The Island of Hvar in the Maritime Merchant Transition of the 19th Century

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The island of Hvar situated in the central eastern Adriatic coast always had important role in the maritime commerce. It was settled in 384 BC by Greek colonizers from the island of Paros, who named the main settlement on the island ΦΑΡΟΣ. Afterwards that name was adopted for the whole island and the main town in Croatian Hvar. The island was on the middle of Venetian sailing route to Levant and became of the utmost importance for the Republic as the winter harbour. In the early 19th century after the Napoleonic war when Austrian Empire took hold of the eastern Adriatic littoral local island population started to develop maritime trade using homebuilt sailing ships of costal navigation. By the mid-19th century the number of ships increased and the trading operations surpassed Adriatic Sea with the constant presence on the Mediterranean and to a certain degree on the Atlantic. The main transport goods were mostly wine and salted fish. The increase in trade triggered the rise of prominent island maritime families, but also of sailors working of these ships. The golden period lasted almost to a last decade of the 19th century when the transition to steamships already strongly entered the eastern Adriatic coast. This had severe consequences on the local island life in the aspects of depopulation, migrations and the increase poverty. Skilled labour of the sailing ships had difficulties adopting to steamships and the technology it brought. Consequently the end of the 19th century and the early 20th saw the end of the maritime trade on the island leaving it to a state sponsored companies and strong foreign entrepreneurs.