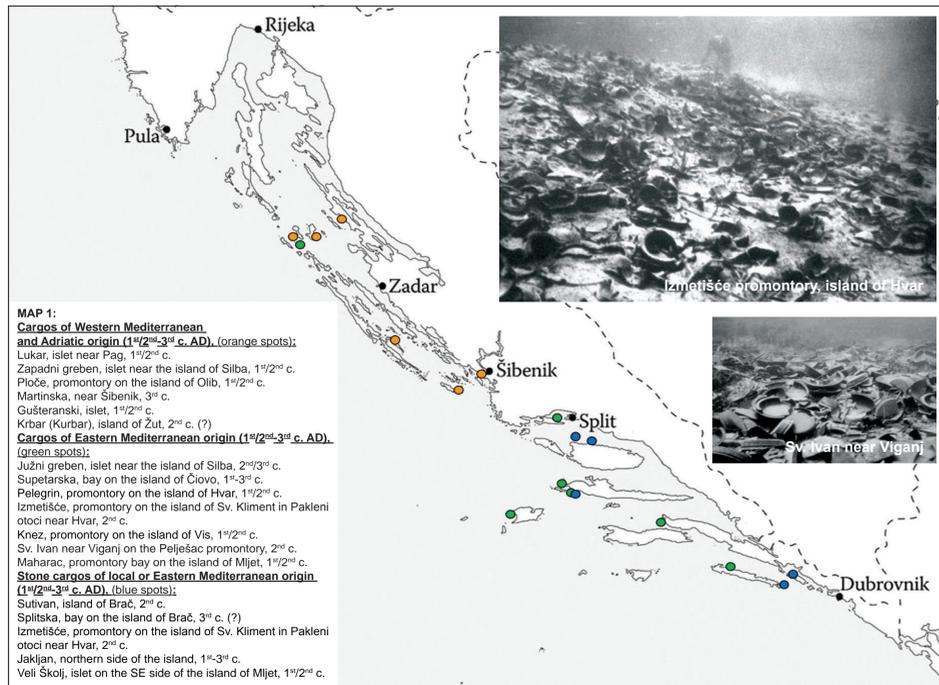


Shipwrecks in Dalmatia:

2nd through 9th centuries AD

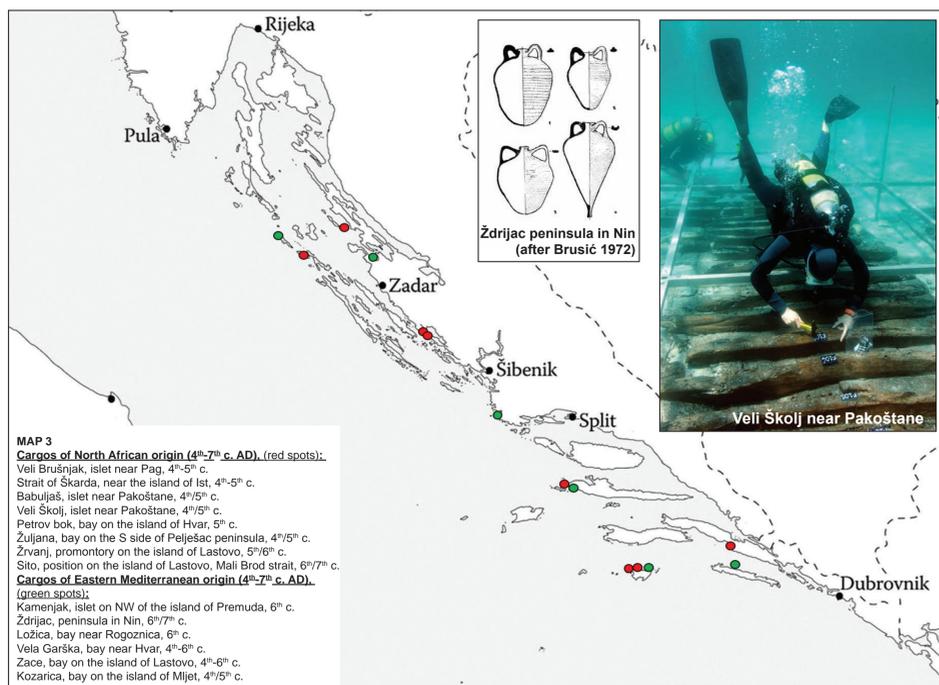


This poster illustrates the current state of research of shipwrecks and wrecked cargoes from the 2nd through 9th centuries AD in the present-day Dalmatia. It consolidates all published data through 2011, and also incorporates several other sites more recently discovered. It shows the geographical and chronological determination of 43 sites, reporting also the presumed provenance of the finds.

The density of shipwrecks in the Croatian waters of the Adriatic Sea from the 4th century BC to the 7th century AD generally reflects the shipwreck density pattern in the entire Mediterranean Sea (Parker 1992). It is characterized by the highest density during the Late Roman Republic (2nd-1st century BC), and a progressive reduction in shipwreck occurrence toward the end of Classical Antiquity (Fig. 1).

The study of shipwrecks and cargoes is not a perfect analogy for the study of trade in antiquity; several common challenges influence the conclusions drawn about the intensity of trade based on underwater remains. These issues include:

- Shallow shipwrecks and cargoes are more easily discovered than deeper remains. Moreover, the evidence is limited to the amphorae, pottery and stone cargoes, easily notable on the seabed.
- The estimation of the origin and chronology of wrecked cargoes is often based on a limited quantity of amphorae shards, distributed through a shallow surface layer of a site.
- The 'rescue' nature of many research campaigns incompletely captures available archaeological data, and could skew interpretations about the origin or navigation route of a particular ship.
- The compendium of recorded sites is based on random discoveries; the introduction of systematic surveys could significantly change the cumulative statistics of recorded sites.



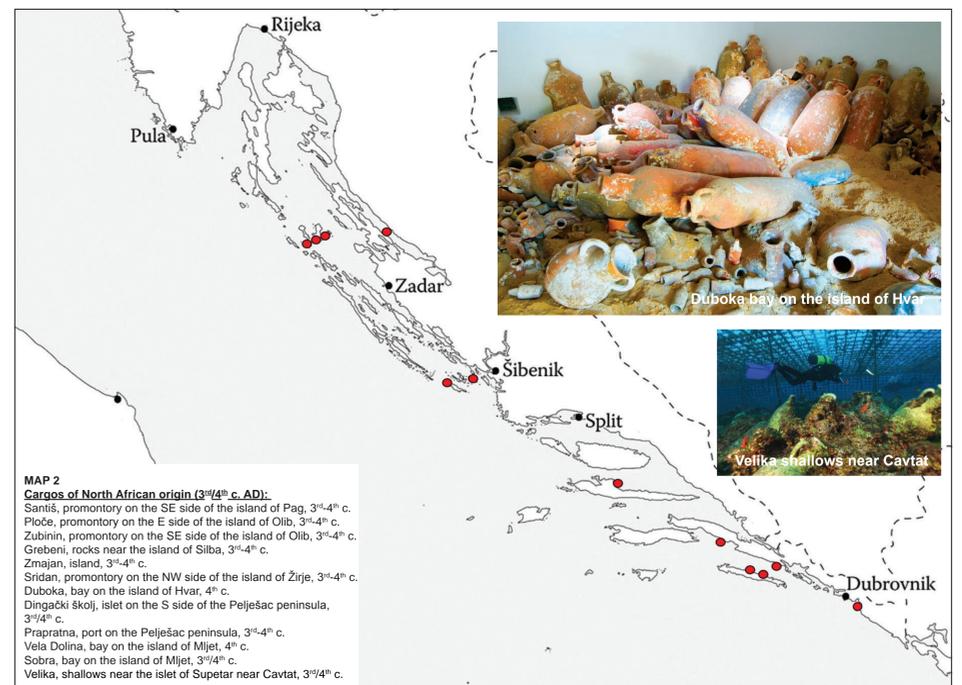
- There is a general lack of precision applicable to incompletely excavated or non-excavated sites (e.g. sites dated to 1st/2nd c. AD, or so, instead of more precise chronological determination).

The parameters and limitations described above prevent 'absolute' statements. However, the lists and data available from known sites allow us to draw several conclusions:

1) The 43 total sites (considering the Izmetišće site with pottery and stone cargo as one single site) are dated as follows: 17 sites are dated to the period from the 1st/2nd to the 3rd c. AD, 12 sites are dated to the 3rd/4th c. AD, 12 sites are dated to the period from the 4th/5th to the 6th c. AD, 2 sites are dated to the 6th/7th c. AD. There are no sites dated to the 8th and 9th c. AD.

Although the imprecise chronological determination does not allow a more accurate systematization of sites, we can observe the maximum concentration of shipwrecks in the period of 1st/2nd and 3rd/4th c. AD, while half (7 sites) of the later sites belong to the period of 4th/5th or the 5th c. AD.

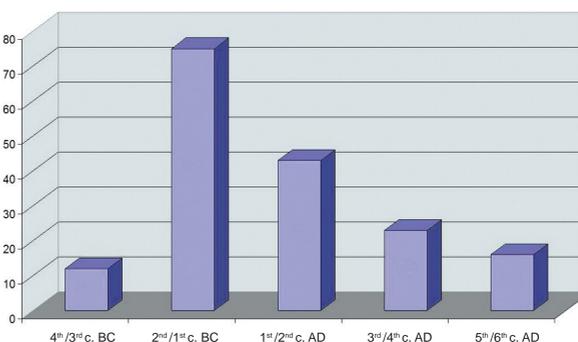
2) The pottery/amphorae cargoes registered for the period of the 1st/2nd to the 3rd c. AD could be attributed in equal quantities to the Western (6 sites) and Eastern (7 sites) Mediterranean markets. What strikes on the Map 1 is the obvious concentration of Western Mediterranean and Adriatic cargoes in Northern Dalmatia, and Eastern Mediterranean and local (stone) cargoes in its middle and southern part. The cargoes dating to the 3rd/4th c. AD are exclusively of North African origin (Map 3). The later cargoes are divided between North African (8 sites) and Eastern Mediterranean origin (6 sites). The complete absence of Western Mediterranean cargoes after the 3rd c. AD is evident.



3) Considering the known historical information, the complete lack of shipwrecks from the 8th and 9th c. AD should be interpreted more as a "lack of evidence" of trade through shipwreck sites, rather than as an indication of a complete halt in seafaring and seaborne trade during the centuries in question.

4) Generally, the geographical and chronological distribution of the sites fits into the known/accepted historical and economical image of Mediterranean trade during the period of Classical Antiquity and Early Middle Ages.

5) Systematic cataloguing of wrecked ships and cargoes, systematic excavations, and the re-examination of old evidence are of essential importance for future studies.



Selected bibliography (containing references on the reported sites):

Dissertations:
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Vrsalović, D., *Arheološka istraživanja u podmorju istočnog Jadrana: prilog poznavanju trgovačkih plovnih putova i gospodarskih prilika na Jadranu u antici*, doktorski rad, Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Zagreb, 1979 (printed in 2011, by Književni krug Split & Arheološki muzej Split).

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Fig. 1 Chronological distribution of shipwrecks in Croatia (4th c. BC - 6th c. AD)



Transformations of Adriatic Europe

(2nd - 9th c.)

Zadar, 11th - 13th February 2016

