

AN UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGY CENTER IN RIJEKA

Podvodni arheološki centar u Rijeci

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Summary

The underwater archaeology term seems speaks only of the greco-roman antiquity, to the recovery of wines amphorae, of anchors, of keel sections, eventually saved from the aggression of the time. The limit of this way of understanding the naval or maritime archaeology is already clear: after these finds, it seems that nothing in the following two thousand years happened on the sea, the waves did not swallow no more things or, if that happened, everything was destroyed or is unobtainable, but it is not like that.

The technical naval object has been artificer of the worldwide progress from the beginning of times and that more in the XIX century, when the navigation passed to steam, propeller and to the ship in iron and then steel. Some inventions revolutionized the fleets in the military field: the rifled and breech-loaded gun, the torpedo, the telemeter, the underwater navigation, only to mention the major events.

In the XIX century a modern naval industry was the synthesis of the productive capacities of a nation; the naval importance of the relic is clear, therefore for evaluating what was the technology to the base of this product.

The conservation of these relics, in all the world, is however disappointing: exist some naval museums with wide collections, but without a cultural base exist, without a territory diffusion policy, without links among them. They turn out some "stores" of material, without logic and therefore, luck. In certain cases, in absence of all that, they are "mothballed".

To come to the depths of the Istrian and Dalmatian Coast, there is a big wreckage wealth: since the Roman epoch the traffic currents were numerous that they were leaving from the Greek coast and arriving as far as the harbour in Aquileia, in the Middle Age this traffic continued, with the navigations of the navy of Venice, Ancona and Dubrovnik, with the wars of the uskoks, to arrive to the long tradition of coastal navigation in the Dalmatian archipelago and the sunk ships during the wars. The museum would contain parts recovered by the sunk ships, photographs or filmed some

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wrecks, with a multimedia contestualization which makes the history of the navigation in the zone to the visitor, in peace and war, points out the technical characteristics of the wrecks in the Dalmatian waters and creates links with other possible museums of this kind which had to rise in Europe. It is clear that, belonging the ships to various nations, it is necessary searching for a synergy with other Countries, but that it would definitely be a stimulus for the birth of analogous initiatives.

But, why Rijeka? In the first place because it is, as I see, the first resort of the Croatian Coast which places the problem of the cultural reuse of a wide ex industrial area, furthermore his arrangement puts her to the center of Europe in a happy position for a meeting among peoples and also, because not, of turist flows that would be interested by an initiative of the kind.

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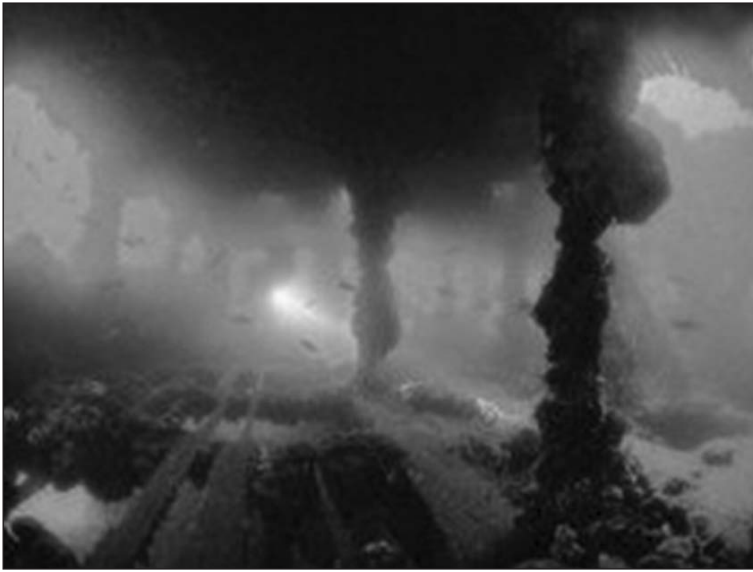
In Italy, for instance, the museums, that should not be only that but the centre of historical information, are those of La Spezia, Milan, Venice, Genoa and Triest, to mention the principals; partial or private collections exist in other resorts as Naples, Imperia, Camogli, Bologna, often in conditions of not accessibility.

Moreover exist a lot of naval or maritime objects scattered in the territory, as monuments, sacred places, more with the medieval logic of the holy relic than that of a conservation to informative and cultural purposes.

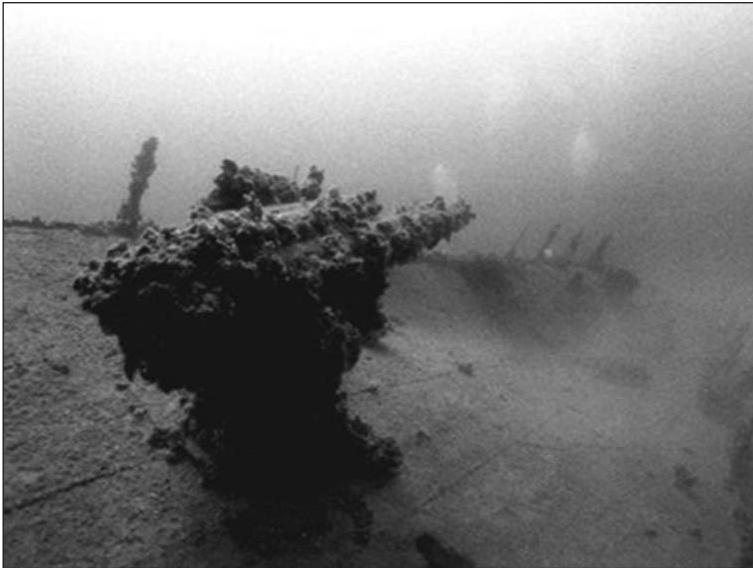
A rich, but divided and dispersed, with an attention turned more to the use than to the technology, except for few exceptions. The consistency of these

relics is then conditioned by the hazard of their enrichment, subject to the good will of private collectors.

This subject is, however, the point of meeting between these observations and the underwater naval archaeology, that is not only industrial technology, but also historical research.



■ *Steamer Baron Gautsch*



■ *Cesare Rossariol*

Most naval relics, in fact, still exist, but under the surface of the sea: they are ships sunk for war causes, for storms or accidents, whose conservation conditions change according to the time passed from the sinking, of the depth of the sea, of the conditions of the seafloor, of the building material and the causes which caused the sinking. It is clear that of a burned galleon remains very few parts, of a scuttled submarine 60 years ago exists more.

If the bottom of the sea is low and rocky, the wreckage will have been submitted to the assault of the plants and animals of the sea; on the contrary, if the depth is abyssal and sandy the conservation conditions will be very good. The recognitions executed by the professor Ballard on the wreckage of the transatlantic liner *Titanic* and the battleship *Bismarck* confirm this.

Particular conditions of the sea support the conservation of the wreckage: for the recovery of great part of ship-of-the-line *Wasa*, taken place a few years ago in Sweden, the intact vessel showed what can do low depths in a very cold sea as the Baltic, less rich of aggressive agents of the wood, it can preserve also ancient wreckages also in wood. There are now problems for the hull, but this is a problem of the technical devices in act after the recovery for the conservation of saved elements.

The Adriatic Sea is rich of ships sunk in every time, but their positioning on the seabottom is argument of discussions and researches: some nautical papers report the position of a few wrecks, but in many cases these signalings are concerning "unknown objects" and of much sunk ships the position is not well known. That is to point out that in the Mediterranean Sea for years it was a total disinterest for the matter, when in a few British universities, in the context of the Cultural Heritage, courses of underwater archaeology of the English seas exist there. The most expressive example is the case of the bronzes of Riace: they were the fruit of a maritime archaeological recovery, but a serious search of the ship which was transporting them has never been performed.

The situation is still more neglected if the wreck is of a modern ship, with iron or steel hull and mechanic propulsion. This relic, instead, would deserve a greater attention because, at level of the ships, the integral naval technology is not well conserved.

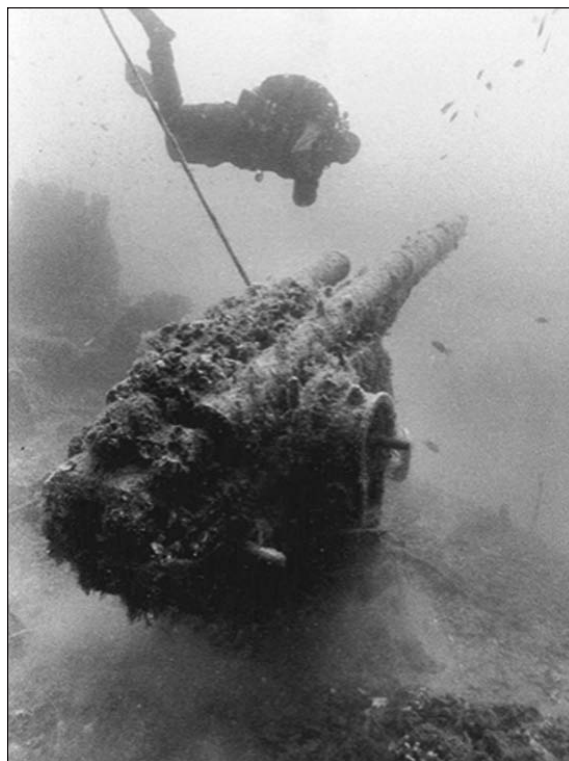
The research work to be done in this field is at the beginnings and in most cases is done by private researchers with adventure spirit. It seems that it is developing a public interest in this sector, but is to be verified.

The work to be done in this field is remarkable and the lines can be traced. I will not touch the economic problem of the research which can change according to the wreck and the interest which dresses in the historical field and must be evaluated on each case.

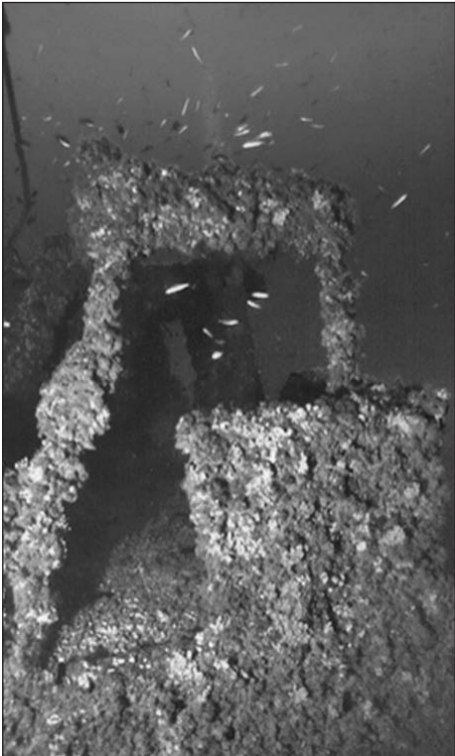
The first step consists in the search of all the existing wrecks along the Dalmatian coast; is not a work for a little, but must be done with synergies



■ *Coriolanus*



■ *Torpedo boat Giuseppe Dezza*



■ *Steamer Giuseppe Dormio*



■ *Istra*



■ *Unknown submarine*

between underwater seekers and naval historians, besides the availability of the archives to look for the news given to the moment of the sinking by survivors and witnesses, evaluating the reliability of these last ones.

Then the research on the field is more and more destined to extend his possibilities thanks to always more efficient technologies: sonars, echosounders, underwater video cameras, rovs, etc.

However, this work reports mostly to the antiquities, and not the wrecks of contemporary epoch.

To this phase must follow another: the visual study of the wreckage, or the immersion by the scuba divers adequately taught if in accessible depths, or with video cameras if in deep waters.

The final phase is the most controversial because it must answer a question: what do of the wreckage found out and identified?

Some of the private scuba divers partly already answered this problem: when they find a wreckage they sack it of all what which is removable, then they keep them at home as souvenirs or resell them to the collectors. However, it is clear that this is not a solution.

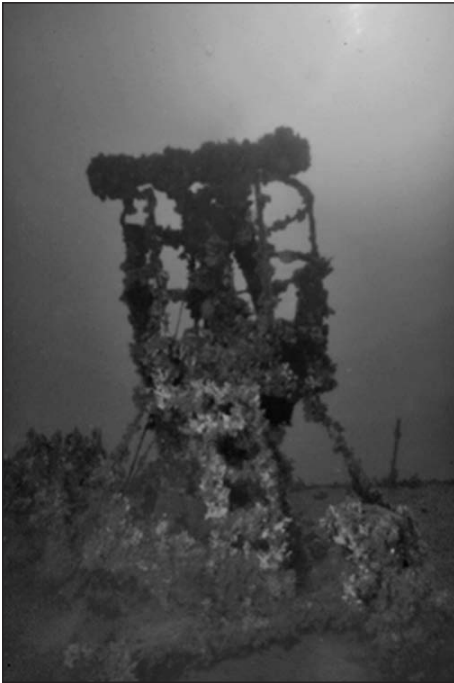
To give an answer, also partial, to this question we must see of what ship we treat and in what conditions it is.

Military ship: if it is a ship interesting under the historical point of view and in good condition, the best thing is leave the wreck in the conditions that is found, after completely studying it and with a periodic monitoring of itself. If in accessible depth, foreseeing the possibility of visit by the scuba divers, with a periodical control that nothing as been removed.

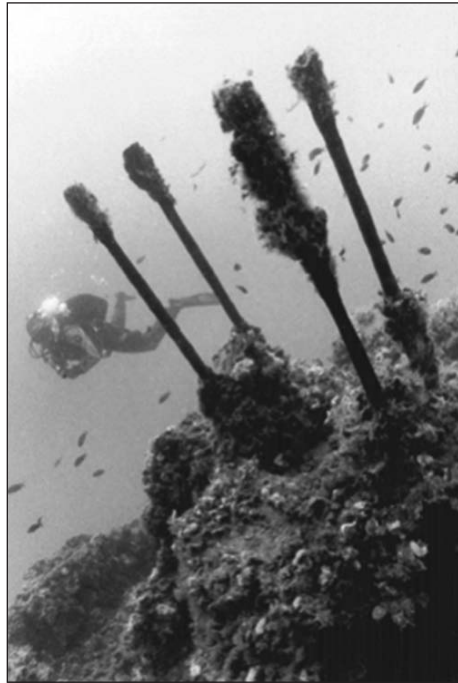
If the wreck is not historically interesting or in bad conservation condition, a procedure of recovery of the interesting finds should be activated, arranging for their restoration and entrusting them to a cultural structure to be created, that should be the "gallery" of the underwater treasures. For the civil ships the same speech is valid, if the ship is interesting goes let intact, it is otherwise possible to arrange for a recovery under public control of the interesting finds.

All this could seem simple, but there are two other problems, an ethical ones and the other juridical ones.

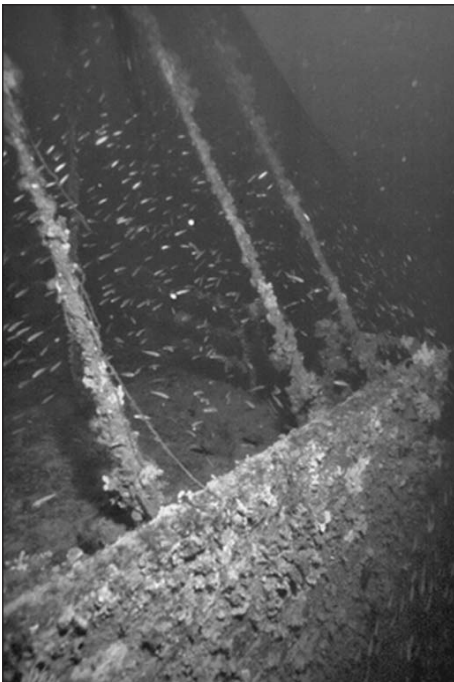
The first concern the fact that, in most cases, a sunk ship is also a grave of the sailors who followed her in the last journey. In these cases, when someone approaches to one of this wreck must be awakened on this problem. In 1981 was stipulated a grant between the British government and the then Soviet government to recover a load of ingots made of gold which, on the british cruiser *Edinburgh* sunk on thirty March 1942, was carried in Great Britain as payment of the military supplies to the Soviet Union. The treasure was recovered to ninety percent, but to execute the task the british divers had to pass between the remains of sixty sailors on the ship. The indignation of the relatives and the public opinion was huge.



■ *Cesare Rossarol*



■ *Torpedo boat Giuseppe Dezza*



■ *Vis*

Photos courtesy of:

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Many of these wrecks are not accessible for the normal scuba divers with the current immersion technologies, but if we make attention to the quick progress in this sector, foreseeing their tutelage is necessary from sacks or “wild” immersions.

Undersea, however, not only the ships, but also the planes are found, in this case sunk mostly in consequence of war events. Also for these the considerations already made on the risk of human remains on shipboard are valid; however for this wreckage there is already a marked tendency to their recovery for two reasons: the rareness of planes in the museums and their fragility, therefore it is easy foresee a quick deterioration if let under the surface of the sea.

While going near the wreckage sunk in war is also to keep present the risk to have contact with shells, torpedoes or explosive charges again active and that, after decades, can have become unsettled. It is superfluous point out the risks and the precautions to be been obliged in going near these ships.

Last problem to be faced is that of the property of the wreckage found undersea and, also in this case, the view is complex. If we consider waters as territorial, if a wreckage belongs to the Navy of the Country this, fairly, claims the possession of him and is always hoped that, when someone dips on a ship which is identified as war unit, must remain in contact with the public authorities. If it is a warship of other nations, one must keep present than the Royal Navy, for example, considers himself as proprietary of its ships in any sea they find and it is not excluded that other Navies have the same regulation. Many ships sunk in Adriatic Sea were Italian, but some are sunk under German flag: in these cases, like the former french units, the property goes brought to the origin navies back, Italian or French.

For the civilian ships, instead, the speech is still more complicated, or simpler according to the choice of the solution: every civil ship was, before sinking, property of a navigation company and, after the sinking, for accident or war cause, an insurance or a damage refund for which, juridically, the wreckage is not theirs any more, but then of whom? If the ship would be on the surface it would be of the company or the corporation that arranged for the indemnity, but being under the sea and not having been any more tried no operation of recovery, the ship can be thought to an abandonment of the good and then the reduction of his state to “res nullius”, therefore at disposal of the first which puts on the hands.

This position, which would seem that more correct under the point of legal view, is however questionable if present than every wreckage is kept, actually, included in what british call “cultural heritage” of the nation.

In every way it is a problem that has been not again still seriously faced and must be examined in detail.

At the end of this short study on a matter which in many cases is still to be well defined, the principal problem is placed: found all the wreckages, identified and studied everybody, who protects all this property from sacks or improper activities? Already there is a big problem for the archaeological goods in surface, it is still greater for those under the sea.

It is however to be faced, because forgetting that the biggest wealth of a country is his history and his cultural property what is not necessary a past, but a present with which everyone lives together every day and that belongs to everybody because this past are “us”.

To come to the case of the Istrian and Dalmatian Coast, there is a big wreckage wealth: since the Roman epoch the traffic currents were numerous: they were leaving from the Greek coast and arriving as far as the harbour in Aquileia, in the Middle Age this traffic continued, with the navigations of the navies of Venice, Ancona and Dubrovnik, with the wars of the uskoc strike, to arrive to the long tradition of coastal navigation in the Dalmatian archipelago and the sunk ships during the wars. To mention the principal units, I remember the battleship *Szent Istvan*, the ironclads *Re d'Italia* and *Palestro*, the passenger steamer *Baron Gautsch*, the torpedo boats *TA 35*, *TA 36* and *TA 45*, the steamers *Istria*, *Romagna*, *Teti* and *Varese*, the explorer *Cesare Rossarol*. All these ships, besides several others and other can be again searched and that are sunk along the dalmatian archipelago, they can constitute the base for the constitution of a museum of the underwater archaeology, which would be the first on the world and whose location in the former Whitehead Torpedo Factory would be an ideal arrangement.

The museum would contain parts recovered by the sunken ships, photographs or filmed of some wrecks, with a multimedia contestualization that can tell the history of the navigation in the zone to the visitor, in peace and war, points out the technical characteristics of the wrecks in the Dalmatian waters and creates links with other possible museums of this kind which had to rise in Europe. It is clear that, belonging the ships to various nations, it is necessary searching for a synergy with other Countries, but that it would definitely be a stimulus for the birth of analogous initiatives.

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It is however clear, that such a museum, or more correctly a “cultural center of information”, it is all to be built: a research campaign is necessary on the depths for the census and the catalogue of the wrecks and their placing in security, a second wide search of recovery of all what which is culturally valid to expository purposes, and the physical preparation of the spaces, the definition of which is not exposed now because it is out of my expertise: besides the campaign of media communication of the existence of this structure, also this subject is the task of architects and designers and must be developed at European level.

What I exposed is only an idea, but I hope that she will be taken into consideration for the historical importance of the goods that still they lie under the sea and that they wait only to be increased in value.

Sažetak

Pojam podvodnog arheološkoga centra govori, čini se, samo o grčko-romanskim ostacima, o pronalaženju vinskih amfora, sidra, dijelova brodova, značajno sačuvanima od uništenja. Ograničenje ovakva shvaćanja morske i pomorske arheologije očito je: ispada da se nakon ovih pronalazaka dvije tisuće godina ništa na moru nije događalo, valovi nisu progutali više predmeta ili, ako i jesu, uništeni su ili su nedostupni, a ipak nije tako.

Tehnički je pomorski objekt bio začetnikom napretka širom svijeta oduvijek, a pogotovo u 20. stoljeću kada je navigacija prešla na par, zatim propeler pa u željezni i zatim čelični brod. Neki su izumi revolucionirali vojne mornarice: puške punjene kroz zatvarač, torpeda, daljinometar i podvodna navigacija, tek su neki.

U 19. stoljeću moderna je pomorska industrija značila sintezu proizvodnih kapaciteta određene nacije; pomorska je važnost ostataka jasna za shvaćanje tehnologije vremena u kojem je proizvod nastao.

Konzerviranje tih ostataka u cijelom je svijetu ipak razočaravajuće: postoje neki pomorski muzeji s velikim zbirkama, ali bez kulturne baze, bez pravila širenja prostorom, bez međusobne povezanosti. Oni zapravo slični na skladišta materijala, bez logike i zato beživotni. U nekim slučajevima, u odsutnosti svega toga, tretirani su kao "rezerve".

Kad bi se doprlo do dubina istarske i dalmatinske obale, našlo bi se veliko bogatstvo ostataka: promet je bio jak od rimskog doba kada su brodovi kretali od grčke obale i stizali sve do luke u Akvileji, u srednjem se vijeku taj promet nastavio s navigacijama mornarice iz Venecije, Ankone i Dubrovnika, zatim s uskočkim ratovima pa do duge tradicije obalne plovidbe dalmatinskim otočjem i potopljenih ratnih brodova. Muzej bi sadržavao dijelove pronađenih potopljenih brodova, fotografije ili snimke brodoloma s multimedijalnom podlogom koja bi posjetitelju približila povijest pomorstva u ratu i miru, koja bi istaknula tehničke karakteristike brodova u vodama Dalmacije i spojila ovaj s drugim takvim muzejima u Europi. Budući da brodovi pripadaju raznim zemljama, jasno je da je nužno tražiti veze s njima, a to bi definitivno bio poticaj za rađanje sličnih inicijativa.

Ali zašto Rijeka? U prvom redu zato što je ovaj grad, kako ja to vidim, prva lokacija na hrvatskoj obali koja ističe problem ponovne kulturne upotrebe industrijskih područja. Njezina je organizacija postavlja u središte Europe, čime dobiva zahvalnu poziciju susretišta naroda, ali i struja turista koji bi bili zainteresirani za ovakve inicijative.