

Private piety or collective worship in early Christian *martyria*. Late antique Naissus case study

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Оригиналан научни рад

“...the church is built to be a tomb,
on the one hand a cenotaph for the honored martyr
and on the other a place erected to shelter the tombs
of a few notables.”

E. Rebillard¹

Explanation of the purpose of early Christian martyria as places of collective memory is a complex of many different circumstances and meanings and must be observed in accordance. First of all, martyria are architectural monuments dedicated to the martyrs, historical evidences of the martyrial death of those who suffered for Christ – this is a simple explanation of their real meaning. Yet, their social role is even more important than their historical role – martyria continuously transferred an idea of Salvation among the people, becoming thus the places of collective memory. But what happen when the martyr’s relics are “usurped” by one wealthy family? This paper aim to shed some light on what could have been the real purpose of one such example, the martyrium attached to the basilica on the necropolis in Jagodin Mala in Naissus (modern Niš).

Key words: Naissus, Jagodin mala, Late Antiquity, funerary complex, martyrium, sacred focus

Last couple of decades a number of scholars turned their attention toward the changes in funerary customs during the Late Antiquity, especially during the fourth century, when almost every aspect of roman life survived its own smaller or larger transformation. Funerary customs in Roman society were not set aside from this phenomenon. On the contrary, changes started to appear more radically during the second century AD, and by the third century inhumation of the deceased became more usual than up to then dominant cremation, despite the national or religious attribution, since it was believed that inhumation protects better not only the body itself but whatever part of the deceased’s soul that may stay attached to it.² It does not mean that inhumation was necessarily Christian asset: it was only in the third century

that the architectural and iconographical forms became recognizable as “Christian”.³

In the pre-Christian Roman Empire the care for the deceased was taken by family or *collegia*, his or hers body was to be buried beside family members or on the communal graveyards, and it was later to be respected by that same family or *collegium*.⁴ Romans indeed took good care of their departed and their graves were treated as “holy places”, *locus religiosus* or *res religiosa*,⁵ i.e. the places which differ from the profane surrounding, just like temples or shrines did. This rule was long lasting and was once again affirmed by the emperor Justinian (527–565).⁶ It stated that tombs were the places to which the religious and not the civilian laws apply. But the term *religiosus* in the pre-Christian times and in Christianized Rome differs in many ways. In the pre-Christian times the term was tied to *manes*, not to *dei*, while in the Christian Roman empire it was connected to the one and only Christian God or his earthly saints.

As is well archaeologically attested, Roman necropolises were tightly connected to the roman city and had their own “urbanism” – tombs, graves and *memoriae* were oriented toward the streets, which enabled the visitor or passer-by to see the place of burial. But only the family members were allowed to enter the tomb or *memoriae* during the regular feast days.⁷ This means that the place of burial in ancient Rome, despite of its form, was actually a protected private place, closely connected to the family, blood tied members, freedman or slaves alike.⁸

³ A. M. Yasin, *Commemorating the dead – constructing the community: church space, funerary monuments and saints’ cults in Late Antiquity*, Chicago 2002 (unpublished doctoral dissertation), 14.

⁴ About the role of the *collegia* and about the reevaluation of the Mommsen’s “*collegia funeratica*”, cf. Rebillard, *op. cit.*, 37–41.

⁵ S. MacCormack, *Loca Sancta: The organization of sacred topography in Late Antiquity*, in: *The blessings of pilgrimage*, ed. R. Ousterhout, Urbana–Chicago 1990, 11; Rebillard, *op. cit.*, 58.

⁶ “Locum in quo servus sepultus est religiosum esse aristo ait”. Cf. *Iust. Dig.* 11. 7. 2., in: *Corpus Iuris Civilis, 1: Digestorum seu pandectarum libri quinquaginta*, ed. J. L. W. Beck, Leipzig 1829, 186.

⁷ Toynbee, *op. cit.*, 51, 63; Yasin, *op. cit.*, 74.

⁸ Davies, *op. cit.*, 146; E. Rebillard, *Conversion and burial in the Late Roman empire*, in: *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Seeing and believing*, eds. K. Mills, A. Grafton, Rochester 2003, 61.

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¹ E. Rebillard, *The care of the dead in late antiquity*, Ithaca–London 2009, 5.

² J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and burial in the Roman world*, London 1982², 40; J. Davies, *Death, burial and rebirth in the religions of antiquity*, London – New York 1999, 149; Rebillard, *op. cit.*, 82–83.

Although based on the traditional Roman care of the dead, Christianity brought quite innovative concept of, as Peter Brown defines it, “the very special dead” – the martyr saint.⁹ The fact that martyrs died in the way that differs from the “usual”, that they sacrificed their lives for faith, just like Jesus did centuries earlier, that they were subdued to various extreme tortures and that they finally deserved their place beside the Lord himself, set them apart from all of those who didn’t die as martyrs. Their tombs were sacred places that offered part of Theophany enacted through their martyrdom.¹⁰ Their acceptance in Heaven was further testified by the ability of their saintly bodies to heal and help in the earthly life or to intervene in the afterlife, which made their graves the places of pilgrimage and important spots in sacred landscape of Christianized Empire.¹¹ The healing itself was enabled first and foremost by touching or seeing the saints’ body or relics, which was unthinkable in the pre-Christian Rome, since no one except from the family members was allowed to see or to touch the body of the departed. The ability of martyr to intervene in the afterlife was, on the other hand, enabled by the burial of the departed Christian as close to the saint’s body as possible.¹² This well known practice called *depositio ad sanctos* implied also that it was not important anymore to be buried next to the ancestors or relatives, since they were not able to provide the same intervention in the afterlife as the “very special dead” could.

Even from the fourth century onward the place of martyr’s entombment was the place where believers used to assemble. Therefore it was in some way connected to the church,¹³ above all because it was believed that martyrs’ relics can likewise help on the communal scale.¹⁴ It implied that the bodies of those who wanted to find themselves close to the saint even in death, were often buried under the church pavement. Necessarily, that meant that Christian believers were to walk or stand on that same pavement during the regular services, which was likewise unthinkable in the pre-Christian Empire.¹⁵ Walking on top of someone’s body was blasphemy for the Romans, the disrespecting of the departed, of their *manes* and of the gods of the Underworld.

The emergence of the completely new Christian cult of the deceased resulted in creating architecture, worthy of those who lost their lives as martyrs and witnesses of the Lord’s grace, which will determine the religious landscape of the entire early Christian world.¹⁶ The primary

function of those buildings was originally to signify and to exclude the sacred place of martyrs’ entombment from its worldly surrounding, whether the Roman necropolis or some other place not necessarily sacred at all. Although worth revising in many aspects, the much cited work “Martyrium” by Andre Grabar, published in 1946, defined the twofold function of those newly created architectural structures. He stated that those were indeed meant to mark the place of martyr’s burial, but on the other hand their function was also to enable the performing of adequate religious acts and to protect the gathered believers.¹⁷ In important urban centres like Jerusalem or Rome, ever since the reign of emperor Constantine I (306–337), large structures were created to protect and to expose the relics, whether of Jesus himself, of his disciples or of the followers who suffered and died for faith in the centuries between the first mass pursuit by Traianus Decius (249–251) and the last one conducted by Licinius (308–324). It seems that not only in these two main centres, but in other parts of the Empire as well, building activities tied to various aspects of the new religion started to flourish during the fourth century. It could be observed in the entire Northern Africa, Balkans, Asia Minor, as well as in the large cities that at that time gained or regained their importance, as Rome, Constantinople, Milan or Sirmium, for example.¹⁸

When considering the earliest phase of Christianity on the territory of modern Serbia, based on the scarce written sources and archaeological traces, one can conclude that Christianity found its way sometimes during the second half of the third century. It doesn’t necessarily mean that there were no Christians before that time, but the fact that the earliest martyr deaths were all recorded during the persecutions of Diocletian (284–305) and Licinius, suggest that in this part of the Empire Christianity was not very popular during the so called “Decian persecution” in the middle of the third century. One should also have in mind the fact that Roman provinces on the central Balkans were finally and completely incorporated into the imperial administrative system only at the beginning of the first century AD.¹⁹ Romanization moved along gradually, so it was in the second century AD that the provinces on the central Balkans were Roman in the true sense of this word, and nothing “Christian” that can be dated prior to the fourth century was positively dated until now. Written sources, above all the Martyrologies, testify that

⁹ P. Brown, *The cult of the saints. Its rise and function in Latin christianity*, Chicago–London, 1982, 70; C. Rapp, *Saints and holy men*, in: *Constantine to c. 600*, ed. A. Casiday, F. W. Norris, Cambridge 2007 (The Cambridge history of Christianity, 2), 550.

¹⁰ P. Maraval, *The earliest phase of Christian pilgrimage in the Near East (before the 7th Century)*, DOP 56 (2002) 72.

¹¹ Yasin, *op. cit.*, 28; Maraval, *op. cit.*, 68–69.

¹² G. V. MacKie, *Early Christian chapels in the West. Decoration, function and patronage*, Toronto–Buffalo–London 2003, 212.

¹³ Maraval, *op. cit.*, 65.

¹⁴ Mackie, *op. cit.*, 212; T. Enchev, „Nie sme i videli i dokosnali“: prekiit kontakt s moshchite na muchenicite, kako vazhen faktor za formirane na rannohristiianската khramova arkhitektura, in: *Srednovkovniit chovek i negoviiat sviat: Sbornik v chest na 70-ta godishnina na prof. d. i. n. Kazimir Popkonstantinov*, red. V. Kostova, B. Turnovo 2014, 718–719.

¹⁵ Yasin, *op. cit.*, 242.

¹⁶ Enchev, *op. cit.*, 719.

¹⁷ A. Grabar, *Martyrium*, Paris 1946, 47.

¹⁸ R. Krautheimer, *Corpus basilicarum christianarum Romae. Le basiliche cristiane antiche di Roma (sec. IV–IX)*, Città del Vaticano 1937; R. Krautheimer, *Three Christian capitals. Topography and politics*, Berkeley 1983; R. Krautheimer, S. Ćurčić, *Early Christian and Byzantine architecture*, London 1986; J. F. Baldovin, *The urban character of Christian worship. The origins, development and meaning of stationar liturgy*, Roma 1987; Maraval, *op. cit.*, 66–67; Yasin, *op. cit.*; W. R. Caraher, *Church, society and sacred in the early Christian Greece*, Columbus 2003 (unpublished doctoral dissertation); M. Jeremić, *Kultne građevine hrišćanskog Sirmijuma*, in: *Sirmium i na nebu i na zemlji (1700 godina od stradanja hrišćanskih mučenika)*, ed. D. Poznanović, Sremska Mitrovica 2004, 43–73; H. W. Dey, *The Aurelian wall and the refashioning of Imperial Rome, AD 271–855*, Cambridge 2011; O. Špehar, *Sirmijumski mučenici i kreiranje identiteta kasnoantičkog grada*, *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja* 21/2 (2014) 25–52.

¹⁹ M. Mirković, *Rimsko osvajanje i organizacija rimske vlasti*, in: *Istorija srpskog naroda I*, ed. S. Ćirković, Beograd 1994, 72.

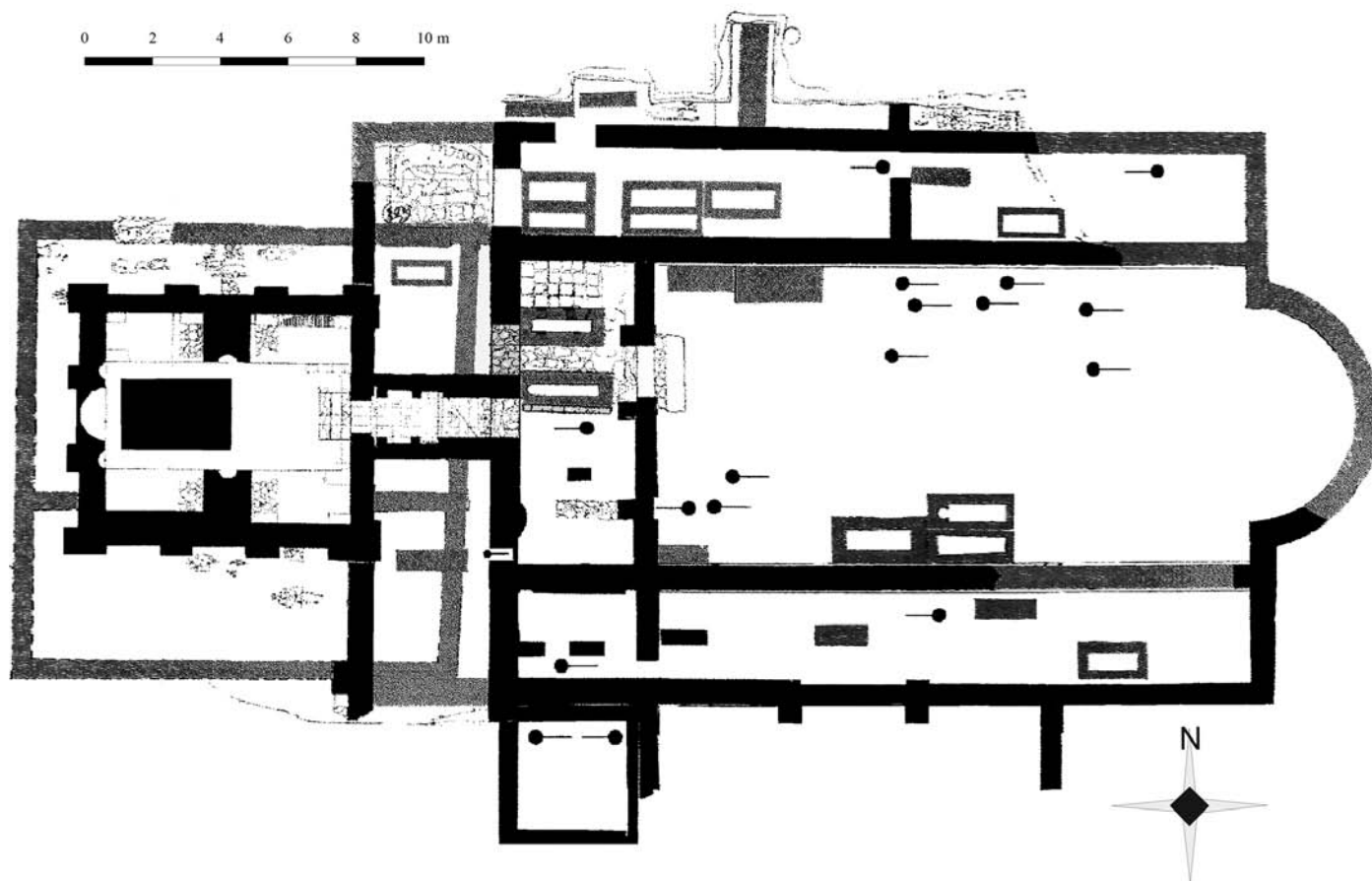


Fig. 1. Complex in Jagodin Mala, Naissus (Niš) – ground plan (after Milošević, *Martirijum*, fig. 4)

numerous Christians were martyred there during the first decades of the fourth century, mostly in Sirmium as the seat of the Prefecture, and that their earthly remains were known to perform miracles.²⁰

Unfortunately, insufficient amount of archaeological material, discovered in known late antique sites, mostly preclude scholars of gaining the complete insight into the formation of early Christianity in modern Serbia. Yet it is still possible to contextualize some individual examples, which can help us to understand the way in which the cult of martyrs developed in this part of the Balkan Peninsula. One such example is the *martyrium* discovered by A. Oršić-Slavetić in 1932/1933 on the necropolis in Jagodin Mala in Naissus (modern Niš). It was originally situated North-East of the supposed central part of the late antique city, which still lies unexplored. Sources inform us that Naissus was an important urban centre in the Roman province of Dacia Mediterranea. Its importance was gained primarily by the fact that the first “Christian” emperor, Constantine I, was born in the city, as well as by the fact that it obviously was one of the main Roman strongholds in this part of the Empire, which led many emperors of the fourth century to spend some time there. It was also one of the largest centres of the Christian church in Illyricum, the seat of the bishopric subdued to the bishop of Serdica, but quite influential itself during the religious

conflicts of the fourth century.²¹ Little is known today about the once great Roman city, since it is mostly buried under the modern settlement. The best excavated city part is Jagodin Mala, thanks among the rest to the mentioned excavations conducted by Oršić-Slavetić. Those campaigns were quite fruitful, since several buildings believed to be Christian churches were discovered, as well as seventeen barrel-vaulted tombs, one of them most certainly belonging to a deceased Christian, to which testify christograms depicted on its inner walls.²² This tomb was situated south of the basilica, in its close vicinity. The discovery of the *martyrium* was, as consequent excavations showed, certainly the most important find of the campaign. It appeared to be attached to the three-aisled basilica, discovered somewhat later during the excavations conducted in 1952–1953 by Dj. Mano-Zisi and in 1962 by M. Grbić (Fig. 1). Despite the fact that the bibliography considering this complex is very humble, it is until today the best published and researched Christian sacred place of ancient Naissus.²³

²¹ Zeiller, *op. cit.*, 159; M. Rakocija, *Das frühe Christentum in Naissus/Niš (Serbien)*, *Mitteilungen zur Christlichen Archäologie* 17 (2011) 14–15.

²² A. Oršić-Slavetić, *Arheološka istraživanja u Nišu i okolini*, *Starinar* 8–9 (1933) 304–305; Rakocija, *op. cit.*, 37–38; G. Jeremić, *The Late Antique necropolis in Jagodin Mala, Niš [Naissus], Serbia – eighty years of research*, in: *Strategie e programmazione della conservazione e trasmissibilità del patrimonio culturale*, ed. A. Filipović, W. Troiano, Roma 2013, 274.

²³ P. Petrović, *Niš u antičko doba*, Niš 1976, 85–87; G. Milošević, *Martirijum i grobljanska bazilika u Jagodin mali u Nišu*, in: *Niš i Vizantija. Zbornik radova II*, ed. M. Rakocija, Niš 2004, 121–140; M. Rakocija, *Paleobyzantine Churches of Niš. Preliminary survey*, in:

²⁰ *Acta sanctorum, martii, III*, Paris–Roma 1865; *Acta sanctorum, aprilis, I*, Paris–Roma 1866; *Acta Sanctorum, octobris, IV*, Paris–Roma 1866; *Martyrologium Hieronymianum e codice Trevirensi*, AB 2 (1883) 9–34; *Victricius Rhotomagensis, Liber de laude sanctorum*, in: PL XX, 453; J. Zeiller, *Les origines chrétiennes dans la province danubiennes de l’empire Romain*, Roma 1967, 73–104.

The basilica to which the *martyrium* is attached was a three aisled structure, 21.6 m long and 15.5 m wide, with the narthex of 3.5 m long and 12.3 m wide.²⁴ These measurements are not definitive since the archaeological investigations conducted in 1952–1953 by Dj. Mano-Zisi suggested that the church could be wider, i.e. that there existed traces of walls south and north of the discovered structure, but the lack of available space disabled further excavations.²⁵ It could also mean that the church was not three-aisled but five-aisled instead, although it is much less possible. The interior walls of the church were embellished by marble revetment in the lower and frescoes in the upper parts of the walls. To this testify the traces of marble slabs and fresco-mortar.²⁶ The narthex went the entire width of the nave and the south aisle of the basilica. West of it, another room 3.5 m long was built, which most possibly had the same width as the basilica, designated in literature as the exonarthex.²⁷ Yet, the earliest Christianity did not recognize liturgical rites for which the exonarthex would be needed. So, it seems that the mentioned space was some kind of vestibule which, despite its possible liturgical role which shouldn't yet be excluded, had the main function to connect the basilica to the upper floor of the *martyrium* in the west, while the staircases led from the narthex inside the underground crypt of the *martyrium*. Among the finds discovered within the basilica, three inscriptions on fragmented marble slabs are very interesting. The dimensions of all three of them suggest that those were parts of different funerary slabs, most probably originally placed above the graves.

The first inscription, dimensions 59 x 42 x 2.5 cm, starts with a cross and ends with the same symbol: “*Fili*



Fig. 2. *Martyrium* in Jagodin Mala, interior of the crypt, view from the East (photograph in public use)

Niš i Vizantija. Zbornik radova V, ed. M. Rakocija, Niš 2007, 125–147; Jeremić, *op. cit.* 272–281; M. Rakocija, *O bazilici sa martirijumom (bazilika mučenika) u Nišu*, in: *Niš i Vizantija. Zbornik radova XI*, ed. M. Rakocija, Niš 2013, 31–68.

²⁴ Jeremić, *op. cit.*, 276; Rakocija, *O bazilici*, 46.

²⁵ Đ. Mano-Zisi, *Arheološko ispitivanje Niške tvrđave i Jagodin-male u Nišu*, Glasnik Srpske akademije nauka IV/2 (1952) 367; N. Spremo Petrović, *Proporcijski odnosi u bazilikama Ilirske prefekture*, Beograd 1971, 28; Milošević, *op. cit.*, 124.

²⁶ Milošević, *op. cit.*, 124–125.

²⁷ Rakocija, *Paleobyzantine churches*, 134; idem, *O bazilici*, 49.

meus dulcis Antonine, quem fata tulerunt cum octavo carperet anno, disripuit mors invida vitae, fecit vero terminum m(en)s(e) sept(embri) ind(ictione) nona”.²⁸ The second inscription, dimensions of preserved part 67 × 58 × 7 cm, also starts with the cross: “*Hic requiescat Petrus filius Thomae vicario annorum XVI iuxta patre et sororis patri et duo germanos suos Antonino et Gentione qui in uno mense simul vita finirunt et maximo lucto matris dereliquerunt mens(e) sept(embri) ind(ictione) nona XIII* (the last number is uncertain)”.²⁹ It appears that on both of these slabs the same Antoninus is mentioned, so it seems that vicarius Thomas had three sons, Antoninus, Gentius and Petrus, all of them departed as children, but not at the same year, and that all three of them were buried in the basilica.³⁰ Unfortunately, nothing further can be concluded from these inscriptions. The third slab is very poorly preserved, but the text was certainly a part of the larger funerary inscription. “...--- *fam]ula dei Ma [---]ssa que re [---] quinqu...*”.³¹ One of suggested readings of the part of this text says: “*Ma[ria abbati]ssa...*” The term *abbatissa* was not rare in Late Antiquity in various parts of the Empire while the suggested name Maria is indeed mostly tied to the Christian population, but it does not give us any more precise information.³² Taken as a whole, these inscriptions only prove that those buried inside the basilica were Christians and that those burials occurred sometimes between the fourth and the sixth century, more probably closer to the latter, since the second inscription was, according to some authors, dated to the end of the first half of the sixth century, maybe after the plaque in 545/546.³³ Namely, they provide neither more precise dating nor the dedication of the church or of the *martyrium*, but they certainly testify to the fact that this complex preserved important relics as the focal point toward which people turned not only in lifetime but in death as well.

The crypt of the two storey *martyrium* was 7.5 m long, 6 m wide and built of bricks and mortar (Fig. 2).³⁴ In the middle of it was the platform, the lateral walls had two arcosolia each, separated from each other by small niches, so it seemed that, besides the body of the saint probably originally laid in the sarcophagus placed on the platform, four more persons were to be buried inside the arcosolia. Indeed, during the archaeological excavations displaced human bones were found within the rubble as well as a piece of a silk cloth, which was supposed to originate from one of the coffins.³⁵ The western wall had in its middle one large niche flanked on each side by one smaller niche. Above the larger niche a window was discovered, which probably enabled the day light to enter the substructure of *martyrium*, but it was also suggested

²⁸ P. Petrović, *Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure, IV. Naissus – Remesiana – Horreum Margi*, Beograd 1979, 91–92, (nr. 50).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 92 (nr. 51).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 91–93. Dating to the later period is given according to *The prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 3B, ed. J. R. Martindale, Cambridge 1992, 1320.

³⁴ Rakocija, *Das frühe Christentum in Naissus*, 20.

³⁵ I. Nikolajević, *Sahranjivanje u ranohrišćanskim crkvama na području Srbije*, Arheološki vestnik 29 (1978) 681; Petrović, *Niš u antičko doba*, 86.

that it could have served as *fenestella*.³⁶ The crypt was originally vaulted, but the vault collapsed, and inside the rubble the coins of Constantine I and Constantius II were discovered.³⁷

The upper floor of the *martyrium*, which was in the same level as the basilica, was insufficiently preserved but it could be concluded that it had the dimensions of 7.15 × 6.20 m, with the entrance in its eastern wall. The outer faces of all the walls of *martyrium* were strengthened by the massive pilasters, very much resembling buttresses. Several fragments of architectural decoration were found during the excavations of the basilica and *martyrium*, the appearance of which led researchers to one today mostly accepted conclusion that the basilica was built in the fifth century, while the *martyrium* was older and was built during the first half of the fourth century.³⁸ On the other hand, some burials discovered below the basilica's floor were dated to the fourth century, among them the burial in the lead sarcophagi and in the cubiculum found on the site (Fig. 3).³⁹ It would then appear that the church itself was built several decades or almost a century later than those burials below the basilica occurred or the *martyrium* was built, yet it managed to keep older burials perfectly intact.

Despite the today accepted opinion that the basilica is later than the *martyrium*, one must once again take into consideration the rapport given by Ljubica Zotović in 1962, the interpretation by Nevenka Spremo-Petrović and some further texts considering the necropolis in Jagodin Mala.⁴⁰ Ljubica Zotović noted that the *martyrium* was built above the elder structure of the same East-West orientation, dated earlier in the fourth century, as well as that the tie between the *martyrium* (which she called "byzantine tomb") and the basilica east of it suggests that they were built simultaneously in the fifth century, although it is not clear whether before or after the Hunic raids which occurred from 441 to 447, while the discovered graves could be dated to three phases: to the fourth century i.e. before the erection of these objects, in the time of their erection, and in the time of the destruction of the basilica.⁴¹ The conclusion was based on the fact that the *mar-*

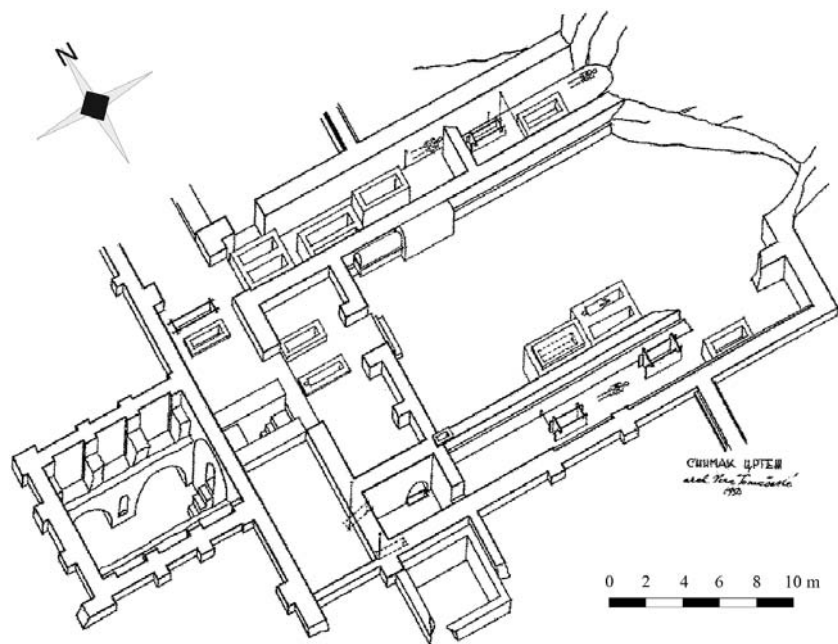


Fig. 3. Complex in Jagodin Mala, Naissus (Niš) – axonometry (after Milošević, *Martirijum*, fig. 3)

tyrium was built above the mentioned elder structure.⁴² On the other hand, N. Spremo-Petrović leaned her explanation on the reading of the architectural modules used during the building of both structures, but she likewise came to the same conclusion, i.e. that the church and the *martyrium* were contemporaneous, and that the fact that basilica and *martyrium* are constructionally divided is the consequence of the different levels of their foundations (because the crypt had a substructure).⁴³ The newest attempt to explain the chronology of these two connected object was made by M. Rakocija. He also state that the *martyrium* was older then the basilica, but noticed that there are many things that suggest that the entire complex was most carefully planned and executed, although not at the same time.⁴⁴

In order to better understand the nature of Naissus' *martyrium* one should also take a glimpse into some of the important analogies. The most similar and geographically closest parallel to the Naissus' is the fourth century *martyrium* built on the site Marusinac, one of the extramural necropolises outside the city of Salona in the province of Dalmatia (Fig. 4). It is believed to mark the burial place of St. Anastasius, Salonitan saint whose martyrdom is testified by the written sources and whose body was laid inside the crypt of the two-storied *martyrium*, built early in the fourth century by lady Asclepia.⁴⁵ East of it, an elaborate complex was erected during the first half of the fifth century, consisting of atrium, two basilical struc-

³⁶ Rakocija, *Paleobyzantine churches*, 133; idem, *O bazilici*, 41.

³⁷ Jeremić, *op. cit.*, 275; eadem, *Kasnoantička nekropola u Jagodin mali*, in: *Jagodin mala, kasnoantička nekropola*, ed. S. Perić, Niš 2014, 20.

³⁸ Rakocija, *Paleobyzantine churches*, 133; idem, *O bazilici*, 53–54. About the ionic impost capital from Naissus, cf. I. Nikolajević-Stojković, *Jonski impost kapiteli iz Makedonije i Srbije*, ZRVI 1 (1952) 170–174; I. Nikolajević-Stojković, *Ranovizantiska arhitektonska dekorativna plastika u Makedoniji, Srbiji i Crnoj Gori*, Beograd 1957. Ionic impost capitals similar to the one found in Niš can be observed in baptistery of Episcopal basilica in Stobi, dated to the fifth century. Cf. S. Filipova, *Ranovizantijski kapiteli u Republici Makedoniji*, Belgrade 2004 (unpublished doctoral dissertation), T. XLVIa.

³⁹ S. Golubović, *Prilog proučavanju olovnih sarkofaga u Gornjoj Meziji*, *Viminacium* 12 (2001) 138; M. Rakocija, *Još jednom o dekoraciji ranohrišćanskog dečijeg olovnog sarkofaga iz bazilike mučenika u Nišu*, *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja* 20/2 (2012) 20, with the older literature.

⁴⁰ Lj. Zotović, *Jagodin Mala, Niš – Kasnoantička nekropola*, *Arheološki pregled* 4 (1962) 230–233; Spremo Petrović, *op. cit.*, 29; Lj. Zotović, N. Petrović, *Kasnoantička nekropola u Jagodin Mali u Nišu*, Beograd 1968; Jeremić, *Kasnoantička nekropola u Jagodin mali*, 22.

⁴¹ Zotović, *op. cit.*, 232–233; Zotović, Petrović, *op. cit.* [18]; Lj. Zotović, *Pogrebni ritual i shvatanja zagrobnog života u svetu kasnoantičke nekropole Naisa*, *Niški zbornik* 1 (1971) 50.

⁴² Zotović, *Jagodin Mala*, 232–233.

⁴³ Spremo Petrović, *op. cit.*, 29.

⁴⁴ Rakocija, *O bazilici*, 47–48.

⁴⁵ E. Dyggve, *History of Salonitan Christianity*, Oslo–Cambridge 1951, 78; J. Zeiller, *Les origines chrétiennes dans la province romaine de Dalmatie*, Roma 1967, 61; Brown, *op. cit.*, 33–34; R. MacMullen, *The Second church. Popular christianity A. D. 200–400*, Atlanta 2009, 50. The dedication of the site as the memoria of St. Anastasius was strengthened by the inscription dated to the late sixth or early seventh century. Cf. A. M. Yasin, *Reassessing Salona's churches. Martyrium evolution in question*, *Journal of early Christian studies* 20/1 (2012) 91, n. 76.



Fig. 4. Martyrium of st. Anastasius, Marusinac, Salona (photograph in public use)

tures and an opened area between them.⁴⁶ Only by looking at the ground plan of the Marusinac complex, it is visible that, as A. M. Yasin recently properly noticed, “the complex contains not one but multiple significant focal points”,⁴⁷ based on the fact that there existed three different places of veneration, i.e. *martyrium* and two basilicas. Yet, the dating of the *martyrium* is based primarily on the tradition found in written sources.⁴⁸

Several similar examples of martyria are known today, like for example those in La Alberca (Spain)⁴⁹ or the ancient Sopiana (Pecs, Hungary) the capital of the province Valeria.⁵⁰ La Alberca structure, uniquely defined as *martyrium*, was actually built adjacent to the late antique rural villa (Fig. 5). It was likewise two-storey structure with thick buttresses on its outer walls, oriented East-West with the entrance on the East and apse-like structure on the West. Its martyrial function is mostly based on the formal similarities with the *martyrium* in Marusinac and is nowadays under suspicion,⁵¹ first of all because of its context (i.e. next to the villa in the rural surrounding). The so called *martyrium* in Sopiana, although there is no secure evidence about the martyr’s burial there, is built in the second half of the fourth century and is likewise

⁴⁶ E. Marin, *Starokršćanska Salona*, Zagreb 1988, 44; Yasin, *Re-assessing Salona’s churches*, 90.

⁴⁷ Yasin, *op. cit.*, 91.

⁴⁸ E. Dyggve even gave a more precise dating of the basilicas to the time of bishop Paschasius, who became bishop sometime before 426 and stayed until 443. Cf. Dyggve, *op. cit.*, 79. The grave of the said bishop was believed to be discovered in the north basilica, cf. Marin, *Starokršćanska Salona*, 58.

⁴⁹ P. C. Maldonado, *Angelorum participes: the cult of the saints in Late Antique Spain*, in: *Hispania in Late Antiquity. Current perspectives*, eds. K. Bowes, M. Kulikowski, Leiden–Boston 2005, 186; K. Bowes, “Une coterie Espagnole pieuse”: *Christian archaeology and Christian communities in fourth- and fifth- century Hispania*, in: *Hispania in Late Antiquity*, 212–213.

⁵⁰ Z. Magyar, *Late Roman Sopiana: a study of different influences in fourth century southern Pannonia*, Sheffield 2006 (unpublished master thesis), 42–43.

⁵¹ Bowes, *op. cit.*, 213.

the two-storied structure with the underground burial chamber and the mausoleum above. Spatial division is very similar to the above mentioned examples, with arcosolia built into the lateral walls, but the apse oriented to the East is actually freestanding and not enclosed by the wall.⁵²

There are many examples of architecturally similar funeral buildings defined as *memoriae*. Those can be found all over the Roman Empire prior to the fourth century, often being used for burying of members of one *familia*, but only those that show traces of future Christian cultic activities can be treated as potential analogies for the martyrium in Naissus. In that context, the geographically and functionally closest is the mentioned martyrium in Salona.

Unfortunately, unlike the Salonitan *martyrium*, all the others lack any written testimony that can in any way be tied to it and the discovered archaeological material is insufficient for more precise conclusions. It can likewise be said for the Naissus’ example. Only one sentence, recorded by bishop Victricius of Rouen (393–407) in his work *De laude sanctorum* mentioned Naissus as one of five cities in which saints’ relics cured and performed miracles, alongside with Rome, Constantinople, Antiochia and Thessaloniki.⁵³

Several questions arose from everything above said about the complex in Jagodin Mala. First is the question of dating of the *martyrium* and the church, since it is still unclear whether the church is contemporaneous with the *martyrium* or was later than it, and how much later was it built. The second is even more important question about the original purpose of the *martyrium*, based primarily on the fact that the entrance into the lower level of this building was enabled. It of course means that it was possible to enter the level of the building which served not only as the *martyrium*, but as private family mausoleum, as is

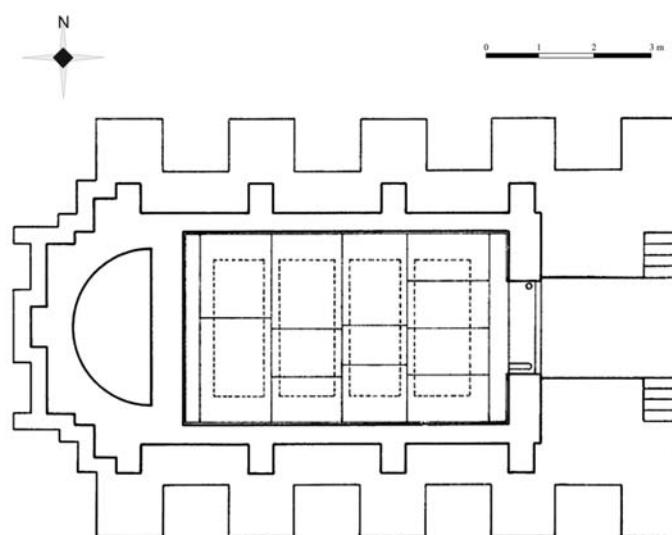


Fig. 5. Martyrium in La Alberca, Spain – ground plan (photograph in public use)

⁵² Magyar, *op. cit.*, 42–43; K. Hudák, *The iconographical program of the Wallpaintings in the Saint Peter and Paul burial chamber of Sopiana (Pécs)*, *Mitteilungen zur christlichen archäologie* 15 (2009) 47–76.

⁵³ Victricius Rhotomagensis, *Liber*, 453; H. Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, Bruxelles 1912, 283; Zeiller, *Les origines chrétiennes*, 108.

believed. The third question is what the primary focus of veneration was – church altar or the *martyrium*, and how the spacious relation between those two really functioned.

The answer to the first question must be searched for in archaeological evidences, which suggest that the church and the *martyrium* might have been built simultaneously. If we aim to reconsider the dating of architectural sculpture, it is true that the style of ceramic capitals from the pilasters in *martyrium* do correspond to the fourth century dating (Fig. 6). But the style can be the enemy of every researcher who aim to date a building according to it, because architectural sculpture, especially capitals, is often reused in later times.⁵⁴ If we take the coins dated to the fourth century as the evidences for earlier dating of the *martyrium*, we are once again in the blind alley, since the date of their mintage can only give us *terminus post quem* because Roman and late antique coins were often in use for a long time.

As was already pointed, when Christianity became legitimate religion, bodies of the “very special dead” were to be buried separately from their family members, becoming the *foci* of the mass veneration.⁵⁵ Later, their bodies were unearthed, moved (*translatio*) and buried again, often dismembered, because even the smallest particle of the remains was sacred to the Christians.⁵⁶ If the *martyrium* in Jagodin Mala indeed had the purpose to unite in death wealthy locals with some unknown martyr, it must have been that his or hers body was unearthed from the original place of its burial, and then laid probably into the coffin placed on the platform in the midst of the lower level of the *martyrium*. Although there are no definite archaeological testimonies, it should not be excluded that the earlier structure discovered below the *martyrium* served as the original shrine that marked the place of saint’s burial. It can also be suggested with certainty, like was for the *martyrium* in Marusinac, that the arcosolia built into the walls of the crypt were intended for the family members of the *martyrium* builders. It seems that the martyr’s body, from the moment of its second entombment inside the *martyrium*, became the property of another family, this time not necessarily of his own but of the one that acquired his or hers body. From that moment on, martyr’s body and the bodies of the deceased ancestors were commemorated together not only by the family members but by the entire community. Yet, it was obviously not enough for the Christian community of Naissus, because everybody wanted to be buried as close to the sacred focus as possible.⁵⁷ That is why the building of the church occurred. But despite this quite simplified explanation, the existence of church itself still poses the question: what was the religious focus of this Christian temple? For the complex in Marusinac it was suggested that the body of St. Anastasius was transferred to the church, and placed under the altar.⁵⁸ The same could also be proposed



Fig. 6. Ceramic capitals from pilasters in *martyrium* in Jagodin Mala (after Jeremić, *Kasnoantička nekropola*, cat. nr. 173)

for the complex in Jagodin Mala. Yet, it would mean that the saint’s body was disturbed twice in a couple of decades. This will also imply another question: what was the opinion of the Church when considering this “adoption” of the saint’s body as well as considering the disturbing of the buried body? In the pre-Christian Empire it was forbidden to exhume the body, regardless of reasons to do so – the exhumation was treated as a crime and protected by civil laws, since the process would terminate its status of *res religiosa*.⁵⁹ The exhumation as a form of violation of the tomb is also recognized in the later laws, for example in the one of emperor Theodosius I (378–396) dated to 386. It states that the transfer of any buried body is strictly forbidden, as well as dismembering martyr’s remains or selling the relics. Yet it allows the embellishment of the martyr’s grave or tomb, in order to be used for the purpose of the cult.⁶⁰ That does not necessarily mean that there were no exhumations, as we can see on the most popular example of bishop Ambrose of Milan’s transfer of SS. Gervasius and Protasius or the two transfers of the re-

the local council of Carthage held in 419 that stated that all the *martyria* built extra muros, which lack earthly remains of saints, should be destroyed. Cf. Enchev, *op. cit.*, 719.

⁵⁹ Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead*, 62–63.

⁶⁰ There were the suggestions that this law was an answer to the act of transferring martyrs’ remains by bishop Ambrose of Milan. Cf. Rebillard, *op. cit.*, 66, n. 26; Enchev, *op. cit.*, 720.

⁵⁴ Caraher, *op. cit.*, 22.

⁵⁵ MacCormick, *op. cit.*, 18.

⁵⁶ Rapp, *op. cit.*, 558–559.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 559.

⁵⁸ Marin, *Starokršćanska Salona*, 44; idem, *Les nécropoles de Salone*, in: *Actes du XI congrès international d’archéologie chrétienne. Lyon, Vienne, Grenoble, Genève, Aoste, 21–28 septembre 1986*, Rome 1989, 1236. It is known that from the second half of the fourth century onward, the martyrs’ remains started to be transferred inside the city walls and re-buried below the church altars. To this testify the acts of

mains of St. Babylas in Antioch, both times by the members of the royal family of Constantine.⁶¹ Mentioned laws actually testify that the state tried to eliminate already existing practice by punishment. Of course, another possible scenario must be taken into account: number of cases were recorded when martyrs never in fact had the proper burial, like was the case with the mentioned St. Anastasius of Salona, SS. Peter and Marcellinus of Rome and many others. Pious Christians saved their bodies from rivers or woods, and then buried them according to Christian funeral practice, which could have also happened to the person buried inside the Naissus' *martyrium*.

The two-storey concept of this building suggest that it was not meant only for burials, but was possibly also intended for some kind of ritual tied to the body of the martyred saint. One possibility, although not very possible, is that some kind of funeral banquets in memory of the departed was held in the upper floor. It is known from the written sources that early Christians did see the banquet as one way of honoring the "very special dead", although that practice was intensely disapproved by some church fathers. It can also suggest that Eucharist was held above the martyrs' tomb, mentioned by Tertulian and Augustine, which imply that believers brought offerings, i.e. the vine and bread, which were partially to be used for Eucharist and partially to be distributed to the poor.⁶² Sadly, the *martyrium* in Jagodin Mala is poorly preserved so there is no evidence about the possible existence of an altar or even a niche in the eastern or western wall of the upper floor, so no proof of any liturgical action can be given. It brings us back to the third posed question considering the interrelation of the church and the *martyrium*.

One possible explanation considering the complex in Jagodin Mala is that the place of martyr's burial, maybe the elder structure below the *martyrium*, was the original cult focus, and that the *martyrium* may have inherited the same function. Another focal point was the church erected east of it. The building of the church suggests strong cult which developed around the *martyrium*, which led to the conclusion that the martyr's body was indeed laid inside the crypt, i.e. that the cult developed *ad corpus*. Than the basilica built next to the *martyrium* in Jagodin Mala in Naissus would actually be the so called *basilica iuxta sanctum*, sacred building which is not necessarily built directly above the saint's remains, but is somehow connected to the saint or the martyr.⁶³ The existence of the church may also suggest that it was the bishop in fact, who was in charge of the martyr cult, so the church was needed in order for services to be conducted on appropriate occasions, as for example on saint's anniversary. Those services became common from the fourth century onward and attracted a large number of faithful who could in their own way participate in the liturgy. The possibility that the bishops were in charge of the cult does not imply that they were the founders of every church in their realm. Founding the churches was usually the privilege

of well-to-do members of Christian community and, as R. MacMullen wrote "the elite *owned* the church they attended".⁶⁴ Another thing to which we must focus is the discovery of architectural remains of different structures both south and north of the church (chambers, walls), the function of which cannot be explained by the regular liturgical acts. Those ancillary spaces suggest that the basilica could have functioned as the place of pilgrimage.⁶⁵ To this can also testify the words of Victricius of Rouan stating that Naissus was one of the most important cities in which saints performed miraculous healings, as well as Priscus' comment that in the Naissus' temples, ruined by Huns, he saw some people who remained there because of illness.⁶⁶ Since it is known that martyrial remains all over the Empire performed miracles, among them primarily miraculous healings, Priscus' words must be understand in the way that those who stayed in temples during Hunic raids must have been seeking for cure from the saints. Those words can also mean that the complex in Jagodin Mala, as the important cultic space of Naissus, could have been founded and in function prior to those raids.

Ever since the Oršić-Slavetić's excavations, at first the *martyrium* and than the entire complex in Jagodin Mala, were often in focus of many scholars, which testify about its importance for the research of early Christianity on the central Balkans. It is the only definitely testified *martyrium*, despite the fact that written historical sources suggest the existence of many others. Therefore, it is of utter importance to define what its functions really were. The obvious are that it served as the place of burial for several persons besides the martyr, as well as that it was the focal point for various burials outside the structure, mostly of wealthier population of Naissus. The less obvious functions must be seek for not in architecture or archaeology, but in ideas and needs that led the founders, builders and believers. Every building activity on the spot was closely tied to the cultic function of the entire complex. Its culmination can be observed in building of the basilica. Whether it was contemporaneous to the *martyrium* or was built later, its erection definitely was the consequence of the strongly established and well developed martyr's cult. It enabled the strong link between the martyr's body and the necessary services. It also served as covered graveyard for all of those that could afford to be buried as close as possible to the martyr's remains. So the final conclusion, despite all still unanswered questions, is that the complex in Jagodin Mala was a conglomerate of diverse functions, all developed around the same idea – that of the Salvation. It was needed by the founders of the *martyrium* and church, by the departed buried around or under the church, as well as for all of those who gathered to pay homage to the saint, whether members of the community or pilgrims. Because they all believed that their sins will be "washed" at the Last Judgment Day by the "martyr's sacred blood" spilled for the Christian God.⁶⁷

⁶¹ MacMullen, *op. cit.*, 26.

⁶² Rebillard, *op. cit.*, 152, 154. M. Rakocija suggests that to this purpose may have served the southern annex built next to the narthex. Cf. Rakocija, *O bazilici*, 51.

⁶³ J. D. Alchermes, *Cura pro mortuis and cultus martyrum. Commemoration in Rome from the second through the sixth century*, New York 1989 (unpublished doctoral dissertation), 113.

⁶⁴ MacMullen, *op. cit.*, 22.

⁶⁵ Pilgrimage churches often had the same kind of ancillary spaces. Cf. Caraher, *op. cit.*, 27.

⁶⁶ Victricius Rhotomagensis, *Liber*, 453; *Prisc. Frg.* 8, 291,9–15, in: *Prisci Fragmenta. Historici graeci minores I*, ed. L. Dindorf, Leipzig 1870.

⁶⁷ G. MacKie, *Symbolism and purpose in an Early Christian martyr chapel. The case of San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro, Milan*, *Gesta* 34/2 (1995) 98.

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Лични пијетет или колективна побожност у ранохришћанским мартријумима. Пример касноантичког Ниша

Олга Шпехар

Ранохришћански мартријум у Јагодин мали у Нишу открио је тридесетих година XX века А. Оршић-Славетић и од тог тренутка ова грађевина доспева у жижу интересовања истраживача различитих профила. Археолошким ископавањима обављеним 1952. и 1953. године, под руководством Ђ. Мано-Зисија, утврђено је да је мартријум само део већег комплекса, којем припада и тробродна базилика саграђена источно од њега. Базилика је дуга 21,6 m, а широка 15,5 m, с нартексом дугим 3,5 m и широким 12,3 m. Те димензије цркве не морају бити коначне, будући да је археолошким ископавањима утврђено да се јужно и северно од ње пружају зидови управни на бочне зидове храма. Даља археолошка ископавања онемогућена су због недостатка простора за њихово извођење. Иако је мало вероватно да су у питању додатни бочни бродови, остаје могућност да су постојале просторије придодате уз цркву, с тим што је њихова намена до данас остала непозната. Западно од нартекса налазио се простор који је у литератури најчешће означавао као егзонартекс, а вероватно је имао намену вестибила што је повезивао базилику с мартријумом. На основу открића јонског импост капитела црква је датована у V век. Испод ње су откривени бројни гробови и гробнице, од којих су неки старији од цркве, неки су из доба њене изградње, док неки потичу из каснијег времена. Приликом археолошких ископавања откривени су и фрагменти трију натписа фунерарног карактера, који су се вероватно налазили над гробовима особа сахрањених испод пода храма.

Мартријум је био двоспратна структура правоугаоне основе, оријентисана у правцу исток–запад, са улазом на истоку. Био је саграђен изнад старијег објекта, који се датује у IV век. Крипта мартријума, димензија 7,5 × 6 m, служила је за сахрањивање, о чему сведоче четири аркосолијума уграђена у бочне зидове, док се у средишњем делу крипте налазио постамент који је могао да буде место полагања саркофага с моштима неког локалног наисуског мученика. У западни зид крипте била је узидана мала ниша, изнад које се налазио прозорски отвор, у литератури најчешће означавао као *fenestella*. Горњи спрат мартријума слабије је сачуван од крипте, али оно што се са сигурношћу могло закључити јесте да су његове димензије 7,15 × 6,2 m, као и да су његови спољашњи зидови били ојачани потпорним ступцима. Приликом ископавања мартријума откривен је новац који се датује у прву половину IV века, због чега се сматра да је мартријум изграђен неколико деценија или чак читав век пре базилике. Као други показатељ за датовање мартријума

у IV век послужили су капители пиластара који својим стилем одговарају IV веку, иако непосредних паралела нема. Аркосолијуми и постамент у крипти мартријума у Јагодин мали сведоче о томе да је овај објекат обједињавао култ мученика и сахране виђенијих чланова заједнице, највероватније чланова породице која је саградила мартријум и самим тим на изванредан начин „присвојила“ мучениково тело.

Ако се детаљније проуче резултати археолошких ископавања, чини се да су базилика и мартријум ипак били грађени једновремено, вероватно пре хунских продора 441–447. године. Мартријум, тачније крипта мартријума, био је сакрални фокус у култу мученика, док је друга важна тачка била базилика. Могуће је да је реч о цркви подигнутој *iuxta sanctum*, то јест уз мучениково тело. То може значити да је светељско тело остало у крипти цркве и да никада није премештено, као што се претпоставља да је учињено с телом светог Анастасија, које се нашло испод олтара јужне цркве у комплексу Марусинац у Салони. Изградња базилике уз мартријум у Јагодин мали свакако сведочи о томе да је бројној хришћанској заједници у Наисусу било потребно место на којем би се обављале службе посвећене мученику сахрањеном у мартријуму.

Мартријум на локалитету Јагодин мала једини је објекат који је сигурно имао ту намену, иако писани извори указују на то да је таквих објеката морало бити много више не само у Наисусу већ и на простору читаве данашње Србије. Стога је од изузетног значаја утврђивање свих функција које је читав комплекс имао. Очигледно је да је сам мартријум служио као место сахране неколико личности, поред мученика, као и да је био фокус око којег су сахрањивани сви они који су у смрти желели да се нађу у близини мучениковог тела (*depositio ad sanctos*). Мање очигледне функције не могу се тражити помоћу археологије или архитектуре, већ разумевањем идеја и потреба које су водиле ктиторе, градитеље и вернике. Врхунац у подизању читавог комплекса представљала је изградња базилике као главног показатеља да је култ мученика на том месту био снажно утемељен и развијен, што је омогућило и стварање везе између мучениковог тела и неопходног богослужења. Она је уједно служила и као покривено гробље, намењено свима онима који су могли себи да приуште то да буду сахрањени што ближе мучениковим моштима. Упркос питањима на која се још не може одговорити, закључак је да је комплекс имао мноштво различитих функција, развијених око исте основне идеје – спасења.