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THE DYNAMICS OF PRE-COLONIAL INTERACTION: GREEKS AND INDIGENOUS HETERARCHY OF THE EASTERN ADRIATIC

Filip BUDIĆ
University of Zagreb
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
fbudic@m.ffzg.hr

Abstract. – Landscape is often considered an essential component for the development of socio-political systems, while relief and topographic specificities can, to a large extent, enable or limit social development. This study focuses on the Eastern Adriatic – the narrow coastal region extending from the Bojana in the south to the Soča in the north, bordered by the Dinaric Alps. The area also encompasses the numerous islands that form one of the most indented coastlines in the Mediterranean. While the relationship between Greeks and the indigenous population is discussed, the primary focus remains on the latter. The specific environment is crucial for understanding their daily lives and socio-economic patterns, which, in turn, significantly influenced their interaction with the Greeks. This article examines the development of socio-political structures, particularly analysing how geographical features fostered or inhibited connections between communities at regional and supra-regional levels. The analysis of these socio-political structures aims to determine the extent to which macro-regional and regional political structures facilitated or impeded Greek interests in the Eastern Adriatic.

Key words. – Greeks, indigenous societies, heterarchy, colonisation.

To sail is necessary – geography and connectivity of the Eastern Adriatic indigenous world

Hillforts were the dominant form of indigenous prehistoric settlement along the Eastern Adriatic, distributed across the coast, islands, and hinterland. Their comprehensive and precise chronological framework remains elusive due to limited archaeological research, challenges in pottery dating, and natural factors such as soil erosion in the karst terrain. Regional studies, combining field surveys and excavations, indicate that certain hillforts might date back to the Early or Middle Bronze Age. Some positions

continued to play a prominent role during the Late Bronze Age and remained significant in the Iron Age.[1] Hillforts were typically located along natural communication routes, with their elevated positions reflecting a variety of social and strategic considerations. These included hierarchical group separation, defensive needs, efforts to establish military and trade control, ritual purposes, and other social factors.[2]

Although each site merits individual analysis, a discernible system of strategic settling, as well as territorial and maritime surveillance, is more than evident across the Eastern Adriatic. In Istria, for instance, hillforts are situated along the coast and major communication corridors, and control access points to the peninsula's interior, including the Plomin and Raška Bays, the Budava Valley, Pula Bay, the Lim Channel, and the Mirna estuary.[3] A similar correlation between advantageous port and hillfort location is evident within the territory traditionally attributed to the Liburnians.[4] In central Dalmatia, hillforts were also strategically positioned along crucial maritime routes, underscoring their function in maritime surveillance (cf. Map. 1).[5] Although many hillforts might not have served as permanent settlements, there is a clear tendency to oversee and control both terrestrial and maritime space. The unusually dense concentration of hillforts on Lošinj island during the Bronze and likely the Iron Age suggests their function as maritime landmarks and dominant spatial features along the navigation corridor leading to the Osor isthmus. A comparable pattern is observed on Unije and Molat islands, where the number of hillforts exceeds what would be expected based on the available land and agricultural potentials. This discrepancy indicates that sites primarily served roles in visual communication – whether by day or night – and in the regulation of maritime activity.[6]

While some settlements, situated on gentle elevations, are categorized as hillforts, Iron Age communities of the Eastern Adriatic also occupied coastal settlements located on peninsulas, capes, and islands. The precise extent and chronological sequence of many remain unclear due to natural erosion and subsequent historical layering.[7] Several developed into significant indigenous centres, such as Osor, Nin, and Zadar. In central Dalmatia, notable examples include Trogir, Vranjic, Stobreč, Hvar, Stari Grad on

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[1] Gabrovec, Čović 1987, 912. For the Histrian and Liburnian regions, see Buršić-Matijašić 2007, 598; Batović 1987, 352 and Glavaš 2015, 70–127. For a recent overview consult Recchia, Cazzella 2019, 92.

[2] Čučković 2017, 531 with older literature.

[3] Buršić-Matijašić 2007, 569–583; Buršić-Matijašić 2012, 207–208.

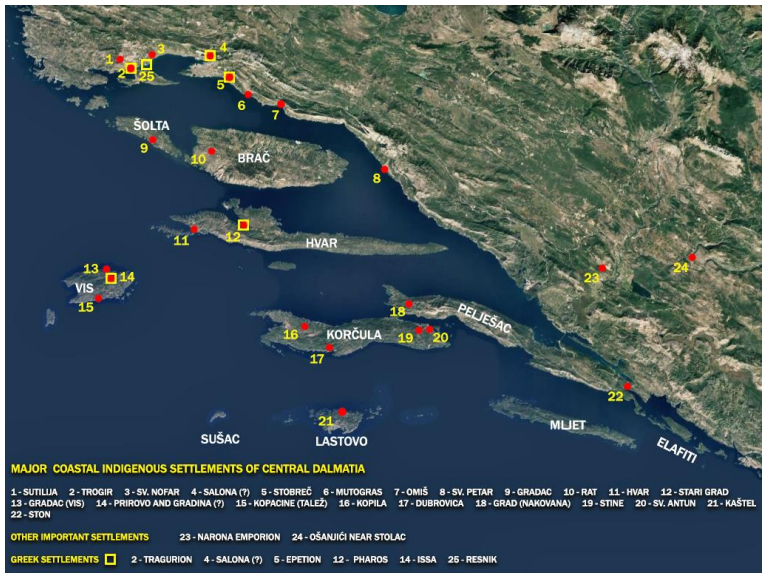
[4] Brusić 2007, 17.

[5] Katić 2009, 13–14.

[6] Batović 1977, 210; Čučković 2017, 536–539.

[7] Radić Rossi 2010, 93; Barbarić 2010, 56. For a list of the Iron Age settlements in Kvarner and northern Dalmatia see Parica 2021, 104–133.

Hvar, and possibly Prirovo and Gradina on Vis, many of which were later settled by Greek colonists.[8]



Map 1: Major Iron Age settlements of central Dalmatia (based on Babić 2020, 13; Kirigin, Paraman 2020, 30; Kirigin et al. 2022, 68; Radić, Borzić 2017, 24; 32, Map 3 and 6). Map by Jakov Budić

The geographical configuration of the Adriatic is an explanation *per se* for a strong maritime orientation.[9] Archaeological evidence reveals a vibrant exchange network connecting the eastern and western coasts, demonstrating sustained interaction among prehistoric communities throughout the Early Iron Age. This is best illustrated by a shared material culture, notably metal objects and pottery, which are found both on the western Adriatic coast and in Istria, Kvarner, and northern Dalmatia.[10] Further-

[8] For Trogir see: Petrić 1992, 34–35; Babić 2020, 12–14; for Vranjic: Radić Rossi 2008, 29–30; for Stobreč: Faber 1983, 25; HINA 2024; Ugarković, Romac 2025; for the town of Hvar: Kirigin et. al. 2022, 76–78; for Prirovo: Katić 2009, 32; 57. Archaeological findings confirm the existence of an Iron Age indigenous settlement at the site of Stari Grad. The dimensions of this settlement, as well as the interpretation of the archaeological layers associated with the events described by Diodorus, remain subjects of ongoing scholarly debate (see: Kirigin 2004, 37–38, 71–72; Jeličić Radonić, Katić 2015, 33–38, 69; Budić 2018, 128, fn. 127; Kirigin, Barbarić 2019, 219–229). Recent fieldwork research has provided new evidence for Iron Age settlements at Pharos and in Stobreč (Ugarković, personal communication). The author gratefully acknowledges Dr Marina Ugarković, the research leader, for providing this information.

[9] Braudel 1997, 131.

[10] Budić 2022, 354–365 with an extensive bibliography of previous research on this subject.

more, the Eastern Adriatic coastline is inextricably linked to maritime connectivity, since accessing numerous islands and distant shores necessitated seafaring. The karstic terrain, orographic barriers, and other geographical constraints rendered overland transportation between distant settlements arduous, particularly before the establishment of well-trodden road networks.[11] This geographical context helps to explain the difficulties in interregional communication and interaction, such as among Istria, Kvarner, and Dalmatia. Nevertheless, overland routes should not be entirely discounted, especially in areas like Istria, Ravni Kotari, and parts of central Dalmatia, where topographical features favoured terrestrial connectivity of coast and closer or further inland. Evidence of land-based interactions includes the exchange of goods visible through archaeological material, as well as the persistence of transhumant practices.[12] However, cabotage likely represented the most efficient means of transport in the Eastern Adriatic, particularly along the coast during the favourable sailing season and under stable winter meteorological conditions.

With the Dinarides forming a natural boundary between the Mediterranean and continental Europe, the relatively narrow coastal and insular zones of the Eastern Adriatic facilitated the emergence of distinctive socio-cultural features. Geographical constraints significantly influenced the distribution of the Histrian and Liburnian cultures,[13] fostering strong interaction spheres within,[14] evident in shared stylistic and technological traits. Maritime connectivity evidently played a critical role in disseminating the Liburnian cultural influence, both among prominent centres such as Osor, Nin and Zadar, but also within the smaller microregional contexts of fragmented Kvarner, as well as northern and central Dalmatian archipelagos.[15] Given similar geographical conditions, comparable patterns are visible in the southern Adriatic, but, unfortunately, the region has been less archaeologically explored.

As reflected in the archaeological material, the interaction sphere exhibits a slightly lower degree of intensity among the Histrian, Liburnian, Central and South Dalmatian cultures. However, similarities exist and analogous stylistic and technological features can be recognised in Istria and the Kvarner region,[16] as well as between southern Liburnian territori-

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[11] A parallel historical example of the difficult land communication in the Eastern Adriatic comes from the Middle Ages. The neglect of Roman road routes and the insecurity of the road forced the largest Dalmatian and Kvarner cities to primarily maintain connections by sea. Cf. Kuzmić 2011, 297.

[12] Čače 2006, 67; Blench 2001, 12; Glavaš 2015, 278–286; Budić 2022, 257.

[13] Gabrovec, Mihovilić 1987, 334–335; Batović 1987, 349.

[14] The term *interaction sphere* was coined by Joseph Caldwell (1964, 133–143) in his analysis of the Hopewell tradition in North America.

[15] Batović 1959, 425–452; id. 1960, 393–418.

[16] For the connections between Liburnian and Histrian cultural spheres see Batović 1987, 349; 386. For the Liburnian influence in central and southern Dalmatia: Čović 1987, 479–

es and the coastal regions of central and southern Dalmatia. The distribution of Daunian pottery, a prominent Early Iron Age import, further suggests the existence of a dynamic longitudinal maritime network along the Eastern Adriatic coast.[17]

The mobility of individuals responsible for disseminating specific cultural and stylistic elements strongly suggests the existence of dynamic maritime connections. The coastal ecosphere can be conceptualized as an intricate network of maritime routes, with micro-regional nodes serving as key points of connection. Within this framework, coastal exchange and fishing emerged as integral components of daily life,[18] while the material culture provides compelling evidence for the mobility of itinerant craftsmen. Intermarriage and kinship networks among geographically dispersed communities (e.g., the Histri, Liburnians, Ardiei) likely contributed to the maintenance of continuous contact, thus upholding distinct regional identities.

Maritime integration but political fragmentation?

The extent of political integration among Adriatic populations remains a subject of scholarly debate. Arguments for political coherence often equate ancient literary accounts on ethnic diffusion with material culture distribution, leading to hypotheses of regional or supra-regional alliances and confederations, possibly emerging as early as the Early Iron Age.[19] However, this approach suffers from inherent limitations, particularly the anachronistic nature of historical sources and the problematic equation of material culture with ethnic identity. While shared artistic, technological, and stylistic features are evident in the material record, simple artifact typologies obviously provide insufficient evidence for determining the precise level of political integration. Broad ethnic categories like the Veneti, Histri, Liburnians and Delmatae could be better understood as ethnic networks[20] that facilitated the circulation of cultural and technological knowledge. However, ancient sources suggest that this network extended beyond mere material exchange to encompass a shared cultural identity, characterized in contemporary literature by perceived common ancestry, traditions, customs, values, beliefs, attire, language, and cultural connections. Members of these networks might have emphasized these shared as-

480; Batović 1988, 66; Kirigin, Paraman 2020, 38, etc. General overview for the Iron Age communities in Barbarić 2010, 59.

[17] Budić 2022, 365–368 with older literature.

[18] Cf. Beresford 2013, 190.

[19] This is particularly emphasized in studies of the Liburnians (Suić 1950/1951, 83ff; id. 1981, 108–109; Čače 1979, 97; Čače 1985, 647; Suić 2003, 20–21). The issue of centralization among the Liburnians is also addressed in Barnett (2017, 80, n. 116).

[20] Cf. Smith 2008. Asja Tonc (2015, 401–402) has applied this concept on the Liburnian case.

pects during communal gatherings, festivals, or in response to external threats.[21] This concept implies a solid interaction sphere, mutual solidarity among communities and elites, and often a sense of shared territorial affiliation. The complexities in reconstructing the socio-political landscape of the Eastern Adriatic are further amplified by ancient sources, including Hecataeus,[22] Pseudo-Scylax,[23] Apollonius Rhodius,[24] Pseudo-Scymnus,[25] and Pliny the Elder,[26] which reveal a far more diverse ethnic composition. While various scenarios are plausible – most notably, the gradual assimilation of smaller ethnic groups such as the Mentores, Hythmitae, Syopii and others into the Liburnian cultural sphere[27] – this ethnic diversity raises significant questions regarding the nature of social "unity" across the region.

The concept of heterarchy among hillfort communities offers a compelling alternative to models emphasizing the political coherence of ethnic groups.[28] This framework posits variable degrees of political autonomy among settlements, eschewing centralized control. Heterarchy allows for internal ranking based on diverse roles and characteristics, yet avoids imposing a rigid spatial hierarchy. In this context, ethnic networks reflect decentralized political structures, while maintaining interconnectedness through kinship or client-patron relationships.

Although the heterarchical model appears dominant in the Eastern Adriatic society, regional variations warrant consideration. Areas with advantageous land communication networks and more abundant resources might have exhibited greater spatial structuring and, correspondingly, more pronounced intra-regional political hierarchies. Istria, Ravni Kotari, and southeastern Herzegovina offer potential examples of such regional differentiation.

Spatial analysis of Istrian settlements reveals inter-visibility, suggesting frequent interaction and the possible presence of a more complex social hierarchy.[29] According to the current state of archaeological research, some areas feature regional disparities in the quantity and quality of grave goods. For example, Istrian site Kaštel near Buje exhibits more homogenous grave assemblages compared to the more diverse contents of Picugi,

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[21] Sahlins 1985, 85–87.

[22] FGrHist I Fr. 89–101

[23] Ps.-Scyl. 20–26.

[24] *Argon.* IV, 330–564

[25] Ps.-Scymn. 377–394.

[26] *HN* 3.139.

[27] Pliny's account (*HN* 3.139) constitutes the primary evidence for this thesis and is frequently cited in the relevant scholarly literature (cf. Batović 2005, 65).

[28] The concept of heterarchy is discussed generally in Crumley 1995, 3–5. Its application to Illyricum can be found in Džino (2012, 73) or Barnett (2014, 17). For comparative examples of heterarchical organization among communities see in Leighton (2000, 29) for Sicily and in Dietler (2010, 87) for southern France.

[29] Čučković 2015, 476–477.

Beram and, especially, Nesactium.[30] Livy's account of a 2nd century BC Histrian alliance,[31] led by a *rex* or *regulus* (explicitly sometimes described as a minor king using the Latin diminutive), encompassing three prominent hillforts (*tria oppida*) and their associated tribal leaders (*principes*), indicates a degree of centralized political system. Slobodan Čače proposed a longer-standing royal tradition, supported by evidence such as the density of hillfort settlements, continuous elite burials from the 7th century BC (including the luxurious tomb in Nesactium), and potential ritual structures indicated by sculptural finds.[32] Alternatively, Alka Starac suggested later unification, i.e. during the 4th or 3rd centuries BC.[33] Regardless of the precise chronology, the position of a *regulus* points towards a degree of centralized political organization, although significant internal instability is also evident. This fragility is apparent during the First Histrian War,[34] when some Histrian communities formed alliances with Rome, while others had to be conquered.[35] The prominence of three major hillforts and derisive naming of the Histrian king,[36] Pliny's division of Histrian communities,[37] along with the extensive Histrian piracy documented in the late 4th century BC,[38] point towards a less centralized, potentially heterarchical political structure.

Evidence from hillfort settlement size in Ravni Kotari suggests a potentially hierarchical structure among the Liburnian communities, with Zadar appearing as the dominant centre. The dense distribution of Liburnian hillfort settlements suggests that there must have been other significant communities (Map 2).[39] However, limited archaeological data currently constrain detailed analysis of spatial power dynamics within the region. Roman-period territorial divisions in Liburnia, as described by Pliny,[40] and Virgil's mythological account emphasizing multiple Liburnian kingdoms (*regna Liburnorum*),[41] suggest a heterarchical organization among urban centres. The absence of compelling evidence indicates that a fundamentally different political landscape in earlier periods is unlikely.[42]

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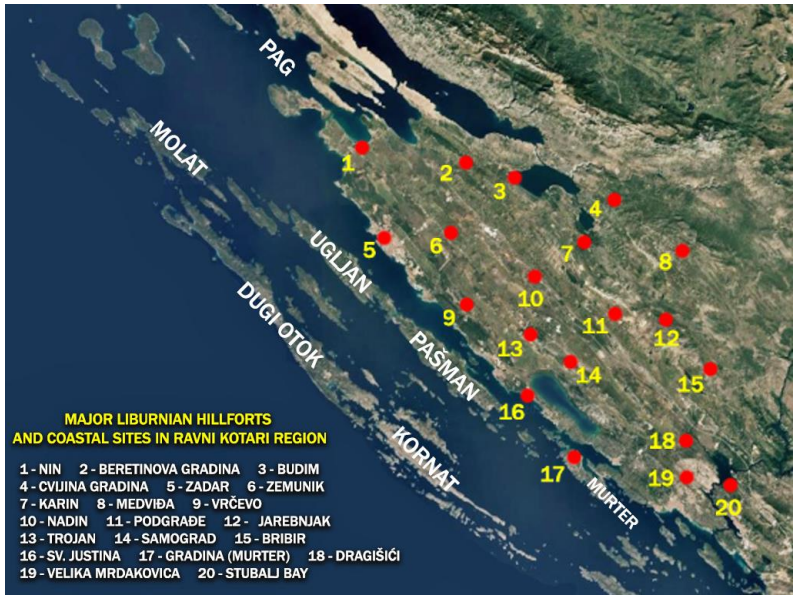
[30] Mihovilić 2013, 328–330.
[31] Liv. 41.11.
[32] Čače 1979, 91, 97–98.
[33] Starac 1999, 8.
[34] Zon. 8.20.10.
[35] Cf. Gabrovec, Mihovilić 1987, 337.
[36] Liv. 41.11.
[37] Plin. *HN* 3.130–133.
[38] Liv. 10.2.
[39] Suić 1962, 179–180; Čače 1979, 117; Chapman, Shiel, Batović 1996, 73–80; Čelhar et al. 2023, 302.
[40] Plin. *HN* 3.139–140.
[41] *Aen.* 1.244
[42] Similar in Tonc 2015, 399–400; Barnett 2017, 80–81.



Map 2: Major Liburnian hillforts and coastal sites in the Ravni Kotari region (based on Parica 2021, 28; Čelhar et al. 2023, 302). Map by Jakov Budić

Alternative interpretations have been offered in the literature, mainly by Mate Suić who proposed the indigenous symmachy led by a single hegemon.[43] The 4th century BC Pharian tropheum (CIG II, 986; n. 1837c) inscription – *The Pharians weapons of the Iadasini and allies (…)* – is frequently cited in this context. If the Iadasini represent the indigenous population of Liburnian Iader (Zadar),[44] this inscription might suggest their leadership within a native alliance. However, the inscription's perspective is demonstrably that of the Greeks stressing maritime power dynamics. The Iadasini's prominence in this Greek account may reflect their significant maritime activity, comparable to the well-documented Liburnian piracy.[45] It does not necessarily indicate a centralized hierarchical power structure within the anti-Greek alliance. While ancient sources also mention individuals like *Liburnos* and *Ionios*, these offer weak evidence for centralized government. The account on Liburnos[46] appears to be a textual cor-

[43] Suić 2003, 21.

[44] Mate Suić (2003, 21) presents arguments supporting the population of Liburnian Iader, while Duje Rendić–Miočević (1989a, 111–120) offers a contrasting perspective, suggesting the population near the Jadro region. A brief synthesis of this discussion is provided by Kuntić-Makvić, Marohnić (2010, 75).

[45] Liv. 10.2.

[46] Steph. Byz. s.v. Λιβυρνοί = FGrHist I F 93.

ruption and later addition to Hecateus' text,[47] reflecting the common Greek inclination to reinterpret native genealogies. Similarly, Ionios is subject to diverse and often conflicting interpretations,[48] making him a figure on the boundary between the Illyrian and Greek worlds, as well as historical and mythical spheres.[49] Therefore, discussion of his political influence offers limited analytical value.

Fig. 1. The Pharian trophy, Zagreb, Archaeological Museum
(Published with permission from the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb) © Igor Krajcar

Understanding political systems in other Eastern Adriatic regions relies heavily on speculation due to limited and anachronistic sources. Diodorus Siculus' account[50] of the Parian displacement of Pharos' indigenous population highlights military cooperation among indigenous central Dalmatian communities. Such native alliances are unsurprising, given the likely interconnectedness and solidarity fostered by trade, shared interests, and kinship ties, leading to collective responses, particularly against threats affecting multiple groups. Competition for limited land resources, especially relevant on agriculturally confined central Dalmatian islands, may have been a significant motivating factor for such collective action. Unlike the Pharian tropheum inscription, Diodorus does not identify specific political leaders or ethnic groups, employing the broad term "Illyrians" instead.

Examples from the Hellenistic period demonstrate the persistent weakness of central authority in the Eastern Adriatic. Teuta's inability to

[47] Cf. Billerbeck 2014, 217, n. 112.

[48] Cf. Strab. 7.5.8–9; Eust. ad Dionys. *Per.* 92; schol. ad Pind. *Pyth* 3.120.21; schol. ad Lycoph. *Alex.* 631; schol. ad Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.308; Steph. Byz. s. v. Ἰόνιον πέλαγος.

[49] Key discussions on this topic can be found in Nikolanci 1976, 154–155; 160–163; id. 1989, 15–26; Rendić-Miočević 1989b, 255–257 and Katičić 1995, 180–181. A review of earlier scholarship is provided by Marin Zaninović (2015, 87, n. 32).

[50] Diod. 15.14.2.

control maritime raiding in 230 BC[51] and Genthius' similar failure approximately 50 years later[52] illustrate this pattern. Varro's 1st century BC account of a Naronitan conventus encompassing 89 communities,[53] and Pliny's detailed description of the ethnic and political diversity of central and southern Dalmatia in the 1st century AD,[54] further support this conclusion. Pliny lists 342 Delmataean decuriae, highlighting the complex division of communities south of Salona. For example, the Daversi (likely Daorsi) comprised 17 decuriae, the Docleati 33, and the Naresii 102.[55] This evidence strongly suggests a persistent lack of centralized political unity, a pattern likely extending to earlier periods.[56]

The absence of centralistic tendencies in the Eastern Adriatic may be primarily attributed to geographical factors. While maritime connectivity was an essential aspect of life for communities along its indented coast, the mainland's relief barriers, coupled with meteorological conditions, could have also significantly contributed to political fragmentation, both within the Adriatic Gulf and especially between the Eastern Adriatic mainland and its islands.[57] These features would have isolated settlements, complicating communication not only at the supra-regional level but sometimes even within micro-regions. The considerable distances and challenging navigation within the archipelago presented obstacles, particularly during unfavourable sailing seasons or inclement weather.[58] Even during favourable sailing seasons, the prevalence of daily maritime activities likely resulted in the frequent absence of men from their home communities. Pseudo-Scylax's 4th century BC observation that gynecocracy prevailed among the Liburnians has been interpreted by scholars as a consequence of that pattern.[59] This social feature likely presented an additional impediment to the centralization process. Despite the apparent geographical unity of the narrow coastline and its associated archipelago, the rugged terrain and navigational limitations could have hindered the development of political integration,[60] thereby imposing substantial challenges

[51] Polyb. 2.8.

[52] Liv. 40.42.

[53] Ap. Plin. *HN* 3.142.

[54] Plin. *HN* 3.142–143.

[55] Plin. *HN* 3.143.

[56] Consider the alternative hypothesis, proposed by Slobodan Čače (1979, 46–47), regarding the Roman impact on the disintegration of the Illyrian kingdom and the subsequent political fragmentation.

[57] For the Mediterranean in general see Horden, Purcell 2000, 16–25; specifically for the Adriatic: Fairbank 2018, 2–3.

[58] Compare the diachronic examples highlighted in Kirigin et al. 2009, 151–152.

[59] Ps.-Scyl. 21. Alföldy 1961, 318–9; Kurilić 2008, 50.

[60] A comparative example can be found in Michael Mann's (1986, 86) concept of the so-called "social cage" of ancient Egypt. The narrow fertile belt surrounding the Nile, which is bordered by arid desert, fostered strong connections and contributed to the development of a distinctive social order. This "cage" enabled the establishment of a centralized government,

to macro-regional centralization, effective territorial governance, and the monopolization of vital communication routes.

Transhumance may have also contributed to regional political fragmentation. Scholarly literature suggests frequent seasonal migrations among communities along the Eastern Adriatic mainland.[61] Anthropological research indicates that transhumance, as a social practice, can impede political centralization. Studies of Iberian indigenous communities, for instance, demonstrate a correlation between the transition from pastoralism to sedentary lifestyles and the subsequent development of urban and hierarchical societies.[62] Therefore, seasonal transhumance in the Eastern Adriatic might have similarly hindered broader political unification.

The karst landscape itself presented further limitations for centralisation. The Eastern Adriatic settlements were largely confined to relatively small and often dispersed tracts of arable land, a pattern particularly pronounced on the islands. Case studies from Hvar and Lastovo clearly illustrate such patterns, and similar patterns are observable on Vis, Korčula, Ugljan, and some others.[63] For instance, Hvar possesses the largest contiguous area of arable land and it is limited to only 13 square kilometres. The tendency of settlements to gravitate towards available arable land was also the Eastern Adriatic mainland feature,[64] as evidenced by the prevalence of so-called agro-towns – communities where the majority of the population was engaged in agriculture within a 5-kilometer radius, enabling daily commutes to and from fields.[65]

Anthropological and ethnological research on the East African and Polynesian societies has shown a clear interrelationship between the availability of land and the development of social structure. In areas with abundant arable land and lower population density, territorially defined tribal alliances with a well-developed political hierarchy and tendencies towards centralization emerged. In such contexts, powerful local leaders distributed land to loyal individuals, thereby controlling agricultural surpluses, labour allocation and resource distribution. In contrast, acephalous societies are typical in regions with higher population density and limited arable land. This is due to factors such as a nomadic lifestyle, the lack of a sedentary agricultural population capable of accumulating surpluses to support centralisation, and the impracticality of large-scale management.

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effective population control, and the monopolization of communication corridors, among other outcomes.

[61] Barbarić 2010, 56, n. 8. Indirectly see also: Gabrovec, Mihovilić 1987, 336; Batović 1987, 385.

[62] Belarte 2009, 106; Celestino-Pérez 2009, 240.

[63] Cf. Gaffney. Stančič 1996, 36–42; Gaffney et al. 2002, 33; Čače 2007, 49–50; Della Casa, Bass et al. 2009, 133–134.

[64] Buršić-Matijašić 2007, 46; Gaffney et al. 2002, 34.

[65] Cf. Delano-Smith 1979, 37–39; Lentjes 2016, 89.

Instead, resources are directly distributed, conflicts are resolved immediately and locally, etc.[66] Similarly, the scarcity of fertile land across much of the Eastern Adriatic could have impeded the accumulation of substantial surpluses, thereby naturally slowing centralization tendencies.

Early Iron Age socio-political organization in the Eastern Adriatic predominantly concentrated on autonomous communities controlling surrounding resources – arable land, pastures, and key terrestrial or maritime routes. Archaeological evidence, specifically burial practices and grave goods, indicates social stratification from at least the 8th or 7th century BC, varying regionally.[67] The basis of elite power likely involved a combination of lineage,[68] martial prowess, accumulated wealth, and access to luxury imported goods. Elite status manifested differently across the region. In Histria, imported goods, particularly painted pottery and metalwork (more jewellery than weapons), dominated among grave inventory.[69] Liburnian elite burials featured larger tumuli, luxury imports, sporadically weaponry, and very rarely imported or even indigenous pottery.[70] In contrast, central and southern Dalmatian elites prioritized weaponry and imported ceramics.[71] The anthropological concept of a "Big Man" appears most apt for interpreting power dynamics in Eastern Adriatic communities. The Big Man's power did not derive exclusively from lineage but rather from ambition and capacity to accumulate, display, and redistribute wealth within the community. Their authority is not coercive but rests upon negotiation skills, a reputation for integrity, and strategic networking. Political dominance is validated by the size and loyalty of their followers, maintained through communal feasts and reciprocal exchange. The potential failure of

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[66] Anthropological studies on the organization of Polynesian communities indicate that the availability of land and resources on the islands significantly influenced the size and complexity of the societal structures. A similar conclusion can be drawn from ethnological analysis of East African communities that faced constraints on fertile land. Cf. Kirch 1984, 95; Shipton 1984, 632–634; Bolling 2006.

[67] For a detailed analysis of Istria see Mihovilić 2013, 328–330. The Liburnian region is thoroughly examined in Batović 1987, 382–383 and further expanded by Tonc 2015. Central and southern Dalmatia are comprehensively discussed in works by Čović 1987, 470–471, Marijan 2001, 83, 143–144; Blečić Kavur, Miličević-Capek 2011, 31. A general conclusion, particularly addressing the issue of statistical sampling, can be found in Barbarić 2010, 57, 60 and Ložnjak Dizdar 2021, 157–160.

[68] The prominence of familial or clan structures among the Histri and Liburnians in later periods suggests a similar social organization in earlier eras. Supporting evidence for the Histri can be found in Gabrovec, Mihovilić 1987, 337; Mihovilić 2013, 330; for the Liburnians, see Batović 1987, 381–382 and Kurilić 2008, 77–78. Parallel observations for the South Dalmatian culture are presented in Marijan 2001, 136–137, 162, and for the Montenegro in Gazivoda 2023, 15.

[69] Mihovilić 2013, 328–330.

[70] Batović 1987, 383; Kukoč, Čelhar 2009, 91; Čelhar, Borzić 2016 77; Ložnjak Dizdar 2021, 158–159.

[71] Čović 1987, 471; Marijan 2001, 83, 86; Kukoč, Čelhar 2009, 91; Perkić et al. 2021, 98–99; Ložnjak Dizdar 2021, 159.

their descendants usually results in the loss of status. Consequently, the authority of such leaders is generally considered unstable and vulnerable to internal strife or challenges from ambitious rivals. The inherent vulnerability of such positions, however, constitutes a significant aggravating factor in their attempt to gain power at the macro-social level. These powerful individuals primarily relied on clan and tribal networks for the distribution of key resources, which, in prehistoric contexts, included fertile land, potable water sources, livestock, grazing rights, luxury goods, etc. The symbiotic relationship between clan elites and the Big Man would have rested on the effective allocation of these resources, particularly within the resource-constrained environment of the Eastern Adriatic. If conflicts escalated, elites would serve as guarantors of systemic stability. However, more substantial imbalances stemming from natural disasters, uncontrolled population growth, disruptions to distribution networks, social unrest, or external pressures compromised the Big Man's reputation, often leading – as sociological analyses indicate – to coups and further societal fragmentation.[72]

The absence of what could be considered elite warrior burials furthermore fortifies the hypothesis of decentralized power structures. Unlike Central Europe, where extensive Early Iron Age grave goods and monumental architecture (such as large tumuli or banquet halls) might indicate the wider political dominance of individuals,[73] the Eastern Adriatic archaeological record predominantly lacks comparable examples.[74] This could reinforce the hypothesis of localized power structures, dominated by a Big Man or oligarchies whose influence remained confined to individual communities and their immediate surroundings.

The arrival of the Greeks – disadvantages of the Eastern Adriatic social background?

Favorable socio-political circumstances facilitated Greek engagement with overseas communities, particularly in trade and the establishment of emporia and colonies. [75] The unique social features of the Eastern Adriatic indigenous populations, particularly *maritime spirit* and *prevailing heterarchy*, likely played a significant role in shaping interactions with Greek prospectors, traders, and settlers prior to the founding of Issa and Pharos, the region's first permanent Greek colonies.

Scholarly literature, drawing upon archaeological and historical evidence, frequently posits that Eastern Adriatic indigenous groups constituted

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[72] Cf. Sahlins 1963, 288ff; Smith 2007.
[73] Frankenstein, Rowlands 1978; Potrebica 2013, 110–111.
[74] Kukoč, Čelhar 2009, 91
[75] Malkin 2002, 154–155; Van Dommelen 2005, 140.

clearly defined social units encompassing both coastal and inland territories. However, characterizing these cultures as monolithic overlooks their significant internal diversity. A key division existed, and still persists – those between coastal and inland communities. Anthropological and sociological studies highlighted a recurring pattern of tension between the mentalities of the Eastern Adriatic coastal communities and those in the hinterland that have existed for centuries.[76] This sociocultural dichotomy is plausibly applicable to the prehistoric populations as well. Coastal and island societies regarded the sea as a vital medium for exploitation and communication, thus shaping their interactions, economic practices and daily life in general. Coastal and island societies developed as *maritime cultures*.[77] Their extensive maritime networks, connecting them both within the region's archipelago and with the western Adriatic, stand in contrast to Irad Malkin's thesis regarding the Greek preference for settling in areas lacking strong maritime competitors. This provides a compelling explanation for the relatively late, 4th century BC, emergence of significant Greek settlements in the Eastern Adriatic, which finally needed to be supported by the imperialistic expansion of Dionysius I of Syracuse.

The *prevailing heterarchy* in the Eastern Adriatic could have had far-reaching consequences as well. As a contrast example, centralised political system could offer distinct advantages. The interaction between the Greeks and large centralized states such as Egypt and the Persian Empire serves as a useful paradigm. Such social background would have provided Greek merchants and settlers with the advantage of negotiating with a single structured authority, simplifying land acquisition, trade agreements, and determination of socio-political norms. The prosperity of Naucratis in Egypt[78] exemplifies the stability and protection offered by a centralised state. Simultaneously, autocratic systems were also subject to the ruler's arbitrary will, potentially leading to the violent dissolution of settlements through his military superiority. A second type of centralised political system existed at a more localized level. Ancient sources mention native rulers such as the Siculi king Hyblon,[79] the Segobrigian king Nannus,[80] or Arganthonios of Tartessos,[81] who evidently possessed sufficient authority

[76] Novak 1971, 602–603; Pederin 2005, 111; Mirdita 2009, 85–131, 159. For similar examples across the Mediterranean see Braudel 1997, 75–83.

[77] Irad Malkin's work (2002, 154) introduced a distinction within Mediterranean civilizations/cultures: maritime versus non-maritime. Maritime peoples, exemplified by the Greeks and Phoenicians, possessed the technological capacity, the motivation, and the navigational expertise for extended seafaring. Conversely, Malkin defines non-maritime civilizations as coastal populations who, while utilizing the sea for fishing or short coastal voyages, did not view it as a means of reaching distant shores.

[78] Hdt. 2.178.

[79] Thuc. 6.4.1.

[80] Just. *Epit.* 43.3.

[81] Hdt. 1.163.

and reputation to facilitate Greek trade and settlement in their surroundings.

Nevertheless, centralistic systems were more an exception, so Greek encounters with heterarchical social organization must have been more frequent across the Mediterranean. From a Greek perspective, the possibility of negotiating with numerous actors also offered benefits due to the potential for acquiring the most favorable trade or settlement conditions. Similarly, some indigenous communities might have benefited from increased development and prosperity through access to Greek goods, technology, and access to Mediterranean trade networks, thus gaining a competitive advantage in the region.

However, the Eastern Adriatic indented coastline and karst landscape formed a unique geographical setting characterized by numerous hillforts and coastal settlements with limited arable land and a consistent tendency to control the surrounding maritime space. Hence, its decentralised system might have created economic barriers, such as the lack of a directed flow of imported goods to a single centre, hindering the development of a powerful, centralized hub where power was legitimized through the clientelistic distribution of luxury imports. Instead, numerous coastal settlements served as nodes within circum-Adriatic and Mediterranean exchange networks, with an equilibrium maintained by inland communities serving similar roles within the Dalmatian and further Balkan interior. This dispersed coastal network facilitated economic fluctuations with foreign suppliers, thereby supporting the decentralized nature of the local market.[82] Moreover, the absence of a centralized authority likely resulted in shortages regarding the exploitative labor practices. Such conditions constrained the production and accumulation of agricultural and other surpluses at a macroeconomic level, thereby directly impacting the transactional potential.[83] Coupled with the inherent Eastern Adriatic limitations of arable land, this could have primarily affected the distribution and exchange of bulk commodities such as foodstuff, highly sought after by the Greeks during the Archaic and Early Classical period.[84]

Socio-political stability was crucial for the prosperity of prehistoric communities.[85] Political disunity implied a lack of organized repression, both on land and at sea. Such conditions negatively impacted trade and agriculture, which relied on military protection for security and unhindered development.[86] The presence of weaponry in the Early Iron Age burials of Istria, Dalmatia and Montenegro suggests that the local elites distin-

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[82] Cf. Barnett 2014, 16–17, 24.

[83] Yoffee 2005, 31.

[84] Osborne 2009, 106–107; Hall 2014, 103, 273; De Angelis 2016, 40; Morris 2016, 137 etc.

[85] Brun 1993, 277.

[86] Yoffee 2005, 23–24, 38–39.

guished themselves through military capabilities.[87] Consequently, disputes could easily escalate into violence and warfare, while the heterarchical system in the resource-confined Eastern Adriatic area could foster the frequent formation and dissolution of alliances, making the political circumstances even more unpredictable and insecure. The highly indented coastline further compounded the problem, because the absence of a solid repression system within such a geographic niche could easily lead to widespread maritime disorder. Piracy is frequently cited as an Eastern Adriatic endemic habit,[88] with attacks that could have been largely peripheral and unpredictable. Successful trade required foreign sailors and merchants to possess a thorough understanding of the local communities and their needs. Long-distance traders, such as the Greeks travelling in the Adriatic before the establisment of the first permanent colonies, faced significantly greater risks from accidental or deliberate attacks due to a much weaker knowledge of the local geographical, social and political conditions. While certain coastal regions, such as Istria and Ravni Kotari, may have developed a degree of spatial hierarchy, they appeared deficient in comprehensive territorial and maritime control. Consequently, no single indigenous community was capable of effectively monitoring the neighboring areas. This lack of control contributed to the prevalence of piracy, which deterred Greek traders and prospective settlers from establishing themselves in the Eastern Adriatic.

Moreover, the heterarchical political system initially presented a potential for conflict, as indigenous communities might perceive Greek traders and settlers as a threat to existing resource control and living space. Conversely, life in such an environment would provide the Greeks with political instability that could cost them manpower and resources. To a certain extent, this situation is reflected in Diodorus' narrative of the Parian colonisation venture (XV, 14, 1–3), the Pharos Tropeum and the inscription of the hero Callias. The settlement in the Eastern Adriatic environment must have been a risky venture, particularly before the powerful external support, as provided by Syracuse in the 4th century BC. Literary mentions of Greek short-lived communities or so-called "phantom settlements",[89] such as Anchiale, Heraclea, or the Cnidian and Issaean colonies on Korčula, contribute to the idea of a challenging colonial environment.

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[87] Čović 1987, 454–456; Marijan 2001, 120, 144; Marković 2006, 247–249, 304–306. While weapons are not a significant feature of Histrian and Liburnian funerary contexts, exceptions exist. (Batović 1987, 358–359; Mihovilić 2013, 328; Ložnjak Dizdar 2021, 157–159).

[88] Cf. Strab. 7.5.10; Liv. 10.2. Ormerod 1924, 167; Beaumont 1936, 161; Škegro 1999, 224; Čače, Kuntić-Makvić 2010, 64; Radić Rossi 2010, 99; Zaninović 2015, 88; Mihovilić 2013, 320 etc.

[89] Mario Lombardo (2006, 20–23) designates as *colonie phantasmi* those Greek settlements attested in historical sources but lacking archaeological confirmation.

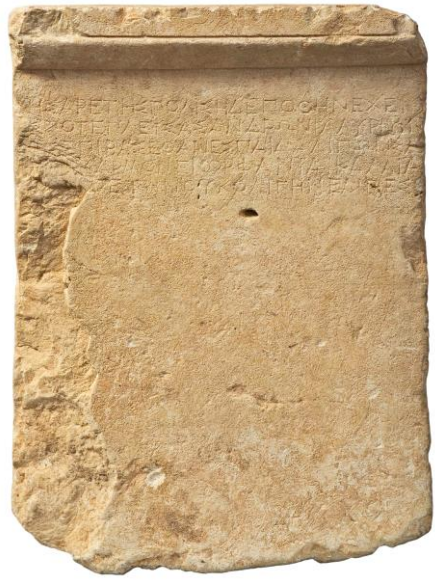

Fig. 2. The inscription of the hero Callias from Issa, Split, Archaeological Museum (published with permission from the Archaeological Museum in Split[90]) © Tonći Seser

Once settled, the Issaeans and the Pharians were compelled to establish a fresh network of relationships, seeking allies for their survival and prosperity within the new environment. Heterarchy appears to be important once more, as some indigenous communities chose to accept the presence of the Greeks and engage in trade with them, while others likely exhibited hostilities, due to the bloody outcome on Pharos.[91] The rapid dissolution of the Issaean colony on Korčula (late 4th or early 3rd century to the mid-3rd century BC)[92] could be interpreted as retribution for previous violent events. However, there are contrasting examples, as evidenced by the Greek connections with trading-towns, one along the Naron and the other on the Montenegrin coast,[93] or some other sites, such as the Kopila hillfort, Ošanjići near Stolac and Grad near Nakovana, where trade has been archeologically attested.[94] The changing dynamics of these relationships over time must be also considered, although precise determination

[90] The author expresses gratitude to Dr Jelena Jovanović for kindly providing the photograph.

[91] Diod. Sic. 15.14.2.

[92] These dates are based on a lecture delivered by Jelena Jovanović and Marta Kalebota (2024, 19–20), with additional confirmation provided by Prof. Hrvoje Potrebica, the excavator of the Koludrt site, to whom we extend our gratitude.

[93] Ps. Scyl. 23–24.

[94] Marić 2004; Forenbaher 2010, 152–157; Borzić 2017, 64–83.

remains difficult given the current archaeological record. A particularly close collaboration is observable in central Dalmatia, where the Issaeans ultimately established Tragurion and Epetion,[95] along with Resnik, which was not mentioned in written sources but has been confirmed through excavation. These emporia were possibly settled in collaboration with the indigenous population by the end of the 3rd century BC.[96] However, a massive defensive wall in Stobreč, the site of ancient Epetion,[97] may also suggest that threats from the surrounding area persisted. Although the presence of diverse Hellenistic pottery types in many indigenous settlements further supports a vibrant trading network,[98] Greek colonization remained geographically limited – no Greek apoikia had ever been founded in the Eastern Adriatic north of Tragurion and Issa. This restricted expansion can be, again, attributed, in part, to the dynamics of indigenous heterarchy.

Fig. 3 Greek defensive wall of Stobreč
(Published with permission from Marina Ugarković) © Marina Ugarković

[95] Polyb. 32.9.1.
[96] Cf. Budić 2022, 427 with relevant literature listed there.
[97] Ugarković, Neuhauser 2013, 55–58.
[98] Šešelj 2009, 513–527.

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