

Maritime Archaeologists Find Bronze Age Settlement under Black Sea's Seabed off Bulgaria's Coast

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The underwater archaeologists from the Black Sea MAP project have explored both the ancient landscapes and human settlements which were affected by environmental change off Bulgaria's present-day Black Sea coast, and the shipwrecks of some 60 vessels dating from the past 2,500 years. Photo: Black Sea MAP

The Black Sea MAP underwater archaeology project, which has discovered some 60 well-preserved ships from the past 2,500 year on the bottom of the Black Sea, has also found and explored an Early Bronze Age settlement off Bulgaria's coast underneath the present-day seabed submerged as a result of environmental change.

The primary goal of the Black Sea Maritime Archaeology Project (Black Sea M.A.P.), which started in September 2015, has been to explore how human societies in Prehistory responded to environmental change.

To do that, the international team of scientists focused on reconstructing the ancient landscapes in Bulgaria's exclusive zone in the Black Sea.

The discoveries of the some 60 shipwrecks have been made alongside the main subject matter of the research project.

The sunken ships which belonged to Ancient Greeks, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and possibly other powers such as Venice and Genoa, are extraordinarily well-preserved because of the anoxic conditions in the depths of the Black Sea, i.e. the lack of oxygen under 150 meters which prevents the decaying of wood and other organic matter.

“Ancient landscapes and prehistoric settlements lost to rising seas [have been] revealed by underwater excavation, remote sensing and geological sampling,” the team of the research project has said.

Black Sea M.A.P. has been carried out by scientists from the UK (the [Center for Maritime Archaeology](#) of the University of Southampton), Bulgaria (the Sozopol-based [Center for Underwater Archaeology](#) at the [National Institute and Museum of Archaeology](#) in Sofia), Sweden (Södertörn University), the US (University of Connecticut) and Greece (Institute of Oceanography of the Hellenic Center for Marine Research).



Well-preserved rope was found aboard one Roman ship discovered on the bottom of the Black Sea by Black Sea MAP. The ship's galley is pictured here. Photo: Black Sea MAP

The submerged Early Bronze Age settlement, which has now been found and explored by the Black Sea MAP archaeologists, is located close to the mouth of the Ropotamo River on Bulgaria's Southern Black Sea coast.

“The Black Sea MAP completes its final phase of fieldwork having excavated the remains of an Early Bronze Age settlement at Ropotamo in Bulgaria near the ancient shoreline when the sea level was much lower than today,” the project team says.

It explains that as the waters of the Black Sea rose, the Bronze Age settlement was

abandoned.

The archaeologists have found remains of house timbers, hearths and ceramics off Bulgaria's present-day shoreline, lying 2.5 meters below the seabed.

As a result of the advancement of environmental change and the advancement of the sea waters, the valley in which the Bronze Age settlement had laid turned into a Black Sea bay.

"The village... became a sheltered bay visited by Ancient Greek colonists of the Archaic period, then a harbor for Early Byzantine seafarers and finally an anchorage used by the Ottomans," the team of Black Sea MAP elaborates.

The team has also continued its survey work in deep water up to 50 kilometers offshore using Surveyor Interceptor, a revolutionary remotely operated robotic vehicle, to carry out geophysical surveys along thousands of kilometers.

It has been revealing former land surfaces buried deep below the seabed and sampling them by extracting sediment cores up to 12 meters in length.

"From the materials in the cores the nature of the ancient environments can be reconstructed including key processes of environmental change such as sea level rise," the research team says.

"If we can understand what happened, when it happened and how it happened, then we are in a far better position to understand the effects these processes had on human populations living in the region at the time," it adds.

"We are looking at a period in history several thousand years ago when the most dramatic form of history we can experience really did happen," Chief Investigator, Prof. Jon Adams from the University of Southampton, has told BBC Radio 4.



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This photo shows a raised piece of a Roman galley found at one of the newly discovered shipwrecks on the bottom of the Black Sea, off Bulgaria's coast. Photo: Black Sea MAP

During both the 2016 and 2017 field season, Black Sea MAP has worked with Swedish based MMT & Reach Subsea, normally focused on surveying for the offshore industry.

The Black Sea MAP underwater archaeology project was conceived by Hans K. Rausing who established the Expedition and Education Foundation to commission the project.

The Foundation's work is funded by [The Julia and Hans Rausing Trust](#), a charitable fund, reflecting their interest in improving our understanding of the origins of humanity and human civilization in the region.

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