

## Island Crossings: the role of the Central Dalmatian Islands in Prehistory and Antiquity

Dr Vincent Gaffney, Department of Ancient History and Archaeology (University of Birmingham)

During 2001 ZRC SAZU hosted Dr Vincent Gaffney from the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology (University of Birmingham) during his [Leverhulme](#) and [Arts and Humanities Research Board](#)-funded sabbatical. During this time Dr Gaffney worked with staff of the Spatial Information Centre (ZRC SAZU) on data collected as part of the Adriatic Islands Project. The aim of the work Ljubljana was to prepare the project's extensive archaeological and environmental databases for use in final analyses and to draw several volumes of the project to a conclusion.

The Adriatic Islands Project was a long-term international collaboration that sought to investigate the role of the central Dalmatian islands as a bridge between the Mediterranean and Balkan cultural zones, and between the ancient cultures of Greece and Italy. The peculiar arrangement of the coastline in central Dalmatia, the myriad of small islands and good harbours, provides numerous opportunities for interaction. The area has easy access south to Greece and north to the Po valley; whilst a string of islands enables "line of sight" travel from the Balkan coast to Italy. The pass at Klis behind Split provides one of the few major routes through the Dinarics to the interior of the Balkans.



Figure 1: Principal project study area (excluding Palagruza)

The principal aims of the project were therefore:

- Study of settlement trends throughout the principal archaeological periods up to the early medieval.
- The incorporation of settlement data within its larger regional context. This included;
  - The nature and impact of the movement of traded materials within local communities
  - The role of long-distance contacts in settlement development

- The nature of direct intervention and colonisation within the region, either by expansive local groups or major colonial powers.

Work as part of the AIP was carried out across a transect of islands running from Palagruža in the west to Brač in the east and incorporated Hvar, Vis, Šolta and a number of smaller islands. Research included:

- The isolation of key areas for small scale intensive work related to period and problem-specific research
- Intensive field survey of small areas to provide standardised chronological data for settlement development.
- Small scale trenching to provide detailed environmental, chronological and cultural sequences for key sites.

The result of this work, which was carried out by a very small team over 10 years, is one of the more extensive survey databases within the region. Some 2291 terrestrial and maritime archaeological sites have been recorded and surveyed and a series of excavations have been carried out including investigations of Impressed Ware scatters on Palagruža, the Early and Middle Neolithic caves at Grabčeva and Pokrivenik, the Middle-Late Bronze Age site at Škrip, the Iron Age hillfort at Talež and the Greek colony at Faros.

Following a review of local Slovene, Croatian, Serb and Bosnian literature for the previous 10 years, the most demanding of tasks carried out during the research period was the cleaning, standardisation and management of the immense geographical database currently based within ZRC SAZU as a precursor for study. The Adriatic Islands Project was one of the first large projects in Europe to adopt the use of GIS systems for primary data management. The base map sets exist in non-standard map projections and cross several UTM map zones. It was therefore necessary to re-project the entire project spatial database into a single map zone to permit standard analyses across the study area. A second related problem faced by staff related to the nature of environmental data used by the project. Previous environmental work in the area is patchy and non standard and the result has been a database of variable quality and resolution. To rectify this situation the most recent spatial plan for the island of Hvar as a basis to reclassify an MS Landsat satellite image to identify the agricultural potential of all land units across the whole of the study area.

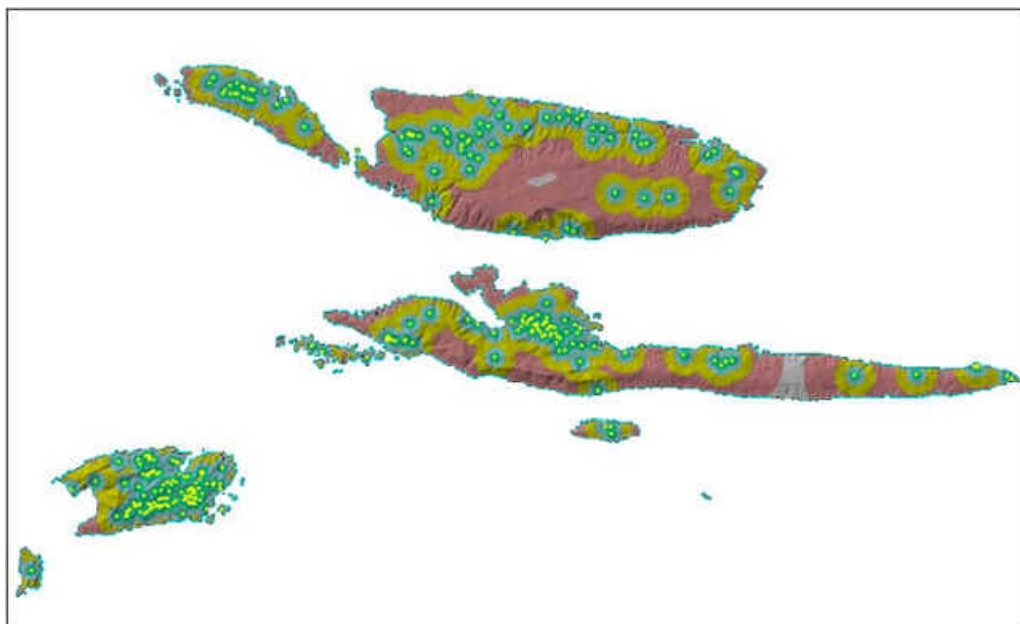


Figure 2: Re-projected Roman settlement across the study area

Following from this specific work has concentrated on the provision of two further data volumes for the project and preparation for publication of a final synthetic volume. Collation of the final and third survey volume for Vis, Šolta and the smaller islands has proceeded as a matter of priority and the volume should be published later this year. The data for volume 4 relating to the material culture, excavations and detailed survey carried out by the project has required the final processing of archaeological material generated during survey and its preparation for publication.

Following this basic preparatory work the applicant has been able to undertake extensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of the primary data for the islands. With such an extensive database it is difficult to be concise about the results but the following key points can be highlighted.

- The Central Dalmatian Islands function as an important land bridge between the Balkans and Italy and this use can be demonstrated to be of considerable depth (note the evidence for Early Neolithic activity of Palagruža). However, there is important variation in how the bridge was used over time. Whilst by nature the area is open to external influence this influence fluctuates according to internal and external political and cultural factors.
- During the Early Bronze Age the remote island of Palagruža appears to act as a centre for specialist lithic arrowhead production. Procurement may be socially embedded and linked to the dispersal of, for instance, Cetina material from the Croatian mainland to Italy and beyond.
- During the Middle - Late Bronze Age the Project has proven contact between the islands and Mycenaean groups at the defended site at Škrip (Brač). However, the spatial context of defended enclosures now suggests that the context of this contact was within a society in which control of ritual was of prime significance. This situation probably suppressed external contact during the later second millennium. The definition of a new class of exotic pottery by project members on enclosures on the island of Brač suggests an emphasis on drinking and feasting, whilst it now seems likely that a significant number of sites defined as "hillforts" by regional archaeologists are better interpreted as public or ritual monuments of the Late Bronze Age.
- During the Early Iron Age the region moves out of isolation and there is increasing evidence for participation in wider social and economic networks during the first millennium BC. Within the study area this culminates in the material assemblages at Talež (Vis) where c. 10% of the total assemblage is imported Greek material by the 5th/4th centuries BC. Greek mercantile and colonial activity is associated with increased evidence for ritual activity in locales with specific maritime associations. The evidence for Greek activity and probably the existence of a shrine to Diomedes on Palagruža from the 6th/5th century BC now seems unequivocal, whilst project staff have argued that these islands can now be identified as the islands of Diomedes contra earlier claims for the Tremeiti.
- During the Greek colonial period there is now a good case for a more sophisticated approach to the placement of Greek colonies locally. Both Issa and Pharos are probably negotiated settlements. However, the regional disputes epitomized by Diodorus Siculus' account of the 4th century battle for Pharos probably divides the land bridge politically and for the first time we can see differential development across the major island groups for nearly 500 years. Issa remains a successful urban establishment and benefits from its association with Rome during the first centuries BC and AD through a marked economic development. Excavation at Pharos by the team has demonstrated that the Greek colony does not survive the 2nd century BC and that Hvar may not have had a significant Roman urban centre. The island does however rapidly develop following integration into the Roman Empire. Brač remains outside colonial influence throughout the whole period. It is only with inclusion in Empire that we see that the tensions provoked by Greek colonialism

are resolved and as the political/military frontier is moved from the islands or littoral to the interior of Dalmatia.

The results of the study provide important evidence for the larger role of the Dalmatian Islands as a key link with regions to west, east, north and south, the nature of colonialism and imperialism in the region and the negotiation between intrusive and indigenous groups over an extensive time period.

### **Publications prepared or planned for publication during 2001**

The Adriatic Islands Project: monument destruction in the Central Dalmatian Islands. S. Čače, S. Forenbaher, V. Gaffney, J. Hayes, T. Kaiser, B. Kirigin, P. Leach, Z. Stančić and N. Vujnović. In Layton J. Stone P.G. and Thomas J. (Eds.) *Destruction and Conservation of Cultural Property*. (Routledge).

Enclosure and defence: the context of Mycenaean contact within Central Dalmatia. V. Gaffney, S. Čače, B. Kirigin, P. Leach, and N. Vujnović with K. Wardle and D. Wardle. In V. Karageorghis and C. E. Morris (Eds.) *Defensive Settlements of the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean after c. 1200 BC*. (Nicosia). 137-156.

Secret Histories: the pre-colonial archaeological context for Greek settlement of the Central Adriatic Islands. V. Gaffney, S. Čače, B. Kirigin, P. Leach, and N. Vujnović. In B. Kirigin (ed.). *Greek Influence in the East Adriatic Coast*. (Split).

The Adriatic Islands Project. Volume 3: Vis, Solta and the Smaller Islands. Vincent Gaffney, Branko Kirigin, Nikša Vujnović, Josip Burmaz, Slobodan Čače, Tomaž Podobnikar and Zoran Stančić. *British Archaeological Reports*.

Škrip Amphora: specialist production of cult vessels on the island of Brač during the Later Bronze Age. Vincent Gaffney, Branko Kirigin and Damir Kriškić. Accepted for publication *Arheološki Vjesnik* (Split).

### **Public presentations associated with the Adriatic Islands Project (2001)**

Dalmatia: papers in honour of Professor John Wilkes. Conference session in the Roman Archaeology Conference March 2001 (Glasgow). Organised by V. Gaffney and D. Davison - planned for publication as a separate volume in 2003.

The Adriatic in Pre and Proto-history. Society for American Archaeologists. Participant. April 2001 (New Orleans).

The Adriatic Islands Conference Department of Archaeological Sciences (Pisa).



Figure 3: Theissen Polygons based on Roman settlement across the study area.