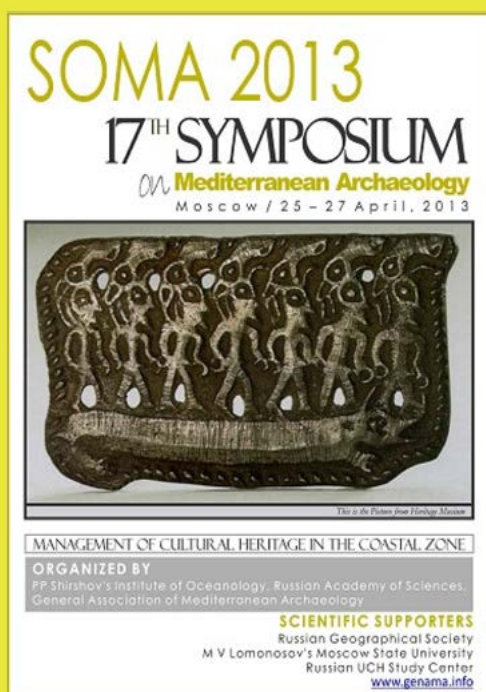


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Routes And Harbour Archaeology: An Attempt to Identify Some Ancient Toponyms on the Eastern Adriatic Coast

Mattia Vitelli Casella

University of Bologna

Abstract

Ancient geographical works talk about several toponyms of the Eastern Adriatic coast, most of which concerning islands. Some of these toponyms have been identified, usually paying attention to philological more than to archaeological data, whereas most of them have not yet been clearly identified. In recent years new archaeological excavations concerning also harbour structures give us some information to draw the landing-places map of the Eastern Adriatic coast. What's more, recently were investigated the shipwrecks and the ancient sea routes, which are today the same in ancient times. So through an analysis of the port structures and of the maritime routes the author tries to identify some toponyms mentioned by Pliny the Elder (*Nat.* 3. 140, 152) and Claudius Ptolemaeus (*Geog.* 2. 16. 2). In particular about the first work, he suggests locating *civitas Pasini* on the coast between Nin/None and Zara and correcting the usual identification of *Portunata*: in fact, he thinks it should correspond to the modern islands of Ugliano/Ugljan or Pasman and not to the Isola Grossa/Dugi Otok. About the second work, he identifies the ptolemaic city of *Οὐολκέρρα* with the modern city of Cirquenizza/Crikvenica, on the base of recent archaeological publications.

Key words

North Dalmatia, identification, toponyms, *Οὐολκέρρα*, *Portunata*, *civitas Pasini*

As a result of my non-archaeological training and background, the goal of this article is to show the usefulness of archaeological investigations in historical geography studies of the ancient world, especially in identifying uncertain toponyms along the coasts of northern Dalmatia. As widely known, it is an extraordinary part of the world also because of its labyrinth of islands which have deeply affected human settlements and navigation since ancient times; at the time it also became necessary to name these places, or at least those usually frequented and inhabited, although the Roman age definitely lacked the cataloguing spirit of modern times, which in the 19th century led the Austrian Empire to appoint an admiral of the Royal Navy to count and give a name to all the islands and rocks which had become part of the Habsburg domains. Obviously, for the smaller, uninhabited islands, he could only ask the Dalmatian farmers and fishermen for the names they commonly used and record them in official documents; he also aroused some salacious comments, to the point that some of the Incoronate/Kornati Islands still have vulgar names, referred to the surveyors to insult and mock the authorities (Lodigiani 2000, 326). Apart from this interesting anecdote, even during the Roman domination *peripli* described routes and landing places, and certainly needed to unmistakably identify many places which served the purpose, but also in that case they mainly used local names and everything was made more difficult by the fact that local languages were proverbially very difficult to understand – at least according to Pliny (*Nat.* 3.139). Our task, sometimes extremely complex but also fascinating, is to connect the toponyms handed down by the sources to specific places, which they had to correspond to at the time because of the mainly practical purpose of those texts, and the importance of archaeological finds in trying to at least determine a correspondence between the names and the harbour structures is evident.

Obviously, various texts can be used for this purpose, starting from the *Periplus of Pseudo-Scylax*, the most ancient document (*Skyl.* 21), to the anonymous *Ravenna Cosmography* (223-224 PP.). However, for the sake of simplicity, I will examine two texts dated to the Roman age and easy to interpret from a philological point of view. If we start from one of the most reliable texts on ancient geography, i.e. Pliny the Elder and to be more precise the third book of the *Naturalis historia*, we find a list of *oppida* and islands of *Liburnia* (*Nat.* 3.140). The majority of these have been identified, but from the end of the 19th century strong doubts were raised for some names, which were then in most

cases dispelled in the light of archaeological and epigraphic data. Since this list, as clearly shown by the geographical sequence, comes from a *periplus*, probably written by Varro (Detlefsen 1909, 46; Katičić 1963, 90; Margetić 1978-79, 326; Marion 1998, 128), it must list places which were significant for navigation, especially in one of the most dangerous areas in the entire Mediterranean. We must also start by saying that maritime communications were crucial for the islands and especially for local transport and trade towards inland areas, since roads were not present everywhere because of the ground conformation (Miletić 2006, 128). As a matter of fact, as shown by the *Itinerarium Antonini* (273-274), the Roman road from *Senia* ran towards the Lika plateau, reaching *Iader* from the hinterland.¹ I therefore think that when identifying, even if correctly, the toponyms *Lopsica*, *Ortoplinia*, *Vegium*, *Argyruntum*, some bibliography did not take into enough consideration that all these places had harbour structures (for example Alföldy 1965, 76-77; Matijašić 2006, 85; Sanader 2009, 55). Let's now quickly analyse these places, which are also mentioned in Claudius Ptolemy's work: *Lopsica* corresponds to the suburb of Sv. Juraj/San Giorgio, *Ortoplinia* to Stinizza, *Vegium* to Carlopago/Karlobag and finally *Argyruntum* to Starigrad-Paklenica: they are all located in positions which allowed fairly safe mooring, and as a matter of fact ruins of ancient ports² have been identified, more or less precisely, in all locations - actually in the last case mentioned two ports were found, on the two sides of the small peninsula, as fairly frequently attested along the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea (Cambi 2001, 148). As we keep on reading Pliny 3, 140 we find the toponyms *Corinium*, *Aenona* and *Civitas Pasini*. Whereas the city of *Aenona* had one of the most important ports in the Zadar/Zara area, there seem to be no archaeological traces of a harbour structure in Carino/Karin – at least based on the bibliography I referred to³ – but this difficulty might be solved otherwise. Its territory, in fact, was in any case strategic for navigation, because this important town, with its favourable location at the end of a narrow inlet, the so-called Mare di Carino/Karinkso More, could be reached – in the past as today - by travelling to the end of the long inlet, as shown more clearly by the map (Wilkes 1969, 210-211; I.I.M. 1972, 243; Figure 1). This allowed trade and commerce with the inland areas of southern *Liburnia*, the most developed region, and in this respect we have to highlight that *Corinium* was well connected to the provincial road system.⁴ This is why it was included in this *periplus*, which deserves to be mentioned for one reason: it does not show the main route, which was – and still is today – the most external one running through the Quarnerolo/Kvarnerić and the Maon/Maunski Kanal or west of the islands of Maon/Maun and Scherda/Škrda (I.I.M. 1972, 184; Vrsalović 1979, karta 3; Cambi 2001, 156), but it mentions a number of ports at the foot of the Velebit, useful for trade with the inland area and the islands facing it, but along a route through the Canale della Morlacca / Velebiski Kanal which was very dangerous and winding, therefore not used for long journeys (Jurišić 2000, 53-54) (Figure 1). As we continue our analysis, also the last toponym mentioned in Pliny's list, i.e. *civitas Pasini*, should have a port and be between None/Nin and Zadar/Zara. Leaving aside the juridical status indicated by the toponym, which should have a scarce population, it is evident that it must have a landing point along the coast, thus I would locate it on the coast north of Zadar/Zara, where at least one find in the Kremenjača Bay near Zaton/Zaton provides evidence of the presence of a large port during the Roman age, normally connected to *Aenona*: the latter used this bay in the Roman age, but before that a port built in the lagoon, then fallen into disuse, was used (Matijašić 2001, 166, with its bibliography). Since the portolan chart used by Pliny can probably be attributed to Varro and therefore dated to the 1st century BC, probably both ports were mentioned: the first one with the name of the *oppidum* of *Aenona* itself and the second one with a different name. In the absence of any other identification element, two hypotheses have been proposed as to the exact location of the *civitas Pasini*: one in the Knin region and the other one along the coast, but east of *Aenona* instead of west (Figure 2).⁵ I therefore prefer, instead of accepting these two locations

¹ The two main Roman arterial roads connected *Senia* and *Siscia* and *Senia* and *Salona* and after a short segment in common they forked at *Arupium*. The one running southwards connected this area to the coast at Zadar/Zara through a smaller road. See Miletić 2006, 129-130.

² In general, for finds of harbour structures along this stretch of coast see Patsch 1900, 103-106, and Vrsalović 1979, karta 2. For more recent data on excavations of harbour structures see Glavičić 1995-96, 65, and Faber 2003, 631-633, for *Lopsica* and Miholjek and Stojević 2012, 146, for *Ortopla*.

³ Kozličić and Bratanić 2006, 109, actually refer to *Corinium* among the ports connecting the coast to the hinterland.

⁴ According to the Barrington Atlas, Map 20, and Miletić 2006, Map 4, the small city was on a deviation from the north-south axis *Tarsatica-Senia-Burnum-Salona*, whereas Zehnacker 1998, 267, considers it a *statio* on the road from *Burnum* to *Iader*.

⁵ Winkler and Köning 1988, 321, once again suggest it was located in Padjine, near Mokro Polje, 15km north of *Burnum*, while more

contradicting Pliny's list, which is otherwise accurate, to propose this one, which does not have to be the final one, but is meant to show the importance of the geographical sequence of our source: this is why the toponym could be identified also with another landing point along the coast between None/Nin and Zadar/Zara. After the list of *oppida* along the Liburnian coast, Pliny moves on and lists the islands facing this area, once again following a *periplus*. We find '*Absortium, Arba, Crexi, Cissa, Portunata*'. Although the geographical sequence north-south is not extremely accurate, it is easy to notice that the islands are in front of the mainland, basically along the same route seen before, but on the other side of the channels. I therefore don't see why the island of *Portunata* should not have a similar position and should, instead, be a breakwater island.⁶ There are, in fact, many islands facing Zadar/Zara, which can be grouped in two lines, separated by the Canale di Mezzo/Srednji Kanal. In the absence of any identification element whatsoever, the most reliable edition of Pliny from a geographical point of view (Winkler and König 1988, 321), as well as the Barrington Atlas, believe it corresponds to Isola Grossa/Dugi Otok,⁷ the easternmost island in the Zadar/Zara archipelago, which could in no way be the stop after Pago/Pag, the ancient *Cissa*, in the previously-mentioned route along the coast. Instead, I believe *Portunata* could be an island in front of the Zadar/Zara coast, following the previous route: it could be the island of Ugliano/Ugljan or the following one of Pasman, because in both places harbour structures have been found and studied (Vrsalović 1979, karta 3; Jurišić 2000, 53). The name of the island in question might have a Latin origin (Krahe 1925, 6) and in this case it could be connected to *portus* or *Portunus*, a god protecting ports and harbours, therefore strengthening our line of reasoning⁸ (Hild 1907, 594; Diosono 2010, 96-97). The name *Portunata* itself has, however, been considered by some scholars as an attribute referred to *Cissa*, which would solve the identification problem, but at the same time would be peculiar, as none of the other islands in the list have an appellation (Matijašić 2006, 85).

After mentioning *Portunata*, the list of islands is interrupted by the words: '*rursus in continente colonia Iader*'. It will start again at 3.152 by mentioning the islands divided into archipelagos with these words: '*contra Iader est Lissa et quae appellata est, contra Liburnos Crateae aliquot nec pauciores Liburnicae, Celadussae*'. Based on this passage, *Lissa* was identified with Ugliano/Ugljan, right in front of Zadar/Zara, while the following one *quae appellata est* could be Pašman, which had to be included in a 1st century BC *periplus* as it was along the main route entering and exiting *Iader* from the south and had several harbour structures, as mentioned before (Vrsalović 1979, karta 2-3; Cambi 2001, 156-157; Figure 3). As to the other names, in the plural, I would rather consider them all as the many islands in the Zadar/Zara archipelago, many of which were known and used in ancient times, as confirmed by the finds (Vrsalović 1979, karta 3; Matijašić 2001, 165-167). It is very difficult to divide the groups, we can only imagine that once again the *periplus* had a north-south direction: in that case the *Celadussae* would be the last group, more or less corresponding to the Kornati/Incoronate Islands, where traces of Roman settlements and ports have been found and which were certainly along another fundamental route in the eastern Adriatic, the most external one along the Canale di Mezzo/Srednji Kanal (Jurišić 2000, 53; Matijašić 2001, 165-166); the name has a Greek origin (Krahe 1925, 2) and might refer to a loud sound, maybe a deafening noise made by the waves or a sea bird. Since I have elsewhere suggested that the island of Δυσκέλαδος could correspond to Zuri/Žirje, it could then be one of the *Celadussae*, characterized by a quite sinister noise, in my opinion to be connected to the great danger of shipwreck (Vitelli Casella 2011, 22-23).

recently Čače 2006, 66-73, refers to *civitas Pasini* as a small coastal town and locates it, although with some doubts, along the western coast of the Canale della Montagna/Velebitski Kanal, thus between *Corinium* and *Aenona* in Pliny's sequence. Wilkes 1969, 488, Zehnacker 1998, 267, and Sanader 2009, 61, are instead very cautious and clearly state that identifying the toponym is impossible.

⁶ Similar doubts on the frequent identification with Isola Grossa/Dugi Otok are expressed in Polascehek 1953, 400.

⁷ Zehnacker 1998, 267, 281, and Sanader 2009, 53, are extremely cautious when it comes to identifying it.

⁸ Hild 1907, 594, clearly explains how *Portunus*, a local god directly connected to the fluvial port on the Tiber as early as the end of the Republican age, was in general the god protecting all ports and harbours, also those on the sea. More recently, Diosono 2010, 96-97, did not contradict this interpretation.

Let's now move on to the second text that can be used as an example: Ptolemy's *Geography*. Along the coast of *Liburnia*, we find most of the cities mentioned in the previous list. The city of Οὐολκέρρα, instead, is unfortunately mentioned only in Ptolemy's work, with the following coordinates: longitude λη' L'' - 39° 30' - and latitude μδ' L'' δ'' (μδ' L'' γ'' X). It is on the Liburnian coast between the mouths of the river Οινεύς, east of Ταρσατικά, today's Fiume, and Σένια, today's Segna/Senj. Therefore, we can only try to locate the small city on the map using distances between points, the resulting coastline, any reference to the site in other texts, although with different names, and other sources, first of all archaeological ones.

In any case, there is a problem we must consider, which also occurred for other sites, i.e. two different lections for the latitude. The lection μδ' L'' γ'' - 44° 50' - would locate the city further north, inland compared to the mouths of the river Οινεύς (44° 45'), and the following Σένια (44° 40'). The comparison with the latitude of Ταρσατικά is not decisive, as it is also uncertain between the same two lections. The other lection μδ' L'' δ'' - 44° 45' - would instead locate it at least at the same latitude of the mouths of the above-mentioned river and this is positive, if we observe the conformation of this part of the Dalmatian coast. Whatever solution is chosen for the Οινεύς, in no case can the mouths be on a promontory, but perhaps inside the Baia di Buccari/Bakarski Zaliv. As for the rest, the coast from Fiume to Segna/Senj is a uniform wall with no significant protrusions or bays (I.I.M. 1972, 228).

Moving on to the distances between points, we must first of all state that the overall figure between Ταρσατικά and Σένια is exaggerated, and that in any case some of the intermediate distances should be reduced or deleted. A distance which could be deleted could be the one between Ταρσατικά and the Οινέως ποταμοῦ ἐκβολαί, as I believe the river corresponds to today's Rječina/Fiumara, which flows into the sea at Fiume (Müller 1883, 304; Kozličić 1980, 170).

Considering the tangled situation west of the town which is the object of our analysis, it is better to start from the distance from Senia, the next stop eastwards. Once again the choice between the two variant readings for the latitude of Οὐολκέρρα is extremely important, although in the end the difference is not that significant: considering the lection μδ' L'' γ'' - 44° 50' - the distance is 24m.p. (about 35.5km), whereas considering μδ' L'' δ'' - 44° 45' - the figure decreases to 22m.p. (about 32.5km). The comparison with ancient itineraries provides a possible distance of 20m.p. which separated the *statio Ad Turres* from the ancient *Senia*:⁹ if we accept this hypothesis, we have yet another fact confirming the lection μδ' L'' δ'', since the error would be smaller. As we said, evaluating the distances west of Οὐολκέρρα is difficult due to the presence of the Οινέως ποταμοῦ ἐκβολαί, which have not been identified yet, but based on what was said before the figure for comparison could be the 20m.p. between *Tarsatica* and the mentioned *statio* listed in the itineraries, and this is another element in favour of the smaller degree of latitude: as a matter of fact, this distance is 24m.p. with the lection μδ' L'' γ'' - 44° 50' - and 22m.p. with the lection μδ' L'' δ'' - 44° 45'. We have thus also analysed the distances, that led to identifying the Ptolemaic Οὐολκέρρα with the later *statio Ad Turres*, in the area of Cirquenizza/Crikvenica, which is actually 35km from Fiume and 32km from Segna/Senj. Furthermore, since recent excavations have unburied a large ceramic production facility with an attached port, which was identified as the *statio Ad Turres* (Lipovac Vrkljan 2009), I sincerely believe that it is possible to consider it the Ptolemaic city of Οὐολκέρρα as well, as suggested as early as the end of the 19th century, before any archaeological data were available (Cons 1882, 194; Müller 1883, 304). In Ptolemy we might simply find the local name of the built-up area,¹⁰ used before the name of the *statio* that we find only in later documents - *Itinerarium Antonini* and *Tabula Peutingeriana* - became famous. This area housed a complex with an attached port as early as the beginning of the Roman age, then followed by a *statio*, but this was also 'the place of a significant antique civilian settlement' (Lipovac Vrkljan 2007), also in consideration of the fact that it is on the mouth of a stream

⁹ TP segm. 4; *Itin. Anton. Aug.* 273,5-7.

¹⁰ The Illyrian origin of the name is attested in Krahe 1925, 59.

which forms a small valley in a very rugged area. I therefore don't see why in Ptolemy's work, based on maritime or terrestrial routes, a site such as today's Cirquenizza/Crikvenica should be omitted.

I hope these few examples scattered along the eastern coast of the Adriatic have shown the absolute need to pay attention to the archaeological data and maritime routes in order to correctly analyse, or at least try to correctly interpret, literary sources, which are too often considered unreliable and full of 'unlocated toponyms'.

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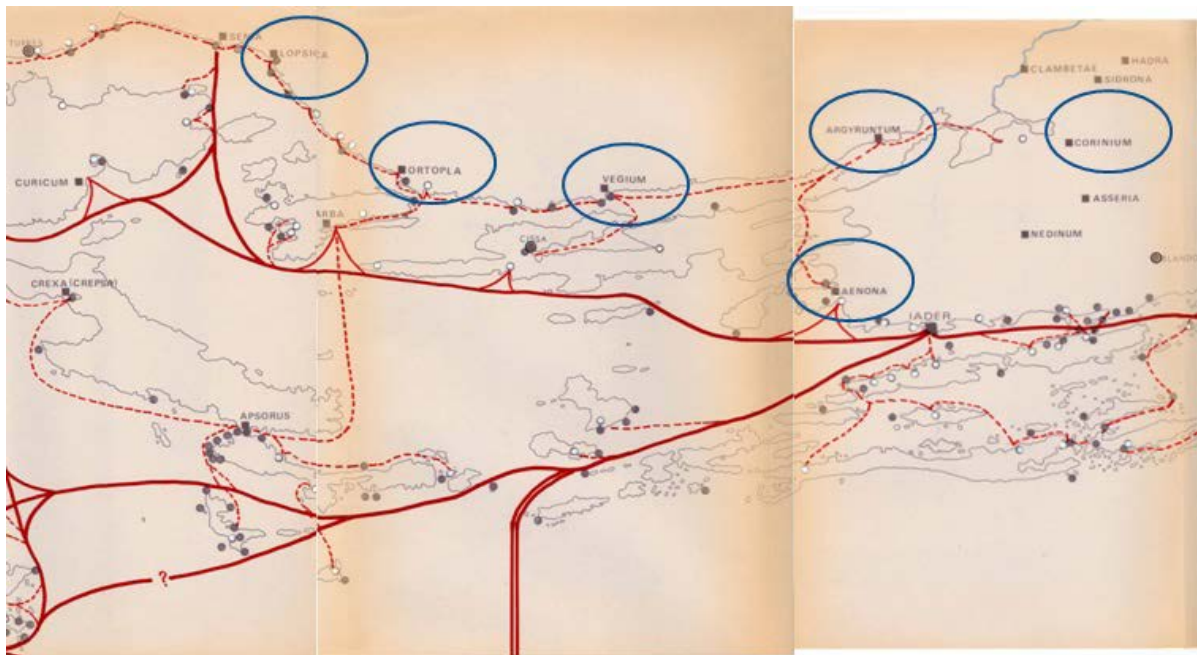


FIGURE 1 : THE MARITIME ROUTS FROM NORTH TO IADER. (SOURCE: VRSALOVIĆ 1979)

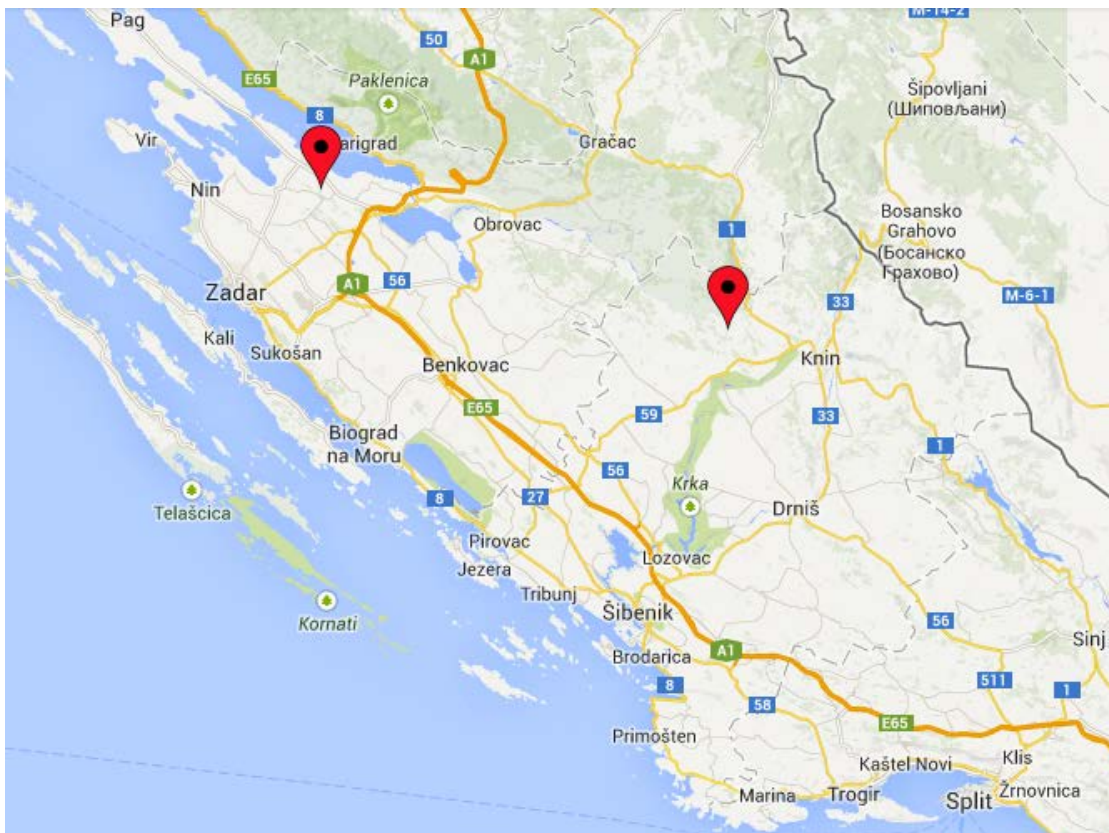


FIGURE 2 : THE TWO HYPOTHESES PROPOSED AS TO THE EXACT LOCATION OF THE *CIVITAS PASINI*. (SOURCE: MAPS.GOOGL.COM WITH MODIFICATIONS OF THE AUTHOR)

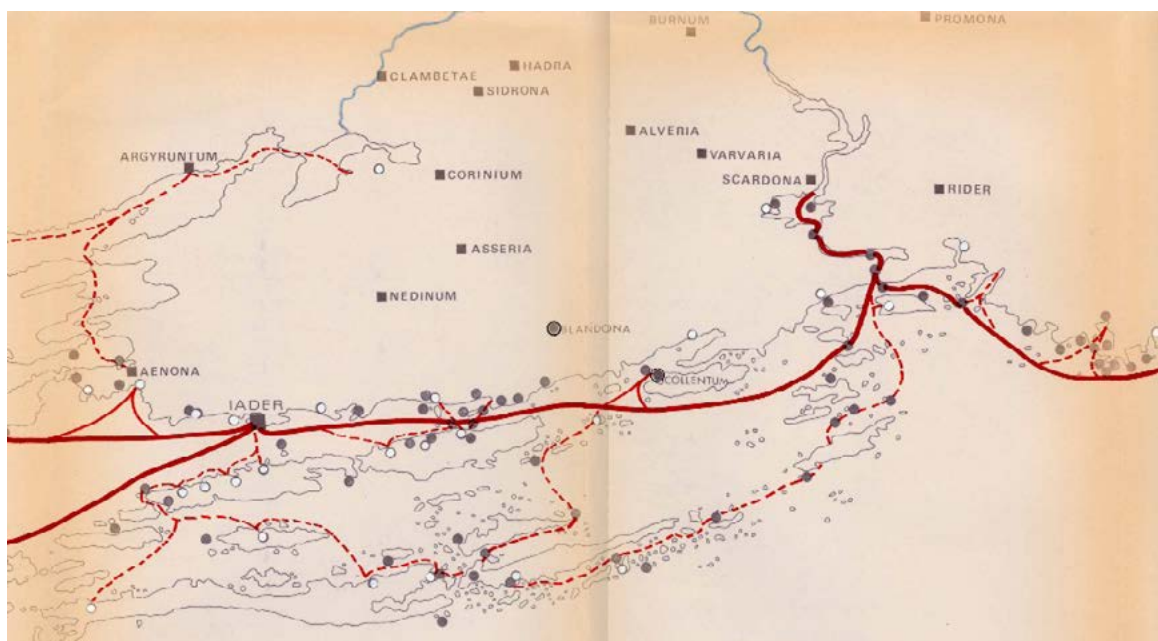


FIGURE 3 : THE MAIN ROUTE ENTERING AND EXITING *IADER* FROM THE SOUTH. (SOURCE: VRŠALOVIĆ 1979)