

# The Shipwreck at Gnalić

A mirror to the Renaissance world

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expertise in various fields

*And forthwith continues  
the voyage  
like  
after a shipwreck  
a survivor  
a sea wolf*

Giuseppe Ungaretti, 'Allegria di naufragi'  
(*The Joy of Shipwrecks*)

To Ksenija Radulić, Sofija Petricioli, Božidar Vilhar and all of their associates,  
whose boundless enthusiasm and committed efforts have saved the site at  
the islet of Gnalić and preserved it for future generations.

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## Foreword

Unlike official history, which passes over times past in large steps, the story about the ship that sank near Gnalić is full of personal human fates woven together from strands spanning the entirety of Late Renaissance Europe and the Mediterranean. Sailing on the route between Venice and Istanbul, the *Gagliana grossa*, formerly known as the *Lezza*, *Moceniga e Basadonna*, symbolically linked two apparently opposing but firmly intertwined worlds. Magnificent items that had spent four centuries on the seafloor briefly brought it fame in the 1960s and 1970s. But it only garnered genuine renown during the past few years, when the scholarly community finally began to examine the untapped information hidden in museum collections, in archival materials and at the actual shipwreck site.

Its discovery is largely due to Konstantin Šikić and Ivo Šimat Butica from Murter, who at one point, through Miljenko Barić, forwarded the relevant information to the proper institutions in Zadar. Among the many who deserve credit for the first investigations and salvaging of valuable finds at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, the most noteworthy names are Ksenija Radulić, Sofija and Ivo Petricoli, Božidar Vilhar and Grga Oštrić. Young archaeologists Zdenko Brusić and Zlatko Gunjača and conservator Dalibor Martinović actively participated in the first campaigns, and several years later Marijan Orlić assumed leadership of the undersea aspect of the research. All of them, and many others, deserve thanks for saving the site from being forever forgotten and thoroughly looted.

Three decades later, an international group of experts led by Mitja Guštin, and consisting of Irena Lazar, Hugh Willmott and Caroline Jackson, used the example of glass finds to reignite interest in the ship's cargo and underscore the site's research potential. Zrinka Mileusnić and her associates highlighted the attractiveness of presenting these materials to the broader public.

After many years of effort undertaken by this publication's authors, in 2012 the University of Zadar once more launched research thanks to support from the Ministry of Culture, the Town of Biograd na Moru, the Tkon Municipality, the Croatian Science Foundation, Texas A&M University, the Ruđer Bošković Institute the Croatian Institute of History, the German Society for the Promotion of Underwater Archaeology (FUWA), the Biograd na Moru Local Heritage Museum, the Croatian History Museum, the

University of Zagreb Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing Science, the audiovisual production company Red Studio d.o.o., the ARS NAUTICA Institute of Maritime Heritage and many other Croatian and foreign institutions and organizations whose participation even today is contributing to the project's ongoing success. Joško Belamarić and Zlatko Uzelac deserve special mention for relaunching the project, as do many well-intentioned participants during the initial efforts in this regard, while Pavuša Vežić and Barbara Peranić provided vital support to the continuity of research work.

Research into and protection of the site and its finds in recent years have been considerably advanced by Matko Barišić, Vladimir Bermanec, Adelphine Bonneau, Patrick Casitti, Marco Ciabattini, Neven Cukrov, Matko Čvrljak, Barbara Davidde, Vincent Delmas, Ana Filep, Maria Geraga, Andrea Gobbi, Ela Jurdana, Željko Kwokal, Neven and Marko Lete, Nili Liphshitz, Davor Matešić, Nikola Mišković, Marco Morin, Stefan Nehring, George Papatheodorou, Martina Patriarca, Pere Ridao, Christa and Herbert Siepenkötter, Ines Šelendić, Franka Trcera and Antonio Vasiljević, while precise modern documentation and attractive photographic and video materials have been produced by Ivana Asić, Mirko Belošević, Marino Brzac, Suzana Čule, Vedran Dorušić, Tena Festini, Danijel and Ranko Frka, Dražen Gorički, Sebastian Govorčin, Matej Martinčak, Alan Meniga, Xavier Rodriguez Pandozi, Rodrigo Torres, Božo Vukičević and Kotaro Yamafune. Here as well, the list of names deserving credit is much longer, and the diversity of individual contributions is far greater.

In the 1970s, Astone Gasparetto successfully initiated the reconstruction of the relevant, long-past events. After a long pause, this painstaking task was taken up by Mauro Bondioli, whose dedicated work in the State Archives in Venice has yielded hundreds of documents, and he connected them to the multi-layered historical story told in another part of this book. He was assisted in these efforts by Benjamin Arbel, Anna Bellavitis, Paola Benussi, Giovanni Caniato, Isabella Cecchini, Lovorka Čoralić, John Davis, Claudio dell'Orso, Marco Di Pasquale, Eric Dursteller, Antonio Fabris, Maria Fusaro, Richard Goldthwaite, Vincenzo Mancini, Vittorio Mandelli, Alessandro Marzo Magno, Antonio Mazzucco, Luca Molà, Reinhold Müller, Serap Mumcu, Gianfranco Munerotto, Antonio Musarra, Maria Pia Pedani, Andrea Pelizza, Andrea Peressini, Stefano Piasentini, Claudio Povoło, Franco Rossi, Jan-Christoph Rößler, Mirko Sardelić, Alessandra Schiavon, Ana Šverko, Lorenzo Tommasin, Stefano Tosato, Alfredo Viggiano, Roberto Zago and Guglielmo Zanelli. With their linguistic suggestions, Vladimir Skračić and Nikola Vuletić contributed significantly to the final form of this text.

The list of those who participated in previous research today encompasses hundreds of names from all continents. We would like to convey our immeasurable gratitude to all of them for their support and cooperation, with hope and anticipation in future common work in stringing together the small pearls of this great historical tale.

# 1. Introduction

In mid-autumn 1583, a large merchant ship laden with all manner of goods met an unfortunate fate near the islet of Gnalić, not far from Gnal Promontory at the far southern tip of the island of Pašman. It may have been the last in an entire series of exciting events in the life of a vessel, if – after being forgotten for almost four centuries – it had not been rediscovered by fishers and divers from the island of Murter in the early 1960s, and in a way they breathed new life into it.

News of the discovery was heard, unfortunately, in the global circles of ill-intentioned visitors to the seafloor who looted numerous items from this rich undersea site over the following decades, and much was irretrievably taken from the country. At the time of the earliest diving activities near the islet of Gnalić, the methodology for underwater archaeological research was still in its infancy, and the proper authorities had yet to exhibit sufficient interest in the protection and preservation of the undersea heritage. It was only recorded in the official register of sites in 1967, when news of the discovery had made its way to the proper institutions in Šibenik and Zadar. The first legally recovered finds excited the broader public and compelled experts to fully commit to an undertaking for which they were entirely unprepared. Thanks to their boundless enthusiasm and hard work, items that are even today breathtaking were raised from the seafloor.

Several exhibitions showed that the site had manifold potential, and for a time interest in its history bloomed. However, the initial excitement dissipated, financial support dried up, and an erroneous impression of exhaustive exploration of the site prevailed even in scholarly circles. Later attempts to relaunch research, although unsuccessful, demonstrated that neither underwater nor archival research, nor conservation and interpretation of the already removed items were nearly complete. Despite this, a full forty-five years had to pass before the conditions for systematic research work were met, and the local community became more seriously interested in the potential for the attractive presentation of the sunken ship and its exciting historical tale.

Systematic research conducted during the past several decades have thoroughly altered some of the initial hypotheses, and careful study of the documents held in the State Archives in Venice have resulted in many astonishing and unexpected discoveries. The story about the shipwreck grew and was enhanced with incredible details, intriguing

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characters and their fates to such an extent that it began to resemble the script of a tense historical spectacle. It soon became apparent to all members of the project team that it was not simply an ordinary sunken ship at Gnalić, but also a clear reflection of the late Renaissance world.