

Srđan Beck  
University of Zagreb

DOI: 10.17234/9789531759113.3

## Re-evaluation of the Historical and Cultural Landscape of the Island of Rab

**Abstract:** *Re-evaluation of the Historical and Cultural Landscape of the Island of Rab is an interdisciplinary scientific project involving students of the Department of Art History (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb) aimed at training them in combining traditional methodologies with new technologies within the research of the transformation of the historical landscape of the island. This paper centres on the presentation of earlier projects and systematic excavations on the island of Rab within the CROMART project, with special focus on the implementation of various different technologies and methods, such as field survey using GPS; 19th century cadastral maps layered with modern ones; RAF photos from the WWII for documenting historical sites in the GIS system; archaeological excavations; documentation and analysis of archaeological findings. The purpose of the project was to combine those different approaches to make the best possible historical and artistic topography of the island.*

**Keywords:** *Island of Rab, historical landscape, new technologies, archaeological excavations, student project, CROMAR*

### Introduction – The project

Student scientific project *Re-evaluation of the Historical and Cultural Landscape of the Island of Rab* was organised as an interdisciplinary project focused on combining traditional methodologies used in art historical and archaeological scientific research with modern, digital technologies using the island of Rab as a case study.

The project was led by the International Research Centre for Late Antiquity and Middle Ages (IRCLAMA) of the

University of Zagreb and the Department of Archaeology of the University of Padua under the CROMART (Croatian Medieval Heritage in European Context: Mobility of Artists and Transfer of Forms, Functions and Ideas) project. Professor Miljenko Jurković, from the University of Zagreb, prof. Gian Pietro Brogiolo and prof. Alexandra Chavarria Arnau, from the University of Padua, and archaeologist Goran Bilogrivić were leaders of the project and coordinated student

activities. The field research lasted from May 29<sup>th</sup> until June 11<sup>th</sup> 2015 on the island of Rab. It was the continuation of earlier systematic campaigns and training schools organised by CROMART project and the project team members: A. Chavarria, G.P. Brogiolo, M. Jurković and R. Starac.

### The island of Rab

The island of Rab belongs to the Kvarner archipelago along with the islands Cres, Krk and Lošinj. Since the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, with islands Lošinj and Pag it shares the name Mentorides (Pseudo-Skilaks periplus), and it was a part of ancient Liburnia.<sup>1</sup> The island is located beneath the Velebit massif divided by the Velebit channel (historically known as *vlaški* or *morlački*) on the north, while on the south a narrow channel separates it from the island of Pag (peninsula Lun in the western part of Pag).<sup>2</sup>

The first recognized historical layer of the island dates to the Bronze Age and it can be related to the Liburnian tribes. At the turn of the millennium, the island came under Roman rule, and during that period, the picture of the landscape started to change, with domicile population starting to move from the hillforts to the fertile lowlands.<sup>3</sup> The newcomers influenced the change in the

social structure, and the island had gradually adapted to the Roman *mores*.<sup>4</sup>

The first document mentioning the formation of the Roman municipality of Rab is an inscription from the time of Emperor Augustus. It recounts the construction of the defensive walls and towers in the city named *Arba* (probably with the prefix *Felix*).<sup>5</sup> The municipality of *Arba* is also mentioned in inscriptions on *spoliae* found in different places on the island.<sup>6</sup>

In the year 493, the Ostrogoths conquered the island, and in the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, during Justinian's Reconquista, it was returned to the Eastern Roman Empire. The Slavic invasions of the 7<sup>th</sup> century were documented in archaeological layers, even though they did not significantly jeopardize the Roman population of the island. During that period, the island was under the jurisdiction of the archbishopric of Ravenna.<sup>7</sup>

### Training schools

In June 2014 and September 2015, two international training schools were held on the island. First summer training school was LLP Erasmus Intensive programme: IntSYSTEM, Integrated Systems of Sources, Technologies and Methods – Remote Sensing of Historical

---

1 Domijan 2001, p. 19.

2 Ibid.

3 Kranjec 2017, p. 11.

4 Ibid.

5 Nedved 1990.

6 Ibid.

7 Domijan 2001.

Landscape, organised by the University of Zagreb and the University of Padua. This training school was closely connected with the CROMART project, as its leaders, A. Chavarria, G. P. Brogiolo and M. Jurković were also involved in the project.<sup>8</sup>

The second summer training school Digital Recording, Study and Public Sharing of Historical Architectures: the City of Rab (Croatia) was organised by A. Chavarria, as a continuation of the one mentioned above. The main goal of both training schools was educating and training young researchers and students in new technologies and methodologies of archaeological research.<sup>9</sup>

### Earlier excavations

#### The first and the second campaign

The first two excavation campaigns on the island, organized by the CROMART project and involving team members A. Chavarria, G.P. Brogiolo and M. Jurković, as well as a group of students from Universities of Padua and Zagreb, were held in summer of 2015 (June, September) on the site of Saint Lawrence in Banjol.<sup>10</sup>

The first campaign was carried out from June 4<sup>th</sup> to June 21<sup>st</sup> 2015. This campaign was a follow-up of the LLP Erasmus training school held on the island the year before in 2014. Two sites were

chosen for the excavations, the first one being the newly discovered church of St. Lawrence in Banjol and the second one being the structures found in the inner courtyard of the restaurant „Kuća rapske torte“ located in the historical centre of the town of Rab.

The second campaign carried out in September 2015 was the continuation of the first one held in June and it resulted in the definition of plans of the two construction phases of the church of Saint Lawrence: the first, early Christian church and a smaller later one (its dating is not yet defined). Furthermore, a number of archaeological finds were discovered, the most significant one being an exceptionally preserved 6<sup>th</sup> century capital used in the smaller church as *spoliae*.<sup>11</sup> The excavation on the site in the historical centre of the town resulted in a discovery of a blacksmith facility from Late Antiquity, and a defensive wall, probably dating to the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup>

#### The third and the fourth campaign

In June and September of 2016, the third and the fourth campaign were carried out on the island.

The third campaign was held from the June 5<sup>th</sup> to the June 12<sup>th</sup> 2016. The chosen sites for the third campaign were: the monastic garden of the

---

8 CROMART 2015a.

9 Ibid.

10 CROMART 2015b.

---

11 Brogiolo et al. 2017, p. 666.

12 Ibid.

Benedictine nunnery of St. Andrew in the town of Rab; the urban structures in the historical centre, which continued to be excavated; and the front of the Benedictine church of St. Peter in Supetarska Draga, one of the best preserved early Romanesque churches on the eastern Adriatic (under the direction of a team member R. Starac).<sup>13</sup> The goal of the excavation on the site in the historical centre was to carry on the excavations from 2015, but it was paused on a well-preserved medieval layer of a blacksmith workshop.<sup>14</sup> It raised a question about the possible preservation of this layer. After a discussion with the representatives of the community, the whole layer was strapped and stored for the future restoration. This kind of cooperation with the local community is a very important part of the CROMART project.<sup>15</sup>

The second excavation was held in the monastic garden of the Benedictine nunnery of St. Andrew.<sup>16</sup> The garden is positioned between the bell tower of the cathedral of Rab and the square in front of it. This site was chosen because the team presumed that the medieval structures of the bishop's palace and possibly remains of Classical or Late

Antique structures are located beneath it.<sup>17</sup>

The third excavation was performed in front of the church of St. Peter in Supetarska Draga. The main goal was tracking and mapping of the transformations of the historical landscape of the island. Conservation excavations were carried out in order to prove the existence of phases earlier than those of today's church, dating to the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup>

The fourth campaign, held from September 18th to October 2nd 2016, was the continuation of the excavations held in June. The fourth campaign resulted in the conservation of the antique stove discovered in the inner courtyard of the monastery of St. Andrew, conducted by the restoration company *Ars Restauro d.o.o.* from Sinj, under the supervision of the conservator Mia Rizner (Conservation Department of Rijeka).<sup>19</sup>

## **Project and 2017 excavations**

### **Preparation for the excavations**

Before the actual fieldwork and excavations, the project was prepared in the library of *IRCLAMA*, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Zagreb). The documentation of earlier excavations

---

13 CROMART 2016.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

---

17 CROMART 2016.

18 Ibid.

19 CROMART 2017a.

held on the island and scientific bibliography dealing with the architecture, art and history of the island were collected by a team of students. The good preparation based on the research of literature and documentation on the earlier systematic excavations was the basis for the continuation and conduction of the project.

### The fifth campaign

The fifth campaign was held from May 29<sup>th</sup> to June 12<sup>th</sup> 2017 and it was co-organised by the students of Art History of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Zagreb). This campaign was part of the project *Re-evaluation of the Historical and Cultural Landscape of the Island of Rab*.

The campaign was held on four sites. Two of them were located in the historical centre of the town, the first one in the inner courtyard of the restaurant, excavated during the previous campaigns, and the second one in a new location, a town park called Dorka. The team of A. Chavarria and G. P. Brogiolo (University of Padua) led both of them. Third location was in front of the church of St. Peter in Supetarska Draga, a continuation of the earlier excavations. The fourth and last one was held on the location colloquially known as Ciprijanovo in the area of Kampor on the island, led by M. Jurković and G. Bilogrivić.

The first site, in the historical centre of the town, has already provided fruitful archaeological finds that prove that the town of Rab was continuously populated for 2000 years.<sup>20</sup> In the town's public park Dorka, the still visible remains of a medieval church were excavated.<sup>21</sup>

The third site was located in front of the church of St. Peter in Supetarska Draga, led again by the team member R. Starac. This site was also a continuation of earlier excavations conducted on the site, aiming to get better knowledge of the rural development of the historical landscape. The excavation resulted in a discovery of a Benedictine burial site and well-preserved wall structures of the abbey.

The fourth site was located in the area of Kampor, named Ciprijanovo, where the team excavated the remains of a church. For the campaign on this site, cleaning of the vegetation and archaeological trenches were made to define the walls of the church,<sup>22</sup> endangered by the construction of an asphalt road.<sup>23</sup> The excavation resulted in the definition of two historical phases of the church: an early Christian one, probably from the 5<sup>th</sup> century and an early medieval one.<sup>24</sup> Based on the

---

20 CROMART 2017b.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

results, we can presume that the long lasting continuation of the sacred site on this location is very much possible.<sup>25</sup>

### Methodologies

The main goal of the project was the implementation of different methodologies and technologies in art historical and archaeological research. When I. Kršnjavi founded both disciplines in 1878 at the University of Zagreb, they formed one Chair of art history and archaeology.<sup>26</sup> With that in mind, we decided that the logical step for us to obtain the best results in our research was to combine both disciplines for the same cause: the re-evaluation of the historical and cultural landscape of the island of Rab, which is also how we named the project.

In the research of earlier periods of the human history, the combination of archaeology and art history go 'hand in hand'. It has always been necessary for art historians researching the earlier art periods to acquaint themselves with methodologies of the archaeological excavations in order to better understand the monument and sites. However, nowadays, technological advancement has given us the opportunity to study and use methods previously reserved only for a small circle of engineers and IT experts. Such

openness to new, digital, technologies yields results that traditional methods alone cannot provide. That is why today, when interdisciplinarity is a common practice in scientific research around the globe, it is our duty to adjust and keep track of the progress and, in the end, to adapt the different methodologies and modern technologies in our research.

With that premise in mind, besides the traditional methods, archival sources and modern technologies were used for the documentation of the findings and to locate the archaeological sites. Using *RAF* photos from the World War II layered over the Austro-Hungarian cadastral maps, which were later documented in the *GIS system*, we were able to locate the sites in the field.

Devices mainly used by engineers, surveyors and IT experts were used on the excavation sites, such as the UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) mapping, laser scanning technology, digital photogrammetry and the thermal camera. They were used for documenting the archaeological layers, so that the documentation could be transferred to the computers, and 3D digital models could be made. Thermal camera was used on the buildings in the city, with the purpose of identifying the building material.

The main reason for the implementation of these new approaches combined with

---

25 Ibid.

26 Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu. „Povijest Odsjeka.“ 2017

traditional methodologies was to do a thorough research and to obtain the best possible results from different aspects, so that the next generations of students and scientists could have an insight into our methodology, results and publications for their own education and research.

## Bibliography

Brogiolo et al. 2017

G. P. Brogiolo, A. Chavarria, F. Giacomelo, M. Jurković, G. Bilogrivić, *The late Antique Church of Saint Lawrence, Banjol (Island of Rab, Croatia) – Results of the First Two Archeological Campaigns (2015–2016,)* in: *Hortus Artium Medievalium*, Vol 2, No. 23, 2017, pp. 666–675.

CROMART 2015a

“Case study Rab: ‘International Summer School: Digitizing, Studying and Sharing Architectural Heritage’” – September 27th – October 4th 2015.” Zagreb: CROMART 2015. <http://wp.ffzg.unizg.hr/cromart/2015/10/16/case-study-rab-international-summer-school-2015/>

CROMART 2015b

“Case study Rab – excavations 2015, June 4th–21st.” Zagreb: CROMART 2015.

<http://wp.ffzg.unizg.hr/cromart/2015/09/23/case-study-rab-excavations-2015-june/>

CROMART 2016

“Case study Rab – excavations 2016, June 5th–12th.” Zagreb: CROMART 2016.

<http://wp.ffzg.unizg.hr/cromart/2016/06/14/case-study-rab-excavations-2016-june/>

CROMART 2017a

“Case study Rab – excavations 2016, September 18th – October 2nd.” Zagreb: CROMART 2017.

<http://wp.ffzg.unizg.hr/cromart/2016/10/06/case-study-rab-excavations-2016-september-18th-october-2nd/>

CROMART 2017b

“Case study Rab – excavations 2017, May 29th – June 12th.” Zagreb: CROMART 2017.

<http://wp.ffzg.unizg.hr/cromart/2017/06/15/case-study-rab-excavations-2017-may-june/>

Domijan 2001

M. Domijan, *Rab, Grad umjetnosti*, Zagreb 2001.

Filozofski fakultete Sveučilišta u Zagrebu.

“Povijest Odsjeka”,

[http://povum.ffzg.unizg.hr/?page\\_id=18](http://povum.ffzg.unizg.hr/?page_id=18)

(Accessed 2017)

Kranjec 2017

I. Kranjec, *Umjetnička topografija Barbata na rabu*, Master’s thesis, University of Zagreb 2017.

Nedved 1990

B. Nedved, *Felix Arba: pregled povijesti i spomenika otoka Raba u rano rimsko doba*, Zadar– Rab 1990.