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Universitas Tyrnaviensis Facultas Philosophica



# ANODOS

*Studies of the Ancient World*

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## *Studies of the Ancient World*

12/2012

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Motif of the „Miracle rain“ from the column of Marcus Aurelius in Rome. In the window: Lotus-palmette pattern, Lagina.

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**CENTRE AND PERIPHERY  
OVER THE PASSAGE OF TIME**

**(From the Bronze Age to Late Antiquity)**

**Dedicated to the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the cooperation between  
Trnava University and Turkish universities**

**Trnava, 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> October 2014**

# Contents

PREFACE .....	7
Klára KUZMOVÁ – Erik HRNČIARIK	
Turkey through the eyes of classical archaeologists. Ten years of cooperation between Trnava University and Turkish universities .....	9
Halime ASLAN	
Lotus-palmette pattern of Lagina Hekate Temple .....	15
Asuman BALDIRAN	
Yalıhöyük: A settlement on the coast of Sugla Lake .....	27
Anton BAMMER	
Der Artemistempel von Ephesos – ein Entwurf des Theodoros .....	43
Ertekin M. DOKSANALTI	
Open air cult sites in eastern Pontus region .....	61
Piotr DYCZEK	
Ancient port of Rhizon/Risinum – Montenegro .....	79
Elisabetta GAGETTI	
Textiles as iconographic media between centres and peripheries over time	
The case of the early mediaeval glass cameos of the “Atelier of the Oriental Fabrics”	
on the Cross of Desiderius in Brescia .....	89
Verena GASSNER – Ulrike MUSS	
Neue Überlegungen zur urbanistischen Organisation von Kolophon .....	119
Martin GRETSCHER	
Peripheral knowledge? Reconsidering archival documents and the Late Bronze Age at Colophon .....	135
Zafer KORKMAZ	
Cilician Iron Age settlements .....	147
Klára KUZMOVÁ – Ján RÁKOŠ	
Roman provincial products from the native settlement of the Przeworsk culture at Trstené pri Hornáde (Eastern Slovakia) .....	163
Ireneusz ŁUĆ	
The mobility of Roman soldiers during their military service .....	173
Michaela NIKLOVÁ	
The household archaeology .....	183
Lucia NOVÁKOVÁ	
Burial places outside the sanctuary: centre of religious life .....	193
Erwin POCHMARSKI	
Grabaltäre mit dionysischen Darstellungen und ihre Vorbilder in Rom, Oberitalien und Noricum .....	205
Dominik REPKA	
Archaeological and written evidence of Western Celtic groups presence in the Carpathian Basin territory at the end of Early and the beginning of Middle La Tène period .....	219

Dimitra ROUSIOTI

Sharing images, shaping power in the periphery: The influence of the Mycenaean palatial system  
in the iconography of the Late Bronze Age Thessaly ..... 233

Suhal SAĞLAN

A garland sarcophagus from Karaman ..... 243

Suhal SAĞLAN

A Roman Republican portrait from Iassos ..... 251

Vladimír VARŠÍK – Titus KOLNÍK

Römisch versus germanisch. Zum Bauwesen des quadischen Herrnsitzes in Cífer-Pác (SW-Slowakei) ..... 257

Zuzana ZETOCHOVÁ

Transformation by the fire. Variability of Celtic cremation rite from the Middle Danube region ..... 269

## Ancient port of Rhizon/Risinum – Montenegro<sup>1</sup>

Piotr Dyczek

**Keywords:** Montenegro, Rhizon, ancient port.

**Abstract:** For fifteen years now archaeologists from University of Warsaw have been excavating ancient Rhizon in Montenegro, on Kotor Bay. In the course of excavation parts of four insulae of ancient Hellenistic Town were open. Numerous finds, among them: coins of Illyrian king Ballaios, amphorae, Hellenistic pottery, fragments of sculptures, gemmae and golden ring, were found in the archaeological layers. From the very beginning of our excavation was clear that ancient Rhizon was the great and important port on Adriatic. In years 2003-2010, underwater investigations were done. We have found three centres of pottery concentration. The greatest one was close to peninsula Rtac. The pottery deposit contain fragments of amphorae, stoppers, kitchen and table wares, tiles from the broad period from 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC till 17<sup>th</sup> c. AD. Two other points of pottery concentration in two smaller inner gulfs were located. Relation between these three points suggest that around peninsula Rtac were roadstead, and in two other places ships wait for exit to the port, or – may be more probably – here smaller boat moored. Close to the delta of small modern river Špila stone construction were located – today partly destroyed and cover bay sand and mud. The structure is not clear, but seems – by analogies – that here was ancient port of Rhizon.

For fifteen years now archaeologists from the Center for Research on the Antiquity of South-eastern Europe of the University of Warsaw have been excavating ancient Rhizon/Risinum,<sup>2</sup> a site within the boundaries of modern Risan on Kotor Bay in Montenegro (Fig. 1).

Research was carried out in Risan in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it was incidental, restricted to small areas that were selected most often arbitrarily.<sup>3</sup> New impetus was given by the implementation of a Polish–Montenegro scientific program. The most important discoveries made by Polish archaeologists have already been published in *Anodos*.<sup>4</sup>

Archaeological excavation of the ancient layers of Rhizon has produced a considerable number of ancient finds. Predominant among these are the amphorae and the many different kinds of stoppers (Fig. 2). All of the clay containers were imported, that is, the wine that was stored in them was imported from many different wine-producing centers around the Mediterranean. Typological research on the amphorae indicates which centers are in question:<sup>5</sup> Corinthian vessels from the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC, types imported in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC primarily from Sicily, that is, types MGS III, IV, V corresponding in the local site typology to Rhizon HA 1, 2 and 3, a few from Rhodos (Rhizon HA 4), Greek-Italic products of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC produced in Etruria, Latium and Campania (Rhizon HA 6). Last but not least, there are types Rhizon HA 8 and 9, both typical 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC containers used for the wine made in Greek cities that evolved from the old Greek colonies in the Adriatic (Fig. 3).

Luxury Hellenistic tableware, including Gnathia vessels, was also imported to Rhizon from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC (Fig. 4). Sets for drinking wine predominate in this group: oinochoe,

<sup>1</sup> The project has been financed with resources provided by the National Science Center, Poland, allotted on the basis of decision DEC-2015/19/B/HS3/02056.

<sup>2</sup> Dyczek 2014a, 91-109; 2014b.

<sup>3</sup> Faber 1992, 32; 1996, 108; Mijović and Kovačević 1975, 25; Kovačević 1997a, 105; 1997b, 17-51; Drobnjakiević 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Dyczek 2008b, 155-63; 2011, 99-110; 2014b.

<sup>5</sup> Dyczek 2012, 66-80; cf. Vandenmersch 1994, 69-87.





*Fig. 1. Aerial view of Risan (photo S. Rzeźnik).*



*Fig. 2. Amphora stoppers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC (photo J. Reclaw).*



skyphoi, small cups. Archaeometric analyses have indicated other centers of production beside Egnatia, the major Italic manufacturing ter, including workshops on the island of Pharos (modern Hvar) and in Epidamnos which is modern Durrës in Albania.

Preliminary research has suggested wood and furniture made of wood, as well as most probably hematite as the main export products that the inhabitants of Rhizon produced in return for the wine and luxury tableware. Large chunks of hematite have been discovered both in archaeological layers and on the sea bottom.

Underwater research by the Polish archaeologists have yielded many examples of amphorae and Gnathia ware. The distribution of these finds in Risan Bay is hardly accidental: some along the shores but a cluster in one spot (Fig. 5). The archaeological data, ancient written sources and site topography leave no doubt that ancient Rhizon was an important harbor in antiquity.

The small locality of Lipci lies not far away from Risan. Depicted on a high rock overhang, which is what remains from a cave in this place, is a wall painting<sup>6</sup> that had excited much debate for years. Following extensive documentation by Polish archaeologists within the frame of salvage operations on the site, the mystery of the images appears to have been solved.<sup>7</sup> One among the different images merits special attention (Fig. 6). This image of a ship is fairly schematic, having been depicted as simplified outline, but it shows all the important details of construction. It brings to mind the image of a ship from the island of Hvar<sup>8</sup> and another representation on the so-called Stele di Novilara from the turn of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, which is believed to be the oldest depiction of a ship from the Adriatic area. Polish research on the Lipci paintings has moved back the date of the images to the turn of the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC, thus making the image from the neighborhood of Rhizon the oldest such representation known from the Adriatic.

A detailed examination of the image from Lipci leads to the conclusion that the ship recalls the characteristic form of a *liburna*. One such ship, measuring about 10 m in length, was discovered in the sea near Zaton. It was dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC.

<sup>6</sup> Pušić 1966, 189; Mijović 1967, 72; 1987, 5; Mijović and Kovačević 1975, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Dyczek 2008c, 189-97.

<sup>8</sup> Novak 1951, 204-5.



Fig. 3. Greco-Italic amphora from Risan (photo J. Reclaw).



Fig. 4. Large skyphos from Risan (photo J. Reclaw).

The excellent design of the liburna gave it great speed and maneuverability, hence it comes as no surprise that the Romans adopted it with only a few minor changes.

The Illyrian Enchelai inhabiting the vicinity of ancient Rhizon were pirates like the *Liburni*. The large and quiet bay with its many little coves gave the pirates excellent cover for a great many ships. Queen Teuta is known to have taken advantage of this fact. In the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC she moved her royal residence to Illyria and plagued the Roman fleet with piratical raids.<sup>9</sup> The first Illyrian war was fought in effect, ending in Teuta's defeat in 228 BC, but this did not curtail the development of the harbor at Rhizon and the growing expertise of the local shipbuilders. From the early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC trade was clearly on the rise.

Rhizon clearly benefited from its good location. It was founded most probably already in the 6<sup>th</sup> c. BC and its description in the *Periplus* of Scylax<sup>10</sup> is sufficient proof of it being considered a safe and frequented harbor from an early period despite the need for special instructions to find it.

An extensive Roman-age harbor is also evidenced in the archaeological record. The so-called 'Villa of Hypnos', which lies close to the modern shoreline (Fig. 7), was believed to be a Roman-age *villa urbana* until the recent verifying excavations carried out by Polish archaeologists. The house turned out to be a Roman *hospitium* located near the harbor. The new dating of the mosaic floors found in this structure indicates that the hospice was raised in the reign of Antoninus Pius and remained in use until the age of the Constantines.<sup>11</sup> This suggests uninterrupted prosperity of the harbor throughout the Roman period. Sherds of amphorae of the LR2 type discovered in the trenches are further proof of a growing trade network with different centers around the Mediterranean.

Risan remained an important port also in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century despite changes of historical fortune, that is, the Venetian first and later Turkish occupation. It served as the main harbor in Kotor Bay uninterruptedly for two and a half millennia, superseded only after the Venetians established ports in Perast and Kotor. Images of Risan in two known atlases, P. Coronelli's from 1688 and A. Zambella's from 1716, illustrate well this fact<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 8).

The glory of ancient Rhizon is long gone but even today there is a small harbor in the town, drawing modern "liburnae" sailing on the Adriatic.



Fig. 5. Clusters of finds underwater in Risan Bay, northern branch of Kotor Bay (author R. Karpiński).

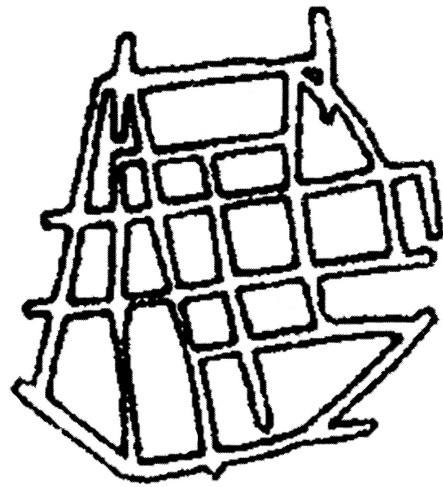


Fig. 6. Image of a ship depicted on the rock in Lipci (author R. Karpiński).

<sup>9</sup> Dyczek 2005, 102-5.

<sup>10</sup> Głombiowski 1977, 47.

<sup>11</sup> Dyczek 2013, 231-42.

<sup>12</sup> Coronelli 1688; Zambella 1716.



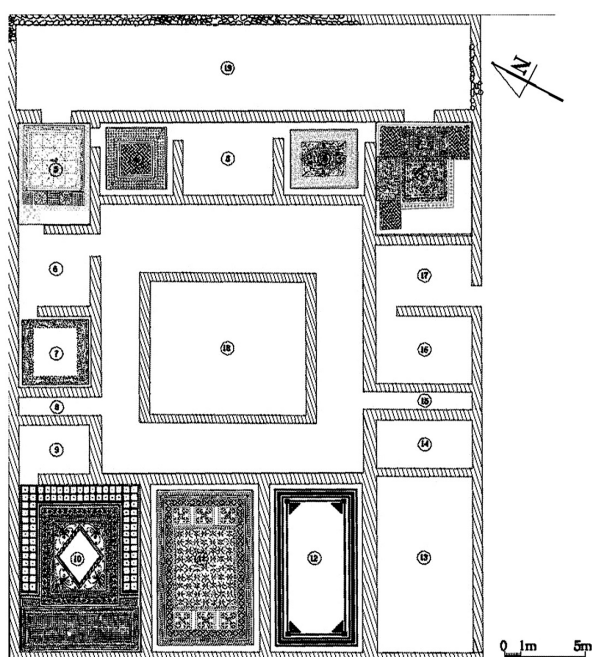


Fig. 7. Plan of the 'Villa of Hypnos' (photo J. Reclaw).

Underwater finds, their nature and distribution, are of greatest importance for the localization of the ancient port. Verified cases of ceramic vessels (mainly amphorae) being fished out in fishing nets have appeared since the 1920s. In the 1950s amateur seekers of antiquities searched for clusters of ancient artifacts on the sea bottom. Harbor structures were discovered at a depth of 17 m. A catastrophic earthquake in 1979 destroyed much of these remains and soem of the blocks were later reused in the construction of the modern waterfront.

In 2004 the Polish team undertook underwater exploration in order to search for the harbor remains and to reconstruct maritime traffic in the part of Kotor Bay adjoining Risan. Locating the roadstead was the first task.<sup>13</sup> The size of the area to be covered by research determined the methodology. The sea bottom was scanned first and the results were used to distinguish two sites for underwater archaeological excavation, one on the **Rtac cape** (Fig. 9), the other at the mouth of a seasonal stream called Sopot where it flowed into the sea (see Fig. 5, area B). A year



Fig. 8. Risan depicted on Zambella's map.

<sup>13</sup> Dyczek 2008a, 137-38.



*Fig. 9. Aerial view of cape Rtac (photo S. Rzeźnik).*

later the diving team located a large ellipsoid cluster of vessels just off cape Rtac (see Fig. 5, area A), measuring about 140 m by 60 m. This artificial mound, the underwater version of Monte Testaccio, was formed of ceramic vessels, mainly amphorae and to a lesser degree tableware and building fabrics, dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC to Ottoman times. There could be no doubt that archaeologists had discovered the ancient anchorage, but why was it so far from the town itself: about 1 km in a straight line, almost 1.4 km following the coastline? The answer lay in the specific sailing conditions inside the Risan part of Kotor bay, that is, the prevailing winds and sea currents.<sup>14</sup> It was here that all ships going to Rhizon had to wait their turn and it is here that their load was inspected and the ship made shipshape. Trash (including broken vessels) was thrown overboard, as was unwanted ballast, that is, fragments of building ceramics, which could have equally well been part of a shipment or just ballast. The rooftile shapes found here have parallels in Apollonia,<sup>15</sup> but also more interestingly in Sinope. Most rooftiles were dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC. Not all the production centers have been identified, but even so, the already known distribution range of the rooftiles indicates that cities in the Black Sea littoral, the Greek colonies in the Adriatic and Rhizon supplied one another with building material. It goes even further to show the intensity and universal nature of maritime connections in this period.

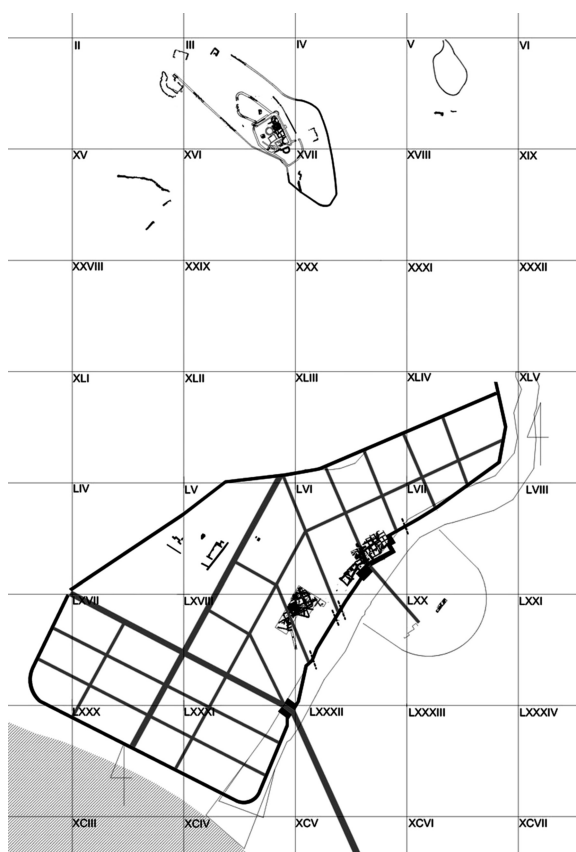
The chunks of hematite discovered both on land and underwater, as described above, have no known provenance, but should their export from Rhizon be assumed, then they would have had to be mined somewhere in the interior to judge by the geology of the area. Naturally, the ore could have been brought to Rhizon, but the contexts in which chunks of iron ore were discovered clearly points to transport by ship.

Another “backup” anchorage appears to have lain at the mouth of the Sopot stream where it flowed into the sea (see fig. 5, area B), although it was a less convenient location in terms of both the shoreline and the ground relief of the sea bottom in this area. Here ships could have waited their turn to enter the harbor only in the summertime. At other times of the year the stream would turn into a cascading river and the sweet water rushing up from the bottom of the sea created dangerous currents and whirlpools. Communication with the land was also less convenient than

<sup>14</sup> Karpiński 2010, 148.

<sup>15</sup> Mano 2006, 598-620.





**Fig. 10.** Plan of ancient Rhizon/Risinium (author P. Dyczek).

in the case of the Rtac cape. The cape was broad and flat and had enough free space and easy landing places, while the land around Sopot was formed of high mountain slopes falling almost vertically into the sea.

In 2010, archaeologists explored the city walls of Rhizon which are now underwater due to earthquake-related ground shifting (Fig. 10). Aerial and satellite photos from 1961, 1981 and 2005 were examined in order to reconstruct the course of the massive stone structures found in the delta of the Špila river in antiquity (Fig. 11). These structures adjoined the southern Rhizon defense, alongside the city gate that opened onto the main Adriatic road leading south (presently the “Jadranka” highway follows the course of this road). This road was marked on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, which shows the topographic situation from Roman times, but there is evidence for a road circumventing the bay already in earlier times. This road ran from Rhizon to the Greek-founded Epidaurous (modern Cilipi near Dubrownik) in the north and Butua (modern Budva) in the south. A sailing route following the coastline corresponded to the land trail.<sup>16</sup> A look at the settlement network shows that all the bigger urban centers were situated along



**Fig. 11.** Remains of harbor architecture(?) in ancient Risan (author R. Karpiński).

the coast and the reason for this was hardly the topographic situation as in most cases access was restricted by steep mountainous slopes falling directly into the sea. And yet these cities were built and colonies established in this region. It should be assumed that the benefits of

<sup>16</sup> Jurišić 2000, 50.



a seaside location and the possession of a harbor must have determined localization in each case. Thus, we should assume that there were once harbors in all these locations, even though few actual remains have been discovered and recorded.

Pictures show sections of walls running parallel to the coastline, but also transverse walls extending inland at right angle, making a comparison with harbor waterfronts inescapable, especially as the modern Risan waterfront is found nearby. Only a short section of partly submerged wall can still be seen today, the rest of these structures being destroyed and covered with sand. Scattered dressed stone blocks discovered on the sea bottom indicate that the walls were raised in the polygonal bond, similarly as the Rhizon fortifications. The suggestion is that they were built at the same time as the main defenses, not later than the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC.

The location of the ancient port of Rhizon in this area, a logical assumption based on the evidence, has to be commended for its rationality. The local topography did not allow it to be located by the west defenses, that is, on the seaward side, as it would have been the weakest point of the defenses. The waterfront could have served raiders as a place for mounting attacks on the walls and it would have also required a wide gateway. Placing the harbor by the southern side wall, already in the river delta, avoided all these drawbacks, while taking advantage of the river as an additional line of defenses. It is also not to be excluded that smaller vessels actually entered the river near the second southern gate where goods could have also been unloaded.

Urban development in the Roman age expanded the town to a size comparable with the modern city. A second harbor may have been needed at this time, located closer to the city center of the times, near the said 'Villa of Hypnos'. An excellent location for this second harbor would have been in the bay between the Rtac cape and the modern port (see fig. 5, area C). Finds of pottery, mainly containers, may be construed as evidence for the presence of a harbor in this area.

Summing up the results of current research, the following line of development can be reconstructed for the Greek and later Roman port. The first harbor corresponded to the building of the polygonal defenses and was located in the delta of the Špila. It had a stone waterfront and was serviced by an anchorage located off cape Rtac. A second harbor may have been established near the 'Villa of Hypnos' sometime in the Roman period. The anchorage off the cape remained in use throughout this period.

But where was the harbor of the newly established Rhizon, starting from the 6<sup>th</sup> to approximately the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Hypothetically, it should be placed in the delta of the Špila, which was the best landing place in the vicinity. It may have not had any sound stone architecture at this time and was used mainly because of the convenient topography. Montenegro archaeologists have reported wooden posts having been found in the river delta and interpreted as the original waterfront, but this information still needs to be verified. While the idea cannot be excluded, this kind of design would be entirely unique in the ancient world.

The location of ancient ports at other sites is based for the most part on finds of shipwrecks. The largest number of wrecks has been found off the coast of France and Italy,<sup>17</sup> but one should keep in mind the developed state of research in these countries. Intensive investigations in recent years by Croatian archaeologists have added a great number of new discoveries to the known catalogue of shipwreck sites along the eastern Adriatic coast and the offshore islands.<sup>18</sup> The catalogue of items that were transported on ships has also grown extensively as a result. The biggest group was made up of all kinds of ceramic containers, that is, amphorae of diverse types, but there were also dolia, mortaria, building ceramics, glass vessels, metals like lead, copper, iron, tin, luxury items but also dressed stone blocks.<sup>19</sup> From the perspective of these discoveries, the set of finds collected underwater at the Risan anchorage fits in perfectly with the general trends.

A much more difficult task lies ahead of archaeologists searching for permanent structures in ancient harbors on the eastern Adriatic coast. There are two reasons for this state of affairs.

<sup>17</sup> Parker 1992.

<sup>18</sup> Jurišić 2000, 60-88.

<sup>19</sup> Jurišić 2000, 117-25; 2006b, 175-92.

For one thing, some of the harbors seem to have been natural ports and needed no specially constructed waterfronts. Regular harbor installations, where they existed, certainly were destroyed either by earthquakes or by later port development. Surely there were also cities – and Rhizon was most probably among these – which had an artificial harbor beside a natural one. Large ships with over 300 tons deadweight moored by the stone waterfronts; smaller boats, under 100 tons, could have sailed into the river delta or been unloaded onto smaller vessels in natural harbors.<sup>20</sup> The existence of natural harbors may be postulated merely on the basis of the topography and finds collected from the sea bottom. Remains of stone structures here and there testify to the presence of artificial ports. In modern Albania, such ports have been noted in Apollonia and Epidamnos/Dyrrhachium,<sup>21</sup> in Montenegro only in Risan. More data comes from excavations in the coastal cities of Croatia<sup>22</sup> where the ruins of ports have been noted at, e.g. Pola,<sup>23</sup> Iader, Salona,<sup>24</sup> Narona, Epidaurum or Aemona,<sup>25</sup> Issa<sup>26</sup> and Brioni island.<sup>27</sup> It is believed, however, that artificial ports existed also at other sites where the results of archaeological research have been less patent.<sup>28</sup>

The well known quote from Plutarch is “navigare necesse est”, to which there is the second part stating “vivere non est necesse” – “sailing is more important than life”. The stormy history of the Greek city of Rhizon and of Roman Risinium, and finally of modern Risan bears this maxim out in full. There would be no city without the sea and it could not have developed without it. The sea brought defeat, but it also assured wealth and contacts with other cultures. Discoveries made by Polish archaeologists reveal a seaside center where different cultures weaved a common fate thanks to the sea. Each new season of excavations confirms us in this view.

The archaeological research, including underwater investigations, will be continued in Risan. In 2015 we hope to complete the exploration of the Hellenistic harbor and collect new data on the Roman-age port.

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<sup>20</sup> Jurišić 2000, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Reddé 1986, 218-19.

<sup>22</sup> Cambi 2001, 137-60.

<sup>23</sup> Matijašić 2001, 272-77.

<sup>24</sup> Oreb and Kirgin 1980, 111-14; Jurišić 2006a, 363-64.

<sup>25</sup> Jurišić 2000, 9, 76-8; Sanader 2009, 38.

<sup>26</sup> Radić and Rossi 2006a, 365-66.

<sup>27</sup> Jurišić and Orlić 1989, 98-99.

<sup>28</sup> Brusić 1968, 203-10; Versalović 1981, 107-18; Radić-Rossi 2006b, 288-89.

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