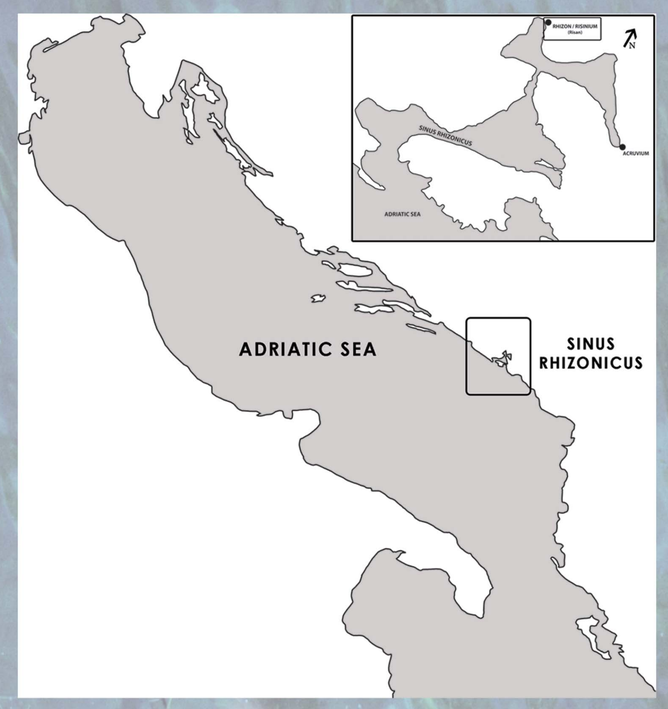
Searching for Harbour of Ancient Rhizon
Past Research
and Future Perspectives

Archaeological research in Risan in Montenegro is being conducted since 2001 by archaeologists together from Poland (Center for Research on the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe University of Warsaw) and Montenegro. Underwater prospection was a part of these research and begin in 2003. Till 2011 there were six seasons of diverse underwater archaeological activity.

Introduction

Risan is a small town in today's Montenegro (11 km northeast from Kotor), located directly on the Risan Bay which is part of the Boka Kotorska (known in Antiquity as Sinus Rhizonicus). Today is a sleepy town with hundreds of tourists during summer time, but in ancient times it was an important centre of trade exchange. It was called Rhizon or Risinium and from this time were collected hundreds of amphorae from numerous magazines, polygonal city walls and luxurious houses. The ancient city was settled on the trade route running along the eastern coast of the Adriatic. In IV century B.C., Rhizon was mentioned by Pseudo Skylaks.


Risan Bay

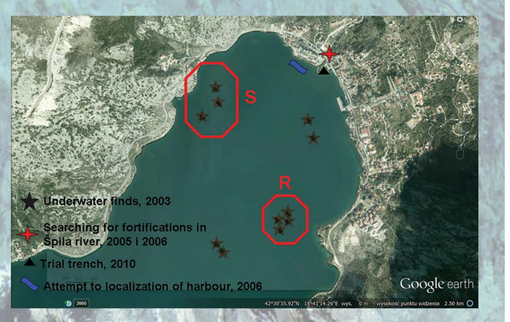


Past Research

Several times amphorae entangled in net were found by inhabitants of Risan. In addition, we know from several sources (from the 19th century) that stone architecture localized in close proximity to the area of the ancient town was visible underwater. Archaeologists and travellers have described visible stone architecture in few areas of Risan Bay, usually near Carine (the area where was an ancient settlement). French governor of the Kotor province Louis Vialle de Sommieres in 1820 mentioned the monumental architecture visible in the sea close to the ancient buildings. In 1878 the ruins visible in the sea also was noted by Sir Arthur Evans, three years later the French explorer Henri Cons observed wall at a considerable distance from the shore. About architecture visible under water also wrote Henri Richly, Austrian archaeologist. Last time when some underwater architecture was visible, was in the mid-twentieth century. Noteworthy is the fact that at the beginning of the twenty-first century no residues were found. We know that in 1979 this area was severely damaged by earthquakes. The walls visible hundred years earlier could simply fall apart. Still, we should be able to find their remains.

All these information gave pieces of evidence to the fact that it is worthwhile conducting underwater prospection in order to locate the port of the ancient centre (if such existed) and possible wrecks or other elements connected with the sea activity of the Risan Bay area. Such research were conducted. At first, the bottom of the Risan Bay was examined with sonar, next more interesting anomalies were verified by divers: the roadstead of ancient Risan, a few clusters of amphorae and stone blocks which are remains of rhizanian walls (?). The results of the underwater work from years 2003-2010 were published in 2010 by the director of underwater works – Rafał Karpiński within cooperation with Center for Research on the Antiquity of Southeastern Europe University of Warsaw, Poland. In 2009 RPM Nautical Foundation surveyed coastline of Kotor and Risan Bay with multibeam echosounder. No evidence of harbour architecture was found above the surface near ancient Risan. However, several amphora fragments were located. It is, therefore, possible that used in the previous study techniques were inadequate.


Underwater survey, 2006



In 2003 the underwater prospection of the Risan Bay started. As results of it, ancient ceramics laying on the bottom of the Bay were located. In next year were conducted research with the Subbottom Sonar. It was the base for the establishing two areas of appearing of a lots amount of objects: Area "W" and Area "S". In the next seasons (2005 and 2006) underwater prospection was conducted in the Špila river where the remains of fortifications of the ancient city were looked for. In this season's works were focused also on area "R" which was assumed as the probable anchorage from which numerous ceramic materials were picked up. The searching of the port started in 2006 when the survey was conducted along buildings of the Teuta Hotel. In 2010 there was the trial trench opened in order to locate the port buildings. In season 2011 the last underwater research was carried out, single artefacts were raised from area "R" and "S". In 2009 RPM Nautical Foundation within the project of the Illyrian Coastal Exploration Program surveyed coastline of Albania and Montenegro. The aims of the project were to gather archaeological data connected to the distribution of artefacts, trade connections, overseas exchange and colonization.

Area 'R' and 'S'

Area "R", so-colled anchorage is located by the Rtc Cape, about 1050 meters in a straight line to the south of the today Risan port. During a few seasons of exploration, a large centre of ceramics was located mainly with amphorae. It contained ellipsoid area about 140 x 60 meters. All artefacts were preserved fragmentarily without single artefact in one piece. What gives us probability assumption that it was a roadstead. The underwater prospection in this area has been conducted since 2005. The material which was explored up to 2010 consists mainly amphorae of different types. Artifacts which were found are dated from Hellenistic period through Late Ancient to the Turkish times. Area "S" is located in the north part of the Bay near the Sopot Cave. This area for the first time was recognized with the subbottom sonar in 2004. However, diagnostics material was picked up for the first time in 2011.

During four seasons from the bottom of the Bay were picked up diagnostics fragments of laying ceramics. It was 105 fragments: 98 amphorae, two ceramic stoppers, three black gloss bowls and one for the lid and the 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.


Lamboglia 2, area "R"

Amphora Dressel 6B, area "R"

Greco-Italic amphorae, type MGS VI, area "R"

Greco-Italic amphorae, type MGS VI, area "S"

Amphora stopper

Future Perspectives

The basic question that we should ask is why used so far techniques in underwater prospections were not enough to detect potential harbour remains? Maybe earthquake from 1979 destroyed all visible structures at that time. Whether sedimentation of probable harbour area is very intensive and stone remains might be still under the silt. In this area, Špila river accumulates material washed away from limestone mountains. Specialized instruments used in the previous study collected only data from the surface of the seabed. Therefore, in order to see what is beneath the Risan Bay sedimentation, we should use instruments like sub-bottom profiler and caesium magnetometer. Underwater mobile caesium magnetometer, which utilizes the phenomenon of nuclear magnetic resonance, enables to detect archaeological artefacts and objects located underground. On the basis of analysis of acquired data, we could appoint future potential places to conduct sample surveys. Likewise, use of sub-bottom profiler might be very useful to identify submerged objects and geological strata's, not recognizable with the side scan sonar. Combination of these research techniques might give a new light to underwater researches conducted in Risan Bay.


Risan Bay with view on Teuta Hotel


Špila river

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