



Discovering the *London* 1665

by Daniel Pascoe

Double block from the gun carriage of the *London*. Image: Luke Mair



Robin Hoods Bay: 'In this place it is a thing peculiar...'

by John Buglass

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John Buglass



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A Roman Merchant Ship Near Omis

Joost van den Besselaar and Peter Seinen

Peter and Joost are on the board of the foundation Mergor in Mosam (www.mergorinmosam.nl), that is involved in all kind of underwater archaeological and paleontological projects. Here they report on their work on a Late Roman amphora wreck in Croatia.

During his vacation in Omis, Croatia, Joost made a few guided dives organised by T. Mrcelic. At a site known as Stanici-Celina, a number of Late Roman (1st-2nd century AD) type amphora remains were visible on the seabed.

The site was discovered in the 1950s by sponge divers, who 'salvaged' a large number of objects from the wreckage, leaving a pile of pottery sherds visible on the seabed – the remains of a Late Roman merchant vessel that sank with its cargo of amphoras near Omis.

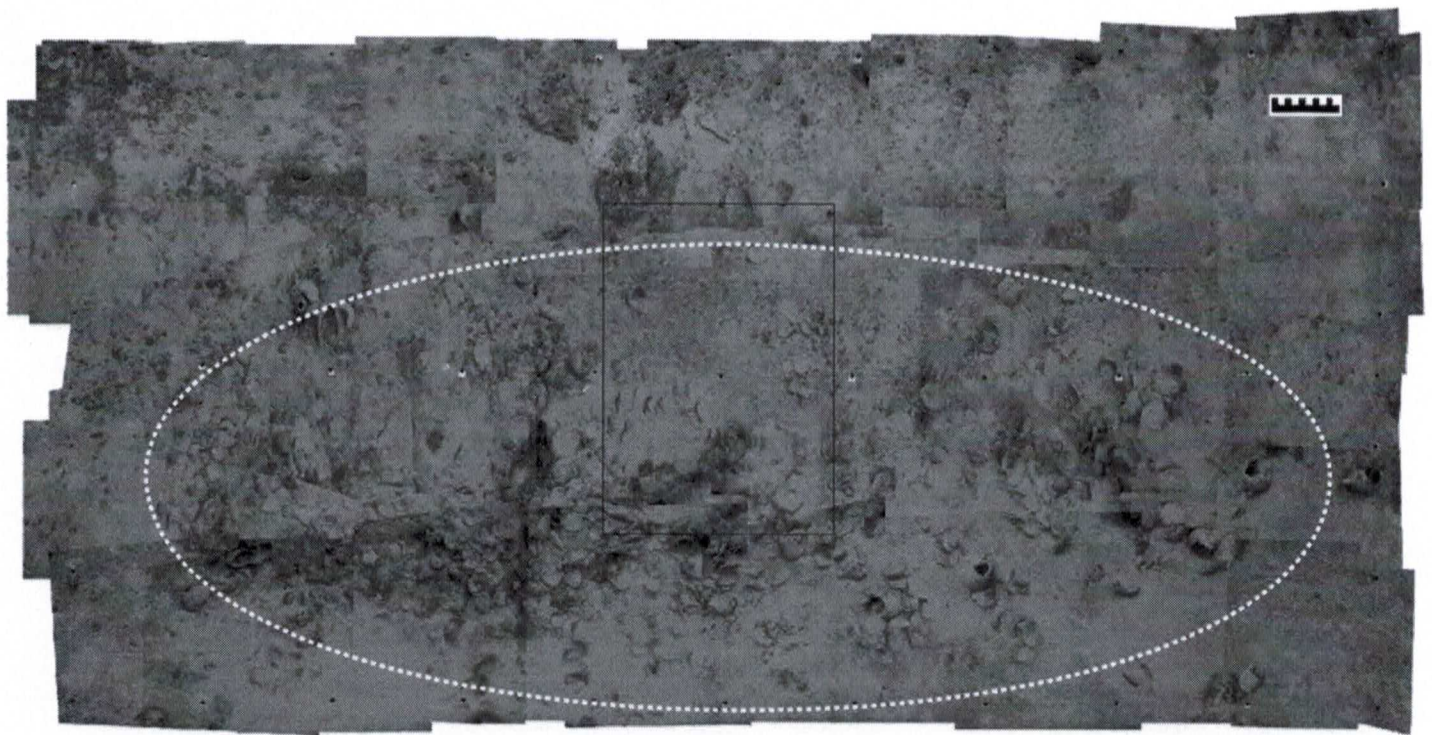
Subsequent inquiries about this site led to our communication with T. Katunaric, a maritime archaeologist at the Arts Academy of the University of Split in Croatia. T. Katunaric agreed to allow a small-scale excavation by the divers of the foundation Mergor in Mosam, with the aim of assessing the site's present state of preservation, and, if possible, to locate the original position of the merchant vessel after its descent two millennia ago.

The project plan consisted of the logical steps usually followed in underwater archaeological projects outlined by well-known publications (Green, J., *Maritime Archaeology - A Technical Handbook*, Elsevier Academic Press, 2004; Bowens, A. (ed.), *Underwater Archaeology - The NAS Guide to Principles and Practice*, Blackwell, 2009).

Our fieldwork started with a general survey of the site, which involved the establishment of a measuring grid with labelled lines over the area. This was followed by the production of a photomosaic of the site,



An intact amphora recovered from the site (scale 10cm). Image: Mergor in Mosam



The complete photomosaic of the site (scale 1m).
Image: Mergor in Mosam

while our fieldwork was finalized by a small-scale excavation.

Besides fieldwork, we also conducted interviews in the nearby town in order to find out more about the history of the site. This local inquiry resulted in the account of a former sponge diver, Marinko Petric, who witnessed the discovery and 'salvage' of amphoras from the site.

Hundreds of complete amphoras were recovered and entered the antiquities trade. Many inhabitants of Omis still possess such prized objects.

The analysis of the photomosaic showed that the distribution of the exposed part of the cargo is not random, but restricted to an area of 7 x 18m, which may indicate the original position of the wreck.

In fact, the distribution may correspond to a ship size of about 18m in length, which is in the lower end of the range of Roman merchant ships (15-45m) of that period.

Such a ship could carry more than 1000 amphoras, which is in line with the eyewitness accounts of the 'salvage'.

The survey of the area also resulted in the discovery of two large heavy metal slabs that were recovered and await further chemical analysis, but which seem to be lead-based.

Our small-scale excavation showed that the amphora remains, although broken, are still *in situ*. Totally unexpected was the discovery of a completely intact amphora. After recovery, its contents were sieved and turned out only to contain marine residues, without a trace of its original content, which might have been grain, wine or olive oil.

The size and shape of this amphora seem to resemble a Dressel 10 vessel, but further analysis is necessary in order to confirm this.

Another important find was an amphora rim with a stamp deciphered by T. Katunaric as AROHELA, which is believed to indicate Italian origin.

The remains on site now lie at 20m depth awaiting a follow-up project to reveal its secrets. ♦