

## Varvaria – Berbera – Bribirska glavica

Any chance-traveler on a tour of attractive sites in Croatia, visiting the Šibenik-Knin county with its two national parks, the Krka river and the Kornati islands, should stop by the archeological site of Bribirska glavica. It is located about fifteen kilometres northwest from Skradin, nearby the old Zadar road which goes through Benkovac to Šibenik. The absolute height of Glavica is about 300 meters whereas its relative height is about 150 meters. Its top stretches in an even manner, appearing like a large oval-shaped plateau, spreading towards the South-East. It covers the area of 72,000 m<sup>2</sup>, only one third of which has been explored. Under the steep rocks of its western side there is the source of the Bribirčica stream, from which the rich and fertile Bribir-Ostrvica field spreads out. Bribirska glavica dominates this whole area. It offers a view of the islands of the Šibenik archipelago. When the weather is fine one can even make out the island of Vis. On the opposite side one has a view of a part of Ravni Kotari and Bukovica all the way to the Dinara mountain range. Across the river Krka, it is possible to see all the way to Promina mountain above Drniš, Moseć, and Trtar.

An interest in the archeological monuments on Bribirska glavica arouse as early as the second half of the 19th century, when F. Bulić (1), D. Alačević (2), S. Frankfurter (3), and many others wrote about it. However, initial archeological research was conducted in the period from 1909 until 1914 by the pioneer of Croatian archaeology, reverend Lujko Marun, who named Bribirska glavica the Croatian Troy. Unfortunately, this whole initiative and enthusiasm in archeological research was interrupted by the World War One (4). Research was resumed only in 1951, owing to the efforts of Stjepan Gunjača. Ever since then, systematic research has been under way, with a break

during the recent war, when the area was occupied by members of the Serbian paramilitary formations who devastated most of the movable monuments and also damaged a part of the architectonic complex.

Because of favourable living conditions, such as the excellent supply of water, the fertility of the Bribir field and the surrounding plains suitable for pasture, man has dwelled around this area ever since the Old Stone Age, from when the flint-stone artifacts found at the site of Pećani (5). Some sites from the New Stone Age have been found close to Glavica: Vrbica (6) and Krivače (7). The Neolithic settlements in the plains disappeared with the arrival of the prehistoric cultures of the Metal Ages, and the population moved to the upper heights where they could organize their defense more efficiently. Bribirska glavica, an ideal place to control the whole surroundings, was perfect for human habitation during the tumultuous periods of history. The one who held Bribirska glavica had control over all the roads and approaches from the sea to the hinterland.

We can claim with certainty that there was a pre-historical settlement on Glavica as early as the beginning of the older Iron Age (8), spreading and developing during the Liburnian predominance and the arrival and domination of the Romans (9), lasting far into the Middle Ages (10).

Archeological research of the prehistoric layers has yielded some rather significant results. The remains of dry-walled fortresses, parts of houses built with the dry wall technique, large quantities of ceramic material, and plenty of animal bones have been uncovered (Fig. 1). The bones were mostly bovine, sheep, and goat, also periwinkles and shells – illustrating the gastro-

conomic pleasures of the inhabitants of that time. The fragments of Greek and Hellenic ceramic vessels, as well as silver and bronze coin findings from that time, give us the evidence of flourishing trade.

Moving forward through the history, we come to the time of Antiquity when Bribir is mentioned in written sources as *Varvaria*, and it was the center of one of the 14 Liburnian counties. Under the Roman domination in the 1st century BC, it obtained the status of a *municipio*, at the head of which there were four main magistrates – *quatorviri iure dicundo*, who were assisted by four lower clerks and the city council – *ordo decurionum* (11). From this period, many archeological relics have been found but most impressive are undoubtedly the fortresses and the way the water supply was organized. The Antique fortresses were built from big stone blocks – megaliths, several hundreds meters in length. They encircled Glavica from three sides, except the south side,

where the sheer cliff was used for defense. The height of these fortresses (5 m), and their thickness (2 m) attest their monumentality (12). As far as the water-supply is concerned, we can say that there existed a whole system of cisterns. In almost all of the houses from the Roman period, there was a bigger or a smaller cistern. However, the main water-supplying object (*Nymphaeum*) was discovered next to the south-eastern fortress. It was made of a number of pools, in some of which mosaics were found (12).

The fall of the Western Roman empire certainly had its repercussions on the life in Bribirska Glavica. The excavations which have taken place have revealed some wayward adaptations and inexpert additional buildings from the period of Late Antiquity, which spoiled the Roman beauty of the fortress.

No archeological findings have been found from the period of the Avaro-Slavic incur-



**Figure 1.** Archeological site of Bribirska glavica near Šibenik. Remains of Roman Varvaria and medieval Bribir.

sions at the beginning of the 7th century. This a gap cannot be easily explained. The first findings after this period, those from the 9th century, show the presence of Croats on Bribir. They were discovered on the three old Croatian cemeteries. They consist mostly of some fine samples of jewelry artifacts (13).

Bribir is mentioned for the first time in the 10th century (14), in the work of Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus *De administrando imperio*, in where he writes about the territorial-administrative division of Croatia into 11 districts in that period. Amongst these, the Berbera district is also mentioned. It bordered with the Knin, Lika and Sidra region, stretching from the Vrana Lake in the West to the river Krka above Skradin in the East.

Bribir also played a significant role during the later Middle Ages because it was the seat of the Croatian peers the Šubići, who were at the top of their power towards the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century (14). This was precisely the time of the rule of prince Pavle, who became the lifetime civil governor of Croatia, taking the title of *Banus maritimus*, which meant the governor of both Croatia and Dalmatia, to which he later added *Dominus Bosniae*. Pavle minted his money, he also had his own stamp, and he never even mentioned the king in the charters he issued. His territory spread from Modruš, Gacka, and Senj all the way to the borders of the Livno region. He had a powerful influence in Trogir, Split, Omiš, and Šibenik due to the support of his brothers who ruled these cities as princes (14).

There are many documents preserved from that time, which give evidence of the significance and richness of Bribir. There were as many as seven churches, a manor, lodgings, and guest-houses. The public notaries of that time, doctors, artisans of different occupations, servants and others are mentioned. Of interest is the fact that King Bela the Fourth stayed with his suite for several weeks in Bribirska Glavica in 1245 (14).

However, the power of the Šubić family decreased dramatically after Pavle's death, and

Bribir and adjoining Ostrovica fell into Turkish hands in 1523, to be conquered by Venice in 1684.

There is a true abundance of archeological findings from the Medieval period on Bribirska glavica, starting from ceramics, glass, weapons, gorgeous jewelry, fragments of stone plastic, to significant remains of architecture and building complexes. The examples of the latter are the church and convent of St. Mary's, which has been conserved as well as the larger part of the southeastern part of the city

After a hundred years of research there is still more to explore on Bribirska glavica, and put it on all the archeological and tourist itineraries. So why not visit it on your travel across the Adriatic Coast?

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