

CASKA
COVE

1.

Origin of the name and the historical-geographic framework

Two thousand years ago, in the encyclopedic work *Natural Science* (*Naturalis Historia*), the distinguished Roman writer and scientist Pliny the Elder mentioned the island of Pag, referring to it as *Gissa*, i.e. *Cissa* (read Kisa). What exactly Pliny meant when he wrote *Portunata* or *Portunota* after Cissa even today is a subject of scientific discussion. However, one premise states that it is an adjective denoting Kisa as a settlement that grew up around a port (Lat. *portu nata*) or well known in the Roman world because of that (Lat. *portu nota*).

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The island, now under the name *Sissa*, was also included in the well-known Peutinger map, a travel map originating in the fourth century A.D. Three centuries later it was mentioned in the Ravenna Cosmography by an anonymous cartographer from Ravenna. In the tenth century Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus mentioned it in the form *Kissa*, joined together with the name of the nearby island of Škrde as *Skerdakissa*.

Kisa, an old Mediterranean name of unknown meaning that the native population called the island's most important settlement, was probably located somewhere in the area around Novalja. This name was used for the island until the late Middle Ages. Today, it has been preserved in the name of the cove Caska. Based on linguistic interpretations, it obviously derives from the name *Cissa*. In its adjectival form the name Caska even today points toward an area that belonged to old Kisa.

The Caska cove, only a few kilometers from Novalja and not far from the dynamic Zrće, is located at the northwestern end of the bay of Pag and on the southeastern end of the fertile Novalja plain. The deep Stara Novalja cove on the opposite side of the



Island Ploče

plain and the port of Novalja, which is separated from the plain by the low hill of Močišćak, together with Caska comprise a unique historical-geographic entity. Its center was once located on the hill called Košljun, set on the western edge of the field. From the tip of the hill extends an excellent panorama of all three coves. Its modern name derives from the Roman word *castellione*, which means fort. The names Stara Novalja and Novalja originated from the Latin *navalia*, which means a place for the supply and repair of boats, and sometimes a port used

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in war and not for trading. The sandy and pebbly beaches in the Novalja area were favorable for pulling out boats so it is entirely possible that the arsenals of ancient Kisa were located in such places.

The numerous archaeological remains, visible even today in the area around the cove, bear witness to the use of the Caska area from ancient times to the present day. The particularly intensive life in ancient times, documented through the powerful ruins and several moveable archaeological finds, have for centuries fueled the imagination of the local inhabitants and attracted the attention of travelers. Although often mentioned in literature, it is only in the past decade that they have become the subject of systematic archaeological research, which from year to year changed and enriched the current knowledge about the island's dynamic past.



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2.

Legends

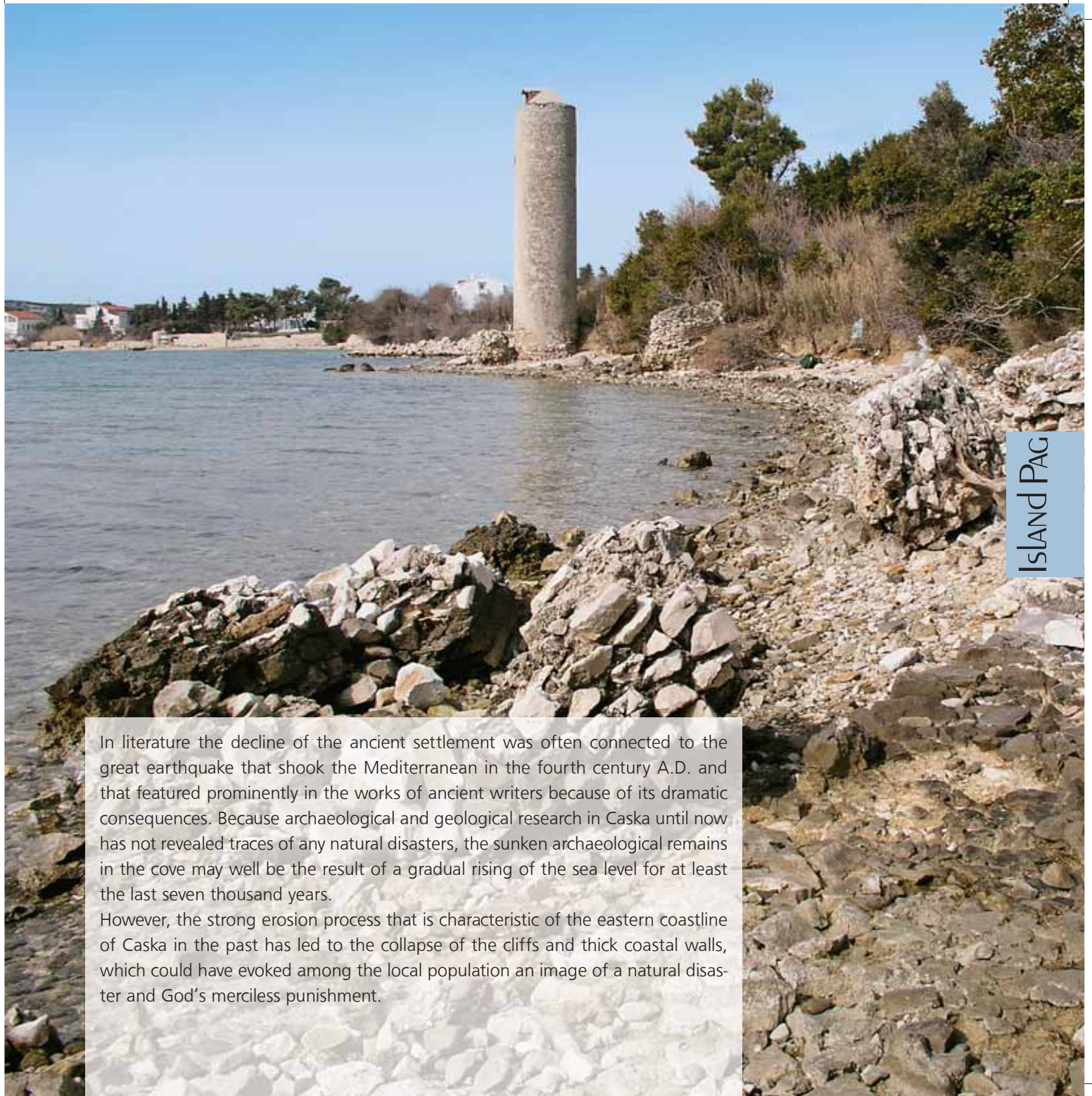
Inspired by the multitude of archaeological finds along the coastline and in the shallow waters of the cove, legends about the dramatic sinking of the famous and rich city of Kisa were passed down orally in the Novalja area for centuries. The most frequently told story was about two sisters, the good sister Bona and the evil sister Mala, and about the angel sent by God to find one good human being among the evil, corrupt population of Kisa. The angel found Bona and ordered her to flee the city, which forever disappeared into the sea in a terrible earthquake as she fled.

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In the second version of the legend, the good sister with her beautiful, healthy children lived in dire poverty, while the evil sister with her pale, sickly children swam in a sea of riches. When the good sister asked her evil sister for help one day, she was rudely refused. God was greatly angered and in retribution sank the entire city, sheltering the good sister and her children on the hill top Sv. Juraj (St. George) beforehand.

In 1968, the local Novalja poet Ivan Šuljić-Iveša wrote three other versions of the legend, stating: "Passing from one person to another, from generation to generation throughout many centuries, it is understandable that the storytellers of the many different nations who inhabited this island through the centuries added things here and there. They each told the story in their own way, according to their own taste, so as to elicit greater sympathy from their listeners; or they added a word here and there, so that over time the stories expanded, but they did not lose their basic foundation."



In literature the decline of the ancient settlement was often connected to the great earthquake that shook the Mediterranean in the fourth century A.D. and that featured prominently in the works of ancient writers because of its dramatic consequences. Because archaeological and geological research in Caska until now has not revealed traces of any natural disasters, the sunken archaeological remains in the cove may well be the result of a gradual rising of the sea level for at least the last seven thousand years.

However, the strong erosion process that is characteristic of the eastern coastline of Caska in the past has led to the collapse of the cliffs and thick coastal walls, which could have evoked among the local population an image of a natural disaster and God's merciless punishment.

3.

Oldest records about the antiquities of Caska

The antiquities of Novalja and Caska entered into travel literature very early on. In the 15th century the renowned humanist Palladio Fusco, in a work entitled *A Description of the Illyrian Coast*, wrote: "The locals claim that the island was earlier called Gisa, and it shows the remains of structures that to the present day are called Gisa."

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Mijat Sabljär

In the 16th century, the Venetian emissary Giovanni Giambattista Giustiniani, while traveling to his posting in Zadar, stopped in the town of Pag. However, attracted by the stories of interesting ancient ruins on the northern part of the island, Giustiniani sent his ships to moor on Rab, while he himself set out on horseback to Novalja and Caska so that he could study the antiquities in peace.

In the middle of the 19th century, the curator of the National Museum in Zagreb, Mijat Sabljär, traveled through Dalmatia on several occasions and diligently noted all of the cultural and historical sites that he found along the way. In 1852, he visited the island of Pag, drafting the first sketch of the archaeological remains in the Caska cove and the Košljun hill. In addition to the mainland ruins, Sabljär sketched the traces of the wall and wooden beams that could be seen just above the surface of the water in the Caska cove.

In 1933, the well-known art historian and conservator, Gjuro Szabo, wrote down his impressions of the island and drew attention to its rich but poorly researched



history. Regarding the ancient ruins in Caska, Szabo wrote: "Scattered everywhere at the semi-circular end of the inlet is a sea of shards, obviously of Roman origin, and they speak clearly of the former size of two altars, which today are overturned so the inscriptions cannot be seen, and they are so heavy that for now they cannot be turned over ... According to the stories of the present inhabitants... much was found here – some of it was sent to Venice, some was broken into pieces, of course there where also stones with inscriptions on them... All in all, it is an extraordinarily interesting region this old Kissa, and the landscape is also beautiful."

4.

Prehistory

The earliest distinct traces of settlement in the Novalja area are about 5,000 years old and date from the Copper Age. In the first millennium B.C., at the end of the Bronze Age and during the Iron Age, the process of ethnogenesis of the native population was completed. From ancient written sources we recognize these people as the Liburnians.

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The Liburnians, related to the neighboring Histri in the region of Istria, were known as skillful mariners. They lived in an area from the Raša River in the north to the Krka River in the south, which also included the northern Adriatic islands. They lived in hilltop settlements fortified by massive stone ramparts (hill forts). One such settlement was located on the hill known as Košljun in the hinterland of Caska. It is assumed that during the Liburnian age it was called Kisa and was the most important prehistoric center of the island.

The Liburnians buried their dead in a contracted position in graves made of stone slabs covered by grave stones (tumuli). An impressive group of tumuli is located near the hill of Sv. Juraj (St. George) above Caska and in the area of Zrće, while the largest among them are located on the reef which separates the peninsula Zrće from Caska.



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5.

Archaeological research

Many scientists visited and described Caska in the past. However, for many years no one took on the complex work of researching, protecting and preserving its rich cultural and historical heritage. After several short research campaigns on land and sea that were conducted in the second half of the 20th century, more systematic archaeological research began in 2003, which in time grew into interdisciplinary research projects led by the University of Zadar and the Archaeological Museum of Zadar. Many other Croatian and foreign museums and scientific institutions are actively participating in the projects,

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as well as many other experts, young researchers and students from other European countries.

The first research campaigns were undertaken around the ancient graveyard, in underwater areas of the cove, in the residential part of the Roman settlement, and on the Sv. Juraj (St. George) hill. The researchers want to resolve the issues surrounding the origin, development and decline of the ancient settlement and its connection with other parts of the historical and geographical entity of the former Kisa. At the same time, attempts are being made to search for the oldest traces of settlement on the Sv. Juraj (St. George) hill and to renovate the church on top of the hill. An organized presentation of the cultural-historical heritage of Caska is also being planned, which is a fundamental prerequisite for its long-term preservation.

Archaeologists have been assisted in their efforts to resolve the issues regarding the origin and disappearance of the settlement in Caska by geologists, paleontologists and biologists whose joint efforts are an attempt to reconstruct changes to the coastline and the entire landscape of Caska during various prehistoric and historical periods.



6.

Roman estates

During the first century A.D., the Romans built several farm and country estates (*villae rusticae*) on the eastern Adriatic coast. Each estate consisted of a residence for its owner, an area designed as permanent quarters for slaves and servants, and an area for processing and storing farm products. Richer landowners often had several such villas that were the center of distant agricultural holdings. In addition to these holding, they also had a house in the city (*villa urbana*) or in its suburbs (*villa suburbana*).

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Archaeological and geophysical research in the area of Caska has uncovered traces of Roman residential and farm ruins. In the northern part of the cove, covering a surface area of about 320 m², the ruins of the storage areas of villas have been investigated. They consisted of two partially walled off cellar areas dug to a depth of about 2.4 meters. Initially they were used for the storage of foodstuffs, but over time they were converted into disposal pits in which a great quantity of broken ceramic dishes, animal bones and other organic materials have been found. At the bottom of one of the cellar money from the 1st century B.C. was discovered, possibly indicating the time of construction of the first building. Part of the storage area contained six large ceramic containers for agricultural products, partially buried in the ground. The Romans called such containers *dolia* (Lat. *dolium*). The diameter of the *dolia* found in Caska was 165 cm, with a height of 160 - 180 cm; their volume is estimated to be 2,400 – 2,600 liters. At the end of the second or beginning of the third century B.C., the ceramic containers were cut in half and overlain with a floor. The above ground parts of the *dolia* were destroyed, and stones and mortar were thrown into them with the aim of leveling



the terrain for a newer facility. Fragments of painted plaster and black and white cube mosaics lead to the conclusion that the villa was decorated with wall frescos and mosaic floors.

In the northwestern part of the site, excellently preserved infrastructural channels for water drainage made of crushed rock and a firm mortar were discovered. The bottom of the canal was paved with roof tiles, while the upper part was covered by sandstone slabs.

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A second facility was discovered near the small Church of Sv. Anton (St. Anthony). Geo-radar images revealed several areas grouped around a central empty space, but archaeological research of a lesser scope revealed only a few humble remnants of a habitation. The remnants of Roman buildings are also located around the cape of Zrće.

The remains of massive walls that extend along the coastline from the area under Tunera/Turan to a location called *Pod bužu* have been interpreted in a variety of ways, but most often as supporting walls built to prevent landslides and intensive erosion or as the remnants of the town walls. Regardless of the reason why the Romans opted for such a demanding construction effort, it is obvious that the land on the eastern slopes of the cove were exceptionally important to them.

An impressive underground standing-height canal has been preserved near Vela pošta south of Tunera/Turan, also at the *Pod bužu* location. The canal is passable for barely thirty meters, and its exit is filled with tiny stones from the beach. One can certainly imagine it to be a canal for water drainage.



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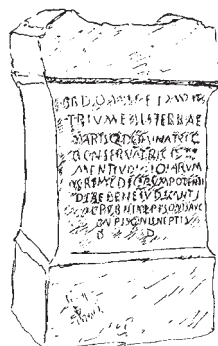


7.

The Calpurnia family

Located somewhere in the Caska area was the estate of the well-known Roman senatorial family *Calpurnii Pisones*, which is indicated by the ruins of three sacrificial altars erected by Calpurnia, the daughter of Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, Roman Consul in the year 1 B.C., and the granddaughter of Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso, Roman Consul in 23 B.C. When Calpurnia lived in Caska, her family was experiencing difficult times: in 19 B.C. her uncle was accused of murdering the young and favorite Germanicus (the nephew of the emperor Tiberius and brother of the emperor Claudius), which ended in his suicide during the court procedure in 20 B.C. Calpurnia's father also committed suicide in 24 B.C., during rigged court proceedings for supposedly insulting the emperor. After this the family's situation stabilized and things turned for the better.

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The only preserved sacrificial altar is the one found at Gramače, which Calpurnia erected in honor of two female deities, the prehistoric goddess Ital Good (*Bona Dea*) and the Liburnian goddess (Hea). The sacrificial altar bears the following inscription: *B(ona)e d(eae) dom(inae) Heiae A[ug(ustae)] / triumphali terrae / marisq(ue) dominatric[i] / conservatric[i] / mentiumque bo[n]arum / ac remedium potenti / deae bene iudicanti / [C]alpurnia L. Pisonis aug(uris) f(ilia) / Cn. Pisonis neptis / d(onum d(edit)).* In translation it reads: To the mistress the Good goddess (and) Hea Augustus, the victorious ruler of land and sea, keeper of the mind and property and mighty healer, the goddess who judges well, a gift is given by Calpurnia, daughter of Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus and granddaughter of Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso. The reasons for Calpurnia's invoking a goddess who judges well and keeps the mind and property may be found in the difficult situation in which her family found itself at the beginning of 1 B.C.

Tombstone inscriptions from Caska, which mention slaves and free men of the Calpurnia family, are also undoubtedly evidence of their estates in the northern part of the island.



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8.

Roman water supply network

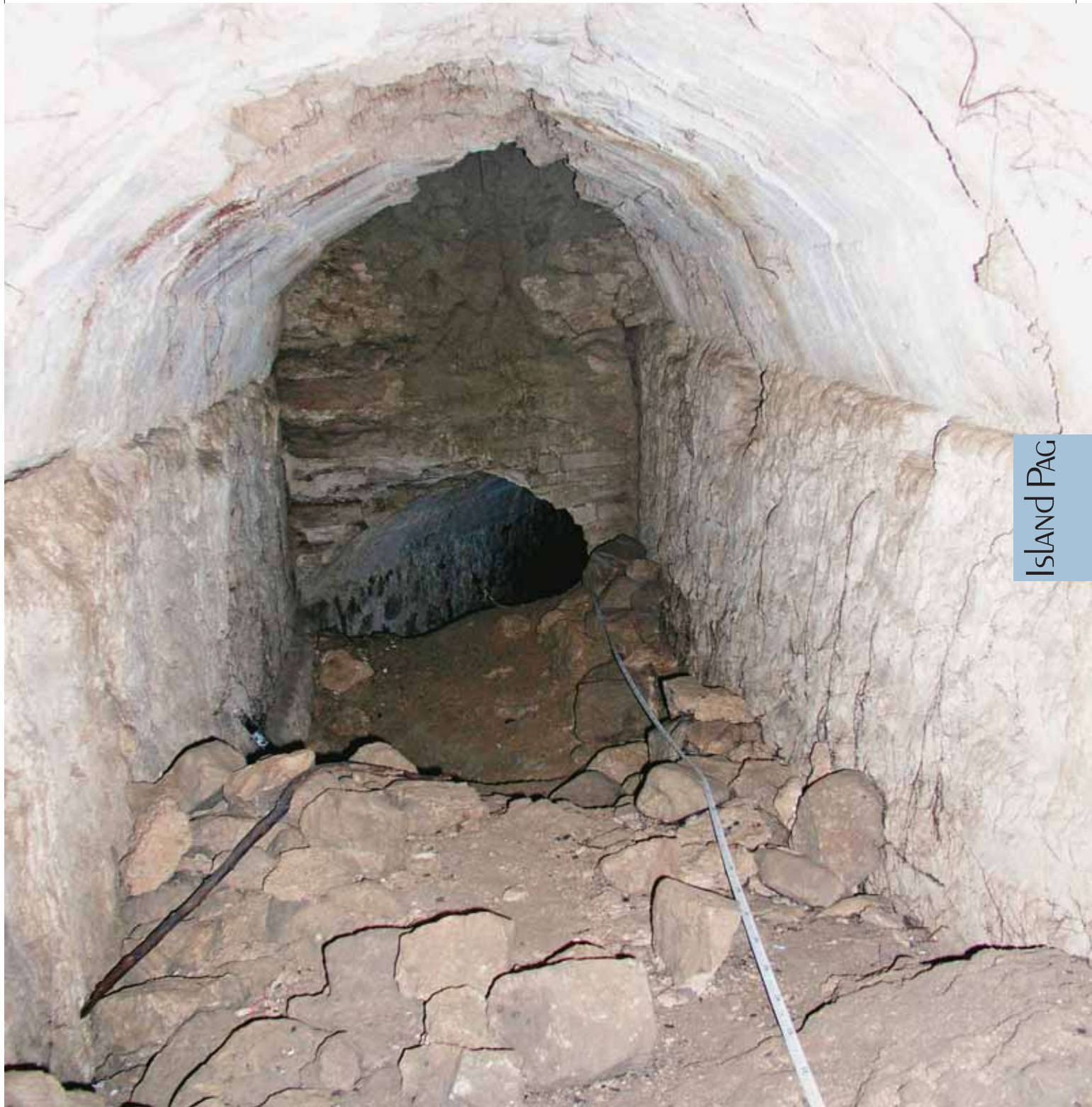
In ancient times the problem of drinking water was solved by building an above ground water supply system, which ran for over 8,000 meters from Vrela, not far from Kolan, toward Caska and Zrće. The assumption that the system was built by the Calpurnia Piso family at the turn of the new millennium cannot be confirmed for now, but everything discovered to date does not refute it.

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For now, all that remains is the unknown place where the water supply system ended. Its constituent parts have still not been successfully connected into a unique whole. The arches on which part of the water supply system rested have succumbed to the weight of time, while throughout the island landscape preserved parts of load-bearing walls and water supply canals still remain.

Particularly interesting are five large water tanks built on the Košljun hill, which in Roman times also comprised part of the complex water supply system. Research on these tanks is still underway, while underground canals, cisterns and water distribution canals, preserved along the northeastern coastline of Caska, also probably comprised a part of it.



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9.

Necropolis

The term *necropolis* originates from the Greek word *nekros* = dead and *polis* = city, and in literal translation reads the *city of the dead*. This is how the Greeks and Romans denoted their cemeteries and why it has remained part of archaeological terminology.

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Archaeological excavations conducted from 2003 to 2007 in the western part of the cove next to the Zrće peninsula revealed the far southeastern part of a graveyard that belonged to the ancient settlement. A total of forty-four cremation graves have been researched as well as a skeletal one, which date back to the fourth century A.D. A special feature of the necropolis in Caska is the special way in which the graves were made, a way which has not been observed at any other site.

The ashes and burnt bones of the deceased were placed with other grave items on the earthen bottom of the grave pit and covered by a structure made of roof tiles and cup channels in the form of a gabled roof. Two joined cup channels comprised a stylized chimney through which food and drinks could be sacrificed or an opening for the deceased person's soul. Then the grave would be surrounded by a rectangular structure of broken stones and mortar whose upper surface, together with the described "chimney", remained visible on the surface of the ground.



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Various items for everyday use were also buried with the deceased person that they could use in the afterlife. Ceramic oil lamps were needed to illuminate the way to the other world; in ceramic and glass dishes the necessary food and drinks were carried; money was needed to pay for transport into the underworld across the underground river Styx, and everyday items served the deceased person so that even on the other side they would be surrounded by dear and known items. So that women would continue to be nurtured and beautiful, their graves also contained cosmetic items and jewelry made of bronze, gold, lead, iron and bones.

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In the immediate vicinity of the graves there were often amphorae that were probably left after the burial rituals or funeral feasts, or even after offering sacrificial libations. The graves were marked with inscribed tombstones, about ten of which have been discovered. From them we can read names, ages and occupations of the one-time inhabitants of Caska. For example, we know that Lucius erected a tombstone for his wife Victoria who lived to the age of 60 or that Atik, a book-keeper (*dispensator*) on a local estate, was buried in Caska.





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10.

Underwater area

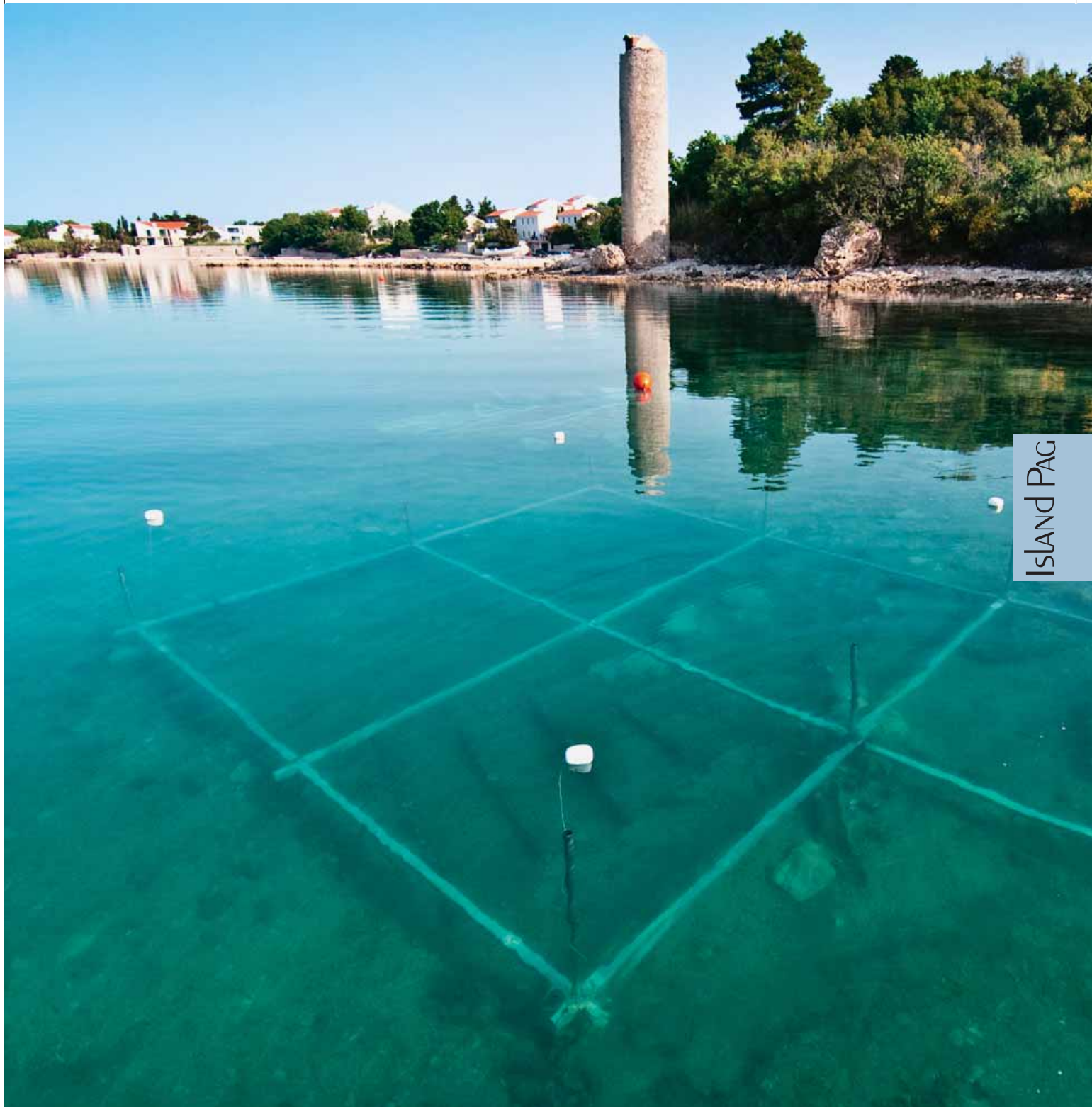
From ancient times the waters around Caska have attracted attention with their abundance of movable and immovable archaeological matter. Some of the smaller sites ended up on the sea floor through erosion of the coastline, while other parts of it are still located in their original locations. In front of the ruins of Kaštela and the Church of Sv. Anton (St. Anthony) in the northern part of the cove sit the sunken remnants

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of a twenty-meter long breakwater, built as an embankment of crushed rocks that protected the bottom of the cove from the southern winds. The external and internal part of the cultural layer is up to half a meter wide. Fragments of discarded ceramic dishes, building materials, and glass and metal objects have been found in it.

Systematic underwater exploration began in 2005. In that same year, an almost entirely preserved wooden anchor from Roman times was found near the breakwater. Such anchors, with flukes and a shank made of wood and a transverse lead crossbar and lead couplings on the flukes to give them sufficient strength and weight, were often used in ancient times.



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During the first and second centuries A.D., anchors made entirely from iron gradually replaced these older style anchors. The muddy bottom of the cove created anaerobic conditions, which were conducive to preserving the wood of the anchor, so that this rare find survived to modern times almost completely intact. Through a demanding conservation process using polyethylene-glycol the anchor has been saved for future generations and today it is on exhibit in the municipal museum of Novalja.

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During the explorations, the remnants of vertically driven wooden stakes and poles and horizontally laid beams were observed at several locations along the northern and eastern coastlines. All of them, it appears, represent the remnants of ancient coastal constructions that most probably served as an auxiliary coastline.



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11.

Sewn boat

In 2007, the underwater area of Caska once again provided a surprise. In the area of the cove Mala pošta, south of Tunera/Turan, the remnants of a boat made with sewing techniques were found. Using this is old Mediterranean technique, the planks of the boat were joined together with plant fiber string, pulled through a series of openings along the plank edges. Sealing the area between the planks was achieved

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by using thicker plaits on the internal side of the “stitches” and coating the inside and outside of the boat with a thick layer of resin. Spanish broom, which still grows in abundance in along the coastline of Caska, was used to make the string and plaits. The frames of the sewn boats were distinct with their series of slots on the bottom side, made on the “stitch” points to avoid friction.

The ancient technique of sewing from classical Greek times has almost completely disappeared from use in the Mediterranean. However, in some areas it was retained deep into the Roman era, and even down to medieval times. One of such areas is the northern Adriatic, where two different prehistoric boat building traditions were kept along the eastern and western coastlines.



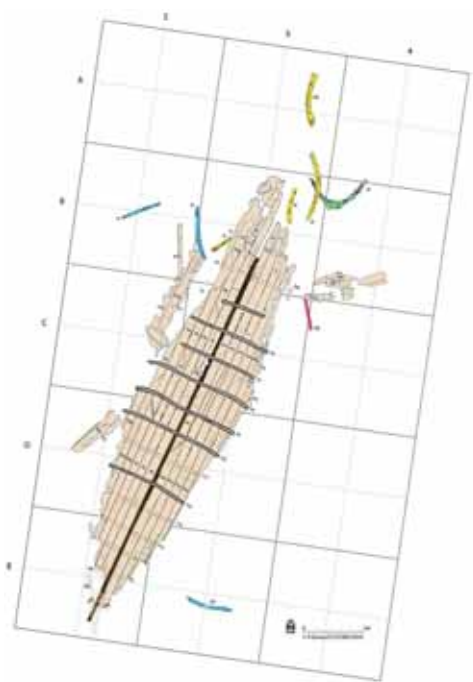
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According to ancient authors, sewing on the eastern Adriatic coast was nurtured in Roman times only by the Histri and Liburnians. This information is confirmed by the sewn boat discovered in Caska.

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About eight meters long, the boat was filled with a mixture of broken stones and mortar. It was intentionally sunk, probably as part of an ancient coastal dock construction. Several wooden stakes were driven around it and through it. Nearby an iron axe with completely preserved wooden handle, which was probably used to cut the wood, was found. Judging by the other movable finds, the boat was used in the second century A.D.



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12.

Fortress and Church of Sv. Juraj (St. George)

At the top of the Sv. Juraj (St. George) hill above Caska there are remnants of a medieval fort, which may have originated in late antiquity, possibly in the sixth century during the time of the Byzantine emperor Justinian and his wars against the Eastern Goths. Justinian was attempting to retain the re-established Byzantine rule along the eastern coastline of the Adriatic by building a uniform fortification system to ensure the security of the sea routes and the peaceful supply of the Byzantine fleet.

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Judging by the visible remnants, the fort had a rectangular shape. At its south-eastern corner the small Church of Sv. Juraj (St. George) was built. The present day church originates most likely from the fourteenth century. However, it may have been built on the remains of another sacral building. Its walls were decorated with several architectural fragments with early Christian and pre-Romanesque ornaments, which were forcibly removed after the small church was deserted. Luckily, some of them found their way into the collection *Stomorici*, exhibited on the premises of the parish rectory in Novalja. These are fragments of stone furniture originating from the ninth century.



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The single-naved Church of Sv. Juraj (St. George) had a semicircle apse sunken into the wall mass and was divided into two bays spanned by cross vaults, with a stone roof made of stone panels. It was first mentioned in 1451, while in 1804, the last procession to Caska from Novalja began. In 1822, the mass was still celebrated here, after which it was left for the passage of time to take its toll.

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In 2006, the existing condition of and archaeological research in the fort and church began to be recorded. This effort led to the discovery of a complex of walls from an earlier building phase and the medieval grave of a small girl decorated in rich jewelry, consisting of a silver ring with a crown, bronze necklace and a pair of bronze earrings.



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Other historical and natural sights

We do not know what exactly happened in the coastal area of Caska after the ancient settlement was abandoned. Judging from preserved documents, the Palčić family arrived from Pag in the fifteenth century and purchased the estates in the cove. Through their efforts the single-naved small church of Sv. Anton (St. Anthony) was built, along with which the so-called *Kašte/* (citadel) emerged. It is difficult to say what its purpose was. However, members of the Palčić family mentioned the possible presence of monks. Today, both buildings are ruins in an exceptionally bad state, but in the future they could be used as a small museum dedicated to Caska antiquities.

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Not far from the small Church of Sv. Anton (St. Anthony) sits a round stone tower for observing the movements of tuna. The tower, which was built by the Palčić family in 1888, is known as the *tunera/turan* (tuna tower). Its peculiarity piques the curiosity of visitors and today it has become a sort of symbol for Caska. In contrast to the many wooden structures along the Croatian coast, the Tunera is the only such tower made from stone. The local poet Radoslav Dabo mentions two other *tunera* along the coastline of Caska, the main one in the Klopotnica cove and an auxiliary one on the point between Caska and Zrće. If they did exist, they were probably made from wood.

The lucrative tuna fishing in Caska and Zrće lasted until 1960. In the distant past long, narrow boats called *ladve* were used for this purpose. They were made from a single piece of wood and sometimes increased in size by adding lateral planks. They would be navigated with oars set in a long outrigger joist called a *jaram* or *igo*. *Ladve* are no longer in use today, although Gjuro Szabo observed them in the Caska region in the 1930s, when they had completely disappeared from use in other regions.



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At the base of the cove there is a small swamp known as Blato, which, as with all other swamp habitats on the island, is particularly valuable due to its biological and landscape diversity. The importance of Mediterranean swamplands and their orinthofaune is increasing, because in Europe today they are a rarity in nature. Therefore, the swampland in Caska has become a protected nature area.

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At the bottom of the shallow sea along the beach of the cove, one can easily see a long, flat stone slab, which has been interpreted in amateur works as a Roman road. It is actually beach rock that originated from the cementing of carbonate particles on the beach that occur in tidal zones under certain natural conditions. How the slab was created has not been entirely explained; however it is assumed that it is the result of calcium carbonate from fresh water that emerges from the bottom of swamps in the hinterland. According to old analyses, the beach slab in Caska is a recent structure that came into existence in the mid-20th century. Given the fact that fragments of Roman ceramic material are located on the beach, it is logical that they, too, during the cementing process, became a part of the slab.