



ARCHEOLOGIA E CALCOLATORI

CNR – DIPARTIMENTO SCIENZE UMANE E SOCIALI, PATRIMONIO CULTURALE

ISTITUTO DI STUDI SUL MEDITERRANEO ANTICO

Rivista annuale open access e peer reviewed  
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Autorizzazione del presidente del Tribunale di Firenze n. 3894 del 6/11/1989

Indirizzo Redazione: Rivista «Archeologia e Calcolatori», CNR – ISMA, Area della Ricerca di Roma 1, Via Salaria Km 29,300, 00015 Monterotondo Stazione (RM)  
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<http://www.archcalc.cnr.it/>

Edizione e distribuzione: Edizioni ALL'INSEGNA DEL GIGLIO s.a.s.  
Via del Termine 36, 50019 Sesto Fiorentino (FI)  
Tel. +39.055.8450216 – Fax +39.055.8453188  
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THE ARCHEOLAB PROJECT  
IN THE DOCLEA VALLEY, MONTENEGRO  
(CAMPAIGN 2017)

ARCHAEOLOGY, TECHNOLOGIES  
AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

edited by  
Lucia Alberti

ARCHEOLOGIA E CALCOLATORI  
Supplemento 11, 2019

*All'Insegna del Giglio*

*Funded by a grant from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation*



**Farnesina**  
Ministero degli Affari Esteri  
e della Cooperazione Internazionale



*Ambasciata d' Italia  
Podgorica*



 **Terna**

Realizzazione grafica della sovracoperta di Marcello Bellisario  
Rivista «Archeologia e Calcolatori» (ISSN 1120-6861, e-ISSN 2385-1953)  
Supplementi (ISSN 2385-202X, e-ISSN 2385-2038)  
ISBN 978-88-7814-896-3, e-ISBN 978-88-7814-897-0  
© 2019 – All’Insegna del Giglio s.a.s. – [www.insegnadelgiglio.it](http://www.insegnadelgiglio.it)  
Firenze, giugno 2019  
Stampa, Andersen S.p.a.

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## FORWARD

Perhaps to some readers this may come as a surprise, but when I think about history I also think of the present. This very moment is, after all, the outcome of our common past. Ancient Doclea is a case in point: it is part of that shared past, a component of the time that has shaped our ‘now’.

The Roman city of Doclea was an important urban centre in the eastern Adriatic Roman province of Dalmatia (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD) and the capital of the later province of Praevalitana (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD). While taking its name from the Illyrian tribe (Docleati) inhabiting the area before its Romanization, the city – due to the strategic location, bordered on three sides by the Zeta, Morača and Širalijska rivers and at a crossroads between the coast and the interior – soon became the second largest Roman municipality in the region (receiving the status of *municipium* during the Flavian age).

Doclea had mighty walls and very important buildings: a triumphal arch, a classic *forum*, a huge bathing complex and various temples. By any standard, it can be considered a flourishing urban and administrative centre, especially during its time as provincial capital.

The city remained prosperous and glorious – until the Ostrogoths sacked it around 490 AD. It was further devastated by a massive earthquake in 518 AD. Though the community partially recovered, the following turbulent period of foreign invasions saw other peoples, including the Slavs then “newcomers” to the Balkans, ravaging the urban centre once more. Though gravely damaged, Doclea probably managed somehow to survive into Late Antiquity, as the dating of the remains of some churches, located in its eastern area, seems to suggest.

Certainly, the memory of the city greatness was never completely lost: in the early Middle Ages, one of the first Slavic states began to coalesce in the region, centring around the valley of the river Zeta, thus incorporating the site of Doclea. This new State was known as Duklja.

The memories of Doclea have been therefore passed on to modern Montenegro through the historical echo of a medieval Kingdom and the visible ruins from the Roman age. In a sense, we know enough to ensure we do not forget, but too little to truly remember: to date, in fact, the once thriving Roman city still keeps most of its past secret.

It can be somewhat discouraging to learn that the main archaeological campaigns focusing on Doclea took place as long ago as between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The first systematic archaeological explorations were managed by a Russian researcher, P.A. Rovinski, in 1890. In 1913, the Italian Piero Sticotti published the book *The Roman Town*

*Doclea in Montenegro*: as it is explained in the papers of this Supplement, that same study is still today one of the most important references for the archaeological site.

It may be even more upsetting – at least to our present ‘cultural’ conscience – to discover that right after World War II a railroad was cut through this important site, irretrievably removing many traces of our common historical heritage.

Today everything has changed.

Independent Montenegro is committed to rediscovering, protecting and valorising its cultural heritage. A new series of archaeological campaigns began after 2006. The Montenegrin Ministries of Science and of Culture have also been promoting a fruitful and important collaboration with the National Research Council of Italy (CNR), in a scientific effort supported by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation as well. The focus of this collaboration, since 2016, is precisely the ancient site of Doclea, in recognition of its importance for Montenegrin history and cultural identity, as well as for the future of the Country.

In this framework, the ‘Joint Italian - Montenegrin Archaeological Laboratory’ initiative started its activities in 2017. An extensive survey at Doclea, using the most modern and non-invasive techniques (such as remote sensing, electromagnetic methodology, ground penetrating radar, etc.), has been conducted by CNR, in cooperation with the Historical Institute of Montenegro (University of Montenegro). The results, described in this Supplement, have produced a detailed and extensive plan of hidden structures, which will be definitely valuable in promoting future excavations and projects of valorisation.

Doclea indeed remains the most significant Roman site in Montenegro, located only a few kilometres from the capital city of Podgorica. In a country that embraces sustainable tourism as a key enabler for economic development, to protect and enhance this historical site is crucial not only for scientific purposes: undeniably, the success of a tourist destination is also increasingly linked to what it offers culturally.

I am therefore particularly glad that the collaboration involving CNR is continuing and even being enhanced. The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation has recently decided to finance a new CNR - Historical Institute of Montenegro project, titled ‘*The Future of the Past: study and enhancement of ancient Doclea, Montenegro*’, identifying it as among the Great Relevance Projects under the Bilateral Protocol on scientific cooperation entered into in 2018.

The objective, as explained in the last contribution of this Supplement, is the design of a sustainable plan for ‘re-launching’ the site, both from the scientific point of view and as a tool for socio-cultural and economic growth. The idea is to create a future *ecomuseum* linking the archaeological heritage



to the surrounding territory and its local community. The residents would be involved in protecting the site and would benefit as well from the economic development triggered by, hopefully, increasing numbers of visitors.

I strongly believe that this new joint project can prove to be a turning point in fully rediscovering and protecting the Doclea chapter of our shared history; at the same time, it offers a possible contribution to shaping better cultural and economic opportunities for future generations. The project, in other words, can demonstrate that by today preserving and valorising the common heritage of the past, we can also foster a promising, credible ‘tomorrow’.

LUCA ZELIOLI

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