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PRESS RELEASE

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Danish expedition in the Baltic Sea locates three intact old shipwrecks

An expert team from Sea War Museum Jutland has just returned from an expedition in the Baltic Sea, where they located and filmed three unique and exceptionally well-preserved shipwrecks. The ships are thought to be over 300 years old and are virtually untouched at the bottom of the sea.

The discoveries in the Baltic Sea are of an unprecedented calibre and have revealed hundreds of years old shipwrecks. Two of them are with great certainty cargo vessels from the Netherlands, while the third and largest is supposed to be of Scandinavian origin. All three shipwrecks stand like ghost ships almost unscathed on the seabed in total darkness at a depth of approximately 150 meters beyond the reach of modern fishing vessels.

'It was fantastic to see the wrecks appear on the screen when we sent an underwater robot down to the seabed. The wrecks stood almost as they did the day they sank hundreds of years ago. I have been diving all my life and have examined hundreds of wrecks, but I have never seen anything like this. The ships stood as if they had just been abandoned,' says Gert Normann Andersen, expedition leader and director of Sea War Museum Jutland.

The expedition was carried out in October by Sea War Museum Jutland from Thyborøn in collaboration with Danish JD-Contractor, who provided the offshore ship Sima and underwater robots with advanced technology, and with the participation of experts from the National Museum of Denmark.

The expedition, with a total of 27 participants, set out with the aim of investigating the breakdown of wrecks and materials under water. But none had expected this level of preservation, says Gert Normann Andersen.



Photogrammetry from the expedition shows an almost intact wreck on the seabed

'In the North Sea, all wrecks are broken down in record time. All the woodwork is eaten by shipworms, and wave movements and heavy fishing gear take care of the rest.'

The Baltic Sea and the American lakes are among the places believed to be home to the world's best-preserved wooden shipwrecks. The reason is that neither shipworms nor other wood-boring animals can live in the fresh water at great depths, where the bottom environment is acidic and low in oxygen. For the same reason, there is also no industrial fishing that would otherwise destroy wrecks at the bottom.

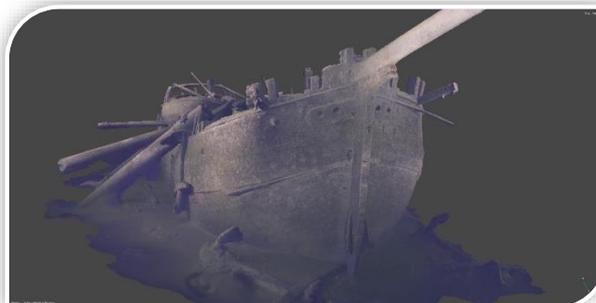


Photogrammetry and 3D recordings provide new insight into shipwrecks

In order to get the best pictures on the expedition, two Swedish photogrammetry experts - Ingemar Lundgren and Fredrik Skorg - from the company Ocean Discovery participated. An underwater robot equipped with an advanced camera brought thousands of images to the surface and reproduces with great precision a virtual image of the wrecks as they actually look. The pictures are so detailed that you get the feeling of being able to move around a ship that sank hundreds of years ago.

'In these water depths, photogrammetry is expensive as the method requires both costly equipment, experts and a large ship, but it is undoubtedly the best method for the investigation and documentation of wrecks at great depths,' says Gert Normann Andersen.

From the National Museum of Denmark, Professor David Gregory participated, who has just received a grant of DKK 18,5 million from the European Research Council for the project "ENDURE", in which the Danish expert in DNA analyses, Dr. Anne Marie Eriksen, will also participate. Project ENDURE is dedicated to investigating the degradation of materials and shipwrecks under water over the next 5 years



Photogrammetry shows one of the wrecks with bowsprits and anchors visible on the seabed

Contribution to basic research at great ocean depths

On the last day of the voyage, the expedition team succeeded in tying a noose around a ship's knee that was loose on the seabed, and then hoisting it up safely from a depth of 150 metres. The knee has now been taken to the National Museum's conservation department in Brede, where it will be examined and conserved in the coming months.

This part alone will contribute to shedding new light on the processes that take place when bacteria and other organisms break down materials at great ocean depths, which means that the findings contribute to regular basic research. The new knowledge can be of decisive importance when deciding in the future whether a wreck should be preserved in situ or whether the most valuable objects should be recovered.

Architect and marine archaeologist Dr. Christian Lemée, an expert in wooden shipbuilding from the 16th century and onwards, also participated in the team. Based on the new knowledge and documentation of the wrecks, he will be able to clarify new and decisive details about the age and origin of the ships.

Finally, footage from a team from British Mallinson Sadler Productions will now be turned into a documentary about the expedition and is expected to be released in 2023.



Christian Lemée, David Gregory and Gert Normann Andersen

For further information or interviews

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JD-Contractor A/S has joined forces with Sea War Museum in a Strategic Partnership with a strong commitment to recover, preserve, document, and share underwater cultural heritage with future generations. Hence, the parties regularly organize expeditions to the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, to document known and make new marine archaeological discoveries.