

Mapping a Roman Shipwreck Site



A 3rd century AD Roman shipwreck site, off the coast of Sicily has been inspiring archaeologists with its array of historical treasures. The wreck site was first discovered in May 2006 under 92 metres of water during a survey of the Sicilian coast. It was an enormous find with an artefact distribution suggesting it was once a vessel 15 - 20 metres long, possibly larger.

Objects recovered from the wreck site included ceramics, concretions and possibly hull timbers. These artefacts are currently undergoing extensive study to identify the date and further detail of the ship and its final journey. It is thought that the ship's last port was in North Africa but it failed to ever reach its destination in Italy.

The merchant ship carried a mixed cargo probably including foodstuffs such as olive oil and grain, along with architectural building materials.

RPM Nautical Foundation has worked in partnership with the Superintendent's Office of Maritime Archaeology of Sicily for several years exploring the waters of the Egadi Islands off the North West coast of Sicily.

Dr. Jeff Royal, Archaeological Director of RPM commented that one of their primary tasks this season was to make a high-quality photo-mosaic and subsequent site plan of the shipwreck. For this they experimented with the Tritech Typhoon Video Measuring System. The system incorporates a colour video camera and a laser measuring capability to obtain precise frame grabs which allowed the researchers to build a mosaic.

The archaeologists were able to start their analysis and interpretation work as soon as the Typhoon images and data was received and this work will continue for several months.

RPM Nautical Foundation will present preliminary results on its website and detailed reports will be published by Dr. Royal and Dr. Sebastiano Tusa, Superintendent of Underwater Archaeology for Sicily, in archaeological journals.