Byzantium Beneath the Black Sea

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The August 2007 Black Sea Expedition of the Institute for Archaeological Oceanography at the University of Rhode Island (IAO) and the Institute for Exploration (IFE) investigated two Byzantine shipwrecks for the protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (CPUCH) called “twinkies” and “kebab” (circa 5-6th centuries C.E.).

Joseph Coleman Carter (Director, Institute of Classical Archaeology, University of Texas at Austin), and to all whose sponsors, participating organizations, and acknowledgements.

Robert Ballard (Principal Investigator)  ●  Bridget Buxton (Chief Archaeologist)  ●  Katherine Croff (Chief Scientist)  ●  Dwight Coleman  ●  Michael Brennan  ●  Kathleen Cantner  ●  Christopher Roman, University of Rhode Island; Institute for Classical Archaeology, University of Texas at Austin; Immersion Presents; Institute for Exploration.

The 2001 UNESCO Convention for the protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (CPUCH) challenges archaeologists to consider site preservation as the first option. The cost and technical challenge of deep-ocean exploration means that a particular appreciation for the subaqueous environment is needed to fully appreciate deep-ocean underwater sites.

The Black Sea is an ostensibly ideal site for archaeological investigations because of its clear visibility, sedimentary environment, and the preservation of wood.

The Black Sea is a sedimentary environment where the depth of the water, the clarity of the water, and the current and wave action are all low. The absence of large marine animals has allowed for the preservation of wooden artifacts. The Black Sea is also an important archaeological site because it was a major trade route for the Byzantine Empire.

The seabed is characterized by a series of depressions, known as basins, which are formed by the collision of tectonic plates. These basins are filled with sediments, which have created a diverse range of environments for archaeological research.

The Black Sea is one of the world's largest enclosed bodies of water. It is located in the northeastern part of the Mediterranean Sea and is connected to the Adriatic Sea by a narrow strait, the Dardanelles.

The Black Sea is home to a rich variety of marine life, including fish, shellfish, and corals. The sea is also home to a variety of archaeological sites, including shipwrecks and underwater cities.

Sustainability, Accessibility, and Archaeological Oceanography

A private enterprise moves into the deep sea with budgets that far exceed the resources usually available to public institutions. It is imperative for the sustainability of humanity’s underwater cultural heritage that archaeologists find ways to keep pace. One option available to archaeologists is to join forces with marine scientists, accessing oceanographic budgets and tools by combining historical and scientific research questions with ocean exploration and experimental development. These goals are integral to the emerging interdisciplinary field of archaeological oceanography.

While recognizing that complete excavation is the easiest way to understand an ancient shipwreck, for the majority of shipwrecks this is neither feasible nor justified. The concept of “stewardship” is a research model suitable for the investigation of shipwrecks. This model accepts the idea that the value of a maritime archaeological site is not fixed, but can be enhanced through conservation and management strategies.