

## Project Description: The Brač Island Project

**Overview:** Brač is the second-largest island in the Adriatic Sea, a body of water that has been the notional boundary between the ancient Greek and Roman worlds and dividing scholarship in Classical literature, history, and archaeology. Yet the Adriatic is better viewed as an arena of intense cultural and economic interaction between Italy, Greece, and central Europe rather than a barrier. Archaeological work in Dalmatia (southern, coastal Croatia) indicates extensive trading contacts between neighboring regions beginning in the 14<sup>th</sup> c. BC (Forenbaher 2009). Brač was the focus of archaeological research by a Croatian team in 1994, under the auspices of the Adriatic Island Project (Gaffney et al. 1997), which documented known sites across the island and produced a gazetteer (Stančić et al. 1999). This volume forms the foundation of the new Brač Island Project that will conduct an intensive pedestrian survey around three sites in conjunction with geophysical work and targeted excavations. The archaeology of the island is threatened today by intense touristic development, including two of our chosen areas – Milna and Bol, so the timing of our project is somewhat urgent. Our overarching goal is to understand the dynamic cultural connections between ancient Greeks and Italians with the local Illyrian/Liburnian peoples from the Archaic through the Late Roman periods. This project began when I was invited by my colleague Dr. Vedran Barbarić at the University of Split to work on the island. Although I have already organized and implemented two field projects in southern Greece, this is a new direction for my work and comes nine years after I earned my PhD at the University of Texas at Austin.

**Research Questions:** Dalmatia is archaeologically-rich, yet understudied compared to many other regions of the Classical world. Located at a crossroads in the Mediterranean, the eastern Adriatic coast have long been neglected by Classical historians and archaeologists due in part to a dearth of ancient literary sources that mention the region and the lack of archaeological publications. Under the former Yugoslavian communist government, archaeological work was largely restricted to the prehistoric Illyrians peoples of the Balkans and had a nationalistic slant. Prior to the Second World War, some basic work had occurred at Diocletian's palace at Split and other well-known sites. Following the Croatian War of Independence in 1995, archaeological work resumed, but again with an emphasis on prehistory. An exception to this trend was the Adriatic Island Project or AIP (see above), the most important predecessor for the Brač Island Project. After the initial documentation of sites with the AIP, director Branko Kirigin began excavation at the site of the Greek colony of Issa (founded by Syracusans in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC) on the island of Vis.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of 20 years of work, he unearthed a cemetery with 4,000 burials of the 4<sup>th</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC, a large Classical-Hellenistic sanctuary, and part of the ancient city that was inhabited through the Early Roman period, a final publication is in progress.<sup>2</sup> Kirigin's work showed the archaeological potential of the islands, including Brač. Today, most of the coastal towns in Dalmatia have small Croatian excavations, these are primarily "rescue excavations" resulting from the rampant touristic development that plagues the region. A few other projects are working at sites excavated before 1938 and still await definitive publication. All of this is to say, that the research questions for the Brač Island Project range from simple to more complex due to the state of archaeology in the region and that the project is poised to make a major contribution to Dalmatian archaeology.

It is during the 7<sup>th</sup> century that considerable evidence for intense contacts with Italy, Greece, and central Europe first appears on Brač and the other Adriatic islands. Ancient literary sources record the foundation of a colony by the Corcyreans on the island of Korčula, while more extensive Greek contacts are supported by scattered finds of pottery from Athens, Corinth, and Magna Graecia (e.g., Cabanes 2002). Archaic Italian matt-painted pottery also occurs at several sites indicating an upsurge in contacts with the western Adriatic too at this time. Such imports of Greek and Italian pottery to the Adriatic islands

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<sup>1</sup> At about the same time, a Greek colony (Pharos) was also founded on Hvar by settlers from the Cycladic island of Paros (Kirigin 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Although not included in the AIP, new excavations on Korčula appear to indicate that they will locate a site of similar size and importance.

continue into at least the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC (see most recently, Miše 2012). The most obvious signs of pre-Roman trade with central Europe are significant quantities amber (worked and as large nodules), which are found at sites throughout the islands. The desire for greater access to ancient routes that carried this valuable commodity is one plausible explanation for the Greek and Italian interest in the Adriatic, but this is still an open question and one which we aim to address. The small site of Rat on Brač (near Luke Bobovišća) holds the most potential for yielding information about trade and external contacts in this period. Rat, which means “fort” in Croatian, is an Illyrian/Liburnian hillfort site believed to be occupied from the 10<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. BC and then abandoned, based on data from the AIP and a test excavation conducted in 2015.<sup>3</sup> Ceramics and a coin from Rat show that the inhabitants were engaging heavily with these new extra-regional trade networks, something that was surely facilitated by having one of the most sheltered harbors on the island just below the site. Once investigated through survey and geophysical work (and some targeted excavations), it should provide new evidence about local responses to the Archaic networks of exchange in the region and more fine-grained data about the imports themselves. Key research questions about this site include: what imports are consumed by the local inhabitants and what cultural impact do they have, what is the timing and direction of trade, i.e., are products from the western Adriatic consumed in the same periods as those from Greek cities of the Mainland and Magna Graecia, who were the traders, and what are the mechanisms by which these imports entered the local economy?

On the south-central part of Brač, we will survey around the hamlet/town of Bol. The AIP found traces of two Roman sites, one on the west and the other on the east side of the modern settlement. Taken together, it is likely that there is a sizable ancient settlement below the modern one from at least the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC and probably continuing into the 5<sup>th</sup> c. AD and later.<sup>4</sup> If there was a Greek colony on Brač, based on parallels to other Adriatic islands, it was probably either here or at Milna (see below). But the area of Bol is also crucial to the project because many of our key research questions revolve around the impact of Roman influence on the island. Dalmatia was one of the first places outside of Italy to be settled during the Late Republic, with sources recounting trading outposts and settlements of Italian merchants beginning in the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC and the first of several colonies was founded at modern Zadar (ancient Iadera) in 58 BC.<sup>5</sup> Later, under Augustus, the region was incorporated into one of the earliest Roman provinces. The small site at Bol has the potential to provide evidence about what happened at the local level during the transition from 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>-century Greek dominance in the region to strong Italian and later imperial Roman influence. Did long-established trade networks with the Greek cities to the south suddenly get cut off? Do we see an influx of Italian goods? How did these changes affect the local economy? Can we see any changes when the area’s political status shifts to one of an imperial province? These are the kinds of questions that are commonly asked of regions under Roman imperial control, but have rarely been asked of Dalmatia.<sup>6</sup> We are therefore in a strong position with Bol to begin answering them through intensive surface collection and detecting changes in the physical layout of the settlement through geophysical work.

The third area to be investigated is around the town of Milna, a large natural harbor south of Luke Bobovišća. The AIP did limited work there in 1994, but the geography of Milna with its double harbor and prime location are strong indications of its potential to be a site like either Rat or Bol. Like Rat, it lies on the straits between Brač and Šolta that are still the most navigable passage through the islands into the harbor at Split. Through our survey here, we are looking for similar kinds of evidence to address questions related to periods of intense contacts with Greeks and Italians in the region. Any information gained from Milna will therefore supplement that from the other two sites, and perhaps be an important counterpoint for understanding what was happening on the island as a whole.

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<sup>3</sup> The most comprehensive historical discussion of the Illyrians remains Wilkes 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Four Early Christian churches and several Late Roman sarcophagi have been documented in and around Bol.

<sup>5</sup> An excellent recent treatment of Early Roman Dalmatia can be found in Dzino 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Glicksman 2005 discusses imported products into coastal Dalmatia from the 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. AD but does not draw any conclusions related to the research questions posed by this project.

**Research Design and Methodology:** Our research design involves conducting an extensive intensive survey at all three sites, supplemented with geophysical prospection at Rat and Bol to address the questions as outlined above. The survey techniques will be the same that I used on the Western Argolid Regional Project, which is a site-less, artifact-based method initially developed by the Eastern Korinthia Archaeological Survey (Tartaron et al. 2006). This will involve gridding the entire landscape around each site into units based on field boundaries and natural geological features and then systematically collecting a 20% sample of artifacts from every period. All above ground features will also be documented. Once analyzed the artifact identifications will be combined with the spatial data from the units in GIS to generate maps that show areas where artifacts from the same periods are clustered. Although the information from the artifacts themselves will be crucial to answering many of our questions, the GIS maps will allow us to extrapolate information about changes in land use and to hypothesize about any political or economic impacts on settlement patterns from period to period. Using artifact density data, we may also locate areas for additional geophysical work in the second season. In the first season, Dr. Larry Conyers (University of Denver) will be conducting ground penetrating radar and magnetometry surveys over the hillfort and harbor at Rat. We also plan to do some geophysical prospection at Bol in the first season, but we have to wait until May to identify the precise areas. We hope that the geophysics will locate structures and their phases of expansion, which will allow some preliminary interpretations of the nature and extent of the sites as impacted by external changes. It is unusual to do survey and geophysical work simultaneously on a project, but we hope by combining techniques we will gain answers more quickly and that one will guide the other. We will also be sinking two trenches on the hillfort of Rat, concurrent with the survey and the geophysics, again to gather more data in a shorter period of time. In the second season, we hope to expand the excavations at Rat and possibly at Bol, guided by both the survey and geophysical work in this initial season. The contribution of this fellowship will therefore be considerable because it will help lay the foundation for second season of the project.

**Timeline of the Project:** At present, we plan on two seasons of fieldwork on Brač with the first from May 26-June 25, 2020 and the second season in June 2021. In this second season, we also intend to revisit sites of all periods located by the AIP that are currently under the most threat from new developments. In the first season, four teams of experienced field archaeologists (both PhDs and graduate students), two working on the survey and two on the excavations, for a total of 14 people will stay in Supetar and drive daily to the sites in rental cars. Our equipment is standard for both survey and excavations, including handheld GPS units needed for the survey teams and the Leica GPS rover unit for the excavations.

**Expected Outcomes:** Using our new data, we will attempt to address our research questions and work to integrate Dalmatia into larger dialogues about Greek colonization, the late Roman Republic and Early Empire, and more broadly into the archaeology of trade networks and economies in the ancient Mediterranean. We also hope that the planned two seasons of fieldwork on Brač will be the foundation for many more years of research and collaboration by expanding to other Adriatic islands in the future. We will present our interpretations as conference papers in the United States and Europe, but we intend to publish this research quickly in Croatian- and English-language journals with a final monograph in English. All data from our fieldwork will be made available on Open Access through UCLA or some other European body; we are still gathering information about the specific requirements of Croatian/EU law on digital publication of archaeological data from collaborative foreign projects. All publications and preliminary reports will be easily accessible and free online through multiple websites, including the project's own [www.dalmatiaarchaeology.org](http://www.dalmatiaarchaeology.org) (still under construction). We have archiving expert Rachel Fernandez, a senior digital curator at Arizona State's tDAR program, as a staff member to ensure that our data is treated appropriately. By freely sharing information, we hope this project will draw attention to the archaeological importance of the region and to encourage others to use it in their research.