Pottery as an Indicator of Trade Dynamics and Cultural Contacts in the Eastern Adriatic

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Introduction

The Mediterranean Sea has long served as a conduit for the exchange of people, ideas, and products for millennia. In the eastern Adriatic, where complex societies evolved in concert with extensive seafaring trade networks throughout the Mediterranean world, the archaeological record reflects a geographically dispersed catchment from which material items originated. This is certainly the case in the Ravni Kotari region of northern Dalmatia, where a number of centuries-old Liburnian Iron Age hillforts ultimately evolved into Roman *municipia,* leaving behind a rich assemblage of artifacts reflecting continuous human occupation for more than a millennium. Indeed, because of its durability, transportability, and utility in carrying other products, pottery is not only one of the most abundant artifact classes represented among these sites, but also one of the most effective proxies to measure cultural contacts and trade dynamics through time. In this study, we draw upon the ceramic assemblage of Nadin-Gradina, a pronounced hillfort site centrally located in Ravni Kotari, to evaluate changing patterns of connectivity between northern Dalmatia and other parts of the Mediterranean world from about the eighth century BC to the late sixth century AD. The results suggest that Ravni Kotari engaged dynamically with places throughout the Adriatic basin, but experienced shifts in its connectivity with the Italian peninsula, Southwest Asia and North Africa through time. These shifts have also been documented more broadly across the central and eastern Mediterranean basins during the Iron Age and Antiquity, suggesting Ravni Kotari was woven tightly into the changing fabric of production and seafaring exchange networks across these periods.

The Nadin-Gradina Archaeological Site

Nadin-Gradina has long been recognized as one of the largest and most distinctive Liburnian and Roman settlements in Dalmatia (fig. 1). Located in the central part of Ravni Kotari, the site occupies a vast area of 32,6 ha, about a quarter of which is enclosed by a stone rampart (fig. 2). The Liburnian settlement was established by at least the eighth century BC, and by the first century AD, it had been transformed into the Roman municipium of "Nedinum". The town remained occupied into Late Antiquity but appears to have been abandoned by the late sixth or early seventh century AD. In the Late Medieval era, the site regained prominence once again but soon came under the con-

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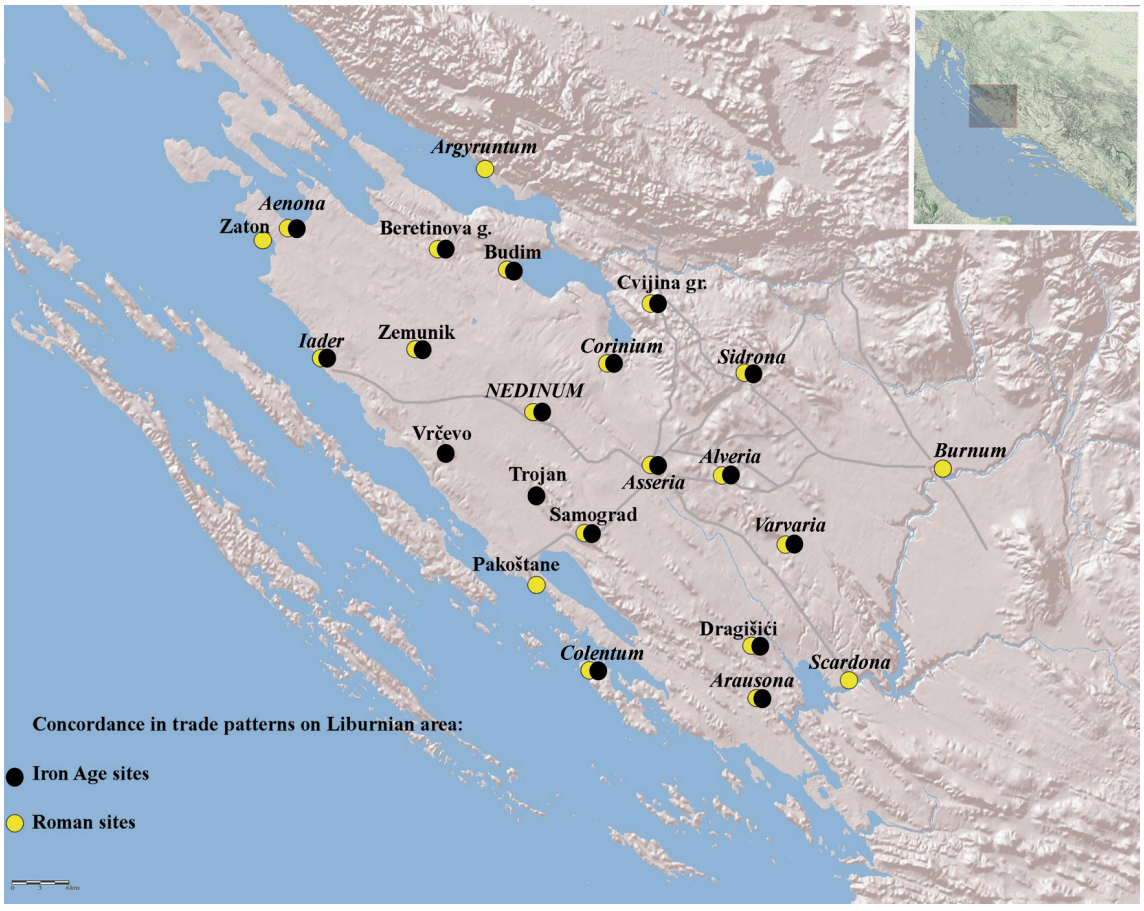

Fig. 1: Nedinum and other South Liburnian Iron Age/Roman sites.

tested administrative influences of the Venetians and Ottomans, which constitutes the final archaeological manifestation of the hillfort.[1]

Nadin-Gradina lies within one of the most productive agricultural and livestock raising territories in Liburnia, and it quickly became the economic, cultural, and administrative center of one of the largest Liburnian territories during the Iron Age. Its importance was also enhanced by its location on the main road connecting the coast to the interior, which facilitated the regular movement of goods and services into Ravni Kotari from coastal ports.

Small scale excavations began at the site in 1968,[2] but research intensified in the 1980s when the Neothermal Dalmatia Project (NDP) conducted a small number of test excavations as part of a wider focus on landscape and ecology in Ravni Kotari. The NDP also put forth the initial occupational chronology of Nadin.[3]

More recent systematic archaeological research on the necropolis[4] and residential segments[5] of the Liburnian and Roman complexes has been conducted over the past decade or so. Between 2005 and 2018, the University of Zadar completed five seasons

Fig. 2: Aerial photo of Nadin.

of excavations at the necropolis on the northwestern flanks of the hillfort. In 2015, the Nadin-Gradina Archaeological Project (NGAP) also began as a collaborative effort between the University of Zadar (Croatia) and University of Maine (USA), with a research design focused on millennial-scale urbanization and landscape change.[6] To date, the NGAP continues this joint effort with multi-year support from the Croatian Science Foundation (project: Ravni Kotari: Urbanization and Landscape Change in Northern Dalmatia, IP-2016-06-5832).

Data Collection

Excavations have been conducted at several locations within and outside of the walled settlement, with its north and northwestern segments proving to be the most promising with respect to a complete stratigraphic sequence. Within the walled enclosure, five test units measuring approximately 25 m² were widely dispersed across the hillfort summit

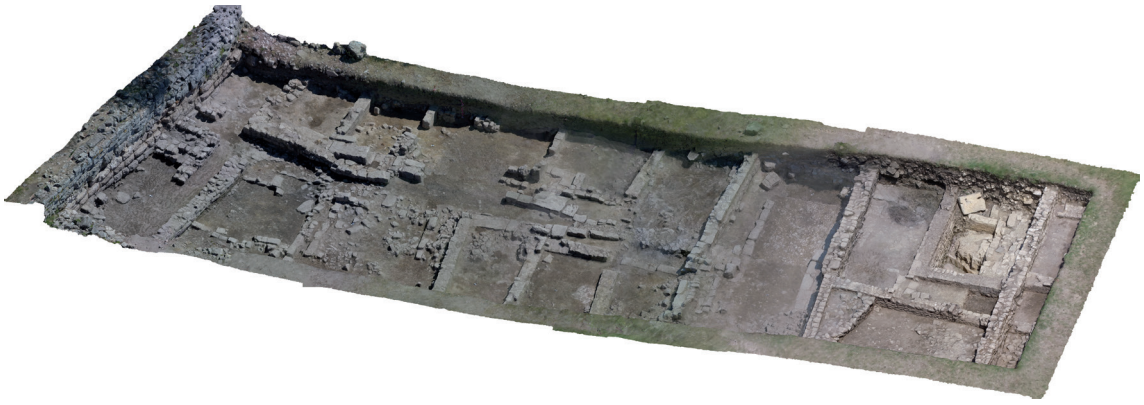

Fig. 3: Nadin, settlement – Area B, 2018.

in 2015 and stratigraphically excavated to bedrock. Pottery was by far the most abundant artifact class from all units and from most strata, permitting stratigraphic analysis of deposits from a range of contexts, including the Iron Age through Late Antiquity periods of occupation.[7] Based on the results of this initial 2015 strategy, subsequent seasons focused on expanding a unit in the northern portion of the walled settlement, which now measures approximately 350 m² (fig. 3).

Beyond the walled enclosure, archaeological efforts have focused primarily on the burial mounds[8] and flat necropolis in the northwest portion of the site. At the flat necropolis, excavations began modestly but now represent a broad exposure of more than 600 m² and have recovered abundant amounts of pottery fragments.[9] Combined, the settlement and necropolis ceramic assemblages have provided an ample sample size for study.

Results

At the Nadin necropolis, two primary cultural and chronological phases have been defined – the Liburnian Iron Age superimposed by the Roman era. The greatest contribution of this research is the discovery of Liburnian land-parceling and architectural delineation of grave areas that preceded Roman organization of space (fig. 4). This phenomenon is previously unknown in Liburnia, and it indicates early planned organization of space and a kind of monumentalization.[10] In the settlement area, excavations have thus far revealed deposits up to about 3 m in depth, with complex architectural stratigraphy characterizing most units. In the case of the northern unit (with broadest exposure), the NGAP has documented walls and other architectural features stratigraphically from the Iron Age through Late Antiquity.

Excavations recovered abundant amounts of pottery from both the necropolis and settlement areas within the site. Current findings suggest a distinct tendency among

Fig. 4: Nadin, Liburnian/Roman necropolis.

Liburnian communities to have imported fine pottery during the Iron Age, and particularly during the Late Iron Age, with most artifacts originating from the wider Adriatic region. This also correlates with an increase in pottery used for transport and storage, confirming Liburnian Nadin's active participation in broader economic and social events of the period. With the onset of Roman influence and governance, the situation changed with the introduction of goods from the wider Mediterranean region in accordance with more "global" trends (fig. 7). Below, we present a chronological view of this changing picture from Nadin-Gradina, as evidenced from the ceramic assemblage recovered from our excavations (refer to fig. 5 for production regions mentioned in the following discussion).

Early Iron Age

Given the research strategy at Nadin-Gradina, which comprehensively documents the Late Medieval and Post Medieval layers first, followed by Roman material culture and finally Iron Age layers, ceramic finds from the Early Iron Age are still underrepresented in the assemblage. Once a larger sample is recovered, we will have a better understanding of trade dynamics during this early occupation. In addition, pottery was only

rarely deposited in the Liburnian graves during the Early Iron Age, so unfortunately, this relatively well-known horizon of the Nadin necropolis is not very helpful in this regard either. Nevertheless, we can offer some observations regarding specific cultural contacts of this period based on the few pottery sherds recovered from Nadin-Gradina, though unfortunately without any information on original context. We also draw upon other artifactual data from Nadin, as well as analogous information from nearby centers dating to the same period.

Excavations recovered a limited number of matt painted pottery fragments decorated with geometric motifs from Daunia. This type of ceramic constitutes one of the earliest categories of pottery to illustrate intensive and continuous relations throughout and across the Adriatic basin and its immediate hinterland during the Iron Age. At the same time, it is an abundant category of pottery in comparison with other imported ceramic types that were circulated in Liburnia during the Early Iron Age. It has been documented at a number of Liburnian sites, beginning with the Middle Geometric phase of Daunian pottery.[11] Cross-Adriatic connections are further evidenced by the recovery of a number of metal artifacts from the Nadin necropolis that is characteristic of the Adriatic cultural *koiné.*

Given its prevalence among other related sites, we would expect to find examples of Corinthian and Attic black figured and Attic and South Italian red figured pottery in layers associated with the latter part of the Early Iron Age.[12] Our continued excavations should clarify this picture.

Late Iron Age

Pottery recovered mostly from the Nadin necropolis reflects significant changes that affected nearly the entire Adriatic region during the Late Iron Age. Indeed, the general dynamics of trade, including pottery exchange along the eastern Adriatic, intensified from the fourth century BC onward, particularly in the latter half.[13] Reasons for this are likely tied to the general historical circumstances in which the Adriatic finally became a part of the Hellenistic *koine,*[14] directed for the most part toward a market economy. On the other hand, the archaeological record undoubtedly indicates a growth in indigenous communities, including that of Nadin, into active participants in this emerging world, depending on their predispositions. This is evident in the appearance of the Hellenistic custom of depositing a number of vessels from the symposiastic repertoire into the previous locally defined funerary ritual.[15]

In terms of ceramic finds, the Late Iron Age at Nadin is characterized by typological diversity and large amounts of imported material, testifying to continuous engagement with general pan-Adriatic trends in pottery (figs. 5 and 7). In this regard, it is important to mention that the early phase of this period, the fourth and third centuries BC, is characterized mostly by imported wares from southern Italy. Examples include late South

Fig. 5: Examples of the Hellenistic pottery from the Nadin necropolis.

Italian red-figure pottery, black-glazed pottery, and the particularly abundant Gnathia ware that mostly originated from the Canosan and Messapian workshops that were most certainly indigenous Italic.[16] Rare examples of the Alto Adriatico pottery type is also dated to the same period,[17] but very likely products of still unidentified eastern Adriatic workshops.

Considering the information on pottery production from local Hellenistic centers in Issa and Pharos,[18] it is interesting to note that their products, which circulated in significant amounts in the central Adriatic region, had not reached Nadin or seemingly the rest of Liburnia by the second century BC. This is the period when Issaean grey-glazed pottery started to be imported, and in particular, relief pottery that is well represented in graves at Nadin until the late first century BC. Also present are some products of relief pottery from Dyrrachium and Asia Minor workshops, in addition to the Italic grey ware that signals the transition to Roman-era Nadin.[19]

Roman "Nedinum"

The general scheme or progression of imported pottery in Antiquity generally begins in Italy, followed by production areas in Asia, and subsequently North Africa (fig. 6). The

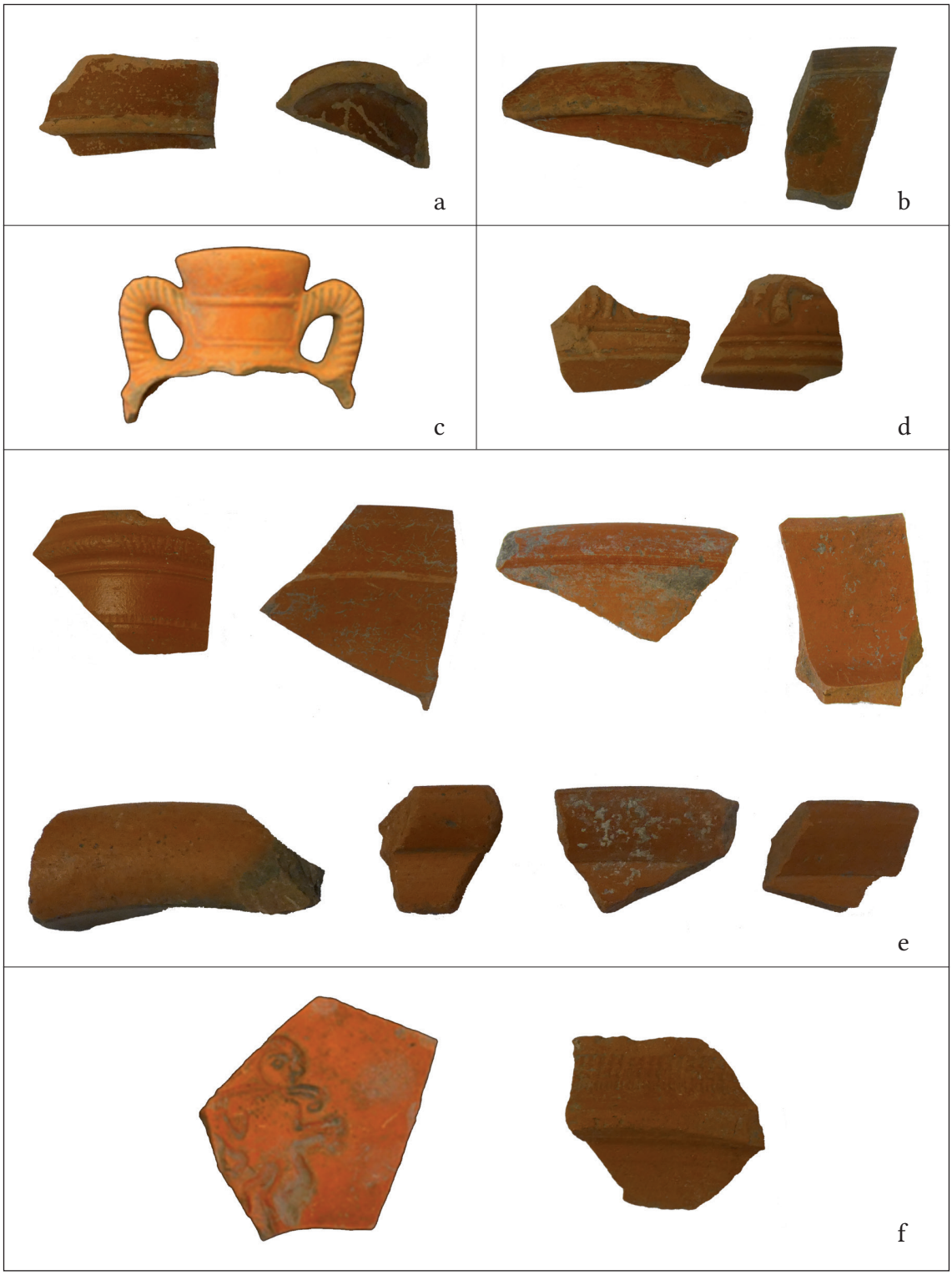

Fig. 6: Examples of the Roman pottery from the Nadin settlement.

Italic production area comes as no surprise as it was an exceptionally prosperous region in the period of establishing and stabilizing Roman authority in Illyricum. Strong colonial and legionary markets in Illyricum catalyzed this trade,[20] with Nadin being one of the municipal or peregrine centers involved. Nadin gradually accepted a wide selection of northern and more generally Italic pottery, a material indicator of the penetration of Roman identity into indigenous Liburnian settings (fig. 6a).[21]

By the middle to late first century, Nadin-Gradina had evolved into Roman "Nedinum". During this period, the productive strength of northern Italy apparently began to decline, while concurrently there was a growing presence of products from strong pottery production centers elsewhere. The ceramic record from both the Nadin necropolis and settlement testify to a sudden appearance of products from western Asia Minor, a category of Eastern Sigillata B2 (fig. 6b) and so-called Aegean kitchenware that are recorded in significant amounts by the second century AD.[22] Furthermore, the study of pottery from Roman-era Dalmatia more broadly has intensified recently, bringing to light certain novelties during this period that indicate very dynamic trade patterns encompassing a much wider area. In addition to the previously mentioned examples, northern Italic kitchenware, Pannonian tableware, Corinthian (fig. 6d) and Knidian relief pottery (fig. 6c), and an increasing number of north African table and kitchen forms are also represented at Nadin (fig. 7).[23] Their emergence in this period foreshadows the

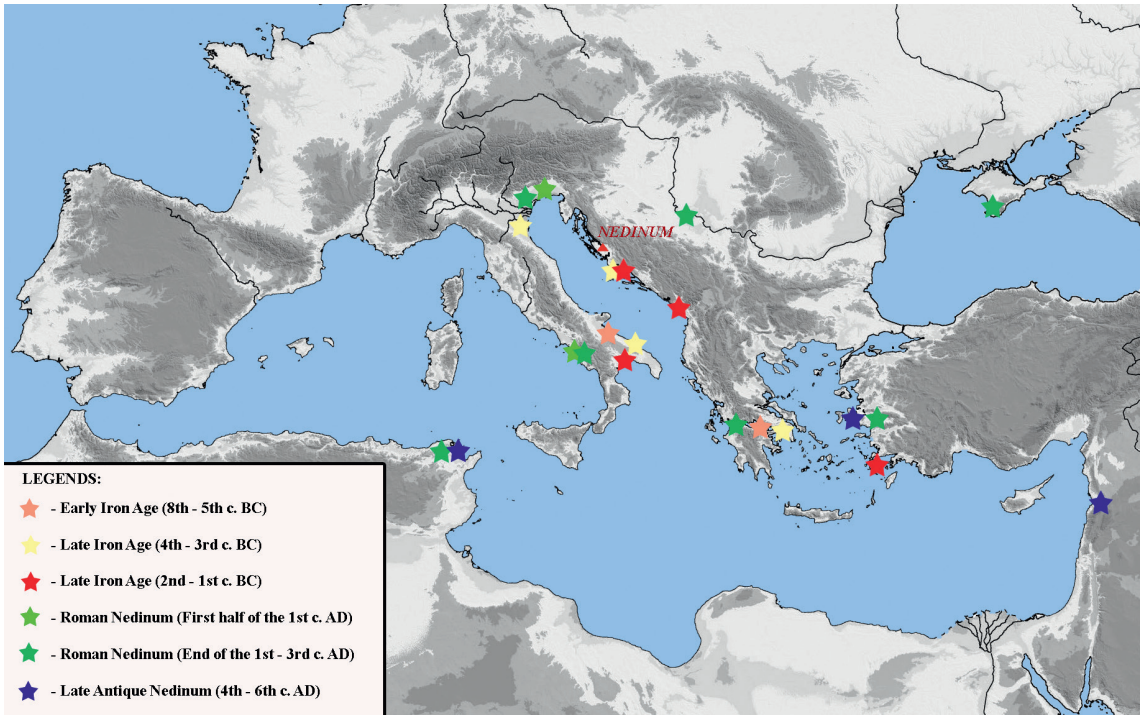

Fig. 7: Fine pottery provenance through Iron Age and Roman period (preliminary condition).

famous North African expansion and can be observed as an indirect association of the African productive zone within the Adriatic market zone. The mediator of this distribution can be found in the southern Italic region, where this pottery is far more abundant owing to its tighter relations with North Africa.

Late Antique "Nedinum"

Exchange patterns began to change after the third century, with the apparent development of very intense and evidently direct contact between the Adriatic and Africa until the end of Antiquity. This is supported by a large number of Adriatic shipwrecks whose cargo consisted of North African material, primarily amphorae,[24] but whose underwater finds are also substantiated by abundant recovery of tableware and kitchenware among many different mainland sites, including from Late Antique deposits at Nadin. Although thus far only documented in a limited area, their presence testifies to Nadin's participation in trade patterns that included a significant share of African pottery. This is particularly evident during the fifth and early sixth centuries, when many forms of ARSW D tableware are represented (fig. 6e). Although scarce, a small number of Phocaean products have also been recovered (fig. 6f), but they are accompanied by a rather large number of amphorae originating from the eastern Mediterranean, again reflecting the general ceramographic picture of the Adriatic.[25]

Discussion and Conclusion

This brief overview of the dynamics of diverse ceramic imports during Iron Age and Roman-era Nadin confirms that the site holds great promise for investigating trade and wider social and economic processes across Liburnia. Interestingly, the ceramic assemblage from Nadin-Gradina reflects the historical circumstances surrounding the gradual integration of the Adriatic into the broader Mediterranean world, which is also part of a much larger interrelated territory during the Roman period. In defining these circumstances, it is important to note the geographic openness of the eastern Adriatic to maritime trade routes, which simply invite a permanent inflow of products from sources found generally along a linear course between the northern Adriatic and eastern Mediterranean. To date, the ceramic collection from Nadin has been subject to preliminary analysis only, but our conclusions regarding the dynamics of pottery importation over time seem realistic. Our interpretation is further supported by the ceramograhic records of other Liburnian sites, which thus far correspond well to that of Nadin (fig. 1).[26] Considering that systematic archaeological research is only just underway, it is clear that Nadin-Gradina and its associated ceramic assemblage holds great potential to become a regional reference collection.

To conclude, the results of this research have significantly improved our understanding of the sepulchral aspect of the Nadin community, including burial traditions and the complex structure and planimetry of the Liburnian flat cemeteries. Complementary excavations on the hillfort settlement have also confirmed more than one thousand years of relatively continuous occupation, making Nadin-Gradina an ideal site from which to reconstruct shifting patterns of exchange and general connectivity between the eastern Adriatic and the broader Mediterranean world over the course of the Iron Age and period of Antiquity. The results of our work demonstrate the utility of ceramic assemblages to delineate trade dynamics and cultural contacts through time, with this interpretation becoming only more refined as our work at Nadin continues in the coming years.

Notes

[1] Chapman et. al. 1996, 116–123; Čelhar – Zaro 2018 (forthcoming).

[2] Batović – Batović 2013.

[3] Batović – Chapman 1987a; Batović – Chapman 1987b; Chapman et. al. 1996, 231–251.

[4] Kukoč 2009; Kukoč – Čelhar 2018 (forthcoming).

[5] Čelhar et al. 2018; Zaro – Čelhar 2018.

[6] Zaro – Čelhar 2018.

[7] Čelhar – Zaro 2018 (forthcoming).

[8] Batović – Čondić 2005.

[9] Kukoč – Čelhar 2018 (forthcoming); Matković 2015.

[10] Kukoč – Čelhar 2018 (forthcoming).

[11] Čelhar – Borzić 2016, 72–76 with literature; Čondić – Vuković 2017, 53–55. 74–83.

[12] In general: Šešelj 2009, 411–425; Čelhar – Borzić 2016, 76–79 with literature; Čondić – Vuković 2017, 84–94.

[13] Šešelj 2009, 411–527; Miše 2015.

[14] Čače 1994, 33–54; Kirigin 1999, 147–164; Kirigin 2006, 17–26.

[15] Batović – Batović 2013; Kukoč 2009, 11–80.

[16] Matković 2015; On distribution of mentioned types of pottery on east Adriatic coast see: Miše 2015.

[17] On Alto Adriatico ware on east Adriatic see: Kirigin 2000, 131–138.

[18] Kirigin 1990, 58–65; Miše 2015, 30–41; Čargo – Miše 2010, 7–40; Katić 2000, 49–58; Kirigin et al. 2002, 241–260.

[19] Batović – Batović 2013; Matković 2015; Distribution of mentioned types of pottery on eastern Adriatic see: Brusić 1999; Šešelj 2009, 109; Miše 2015, 58; Kamenjarin 2014, 129–160.

[20] Von Gonzenbach 1975, 181–205 (Salona); Topić 2003, 183–344 (Narona); Brusić 1989, 93–158 1990, 79–106 (Liburnia); Kandler – Zabehlicky-Scheffenegger 1979 (Burnum); Borzić 2010 (Burnum); Šimić-Kanaet 2010 (Tilurium); Konestra 2016 (Kvarner area) etc.

[21] Some of the most numerous finds belongs to sigillata types *Consp.* 4, 18, 22, 6, 36, R13, Campanian cooking ware, Italian amphorae Dressel 2–4, 6A, 6B etc.
[22] ESB2 is mostly represented with types Hayes 59, 60, 71, 74, 75, 76 and 80. For general distribution on Adriatic area see: Maggi 2006, 179–194. For Aegean kitchen ware see: Istenič – Schneider 2000, 341–348; Jurišić 2000, 34–38; Parica 2008, 81–96; Taras 2014, 191–217.
[23] On these from other eastern Adriatic sites see: Ožanić Roguljić – Konestra 2017, 453–460 (Pannonian ware); Brusić 1999 (Corinthian and Knidian relief ware); Brusić 2006, 33–45 (ARSW A); Čremošnik 1962, 115–140 (ARSW A); Topić 2003, 183–344 (ARSW A); Borzić – Eterović Borzić 2015, 11–88 (ARSW A).
[24] Vrsalović 1979 (2011); Jurišić 2000, 56–58.
[25] Pešić – Borzić 2017 (forthcoming).
[26] Except already mentioned see also: Batović 1968, 53–74; Batović 1990, 55–94; Suić et al. 1968; Šešelj et al. 2013; Miše 2017, 83–104; Borzić et al. 2013; Perović 2013, 209–238; Čondić – Jurjević 2014.

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