

# Maritime Trade in the Adriatic Sea

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The project “The Adriatic Communication Area: Functional Characteristics of Port Cities and their Facilities on the Italian and Dalmatian Coast during the Roman Imperial Period” focuses on port cities, port facilities and traffic route relations of the coastal areas of the Adriatic Sea (fig. 1). A special view is on networks and mobility of Roman settlers involved in trade and economy. The study started with the analysis of merchant families in the ancient Adriatic region. According to previous research, many of them show relationships to Rome, Spain or Africa being involved in trade activities in Pannonia, Dacia and across the Alps. The paper presented concentrated on questions with regard to trans-Adriatic trade networks revealing the background of their actors as well as economic needs and infrastructures.

The trans-Adriatic trade reflects the settlement history of the region. Already in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. there was the foundation of trading posts and colonies of Greek cities on the islands and in the coastal areas of the Adriatic. The protection of the western and eastern Italic coasts played an important role in the following periods, since the controlled access to the sea and the protection of the trade routes enabled sea transport.

In the course of the First Illyrian War (229–228 B.C.) Roman military fleets crossed the Adriatic Sea to contain the pirates. The raids apparently affected mainly the trade along the Strait of Otranto and the Latin colony of Brundisium. The reasons for the war were certainly complex. Many Greek coastal cities were allies of Rome and as a result, Epidamnus (from now on Dyrrhachium), Apollonia and Korkyra came under Roman protection. For a long time, the dominant view of research was an impoverishment of the local population as the cause of the piracy, now the situation evaluated as an economic conflict of a wealthy population with Rome. The takeover of Illyrian territories brought the Romans not only coastal control and properties, but also the control of overseas ports that were very important for later Roman maritime trade.

It was not until the Augustan period that the last great Pannonian-Dalmatian uprising was put down and Dalmatia was established as a province. According to the narrative established by Wilkes, many settlers with Italic roots settled in the province in this period, they established *villae maritimae* on the numerous islands off the coast and there are traces for an intensive maritime trade in the Adriatic. Former scholarship assumed that the Adriatic Sea had a separating effect in the Republican period, but from the Augustean phase onwards the two Adriatic coasts got in closer contact by merchant activities and probably, the merchants and the settlers as well perceived the Adriatic Sea as a communication space.

At the time of pre-Roman and Roman settlement, cattle breeding and wool production were the most important branches of production in Dalmatia and Liburnia. Especially in the settlements in the hinterland many cowbells and sheep shears were documented. Due to the karst landscape, there were only a few areas suitable for ag-

riculture, especially farming. With the settlement of the Romans, the cultivation of wine and olives increased, especially in the coastal areas and on the islands. Near fertile areas, the settlers built numerous *villae*, which, if possible, had infrastructures for the loading of goods. Strabon mentions the innumerable ports and landing places along the Dalmatian coast. Other major economic activities include forestry and mining. The main source of lumber was the region of nowadays Bosnia and from the area south of the Velebit massif. Among the products made from it were wooden barrels. Mining was probably one of the most important economic reasons for the expansion of the Romans. Several written sources mentioned Dalmatia as the land of gold. The mining of silver, iron and copper is also attested. The mining areas were mainly located in the region of today's southern and central Bosnia and Herzegovina. Central roads connected them with Salona, Narona and Epidaurum. In the east, roads as well as rivers reached the Danube system. Roman roads met ports mainly at Salona, but also at Narona, Senji and Epidaurum.

Due the Dinaric Alps which are a karst mountain range running from north to south through the whole province, the transport infrastructure is difficult. With their more than 1000 m high peaks, rugged slopes and many caves, they form a natural barrier between the coast and the hinterland. Accordingly, the larger settlements are located – with a few exceptions – on the Adriatic coast or along the Sava and Danube rivers. According to the findings, there seemed to exist a very intensive local trade in coastal goods, with some ports playing a central role in trans-Adriatic and supra-regional trade. The most important and probably largest port was Salona. It was located in the so-called Bay of Castles, on the eastern shore of the Jadro estuary, between the trading colonies of Tragurium and Epidaurum. Salona was located exactly at an interface between the hinterland and the coast. This seems to have been the decisive factor for its establishment, since from a maritime point of view there would have been better harbor locations along the coast with today's Split. The colony Salona probably established in the period of Julius Caesar.

An only slightly younger colony with an important port was Iader, today's Zadar. The colony situated between the Velebit massif and the Ravni Kotari plain. In the times of Augustus, Iader served as a naval base in the fight against piracy. There was a junction to the north-south route from here, but there was no road to the distant hinterland. The Roman reached the hinterland via Senji in the north or via Salona or via Epidaurum in the south. The close connection of Iader with Aenona and the Italic Pisaurum was already topic in a former article. Hereafter, the focus is on persons with evidence to have been active in trade and/or navigation during the Roman period.

According to Broekaert, several names linked to trans-Adriatic trade, each associated in a different way with the port of Salona. These include members of the Ancharii, who are attested through about 120 individuals in the provinces with a focus in several port settlements along the Tyrrhenian coast between Tarquinia and Salerno in Etruria and Latium et Campania. Thus, the Ancharii show a connection on a political-religious level

in two cities. However, there is no direct evidence of presence in the hinterland or in Pannonia and Dacia.

The Canii had contacts to Pannonia and Dacia, e.g. the released negotiator Titus Canius Titi Libertus Cinnamus was buried in Sopron in Pannonia superior. With a little more than 50 individuals, the Canii probably were part of a network with nodes in the eastern provinces of Pannonia and Dacia. Canii also appear more frequently in Aquileia, Salona and in Ostia.

Obviously, the evidence reveal two different family entanglements and probably trade networks here. The Ancharii seem to be specialized in trade between the two Adriatic coasts, with a focus in Pisaurum. Members of the Ancharii also settled along the so-called communication routes between Rome and the Adriatic coast. The Canii, on the other hand, moved much further away from the Adriatic Sea in the course of time. Salona and Aquileia served apparently rather as intermediate station for the long-distance trade in the direction of the East. Possibly, the evidence allows the interpretation that Salona and Aquileia functioned as central distribution points for the northern and eastern Adriatic coast. Epidaurum, with its optimal connections to the mining regions, also appears in these networks. For the western Adriatic coast, such a node could not be determined yet. In ancient written sources the role of Ancona for the Roman troop

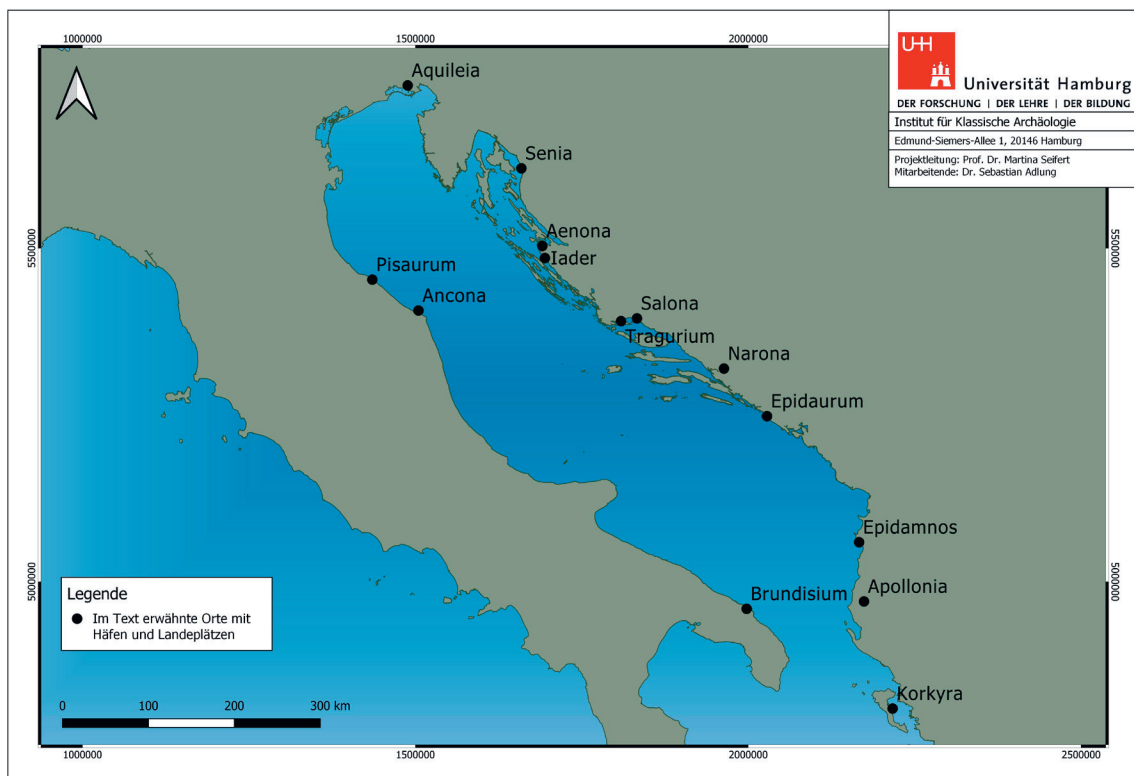


Fig. 1: Map of all places mentioned in the text with ports and landing sites

movements is mentioned several times, e.g. in the conflicts with the Illyrians between the years 178–163 B.C., but does not reflect the epigraphic analyses so far. However, connections from Salona and Iader to Pisaurum are attested. The topographical situation may be the decisive factor here: Ancona is situated at the end of a chain of hills, at an approximately 10 km long junction of the north-south connection running parallel to the coast, whereas Pisaurum is situated directly on this coastal road. For the Roman army, Ancona was a strategically favorable location, while for civilian trade, Pisaurum offered optimal connections by sea and land.

Further investigations will have to focus on the flow of goods and the distribution of individual products. The preliminary evaluation of the pottery finds at Aenona, for example, show the flow of goods between the Adriatic and the Aegean.

### Image Credit

Fig. 1: Map by Sebastian Adlung and Debora Oswald

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