

# SHIPWRECK AND ITS ENIGMATIC FINAL YEARS



Shipwreck 43 was found in the northern section of the Central Harbour of Thonis-Heracleion. The wreck is one of more than 120 ancient shipwrecks discovered during the IEASM's ongoing survey and excavations at the port-city. The upper layers of sand around the surviving edges of the wreck had been removed and the outline mapped.

Wood samples were also taken for wood species analysis and radiocarbon dating. Subsequent analyses demonstrates that the structural elements of the wreck were found to be made from locally-available *Acacia totilis/radiana*, suggesting that the vessel was Egyptian in origin. The ship is tentatively dated between 785 and 481 cal. BC.

## **Distinctive form of naval architecture**

From the preliminary excavations at the stern of the vessel, it would appear that it has a distinctive form of naval architecture involving the use of long tenons that were initially fitted to channels that passed through the keel plank, over which multiple lines of planking were added. These were pegged into place with wooden treenails. From the albeit limited excavations, there do not appear to be any frames and consequently the long tenons may have provided the structural stability of the vessel through a kind of

‘internal framework’. This probably reflects a shipbuilding tradition that developed in accordance with the availability of local supplies of timber and the realities of nautical life at the margins of the Nile Delta.

## **Enigmatic final years of ship**

The excavations also revealed something of the life of the ship following its withdrawal from service and it appears that the vessel was reused in antiquity for a purpose that is, at present, enigmatic.

Hypotheses under consideration include the use of the vessel as part of a type of ‘pontoon bridge’ and the deliberate fastening in position for defence or land-reclamation purposes. A stone anchor, found complete with its wooden flukes, was recovered adjacent to the stem piece.





**Object:** *Acacia totilis/radiana*, location: Central Harbour of Thonis-Heracleion

**Source:** Original text by Damian Robinson, Director of Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology, University of Oxford, 2014

**Further reading:** Robinson, D. and Goddio, F. 'Ship 43 and the graveyard in Thonis-Heracleion', in D. Robinson and F. Goddio (eds), *Thonis-Heracleion in Context*. Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology Monograph 8: 211–25. Oxford: OCMA 2015.

Fabre, D. 'The Shipwrecks of Heracleion-Thonis: A Preliminary Study', in D. Robinson and A. Wilson (eds) *Maritime Archaeology and Ancient Trade in the Mediterranean*. Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology Monograph 6: 13–32. Oxford: OCMA 2011

Belov, A. 2014, A new type of construction evidence by Ship 17 of Heracleion-Thonis. *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 43.2: 314-329

Belov, A. 2019, Ship 17: a baris from Thonis-Heracleion, Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology

**Photos:** Christoph Gerigk © Franck Goddio/Hilti Foundation