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7 OCTOBER, 2014 - 14:16 APRILHOLLOWAY

2,000-year-old shipwreck and sacrificial altar found near Aeolian Islands



An archaeological team equipped with a mini-submarine made a spectacular discovery while exploring in deep water around the Aeolian Islands of Pantelleria, Lipari and Panarea – a 2,000-year-old sunken ship, complete with dozens of amphorae, plates, bowls, anchors, and a well-preserved sacrificial altar, according to a report in [palermo.repubblica.it](#).

The research team, coordinated by the Superintendent of the Sea in cooperation with Global Underwater Explorers, made the rare discovery while investigating the sea floor at depths of 130 metres near the island of Lipari. The exploration was only made possible thanks to the use of two high-tech submersibles called 'Triton', as diving at such depths is extremely dangerous.



One of the Triton submersibles. Credit: Division The Republic, Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso SpA. [Image source.](#)

One of the most exceptional discoveries was a terracotta altar on a pedestal containing decorative carvings of waves. While historical sources have referred to sailors making sacrifices to the gods to ensure a safe journey or to give thanks for having navigated a difficult passage, this is one of the first examples of an altar on a ship that may have been used for such purposes.



The terracotta altar recovered from the shipwreck. Credit: Division The Republic, Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso SpA. [Image source.](#)

The presence of a large number of anchors near the wreck suggests that the site was used as a place to stop along the ancient routes of interest in the Aeolian archipelago. Archaeologists also found cylindrical vases, plates, bowls, and dozens of amphorae, mostly in Greek style but a substantial portion are of Punic origin.



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One of the clay vessels recovered from the wreck near Lipari. Credit: Division The Republic, Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso SpA. [Image source.](#)

Thrilled with the results, the Superintendent of the Sea, Sebastiano Tusa, said [translated]: "I have seen and touched dozens of ancient and modern wrecks in my long career as an archaeologist, but to be able to reach a wreck of a ship sunk 2,000 years ago, which is in the dark and in the silence of 130 feet deep, gave me an indescribable feeling."

The wreck, along with the recovered artifacts, are currently undergoing further analysis to further understand the origin, destination, and life on board the ancient ship.

Featured image: A diver examines amphorae found near the island of Lipari. Credit: DiverDivision The Republic, Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso SpA. [Image source.](#)

By [April Holloway](#)

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