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Searching for the Port of Ancient Rhizon. Past Research and Future Perspectives

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The ancient settlement of Rhizon is located in the Bay of Kotor, Montenegro. Since 2001 a Polish-Montenegrin team have discovered storerooms filled with amphorae, residential units and pottery from the Mediterranean world during excavations. Risan was located on the ancient Adriatic trade route, which allowed an exchange of goods. 19th Century travellers' reports mentioned the remains of building structures visible in the sea. These descriptions provided a case study during underwater surveys (2003-2011). Only clusters of ceramics and single stone blocks were found. It is possible, that techniques used in the previous study were inadequate and walls are hidden beneath the seabed.

Key words

Rhizon, Risinium, harbour survey, underwater archaeology

Introduction

Archaeological research in Risan, Montenegro has been conducted since 2001 by archaeologists from Poland (Center for Research on the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe University of Warsaw) and Montenegroⁱ. The underwater survey was a part of this research and began in 2003. Between 2003 and 2011 there were six seasons of various underwater archaeological activityⁱⁱ.

Risan is a small town in today's Montenegro (11 km northeast of Kotor), located directly on the Risan Bay which is part of the Boka Kotorska (known in Antiquity as Sinus Rhizonicus) (Fig. 1). Today it is a quiet town with hundreds of tourists during summer time, but in ancient times it was an important centre of trade and exchange. The city was called Rhizon (in Greek and Hellenistic times) or Risinium (in Roman times). During excavations polygonal city walls and luxurious houses were found, from numerous magazines hundreds of amphorae were collected. The ancient city was settled on the trade route running along the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea and was mentioned in the 4th century BC by Pseudo Skylax in his *Periplus* (after: Plóciennik, 2017: 120)ⁱⁱⁱ.

Past research

Inhabitants of Risan found amphorae entangled in fishnets on several occasions. In addition, it is known from several sources (from the 19th century) that stone architecture located close to the ancient town was visible underwater. Archaeologists and travellers have described stone architecture visible in a few areas of Risan Bay, usually near Carine (the area where there was an ancient settlement). French Governor of the Kotor province, Louis Vialle de Sommières, mentioned in 1820 the monumental architecture visible in the sea close to the ancient buildings (Vialla de Sommières, 1820: 245). In 1878, the ruins visible in the sea were also noted by Sir Arthur Evans (Evans, 1883: 40), three years later, the French explorer Henri Cons observed a stone wall at a considerable distance from the shore. Henri Richlý, the Austrian archaeologist, also wrote about architecture visible underwater (Richlý, 1898: 146). The last time underwater architecture was visible was in the middle of the 20th century^{iv}. Noteworthy is that at the beginning of the 21st century no residues were found. In 1979 earthquakes occurred, which significantly destroyed the area of Risan Bay. The stone walls visible one hundred years earlier could have crumbled; nevertheless, remains of the wall should have been visible.

All this information indicated that it was worth conducting an underwater survey to locate the port of the ancient settlement (if such existed) and possible wrecks or other elements connected with the maritime activity of the Risan Bay area.

In 2003 the underwater survey in Risan Bay led by the Center for Research on the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe University of Warsaw began. During the survey shards of ancient ceramics laying on the bottom of the Bay were located. In the following year research was conducted with the use of an echosounder (Karpiński, 2010: 144). As a result, two areas were marked for future research: Area “W” and Area “S”. In seasons 2005 and 2006 research was conducted in the **river Špila**, which flows from the Špila Cave located over the ancient settlement. The bottom of the river has been cleaned, and a section of the **Cyclopean wall** was discovered. In this season works were also focused on area “R”, which was assumed to be the probable anchorage from where numerous pottery material was raised. In 2006 the survey was conducted along buildings of the modern Teuta Hotel. In 2010 the trial trench was opened to determine the port structures (Karpiński, 2010: 143–158) (Fig. 2). In 2011 the last underwater research season was carried out, and individual artefacts from area “R”

and “S” were lifted. In 2009 RPM Nautical Foundation within the project of the *Illyrian Coastal Exploration Program* surveyed the coastline of Albania and Montenegro. The project aimed to gather archaeological data connected to the distribution of artefacts, trade connections, overseas exchange and colonization. The campaign primarily focused on Kotor and Risan Bays, which were scanned entirely using the multibeam echosounder. No evidence of harbour architecture was found above the surface near ancient Risan. However, several amphora fragments were located (Royal, 2009: 52; Royal, 2012: 431).

Area ‘R’ and ‘S’

The **Rtc Cape** is the location of area “R”, so-called **anchorage**, about 1050 m in a straight line to the south of today's Risan port. During a few seasons of exploration, a large centre of ceramics was located, mainly with **amphorae spread across the area covering about 140×60 m**. All artefacts were fragments without a single object in one piece, which may indicate that it was a roadstead (Karpinski, 2010: 146, 148). The underwater survey was conducted in this area since 2005. The material explored between 2005 and 2010 consisted mainly of amphorae of different types dated from the **Hellenistic period, through Late Ancient to the Turkish times** (Karpinski, 2010: 146). Area “S” is located in the north part of the Bay near the Sopot Cave, and in 2004 was surveyed with the echosounder (Karpinski, 2010: 144). However, diagnostic material was lifted for the first time in 2011 (Fig. 3).

During four seasons diagnostics fragments of pottery were raised from the bottom of the bay; 105 fragments: 98 amphorae, two ceramic stoppers, three black gloss bowls and one lid as well as a roof tile. In the majority, there were fragments of a few types of amphorae: Greco-Italic amphorae form MGS V and MGS VI, Lamboglia 2 and Dressel 6A (based on personal observations).

Future perspectives

According to 19th-century writers remains of the port should be visible in modern Risan. Presumably the earthquake in 1979 destroyed structures visible at that time. In the area where the probable port lies, the sedimentation is very intensive. River Špila, that pours into the Bay, accumulates material washed away from limestone mountains. Additionally, at the bottom of the Risan Lagoon, as in the entire Bay of Kotor, there is the phenomenon of underwater springs with fresh water, which also increase bottom sediments (Karpinski, 2010: 143; Royal, 2012: 409). Specialised instruments, used in the previous research seasons, enabled the team to collect data from the surface of the seabed. Therefore, in order to investigate material beneath the Risan Bay sedimentation, instruments like a sub-bottom profiler and a caesium magnetometer should be used.

The underwater mobile caesium magnetometer, which utilises the phenomenon of nuclear magnetic resonance, enables us to detect archaeological artefacts and objects located underground. On the basis of analysis of acquired data, we could select future potential points for trenches (see: Camidge *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, use of a sub-bottom profiler might be useful to identify submerged objects and geological

strata's, not recognisable with the side-scan sonar and echosounder. A combination of these research techniques might enable the team to acquire new data connected to ancient marine activity in Risan Bay.

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Illustrations

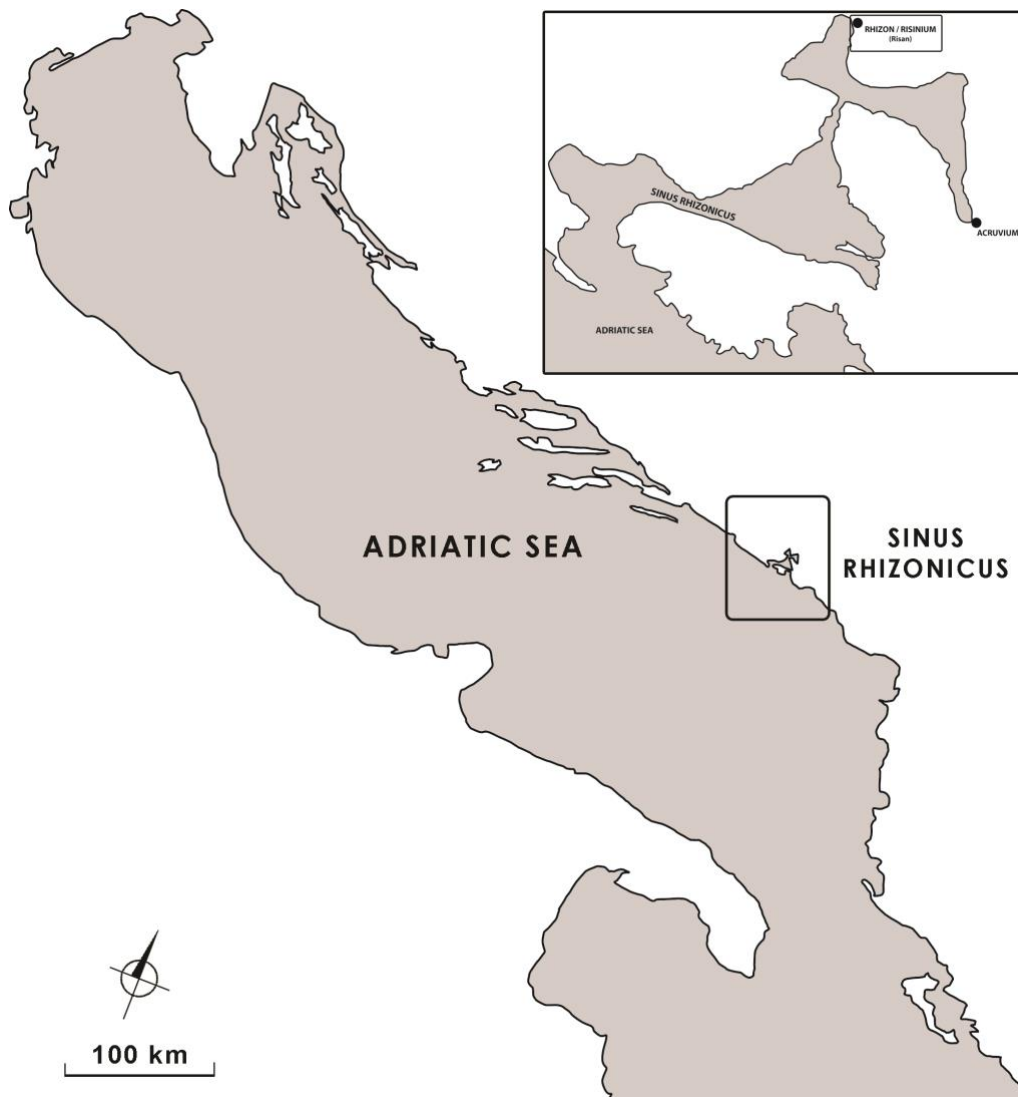


Fig. 1. Map showing location of ancient Risan.

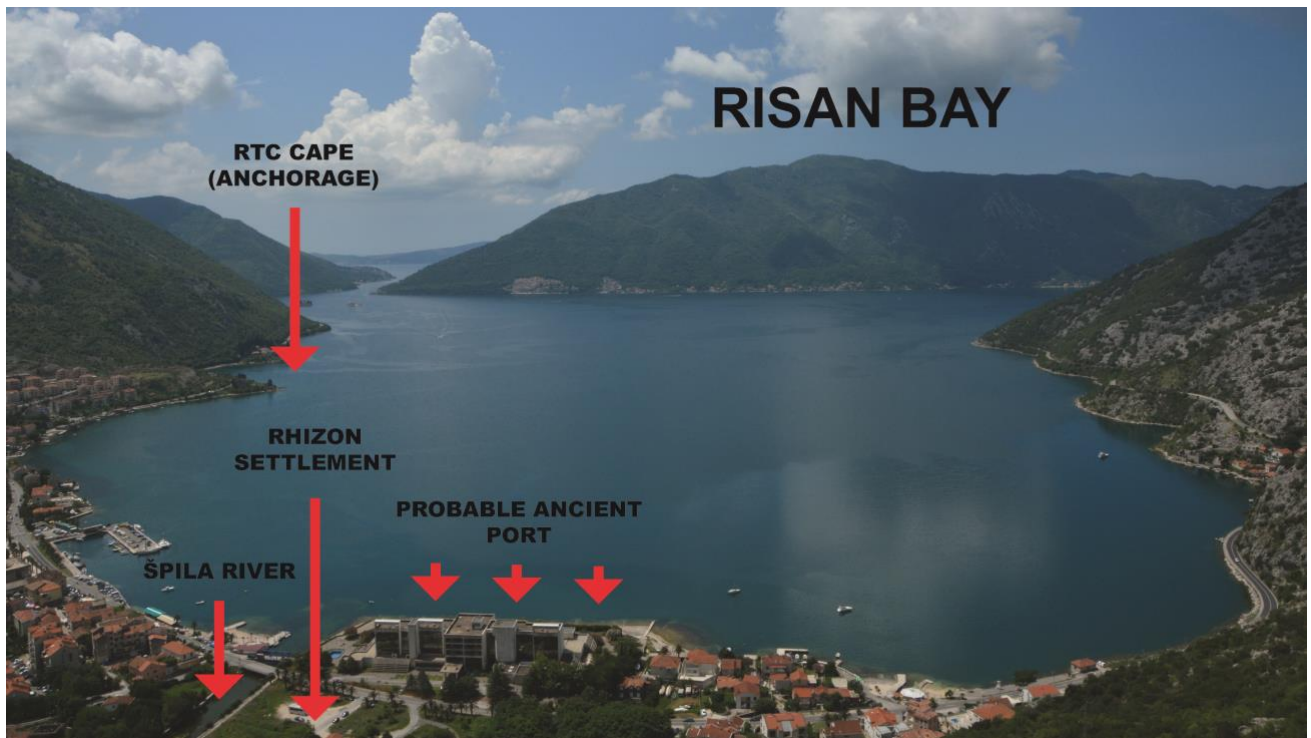


Fig. 2. View from Gradine Hill on Risan Bay.

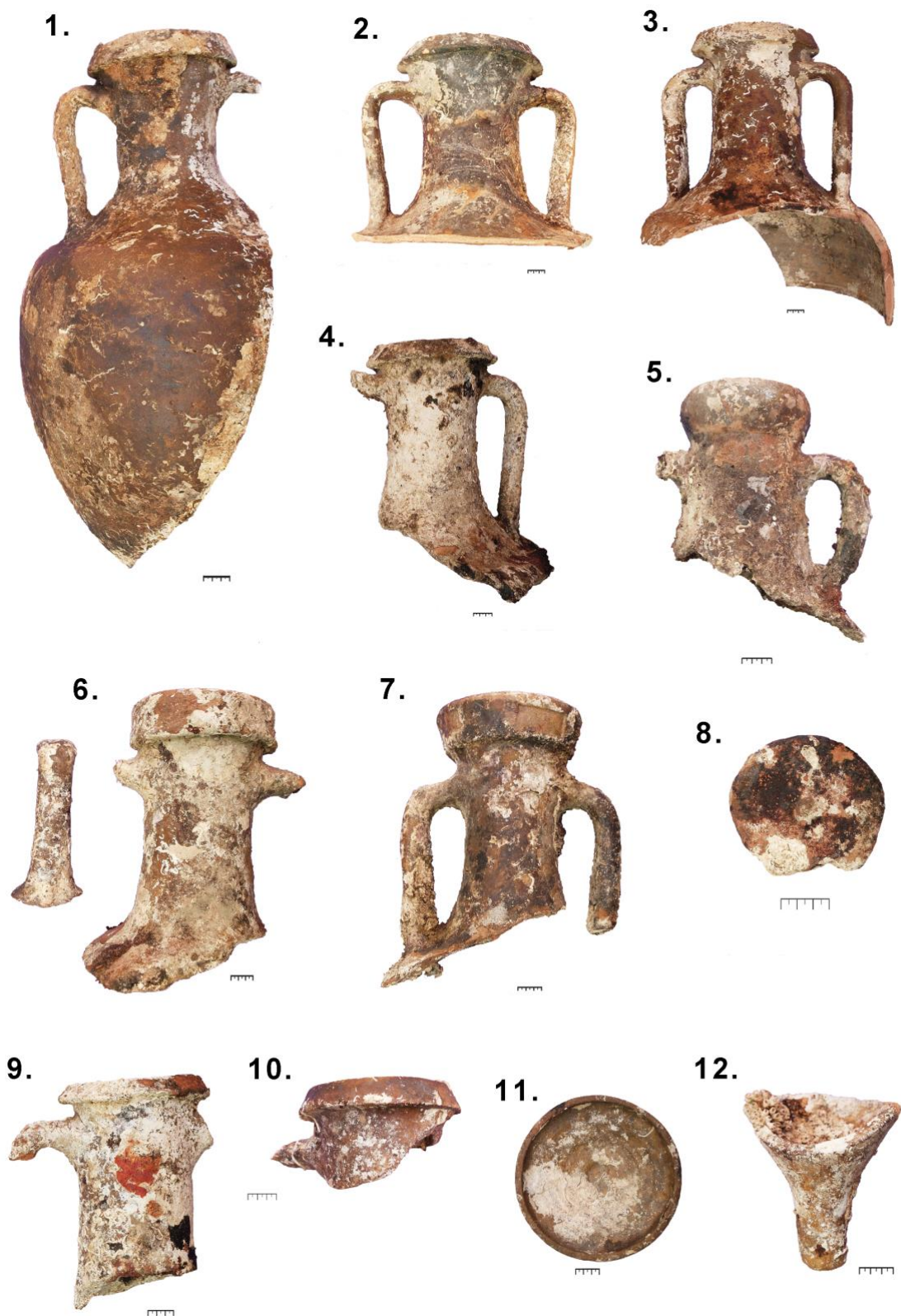


Fig. 3. Finds lifted up in 2011 season: No 1-4 Greco-italic MGS VI, area R; No 5 Dressel 6B, area R; No 6 Lamboglia 2, area R; No 7 Lamboglia 2 / Dressel 6A, area R; No 8 amphora stopper, area S; No 9-10 Greco-italic MGS VI, area S; No 11 vessel lid, area S; No 12 Greco-italic / Lamboglia 2 foot.

Endnotes

- i Reports on excavations in Risan: Dyczek *et al.*, 2004; Dyczek *et al.*, 2007; Dyczek *et al.*, 2014
- ii The results of the underwater work from years 2003-2010 were published in 2010 by the director of underwater works – Rafał Karpiński (Karpiński, 2010). From season 2011 only ceramic finds which were raised were published (Bajtler, 2017).
- iii Rhizon is mentioned in two chapters 24 and 25.
- iv During diving near the Carine area, Boris Verigo discovered stone architecture at a depth of 17 m (after Karpiński, 2011: 139).