coarse sand grain size dominate, followed by strongly abraded red algae fragments, extraclasts of grey and red-coloured carbonates and other bioclastic grains. Pervasive porosity as fine sediment is lacking, sorting and alignment of the components are well developed. That altogether reflects a high energetic depositional environment. The sample was taken from the old quarry face in Figure 4.

Figure 5C: Cream to beige and light blue coloured bioclastic limestone (rudstone to grainstone) with a coarse layer containing broken and unbroken oyster shells. Striking encrustations from bryozoans and some red algae occur, the sediment shows fining upward and is as porous as usual. This coquina is less reworked than the previous example.

Figure 5D: Brownish-grey porous coarse clastic limestone and fine breccia. Its components are similar to 5B, however, among the meta-carbonate extraclasts, the red coloured meta-limestones are enriched. They are an identification criterion for the northwestern Hainburg Mountains.

Figure 5E: Medium sand sized bioclastic limestone (grainstone), ivory-coloured with light rusty banding, The clasts are composed of red algae, foraminifers, bryozoans, echinoderms, molluscs and others. A tiny rhodolith is visible. The well-sorted and -layered sediment has a fine porosity.

### Archaeological implications from the ongoing evaluations

The study of the archaeological objects themselves and their comparison with geological samples provides first important results. A representative number of about 100 safely dated objects have been selected, for example funerary monuments erected by members of the legions based at Carnuntum during certain, well-defined periods. Among them, a group of early dated slabs for funerary or other inscriptions were erected for or by soldiers of the 15<sup>th</sup> legion, and are therefore dated to between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (Fig. 6).<sup>11</sup> Some of these early funeral slabs comprise an assortment of rock types (compare Figure 5) which indicates a probable provenance from the area of Bad Deutsch-Altenburg – Hundsheimer Berge, only 4 km east-northeast of Carnuntum. There the typical lithologies are porous unsorted clastic limestone to fine breccia composed of mainly coralline algae,

11 MOSSER 2003.



Fig. 7. Funerary slab of Marcus Gavius Cupitus, legionary of the Legio X Gemina (CIL III, 14358/18 a; Arch. Museum Carnuntinum, Bad Deutsch-Altenburg)



Fig. 8. Funerary slab of Matta, from Gols (CIL III, 4392; Burgenl. Landesmuseum Eisenstadt)

characteristic dolomite clasts and minute but specific clasts of a red limestone ('local types of Leitha limestones'). From this geological observation and the scarcity of pre-Roman building stone use we can already conclude that the local quarries in the immediate vicinity of Carnuntum were opened most probably by the Roman military. The rocks of this region east-northeast of Carnuntum are still exploited.

Roman quarries are therefore most likely completely destroyed or covered by spoil. In spite of that, as already mentioned, the location of some pre-Modern quarry sites by geological field-work was possible (Fig. 3, 4). The combination of different generations of historical maps and high resolution airborne laser scanning topography interpretations indicate that the most probable areas for Roman quarry sites are the lower areas directly north and northwest of the Pfaffenberg in Bad Deutsch-Altenburg. Unfortunately, a major part of this area was reshaped for railway and road constructions. Another part is completely covered by vegetation and modern buildings and therefore access has been very limited so far.

Additionally, the lithological types of the funeral slabs of Carnuntum also indicate further quarry regions,

which are not in the immediate surroundings of the capital. The 10<sup>th</sup> legion was based in Carnuntum only for a few years, between 63 and 68 AD, but a group of monuments survived from this period (Fig. 7).<sup>12</sup> They are very similar to each other, not only from a stylistic and typological point of view, but also concerning the rock type which confers to a certain lithotype of Leitha limestone (light, porous grain- and rudstone, predominantly composed of reworked coralline algae, typically with additional quartzite clasts). The material of these slabs can be referred to a region in the northeastern Leitha Mountains, close to the village of Winden, where several quarrying sites are recorded.<sup>13</sup> Therefore the funeral slabs give us information about quarrying activity and probably related workshops in this period, which seem to be closely connected with the military troops.

Another specific group of monuments was erected by the local population and is strikingly different from

12 VORBECK 1980, n. 9–26, 28–30, 262; KRÜGER 1972.

13 ROHATSCH *et al.* 2016.

those from the metropolis, regarding both the figural representations and the technical quality (Fig. 8).<sup>14</sup> They commonly show local Celtic names, and also the characteristic costumes of the region, first of all the representation of women with huge Pannonian caps and their specific jewelry.<sup>15</sup> This population seems to have been concentrated on the western slopes of the Leitha Mountains, where a number of historic quarries are recorded too, and where we assume the existence of several local workshops. Further stone analysis will show whether these observations will be confirmed and if an allocation to specific quarries can be confined.

#### Anticipated archeological objectives

From the synthesis and evaluation of the recorded data we expect insights into the historico-cultural development of the region, such as the organization and evolution of quarries and stonemason workshops in the Carnuntum – Vindobona region, the development of Roman settlements, infrastructure, transportation links and economy of the region<sup>16</sup>. The exchange between the two legionary forts Carnuntum and Vindobona, as well as their relationship to the so-called hinterland will be investigated. Last but not least we also expect some practical benefits, such as new possibilities for the dating of certain monuments, or new information for the improved detection of forgeries.<sup>17</sup>

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14 WEBER-HIDEN 2008; KREMER 2013; KREMER, KITZ 2016.

15 GARBSCH 1965; GARBSCH 1985.

16 Compare with DRAGANITS 2008b.

17 KREMER 2012.

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