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THE ISLANDS OF ARTEMIS IN THE CRONIAN SEA

The Islands of Artemis appear as toponym in the epic poem Argonautica (4.330) written by the Hellenistic poet Apollonius of Rhodes. From his verses and the testimonies of later ancient authors, it is evident that the term refers to the Kvarner islands Cres and Lošinj. The paper aims to analyse Apollonius's idea of identifying islands with the Greek goddess. The emphasis is placed on the geographic peculiarities of the Kvarner Islands and the potential connection to a prevalent regional worship of female deities.

Key words: Artemis, the Adriatic, Cres, Lošinj, Apollonius of Rhodes.

In the 3rd century BC, Apollonius of Rhodes left a distinctive version of the Argonauts' route from Colchis back to Greece in the epic poem *Argonautica*.^{*} Unlike some older accounts (e. g. Hecataeus, Pindar, or Timaeus), a Rhodian poet linked the return voyage to the routes through the central Mediterranean. From the Black Sea, Jason and his companions sailed into the Istros River. After following a geographically fantastic river course through the Balkan interior, they finally reached the Cronian Sea (ἡ Κρονίη ἄλς).¹

The Alexandrian poet coined the unique term for the seascape to describe what is today called the Adriatic. In addition to Apollonius' toponyms, that claim can be further reinforced by later testimonies, such as the anonymous scholiasts of Aeschylus (837), Apollonius of Rhodes (4.327) and Lycophron's Alexandra (630). For the regional context of the Eastern Adriatic, Apollonius' narrative is a literary source of immense value. Written in the style of a nautical pilot, it remains an utter treasure-trove for unique local toponyms, as well as infrequent mythological details.

* Ovim putem želio bih iskazati veliku zahvalnost profesorici Marini Milićević Bradač za višegodišnju pomoć koju mi je dragovoljno i strpljivo pružila tijekom izrade mog diplomskog i doktorskog rada na Odsjeku za arheologiju Filozofskog fakulteta u Zagrebu. Duboko u sjećanju ostaju višesatne i uzbudljive rasprave o grčkoj mitologiji, okolnostima grčkog naseljavanja na Sredozemlju, znanstvenoj terminologiji kao i bespućima teorijske literature. Brojne tematske cjeline iz profesoričine monografije *Stara Grčka: Grci na Crnome moru* inspirirale su moj znanstveno-istraživački interes. *Sve dalje i dalje* za me ne stoji samo kao ime posljednjeg poglavlja te knjige, već istovremeno nosi jasnu motivacijsku poruku za učenje, čitanje i napredovanje. Budući da je ovaj članak izvorno pripremljen za konferenciju *Naming and Mapping the Gods in the Ancient Mediterranean* koja se održala u pandemijsko doba 2021. godine na daljinu, odlučili smo ga ostaviti napisanog na engleskom jeziku.

¹ This geographical concept originates from the ancient Greek belief that the Istros River had several mouths, one of which was in the Adriatic. See more in Hunter 1995: 128. A more detailed study in Croatian language was done by Radoslav Katičić (1995: 44; 48f).

The islands of Artemis

An uncommon toponym appears in Apollonius' description of Argonauts' journey through the Cronian Sea - *the Islands of Artemis*. It is a place where the twist of the plot happened - the conspiracy against the Colchian prince Apsyrtos. According to Apollonius (4. 330-481), the murder occurred on one of two islands that belonged to the Brygoi tribe. Both islands were concurrently dedicated to the goddess Artemis (4. 330).

The poet's testimony (4. 481) about the conversion of the islands' names to Apsyrtides after the assassination of Apsyrtos enables their smooth location on the modern map. Later Greek and Roman accounts, including those of Pseudo-Scymnus (373), Strabo (2.5.20; 7.5.5), Pliny the Elder (NH 3.151), Pomponius Mela (2. 114), Claudius Ptolemy (2. 16. 8), and Stephanus of Byzantium (s.v. Ἀψυρτίδες), lead to the undeniable conclusion that the Apsyrtides are the Kvarner islands of Cres and Lošinj in the northern Adriatic. Furthermore, there is an obvious connection linking the islands' name and the strategically important settlement of Apsoros (Ἀψωρος or Ἄψωρος) or Absorus, which is located on the isthmus between two aforementioned islands (fig. 1). Osor - the modern term for the settlement, shows a linguistic and phonetic connection *par excellence* with older Greek and Latin versions of the name.

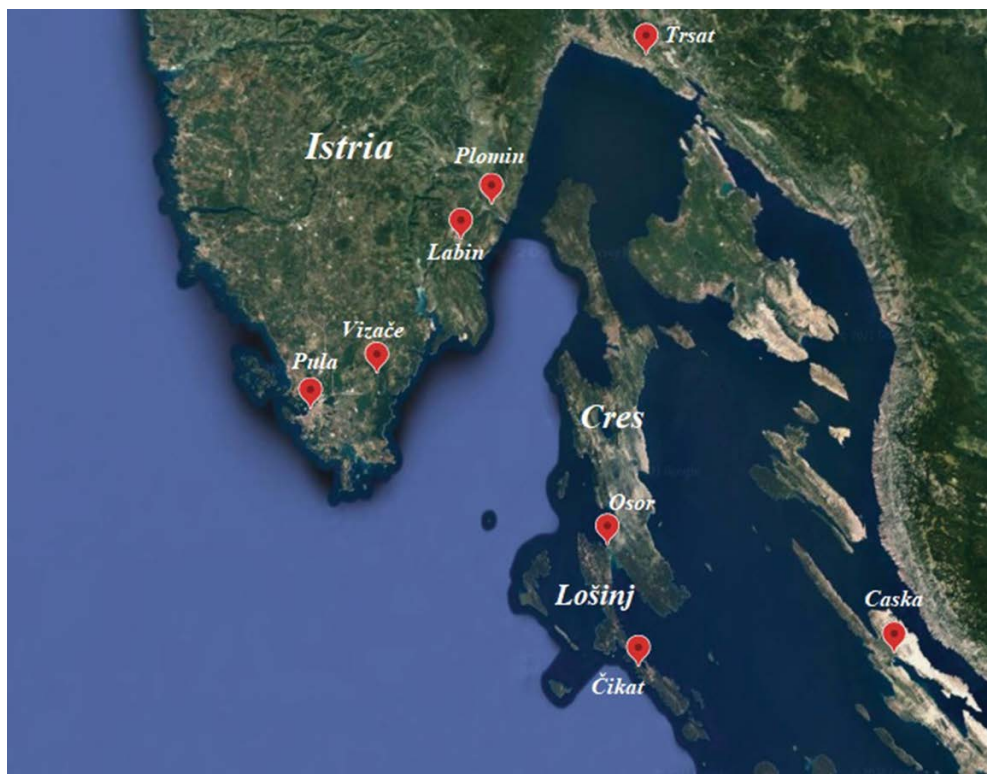
Apollonius' testimony is unique. It attests to Apsyrtos' murder taking place on the Adriatic Island that had been dedicated to Artemis. Several later narratives contain similar motifs. Such is, for instance, a fragment from the collection of the ancient anecdotes *On Marvellous Things Heard* written in the 3rd century BC, usually attributed to Aristotle. Unlike Apollonius of Rhodes, Pseudo-Aristotle (*De mir.* 105a) claims that during Jason's journey through the Adriatic, Medea built a temple dedicated to Artemis on one of the Adriatic Islands.

Indirect connections to Apollonius' testimony can be recognised in a fragment written by Phlegon of Tralles (FGrHist 257 F 36.12), a Greek historian who lived in the 2nd century AD. According to his account, in Dalmatia existed a cave named after Artemis, with bodies whose ribs exceeded eleven cubits (ca. 4.5 m). Since large bones in Greek literature often point to the resting place of a mythical character, such as the ones of Orestes (Hdt. 1. 67-68), Theseus (Diod. 4. 62. 4; Plut. *Thes.* 35-36; Paus. 1. 176) or Otus and Orion in Crete (Solin 1.91), it is possible that Phlegon's attestation should be observed in the context of the Colchian massacre committed by the Argonauts after assassination of Apsyrtos (Ap. Rhod. IV. 477-489). In this case, the connection between Artemis' cave and the island could be explained as a *pars pro toto*.² Based on the textual evidence, it is reasonable to suggest that Pseudo-Aristotle, and possibly Phlegon, adopted and reinterpreted a mythological pattern first presented by Apollonius of Rhodes.

In contrast to Apollonius' mythical toponymy, a variation can be found in the *Fabulae*, written by the Roman mythographer Hyginus.³ The author

2 A similar view was pointed out by Benedetta Rossignoli (2004: 84). For a different perception of Phlegon's narrative, see Milićević Bradač & Karavanić 2015.

Map 1. A map with highlighted toponyms mentioned in the following text (adapted from Google Earth 2021).



claims that Apsytyos was treacherously slain on the island dedicated to Minerva (Hyg. *Fab.* 23). Moreover, that is the only surviving testimony in which the island is attributed to a different deity, i.e. the Roman goddess of wisdom. The corresponding reasons could have been complex and various, starting from the Augustan imperial propaganda,⁴ the typical Roman reinterpretation of the Greek mythological elements or possibly Hyginus' compiling mistakes. The two latter claims seem quite plausible, especially due to the contemporary critique of the author's competence and writing expertise.⁵

Regardless of Hyginus' testimony, the principal aim is to focus on the Greek equation of Cres and Lošinj with the islands dedicated to Artemis. The goal is to sort out and interpret the most apparent reasons for this poetic intention.

3 There is no consensus whether the author of the *Fabulae* was Gaius Julius Hyginus, who lived in the second half of the 1st century BCE or some later compiler whose work was written before the beginning of the 3rd century AD. Different attitudes are expressed in Schmidt 1998: 778; Fletcher 2013: 137.

4 Based on the equating Hyginus the Mythographer with Gaius Julius Hyginus, who lived in the Augustan era, such a conclusion was emphasised by Bruna Kuntić-Makvić (2001: 174; 180).

5 It seems adequate to append the statement expressed by Hyginus' editor Herbert Jennings Rose (1967³: xii). He described the Roman mythographer as an ignorant, youth, semi-learned and stupid writer. A more fresh discussion on the topic and a different attitude towards Hyginus' work see in Fletcher 2013: 137–164.

The islands of Artemis – an important ingredient of the mythical narrative

According to Apollonius' narrative (4. 576–587), Zeus decided to punish Jason for the horrific murder, condemning the Argonauts to wander in the vast ocean and suffer in terrible storms. Three dominant elements indicate the gravity of Jason's crime. Firstly, the murder was undertaken as Jason's and Medea's conspiracy against Apsyrtos and was committed by deception and prepared in an ambush (4. 355–480). Secondly, since Medea was involved in the preparation of the mortal trap, the murder can be characterized as a fratricide - a horrible crime *per se*. Thirdly, the violation was committed on an island dedicated to Artemis in the goddess' Sacred Grove that was supposed to guarantee a protection for negotiators.

Therefore, the murder can be interpreted as a profound sacrilege. Jason was aware of the transgression severity. Soon after the murder, he made a rite of *maschalismos*, trying to prevent vengeance from the dead man. It was followed by the rite of licking and spitting out the dead man's blood so the Greek hero could remove blood guilt.⁶ Judging by these facts, dedicating the island to a Greek deity is unquestionably an important narrative element that reinforces the dynamics of the myth itself.

The wild landscape dedicated to Artemis

Nevertheless, such a general conclusion could lead to the hypothesis that Apollonius might have dedicated islands to any Greek deity. Thus, Apollonius' choice would have been utterly random. However, there are several good reasons why his decision for Artemis seems not to be purely accidental.

Regarding the goddess Artemis, the immediate correlations that stand out are the wilderness, wild animals, the hunt, vegetation and similar features. As Robin Hard pointed out: *In all accounts, [Artemis] is a virgin who devotes herself to hunting, and loves wild, untamed lands and their wildlife - hence her title of Agrotera, 'She of the Wild', an epithet already applied to her in Homer (Il. 21.471).*⁷ These typical aspects of Artemis' character could be brought into direct connection with the Greek impression of a specific landscape. Geographical and paleovegetation features of Cres and Lošinj seem like suitable arguments for such an equation.

Cres is a large and elongated island. Although it is almost 66 km in a length, the average width is less than 12 km. The northern coast is steep and partly wooded, while the entire eastern part is bare and almost uninhabited due to the strong NE wind - the Bura. The western coast of Cres is well-indented and unlike the eastern side, it offers several harbours and safe anchorages.⁸ However, apart from the areas with gentler slopes such as the

6 More comments in Hunter 1995: 156–157.

7 Hard 2004: 186.

8 Mediterranean Pilot 1946: 435.

Fig. 1. A view on the steep and overgrown western slopes of Cres from the village of Lubenice (The photograph was taken by F. Budić).



bays around modern towns of Cres, Valun and Martinšćica, the majority of western coasts are predominately steep and inaccessible from the sea (e.g. fig.1).

The Island of Lošinj consists of mountainous heights united by low isthmi. From a distance, it looks like a group of three low islands. Lošinj's coastline is generally high, broken and very well-indented. The northern part of the island is hilly and barren, with Mount Osorščica, around 588 m high. The peak belongs to one of the most remarkable orientation points in this part of the Adriatic (fig. 2). In the southern part of the island are several well-sheltered inlets, but the surrounding land surface is nowadays covered with dense vegetation, except for the sites where the contemporary settlements are located.⁹

While dry grasslands and rocks cover more than half of Cres, Lošinj is characterized by its dense Mediterranean forest. That peculiarity distinguishes it from most of the eastern Adriatic islands, which are predominately rocky and covered by low Mediterranean vegetation - maquis and garrigue.¹⁰

The recent palynological samples give an additional support for the widespread Mediterranean vegetation on Cres and Lošinj during the course of the 1st millennium BC. The analysis proposes that Kvarner islands were covered with forests of the holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) and to a lesser extent, the downy oak (*Quercus pubescens*). The coast was mostly dominated by evergreen and

⁹ Ibid. 430.

¹⁰ Glamuzina & Fuerst-Bjeliš 2015: 35–36.



Fig. 2. A view on the densely overgrown Island of Lošinj from Mount Osorščica (The photograph was taken by F. Budić).

inland by deciduous species.¹¹ Furthermore, based on pollen findings around the Vrana Lake on Cres, it can be deduced that the first deforestation occurred on the island between 1900 and 1700 BC. However, throughout the following centuries, dense vegetation continued to dominate the landscape, and the first significant changes began to take place probably during the 1st century BC, induced by the Roman cultivation of land for growing olive trees and vines.¹²

Paleoclimate research provides further support for the distribution of dense vegetation. The dominant relief feature of the Eastern Adriatic - a narrow and low coastline in contrast to high Dinaric Mountains in the inland, favours the movement of depressions along the coastal regions. Consequently, the Eastern Adriatic is one of the Mediterranean's rainiest areas.¹³ Unlike the southern and western Mediterranean where the rainy season is limited mainly to autumn and winter, heavy precipitation can be expected in the Adriatic during all seasons.¹⁴ Such meteorological conditions are highly favourable for vegetation growth. The climate pessimum that prevailed during the Iron Age (ca. 800 - 300 BC) implies weather conditions with a higher average annual precipitation than today,¹⁵ hence even more suitable weather conditions for a dense and extensive vegetation cover.

11 Schmidt *et al.* 2000: 126-127; Šoštarić 2005: 388-389, tab. 1.

12 Schmidt *et al.* 2000: 126-128.

13 Mediterranean Pilot 1988¹⁰: 35. See also Morton 2001: 64-66; Beresford 2013: 92.

14 Beresford 2013: 93.

15 Brice 1978: 63-64; Bintliff 1982: 148; Goudie 1992: 162; Van Geel *et al.* 1996: 455-456.

Another support for the wild and overgrown landscape on the islands can be drawn from the prehistoric settlement pattern.¹⁶ Current analysis shows that the hillforts of the Island of Cres are somewhat further into the interior and hidden from the sea. Despite the island's large size (405.8 km²), Cres seems to be relatively sparsely populated with hillforts.¹⁷ On the other hand, Lošinj offers a different case. The anomalous density of hillforts on the island tended to be explained by various models, one of which was territorial control. However, the low carrying capacity of the agricultural terrain of Lošinj implies that all sites that were suggested as permanent settlements should not be interpreted as such. It seems more plausible that different sites were fortified during a longer period, i. e. throughout the Bronze and Iron Age, and their primary role mostly depended on the surveillance of the maritime space and organisation of trade networks. It is also to be assumed that Lošinj's hillforts had an ostensible display role, trying to emphasize human occupation both on the land but also of the sea.¹⁸ Ultimately, the geomorphology of Lošinj as well as the low carrying capacity of agricultural land¹⁹ suggests that despite an unusually great number of hillforts, the predominant Mediterranean vegetation was probably not stripped bare, especially along the island's coast and on higher altitudes in the north.

All the highlighted islands' peculiarities, whether natural or anthropogenic, are primarily related to visual impression. It seems tempting to connect them to observing habits of Greek travellers, prospectors and merchants.²⁰ Although such geographical and social details of the Eastern Adriatic are poorly reflected in the preserved Greek written sources,²¹ it is reasonable to assume they existed. Even the data presented in the Greek Periplus (e.g. written by Pseudo-Scylax or Pseudo-Scymnus) lack any detailed topographic or meteorological characteristics. Professional sailors had to rely on personal skills or mental charts and sensory maps that emerged from the accumulation of experiences and the exchange of navigational lore.²² That can be concluded not only for the Adriatic but for the rest of the Mediterranean as well.²³

16 It should be emphasized at the outset that poor archaeological knowledge extremely limits the detailed insight into this problem, especially in the matter of connecting the site distribution with their dating. Hence, it is possible to rely only on the preliminary state of research. See more comments in Čučković 2017: 532–534.

17 Ibid. 538.

18 Ibid. 538–539.

19 A contemporary pedological map indicates the weak agricultural potential on Cres and Lošinj (Vukadinović 2016). This can be further strengthened by medieval sources that testify about predominant maritime activities on the Island of Lošinj, due to the lack of fertile land. See Čoralčić & Novosel 2014: 258–259.

20 Cf. Lepore 2000: 38; D'Ercole 2012a: 25.

21 Cf. Čače & Kuntić-Makvić 2010: 65–66; Kuntić-Makvić 2010: 188–190.

22 Fenton 1993: 45–46.

23 Cf. Beresford 2013: 192–194.

When Apollonius' epic poem appeared in the 3rd century BC, Greek sailors must have been quite accustomed to the local Adriatic geography. The earliest specific geographical knowledge can probably be traced back to the second half of the 6th century BC when Greek merchants settled in the Po River delta and organised two emporia - Adria and Spina. The sailing route along the Eastern Adriatic Islands seems to be more frequent after the establishment of Greek settlements Issa on the Island of Vis and Pharos on the Island of Hvar in the early 4th century BC. Consequently, the dynamics of the trading routes along the East Adriatic were expanding and increasing.²⁴ Among plenty of other indigenous sites, miscellaneous Greek Hellenistic material was discovered in Osor - located on the isthmus between Cres and Lošinj.²⁵ That could serve as the most representative evidence so far for the Greco-indigenous exchange of goods, possibly in a direct way. It is noteworthy to emphasise that the archaeological material from Osor precedes or is contemporary to the time frame when Apollonius compiled *Argonautica*.

It is reasonable to suggest that the everyday Greek remarks on natural peculiarities could have directly or indirectly reached Apollonius. Leaving aside a more meticulous discussion on the matter, let us just emphasise that in contemporary literature the Rhodian poet is commonly recognised for his scholarship and rich geographical knowledge.²⁶ Since his life was tightly connected to Alexandria and its Library (e.g. Vit. Ap. Rhod. 2; POxy 1241),²⁷ the institution offered him access to diverse Greek literary sources. Among the vast number of works that are now lost, it seems highly reasonable that some could have contained more specific geographical and social data about the Eastern Adriatic. We are inclined to believe these circumstances are primarily reflected in equating the natural and geographical features of Cres and Lošinj with the landscape dedicated to Artemis. The same pattern can be even more distinctly recognized in verses 4.566-571, where Apollonius gives an etymological account of Kerkyra Melaina (present-day Island of Korčula), noting that Poseidon settled there the lovely-haired nymph Kerkyra. From the open sea, sailors recognise the island because it is everywhere surrounded by dense forests and for that reason they call it the Black Kerkira (*Kerkira Melaina*).

Another visual element in Apollonius' narrative about Apsyrtides is a sacred temple. Although the author does not specifically describe its appearance, this place of action undoubtedly belongs to the sphere of mythical and imaginary that was carefully incorporated in an ornamented Hellenistic masterpiece. However, it is tempting to assume that the visual dominance of the hillforts in the landscape of Lošinj could have also served as an inspiration for a temple dedicated to Artemis. Nevertheless, it remains challenging to assess, whether that sort of equation should be traced to a domain of pure po-

24 Šešelj 2009: 387-392; 472-527; map 138.

25 Mihovilić 2002: 505-509, maps 4-7.

26 Delage 1930: 277-279; Meyer 2001: 219.

27 See more in Hunter & Siegel 1996: 874f.

etic imagination or a real Greek experience. Although the Greek objects were imported to Osor, according to the current archaeological data, the level of Greco-indigenous social entanglement can be described as very faint. Therefore, direct Greek influence on the construction of a building that would have resembled a proper temple can be ruled out as an option. Still, the possibility of *interpretatio Graeca* of a certain indigenous construction concealed within the islands' dense vegetation cannot be ruled out.

Another tempting idea – the “Liburnian” Artemis?

In addition to the aforementioned thoughts, another intriguing social element seems like an adequate basis for equating the islands with a goddess of wilderness exclusively.

Cres and Lošinj belong to a territory that was during the Iron Age dominated by the Liburnians. Although there is an active discussion on the Liburnian influential range inside the traditional boundaries allocated between rivers Raša in the north and Krka in the south,²⁸ the archaeological traces from Osor confirm the affiliation of local workshops to the Liburnian sphere as early as the 9th century BC.²⁹

The preponderance of female deities is distinctive feature of the Liburnian society. This phenomenon can be observed starting with the permanent Roman dominance over the Eastern Adriatic (i.e. the end of the 1st c. AD) when active literacy began to spread extensively. Eight different names of indigenous female deities are known from epigraphic inscriptions - Latra, Sentona, Anzotica, Iria, Ica, Eia or Heia, Iutossica and Aitica (Table 1). On the other hand, only two indigenous male deities are known: Iicus and Taranucus.³⁰ In addition to that, the god of forests and water Silvanus was also worshipped in Liburnia, in a similar manner to his Italian counterpart. Some indications designate that his cult should be considered as indigenous, and not imported.³¹

Based on the current state of research, scholars suggest that many recorded names of indigenous goddesses point to their significant religious role and the adoration of the female principle in the Liburnian pantheon.³² A similar pattern can be observed among the Histrians - the people who inhabited a peninsula west of the Kvarner islands. A total of 14 indigenous deities are recorded there, out of which 13 are female and only 1 is male.³³

28 Essential discussions are based on the literary testimonies written by Hecataeus of Miletus (FGrHist.1 F 91; 93), Pseudo-Scylax (21); Pseudo-Scymnus (373f), Pliny the Elder (*HN* 3.139; 141) etc. See also: Suić 1955: 277; Batović 1987: 344–346; Čače 1985; 2002: 92, etc.

29 Mladin 1960: 212; 217–220; Glogović 1982: 35–40.

30 Šašel Kos 2006: 65–66; Kurilić 2008: 27.

31 Matijašić & Tassaux 2000: 81–89.

32 Suić 1966: 54; Medini 1984: 227; Šašel Kos 2006: 63, etc.

33 Girardi Jurkić 2005: 113.

Table 1: Liburnian goddesses list and associated inscriptions (according to Kurilić 2008, 26).

Name:	Total number of devoted inscriptions	Place of discovery	More detailed insights and additional comments:
LATRA	11 or 12	Nadin (<i>Nedinum</i>)	4 or 6 The place of discovery of two inscriptions is unknown. Possibly from Nadin.
		Karin (<i>Corinium</i>)	2
		Podgrađe (<i>Asseria</i>)	2
		Skradin (<i>Scardona</i>)	1
		<i>Salona</i>	1 The name has been assumed due to the inscription's poor state of preservation Medini 1984: 225
SENTONA	9	Labin (<i>Albona</i>)	4
		Plomin (<i>Flanona</i>)	3
		Trsat (<i>Tarsatica</i>)	1 This inscription possibly originates from Flanona and was later brought to Tarsatica (Girardi Jurkić 2005: 128)
		Katuni village close to Pazin (Istria)	1
ANZOTICA	2	Nin (<i>Aenona</i>)	2
IRIA	2	Plomin (<i>Flanona</i>)	2
ICA	2	Plomin (<i>Flanona</i>)	1
		Pula (<i>Pola</i>)	1
EIA OR HEIA	1	Caska (<i>Cissa</i>)	1
		Vizače (<i>Nesactium</i>)	2
		Pula (<i>Pola</i>)	1
IUTOSSICA	1	Labin (<i>Albona</i>)	1
AITICA	1	Labin (<i>Albona</i>)	1

Although no inscriptions directly link to Cres and Lošinj, over 15 originate from the surrounding area. (tab. 1 and map 1). This fact strongly supports the hypothesis that the islanders were prone to the same veneration pattern as the communities on the mainland.

Moreover, it is reasonable to observe the cults of female deities as a legacy of Liburnian ancestral traditions whose roots can be traced far back into

Fig. 3. The Lady of Čikat (Island of Lošinj). Size: 10.4 cm in height, broadest in the shoulder region at 6.6 cm and with a head of 4.8 cm in diameter; Čikat Peninsula close to Mali Lošinj (Museum of Lošinj, inv. nr. I/M750). Reproduced with permission from Martina Blečić Kavur (2014: 12; fig. 2).



prehistory. It should be stressed that extensive discussions on the Liburnian religion often emphasise protective preservation of tradition and artistic forms together with rigid conservatism.³⁴ However, material traces of the prehistoric Liburnian religion are very scanty. One of the crucial obstacles is the tendency of strict stylization in artistic expression. Detailed figurative forms appear to be almost absent among the archaeological objects of the Early Iron Age Liburnia.³⁵ Still, one isolated object found on the Island of Lošinj makes an exception. This accidental find is known as the “Lady from Čikat” (Fig. 20). A small terracotta statuette (10,4 cm high) depicts a half-naked female figure with an accentuated braid, or possibly a scarf on her back. Her neck is wide and stocky, her head oversized, and both hands are placed on the breasts. According to the stylistic analysis done by Martina Blečić Kavur, it can be concluded that the statuette was imported from the Etruscan area.³⁶

It is tempting to link this specific figurine with the worship of a local goddess. In addition to the ceremonial or ritual purpose of the object that has already been suggested,³⁷ the hypothesis could be further strengthened by her half-nakedness and the position of the hands placed on the bosom. Unfortunately, the final judgement cannot surpass the level of speculation, especially due to doubts about the exact place of discovery and absolute ignorance about its role in the Liburnian social context.

34 Suić 1966: 54; Medini 1984: 223f.

35 Batović 1987: 367ff.

36 Blečić Kavur 2014: 19–36.

37 Ibid. 37f.

Following the more significant Greek impact on the area from the beginning of the 4th c. BCE, traces of female cults can be recognised on the other Eastern Adriatic Islands as well. Highly indicative is Apollonius' link (4.566-571) between the Island of Kerkyra Melaina and the lovely-haired nymph Kerkyra. It should be noted as an aside that from the very same island stems the Roman inscription (CIL III 3066 = 10083) from the 2nd c. AD, mentioning the cult of Venus Pelagia.³⁸ Moreover, among several Greek goddesses whose worship has been recognized on Greek inscriptions of central Dalmatia,³⁹ Artemis is also present. Lost pedestal carried a dedication that testified to the worship of Artemis Feraia (Ἄρτεμις Φεραία) on the Island of Vis.⁴⁰ In addition to that, scholars detected the traces of her cult elsewhere. According to a detailed analysis done by Nenad Cambi, an elegant bronze head of a goddess that stems from Issa has close parallels to the sculpture of Diana of Versailles. Hence, this bronze head shaped in the Praxitelean artistic tradition that was probably completed at the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 3rd centuries BCE, should also be interpreted as a part of a larger statue dedicated to Artemis. Unfortunately, little can be said about its original context.⁴¹ The symbolism of Artemis possibly appears on the 3rd-century Issaeian coins, due to the depiction of a deer on the reverse.⁴² Comparable are the coins of the Illyrian king Ballaios, who ruled in the wider region during the 2nd century BCE. They contain a rustic depiction of Artemis or Artemis-Hecate dressed in a chiton. The figure is shown as advancing or standing, with or without a torch and sometimes carries one or two spears.⁴³ Although *interpretatio Graeca* of the already existing indigenous cults on the Eastern Adriatic Islands would certainly be overambitious at the moment, it is still possible to point out a fertile ground for the worship of Artemis in the regional context. The fact that her figure found a place on a 2nd-century coin of the local ruler generally indicates a prominent role among some indigenous communities.

Conclusion

The content of Apollonius' *Argonautica* displays a deep intertwining of geographical and mythological elements. The very same intention can be easily spotted in the narrative dedicated to the Eastern Adriatic. We tend to believe that the term "Islands of Artemis" contributes to the same hypothesis. If Apollonius' details are compared with the actual geographical features, it can be noticed that the islands are described as smaller than they are in reality. In addition to that, their layout is imaginatively determined and geographically

38 Kuntić-Makvić 2001: 174f.

39 Marohnić 2012: 33ff.

40 Brunšmid 1898: 20, nr. 7.

41 Cambi 2002: 308ff.

42 Rossignoli 2004: 87.

43 Rendić-Miočević 1964: 87-88.

insufficiently defined. From another point of view, one should be aware that the Hellenistic author adapted the scene as much as possible to effectively meet the needs of the mythological content. For the context of his story, he carefully wove dramatic elements, that belong either to the sphere of geography or religion, into the description of Apsyrtos' treacherous murder.

Although Radoslav Katičić and Richard Hunter frequently stressed the distinction between the actual geographical and mythological, we tend to avoid the dichotomous view and try to observe it as an entangled mosaic. Needless to say, some details can be instantly sorted out as purely mythological – for instance the actual temple of Artemis on one of the islands. On the other hand, the poet's inspiration for equating the Kvarner islands with the Greek goddess of the wilderness seems to have a foothold in real geography. Convincing arguments are primarily based on the paleovegetation and geomorphology of the Islands of Cres and Lošinj. In addition to that, a tempting hypothesis can be drawn for the social circumstances, such as the preponderance of female deities among the Liburnian and Histrian communities.

The origins of such knowledge likely lie in Greek prospecting and trading activities in the Northern Adriatic. Although such data are mostly lacking in literary sources, the Greek trading activities along the Eastern Adriatic coast imply that these must have existed already at least from the 4th century BC. As a Hellenistic scholar, Apollonius was able to obtain knowledge through the works of the Alexandrian Library, or possibly from sailors and merchants that frequently gathered in the vibrant Hellenistic hub. Such a probable transfer of knowledge fits into the concept of a "bottom-up" transmission that found its way from the broad masses and finally settled in the high literature of the Hellenistic period.

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