

## **Archaeological Potential of the Anchialine Caves in Croatia**

### **Abstract:**

Anchialine caves are a common phenomenon in the Mediterranean karst. Their entrances lie above sea level, and underground accumulations of fresh water in their interior float on top of the seawater, which communicates with the sea through porous carbonate rocks. The fresh water layer of such caves represents a significant resource of potable water for the ancient inhabitants of the eastern Adriatic coast. Due to the systematic work of a group of Croatian speleologists of geological and paleontological background, more than 100 anchialine caves have been registered along the Croatian coast and its numerous islands. Submerged speleothems from two caves, situated on the islands of Krk and Lošinj, have contributed to the reconstruction of the Late Pleistocene and Holocene sea level changes in the northern part of the eastern Adriatic. Archaeological finds have been noticed in at least seven caves, but only one cave, Vodeni Rat on the Pakleni Islands near the island of Hvar, has been archaeologically researched. As with many other similar structures, there is evidence of human intervention on its rocky walls, and from the bottom of the cave, some Roman amphorae were recovered. Another cave named Živa Voda, situated on the other extremity of the island of Hvar, revealed the presence of a great quantity of Bronze Age underwater finds, testifying to the intense use of fresh water from its interior, or maybe some other ancient function of the underground space. Considering their distribution, accessibility, depths and position in relation to the attested prehistoric settlements, we can assume that the anchialine caves in Croatia have high archaeological potential that should be protected and researched. The lack of archaeological interest has already resulted in disturbance of some interesting archaeological contexts.

### **Keywords:**

anchialine caves, eastern Adriatic, Croatia, cave archaeology, water resources, karst, speleothems, seafaring, Bronze Age, Classical Antiquity