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.

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.

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 fact, the 2nd and 3rd c. Senia lived a phase of major reconstruction, with public and sacred monuments being rebuild. The same can be said of Arba, also improving its urban infrastructue 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.

Bibliography: