

11

BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE – ILLYRIAN COMMUNITIES ON THE ISLAND OF KORČULA IN PROTOHISTORIC TIMES



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Abstract. – The journal *Živa Antika* and its publisher, the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, are associated with the work of Petar Lisičar, one of the most meritorious archaeologists and historians, whose small but significant bibliography also covers the prehistoric and ancient periods of his native island of Korčula. Since his work from the middle of the 20th century up to the present, knowledge about the island's indigenous Iron Age population has developed considerably, both topographically and culturally. On this occasion, therefore, an attempt will be made to contextualise the peculiarities of the island's geographical position and, thus, of the communities that had settled on it in the protohistoric period, when the southern part of the Adriatic was the scene of several episodes of warfare between the indigenous population and the Greeks/Romans. The discussion of the possible role of the Korčula communities in certain episodes, their military potential, but also the apparent peacetime contacts, especially with regard to trade, with the “opposing” sides, will be based mainly on the results of the archaeological excavations of the Iron Age hillfort Kopila above the Blato field, which have been carried out for a decade by the Vela Luka Culture Centre and the Department of Archaeology of the University of Zadar. The collection of metal, glass and ceramic finds, very diverse with regard to function and provenance, recovered from the settlement part of the site, and especially the necropolis, testifies that this specific Illyrian community from the island of Korčula must have been an active, even respectable participant in the aforementioned events in the last centuries BC.

Key words. – Korčula, Iron Age, Hellenism, Kopila hillfort.

The bibliography of the highly respected Croatian historian and archaeologist Petar Lisičar includes works that he published as an internal or external collaborator in the journal *Živa Antika*, which is in the focus

here.¹ Its publisher, the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, was the home institution for the said author, where he spent a good part of his scientific and teaching career with which he laid the foundations of the further study of the history and archaeology of the ancient Adriatic.² After all, the same institution was also the publisher of his doctoral dissertation, which focused on the study of the Greek colonization of the eastern Adriatic.³ A significant part of the dissertation was dedicated to the author's native Korčula, an island to which as many as two Greek colonies are related, the archaic Knidian one and the Hellenistic Issaeon one. He returned to the island's prehistoric and ancient archaeological heritage in many subsequent publications.⁴

A short homage to Petar Lisičar is used here as an introduction to the main topic of the article. Namely, in his works Lisičar also touched upon the Illyrian indigenous population of the island of Korčula, their hill-fort settlements, a smaller part of their material culture, as well as the general relationship of the Illyrian population with Greek and, later, Roman settlers.⁵ Of course, the state of knowledge of the Iron Age topography of the island of Korčula has greatly increased since the time of his activity,⁶ but this has not diminished the significance and incisiveness of the professor's conclusions, which define this southern Dalmatian island as an important point for understanding the process of the Hellenization and Romanization of the eastern Adriatic coast.

The island of Korčula is the sixth largest Croatian island (279.03 km²), located on the border of the central and southern Dalmatian archipelago.⁷ Presently, it is the second most populous Adriatic island, which is obviously a reflection of the many prehistoric and historical stages of its development, and the reasons must be sought in its exceptional spatial characteristics and resources. Indented coasts with sheltered coves and bays, decent agrarian areas, in terms of insular conditions, supported by livestock and forest potentials, and a location at the confluence of the navigation routes along and across the Adriatic have determined the dynamics of the island life throughout its history, especially in those transitional civilizational periods.⁸ One of these periods must have been when the eastern Adriatic coast and its indigenous Iron Age population came first

¹ Complete list accessible at <https://antiquitasviva.com/author-index-k-l/>

² Oreb 2004.

³ Lisičar 1951.

⁴ Lisičar 1950; 1958; 1959; 1963a.

⁵ Lisičar 1950; 1951; 1963b; 1973.

⁶ Radić, Bass 2001; Radić, Borzić 2017a; 2017b.

⁷ Kalogjera 1974; 1976.

⁸ An overview of the protohistory and antiquity of the eastern coast of the Adriatic with relevant literature: Matijašić 2009.

under the Greek and then the Roman sphere of interest, in the last centuries before Christ.

The history of certain areas, including the one highlighted here, is full of geostrategic deliberations by protagonists, their plans of action, making correct, but also incorrect, often hasty decisions, whose consequences could be a forte, but also a burden to the progress of those who made them and were affected by them. We emphasize the latter because the previously mentioned extraordinary natural and geostrategic characteristics of the island of Korčula lead us to the conclusion that in the dynamic whirl of the protohistory of the eastern Adriatic, the Iron Age communities of this island must have found themselves at least several times in serious doubt about their strategic positioning on the “international” political scene, where they had to figure as “a good catch”, but were also very aware of their value and potential. Specific situations can, first of all, be discussed on the basis of written sources, and in this sense we will first mention the Roman historiographer Appian, who offers testimony of the end, of the downfall of Illyrian Korkyra. Namely, his *Illyricae* provides the most detailed description of Octavian’s conquest of these areas in the warfare from 35 to 33 BC.⁹ These activities, according to different authors, undertaken for different reasons,¹⁰ also touched the southern Adriatic continental and island areas, where the Roman army dealt with many indigenous communities either in diplomatic ways or by using arms. These communities included those from the islands of Mljet (Μελιτηνούς) and Korčula (Κορκυρηνοί), and the way in which these activities were carried out calls for special attention, as well as the conclusion that the island communities were simply self-overestimated.¹¹ However, the potential overestimation and the strong Roman engagement could be “justified” by the fact that this phase of the war, which was directed at settling the situation on the islands mentioned by Appian, was contextually placed in the same group as those in which the Roman army dealt with Illyrian and other eastern Adriatic communities much stronger in terms of territory and population, for example Docleati, Carni, Interphrourinoi, Naresi, Glinditiones and Taurisci. The basic reason for the obviously aggressive Roman approach towards the local island population can be clearly read from Appian’s statement (ὅτι ἐλίστευον τὴν θάλασσαν – *they plundered the sea*), but it is also certain that the reasons could have been much deeper. There is an interesting allusion in the literature that it could be a consequence of some past events from the period of the Roman civil war that had ended not so long ago, in which Hellenistic Issa, and under its influence potentially also

⁹ App. *Ill.* 15–28.

¹⁰ More comprehensively about it: Bilić-Dujmušić 2004, 426–437; Šašel Kos 2018, 44–46.

¹¹ App. *Ill.* 16.47: “...Others which had revolted, the Meliteni and the Corcyreans, who inhabited islands and practiced piracy, he (Octavian) destroyed utterly, putting the young men to death and selling the rest as slaves...”

the aforementioned island communities, sided with Pompey and, thereby, sealed their fate, even after some time had passed.¹² Unfortunately, this will be difficult to prove, but regardless of that, the fact remains that clearing these waters of pirate threats in a strategic sense once and for all enabled free and safe navigation along very vital maritime routes directed towards the Roman enclaves in Naronia, Epidaurus, Issa and Salona, which were considered exceptionally promising in economic terms.¹³ There are no concrete traces of the aforementioned conflicts on the island of Korčula for now, but archaeological finds in combination with the change in the settlements patterns, in which the hillforts as such cease to exist and Roman ruralization of the landscape occurs,¹⁴ practically leave no room for doubt about the veracity of Appian's assertions.

Going back a little deeper into the past, the island of Korčula and its Iron Age population occur again in a rather interesting situation that precedes the outbreak of the Third Illyrian War by a little more than a decade. Namely, the appearance of Gentius as the head of the Illyrian kingdom no later than 181 BC is accompanied by the immediate Roman accusation of pirate activities that went so far that the Roman praetor L. Duronius reprimanded him for the imprisonment of Roman citizens.¹⁵ What is interesting in these accusations for this paper is that Korkyra is mentioned as the place of their detention, and the general consensus of the scientific community is that, considering the political-territorial relations at the time, it must be the Adriatic Korkyra, i.e. the island of Korčula, which was, obviously at that time, considered the westernmost part of Gentius' kingdom.¹⁶ Regardless of the fact that modern historiography doubts the sincerity of Duronius' account, the mention of precisely defined protagonists and the place of events suggest a "climate" in which there were obviously real potentials for such accusations, especially in view of the problem of the Illyrian piracy and its influence on the eastern Adriatic Roman allies, but also on themselves.¹⁷ In such circumstances, two questions arise quite legitimately related to Duronius' accusation – who were these Roman citizens, and where were they detained on Korčula? The first question is relatively easy to answer by referring to the fact that the 2nd century BC is the time of already advanced Roman economic interests on the eastern coast of the Adriatic. It is well known that the first strategic Roman "crossing" of the Adriatic was related to the First Illyrian War in 229/228 BC, but their significant local presence and economic engagement is evidenced first by

¹² Šašel Kos 2012, 97.

¹³ On the maritime significance of the Korčula waters see Kozličić 2001.

¹⁴ Borzić 2010.

¹⁵ Liv. 40.42.1–5. ("...Duronius adiecit multis civibus Romani set sociis Latini nominis iniurias factas in regno eius et cives Romanos dici Korkyrae retineri").

¹⁶ Nikolanci 1989, 92; Šašel Kos 2005, 284; Milivojević 2021, 41.

¹⁷ Dell 1967.

the numismatic finds in the area of Liburnia,¹⁸ as well as by the general and dominant appearance of wine amphorae of the Lamboglia 2 type, one of the representatives of the Roman policy of economic dominance in the area throughout the entire 2nd and 1st centuries BC.¹⁹ In “Roman citizens”, as suggested earlier in the literature, we should see people involved in maritime trade.²⁰ It is not surprising that this kind of trade reached the island of Korčula, on the contrary, the waters of Korčula yielded numerous locations of shipwrecks and anchorages with the specified amphora type.²¹ With regard to the dispersion of the archaeological material dated to the 2nd and 1st centuries BC both on the sites and on the island in general, two hillfort settlements stand out: Kopila in the west, and Stine in the eastern part of the island,²² both located in the immediate but accessible continental hinterland of the shores of the bay of Vela Luka, i.e. the eastern island archipelago, more than suitable for both maritime activities and trade, and if we genuinely want to look for a place where Roman citizens were imprisoned, then it would have to be in one of those locations.²³

Based, above all, on the current knowledge of the Late Iron Age topography of the island of Korčula and the spatial potential of the site, the author of this paper recently tentatively expressed the opinion that the latter site, the Stine hillfort, might have been the centre of the indigenous island community, the Illyrian Korkyra, represented by Pyllos and Dazos in the negotiations regarding the establishment of the Issaeian settlement in Lumbarda in the mid-3rd century BC.²⁴ Their mention on the epigraphic monument of the local significance at the time, and now world-famous, Lumbarda Psephism,²⁵ is another piece of proof of the respect and external awareness of the strength of the local population of the island of Korčula, which, in this particular case, clearly recognized the advantages of entering into a political-territorial coexistence with the Issaeians and “allowed” the foundation of their *apoikia*, due to changed political circumstances and the expansion of the Illyrian kingdom, apparently short-lived.

¹⁸ Šešelj, Ilkić 2014.

¹⁹ Kirigin, Katunarić, Šešelj 2005; Carre, Monsieur, Pesavento Mattioli 2014; Šuta 2017.

²⁰ Nikolanci 1989, 92.

²¹ Jurišić 2001; Radić Rossi 2005; Borzić 2009.

²² Borzić 2007; Borzić, Radić 2021.

²³ In Nikolanci 1989, 92–93, the idea appears that the mention of Korkyra refers to the town of the same name on the island, which the author places on the site of the present-day town of Korčula, and whose roots he still sees in the Greek Knidian colony, but from today's perspective such a conclusion is questioned by the complete absence of archaeological evidence of the said colony and generally of the prehistoric and ancient settlement at the location of the town of Korčula.

²⁴ Borzić, Radić 2021, 360.

²⁵ Brunšmid 1898; Rendić-Miočević 1970a; Lombardo 2005; Marohnić, Potrebica, Vuković 2021.

One epigraphic and two written references, mentioned only briefly, in which the island of Korčula, or its indigenous Iron Age population, appear directly, as main protagonists, probably represent only a drop in the sea of events in which they could have been participants of some kind during the last few centuries before Christ. It is enough just to recall some crucial episodes that took place in the immediate vicinity of the island, for example, the foundation of the Hellenic colonies on the island of Vis (Issa) and Hvar (Pharos) at the beginning of the 4th century BC, “battlefields” in the same maritime zone during the First, Second and Third Illyrian War, war events related to S. Fulvius Flaccus’ subjugation of Ardiaei and Pleraei in 136/135 BC, the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, as well as the certainly numerous events of local importance, irrelevant for the chronicles of Greek and Roman writers.

It is exactly the focus of the written sources on precisely defined spaces, persons and events in many cases, including this one, that results in certain limitations in the aspiration to fully understand and know what kind of communities and dynamics of their lives we are talking about, and this problem is tackled by archaeology, in one of its segments. It has already been emphasized that the topography of the island of Korčula in the late prehistoric periods is relatively well known. This relativity is reflected in the fact that a large number of hillfort and observatory positions are known, over 30,²⁶ but in the absence of more specific archaeological research, a large number of them cannot be dated more precisely within the Bronze Age, Iron Age, or a continuous time frame. Of some 20 hillfort sites, only four have been investigated, at least with trial excavations and, thus, provide a chronological framework. An additional criterion for distinguishing the sites important for the current topic lies in the material collected in the field survey, among which, in addition to the predominant coarse pottery, there was also pottery dating to Classical Antiquity, most often related to transport and storage (amphorae and pithoi), as a definite signifier of activities carried out during the Late Iron Age. Other sites where this category of pottery has not been recorded are, for the time being, considered to date to the Bronze Age or the Early Iron Age. This group of sites includes the following hillforts: Greben, Maslinovik,²⁷ Kula, Kom, Velo Gračišće, Sutulija, Ripanjsko Stražišće, Velo Stražišće, Gradina na Dubovo, Kosorica, Gradac-above Račišće and Veli vrh. The second group of sites with attested Late Iron Age features includes: Gradina Svetog Ivana,²⁸ Gra-

²⁶ Radić, Bass, 2001, 133–145.

²⁷ This hillfort is dated exclusively to the Bronze Age in the literature (Radić, Bass 2001, 136).

²⁸ It is a multi-layered site with the dominant Middle Bronze Age, Late Antique and Late Medieval phases. Although the Iron Age layer was not clearly isolated during the excavation, the smaller amount of Hellenistic amphorae on the hillfort itself and in the bay below it (Borzić

dac-Potirna,²⁹ Kopila,³⁰ Smokviška gradina, Dubrovica, Stražica, Stine³¹ and Sveti Antun (Fig. 1). This current list will surely change and be expanded over time, but regardless of that, it is evident that all potential strategic resource points of the island area have been occupied, with the primary aim of settling, monitoring and exploiting the areas on the eastern and western thirds of the island rich in areas suitable for agricultural and maritime activities, and, the central one with predominantly livestock areas.

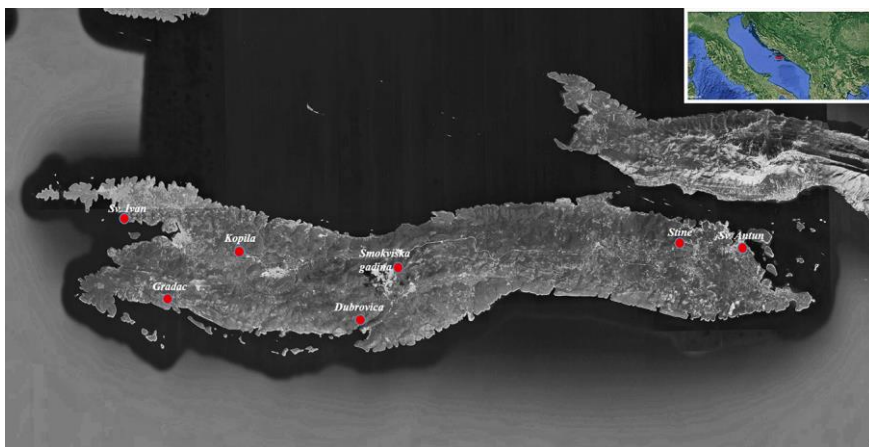


Fig. 1. Late Iron Age hillforts on the island of Korčula (made by: I. Borzić)

Knowing the dynamics of population and social development through the Bronze and Iron Ages of the eastern coast of the Adriatic, the expected number of settlement sites in a limited area decreases, that is, there is centralization and development of a smaller number of significant settlements.³² In such circumstances, it is not surprising that in the Late Iron Age topography of the island of Korčula, a pattern of more pronounced polarity of population is visible, present also in the more modern history of the island, with the strongest centres on the westernmost (Kopila and

2009) and the Hellenistic numismatic finds (Lisičar 1963a) testify to its use in the Late Iron Age as well. About the results of recent research: Borzić 2022b.

²⁹ Although conducted but still unpublished trial excavations on the acropolis part of the settlement did not result in the recording of well-defined Greco-Hellenistic or Roman pottery, this site is placed in this group due to the old nearby find of eight Hellenistic vessels (Vuletić Vukasović, Radić 1887, 100–111).

³⁰ Until recently, this site was considered exclusively as the Iron Age centre of the western part of the island, but recent research on the acropolis part of the settlement isolated its Middle Bronze Age phase, as well. More about the site in the continuation of the paper.

³¹ It is a newly discovered hillfort with a well-represented Late Iron Age horizon. Trial investigation has been carried out and planned further research will determine its complete chronology. Basic information about the site is provided in the continuation of the article.

³² Suić 1976, 47–53.

Gradac-Potirna) and easternmost ends of the island (Stine), and those secondary located along the fertile areas of its interior (Smokviška gradina and Dubrovica).

Such a conclusion is based on the archaeological indicators so far, and those on the far eastern part of the island point to the Stine hillfort in Žrnovo as the central point of the events (Fig. 2).³³ In the topographical sense, it is a rather atypical hillfort settlement located on a slope of a hill on the north side naturally defended by high vertical rocks called “koki”, and in the south again by rather high cliffs. The immersion in today’s otherwise terraced cultural landscape is the main reason for the relatively recent date of the discovery of this site, which, given the density and character of the surface finds, immediately attracted enormous attention capitalized through the organization of smaller, but very interesting trial excavations.³⁴ Stine, as the most promising settlement in the Korčula part of the Pelješac Channel, was mentioned earlier in this paper in the context of the Issaeian settlement in Lumbarda, and there is almost no doubt that the community here, through its strategic outposts on Stražica, Sv. Antun and the location of today’s town of Korčula, and in synergy with the communities on the Pelješac side of the channel, above all the one from Nakovana,³⁵ must have had a significant impact on the development of all economic and political events in the period of interest here. Truly impressive amounts of imported, predominantly ceramic material scattered over the surface of the site testify to reaping the fruits of its ideal position during the Late Iron Age.³⁶ As expected, the most common forms include storage and transport variants of pithoi and amphorae, among which typologically the most prominent examples are Corinth A, Corinth B, Greco-Italic and Lamboglia 2 wine amphorae of various fabrics, and, therefore, various workshop origins.³⁷ Some of them must have been related to the Dalmatian area, primarily that of Issa. Of course, other categories of Hellenistic tableware have also been recorded, as well as other forms of products, for example Olynthus-type millstones and terracotta roof coverings, the origin and distribution of which are linked to the Hellenic world, with which this community obviously had very close ties.

³³ Radić, Borzić 2017a, 309–310; Borzić, Radić 2021.

³⁴ The research is conducted under the leadership of the Museum of the Town of Korčula in cooperation with the Vela Luka Culture Centre, the Department of Archaeology of the University of Zadar, the Department of Archaeology of the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb and the Dubrovnik Museums. The presentation of the research results is underway.

³⁵ Forenbaher, Kaiser 2003; Rajić Šikanjić, Forenbaher 2010; Perkić et al. 2021.

³⁶ Borzić, Radić 2021, 350–359.

³⁷ Miše, Quinn 2022.



Fig. 2. Stine hillfort in Žrnovo, east of the island of Korčula (photo by: I. Borzić)

The same can be said about the community from the hillfort settlement of Kopila on the opposite, western end of the island of Korčula, and, at the moment, due to more comprehensive research, even more specifically so. In terms of topography, it is a typical hillfort settlement, strategically positioned on a prominent hill ideal for monitoring the vital maritime routes of the channels of Pelješac, Korčula and Vis and the bay of Vela Luka, as well as the agriculturally extremely significant field of Dol, and especially the Blatsko polje, which was periodically flooded until 1912 (Fig. 3).³⁸ The site has been known in scientific literature since the middle of the 19th century, when the Dubrovnik Museums³⁹ started receiving random finds from this site, mainly metal parts of clothing and jewellery characteristic of the southern Adriatic Iron Age cultural circle,⁴⁰ and possibly also five archaic Corinthian ceramic vessels.⁴¹ However, the archaeological

³⁸ About the characteristics of the location of the Kopila hillfort see Radić, Borzić 2017b, 35–39.

³⁹ History of the earlier research: Radić, Borzić 2017b, 39–42.

⁴⁰ The complete list of metal and other finds from Kopila that reached Dubrovnik museums with bibliographic information: Radić 2003, 82–84.

⁴¹ Unfortunately, the documentation regarding the acquisition of these vessels is not entirely clear, and there is a possibility that they reached the Museum in some other way, not necessarily related to Kopila. Nevertheless, the mention of “*vasi etruschi*” by the first publisher of the site, N. Ostoich (1878, 111–112), provides a strong argument for their association with this hillfort, which was embraced by most authors who discussed them in different ways in their works, e.g. Schneider 1885, 33; Lisičar 1950, 38; 1973, 6–7; Nikolanci 1973, 111; Radić 2003, 74–76; Borzić 2017, 61–63.

research started only in 2012,⁴² and to date, in addition to a clearer topography of the settlement and a number of moveable archaeological finds, it has also confirmed the continuity of the settlement from the Middle Bronze Age (16th/15th centuries BC) to the end of the 1st century BC, with an obvious peak precisely in the Late Iron Age and a revitalisation during Late Antiquity. With this, Kopila turned into an ideal training ground for the study of the relationship between the indigenous Illyrian community on the island and the Greco-Roman world, and, thus, possibly also for materializing what the previously listed written and epigraphic sources speak about in a direct or indirect way.



Fig. 3. Kopila hillfort above Blatsko polje with a western view towards island of Vis (photo by: L. Bogdanić and I. Borzić)

Apart from a few smaller trial trenches in the acropolis part of the settlement, the previous research of Kopila was mainly focused on the excavation of its unique Late Iron Age necropolis (Fig. 4). Namely, we are referring to two separate nuclei with a large number of interconnected monumental grave plots of an irregular circular shape. In terms of structure, they are composed of a monumental stone ring, which is the highest of all the structures in the nucleus, an internal stone embankment, sometimes divided again by rings formed on the surface, and a centrally positioned buri-

⁴² The research is carried out in cooperation with the Municipality of Blato, the Vela Luka Culture Centre, the Department of Archaeology of the University of Zadar and the Museum of Ancient Glass in Zadar, and about its dynamics see Radić, Borzić 2017b, 42–45; Borzić 2022a.



Fig. 4. Kopila hillfort, two nuclei of necropolis (photo by: M. Vuković)

al chamber constructed sometimes only at ground level, and in some cases up to the final height of the tomb's use.⁴³ Looking at the positioning and prominence of these two nuclei in the landscape and architecture of each plot, it is difficult to escape the impression that their conceptual design is strongly rooted in the tradition of building burial mounds of stone, characteristic of the eastern Adriatic from the Early Bronze Age.⁴⁴ They are also a common phenomenon among the Bronze Age communities of the island of Korčula,⁴⁵ and lowering the dating of the Kopila hillfort to the Middle Bronze Age is justified by the appearance of an isolated classical tumulus at the nearby location of Lukoravac.⁴⁶ There is currently no information on Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age flat burials on Korčula, but their appearance in neighbouring Pelješac, specifically in the already-mentioned Nakovana,⁴⁷ is extremely suggestive, especially since it is an area where the closest analogies with the specifically formed necropolis at Kopila are recorded, which speaks in favour of culturally very close communities.⁴⁸ The majority of indicators so far suggest that most of what is presently visible of the necropolis on Kopila was created during the late 4th and early 3rd centuries BC, and only future research will answer the ques-

⁴³ Overview of investigation of eight individual tombs in Radić, Borzić 2017b, 49–55; Borzić 2022b.

⁴⁴ Potrebica 2012.

⁴⁵ Radić, Bass 2001; Radić 2010.

⁴⁶ Radić, Bass 2001, 137.

⁴⁷ Perkić, Dizdar, Potrebica 2021.

⁴⁸ Perkić, Dizdar, Potrebica 2021.

tion of where the necropolis from the earlier periods of this settlement was located and what it looked like. The answer should not necessarily be any different from what we know about this necropolis, especially because the bottom of Tomb 1 in Nucleus 2 also yielded some older, but obviously recycled material from the time span from the 7th to the 4th centuries BC.⁴⁹

All investigated tombs were used repeatedly over a longer period of time (Fig. 5), which in some cases includes the entire period from the middle of the 4th to approximately the middle of the 1st centuries BC, and in some cases slightly narrower temporal segments.⁵⁰ This may be the reason for their monumentality, literally growing upwards, but regardless of this, such a multiple way of using burial spaces respected the tradition of the Iron Age communities in the southern part of the eastern Adriatic and its hinterland.⁵¹ Part of the tradition was also the different orientation of the deceased depending on their gender, which was already recorded earlier, at the necropolis near Grebnice.⁵² And in the case of Kopila, such reasoning, in the absence of more specific osteological findings, was prompted, above all, by the distribution of grave finds, especially metal parts of clothing and jewellery, specifically pins, as a traditional part of men's attire found almost exclusively in the western halves of the tombs, as well as fibulae, amber and glass jewellery, as part of women's clothing and decorations in the eastern halves.⁵³ Such a distribution suggests that the men were laid on their backs with their heads to the west, which is tentatively confirmed by the position of the helmet in Tomb 1 in Nucleus 2, while the women were buried with their heads to the east. The presence of both sexes and all age groups of the deceased in most tombs also confirms their family character,⁵⁴ but the Kopila necropolis is unique, for the time being, in that two tombs that were isolated and investigated within the western nucleus were intended for the burial of exclusively infants with an upper limit of three years of age (Figs. 5–6). All the scientific potential of this find will only be capitalized with a broad multidisciplinary approach, but it can be preliminarily concluded that the location of these two tombs (Tombs 1 and 7) within the nucleus of family tombs, and the ritual which, apart from the absence of weapons as grave goods, practically does not differ from that recorded in the other tombs, suggests a rather pronounced awareness of family or even tribal affiliation of all age groups of this community, including the youngest of infants. The uniqueness of this grave context

⁴⁹ Borzić 2022a, 102–104.

⁵⁰ Borzić 2022a, 95, T. 1.

⁵¹ Čović 1987; Marijan 2000, 122–135 (Grebnice-Ukšiči, Kačanj, Ston, Cavtat and so on with bibliography); Perkić, Dizdar, Potrebnica 2021 (Zakotorac, Pelješac).

⁵² Marijan 2000, 123–130.

⁵³ For a discussion of the above based on the specific example of Tomb 4 see Čelhar, Borzić, 2024.

⁵⁴ Radovčić 2017; Marić et al. 2022.

does not allow it to fit into any possible local and regional customs inherent in Illyrian burial and social practice, but the determination of the third year of life as the obvious upper limit of the biologically and socially earliest stage of life is something that is mentioned by Greek and Roman written sources,⁵⁵ because of which there is no reason for doubt, and this seems to be unequivocally evidenced by the situation in Kopila, that the Illyrian and other communities on the eastern coast of the Adriatic held the same concept. How the communities treated the deceased of that age group is another question, especially since in many Mediterranean proto-historic communities there is a discrepancy in the number of found burials of this type and the estimated extremely high mortality rate of children of as much as 50%, which supports the existence of a selective burial right.⁵⁶



Fig. 5. Kopila hillfort, current state of research of the two nuclei of necropolis
(photo by: L. Bogdanić with intervention by: I. Borzić)

A large number of children were buried in both children's tombs in Kopila, in Tomb 1 at least 108, and in Tomb 7 there might have possibly been up to 150, which may sound devastating for this community, but the picture becomes less tragic if we know that these are spread over at least two centuries of use of these tombs (3rd to the 1st centuries BC). Since the necropolis at Kopila appears as an exception in terms of the number of burials of neonates/infants and of adults, in which the number of the former

⁵⁵ Fulminante 2018, 29–30.

⁵⁶ Shepherd 2018, 523–524; Bortolami 2023, 125 with bibliography. For the ratio of adult to infant burials at the necropolises in the vicinity see: Basler 1969 (Labeatan necropolis Vele Ledine-Gostilje); Ugarković 2019 (Issaeon necropolis Vlaška njiva).

greatly exceeds that of the latter, the theory of a selective right to burial in our case may need to be rejected and replaced with an assumed social equality suggested by the number and character of the grave goods within all the tombs investigated so far at this necropolis. At this point, it may not be negligible that the preliminary analyses of the dental remains of the adults from Kopila showed that the state of their health was relatively good and stable, which is primarily due to the agricultural, livestock and other resources, which were obviously more than enough for their personal needs, but very likely also sufficient for trade.⁵⁷ The preliminary analyses of stable isotopes suggest that the basis of their diet consisted of legumes, barley and cereals, and the meat of farmed animals, primarily sheep, goats and cattle, with a certain percentage of wild animals and completely secondary amounts of marine food.⁵⁸



Fig. 6. Kopila hillfort, necropolis, Nucleus 1, child Tomb 1 surrounded by family Tombs 2, 3 and 5/6 (photo by: I. Borzić)

The elements of settlement and burial practices mentioned so far speak in favor of the strongly expressed traditionalism of the community settled in Kopila. Of course, it is illusory to expect that it remained immune to all the events that took place on a local and regional level in the last centuries before Christ, i.e. in the wake of Hellenization and then Romani-

⁵⁷ Marić et al., 2024.

⁵⁸ Marić et al., 2024.

zation, especially since the archaeological material from the early Iron Age layers of the settlement determines it as a community open to external contacts.⁵⁹ However, before we pay attention to the aspects of the funerary ritual, and the evidence of intensive communications, we need to dwell on another segment of material and spiritual culture specific to the Illyrian communities of the southern Adriatic, and that is the presence of weapons in the grave context. Namely, since the Early Iron Age, mainly offensive weapons have been a common occurrence in the graves of central and southern Dalmatia,⁶⁰ so it is not surprising that they are regularly found in the Late Iron Age burials at Kopila. First of all, it should be emphasized that weapons were found in all family tombs (Fig. 4), most often laid along the sides of the burial space (Fig. 7), and in relatively large quantities. The impossibility of numerically listing individual pieces of military equipment in each individual tomb and with each male burial is the result of the poor preservation and stratigraphic ambiguities resulting from the multiple use of the tombs, but it is evident that one cannot speak of a kind of saving, or a fear of a lack of military equipment in times of need. Typologically, to the greatest extent, we are talking about spearheads (Fig. 7), among which two quite close variants can be distinguished, according to the context of their discovery at Kopila, apparently without any chronological divisions. Ubiquitous and more numerous is the one with a cylindrical socket for hafting and a blade over 20 cm long, the widest in the entire first third of the body, with a rather pronounced triangular midrib. Analogies can be found throughout the area of interest even in the older phases of the Iron Age related to the 6th/5th centuries BC.⁶¹ The fact that they are found at all “height” levels in the tombs in Kopila suggests their duration practically until the end of the 1st century BC.⁶² The second variant, currently known with certainty through only one, fairly well-preserved specimen from the lowest layers of Tomb 1 in Nucleus 2, is characterized by a long cylindrical socket and a round shaped initial part of the blade, where it is also the widest. Analogies to such spear design are somewhat rarer, but in terms of chronology they are close to the type described earlier.⁶³

Other forms of offensive weapons are less well represented and refer mostly to individual examples of daggers (Fig. 7). The specimen from Tomb 1 in Nucleus 2 belongs to the variant with a single blade, and is

⁵⁹ Here, above all, we refer to ceramic material, whether it is Greek or Daunian import dated back to the 7th/6th centuries BC (Borzić 2017, 61–65).

⁶⁰ Marijan 2000, 51–53, 60–61, 70, 81, 94; Blečić Kavur, Miličević-Capek 2011, 52–65; Perkić, Dizdar, Potrebica 2021, 93–94.

⁶¹ Cf. Basler 1969 (Gostilje); Marijan 2000, 83, T. 4/2–6 (Grebnice-Ukšići); Perkić, Dizdar, Potrebica 2021, 93 (Zakotorac-Pelješac); Blečić Kavur, Miličević-Capek 2011, 63–64, Fig. 18 (Vranjevo selo-Neum); Katić, Kapetanić 2023, 73–74, T. XII and XIII (Peranova grada).

⁶² Radić 2017, 96.

⁶³ Marijan 2000, 83, T. 4/2–6 (Grebnice-Ukšići) and T. 15 (Radimlja).

characterized by a flat spine and a wavy blade that gradually descends from the middle towards the top. Such modelling is somewhat similar to the Illyrian knives from the Labeatan necropolis in Gostilj,⁶⁴ but in terms of function and structure, it can also be related to Greek swords of the *kopis* type. The second type of dagger from Tomb 3 in Nucleus 1 unfortunately cannot be described, except on the basis of the preserved scabbard with a knob end to assume that it was used to hold a shorter dagger with two blades.⁶⁵



Fig. 7. Kopila hillfort, necropolis, Nucleus 2, detail from the Tomb 1. In the section, typology of iron naval weapons from the necropolis (photo by: I. Borzić)

The finds of two Illyrian-type bronze helmets are of great importance in the context of not only burial ritual, but also as regards the economic possibilities of the Kopila community and its social structure. Both of them, the one from Tomb 3 in Nucleus 1,⁶⁶ preserved only in fragments, and the complete one from Tomb 1 in Nucleus 2 (Fig. 7),⁶⁷ seem to belong to variant IIIA2, distributed mostly in the western Balkans and the eastern Adriatic coast and hinterland. Their origin is connected with the 5th century BC, but the archaeological contexts, including this one from Kopila,

⁶⁴ Basler 1969, T. XII, 54/3.

⁶⁵ Radić 2017, 96.

⁶⁶ Radić 2017, 96.

⁶⁷ Borzić 2022a, 102–103.

are chronologically related to material from the late 4th/early 3rd centuries BC, and support their long-term use or symbolic preservation within families/communities.⁶⁸

As already emphasized earlier, depositing weapons in graves is a common occurrence among the indigenous Iron Age population of the southern Adriatic region, but, on the other hand, it also speaks in favor of the social organization in which the warrior aristocracy played an important role. Whether it is possible to recognize the resting place of the military and social elite of the Kopila community in the two mentioned graves with helmets and other military equipment has yet to be determined, but the fact is that their inventory so far offers the most complete insight into the weaponry of this community. Furthermore, the awareness of the need for a strong warrior component in the very dynamic historical circumstances of the last four centuries BC can be seen from the amount of weapons placed in the tombs of the necropolis at Kopila. In the same way, the typology of weapons, in which spears predominate, proves the generally accepted opinion about the principle of warfare at that time,⁶⁹ in which warring parties were at somewhat greater distance in comparison to earlier periods, at least in those initial moments of the conflict until the need dictated the use of a more suitable type of weapon, which is evidently represented by daggers among the finds from Kopila. In this sense, one should not lose sight of the fact that we are talking about island communities whose defence strategy implied a good control of access points, and “long-range” weapons certainly facilitated this to some extent. In the end, the arsenal from Kopila is a first-rate material justification of all the information mentioned at the beginning of the paper, in which the indigenous population of the island of Korčula is indirectly described by Greek and Roman writers as warlike, brave and aware of their strength for undertaking intense pirate activities, but ultimately also capable of opposing a nominally stronger enemy.

Such an inclination could, in certain situations, not necessarily those of war, but also of peacetime, provide a good foundation for developing diplomatic relations. It is nominally held that the island of Korčula was part of the Illyrian world, but this does not mean *a priori* that in certain historical segments its communities did not have extremely close relations with the Hellenic ones, primarily the Issaeian community, as evidenced by the aforementioned episode of the foundation of their settlement in Lumbarda. Kopila significantly advanced our knowledge in this sense as well. Namely, until the discovery of this necropolis, and a more intensive field survey of the settlement, the amount of Hellenistic and Republican material from the island was negligible and did not indicate any regular contact

⁶⁸ Blečić Kavur, Pravidur 2012, 69–73; Perkić, Dizdar, Potrebica 2021, 93.

⁶⁹ Bilić-Dujmušić 2004, 91; Blečić Kavur, Miličević-Capek 2011, 72–73.

between these two spatially neighbouring, but culturally distant communities. At present, we are aware that the truth was, in fact, completely the opposite, and that the intensity of their contacts greatly exceeded the occasional, accidental or intentional trading, piracy and conflict-ridden encounters. This is suggested not only by the numerous finds of primarily ceramic storage-transport forms of vessels, i.e. amphorae of Corinth A, Corinth B, Greco-Italian and Lamboglia 2 types, as well as pithoi recorded in the residential part of the site,⁷⁰ but also by the respectable quantity of over 1000 mostly complete specimens of diverse Hellenistic vessels from only eight explored tombs. It is precisely in the emphasized context of Hellenistic pottery finds that evidently external, Greco-Hellenistic influences can be seen in not only the southern Adriatic, but in the entire eastern Adriatic Iron Age indigenous populations, in whose tombs, starting from the 5th century BC, different sets of symposiastic ware can be found, apparently related to carrying out certain ritual activities, at least partly influenced by the newly arrived Hellenic population.⁷¹ That such a practice was adopted by the Korčula communities at least a generation earlier than the formation of the tombs from Kopila that have been investigated so far is evidenced by the already mentioned repertoire of vessels from Potirna.⁷² In the same sense, but in a completely different Hellenic environment, the finds from the Issaeian graves in Lumbarda should not be ignored either.⁷³ The repertoire of Hellenistic tableware from Kopila, despite its number, is not overly diverse and is predominantly made up of vessels intended for drinking, primarily skyphoi, and to a lesser extent kantharoi, while balsamaria and gutti are less common, and bowls, olpae and oinochoai appear only rarely (Fig. 8).⁷⁴ In terms of typology and provenance, it corresponds to the general Hellenistic repertoire of vessels recorded at numerous sites along the eastern coast of the Adriatic and its interior, so as expected, it includes Apulian and Issaeian pottery of the Gnathia type, and products of black-, brown-, red- and gray-glazed pottery, among which, most, especially the latter, comes from local Dalmatian, primarily Issaeian Hellenistic workshops.⁷⁵ Such origin of the majority of pottery finds is also logical considering the spatial relations and the power of Issa as the redistributive centre at first, and from the 3rd century BC also the leading regional economic/production centre. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that the intensive commercial contacts established early on between these

⁷⁰ Borzić 2007; 2017, 82–83.

⁷¹ Cf. Blečić Kavur, Miličević-Capek 2011, 65–70 (Vranjevo-Neum); Batović, Batović 2013 (Nadin); Miše 2019 (Dragišići); Perkić, Dizdar, Potrebica 2021, 89–93 (Zakotorac-Pe-lješac).

⁷² See n. 29.

⁷³ Lisičar 1973.

⁷⁴ Borzić 2017, 65–82; 2022c.

⁷⁵ About the mentioned pottery categories: Miše 2015, Ugarković 2019.

two parties could also be the basis for the potential development of much deeper political, military and socio-cultural relations. In an effort to ensure as safe as possible navigation, which was necessary for the prosperity of Issa in an otherwise piracy-ridden environment, the Issaeans should have insisted on this more, which automatically placed the community from Kopila in a more favourable negotiating position. What has been said obviously belongs to the domain of hypotheses and cannot be supported by anything tangible except the feeling derived, above all, from the amount of Issaeian material on the hillfort, which erases the impression about the latent tension between the Issaeian and the Illyrian interests in this part of the eastern Adriatic gained from the sources.



Fig. 8. Kopila hillfort, necropolis, Nucleus 2, detail from Tomb 1, pottery assemblages (photo by: I. Borzić)

The implementation of imported symposiastic tableware represented a great innovation in the funerary rituals of the indigenous population of the island of Korčula. However, the fact that the coexistence of all the sharers of the central and southern Dalmatian space became deeper over time, not excluding population migrations, is proven probably by one of the last burials at the necropolis at Kopila, but now completely transformed and carried out according to the ritual customs of practically Italic settlers to the eastern Adriatic area. Namely, at the top of the children's Tomb 7, the burial of a cremated body was recorded in a locally produced

urn with ceramic and glass balsamaria placed around it, dated to the middle of the 1st century BC.⁷⁶ That date is not much later than the more significant appearance of cremated burials in the neighboring, then already quite Romanized Issa,⁷⁷ which, in this case, can also be considered “a hot-bed of ideas and practices”.

The mentioned detail of the sepulchral practice, as well as the offerings used in it, indicate new trends that are noticeable along the entire eastern Adriatic from the 2nd century BC, as a result of the more tangible presence of Rome. The involvement of local communities in this network, i.e. the constant dance between local and external influences, is best illustrated by the loss of the regional and the appearance of “global” types of material culture, for example, parts of costumes and jewellery, which start to conform to Roman uniformity. Regarding the truly numerous and varied material of this type from Kopila, this is best illustrated by the fibulae from the end of the 2nd and the 1st centuries BC (Almgren 65, Picugi and Jezerine types) characteristic of the entire Adriatic area.⁷⁸ Until then, it can be said that this segment of the material culture of the community from Kopila was mainly related to the southern Adriatic and Balkan Illyrian cultural circle, which, on the one hand, is characterized by double/omega and *Schlaufennadeln* pins as part of the male costume,⁷⁹ and Delmatian/Gorica, circular, “Štrpci” and middle La Tene forms of fibulae as accessories of women’s costumes.⁸⁰ On the other hand, the origin and style of the entire jewellery repertoire depended on the material of its manufacture, so the metal, mainly silver earrings, bronze and iron rings with gems, and pierced coins are mostly associated with Hellenistic and Republican workshops;⁸¹ glass, that is, numerous beads and pendants with the Macedonian, Eastern Mediterranean circle, and in the case of eye beads, potentially also with the Alpine cultural circle;⁸² and, finally, amber, whose origin is difficult to pinpoint more precisely at the moment, except to emphasize that the typology of beads, dividers and pendants corresponds to that generally recorded in the southern Adriatic area, as well as that it seems that it mainly originates from the layers of the necropolis dated before the 2nd century BC.⁸³

The presented results of the archaeological research at Kopila suggest that there was a very visible community in regional events, especially those that took place from the middle of the 4th century BC until the end of

⁷⁶ Borzić 2022a, 99. About the glass balsamarium see Eterović Borzić, Borzić 2022.

⁷⁷ Ugarković 2019, 183–184.

⁷⁸ Radić 2017, 85–89; Čelhar, Borzić, 2024, 177–179.

⁷⁹ Radić 2017, 89; Čelhar, Borzić, 2024, 177–179.

⁸⁰ Radić 2017, 85–88; Borzić 2022a, 102.

⁸¹ Radić 2017, 89–94.

⁸² Eterović Borzić 2017a, 104–116; Eterović Borzić, Borzić 2022.

⁸³ Eterović Borzić 2017b; Čelhar, Borzić, 2024, 180–181.

the 1st century BC (Fig. 9). The amount of archaeological material, its diversity in terms of purpose, typology and provenance, suggest that it belonged to an economically capable community, with an optimal population size for the possibilities, which were evidently not small, socially organized in accordance with the principles of emphasizing family and clan affiliation, with the obviously existing ruling aristocracy as the creator of the influence of this community on the local and regional levels, which brings us back to the beginning of this article and the definition of the specific appearance of Korčula's protohistoric communities in ancient sources. Looking at all that has been said so far, quite expectedly, a question arises as to the reasons why the community from Kopila, and we will assume also the others from Korčula, about which at the moment a little less is known, but still sufficient enough, decided to step out into the open precisely during the second half of the 4th century BC. It has already been mentioned more than once that this settlement has deeper roots that go back at least to the Middle Bronze Age, but the Late Iron Age necropolis, with a clearly expressed visual monumentality, and also with the organizational effect of community connection, determines the precisely mentioned time as the critical moment when its meaning began to expand beyond the narrow local frameworks. The middle of the 4th century BC in the central and southern Dalmatian area is a time of great turmoil, which is followed, for example, by the cessation of the Syracusan domination and the related independence of Issa through a still not fully clarified context of Ionius' state,⁸⁴ then the apparent disappearance of also a rather mysterious Hellenic colony of Heracleia,⁸⁵ hoards of coins as a symbol of political and social instability,⁸⁶ the establishment of Illyrian and Hellenic sanctuaries in Nakovana,⁸⁷ i.e. at Punta Planka,⁸⁸ which, in addition to religious aspects, may also have something to do with marking the spheres of interest of the political actors in this area, and so on. In the aforementioned circumstances, it is quite legitimate to expect the traditionally Illyrian communities of Korčula to choose strategic positions in accordance with their affinities, a kind of foreign policy with the intention of adapting to the new circumstances. The archaeological material indicates that it was then that the period of development of ever-closer, primarily trade ties with the eastern Adriatic Hellenic communities began, but it is difficult to say with certainty to what extent these ties reached other, deeper proportions in the near future. The situation with the Lumbarda Psephism certainly suggests a positive direction in the development of relations with Issa, but future events had to change it and leave us today with many doubts regarding the further

⁸⁴ Rendić-Miočević 1970b.

⁸⁵ Zaninović 1992 with bibliography.

⁸⁶ Göricke-Lukić 2012 with bibliography.

⁸⁷ Forenbaher, Kaiser 2003.

⁸⁸ Šešelj 2012.

strategic positioning of the Korčula communities globally, as well as individually. Finally, until the very brief but indicative mention of Korčula in the context of Gentius' Illyrian kingdom,⁸⁹ it is not possible to state categorically what the relationship of the Korčula communities was with the newly-present/newly-formed state-political creations or their position within them, for example, the previously mentioned Ionius' state, then later, the emerging Illyrian kingdom, the protectorate of Demetrius of Pharos, the Issaeian dominion, and, ultimately, the Roman protectorate. Nevertheless, the archaeological material from two particularly prominent, evidently representative island hillfort settlements, Stine and Kopila, suggests their constant stability and obviously skillful adaptation to all new circumstances, which must, first of all, be associated with their geostrategic and resource potentials. There is no doubt that the preservation of traditions until the end of their existence at the end of the 1st century BC determined their Illyrian (Pleraeian?) affiliation, but it cannot be ignored that these are communities that formed a kind of hybrid identity owing to a more pronounced presence and coexistence with the Hellenic, and eventually Roman communities. Let us mention again only the cases of the mass appearance and the use of Hellenistic and Republican ceramic vessels in everyday life as a testimony to external influences and in the transformation of much deeper spiritual spheres of life, especially those related to the funerary ritual, at one point completely changed by the use of cremation.



Fig. 9. Korčula's Late Iron Age communities in the middle/south Dalmatian socio-political surroundings (made by: I. Borzić)

⁸⁹ See n. 15 and 16.

Finally, it can be concluded that everything we know through the mainly archaeological, but also to a lesser extent, multidisciplinary research carried out so far, clearly testifies to the exceptional dynamics of the cultural and social elements of the protohistoric Korčula communities. Their development should, first of all, be looked at through the prism of resource bases, and then the historical circumstances, and, in this sense, they should be characterized as the very representative examples of the southern Adriatic Illyrian communities caught in the grip of different cultural spheres in the period of the last four centuries BC. The dominant and, in certain segments, key geostrategic position of the island of Korčula in those times inevitably caused periodic states of war that justify the information from the written sources, but it seems that from such a position, the Korčula communities drew positive elements much more often and became a respectable partner in the creation of a highly functional multi-ethnic and multicultural area of the eastern Adriatic. However, despite this and their evident adaptability, archaeology and written sources agree in concluding that this very position, observed in conjunction with some apparently compromising activities (piracy) and the appetites of a global player (Rome), led to their disappearance at the end of the 1st century BC. The hillforts were abandoned and shortly after the beginning of the 1st century AD, the topography of the island was completely changed and turned into a classic Roman countryside with numerous estates that, with their facilities, suggest further, very intensive use of the natural resources of this, in many ways, unique Dalmatian island, which was later also “punished” several times for its ideal spatial determinants.

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