

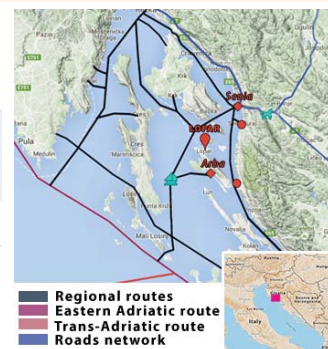


The Lopar peninsula (Island of Rab, Croatia): a rediscovered ancient pottery manufacturing region

Islands offer unique insights for the study of human relationships with the landscape (Walsh 2014: 212). Rab Island (Kvarner gulf, north-eastern Adriatic), is one example. The karst bedrock of the eastern Adriatic, presents few areas where sedimentary soils are fit for agriculture and even fewer are characterized by flysch – Rab Island, Lopar peninsula in particular, is one of them.

This contribution aims to investigate the role of Lopar peninsula in the wider economic and trading network operating in the Kvarner gulf in Antiquity. Lopar, situated in the rural backdrop of *Arba* (Rab town) and separated from it by a rocky ridge, lays on fertile grounds near the main sea route leading to *Senia* (Senj), a major ancient port and important crossroad of routes leading to the hinterland.

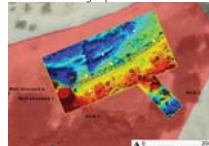
In medieval times, while Rab town was flourishing, this unique landscape features haven't proven sufficient to boost Lopar, which has been marginalized and depopulated. In the 20th c. its sparse rural habitation has given way to massive tourism exploitation. This historic role of self-sufficient community, with few links to Rab town and the coastal centres, is still evident in its traditions, dialect and onomastics.



Mahučina cove with the location of pottery kilns

Mahučina cove ceramic wasters

Mahučina cove geophysics results



Lopar peninsula archaeological topography



Podšilo bay with the location of the pottery kiln



Podšilo bay pottery kiln after excavation



Podšilo bay - materials from the kiln

Archaeological research carried out by the Institute of Archaeology (Zagreb, Croatia), has established a radically different picture of Lopar peninsula in Roman times (Lipovac Vrkljan, Šiljeg 2010, 2012).

Firstly, the discovery of a **pottery kiln in Podšilo bay** hinted to pottery production, while a second site with at least two kilns, on the opposite side of the peninsula in **Mahučina cove**, proved that in Roman times the economy of Lopar was thriving and might have heavily relied on pottery production. Further confirmation was provided by Early modern sources mentioning Lopar's tile manufacture.

Parallel to these discoveries, wider topographical research established a network of sites, mostly interpreted as rural *villae*, which dotted the peninsula and allowed us to reconstruct an even more vibrant economic landscape (Lipovac Vrkljan et al. 2014).



Balnea renovation inscription (3rd c. AD), Senj, CIL III, 10054

Trebonianus Gallus statue base, Rab town, CIL III, 3122 (10119)



So far, kiln wasters point to ceramic building materials manufacture, and the Podšilo kiln to activity in the 3rd c. AD. Such manufacture can be linked to the needs of rural estates on the peninsula, but it could also be one of ancient Lopar's goods traded with the main regional centres.

In fact, the 2nd and 3rd c. *Senia* lived a phase of major reconstruction, with public and sacred monuments being rebuilt. The same can be said of *Arba*, also improving its urban infrastructure in the 3rd c. AD. Locations with resources necessary for ceramics production are scarce and import from major italic and regional workshops at that time had already ceased.

Could Lopar's pottery kilns provide the necessary materials for this wave of renovation in its close vicinity? If so, was there other produce being shipped from Lopar alongside its bricks and tiles?

By addressing kiln product's identification, distribution and quantification, while investigating the nature of settlement and related agricultural production, future research could explain in more detail ancient Lopar's connection to the major centres in its neighbourhood.



Lopar peninsula with its fertile field stretching from Kamenjak, Rab Island's main karstic ridge

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