

AN UPDATED ASSESSMENT OF THE SUBMARINE CULTURAL HERITAGE OFF THE SOUTHERN ROMANIAN COAST

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Since Antiquity, when the Greek colonization of Pontus Euxinus started in the 7th century BC, the Black Sea area was the scene of diverse human activities, among which the most important was the trading navigation. Most of the colonies and settlements founded by the ancient Greek colonists coming from Megara, Milet, Corinth or Heraclea Pontica were located along the coast and were connected to each other and also to the metropolis of origin mainly by nautical trade routes running along the shores.

Over millennia, the navigation along Black Sea maritime routes has intensified and diversified, many military confrontations have also taken place, all these leading to the accumulation on the seabed of numerous shipwrecks. Although the history of navigation and its associated activities along the western coast of the Black Sea is over 25 centuries old, paradoxically, the number of shipwrecks discovered until now, especially from the ancient and medieval periods, is unnaturally low.

However, if such discoveries have been made in the Bulgarian coastal waters at Kitten (e.g. Batchvarov, 2014) and Ropotamo (e.g. Pachero-Ruiz et al., 2018, Sturt et al., 2018), in Bulgarian deep waters (see the fabulous results of *Black Sea Maritime Archaeology Project*, 2017-2018), in Ukrainian and Turkish waters at Chersonesos (Brennan et al., 2011) and respectively off Sinop Peninsula (Piechota et al., 2010, Brennan et al., 2011, Sahin et al., 2016), until recently such information regarding findings of interest for the submerged cultural heritage (e.g. Scarlat, 1973; 1975, Munteanu & Vochițu, 2009, Atanasiu-Croitoru, 2015) made in Romanian waters were very few and only published in Romanian. Recent findings of researches carried out during the few last years (e.g. Caraivan et al., 2015, Pfloderer et al., 2016, Dimitriu et al., 2018), as well as synthesis (e.g. Custurea et al., 2007, Munteanu, 2016, Dobre, 2016, Dimitriu et al., 2019), of the archaeological discoveries made over the last decades in the coastal waters provide information that clearly invalidate the false impression regarding a poor submarine cultural heritage off Romanian coast. Thus, the synthesis of all available data and information regarding the geo-archaeological findings made in Romanian waters indicate until present the certain existence of over 120 shipwrecks (Fig. 1), among which 15 belong to former wooden ships, whose ages range from Antiquity to the beginning of 20th c. BC.

Within the paper, the authors focus exclusively on the southern half of the Romanian coastal zone. When assessing the potential of the marine shallow waters off the southern Romanian coast, from the perspective of its submerged cultural heritage, we must consider at least the following essential aspects: (1) – the entire coastal zone is subsiding by 1-2 mm/y to 3-4 mm/y (e.g. Popescu & Drăgoescu, 1986, Dimitriu et al., 2017, etc.) and (2) – the secular mean sea level rise is about 0.5-1 mm/y. Combined, these two processes determine the sinking of the site located in ancient times at the sea level, to 6 m or more below the current mean sea level.

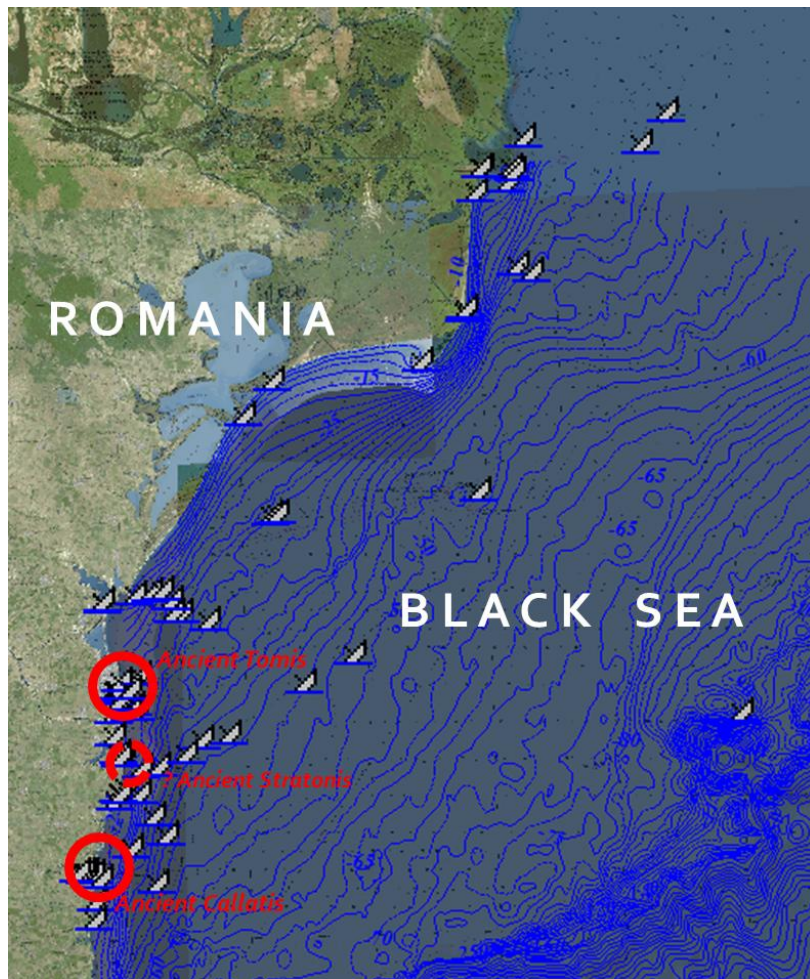


Fig. 1 Shipwrecks found until present on the surface of the Romanian maritime space, according to MAR-S GIS database (<https://gis.geocomar.ro/marss/>). In red are depicted the locations of the ancient Callatis and Tomis colonies and also the supposed location of Stratonis settlement

Results of some researchers started at late '60s, but which are still ongoing, are synthesized and grouped in five distinct case studies. The first two case studies regard the harbors and surroundings of the ancient Callatis and Tomis colonies, both founded in the 6th c. BC by colonists from Heraclea Pontica and respectively from Millet. On these locations the underwater mappings carried out during late '60s (Scarlat, 1973; 1975) revealed the probable ancient shore line, as well as numerous drowned ruins of the harbors and of the ancient protection wave-breaks. The certain presence of several ancient and later shipwrecks is well documented, the possible existence of several other is only debated.

The third case study regards the enigmatic ancient settlement of Stratonis, whose exact location was not established until present. Based on the clues from the ancient historians, but also on the ruins and fired artefacts found at Cape Tuzla, the hypothesis according to which the ancient settlement Stratonis was located on the promontory, submerged today, which prolongs Cape Tuzla seawards, is issued.

The fourth case study presented regards the enigmatic wooden shipwreck discovered off Costinești village (Dobre, 2016) which, according to some old, unofficial, local sources, could be in connection with a gold coin hoard found decades ago by local fisherman on the seabed. Finally, the fifth case study regards both the medieval, silver coin hoards Eforie Sud I and II, discovered in the early 2000s nearshore (Custurea et al., 2007) and the wooden

shipwreck Eforie Sud A, found nearby in 2009, also in the close vicinity of the shore line (Dobre, 2016).

The paper also draws attention to the fact that although the law of the patrimony (L. 150/1997 and L. 99/2007) exists and is in force, additional measures are still needed for its consistent application and the enhanced protection of the underwater cultural heritage.

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